



The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder

Rebecca Wells

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“Rebecca Wells has done it again....A new book full of Southern charm and unique characters...impossible to put down.”

—*Houston Chronicle*

“Wells weaves that magic spell again.”

—*New Orleans Times-Picayune*

For Ya-Ya fans everywhere, *New York Times* bestselling author Rebecca Wells returns with *The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder*. The creator of the literary sensations *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, *Little Altars Everywhere*, and *Ya-Yas in Bloom* delivers an unforgettable new stand-alone novel about the pull of first love, the power of home, and everyday magic. No matter if you already adore the Ya-Yas or haven't yet entered the miraculous world of Rebecca Wells, you are going to love—and never forget—Calla Lily Ponder.

The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder Details

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Author : Rebecca Wells

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From Reader Review The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder for online ebook

Tim says

This book could have been titled The Flowering of a Southern Belle. Calla Lily Ponder narrates her history by gathering the sprigs of her life in rural Louisiana from age eight in 1961 until she reaps a nearly improbable ending as a 31-year-old in 1984. Within her two-decade bouquet of budding and blooming into full womanhood, Calla endures parental attachment and loss, adolescent attraction and loss, and marital bliss and loss. But not to worry, no one can nip this flower in the bud.

The Moon Lady, La Luna, serves as an emcee/narrator for the prologue and epilogue to this tale. Meanwhile, many references, reprises and prayers to the moon goddess cultivate the story with a type of spiritual guidance and benevolence. This medium sometimes may suggest the naturalistic, Wicca-dance of the quartet we might have met in the Ya Ya Sisterhood. But this charming novel focuses on the La Lunettes, a trio of lifelong BFFs: Calla, Sukey, and Renée.

“The Crowning Glory” has a Biblical roots: 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 reads: “Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.” The verse may explain why Calla keeps her long locks into her 30s. Nevertheless, I prefer Proverbs 16:31: “Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.” Regardless of its germination, The Crowning Glory title serves multiple ironic purposes as a beauty salon brand, tendril references to hair and morality, as well as the gathered splendor Calla’s lifelong achievements.

There are perhaps too many minutiae in cosmetology, its practices and products. Then, too, there is an awful plentitude of food descriptions and clothing details. But that’s a woman writer’s touch, I guess. Verging on the tedious, these details do coronate the rites of passage of a Southern flower who survives the peacenik ‘60s and the free-love ‘70s. Colorful depictions of Louisiana life are delightfully picturesque, almost rooting the reader dockside on the La Luna River.

This was extremely pleasurable reading, although the denouement is a distracting weed. So, I think I’ll take my long white hair to the salon for a shampoo and massage from a healing-hands operator who’ll blow away the conclusion’s wrinkle.

Babs says

What a disappointment!!! I truly wanted to like this book... I read The Ya Ya Sisterhood and Little Altars Everywhere a few years back, and I remember loving them, so when I saw the author's newest book at the library, I grabbed it. As I read the first few chapters, I thought the book moved pretty slowly and was kind of schmaltsy. As I got farther along, I just found that the characters were cliché, and in my mind, many of Calla Lily's and her friends' quotes seemed very "Peggy Hill". It also seemed as though the author was trying to hit on some deep themes, but the novel was sketchy and esoteric and came off like a Lifetime movie. I should have quit while I was ahead, and stopped reading it after the first few chapters, but most of the time I'm obsessive-compulsive about seeing a book through to the end. So I finished it - now I'm pissed off that I wasted my time. I find myself questioning how much I liked Wells' other books. Was I delusional at the

time? Was I much less sophisticated about my reading material? Is it just me? I'm half tempted to go back and read the Ya Ya books, just to find out, but then it would be more of my time wasted - so little time, and so many good books that I haven't read.

Sheri says

The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder was a heart warming memorable story. It is told through Calla Lily's eyes, from childhood on to adulthood. Family love, friendship and death all brought together in an unforgettable journey through one woman's life. Excellent read.

Lorihudeck says

Let me start by saying that this is the first book by Rebecca Wells that I have read. She writes beautiful, lyrical prose that meanders along like the river that is central to this tale.

When I first started this novel, I noted that it was beautifully written by slow moving. As I spent more time getting to know Calla Lily Ponder, I realized that her journey moved in bits and spurts, at times meandering and other times rushing forward much like rivers do.

I loved the narratives from La Luna or the moon goddess as she looked down on her children. It added a magical, fairy tale like essence to the story.

That being said, there were still bits of the story that bothered me. For example, Calla witnesses a horrific beating of a young black boy by a large white sheriff, and while she goes home and vomits and is upset, the incident is quickly washed away.

Also, I found myself becoming annoyed by Calla Lily Ponder at times. From the Lucille Ball-esque attempts to change a gay man to her marriage to the ending, her journey was just a bit predictable and yet not entirely logical. Then again, that pretty much sums up most people's lives so who am I to complain.

The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder is a good summer read when you are not in a hurry to rush through to get to the end. It reminded me of a large vanilla ice cream cone on a warm summer day: refreshing, possibly a bit bland but still very good, just ultimately not very filling.

Jennifer says

This is the story of Calla Lily Ponder who grew up in the small town of La Luna nestled along the Mississippi River in Louisiana. We meet her family and friends, but most importantly her mother, whom she calls M' Dear. Call Lily has a wonderful loving relationship with her mom. They are best friends as well as mother and daughter. Everything Calla Lily is and grows up to become, is due to her mother and their special relationship. It is because of M'Dear that Calla Lily chooses to become a beautician, and grows up to be one of the finest young ladies I have read about in quite a long time.

Calla Lily is a sweetheart! She is kind to everyone she meets, and strives to see the best in people. She tries not to be mean or judgmental towards others. Calla Lily has also inherited what M'Dear calls healing hands. This is the ability to make her salon clients feel whole again. To ease their cares and worries with the touch of her hands and sometimes the kindest of words. Calla is truly what I call good people.

During the course of the story, Calla Lily experiences some of the toughest heartaches of her life. But she manages to pull through with the help of friends and family, and of course, the Moon Lady. Who is the Moon Lady? Well, you can read about her in the beginning of the book and then here and there throughout the story. Basically, according to M'Dear, the Moon Lady is the benevolent force who watches over Calla Lily and the residents of La Luna. I interpreted her to be like Mother Earth, except she is the Moon.

I loved this story. Wells' writing placed me firmly in the story with her descriptions of small town Southern life in Mississippi, and again when Calla moves to New Orleans. The accented dialogue, the food, the weather, everything made me feel as though I was in Louisiana. I did have one complaint, at first. Sometimes it seemed as though Calla never grew up. She was almost childish in her thinking at times. However, I realized that is exactly what I liked about her. Calla never becomes jaded or angry like adults can be. Her positive attitude and way of living are simple and uncomplicated. With so many sad and mean people in the world, it was nice to escape from that for a while. So my complaint, is really not a complaint after all!

So, if you are looking for an enjoyable read, that transports you down South in the company of good people, then this book is for you. After reading this one, I will definitely check out Wells' other books as well.

Cheri says

For the most part, I agree with Cyndi Michener's review, although the Moon Lady "stuff" didn't bother me. Perhaps because I know a few people whose beliefs are very similar, so it wasn't a stretch for me. For the most part, I found "Crowning Glory of Calla Lily" to be entertaining, but disappointing. Especially in comparison to "Ya-Ya Sisterhood." It didn't have me reflecting on my childhood, it didn't have me laughing out loud or thinking of my dear friends. I did think a lot of places in New Orleans as they came up, and in that sense I did connect to the place, the setting, the characters. I loved the parts where she was describing working on someone's hair. All of that seemed very much one character, consistent, prosaic.

Where it lacks consistency is the section set in New Orleans. The voice of Calla Lily suddenly turns from a young woman with a mind of her own, and an adult vocabulary, to a somewhat insipid, eye-batting, giggling young girl. That voice comes and goes, but I found it distracting and, well, annoying. Fortunately, before the ending, it seems to return to more of the writing I expect of Rebecca Wells. What Rebecca Wells does have is her ability to lull you into almost believing you're right there, along for the ride in rural Louisiana, and charm you with the characters and ways of New Orleans so you'll wish you were there, once you put the book down.

Kathleen says

Rebecca Wells is back and better than ever with *The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily* Ponder! Fans of the *Ya-Ya Sisterhood* be forewarned - I think that I may actually like Calla Lily more than the *Ya-Ya's*. I was charmed by page 2, in tears by page 6 and totally committed to Calla, La Luna and M'Dear by page 11.

Calla and her two brothers grow up in a loving family in the tiny hamlet of La Luna, LA. But the love and protection her family and friends provide as she grows up isn't enough to protect her from the sorrow and sadness that sometimes follows us through life. But Calla is strong and, keeping in mind what M'Dear has taught her accepting and enjoying what life has to offer, Calla is able to pick up the pieces and move forward.

I read Calla Lily in one sitting and the whole time a little voice in my head kept saying "Slow down, savor it" but I just couldn't. Calla's story kept my entranced, it wove a spell around me, much like La Luna does in the book. I cried at the end of the book but more because I was saying goodbye to someone whom I had come grown to love and admire. I have been missing Rebecca Wells but after reading Calla Lily I have to say, it was worth the wait.

Melissa says

What in the world happen here Rebecca? Seriously? I've waited a year and a half to read this book? I don't understand. The three YaYa books were magical. I couldn't put them down. I was so excited to find this one at the library that i snatched it up. Was i ever disappointed. I could barely finish the thing. There were no magic. No feelings of warmth. Nothing to make me care for Calla Lilly of anyone in this book. In fact it makes me wonder if Rebecca lost her edge here. I was so emotionally attached to the YaYa's that i was sad to let them go. I don't even want any of the characters here. The only part that pulled on my heartstrings was the chapters where "M'Dear" was dying. Mainly because it was like reading my Aunt Bev's death in print. Except take out breast cancer and insert colon cancer.

So so very disappointed... I hope Rebecca either returns to the YaYa's or makes characters i can care for in her next novel....

Too tired to write anymore and frankly i have nothing else more to say.

Jennifer says

From My Blog...

The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder by Rebecca Wells is a beautiful tale of love and its many forms. The novel, narrated by Calla Lily Ponder, begins in La Luna, Louisiana and the reader learns about various adventures and life-changing events that transpire through Calla Lily's childhood and adolescence. After high school she moves to New Orleans and another chapter of her life begins. Calla Lily takes the reader through over two decades of her life, during the most profound moments and those that take her breath away, and always with the two constants, La Luna and M'Dear. Wells weaves together an almost lyrical tale of a young girl named after a flower, brought up by open and loving parents, who chose to follow her own path. "The Rules of Life According to M'Dear" were not only my favourite part of the novel, but also profoundly brilliant in the sheer simplicity of them. With the exception of M'Dear and Calla Lily, I did not truly feel as

though I knew the characters. While referred to often, there was a certain lack of depth to the characters, as though the events themselves were the focal point and considering the powerful messages carried throughout *The Crowning Glory* of Calla Lily Ponder, I do believe the events are indeed the focal point. Each section Calla Lily shares with the reader holds a life lesson, culminating into a series of lessons one must learn and never forget, much like M'Dear's "Rules of Life". I would not hesitate to recommend this novel, especially to discussion groups.

Reese says

If you loved Rebecca Wells's *Little Altars Everywhere* and/or *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* and you intend to read *The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder*, expect an inferior work, inferior even to her *Ya-Yas in Bloom*. Yes, descriptive prose in *The Crowning Glory* put tastes in my mouth, smells in my nose, images in my eyes. But most of the dialogue reminded me of conversations in soap operas. And the foreshadowing devices seemed like billboards displaying what's ahead. Yet I kept reading. I suppose I like junk food -- stale, it's still more pleasing than kale.

Jessica says

This book reminded me of a bad made-for-TV movie. Or maybe an episode of *Full House*, where every time there is a problem, it manages to be resolved by the end of the episode with some cheesy apology and admission of wrong-doing with violins playing in the background.

Part 1 was actually somewhat endearing and heart-breaking. A story of a simple life growing up in Louisiana with great friends, a first love, and a loving, caring family torn apart by the death of her mother followed shortly by a broken heart. And at this point in the book, the simple narration was fine, it seemed to fit the age and innocence of Calla Lily Ponder. However, by Part 2, the "simple southern girl" narration style was hackneyed and just downright annoying. An example:

"Basically what I was doing was washing her energy. When I hold a client's head in my hands, their energy comes into me and then moves up from me to the Moon Lady, where she washes it in her river of love and goodness and sends it back down through me and back into the client in all of its cleanliness."

Its like Rebecca Wells wanted to write a poetic, moving, piece of literature - but all that came out was this overly sentimental, overly simple dribble. I really didn't think I was going to make it through the last 100 pages, it was that bad.

If you want to read a truly inspirational book about the ability of hairdressing to empower women who otherwise would have no hope, read [Kabul Beauty School](#) by Deborah Rodriguez.

Nicole says

I tried to like this book, but it was just so boring. The characters were one-dimensional southern stereotypes. For example, everyone in the small town of La Luna, LA simply adored the main character, Cala Lily Ponder, and when her mother, M'Dear, died, the whole town rallied to raise Cala Lily. M'dear, a hairdresser,

had healed people while doing their hair and was known to dance at odd times and places. This, paired with her worship of the Moon Lady (they live in La Luna, get it?), and her spouting new-agey advice (well before the time of the new age movement) are meant to portray the mother as a free-spirit in tune with loving the whole world, but it just comes off as flighty and forced. Add to this the fact that it takes forever for anything to happen in this book. I just couldn't get through it. If the Ya-Ya books hadn't been so well received, I doubt this one would have been published.

Cyndi says

Warning: Possible spoilers

After reading several heavier books this summer, I was ready for a light read, and this book fit that bill fairly well. It's a good story, but I think it could have been a better story without all the Moon Lady nonsense. Like another reviewer said, I was quickly hooked on the characters and had a good "four hankie cry" when M'Dear died, but a lot of the book felt like a first draft. There was a lot of repetition in the first two chapters that seemed unnecessary and perhaps accidental. The dialogue between characters was often weirdly stilted and unnatural. People just don't talk like that and it made me imagine the characters waving scarves in their hands dramatically as they spoke. I was shaken by a scene early in the book where a black child's desire to skate in the white rink leads to violence, but that incident stood alone. As the book spans more than 20 years, I expected the scene to have some later relevance that never showed up.

I had been waiting excitedly to read this book and while I found it mostly entertaining, it was disappointing to find so many things *wrong* with a book by a favorite author.

Emily says

Almost everything I read in this book I had read somewhere else.

Much of it came straight from Cassandra King's "Making Waves" - about a small-town Southern girl who opens up a hair salon once run by a family member, with several scenes taking place in the Big City of New Orleans. I wasn't a huge fan of that book either, to be fair.

The dramatic twist: a family member intercepts the love letters between the young couple and never tells them! The boy and girl write each other nearly every day but never receive the other's letters! When they discover this after years of separation, they have a passionate reunion! I can only assume one of them will end up in an old folks' home with Alzheimer's, and the other will read from the notebook of their love.

Other Same Old Same Olds:

Alcoholic friend who quickly comes around to recovery? Check. (Also, duh, she is the one who is loose with her sexuality at a young age, because girls who date several men are alcoholics.)

Female friends who practice kissing with each other and frequently get nude together in a platonic way? Check.

Friend who gets married, has a child, and is almost never heard from again? Check.

Fabulous gays who cook, do hair, and have exquisite taste in interior design? Check.

Riding horses used as a symbol for young girl's first sexual thoughts and experiences? Check.
A "Magical Negro" who provides wisdom and insight to help out the white narrator, and also serves to demonstrate how kind and tolerant the narrator is? Check.

Also, all that Moon Lady nonsense should have been cut straight out.

Jessica Larson-Wang says

This book is a bit too long and slow to be a pure fluff beach read, and the writing just isn't good enough for it to be a serious novel, although it tries. The characters come off as cliches and Calla Lily's small town Louisiana home is hard to buy as an actual place. The story is also thick on the melodrama and tries too hard, especially in trying to bring social issues into the story in an effort to portray her characters as progressive for their time. The high drama: Calla Lily witnesses a black boy being brutally beaten by the cops, loses her mother as a teenager, has her heart broken by her first love, moves to the big city, falls for a gay man, makes best friends with a gay man, deals with an alcoholic best friend, falls in love, struggles with infertility, loses her husband in a tragic accident, returns to her small town, and falls in love again with her now conveniently divorced first love, who, as it turns out, never left her at all but was forced to break up with her by his now-dead grandfather. Writing it all out like that, it is easy to see why the novel hit 400 pages, but a more skilled writer would not have felt the need to cram so much drama into one story.

That said, Wells' writing has its moments, and I finished the book and was even moved at times (the death of Calla's mother is particularly heart wrenching). With better editing this could have been a much better book.

Anderson's Bookshops says

Kathleen said: "Rebecca Wells is back and better than ever with *The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder!* Fans of the *Ya-Ya Sisterhood* be forewarned - I think that I may actually like Calla Lily more than the *Ya'Ya's*. I was charmed by page 2, in tears by page 6 and totally committed to Calla, La Luna and M'Dear by page 11.

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Jaclyn Day says

I love Rebecca Wells' writing. The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood is one of a few books that I can read over and over again and still enjoy. Having never lived in Louisiana, I don't know how accurate her depictions of the area are...but nevertheless, I was sucked in from the first page. I had high expectations for The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder having enjoyed Wells' other books, and happily, there were traces of Wells throughout it.

But, unfortunately, I have to echo what some other reviewers have said about it which is that it's haphazard, devoid of plot and careless with character development. The book is enjoyable, but as much as it is entertaining, it's also equal parts frustrating and flawed. To be honest, I think the problems in this book could have been solved with a more thorough edit. It feels like a first draft in many ways—like Wells wanted to get absolutely everything down before sifting through and deciding what should stay or go. But...everything stayed. Some characters are introduced, then disappear...others come into the main character's life and are seemingly important people to her, but never become more than a passing fancy to the reader. It's frustrating.

This coming-of-age novel about a girl growing up in a small Louisiana town could have been so much more than it was, and there are occasional glimmers of this. To be fair, Wells' writing doesn't disappoint. She's got a unique way with dialogue in particular that I've always enjoyed. I just wish the overall package hadn't felt so unrefined and clunky.

Irene says

Say what you will about schmaltz but I think Wells is a good storyteller. I don't expect her to produce haute literature. I don't expect her books to address the great problems of the age...I just want a good story and I got one.

I admit, being the jaded character I am, if a piece of writing can make me tear up, I'll give it a thumbs up. It may be a cheap shot on Wells' part to zero in on a woman's emotions, but hey, she's a woman too.

What's wrong with a good old-fashioned love tale, anyway? We don't have enough of those, having been subjected to religious thriller-relic hunting-adventure seeking novels for the past (fill in the blank) years. Maybe I'm being a little defensive, but Calla Lilly was good, very good. Why? Because I said so...

Ab says

Sappy, schmaltzy, overly sentimental . . . just a few words to describe this novel. It's what I think of when people want a "beach read", or something akin to "chick lit". That being said, I did, in fact, read the whole thing. There was something in the descriptions of the setting, the development of at least the main character, that kept me interested. Wells' descriptions of this small, thoughtful riverside town of La Luna, Louisiana, actually made me interested in going to the south and seeing those huge plantation houses, the trees blooming with flowers and figs and pears, and just the very "Southern" ways of these people (minus the negative parts, of course). I didn't read "Ya Ya Sisterhood", but I loved the movie, and I can see this being a decent movie once you cut out the sappy, schmaltzy, overly sentimental dialogue and crap.

Toni says

Fans of Wells' tales of the "ya-ya sisterhood " will like this book. If it had been written by a new come-out author ,it would have been sent back to editing. In parts the writing is lyrical and in others just hurried and choppy. The story which can be moving in sections can become just downright preach-y in others. It seems that the author had a beginning point and an end point and was going to get to it in the pre-subscribed number of pages without regard to flow and therefore you never just fall into the book and ride along with it. It has potential and some wonderful moments, however for me, it just misses.
