



Reading Group Gold

'Til The Well Runs Dry

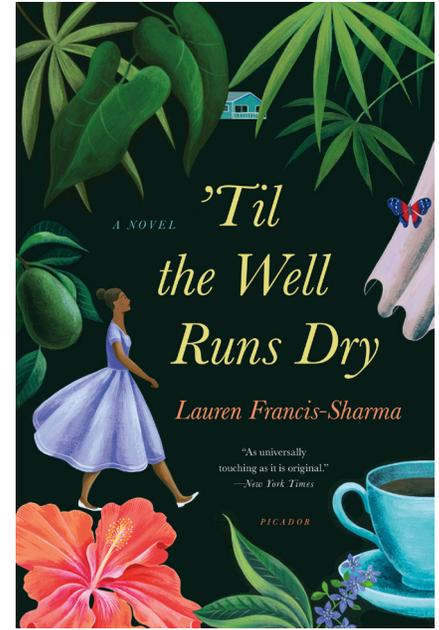
By Lauren Francis-Sharma

About this Book

Lauren Francis-Sharma's *'Til the Well Runs Dry* opens in a seaside village in the north of Trinidad where young Marcia Garcia, a gifted and smart-mouthed 16-year-old seamstress, lives alone, raising two small boys and guarding a family secret. When she meets Farouk Karam, an ambitious young policeman (so taken with Marcia that he elicits the help of a tea-brewing obeah woman to guarantee her ardor), the risks and rewards in Marcia's life amplify forever.

On an island rich with laughter, Calypso, Carnival, cricket, beaches and salty air, sweet fruits and spicy stews, the novel follows Marcia and Farouk from their amusing and passionate courtship through personal and historical events that threaten Marcia's secret, entangle the couple and their children in a scandal, and endanger the future for all of them.

'Til the Well Runs Dry tells the twinned stories of a spirited woman's love for one man and her bottomless devotion to her children. For readers who cherish the previously untold stories of women's lives, here is a story of grit and imperfection and love that has not been told before.



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Discussion Questions

1. Each chapter in *'Til the Well Runs Dry* is told from the perspective of one of three characters. Why do you think the author chooses three characters to tell the story? How do you think this choice enhances the storytelling?
2. Why does Marcia choose to keep the story of the twin boys a secret from Farouk?
3. Tanty Gertrude is known to dabble in obeah or the "darker arts," as the author suggests. Do you think Farouk understands the inherent risks when seeking help from Tanty Gertrude?
4. Tanty Gertrude tells Marcia that her relationship with Farouk did not work out because Marcia has too much pride. Marcia, however, feels that Tanty Gertrude sabotaged her relationship with Farouk for her own benefit. Who do you think is correct? And why?
5. Why do you think Marcia is so firm with Jacqueline?
6. Freedom vs. commitment is an important theme in this book. How does a desire for freedom inform each character's story? What role does commitment play in limiting the characters' desire for freedom?
7. There has been a lot of discussion in literary circles about the likeability of characters, particularly female characters. Do you feel you have to "like" or "identify" with a character to enjoy a novel? Do you like or identify with Marcia?



Reading Group Gold

8. In telling the story of Marcia Garcia and her children, the author paints a memorable picture of Trinidad's natural beauty, particularly of the northern coastal village of Blanchisseuse. In the earlier parts of the novel, Farouk wishes to take Marcia away from Blanchisseuse, yet close to the end of the novel, he takes a day trip there with the children. Why do you think it is important for him to return?
9. How is Farouk's character revealed over the course of the novel?
10. What do you think is the reason behind Patsy's rebellion?
11. Inspector Chung Marlock tells Marcia that she is the kind of woman "who's always looking to find a way out." Do you think this is true of Marcia? What impact do these words have on Marcia?
12. For Marcia, New York City symbolizes risk. How does going to New York change her?
13. Were you surprised at the end of the novel when you found out about the twin boys? How do you think Marcia's life would have been different if they had not been taken away from her?
14. This novel sheds light on many of the challenges immigrants face in America. Why, after all the mistreatment she suffers, does Marcia still feel as if bringing her children to America is the best decision? Do you feel more informed about the history of modern immigration after reading this book?



Reading Group Gold

Recipes

With a distinctive blend of African, Indian, Chinese, and indigenous influences, the cuisine of Trinidad infuses the sensual environment of *'Til the Well Runs Dry* with its resplendent sights, smoky aromas, and rich flavors. From the stewed chicken that Marcia ladles into her children's bowls at dinner, to the rum punch that Patsy mixes at the Five Rivers' snackette, here are three of Lauren Francis-Sharma's favorite recipes—no opossums involved.

Curried Potato and Channa (Chickpea)

- 1 cup of chickpeas soaked overnight
- 2 tbsp. vegetable or canola oil
- 1 ¼ cups of water
- 2 cups of sliced or cubed potatoes
- 2 tsp. minced garlic
- 2 tsp. salt
- 2 tbsp. curry powder (taste will vary depending on variety and freshness)
- 1 cup diced onion
- 1 tsp. black pepper and/or Caribbean pepper sauce to taste
- 1 tsp. ground cumin (optional)

Directions:

1. Boil chickpeas until tender and drain.
2. In large pot, heat oil over medium heat. Add garlic and onion. Sauté.
3. Heat 1 cup water and set aside.
4. In separate bowl, mix curry powder (and ground cumin, if desired) with ¼ cup water. Add curry/water mixture to pot and stir constantly. Add potato, ensuring that all pieces are coated with curry. Add the cup of heated water, salt, pepper and/or pepper sauce.
5. Cover and cook for approximately ten minutes.
6. Stir in chick peas (careful not to break peas). Cook until gravy is thicker and potatoes are tender. Add water for additional gravy.
7. Adjust for taste with salt.
8. Serve with rice.

Stewed Chicken (Trinidad Style)

- 6-8 small pieces of chicken OR 3 lbs sliced or cubed (dark, light or both)
- 2 tsp. garlic powder or minced garlic
- 2 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 tbsp. salt
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- 1 tbsp. vegetable or canola oil
- 3 tbsp. sugar (preferably brown) OR thick soy sauce
- ½ cup chopped onions
- ¼ cup chopped tomatoes
- 1 ½ cups water



Reading Group Gold

Directions:

1. Toss rinsed chicken pieces with garlic, lemon juice, salt, and black pepper. Let sit for 5 minutes.
2. Heat oil in large pot, add sugar (or thick soy sauce) to middle of pot and allow it to brown and bubble. Add chicken, onion, tomatoes, and water. Cover pot and cook on medium heat (stirring occasionally) until chicken is tender and gravy thickens to desired consistency.
3. Add a little more water for additional gravy and salt to taste.
4. Serve with rice.

Rum Punch

- 6 tbsp. dark rum
- ½ tsp. very fine nutmeg (dust)
- 4 tbsp. lemon juice
- ¼ tbsp. Angostura bitters
- 1 ½ cups of water
- 2 cups sugar

Directions:

1. Boil sugar and 1 cup of water in small pot for 5 minutes until syrupy.
2. In small pitcher, combine the sugar syrup with lemon juice, Angostura bitters, rum, and ½ cup of water. Stir well. Sprinkle with nutmeg.
3. Allow to sit overnight (in direct sunlight when possible).
4. Serves 2 over ice.



Reading Group Gold

Two Questions for Lauren Francis-Sharma

What was your inspiration for writing *'Til the Well Runs Dry*?

'Til the Well Runs Dry is a story that comes out of one small moment in a hospital room. When I was still nursing my youngest daughter, my grandmother had a stroke. With the baby asleep in the car seat, we drove into the night from Baltimore to Brooklyn to see her. As I was sitting next to my grandmother's hospital bed, I thought about how I had never asked her questions about herself. I had never asked about her life, about her journey to America from Trinidad, about why she left home. There were so many questions and I felt such an immense sense of loss.

Nearly six months after my grandmother had that stroke, my paternal grandfather passed away. My parents, my sister, and I had to travel to Trinidad for the funeral. While we were there, we were in a pretty reflective mood, and we took a trip up the North Coast Road to the village where my grandmother was born, Blanchisseuse, which is also the place in Trinidad where the novel is mostly set. We took a walk along the beach, and I sat down in the sand. I felt very connected to the place. It's a lovely, quaint town, and I imagined it felt much like it would have seventy years ago. I thought about my grandmother being a young woman there, and when I rose from the sand, I realized I had to write a story about a girl from this place. That girl became Marcia Garcia, the protagonist of *'Til the Well Runs Dry*.

Before writing *'Til the Well Runs Dry*, you had a distinguished career as a lawyer. What made you decide to become a writer?

I think I had always imagined myself as a writer. I had invested so much into being a lawyer, though I was not always a happy lawyer. I knew from pretty early on after law school that lawyering was not the thing that would make me most happy. I was a second-year associate at a firm in New York City, and had one of those moments that a lot of lawyers have, where you are just shaken to your core by some incident that takes place. Usually, those happen in a law firm [laughs]—sorry, law firms!

I was working on a deal for a small client, and we were logging very long hours for several weeks, in fact, pulling all-nighters. It was football playoff season, and the senior associate on my deal wanted to have a party at his home to support the New York Giants. We needed to prep for closing, and he asked me if I could handle it, and I said I could, because, indeed, we both thought I could. He told the client that he was going to leave me in charge of closing prep. The client lost his temper, and told him that he would not be leaving his deal with the [expletive] coat-check girl. I think that was probably the moment when I realized that practicing was not going to be fulfilling enough, and definitely not worth that.

I left the office immediately thereafter, and walked to the local bookstore, which was one of my favorite places. I cried a little bit, and strolled around, looking at the books there, pulling myself together. After a half hour or so, I walked down the steps, and who was standing there just outside the bookstore? One of my favorite authors: Stephen King. It was a really amazing moment for me. I was obviously at a fork in the road of my life. Law practice or . . . something else. And there was Stephen King. I walked up to him, and I said, right to his face, "I love you!" And of course, he looked at me oddly. Rightfully so! But for me, that moment was simply joyous. To see him reminded me of how much I loved reading, and how much I love to write. And how much I had wanted to be like him. That moment stayed with me through those many dark times as an unhappy lawyer and a closet writer trying to get published.



Reading Group Gold

About this Author

Lauren Francis-Sharma, a child of Trinidadian immigrants, was born in New York City and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. She holds a bachelor's degree in English literature with a minor in African-American Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and a J.D. from the University of Michigan Law School. She lives in the Washington, D.C., area with her husband and two children. *'Til the Well Runs Dry* is her first novel.



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