No One Is Coming to Save Us

by Stephanie Powell Watts

About the Book

Named one of the most anticipated books of 2017 by *Entertainment Weekly, Nylon, Elle, Redbook, W Magazine* and *The Chicago Review of Books*

JJ Ferguson has returned home to Pinewood, North Carolina, to build his dream house and to pursue his high school sweetheart, Ava. But as he reenters his former world, where factories are in decline and the legacy of Jim Crow is still felt, he?s startled to find that the people he once knew and loved have changed just as much as he has. Ava is now married and desperate for a baby, though she can?t seem to carry one to term. Her husband, Henry, has grown distant, frustrated by the demise of the furniture industry, which has outsourced to China and stripped the area of jobs. Ava?s mother, Sylvia, caters to and meddles with the lives of those around her, trying to fill the void left by her absent son. And Don, Sylvia?s unworthy but charming husband, just won?t stop hanging around.

JJ?s return --- and his plans to build a huge mansion overlooking Pinewood and woo Ava --- not only unsettles their family, but stirs up the entire town. The ostentatious wealth that JJ has attained forces everyone to consider the cards they?ve been dealt, what more they want and deserve, and how they might go about getting it. Can they reorient their lives to align with their wishes rather than their current realities? Or are they all already resigned to the rhythms of the particular lives they lead?

NO ONE IS COMING TO SAVE US is a revelatory debut from an insightful voice; with echoes of THE GREAT GATSBY, it is an arresting and powerful novel about an extended African American family and their colliding visions of the American Dream. In evocative prose, Stephanie Powell Watts has crafted a full and stunning portrait that combines a universally resonant story with an intimate glimpse into the hearts of one family.

Discussion Guide

1. What is this significance of the novel?s allusions to THE GREAT GATSBY? In what way does NO ONE IS COMING TO SAVE US both complement and contrast with Fitzgerald?s classic?

2. The novel is written from a number of perspectives. How does that multi-perspective approach help to shape the reading experience?

3. JJ is the lynchpin of the story, but the novel is mostly comprised of female voices. What is the effect of having the central cast made up of mostly women?

4. The mother/daughter relationship between Sylvia and Ava is a fascinating portrayal of intergenerational tension. How is their dynamic presented on the page, and what are the conflicts that threaten their relationship?

5. At the start of the novel, Ava and her husband Henry have been draining their savings trying to conceive for years, and Henry is dealing with cutbacks in his hours at the furniture factory where he works. How do their economic anxieties bleed into their marriage?

6. Sylvia talks to Marcus, a prisoner, after his friends and family have given up on him. Do you think Sylvia is right to have hope for him? Do you think he has a chance at turning his life around?

7. JJ builds an empty dream house, while Sylvia reminisces about the people who once filled her little house. What do houses mean to these characters? What is the difference between a house and a home?

Author Bio

Stephanie Powell Watts won the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence for her debut story collection, WE ARE TAKING ONLY WHAT WE NEED (2012), also named one of 2013?s Best Summer Reads by *O: The Oprah Magazine* . Her short fiction has been included in two volumes of the Best New Stories from the South anthology and honored with a Pushcart Prize.

Ms. Powell Watts? stories explore the lives of African Americans in fast food and factory jobs, working door to door as Jehovah?s Witness ministers, and pressing against the boundaries of the small town, post-integration South. Her debut novel, NO ONE IS COMING TO SAVE US, follows the return of a successful native son to his home in North Carolina and his attempt to join the only family he ever wanted but never had. As Ms. Powell Watts describes it, ?Imagine THE GREAT GATSBY set in rural North Carolina, nine decades later, with desperate black people.?

Born in the foothills of North Carolina, with a PhD from the University of Missouri and a BA from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, she now lives with her husband and son in Pennsylvania where she is an associate professor at Lehigh University.

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