

A Spy in the House of Love

by Alice Griffin

I think that Anais Nin's writing is less a fantasy that helps us escape from the monotony of life and more about facing up to the monotony that life can be and this sweet, concise book that is bursting with lust, imagery, truth and real feeling makes me realise just how fragile and just how full of desire the heart of a creative being can be.

All of us dream of an escape from the ordinary and those who have no idea of what the ordinary is in comparison to the extraordinary, would not understand the path this book will take them on – however, I urge them to read it anyway for it will make even the most uptight person surely face up to how much appeal the sensuous life has.

This book is for women, and for men who wish to understand women. Day in day out women go about their business; taking children to school, doing the washing up, but on that journey they forget that as a woman they have wants and desires; they push those thoughts to the backs of their minds, but the danger is that in doing this, they lose touch with who they really are. This book will force those women to make that hidden part of them come alive again. For every woman laying in bed each night wondering why their life has descended into the humdrum, this book will make you want to don a cape and venture out into the night to find sexual gratification in the arms of a stranger. For any man, it will make you turn to your wife with a deep need to draw from her the woman that lies beneath the exterior; that or go out and continue to enjoy your mistress.

The main character, Sabina, a married woman in 1950s New York holds the same sophisticated appeal as the women painted by Tamara Lempicka, another female unafraid to experiment with sexuality and her character moves through the narrative with the fluidity of a dancer at the ballet. Undoubtedly autobiographical, Nin explores the social expectations of women that are still relevant today. Through Sabina she analyses the difference between men and women; their ability to remain emo-

tionally detached from physical relations and she demonstrates with what ease a woman can become the epitome of male fantasy.

Sabina, a victim of 'inner chaos', dons costumes before venturing out into the night to experience one tryst after another. Always on guard, always aware of her unfaithfulness but still ravaged by an urge to continue, the constant toiling of emotion in this book is gripping; on the one hand Sabina loves and needs the security of her husband, Alan, but on the other she desires more. How she can combine the two with minimum guilt and altercation is the path we follow throughout the story.

The prose contained in the covers of this book holds the same presence as that found in a Milan Kundera, but with a heartier conviction, and the beauty of her descriptions are like a paragraph of Vladimir Nabokov. The linking word with these writers could, and should be, sensuality, and the knowledge that none of them are afraid to use the power of words to venture deeper into the psyche, therefore ensuring the reader is both moved physically as well as emotionally.

For me, the only thing wrong with this book is the title as through all her liaisons, with Alan the father figure and a myriad of other, more racy lovers, Sabina never really allows her true self to be seen, therefore she is more a Spy in the house of lust, rather than love. For some Nin's writing is nothing more than a jumbled rambling of poetic prose that holds little sense, but for me, through the veil of beauty, there is truth.