

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Sally Hepworth is the New York Times bestselling author of six novels, most recently *The Good Sister* (2021), which was an instant bestseller. Her novel, *The Mother In Law* (2019) has been optioned for a TV series by Hollywood actress and producer, Amy Poehler.

Drawing on the good, the bad and the downright odd of human behaviour, Sally writes incisively about family, relationships and identity. Her domestic thriller novels are laced with quirky humour, sass and a darkly charming tone.

Sally's novels are available worldwide in English and have been translated into 20 languages.

Sally lives in Melbourne, Australia with her husband and three children.

- [Author's website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the opening chapter of the novel, Lucy describes feeling a "little niggle" in the pit of her stomach when the police showed up—a warning of oncoming danger. Are you familiar with the feeling she's describing? When have you felt it? How do you think this ominous tone serves to set up the rest of the book?
2. The Mother-in-Law is told in dual timelines and dual narratives—Lucy and her mother-in-law, Diana. How does this structure affect your reading experience? Did you feel more sympathetic towards one narrator or the other?
3. What was your initial impression of Diana, both through the lens of Lucy and through hearing Diana's own voice? How did your understanding of her and her motivations evolve throughout the book?
4. Diana and Lucy have very different definitions of what makes a "good" mother-in-law. What do you think makes for a good mother-in-law? How universal do you think your opinion is, or how personal? How do you think you would react in Lucy's position?
5. What did you think when you first learned about Diana's Orchard House past? Did it make sense to you, or come totally out of the blue? How do you think it fits into Diana's character and explains why she acts the way she does in the present timeline?

6. Before you learned about what happened on Thanksgiving, what did you think the "incident" was? What were the clues throughout the first half of the novel that make you think that way?
7. On page 133, Diana thinks, "When left to their own devices, bitter people can do bad things." Do you think she's right to assess Hakem this way? Where are the other places in the narrative where you think that this same quote applies?
8. Tom and Diana have very different philosophies about giving their children money. Is either of them correct? Or is there more of a middle ground that neither of them have considered? Do you think it's cruel for them to let Nettie suffer when they could help pay for her treatments?
9. On page 219, Ghezala says to Lucy, "Maybe [Diana] was so busy looking at the problems in the world, she forgot to give chances to those right under her nose." What do you think about that statement? Do you think she's correct, or is there something more at play?
10. Before you learned the truth of Diana's death, did you have a suspect in mind? Who and why?
11. A good ending is essential in any mystery or crime thriller: it should ease up on tension, answer questions, and tidy up loose ends. Does the ending accomplish those goals? Is the conclusion probable or believable? Is it organic, growing out of clues previously laid out by the author? Or does the ending come out of the blue, feeling forced or tacked-on? Can you envision a different or better ending?
12. Would you recommend this work to a non-mystery/thriller fan simply on the basis of its literary merit? Would you endorse it purely because of the skillful writing and the well-developed characters? Or do you think the work would strictly appeal to fans of the mystery/thriller genre?

- <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-mother-in-law/guide>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

/ Starred Review */* Hepworth (*The Family Next Door*, 2018) turns up the tension in her latest Australian-set domestic-suspense novel. Lucy's ties with her husband's mother, Diana, have always been fraught with tension, especially disappointing because Lucy had delighted at the prospect of a mother figure in her life after her own passed away. Lucy and Diana were never on the same page, and so it's with mixed feelings that Lucy receives the news of Diana's sudden death. Determining the circumstances to be suspicious, police question Lucy, her husband, and her husband's sister and brother-in-law, unraveling secrets Diana had held close. Hepworth entwines the stories of two complicated women, from both of their perspectives, past and present, who desperately needed each other but were unable to say or do the right thing. Diana's personality always suggested a cold, distant woman more interested in her charities than her family, but though everyone seems to have a reason to want Diana dead, Lucy realizes she never really knew her

mother-in-law at all. A masterful depiction of how much is said in the silences, accompanied by increasing unease over what happened to Diana, makes this a winner for fans of Liane Moriarty and Megan Abbott. - Tracy Babiasz (Reviewed 2/1/2019) (Booklist, vol 115, number 11, p30)

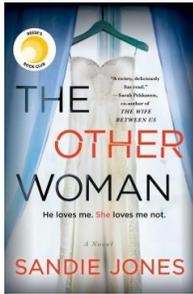
Publisher's Weekly

Hepworth (*The Family Next Door*) takes readers on a suspenseful ride as a family copes with the suspicious suicide of its matriarch. Lucy has never thought her mother-in-law, Diana Goodwin, liked her since they first met a decade earlier. Chapters in the first person from both Diana's and Lucy's perspectives reveal their deepest feelings and desires, highlighting past events such as the day Lucy married Diana's son, Ollie, and Diana's problems with depression after the death of her husband, Tom, moving forward to the time of Diana's apparent suicide. The investigation of the suicide changes dramatically when police learn that Diana didn't have breast cancer, as she had told her family she did. Furthermore, evidence emerges indicating she may have been murdered. Police question Lucy, Ollie, Ollie's sister, Nettie, and her husband, Patrick, about their involvement in the possible murder, and each of them have motives, especially Lucy, given her contentious history with Diana. Hepworth's short, punchy chapters keep the pages quickly turning while effortlessly deepening her characters. Readers will race to the end of this clever novel to find the truth. (Apr.) --Staff (Reviewed 02/25/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 8, p)

Kirkus Reviews

When Lucy first met Diana, 10 years ago, she had desperately hoped to find a warm, loving future mother-in-law. And while her fiancé, Ollie, adores his mother, his sister, Nettie, and her husband, Patrick, wryly warn her that Diana has always been more practical than sentimental. Aloof and absorbed with her volunteer work with refugees, Diana is an elegant woman of few words but lots of money. Although she is devoted to helping others navigate childbirth and the job market, she is loath to give her own children any money because she is convinced that they should have the opportunities to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, as she and her refugee clients have had to do. Frustrated by their mother's financial indifference to their troubles, Ollie and Nettie long ago learned to turn to their soft-hearted father, Tom. Yet as Hepworth (*The Family Next Door*, 2018, etc.) shifts perspectives, chapter to chapter, we discover that Diana's emotional reserve is actually secretiveness and uncertainty grounded in her own traumatic experiences. Her every attempt to show she cares is fraught with second-guessing how others might misconstrue her meaning. And it is this careful shifting of perspectives and time periods that exposes the sense of loss haunting the family, keeping the reader questioning who might have murdered Diana. Was it Lucy who finally snapped after Diana snubbed her one too many times? Or maybe Ollie, whose shady business partner may have pushed him into a desperate financial spot? Or perhaps Nettie and Patrick cannot wait for Diana's estate. But why was the suicide note left in a drawer? A mesmerizing domestic mystery. Kirkus Reviews Issue: Feb. 15th, 2019.

READALIKES



***The Other Woman* by Sandie Jones**

A blissful romance between Adam and Emily is challenged by Adam's manipulative mother, who resorts to dire measures to keep all other women out of her son's life.



***Then She Was Gone* by Lisa Jewell**

Struggling to put her life back together a decade after her beloved teen daughter's disappearance, a divorced woman bonds with a charming single father whose young child eerily resembles the woman's own lost daughter and who compels a wrenching search for answers.



***Let Me Lie* by Clare Mackintosh**

Struggling to come to terms with her parents' double suicide, new mother Anna commits herself to uncovering what really happened, only to be confronted by a mysterious adversary who would keep the past hidden.