

The Secret Keeper

By Kate Morton

First published in 2012



Genre and Subject

Actresses— Fiction

Great Britain— 20th Century— Fiction

Mystery Fiction

Synopsis

During a party at the family farm in the English countryside, sixteen-year-old Laurel Nicolson has escaped to her childhood tree house and is dreaming of the future. She spies a stranger coming up the road and sees her mother speak to him. Before the afternoon is over, Laurel will witness a shocking crime that challenges everything she knows about her family and especially her mother, Dorothy.

Now, fifty years later, Laurel is a successful and well-regarded actress, living in London. She returns to the family farm for Dorothy's ninetieth birthday and finds herself overwhelmed by questions she has not thought about for decades. From pre-WWII England through the Blitz, to the fifties and beyond, discover the secret history of three strangers from vastly different worlds--Dorothy, Vivien, and Jimmy--who meet by chance in wartime London and whose lives are forever entwined.

This book explores longings and dreams, the lengths people go to fulfil them, and the consequences they can have. It is a story of lovers, friends, dreamers, and schemers told--in Morton's signature style--against a backdrop of events that changed the world.

Author Biography

Morton is the eldest of three sisters. Her family moved several times before settling on Tamborine Mountain where she attended a small country school. She enjoyed reading books from an early age, her favourites being those by Enid Blyton.

She completed a Licentiate in Speech and in Drama from Trinity College London and then a summer Shakespeare course at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. Later she earned first-class honours for her English Literature degree at the University of Queensland.

She obtained a scholarship and completed a Master's degree focussing on tragedy in Victorian literature. She is currently enrolled in a PhD program researching contemporary novels that marry elements of gothic and mystery fiction.

Kate Morton is married to Davin, a jazz musician and composer, and they have two sons; they live in the Brisbane suburb of Paddington.

Discussion Starters

- Each of Kate Morton's four novels are securely anchored in their strong sense of time and place. In *The Secret Keeper*, World War II is a rich and realistic environment—close enough for memory but a long way from our twenty-first century lives—which allows the author to show both the frailty and courage of human nature. Discuss.
- The rusted-on loyalties of family members to each other are key in this novel. Do you think Dolly's feelings of unease about her own family contribute to her love of playing make-believe?
- Laurel had never thought to ask her mother about her life before Dorothy met Stephen Nicolson. And it's impossible for Dolly to imagine Lady Caldicott being young and beautiful wearing those glorious dresses now going musty in the dressing room. And Jimmy's dad loves to tell his stories of the past. How is ageing portrayed in *The Secret Keeper*?
- Many readers have commented on how extremely likeable Jimmy is—how has Kate Morton developed his character to make him so?
- Do you think that *The Secret Keeper's* characters live the lives they deserve? Were you satisfied and surprised at their various outcomes and their influences on each other?
- Once you understood Dorothy's reasons for committing that violent action at the end of chapter one, did you find any moral ambiguity in her behaviour? Did she really have a choice?
- Everyone has their secrets. *The Secret Keeper*, some more than others! Do you think Laurel is justified in upturning her mother's carefully laid secrets? When is keeping a secret within a family justified?

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- *Rebecca by Daphne Du Maurier*
- *Stone's fall by Iain Pears*
- *The Ghost writer by John Harwood*

Author biography from Wikipedia

Discussion starters from Publisher

Read-a-likes from City of Ryde Library staff