Darkest Child: A Novel by Delores Phillips

“Evil’s regenerative powers and one girl’s fierce resistance. . . . A book that deserves a wide audience.”—The Cleveland Plain Dealer

“Filled with grand plot events and clearly identifiable villains and victims . . . lush with detail and captivating with its story of racial tension and family violence.”—The Washington Post Book World

“[An] exceptional debut novel. . . . [Has] a depth and dimension not often characteristic of a first novel.”—Library Journal (starred)

“Phillips writes with a no-nonsense elegance. . . . As a vision of African-American life, The Darkest Child is one of the harshest novels to arrive in many years. . . . [Phillips] buttresses those harsh episodes with a depth of characterization worthy of Chekhov, pitch-perfect dialogue, and a profound knowledge of the segregated South in the ’50s.”—The New Leader

Rozelle Quinn is so fair-skinned that she can pass for white. Her ten children are mostly light, too. They constitute the only world she rules and controls. Her power over them is all she has in an otherwise cruel and uncaring universe.
Rozelle favors her light-skinned kids, but Tangy Mae, 13, her darkest-complected child, is the brightest. She desperately wants to continue with her education. Her mother, however, has other plans. Rozelle wants her daughter to work cleaning houses for whites, like she does, and accompany her to the “Farmhouse,” where Rozelle earns extra money bedding men. Tangy Mae, she’s decided, is of age.

This is the story from an era when life’s possibilities for an African-American were unimaginably different.

Delores Phillips was born in Bartow County, Georgia in 1950, the second of four children. She graduated from Cleveland State University with a bachelor of arts in English and works as a nurse at a state psychiatric hospital. Her work has appeared in Jean’s Journal, Black Times, and The Crisis. She has lived in Cleveland, Ohio since 1964.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

My Personal Review:
The Darkest Child is a powerful debut from Delores Phillips; one so strong, I think she should earn a nomination for rookie author of the year, if such a category in literature exists. It is a harrowing saga set in the late 1950s in rural Georgia and narrated by a teenaged Tangy Mae Quinn. Tangy is child number seven from Rozelle (Rosie) Quinn, a beautiful woman who has slept with most of the men in the town resulting in marriage to no one and ten fatherless children by as many men. Rosie exhibits selfish, erratic behavior leading the reader to believe she is a paranoid schizophrenic, although she is never diagnosed as such in the novel. Rosie rules the household with an iron fist (and an occasional iron poker) and is mean-spirited and merciless. Partially because of her mental condition, Rosie brainwashes the children with biblical references to Honor Thy Mother which burdens them with an obligation to forfeit all earnings to Rosie and never abandon her.

Although Tangy is the lead storyteller, there are numerous characters with much drama of their own and a subplot surrounding the Civil Rights struggle and school integration. Phillips also adds the classic theme of colorism, in which the options of dark-skinned women in a color-conscious, male-dominated society are limited; however in this novel, Tangy tries to overcome it via education. There are tantalizing family secrets and vivid descriptions of child abuse which elicits reader empathy for the characters. I felt the characters pain as they struggled with suppressed
anger/frustrations from the domestic situation with a manipulative, mad mother as well as the social situation regarding second-class citizenry in the segregated South. This is a really good book if you like to read about African American families and women's issues and struggles. However, I thought it could have been a great book if the cause of Rosies dementia was revealed and had more closure on the outcome of key characters. Perhaps a sequel is forthcoming....If so, I would love to read it.

Phyllis
APOOO BookClub, The Nubian Circle Book Club

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price: