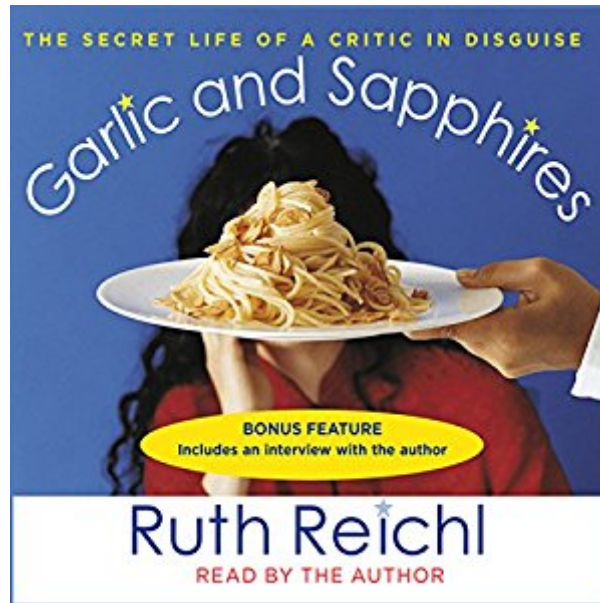


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Garlic And Sapphires: The Secret Life Of A Critic In Disguise



Synopsis

"Garlic and Sapphires" is Ruth Reichl's riotous account of the many disguises she employs to dine undetected when she takes on the much coveted and highly prestigious job of "New York Times" restaurant critic. Reichl knows that to be a good critic she has to be anonymous - but her picture is posted in every four-star, low-star kitchen in town and so she embarks on an extraordinary - and hilarious - undercover game of disguise - keeping even her husband and son in the dark. There is her stint as Molly, a frumpy blonde in an off-beige Armani suit that Ruth takes on when reviewing Le Cirque resulting in a double review of the restaurant: first she ate there as Molly; and then as she was coddled and pampered on her visit there as Ruth, "New York Times" food critic. Then, there is the eccentric, mysterious red head on whom her husband - both disconcertingly and reassuringly - develops a terrible crush. She becomes Brenda the earth mother, Chloe the seductress and even Miriam her own (deceased) mother. What is even more remarkable about Reichl's spy games is that as she takes on these various guises, she finds herself changed not just physically, but also in character revealing how one's outer appearance can very much influence one's inner character, expectations, and appetites. --This text refers to an alternate Audible Audio Edition edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours and 1 minute

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Books on Tape

Audible.com Release Date: April 21, 2005

Language: English

ASIN: B0009HJCBW

Best Sellers Rank: #107 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Business Leaders #123 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Lifestyle & Home > Cooking #409 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists

Customer Reviews

Ruth Reichl's *Garlic and Sapphires*, an account of her years as restaurant critic of the New York Times, is simultaneously hilarious, refreshing and poignant, altogether a five-star read in the light memoir category. The hilarity comes from Reichl's penchant for donning elaborate disguises, the better to assure anonymity in assessing New York's most prominent eateries. These incognita

excursions allow Reichl to skewer the pretensions and omissions of such well-known restaurants as Le Cirque and Tavern on the Green. Garlic and Sapphires sets a refreshing tone due to Reichl's insistence on recognizing excellent dining in all of its venues, from humble ethnic restaurants to New York's most elegant establishments. Reichl's penchant for ferreting out little-known gems earns her the opprobrium of Bryan Miller, her predecessor as the Times's restaurant critic, and his supporters, all of whom charge Reichl with "letting down standards". But the many New Yorkers who experience life without expense account or trust fund appreciate her excursions to the wrong side of the tracks to identify dining delights. Most important, Garlic and Sapphires provides a poignant look at what it is like to be too old, too unfashionable, or too poor to fully take part in the glories of the Big Apple. Reichl's disguises frequently place her in one or more these overlooked groups, and she provides a sensitive picture of what it is like to be marginalized-- not only by headwaiters at four-star dining establishments, but by society. One hopes that Reichl's tenure as Times restaurant critic made top restaurants more likely to treat all of their patrons with dignity and respect.

It's one thing to hold the coveted job of restaurant critic for the New York Times but it's an entirely different matter when that person can deliver such a wonderfully breezy book about her experiences. Ruth Reichl has done just that in a style that is as warm, informative and delicious as the best restaurants she has reviewed. In "Garlic and Sapphires" the author invites you into her world so intimately that you feel you are sharing each and every meal with her. It would probably have been enough if Ruth had simply given us a compilation of her entire collected reviews because she writes so well in that vein, but the joy of this particular offering includes a cast of characters who are not from central casting. While she manages to keep herself in the limelight, as she should, she surrounds herself with willing (and sometimes unwilling) cohorts in her attempts to review restaurants through her many disguises and personalities. Her usually understanding husband, Michael, her precocious son Nicky, her friend and sometimes mentor Carol, and her close buddy Claudia all add to her support as the author becomes Miriam, Chloe, Brenda, Betty and Emily. A male critic could never have gotten away with what Ruth pulls off! It is a surprise to both the author and the reader that her dinner guests often become angry with her because she plays the roles of her assumed identities with such panache that they almost beg her to return to her own self. In one of the most alluring chapters, Ruth relates how she meets a total stranger, Dan Green, who ends up dining with her at Lespinasse. Keeping her secret, she spends an evening with him wondering what he will think of the review when he reads it.

'Garlic and Sapphires' is the third volume of memoirs by Ruth Reichl. After 'Tender at the Bone' which deals with her childhood and teens and 'Comfort Me with Apples' which deals with her early journalistic career in San Francisco, this latest volume deals with her five years as the lead restaurant critic for the New York Times. This volume proves that Ms. Reichl is truly the best culinary memoirist today, and easily the best since M.F.K. Fisher. And, as one who has read more than a few of Ms. Fisher's memoirs, I would easily choose Ms. Reichl's humor and great stories of the modern scene over Ms. Fisher's slightly musty, albeit exquisitely crafted tales of cities and towns in France. The primary point of this volume is to tell the stories behind Ms. Reichl's various disguises and personas she took on in order to dine at Daniel's and Lespanisse and Le Cirque without being identified as the restaurant critic for the Times. The book starts off with the amazing story of Reichl's flight from Los Angeles to New York seated, by coincidence, along side a waitress of a major Manhattan restaurant. It turns out that posted in all restaurant kitchens in New York City was already a photograph of Ruth Reichl with a reward to any staff member who identifies Ms. Reichl in their restaurant. In spite of all the other things on which Ruth could dwell, she stays remarkably on message. There is only the slightest of references to the great New York Times culinary writer, Craig Claiborne, who was still alive while Reichl was at the Times. And, there was only a slightly more specific reference to R. W. Appel and Amanda Hesser.

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