



Secrets and Shadows

Roberta Silman

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Secrets and Shadows is captivating historical fiction, blending huge events and minutiae with grace and detail.

Poetic and emotional, *Secrets and Shadows* by Roberta Silman explores marriage, forgiveness, and trauma through the lens of a man reliving his childhood with his Jewish family in Nazi Germany.

Paul and Eve started their marriage happily, raising three beautiful children in a home filled with culture and music. As Paul became increasingly cruel and prone to affairs, though, Eve retreated inside of herself; their marriage devolved, and they divorced.

After five years apart, Paul reaches out to Eve on the night that the Berlin Wall is torn down, asking her to travel to Germany with him so that he may finally face his demons. In Germany, Paul's childhood traumas are meticulously revealed, as is the impact of those events on his behavior during his marriage. Paul and Eve navigate their past while contemplating what it all means for their future.

Secrets and Shadows is beautifully written. Rich imagery brings each scene and landscape to life. From Paul's childhood home where he and his family hid from the Nazis to each café where he and Eve stop to eat, every setting is easy to imagine. Great attention is given to details, from architectural features to specific color palettes.

Moderately paced, the novel slows near its middle. It weaves in and out of the past and present effortlessly, and the time period always remains clear. Paul's stories are related in various ways, though—at times, he is quoted directly; at other times, his story comes in large swaths of italicized paragraphs. The intentions behind these differences are unclear.

The plot is straightforward, driven by the suspense of Paul's revelations and the tension of Paul and Eve's relationship, which is complicated and dramatic. Intricate personal concepts, such as the surreal feeling of childhood memories and the bilious sensation of recalling trauma, are successfully conveyed. History plays in, particularly through Paul's personal memories of being Jewish in Nazi Germany. The story line is carried out to its conclusion, but still leaves room for the imagination.

Paul and Eve are well-developed characters who display a wide range of emotions. They are thoroughly described and easy to visualize. Eve's actions and decisions occasionally lack context, especially compared to Paul, who is the greater focus of the book. Dialogue is engaging and well researched; Paul occasionally slips into using German and Yiddish words. A few characters are positioned to reinforce the novel's themes, but seem unnecessary, and a character death near the end of the novel hardly seems to impact the main characters or add to the story line.

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DELIA STANLEY (January 24, 2018)

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