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Secret Lives



Synopsis

Actress Eden Riley's decision to make a film about her mother plunges her into a shattering confrontation with her own past, irrevocably altering her life and the lives of those she loves. Her mother, Katherine Swift, was a renowned children's author who died when Eden was very young. Now Eden, recovering from a divorce and disillusioned with her glamorous life, returns to the childhood home of the mother she barely knew. She moves in with her uncle, archaeologist Kyle Swift and his wife, Louise. Eden gets more than she bargained for when Kyle gives her the journal her mother had kept from the age of 13 until her death. Eden is spellbound by the powerfully written, intimate diary that chronicles a life of hardship, madness, and tragedy. But her fascination turns to horror when she discovers the shocking truth about her mother's life. Eden turns for comfort to Ben Alexander, Kyle's colleague, not knowing that Ben has a secret of his own that could ruin Eden and her career. Now Eden must make a heartbreaking decision as she struggles to lay the ghosts of the past to rest and come to terms with her own future. Shifting gracefully between Eden's world and Katherine's, *Secret Lives* seduces with the power of its images and the lyricism of its prose.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I know my title for this review might be a paradox to the cold cavern, by I really enjoyed and appreciated the way I felt personally drawn into the lives and plights of the characters, especially Eden, Kyle, Ben, Kate and Lou. They were wonderful people, so human and during the process of understanding and learning about their past, they grew so much, while others already had such

emotional intelligence. This was certainly fast paced and while I could not put it down, I felt sad when I had finished reading it. Well done Dianne Chamberlain, you are truly a gifted writer and have put a lot of research and effort into this story.

Note: This review, as well as many more, can also be found on my blog, The Baking Bookworm ([...]My Thoughts: This is not my first book by Ms Chamberlain. Last year I read and reviewed another of Chamberlain's books (The Good Father) and enjoyed it. She has a knack of writing interesting storylines with just the right amount of twists to keep the reader interested. "Secret Lives" is an easy and engaging read told via multiple storylines about familial secrets and people running from their pasts. While this is an easy read it does deal with a few very serious topics. There's mystery, dark family secrets, child abuse and forbidden love. This book deals with these, sensitive issues believably and I didn't feel salaciously. That said, some of these topics may shock more sensitive readers. I will admit that a few scenes made me inwardly cringe based on the subject matter. Let's just say that I'm not sure that I would have read the book if I had known that it dealt with these very sensitive topics. There are just some issues that I don't want to read about. So what did I think of the characters? They were hit and miss with me. On the one hand I adored Katherine. She is a unique and very misunderstood young woman. What helped me really get to know her were the additions of excerpts from the journals she kept as a teen and young woman. You get a very personal and in-depth feel for her character as well as her inner struggles with her debilitating anxiety disorder that has plagued her entire life. Chamberlain's descriptions of Katherine's anxiety were vivid and sensitively written making them almost painful to read. My heart broke for this poor misunderstood woman who tried so hard to overcome her disorder. In stark contrast, I really didn't love Eden and didn't have sympathy for her plight. At times, she felt overly naïve for a woman of her age, occupation and status. This seemed very disjointed with who she was (a famous actress - à la Julia Roberts, I'm assuming) and it frustrated me. I didn't feel that she really portrayed a successful and famous actress. Also, her sudden romance with a new man in her life felt rushed, a little desperate and unbelievable that this woman would throw everything away for a guy she just met. Gratuitous sex scenes were added to spice things up but didn't add to the storyline for me. Ben was a decent leading man; a handsome man with a dark past. Personally, I'm not sure that I could have looked past his issues but I did appreciate the tension that that author created as she slowly let the reader in on Ben's secret. Chamberlain is quite good at adding the tension and mystery to her storylines without losing the interest of her readers. That said, I wasn't too shocked when I finally found out about his big secret but it didn't really stop me from enjoying the ride. The only

major beef that I had with this book is the conclusion to Ben's issues. These issues plagued the man throughout the book. They destroyed his life and yet were resolved very quickly and wrapped up much too easily at the very end of the book. When I read a book, I love for the momentum to continue right up to the end and sadly this book didn't. It skidded to a stop and ended with everyone being all happy. Nice but not very realistic. Diane Chamberlain has a knack for writing books that keep the reader interested. While she did throw in several big reveals into the storylines, overall I felt like the book was fairly predictable and towards the end I knew how it was going to end. This is not a literary work of art but it is a nice, enjoyable afternoon read. It wasn't jaw dropping in its reveals and its main character left a lot to be desired but the honest portrayal of Katherine's character truly made this book for me. While this isn't my favourite book from Diane Chamberlain, I do plan to read many more of her books. My Rating: 3/5 stars

An absolutely amazing book. It had me hooked from the first chapter. We never really know how keeping secrets can change how we view ourselves. Eden never realized how much her mother had suffered in her young life. Kate and Kyle both suffered at the hands of an abusive mother. Kate was an depressed, isolated girl with a brilliant mind. How she lived her life being isolated in a cave with her writing was truly symbolic of her isolated life.

Goodreads Description- Actress Eden Riley's decision to make a film about her mother plunges her into a shattering confrontation with her own past, irrevocably altering her life and the lives of those she loves. Her mother, Katherine Swift, was a renowned children's author who died when Eden was very young. Now Eden, recovering from a divorce and disillusioned with her glamorous life, returns to the childhood home of the mother she barely knew. She moves in with her uncle, archaeologist Kyle Swift and his wife, Louise. Eden gets more than she bargained for when Kyle gives her the journal her mother had kept from the age of thirteen until her death. Eden is spellbound by the powerfully written, intimate diary that chronicles a life of hardship, madness and tragedy. But her fascination turns to horror when she discovers the shocking truth about her mother's life. Eden turns for comfort to Ben Alexander, Kyle's colleague, not knowing that Ben has a secret of his own that could ruin Eden and her career. Now Eden must make a heartbreaking decision as she struggles to lay the ghosts of the past to rest and come to terms with her own future. Shifting gracefully between Eden's world and Katherine's, *Secret Lives* seduces with the power of its images and the lyricism of its prose. Eden Riley is a film actress, who has made quite a name for herself. After her 15 year marriage dissolves, she decides to write a screenplay based on her mother's life. Her mother was

decidedly introverted, strange, and talented, being a prolific children's book writer. She died when Eden was four years old. Eden returns to her family home in Virginia to live with her aunt and uncle while she researches her mother's life. As Eden writes her screen play, she learns the truth behind her mother's perceived crazy antics and aloof ways. Shortly after her arrival in Shenandoah Valley, Eden's Uncle Kyle presents her with the first of many handwritten journals penned by her mother. Shocked and surprised, Eden dives in, learning more about her mother than she ever imagined. Through Katherine Swift's journals, we learn that her perceived eccentricity hid a deeply troubling and debilitating mental illness. Finding solace, alone, in her cave, she is fearful of the outside world. A world, Kyle desperately wants her to see and experience. Her struggles with mental illness are poignantly illustrated and crafted. At the time, however, mental illness had quite a bad stigma attached to it, and even though Kate clearly needed help, Kyle never did anything about it. He made this decision after talking to a friend who warned that if Kyle were to approach doctors for help with Katherine's clear agoraphobia, Kate would most likely be locked up forever. It was very hard for me as a reader to see Kate struggle with such a clear mental illness at a time when people were just locked up and kept away from society. There were times when I just wanted to yell at her family to find this woman some help! While staying with her Uncle Kyle, Eden meets Ben Alexander who is Kyle's friend and ex-student of archeology. Both Ben and Eden are running from pasts that have nearly broken them and together they attempt to re-learn how to trust and love. However, the obstacles and challenges prove to be more than either can handle. One of them will be forced to make life altering decisions and a leap of faith that may be asking too much. *Secret Lives* was most definitely a work of exceptional structure, pacing, and revelations (author's goal), which was elegantly achieved through Diane's writing style, usage of characters, different generations, controversial issues-- molestation, sex, agoraphobia, conceiving within families/cousins, love, romance, archaeology, generations, and particularly liked the first person writing with the journal entries, which makes it so realistic and personal. In addition the author's past social work really shines with her detail, insight, knowledge, and research within all her books. Even though Kate may have been strange and loved her solitude in the caves, I can understand because many creative people (writers, artists, etc.) tend to need this time because it helps them find time to discover ideas to create their work. Lou was a very supportive character and you really sympathize with Ben and Kyle throughout the book and Eden grows on you especially as the book moves on. I really loved the ending to this very poignant and beautifully written book. I look forward to reading Chamberlain's older books. I highly recommend this book to any fan of Chamberlain. Even though it is one of her earlier books, it contains the same themes and writing style as her current books. This books

doesn't seem dated and I felt like I was reading one of her recently written books. This is definitely not a formulaic chick lit book and it certainly worth a look if you are wanting to read a women's literature book that is written in a more literary style. 5 stars!

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