

Book Review: The Silent Sister

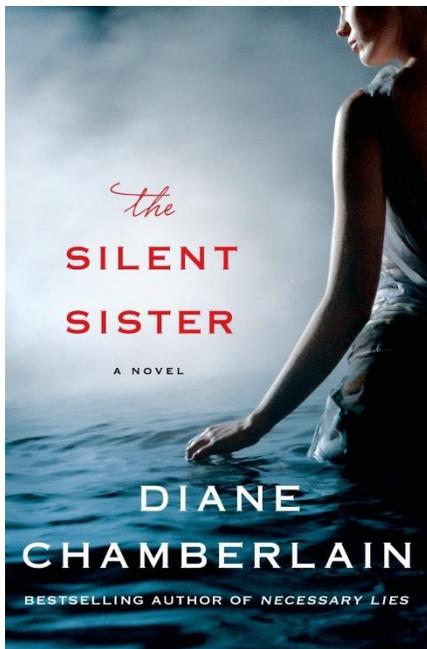


Scars and Secrets: 'The Silent Sister' by Diane Chamberlain

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As I read Diane Chamberlain's latest book, *The Secret Sister*, I had visions of the main character, Riley MacPherson, joining a club populated by fixer Olivia Pope from ABC's "Scandal" and Agent Elizabeth Keen from NBC's "The Blacklist." The club would be exclusive and limited to women whose family histories are mysteries that have eluded or been kept from them all their lives.

Riley, a 25-year-old middle school counselor living in Durham, has been charged with the daunting task of settling her father's affairs upon his sudden death. Her older brother, Danny, emotionally scarred and physically damaged from a tour in Iraq, is no help. Preferring instead to purge his world of family burdens once and for all, he manages to keep a soft place in his hardened heart for Riley while carrying a smoldering hatred for their late older sister, Lisa, and their father.



Lisa, a violin prodigy, committed suicide as a teenager, and that loss provided the tone of Riley's and Danny's upbringing, shrouded in dark secrets and accepted lies that were quietly shut away in a closet. As Riley sifts through her father's belongings in their family home in New Bern, bits and pieces of the truth begin to surface. The first startling piece suggests that Lisa may actually be alive and living under an assumed identity.

Riley's need to prove Lisa's status consumes her while she walks a delicate line with Danny, hoping to heal his wounded spirit and alleviate his PTSD in a bid to keep him from committing suicide himself. As Riley digs deeper, asks more questions, and faces obstacles specifically designed to distract her attention, Lisa's story becomes more complex, and Riley's own origins come into play. The paths she follows lead her to places she never expected for reasons she could never have imagined.

The author's treatment of siblings, parents and family friends is both realistic and surprising, rendering relationships that resonate, validate and subjugate pre-conceived notions of "the way it should be." Her writing is fluid and engaging and, as a storyteller, Chamberlain is accomplished at setting up a mystery without the need for the story to be categorized as such.

The Silent Sister captures the reader immediately through the introduction of more than a handful of compelling questions that not only beg but demand to be answered. There are answers indeed, but the reader soon learns that each is earned by peeling away layer after layer of delicious diversion.

Chamberlain, who recently participated in Writer's Night in the Forest at the Wake Forest Renaissance Centre, has written over 20 novels and has another scheduled to be published in October. – *Jeanne E. Fredriksen*

The Silent Sister by Diane Chamberlain. St. Martin's Press: New York. 2014. 352 pages. This review appeared in *The Rolesville Buzz* newspaper.