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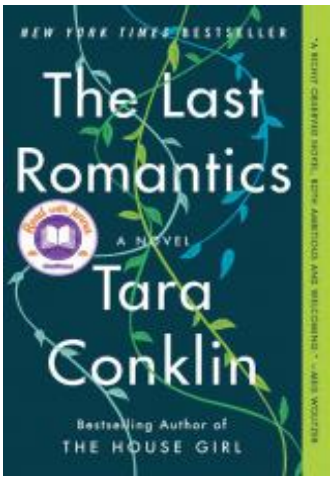
The Last Romantics

by Tara Conklin



About the Book

A sweeping yet intimate epic about one American family, THE LAST ROMANTICS is an unforgettable exploration of the ties that bind us together, the responsibilities we embrace and the duties we resent, and how we can lose --- and sometimes rescue --- the ones we love.

When the renowned poet Fiona Skinner is asked about the inspiration behind her iconic work, *The Love Poem*, she tells her audience a story about her family and a betrayal that reverberates through time.

It begins in a big yellow house with a funeral, an iron poker, and a brief variation forever known as the Pause: a free and feral summer in a middle-class Connecticut town. Caught between the predictable life they once led and an uncertain future that stretches before them, the Skinner siblings --- fierce Renee, sensitive Caroline, golden boy Joe and watchful Fiona --- emerge from the Pause staunchly loyal and deeply connected. Two decades later, the siblings find themselves once again confronted with a family crisis that tests the strength of these bonds and forces them to question the life choices they?ve made and ask what, exactly, they will do for love.

A novel that pierces the heart and lingers in the mind, THE LAST ROMANTICS is a beautiful meditation on the power of stories --- how they navigate us through difficult times, help us understand the past, and point the way toward our future.

Discussion Guide

1. Why does Tara Conklin choose to frame the story from 2077? Did you think that was effective?

2. Which of the four Skinner siblings do you like the most?

3. How do the effects of The Pause ripple through each of the four siblings? lives? If the Pause had not happened, what do you think might have been different for each of the siblings?

4. Noni came out of her paralyzing depression a staunch second-wave feminist. In what ways does her brand of feminism help her children, and in what ways does it let them down? How does Noni?s feminism compare to Fiona?s feminism, and to the feminism we are seeing today? What strides have we made as feminists, and where do we still need to go?

5. Joe and Fiona?s last conversation was an argument about Fiona?s blog, The Last Romantic. Whose side do you take in that argument? Why?

6. Caroline and Fiona try to find Luna in several different ways. Why is it so important for them to find her? Did you think the PI was a good idea? The psychic? What did each sister need from the search for Luna, and did she get it? Why didn?t Renee want to find Luna? Which sister did you sympathize with the most? The least?

7. After Joe?s death, the Skinner sisters break apart for a long time. What brings them back together? How much of family relationships are we able to control? Do you think sometimes it is necessary for families to separate for a time?

8. Do you agree with Fiona?s decision to keep Rory?s existence from her siblings?

9. Caroline ends her long marriage to Nathan, but they remain friends to the end of their lives. Renee leaves Jonathan in order to have a baby, but allows him to return when the baby is born. Fiona has two great loves: Will and Henry. What is Conklin saying about the nature of marriage? Why do you think the Skinner sisters find and forge meaningful partnerships, but Joe does not?

10. At the end of her life, Noni tells Renee that, though her children have forgiven her for the Pause, she has never forgiven herself. Consider the ideas of betrayal and forgiveness. Who in this novel is a betrayer? Who is forgiven? Do you think forgiveness is necessary for rebuilding a relationship after betrayal?

11. At the beginning of the novel, Fiona says, ?This is a story about the failures of love.? At the end she says, ?I was wrong to tell you that this is a story about the failures of love. No, it is about real love, true love.? Which do you think is correct? Is there room for both?

Author Bio

Tara Conklin is a writer and former lawyer whose first novel, THE HOUSE GIRL, was a *New York Times* bestseller, a #1 Indie Next pick and a Target Book Club pick, and has been translated into eight languages. Her second novel, THE LAST ROMANTICS, was published to wide acclaim. An instant New York Times bestseller, THE LAST ROMANTICS was a Barnes & Noble Book Club pick and an Indie Next pick, and was selected by Jenna Bush Hager as the inaugural read for the Today Show Book Club. Her latest novel is COMMUNITY BOARD.

Before turning to fiction, Tara worked for an international human rights organization and at corporate law firms in

London and New York. She was born in St. Croix, US Virgin Islands, and grew up in western Massachusetts. She holds a BA in history from Yale University, a JD from NYU School of Law, and a Master of Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. Tara now lives in Seattle with her family where she writes, teaches at Hugo House and works with private clients on manuscript development.

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