

A LONG TIME GONE by Karen White

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "Home means so many different things. . . . It's where your people are." The author creates such a dynamic sense of place for the reader through sensory details and evocative objects such as the heirloom black bed, the watermark from the flood, and the lost diary. What things or memories evoke "home" for you?
2. Does Vivien get the closure she needs with her mother once she returns home? How do Bootsie's death, Carol Lynne's dementia, and Vivien's reliance on prescription drugs complicate things?
3. What is the effect of Carol Lynne's dementia on those around her? As a reader, what was it like to encounter Carol Lynne only through her diary?
4. In one of her diary entries, Carol Lynne notes, "There's something in the ways of mothers and daughters, I think, that makes us see all the bad parts of ourselves." Do you think this is true? How does this apply to the Walker women? Does each woman grow emotionally from this realization?
5. "Because it was something I'd been born with, a poison in the blood I'd inherited from my mother and she from hers and way on back before anybody alive could still remember." When they left home, what ghosts was each Walker woman chasing? What made each woman return?
6. Carol Lynne's diary also reveals the following sentiment: "[Bootsie] just smiled and told me to wait until I become a mother, and then I will understand that my real destiny will be decided by those not yet born." What does Bootsie mean by this? How do children shape the futures of the Walker women?
7. Did you suspect the identity of the body earlier in the novel? How does this "ghost" affect the lives of the Walker women?
8. How does the author use objects or heirlooms such as the watch and ring to unite the characters' stories across multiple generations? Is there an heirloom you've inherited that is loaded with meaning or inspires curiosity about the past?
9. Did you have any trouble shifting between time lines, which run from the 1920s to the present day? Which era or woman's story was your favorite?