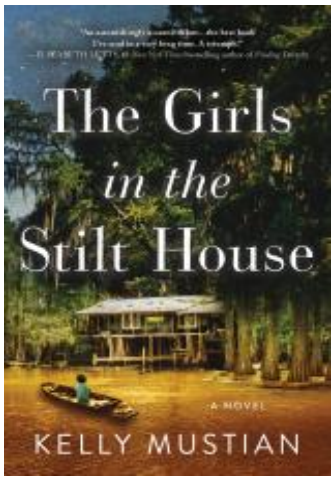
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The Girls in the Stilt House

by Kelly Mustian



About the Book

Set in 1920s Mississippi, this debut Southern novel weaves a beautiful and harrowing story of two teenage girls cast in an unlikely partnership through murder --- perfect for readers of WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING and IF THE CREEK DON'T RISE.

Ada promised herself she would never go back to the Trace, to her hard life on the swamp and her harsh father. But now, after running away to Baton Rouge and briefly knowing a different kind of life, she finds herself with nowhere to go but back home. And she knows there will be a price to pay with her father.

Matilda, daughter of a sharecropper, is from the other side of the Trace. Doing what she can to protect her family from the whims and demands of some particularly callous locals is an ongoing struggle. She forms a plan to go north, to pack up the secrets she's holding about her life in the South and hang them on the line for all to see in Ohio.

As the two girls are drawn deeper into a dangerous world of bootleggers and moral corruption, they must come to terms with the complexities of their tenuous bond and a hidden past that links them in ways that could cost them their lives.

Discussion Guide

1. How did you feel about Ada?s return to the Natchez Trace? Why do you think she decided to come back? Do you think there were any other choices that she didn?t consider?

2. Describe Matilda?s and Ada?s relationship after their first fraught night together. Who is in charge? How are their actions shaped by Virgil?s lingering presence?

3. Why do you think Matilda insists that Ada call Gertie ?Miss Tuttle?? How would you characterize the relationship

between Matilda and Gertie throughout the story?

4. What did you think of Peggy Creddle? Is there a difference between how she treats Matilda and how she treats Ada? How do her whims shape the story?

5. Think about Virgil Morgan and Frank Bowers. Are they comparable villains? How does social class affect their actions and demands? What did you think of their ultimate ends?

6. Why do you think Matilda withholds so much information from Ada?

7. Teensy always looks for something beautiful in her day, even if she ends up being grateful for something very small. What do you think of that philosophy? How do Matilda?s feelings toward the practice evolve throughout the book?

8. Matilda blames herself for losing Dalton and Annis to the fire. How does guilt motivate her? Do you think she ever forgives herself fully?

9. Describe the events that lead to Ada accepting the housekeeping job from Frank. Can you imagine something similar happening today?

10. By the end of the book, how has the relationship between Ada and Matilda changed since their first meeting?

Author Bio

Kelly Mustian is the *USA Today* bestselling author of THE GIRLS IN THE STILT HOUSE and THE RIVER KNOWS YOUR NAME. She is the recipient of the Mississippi Library Association?s 2023 Author Award for Fiction, and THE GIRLS IN THE STILT HOUSE was shortlisted for the 2022 Crook?s Corner Book Prize for best debut novel set in the American South. Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals and commercial magazines. Originally from Mississippi, she currently lives in North Carolina.

Photo Credit: Rachelle Thompson

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Publication Date: April 6, 2021
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Sourcebooks Landmark
ISBN-10: 1728217717
ISBN-13: 9781728217710