FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Clarion Review

Convenient Secrets
Ann Wade
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4269-0068-6

Most people would agree that a successful marriage depends upon honesty and trust between partners. When one of them withholds information from the other, for whatever reason, possible discovery of the secret poses an ever-present threat for the relationship.

Emily and John Strutter experience this disconnect in Ann Wade's novel, Convenient Secrets. The couple begins married life in Witherston, a community in southwestern Minnesota that has been home to John's family for several generations. Their hopes for a large Catholic family fade as Emily suffers one miscarriage after another. Deciding to adopt, they rejoice when an infant boy finally becomes available to them. They name their new son Jon. For reasons he can't explain, John decides on a course of action that he knows Emily would never approve, creating a secret he must keep from her, probably forever.

Emily weaves secrets of her own in her efforts to protect Jon and keep him close. Instead of embracing his ability to climb an apple tree, where he talks with an imaginary friend Mikey, she feels excluded and frets about his safety. She explains to her father, "I stood under the tree…but Jon cried saying Mikey wouldn't come if I was there. That night I told John to take the ladder away. Jon believes that someone stole it."

Jon's relationship with a girlfriend never seems to grow into the teenage romance she and his parents expect. Instead, he feels a puzzling attraction to Ken, who has accepted his own sexual orientation and wants Jon to come with him to San Francisco after high school graduation. Jon knows his parents wouldn't understand and tells Ken, "If I can't explain horticultural over pharmacy, how the heck do you think I can explain guys over girls. You've got to be kidding!"

Confusion about his sexual identity leads Jon to ask for his parents' permission to seek information about his birth family. Emily reacts adamantly against the idea. Fearing competition from these unknown people, she says, "All my life, things are taken from me. My mother just when I needed her. Three babies, wanted and longed for. Then another adoption canceled with a last minute change of mind."

When Jon leaves home, his character finally begins to take on realistic dimensions. Unfortunately, Emily becomes less sympathetic as her fear of losing Jon increases and her controlling personality grows more intense.

The book gets off to a slow start, as author Ann Wade provides historical background about Witherston and the Strutter family's arrival there. The text would also benefit from closer editing to eliminate misspelled words and grammatical errors.

Wade writes from Iowa City, Iowa, where she retired after a long career in business. In Convenient Secrets, she explores important themes, such as adoption, sexual identity, and the difficulties young people face when coping with overarching family expectations. These subjects will be of interest to select readers who can overlook the book's flaws.

Margaret Cullison