



Stiltsville

By Susanna Daniel
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Introduction

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?

Questions for Discussion

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.

About the Author

Susanna Daniel was born and raised in Miami, Florida, where she spent much of her childhood at her family's stilt house in Biscayne Bay. She is a graduate of Columbia University and the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, and was a Carl Djerassi Fiction Fellow at the University of Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.

Her stories have been published in Harcourt's Best New American Voices Anthology, One Story, Epoch, The Madison Review, and SignificantObjects.com.

Susanna lives with her husband and son in Madison, Wisconsin, where during the long winter she dreams of the sun and the sea, and of jumping off the stilt house porch at high tide. She is the author of the book *Stiltsville*, and is at work on a second novel.