

Book Review: Kin

By Tayari Jones

“Kin” is the New York Times best-selling novel by Tayari Jones. And after reading it, I’m not surprised by its ranking. It’s a very well-written, thought-provoking novel about mothers and daughters, friendship and sisterhood.

As the story unfolds in Honeysuckle, Louisiana in the late 1950s, we’re introduced to Vernice and Annie, two motherless daughters who have been friends since their cradle days. They’re as close, if not closer than sisters.

Vernice is raised by her aunt after her father shoots and kills her mother before turning the gun on himself. Aunt Irene is determined to provide Vernice with a stable home.

Annie is raised by her grandmother after her mother abandons the family when Annie is just days old. Despite that void resulting from her mother’s absence, or perhaps *in spite of it*, Annie is fixated on finding her.

The girls’ lives take divergent paths. Vernice graduates high school and heads off to Spelman College in Atlanta where she joins a sisterhood of powerfully connected Black women, eventually marrying into an affluent family. Annie forsakes high school graduation and heads to Memphis and the last known address she has for her mother. The journey takes her into a world of peril and adversity.

But through it all, Vernice and Annie remain as close as ever.

“Kin” is a slow but strong read. The narrative paints a vivid and sometimes disturbing – yet accurate – picture of life in the south for two Black women. It also perhaps broadens the definition of *kin* which generally refers to a blood relative. Vernice and Annie are profoundly impacted by the strong supporting cast they meet along their journeys who *are not* blood relatives, but by the end of the story can certainly be considered kin.

The ending, for me, was a little strange and a bit weak. It left me with some unanswered questions. The answers were perhaps subtly implied, but the narrative feels like it just falls off a cliff at the end.

Four stars for “Kin.” Short of a solid five stars due to the ending, but still a highly recommended read.