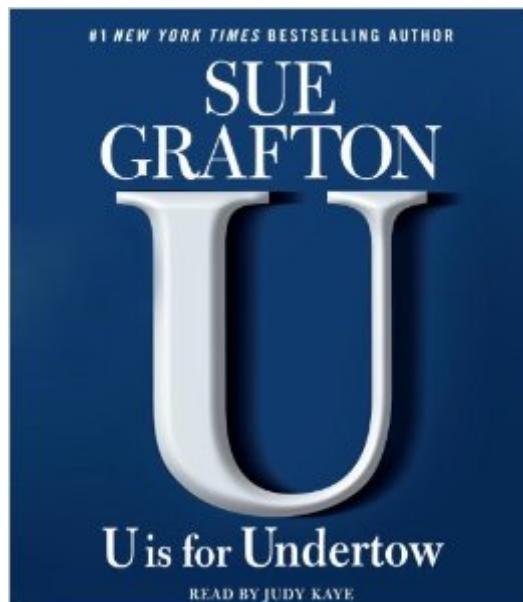


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U Is For Undertow: A Kinsey Millhone Novel



Synopsis

It's April 1988, a month before Kinsey Millhone's thirty-eighth birthday, and she's alone in her office catching up on paperwork when a young man arrives unannounced. Michael Sutton is twenty-seven, an unemployed college dropout. More than two decades ago, a four-year-old girl disappeared, and a recent newspaper story about her kidnapping has triggered a flood of memories. Sutton now believes he stumbled on her lonely burial and could identify the killers if he saw them again. He wants Kinsey's help in locating the grave and finding the men. It's way more than a long shot, but he's persistent and willing to pay cash up front. Reluctantly, Kinsey agrees to give him one day of her time. But it isn't long before she discovers Sutton has an uneasy relationship with the truth. In essence, he's the boy who cried wolf. Is his story true, or simply one more in a long line of fabrications? Moving effortlessly between the 1980s and the 1960s, and changing points of view as Kinsey pursues witnesses whose accounts often clash. Gradually, listeners come to see how everything connects in this twisting, complex, surprise-filled thriller. And as always, at the beating heart of her fiction is Kinsey Millhone, a sharp-tongued, observant loner who never forgets that under the thin veneer of civility is a roiling dark side to the soul.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sue Grafton's "U is for Undertow" takes place in 1988, with flashbacks to 1967, the "Summer of Love." Kinsey Millhone, thirty-seven, is the veteran of two failed marriages. Most of her time is devoted to her work as a private investigator, and she occasionally socializes with a small group of

friends, including her eighty-eight year old landlord, Henry Pitts. Kinsey's latest case involves Michael Sutton, who claims that he recently recalled an event that occurred when he was just six years old. In July of 1967, four-year-old Mary Claire Fitzhugh was abducted from her home in Horton Ravine, California. Although her parents agreed to pay the ransom demanded by Mary Claire's kidnappers, the money was not picked up and the child was never seen again. Sutton remembers playing in the woods when he saw two men digging a hole and burying a bundle in the ground, and he cannot help but wonder if the pair was burying the corpse of little Mary Claire. Michael hires Kinsey to reconstruct the past and find out if his memories are accurate. Although Millhone is far from physically imposing, she has resources that may be more effective than brute force: Kinsey is smart, intensely curious, and reluctant to give up once she starts an investigation. When Kinsey is stymied, she shuffles the index cards on which she records her notes and tries to see matters from a different perspective. Sooner or later, she usually connects the dots. This mystery has many familiar elements, including long buried secrets, dysfunctional families, greed, stupidity, and selfishness. In addition, Grafton provides the reader with a poignant glimpse into Kinsey's early life that helps explain why she is a loner who is reluctant to trust anyone.

This is my first experience reading a Sue Grafton mystery. What a treat! From the time I first started the book, she had me entranced. The story revolves around Kinsey Millhone, a 37 year old private investigator, who is hired to investigate an unsolved kidnapping of a little girl, Mary Claire Fitzhugh who disappeared twenty years before. Her probing, which at first seems to lead to a dead end, actually unleashes a tangle of complicated stories that provides insight to the twenty year mystery. The setting splits between 1988, the "current" time of Kinsey's investigation, and 1967, the year of the child's kidnapping. The narration forks between Kinsey Millhone as she unfolds some inconsistencies in what appears to be nothing on the surface, Deborah Unruh, the grandmother turned mother to a little girl who experienced a similar episode as the missing girl, and other characters who unfold and show the sometimes undignified side of human nature. Each of the character's stories are enthralling, told in a voice that mirrors reality and captures the intricate details that shows how events can mold the character and direction of a life. At first, the stories may seem independent of each other, but as events from the past collide with the present, it becomes evident that their stories are intertwined and come together to portray the truth of the past, bit by bit. Additionally, another subplot unfolds regarding Kinsey's personal life--her reconciling resentment regarding her family. An orphan, Kinsey was raised by her aunt who alienated her from the rest of her family. This subplot of Kinsey discovering the truth about her past was touching, and added an

intimate flair to an already moving narrative. I'm glad that I stumbled upon Grafton's novel.

U is for the ubiquitous queen of Alphabet Soup titled mysteries. Any Sue Grafton novel reads like a welcomed but long-overdue letter from iconic private eye, Kinsey Millhone, bringing readers up to speed with her latest escapade. Following T is for Trespass, Grafton (who earned the title of Grand Master from Mystery Writers of America), has made a quantum leap by taking on social issues in the last few of her 21 too-realistic-to-be-fiction works. Set in 1988, with flashbacks to social unrest of the '60s, Michael Sutton hires Kinsey to investigate what he thinks was the backyard burial of a kidnapped young girl in 1967, when he was six. From a wealthy family, Sutton was a wolf-crying boy at elite Climbing Academy and now financially exiled from his family, loses credibility with police and Kinsey. And Kinsey learns a painful truth about preconceptions regarding her own family she discovered existed only four years previously. Predictably, characters face death during the investigation, and Sutton is pulled into the vortex. ["Vortex" would be an excellent installment name, following "Undertow".] With perpetrators identified early on, this is not so much a whodunit as a whydunit, validating Grafton's title of Grand Master bestowed by her peers. While Kinsey--an average Jo--has learned to leap hurdles in her career, Sue Grafton has become an Olympic-class pole vaulter in hers. Impeccable plot, prose as rich as Warren Buffet, and everyone's favorite investigator make this a sure-fire bestseller.

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