



Sister of Mine

Sabra Waldfogel

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When two Union soldiers stumble onto a plantation in northern Georgia on a warm May day in 1864, the last thing they expect is to see the Union flag flying high—or to be greeted by a group of freed slaves and their Jewish mistress. Little do they know that this place has an unusual history.

Twelve years prior, Adelaide Mannheim—daughter of Mordecai, the only Jewish planter in the county—was given her own maid, a young slave named Rachel. The two became friends, and soon they discovered a secret: Mordecai was Rachel's father, too.

As the country moved toward war, Adelaide and Rachel struggled to navigate their newfound sisterhood—from love and resentment to betrayal and, ultimately, forgiveness.

Now, facing these Union soldiers as General Sherman advances nearer, their bond is put to the ultimate test. Will the plantation be spared? Or will everything they've lived for be lost?

Revised edition: Previously published as *Slave and Sister*, this edition of *Sister of Mine: A Novel* includes editorial revisions.

Sister of Mine Details

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George Bristow says

Well written

The story pulled me along until the two sisters end up with the same man. Then it was strange...I also didnt think so much sexual details was necessary for the story. Would have been better without it.

Holly H says

This book was great! The narrator did a wonderful job reading this story. I hated for the story to end.

Lois says

Slavery from the owners point of view

This book is a mess. The author has researched Jewish chattel slave owners in the US but does not seem to have studied slavery from the pov of the enslaved.

The characters don't behave in realistic ways. This feels like white guilt wrote a book.

Chrissie says

I wavered with this book, back and forth between three or four stars. Some sections grab you, pull you in and won't let you go. Other sections are weaker – ordinary, cute or holier-than-thou. Unfortunately, the ending was for me too neat and too sweet, the result being I gave it three stars. I liked the book. I can recommend it to others. Many adore such endings.

The book covers many themes – the production and trade of cotton, the relationship between sisters of different color, Jews in the South, Jewish traditions, discrimination of Blacks, the bloody events of both the Civil War and the chaos afterwards when the Unionists won. What the book does best is make the reader feel emotional forces binding and tearing individuals, between father and daughter, daughter and mother, between sisters and between lovers. How did it feel to be black and discriminated against? Think again....how did it **really** feel? Can we understand this? Can we put ourselves in their shoes, but forget it, they often didn't even have shoes?! Each character is not good or bad, but both good and bad. This made them believable.

There are love scenes, some quite explicit and lengthy. Too lengthy?

I appreciated that the book concludes with an afterword documenting the history and the presence of Jews in the South during antebellum times. How many actually had slaves and how did this come to be given their

own heritage of discrimination in Europe and slavery in Egypt?

Bahni Turpin narrates the audiobook. She dramatizes. In my view, when an author's words are themselves emotive further emphasis is really not needed! One easily hears who is speaking - infants, youngsters, Blacks, Whites, slaves and gentry. There are even shrill chirping birds.....which I felt were too loud!

Nancee says

My thoughts ~

Daughter of a Jewish cotton planter, Adelaide develops a friendship with her young personal maid, Rachel. Mordecai Mannheim fathered the half sisters born to different mothers, one Jewish, the other a black slave. The girls became friends, and Adelaide taught Rachel how to read and do numbers. Forbidden to slaves, Rachel's reading and numbers became her advantage as time passed.

The Civil War is well researched. Varied, but believable characters make up the substance of this book. Life in the mid-1800s is so well delineated that through reading this book, details were realistic and authentic. Civil War history is one of my favorite topics, and this book satisfied my interest on numerous levels.

Relationships became tempestuous and intense as forbidden activities develop between main characters. Although I found the book to be a bit slow at times, it is intriguing, passionate and complex. If you love Civil War tales, this one is a very detailed and satisfying read.

Warning: Contains explicit intimate scenes.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book through a Goodreads contest in exchange for my honest review. All expressed opinions are my own, and no monetary compensation was received for this review.

SenoraG says

Listened to the audio book. I feel this is one of those times when the audio book was better. The narrator was one of the best that I've heard.

Denice Barker says

We don't always think of Jews as being slave holders in the South but if a planter had cotton they couldn't do it without slaves. As the only Jewish planter and thus slave owner in Georgia, Mordecai Mannheim had a lot to protect. Among these things, his daughter Adelaide.

For her birthday as a child, Adelaide was given Rachel, a slave. The two grew up together, Adelaide taught Rachel to read and write, they became friends and confidants. But Rachel must always be conscious of her place. When a grown Adelaide is paired with one of the few Jewish suitors in the state, it is because of Rachel's treatment by him that Adelaide breaks off the engagement and this breaking of the engagement is a

scandal and a mark on Adelaide's life for years.

When Mordecai discovers Henry Kaltenbach, a dry goods merchant, he brings him home and sets him down in front of Adelaide. Both Adelaide and Henry know what is meant by this introduction and they comply and marry.

Henry wants to make his fortune as a cotton planter and enlists the aide of Adelaide's father. But Henry also grapples constantly with the fact the Jews were held slave in Egypt and here he is, a slave owner himself, for the only purpose of making his fortune. He is a kind, fair, gentle man and this torments him.

When the Civil War comes to the family, there are real choices to be made, family secrets revealed, life decisions to be made. And when deep inside the war a company of Union soldiers happens on the Georgia plantation to find a Union flag flying from the roof, the story all comes together.

There are thousands of books about the Civil War and finding something different can be difficult but this author did bring things I didn't think of and wrapped her story around them. It was a refreshing take.

Kati Berman says

I received *Sister of Mine* from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

This is a historical fiction of the pre civil war and civil war era. It is about a Jewish family, the Mannheims of Cassville, Georgia. Mordechai Mannheim is owner of a cotton plantation and slave owner. He is a ruthless man, manipulating those around him, including his daughter, son in law for his own best interest. After his daughter, Adelaide breaks her engagement to a suitor, he literally forces her to marry Henry, a Jewish German immigrant. He lends money to Henry for his own plantation, thus keeping Henry in his debt for a long time. This is a loveless marriage, frustrating to both husband and wife. "Sisters" are Adelaide and the slave Rachel given to her on her 12th birthday. It turns out that Rachel is also Mordechai's daughter from a relationship with a slave who later died in childbirth. Adelaide's and Rachel's relationship is a roller coaster drive of ups and down, riddled with jealousy, hate, sometimes love, compassion, and friendship. Adelaide teaches Rachel to read and write, that is forbidden to slaves. Rachel has a yearning to learn and has a very good sense of figures. The book explores the sharp contrast of the family celebrating Passover, when the Jews of Egypt were freed from slavery, yet owning slaves in their own time. The characters are well developed, the reader feels with them. Henry is a hard worker, trying everything in his power to make his marriage and plantation a success, while deep down he is against slavery. In spite of his efforts, his marriage doesn't work out and when he is forced to enter the war on the Confederate side, (again manipulated by his father in law), he has to leave the plantation in other hands. The reader gets a glimpse of the horror of the war through Henry's letters to Rachel. I enjoyed this book very much and felt strongly with some of the characters, especially Rachel. Some of the other characters, Charlie, Minnie to mention just a few also drew my sympathy. I recommend this book to anyone who likes historical fiction.

Thank you NetGalley , Lake Union Publishing and the author, Sabra Waldfogel for giving me the opportunity to preview this book.

Deborah Bailey says

Contains spoilers

A complex and layered story that drew me in to the point where I couldn't put the book down. What happens when emotions come in conflict with a system that rationalizes and perpetuates a cruel and inhumane practice? Can you be enslaved and yet allow yourself to love and commit in a world where you cannot call your body your own? It amazed me that a first-time author, Sabra Waldfoegel could weave these strands together so well and create a story that's both moving and disturbing.

The main characters, Rachel, Henry and Adelaide are locked in a triangle. Bound by family ties and (in Rachel's case) literally bound in slavery. Rachel is enslaved and at the mercy of the owners, which include her father and sister. The memory of her mother's death haunts her and she's left to determine what the relationship could have been between her slave mother and slave-master father.

Adelaide is, in her way, bound to convention and tradition -- both the tradition of the culture and her religion. She must marry in spite of her own desires, and she's faced with a match that may lead to disaster, only to choose one that might deliver the same fate. Henry is conflicted between his own heritage and religious beliefs, and the customs of the country he now inhabits and wants to succeed in. Though Adelaide and Henry could make the choice to walk away - and risk everything that comes with rejecting religious and social mores - they do have the choice. Rachel does not. So the ties that bind depend on where one is in the hierarchy.

In a heartbreaking scene at a slave auction, slaves try to make arrangements for their own sales in order to stay with family and loved ones. This shows that the enslaved were not mute, passive victims. They were actively working to make a way out of no way, and taking charge of their survival the best they could within the constraints that imprisoned them.

Rachel's story reminded me of stories from my own family, particularly when it came to slaves making deals (or using trickery) to learn to read and write. Yet, at the same time, they had to hide their intelligence and strength lest they incurred the wrath of the slave-master. Rachel must hold her own feelings in check, and try to navigate between staying in her "place" while reserving the right to call her soul her own (even if she can't say the same for her body). It's a precarious path that could lead to death, or even madness.

The author did a great job of showing the conflict within the slaves who must stay subservient, hiding their true feelings and thoughts under the "slave mask." Their need to work to keep Henry's place going comes mostly from their desire not to be sold off. Working to keep him successful keeps their families intact, and lessens the chance they'll end up in an even worse situation.

As the story continues, each character must face various trials as their relationships are tested. Adelaide's growth comes at a price, but she is able to finally come to terms with the world as it is after the war. In fact, it just might be a world where she can finally stop being subservient to her father's bidding. Her growing acceptance of the real nature of her relationship with Henry, also frees her to connect with Rachel, woman-to-woman. This realization is put to the test when they're threatened by people who see their success (and freedom for the slaves) as a threat that can't be tolerated. Adelaide finally comes into her own and shows she is not the person we saw in the beginning. In addition, the author shows how the seeds for present-day racist resentments were sown as the various social and economic classes of whites clashed at war's end. Once the veil of order and gentility is ripped away, a new reality must be faced.

Henry's letters give startling and horrific glimpses of war, and his transition also comes with a price. Although he still maintains a bit of idealism (evidenced by his decision to live his life on his terms with the woman he really loves) it also reflects his new found awareness. However it is important to note that the people he leaves behind - slave and free - are the ones who keep things going. Thanks to them, he returns to

a better situation than others who either didn't return or lost the status and riches they once had.

Rachel's transition, for me, is about her acceptance of her positions as sister, sister-in-law, lover, daughter, mother. Through it all she keeps her sense of self while navigating a landscape filled with danger. She's at the center of a knot of family ties that are also master/slave ties, tangled and almost impossible for a reader in the present day to comprehend.

The author's research is evident, and it gives the story richness that never makes it ring false. It's not an easy read, and there are questions asked that are still being answered today. This is not a sweeping saga with larger than life characters, but an intimate look at people whose fates are intertwined for better and for worse during a time in this country's history that is still resonating today. (Received a review copy.)

Tracy says

****Some Spoilers****I like the story and the characters drew me in. I hated each of the main characters at different points in the story. Of course you hate the slave owners for their deep rooted evil, I was surprised to find myself angry at Rachel and Henry for their betrayal. It struck me as laughable that they were angry at Adeline for being upset about their affair. These were all good in the book, you want to feel emotions good or bad when reading because it means you are invested in the story. I would have given the book 4.5 stars if it had not been for the ending. MAJOR SPOILER...

Rachel sees yet another hungry soldier plodding up the driveway and says it another mouth to feed and then stops short because she recognizes the gait of his walk despite his limp then takes off running to him....it's Ashley, OOPS I mean Henry. (Totally stolen from Gone With the Wind). I realize historical books tend to be similar due to some facts of the time period but that particular scene was just too exact for my taste. Sadly this would have been a great book if it would not have been for that plagiarism at the end.

Emily says

Points for great story line, characters, and historical accuracy. It was good until it got to some R-rated scenes and because of that I decided to stop reading it. I only read about ten percent.

Thanks to NetGalley for the ARC.

Kerry Pickens says

Read it for a book club. Didn't find it particularly interesting as I am not into softcore porn, and it was full of stereotypes. The white women were all frigid and the black women represented sexual desire. The slave women did not have love affairs with their slave owners, they were beaten and raped. This book also perpetuates the myth that black men will riot and kill all the white people, which the basis of all white racist thinking.

Ariel Uppstrom says

The first half of this book was great. It really captured the complexity of the South during slavery and the relationships between slaves, mixed slaves, and their white masters. However, then the white mistress's (Adelaide) half black sister (Rachel) "falls in love" with her master and starts a relationship with him. The idea that she was actually in love with him and allowed the relationship to go as it did seemed so against her earlier character. Then the fact that the sisters were able to come to a positive understanding about their situation while the master was away at war seemed so unlikely and so rapid that I just couldn't believe it.

Rachelle says

Sister of Mine explores a rarely discussed part of the Antebellum South - the Jewish community, many of whom were wealthy slaveholders. Through the lives of Adelaide Mannheim and her sister Rachel who is her slave, we get an intimate look at slavery's destructiveness. Both women are severely limited by society's laws and expectations. We see the pervasive cognitive dissonance of Adelaide's friends and family who recite the Jewish prayers and remembrances of when the Jews were slaves in Egypt and when they were discriminated against in Europe and yet are able to justify the slaves they own that provide their wealth and status. Waldfogel shows a deft hand with both description and dialogue as she explores the unhealthy intimacy and inequality between masters and their slaves that create complex, painful and at times loving relationships.

Note: Book provided by Lake Union Publishing and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Sonya Heaney says

It's not perfect, but I'm giving it five because of how interesting I found it.

Also posted [**HERE**](#) .

This is an epic sort of story, one that seemed to take me a while to read, but one I'm very glad I did. Dealing with slavery and sisterhood in the lead-up and duration of the US Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century, *Sister of Mine* is told from the perspective of two young Southern women, one the daughter of a rich Jewish landowner in Georgia, and the other her slave (and secret half-sister).

If you're not from the United States you might want to familiarise yourself with the basics of the war (and where the various states are positioned) before starting – if you want to get the most out of the book.

I can't tell you if every detail of the history is correct, but there does seem to be a staggering amount of research that went into this. It's not that it overpowers the story, but that the casual mentions of everything from foods to fashions seemed to have been carefully researched before being put on the page.

This is historical fiction, which means there's plenty of sadness to go with the better times. There are a few points in the story where you're going to find some of the major players (very) difficult to like, but that seemed realistic to me, and it left lots of room for them to change and grow over the years and through the

war.

Nobody is perfect here, and it is all much more complex with the topic of slavery and seeing a war through the eyes of the losing side, especially as some of it is told from the perspective of people who own slaves. I thought it was really brilliant how the author managed to turn characters' minds around, and how she found a way for them to be on both sides of the conflict – sometimes at the same time.

Mostly, this is a bittersweet sort of story. It's not fluff that you read through in a few hours, and it was exactly what I'd been looking for after one Regency ballroom too many in my recent reads.

Review copy provided by NetGalley.
