

THE
EVOLUTION
OF
CALPURNIA
TATE

"The most delightful
historical novel . . . Fresh,
funny, and poignant."

—*The New Yorker*



JACQUELINE KELLY

CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

When a young naturalist commences the study of a group of organisms quite unknown to him, he is at first much perplexed to determine what differences to consider . . . for he knows nothing of the amount and kind of variation to which the group is subject. . . .

BY 1899, WE HAD LEARNED to tame the darkness but not the Texas heat. We arose in the dark, hours before sunrise, when there was barely a smudge of indigo along the eastern sky and the rest of the horizon was still pure pitch. We lit our kerosene lamps and carried them before us in the dark like our own tiny wavering suns. There was a full day's work to be done before noon, when the deadly heat drove everyone back into our big shuttered house and we lay down in the dim high-ceilinged rooms like sweating victims. Mother's usual summer remedy of sprinkling the sheets with refreshing cologne lasted only a minute. At three o'clock in the afternoon, when it was time to get up again, the temperature was still killing.

The heat was a misery for all of us in Fentress, but it was the



women who suffered the most in their corsets and petticoats. (I was still a few years too young for this uniquely feminine form of torture.) They loosened their stays and sighed the hours away and cursed the heat and their husbands, too, for dragging them to Caldwell County to plant cotton and acres of pecan trees. Mother temporarily gave up her hairpieces, a crimped false fringe and a rolled horsehair rat, platforms on which she daily constructed an elaborate mountain of her own hair. On those days when we had no company, she even took to sticking her head under the kitchen pump and letting Viola, our quadroon cook, pump away until she was soaked through. We were forbidden by sharp orders to laugh at this astounding entertainment. As Mother gradually surrendered her dignity to the heat, we discovered (as did Father) that it was best to keep out of her way.

My name is Calpurnia Virginia Tate, but back then everybody called me Callie Vee. That summer, I was eleven years old and the only girl out of seven children. Can you imagine a worse situation? I was spliced midway between three older brothers—Harry, Sam Houston, and Lamar—and three younger brothers—Travis, Sul Ross, and the baby, Jim Bowie, whom we called J.B. The little boys actually managed to sleep at midday, sometimes even piled atop one another like damp, steaming puppies. The men who came in from the fields and my father, back from his office at the cotton gin, slept too, first dousing themselves with tin buckets of tepid well water on the sleeping porch before falling down on their rope beds as if polcaxed.

Yes, the heat was a misery, but it also brought me my freedom. While the rest of the family tossed and dozed, I secretly made my way to the San Marcos River bank and enjoyed a daily interlude of no school, no pestiferous brothers, and no Mother. I didn't have permission to do this, exactly, but no one said I couldn't. I got away with it because I had my own room at the far end of the hall, whereas my brothers all had to share, and they would have tattled in a red-hot second. As far as I could tell, this was the sole decent thing about being the only girl.


Our house was separated from the river by a crescent-shaped parcel of five acres of wild, uncleared growth. It would have been an ordeal to push my way through it except that the regular river patrons—dogs, deer, brothers—kept a narrow path beaten down through the treacherous sticker burrs that rose as high as my head and snatched at my hair and pinafore as I folded myself narrow to slide by. When I reached the river, I stripped down to my chemise, floating on my back with my shimmy gently billowing around me in the mild currents, luxuriating in the coolness of the water flowing around me. I was a river cloud, turning gently in the eddies. I looked up at the filmy bags of webworms high above me in the lush canopy of oaks bending over the river. The webworms seemed to mirror me, floating in their own balloons of gauze in the pale turquoise sky.

That summer, all the men except for my grandfather Walter Tate cut their hair close and shaved off their thick beards and mustaches. They looked as naked as blind salamanders for the few days it took to get over the shock of their pale, weak



CALPURNIA IS ABOUT TO HAVE THE MOST EXCITING YEAR OF HER LIFE.

THE SUMMER OF 1899 is *hot* in Calpurnia's sleepy Texas town, and there aren't a lot of good ways to stay cool. Her mother has a new wind machine, but instead, Callie's contemplating cutting off her hair, one sneaky inch at a time. She's also spending a lot of time at the river with her notoriously cantankerous grandfather, an avid naturalist. But just when Callie and her grandfather are about to make an amazing discovery, the reality of Callie's situation catches up with her. She's a girl at the turn of the century, expected to cook and clean and sew. What a waste of time! Will Callie ever find a way to take control of her own destiny?



★ "Readers will finish this witty, deftly crafted debut novel rooting for 'Callie Vee.'"—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

"A memorable, warm, spirited young woman who's refreshingly ahead of her time."—*The Horn Book Review*

A NEWBERY HONOR AWARD WINNER
AN ALA NOTABLE BOOK

