



Summary

From *New York Times* bestselling author Clare Mackintosh comes a claustrophobic thriller set over 20 hours on-board the inaugural nonstop flight from London to Sydney.

Mina is trying to focus on her job as a flight attendant, not the problems with her five-year-old daughter back home, or the fissures in her marriage. But the plane has barely taken off when Mina receives a chilling note from an anonymous passenger, someone intent on ensuring the plane never reaches its destination: "The following instructions will save your daughter's life..."

Someone needs Mina's assistance and knows exactly how to make her comply.

When one passenger is killed and then another, Mina knows she must act. But which lives does she save: Her passengers...or her own daughter and husband who are in grave distress back at home?

It's twenty hours to landing. A lot can happen in twenty hours.

For fans of the locked-room mystery of *One by One* and the heart-stopping tension *The Last Flight*, *Hostage* is an explosively addictive thriller about one flight attendant and the agonizing decision that will change her life—and the lives of everyone on-board—forever.



About the Author

With more than two million copies of her books sold worldwide, number one bestseller Clare Mackintosh is the multi-award-winning author of [I Let You Go](#), which was a Sunday Times and New York Times bestseller, and the fastest-selling title by a new UK crime writer in 2015. It also won the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year in 2016.

Both Clare's second and third novels, [I See You](#) and [Let Me Lie](#), were number one Sunday Times bestsellers and Richard & Judy Book Club picks. Clare's novel [After the End](#) was published in June 2019 and spent seven weeks in the Sunday Times hardback bestseller chart, and in June 2021, Clare's locked room thriller, [Hostage](#), flew straight into the top ten.

In July 2022, Clare launched a crime series set on the border between England and Wales. It features Welsh detective DC Ffion Morgan and is currently being adapted for television. The first book in the series, [The Last Party](#), was an instant Sunday Times bestseller. The sequel, [A Game of Lies](#), publishes in July 2023.

Together, Clare's books have been published in more than forty countries and have spent a combined total of 64 weeks in the Sunday Times bestseller lists.

Clare is patron of the [Silver Star Society](#), a charity based at the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford, which supports parents experiencing high-risk or difficult pregnancies. She lives in North Wales with her husband and their three children.

Discussion Questions

1. Sophia's care before her adoption creates added challenges for Mina and Adam. Do you think adoptive parents and biological parents have different approaches to supporting their kids?
2. What was your first impression of Adam? Why do you think he was first introduced through Mina's perspective? How did your opinion change throughout the book?
3. Mina calls the protests just outside the airport pointless because they only reach people who are already committed to flying. Who are the protestors trying to reach? Is there anywhere else that would be more effective?
4. The disagreement in the bar highlights disparities between business and economy class passengers, and Mina insists the economy passengers return to their seats. Why do these divisions exist? Do you think there was another way to de-escalate the situation?
5. When Mina receives the note, she thinks through some of the training she received to deal with hijackers. Why didn't she follow that training? What would you have done in her place?
6. Passenger 1G discusses the way they groomed the other members of the group and coaxed them into participating in the plan. What did all the members have in common before they boarded the plane? How does the internet enable radicalization?
7. The terrorists hold the airline employees, the passengers, and the airline itself all equally responsible for the London–Sydney flight. Can personal choices, like eating less meat or flying less often, make a significant difference to ecological health? Why do we focus on individual choice more often than corporate responsibility?
8. How do you feel about the dictate “Never negotiate with terrorists”? What are the short-term and long-term impacts of that stance? 9. How is business travel changing after the COVID-19 pandemic? Would you argue for or against the continuation of regular business travel?
10. Do you think the characters all got justice? Did you want a different outcome for anyone?

A Conversation with the Author

As a writer, at times you've challenged yourself to step outside crime fiction and suspense. How does genre affect the way your stories develop? Do you think your suspense generally and Hostage specifically have benefitted from writing other types of books?

I am a firm believer that story is what matters, not genre, and I always think it is a shame when a reader staunchly refuses to read a particular type of book. Some of my favorite writers segue between, say, crime and literary fiction, and some of my favorite novels are a hybrid of two genres. My fourth novel, *After the End*, is a family drama, not a thriller, but it is every bit as suspenseful as a crime novel. The only difference I found in writing it was that the story was led more by the characters than by the plot. This pushed me to spend more time considering who the protagonists were and why they made the choices they did. As I came to write *Hostage*, I found myself naturally spending more time on the backstory for Adam and Mina, and I think the novel is richer for it. You point out that fundamentalist activists are rarely sympathetic. When you worked as a protest liaison officer, what strategies were most effective in gaining public sympathy and support for a cause? No one is without flaws, and few of us have no redeeming features. I was fascinated by the workings of extremists and had a reluctant respect for their passion and singlemindedness. The most successful causes play on the emotions of their targets. Think about the times you've given money to a good cause: nine times out of ten, it's because a photograph, story, or statistic has made its way to your heart. For the organization hoping to secure sympathy, research is the key. They have to know their audience and understand how to push their buttons. A demonstration held by a right-wing organization gathered huge support in an area with high unemployment by sowing the seed that unwanted immigration was responsible. We all have a responsibility, I think, to do our own research and to ensure we are not being swayed by someone else's agenda.

Sophia's attachment struggles are a poignant thread throughout the book. How did you learn about the adoption process? How did that compare to your research process for airlines and flights?

A Conversation with the Author

I have a number of friends who have adopted children and who were generous enough to speak openly to me about their lives. Some families encounter no significant issues as their adoptive children settle in and grow up, but several of my friends have found it a challenging — although no less rewarding—experience. My time in the police had exposed me to the long-lasting impact of childhood trauma, and I wanted to explore this area. I was particularly struck by one friend’s account of how her daughter, adopted at birth, had asked for a hug for the very first time at the age of ten. Attachment disorder is deep-rooted and long-lasting, and I wanted to write about the impact of this on a relationship.

Researching the aviation side of the book was equally interesting. I based the layout of my fictional aircraft on a combination of real-life planes and quickly fell down a rabbit warren of online resources. Flight attendants are extraordinarily indiscreet on message boards, and there is a surprising amount of information about how to deal with a hostage situation. I spent hours on the brilliant NATS.aero website, where their “Plane Talking” page enables you to listen to air traffic controllers guide a real flight into London Heathrow.

How often do you come up with new ideas for a book? How many of those ideas would you estimate make it to a full manuscript?

I’m constantly thinking of “what if?” questions or extraordinary situations in which I might drop ordinary people to see how they cope. A fraction of those are right for a novel, and I have several half-finished books behind me, where the idea simply wasn’t enough to continue. Hostage is one of the rare times when I had the idea and knew almost immediately what would happen and how it would end. It made it a hugely enjoyable book to write and, I hope, to read.