

[PDF] River, Cross My Heart (Oprah's Book Club)

Breena Clarke - pdf download free book

Books Details:

Title: River, Cross My Heart (Oprah's

Author: Breena Clarke

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Description:

Oprah Book Club® Selection, October 1999: Breena Clarke's first novel takes place in Georgetown in 1925, where a large and close-knit African American community took shape beneath the shadow of segregation. At the center of the story is baby Clara, who is swallowed by the Potomac as her sister, Johnnie Mae, cools off in the brackish water. It's the only place the girls can find relief—they're banned from the new, clean swimming pool the white kids use.

After Clara drowns, the river is never the same, and Johnnie Mae hovers on the edge of womanhood wondering if she'll be able to get past her guilt and emptiness. In an eloquent passage, Clarke writes, "Losing a loved one, a family member, is like losing a tooth. After a while, those teeth

remaining shift and lean and spread out to split the distance between themselves and the other teeth still left, trying to close up spaces."

Bits of wisdom like this are the book's charm. Most remarkable are the church scenes, which Clarke renders almost purely in the give-and-take of voices: the booming preacher's sermon ("The people we love, we only borrowing them"), and the congregation's "Praise Jesus, Amen" exclamations. The author based her novel on stories passed down in Georgetown--tales of that area's first black churches, founded when people decided they wanted their own place of worship, and implicitly their own God. In church the novel takes flight. Elsewhere *River, Cross My Heart* suffers from clumsy, purple prose, and a plot that moves forward in labored fits and starts. Clarke painstakingly tries to re-create this past world, but sometimes it seems her duty to history is holding her back, bogging her down in period-piece details. In the effortless church scenes, history loses its gravity and is absorbed by grace. --*Emily White* --This text refers to an alternate edition.

From Publishers Weekly Debut writer and Washington, D.C., native, Clarke has written a novel as lyric and alternately beguiling and confounding as its title. It is the story of the drowning of a six-year-old child, and the tragedy's ramifications for her family and neighbors in the black area of Georgetown in 1925 D.C. Clarke's scene-building skills are the novel's strengths and occasionally its weaknesses, as each chapter is an intense set piece that sometimes provokes more questions than answers. The story is ultimately that of the effects of Clara Bynum's death on her 12-year-old sister, Johnnie Mae, who was babysitting Clara at the time she fell into the river. Johnnie Mae suffers guilt, fear and loss, endures dreams, imaginings and confusion as she sees visions of her sister everywhere: in a trauma-stung classmate who wears braids like Clara's, and the vapor from a boiling pot of green beans that resembles her sister's face. Against a felt, poignant and meticulously detailed panorama of the African-American (then called "colored") community of Georgetown, Johnnie Mae struggles to find her bearings, to cope with institutional and family expectations, and with puberty and race. Johnnie Mae ultimately derives strength from her element, the water, as she becomes a talented swimmer, but her parents Alice and Willie struggle with inextinguishable grief. From the first vivid description of the Potomac, liquid elements provide themes and narrative tension in this plangent coming-of-age story, granting the reader a necessary, if temporary, distancing from the blunt fact of a dead child. Indeed, Clarke's research about African-American Georgetown in the early 20th century revisits a time and place as intricate as any, but so remote from most memories that the historical details are fascinating footnotes to an era. While authorial asides are sometimes intrusive, this is a haunting story. Agent, Cynthia Cannell. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the edition.

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