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Sarah MacTavish

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The truth might set them free, but at what cost?

In the summer of 1860, when slavery ruled the heart of America, two young abolitionists discover how dangerous it can be to believe in freedom for all.

Saoirse Callahan's family is broken. Hunger forced them out of Ireland and they still struggle to survive in their new home, where scorching Texas droughts threaten their small farm. Then, on one blazing Sunday afternoon, a series of mysterious fires devastates the region. Whispered rumors of a slave rebellion soon flame into a statewide panic. Vigilantes scour the countryside for arsonists, targeting foreigners and slaves in a bloodthirsty witch-hunt. Saoirse is determined to find out how the fires really started, but the more questions she asks, the more she puts her family and friends in danger. And the truth may be more than she can handle.

Meanwhile, safe in Pennsylvania, Westleigh Kavanagh can call himself an abolitionist with little fear. But when he realizes his father's new boarder is actually a runaway slave, he must keep the wanted man's identity a secret. Because Westleigh's father is the sheriff, and bound by law to help capture fugitives, whether he believes in slavery or not. Westleigh wants to protect his father from the truth, but the longer he lies, the greater chance they will all be caught. Then Westleigh makes his own discovery—an old forbidden journal that holds secrets of his father's past. Secrets that lead to the Callahans. Secrets that, if unraveled, could destroy both families.

Firebrand Details

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Author : Sarah MacTavish

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From Reader Review Firebrand for online ebook

United Indie Book Blog says

I honestly have no idea where to start with writing this review. This is a wonderful debut novel! I will say that I am not a big history genre reader but I absolutely love Firebrand. I was pulled in right from chapter one and made myself go slow so I could savor the story and the wonderful characters. There is a lot going on but under it all is one common thread that links all the characters. I'm not going to give away any plot in my review, please read the blurb for that. It's written in two POVs, in two different parts of the U.S. so you can see how the parts are different yet similar. The characters are beautifully written and developed, the way they see the events around them is amazing. I honestly think this would be a great read for any YA or YA at heart. I can see this being read in English or History class in high school. Wonderful job and I look forward to reading more from Sarah MacTavish.

Review by Raychel

Rachel Abarca-Contreras says

Adventure and History

Historical Fiction is my reading niche without a doubt, and this book did NOT disappoint. The characters felt real, like my own loved ones, instead of fiction. Like the author, I'm a Texan with Yankee roots, so I've struggled to understand the South in the events leading to the Civil War. The stories intertwined throughout this book gave me a good picture of what happened in my home state, and how real people probably felt. I was a little late to this party in reading Firebrand for the first time, and now I can't wait for the next book! I may even reread this one soon because the series of adventures and mysteries seem re-discoverable.

Joshua Carroll says

Wonderful first novel from an inspiring new author. I confess that historical fiction is not my usual genre, but this book drew me in and kept me engaged despite myself. The characters were endearing and felt like friends by the end. The entire thing is beautiful and thought-provoking, full of lines like this:

"We had the power to change things, and yet while we had pity for the oppressed, we held parties for their oppressors. Injustice festered around us, and we held our tongues. Kept our heads down. Smiled and curtsied. Quiet, polite, safe."

Monica Nolan says

Sarah when I saw you at the book signing it was exciting to know you had finished the book you started and talked of for so long. I got the signed copy and promised myself to read it when I could. It's taken me four months to get to it but I'm so very glad I did. A great job at historical fiction. Wonderful characters leaving me wanting for more of the story. Can't wait for book two!!! Congratulations on a job well done.

Lisa Betham says

I am eagerly awaiting the sequel to this book. I love these characters so much. Do yourself a favor and read this book.

Karen Keith says

This debut novel by Sarah MacTavish is not to be missed. In the current climate of our America, this novel takes us back to when the strife over whose life matters or not began. It's a fascinating story of the heartache over the injustice of slavery and the broken minds that protected it. One side coming from the South and another parallel story coming from the North eventually converge in a gripping tale that kept me on the edge of my seat for that last 100 pages. This story will make you angry, sad, furious and heartbroken and you will be standing right there in the middle with the characters you will fall in love with. The last page states "to be continued" and I want to see the movie version. It's what we need at this time in our country. We need to get back to our roots, clear the chalkboard and draw up new compassionate plans for dealing with all of our heartache over the past. Again, do not miss this fast read.

Stacey says

Firebrand, Sarah MacTavish's debut novel, takes place in the volatile pre-Civil war years of 1860 - 1861 and lets us see this tumultuous time through the eyes of two young abolitionists – Saoirse, a headstrong and passionately impulsive Irish immigrant, and Wesley, a contemplative and studious idealist. The book alternates each chapter between Saoirse in Texas and Wesley in Pennsylvania. Their stories converge in the last fifth of the book and the chapters continue to alternate between Saoirse's perspective and Wesley's perspective, allowing us the delight of seeing each of them through the other's eyes. Firebrand tackles some difficult subjects - slavery, murder, adultery, abuse, and alcoholism. It handles these scenes with compassion and dignity without diminishing the gravity of them. The book remains appropriate for young readers, around ages 13 and up, and would make an excellent addition to a History/English class for middle or high school. I can see this book encouraging teenagers to stand for what they know is right and to believe they can make a difference in their world and their families. I believe adults will enjoy as well. I don't read a lot of historical fiction, but I loved this book and the characters in it. It was a joy to see women, men, girls, and boys portrayed as real people instead of gender stereotypes. Saoirse's strength is brash and daring while Wesley's strength is persevering, frank, and steady. Despite the story's serious nature there are still light moments and quite a bit of humor. This helps to balance it out and make it both a moving and enjoyable read.

Cary Cox says

Excellent read that's hard to put down. Two related families, one on Pennsylvania and one in Texas, face terrible consequences for their beliefs in freedom and equality, and must fight to survive. Readers might want to keep a family tree to remember how the family members are related, if you're older like me! Worth it though!

Linda says

MacTavish has done an amazing thing. YA book that doesn't feel YA. Historical fiction that rolls with the more comfortable fluidity of contemporary fiction. Characters so believable that I didn't even like the main female character for the first part of the book, her teen angst so real it was almost too hard to see past it. But, true to nature, she hits a time of such raw emotion I don't know if I could read it again, and she was slammed with so much pain and humility, my heart totally went out to and I "got" her.

Switching between points of view is a risky venture, but MacTavish pulls it off admirably. I enjoyed both voices, and the short chapters moved the book along almost too quickly.

I respect the amount of cultural and historical research which made the book believable and authentic. My only complaint is the fact that it's book one in a series and, although several parts of the story were tied up enough to be satisfying, there was enough of a cliffhanging twist at the end to make me hope MacTavish is at the keyboard right now hammering away at part 2. I'll be pre-purchasing that one as soon as it's available.

Jessica Dowell says

Saoirse buried her older brother the day after they arrived in Texas. Her family has never been the same since. She blames herself for his death and so does her family. The only ones in her family who still speaks kindly to her is her cousin Jack and Abigail, the family's loyal slave. The two cousins want to free her, but that sentiment is a dangerous one to have for people in their town.

Westleigh lives in the relative comfort and safety of Dove Hollow, Pennsylvania. His anti-slavery views, though not always popular with the people in town, are not a danger to him. That is until he and his adoptive father take in a freedman as a favor to an old friend. When Westleigh overhears a conversation between his father and friend, he begins to question what little he knows about his past.

I could not put Firebrand down from the moment I picked it up. Saoirse is such a stubborn and fiery character. I could not help but root for her, even as I inwardly screamed for her to back down for her own safety. Every foolhardy thing she does comes from a place of fierce love for someone else. I admired her and I felt for her in everything she went through in this story.

Westleigh, though likable, did not impress me at first. I think this was mainly because he (understandably) spends much of the book in confusion and indecision. Still, there was enough to his character that I wanted to continue to get to know him. And then he completely surprised me in Chapter 17! I do love when characters surprise me. After that moment, my respect for him did nothing but grow throughout the rest of the story. I discovered that he is not only loyal and kind but brave as well. Once he knows his mind he acts on his

convictions. There is a quiet fierceness to him. I was sad to leave him when the book ended.

All the characters were well crafted. Every member of the two families had depth, even the members I wanted to hate. It was impossible to not invest in their fate. I loved that the author did not reveal the two families' connections all at once. It kept me captivated.

I would recommend this book to anyone who loves history, suspense-filled plots, and complex characters who surprise you. Warning, this is the first book in a series, which I did not realize until I was halfway finished with it. While it does end in a semi-resolved way, the story is definitely not over yet. I will be waiting with bated breath the launch of book 2, and I cannot wait to see where the plot goes next. There are so many options!

Kathleen Rodgers says

A Novel Rife With Tension On Every Page!

Sarah MacTavish's *Firebrand* is a page-turner. Her characters rise up off the page fully formed, and you will think of them for weeks after finishing this well-crafted story. The writing is tight, and from the opening sentence until the closing scene, she pulls the reader along at a breathless pace.

I highly recommend *Firebrand* for readers of all ages. It will appeal to both males and females.

I'm looking forward to the sequel.

Kathleen M. Rodgers, author of the award-winning novel, *Johnnie Come Lately*

Jacqueline Smith says

Firebrand is an engaging and beautifully-written historical thriller written by debut author, Sarah MacTavish. Set in 1860, *Firebrand* follows the story of two families from two very different worlds, the slavery-ridden South and the free North. I've always looked back on the abolitionists as those who bravely stood up for what is right, but I never fully understood or appreciated the dangers, the true horror, of what it was to believe in something that the rest of the country so passionately opposes. To live in this world was to fear for your life. And Sarah MacTavish, I believe, is the only author who could have told this story.

I had the privilege of meeting Ms. MacTavish and talking to her about her inspiration, research, and writing process. She is a phenomenal author and I was so impressed by her dedication to creating an inspiring and historically accurate book. Like several other reviewers, I have to admit that historical fiction has never been my preferred genre. I'm a big fan of contemporary YA and romance. But Ms. MacTavish has changed my mind. This book is amazing. I cannot wait to read the sequel.

Tonja Drecker says

Historical fiction is a genre I don't hit often, but since I've been taking an interest in this time period lately, I

thought I'd give this one a try. I'm more than glad I did.

Sarah MacTavish does a marvelous job of bringing the past to life. This is told from two different points of view, one from a character living in the North, and one from the South. Each has a very different perspective on the world around them, which grants the entire plot a broadness not usually found in stories set during the abolitionist time period. But it's not only these two characters which draw in, rather there's a rich cast. So many people, each with their own experiences, desires, fears and troubles. This is a book which grabs on many levels and builds a realistic world.

What I really loved about this was the refreshing dialogue. Although set in the past, the characters never feel rusty, flowered or forced. The exchanges, thoughts and feelings come across naturally, over-stepping the feeling of being from the past. The fears and troubles come to life, making it clear how difficult it was to stand up for what was right. After reading this, the abolitionists take on a new dimension and earned respect. In other words--although historical, this is by no means a dry story. There is so much life and action, tension and emotions, that I believe it's something many YAers will have no trouble diving into and devouring every page. Best of all, when the last page is done, the story and characters don't disappear but remain filed away as a part of this time period and change how the reader looks back at it.

Erin Kelley says

I adored this book.

I go to Sarah's teen writing club at the library, and this book deeply reflects her- filled with heart and sarcasm.

Very well written characters and a captivating plot.

Chelsea says

Historical fiction strikes me yet again to the heart, and I can thank Sarah MacTavish for several emotional hours of reading.

Like many people, I have taken history classes in high school; I might not have paid much attention, but I always got the general idea of a historical concept, you know? When I hear the word "abolitionist", I think of heroes, of revolutionaries, of courage and of change. But I forgot that with those, there come villains, resistance, danger and a cause to change. And that's what I realized in Firebrand. When your whole country opposes your way of thinking, the world becomes dangerous.

What I liked most about this novel was the dialogue. It was raw and sharp, and I appreciated the normality of the discussions. What do I mean by normality? You know when you're reading a historical fiction, and the author goes out of her/his way to embellish sentences and to find elegant and old-fashioned words in order to make the readers practically feel out of place? Yeah, that's not what you'll find in this book. The characters talk in a way that you don't feel like it's 1860, you don't feel uprooted by the sheer old-fashionedness of their dialogue. It just comes across as natural, not forced.

Firebrand is written in two POVs: one from the South, one from the North. Their perspectives on the world

and slavery are very different, and this gives depth to the book. Readers encounter two separate lifestyles. Along with those two characters, the rest of the cast is amazing as well. They are all well developed, all with their own experiences, fears and desires. Action-packed scenes help to highlight how all of them are each an individual who is complete, in their own way. They bring so much life and emotions to the pages, that it felt so entirely right that I read it.

Firebrand is beautifully written, and Sarah MacTavish really did a marvelous job for a debut novel!
