



LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Reader,

To categorise *The Silent Inheritance* as a crime novel is a terrible understatement. Certainly there is a crime committed, a couple in fact, and the suspense and mystery surrounding these crimes makes for riveting reading but this novel is so much more than that.

In *The Silent Inheritance* we meet devoted mother Sarah, who lives under the radar for fear of her old life catching up with her, and her spunky daughter, Marni, who acts as her deaf mother's ears but has a mind of her own. We follow wily Freddy, forever compensating for his traumatic childhood with a life of luxury furnished through the representation of rich, unsavoury characters. We feel for Bob, Sarah's sweet-natured but uninspiring boss, and fall for Ross, the divorced Sergeant racing against time to save the latest young victim of The Wolf (who has his own sick, sad tale). Through these characters, and a number of others, Joy weaves a story that defies definition, combining the best bits of family saga, psychological suspense, mystery and even commercial women's fiction into a complex, richly layered and compulsively readable novel.

With skills like this, is it any wonder that Joy Dettman has sold over a quarter of a million books?

For those of you who have read Joy's work, you know you're in for a treat. And for those readers for whom *The Silent Inheritance* is the first foray into Joy's writing, I can assure you it will not be your last.

It is my pleasure to share this book with you.

Sincerely,

Haylee Nash Commissioning Editor – Fiction Pan Macmillan Australia





READER LETTER

Dear Readers,

The Silent Inheritance is the novel I planned to write one day when I found the time. Most of my tales have been set in country towns, where I spent my childhood. I made the move to Melbourne many years ago, and from paragraph one, *The Silent Inheritance* demanded the backdrop of a large city.

Bringing new characters to life is never easy, but my evil *Mr Wolf*, waiting for years on the backburner of my mind, broke free, his character already set in stone. After completing Number Six in the Woody Creek series, I was ready to handle him.

Also on the backburner of my mind, was a novel I'd promised myself to one day build around a deaf woman, born too late to benefit from a cochlear implant. Much of my life has been spent with the deaf – and isn't it suggested that a writer write from her/his own experience? Also, I have access to one who for many years has worked with deaf infants who have been given the gift of hearing and perfect speech by the miracle of a cochlear implant.

I found *Sarah*, the profoundly deaf single mother of *Marni*, a precocious twelve year old who becomes her mother's ears, her voice. In the *The Silent Inheritance* we glimpse the life of a city office worker who labors so her girl might know a more secure childhood than *Sarah*'s own, while outside their door, *Mr Wolf* prowls.

I hope I have captured *Sarah* and *Marni's* very different world, and my city. I hope too that you enjoy your reading of *The Silent Inheritance*.

Best regards, Joy Dettman.





READING GROUP NOTES

BLURB

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

PLOT SUMMARY

THEMATIC SUMMARY

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BLURB

In The Silent Inheritance, the author of the bestselling Woody Creek series brings another unforgettable cast of characters to life in a brand new story.

'an adept storyteller' Sydney Morning Herald

'Dettman writes compulsively readable stories' The Age

Sarah Carter, mother of twelve-year-old Marni, is raising her daughter alone in a small granny flat in suburban Melbourne. A serial killer, dubbed 'The Freeway Killer', is headline news and when Marni's classmate is abducted from the mall where Sarah and Marni shop, their city no longer feels safe.

Detective Ross Hunter's investigation into the abduction leads him to dead ends – until an unrelated incident sends him to the door of Freddy Adam-Jones, an unscrupulous barrister, who is guarding a secret that could ruin his life.

When an unexpected windfall changes the lives of Sarah and Marni, their sudden wealth opens doors long closed, and threatens to cast light on history better left buried.

What might Sarah's past reveal? What is her connection to Freddy? And can Detective Ross Hunter discover the link in time to save a young girl's life?

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Joy Dettman was born in country Victoria and spent her early years in towns on either side of the Murray River. She is an award-winning writer of short stories, the complete collection of which, Diamonds in the Mud, was published in 2007, as well as the highly acclaimed novels Mallawindy, Jacaranda Blue, Goose Girl, Yesterday's Dust, The Seventh Day, Henry's Daughter, One Sunday and the bestselling Woody Creek series.





PLOT SUMMARY

Sarah Carter has struggled most of her life. At twelve years old, her 'rainbow-chasing' alcoholic father crashed his car, killing her mother. Rejected by her father who 'needed his wife but not his deaf and dumb daughter' (Page 45) she was fostered by the Clarks in Perth. After falling pregnant to the Clarks' dying son, she runs away to her biological Gramp and Gran where she raises baby Marni on their farm on the outskirts of Melbourne.

Now, Sarah is raising her twelve-year-old daughter alone in a small granny flat in suburban Melbourne. Sarah is a model employee and due for a promotion but her employer David Crow promotes his mistress, Barbara Lane, instead. Just when she begins to feel that all is lost, she wins a life-changing amount in the lottery. But Sarah can't outrun her past – their sudden wealth opens doors long closed, and threatens to cast light on history better left buried.

Barbara Lane, mother of twelve-year-old Danni, has relocated from Sydney to Melbourne to start a new life with David Crow. David has bought her a house but her new life isn't as satisfying as she'd hoped. She is angry and frustrated that David hasn't divorced his wife and she threatens to move back to Sydney. Just as Barbara is packing to leave she realises that Danni is missing and believes she has been taken by Barbara's estranged ex-husband. But the police believe it is something more sinister.

Freddy Adam-Jones, ashamed of his family and upbringing, has reinvented himself as a man of substance – a top barrister and a defender of criminals. He believes he has it all until he has a few drinks too many and hits seventeen-year-old Lisa Simms with his wife's Commodore, killing her instantly. Panicked, he dumps her body and the car and uses his knowledge of forensics to cover up his involvement.

Detective Ross Hunter is investigating the Freeway Killer. The serial killer's fourth victim, Monica Rowan, has just turned up murdered in a garbage bag, tossed onto the side of the Monash Freeway. When both Lisa Simms and Danni Lane go missing, he's convinced that Danni is the Freeway Killer's latest victim. The police eventually find Freddy's burnt out Commodore and Lisa Simms' body ditched on the outskirts of Melbourne. Some DNA and a breadcrumb trail of clues lead Ross Hunter back to the door of Freddy Adam-Jones and his intangible link to Sarah Carter's past.

What might Sarah's past reveal? What is her connection to Freddy? And can Detective Ross Hunter discover the link in time to save a young girl's life?





PLOT SUMMARY

Question I

'She stripped in the bedroom, her hearing aids first. Always wore them. Had forever. They allowed her to hear fire sirens, big trucks and thunder, but no speech – and, as Marni knew, as Sarah knew, those aids were the reason she hadn't got the accounts officer job. She couldn't hear telephones. She could feel their ring. Couldn't hear who was calling, or reply to them.' (Sarah Carter, Page 28.)

'Easy isn't always best, baby, her mother used to say. The world is full of people who can't sign, and if you're going to find your own place in it, you need to talk. She'd never found her place, not in Melbourne.' (Sarah Carter, Page 44.)

 How did Sarah's hearing impairment affect the plot, Sarah's character and her voice? How did this strengthen, limit or provide opportunities for the story and affect the general reading experience?

Question 2

'She who expects nothing is never disappointed.' (Sarah Carter, Page 14.)

'She'd given up her own holidays for him – or maybe she'd given them up to prove to Crow that she was a team player, and could handle the job.' (Sarah Carter, Page 17.)

'I've never had anything to do with deaf and dumb people,' she'd [Barbara] said, and every word of it clear.' (Sarah Carter, Page 28.)

'Her skill had got her the job, or perhaps the hearing aids. At that time, large companies were being urged to employ the disabled.' (Sarah Carter, Page 49.)

'Men always won. In the end, it was the man who got what he wanted. She used to think she was using them, but each time, it was she who ended up the one being used.' (Barbara Lane, Page 104.)

 Discuss if the novel is an accurate portrayal of women, disabilities and power plays in the workplace.





PLOT SUMMARY

Question 3

'Screaming did no good. She couldn't fight, so it was a brain game, and as she lay on her back, staring into black, she began to build her own help box.

- · Rule one. No more screaming.
- · Rule two. Eat whatever he gives you, even dog food.
- Rule three. Stay alive until Daddy comes. The police might give up but he and Grandpa won't ever give up.' (Danni Lane, Page 151.)
 - Twelve-year-old Danni Lane shows perseverance and resilience in the face of her kidnapping. Discuss her strength of character. Where does this strength come from? Does this come, in part, from her upbringing?



THEMATIC SUMMARY

SECRETS

Many of the characters hold their secrets close to them and fear truth and honesty. Sarah is secretive about the paternity of Marni's father and haunted by her upbringing. Freddy does everything in his power to cover up that he accidentally killed Lisa Simms. The Freeway Killer is living a secret life. Even David Crow, to an extent, is keeping his relationship with Barbara Lane a secret.

Question 4

'Should have let Marni grow up knowing the truth. She'd never lied to her, or only about her father's name... She lied about having no photograph of Marni's father. She had one, but justified that lie by telling herself he hadn't been her father when the photograph was taken. Should have told her the truth.' (Sarah Carter, Page 210.)

'Watchful, honest eyes, except when he'd asked about her family. Their shields had been raised then. She was hiding something, from him or from her daughter, and he had a fair idea of what she was hiding.' (Ross Hunter, Page 353.)

- Discuss how secrets are used as a device for building suspense.

Question 5

'I won't ever stop, and I don't care if you're crying or not, because you're stark raving crazy, and a liar too, and you had no right to take who I was away from me.' (Marni Carter, Page 276.)

 Honesty is traditionally a redemptive quality and the truth is often viewed as being right. Think about the reasons why each character is being secretive. Why do they fear the truth getting out? Why or why not is honesty important in their specific circumstances?





THEMATIC SUMMARY

MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

There are two vastly different mother–daughter relationships in the novel. Sarah and Marni Carter are close, trusting, nurturing and rely on each other – even if Sarah does keep secrets from Marni. Whereas Barbara Lane's internal monologue reveals that she never wanted children. Barbara seems to hold resentment towards her ex-husband and Danni but this doesn't stop Barbara fighting for custody of Danni.

Question 6

'Loved her. Lived for her. Worked for her. Would have put up with ten Barbara Lanes for the next twenty years so her beautiful girl could have the best, the safest life she could give her.' (Sarah Carter, Page 43.)

"I'm a hostage in Mom's war game," the girl said.' (Danni Lane, Page 56.)

'Barbara slammed both doors and almost lost her footing on the way down, and who needed a bloody house with stairs you spent your life climbing, looking for a twelve-year-old bitch of a girl?' (Barbara Lane, Page 91.)

- Discuss this dramatic juxtaposition between Barbara and Danni Lane's, and Sarah and Marni Carter's relationships. Why do you think the author chose to make these vastly different relationships so prominent? What does it bring to the storyline? What does it say about mother-daughter relationships as a theme?





THEMATIC SUMMARY

THE WOLF MOTIF

Traditionally, the wolf motif is associated with a predatory nature and this is commonly recognised in the Big Bad Wolf from fairy tales and folklore. The Freeway Killer's thoughts are deep-seated in nursery rhymes, he calls himself 'The Wolf' and compares himself to the 'sheep' of society and the 'hunters' of the police force.

Question 7

'The very young were on familiar terms with terror. Still so close to their time in that place before the light, they remembered old Lupine's hot breath on their naked skin, remembered the sound of his teeth snap-snapping at their pretty pink heels.' (The Freeway Killer, Page 3.)

'He'd wait his chance, be Lupine, the wily one, his every sense alert for the hunters.' (The Freeway Killer, Page 34.)

'He'd become one of God's sheep for a time, had obeyed the warped rules of society where the wolf must learn to sit on command. Not any more. The wolf walked alone now, and alone he drove back to his lair.' (The Freeway Killer, Page 173–74.)

- Discuss the use of the wolf motif as a theme in The Silent Inheritance. How is it used to strengthen the Freeway Killer's character and his storyline and how does it give thematic weight to the story?





THEMATIC SUMMARY

THE LEGACY OF FAMILY

The Silent Inheritance concludes that the legacy of family is, to some degree, inescapable. Sarah was trying to escape her secret past and hang-ups only to inherit Gramp's farm and discover the degradation of her father. Freddy is obsessed with leaving his family and his name behind but circumstances lead him to his niece Sarah Carter. The Freeway Killer is acting, at least in part, because of the loss of his deceased daughter, Angie.

Question 8

'You can't change lives. You can move away, change your name, hide in a granny flat with a landlady playing watchdog at her front window, but inside you're still stuck with who you were born to be, because every memory of who you were is still jammed inside with every image of where you've been.' (Sarah Carter, Page 125.)

'The day Freddy had walked into the hallowed halls of Melbourne University, he'd pencilled in that hyphen between Adam and Jones, and it had looked so good, he'd gone over the pencil with a biro, knowing that to have any hope of unshackling himself from his family, he'd need that hyphen . . . There was a rotten gene in the Jones family.' (Freddy Adam-Jones, Page 344.)

Discuss the legacy of family in The Silent Inheritance. Why can't Sarah,
Freddy or the Freeway Killer escape their past?





WRITING STYLE

The Silent Inheritance is written in third person which helps the reader explore several unique points of view including Sarah, Marni, Barbara, Danni, Freddy and Ross. Specifically, it emboldens Sarah's voice and her hearing impairment; it expresses Marni's feelings towards her mother and her mother's past; we understand Barbara's internal monologue regarding her relationship with Danni, David Crow and her ex-husband; it exposes Freddy's insecurities and thought processes throughout his predicament; and we hear Ross's knowledge about the serial killer's motives. Most distinctly, the perspective of the Freeway Killer permeates the novel, so the reader feels his sinister thoughts and motivations from beginning to end.

Question 9

'If he didn't rape them, if he didn't photograph them, what was his motivation? There was always a motive, which at times may have only been clear to the perpetrator, but there was a motive.' (Page 204.)

- Discuss the ability to see and feel the serial killer's motivations. Why did the author choose to write this perspective in italics? Did this point of view affect the story and your reading experience? Were you able to empathise with the serial killer? Or did this dehumanise him?

Question 10

'Rage was not good. It gave birth to rash decisions. Rash decisions led to mistakes. What was required of him was calm, cool-headed thinking.' (The Freeway Killer, Page 165.)

'Frederick Adam-Jones was nothing if not methodical . . . He drove the back roads through that storm, knowing that he was now one of the bastards he defended, but knowing too that he was one who knew how the law worked, and if he was going to do this, he do it right.' (Freddy Adam-Jones, Page 118–119.)

- Compare the Freeway Killer's ramblings to the voice of accidental murderer Freddy Adam-Jones. What are their differences in character and writing style? Even though Freddy accidentally killed Lisa Simms, are there any similarities between the two characters?