



# The Secret of Laurel Oaks

*Lois Ruby*

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## **The Secret of Laurel Oaks** Lois Ruby

When Lila and her family visit Laurel Oaks Plantation in Louisiana, her parents and brother scoff at the claim that the house is haunted. But secretly, Lila suspects there are ghostly presences willing to communicate with her, and her alone. One spirit eager to tell her story is Daphne, a slave girl at Laurel Oaks in the 1840s, who was blamed for the poisoning deaths of two girls and their mother. Daphne's spirit senses that Lila is the very person she's been waiting for, the one who can prove her innocence so her spirit can rest at long last. Shifting back and forth from Lila's world in the present to Daphne's world in the past, the true story of what really happened that fateful night finally comes to light.

Laurel Oaks is a thinly disguised version of the legendary Myrtles Plantation in Louisiana, which is on the Smithsonian's list of the ten most haunted places in America. This novel was inspired by the author's visit to the plantation and her experiences there.

## **The Secret of Laurel Oaks Details**

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Author : Lois Ruby

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# From Reader Review The Secret of Laurel Oaks for online ebook

## Sarah Hepler says

Great story for a cozy Saturday on the couch. Suspenseful, fun to read and interesting historical info.

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## Nandika says

I absolutely love this book!

I couldn't stop reading, even though it took a month to finish it which was because I started reading other books.

This is my most favourite ghost story. It was really interesting and thrilling!

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## Claudia says

An ambitious book that didn't connect with me until the very end as I read the author's notes. Two narratives -- one in modern times, one from over 200 years ago. Lila, visiting the New Orleans area (and the ancient 'hotel' on the site of the former plantation Laurel Oaks) from New Mexico with her family and Daphne, a ghost of a young slave who lived and died on Laurel Oaks. I found Daphne's voice difficult to fall into...sometimes I was jarred by her two stories...her life and death, and her watching Lila, and trying to help Lila solve the mystery that has haunted the place for years.

Lila also had issues that were not explored, only hinted at.

As often happens, I get frustrated with a story that really should be an adult novel so ideas can be fully explored. I understand the genre of YAL has length restrictions, and sometimes it interferes with the storytelling.

But, reading the author's notes, and understanding her motivation, I can see how committed she was to THIS story, and THESE girls.

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## Amy says

Lila, 13, and her family are in Louisiana for an academic presentation her mother is giving. Lila is put in charge of finding their accommodations, and - perhaps infected by ghost hunting fever - she books the spookiest place she can find. It's an old plantation called Laurel Oaks, and it was beset by tragedy more than once in its storied past. As a result, its halls are teeming with spirits - or so says Camilla, the cryptic caretaker. But Lila starts to believe (or else suspect that she's crazy) - she can see and hear things that no one else in her family can. Most notably, she starts to feel a connection with Daphne, a slave who lived 170 years ago. Daphne was hanged from one of the laurel oaks on the property because she was suspected of poisoning her master's wife and two little girls. But Daphne seems to be trying to tell Lila something...maybe Daphne didn't do it, after all, and she needs someone to clear her name before her spirit can move on.

The narration alternates between Lila and Daphne. In Lila's chapters, readers see her trying to figure out the mystery of Laurel Oaks and what REALLY happened on the day the master's wife and children were poisoned. Her information comes mostly in the form of visions and whispered voices that only she can hear. She also communes with a tree named Timberlarken, who Daphne also had a connection with almost two centuries ago. Timberlarken reveals (through its psychic connection with Lila) key pieces of the puzzle that lead to Lila's unearthing of the truth.

In Daphne's chapters, she takes us back to the Laurel Oaks of 170 years ago, describing the horrific realities of being a slave - which included withstanding the master's unwanted sexual advances. Daphne reveals her story piece by piece, until readers and Lila figure out that she's not a murderer at all - it was the gardener who's sweet on her. He wanted to make the family just a little bit sick - enough so that Daphne could nurse them back to health and thus stay in their good graces and away from a life in the cotton fields.

The basic gist of the story was fine, but there were some plot elements that seemed unnecessary - the death of family friend Roberto and the hidden "bebe" statues are two examples. I also wanted more atmospheric details about the plantation - I felt like I never got a good sense of its spookiness. But I read at least one other book about the Myrtles (the real-life plantation this book is based on), and I know enough about that part of the country that my brain could fill in the missing details. Finally, I felt like the writing in Lila's chapters came off as a little flippant - the tone didn't reflect the spookiness and unease that I'm sure would accompany a paranormal experience. I loved Daphne's chapters, though - her voice was rich with details of the time, and she was immensely likable.

Not my favorite ghost story, but it's a solid mystery, and it's worth reading for the Daphne chapters.

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## **Valeria says**

3.5 stars

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## **Shelly Reed says**

### **New Orleans flavor with a spooky twist**

I was looking for a good NOLA read and this YA book didn't disappoint. It is told from two sides: modern day Lila and past Daphne. A little spooky because there are ghosts in it. The truth becomes revealed about Daphne's death in the end.

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## **Heather Gunnell says**

Staff Pick

Kathi

This story takes place in Louisiana. The fictional plantation is Laurel Oaks but the true location is the legendary Myrtles Plantation.

Ruby weaves an interesting storyline between the past and the present. The characters are interesting and her descriptions make the book seem very realistic. Great creepy ghost encounters make the book even better!

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### **Hayley Tolan says**

*The Secret of Laurel Oaks* is a ghost story based on stories about The Myrtles Plantation in St. Francisville, Louisiana.

The author's main purpose for writing this novel is to entertain readers. It is suspenseful, mysterious, and spooky from the beginning to the end.

The theme of this book is to not believe all the rumors you may hear. In the book, a young slave girl was accused of poisoning her master's wife and two daughters. She was hanged for it despite any evidence proving she committed these crimes.

This book was written using the rhetorical mode of narration. The narrators of the story alternate between chapters. One narrator is a rebellious teenage girl named Lila from the present day. The other narrator is a teenage girl named Daphne. Daphne was a slave who lived and died on the Laurel Oaks plantation two centuries ago. During Lila's family vacation to the haunted plantation, Lila would see Daphne and other ghosts around the house. In the next chapter, Daphne describes seeing Lila to the reader.

Using the style of narration is effective because it shows differences between modern times and the hard times of slavery. Alternating between narrators allowed the readers to experience a story through different perspectives. For instance, during a tour of the house, Lila looked in a mirror and saw Daphne. Then in the next chapter, Daphne describes how intently Lila was looking back at her in the mirror. Daphne knows she's a ghost and only a few people have ever seen her. She hopes Lila is the one person she can trust to tell about the secret she's been keeping for two hundred years.

I loved this book and was very intrigued by the ghostly plot. The characters were interesting and even included a wise, talking tree! I did not dislike anything about this book. However, if I could change anything about this story, I would have Lila confide in her parents what she was seeing in the house. She didn't have a very good relationship with them. But all in all, I loved the book. This book reminds me of my favorite ghost story, *Who's there?* by Stephanie Tolan.

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### **Carissa says**

I have a feeling that I would have been all about this book when I was in Jr High, which is good for the book since it is for Young Readers. As it is I have been spoiled by all the adult ghost story fiction/nonfiction that I have read. I was looking for more detail, I wanted to know more about small points in the book. The baby statue was weird. I suppose I agree that it should go in the museum (cue Dr. Jones, here) but originally it was probably meant to help out one of the daughters if she ended up in a loveless marriage to some jerk that beat her. I thought the Cambridge Room was tidied up too nicely. Assuming that the sewer backup had happened the day they came, it's been sitting in that room for two days now. It sounded like it was on the ground floor and that the caretaker and her charge live in the basement (who lives in the basement of a creepy house??). Wouldn't there be... seepage? Eventually it would rot the floorboards, so I'm hoping that it is fixed soon, somewhere out there in the realm where the story keeps going.

Don't skip the author's afterward. The story is loosely based on a legend at the Myrtles Plantation. I have heard of it! I did not know that the Smithsonian kept a list of the top ten most haunted places, so you can

imagine where my internet navigation is taking me next.

3 and 1/2 stars. if I could.

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### **Kim says**

I love a good ghost story, so I was intrigued by both the cover and the premise of this book. Thirteen-year-old Lila and her family stay at Laurel Oaks Plantation in Louisiana while her mother delivers an address at a university. They are the only guests at the house, which the tour guide/caretaker assures them is haunted. The opening narrator is one of the plantation's ghosts, a slave girl named Daphne. Daphne's history is juxtaposed with the present day, including her interaction with Lila and her family. Gradually, the reader learns more and more of Daphne's life at the plantation, the mystery surrounding the death of her mistress and two children, and the circumstances under which Daphne herself died. Lila and her brother help uncover the facts surrounding these events and eventually clear Daphne's name of the crimes of which she had been accused. Lois Ruby creates interesting and realistic characters and has added just the right amount of spooky elements for a children's ghost story. My only complaint is that she refers at least three or four times to the plantation owner's misuse of Daphne as an unwilling sexual partner. I do not contend that this is historically inaccurate, nor is it completely inappropriate to include in an older children's book. However, I think mentioning it once or twice would have been sufficient. Instead, it began to become an annoyance.

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### **Taylor says**

pretty good  
the book smelled good too idk

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### **Shraddha Saraf says**

Awesome cozy story. Thanks Shanu (my sister) for giving me this to read. Just the type of stories we love.

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### **rishika :) says**

Wow. Just wow. From my last status update, you could tell that I did not like this book at all, but a lot has changed in these last few chapters. I really liked The Secret of Laurel Oaks, but even though the book was described as a "chilling ghost story" I wasn't scared at any point. So basically, the story switches between two character's points of views, Lila's and Daphne's. Lila is a girl who comes with her family (her mom, dad, and brother) to this hotel sort of place, called the Laurel Oaks Plantation. Laurel Oaks is supposed to be haunted, but Lila is the only one in her family who actually believed that, while the rest of her family just scoffed at the idea of ghosts. Lila starts seeing things, like ghosts and mysterious happenings, and starts thinking that there is something more to Laurel Oaks, than what meets the eye... Daphne was an African-American slave who a long time ago worked at the Laurel Oaks Plantation. She was accused of poisoning her master's wife and two daughters, when she actually didn't. Her master, Judge Nethercott, ordered that she should be killed, because he believed that she killed his own family. For 200 years Daphne has been waiting

for someone to come along and find out the truth about who actually killed Judge Nethercott's family, and to free her spirit. And Lila was that someone. The Secret of Laurel Oaks is such an entrancing and well executed story that actually was inspired by true events. Lois Ruby's story had parts which I was bored to death (haha see my pun?), and also parts where I was clinging to the edge of my seat in excitement. If you want to read this book, I would recommend not giving up on it once the story starts to get a little boring, because trust me, the ending is so great! Overall, this book is amazing and it would only lose one star because there were some parts which didn't really make me want to continue on with the story, but other than that, The Secret of Laurel Oaks is a breathtaking book, and such a great read...

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### **Ashley Castillo says**

This book is called The Secrets of Laurel Oaks. I think this is a good book. I think this is a good book because it's about haunted places in America. And these stories are true. Lila is one of the characters in this story. She thinks the house they are staying in is haunted. So they are scared to be there. So this is why this is a good book.

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### **Sarah Carlson says**

I really liked this book and it was really fun to read! If you're into scary mystery stories this book would be really good for you. There are two main characters named Daphne and Lila, Lila is a human who goes to a scary house for the weekend- like a haunted hotel. She ends up staying longer than expected with the other character named Daphne. Daphne is a ghost who haunts the house. No one can see Daphne that is alive except for Lila. There are also rumors about Daphne that she killed two people but no one knows if it's true- only Lila can find out! I would recommend this book for middle school students because it's a little more mature. You also need to know that it is a first person point of view story and Lila and Daphne switch off every chapter.

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