



Black

Joan Vassar

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Vivid, poignant, and absorbing, this outstanding novel reaches back in time to portray Nat Turner's son's quest for freedom and equality.

Set in nineteenth-century America prior to the Civil War, this well-researched novel depicts the horror of slavery and the violence of revolt in a heady mix of bloody realism and heroic romance. Joan Vassar portrays Nat Turner's literate son in his passionate quest for freedom and equality in *Black*, a moving, revelatory, and disturbing narrative. This is the first book of a promising series.

A skillful blend of fact and fiction, Vassar's plot is a journey that takes place during a volatile period in US history. Her believable protagonists emerge from carefully crafted pages with a human quality that transcends ordinary characterization. Without whitewashing or condemning, Vassar depicts Black as he leads a slave uprising, while he and his lover, Sunday, face incredible obstacles to be together as the country teeters on the edge of war. He rescues her from a life in captivity and then teaches her to read, eventually marrying the young woman he has befriended and nurtured.

Laced with heavy dialect—perhaps too much in places—and straightforward description, this somber book allows a candid look at behind-the-scenes maneuvering and clandestine negotiation in a world where no one knows for certain who can be trusted. Danger lurks on every path along the Underground Railroad, from bounty hunters in the North to plantation overseers in the South, creating a treacherous route to freedom and relative safety.

Potent use of language empowers the story, giving a filmlike quality to action scenes. Sexual interludes are explicit, often beautiful, sometimes rough. The focus remains on Black and Sunday, even as cataclysmic events threaten to tear them apart; they live in the now of the mid-1800s. External conflict heightens their passion, awareness of mortality always in the forefront rather than suppressed in the depths of subconsciousness.

In a heartrending battle for his life, Black struggles to survive serious injuries, but his first thought is of Sunday:

Black had been in a dream state, yet he could feel her touch and her love. It had grown cold as though she left, and he was forced to have to push through the pain and fogginess to find her. Slowly he opened his eyes, unsure of what had happened or where he was. Staring at the ceiling, he recognized his room. He felt weak, and he needed her.

Ideal for adult classrooms and book groups, *Black* educates with an honest yet aching style. Vassar's outstanding novel reaches back in time, vivid, poignant, and absorbing. No one will walk away from this literary endeavor without unearthing a piece of history to serve as a reminder of what previous generations endured for the sake of universal emancipation and abiding love.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 22, 2015)

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