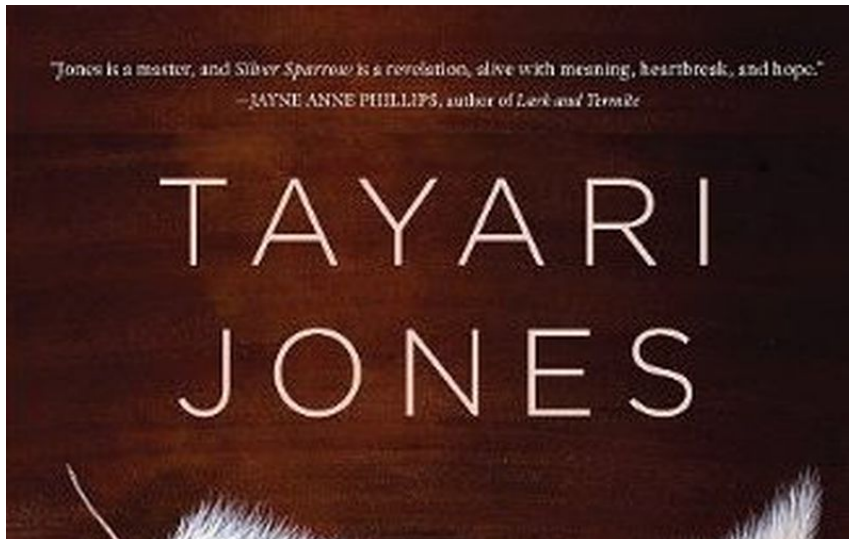


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'Silver Sparrow' by Tayari Jones

By **SHAMONTIEL L. VAUGHN**
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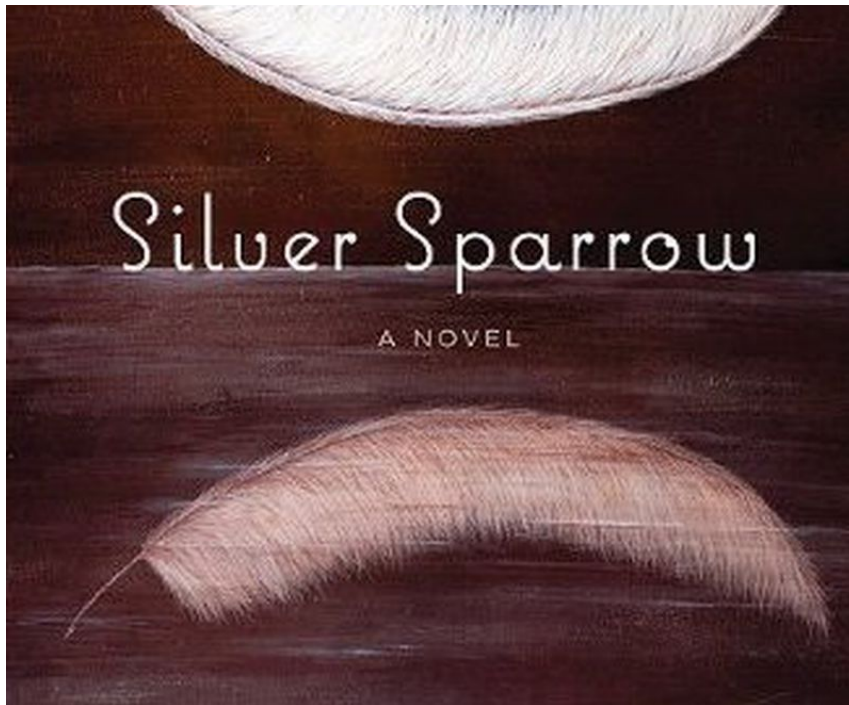


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Imagine knowing that when your father leaves your home, he goes back to his "real" home, where his wife and his other daughter live. Meanwhile you know full well that you are the "secret" daughter of a married man.

Sound messy? It certainly is.

Dana Lynn Yarboro is the daughter of mistress Gwendolyn Beatrice Yarboro. Bunny Chaurisse Witherspoon, who goes by her middle name, is the daughter of James Witherspoon's legal wife Laverne Witherspoon. Dana and Gwendolyn know about Chaurisse and Laverne, but Chaurisse and Laverne have no idea Dana and Gwendolyn even exist.

For 17 years, James and his limo service partner and childhood friend "Uncle" Raleigh have managed to live double lives. Both James and Uncle Raleigh, who dutifully keeps his friend's secret, make visits to Gwendolyn's home to hang out, dance and eat—not too much, though, or they'll be suspiciously full when they reach Laverne's home. Uncle Raleigh's name is on Dana's birth certificate and James even signed a marriage license with Gwendolyn, although he was already married to Laverne.

The marriage was a plan created by Gwendolyn's friend Willie Mae. She told Gwendolyn that getting James to marry her and "making him a bigamist, a criminal would give her something to have up her sleeves."

Laverne has her own beauty salon and listens to women's gossip all day long without ever hearing about her husband's double life. But since Gwendolyn knows the truth, she doesn't hesitate to spy on Laverne or Chaurisse. When Chaurisse got a fur coat, you better believe Dana had to have one as well. When Chaurisse took ballet lessons, Gwendolyn wanted James to pay for Dana to have lessons too. Gwendolyn's logic: Dana "has two working parents."

The constant comparisons to Chaurisse finally get the better of Dana's curiosity, and that's when the prank calls and beauty salon visits start. The two accidentally bump into each other a couple of times at parties and recital practice, too. In a city like Atlanta that has a small-town feel in a big city environment, it was bound to happen.

But Chaurisse and Dana becoming friends wasn't part of the plan, and while Dana had her own sneaky reasons for visiting her sister originally, she actually grows to like her. They hang out at Chaurisse's house and at the beauty salon. Although Dana does odd things such as wanting to sit in her father's spot at the kitchen table, Chaurisse blames these quirks on Dana being lonely. Laverne meets and likes Dana, encouraging her to visit the shop again.

Dana managed not to visit when James or Uncle Raleigh were around, but that plan falls through when the girls head to a party and Chaurisse's car's tire blows out. Chaurisse does what any daughter would do who doesn't know how to change a tire and has a professional driver as a father — she calls him. That's when all hell breaks loose.

Because the book was split into two parts — Dana's side and Chaurisse's side — readers get to watch both girls grow up and listen to their perspectives. There were points when I heard horror music in the background and wanted to scream, "Don't do it. Don't go in there." But if not for the drama, including a new perspective on the "grit throwing" scene with popular soul singer Al Green, this book wouldn't be as suspenseful.

While I had zero sympathy for Gwendolyn, James and Willie Mae, I was left with mixed feelings about Uncle Raleigh and Miss Bunny, James' mother. And who wouldn't want to protect Chaurisse and Laverne?

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Is violence the answer when you're betrayed? Is denial a better solution? Who's wrong and who's right in a situation like this? And what should be the end result? Not everybody will agree with the ending or even small incidents throughout the story, but it's an exciting read all the way through.

Silver Sparrow

By Tayari Jones

Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 340 pages, \$19.95 (hardcover)

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