



***The Teacher's Secret***

**Suzanne Leal**

*(Allen & Unwin, \$33)*

Terry is a popular teacher with kids and staff but the new principal in this coastal community thinks he's hiding something. Single mother Nina is fleeing the break-up of her marriage but faces other problems. Rebecca is struggling with life in a new country but hoping for asylum. All lost in some way, they find strength in unexpected places. This could have descended into soapy territory but former lawyer Leal treats her characters and their problems with respect — perhaps partly due to her own experiences as a single mother in a small town. This multi-layered story of hope in the face of adversity is great book club fodder.

**Julie Hosking**