

## Why Birds Sing

**Nina Berkhout**

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In Nina Berkhout's tender novel, an opera singer falls in and out of love with both her craft and her spouse.

After flopping on stage and damaging her vocal cords, Dawn is unable to find work as a singer. Coinciding with this tragedy, Tariq, Dawn's brother-in-law, is diagnosed with cancer and moves in with her and her husband. He brings with him a rude but charming African Grey, Tulip. Now stuck at home, Dawn is forced to reevaluate her contented life and attitudes.

The story transitions when Dawn is forced to teach a whistling class to a group called The Warblers, hoping not to damage her voice even further. She shows up to her first class just before it ends and is met by rambunctious, mixed-age students. Their focus is on the fun of music, rather than the skills it requires. Because of this group setting, Dawn's depressed, meditative state becomes more lighthearted.

The terrific cast helps to showcase how people interact with one another. Each of Dawn's students is introduced in a formal manner in the classroom setting before they're met again in their one-on-one encounters with their teacher. Dawn learns each student's story; many of their tales are heart wrenching. Despite their sometimes unfortunate circumstances, though, the class maintains its high spirits, inspiring Dawn to celebrate life, rather than dwell on her downfalls.

Tariq and Dawn's deep bond is another point of focus; their relationship comes to seem stronger than Dawn's marriage. Tulip assists: her beauty, spiteful personality, and multifaceted emotions stand out in the sibling-in-laws' interactions.

Capturing the joy that's brought through camaraderie and passion, *Why Birds Sing* is an inspiring novel focused on the power of connections.

GEORGE HAJJAR (September / October 2020)

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