



Secrets We Kept: Three Women of Trinidad

Krystal A. Sital

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There, in a lush landscape of fire-petaled immortelle trees and vast plantations of coffee and cocoa, where the three hills along the southern coast act as guardians against hurricanes, Krystal A. Sital grew up idolizing her grandfather, a wealthy Hindu landowner. Years later, to escape crime and economic stagnation on the island, the family resettled in New Jersey, where Krystal's mother works as a nanny, and the warmth of Trinidad seems a pretty yet distant memory. But when her grandfather lapses into a coma after a fall at home, the women he has terrorized for decades begin to speak, and a brutal past comes to light.

In the lyrical patois of her mother and grandmother, Krystal learns the long-held secrets of their family's past, and what it took for her foremothers to survive and find strength in themselves. The relief of sharing their stories draws the three women closer, the music of their voices and care for one another easing the pain of memory.

Violence, a rigid ethnic and racial caste system, and a tolerance of domestic abuse—the harsh legacies of plantation slavery—permeate the history of Trinidad. On the island's plantations, in its growing cities, and in the family's new home in America, *Secrets We Kept* tells a story of ambition and cruelty, endurance and love, and most of all, the bonds among women and between generations that help them find peace with the past.

Secrets We Kept: Three Women of Trinidad Details

Date : Published February 20th 2018 by W. W. Norton Company

ISBN : 9780393609264

Author : Krystal A. Sital

Format : Hardcover 352 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography



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From Reader Review Secrets We Kept: Three Women of Trinidad for online ebook

tinaathena says

This book is what I aspire to write like and has given me a new understanding of how I can approach writing non-fiction in a rich and detailed way. I loved it! I picked this up because I was looking to read books from T+T authors and am so grateful that I wound up with this.

There was a lot for me to personally relate to here, with some of the author's experiences running parallel to things that happened in my family—the resigned constant labour by women, an unquestioned patriarch, domestic abuse and a complex relationship with your "motherland." Parts of this book reminded me of *Pachinko*, but maybe more devastating (? not sure that's the right word) because it is reality. Like *Pachinko*, religion looms in the background of the book but ultimately the kitchen hearth is the dais for women—obliged to cook for what are ostensibly their gods but are left alone to meditate over melding flavours and the warmth of a fire...perhaps soothed by this duty, knowing that ultimately, they are feeding their family and are the givers of life. The description of food in this book is just ??? This book checks off all my boxes.

Karen A. Lloyd says

Secrets We Kept is a stunning memoir - unbelievable in parts, touching throughout, and thoroughly impactful.

Sital's writing feels honest and she refreshingly portrays people as the full and complicated humans they are. The women are strong, but accepting of and sometimes complicit in the culture that abuses and diminishes them to roles of servitude. The men are charming, and cruel, and completely invested in the privileges that allow them to treat the women in their lives as their property.

Centred on the lives of three generations of women in Trinidad, Sital gives us a bird's eye view of women's lives in Trinidad and to some extent the rest of the Caribbean, where the hardships faced by women largely centre on socio-economic and cultural constraints in a fundamentally patriarchal system that prizes men.

Quite expectedly, the hardships faced by these women in Trinidad led to migration. Heartbreakingly, the abuse faced, especially by Sital's grandmother, is still present but takes on different characteristics. Questions around responsibility and loyalty to men who destroyed the lives of their wives and children, who are now burdened to take care of these men and show unreciprocal kindness, are raised.

I was fascinated by much of the Hindu traditions that came out in this memoir. I also felt that I got a good sense of Trinidad through Sital's pointed storytelling.

I wish the cover of the book was more imaginative. I don't think I would have picked up this book off a shelf, which would have been quite a loss.

Krystal says

This poignant memoir captivated me, and it was meaningful to read experiences that mirror my own, from the reverence of Pappy in childhood to leaving Trinidad but still calling it home!

Elizabeth Conley says

It's fitting that I have finished this book on International Women's Day. The harrowing stories of these women coming up in the male dominated Trinidadian culture, unfolding through the strength of each to ask about and share their secrets kept me coming back at every free opportunity. Timely in nature and so descriptive you swear you can smell food and the heat of the Caribbean sun. Glad to support female authors and keep their voices and experiences in my library for future generations.

Gail (The Knight Reader) says

This is the kind of book that should mean so much to people from the Caribbean. It tells an all too familiar story that is likely to resonate with even the most far removed West Indian. Beyond the "Caribbean" story, it is a tale of hardship, survival and devotion. If you have no idea what Ms Sital is talking about and cannot relate, take it as a history lesson. This is the story of our women. This is the story of strength.

BookOfCinz says

If you are a Caribbean Woman or from Caribbean heritage this book is a must read.

This debut novel by Krystal Sital unpacks so many issues that Caribbean Women face, particularly their mothers and grandmothers. The book is basically a memoir/biography of sorts for Krystal, her Mom and her Grandmother. When Krystal's Grandfather accidentally falls and is rushed to the hospital, there seems to be no urgency by her Grandmother in trying to save her husband's life. When Krystal asks her Mom, "Why Grandma doesn't want Grandpa to live? the secrets that were kept for generations started unravelling.

This book covers a lot and in such an authentic and unapologetic way. Mother-Daughter relationships are explored, racial tension in Trinidad and Tobago, Domestic Abuse, Mental Health, Family Secrets/Dynamics and the how being uneducated as a woman impacts quality of life. I could talk for hours on each theme and how Sital expertly addresses it in this novel, but I think you need to read this one for yourself.

Coming from a Caribbean background and reading this, I couldn't help but think, "this is so damn typical of us!". Families are rife with secrets that never gets aired because of shame, there is the toxic male culture that seems to exist throughout the book. Overall, a real life read.

What I absolutely loved was how Sital portrayed her Grandmother and Mother, while they were all flawed, their resilient spirit is truly one worth reading about.

This might be one of my top Caribbean reads for the year. I absolutely recommend everyone picking this up.

Booktart says

A very tough read due to the domestic abuse detailed in the book, but also a very compelling memoir (written more like narrative fiction) set in a country I really didn't know much about. I feel like the book gave me a sense of Trinidad and its complexities.

Alice Lippart says

Really interesting.

Rebel Women Lit says

Trigger Warning: Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence

Secrets We Kept by Krystal Sital is a stunning memoir?—?unbelievable in parts, touching throughout, and thoroughly impactful.

Sital's writing feels honest and she refreshingly portrays people as the full and complicated humans they are. The women are strong, but accepting of and sometimes complicit in the culture that abuses and diminishes them to roles of servitude. The men are charming, and cruel, and completely invested in the privileges that allow them to treat the women in their lives as their property.

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Thank you W. W. Norton Company for providing us with an ARC of Secrets We Kept: Three Women of Trinidad in exchange for an honest review.

Secrets We Kept: Three Women of Trinidad review by Karen Lloyd.

Joy says

I received an ARC of this title in exchange for an honest review.

Sital shares an immigrant's legacy, not an immigrant's story. The strength of the Trinidadian women in the face of generations of culturally embedded abuse is both foreign and remarkable to an American reader. The narrative passages sharing Rebecca and Arya's memories and the depiction of Trinidadian funeral rituals are by far the most compelling. The descriptive sections, especially at the beginning, feel a bit stiff and heavy. Also, as the layers of the family stories continue, it becomes difficult at times to keep the different men and women clearly identified - it is too easy to get lost in references to "her mother" or "his brother." Overall, *Secrets We Kept* is a tribute to one writer's heritage that puts faces and, more importantly, a heart onto the cultural history of the women of Trinidad.

Rosie says

Goodreads Giveaway winner. The author revered her grandfather and could not understand her grandmother's reaction when her grandfather becomes comatose after a fall. Then she is told the secrets that should never have been kept of the years of physical abuse inflicted on her grandmother and mother. This book was very hard to read because of the gut-wrenching accounts of the vicious brutality that these women endured at the hands of this cruel violent man.

Lindsay says

What a beautiful and heartbreak account. I am still reeling from the extent of violence this family endured. Sital does an incredible job of weaving together the storylines, bouncing between past and (relative) present, and keeping the reader engaged...not because Shiva's violence is sensationalized, but because you need to know that these people made it out OK. With the recent exposure of domestic violence as horrifically commonplace, this is a very timely book. Sital deftly tackles how muddy the waters get when domestic violence is so pervasive in a society and the complex twists families become when living in fear of an abuser (not to mention the added factor of mores specific to a particular culture--in this case, the Trinidad desi).

Let's also talk about the feel of *Secrets We Kept*. It is very much a "place as character" book. Sital's descriptions put you right there in Trinidad--the sights, smells, tastes, people, culture, everything. It also reminded me how much I love conversation written phonetically in the local patois. It probably took me longer to read because I was so caught up in the language; by the end, I was putting much of the non-conversational script in the dialect.

Thank you to WW Norton and Co. and Net Galley for this ARC.

Krystal Sital says

I'm biased but oh well ;)

Ashley says

There were so many aspects of this book that made me want to break down and cry or just be totally angry at

what was going on. You learn about the cruelty inflicted by a man's anger and hatred towards his family for no reason. You wonder as to why a woman would stay with a man that showed the slightest bit of love and affection, not anything at all. You learn of another family member's act of infidelity, and there was no remorse from the man when he was caught, as if it were no big deal. You learn the hardship of escaping from a life that you know to make something of yourself, trying to find a happy ending, and how difficult it is when you're from the poorer side of the island. You get very vivid scenarios of the island of Trinidad that you and can almost feel yourself there, feeling the sea breeze against your face and smelling the fresh fruits. It was beautifully written, especially the language that was spoken, and grabbed your attention, yearning for more about the secrets that were kept for so many years. It kind of makes you wonder if there are any secrets within your own family history...

enyanyo says

This was a captivating read. First, the idyllic descriptions of the island of Trinidad and then the author's gradual unfolding of her mother's, grandmother's and finally her own story. Krystal A. Sital's memoir highlights the power of owning and telling one's story. You could sense all three women's collective sigh of relief as they finally opened up about their experiences.
