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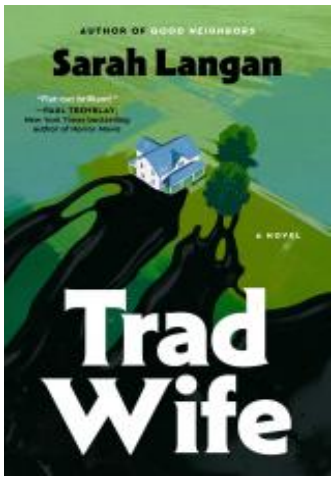
Trad Wife

by Sarah Langan



About the Book

A journalist descends into horror as she uncovers the sinister truth behind a trad wife influencer in this ?flat-out brilliant? (Paul Tremblay, *New York Times* bestselling author) blend of chilling suspense and razor-sharp commentary on modern femininity, performative domesticity and social media --- perfect for readers of YESTERYEAR, MEXICAN GOTHIC and THE YELLOW WALLPAPER.

Every day, millions watch Mia Wright, the ?trad wife? queen, on her idyllic 300-acre farm. With her handsome husband, seven well-behaved children, and a life of from-scratch meals and pastoral bliss, she?s an icon of modern femininity. But behind every perfect image is a secret. And in this case, the secret is a horror.

Desperate to save her tarnished career, journalist Jenny Kaplan arrives at Black Swan Farm to profile Mia. Jenny is ready to write a scathing exposé, determined to expose the deception behind Mia?s curated life. But soon, Jenny has more to contend with than staged videos and camera-ready poses. There?s something wrong at the farmhouse. Something slithers through Jenny?s dreams, and at night, the children sing strange nursery rhymes.

She?s losing time. She?s losing her hair. She starts to worry that she?s losing her mind.

There is a horror at the heart of Black Swan, and it?s waiting just for Jenny. TRAD WIFE will make you question what?s real and what?s just a perfectly curated deception.

Will you see the lie?

Discussion Guide

Act I

1. Jenny describes journalism as a ladder without a top. The novel goes on to characterize the disintegration of institutions she?d once depended on. How does this contribute to her isolation? What is driving that collapse?

2. Why does Jenny pen a confessional when she?d prefer to publish hard-hitting journalism? Can this be connected in any way to Mia Wright?s use of ?accidents?? Or is Jenny finding her true voice?

3. Why do you think Jenny is canceled by The Brotherhood of the American Agenda?

4. Is Mia manipulating Jenny by pretending to need help? Is there an unspoken code that women must always follow?

5. Blair Roberts, a conventional homemaker, is hurt by Mia Wright?s multilevel marketing business. Is this fair, given that she chose to enroll?

6. Jenny raised her sister, Melissa, and they love each other deeply. So what explains the strain in their relationship?

7. Was it wrong of Jenny to publish *Drano*, given it might hurt Jarron? Should she apologize to him?

8. Jenny decides to return to Black Swan after Mia?s post of her holding baby Isaac goes viral. Why? What does she stand to gain --- and what does she risk losing?

Act II

1. How is Phil Parmet different from other characters in the novel so far? Why does his perspective feel so emotionally distant?

2. Despite so many gains, is it possible that women?s roles have recently regressed? How does this explain the popularity of Trad Wives? After a kind of revolution of freedom, are women being pushed back into restrictive roles? Who benefits?

3. Why is Jenny so relieved when Mia tells her she?s not in physical danger? Why is it so hard for her to ask that question outright?

4. Jenny avoids thinking about upsetting memories, fearing she?ll fall apart. But these things from her past seem to haunt her. Why?

5. Jenny quickly becomes concerned about Mia?s drinking and the ?accidents? involving her children. This happens especially with Victoria and her asthma. Have you ever witnessed or experienced a medical gaslighting?

6. Why does Jarron?s mother blame Jenny for his breakdown?

7. After Jenny?s abortion, her friends take her out for brunch. All but one knows what happened. Why didn?t she tell that

fourth friend? Why didn?t she tell her sister? In what ways is shame internal? In what ways is it imposed by external forces like The Brotherhood of the American Agenda?

8. Why does Jenny stay at Black Swan Farm even after it becomes clear something is very wrong? Does her past make her more susceptible to gaslighting? Society? Her character?

9. Ashley Vonnegut also stayed in a dangerous situation instead of leaving when smoke filled her town. Her reasons were both financial and internalized. It?s why she became a Black Swan Ambassador. Are there times in your life when you stayed in a situation you wish you?d left?

10. Steadman trauma-dumps on Jenny when he catches her throwing out Mia?s empty bottles. As the days pass, he begins to mistake Jenny for Mia. While there are supernatural elements at play, what other factors might explain this?

11. The mundane realities of childcare consume much of Jenny?s time at Black Swan. How does the image of motherhood compare to its reality? Are there moments of joy within that tension?

12. Jenny?s article is changed by Mia. In many ways, this is the novel?s greatest betrayal. How did you respond to this moment?

Act III

1. How does body horror operate within the context of this story?

2. Hair plays a significant role in this novel. Describe its symbolism.

3. Readers all want Jenny to escape. Why does it make sense that she doesn?t? Is there any form of victory within her captivity?

4. Is Mr. Yellow real?

5. The novel suggests that women are losing their rights because of larger forces --- a kind of horrific, generational conspiracy (the curse). Is this driven by human nature, or is money (radicalized social media clicks, political PACs, for-profit religions) to blame?

6. What does it mean to surrender your name?

7. Can parallelisms be drawn between Trad Wives and the manosphere? Does the system benefit from placing men in restrictive roles as well?

8. What do you think happens to Jenny, Mia and Victoria next?

Author Bio

Sarah Langan, a Columbia MFA graduate and three-time recipient of the Bram Stoker Award, is the author of several novels, including A BETTER WORLD, GOOD NEIGHBORS and TRAD WIFE. She?s got an MS in environmental health science, grew up on Long Island, and she currently lives in Los Angeles with her husband and daughters.

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