A House Named Brazil

by Audrey Schulman



About the Book

In her exuberant, darkly funny new novel, the critically acclaimed author of *The Cage* and *Swimming with Jonah* turns her dazzling talent in a new direction. *A House Named Brazil* exposes the deep roots of a delightfully twisted family tree.

When the phone rings at precisely six o'clock one evening, it shatters the silence of the farmhouse where Fran has lived alone since her mother abandoned her at age fourteen.

She recognizes the voice on the line immediately. Though it has been four years since she left, Fran's mother offers no apologies or explanations. She is calling to tell Fran the family stories. And though Fran longs to hang up on her, she can't help but be drawn in by the strange and wonderful tales her mother has to tell.

So begins an uneasy relationship between the pair, one that takes place only during the phone calls that continue to come every night at six sharp. Over the course of several weeks, the amazing history of their large and colorful family unfolds: tales of saints and murderers; world-renowned pickpockets and fabulously talented bakers; bitter rivalries and unconditional loves; adventures across continents; tragedy and transcendence.

What Fran urgently seeks is an explanation for her mother's abandonment, but all she gets are tall tales of a family exodus from a desolate Canadian farm to a new home in the Florida swamplands. In the sprawling house named Brazil, there is more than enough room for every larger-than-life member of this family -- and all the noise, heat, and passion they generate.

Discussion Guide

1. Many of us love hearing our family stories told over and over. What do family stories teach us? What is it about them that we enjoy?

2. Why does Gloria, Fran's mother, tell Fran the family stories? What is she offering to her daughter? What do the two of them gain from sharing the family stories?

3. Do you think that family "myths" tend to be factually true or not? Of the tales Gloria tells, how much do you think is true? Does it matter whether Gloria is stretching the truth? Why or why not?

4. As a story is retold through the generations, how does it tend to change? How do you think the family stories from Fran's family got changed?

5. Fran goes through a transition during the course of the book. In what ways does she change? What role do the stories play in this transformation?

6. What do you think the house called Brazil represents? Why did the author choose this title? What would you have named the book?

7. Fran and her mother don't have a typical mother/daughter relationship. In what ways is their relationship normal? In what ways is it different? Would you want someone like Gloria as your mother?

8. Why do you think Gloria left Fran alone at such a young age? Do you think Fran would have learned the family stories if her mother hadn't left?

9. How do the family stories change Fran's relationship with her mother?

10. There are several examples of parenting in the book, both in Fran's life and within the tales her mother tells. How good or bad is the parenting in the book? Would you consider any of the parents "ideal"?

11. Of all the relatives, such as Celia and Cessil, who did you like the best? Why? Did some of the characters come to life more than others?

12. At one point Fran admits she isn't revealing everything that happened. Why do you think she is keeping some things hidden from the reader? What do you think she might not be saying? What does this say about the book?

13. What do you think happens after Fran leaves the family farm?

Author Bio

The Cage, Swimming With Jonah, and **A House Named Brazil**. In addition to writing, Ms. Schulman programs software, teaches creative writing, and travels the globe in search of adventure. Born in Montreal, she now lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Critical Praise

This family saga with overtones of magical realism . . . is an entertaining, and at times affecting, portrayal of that most basic of human instincts -- our desire not to be forgotten.

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Publication Date: September 5, 2000
Genres: Fiction
Hardcover: 320 pages
Publisher: William Morrow
ISBN-10: 0380977990
ISBN-13: 9780380977994