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Lesley M.M. Blume

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It's 1932, the Depression. Things are evening out among people everywhere. Tennyson Fontaine and her sister Hattie live in a rickety shack of a house with their mother and father and their wild dog, Jos. There is no school, only a rope swing in the living room and endless games of hide-and-seek in the woods on the banks of the Mississippi. But when their mother disappears and their father sets off to find her, the girls find themselves whisked away to Aigredoux, once one of the grandest houses in Louisiana, and now a vine-covered ruin. Under the care of their austere Aunt Henrietta, who is convinced the girls will save the family's failing fortunes, Tennyson discovers the truth about Aigredoux, the secrets that have remained locked deep within its decaying walls. Caught in a strange web of time and history, Tennyson comes up with a plan to bring Aigredoux's past to light. But will it bring her mother home?

Tennyson Details

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From Reader Review Tennyson for online ebook

Abby Johnson says

The year is 1932 and 11-year-old Tennyson Fontaine's high-strung, artistic mother has left, leaving her two daughters to be dropped off at their ancestral home, Aigredoux. This crumbling Louisiana plantation home has been deteriorating since the Civil War, much to the distress of Tennyson's Aunt Henrietta who lives at Aigredoux and struggles to find the money to repair it. Trapped in a creepy, falling-down house with relatives who can only cling to the past, Tennyson must come up with a plan to bring her mother back. When Tennyson discovers that her dreams are telling her the story of Aigredoux's history, she has an idea... but is it enough to bring her mother back? And what haunting secrets will she learn through her dreams?

Life and the characters at Aigredoux are suitably creepy. I loved the gothic tone and all the details that made the crumbling plantation come to life. I generally dislike dreams as a literary device, but the premise worked here. The house was almost another character in the story and it made sense that it would sneak into Tennyson's dreams, communicating its history. I would have given the book a higher rating, but it ended so abruptly and there was so much more to be wrapped up... I feel jilted... My only other criticism (and this is something I noticed in *The Rising Star of Rusty Nail*, too) is that sometimes the dialogue sounds anachronistic and that jolted me out of the story occasionally.

BellaNYVA says

This book could have been so good. The writer set the story up to be so strong and powerful and then failed in so many ways. Too bad.

GypsyBookworm says

I didn't like this. I thought it started out interestingly enough, but it quickly went downhill. I waited the whole book for it to become actually scary but I didn't find it creepy. I also felt that even though this is a middle grade book, and my expectations of maturity shouldn't have been overly high, it become increasingly MORE juvenile as the book went on. The ending was terrible. It wasn't an ending at all, merely a cop out. I couldn't believe the author let the book end the way it did, and there is no sequel so that's just it I suppose. I wasn't impressed.

Jennifer says

I wasn't very interested in picking up this book-- the title and cover did nothing for me. There was no dust jacket to draw me in further. It waited on my nightstand for quite some time. Was it Gothic something-or-other? A ghost story? Meh.

It didn't take too much reading, however, to be thoroughly enveloped by the eerie mood in this novel. I loved the bohemian unschooling feel of *Inisfree*-- which was almost immediately dashed by tragedy. The sisters

had each other if they had nothing else.

Tennyson's dreams and the almost visceral feel of Aigredoux were the real charm of the novel for me, though. The bitter hopelessness of the situation came through in her calmness, her oldness. The sense of history felt totally palpable.

Aimée says

I was irritated with the ending, mostly because it still has like 20 pages of useless appendices.

Alexandra says

"That's what the Mississippi does. It tempts you in, and then it catches you. It loves you and doesn't want to let you go. So it pulls you down to the bottom and keeps you there."

Like the Mississippi River, this book tempts you in, and then catches you.

Some of the passages were poignantly beautiful, unpretentious, and rang true to life for this New Orleans girl.

Other parts (ie, the New York editor) reminded me of a caricature. . . Not in a poorly written way, but seemingly written with that intention.

The ending was not completely satisfying. I'm not sure why not. I almost felt as if something was missing.

Still, so worth the read.

Macklin says

This creeped me out when I read it. The ending was just so sad. I felt so angry for Tennyson. And yeah this was spooky. I thought it was good.

Mary Lindsey says

The setting of this historical fiction book is on the banks of the Mississippi in 1932. The Great Depression is in full swing, but 11 year old Tennyson Fontaine and her little sister, Hattie, are oblivious to this as they spend their evenings with their father, telling stories and reading history books, and their days playing hide-n-seek in the swamp that surrounds their rickety shack which they named Innisfree. They live with their mother and father whom they called by their first names, Sadie and Emery. We get the idea that Sadie didn't like being a mother; she felt that greater things awaited her. She longed to be a famous writer and often submits her stories to the Sophisticate, a literary magazine, but her characters never seemed to behave properly and she doesn't get published. Tennyson, who has a natural gift for writing once fixed a story of her

mother's and it upset her; so after that Tennyson was careful to only write stories about little girl things like the adventures of their wild dog. But "once in a while Sadie could see the poetry in raising untamed little girls in a shabby house on stilts in the woods with poems and stories tacked to the walls and a rope swing in the main room and a wild dog named Jos with good manners. (Pg 17-18) but she never wrote stories about her home or her family. Tennyson worked very hard to make sure her mother continued to see the poetry in her life because she feared that the minute her mother no longer saw the poetry she would leave.

One day, after an all day game of hide-n-seek, her mother doesn't come home so her father leaves the girls in the care of his estranged sister while he goes to search for her. The family home, Aigredoux, was once one of the grandest plantation houses in Louisiana. That was before the Civil War, now it is a vine-covered, decaying, old house surrounded by a "dense grove of ancient looking trees in the middle of sugarcane fields." Upon seeing the house for the first time Tennyson remarks, "It has no color. Like a mirror or a lake on a cloudy day. She had never seen a colorless house before. Even their dirty little house on stilts at Innisfree had a color. It was brown, like sticks, like kindling being put into a fire." (pg23)

The time the girls spend with their austere Aunt Henrietta is miserable for them. She is determined to make them into young ladies. She informs them that they will no longer be allowed to read and write because "There is nothing more unpleasant than a girl who knows too much". (pg71) Her aunt plans to train them to be proper young ladies and marry them off to a wealthy nearby family who would then be obligated to pay for the renovation of Aigredoux.

Their Aunt spends all her time writing letters to the United States Government demanding that they return her families fortune that was stolen during the war. The only thing close to companionship they have is with Zulma, the maid, who is a sharp and no nonsense descendent of the mansions former slaves. Tennyson is given the job of walking to the post office to mail the letters that her aunt writes; that is where she meets the kind and compassionate Zipporah Tweed who helps her.

While Tennyson is in a dream like state, the house begins to reveal its history; she devises a plan that she believes will make her mother return and thus her father and they could all return to Innisfree, their home in the swamp. She secretly writes the stories that the house reveals to her, the stories of grandeur and wealth, the stories of loved ones lost, stories of cruelty and stories of war. She sends these stories to the Sophisticate, because she knew that her mother would read and them. Not only does Tennyson's stories get published but they become extremely popular. The owner of the magazine sends the colorful, pretentious, New York editor on a "ghastly trip" to Louisiana to find the now famous Mr. Tennyson Fontaine and convince him to finish writing his book. But will her plan work? Are the publications of the stories enough to bring about her mothers return?

I would say that this book is maybe fourth through eight grades.

How to use in the classroom? I would use it when we talk about descriptive writing. Blume's imagery in the book is fabulous as is her personification of the house; such as in the conversation after her little sister is stung by an entire nest of wasp, Hattie states, "Aigredoux hates us," Tennyson ponders this and states that "it does and it doesn't at the same time". (pg 81) "Aigredoux had flung hateful things in their direction, like wasps and bats and rotten floors that waited in silent glee for little girls to fall through them. It pushed its way into Tennyson's dreams and made her see funerals and spiders. But there were nicer things too....." In French, Aigredoux means bittersweet and the ending of this book is truly bittersweet

Sarah says

Another book I nearly abandoned, but thanks to Miss Erin's review, I stuck it out.

If a fleeting glance at the flap copy has led you to believe this is a tale of a plucky girl helping her family brave the Great Depression, think again. This is in fact a very strange book, of the sort that seems to cast an otherworldly spell over you as you read. Yet it's precisely the disquieting combination of real and unreal that compels you to keep the pages turning.

With its decrepit old house, bright but mildly savage characters, and cache of family secrets, the story itself strikes me as something like a younger cousin of *The Thirteenth Tale*. Come to think of it, there's even a flavor of *Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte* in its decayed southern setting.

The conclusion didn't have quite enough concrete resolution for my taste, but I'm glad I stuck it out nonetheless. In the end, you sort of creep out from under this story and find yourself surprised to find the everyday world around you.

If you find yourself getting bogged down, just remember, "Gothic, gothic, gothic." No matter what you think of it, *Tennyson* is a book that will stick with you, rather like cobwebs...

Kate Hastings says

RL 760.I enjoyed the premise of this book. Tennyson, named after her starving artist mother's favorite poet-- is dropped off at her ancestral home in Louisiana. The house is falling apart, a symbol of how the family is falling apart and how the reputation of Tennyson's relatives has been in the toilet since the Civil War.

SPOILER ALERT***

While staying with her old, uppity aunt-- she dreamwalks and sees the events that led to today's reality. She writes about them and submits her stories to a literary magazine, hoping to find her mother.

Loved it. And then it all fell apart at the end. I wanted more stories of Tennyson's ancestors. I wanted her father to come back or something. Instead, she's there with the editor of the literary magazine, whom she tells she will not continue writing the story until she is done being reunited with her father. Her mother is never returning. The point of her writing is gone. I DON'T GET IT. Very disappointing.

Karolinde (Kari) says

It's kind of hard to describe this book. Tennyson's mother leaves her family and Tennyson and her sister are dropped at the family "home" while her father searches for her mother. The book claims there is a "deep terrifying secret" but it's more of history of slavery and the consequences of it. While I enjoyed the story, it didn't live up to its potential.

Quince Winstyn says

What a selfish Mom! Honestly, the only thing that's wrong with this book is Sadie!

Jean says

This Southern gothic tale set during the Depression is filled with interesting characters and a credible plot. I really liked the story until the end, which came all too quickly and without any resolution. If I thought there would be a sequel then it would be okay, but as it was I was left with too many questions. I had a feeling that something more needed to be said and it wasn't. So ultimately it was an unsatisfying read, which is a shame because it had so much promise!

Elizabeth says

I chose this novel to read as I had a copy of one of Lesley M.M.Blume's in my library. I was pleasantly surprised at the high literary quality of this read. Older middle school girls will enjoy this read. The book has elements of the surreal yet can be seen as an interesting insight into the southern culture and its history.

Epicallyagirl says

Tennyson was a little bit creepy.

Aigredoux is falling apart, it's the Great Depression, and in the heat of it all are the Fontaine's. After Hattie and Tennyson's mother leaves, their father, Emery, goes to find her and bring her home to Innisfree and her family. While searching, he leaves his daughters at his old home, Aigredoux. Tennyson and Hattie hate everything there, and just want to go home. Until Tennyson starts having flashes of the past, and writes to the Sophisticate magazine. From there, her stories get published for the whole world to see, and hopefully Sadie Fontaine as well. The book ends terribly, confusing you and making you hope for a sequel. Which there isn't, at least none that I know of.

I would love the book if it went further into their lives and showed how Tennyson finished writing the stories. There is no explanation of how her father gave up on searching, or on their return to Innisfree. Tennyson also promises to write the rest of her story to the editor of the Sophisticate when she is older, which never happens. The redone cover scares the life out of me any time I look at it- my biased opinion- and you don't even find out what the characters look like. I received this book as a present, and has hoped it would serve as a wonderful mystery for me to curl up by the fire and read. I end up reading it quickly, for lack of depth and explanation. I hope that my review doesn't influence your decision or not, because there are many terrific scenes in the book. I feel like Amber House is another amazing book to read if you liked Tennyson. I hope you love Tennyson, and that your experience of the book was better than my own!
