

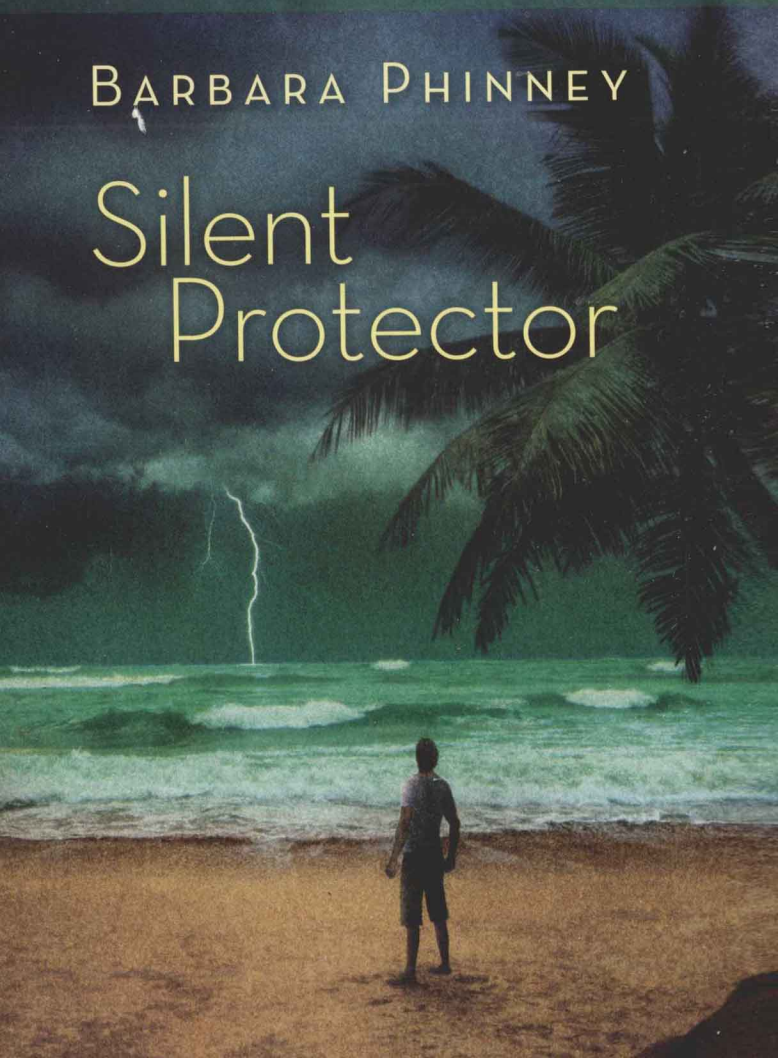
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BARBARA PHINNEY

# Silent Protector



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Dear Reader,

As someone who lives in a cold climate, I love to vacation down south. Naturally, the hot summer weather I avoid, but I often thought of those who must make that transition. And of course, I think of how exotic even Florida seems to me and how I would love to set a story where the heat practically becomes a character in the story.

But it's more than just a story set in hot weather that drove me to write *Silent Protector*. Children touch our lives all the time, and when they are in danger even childless adults are willing to die for them. It's something I believe God has set in our souls. And as a writer, putting a child into a story is a joy. They are so innocent, so sweet, it's wonderful to write them. So when they are put in danger, the tension ratchets up in exciting increments. I hope you feel the same way Liz and Ian feel when they learn to work together, find love and save those who mean so much to them.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Once he starts talking, Charlie sometimes tries to talk his way out of doing chores. In that sense, he's trying to manipulate people. While he's just a small boy and it's cute to read about, have you ever found yourself doing the same thing sometimes? What was the result?
2. Liz doesn't think Ian cares enough for Charlie. In a way, she sees only one side of a story, and is accusatory because of it. How does she change throughout the book?
3. After Liz is pulled from her sinking car, and after she's dried off, she realizes that she needs dry clothes and a shower. She offers a simple prayer to God, stating that He knows her basic needs. Do you take your basic needs to God? Do you have a laundry list of wants? Or do you think you should wait until there is something important? What should prayer be?
4. We are to have faith like a child. How do you perceive that? Who in the story had that type of faith? Who did not?
5. What is your first impression of Ian? Does he sound like someone who can and will get the job done? How is that a good thing? How is that a bad thing?
6. In the book of Exodus, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, tells him to get help, that he's doing too much. George says something similar to Ian, but how does he respond? How should he respond?

7. Ian believes he's better than he was before. Do you agree? Why?
8. Liz is afraid that she'll fail Charlie. Do you see her doing that? What do you think she should be doing or thinking?
9. Liz learns that she can do all things with God's help. Read Philippians 5:12-14 and ask yourself how the verses affect you. What can you attempt today with God's help?
10. Charlie makes a deal with God that he'll tell what happened to his father and God will protect him. Charlie is just an innocent boy, but what was your reaction when you read that? Have you ever made a deal with God? Is it the right thing to do?
11. Liz admits she was wrong when she is found on the trail. She even goes as far as to thank Ian for pointing out the fault. Have you ever done that? What was the result?
12. Liz needs confidence, but she doesn't realize how courageous she is when she thanks Ian for pointing out her fault. What is Ian's reaction? What would you do in his place?
13. When Ian brings Charlie down to Moss Point, he alters the boy's appearance. The results are mixed, though. Now the killer has several boys to choose from, and Liz is scared he'll kill them all. What Bible stories does

this remind you of? What did God do in those situations? How were those two stories connected? How were Moses and Jesus connected?

14. What stopped the random killings in this story?
15. Do you think Liz was right to go after Charlie even though the authorities told her not to? Why or why not?



**"Charlie is a witness, Liz. He has seen his father's killer. We need him."**

"You *need* him?" She tightened her lips before speaking again. "What about his needs? Hasn't he suffered enough without being dragged from everything he's known to live with strangers? He needs to feel safe, not scared."

Ian held her gaze. "If Charlie testifies against his father's killer, he can bring down that man—a man who could destroy many lives—more than you know."

Liz went cold, despite the lapse in the breeze that had offered relief. So that was it. They stole Charlie, hoping her nephew would give a statement that they could use in court, without caring about his emotional well-being.

"So as long as you get your killer—that's all you care about?"

Sighing, he shook his head, then looked into her eyes. "That's not true."

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## **BARBARA PHINNEY**

was born in England and raised in Canada. She has traveled throughout her life, loving to explore the various countries and cultures of the world. After she retired from the Canadian Armed Forces, Barbara turned her hand to romance writing. The thrill of adventure and the love of happy endings, coupled with a too-active imagination, have merged to help her create this and other wonderful stories. Barbara spends her days writing, building her dream home with her husband and enjoying their fast-growing children.

BARBARA PHINNEY

# Silent Protector



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SILENT PROTECTOR

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Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as  
a little child, he shall not enter therein.

—*Mark* 10:15





## ONE

Someone was trying to run her off the road!

Liz Tate gripped the rental car's steering wheel tightly, her heart pounding in her ears as she struggled to keep the car straight.

And not careening off the edge of the newly built causeway and into the deep water to her right.

*Please, Lord, help me!*

The SUV beside her, some dark blue thing she didn't dare get a good look at, scraped up against her driver's side once more. A painful sound grated through her senses. The sickening shove bumped her closer to the loose gravel and rocky edge.

She swerved back, slamming on the brakes to help control her car. The tires bit into the gravel then spun and slipped farther. The other vehicle backed off.

She was losing control of the car! With a wild glance over her shoulder, she yanked the vehicle back onto the road again.

Filled with dust and gravel, her brakes squealed in protest. She fishtailed uncontrollably.

Close to the end of the causeway, the SUV beside her rammed her side again. The force knocked her against the driver's door.

Liz felt her rental spin and lurch over the gravel, catch and bump on the jagged rocks that lined the water's edge and saw nothing but slushy, dark water ahead.

She'd come down here to Florida to find her nephew Charlie, following a set of circumstances almost too fearful and incredible to believe. And now, as the hood of her rental splashed into the murky water, as that water surged over her windshield, she knew that she'd never see Charlie again.

*Keep him safe, Father God. Because I've failed him again.*

"Are you thirsty, son? Do you need a cold drink? Something to eat?"

But Charlie Troop sat mutely across the cluttered office from Ian MacNeal, his young eyes downcast, just as he'd been for the entire flight down here from Bangor. The child hadn't said a word to him. Not a single word. This was the boy's second full day here and still nothing. He refused to speak.

Even when the boy's hair had been shorn off yesterday, that matted, dirty mess of dark curls and knots that perpetually fell into the boy's eyes, he'd said nothing. It was too hot to bear here, Ian figured, but that wasn't the whole reason for the cut. After Charlie's hair had been trimmed down to a longish crew cut, Ian had bleached the remaining length a dark blond. He had then given the boy a pair of glasses to wear.

Charlie had studied his new look in the mirror. But after that, his gaze fell to his feet again.

It cut Ian to the core to change the boy's appearance, but his safety was too important. He needed his look altered.



Ian had tried several times to initiate a conversation with the ten-year-old, but Charlie would drop his gaze and bite his lip. And remain completely silent.

Even Ian's new assistant, Monica, a young woman whose own parents died suddenly a few years ago, tried to reach him, but Charlie stalwartly refused to speak to anyone.

*Patience*, Ian told himself. The psychologist who'd assessed the boy said he'd been traumatized by what he'd seen. With patience, trust and time, the child would talk. Just don't push him or he'd slip further into his mute shell, the specialist had advised.

Looking across from him this hot July day, Ian sighed. Even when he'd been a U.S. Marshal full time, long before he'd given up that life for the no-less-busy one of a pastor, he'd never had to deal with someone who so completely refused to communicate with him.

Only recalling his own turbulent youth, the gypsy lifestyle forced on him by a long line of uncaring relatives who were too busy to bother with an orphan, was he able to anticipate Charlie's basic needs. That and the wealth of experience that his neighbors, Elsie and George Wilson, could offer.

The older couple was an invaluable help. George, himself, had been a U.S. Marshal back in the day. In fact, he'd met Elsie there when she'd been hired on as part of the administrative staff. It was Elsie who had first told Ian about the need for a pastor on Spring Island, and he was happy to be working near his old friends. Especially now. Even though the Wilsons weren't officially on Charlie's protective detail, the marshals had agreed to let the boy stay in their home. Their trailer was right next to Ian's house, and they were all hoping Elsie's grandmotherly ways would have a positive effect on the frightened child.