



## Bowery Girl

By Kim Taylor Blakemore

### Reading Group Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. As Mollie goes to pick up her friend Annabelle, we are told that, “It was Annabelle who had held out her hand, had pulled Mollie from the rags she had crawled into to warm herself,” and it was Annabelle who named her Mollie Flynn. How have Mollie and Annabelle created a family of two? Although initially Annabelle was Mollie’s savior, how do they relate to each other and depend on each other in the beginning of the novel? Is one character more dominant in the relationship than the other? If so, how is this shown?
2. Mollie’s first reaction upon realizing Annabelle is pregnant is of anger and disgust. “Of all the things that could happen in the world, this was the worst.” Why is Mollie’s reaction so strong? How does she foresee the birth of Annabelle’s child as affecting their lives, their plans? The first mention of Brooklyn comes a few paragraphs after Mollie notices Annabelle’s condition. What does this new information reveal to the reader? Does it make Mollie’s reaction more comprehensible?
3. Why does Mollie hate do-gooders? What does she see in Miss DuPre that bothers her? What surprises her? In the course of the novel, how do her feelings toward the Do-Gooder change? How does witnessing DuPre watching the shell game on the Elevated platform alter her opinion of the Do-Gooder? How does she see the Do-Gooder affecting her relationship with Annabelle?
4. The author refers to Emmeline DuPre as *Emmeline*, *Miss DuPre*, or the *Do-Gooder*. This character is the only one who the author refers to by her perceived identity. She doesn’t call Tommy, The Gang Leader, or Mollie, The Pickpocket. Why did the author choose to use this naming technique for Emmeline DuPre only? How do you respond to this? Do you think it’s an effective technique?
5. Why is Mollie opposed to Annabelle learning to read? Is there an element of control in her resistance to Annabelle having a skill? How has Annabelle managed so far with reading? What does Mollie’s act of taping newspaper stories to on the wall and reading them to Annabelle suggest about Mollie’s character? How does Annabelle’s decision to take classes at the settlement how affect Mollie? What actions does it propel her to take?
6. How accurate are Mollie’s observations that she can make a better living on the streets than by working in an office as a typewriter or clerk? How strong is the lure of the streets? Are there parallels today to this way of thinking?
7. Initially, what is the role of Seamus in Mollie’s life? How do her feelings for him change over the course of the story and why? What do you think will become of Seamus and his dream of having a dance hall? What are his actions and character traits that support your opinion?

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8. How does the character of Tommy differ from Seamus? What does Tommy represent in the overall story?
9. When Mollie agrees to do the job for Tommy and Seamus to pay off a debt, Annabelle is against it, but Mollie decides to go through with it anyway. Ironically, it's the growl of Mollie's empty stomach that wakes the sleeping watchman she is about to rob, and it is this sound that changes everything. What is going through Mollie's mind just before the watchman wakes? How does this compare to what goes through her mind after she hears the shot?
10. After the watchman is shot and Mollie is running through the rain, the author uses second person; this is the only time the second person is used. What are the messages from the voice? Whose voice do you think Mollie is hearing? Why do you think the author chose this technique? What effect does it have on you?
11. Water is often used as a symbol in the novel. Look at how often and in what ways water plays a part in specific events or atmospheres of the novel. What different things does it represent? Tears? Cleansing? Purging? Something else?
12. The killing of the watchman is the turning point in the story and in Mollie's consciousness. What changes take place in Mollie after the event, both short- and long-term? How does Mollie's growing consciousness of other people threaten her own existence? How does Annabelle pull Mollie out of her depression after the watchman incident, and what is changing in Annabelle's and Mollie's relationship at this point in the story?
13. Mollie finally goes to Emmeline for help with her shaking hands. Emmeline sets her to work learning to type, and although she is grateful to Emmeline, she continues to case the settlement house figuring out ways to steal from it, given the right opportunity. What changes her mind about stealing from Emmeline DuPre and the settlement house? What does this decision tell us or reinforce about Mollie's character?
14. At the settlement house, Mollie meets "Duchess" Zwierchoniewska, who speaks in a voice unlike any of the other characters. She tells Mollie fantastic stories of her past in which she says she was trapped in castles, tied to a bed with a silken rope, which she chewed through, and then she flew to Moscow. Later she says, "Pasts are better imagined than remembered." She is a part of Miss DuPre's past. What do you think of the introduction of this character into the story? How does her perspective add to the novel?
15. When Ms. DuPre tells Annabelle that she knew a family who would bring up Annabelle's child in a good home, Annabelle feels betrayed and flees the settlement house. What do you think this suggestion tells us about DuPre's attitude toward the people she helps, towards class? Her attitude toward Annabelle? Are DuPre's beliefs legitimate? How does her action illustrate the contradictions and complexity of her role as "Do-Gooder?"