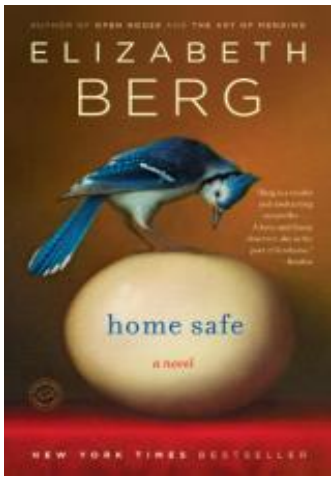
ReadingGroupGuides
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Home Safe

by Elizabeth Berg



About the Book

The bestselling author of *The Day I Ate Whatever I Wanted* and *The Year of Pleasures* returns with a wonderful novel about a woman, a daughter, and a surprising change in life

Beloved author Elizabeth Berg tells the story of the recently widowed Helen Ames and of her twenty-seven-year-old daughter Tessa. Helen is shocked to discover that her mild-mannered and loyal husband had been leading a double life. The Ames?s had saved money for a happy retirement, planned in minute detail, but that money has disappeared in several big withdrawals --- spent by Helen?s husband before he died. What could he possibly have been doing? And what is Helen to do now? Why does Helen?s daughter object to her mother?s applying for a job --- and why doesn?t Tessa meet a nice man and get married?

What Helen?s husband did with all their money turns out to be provocative, revelatory --- and leads Helen and her daughter to embark on new adventures, and change.

Discussion Guide

1. In the opening pages of Home Safe, we see Helen as a young girl, writing poetry to deal with the grief of losing a classmate: ?With this, she was given peace? (page 4). What types of activities calm or fulfill you? How do they resonate emotionally?

2. Helen says that her favorite Christmas gift is the custom-mixed CD her daughter makes for her each year. Do you have a tradition of making homemade gifts? What have been some of your favorite or most memorable holiday gifts? What gift would you be thrilled to get from your child? From your parent?

3. As a diversion, Helen prepares an elaborate meal of ?roast pork with cinnamon apple chutney, mashed sweet potatoes,

green beans with crispy shallots,? and an apple crisp (page 26). If you were making such a meal just for yourself, what foods would you choose? What roles does food play in our lives? What types of situations and occasions do you associate with special meals? Discuss other creative pursuits that you might have or indeed have tried in a similar situation.

4. One writing exercise Helen uses as a teaching tool is for her students to write short stories using a number of given objects: ?an old silver hairbrush, a blackened frying pan, a love letter from the 1930s, a pair of men?s shoes, a floppy-necked teddy bear, one dusty wing of a butterfly? (page 47). What sort of story might you construct about these objects? Who do these things belong to? If you had created this exercise, what objects might you have chosen?

5. Helen relates, on page 89, that Dan used a children?s book to illustrate his dream of sailing. Are there any particular children?s books that resonate with you as an adult? That influence you? Why?

6. The title?s title, Home Safe, appears in an expression Helen recalls on page 86. How did Helen and Dan use this phrase? What people or places in your life give you this feeling?

7. Helen wonders what she and Dan might have discussed in the tree house, recalling that a friend had wisely said,?It?s not the things you have in a tree house, it?s the things you think about there? (page 129). If you could have a special retreat of your own, what and where would it be, and why? What sorts of things would you discuss there, and with whom

8. When Helen considers moving to San Francisco, knowing that Tessa has accepted a job there, she wonders if Tessa will be upset about it, and asks herself if she ?is allowed to make a decision that is for and about herself?? (page182). This question of whether an action is for Tessa or for Helen recurs throughout the novel. From where does this question stem? How does this issue affect their relationship? How would you advise each party? Do you know a mother-daughter pair, or a female pair with a different bond, who disagrees on such issues?

9. Helen thinks that ?if you leave one home, you can find another? (page 202). Who or what makes a home? What qualities do you associate with home? Have you found Helen?s thought to be true in your own life?

10. The details and features of Helen?s dream house are carefully and delightfully described. What might your dream house look like? What features would it include? Where would it be located?

11. What parts of Helen?s journey are universal? What parts can you relate to your own life? What themes does Elizabeth Berg draw out of the characters?

12. The lush and detailed images in this novel are unique. Can you point out a few effective images that really conveyed the novel?s themes to you? What images did you most relate and respond to?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Berg is the *New York Times* bestselling author of many novels, including THE STORY OF ARTHUR TRULUV, OPEN HOUSE (an Oprah?s Book Club selection), TALK BEFORE SLEEP and THE YEAR OF

PLEASURES, as well as the short story collection THE DAY I ATE WHATEVER I WANTED. DURABLE GOODS and JOY SCHOOL were selected as ALA Best Books of the Year. She adapted THE PULL OF THE MOON into a play that enjoyed sold-out performances in Chicago and Indianapolis.

Berg?s work has been published in 31 countries, and three of her novels have been turned into television movies. She is the founder of Writing Matters, a quality reading series dedicated to serving author, audience and community. She teaches one-day writing workshops and is a popular speaker at venues around the country. Some of her most popular Facebook postings have been collected in MAKE SOMEONE HAPPY, STILL HAPPY and HAPPY TO BE HERE. She lives outside Chicago.

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