



# **Jazz Girl: a Novel of Mary Lou Williams and Her Early Life**

*Sarah Bruce Kelly*

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13-year-old Mary was marked from birth by the "sign of the caul," a powerful signifier in African-American culture. The caul indicates rare powers, especially a tendency toward "second sight." Mary's special gift of seeing manifests itself in visions of ghosts and spirits and culminates in an uncanny musical ability. But her remarkable gifts set her apart from her Pittsburgh neighbors, and she is shunned and belittled. Mary's loneliness is compounded by her mother's cruelty and indifference. She must find her own way through the tangled web of difficulties she faces everyday, and her music becomes her refuge. Gradually, though, Mary learns that music is more than just an escape from her problems. By losing herself in her extraordinary musical creativity, she grapples with her inner demons and discovers the true power of her special gifts.

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