

**Audiobook Recommendations
From Mary Margaret Cromarty**

I haven't been inspired to write a review until I read *The Kitchen House* (by Kathleen Grissom, narrated by Orlagh Cassidy and Bahni Turpin)—a great listen. But what really made me want to write you was the one I just finished: *The All-Girl Filling Station's Last Reunion* (written and narrated by Fannie Flagg).

Both the books have multiple narrators and are set in a period of great social change. Both had me laughing and crying during my commute. And both left me happy I'd read them.

Interested? Let me give you a brief overview. I read audiobook editions of both and highly recommend them.

The Kitchen House. The story begins in 1790, in southern Virginia. Captain Pyke has brought home 7-year-old Lavinia whose parents perished during the voyage from Ireland. She is indentured to pay the Captain for her passage and taken, very ill, to the kitchen slaves to recover. Lavinia grows attached to Belle, the Captain's illegitimate slave daughter, who works in the kitchen house. Belle's is the second narrator. (Belle is narrated by Bahni Turpin who narrated Minny in *The Help*.)

Eventually, Lavinia enters the world of the big house and the orbit of the mistress—the third narrator—and her story is added to Lavinia's and Belle's.

The book is full of real people, coping with difficult situations, and living with their decisions, good or bad. It is rich with details and narratives that bring life on a plantation to vivid reality. The characters develop and mature as the story progresses.

If you like historical romance, skip this book. If historical romances aren't your cup of tea—if you like characters that feel real, check out *The Kitchen House*. All is not roses but it won't disappoint. (Audiobook is just under 13 hours.)

The All-Girl Filling Station's Last Reunion begins in current day Alabama where Mrs. Sookie Poole has just married off the last of her daughters. She's looking forward to relaxing but has to deal with her overbearing and overwhelming, 80-something-year-old mother.

A letter is delivered to Lenore, in care of Sookie, who, thinking it a bill, opens the envelope. The contents turn Sookie's world upside down and leave her questioning everything she thought she knew about herself, her family, and her life.

The second, intertwined storyline, begins back in the 1940's, as the Jurdanralinski family opens a filling station in Pulanski, Wisconsin. The story follows the eldest daughter, Fritz, as she copes with life during the war years and becomes a WASP—Women Airforce Service Pilot.

Sookie started off a little shallow (which was, at times a bit frustrating—I wanted to shake her) but she grew through the story until she was a multi-faceted woman, in charge of her life. Sookie, Fritz and Lenore are well-developed characters I've enjoyed spending the last several days with. This is a very entertaining novel with a sly, twisting mystery at its heart. (Audiobook is just under 11 hours.)

David Cornwell, pen name John le Carré, was born in Poole, England in 1931. Although the author of some of the greatest spy stories ever written, Le Carré mainly writes about good manners and proper social behavior. Most of his stories cleverly satirize the British class system while—like many of the novels written by Jane Austen and Charles Dickens—seeming to be about something else. Espionage was played out on the Cold War's battlefield, and spies were the ground troops. In Le Carré's world, a spy is more like the man down the hall rather than a pro-active, risk-taking loner such as Ian Fleming's James Bond. With the international success of his third novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), Le Carré left the British Foreign Office—he was in the Service from 1959 to 1964—and devoted himself to writing. (Graham Greene called Le Carré's novel the best spy story he'd ever read.) The plot revolves about the Berlin Wall, an ugly construct of breeze blocks topped with barbed wire that, for 28 years, was the symbol of the East-West confrontation. Built in August of 1961, the Wall represented an ideology gone awry. Many of us lived through that era of brinkmanship when we feared that some idiot (or someone with suicidal tendencies) might initiate a nuclear exchange. (It almost came about during the Cuban missile crisis in October of 1962.)

In his early novels and the trilogy: *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, *The Honorable Schoolboy* and *Smiley's People*, Le Carré's chief protagonist is George Smiley, a short, self-effacing man with imperfect eyesight (as well as an astronomical IQ and a Henry Higgins-like ear). Smiley seamlessly blends into the story's background, and vanishes from memory instantly. His methodology seems to be more that of a character out of an Agatha Christie novel rather than an Eric Ambler tale. Had Smiley worked for the London police instead of British Intelligence he would be one of literature's most prominent detectives.

Le Carré is a master craftsman who's seen several of his stories made into movies. Besides his early novels, which includes *The Looking Glass War*, Le Carré wrote *The Little Drummer Girl*, *The Russia House*, *The Secret Pilgrim*, and *The Constant Gardener* (which Le Carré considers, along with *A Perfect Spy*, to be his best work). His personality was heavily influenced by his father, a charming rogue who, when he wasn't hob-nobbing in aristocratic circles, was spending time in a jail cell. Le Carré himself confines his duplicity to the printed word, imbuing his protagonists— notably Smiley—with a moral clarity. (Not so easy to do since espionage normally discourages forthright behavior.)

-Essay by Bill Lounsbury

KRL has all of the books referenced in this issue.

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