

Secrets of Worry Dolls

Amy Impellizzeri

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In *Secrets of Worry Dolls*, Amy Impellizzeri winningly weaves together the stories of a mother and daughter, using large-scale tragedies to explore the smaller tragedies of her characters and the experiences they kept from one another. Both women are well drawn, and their stories take surprising turns that deepen their relationship.

The main narrative takes place in the months leading up to December 2012, the date the long-count Mayan calendar ended, with chapters set “X days before the end of the world.” The daughter, Lu, decides at the last minute not to take a flight from New York City to her mother’s childhood home of Guatemala—a flight that crashes in her neighborhood shortly after takeoff. With her mother, Mari, in a coma and their home damaged, Lu learns some of Mari’s most closely held secrets.

Both characters’ perspectives come in the first person, with chapters alternating between Lu and Mari. Lu’s story takes place mostly in the present, while Mari’s sections look back on her life. The women give their perspectives on major events, like losing Lu’s twin sister and Mari’s husband in the terrorist attacks of September 11th, and on smaller ones, like meeting boyfriends and searching for meaning. In many cases, Lu and her mother share things that they had never shared with one another before, and the gaps in their knowledge inform their development. Both Lu and Mari are three-dimensional, flawed but relatable, and their parallel stories of the past and present build upon one another well.

Secrets of Worry Dolls finds its way to an earned ending true to its characters, and to the world events that exact influence on them. Impellizzeri does well with the small details that make her characters feel like real people. This is a strong and memorable work of fiction.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Winter 2017)

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