

## Secret Chambers: A Family Saga: Love & Mystery in Old New York

**Alicia Hayes**

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*Alicia Hayes's elegantly written book contains in-depth characters, mystery, details of detective work, and varying kinds of love.*

Part mystery, part love story, *Secret Chambers* is a wonderfully written tale that will entertain the mind with solving murders and educate the heart by depicting new and honest familial love.

Subtitled *A Family Saga: Love & Mystery in Old New York*, the story follows Alan Varden as a young child through middle age in the latter half of the nineteenth century in New York City. Alan is a smart child and is encouraged to dissect animals and ask many questions of his grandmother. This background sets the stage for Alan to become a doctor and coroner in his adult life, with an avid interest in psychology and therapy. His therapy interest leads him to become friends with the well-connected and respected Esmond family, which helps him learn to love—and to see that “love” can mean “family.”

A murder near the Esmond home leads Alan, acting as coroner, to wonder if the Esmonds had anything to do with the death and, if so, if he'll be able to protect these dear friends. This book is filled with mystery, details of detective work, and varying kinds of love.

Alicia Hayes has written a superb book with in-depth characters and elegantly written text. The story follows Alan as a child, abused by his father. His grandmother takes care of him and protects him as much as possible from his father. She also teaches Alan about unconditional love up until her death. This upbringing contributes to Alan's later difficulties with love and even making friends.

The text contains beautiful imagery, such as “Georgie's assertion was a contaminated tree purposely planted by him in the garden of Judith and Robert's marriage, a tree intended to bear poisonous fruit, day after day, year after year, with no season of dormancy” and “The ship carried him through the Narrows, moving along this birth canal from the enclosed womb of Upper New York Bay to the much larger, far-reaching Lower Bay.”

The plot is well developed, with many twists and enough background on the characters and setting through all six-hundred-plus pages of the novel.

The cover shows a view of an aristocratic home. Blue sky takes up the top half of the cover image, leaving room for the easy-to-read script of the title and the block lettering of the subtitle. While this cover does give a feel for the historical setting of the novel, it doesn't depict the mood of the mystery and love story. The synopsis on the back cover is perhaps too extensive, though this is a long novel with quite a bit going on.

An exciting book, *Secret Chambers* intrigues with its picturesque text, unexpected twists and turns, and, almost unexpectedly, a love story.

BETH VANHOUTEN (March 4, 2014)

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