

The Secret Keepers of Old Depot Grocery

Amanda Cox

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Amanda Cox's poignant novel *The Secret Keepers of Old Depot Grocery* waltzes "between grief and joy" as its mothers and daughters grow to appreciate each other's strengths.

Sarah, after being widowed, returns to the Old Depot Grocery, a childhood sanctuary of hers. The grocery store was also her grandmother Glory Ann's haven; her arranged marriage with its selfless owner, Clarence, helped her to heal from the sudden loss of her first love, while Clarence's understated guidance helped to shape her daughter Rosemary's outlook on kindness. In the present, Rosemary has health concerns, and the women also deal with the challenges of Glory Ann's advancing age. But while Rosemary fears that Sarah is limiting her future by being too sentimental about the store and thinks that it's time to sell, she holds back her reasoning from Sarah, leading to misunderstandings.

The narrative alternates between concerns about the languishing store and insights into its past. The Old Depot Grocery fuels memories and fosters community connections; the women's neighbors, including a veteran who became a farmer, extend their grace outward, showing that it's never too late to alter one's course.

The women's stories are heartbreaking: one atones for an impulsive decision that spiraled into an unforeseen tragedy, and all three are self-reliant to the point where they cause unintentional harm. Throughout, their misguided views about what's best for their loved ones are cloaked in silence, resulting in decades-long strains. Healing comes when Sarah discovers a letter that forces new reckonings. Here, there's freedom in telling the truth.

In the uplifting novel *The Secret Keepers of Old Depot Grocery*, generations of women navigate their delicate relationships as they work to honor their family legacies.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2021)

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