

When the Reckoning Comes

Harper Perennial

By LaTanya McQueen

ISBN: 9780063035041

Introduction

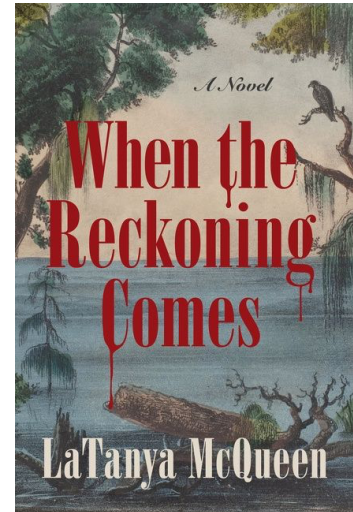
A haunting novel about a black woman who returns to her hometown for a plantation wedding and the horror that ensues as she reconnects with the blood-soaked history of the land and the best friends she left behind.

More than a decade ago, Mira fled her small, segregated hometown in the south to forget. With every mile she traveled, she distanced herself from her past: from her best friend Celine, mocked by their town as the only white girl with black friends; from her old neighborhood; from the eerie Woodsman plantation rumored to be haunted by the spirits of slaves; from the terrifying memory of a ghost she saw that terrible day when a dare-gone-wrong almost got Jesse—the boy she secretly loved—arrested for murder.

But now Mira is back in Kipsen to attend Celine's wedding at the plantation, which has been transformed into a lush vacation resort. Mira hopes to reconnect with her friends, and especially, Jesse, to finally tell him the truth about her feelings and the events of that devastating long-ago day.

But for all its fancy renovations, the Woodsman remains a monument to its oppressive racist history. The bar serves antebellum drinks, entertainments include horrifying reenactments, and the service staff is nearly all black. Yet the darkest elements of the plantation's past have been carefully erased—rumors that slaves were tortured mercilessly and that ghosts roam the lands, seeking vengeance on the descendants of those who tormented them, which includes most of the wedding guests.

As the weekend unfolds, Mira, Jesse, and Celine are forced to acknowledge their history together, and to save themselves from what is to come.



Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe the friendship dynamic between Mira, Jesse, and Celine? In what way does race play into the dynamics of their friendship?
2. How would you describe the relationship Mira has with her mother, and how has this relationship had an influence on Mira's life, from her interactions with others, her job, and how she views herself?

3. Why do you think Mira's mother feels the way she does about Jesse? How does it affect Mira's own friendship with him? How does it affect how she sees and treats him?
4. Why do you think Mira refuses to tell Jesse what she saw on the day they snuck out to visit the Woodsman Plantation?
5. What are each of their reasons (Mira, Jesse, and Celine) for wanting, or not wanting, to find and sneak into the Woodsman house?
6. Following the aftermath of what happens when Jesse and Mira snuck onto the Woodsman Plantation, Mira begins to have nightmares, described as "always a menagerie of faces wearing masks, the masks painted black and outlined in white." What is the symbolism behind this dream? Do any of the characters, literally or figuratively, wear masks?
7. What does Mira mean when she says, "Black girls like her had always been invisible"? Have you ever felt invisible or ignored? How did it impact your self-image?
8. Have you ever visited and toured any plantations? In what ways did your experience mirror or differ from Mira's when she comes back to Kipsen and sees how the Woodsman Plantation has been renovated?
9. After Mira has seen what the Woodsman Plantation has become, she goes to a bar and has a drink and thinks about how "she felt shame for participating, for coming and being complicit." Do you think Mira is complicit and if so, in what way?
10. How do Celine and Mira differ in how they see the Woodsman Plantation? What does the plantation represent for each of them? Why do you think Celine decided to have her wedding at the Woodsman Plantation? Why is it such an issue for Mira?
11. Jesse and Mira disagree over whether they should go back and warn the guests at the plantation about the ghosts. What are each of their reasons? What has led to them to feeling the way they do?
12. After Mira confesses her feelings to Jesse, he responds by saying how neither of them knows the other: "We know who we used to be, but that's not enough. We can't love ourselves in the past, or whoever we thought we were." What does he mean by this? How has Mira seen Jesse? How does Jesse think Mira sees him?
13. Why do you think Jesse was unable to see the ghosts? Why was Mira able to see them? What were they trying to make her see and why was it important that she see it?
14. Compare the stories people in the present told of what they believe happened at the Woodsman Plantation to the flashback reenactments that Mira sees. What was similar? What was different? Why do you think no one knows the real story of what happened in the past?

15. After having read *When the Reckoning Comes*, do you believe the ghosts were responsible for any of the present-day deaths?