

## Forbidden Secrets

**Jen Ritchie**

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*The novel captures the tumult of teenage life as it skirts around encounters with mysterious creatures.*

In Jen Ritchie's supernatural fantasy novel *Forbidden Secrets*, teenager Twyla Sokolovski confronts her hidden past and discovers her superpowers.

Together with her best friend, Carol, Twyla is excited to start her senior year in high school. A new boy, Hunter, only adds to the back-to-school excitement. But Twyla's life begins to unravel when she survives an attack by a mysterious creature in the woods, and discovers that she can move between places by sheer willpower. She is abandoned by Carol and left puzzled by Hunter's behavior. The attack forces Twyla to confront a memory that has haunted her since she was a child: witnessing her father's murder at the hands of a monster.

The present-day setting includes elements like social media, smartphones, and internet search engines as a natural part of everyday teenage life. Twyla, the only child of a single mother, is credibly portrayed. The loss of her father is a constant factor in her inner monologues, which feature conflicting, confusing emotions.

The relationship between Twyla and her mother is warm, caring, and humorous without losing track of the fact that they are parent and child. The friendship between Twyla and Carol is genuine. The intimacy between the girls, as well as Carol's sudden abandonment of Twyla in favor of a new group of friends, rings true to how friendships develop in certain age groups.

Twyla's reaction to Hunter is physical and immediate, with equal measures of the budding confidence of a grown woman and teenage mortification. Hunter's behavior toward Twyla, on the other hand, grows frustrating; it remains unclear where he stands in his relationship to her and why, hampering development between the two of them.

The book flows naturally, with accessible language. Punctuation and capital letters are used to good effect to emphasize the highs and lows of a teenager's emotional life. Twyla's character arc starts out strong but stalls as the book progresses, in time with her confusing relationship to Hunter and the removal of Carol as a friend and confidant.

Scenes are repetitive; Twyla wakes up, gets ready for school, and reports on her experiences during the course of her day like she's composing a diary entry. Dream sequences and actual experiences blend together, making it difficult to grasp what's actually happening. Upsetting situations are trivialized in favor of punchlines, and the book ends abruptly, just as the story begins to ramp up. Questions are left unanswered, and none of the mysteries hinted at throughout the book are solved.

In *Forbidden Secrets*, the turmoil of teenage life is deepened by confusing encounters with mysterious creatures.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (August 31, 2018)

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