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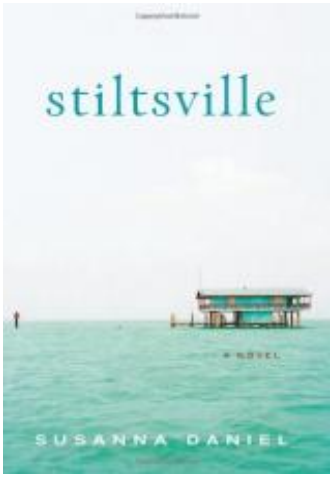
Stiltsville

by Susanna Daniel



About the Book

One sunny morning in 1969, Frances Ellerby finds herself in a place called Stiltsville, a community of houses built on pilings in the middle of Biscayne Bay. It's the first time the Atlanta native has been out on the open water, and she's captivated. On the dock of a stilt house, with the dazzling Miami skyline in the distance, she meets the house's owner, Dennis DuVal --- and a new future reveals itself.

Turning away from her quiet, predictable life back home, Frances moves to Miami to be with Dennis. Over time, she earns the confidence of his wild-at-heart sister and the approval of his oldest friend. Frances and Dennis marry and have a child --- but rather than growing complacent about their good fortune, they continue to face the challenges of intimacy in the complicated city they call home.

With **Stiltsville**, Susanna Daniel weaves the beauty, violence, and humanity of Miami's coming-of-age with an enduring story of a marriage's beginning, maturity, and heartbreaking demise.The book gets its title from Stiltsville even though it?s only partially set there. What role do you think Stiltsville, the place, plays in the novel?s themes?

Discussion Guide

1. Frances is writing a memoir of her marriage and family life, but she chooses to highlight only particular years and summarize others. Why do you think she focuses on these events?

2. How does the novel mimic the memoir form? How does it differ from it? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story so much like a memoir?

3. Miami has changed a lot since the years of the novel. How would this family be different if they were living in Miami at the present time?

4. A lot has been made of the life-changing decision Frances makes at the very end of the novel. Why do you think she made that decision? Would you make the same one, or a different one, if you were in her shoes?

5. Stiltsville has been called a love story but not a romance. Do you agree? Why?

6. Though her life is conventional --- husband, child, home --- Frances comes to understand that her life is not mapped, that very little can be predicted for the future. Do you think that?s true of your own life?

7. How would you characterize the relationship between the narrator and the other women in the novel --- Bette, Marse, Margo, and Gloria? Are these relationships realistic or typical? In what ways do they defy convention and stereotype?

8. Discuss in particular the relationship between Frances and Marse, which survives an early trauma when Dennis falls for Frances instead of Marse. How does their friendship make it through this? Who is more responsible for the friendship?s salvation?

9. The last line of the book offers, ultimately, a justification for the act of telling the story. Discuss what this line means and how it relates to the book as Frances? post-marriage project.

Author Bio

Critical Praise

?[Daniel] has written that rare thing, a novel that conveys the drama in the everyday lives of good, normal people. . . . I can?t quite identify the magic by which Daniel maintains narrative tension and drive. . . . It has something to do with her clear, detailed view of Frances? life, but mostly, I think, it lies in the plain, faintly lyrical prose, which rises quietly to a surprising crescendo of well-earned feeling at the end.?

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Publication Date: August 1, 2010
Genres: Fiction
Hardcover: 320 pages
Publisher: Harper
ISBN-10: 0061963070
ISBN-13: 9780061963070