



The Rebel Wife

Taylor M. Polites

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Brimming with atmosphere and edgy suspense, *The Rebel Wife* presents a young widow trying to survive in the violent world of Reconstruction Alabama, where the old gentility masks a continuing war fueled by hatred, treachery, and still-powerful secrets.

Augusta Branson was born into antebellum Southern nobility during a time of wealth and prosperity, but now all that is gone, and she is left standing in the ashes of a broken civilization. When her scalawag husband dies suddenly of a mysterious blood plague, she must fend for herself and her young son. Slowly she begins to wake to the reality of her new life: her social standing is stained by her marriage; she is alone and unprotected in a community that is being destroyed by racial prejudice and violence; the fortune she thought she would inherit does not exist; and the deadly blood fever is spreading fast. Nothing is as she believed, everyone she knows is hiding something, and Augusta needs someone to trust. Somehow she must find the truth amid her own illusions about the past and the courage to cross the boundaries of hate, so strong, dangerous, and very close to home. Using the Southern Gothic tradition to explode literary archetypes like the chivalrous Southern gentleman, the good mammy, and the defenseless Southern belle, *The Rebel Wife* shatters the myths that still cling to the antebellum South and creates an unforgettable heroine for our time.

The Rebel Wife Details

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From Reader Review The Rebel Wife for online ebook

Kara says

Real rating: 3.5 stars.

I very much enjoyed the writing style - the present tense, almost stream of consciousness feel, the extremely vivid descriptions. It really kept me in the moment. I also liked the Gone With the Wind era setting (though a decade or so later). It's not the South's finest moment, but a compelling stage for a drama. My main gripe was that this particular drama was so narrowly focused. The plot consisted only of finding one hidden object with a number of obstacles simmering in the background: an epidemic, social conventions, racial hate, dubious friendships. While Augusta did grow into a strong, independent woman over the course of the novel, the journey of the actual plot seemed very short. (view spoiler) There was some suspense, and I liked the sense that secrets were slowly being unfolded, but I feel like the author could have done more to make the ending feel satisfying.

Jenny says

I was hoping to win this book from Goodread and I'm happy I did. From the very first page I enjoyed the vivid descriptions... "The humidity hung in the air like wet sheets shimmering in the sunlight.". I enjoyed the realistic aspect, not romanticizing the aftermath of the Civil War. Times were hard both financially and emotionally for the South as the nation was rebuilt. Looking through Augusta's eye, the reader glimpses the turmoil brought on by the early civil rights movement and the uncertainty of future acceptance from those with deep seated hatred or refusals to change. Also through Augusta's story the reader is able to take a glimpse in the lives of those Southerners who took a brave stand for the rights of slaves and the new changes in the country. I thought the story was well told.

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

This book starts out well enough: it's reasonably well-written and has good descriptions and a vivid depiction of life in Reconstruction-era Alabama. Nevertheless, I wound up quite disliking it; this seems like a novel that would appeal to a certain subset of historical fiction readers, but not to everyone.

In a small Alabama town in 1876, Augusta Branson's husband dies a mysterious, bloody death in their bedroom. Augusta quickly realizes that everyone around her has their own agenda, that she doesn't know who she can trust, that a large amount of her husband's money has apparently gone missing and that she's going to need that money.

While the novel starts off pretty well, it soon loses steam. Which, for me, it never really regained. The plot was much more straightforward than I expected (although, in all fairness, at 282 pages it's a very short book). It's also definitely horror-influenced; the first 100 pages or so is all about building atmosphere, with everybody hiding things for one reason or another (in some cases, for no reason I could deduce except that it added to the suspense). Full disclosure: I don't like horror, and in picking out this book was more focused on its marketing as a sort of anti-Gone With the Wind than in the oft-used descriptor "gothic." Well, it's quite gothic (read: creepy), but it isn't really a 21st century "answer" to GWTW, except insofar as there are former slaves in the book who aren't infantilized and a burgeoning KKK that isn't praised. Which I would hope to

be true of all modern fiction dealing with that era. The scope, style, subject matter, even the genre, are otherwise too different to allow for much comparison even if this book was that good, which it is not. (For all its racism, GWTW is an excellent novel in many, many ways--and I find it kind of amusing that even in lauding this book as different, the marketers want to grab onto its coattails.)

Although, to the book's credit, it does handle the setting well. There is a good look at how society changed (and stayed the same) after the Civil War, and you get a sense of the culture beyond the demands of the plot. There's a look at the politics of the time without getting too bogged down, and at how emancipation didn't really mean freedom for a lot of people who stayed in the same place where they'd been slaves.

But then there are the characters. Augusta's decently well-developed, and manages to be convincingly a 19th-century southern white woman while still being mostly sympathetic by modern standards. But the rest of the cast feels rather flat, probably because of the dialogue, which is.... flat. I could not hear the characters' individual voices or speech patterns in their words--and this is a book with a lot of talking, where much of the character development depends on it. They did not come alive.

I debated between 2 and 3 stars (for the right reader, this may be a very good book), but am going down to 2 because I personally did not enjoy it.

Rachel says

This would have been a really good novel as it has more historical details about what happened to the Southern towns after the Confederate defeat in Civil War. It talks about the former slaves still working for their families and often-times not getting paid; it talks about the Reconstruction and the Carpetbaggers taking over; it talks about trying to define the new roles and talks about the horrors of the KKK being formed and talked about racism. However, if this was to be a mystery, it did a poor job at coming up with a satisfying conclusion at the end. There were some loose ends that needed to be tied up to make it more believable.

Other than that, it was a good novel to read during one's downtime. It kept me guessing till the end what the great secret was. For a debut novel, it was an good attempt at solving a mystery.

Shari Larsen says

Augusta Branson is a young widow trying to survive in the violent world of Reconstruction Era Alabama. When her scalawag husband dies, (man she was to forced to marry by her mother) dies of a mysterious illness, at first she is relieved to finally be a widow, but when she finds that the fortune she expected to inherit is gone, she is forced to fend for herself and her young son. She slowly awakens to the new reality of her life; her social standing is stained because of her marriage, she is alone and unprotected in a community that is being destroyed by racial prejudice and violence, and a deadly fever is spreading fast. She does not know who to trust, everyone she knows is hiding something. Somehow, she must find the truth amid her own illusions of what she once believed about the past, and find the courage to cross boundaries of hate in order to do what is right.

This piece of historical fiction has a Southern Gothic feel to it; the author's writing is very descriptive; as I was reading, I could really feel the oppressing heat and humidity, and Augusta's frayed nerves. I liked that the author could write about the Old South without glorifying it. To me, there was nothing glorious or grand about that period. Because of slavery, it is a very shameful part of our American history. The story slowed

down a bit in the middle, but it was never boring; it fit in with the brooding atmosphere and the build up to the climatic conclusion was well worth the wait.

T says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, even staying up late to finish it in one day. A review quoted on the cover calls it a "fascinating, genre-subverting historical novel." I couldn't agree more--the book jacket might lead you to expect an apologist postbellum romance or some other garbage. This is not that. This is historical fiction--not romance--at its best.

The Rebel Wife is written in first person, and the tone evokes the personality of the heroine from the start. Gus is cold, detached, and calculating. She is not written to be sympathetic or anachronistically egalitarian or feminist. Nevertheless, as you experience her growth as a character your sympathy for her grows as well. One criticism, however, is that her character during the events of the book make me question what her personality was like while her husband was still alive. I very much had the sense that Gus has woken up with her husband's death--to take more interest in her affairs and the world around her (including especially the servants). Her ignorance about everything (from servant intrigues to her husband's role in the community to the political alliances in town) suggests that she was dead to the world during her ten years of marriage. But before her husband is cold, she suddenly transforms into her new cunning self?

The most interesting ongoing theme of the book is freedom and independence for former slaves and women. For the first half of the book Gus is essentially forced into passivity, waiting at home (as mourning rules dictate) for her cousin, the trustee of the estate, to come tell her what money may be left from her husband (whom everyone believed to be wealthy (view spoiler)). Gus's frustration (at her own ignorance about her husband's business affairs and her inability to judge whether the men around her are telling the truth or lying for their own gain) became my frustration. I wanted to scream at the paternalism and malignancy of the characters she had to contend with. A lot of historical fiction treats issues like this lightly--i.e. glossing over how land was entitled away from females or assets were held in trust and administered for them. This is the only novel I've read that made me feel how frustrating and terrifying it would be to have my finances taken out of my hands and even out of my ability to question, by someone supposed to have my best interests at heart.

The real triumph of this book for me is how it upset my expectations time and again. Reading the synopsis, I expected a Southern gothic romance where the old lover comes back to woo and support the beset widow. (And don't get me wrong, I was totally down for that cheap entertainment.) I was surprised by how, as an official review said, the book turned the tropes of the "chivalrous Southern gentleman, the good mammy, and the defenseless Southern belle" on their heads. I had read the review, so I expected that to be done. But I expected it to be done in a way that gratified modern readers and made for a more pleasing story--not for, as it turned out, a more challenging and honest story. I was also surprised as expectations I developed early in the book were also destroyed. (view spoiler) And when I flipped to the book jacket to read about the author, my mouth fell open in shock to see that this wonderful heroine had been written by a man (sexist of me, I know). What a thoroughly surprising treasure of a book. I look forward to more by this freshman author.

Sharon Huether says

The Rebel wife by Taylor M Polites Thankyou Goodreads. This was a wonderful book. The story took place after the slaves were freed, some had no place to go, so they remained with their former owners. It was the

Antebellum South. A young widow whose relatives and late husband, were not the most honest of men. She was very strong in her beliefs of what was right and what should be hers from her late husband's estate. It wasn't only herself, but she had a young son and loyal servants she wanted to help and protect. She promised a loyal servant that if she found her husband's money, which was in a missing saddle bag that she would give him half which she did putting her own safety in great danger. She was a woman ahead of her time.

Burgandy Ice says

This book is very interesting and unique.

It takes place in 1875 in the Deep South. The Civil War is over, but emotional upheaval continues boiling in the south over civil rights. I was reminded of *The Help* as I read how Gus related to the servants. She loves Emma, who raised her, but now she's feeling jealous of her son's love for Emma. But this book evokes more parallels with *Gone with the Wind*, which I haven't read, and the beautiful southern belle.

I thoroughly enjoyed the author's dive into the character of Augusta and everyone around her. Augusta is a wonderfully strong woman. She is careful to not upset the balance of life around her - at first, anyway - while reserving her opinion to herself. The time period comes to life, right down to the feel of the heat in summer and how black-dyed cloth runs in sweat. Her husband's death was very untimely and Gus doesn't have a clue. She's is a rebel, alright, in more ways than one.

I don't want to spoil any of this story. It is a joy to read. The details are rich and the characters are deep. You must unravel the dangerous mystery of the money bag while avoiding the fever and political unrest for yourself.

Colorimetry welcomes Taylor M Polites:

Why did you choose Alabama in this time period?

Alabama is where I was born and grew up and it has always fascinated me, particularly Huntsville in North Alabama, with an important and beautiful antebellum district and political prominence in the early years of the state. But I chose the particular year 1875 because it was an important pivot in both the drama of the Civil War and the history of the region. So many writers have told the story of the Civil War and the immediate aftermath of the war, but the entire period of Reconstruction is fundamental to understanding what the war itself was about and what it accomplished. Reconstruction was an incredible experiment in civil equality at a time when racism was the norm—an experiment that was ultimately abandoned, but the effects of which, both for and against, continued to be felt all the way through the Civil Rights movement one hundred years later and up to today. The people who lived in the crosshairs of those events had many hard challenges and choices before them. It is a fascinating, yet neglected, time.

What inspired you to write this book?

The inspiration came over a long period of time and from so many different sources. But certainly, one of the inspirations (or fascinations of mine) has always been dramatic female characters (both fictional and real). Starting with *Scarlett O'Hara*, of course, but moving on through some of the truly great and wonderful women of fiction, *Elizabeth Bennett*, *Emma Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, *Lizzie Eustace*, *Becky Sharp*, *Isabel Archer* and *Lily Bart*. But also the real women of the South that I read again and again growing up—*Mary*

Chesnut, of course, with her wit and pride and doubts; spunky and smart Sarah Morgan; the vain but also brave and determined belle Virginia Clay Clopton (a Huntsville resident); the Englishwoman Fanny Kemble with her memories of the beauty as well as suffering and tragedy on her husband Pierce Butler's plantation; and finally another Huntsville woman, Kate Fearn, who I got to know through her letters to family members, so honest and passionate. Lots of different inspirations and all wonderful, complex and fascinating women!

What would you like to share with your readers?

I really hope that readers enjoy the book—that is number one. I hope that readers are absorbed by the story. I hope they connect with Augusta, with her flaws and her awakening and her change. And I hope they learn something from the story, from the history of the period, perhaps develop a new or different understanding of what the Civil War was about and what its legacy is, especially as we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the war.

Share a story about your pet Clovis, the Chihuahua (and why “Clovis”?)

Young Clovis, as I call him, is my best travelling companion. He loves to ride in the car—he can sleep for four hours without moving, tucked inside my coat, then will get up and look out the window for about ten minutes as we zoom down the highway, and then go back down for another four. He is great in hotels—I set him up with his crate and food and he seems perfectly agreeable to everything. He is a fierce defender of mine and so has earned his name, Clovis, King of the Franks. The original Clovis was a late fifth century warrior king who organized the tribes of Gaul more or less into what is France today, creating a hereditary kingship. What better name for my fierce and loyal Clovis, no matter how small (3.75 pounds!)?

I would not have guessed he was named after a warrior king... you have an imagination!!

Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk to you on your blog!

Thank you for sharing your thoughts... and thank you for writing this book!!!!

Lauren says

This book's title and description captivated me the first time I saw it at my bookstore (by the way, did I mention I got a side job at my local bookstore?). When I first opened its crisp new pages, I was expecting to be whisked off to one of my favorite places: the Civil War-era South, with rows upon rows of cotton fields and Southern manners and a high society coping with their loss of money, relations, and culture.

Instead, I got the poor man's version of *Gone with the Wind*. At 282 pages, it is pretty short, and while it has a lengthy bibliography at the end, it just seemed really... off. Some things were mentioned that didn't seem to be historically accurate (not that I'm a big history buff, but were lawn mowers around back then?), and the way the protagonist treats her slaves/servants as though they're almost equals is not typical of the time.

The book takes place a few years after the end of the Civil War. Augusta's husband dies within the first few pages, and the remainder of the book chronicles her life as she deals with his demise. She doesn't deal with it in an emotional way - their marriage was not one of love or mutual respect - but she deals with it financially, suddenly finding herself poor. She doesn't tackle this problem like my favorite Southern heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, who grows food for herself and her family with her own hands, runs her own business, uses her charms to seduce wealthy men into marriage, etc. Augusta is the most spineless and uninspiring of characters

who decides to go on a sort of treasure hunt with one of her servants for a bit of cash that her husband was rumored to have had in his possession before his untimely demise. Meanwhile, a horrible illness is sweeping the city and forcing people to flee before a government-ordered quarantine is put in place.

It was all a bit... awkward. The book felt like it was modeled after GWTW in that the protagonist finds herself poor after the war, she marries for money, the old gentry of the South don't agree with her marriage and shun her, the marriage is loveless but produces a child, she's still in love with a family friend from her childhood, etc. However, she is not Scarlett O'Hara by any measure. She mildly does what her husband asks of her, she knows that people are stealing from her and insulting her but does not bother to confront them 90% of the time, and she is addicted to a drug called "laudanum". I know Scarlett had her battle with alcohol, but drugs?! Augusta is a flake.

I guess my main complaint was that I was going into this book thinking it would be a romance. Not the sort of "tender embrace" romances that are actually placed under the "Romance" sign at the bookstore, but at least something that would rouse some sort of emotion in me. With a title like The Rebel Wife, wouldn't you expect the same? Instead, Polites seemed like she was legitimately trying to make an argument about society during this time period, and she wasn't concerned with trying to disguise it with a respectable protagonist or plot. In between the many, many references to politics at the time, she makes the argument several times: women during this time period were like slaves. They don't get the freedom to marry who they want, they don't get the freedom to vote, they don't get the freedom to choose to obey their husbands or not (especially when it comes to their bodies), they don't have the freedom to conduct their own affairs or to manage their own money, and they don't have the freedom to snub society and do whatever they want.

I get it. And I think it's an important lesson we've learned. However, I would be lying if I said I preferred this social and political piece of work over the charms of Rhett Butler.

Misfit says

Augusta (Gus) Branson finds herself widowed after her husband dies of a mysterious blood fever and a bit surprised when the executor of her husband's will breaks the news that she's not exactly a well-to-do widow. But wait, is there something else going on here? What is this missing saddle bag of her husband's that former slave Simon is searching high and low for? And who would want to stop Simon and Gus from getting it? Or perhaps Gus has been hitting that laudanum bottle too heavy and she's imagined it all?

Yawn

I love anything and everything southern and post-Civil War and was really excited to get my hands on an early copy, but I was fairly disappointed in this one. The writing itself is engaging (although I loathe first-person present tense), and I did like the Alabama setting as well as seeing the societal changes, but unfortunately that's all we got for the first 200 pages of this 286 page book. That's a wee bit too long to get the story moving and letting the reader know what is going on, and by the time this reader finally saw the connecting dots I had pretty much lost interest in the whole thing.

Library only, then buy it if you love it.

Brandi says

I won this book as a Goodreads Giveaway Winner. I was very excited to begin it and anticipated the book showing up in my mailbox. Unfortunately, I found this book very flat and dull. I had to force myself to read it and finish it. It was very forgettable to me and I went whole days at a time without a thought of it before I remembered that I was reading it and should finish it. The majority of the characters were flat and predictable, some I even wondered why they even had a place in this story.

I found the main character extremely dull. Gus seemed to be very childish and not heroic at all. I had expected from the title *The Rebel Wife*, to have a main character with some grit and fire, instead I found a very childlike, cowardly woman. I would see glimpses of fire towards the end, but each one quickly died out. The book did show a slip into madness for Gus, but it almost seemed to not have a real place in the book and ended as quickly as it began, only spanning a few days time.

I felt like the book gave me many unanswered questions. There were many little details that did not seem to have relevance to the story, more so because there was never any more explanation. I was often left thinking, "What was the point of that?" and hoping it would make sense later, but mostly this did not happen.

With the exception of a very small handful of surprises, this book was very lacking. It just seemed to drag on and I felt, at times, like it would never end. I think that the overall idea of the book was a good one, but it didn't seem well put together.

Kristen says

Impressive command of the era's politics and history, without that getting in the way of the story, which was also excellently told. I kept turning the pages, thinking here the author will indulge himself in what for me is a breather, with pages of digression, those boring bits that I often skim through, but it never happened.

Gus Branson, the rebel wife of the title, must deal with her husband's horrible death - by poison? Disease? He was a "scalawag," a southerner who cooperated with the Union Army's reconstruction of the South, helping the former slaves understand civics and vote, to rebuild a society that had been based on slavery into something else. The goal was similar to what happened in Germany after World War II, and "scalawags" were analogous to the good Germans cooperated with conquering Americans.

As *The Rebel Wife* shows, old hatreds are still alive, and Gus's powerful uncle, called "Judge," since his youth, is well on his way to returning power to the old planter elite class - or at least whites. He's also got power over Gus's husband's estate, and she's penniless. Judge tells her that her husband had been dishonest, and that his debts to his creditors - including Judge himself - were paid off. Gus's only hope is her husband's servant Simon, a man nearly partner rather than servant, despite his black skin. Simon tells Gus that her husband had a packet of money that's disappeared. The two will split it - if they can find it. And does Judge know about the money? The summer heat adds to the brooding sense of violence to come.

Gus's various relationships with her own black servants are the, former slaves, wonderfully evolves. I'd recommend this novel to anyone looking for a good story infused with atmosphere, especially anyone interested in the era.

Tara Chevestt says

The Rebel Wife. Key word, attention grabbing word: REBEL. Uh.. what makes the heroine of this book a

rebel?

I made it to page 113 before just setting it aside...probably for good. Gus is newly widowed, okay. Her husband had a gruesome death. Okay. But again, what makes her a rebel??? She never spoke up to her husband when he was alive, doesn't really speak up enough to the Judge who is now taking control of her estate, doesn't speak up to her "servants" who talk to her in a way she doesn't approve, and word, she doesn't even believe she should have the right to vote.

"Would you like to vote, Miss Gus?" (Her servant asks her. He is a freeman/former slave.)

"Me? Of course not. It's not my affair. Nor is it yours!" (Says our rebellious southern belle.)

Yea, that's a rebel wife, right there. Add to that, the endless vagueness of all the characters and the constant riddles that were supposed to make me feel eaten with suspense, but only served to irritate me, and the book wasn't a winner for me.

Michelle says

I LOVED THIS BOOK!!!!!! The imagery was rich and full, the symbolism of the plague coming but also coming in the form of the White Knights, a potential husband immediately after the death of Gus' husband, the frantic search for the missing pouch, all the secrets Gus' husband kept from her, herself realizing she was no better than a slave, was traded to her husband for a chest of confederate notes...I could go on and on. I think I need to re-read this book again, at another time, at a slower pace, but I couldn't help read it fast because it was such a page turner. Plus, the author is a man, who wrote from a woman's point of view, and very nicely done!

Jeanne says

We first meet Augusta "Gus" Branson as her husband, Eli, is dying a slow, painful death. Gus is shut off from all feelings. As a former Southern belle, she has been shielded and babied all her life. It is as if she exists in a bubble of ignorance of everything around her. The South has lost the Civil War and it has been ugly. Former slaves are now wage-earning employees. Gus is being faced with the challenges of life without her protector in the dangerous Reconstruction Era. Layer by layer, the author reveals who is friend and who is foe and the secrets being kept from her. Even though I did want to shake Gus out of her fog of inaction, it does all come to a satisfying conclusion.

Martha says

This is a stunning debut novel with a little of something for everyone--and I mean that in a good way. There is history (how many novels conclude with a six page bibliography?), there is character development, and there is an element of suspense. What is most admirable is the writer's style. He sketches out the bones of the small Alabama town of Albion (fictional) and its characters. Then, after the death of her husband, as narrator Augusta (Gus) awakens to the reality of her world and the deceptions of the people she has considered friends all of her life, the sketch deepens and fills with color and sounds and emotions and dark implications. Finally, the pace quickens and races to a heart-thudding conclusion. This is a story of the south during

Reconstruction that is brutal in its depiction of the people struggling to survive in a world that has been turned upside down. Post war promises have gone bad for former slave owners and former slaves alike. Most of the time it's each man for himself--and forget about women's rights. One of my favorite lines is toward the end when Gus speaks of some hard truths she has learned about her friends and family and what they have done to each other and to those other members of their families, their former slaves:

"This terrible sin," I say. "We're all bound to each other in it. And we can't get out of it, no matter what we do."

I can't wait to read more from this author.

Tiffany says

I have to be honest, I am not really a fan of this book, although I enjoyed the second half far more than I enjoyed the first half. My major concern is the writing. To me, the writing was extremely slow paced, although the second half went by much faster. Also, the earlier flashback scenes seemed to be faster as well. The writing was especially dragging when the author got caught up in the details and really set the scene. He would describe every minute bit of the scene and it would take away from story, not add to it. I was practically screaming in my head, "Stop describing things that do not matter and just tell the story!" Another thing that I did not like was the way the author introduced characters. He would often mention a name and then, not tell the reader who that person was and what relevance they had to the story until pages, or even chapters later. All that time, even if the scene had changed completely, my mind was busy back on that character, wondering "Who the heck is so-and-so?" This was alleviated in the second half because there were no new characters to introduce, which probably added to my enjoyment of the latter part.

The Lit Bitch says

Saturated in rich, golden prose Taylor Polites's novel, *The Rebel Wife*, oozes engrossing detail and with such a commanding voice/tone from the first page....I found it difficult to put down. The novel contains whispers of literary delight from beloved American classics such as *Gone with the Wind* and is told with a dark edge which echos William Faulkner.

Just as the blazing cover suggests, this novel radiates from within....a golden Southern Gothic novel sure to win the hearts and admiration of many readers. See my full review [here](#)

Keri says

I received this book for free through Goodreads Giveaways.

First of all, I believe this book is far from a light and easy read, which explains why it took so long for me to finish it. But this does not go to say that the book isn't fantastic.

The book is hard to get into. I found myself either confused or bored during some moments. Early on, I also found Gus unlikeable. As the story progressed, though, I was really pulled in. It is very suspenseful and the setting of the war-torn South, plagued by a deadly disease makes for a bleak background that fully enhances

the emotions and pacing of the novel. Gus soon became more likeable and a strong female character, a complete contrast from typical "Southern Belles." Despite the bleak atmosphere, there were moments in the story that did transport me to the classic novel *Gone With the Wind*. There were moments when Gus exactly reminded me of Scarlett O'Hara.

One of my favorite aspects of the book is the relationship between Simon and Gus. Never before have I read a historical fiction book in which there is such a strong relationship between a white Southerner and his or her former slave. Simon's character grew on me and he turned out to be one of the true heroes of the novel.

For lovers of historical fiction, this book is a must. It provides a totally different setting and storyline than any other Reconstruction novel you have probably ever read.

Stuart Smith says

At its core this is a novel of freedom set in a time when freedom was questioned for so many across the south. Polites really hones in on the desperate tones of Augusta, her staff and those in town fearful of sickness. And in that desperation is an excitement that really keeps a reader enthralled and keeps the pages turning. Like Augusta, I (as a reader of her story) didn't know who to trust and who to believe. The mystery really gives this novel some juice.

The moment in the book that grabbed me and made me really love this novel was on page 268 during Rachel and Augusta's final moments together. Rachael says " Or maybe none of us are free. It's just a word they give us to keep quiet. But I'll find it out...Do you feel free, ma'am?" (Augusta says)"I hope you find your freedom, Rachel" Rachel nods and looks at the door, then back at me "I hope you find yours, too".

It's a quiet moment in all the frenzy that stopped me in my tracks and finally see the need in all of these characters. I thought that just summarized what everyone in this novel was looking for and what every reader wants for them all.
