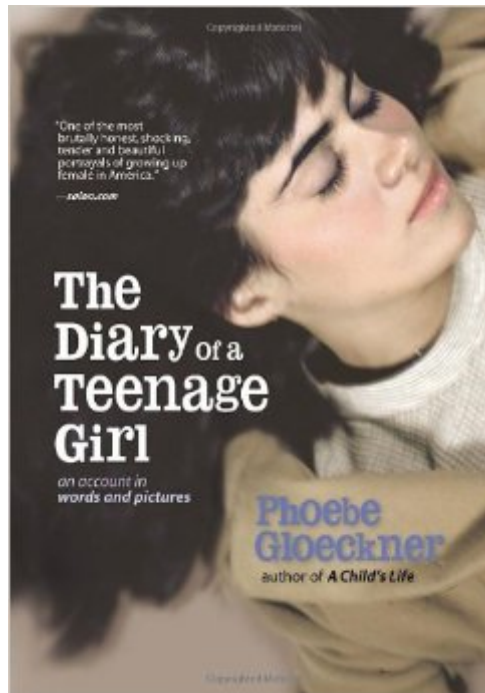


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The Diary Of A Teenage Girl: An Account In Words And Pictures



Synopsis

"I don't remember being born. I was a very ugly child. My appearance has not improved so I guess it was a lucky break when he was attracted by my youthfulness." So begins the wrenching diary of Minnie Goetze, a fifteen-year-old girl longing for love and acceptance and struggling with her own precocious sexuality. Minnie hates school and she wants to be an artist, or maybe a speleologist, or a bartender. She sleeps with her mother's boyfriend, and yet is too shy to talk with boys at school. She forges her way through adolescence, unsupervised and unguided, defenseless, and yet fearless. The story unfolds in the libertine atmosphere of the 1970s San Francisco, but the significance of Minnie's effort to understand herself and her world is universal. This is the story of an adolescent troubled by the discontinuity between what she thinks and feels and what she observes in those around her. The Diary of a Teenage Girl offers a searing comment on adult society as seen through the eyes of a young woman on the verge of joining it. In this unusual novel, artist and writer Phoebe Gloeckner presents a pivotal year in a girl's life, recounted in diary pages and illustrations, with full narrative sequences in comics form.

Book Information

Paperback: 312 pages

Publisher: Frog Books; New edition edition (November 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1583940634

ISBN-13: 978-1583940631

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 0.8 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (92 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #559,118 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #108 in Books > Comics &

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Relationships > Family Relationships > Conflict Resolution #886 in Books > Comics & Graphic

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Customer Reviews

It was probably a decade ago when I first began seeing Phoebe Gloeckner's work in a handful of low rent independent comics. Initially it may have been the intensely rendered pornographic sequences that snared my attention, but there was something about her work that always drew me in further; a kind of downward-spiraling confessional verisimilitude one seldom encounters in any

medium. She depicted familial discord and childhood cruelties with precisely the sort of raw, unflinching honesty that seemed to elude every other R. Crumb wannabe on the circuit. And her stories had a way of churning uncomfortably in my mind long after the last bitter panel, almost as though a close friend had revealed a dark secret. With "Diary of A Teenage Girl," Gloeckner revisits the same dodgy terrain of her earlier comics, with strips and illustrations now being used more as a kind of episodic punctuation to the diary-based narrative. The cumulative effect may lack some of the signature boundary-crushing sting exhibited in her 1998 collection, "A Child's Life," but readers are rewarded with an eerily convincing character portrait and a disquieting coming-of-age story that avoids cheap coming-of-age clichés. Set in San Francisco during the late 1970s, the main (presumably autobiographical) story recounts a tumultuous span in the life of Minnie Goetze, a likable, artistically precocious 15-year-old girl who has become caught up in a sexual relationship with her mother's sleazy, self-actualizing boyfriend. Longing for genuine affection and trying desperately to make sense of her situation, Minnie makes the usual self-destructive choices, finding clarity and purpose only in her slowly emerging identity as an artist. Gloeckner doesn't condescend or gloss over ugly details.

I am the first to admit I know very little about the world of underground comics. A student of mine recommended this book to me, and I ordered a copy from out of mild curiosity; I ended up reading through it in one sitting. Gloeckner's fifteen year-old protagonist, Minnie Goetze, is a superbly realized, multi-dimensional, picaresque character like few others I have encountered in adolescent-oriented American fiction. Though the frank descriptions and visual images of Minnie's often self-destructive sexual encounters may disturb some readers (and perhaps titillate others), the genius of this book lies in Gloeckner's extraordinary ability to capture the mercurial, labile emotions of this clever, troubled young diarist. As a male reviewer, I realize that it is problematic for me to write this, but from my professional and personal experience, Gloeckner's understanding of "American female fifteen year-oldness" is pitch-perfect, even if Minnie's actual life is unlike that of most (but not all) of the adolescents with whom I work. "Diary of a Teenage Girl" is also a damning indictment of the world in which Minnie grows up. The adults in the book are, for the most part irresponsible, incorrigibly self-obsessed, exploitative and ineffective. Minnie was born at the dawn of the 60s, and has come of age in the immediate aftermath of the "summer of love". The rhetoric of the age of Aquarius is on the lips of many of the adults -- but the free love of the adult world has meant nothing but exploitation and alienation for Minnie.

I am honored to have known Phoebe Gloeckner during the very times depicted in this book. It is important to understand while that this story is fictionalized, it is also a personal and a very autobiographical helter-skelter confessional. It is brutal, disturbing, raw, ugly, grotesque, poignant, harrowing, soul-testing, dangerous, boundary-pushing. The scenes depicted, the times and places, were captured too well. At no time does the author allow herself, or the reader, to look away. As written in the introduction, "...if you do read this, you may be deeply hurt and bewildered and confused". It is this brutal honesty that is this story's greatest power. It is not kids' stuff. In fact, far from it. This troubled/lost/wanton girl's soul is poured out in every gory, graphic detail. Every dirty thought and histrionic detour, every violation, every act of destruction and self-destruction, dirt from every forbidden corner. It ensues immediately and never lets up. It isn't easy or "fun", or "funny". It does not ask to be liked. There is no moral center, so don't look for one. Those who dismiss it simply as trash miss the point, and what lessons this extremely cautionary tale might offer. Where do you draw the line between exploitation and abuse, and willful acts of self-destruction? To quote again from the book: "Should I be ashamed that human deterioration is an eternal source of fascination to me? Squalor is cozy to me and I love to place myself in situations of potential danger. I know my sordid tastes are the expression of a death wish..." Those of you coming to it because of the movie of the same name should understand that the film is a sugarcoated, watered down echo of this book.

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