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Ask Again, Yes

by Mary Beth Keane



About the Book

How much can a family forgive?

Francis Gleeson and Brian Stanhope, rookie NYPD cops, are neighbors in the suburbs. What happens behind closed doors in both houses --- the loneliness of Francis? wife, Lena, and the instability of Brian?s wife, Anne --- sets the stage for the explosive events to come.

In Mary Beth Keane's extraordinary novel, a lifelong friendship and love blossoms between Kate Gleeson and Peter Stanhope, born six months apart. One shocking night their loyalties are divided, and their bond will be tested again and again over the next 30 years. Heartbreaking and redemptive, ASK AGAIN, YES is a gorgeous and generous portrait of the daily intimacies of marriage and the power of forgiveness.

Discussion Guide

1. ASK AGAIN, YES grapples with the idea of learning from the past. What lessons do Kate and Peter learn from their parents? experiences? What mistakes did they repeat?

2. Do Francis Gleeson and Anne Stanhope --- both Irish immigrants --- experience things differently than their American-born spouses? Do you think this contributes to tensions within the couples, and between the two families?

3. ASK AGAIN, YES is set over the course of four decades. How do attitudes toward mental health and addiction change over that time? How do these changes affect the characters? For example, how do Brian and George Stanhope differ in their attitudes toward drinking?

4. Francis marvels at how many pieces had to come together for a woman like Lena to exist and for him to have met her

(page 7). What role do you think fate plays in this novel? Do the characters have free will to make their own choices? Why or why not?

5. When Kate learns about the episode at Food King, she momentarily thinks that it couldn?t have been as dramatic as Peter was making it out to be. Then she realizes that it was, in fact, the opposite, ?that it was such a big deal that the adults had been careful not to talk about it in front of the kids? (page 85). What role does keeping secrets --- from children, parents, partners --- play throughout the novel? Do you think certain events could have been avoided if the characters had been more open with each other?

6. The idea of inherited traits and characteristics appears frequently in the novel. Trauma is another thing that is passed down from generation to generation. Do Kate and Peter address the legacy of trauma they?ve inherited from their parents?

7. Redemption is an important theme throughout ASK AGAIN, YES. Discuss the many ways in which the characters forgive each other.

8. The novel is divided into four parts. Discuss the significance of each of the part titles --- ?Gillam,? ?Queens,? ?Two by Two? and ?Muster.? Why do you think Mary Beth Keane chose to structure the story this way?

9. At the end of the book, Francis thinks, ?It was always the same. People didn?t change? (page 385). Do you think he really believes this?

10. What does the book?s title, ASK AGAIN, YES, mean to you?

11. This novel is specific to these two families, yet it also feels universal in its themes. Do you see echoes of your family?s history in the Gleesons or the Stanhopes?

Author Bio

Mary Beth Keane is the author of five novels, including the *New York Times* bestseller ASK AGAIN, YES. She was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for fiction writing and has received citations from the National Book Foundation, PEN America, and the Hemingway Society. Born in the Bronx to parents from the west of Ireland, she lives in New York with her husband and two sons.

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