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The Churchill Secret KBO



Synopsis

Nineteen-fifty-three is synonymous in the British memory with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June. But less well known is what happened in 10 Downing Street on 23 June. With Anthony Eden vying for power, the elderly Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, must maintain the confidence of his government, the press and the public. But after a diplomatic dinner in which he is on typically sparkling form, Churchill's Italian dining companions are rushed out of the building and his doctor called. The Prime Minister has had a stroke. Churchill is bedbound throughout the summer, and while secrecy agreements have been struck with leading newspaper barons, the potential impact of his health on public life is never far from the minds of his inner circle. With the help of a devoted young nurse and his indomitable wife, Clementine, Churchill gradually recoups his health. But will he be fit enough to represent Britain on the world stage?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's the summer of 1953 and the post-war gloom is starting to lift: the new queen has been crowned, Hillary has conquered Everest, the Ashes will soon be returned to their 'rightful' place. At Chartwell, as Winston concludes his splendid after-dinner toast to an Italian delegation, he suddenly slumps back in his chair. Fatigue - or something far more ominous? Churchill's slow recovery from a stroke must be kept secret from the world at all costs. His wingman, Anthony Eden, is also seriously ill and undergoing surgery in Boston. The UK is without governance. Churchill's tightknit group close ranks to keep the general public out of the loop. Despite such weighty subject matter, this is in fact a very bright and breezy read. With the bare minimum of exposition, Jonathan Smith tells us the story of

those difficult summer months largely through dialogue - and what a masterclass it is. This book should be required reading on writing courses! All the players spring vividly to life from these 200-odd pages. The irascible yet irresistible Churchill. His stressed wife Clementine who longs for him to retire (and the only person towards whom he evinces any fear: "...whatever you do, don't tell Clemmie."). Smart Jock Colville, the Prime Minister's politically astute private secretary who rarely sees eye to eye with Churchill's long-serving doctor, Charles Moran, a man who would appear to have had a sense of humour bypass. And last but by no means least, the exemplary Nurse Appleyard who surprises everyone by getting her prickly patient onside. Congratulations to Jonathan Smith on his fine achievement. This couldn't be more entertaining - or more highly recommended.

On the 23rd June, 1953, Winston Churchill was entertaining guests at Downing Street when he suddenly collapsed. His hopeful successor-in-waiting, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, was in America, having surgery to correct a previously botched operation. At a time when Churchill was supposed to be sailing to Bermuda to meet President Eisenhower for a summit, and the Cold War over-shadowed Europe, England had no leader. This is the story of how Churchill's inner circle - with the collusion of the government, and even some of the press - conspired to keep the news of his health scare secret. This book wonderfully re-imagines what could have happened during those months when it was touch and go whether or not Churchill would survive his stroke. We see things mainly through the eyes of Churchill's wife, Clementine, who is desperate for him to retire, his old friend, and doctor, Charles, Lord Moran, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary Jock Colville and a young nurse, Millie Appleyard, who arrives at Chartwell to care for her eminent patient, under strict secrecy. There are gentle power plays between Moran and Colville, secret meetings, intense secrecy and a stricken Eden waiting, in the wings, for Churchill to pass on the baton. Churchill himself is just how you imagine him to be - irascible, difficult, a showman, opinionated, vulnerable, flawed and incredibly intelligent. Always with one eye on Clementine's possible objections, Churchill really comes alive during his time spent with Nurse Appleyard. Their discussions of books and poetry allow his personality to flourish on the page. This book is a delight and I recommend it highly. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

I have read a lot of Churchill biographies and it was nice to get a more detailed rendering of this very critical period and situation. A lot of people who have not read a great deal about him might not

know anything about this situation, since they did such a good job of covering it up.

This was a disappointment. Novels based on a real person and events seem a misuse of that person's reputation. I have read other books about Churchill that revealed his personal characteristics but that is about all this one seems to reveal.

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