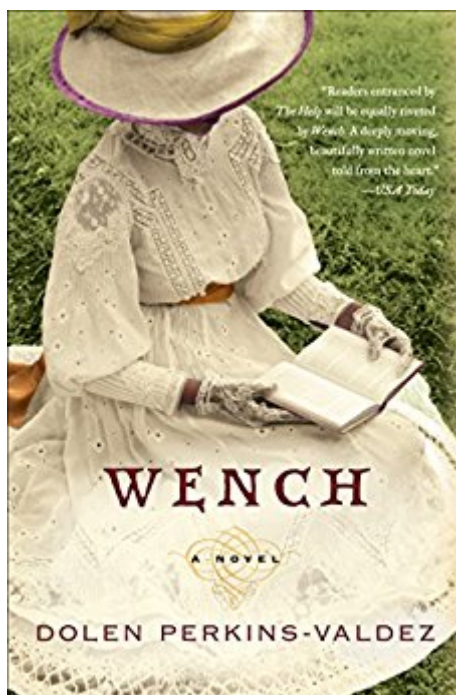


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Wench: A Novel (P.S.)



Synopsis

Dolen Perkins-Valdez's enchanting and unforgettable novel, based on little-known fact, combines the narrative allure of *Cane River* by Lalita Tademy and the moral complexities of Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* as it tells the story of four black enslaved women in the years preceding the Civil War. wench 'wench n. from Middle English "wenchel," a: a girl, maid, young woman; a female child. Situated in Ohio, a free territory before the Civil War, Tawawa House is an idyllic retreat for Southern white men who vacation there every summer with their enslaved black mistresses. It's their open secret. Lizzie, Reenie, and Sweet are regulars at the resort, building strong friendships over the years. But when Mawu, as fearless as she is assured, comes along and starts talking of running away, things change. To run is to leave everything behind, and for some it also means escaping from the emotional and psychological bonds that bind them to their masters. When a fire on the resort sets off a string of tragedies, the women of Tawawa House soon learn that triumph and dehumanization are inseparable and that love exists even in the most inhuman, brutal of circumstances—all while they bear witness to the end of an era. An engaging, page-turning, and wholly original novel, *Wench* explores, with an unflinching eye, the moral complexities of slavery. "Readers entranced by *The Help* will be equally riveted by *Wench*. A deeply moving, beautifully written novel told from the heart." —USA Today

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Customer Reviews

Interesting story with an intriguing background from which the author based the story. Historical aspects are in most ways accurately portrayed. Some of the dialogue and interactions between characters were less authentic - seemed to reflect 20th/21st century relationships versus male/female relationship dynamics of the 19th century. Story had a good pace - good weekend read.

Review written by Wanda Pulliam. Quite different than anything I've ever read before. Story of "favored" slaves who were taken on vacation with their masters each year at the same time to a free state. They looked forward to seeing each other and became close friends and shared good and bad times together as they met each year. Even though they got special favors, they were still slaves and I found an entirely different story about slave days than I had ever even imagined. Very interesting!

This novel was beautifully and eloquently written, with the heart and soul in mind. Although a work of nonfiction I can definitely see how this could have indeed happened....It did happen. Easily one of the best books I have read in years. Astounding, brutal, truthful...a book of friendships, love, heartache, pain and HOPE....always hope.

After weeks of reading mediocre literature, I was about to give up and forego my nightly ritual that I've had since childhood of reading until I go to sleep. Luckily, I came across Perkins-Valdez's novel, *Wench*, which had me riveted. The story involves a group of four female friends, who are slaves, and their vacations to the "free country" up North. All of the women are involved sexually with their Masters, and the protagonist, Lizzie, is in love with her Master, Drayle. The women are constantly tempted to run for freedom, especially when they discover free blacks in Dayton, and are befriended by a white Quaker woman. They experience an extreme of unpleasant situations and adversity; I began to really ache for their heartaches, but the characters seemed to accept most of the situations as normal--which in itself is heartbreaking. The only thing that I did not understand was the love Lizzie had for Drayle--I really didn't see a love story there, and I assume I am not supposed to.

However, Lizzie seemed more intent on manipulating Drayle for special favors than being in love with him. Perkins-Valdez uses realistic dialogue and smooth, cadenced narration to create an unforgettable historical fiction novel.

Wench by Dolen Perkins-Valdez is an interesting read. Focusing on a part of slave and master history, it is a glimpse into the lives of black women slaves before the Civil War. In the state of Ohio, masters bring their black slave mistresses for a vacation. This is a well known fact among both owners and the owned. For some it is a wonderful time, for others it is a miserable experience to always be at their masters beck and call. One summer, four black slave women who are at this resort meet and form a friendship which will stand the test of time and events. Three of the four are fully aware that they are only of use to their masters as long as they are interested in these slave women. The fourth, Liz, truly loves her master and hopes that one day he will give her and their children their freedom. Then one day while walking they meet a white woman who is very interested in them and even shows them a resort where free black men and women can vacation. Eventually, this woman talks to them about abolition and encourages them to run away from their masters and make their way North. Three of the four are scared to do this since if they are found they could either be subjected to a severe whipping or even death. As one of them tried to escape, it becomes clear to Liz that her master will never give her or their children their freedom and Liz is left to wonder what path to take. I liked this book but didn't love it the way I have loved other books with a similar theme. I'm not sure why although I didn't find the women separately that interesting. One part of the book is solely devoted to the beginning relationship between Liz and her master which does allow one to understand a slave's emotions better. The book also gives the reader an opportunity to learn about a seldom known time and place. In the end the women formed wonderful friendships and persevered through all of their tribulations, sometimes because of their camaraderie. (less)

Someone compared this to *Cane River* by Lalita Tademy, which was one reason I got it, but I don't think this holds a candle to it. I couldn't put that one down & found it so moving I had to write to Lalita. This one is OK, I'm glad I read it & it gave me some insights, which is always a good thing, but I thought the writing was a little confusing & even choppy. Many chapters & scene changes within a chapter, started 'in medias res', in the middle of things, where I wondered where are they now & what are they doing? Then I'd get a better idea as I read a bit more. Then the book just stops. Some characters have died but you are left wondering what happened to the rest of them? I was disappointed, I think it had the potential to be a whole lot better, but I don't regret having read it.

I had heard about the resorts where slave owners took their mistresses. The reality of the resort was unexpected. Rather than being luxurious, it was just sad. The sexual bondage of slave women is one of the aspects of that period that befuddles me. Lust fueled by power is a hateful thing. It did not end with Emancipation. Strom Thurmond certainly felt he had the right to dally with a house servant and produced a child. I dated a young man in Fredericksburg, VA in the 1960s. He told me his father's mistress lived in the house with the family. She lived there as a domestic.

I really liked this book. It gives a different perspective on things we have been previously taught. It is about interracial matters and the story is not easily determined by reading a few pages.

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