

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Tara Conklin is a writer and former lawyer whose first novel, *The House Girl*, (William Morrow) was a New York Times bestseller, #1 IndieNext pick, Target book club pick and has been translated into 8 languages. Her second novel, *The Last Romantics* (William Morrow) was published in February 2019 to wide acclaim. An instant New York Times bestseller, *The Last Romantics* was a Barnes & Noble Book Club Pick, IndieNext Pick, and was selected by Jenna Bush Hager as the inaugural read for The Today Show Book Club.

Before turning to fiction, Tara worked for an international human rights organization and at corporate law firms in London and New York. She was born in St. Croix, US Virgin Islands and grew up in western Massachusetts. She holds a BA in history from Yale University, a JD from NYU School of Law and a Master of Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. Tara now lives in Seattle with her family where she writes, teaches and works with private clients on manuscript development. She is also a sought-after speaker on a wide range of topics, including a writer's life, work-life balance and mid-career pivots.

- [Author's website](#)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Conklin choose to frame the story from 2077? Did you think that was effective?
2. Which of the four Skinner siblings do you like the most?
3. How do the effects of The Pause ripple through each of the four siblings' lives? If the Pause had not happened, what do you think might have been different for each of the siblings?
4. Noni came out of her paralyzing depression a staunch second-wave feminist. In what ways does her brand of feminism help her children, and in what ways does it let them down? How does Noni's feminism compare to Fiona's feminism, and to the feminism we are seeing today? What strides have we made as feminists and where do we still need to go?

5. Joe and Fiona's last conversation was an argument about Fiona's blog, *The Last Romantic*. Whose side do you take in that argument? Why?
6. Caroline and Fiona try to find Luna in several different ways. Why is it so important for them to find her? Did you think the PI was a good idea? The psychic? What did each sister need from the search for Luna, and did she get it? Why didn't Renee want to find Luna? Which sister did you sympathize with the most? The least?
7. After Joe's death, the Skinner sisters break apart for a long time. What brings them back together? How much of family relationships are we able to control? Do you think sometimes it is necessary for families to separate for a time?
8. Do you agree with Fiona's decision to keep Rory's existence from her siblings?
9. Caroline ends her long marriage to Nathan, but they remain friends to the end of their lives. Renee leaves Jonathan in order to have a baby, but allows him to return when the baby is born. Fiona has two great loves: Will and Henry. What is Conklin saying about the nature of marriage? Why do you think the Skinner sisters find and forge meaningful partnerships, but Joe does not?
10. At the end of her life, Noni tells Renee that, though her children have forgiven her for the Pause, she has never forgiven herself. Consider the ideas of betrayal and forgiveness. Who in this novel is a betrayer? Who is forgiven? Do you think forgiveness is necessary for rebuilding a relationship after betrayal?
11. At the beginning of the novel, Fiona says, "This is a story about the failures of love." At the end she says, "I was wrong to tell you that this is a story about the failures of love. No, it is about real love, true love." Which do you think is correct? Is there room for both?

- <https://www.today.com/popculture/join-read-jenna-discuss-tara-conklin-s-last-romantics-t150656>

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

No family is perfect. No one truly knows what's happening behind closed doors unless they're there, a part of it from the beginning. Conklin (*The House Girl*, 2013) captures these truths with honesty and seeming ease in her second novel, a beautifully written story of four siblings' love for one another across their entire lives. Sibling relationships are exposed in their truest forms as Renee, Caroline, Joe, and Fiona Skinner fall in and out of love with each other over a lifetime. Bound together early in life by both blood and tragedy, they find solace and security in childhood summers spent at a neighborhood pond. These early memories shape their lives and future relationships, and when tragedy strikes again years later, the siblings are once again forced to either sink or swim together. Despite spanning almost a century, *The Last Romantics* never feels rushed. Conklin places readers in the center of the Skinner family, moving back and forth in time and allowing waves of emotion to slowly uncurl. Perfectly paced, affecting fiction. -- Melissa Norstedt (Reviewed 12/1/2018) (Booklist, vol 115, number 7, p24).

### Library Journal

Conklin's sophomore effort (following *The House Girl*) recounts the complex but loving relationships of four siblings whose lives are irrevocably changed after their father dies unexpectedly when they're children, ranging in age from four to 11. Their mother sinks into depression and leaves them to fend for themselves for three years. Elder sister Renee shoulders the majority of the burden and takes this sense of responsibility into a career as a surgeon. Caroline seeks traditional marriage and motherhood at the expense of personal fulfillment, until later in life. Joe, the beloved only brother, becomes the focus of attention and promise for the whole family; his demons are ignored or dismissed until too late. Fiona, the youngest, eventually a celebrated poet, serves as the omniscient narrator. Another family tragedy leads them all to reexamine their lives and their relationships and the impact their early loss had on them. A somewhat implausible framing device, set in the year 2079, serves little purpose, except perhaps to explain the occasional anachronisms and time line inconsistencies that could have been caught by more careful editing. VERDICT Structural problems aside, the examination of trauma and its impact on family relationships is believably rendered. [See Prepub Alert, 7/31/18.] --Christine DeZelar-Tiedman (Reviewed Winter2018) (*Library Journal*, vol 143, issue 21, p67).

### Kirkus Reviews

From the vantage point of a future ravaged by global warming, Conklin's (*The House Girl*, 2013) narrator describes the lingering consequences of the traumatic childhood she shared with her three siblings. In 2079, when the world is increasingly devastated by floods and other climate disasters, renowned 102-year-old poet Fiona Skinner meets a young woman whose parents named her Luna after a woman mentioned in Fiona's world-famous work, "The Love Poem," written 75 years earlier. To answer the young woman's questions about the original Luna, Fiona tells the story of her childhood: After their father dies suddenly in 1981 and their mother, Noni, retreats to her bedroom in paralyzing depression, 4-year-old Fiona, 7-year-old Joe, 8-year-old Caroline, and 11-year-old Renee must fend for themselves for several years in what they call "the Pause" until Noni eventually reclaims her parental responsibility. The Pause creates a powerful bond among the children but affects each differently. Renee carries her take-charge sense of responsibility into a high-powered medical career but avoids having children of her own. Despite the disapproval of Noni, who has become wary of men and dependent womanhood, Caroline marries early and creates a perfect domestic world for her professor husband and their children without considering what world she wants for herself. Coddled, slightly clueless Fiona takes a mindless job at a nonprofit called ClimateSenseNow! (hint, hint) and writes a blog recounting each of her sexual experiences in numerical order. Passionately protective of his sisters, Joe is perhaps the most damaged. Despite early promise, his life skitters off the rails, redeemed only briefly by his love affair with the young bartender Luna before he suffers what Fiona calls his "accident." In reaction, the sisters re-examine their own priorities. A problem, especially in scenes involving Joe, is that Conklin sometimes describes private thoughts and feelings Fiona could not know, although according to the novel's framing device she is recounting her own memory of events. Basically a lukewarm turn-of-the-21st-century family melodrama despite the intermittent, never adequately integrated references to a future wracked by climate change. (Kirkus Reviews, November 15, 2018).

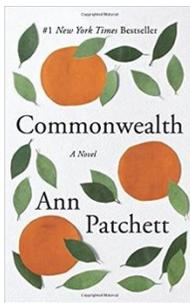
## READALIKES

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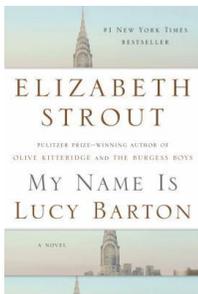
### ***A Place for Us* by Fatima Farheen Mirza**

A family caught between two cultures yields a resonant story of faith, tradition, identity and belonging.



### ***Commonwealth* by Ann Patchett**

A five-decade saga tracing the impact of an act of infidelity on the parents and children of two Southern California families traces their shared summers in Virginia and the disillusionment that shapes their lasting bond.



### ***My Name Is Lucy Barton* by Elizabeth Strout**

Lucy Barton is recovering slowly from what should have been a simple operation. Her mother, to whom she hasn't spoken for many years, comes to see her. Gentle gossip about people from Lucy's childhood in Amgash, Illinois, seems to reconnect them, but just below the surface lie the tension and longing that have informed every aspect of Lucy's life: her escape from her troubled family, her desire to become a writer, her marriage, her love for her two daughters.