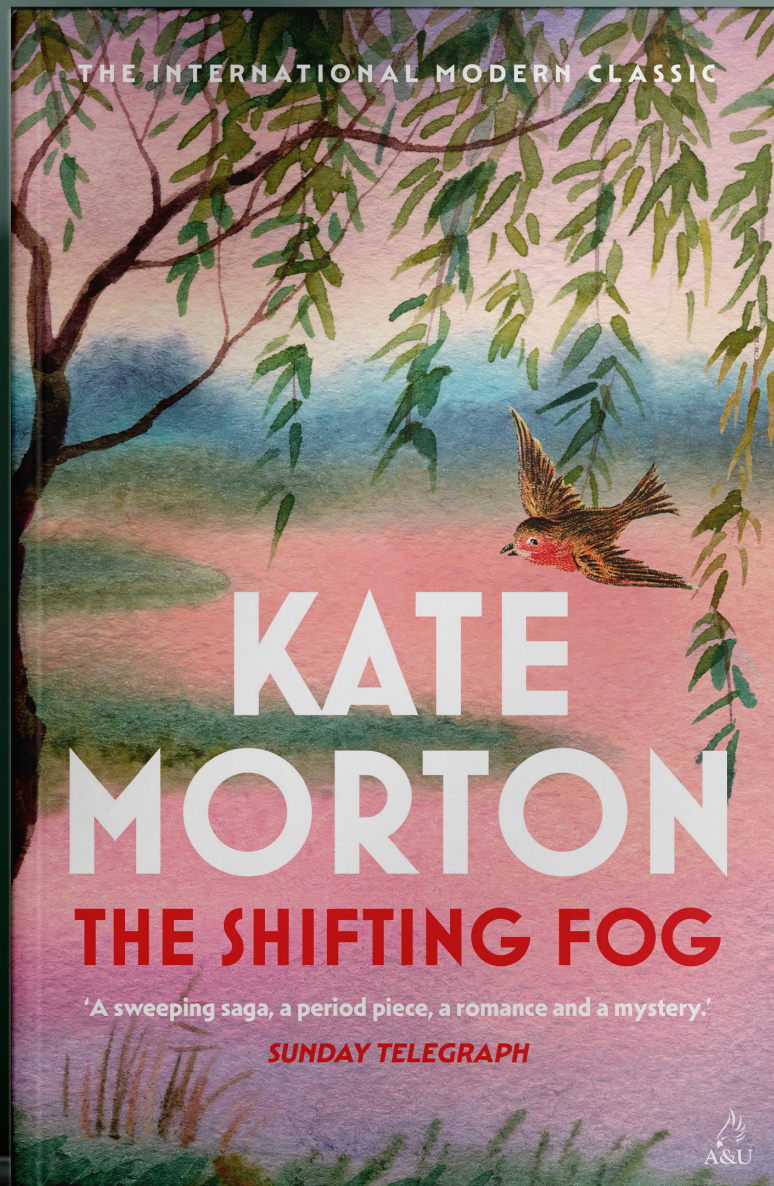



ALLEN & UNWIN
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BOOK CLUB GUIDE

THE SHIFTING FOG



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

July 2026 will mark twenty years since my first book, *The Shifting Fog*, was published in Australia. I'd already finished two manuscripts when I began writing it, but this one felt different from the start. I'd given up on publication by then and wrote with no expectations. I also wrote with a small baby—my first—on my hip. Literally, at times. I wrote for the love of storytelling and wordplay, and the joy of escaping into my own imagined world.

The Shifting Fog, like all of my books, reverberates with the many things I loved and felt and thought while I was writing it. Looking back at it now is a bit like watching a home movie I've only recently rediscovered, or leafing through an old photo album. I see the scenes for what appears on their surface—the story of the Hartford sisters and Grace, the passing of a particular time in English history, the elegant and inevitable decline of Riverton Manor—but I see other, deeper layers, too. Shadow imprints that cast me back precisely to the place I was in, and the person I was, when they first came to mind.

When I read the name 'Riverton' in the pages of my novel, for instance, I am here in the present, but I am also sitting on my bed twenty-two years ago with a notebook on my lap, scribbling ideas for a yet unwritten story. I've taken a brief break. My baby son is asleep in the room across the hallway of our tiny wooden workers' cottage in Paddington, and I dial the 'Riverton' Child Health number, given to all new parents in Queensland, to ask advice on when he should be feeding, sleeping, burping.

As I speak to the stranger at the other end of the line, as her warm voice tells me I'm doing a good job, that everything will be all right, that my little boy is fine, I think about this wonderful place, this 'Riverton', from where advice is dispensed, and I picture a beautiful country residence in the middle of serene green grounds, where kind women are waiting near antique telephones, ready to allay the fears of nervous new parents. *Riverton*. I sketch the word in my notebook, and afterwards, when I return to my story, I remember my vision and know that the English manor where my characters live will share this lovely name.

Each scene, each page, each thought within the book could tell a similar tale. I don't remember them all. Some inspiration is fleeting. Some ideas barely leave a trace. Nevertheless, the finished book is a time capsule; a tapestry of threads discovered along the way and entwined to present a story that would have been different without any one of them. I've learned over the past twenty years, that being receptive to the world and its suggestions, noticing and collecting useful threads, is essential to my writing process. I've learned, too, that the act of creativity doesn't end with me. When one of my books is opened by another person, it becomes something new again. For while my experiences underlie the text, each reader overlays her own, transforming the book into a living, breathing story unique to her.

This, I believe, is the magic of fiction. This is its beauty. It is a conversation between two people, a place where two minds meet across time and space. It is alive and it is intimate, and it gladdens me enormously to know that a book will tell a different story depending on the day it's written and the day it's read; that you will bring my story back to life even as you make it your own.

So, whether you are a new reader, discovering *The Shifting Fog* for the first time (welcome!), or an old friend, returning to Riverton after many years, thank you. Writing stories, publishing books, and connecting with readers like you is a great privilege and joy, and I wish you much happy reading until we meet again.

KM
July 2026



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Why do you think Grace was so determined to keep her secrets despite Hannah and Emmeline being long gone?
- Had Ursula never contacted Grace about her film, do you believe Grace would have taken her secrets to the grave?
- How did the time in which Hannah, Emmeline and Grace lived shape their lives and choices? Despite their wealth, how were Hannah and Emmeline just as restricted as Grace by the expectations and limitations placed on women?
- In what way was Grace overlooked and underestimated in both her youth and old age? Did that ever work to her advantage?
- Why do you think Morton chose to tell part of the story through Grace looking back at her past? How would the novel be different if it were told entirely from the perspective of Grace as a young woman?
- Do you think if Hannah knew Grace was her sister it would have changed anything between them?
- The novel explores the many things we inherit — family, trauma, wealth, status and expectations. How do these inherited circumstances shape the choices and lives of the different characters? Are we ultimately able to escape what we inherit?
- Why do you think Grace kept things from Ursula but shared them with Marcus?
- What do you think the novel is trying to say about the nature of secrets?
- Kate Morton has said that the novel's setting is as important to her as its characters, that Riverton Manor is as much a character as its inhabitants. Do you agree? In what way does Riverton mirror the fates of the Hartford family?
- Is *The Shifting Fog* ultimately a tragedy? What makes it tragic, and are there moments of hope or redemption?

For more background on the making of *The Shifting Fog* visit Kate Morton's official website. And be sure to sign up to her newsletter to be the first to hear about upcoming releases.

<https://www.katemorton.com/behind-the-house-at-riverton/>

JUST FOR FUN

- Who would you cast in a screen adaptation of *The Shifting Fog*?
- If you could be friends with any character from the novel, who would it be and why?
- Agatha Christie makes a cameo appearance at the dinner table. If you could choose any author to dine with, who would it be and why?