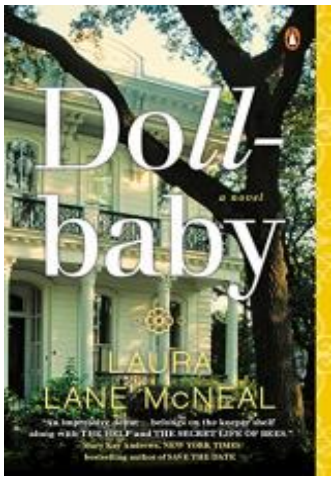
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Dollbaby

by Laura Lane McNeal



About the Book

When Ibby Bell's father dies in the summer of 1964, her mother Vidrine deposits the 11-year-old with her eccentric grandmother Fannie Bell, whom she didn?t know existed. Fannie, who lives in a decrepit Victorian mansion in Uptown New Orleans, tends to wind up in the local asylum every now and then. Her black cook, Queenie, who runs the household, and Queenie?s outspoken daughter, Dollbaby, take young Ibby under their wing and initiate her into the ways of the South --- both its grand traditions as well as its darkest secrets. As Ibby uncovers the ghosts of her family's past, she learns that family can be found in places you least expect it.

Uplifting and funny, poignant and full of verve, DOLLBABY is a novel of Southern eccentricity, secrets and charm. Fans of Sue Monk Kidd, Pat Conroy and Harper Lee won?t want to miss this one!

Discussion Guide

1. Ibby?s arrival to Fannie?s home is the catalyst for change. How does Ibby transform the household?

2. Ibby is warned early on not to ask Fannie about her past. Why is she given this advice?

3. Why does Vidrine leave Ibby with Fannie? Later, after four years, why does Vidrine suddenly come back and what does she wish to achieve from the visit?

4. As Ibby lives in Fannie?s house, she begins to uncover its hidden truths, both physically and emotionally. What secrets does the house hide, and what do they mean to her?

5. In some ways Fannie is very old-fashioned, yet in other ways she seems quite progressive for someone of her era. How would you characterize her, and why?

6. Dollbaby wants to participate in the civil rights protests but Queenie tries to discourage her. What is the difference between their views on the issue and why do you think they differ?

7. As the era unfolds, what are its political effects on Fannie?s household? How do the realities of race and class trickle down to affect the characters? lives?

8. Fannie tells Ibby that she must be ?willing to live the life that is waiting for you.? What does she mean by this, and how does the advice relate to both of their lives?

9. Through this novel McNeal seems to suggest that family is what we make it. How does Ibby?s adopted family influence the person she ultimately becomes?

Author Bio

Laura Lane McNeal grew up in New Orleans where people laugh a lot, talk with their hands, love good music, good food, and will make up any excuse for a party. After receiving two undergraduate degrees from Southern Methodist University, she went on to earn an MBA from Tulane University. DOLLBABY is her first novel.

Photo Credit: Carlton Mickle

Critical Praise

?In this tender coming-of-age novel, McNeal brings to life a place, an era and an amazing cast of strong, larger-than-life characters. Heartrending, captivating and, ultimately, triumphant.?

Dollbaby
by Laura Lane McNeal

Publication Date: June 23, 2015
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Penguin Books
ISBN-10: 0143127497
ISBN-13: 9780143127499