



The Book of Sarahs

Catherine E. McKinley

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Suffused with longing, this rueful, passionate memoir about an adopted woman's search for her birth parents explores themes of race and family. Catherine McKinley was one of only a few thousand African American and bi-racial children adopted by white couples in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Raised in a small, white New England town, she had a persistent longing for the more diverse community that would better understand and encompass her. In an era shaped by the rhetoric of Black Power and Black Pride, McKinley's coming of age entailed her own detailed investigation into her birth history, a search complicated by the terms of a closed adoption that denied her all knowledge of the circumstances of her birth. THE BOOK OF SARAHs traces McKinley's own time of revelations: after a five-year period marked by dead ends and disappointments, she finds her birth mother and a half-sister named Sarah, the name that was originally given to her. When she locates her birth father and meets several of his eleven other children she begins to see the whole mosaic of her parentage-African American, WASP, Jewish, Native American-and then is confronted with a final revelation that threatens to destabilize all she has uncovered. At the center of the narrative is McKinley's angry passion for her two mothers and her quest for self-acceptance in a world in which she seems to herself to be always outside the bounds of social legitimacy. In telling of her struggles both to fit into and to defy social conventions, McKinley challenges us to rethink our own preconceptions about race, identity, kinship, loyalty, and love.

Catherine McKinley is the author of *The Book of Sarahs* and *Indigo: In Search of the Color That Seduced the World*. She is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, where she has taught Creative Nonfiction, and a former Fulbright Scholar in Ghana, West Africa. She lives in New York City.

"McKinley writes beautifully in this debut memoir, never resorting to sentimentality or easy emotions within this tangled web of emotional and family secrets."

- *Publishers Weekly*

"In recounting her long and arduous journey in search of her birth parents, McKinley (Afrekete: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Writing) draws us into a page-turning treasure hunt. Along the way she skillfully describes her upbringing as a black (or so she believed) child adopted by a white family during the 1960s, her tenacious efforts to winnow information out of the bureaucratic agency that handled her adoption and her often startlingly candid reactions to each new revelation about her background. Ultimately, she discovered that her parentage includes African American, WASP, Jewish, and Native American forbears. The multiple Sarahs of the title are just another confounding bit of information in this painful, funny, and very human memoir about race and family. In the end, the treasure McKinley seems to have discovered is her own independent self. Recommended for all libraries."

- *Library Journal*

"In elegant, original prose that springs from a mind and heart at turns spirited and pensive, Catherine McKinley tells her dramatic story with defiant candor, precocious wisdom, and courageous sensitivity."

- Sarah Saffian, Author of *Ithaka: A Daughter's Memoir of Being Found*

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