Keeper of Lost Children

by Sadeqa Johnson



About the Book

In this new novel from the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE HOUSE OF EVE, one American woman?s vision in post-WWII Germany will tie together three people in an unexpected way.

Ethel Gathers, the proud wife of an American Officer, is living in Occupied Germany in the 1950s. After discovering a local orphanage filled with the abandoned mixed-race children of German women and Black American GI?s, Ethel feels compelled to help find these children homes.

Philadelphia-born Ozzie Phillips volunteers for the recently desegregated army in 1948, eager to make his mark in the world. While serving in Mannheim, Germany, he meets a local woman, Jelka, and the two embark on a relationship that will impact their lives forever.

In 1965 Maryland, Sophia Clark is given an opportunity to attend a prestigious all-white boarding school and escape her heartless parents. While at the school, she discovers a secret that upends her world and sends her on a quest to unravel her own identity.

Toggling between the lives of these three individuals, KEEPER OF LOST CHILDREN explores how one woman?s vision will change the course of countless lives, and demonstrates that love in its myriad of forms --- familial, parental and forbidden, even love of self --- can be transcendent.

Discussion Guide

1. The quote ?When I discover who I am, I?ll be free? from Ralph Ellison?s INVISIBLE MAN serves as the epigraph for part one. How does this quote set the tone for part one? What do you think Ellison meant when he said ?free?? What does being ?free? mean to you?

2. Ethel, Ozzie and Sophia all make pivotal decisions that change the course of their lives. What role do you think fate and chance play in their lives? In your opinion, is life ruled by fate or by chance?

3. When Sophia arrives at West Oak Forest Academy, Willa tells her they are the first Black girls to attend the school. Consider what you know about the efforts for school desegregation in 1965. How is Sophia?s experience with school integration similar to your previous knowledge? How is it different?

4. The novel is divided into three POVs with three separate timelines. How does this structure impact the direction of the story? How would the story be different if the narrative were structured differently?

5. Ethel Gathers is inspired by the largely untold story of Mabel Grammer, an African American journalist who founded the Children Worldwide Organization to place Afro-German children with Black families. The novel also features Ozzie, who represents another group of unsung heroes: African American soldiers who participated in the Double V campaign post-World War II. Why do you think the author chose to introduce the perspective of an African American soldier? What did you learn about these soldiers' experiences that you did not already know?

6. Reflect on Ethel Gathers? Brown Baby Plan. What does Ethel?s devotion say about motherhood in the 1950s?

7. Throughout the novel, ambitious women pave the way for themselves and women to come. Discuss the similarities and differences between Rita, Ethel and Sophia. How do you think they've helped pave the way for the next generation of women?

8. Ozzie represents the experience of African American soldiers returning home post-World War II to Jim Crow, race-based violence, and the systemic denial of government benefits like the G.I. Bill. What do you think impacted Ozzie's life more: the lack of opportunities he faced at home or the secrets he left behind in Germany?

9. An overarching theme of the book is love. How would you describe the different types of love portrayed in the book?

10. How does secrecy function in the story? When do you think secrecy protects individuals? When does it cause harm?

11. In the epilogue of the novel, Ethel Gathers is honored with an award from the Pope and is referred to as a ?Keeper of Lost Children?. What does the epilogue say about self-determination? Consider Ethel?s journey throughout the novel. What do you think is the next chapter in Ethel?s story?

Author Bio

Sadeqa Johnson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of five novels. Her most recent novel, THE HOUSE OF EVE, was an instant *New York Times* bestseller, a Reese?s Book Club selection, an NAACP Image Award nominee, and a

Goodreads Choice award finalist. Her previous novel, YELLOW WIFE, was the Library of Virginia?s Literary People?s Choice Award winner, a Goodreads Choice Award finalist, a Hurston/Wright Foundation Legacy finalist, and a BCALA Literary Award honoree. Originally from Philadelphia, Sadeqa currently lives near Richmond, Virginia.

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