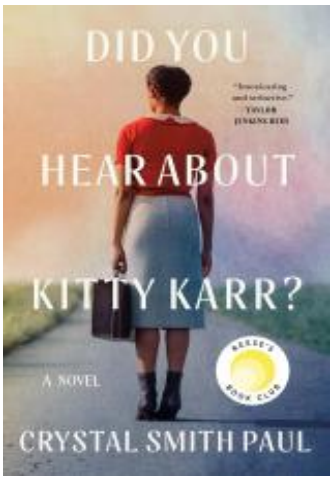
Did You Hear About Kitty Karr?

by Crystal Smith Paul



About the Book

A multigenerational saga that traverses the glamour of old Hollywood and the seductive draw of modern-day showbiz.

When Kitty Karr Tate, a white icon of the silver screen, dies and bequeaths her multimillion-dollar estate to the St. John sisters --- three young, wealthy Black women --- it prompts questions. Lots of questions.

A celebrity in her own right, Elise St. John would rather focus on sorting out Kitty?s affairs than deal with the press. But what she discovers in one of Kitty?s journals rocks her world harder than any other brewing scandal could --- and between a cheating fiancé and the fallout from a controversial social media post, there are plenty.

The truth behind Kitty's ascent to stardom from her beginnings in the segregated South threatens to expose a web of unexpected family ties, debts owed and debatable crimes that could, with one pull, unravel the all-American fabric of the St. John sisters and those closest to them.

As Elise digs deeper into Kitty's past, she also must turn the lens upon herself, confronting the gifts and burdens of her own choices and the power that the secrets of the dead hold over the living.

DID YOU HEAR ABOUT KITTY KARR? is a sprawling page-turner set against the backdrop of the Hollywood machine, an insightful and nuanced look at the inheritances of family, race and gender --- and the choices some women make to break free of them.

Discussion Guide

1. How did you feel when you learned about Hazel?s plan for Kitty? Do you think Kitty?s and Hazel?s isolation from the

larger Black communities influenced their sense of racial identity? Did this isolation make it easier for Kitty to pass?

2. Many characters in the story, particularly the Blair House women, must put practicality and circumstances before love when considering marriage. How do you think that shapes their overall attitudes towards men?

3. What rules and policies would you implement if you were running Blair House? Are there any practices you would reject?

4. Elise, Giovanni and Noele all overtly diverge in their approaches to life, but they maintain an intimate dynamic. What about their bond makes this possible? What commonalities do you see between the sisters?

5. Sarah scrutinizes all areas of her daughters? lives from their careers to their choice of partners and the food on their plates. What impact does this have on each of them?

6. Kitty and Elise both witness significant moments in America?s ongoing history of violence and discrimination against Black people. Kitty was impacted by the murder of Emmett Till, and Colin Kaepernick?s NFL protest inspired Elise to activism. What role do you think celebrities should play in social issues?

7. ?He already owned her career, and that night, he showed her he thought he owned her too.? How do you think Nathan?s sexual assault of Kitty impacted their marriage? Is the issue of consent in marriage different then vs. today?

8. In many situations throughout the book, legacy implies responsibility --- like when Hazel demands Kitty take advantage of her skin color to gain privileges that would otherwise be denied to her, or when all of the St. Johns work to figure out what to do with Kitty?s wealth. To what degree do you believe those in the present are obligated to follow the expectations of their elders?

9. What do you think the ramifications would have been at different points in time if Kitty had revealed she was a Black woman? What do you imagine the differences would be if she had revealed this information right before her death in 2017 versus if she had done so earlier?

10. How would you have handled Rebecca?s transgression on Elise?s social media accounts and subsequent attitude if you were in Elise?s position?

11. What are the protections and limits of wealth in the St John?s lives? How does the incident in which the police arrested James and detained a young Elise highlight this?

12. Kitty had to learn to be a good ?actress? in order to assume a life as a white woman in addition to building a career. When we meet Elise, she is struggling to break free of the mask her role as a celebrity demands. Some might argue that we all wear ?masks? to the extent that we might show different parts of ourselves at work, versus to our friends, family members or our partners. How do you think these masks affect intimate relationships?

13. Motherhood is often fraught or disrupted as experienced by characters like Hazel, Kitty, Nellie, Sarah and even Nora. What does the novel have to say about motherhood and the choices mothers make depending on their station in life?

14. How does not knowing the truth about her parentage shape Sarah and thus her daughters?

15. What impact do you think Kitty?s Oscar win might have had on Hollywood if she?d revealed herself to be a mixed-race Black woman in her acceptance speech. How do you imagine Elise?s acceptance speech affects her world?

16. In what ways does Hollywood versus other localized industries that impart fame, wealth and influence onto its most successful participants (think Washington D.C.?s political world and New York?s media arena) uniquely function in this story?

17. Kitty/Mary?s ?grandfather three times over? gave a pair of gold ball earrings to an enslaved ancestor named Elizabeth with whom he had two children. Hazel tells Kitty/Mary to ?Choose the gold-earring life.? How do material consumption and excess like Sarah?s Ferris wheel show up across generations?

18. What does Kitty?s estate reveal about generational wealth in America?

Author Bio

Crystal Smith Paul attended Spelman College and UCLA?s School of Theater, Film and Television and received her master?s in journalism from NYU. Her nonfiction writing has appeared in *Salon, Jezebel* and *HuffPost*. She currently works in digital marketing for wellness and beauty brands. DID YOU HEAR ABOUT KITTY KARR? is her first novel.

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