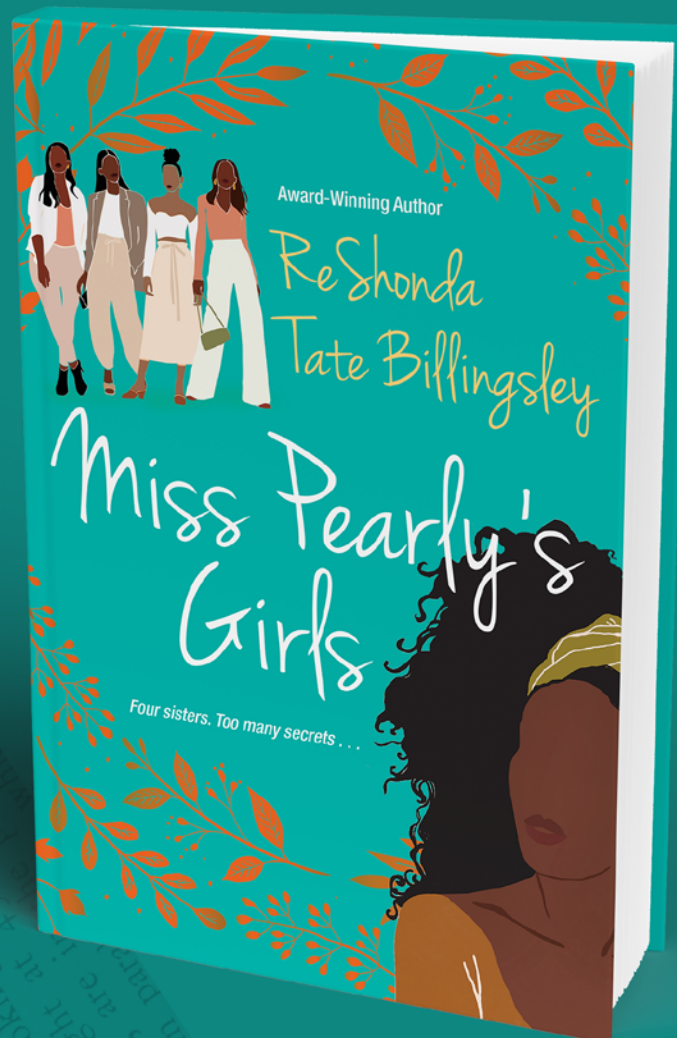


Woman
EVOLVE

BKCLB

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BOOK SUMMARY



MISS PEARLY'S GIRLS

RESHONDA TATE BILLINGSLEY

BOOK SUMMARY

Miss Pearly's Girls is a fictional novel that tells the story of four sisters and their journey of loss, excavating secrets, and returning home. Set in small town Smackover, Arkansas, the story begins with readers meeting an elderly Black woman named Miss Pearly Bell, often called by her four daughters as Mama Pearly. In an early scene, as she is preparing her weekly Sunday feast, she passes out and is found in a pool of blood by her eldest daughter Maxine who also lives with her. After being admitted to the hospital, readers learn that Mama Pearly has been living with stomach cancer and kept it hidden from her family. With a terminal prognosis, Mama Pearly expresses her desire to see her daughters come together. This is the starting point for the uncovering of many hidden secrets, wounds and undealt with emotional triggers for each of the sisters. As the secrets begin to be revealed, each sister has to deal with the consequences and the turmoil of their decisions and actions, and the prospect of healing as a family hangs in the balance.

Character stories:

Maxine is the oldest of the Bells. Married to a pastor and ever the supportive, loyal daughter who stayed in her hometown, she has a rigid demeanor that was often the bane of her young sisters' existences. She was controlling and particularly mean to her youngest sister, Leslie. As a mother of one son (who never comes around), Maxine desires to nurture but doesn't express it well to those in her life.

Her secret: Maxine was raped by a family member at 14 and is actually the mother of her youngest 'sister'. Her berating of Leslie was because she was a living reminder of the trauma of her sexual assault. She kept this from her sisters because of shame, hurt, and embarrassment. Her mother, Miss Pearly knew the truth but decided to protect Leslie by keeping it from her as well.

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Stella is the hotshot PR mogul who had a deep disdain for Smackover and left to build the life she desired. She was the 'fine' twin of her sister pair and was always at war with her sister. As she was elevated to mogul status in Atlanta, she repressed her humble roots and dove into her career. As successful as she was with work, she wasn't as successful in love. In a bit of a 'situationship' with a handsome but not 'together' man, Lincoln, she couldn't quite commit to a life with him because his professional and financial status didn't complement hers. He was, however, meeting her physical needs so she kept their relationship consistent but low profile.

Her secret: Stella stole her sister's (Star's) acceptance letter to Spelman college when she had actually been rejected. Her successful career and lifestyle began in deceit.

Star, originally named Ella, is the twin sister of Stella. Stella's life was filled with her role as a wife and mother. Her quick temper and aggression led to a deeply tense relationship with her twin sister. She also struggled with accepting herself as she was the 'fat' twin.

Star had no expressed secrets that were revealed in the book, and from the storyline, had the least tension between her and the rest of her sisters.

Leslie is the youngest of the Bells, and the most estranged. She has created her own life as a successful fiction writer. She is 15 years younger than her oldest 'sister' and unlike the rest of the Bell girls, was very dark skinned and often felt like she didn't fit with her sisters.

Her secret: Leslie is gay and on the day of her mother's collapse, was marrying her best friend turned love, Nona, a white-passing Hispanic woman who she kept hidden from her family.

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The tensions rise over the course of the book, presenting each sister with the opportunity to come clean to the rest of the family, while honoring Mama Pearly's wishes for them to come together. In line with secret keeping, readers also learn that Pearly had her own secret and estranged relationship with her own sister, Paula, whose husband raped Maxine and ultimately fathered Leslie.

At the end of the book, after Mama Pearly's death, the sisters vow to keep in better contact. The book closes with a celebration - the 40th birthday party of Stella and Star, which also becomes the engagement of Stella and her friend turned bedroom buddy, turned boyfriend then fiancé.

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