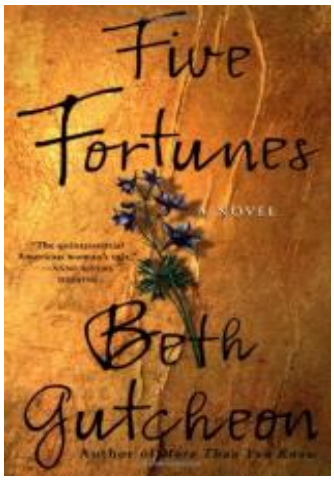
Five Fortunes

by Beth Gutcheon



About the Book

Five Fortunes is a novel about the rejuvenating power of friendship. In it, five women of different socio-economic background and temperaments meet at The Cloisters--a posh health spa in Arizona affectionately called "Fat Chance" by its devotees. Each brings with her a private burden and a hope for emotional and physical healing. Rae Strouse, a wealthy, spry octogenarian, comes every year for relief from the pains and losses of old age. Amy Burrows and her overweight teenage daughter, Jill, come to try a new cure for an old trauma. Carter Bond, a divorced L.A. Private Investigator, has been tricked into a week at the Cloisters by a business partner who wants her to quit smoking. And Laura Lopez, a judge and daughter of a prominent Idaho political family, hopes to let go of a paralyzing sense that her own life ended when her husband's did.

These five women have extremely different lives and gifts, but they have in common kindness, courage, and a sense of the ridiculous. The interlocking alliances they form affect each of them in unexpected ways in the touching, witty, and always entertaining story that follows their first chance meeting.

Discussion Guide

1. Five Fortunes begins and ends at a health spa. Why was this particular setting chosen? How does it bring out the essence of each character?

2. Of the five central characters, Jill is the only person who is under 40, and arguably, she has the most complicated inner life. Which experiences in Jill's life account for this? What does the nature of Jill's friendship with other women say about the relationships forged in middle age as opposed to friendships forged in the years of early youth?

3. The Taoist tale of the Tiger that Jill, Carter, and Laurie hear in T'ai Chi is a cautionary tale which says that any act, no matter how well meant, could have an unforeseen harmful consequence, and any horrible event may bring some good

with it. We can't know the ultimate effect of our actions, and we can't necessarily tell the difference between good and evil when we're looking right at it. All we can do is remember that everything we do matters, and will have consequences for ourselves and others. Which events in this novel support the assumption?

4. In the year we follow them, each character grows in different ways. Is there any one who grows more than the others? If so, which one?

5. One of the undercurrent themes in Five Fortunes is that acts of generosity have impact on both the givers and the receivers. If the ability to give wisely and well is one of life's greatest luxuries, then Albie Strouse is a truly rich man, but what has made him so? What if we ask the same question about Eloise?

6. MacDuff is an ambiguous figure, but his presence seems to embody important themes in the book. How does his story comment on the Tale of the Tiger? How about Walter's story about the man who won the Hero medal? What is the author saying about giving and receiving? About who is saved, and how?

7. Five Fortunes explores the overlapping cycles of a woman's life. What are some of these cycles? How do Rae, Carter, Amy, Jill, and Laura personify each one?

Author Bio

Beth Gutcheon is the critically acclaimed author of the novels THE NEW GIRLS, STILL MISSING, DOMESTIC PLEASURES, SAYING GRACE, FIVE FORTUNES, MORE THAN YOU KNOW, LEEWAY COTTAGE, GOOD-BYE AND AMEN, GOSSIP, DEATH AT BREAKFAST and THE AFFLICTION. She is the writer of several film scripts, including the Academy-Award nominee *The Children of Theatre Street*. She lives in New York City.

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