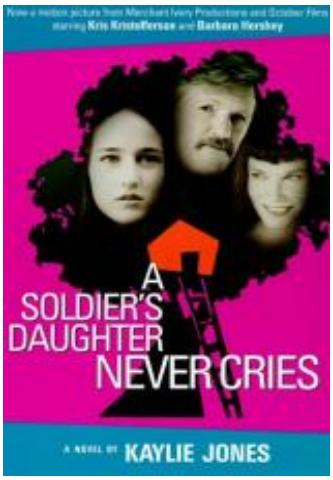
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A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries

by Kaylie Jones



About the Book

In 1964, Charlotte-Anne "Channe" Willis is four years old. She lives with her famous father, an American expatriate writer, and her socialite mother in an apartment overlooking the Seine River in Paris. Charles de Gaulle is president, America's involvement in Vietnam is not yet a global issue, and something has just happened that will change Channe's life forever.

Channe is used to having what little attention her preoccupied parents devote to child rearing all to herself. When her parents illegally adopt a little French boy, Benoit, who is her same age, Channe is jealous and treats him as an intruder. Having to share with him her parents' love and limited time--particularly her father's--she grows both fiercely resentful and protective of her new sibling.

As the years progress and the family moves to New York, Channe wavers between feelings of love and jealousy for her brother, while simultaneously exploring sexual and emotional relationships with other boys. But soon after they nestle in their new small town on Long Island, Channe is forced to cope with the rapidly declining health of the man she loves the most: her complex father. In the midst of this harrowing struggle and her mother's alcoholic depression, the truth about her brother's parentage is revealed. As Channe becomes obsessed with his mysterious past and begins to confront the ghosts of that long-ago sibling rivalry, she realizes that it is only through her brother that she'll find solace.

Told with all the compassion, verve and wit that one would expect from the author, this uncommon coming-of-age story explores the complex and volatile relationship between a brother and sister who learn to love and respect each other for what they were as children--and what they have become as adults.

Discussion Guide

1. In "The Suitcase" chapter, what effect does Channe's repeated use of the phrase "the little brother," when referring to

Benoit, have on her family--as well as the reader?

2. Most people would assume that Channe is living a privileged lifestyle. In what ways would such an assumption be true/not true? What would it be like to be the child of a famous writer and expatriate parents?

3. What effect does her father's instruction that "a soldier's daughter never cries" have on Channe's behavior and life?

4. What external events occur to alter the relationship of Channe and Billy as the novel progresses?

5. Consider Channe's expression of her sexuality. Is Channe's father too permissive with her or is his way of dealing with his daughter's sexuality healthier for both parent and child than more restrictive approaches?

6. Why does Channe think her father is "the most trustworthy person I know, honest to a fault?" What is the nature of Channe's relationship with her father? And Billy's?

7. From Bill's viewpoint, why is it okay for the Willis children to spend their formative years in Paris but preferable to spend their adolescence in the States?

8. Why is Channe unwilling to stick up for her brother in difficult situations and why is Billy, conversely, so fanatically loyal to her? From where does Billy get his principles, his deep-rooted sense of what is right?

9. Describe Channe's feelings for Billy. Why is she resentful of him? Why is she protective? What are some of the events which make her feel differently about him?

10. Considering some of the examples of mothers or mother substitutes that the novel offers--Marcella, Candida, Veronique, and Veronique's mother. What constitutes a good mother and how do these various women measure up?

11. With Channe and Billy so clearly adoring and favoring their father, how does this in turn effect their relationship with their mother, Marcella? Billy is protective and nurturing toward her, and when details about his biological mother surface, he insists that he has only one mother, remaining loyal to Marcella. But what does Channe think of her mother? And what is Marcella's relationship to her two roles: wife and mother?

Author Bio

Kaylie Jones was born in Paris, France in 1960 and attended French schools until her family returned to the U.S. in 1974. *A **Soldier's Daughter Never Cries***, her third novel, is loosely based on her experiences growing up in an expatriate, artistic home as the daughter of famed novelist James Jones. She originally began writing this story as her undergraduate honors thesis at Wesleyan University.

Jones' first novel, ***As Soon As It Rains*** (Doubleday), was published in 1986 when she was working at Poets & Writers, Inc. in the Reading/Workshops Program. There, she fell in love with the poetry of underprivileged children, written in workshops she helped to fund. As a result of this work, she was appointed as a Writer in Residence in the NYC public

schools, where she continues to work today.

A stay in Jamaica when she was two was interrupted by an evacuation due to the Cuban missile crisis, and this created in her a fascination for all things Russian. Jones began to study Russian as her third language at age eight, and continued to study the language and literature through her undergraduate and graduate years. She spent six weeks at the Pushkin Institute for Russian Studies in Moscow in the summer of 1984, followed by six months in 1987, which resulted in the novel ***Quite The Other Way***(Doubleday, 1989). Jones received an MFA in writing from Columbia University's School of the Arts and taught fiction workshops for several years at The Writer's Voice. She helped to found the MFA Program at Long Island University's Southampton campus, where she still teaches fiction.

A Phi Beta Kappa, Jones loves scuba diving and yoga. She is married to Kevin Heisler and considers their infant daughter, Eyrna, to be "her greatest accomplishment." In September of 1998, ***A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*** will be released as a Merchant Ivory film starring Kris Kristofferson and Barbara Hershey.

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