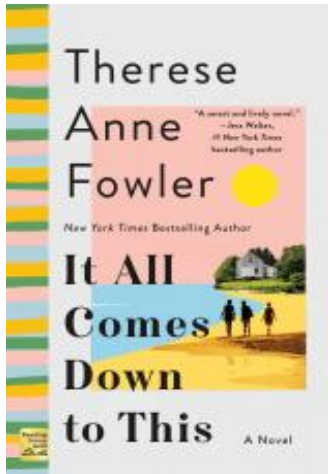


# It All Comes Down to This

by Therese Anne Fowler

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## About the Book

Meet the Geller sisters: Beck, Claire and Sophie, a trio of strong-minded women whose pragmatic, widowed mother, Marti, will be dying soon and taking her secrets with her. Marti has ensured that her modest estate is easy for her family to deal with once she's gone --- including a provision that the family's summer cottage on Mount Desert Island, Maine, must be sold, the proceeds split equally among the three girls.

Beck, the eldest, is a freelance journalist whose marriage looks more like a sibling bond than a passionate partnership. In fact, her husband, Paul, is hiding a troubling truth about his love life. For Beck, the Maine cottage has been essential to her secret wish to write a novel --- and to remake the terms of her relationship.

Despite her accomplishments as a pediatric cardiologist, Claire, the middle daughter, has always felt like the Geller misfit. Recently divorced, Claire's secret unrequited love for the wrong man is slowly destroying her, and she's finding that her expertise on matters of the heart unfortunately doesn't extend to her own.

Youngest daughter Sophie appears to live an Instagram-ready life, filled with glamorous work and travel, celebrities, fashion, art and sex. In reality, her existence is a cash-strapped house of cards that may crash at any moment.

Enter C.J. Reynolds, an enigmatic southerner ex-con with his own hidden past who complicates the situation. All is not what it seems, and everything is about to change.

## Discussion Guide

1. What are the effects of the reader getting to meet Marti before she passes away? How did this set the tone for the rest of the novel?

2. When Marti first met Leo, she lied about the details of her background. The story asserts that some lies can lead to something true. What role do lies and secrets play in this novel, and how do they propel the story forward? Do any of those lies lead to something true?
3. Discuss the trajectory of Beck and Paul's relationship, specifically the different phases it goes through and the significance those periods hold for each of them. In what ways has their dynamic been shaped by external factors such as money, familial expectations and the opinions of others?
4. Consider the evolution of Beck's character over the course of the novel. How did losing her mother change her perspective (if at all) on what she wants from her life?
5. Beck draws inspiration from the novel *LITTLE WOMEN* by Louisa May Alcott. If you are familiar with *LITTLE WOMEN*, what parallels (if any) do you see between Jo March and Beck, and between the Geller sisters and the March sisters?
6. At the time Marti was young, finding a good husband to support her was a girl's ultimate goal. How much do you think societal expectations versus personal circumstances influenced Marti's life decisions?
7. Unlike her sisters, Sophie's "happy ending" does not involve the promise of a romantic relationship, even though she repeatedly references her desire to find a partner. How did this make you feel?
8. Art plays a major role throughout the narrative. C.J. is a painter; Beck is a writer; and Sophie is a gallerist. For Sophie, "art was how people throughout human history had made sense of their worlds" (page 194); art "was life, reflected in ways that actually mattered"(page 313). Taking that idea one step further, in what ways does this novel reflect life in a way that "actually matters"?
9. How does C.J.'s time in jail affect other aspects of his life? In what ways does his criminal record taint his reputation and cause others to mistrust/judge him? Do you think it changes his perception of himself?
10. Familial relationships often prove difficult in this novel: C.J. struggles to form a connection with his father, the Geller sisters are not close (at least at first), and Marti's relationship with her parents was fraught. How have difficult familial relationships affected other aspects of the characters' lives, especially for C.J. and Beck?
11. Financial struggles are a significant motivating factor for each of the characters, and yet Sophie --- the most cash-strapped of them all --- believes "success and wealth didn't alter one's character, it revealed it" (page 191-192). How does this play out within the novel?
12. Discuss the evolution of Beck, Claire and Sophie's dynamic by the end of the novel. In what ways does grief affect their relationships with one another?
13. Were you surprised to discover that the story you'd been reading was being told by Beck? Do you think Marti would be happy to have her history revealed this way?

14. What is Beck's initial perspective on fate, and how does it change (if at all) throughout the novel? Do you think fate was responsible for the story's ending, or might one of the characters have had a hand in that reunion? Could both be true?

## Author Bio

Therese Anne Fowler is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling novels *IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS*, *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*, *A WELL-BEHAVED WOMAN* and *A GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD*. Raised in the Midwest, she migrated to North Carolina in 1995. She holds a B.A. in sociology/cultural anthropology and an MFA in creative writing from North Carolina State University.

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