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The Things We Wish Were True



Synopsis

In an idyllic small-town neighborhood, a near tragedy triggers a series of dark revelations. From the outside, Sycamore Glen, North Carolina, might look like the perfect all-American neighborhood. But behind the white picket fences lies a web of secrets that reach from house to house. Up and down the streets, neighbors quietly bear the weight of their own pasts—until an accident at the community pool upsets the delicate equilibrium. And when tragic circumstances compel a woman to return to Sycamore Glen after years of self-imposed banishment, the tangle of the neighbors' intertwined lives begins to unravel. During the course of a sweltering summer, long-buried secrets are revealed, and the neighbors learn that it's impossible to really know those closest to us. But is it impossible to love and forgive them?

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Customer Reviews

I picked this book as my August Kindle First read. Without giving anything away, I will try to review the novel. The story is told through multiple POV chapters of characters living in a close-knit suburban town - some of whom have never left and others who have had to return after years of being away. The chapters are short, slowly building up the story from various perspectives, and effectively ease the reader into the underlying mystery of the town and leave you wanting to keep reading the book to find out exactly what is going on. The characters are 3-dimensional, and their chapters noticeably differ in tone and writing style. I have been disappointed with some of the Kindle First books I've selected in the past because the writing was too bland and predictable, and good

writing is very important to me. This book was well-written, pleasant, and a nice quick read.

After a miserable experience with July's Kindle First selection, I was tempted to pass August by. But the title of this book caught my attention, and it was as far removed from historical fiction--or in the last case, hysterical fiction--as I could find. Folks, this little book was a treasure, a journey sometimes pleasant, sometimes perilous, but always gripping, through a bucolic and almost too-good-to-be-true fictitious suburban enclave just outside the very real metropolis of Charlotte, NC. I can attest to the landscape's atmosphere conjured in deft, often lyrical prose by the author--I've been there and seen that back in the day, and it's real enough. Without trying, I believe you can actually smell the chlorine, hot asphalt, cut grass, and hear the sounds of kids at the pool, amplified by the concrete surround and the humid, breathless air. Besides the setting, which in the author's hands is a character on its own, we see this small world through the shifting viewpoints of children and adults. Normally I'm not a fan of a multiplicity of such viewpoints from so many characters, but this time it worked for me. I found the necessary distinction between the adult women, Jencey, Zell, and Bryte, and the adult men, Lance and Everett, for example; they each had a voice, and each had secrets that colored those voices. Above all is Cailey, who sees more that summer than she wants to see and hears things she shouldn't, and tries to understand. She speaks honestly, as a child, and not a miniature adult. That is difficult to portray with skill, I think. I thought at first that the issue of secrets might mean this story would have something of the ominous thriller about it, but no. Not all secrets are scary, and not all lies are harmful. Yet there is enough here in the memories of the characters and in their intertwined lives during this particular early summer to keep the reader engaged. Don't expect these short chapters that build towards a satisfying but in some ways unexpected conclusion to barrel along like a runaway train, leaving you exhausted in its wake. Instead the chapters and their resident characters will tug you gently at first, and then more insistently, until you get where you're going. I think you will truly enjoy the trip. And Cailey, well, she is quite special.

According to the description, this is a book about secrets. There ARE secrets in the middle-class enclave of Sycamore Glen, NC. Old ones and newer ones; important and trivial. Some are deep, dark secrets and some are the kind of secrets that people think they've kept under wraps until something happens that makes them realize that everyone knew all along. The smooth surface of social intercourse must be maintained and sometimes pretending not to notice what's right in front of your nose is the only thing to do. But it seems to me that on a deeper level it's a book about loss.

The losses that all of us sustain as we go through life and must deal with as best we can. There are inevitable losses that creep up so quietly we don't see them coming and couldn't do anything about it if we did. Sometimes (ironically) our losses are a result of getting what we hoped and worked for. Bryte has longed to be a mother, but her achievement of that status brings an end to the freedom and satisfactions of her career. Zell and her husband have worked and sacrificed for years to raise their children and make them independent adults. Now they can enjoy their well-earned "Golden Years" but Zell has a sense of emptiness and would give anything to go back to the chaos of a young family. Be careful what you wish for. There are the unspeakable losses that we know CAN happen. The end of a marriage. The death of a spouse or child. A severe, life-changing illness. We make bargains with God and do all the right things. I will eat a healthy diet, exercise, buy a car with a good safety rating, and never, ever let my children out of my sight. All worthwhile precautions, but then a shocking accident at the community pool reminds everyone that even the most stringent precautions don't always stave off tragedy. And there are losses that take us completely off guard. Police. Lawyers. Embarrassed friends and neighbors. The sense that "things like this don't happen to people like us." Two women in Sycamore Glen have men in prison. One has a family and strong support system. One doesn't. Is loss easier if you've never known anything else or harder if you had a lot to lose? What struck me forcibly was the lack of complacency. These women know that they lead enviable lives. They cling to what they have and try to deserve it. They are "good people." They look after each others' kids and walk the elderly neighbors' dogs. In a time of crisis, they even reach out to the neighborhood undesirables - the renters in the run-down house they call "the eyesore." It's awkward, but they do it. God love 'em. This is very much a "woman's book" although one of the main characters is a man whose wife deserted him and their children. Typically, he gets much more sympathy and help than would be extended to a woman in the same situation. All women believe that men are really the weak, helpless ones and men take full advantage of that belief. It's also a very Southern book. The younger women sometimes lapse into "you guys" but they also say "a gracious plenty" and pepper their conversations with the polite Southern woman's disclaimer, "if you ask me." The nights are hot and the days are hotter and comfort food is a tomato sandwich on squishy white bread with lots of mayonnaise. Even the author's name is a tip-off. I grew up with Marybeths and Mary Lous and Mary Sues and Mary Carolines, but never a plain Mary. Southerners are great for embellishment. If you can't make something better, at least you can pretty it up. Sometimes it's a bit self-conscious in a "we're-Southern-aren't-we-cute way" but mostly it rings true. I enjoyed this book. Some of the people and the situations are cliches, but cliches and stereotypes exist because there's some truth in them. While we all feel unique, there are only so many human

possibilities. The teen queen whose adult life disappoints her. The shy wallflower who blossoms into a beauty but lacks confidence. The old people who envy the young ones' full lives and the young people who envy the old folk's freedom and financial security. The men and women who fall in love and don't live happily ever after. The misfits who make us uneasy and fearful. The losers who irritate us by making the same mistakes over and over. These are real, recognizable people. This isn't a perfect book. Sometimes the author makes her points a little too carefully. Ideally, the characters should tell the story and the reader should interpret it. Still, the author created a cast of characters and made me want to finish the book and find out what happens to them. Isn't that what fiction is all about?

I got an early read of this August Kindle First Pick and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Whalen does a great job of building up tension over a summer filled with memories and mysteries. This book packs a punch. The story unwinds through the alternating perspectives of a host of characters living in the same small town who are all connected through a web of secrets and lies. Deftly told. Highly recommend.

The setting is a small North Carolina town during the summer of 2014, the characters are several townspeople (current and past residents). They unite together when a near tragedy strikes one of the children. This is a refreshing story, where everyone is living their lives, but not everything is as clear cut as it seems. This is a character driven story, the author did a wonderful job of defining each one and how they interact. This was my Kindle First choice for August, it was a very fast read, very enjoyable.

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