



## The Good Sister

*Drusilla Campbell*

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## **The Good Sister** Drusilla Campbell

Roxanne Callahan has always been her younger sister's caretaker. Now married, her happiness is threatened when beautiful and emotionally unstable Simone, suffering from crippling postpartum depression, commits an unforgivable crime for which Roxanne comes to believe she is partially responsible.

In the glare of national media attention brought on her sister, Roxanne fights to hold her marriage together as she is drawn back into the pain of her troubled past and relives the fraught relationship she and Simone shared with their narcissistic mother. At the same time, only she can help Simone's nine year old daughter, Merell, make sense of the family's tragedy.

Cathartic, lyrical, and unflinchingly honest, *The Good Sister* is a novel of four generations of women struggling to overcome a legacy of violence, lies and secrecy, ultimately finding strength and courage in their love for each other.

## **The Good Sister Details**

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Author : Drusilla Campbell

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## From Reader Review The Good Sister for online ebook

### Margaret says

Post-partum depression is an issue that is prevalent in society, but often overlooked as a serious disorder, so I was glad that this book brought to light the real pain and confusion many young mothers feel after the long awaited birth becomes a reality. I just felt like the book missed its opportunity to hit that mark.

The Good Sister was about cycles--mothers who will do anything to keep their husbands happy; mothers who really don't want children and are not equipped to raise them well; eldest children becoming the parent to their mother and to their younger siblings. It is about the damage that is done when a child is overly-protected and is expected to be and is sometimes rewarded for being helpless.

Simone is the younger sister of Roxanne. The author reveals that she is border-line mentally disabled, bipolar, and suffers from attention deficit. She has been overly protected and comes to believe what others have taught her; that she is worthless. Not wanting her own daughters to grow up like her, she decides to "save" them from by taking their lives.

I felt Roxanne's pain and the conflict she felt at being Simone's main supporter as she often chose her sister's needs over her husband's, but I would have liked to have seen the character of Simone developed more. I didn't feel as sympathetic toward her because I didn't see all the traits that led her to her adult life. She came across as being selfish and self-centered and pampered and coddled with little to support the premise that she actually suffered from mental disorders and true post-partum depression. I wanted to know her better.

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### Nancy says

May 26, 2005. The day I stopped loving Tom Cruise. That is the day he slammed Brooke Shields for publicly announcing her reaction to postpartum depression. She chose medication. Gasp! Since then I've felt nothing but contempt for the man who has never had his body rewired while internal organs are pushed aside and changes in hormonal balance makes you cry because the cat coughed up a hairball.

On this particular day, my own body was waging a war with itself, having pushed a person the size of a pot roast through a hole the size of a nostril, and for some mysterious reason, my previously aesthetically pleasing breasts became as hard as granite were leaking sustenance for a child that was wholly dependent on me. No amount of positive thinking was going to magically restore my sleep deprived, physically rewired body. Nope. Instead I did what any sane woman would do.

I painted the family room. And the kitchen. And the entry.

To this day, I can't properly articulate my manic response to giving birth. I can only sit back, sigh and enjoy the ambiance of the colors.

And so, back to the book and painting. The author paints a clear path to Simone's thinking and thinking errors. The feeling of being overwhelmed and helpless as the demands continue to pile around her, looking for impossible solutions and eventually slipping past depression into psychosis. It is as disturbing as it is well

articulated. A new mother may see a sliver of herself in Simone and feel uncomfortable.

The author adds to Simone's personality bipolar, learned helplessness, narcissism, and provides a breeding ground for Simone's role. At the same time, Simone's older sister, Roxanne, takes on the caretaking role from a very early age. Co-dependency is threaded throughout the story by not only Roxanne but others from Simone's life and ancestral chain.

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This is a work of fiction however, the author lays her soul out by taking on such a difficult subject. This book covers so many different aspects of relationships and mental illness and health along with multidimensional characters, I would strongly suggest it for a mature Reading Group. Reading level is not difficult, the language does contain the "F" word at times.

### **Amy says**

I have to give this book a few stars because I definitely found it interesting, and I really enjoyed getting to know the characters and all their history, but it was really kind of a mess. The writing was sometimes good and sometimes not, often too confusing to follow with all the jumping back and forth between viewpoints and past/present, and I really felt like the author just didn't give enough. There were so many hints or brief allusions to certain parts of each character's story, and I kept waiting for the full explanation, but it never really came. I couldn't figure out how to feel about anyone because the author remained so vague on so many key details. That really bothered me, and to be honest, when I finished I was just glad to be done. It was really just a soap opera in novel-form, and I enjoyed it as a diversion but felt that it stayed too shallow, especially considering the serious nature of the topics it addressed (postpartum depression/psychosis, dysfunctional family relationships, marital abuse, child neglect, just to name a few)

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### **Rhonda Rae Baker says**

This was an extremely intense novel that had my attention from the beginning. I totally related to the storyline and understood what was going on. The way Drusilla changed POV (third person) was important and the backstory was woven in beautifully with just the right amount at the right time causing me to read faster and faster.

I'm choked up about it as the subject matter isn't for the faint of heart and it's possible that shallow thinkers or those who haven't been in similar circumstances won't get some of it but that has nothing to do with the prose.

The novel was written perfectly and I came out of it wanting to contact my children with tears of joy because all five of them are accessible to me right now. I've struggled with how they were raised because of how I was raised and the choices they've made because I wasn't perfect. None of us are perfect but we can love and nurture and train...essentially, all we can do is the best we can...and at the time of raising young children, we can only do with what we know. If I had a mother to help me along the way raising my children then they may have had things a little better. But I can also say that they are extremely strong and independent children because of the things they endured. They all are close to Momma Rae and I'm honored to be their for them. I

no longer enable them and they are beginning to tell me what happened to them while I was away working...they are healing...they are growing...they are learning and coming back for more wisdom and knowledge from family.

Not to get off track but any mom that reads this will want to go and hug their children. Mine are not living in the same town but they come to visit me at least once a month...and it blesses my soul to be sharing life and laughter with them. I'm happy that we all survived the 'baby' years and they are surviving their 'baby' years as well...my girls call me about everything now. We are all doing much better and learning from each other!

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### **Rachel Wallace says**

#### **4 Stars**

The book opens with Simone, a beautiful, over-privileged mom / housewife, on trial for the attempted murder of her children. The story of this horrible turn of events is told in alternating points of view by Simone, her oldest daughter Merrell, Simone's older sister Roxanne and their mother Ellen, with the majority told by Roxanne and Merrell. We follow Roxanne through a rocky childhood, in which she became Simone's protector, caretaker and only friend, forming a very strong yet codependent bond.

Roxanne has spent her adult life trying to forge some level of independence for both herself and her sister, yet cannot seem to break away, even at the potential cost of her own marriage.

#### **WHAT WORKED:**

This is a timely subject, post partum depression/ psychosis is more common than most people think and effects people at all socio economic levels. Most people have a lot less sympathy for a wealthy women who can afford to have household help and Simone was such a controversial offender, in part, because of her wealth.

The parts about Simone and Roxanne's childhood went a long way to explain how they ended up in the roles that they played in life.

I loved that Drusilla Campbell painted Johnny (Simone's husband) to be a 3 dimensional character. He was quite unlikable in places, yet in other places, he was almost loveable. Their mother Ellen was also well written, at times she seemed totally irredeemable and yet, she also had her moments of good.

I really loved little Merrell. She was smart, perceptive, funny and very in charge. She kept things running but deserved much better. She was quickly becoming an adult in a child's body. I just wanted to slow this down for her.

The crying baby felt so real for me. My oldest was a crier and was not a sleeper at all. I could sympathize with the fact that nobody in the house ever got any peace. It really puts anyone on edge.

Although it dealt with a very disturbing topic, the author handled the attempted murder scene quite well; without any unnecessary description or sensationalized details.

#### **WHAT DIDN'T WORK:**

This was a good book. There wasn't a lot that didn't work for me. I guess it frustrated me that no one forced

Simone to get any mental help until it was almost too late. With all these people around her and all the money and education they had, you would have thought someone would have seen it coming.

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### **Natasha says**

There are so many important topics in here. Postpartum, co-dependency, difficult childhoods... the author, I believe, wants postpartum to be the main topic but there were too many other stories going on. Simone's sister and their mother both have difficult stories to share. They all get mixed in together and it can have you thinking that Simone's postpartum is due to the messed up family life, which I don't think is what the author intended.

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### **Linda Rowland says**

Interesting story and the characters could have been as well if I could keep the men they kept losing straight. Same crazy people reproducing the same crazy situations.

I thought it was a good story badly written. Maybe the confusion was only in my head but it was at the very end that I realized it was the grandmother of Roxanne whose husband left and had another family. Did the rest of the men die?

It seemed that the buildup to the event was the thing and not what actually happened.

I am rambling. Do not like the way this author writes. Are all her books like this?

Come on Holly. Tell us what you really think.

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### **Ruth Turner says**

Held my interest until the trial, when it became a little boring. I skimmed through most of it.

An easy, quick read. I finished it in one sitting.

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### **Wendy Hines says**

The Good Sister opens with Simone Durand on trial for the attempted murder of some of her children. Devastating to think anyone would want to kill their kids, but tragically, it is on the news all too often.

The story then goes back in time to showcase how Simone came to be how she is, and her connection to her sister, Roxanne. Roxanne has always been there to care for Simone, but she feels guilt when she doesn't want to care for her, she wants to have her own life. Roxanne's husband doesn't understand, and so Roxanne's marriage is rocky at best as she tries to help her sister out.

Simone married a wealthy man and his fondest desire is to have a son. Simone keeps having children and many miscarriages, and sinks into a deep depression, but instead of having her seek help, her husband wants to keep trying until they get a son.

There is not much help from Simone and Roxanne's parents. Their mother is a cold, narcissistic person and cares for nothing but herself. Simone's nine year old daughter Merell knows something is wrong with her mom, and she tries her best to help care for her younger siblings, but she's only nine and can only do so much.

The story is tragic, yet one can remain hopeful that some good will come of the situation, even as the trial is played out over the national media. Ms. Campbell has created complex and diverse characters that you will either hate or love, and perhaps relate too. Post-partum depression is a real and often overlooked, and this is a up close and personal look at what it can do to a person and those that surround them. Delightful? No. Captivating and heart-wrenching? Yes. Ms. Campbell is a very talented writer and *The Good Sister* will enrapt you.

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### **Smitha says**

This was not an easy read as the book dealt with issues like postpartum depression bordering onto psychosis, neglect of dependent children and an aversion of the female child. The young mother, who is described as a girl in a woman's body is 'forced' to repeatedly bear children, the goal being a male baby in the family. To begin with, she herself is dependent on others, emotionally and physically, to a much greater extent than normal. She was neglected by her mother, overtly protected by her sister and has lots of emotional baggage. The story starts when she is charged and arrested for attempted murder of her children. Now her over protective family has to rally around her and try to save her from doom. All the characters in this fiction were raw and complicated. They never were good or bad, in fact, they resided somewhere in between. It was an interesting read. I knew about postpartum psychosis, but I got to know about a new psychological concept called as 'learned helplessness' which seemed interesting, and retrospectively, I think I have encountered a couple or so such females.

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### **Louise says**

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#### Story Description:

Nine-year-old Merell knows what she saw in the pool that day. And her call to 911 immediately put her mother, Simone, under suspicion for an unforgivable crime. But as usual, Simone's older sister, Roxanne, has come to the rescue. In the glare of national media attention she tries to help her vulnerable niece make sense of the family's tragedy. And while striving to hold her own marriage together, she struggles with her always troublesome relationships with the beautiful Simone – who suffers from crippling postpartum depression – and their cold, narcissistic mother, Ellen. Unflinchingly honest and moving, *THE GOOD SISTER* is a novel of three generations of women seeking to overcome a legacy of violence, secrecy, and lies...as they discover just how far sisters, mothers, and daughters will go to hurt and help one another.

#### My Review:

This was a very interesting and intense read!!! Nine-year-old, Merell, witnesses her mother attempting to drown her baby sister in their swimming pool and calls 911. Knowing full well that she'd be charged with

attempted murder, her mother and older sister, Roxanne, come to her rescue telling the police that is not the way it happened and that Merell being young was mistaken. However, Simone is eventually charged with the attempted murder of all four of her children and under goes a trial.

This is a story about postpartum depression, depression, narcissism, dependency and co-dependency which has been going on in this family for three generations. My feelings really went out to Roxanne who is always there for Simone to the detriment of herself and her own happiness. Simone just cannot function without Roxanne after having been taught to be totally “helpless” by her family growing up. Due her to delicate condition she was literally waited on hand and foot, carried when she should have walked, never had to figure anything out on her own, and didn’t learn how to cope with any type of stress whatsoever.

Simone’s husband keeps her pregnant having had eight or nine pregnancies within a few years along with some miscarriages. His plan was not to stop until Simone produced him a son. I felt he took advantage of Simone in a lot of ways but other people may not see it the way I do.

Of course, I also felt sorry for Simone who was a product of her environment and the way she was raised. She didn’t ask to be raised ‘helpless’ and unable to cope with ordinary every day stresses never mind having four children in such a short span of time.

The interesting thing is that this story was similar to the life the author, Drusilla Campbell, lead as she writes in her “Note from the Author” near the end of the book. Having now read the book, I wonder how much more of this fictionalized version was really true. In any event, the book was intense yet very, very sad for all those concerned. Every character in this story was affected in some way, an incredible read, really.

We all know about the horrors of postpartum depression but rarely do women also encounter a psychosis along with it like Simone does, or women like the very real life “Andrea Yates” who also killed her own children. Although written as fiction, this story is a reminder to us all to remember to seek help for any new Moms we know who may be suffering from postpartum depression because it is very real. I would definitely and most highly recommend this book to other readers.

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### **Holly Mueller says**

Shelley picked this for our book club. I enjoyed it even though it was about a macabre subject – a mother attempting to murder her children! Roxanne is Simone’s big sister, and she has been taking care of her all of her life. Now Simone is married to a chauvinist who married her because she was beautiful, but vulnerable and fragile. He ends up practically abusing her by repeatedly impregnating her, hoping for a boy after 5 girls, even though she’s obviously not capable of taking care of all those children. Simone is also borderline mentally disabled, which makes him even more repugnant. Roxanne tries to keep her safe, but Simone is spiraling out of control from post-partum depression bordering on psychosis. Roxanne is also trying to keep her own marriage together and deal with their mother. The reason I liked it is that it’s a novel that tries to be empathetic toward mental illness – it makes you think twice about making monsters out of some of the mothers that have been in the national news.

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### **Cindy says**

All in all a good book on many subjects very near and dear to my heart. However, there were three main faults keeping me from rating this book any higher:

1.) I wanted to feel for Simone. Whether by my own choice or by the persuasion of the author, or other outside factors such as reviews, I'm not sure. So I kept trying to like her but I just wasn't convinced. Maybe there is not enough background into Simone's life but ultimately I didn't see her as anything more than a self-loathing, entitled adolescent in a woman's body. Though there were obvious factors of mental illness including the crimes against her children, the mental illness didn't seem prevalent in all aspects of her life; it seemed more like a personality disorder.

2.) I needed more evidence of a bond between Simone and Roxanne. It seemed too often to be stated rather than demonstrated and with an age gap of roughly 9 years between the siblings, it is hard to believe there is much of a connection. I wasn't sold.

3.) There was a struggle as to who the protagonist was. When I picked up the book I thought Roxanne was the protagonist, but as the chapters shifted narrators it became the four generations of women. Both would have worked well, but I felt that the ambivalence made it hard to focus on or empathize with any of the characters.

Also, Roxanne should have been fat.

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### **Jodi says**

I realize this is a controversial subject matter, and I understand that and factored it into my thoughts , but I had an extremely hard time getting into this book. The "mother" and I use that term lightly, was a whiney, blame everyone but herself woman from the start. I couldn't stand her character & I certainly didn't feel for the Grandmother or the sister who kept protecting her to save her from punishment for her crimes. I felt myself cringing at the words used, and disgusted that she was constantly lying & that others continued lying to save her.

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### **Susan Anders says**

Well-written fiction account of a woman suffering through postpartum depression and how it effects generations of women. As a mother of an infant that was very difficult, I totally understand this temporary and sometimes long-term affliction! When my sister-in-law (mother of 4 boys) called me a few weeks after bringing my second infant home from the hospital and jokingly asked if I was ready to throw her out the window yet, I was so relieved to know that I was not the only one that had that thought, if only for a split-second! Thankfully, I never acted on them, but I totally understand why women that suffer from PPD want to harm their children. This story also focuses on the dysfunction of upbringing and how it effects us as adults trying to raise our own children. We all carry baggage from our childhood and it's easy to see how it plays a

big role in PPD.

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