

# BEST BOOKS ABOUT FAMILY SECRETS



*Daisy Goodwin*

THE author and broadcaster suggests key novels to help you through the trickier times in life

EVERY family has its secrets, things that one generation try to keep from the next. One of the most traumatic is lying about a child's parentage. There is no doubt that discovering your father or mother is not who you thought, can have a very unsettling effect on an adult's identity.

This is the situation explored in Ann Tyler's wonderful novel *A Spool of Blue Thread*, where the youngest son — the one whom everyone agrees is most like his dad — discovers he is not the biological son of his parents at all, but a stray child that his social-worker mother adopted.

Even worse, his real mother is someone the whole family despises.

When Chip finds out through a remark that his older brother lets slip after their mother's death, he is devastated.

Chip's mother thought she was being kind by not letting him know he wasn't her biological son, but the lesson of the book is that it is better to live with the truth than to get used to a lie.

Keeping secrets from your husband or wife can undermine the foundations of a marriage as Daniel Sullivan, a linguistic expert, finds out in Maggie

O' Farrell's electrifying novel *This Must Be The Place*. He is married for the second time to a famous but reclusive film star called Claudette, the love of his life. That feeling is mutual until he has to face up to the fact that he's failed to tell her about a secret from his past.

This lack of honesty threatens to break their relationship apart. Claudette feels she no longer knows whom she is married to. At one point, she turns to him and says, 'Do you think Daniel that we might have reached the end of our story?' I won't give away the ending, but it is clear Daniel's secret is the thing that poisons their closeness.

Another relationship that is torn apart

by a secret is the one in Polly Samson's haunting novel, *The Kindness*, between Julian, a writer, and Julia, an older woman stuck in an abusive relationship.

Happily, they end up getting married, but Julia does something wrong for understandable reasons (spoiler alert!), sleeping with Julian's best friend because she knows Julian is infertile.

She thinks a baby will make their relationship whole, but the secret of their daughter's parentage drives them apart. It's a compellingly plotted account of the corrosive power a secret has to destroy the happiest of families.

Above all, each of these novels makes clear one sure thing about secrets — that they are always impossible to keep.

## Words that time forgot **KENCH**

Delightful lost words ripe for revival

**Meaning:** To laugh loudly, as in: 'We were **kenching** all the way through the film.'

**Origin:** From Old English, used in the 13th century.

