



Sapphire's Grave

Hilda Gurley-Highgate

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The debut of a major new talent, **SAPPHIRE'S GRAVE** tells the stories of several generations of African-American women, bringing their spirit and their sorrow to life with a power, sensitivity, and immediacy.

In 1749 in Sierra Leone, a woman of fierce dignity is captured and forced onto a slave ship. On the harrowing voyage to the Americas, she is beaten for her unrelenting will and staunch pride. When she arrives, she gives birth to a daughter who is called Sapphire because of the "black-blue-black" complexion she shares with her mother. Sapphire has also inherited her mother's strength and defiant spirit, and despite a life of poverty and oppression, she grows up to mother several daughters of her own. Even when tragedy strikes and part of Sapphire dies, her strength gives rise to a legend that will sustain the women who follow her, "each carrying something of her mother, her grandmother, her aunts; each passing on to her own daughters blessing and cursing, the consequences of her own choosing.

Through the lives of Sapphire and her descendants, Hilda Gurley-Highgate not only creates a poignant and engrossing saga of black women in America, she brilliantly illuminates the meaning of roots and the links between women and their female ancestors, a tie that often appears tenuous, undefined, and distant, but is strong, palpable, and much closer than we imagine. Written in luminous prose, **SAPPHIRE'S GRAVE** is an astonishing work by an author poised to take the literary world by storm.

From the Hardcover edition.

Sapphire's Grave Details

Date : Published December 23rd 2003 by Broadway Books (first published 2002)

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Author : Hilda Gurley-Highgate

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From Reader Review Sapphire's Grave for online ebook

Kathleen McRae says

This book describes generations of black women who rose through slavery, then emancipation into poverty and predation. The institution of slavery fractured family bonds. Black women today still struggle with discrimination both sexual and economic.

Martha Johnson says

The premise of the book is important. I wasn't quite as gripped by the transcendence of the women's spirits across generations as I wanted to be. The writing was good but it is not easy to capture rich, deep personalities and their idiosyncrasies without sounding like a movie script. Admirable attempt.

Titilayo says

I was impressed with the ease of the reading and the composition of the story. The ending was a bit disappointing, but it was a good book.

Cathy says

tried to read but couldn't - the language and topics were way too offensive to bother with.

Shelley says

This is one of those books you read that you never, ever forget.

Sue says

Vague and disjointed.

Mocha Girl says

Sapphire's Grave is a moving and poignant debut novel by Hilda Gurley-Highgate. The author transcends two centuries to reveal the foundation of a family: an African captive called Sapphire because of her beautiful blue-black skin tone. Her physical stature and dauntless attitude commands a semblance of respect from everyone, including her enslavers. Sapphire remains strong, defiant, and unbroken despite the horrors

of the Middle Passage, systematic rape, physical beatings, and back-breaking slave labor. So daring is she that immediately following a brutal act of sexual abuse at the hands of her owner who promises to do the same to her infant daughter when she is of age, Sapphire kills her daughter rather than allow the child to suffer the same fate she herself has endured.

At death, Sapphire is hastily buried in a shallow grave, but her tormented soul cannot rest. In spirit form, she approaches each of her female descendents and evokes memories and visions for them to discover, awaken, and use their inherent inner strength to love themselves, gain self-respect, and obtain inner peace to survive in a cruel and difficult world. For the next two hundred years, Sapphire touches the bewitched Sister, the prostitute Vyda Rose, the lovelorn Jewel, the artistic Clovey, and truth-telling, outspoken, shameless Rae'ven who embodies Sapphire's spirit completely and thus allows Sapphire to return to the grave satisfied and fulfilled.

The author writes in a thoughtful, lyrical prose which educes a myriad of emotions and reader empathy for the characters. Gurley-Highgate offers the reader an introspective look inside the lives and minds of the lead characters and their lovers. She clearly illustrates how Sapphire's spirit changes, fortifies, and empowers her daughters regardless of their station in life. There is a valuable lesson in this book for all women regardless of race and/or socio-economic class.

So touching and well written that this book has earned a place on my best reads list. Bravo, Ms. Gurley-Highgate! A job well done...I cannot wait until the next release.

Kesia Martin says

Interesting reviews from others. I just enjoy every work of art as it's individual self. I was drawn into this story and the struggles and accomplishments of each character and each generation. This author did a wonderful job capturing times and experiences that so many do not wish to imagine nor know much about.

Beverlee says

Fantastic story....I think it's very much like life. We may begin in one place (not we as in particular person but family lineage) & go through tragedies, hardships, joyful moments, and jubilation, eventually coming full circle. I wouldn't necessarily call sexuality a generational curse, but I felt the common point of breakdown for all the women lay in being repressed namely because of what happened to Sapphire-rape vs descendants choosing to love and not be loved in return. Until Jewel and her white lover(coincidence that it's an interracial couple?) find a real love together does Sapphire's spirit begin the process of resting, finally ending with the birth of Clovey's daughter...I don't want to give away everything, but the main lesson that resonated with me is karma exists...things that happened in the past definitely influence the present & decide the future.

Nikki Clark says

A bit confusing at times, but generally well written. There were many times that I developed an attachment to a character only for her to disappear again as time moved forward.

Judy King says

Ok, after two days, I've gone back and looked again at the last chapters of this book. Evidently I was sleep-page turning...The End DOES match the beginning in terms of drama, intrigue and satisfaction. I'm ready to totally revise my review and my rating, with mi culpa, Mi culpa, mi gran culpa...I was so wrong.

And the lack of spark and sparkle in the book evidently had everything to do with my stress and fatigue and little to do with the author, writing or story.

I DO recommend the book...I knew it was an interesting plot theme...an unusual twist. I just wasn't cognizant during the last third of the Story! Wish I could do 4.5 -- I would if I could.

Just want you to know that as you read the following original review: . I wasn't as entranced with this book as I have been with several others lately, but I think that fault had more to do with my stress and fatigue levels and having to read in small whisps instead of good chunks. It's harder to stay drawn into the story that way.

Interesting to see a woman with two families -- living alternately with the husband and the lover. Here in Mexico we call that having the big house and the little house.

I'll give the second half of this book another shot sometime --I don't think it failed me...I think I failed it -- or at least dozed off too often.

Chockletter says

I really wanted to love this book, and I continued to plod through it all the way till the end hoping it would turn around, but....it never did. Such a confusing storyline and no real character development. Such a disappointment.

Ashley says

This book had an extremely promising beginning. I was captured by the imagery and believed that the book would become another "Their Eyes Were Watching God," telling tales of African-American legend. Instead, it went from one generation to another, describing what each woman passed down to her daughter. The tough thing about that is that it never develved very deeply nto th elives of any of the characters. I wanted to know Sapphire's whole story, I wanted to know what happened to Sapphire's mother, I wanted to know what other images Sister saw. Instead, the story grazed over each life and I had trouble getting into it.

R.K. Byers says

this was one of the most warped, bizarre books that I've ever had the displeasure of enjoying.

Babydoll says

Hailed as “capturing regional cadences as succinctly as the poetry of the inner self” by the Baltimore Sun; *Sapphire’s Grave* is the debut novel by author Hilda Gurley-Highgate that leaves the reader gushing with admiration of this eloquently written novel. While reading this book, I was reminded of the genius of Toni Morrison, in that it does not render as an easy read. However, the words take on a profound poetic prose, which prompts the reader to reflect upon it, in order to truly understand and digest the narrative.

Sapphire’s Grave is a seemingly haunting tale that follows numerous generations of women that descend from Sapphire, a strong willed woman described as “black-blue-black” who suffers under the throes of slavery. Through each generation, a piece of Sapphire’s spirit lives on within each woman to fortify and help them rediscover aspects of their innate characteristics, often stolen by the harsh realities of their environment and/or circumstances. Gurley-Highgate highlights the struggles, endurances, and triumphs within each of their grappling life stories.

I appreciated that Gurley-Highgate was able to develop a tale that celebrated the persevering strength of women. She unapologetically created characters that were imperfect in identity and morale, as well as offered the reader insight into ancestral links and how its influence is more powerful than we imagine. I hope that this will not be the last that we see of her literary works.
