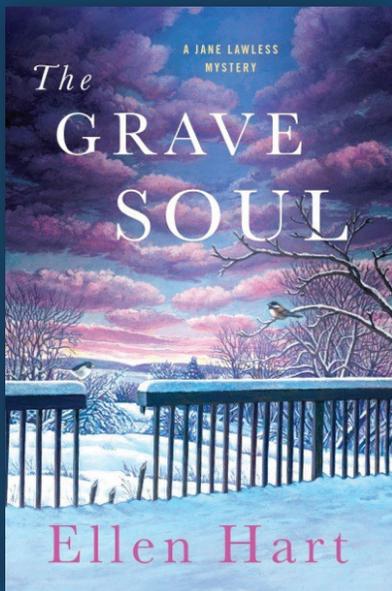


**GENRE FICTION WINNER**

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***The Grave Soul*  
by Ellen Hart**

MINOTAUR BOOKS

**ABOUT THE BOOK**

When Guthrie Hewitt calls on restaurateur and private investigator Jane Lawless, he doesn't know where else to turn. Guthrie is ready to propose to his girlfriend Kira, but his trip to her home over Thanksgiving made him uneasy. All her life, Kira has been haunted by a dream in which she witnesses her mother being murdered, but she knows it can't be true because the dream doesn't line up with the facts of her mother's death. After visiting Kira's home for the first time and receiving a disturbing anonymous package in the mail, Guthrie starts to wonder if Kira's dream might hold more truth than she knows. Ellen Hart once again brings her intimate voice to the story of a family and the secrets that can build and destroy lives.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



**Ellen Hart** is the author of more than thirty crime novels in two different series. She has won innumerable awards for her writing, including being a six-time winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Best Lesbian Mystery, a four-time winner of the Minnesota Book Award, a three-time winner of the Golden Crown Literary Award in several categories, a recipient of the Alice B. Medal, and status as an official GLBT Literary Saint at the Saints & Sinners Literary Festival in New Orleans in 2005. In 2010, Ellen received the GCLS Trailblazer Award for lifetime achievement in the field of lesbian literature. Visit [www.ellenhart.com](http://www.ellenhart.com).

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. In *The Grave Soul*, Hart poses the often complex question of what moral obligations family members have to one another. Did you agree with the decisions the Adlers made to protect one another? Could you see yourself making similar decisions to protect a loved one?
2. What did you think about the nonlinear structure of the story? How would the novel's impact have been different if the events had been revealed in chronological order?
3. Why does Laurie feel a moment of panic when she first sees the face of the injured woman on New Year's Eve? Do you think she and Hannah dealt with the situation as well as they could have that night?
4. As Jane and Guthrie discuss the case, Jane asks: "You really want to pay me to prove that someone Kira loves is a murderer?" Do you think Guthrie was right to meddle with the Adler family's secrets? Would Kira have been better off never knowing the truth?
5. Why did one family member take photographs of the crime scene and conceal them for so many years? Did you correctly guess the identity of the person responsible for mailing the photos to Guthrie?
6. What controversial changes does Hannah want to make at the farmhouse? Do you think her proposed solution is a realistic one?
7. Why does Laurie blame herself for Kevin's unhappiness? What was the "epic failure of imagination" that sealed her fate?
8. Jane learns about Delia Adler by questioning several people in New Dresden – Hannah Adler, Riley Garrow, Katie Olsen, Father Mike, and others. What do we find out about Delia through these combined accounts? What sort of mother and wife was she?
9. Once you understood the killer's motive for murdering Delia, did you find yourself feeling any sympathy toward him/her? Was the killer's moral suffering punishment enough for the crime?
10. What do you make of Jane's decision to simply pass the evidence along to Guthrie instead of taking action against the killer herself? What do you believe Guthrie will do with the information Jane has uncovered?

# 28TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide, year-round outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul.

GENRE FICTION CATEGORY SPONSORED BY:

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## A CONVERSATION WITH ELLEN HART

**You've said before that the titles of your novels tend to come first. How did the title of this book come to you and how did it inform the story?**

Titles always come first for me. They help me thematically, assist me in finding my way into the story. I don't remember what I was reading, but I came across a Dorothy Dix quote, "The grave soul seeks its own secrets, and takes its own punishment in silence." I knew I wanted to write about a secretive, tightly-knit family in my next book. The family lived in a small town in rural Wisconsin. I began to see how the title resonated - they all guarded dark family secrets. In the end, keeping secrets exacts its own kind of punishment. I followed that theme through the book.

**The nonlinear structure of *The Grave Soul* makes for a spectacular beginning. What made you decide to format the book in this way?**

The opening chapter was the first image that came to me. It seemed like such a striking situation that I knew I had to use it. The non-linear approach was the only way I could get away with it. We start toward the end of the story, double back to the beginning, move through the story, and then come back to the end. I worked hard to make sure that structure was understandable. I'd never used a structure like that before, so it produced some interesting challenges.

**After twenty-three books, how have the characters of *Jane and Cordelia* evolved? How have they surprised you?**

Both characters have surprised me. My main character, Jane, has always been a hard nut for me to crack. I've never entirely understood her. That may sound strange, or even a little precious, but it's true. I enter my stories - and my characters - very much the way the reader does. I come to them over time, understand them as I see them act and react. For instance, the character of Cordelia always loathed children. I make a big point of that...until she takes over the parenting of her niece. In a sense, it's the first time she truly falls in love.



Ellen Hart presents the award for Genre Fiction at the 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards in 2008.

**When did you decide you wanted to become a writer? What drew you to writing mystery novels, in particular?**

I believe that many people who love to read also secretly want to write. In my middle thirties I decided that if I didn't give writing a try, I'd come to the end of my life with a huge regret. I'd always loved mysteries and when a mystery idea came calling, I decided to act on it. That was twenty-eight years ago. I'm currently at work on my thirty-third mystery.

**What challenges you most in your writing?**

Keeping it fresh. Raising the bar with each book. Challenging myself to go deeper into the characters, to understand more fully what makes us do what we do - what makes us human.