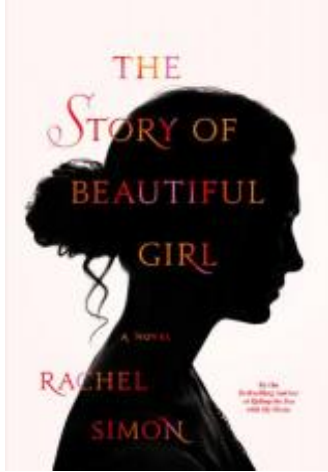


The Story of Beautiful Girl

by Rachel Simon



About the Book

It is 1968. Linnie, a young white woman with a developmental disability, and Homan, an African American deaf man, are locked away in an institution, the School for the Incurable and Feebleminded, and have been left to languish, forgotten. Deeply in love, they escape and find refuge in the farmhouse of Martha, a retired schoolteacher and widow. But the couple is not alone --- Linnie has just given birth to a baby girl. When the authorities catch up to them that same night, Homan escapes into the darkness, and Linnie is caught. But before she is forced back into the institution, she whispers two words to Martha: "Hide her." And so begins the 40-year epic journey of Linnie, Homan, Martha and baby Julia --- lives divided by seemingly insurmountable obstacles, yet drawn together by a secret pact and extraordinary love.

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Discussion Guide

1. What did you learn that you didn't already know about the history of people with disabilities and the ways they were routinely treated by society? What did you learn about how people with disabilities might live today? Consider the lives of people you know who have a disability. Did the experiences of Linnie and Homan change or shed light on your understanding of them?
2. Martha's former students provide her with support for the first several years of Julia's life. Was there a teacher in your life who meant as much to you as Martha meant to her students?
3. Why do you think Martha took on the incredible responsibility of raising another woman's child instead of contacting proper authorities? What would you have done in her place?

4. Kate breaks the rules for Linnie, doing such things as letting her draw pictures in her office and giving her a private place to see Buddy. When is it appropriate for professionals to go against office policy?

5. Linnie does not want Kate to go in search of the baby and Kate says she will honor Linnie's wishes. What do you think of Kate's decision to do this? Kate also secretly goes against Linnie's wishes, but does not tell her. Was this the right thing to do?

6. Homan is up against incredible odds in making his way in the world, especially once his uncle

Blue dies. Discuss the way that race, impairment, illiteracy, and institutionalization play a part in how he interacts with the world and how the world reacts to him.

7. Homan realizes in the faith healing scene that he isn't so sure he wants to be "fixed". Why does he have so little interest? Sam also does not pursue healing, and the subject of being healed never even comes up for Linnie. What do you think Rachel Simon is saying through her characters' indifference to being "fixed"?

8. What do you think happened between Sam and Strawberry that led him to cry, and then to lose his interest in the freewheeling life he and Homan had been living? Why do you think the man in the house at the top of the long front steps closed the door in Homan's face?

9. When Julia is a baby in the stroller, Martha thinks about the history of words like "pajamas".

Later, when Julia is nearing school age, she collects twigs that she uses to spell words. How do these references to language foreshadow what happens to Julia as a teenager?

10. Do you think Julia's lack of knowledge about her parents plays a role in her emotional development as a teenager, and as an adult? Was it right for Martha not to tell her the truth?

11. How does art create links between the characters throughout the book, and what is the role it plays in the final chapter?

12. Each character has a relationship to spirituality. Discuss how and if each changes over time.

What do you think Rachel Simon was trying to say by including this aspect of all the characters' lives?

13. Discuss the symbolism of the lighthouse man. Is it meant to be taken purely literally, or is there a metaphoric aspect to it as well?

14. Romantic relationships between characters with disabilities are rare in fiction. How is the romance between Homan and Linnie like the romances of characters in fiction who don't have disabilities? How is it different?

Author Bio

Rachel Simon is an award-winning author and nationally known public speaker. She is best known for her critically acclaimed, bestselling memoir *Riding The Bus with My Sister*, which was adapted for a Hallmark Hall of Fame movie of the same name. The book has garnered numerous awards, and is a frequent and much beloved selection of many book clubs, school reading programs, and city-wide reads throughout the country.

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Publication Date: May 4, 2011

Genres: Fiction

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Grand Central Publishing

ISBN-10: 0446574465

ISBN-13: 9780446574464