



## The Silversmith's Wife

*Sophia Tobin*

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## **The Silversmith's Wife** Sophia Tobin

Stunning commercial historical fiction, perfect for fans of Tracy Chevalier The year is 1792 and it's winter in Berkeley Square. As the city sleeps, the night-watchman keeps a cautious eye over the streets, and another eye in the back doors of the great and the good. Then one fateful night he comes across the body of Pierre Renard, the eponymous silversmith, lying dead, his throat cut and his valuables missing. It could be common theft, committed by one of the many villains who stalk the square, but as news of the murder spreads, it soon becomes clear that Renard had more than a few enemies, all with their own secrets to hide. At the centre of this web is Mary, the silversmith's wife. Ostensibly theirs was an excellent pairing, but behind closed doors their relationship was a dark and at times sadistic one and when we meet her, Mary is withdrawn and weak, haunted by her past and near-mad with guilt. Will she attain the redemption she seeks and what, exactly, does she need redemption for...? Rich, intricate and beautifully told, this is a story of murder, love and buried secrets.

'A dense, intricate historical thriller centering around the murder of a silversmith - in the tradition of Iain Pears' *An Instance of the Fingerpost* and Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*' Sophie Hannah and Janet Todd, judges of the Lucy Cavendish Prize

## **The Silversmith's Wife Details**

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## From Reader Review The Silversmith's Wife for online ebook

### Claire says

I really enjoyed this story. It was a book I couldn't put down - and I haven't read one of those in a while. I enjoyed the characters - their depth and darkness. It was a story full of intrigue, secrets and grit relevant to the era it was based on.

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### Denise says

Historical fiction set in 1792 London. Centered around the murder of a silversmith, the character-centred story delves deeper and deeper into the characters, motives and relationships of the people surrounding the dead man while slowly unravelling the mystery of who killed him and why. Atmospheric but a little too slow and meandering for my taste - I found my attention wandering a lot after the first few chapters.

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### Phoebe says

Underwhelming. Could not get into any of the characters, least of all the eponymous Mary. I did finish it, but really for the sake of finishing it rather than because I wanted to know any outcome. I kept waiting for something interesting to be revealed, but in the end it was a bit of an anticlimax.

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### Michael says

Berkeley Square, London 1792 Pierre Renard, a respected local silversmith is found dead with his throat slashed and his pocket watch stolen. From the outside Pierre seems like a highly successful businessman but further inspection finds a man with many enemies, who despised his wife Mary and had a wandering eye. As we go along with the diary extracts from Pierre at the start of each chapter we discover more and more about the man. For one he wishes his wife was dead, despises her little brother Eli so much that he has him sent away, something that breaks Mary's heart and will have an affair with the wife of a customer.

The question from the start is who killed Pierre and why? Mary is the obvious candidate as she is miserable in her marriage and knows her husband is not truly devoted to her but would she who seems so timid towards him finally snap? There are others who can be called enemies of the silversmith and all have the hidden secrets. The doctor Taylor for one is fierce in his allegiance to Pierre after his death and will have none of the negative talk about his friend while knowing all that is said is true while in the end all the characters can be seen as being under suspicion.

Sophia Tobin has done a wonderful job with The Silversmith's Wife of bringing eighteenth century London and a diverse array of characters to life. From Mary, Pierre's long suffering wife to the man who discovered his body Digby, all are vividly created and come under the microscope. The best part of the book is the answer of who committed the crime is not obvious and one that will not be revealed until well into the book. Combining mystery, romance and lots of secrets, the book comes highly recommended from historical

fiction fans.

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### **John says**

This is a debut novel set in 18th century London, and in particular in Berkeley Square and Bond Street. It is a "who-dun-it" without a central detective figure, and concerns the death of a silversmith. Whilst the plot is intriguing, I found it difficult to get too involved, partly because of the weaknesses of the three central characters, who I found fairly boring. The key problem to this book is a lack of pace, there is too much description of the lives of the two main female protagonists and no-one with whom it is easy to empathise.

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### **Tracey Allen at Carpe Librum says**

\* Copy courtesy of The Reading Room \*

Set in 1792, *The Silversmith's Wife* takes place in London's Berkeley Square and is Sophia Tobin's first novel.

Pierre Renard is an ambitious silversmith found by the night watchman with his throat slashed and his belongings stolen, much to the shock of his wife Mary.

I was immediately drawn to *The Silversmith's Wife* with its gorgeous cover and the hope of finding out more about the night watchmen of London during this era. When I read *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* I was enthralled by the 'night watch' whose job it was to patrol the streets, apprehend criminals or thieves, watch for signs of fire and call out the time.

The night watchman in *The Silversmith's Wife* was a dark and intriguing character, but I was just begging him to call out the time or an 'All's Well' but sadly he never did.

However, what I did find was a story centred around Mary and a few central characters in what I would call a character based (rather than action based) whodunnit. It was interesting (and frustrating) to read how Mrs Renard was treated - both as a wife and a widow - and the several characters who had motive to kill the pompous Pierre Renard.

*The Silversmith's Wife* captured the life and times of London in the 1790s very well although I would have loved more detail on the art of making and producing the pieces of silver described in the novel.

Readers are not left hanging in this whodunnit with a timely confession at the end that I didn't see coming. An enjoyable read.

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### **Shannon (Giraffe Days) says**

Mary was the daughter of a silversmith and then, the wife of one too. Her husband, Pierre Renard, is now more of a businessman than an actual smith; it's been a long time since he wielded his tools at the bench. Now he panders to the rich and influential, ingratiates himself with them to secure their business, and farms

out the work to others, stamping over their mark with his own before presenting the finished product. Pierre is a man of great pretension and affectation, who considers himself a great man and worthy of much - worthy, in particular, of a perfect wife who will give him the perfect son in his own image.

But Mary was never good enough for Pierre, and eleven years as his wife has made her a ghost of herself. The girl she once was has been shrivelled to nothing under his withering gaze, impatience and high expectations - not to mention the times of actual violence. She lives in terror of him now, a fear that manifests in severe sleepwalking, to the point that the whole house must be locked at night, and all the doors within, too.

On this particular night in 1792, though, she is woken from a doze by a knock on the door. The physician, Dr Taylor, arrives with bad tidings: Pierre is dead, mugged perhaps, his possessions - especially his distinctive pocket watch - gone. Mary is left in a state of shock. So long under Pierre's thumb and shadow, his dictatorial word, she's adrift, lost even. She fears that in her sleepwalking she did something, is to blame. Her forthright and indomitable sister, Mallory, scoffs at this and had no love for Pierre - who had many enemies - but she can see Mary is sinking into a bleak depression.

In his will, Pierre left the whole business to his young apprentice, the nephew of the woman he wanted to marry but wasn't granted permission to. He left a codicil for his wife, stating that she should marry his cousin - thankfully, the cousin is dead, but with Mary's life and future held in the hands of Dr Taylor and the other men who stand as trustees, she soon feels pressure to hear the proposals of other men.

Newly returned to London, Alban Steele has come to help his ailing cousin, Jesse, with his trade. Jesse produces work for Pierre Renard, but as he weakens he needs more help. Alban arrives the same night Pierre's body is discovered, and the news reminds him of the time he saw Mary, before she was married, an image of her that has stuck with him all these years.

Also affected by the death of Pierre is Joanna, a lady's maid for a young newly-wed, Harriet Chichester, who married her for her family's wealth. The Chichesters had commissioned a set of silverware from Renard, and Joanna had also made a request of him: a locket to hold a piece of her beloved's hair. Over the following months, Joanna uncovers a secret that sheds new light on Pierre's death and puts her in a difficult position.

Watching it all from the shadows is the nightwatchman, Digby, a red-haired man who resents the rich and the life he wasn't born to, who nevertheless manages to be where he is needed and who sees much, and understands more.

Set during the reign of Mad King George (George III), *The Silversmith's Wife* takes place in a London stripped bare of its glamour, riches and beauty. This is a dark, minimalist, almost bleak London, the London of the tradespeople, domestic servants and others who work hard in this slippery world where death is a matter of fact and life. There's no sign of the swelling French Revolution that would have started four years before, or of life beyond the sphere of the characters of this story. You'd easily forget that there was a world beyond Bond Street or the shadows of Berkeley Square. This creates a tense, brooding atmosphere that serves the story well, giving it the sense that you're getting a glimpse into the "real" world of London in the late 18th century.

Tobin's debut novel begins with a murder but, since there was no forensic science available and even post-mortems were avoided, there is no actual investigation into the death. Digby, the watchman, is asked by a gentleman, Maynard, to keep his eyes and ears open, but Digby is under no real obligation to do anything. No one wonders very much over the death, assuming it to be a mugging turned mortally violent. Yet the

lingering tension over a death unsolved remains, and is ever-present, adding an unsettling sense of unpredictability to the story. It's as if, even though everyone has pretty much forgotten the matter, the fact that there's a murderer out there - for whatever unknown reason - adds a dark sense of menace to this London. The characters don't pick up on it - for them, that kind of threat and menace is probably a fact of life. But it's enough to keep the reader reading.

Sadly, not much else about this story kept *this* reader reading. I do love a good historical fiction novel, but this one left me feeling distanced, even a bit alienated, and lacking in sympathy. It's a slow read and not a whole lot happens, yet it's also long. It's rich with historical detail, but such details seem like too much padding. For a debut novel, it's competent, and Tobin has much potential, but her actual writing lacked fluidity and an organic naturalness that makes for a smooth, effortless immersion in another world. Her narrative voice does a good job of feeling historical - it has a syntax and diction that echoes contemporary novels, making it feel less modern and more genuine. But it's not quite polished, hasn't yet hit its stride, and reads too sluggishly.

Combine a slow, uneventful plot with dour, unlikeable characters and a sluggish writing style, and you get a story that loses its lively promise under the weight of historical accuracy. It was an interesting story, but not a very enjoyable or captivating one. I wasn't engrossed, only mildly curious. And after the slow, heavy-footed hobble to the finish, the climax was decidedly anti-climactic, serving only to vindicate (mildly) and answer the question that got us reading in the first place: who killed Pierre and why?

*My thanks to the publisher for a copy of this book.*

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### **Tamara says**

This book caught my eye in a local second hand bookshop and on a whim I decided to buy it and go into reading it completely blind.

I really liked this book, I enjoyed the plot and the characters, the mystery and the setting. Everything unravelled perfectly and I'm so glad I picked this one up.

I might even have to read her next book, which by the preview in the back of this one looks like it follows on from the next generation in this book.

4/5 stars and what a great start to 2016.

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### **Karen says**

With this debut novel we are transported back to 18th century London, and in particular to Berkeley Square and Bond Street. This is a dangerous place requiring the presence of a night watchman to protect its people and property. One night Edward Digby, the night watchman on duty finds the slain body of Pierre Renard, a well-known and a highly regarded silversmith.

Despite cultivating a superior persona, Renard was not a popular man and he was not mourned by many. In private he was a cruel sadistic bully and in business, a fraud. His wife Mary suffered the most at his hands,

his diary notes at the beginning of each chapter make clear his disappointment of her and his wish to be free of his marriage.

Without the benefit of modern day forensic examination, there is not much of an investigation into his death. The local doctor is also the coroner and only a cursory inquest is held. What then follows is a cleverly constructed story encompassing the many people who were in some way involved with Renard, either through business or his personal life.

This is a very richly detailed and atmospheric story. It has clearly been well researched and the historical detail is fascinating. The characters are superbly drawn, from the widow Mary, who is a shell of her former self after her unhappy marriage to Renard; the night watchman Digby, a man who is not without flaws; a young newlywed upper class couple whose marriage is not all it seems and the silversmiths and engravers who work in poor conditions to produce such beautiful silverware. There were one or two characters who particularly stood out for me – Mary's sister Mallory, a no-nonsense widow and businesswoman and Alban Steele, an old acquaintance of Mary's who comes to London to help his ailing cousin with his silverwork.

This is very much a slow burner of a story which proceeds throughout at a sedate pace. I've always loved history and thoroughly enjoyed the historical detail and vivid descriptions. Little by little the life and secrets of the silversmith Renard, are revealed and suspicion is cast upon those closest to him and those who had the most to gain from his death. Do we ever find out who killed him – you will have to read the book to find out!

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### **Christina says**

A good, easy read, I finished this in a day. The plot fits together well, the characters are well drawn, nothing jars in the historical detail. It's not much of a mystery but it kept my attention.

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### **Ann says**

I don't usually read historical novels so that might one reason for such a low rating. I like the format of the book in that the main character although dead was heard through his journal. However, I found the subject matter almost as depressing as Brexit. Not a happy soul in site. Well written I suppose but oh dear so dreary.

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### **Kiri Kayrooz says**

Pierre Renard is a silversmith of some renown in London in 1792. Until someone slits his throat. The list of suspects is long - turns out Renard was pretty horrible.

I started reading this book AGES ago and got bored with it. It's not a bad book but it's not really my taste anymore and is a reason why you shouldn't judge a book based on its cover. I thought it looked interesting and the search for Renard's killer was, but the characters themselves did nothing for me. The central characters were a bit insipid and the more interesting characters were not in the story enough.

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## **Blodeuedd Finland says**

I always do like historical mysteries and this one had me guessing. Because at times it pointed towards someone, and then someone else and then I wondered again. In the end I always suspect everyone.

The book starts with a murder. Pierre Renard, a silversmith, that was not that liked it seems in the end. He lives behind his wife Mary, she was a wreck of nerves and had not been treated right by him.

At the beginning of every chapter we also get a page from his diary and see what really was going on with him and how much he hated his wife. Yeah, I really did not like him.

Other Povs are Digby who found the body and investigates who did it. Then there are Mary's sister, the people who worked for Renard, his best friend and new people that comes into the story. Another POV are the Chishesters who commissioned some work from him and they deal with their own issues and his death of course. It all comes together in a fine woven plot.

Good characters, a nice plot and nicely done murder plot. I enjoyed it.

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## **Laura says**

I enjoyed the story and setting but it ended surprisingly abruptly for me.

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## **Atueyi Chinene says**

I gave it a three star because it is not easy to write a novel no matter how bad. The book started out good. I love the old English setting and language And the way each new chapter began with Perre Ranard diary.

What I didn't like about this book was I couldn't identify with any character NON. Mary Ranard was portrayed as a very weak woman who can't think for her self I didn't like it at all thank God her sister was there for her. I wished her sister played a more interesting role in the book maybe she would have been my favorite.

I love Alban Steele when he was introduced but he failed me too. He acted like he didn't really want Mary through his actions his brother had to push him and mary hand to ask to accompany him to see his brother Jesse Steele family before he made any move.

Another character I loved was Joanna Dunning I wished she eventually made something for herself. I wish her character found out who killed Perre Ranard. She deserved a more significant role.

In conclusion, this book is not really a story of murder, yes there was love if you can call it that and buried secrets but there was no active investigation into who killed Perre Ranard. This book is interesting although the characters were disappointing. If you looking for a murder Mystery infused with love and secrets this is not the book.

the book was more about shallow characters limited expressions. As you read you want the characters to do more but they didn't they just disappointed. But you will be defiantly surprised by who killed him. I kept reading because I wanted to know who killed him.

would I recommend this book after all? yes.

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