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The Other Side Of Dark



Synopsis

Katie Mullens is known as the weird kid. Dead dad. Dead mom. Loner. Maybe crazy. Always drawing in her sketch pad, and she talks to herself "or at least that's what it looks like. But Katie is talking to real people—they're just dead. Law Walker is drawn to Katie when he sees the sketch she's made of a historic home—the way it looked before it burned. Law soon discovers that Katie's sight goes beyond death, and what she sees reveals the strange, twisted history of a famous Boston family's connection to the illegal post-emancipation slave trade. Past, present. Living, dead. Black, white. This is a powerhouse debut about ugly histories, unlikely romances, and seeing people—alive and otherwise—for who they really are.

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Atheneum Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition (November 15, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1442402814

ISBN-13: 978-1442402812

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars— See all reviews— (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,513,081 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 in Books > Teens >

Historical Fiction > United States > Civil War Period #521 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Prejudice & Racism #1443 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1800s

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

The Other Side of Dark is an extremely well written tale of ghosts and history, grief and guilt, and the true meaning of freedom. With its goosebump-inducing ending and multi-layered plot, this book is a nice surprise for not only fans of the paranormal, but also fans of historical fiction. The author did a wonderful job of creating characters that were believable and who sucked you right into a story exploring not only slavery but also the relationships between daughters and mothers and fathers and sons. Law is a great character. Like many teens, he is struggling to find his place in the world. This is not easy to do when your father is black and considered the voice of his people, your mother

is white, and all they do is fight. Law is responsible. He often seems to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders, literally stumbling under the weight of his father's expectations. He doesn't want to be an angry black man, and his journey to independence and freedom from both his history and his father is poignant and extremely well portrayed. There is a depth here that was totally unexpected. Katie flies through this book like a wounded bird. She's the one who can see ghosts, and when she meets up with Law, it seems like he's the one that finally grounds her, just as she is the person who can finally set him free. Theirs is a great example of a meaningful teen relationship based on mutual respect and love. The historical aspects of the story are riveting and will no doubt drive teen readers to find out more about this time period. The scenes involving ghosts are at times frightening, touching, and inspiring. Katie becomes involved with this story partially through her relationship with a ghost named George. Her love for him was beautiful and the author did a great job in creating his character and giving their relationship such an obvious level of caring that it served as an underlying theme throughout the story. Katie was both traumatized by these ghosts and cared deeply for them. This is an enthusiastic recommend for teens grade 7 and up. Adults will also find much to appreciate in this excellent effort.

Quick summary: Katie sees and draws ghosts. Law is a biracial teenager who has a father who pushes him to have as much success as he did, basically fighting for reparations. Law wants nothing more than to get into architecture (against his father's wishes). Katie wants nothing more than to be "normal." An unlikely couple, they are drawn together to save Pinebank from being torn down. This book captivated me. I was sucked in to both characters pretty much from the beginning. It was a very interesting story. Yes, it helps that I love reading historical type books. This book had a lot of history involved. I knew very little about Boston going into this book. After reading it, I had to look up the story to see if it was true! The middle of the book could get a little tedious for someone who doesn't like history, but the ending is worth it for everyone. I enjoyed the whole book and wanted to know what was going to happen, but it was the last third of the book that I refused to put down until I was done. I was quite surprised by most of the revelations. The book is written so well! I dreamed that I could see ghosts of my relatives while reading this book, but it wasn't scary. It was actually more sad. I also got this feeling while reading the book, that the ghosts were not scary. They were more heartbreaking.

Sarah Smith's young adult debut, *The Other Side of Dark*, combines just the right amount of mystery, suspense, and ghost story into a historical fiction narrative that packs an emotional punch.

Growing up as the son of his black professor father and his white architect mother, Law feels increasingly pulled between them and their professional and racial identities. Ever since her mother died tragically, Katie has also been pulled in two directions - between the world of the living and that of the dead who she now sees and draws. When Law discovers that Katie knows more than reasonably possible about the old mansion he wants to save from demolition, the two teens are drawn together to learn more about each other, the ugly history that surrounds them, and how their decisions can impact both the past and the present. While the book's back cover suggested a paranormal romance with some "real" issues mixed in, *THE OTHER SIDE OF DARK* blew me away with its powerhouse combination of mystery, suspense, and romance to tell a story about self-identity, grief, history, racism, and slavery. Smith expertly uses the supernatural backdrop to demonstrate that the scariest things we can fear are real and human-created, not the ghosts that may surround us. As main characters, Law and Katie are sympathetic and their struggles genuine. The characters' development shows the complexity and awkwardness expected by two teens trying to define themselves in spite of, or in relation to, their parents. Consistent pacing and plotting move the story forward, and a complete story arc wraps up in the last 50 pages with an incredibly moving end. The author also excels in her descriptions about architecture, Katie's drawings, and the ghosts Katie sees. The author's obviously well-researched history about slavery also makes the story even more poignant because of the reader's ability to acknowledge that similar things have happened in our real past. Though an incredibly strong book overall, the romantic relationship between Law and Katie was not as grabbing as I had hoped; the progression of their emotional and physical intimacy seemed jumpy and unrealistic at times. There were also moments of awkward dialogue, and a few sentences here and there didn't make sense and felt dropped in. These small blips took very little away from the emotional impact of the story, however. Even if *THE OTHER SIDE OF DARK* wasn't what I expected, I was delighted and moved when it was so much more. Very rarely do novels so deftly combine an engaging and suspenseful plot with an examination of social and historical issues that impact us all. This is a great book for all readers, especially teens who may be struggling with how their heritage and past defines them and who they want to be. I look forward to any other books that Smith brings us in the future. Note: This review refers to an advance reader's copy.

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