



Insectual: The Secret of the Black Butterfly

Barbara Sala

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What is the root of Maya's dysfunction in her matrimonial bedroom? Lorenzo sends her to a psychiatrist. In his office, she analyzes her marriage in Africa, and her childhood in Germany. She discovers art and spirituality. She divorces Lorenzo. But still, where did the sting of her suffering begin? To penetrate her resistances, the doctor suggests "hands-on sex therapy." INSECTUAL: Secret of the Black Butterfly contains 80 images illustrating Maya's dramatic journey through inner and outer worlds. A fast read.

Insectual: The Secret of the Black Butterfly Details

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Author : Barbara Sala

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Genre :



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From Reader Review Insectual: The Secret of the Black Butterfly for online ebook

Rosie says

Most of Barbara Sala's book 'INSECTUAL (The Secret of the Black Butterfly)' consists of Maya's therapy sessions, her thoughts, her fears, her dreams and what she chooses to tell her therapist. It is very well written throughout and the illustrations at the beginning of each segment of the book are quite clever, painting a very clear picture of what Maya is thinking. While the book was very difficult to read in some places due to the content, I am grateful to have read it, as it teaches one of the most incredible lessons a person can learn in life: forgiveness.

- Rosie Malezer for Readers' Favorite

Ann Diamond says

I've read INSECTUAL at various stages as I was involved in editing it beginning about ten years ago. I'm very glad to see it finally appear in print. It has all the qualities other reviewers have mentioned: strong, vivid writing; a fast-moving story that begins in Nazi Germany during the war years, moves to the Belgian Congo in the early sixties and another particularly bloody war, then comes to rest in Montreal where the narrator enters therapy with a brilliant psychotherapist who helps her retrieve childhood incest memories and unfreeze her considerable artistic talent. (Writing is just one of Barbara Sala's gifts -- she's also a well-respected 'naive' painter.)

I haven't read the current version of INSECTUAL -- a brilliant title that I believe her granddaughter contributed to the project. I'm a fan of Barbara's writing (and painting) but we came to loggerheads when she revised the book, back in about 2010. I was in love with the earlier version -- a masterpiece of dramatic irony with a darker subtext than the current one -- in fact I thought it really had 'bestseller' potential as a portrait of a woman caught in the throes of romantic obsession to the point of extreme self-deception. If this version is disturbing, the earlier one was at times terrifying in its exploration of a shattered female psyche, almost (but not quite) rescued and redeemed by art

The reason I'm giving it four stars (instead of 5) is that I still hold onto the hope that Sala will resurrect her earlier draft, which was even more relentlessly honest and thought-provoking than this one, which has lost some of its truth and power to political correctness. That, in my opinion, would be a rare act of healing -- which is what INSECTUAL is about.

Sahani Perera says

A complex read that may way on you if you have the habit of aborting yourself into a read. Strictly advice that its suitable for an adult audience. A typical psychological thriller read with certain amount of fragments associated with historical fiction and biography. Noted subject discussed on incest, dysfunctional family, abuse, sex therapy, awareness. Not pleased with the ending At ALL!

Isana Isana says

As soon as I began reading this book it had my full attention. Barbara was not afraid to tackle the subject of sex from a woman's point of view, which was incredibly refreshing. However, my heart ached for her and her experiences with her husband, Lorenzo. She lived in constant shame and seemed to be covered in a shroud of sadness and depression, unable to figure out the "devil."

I was amazed at her tenacity in the years she put in, working with a psychiatrist, hoping to uncover her "problem," only to be victimized again by someone who knew better.

Barbara writes with openness, honesty and a straight to the point approach. Thankfully, she discovered her incredible creative side, both in art and writing. I do believe this is what saved this amazing woman, giving her the outlet she needed to express the deep, hidden, secret trauma.

Thank you for having the courage to write your story: it touched me deeply.

Fulluri says

Unique and interesting, but the dialogs do not live up to the promise

This is quite an exciting book written in a unique manner. In fact, a lot of the bitter truths about life can be found here. Consider, for instance, the very opening paragraph of the book: which couple, married or in an otherwise long term relationship, won't be able to relate to the mundaneness and monotony of sex life after the initial fervor is gone? -

"Making love. Oh making love! I really hate it. Day in, day out, always the same ritual. I don't desire it as often as he does. Therefore, we get the passive sessions, when he "rapes" me, and the active sessions, when I play along"

OR

"To me, making love is boring and a waste of time. One housewife once confided to me that eating a steak was much more pleasurable than making love."

Is it any wonder that there is something called 'marital rape' in lawbooks? Is it any wonder that sometimes men and women in long term relationships cheat on each other? The whole book is a very accurate mirror into the mind of a woman who has lost the urge for sex.

Surprisingly enough, a lot changes in the protagonist's life except for one thing: her sexual ardor: she is still frigid, even with a new lover:

"Sexually, I am still a cripple."

Well at least she realizes the reality of sex therapy, thank goodness!

The atmosphere is sometimes chilling and often takes you by surprise; many a times the character's actions themselves are shocking. In one of the chapters ("Abortion") for instance, you are transported from the relatively calm and serene images of refectory and flowers to a comparatively bleaker imagery of cemetery.

The dialogs could have been better, however. A lot of times they are unoriginal, hackneyed or cheesy:

"Hi," it says cheerfully. "I am here, look at me."

"Come, Chérie, sit on me. Give yourself to me," says the little thing. It is trembling."

""Yes, I will perform a proper abortion. But abortion is illegal in this country. That's why we have to be so prudent."

Considering the effort the author spent on creating extremely relatable, multi-dimensional characters and a page turning plot, if only she had invested just as much effort on the dialogs too, I would have given it five stars.

As it is stands though, it is worth the money due to the unique nature of the plot and very realistically drawn

characters. I believe both genders would be able to relate to this book: women, who confuse sex with rape when the relationship gets old and tired, and men, who are frustrated by their wives' increasingly reduced appetite for sex. It even has something to appease the feminist crowd ("I am riding on this powerful wave." "Get the bastard," I hear myself say. "Castrate him. Get justice for all of us who are in brothels, underprivileged, bound to sexual slavery or mistreated for our womanhood.") as well as for the 'religious' crowd ("The "devil" represents temptation, guilt and sex"). More importantly, for me, it finally answered a long standing question I used to have about the most lucrative career ever: well I believe it is the job of a sex therapist, well for men anyway!

Barbara Sala says

Danielle Berthiaume:

I was seriously hooked from your first two words: Making love. Wow, what a start to a book that is inspirational, mesmerizing, troubling, raw, mystical, fascinating, insightful, hopeful, sad, deeply personal: there are not enough words to say how I was touched by you. I enjoy a book sometimes for the writing, sometimes for the story, lucky if I have both in the same book. I had both in abundance with yours (the writing is wonderful as well as the story); however, the added bonus of the art is just marvelous. In each chapter, I kept going back to the art several times : it added dimension, joy and depth to each. Thank you ever so much for sharing this deeply personal saga.

Your courage and your journey deserve to be shared by as many people as possible. Your bravery is as inspiring as your art. Danielle Berthiaume.

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Reviewed by Rosie Malezer for Readers' Favorite: 5 Stars

The title and cover art of INSECTUAL (The Secret of the Black Butterfly) by Barbara Sala intrigued me. It details the life of Maya – a German woman who describes intimacy and sex as 'the devil' – yet has no problems falling in love. After an unwanted pregnancy and abortion, Maya meets and marries Lorenzo, an Italian man who finds Maya enchanting. Due to complications with the birth of her second child with Lorenzo, Maya and the baby are rushed to the hospital. After the birth, she is secreted away just moments before her city comes under fire. When Maya and Lorenzo are finally reunited, Lorenzo confesses his infidelities in a drunken stupor.

Therapy is recommended to Maya in the hopes that it will fix her loathing of sexual acts. Shortly after her therapy sessions commence, Maya realizes that she does not want to stay married to an unfaithful husband. After divorcing Lorenzo, Maya spends many years in therapy, discovering her real inner demons lie with her father who had molested and raped her as a child – traumatic memories which Maya had buried over the years.

Most of Barbara Sala's book INSECTUAL (The Secret of the Black Butterfly) consists of Maya's therapy sessions, her thoughts, her fears, her dreams and what she chooses to tell her therapist. It is very well written throughout and the illustrations at the beginning of each segment of the book are quite clever, painting a very clear picture of what Maya is thinking. While the book was very difficult to read in some places due to the content, I am grateful to have read it, as it

teaches one of the most incredible lessons a person can learn in life: forgiveness.

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Review by Catherine Watson, sociologist and writer, member of the McGill Community.

Insectual – The Secret of the Black Butterfly, by Barbara Sala

This book tells the story of Maya's two lives – the first as a child and young woman in Central Europe and then the former Belgian Congo, the second as a woman in mid-life in North America who relives her life in psychotherapy. There she seeks to rid herself of the Black Butterfly, a disturbing insect-like presence that still haunts her dreams and her waking moments, even as a mature woman. Guided by her therapist, the meaning of her past and perhaps of her rage becomes clear although freedom, love and true security are harder to find.

Maya was born in Nazi Germany two years before the outbreak of the Second World War. In the last year of the war her family moved to a remote chalet in Bavaria where she witnessed the arrival of the Allied troops. They were welcomed by her father – the emotional scars of family conflict and betrayal remained. Later she worked for the United Nations in the Congo, married, gave birth to two children, and was forced to flee as the war within that country escalated. She moved to the United States with her husband and children, spent some years in the Caribbean and settled finally in Montreal, Canada. This then is the story of several journeys across countries and continents as well as the story of a woman's journey back to the experiences which oppressed her and stood in the way of her happiness. It is also a story of renewal. Maya attributes her healing not only to psychotherapy but to spiritualism, her openness to the influence of African gods, and the power of Art.

Each chapter recounts a brief episode in Maya's life, either from her early or later years. Each is illustrated with a drawing portraying actual or remembered psychic experiences. The writing describes the events, the drawings show the power of emotion unleashed in the telling. The writing is matter of fact, direct and at times starkly honest. I did not anticipate the ending. Names and details of specific incidents have been changed to protect the identity of others involved - because as the writer reminds us, "This is a story about events that happen to ordinary people." In life Barbara Sala is a naïve artist who has exhibited internationally. She has published three illustrated children's books and is now in her mid-70's.

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Following is the official OnlineBookClub.org review of "Insectual" by Barbara Sala. 4 out of 4 stars by ananya92

Insectual: The Secret of the Black Butterfly by Barbara Sala is a book which can be categorized in the Historical fiction genre.

This story traces Maya's journey which begins in Germany, coinciding with the Second World War. Maya grew up in Bavarian Alps, where the family had fled to escape from the bombing raids. Growing up was a

tough experience for Maya, due to the constant tension between her parents which culminated in their divorce. After finishing her education Maya moves to former Belgian Congo as part of a UN mission. There she meets and marries her Italian colleague and gives birth to her two children, in the middle of all the chaos of the Mulele Revolution. The ensuing revolution forces Maya and Lorenzo (her husband) to move to Montreal with their family. Maya's life has been eventful but there has been an ailment ailing her, gnawing at her subconscious constantly, something that she calls 'the devil'. This 'devil' is now threatening to end her marriage and tear apart her family. Maya undergoes psychotherapy to find out the reason behind this condition and discovers that the answer is hidden in the troubled memories of her childhood. Will she find out the truth that she desperately seeks?

The book is divided into four parts with around seventy chapters in all. All the chapters begin with a dialogue quoted from the chapter, accompanied with an intriguing, often funny, illustration. The illustrations are mostly related to Maya's fantasies or her dreams. The story is written in first person and starts with Maya's life in Montreal. The story is written mostly in the form of flashbacks and the author takes the reader back and forth in time, tracing Maya's journey across three continents. The fantasies and dreams which the author conjures for Maya's character are quite inventive, with a deeper meaning camouflaged in them. One huge positive of this story is its unpredictability. With every flashback a new facet of Maya's life comes to fore, changing the direction of the story. There are plenty of metaphors and symbolism used by the author to narrate this tale.

This book is pretty unusual in the sense that though there are some familiar elements like sexual abuse, troubled child psychology due to separation of parents, etc, it doesn't follow the oft taken route and displays a twisted view of things. At times I was confused whether I should see Maya as a victim of circumstances or a victim of her own mind. Our protagonist, Maya, lives in a dual world caught between reality and the world of her imagination. She desperately wants to save her marriage and give her children a good family life. The other characters in this book are also interesting and not conventional characters made in the familiar mold. One would sympathize and be annoyed with them at the same time.

The author weaves in two important events in history and portrays them through a different lens. Readers who like psychological thrillers coupled with historical content should try this one. This book tells a story which is thought provoking and has a dark tone. I rate it 4 out of 4 stars for its unusual plot and riveting storyline.

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Readers Favorite: 5 Stars, Review by Rosie Malezer

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Catherine Watson is a sociologist and writer. She is a member of the McGill Community for Lifelong Learning in Montreal.

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Caroline says

We all live lives full of experiences. So much we learn. Yet, because we live in a society where it is best seen to remain ``private`` a lot of lessons remain untold and lost. I loved reading Barbara Sala's book. She puts it

all out, emotions, experiences, hardships, in details. You read and you actually live Maya's story (the heroine of the book), realizing that someone here has had the guts to show herself totally naked. Many difficult experiences were described (which depending on the reader's life some could relate to), but what fascinated me the most was to learn how powerful the mind is. That is, the capacity to hide information in the subconscious in order to survive and stay strong. But then, what is hidden has to come to the surface one day...

We all need examples of the struggles others go through so we can see how it is possible to grow and emerge.

This book is a reminder to respect our elders because they have so much to teach. They are like gold mines rich with experiences. Can you believe that Barbara will turn 80 years old in 2017! It is up to us to choose to dig into these mines.

Jennie Rosenblum says

I did not finish the book. After over 100 pages the story only loosely followed the book summary given. It was not for me.
