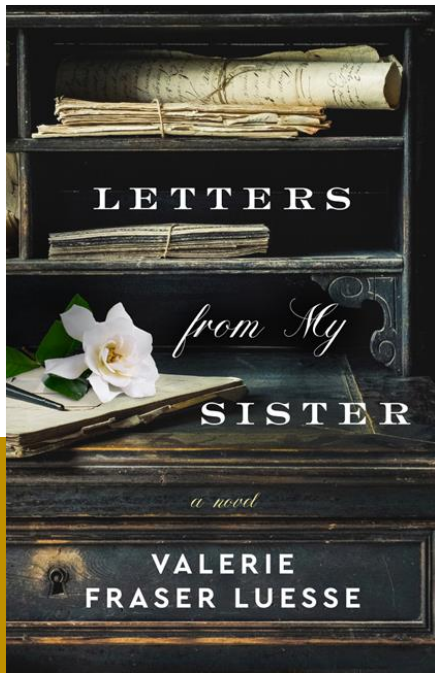




Can a Single Act Shape the Rest of Your Life?

“This is the kind of book you can’t wait to get home and read every night.”
—Sara Peterson, editor in chief of *HGTV Magazine*, on *Almost Home*



Letters from My Sister by Valerie Fraser Luesse

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Paperback ISBN: 978-0-8007-4160-0
\$16.99; 352 pp
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Ada, Mich.—Award-winning magazine writer Valerie Fraser Luesse has received high praise for her storytelling ability. Her novels have been described as engrossing, heartwarming, captivating, and uplifting, and her perfect blend of Southern charm and historical prowess creates captivating tales that have readers longing for more. Now she invites readers to journey back to the turn of the century for a complex and suspenseful tale dripping with intrigue and romance in *Letters from My Sister*.

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Sisters Emmy and Callie Bullock are living a privileged life. As the only daughters of a wealthy Alabama cotton farmer, they are surrounded by a close-knit family and share a fierce bond with two Black women—Tirzah Randolph, who delivered both of them into the world, and her daughter, Hepsy Jordan, who runs the Bullock household. But when Hepsy’s beautiful granddaughter, Lily, arrives in town, she draws the wrong kind of attention. This sets in motion a chain of events that shakes not only the Bullocks’ well-ordered household but the whole community.

After Lily has a baby, Callie witnesses something that she can’t explain. But her memory is just a haze—an image of her beloved sister, Emmy, standing by a darkened riverbank with Lily’s baby girl. As Callie tries to come to terms with what she deems an unthinkable act, it will take letters from her sister to reveal hidden truths leading back to a chilling September night that changed them both forever.

Appealing to readers of various genres, *Letters from My Sister* will take booklovers on a life-altering journey they won’t soon forget.

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About the Author

Valerie Fraser Luesse is the bestselling author of *Missing Isaac*, *Almost Home*, *The Key to Everything*, and *Under the Bayou Moon*. She is an award-winning magazine writer best known for her feature stories and essays in *Southern Living*, where she recently retired as senior travel editor. Specializing in stories about unique pockets of Southern culture, Luesse received the 2009 Writer of the Year award from the Southeast Tourism Society for her editorial section on Hurricane Katrina recovery in Mississippi and Louisiana. A graduate of Auburn University and Baylor University, she lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with her husband, Dave.

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PRAISE for Valerie Fraser Luesse's Novels

“Luesse’s multifaceted, lyrical tale dazzles with larger-than-life villains searching for a big payday, a mythical albino alligator, and a lovable cast.”
—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review of *Under the Bayou Moon*

“Luesse unfolds another beautiful story of poverty, community, and love in the Southern United States.”
—*Library Journal*, starred review of *Under the Bayou Moon*

“Luesse’s latest historical tale was inspired by a true story. Realistic characters and two sweet love stories will provide readers with an escape and inspire hope.”
—*Booklist* on *The Key to Everything*

“*The Key to Everything* by Valerie Fraser Luesse gets my vote for one of the best reads of this year. . . . This is a happy read that will touch you and make you smile.”
—*Fresh Fiction* on *The Key to Everything*

“Luesse presents a heartwarming story of the power of relationships, and how the most inopportune circumstances can yield unexpectedly rewarding results.”
—*Publishers Weekly* on *Almost Home*

“Valerie Fraser Luesse once again directs a symphony of characters, charming readers with her storytelling expertise and captivating dialogue.”
—*BookPage* on *Almost Home*

“*Missing Isaac* beautifully elucidates how good things can arise even in the midst of painful trials.”
—*Foreword Reviews*, starred review of *Missing Isaac*

“I love the writing in *Missing Isaac*. I love the characters, the dialogue, the storyline, and, well, pretty much everything about it.”
—*Birmingham Christian Family* on *Missing Isaac*



Sample Interview Questions for Author *Letters from My Sister*

Can you please provide a brief summary of your novel, *Letters from My Sister*?

Sisters Callie and Emmy have no secrets between them until a mysterious accident robs one of a crucial memory and sparks troubling visions about the other. Only through letters they exchange while painfully separated do the sisters reveal hidden truths leading back to a fateful springtime day—and a chilling September night—that changed them both forever.

***Letters from My Sister* offers a fascinating plot. What was the inspiration behind your novel?**

Three women: my maternal grandmother, her only sister, and a Black woman named Bama, who cooked for their parents and ran their house. My grandmother spent a year at a healing springs resort when she was seventeen. Her sister also took a difficult journey that separated her from the family for a while, but I can't explain too much about that without giving the story away.

My grandmother was a tough critic of humanity! She didn't respect many people outside her family, but she revered Bama, who delivered some of her children and taught her critical life skills she would need later in life, when she faced tremendous hardship.

The plot of my story is fictional, but I was inspired by the close relationship between my grandmother and her sister, the journeys they took, and the strong woman who became much more to them than their parents' employee.

Your two female protagonists, Emmy and Callie, are the privileged sisters of a wealthy cotton farmer. Although very different, they share a strong bond. Can you please give a hint of what tested their relationship?

Callie is faced with difficult questions: How much can you trust someone you love? Will you believe what you see or what you feel?

Lily is the beautiful granddaughter of Hepsy Jordan, who runs the Bullock household. Her appearance affects not only the Bullock household but the whole town. Without giving away any spoilers, can you provide some insight on how her appearance turns the whole town upside down?

Lily upends their perception of what a woman of color "should" be. Strikingly beautiful and talented, she makes it difficult for anyone to consider her inferior, which many of the white women in the community want very much to do. The Black women in the

community can see what's happening and worry for Lily, who does nothing to incite resentment from anyone; rather, it's imposed on her, born out of envy. And then Lily attracts the unwanted attention of a man connected to the Bullock family, which sets a whole chain of events in motion.

***Letters from My Sister* has many features that readers will love—romance, suspense, history, Southern charm. How were you able to successfully blend all of these elements?**

The short answer is that I've lived in the South my whole life. Remember that famous quote by William Faulkner? "The past is never dead. It's not even past." I grew up in a family that loves to tell stories about the past, and we had a deep well to draw on. My maternal grandmother was born in 1893 and lived well into her nineties. She loved to talk about her family and the farm where she grew up.

Also, I think the South lends itself to romance. There's a mystery and great beauty in the landscape and waterways. (What's more romantic than wading a creek and picnicking with a handsome guy?) I had a college friend from New Mexico, and when he came to Alabama for the first time, he said the South—with all its dense woods and mountains and flowering vines and back roads—made him nervous because he couldn't see what was coming. That's what I love about it!

In addition to a captivating and entertaining read, what do you hope readers will gain from reading *Letters from My Sister*?

For me, the story is about the power of truth, faith, love, and compassion to overcome anything else—from the social mores that constrain a young woman's self-actualization to racially driven prejudice and injustice.

You once said, "I'm inspired by a particular time and place, and everything else spins off that." In *Letters from My Sister*, your setting is Alabama prior to the First World War. What made you choose this place and time?

Because the story was inspired by real people and a real place, I couldn't see setting it anywhere but Alabama. This is a place I have in my heart and soul—I grew up playing in my uncles' cotton fields and wading in creeks with my parents and cousins. The natural spring at my aunt Vivian's farm wasn't so different from Dewberry's Dip in my story. Alabama just felt natural to me for Callie and Emmy's home.

As for the time, *Letters from My Sister* opens in 1909. That's less than fifty years after Appomattox and less than ten years before the United States entered World War I, after which the agrarian South began changing radically. So it's a pivotal moment—or maybe I should say one of the pivotal moments—in Southern history and culture. Also, I just like

the romance of this horseback riding, hat-wearing, house-dancing era, when people wrote letters instead of sending texts and the fastest way to get anywhere was by train.

What about your own background influences your writing?

As I mentioned, I come from a storytelling family, so I've always been fascinated with stories and with the past. The South itself feeds my fiction. It's beautiful and eccentric and complicated and inspiring.

Two of my strongest “aha” moments as a writer came courtesy of Eudora Welty and Harper Lee. Welty's “A Worn Path” and Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* made me want to write—or try to anyway. What I saw in those stories was proof that ordinary people are a gold mine for exploring what makes us all human—and what offends our humanity. I think it was Welty who once said that you can find, in a family, all the great emotions that fuel fiction—love, hate, anger, compassion, envy, trust, betrayal . . . I believe that.

What are you working on next?

The working title of my next book for Revell is *Flight of the Silver Angels*, and it's about the friendship that develops between a young woman who returns home to sort out her life and a group of senior women who have no intention of behaving like they're supposed to.

I've always enjoyed the company of older women. One of my best friends at Baylor was in her nineties. I traveled with my paternal grandmother when she was in her eighties, and my maternal grandmother lived with us when I was growing up. Women with a long history don't belong in the box we sometimes put them in. And they have no fear of what others might think. They have a lot to teach the rest of us.

How can readers connect with you?

I have two Facebook pages, and I'm on Instagram. I also have a website, where readers can find discussion questions for my books or inquire about speaking appearances.

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