



Waiting  
for  
August

Jessica  
Lambert

A thoughtful, amusing and quirky tale that nails its emotions and message a little too squarely on the head but is enjoyable nonetheless. Benjamin Putter is an eleven year old kid whose dad has just died. (Putter! And if that's not bad enough, his middle name is Hogan!) That would be sad enough but Ben never felt as close to his dad as he wanted. Dad was obsessed with golf (he almost turned pro but life interfered) and when dad wasn't practicing his swing he was tending to the BBQ for the family restaurant. To make matters worse, Ben loved painting a lot more than whacking at a bucket of balls. He's not just out of step with his dad: he's out of step, period. It's the early 1970s and Ben loves art work, talks to himself and his best friend in Hilltop, Alabama is a black girl who has just come to his newly desegregated school where she's bullied and picked on while Ben is too scared to do anything about it. To top it off, Ben now hears the ashes of his dead dad -- sitting in an urn on a shelf in their home -- and they're talking to Ben and telling him his spirit won't rest until Ben takes him to Augusta, Georgia during the Masters Golf Tournament and spreads his cremains on the 18th green. Before you know it, timid Ben has run away from home, teamed up with a fast-talking little girl on her own quest and they're riding the rails to Augusta. Author Jessica Lawson creates two very enjoyable characters in Ben and that girl named Noni. She also juggles various issues like racism and when a child realizes it's ok to disagree with your parents without it meaning you love them any less. It's a pity she leans on imagery again and again to make her points: cooking BBQ and golf are used every few pages and if someone is seen trimming away Spanish moss, you won't be surprised when Spanish moss is used as truth-telling imagery somewhere down the line. It's a hoot having Ben chat with his daddy's ashes but the pleasure is lessened when Lawson removes any mystery as to whether this is Ben's imagination or a genuine supernatural event. Ditto the surprise revelation about his runaway pal. Let's say Lawson shot an 80 this time around the course of her novel, but you just know she can improve and sharpen and hit 70 in the future. -- Michael Giltz