



The Secret of Goldenrod

Jane O'Reilly

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Trina and her father move into Goldenrod, an old and possibly haunted mansion. There Trina finds a tiny porcelain doll, Augustine, who helps Trina understand more about her forgetful father, her absent mother, and herself.

The Secret of Goldenrod Details

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From Reader Review The Secret of Goldenrod for online ebook

Venus says

Review originally posted on Children's Atheneum

A new book with a classic feel too it, this left me with all the feels I would get from The Secret Garden or The Root Cellar. Although the story is modern and certainly mentions computers and phones, by setting this in a place where there isn't good cell phone reception or high speed internet, it made the story feel timeless. Trina is a great character who is trying to find who she is within the chaos of constant moving. She wants to find home and belonging, both of which begin to happen as she falls more in love with Goldenrod and the little doll Augustine. Yet, there are also ominous things as well.

As mentioned earlier, Goldenrod may be haunted. And even if it isn't, it doesn't matter because the whole town thinks it is. For year, the people have been sneaking into Goldenrod and daring one another to spend the night. When they couldn't they owed money to the Dare Club and took one item from the house. Which would explain why random objects like a dining table or a rocking chair keep appearing in their driveway. It is also why Trina has such a hard time making friends.

The story keeps along at a nice pace, slowing down for brief periods that often felt like catching your breath before diving back in. My one and only criticism was the subplot concerning Trina's mother, which I felt was a bit predictable although certainly an important part of the story.

A solid middle grade novel that will appeal to those who like many different genres, but particularly those who like creepy old houses and dolls that talk.

An ARC of this book was provided to me by the author in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Rebecca McNutt says

This haunting supernatural mystery is old-fashioned in style yet modern in characters and setting, and it has amazing emotional undertones in the story.

Mark Buxton says

My name is Citrine, or Trina. My father is a master carpenter, so we've moved halfway across the country to fix up an old, rundown house called Goldenrod. It's actually a huge mansion, but all of the people around here believe it's haunted and has cursed the whole town with bad luck. The house scares me, I hate school, I don't have any friends, and I haven't seen my mother in eight years. I find a talking doll in my room that needs my help, but she seems to be helping me too. She's the only one I'm able to talk to, and she's helping me understand Goldenrod. I learn about its tragic history, and I am the only person able to bring it peace, and bring peace to the whole town.

I was extremely impressed with the author of this book. I typically enjoy speculative fiction books with more

action and adventure, but this book really grabbed my interest. The unbelievable elements weren't overdone and became underlying parts of the story. Goldenrod slowly became a character, as it gave hints about its feelings and Trina was forced to figure out what it wanted her to do. I was able to connect with Trina's character and understood the confusion, challenges, and frustrations with her life. The doll's positive attitude kept Trina motivated and encouraged her to face her fears. The climax and resolution evoked feelings of sadness, joy, and satisfaction. It was amazing to see a young girl change the attitude and hope of a town trapped in years of depression. It's definitely a book you should read!

Christy says

Thanks to NetGalley for an advance copy of this book.

The Secret of Goldenrod is a magical tale of a young girl and her father who find more than an old house to renovate when they move to New Royal: they find a place to belong.

Trina and her father have been traveling the country for as long as Trina can remember. Her dad is a master carpenter and goes where the work takes him. This time his work takes him to a home that has been vacant for 100 years. The locals say it is haunted and when Trina arrives, she agrees. Of course, her father has a logical explanation for everything. The creaks and moans are normal old house sounds according to him. Trina isn't so sure.

When Trina discovers a secret door to the turret room, she finds that though the house may not be haunted, the little doll in the dollhouse is certainly animated. Trina, who is unable to make friends at school, finds a friend in the doll. As the story progresses, Trina begins to find that the kids at school really aren't as bad as she first thought, and she begins to make friends.

I absolutely loved this book. The entire time I was reading this, I couldn't help but think how much I'd have enjoyed reading this book as a little girl. It is just the type of book I loved. It has wonderful characters with a mysterious and fanciful plot. It teaches the lesson that things are not always as they seem...sometime they are better!

I highly recommend this book to all readers, both young and old.

Leah says

I'm glad that this wasn't a scary story, but I was disappointed by the mystery. I was expecting more from the mystery and the story, especially the ending. I did like the characters, especially Augustine and Edward. I found Augustine amusing. Charlotte was the exception, but she was more likeable at the end of the book. Also, I liked the setting, a small town in Iowa.

Delainie says

The perfect mix of mystery, ghost story and coming-of-age. Trina, AKA Citrine, is a spunky, can-do, 5th grade tomboy. She and her dad move from place to place as work becomes available. Their latest job takes

them to Goldenrod, a 100 year old mansion in need of much repair. On the first night Trina can feel something strange with the house and clues slowly reveal themselves to her including a talking porcelain doll. Trina learns about the Roy's, the family that lived in Goldenrod in its prime, and the tragedy that befell them. As her dad makes the repairs and the house begins to look more liveable, household objects begin to show up in the front yard and on the porch. Trina learns of the town's "Dare Club" and starts to understand why the objects are showing up. I loved how the story slowly unfolded, clue by clue. The ending was complete without feeling forced. I hope there is a sequel.

Both of my daughters (6th grade and 3rd grade) read and loved this book.

Brandy Painter says

2.5 stars

The sentence level writing in this book is good and the characters are also memorable. My reasons for not clicking with the book are more about my expectations as a reader, which I would ordinarily say was my own fault. However, in this case the author intentionally messes with those expectations. Girl moves to a spooky house where strange things happen, no one has been able to live in, all the town's people are afraid of, and as a reader you sit back and wait for the ghosts and the stories of murder and anguish in the house. The author built that expectation up beautifully. Then the doll in a doll house in a hidden room behind a mirror comes to life. And talks. I mean, COME ON. Creepy stuff right around the corner. Right? Clearly the doll is going to be bad news. Again the author builds on that expectation and keeps the reader in a heightened sense of suspense. And....NOTHING HAPPENS. The girl plays with the doll. She learns lessons about friendship. And kind of sort of deals with her mom issues. (Her mom left her, because it's a MG book.) Everyone gets a happy ending. Over 300 pages and that's it. I ended the book with a huge sense of betrayal and more than a little annoyed at the author.

Ivonne Rovira says

Jane McKnight's debut novel shouldn't work; however, not only does *The Secret of Goldenrod* work, but it works fabulously.

Every single person in New Royal, Iowa, knows one thing for sure: that Goldenrod, the mansion on the outskirts of town that was the scene of so much tragedy, is dreadfully haunted. Fifth-grader Trina Maxwell learns this as soon as she arrives in the town of 397 with her father, a handyman who's been hired to bring the house, abandoned for 100 years, back to its glory. And now tomboy Trina and her dad are going to be living in the abandoned Victorian house while he's fixing it up! Her dad, Mike Maxwell (nicknamed Poppo), doesn't believe in ghosts, but a frightened Trina knows better.

To tell any more would be to ruin this delight of a novel, but I will say that I found the novel, tomboy Trina, and Augustine the antique doll to be utter delights. You'll cherish the novel about hope and love long after savoring the last page. Highly recommended for young and old alike.

In the interest of full disclosure, I received this book from NetGalley, Lerner Publishing Group, and Carolrhoda Books in exchange for an honest review.

Abbey says

Trina (Citrine) is on the edge of pre-teendom when she arrives at Goldenrod, a house where her father has taken a restoration contract. Hints of haunting surround the house, but once inside, Trina realizes that the house itself is communicating with her. But not in a scary-creepy way if such a thing is possible where a haunted house and kids meet in a single plot.

Anyway, it isn't long before Trina finds a new friend in the form of sentient porcelain doll who is hung up on ideas that life must imitate fairy tales (the stories she's heard when she belonged to the last child of the house). A small amount of mostly benign preteen angst ensues as Trina attempts life in (another) new school (yet again). But with a French porcelain doll for a best friend, some stuff is bound to happen.

Overall, a sweet story (with a dash of suspense) of a home that is as much a citizen of a community as any of the human residents.

Brenda Ayala says

I love everything about *The Secret of Goldenrod*. It's the kind of book I would have loved as a child, the kind I would've checked out from the school library then once I finished it, gone home and asked my mom to take me to the bookstore so I could buy it. It has all the elements that satisfy me within a story and I can't help but wish I had a kid to share it with.

The story is pretty straightforward--Trina and her father are nomads, never staying in one place long. Trina's father is the best kind of handyman, the kind who knows how to fix everything, and they only stay in a town long enough for him to finish a project before they skip town to the next place. For Trina, this has never been an issue. When they get to Goldenrod they find they'll be there for a longer stint than usual, and Trina takes the time to explore as she would any other house. Only in this case, the house is surveying her as much as she is surveying it. Add a talking doll to it, and you've got a deliciously mysterious setting while Trina works to discover the secrets.

The characters and their relationships to each other are what drive the novel. I loved that we had a separated family as the center point without death being the thing that separates the parents. As a child of divorce, I appreciate the nod to children with single-parent households. And because it's just Trina and her dad, you really see the loving relationship they have. Trina wants to be treated like an adult but acts more like a child sometimes to appease her father, while her father wants her to be a child but treats her like more of an adult to appease her. That give and take was magical to me, even without the talking doll and a house with feelings.

The mystery element is cute and fitting for the age group. I wouldn't say it was scary at all which probably wasn't the case anyway, but I had hoped for a little bit of scary to keep me going. Either way, it's a good book for young readers and worth a look-see.

Ms. Yingling says

Warning: This is NOT a creepy book. The cover makes it look like it should be. It should be. It has a creepy cover. It has all the elements of a story that could turn creepy on a dime. And yet, the talking doll NEVER KILLS ANYONE. I expected this to be like *The Time of the Fireflies*.

If I knew the talking doll wasn't going to kill anyone, I could have enjoyed this as a Rumer Godden style book with a fantastic dollhouse. As it was, I was on edge every time something new happened.

E ARC from Netgalley.com

Citrine (formerly Trina) moves to an abandoned house so that her father can refurbish it. Everyone in town is deeply apprehensive about the house, and at school the children give Citrine such a hard time that she doesn't want to return. Her father lets her stay at home and help with the refurbishment, probably in part because he feels guilty that Citrine's mother left the family and hasn't been in contact with them in years. She finds the secret entrance to the turret room where a beautiful dollhouse is. The house has one doll in it-- and the doll talks to Citrine. The two decide that the doll's name should be Augustine, and they have a fair amount of fun together. In the meantime, townspeople keep returning items that had been stolen from the house in the past, hoping that by returning them, their bad luck will end. Citrine finds out about the original family, the Roys, and discovers that Augustine's owner, Annie, died of diphtheria, which drove her grieving mother over the edge. The father moves to the carriage house (on which the dollhouse is based), which eventually burns down. Even so, none of the family comes back to murder Citrine and her father in their sleep. When the townspeople decide to give Citrine the money that was collected when kids dared each other to spend the night in town, Citrine decides to use the money to recreate the wonderful costume party that the Roys held. Descendants of the Roys come to the house and decide it is so wonderful that they want to live there, and Citrine and her father are to be the caretakers.

Strengths: The descriptions of the house are fantastic, the dollhouse is great, and Augustine provides friendship for Citrine at a time when she really needs it. As I stated earlier, if I hadn't hear that squeaky-death-is-around-every-corner violin music in my head at every plot turn, I would have loved this.

Weaknesses: I wasn't fond of the bullying, and the sub plot with Citrine's mother seemed forced.

What I really think: This might be better suited to elementary libraries, since doll stories are a tough sell in middle school, unless the dolls are murdering everyone with the steam heating system. Still, I really enjoyed it and might just have to buy a copy.

Althea Ann says

This charming and old-fashioned-style story for young people can definitely be enjoyed by readers of all ages. I'd particularly recommend it to fans of Zilpha Keatley Snyder - except for a couple of mentions of cell phone cluing me in that this was a more recent publication, it completely brought me back to the Snyder books that I read back in the 70s.

Trina's dad renovates old houses for a living, so she's used to having to move from place to place. But his latest job - a dilapidated and remote mansion called 'Goldenrod' - is going to be more challenging than usual, in more ways than one. Not only is her new school a tight-knit, tiny community where everyone already knows each other, but the whole town seems to sincerely believe that Goldenrod is haunted - they're

legitimately terrified of the place. Trina has no such fears - but something does seem to be a little bit odd about Goldenrod. It seems that she can sense the 'mood' of the house. And then, in a secret tower room, she discovers an amazing antique dollhouse - and a doll that can talk.

The setup is great, and I loved everything about the haunted house, the doll, &c. Trina's personality was complex and believable, accurately capturing a girl just at the cusp of maturity and all of her conflicting wants regarding family and friends. However, I didn't think that the second half of the book, and the resolution, was as good.

Part of this was the coincidence that I'd just (not of my own volition) viewed the terrible and sappy movie "Instructions not Included," which features the exact, precise same scenario involving "postcards from mom." After the movie, I just couldn't take that premise seriously. Another part was that, in my personal experience, trying to make nice and befriend a bully is a waste of time at best. It never really ends well. Thirdly, too much of the story's energy toward the end was invested in the "throwing a big party," which was a bit of a dull climax. And lastly, the family scenario was wrapped up just a tad too neatly for my taste.

Still, overall, I enjoyed the story - and younger people will likely enjoy it even more.

Many thanks to Lerner Books and NetGalley for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

Kathy says

What a delightful story! A girl, her dad, a big old house, and a mystery to solve. Oh, and a talking doll. This is a story about Trina. She and her father renovate houses, moving from place to place in the process. That means another new school and making new friends as they live and work in a large old house, Goldenrod, in a small town. It's hard always being the new kid. The small town has an interesting group of residents who all think the house is haunted and who each has a story of his own. As Trina sees the connections among the mysterious happenings and puts it all together, she helps herself, her dad, and the town reach a satisfying conclusion to the story. And Goldenrod.

This is just the kind of story that would have kept me reading with a flashlight under the covers when I was a girl. My 11 year old daughter loved it, too.

Jennifer says

Yikes, that cover. Doesn't do it justice at all. This book was fabulous!

The Library Lady says

Old fashioned story of the kid who moves to a new town, hoping to fit in, and finally does, her problem solved by a haunted house and a talking doll. It's predictable for the most part, but nicely written, and after

all, if you're 10, this plot would probably be new to you.
