

The Sweeney Sisters

William Morrow

By Lian Dolan

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Introduction

An accomplished storyteller returns with her biggest, boldest, most entertaining novel yet—a hilarious, heartfelt story about books, love, sisterhood, and the surprises we discover in our DNA that combines the wit of Jonathan Tropper with the heart of Susan Wiggs.

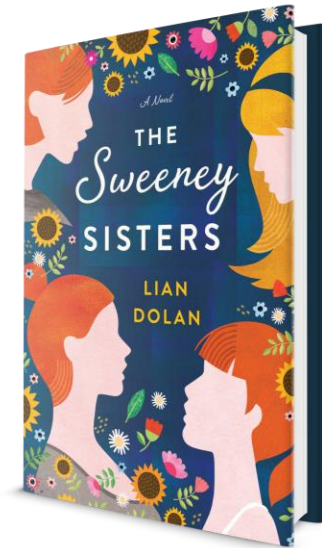
Maggie, Eliza, and Tricia Sweeney grew up as a happy threesome in the idyllic seaside town of Southport, Connecticut. But their mother's death from cancer fifteen years ago tarnished their golden-hued memories, and the sisters drifted apart. Their one touchstone is their father, Bill Sweeney, an internationally famous literary lion and college professor universally adored by critics, publishers, and book lovers. When Bill dies unexpectedly one cool June night, his shell-shocked daughters return to their childhood home. They aren't quite sure what the future holds without their larger-than-life father, but they do know how to throw an Irish wake to honor a man of his stature.

But as guests pay their respects and reminisce, one stranger, emboldened by whiskey, has crashed the party. It turns out that she too is a Sweeney sister.

When Washington, DC based journalist Serena Tucker had her DNA tested on a whim a few weeks earlier, she learned she had a 50% genetic match with a childhood neighbor—Maggie Sweeney of Southport, Connecticut. It seems Serena's chilly WASP mother, Birdie, had a history with Bill Sweeney—one that has remained totally secret until now.

Once the shock wears off, questions abound. What does this mean for William's literary legacy? Where is the unfinished memoir he's stashed away, and what will it reveal? And how will a fourth Sweeney sister—a blond among redheads—fit into their story?

By turns revealing, insightful, and uproarious, *The Sweeney Sisters* is equal parts cautionary tale and celebration—a festive and heartfelt look at what truly makes a family.



Questions for Discussion

1. Proper and socially graceful Liza, bohemian Maggie, razor-sharp corporate success story Tricia: which of Bill Sweeney's daughters do you most resemble? Do you have sisters—biological or otherwise—who fit into those molds...or defy them?
2. Early in the novel the author tells us that despite her lack of professional success and personal stability, "Maggie was the glue that held the whole family together." Does that ring true to you? By the end of the novel, has each sister contributed her own unique talents to holding the family together?
3. When Bill Sweeney was alive, Maggie commented: "Suppress and deny should be the family motto." She was talking about their father but were the sisters also guilty of suppressing and denying things in their own personal lives?
4. Bill never spoke to Serena or revealed that he was her father because, according to his best friend, "seeing her as an adult, after having paid so little attention to her as a child, would remind him of all the ways he had failed in his life. Talking to her now would break his heart." Was that the right decision? What do you think Bill should have said to Serena if he'd had the courage to speak to her?
5. "None of the Sweeney sisters had the instinct to go all "Dr Phil," as Maggie called it, rushing to meet their long-lost sister in a tearful reunion." How would you have reacted?
6. Is *The Sweeney Sisters* a cautionary tale about taking DNA tests? Have you or someone you know had surprising results when they took one?
7. What did you make of the revelation that Bill Sweeney had burned his wife Maeve's poems instead of having them published? How did you view Bill as a person at the start of the novel versus at the end of the novel, after there were so many revelations about his actions?
8. Liza says, "Could be having a messy family tree isn't the worst thing in the world." Was learning the truth ultimately a positive experience for the Sweeneys?
9. What do you think becomes of each Sweeney sister in the years after this book ends? What will their lives be like?