



## The Good Sister

*Maggie Christensen*

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## **The Good Sister** Maggie Christensen

Two Isobels. A lifetime of regret. A love that spans the years

In 1938, as the world hurtled towards war, twenty-year-old Isobel MacDonald fell madly in love. But fate and her own actions conspired to deny her the happiness she yearned for. Many years later, plagued with regrets and with a shrill voice from the past ringing in her ears, she documents the events that shaped her life.

In 2015, sixty-five-year-old Bel Davison returns from Australia to her native Scotland to visit her terminally ill aunt. Reading Isobel's memoir, she is beset with memories of her own childhood and overcome with guilt. When she meets her aunt's solicitor, events seem to spiral out of control and, almost against her will, she finds herself drawn to this enigmatic Scotsman.

What is it that links these two women across the generations? Can the past influence the future?

## **The Good Sister Details**

Date : Published November 23rd 2017 by Cala Publishing

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Author : Maggie Christensen

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## **From Reader Review The Good Sister for online ebook**

### **Anne Moorhouse says**

While the location of Maggie's latest book was a departure from her earlier books, the plot, the characters and the writing continue to be the usual high standard that this talented Sunshine Coast author maintains. This book was a joy to read, and reveals Maggie still has a love of her native Scotland.

When Bel is summoned from Sydney to Glasgow to be at the side of Isobel, her dying aunt, little does she know what is ahead of her.

Isobel has always been the 'good sister' of the family, and as we follow her story from the 1940s through to the present day, it recalls a time when young women were expected to save themselves for marriage. How that pressure can dominate a relationship, and ultimately change lives, makes an intriguing story.

Once again, Maggie manages to bring together a cast of characters who come alive for the reader and provide a heart-warming family story, one which older readers especially will be able to relate to.

It wouldn't be a Maggie Christensen story without a contemporary, mature romance as well and the author manages to blend Isobel's and Bel's stories and their different time lines nicely without the reader losing the thread of either one.

I was privileged to be able to read a pre-release copy and I highly recommend Maggie's latest book. I hope there will be more from her Scottish background.

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### **Mommysmoose says**

I really enjoyed this book. I loved the characters and the story was well written and very interesting. I also like the fact that the characters were real and believable. They weren't perfect size 2's and hot. They were real mature and honest. I think that is my favorite part of Maggie's books. Love doesn't come in a size or number. It can happen anytime and is beautiful. Isobel waited her whole life for a ring on her finger to have it become out of reach because of her strong morals. Bel on the other hand goes at life differently. But, both end up alone in the end. Bringing Bel home in the end is very important to Isobel. She wants to tell her story and if she can make a happily ever after happen then that's a bonus. Beautifully written and very captivating. I love this book.

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### **beverley ann says**

really enjoyed reading this book about isobel and bel. this story had me gripped from the first page its a must for war time saga fans

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### **Mary Monks says**

Another thoroughly enjoyable story by this Queensland author.

The story spans 2 generations and 2 time periods: 2015 and 1938 - 1985.

Two women share the same name (Isobel) and are joined by family ties.

As the story unfolds however, the reader realises that there is so much more linking them!

The younger of the 2 (who calls herself Bel) is summoned from Australia back to Scotland by her dying Aunt, Isobel.

Aunt Isobel's story unfolds for Bel as she reads the diary of her aunt.

We discover the meaning of the title and from it realise how much sadness and loss there has been in Isobel's life.

"Young" Matthew, the solicitor, is privy to Isobel's wishes and Bel and he join forces to help work out how this can be done.

Who is Matthew really? What will Bel think about what she discovers? Will her Aunt's wishes come true? Treat yourself to a delightful read.

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## **sue says**

I enjoyed this authors other book I had the chance to read, but this one I did enjoy so much better but for different reasons.

This one is an historical fiction but I enjoyed the modern day overture as it could easily be of present day due to the emotions, love interests etc that are never going to be different from one era to the next.

Isobel MacDonald is falling in love with Bob, he is the smitten image of Clark Gable.

I personally didn't like him.

Isobel is a pure girl, whilst her friends may not have the same morals as her, she wants to stick to her beliefs of staying pure, but Bob isn't so patient with her and he is the most horrible person, I felt like slapping him. It seemed all he wanted from Isobel was what he couldn't have.

So he walks away.

Isobel's niece, also named Isobel, but wants to be known as Bel, comes to look after her aunt Isobel with her failing health, near her last days. Bel has been away for some time because of circumstances, but she loves her aunt and wants to do what's best for her aunt.

It shows how the generations and the sisters can manipulate for the Good.

The war breaks out and loved ones need to sign up. We see the devastation that can cause.

Lovers wanted to get married in haste 'just in case' because no one knows the future or what may happen in such times.

We have Isobel planning things not only for her death but for instigating the happiness of her dear niece.

I loved this book, I loved the characters, the stories, the past and the present, the love interests the emotions the whole drama/family dynamics unfolding as I read.

I enjoyed this authors book Champagne for Breakfast, but I especially enjoyed this one.

Its well written, its well rounded and has enough going on that peaks you're interest.

A fairly new author to me, but one I'm keeping on my radar.

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## Helen says

Have thoroughly enjoyed a couple of Maggie Christensen's novels...so far, this one is my pick. Engaging storyline, emotional characters that you immediately relate to and just want to keep reading on page after page, which is what I did. I love a novel that makes the reader ponder over the subject in their mind and touches the heart. Maggie writes beautifully and is so nice that her stories centre on the mature age who find romance.

Looking forward to more

Helen

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## Sue Gerhardt Griffiths says

4.5 stars

My first book by this author and also my first older adult fiction read and wow, wasn't I pleasantly surprised... as well as being a nice change to what I usually read! The pacing of the story was relaxing which produced a comfy, and homely read.

Dual storylines are a huge favourite of mine so clearly, I was going to love this book and love I did. A warm, gentle, beautiful, and engrossing tale of two striking women, both named Isobel. Their story switches between the past and present taking us right back to the late 1930s and continuing through to 2015. The reader is also transported to stunning Glasgow, Scotland (another country to add to my bucket list) where this wartime tale is based.

I adored the two Isobel's both such lovely and strong characters and Matt, what a sweetheart (haha, I kept picturing the doctor from Downton Abbey).

I look forward to reading all of Maggie Christensen's backlist titles and as I just read in the 'About the Author' section, the reader first meets Bel in Broken Threads so I guess that will be my next read before I start Isobel's Promise, the sequel to The Good Sister.

#Book Bingo 2018: 'A book written by someone over 60' - The Good Sister by Maggie Christensen

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## Janine says

The Good Sister is a women's fiction novel combined with historical fiction. It can be read as a standalone, but does kind of follow on from Maggie's other book Broken Threads.

It tells the story of two Isobels, one living in Scotland, and the other Isobel (Bel) who lives in Sydney. Bel is the niece of Isobel and has been called back to Scotland because her aunt is unwell and as Bel is her only living relative, she needs to put her affairs in order.

The story is told in two timelines, the past and the present. Isobel encourages Bel to read her diaries which virtually tell her life story. Isobel was madly in love with Bob Smith in her youth, but because of her principles would never consider anything inappropriate in their romance. Consequently Bob marries someone else and Isobel never got over that. She was always the good sister, when her other sisters were out having a good time, Isobel stuck to her guns.

This book has it all - history, descriptions of Scotland and Scottish life, family life and a bit of romance - and lots of cups of tea (the Scottish love their tea, and it can be comfort in all types of situations). I really enjoyed this book by Maggie and would definitely recommend it to fans of women's fiction and historical fiction.

Thank you to the author for an ARC of this book for an honest review.

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### **Carmel says**

Walk the streets of Glasgow with Isobel as she returns from Australia after an absence of many years. Peer into her aunt's lifetime of romantic regret with snippets from times past. Throw in the rugged discombobulating male and the scene is set for another of Maggie's delightful romances.

In *The Good Sister* the interplay of place and character marry well to provide support for the romance. There is life in Australia versus life in Glasgow, a life lived and one to come, an old house populated with memories of the past with plans for its future already in place.

Take a walk on the moors or find a sunny spot and indulge in some mature romance reading to enjoy several hours in the pages of Maggie Christensen's latest book.

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### **Ann Fleming says**

This is the first book by Maggie Christensen that I have read. It will not be the last. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The character development was excellent. I felt like I knew both of the Isobels and wanted to wrap my arms around both of them. I hated when the book ended - I wanted more.

Maggie Christensen took me to a Scotland I have never visited and into the lives of new friends. Well Done!!

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### **Theresa Smith Writes says**

I've long enjoyed a Scottish novel, be it in setting, written by a Scottish author, or both. *The Good Sister* sits well within my Scottish reading repertoire and Australian author Maggie Christensen, hailing originally from Scotland herself, has done a fine job of authenticity. Told with a dual timeline narrative, this story about a niece and her aunt was engaging from the first page through to the last. I barely put it down and read it over three sittings. Indeed, I got to the end and was somewhat at a loss as to what I was going to read next, I had been enjoying *The Good Sister* so much that I was reluctant to let it go.

Maggie has a strong sense of time and place, her descriptions vivid and true to whatever era her characters are inhabiting at the time. This was as much a heartwarming story as it was a poignant one. Regret and misunderstanding colour much of the older Isobel's experiences while past hurts and repressed guilt taint the younger Isobel. Yet both of these women are very likeable and highly relatable and I would be hard pressed

to pick a favourite between them, having enjoyed both of their stories equally. I finished the novel with a couple of unanswered questions, but on the whole, both stories wrapped up very nicely.

Maggie's focus on mature women is quite refreshing to approach. I am new to Maggie's work but I certainly look forward to reading more of her novels. I believe this is her first foray into historical fiction. If so, she has done a sterling job of it and I encourage her to continue – for my sake, if not her own!

Thanks is extended to the author for gifting me with a copy of *The Good Sister* for review.

*The Good Sister* is book 70 in my 2017 Australian Women Writers Challenge.

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### **Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says**

\* <https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

*The Good Sister* by Maggie Christensen is the author's first foray into the world of historical fiction. Christensen does this genre justice with her solid contribution. *The Good Sister* is a beautiful Scottish based wartime saga that fuses the past with the present, through two unforgettable women, who are both named Isobel.

In the days leading up to World War II, Isobel MacDonald is busy falling in love with her very own Clark Gable lookalike, Bob Smith. When the war looms over Isobel's home in Scotland, it derails her plans for the future. Missed opportunities, regrets and a huge misunderstanding defines Isobel's life. It is a mistake that determines Isobel's unfulfilled pathway to love and marriage. Isobel's niece, also named Isobel, or Bel as she prefers to be addressed, was born in Scotland. Bel spent her childhood, as well as formative years being raised by her mother and aunt Isobel, following the death of her father in a tragic accident. Bel has since left her native home, forging a new life for herself in Sydney. When her dear aunt takes a turn for the worst health wise, she calls on her only surviving relative, Bel, to help her settle her affairs. At the same time, old aunt Isobel has an ulterior motive to inviting her niece to return home to Scotland. Isobel wants to put old memories to rest, while securing her niece's happiness, with the help of her solicitor. *The Good Sister* draws two generations together, through an unforgettable series of events that happened decades ago.

*The Good Sister* marks the third book I have read from Australian fiction novelist Maggie Christensen. I really enjoyed Maggie's previous two novels, *Madeline House* and *Champagne for Breakfast*, both were fantastic mature based women's fiction novels. After devouring *The Good Sister* in a sitting, I can now easily attest to Maggie's latest novel being her best yet.

My attachment to *The Good Sister* initially comes from the wonderfully presented setting. Maggie has decided to cross the globe with her latest novel and ground her new book predominately in Scotland, which I believe is her native home. Australia does still feature in *The Good Sister*, only it plays a much smaller role. Maggie's presentation of her setting is authentic and vivid. I felt a closeness to the main location of the novel in particular, as my own mother was born and raised in Scotland in the 1950's. This personal connection definitely enhanced my reading of the setting, the characters and their experiences.

*The Good Sister* features a historically accurate setting. It is accompanied by precise use of period language, Scottish culture and social customs, which were spot on. Where Christensen also excels is in her re-creation of wartime Scotland. I have read a lot of material on World War II, but I feel I know very little about the

Scottish experience of the war. Thankfully, Christensen filled in this gap in my knowledge by her enlightening and comprehensive account of life during the war, especially on those left on the home front.

I loved the character list in *The Good Sister* immensely. Isobel MacDonald, the lead protagonist, is likeable from the outset. I was soon invested in her heartbreaking ordeal in love and life. Supporting Isobel is the other main lead in this novel, Isobel's 60 year old niece Bel, from Australia. Bel is also a very agreeable leading lady. Bel's background was interesting to unpack and her accompanying love story will definitely appeal to those who enjoy a mature relationship story filled with romance. Rounding off the character set in *The Good Sister* is Isobel's sister and Bel's mother Nan, who features in the past segments of this novel. There is also Isobel's friend Eileen, sister Kate and love interests, Bob and John. In the present day, Isobel's solicitor has a crucial role in the book's turn of events. Christensen takes care to ensure that each of her characters both in the past and present have a vital part to play in the unfolding tale.

*The Good Sister* is a dual time frame style narrative, which is my favourite type of novel. Christensen employs the use of this form of storytelling well. I loved the use of Isobel's diaries, which were used by her niece Bel in the present day to uncover the hidden past of their family's secrets. I found myself equally drawn to both the past and present storylines, which is testament to Christensen's skill as a writer. I will admit to racing through the present day events, in order to get back to Isobel's story in the past, it was quite the addictive read. I liked the way Christensen tracked Isobel's story from prior to the outbreak of the war, through to the wartime itself, then to the post war period and she followed her story to the 1980's. Not only did this comprehensive narrative help me feel more invested in the story, I felt a strong attachment to the lead as a direct result.

The ending, when it came, was touching and befitting of this emotional family saga. Not only did the final moments of *The Good Sister* reconcile the past with the present very well, it highlighted the emigrant experience extremely well. Christensen marries Bel's feelings towards the country of her birth Scotland, to her second home in Australia, perfectly. It will be sure to draw much semblance with many readers. I endorse *The Good Sister* whole heartedly, it is a great piece of historical fiction, which will appeal to fans of the genre.

\*I wish to thank the author, Maggie Christensen, for a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Brenda says**

It was 2015 and Bel Davison returned to Glasgow from Sydney, which had been her home for over forty years, to be by her elderly aunt's side. Her namesake, Isobel MacDonald was ninety-seven years old and in poor health. There was no one left, apart from Bel, and she needed her niece with her to finalise her life; to set her affairs in order.

Beseeched by her aunt to read her memoirs, as Isobel was still unable to speak of the past, Bel found herself buried in memories. Her childhood came back to her with suddenness, the impact of what had been buried for so long still able to hurt. But mostly Bel felt guilt. She knew she had been cruel – as teens were – to her aunt, who, even though she'd been an old curmudgeon, loved her as if she was her own child. When Bel learned of Isobel's lost love from the war years, and the span of heartache she had endured, she was shocked. She'd had no idea.

Matthew Reid was Isobel's solicitor and when Bel met him, she could see the relationship between him and

her aunt was a close one. As she spent time with Matt, going through her aunt's wishes and discovering the planning that had been involved, she found herself warming to the Scotsman who'd had troubles in his own past. But Bel had trouble coping with the imminent loss of her aunt – she loved her feisty manner; her devotion and love. What would she do without her?

*The Good Sister* by Aussie author Maggie Christensen is the author's first historical fiction novel and it's brilliant! More please!! Maggie always writes about older women – this one is no different. But the nature of the two timeframes – 1938 onwards in Scotland, and 2015, also in Scotland, but with mention of Sydney, the heat and other significant Australian icons – made my enjoyment of *The Good Sister* complete. For fans of historical fiction; and of Australian authors – I have no hesitation in recommending *The Good Sister* extremely highly.

With thanks to the author for my digital ARC to read and review.

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### **D.M. says**

Two ladies both named Isobel's. Both 60+ and single. This is a reflection of the past story.

Bel is visiting her aunt Isobel in Scotland. She has travelled all the way from Sydney back to the house she grew up in. Her aunt wants to leave her house to Bel. She is hoping she will follow her wishes, and make the house into something special. Bel meets Isobel's solicitor and some of her old friends. Isobel is the meddling old lady but in a friendly way. She wants Bel to get reacquainted with Scotland in this heartwarming tale of love and war.

This book flits between modern time and the past (starting early as the 1940's). Bel reads Isobel's memoirs reflecting on her own past and gets a glimpse into her own parent's romance. Bob is Isobel's once upon a time. He is the man who held so much promise and temptation.

Isobel is the good sister and lives a bittersweet life. This book isn't my usual happy-go-lucky story, but it was enjoyable. 4 stars out of 5.

\*I received an ARC in exchange for an honest review via Hidden Gems.

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### **Katz Nancy from NJ says**

I was so disappointed with this book. When I read the blurb, I thought the parallel story would be very interesting. Instead it turned out there was very little story but rather a romance title. I found the two Isobel's quite biting and their love stories rather silly.

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