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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Child Secrets: A Milford-Haven Novel

Mara Purl
Haven Books (September 2007)
Softcover $16.95 (328pp)
978-1-58436-003-2

Coming in after the beginning of a soap opera is confusing; one doesn't quite know who's who—something even the characters can have trouble figuring out. *Child Secrets* is a soap opera in print the third installment in novel form of a successful BBC Radio series that explores the lives loves and secrets of the residents of a small California town. Author Purl has the format down pat; she should since she's a former member of the cast of *Days of Our Lives*. She's been considerate enough of her readers to give them a list of characters in the back of the book so they can keep track of the players.

Milford-Haven overflows with secrets. Deputy Delmar Johnson is searching for clues to the disappearance of TV reporter Chris Christian. Zack Calvin seems to be falling in love with Miranda Jones but former Las Vegas singer Cynthia Radcliffe isn't about to be dispossessed of the man she thinks of as hers. She doesn't hesitate to use people to get what she wants either whereas sweet Miranda a gifted artist is na&239;ve enough to take people at face value.

Miranda's agent is one of these people. Zelda McIntyre pushes Miranda's work—but to her own ends: entrée into a stratum of society she covets. Right now she covets Zack's father Joseph head of Calvin Oil—and Miranda has no idea what her new lover and his father do for a living. As an environmentalist she's painted the results of oil spills.

To add further irony Samantha Hugo another environmentalist trying to protect Milford-Haven goes out with Joseph for a drink after Miranda's debut art show—thus frustrating Zelda's machinations toward him. But Samantha has her own problems: she gave up a son for adoption years ago when ex-husband Jack Sawyer deserted them. Now she's searching for the boy. Jack has just dumped his current girlfriend Sally O'Mally who's pregnant. Sally has to decide not only whether to keep her baby but also whether to turn Jack in for taking environmental chances—something Samantha has been trying to stop him from for some time.

While in true serial style nothing gets resolved in this volume plenty is stirred up for more action. Clues and hints are dropped everywhere holding the reader's interest. The writing flows easily and the characters are compelling if "soapy" —many are somewhat stereotypical at least insofar as this book goes: "[Cynthia] wanted him…She knew it would take time but she certainly expected to get back every bit of her investment—with interest."

Purl has expertly interwoven her characters' lives into a colorful fascinating tapestry of mystery romance and suspense. Readers will find it fun to pass the time with the inhabitants of Milford-Haven and will want to know more about their fates.

MARLENE SATTER (March 25, 2008)

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