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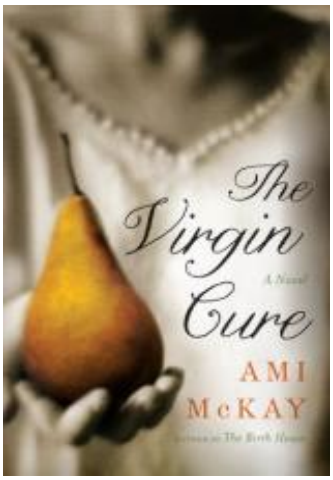
The Virgin Cure

by Ami McKay



About the Book

From #1 international bestselling author Ami McKay comes THE VIRGIN CURE, the story of a young girl abandoned and forced to fend for herself in the poverty and treachery of post-Civil War New York City. McKay, whose debut novel THE BIRTH HOUSE made headlines around the world, returns with a resonant tale inspired by her own great-great-grandmother?s experiences as a pioneer of women?s medicine in nineteenth-century New York. In a powerful novel that recalls the evocative fiction Anita Shreve, Annie Proulx, and Joanne Harris, Ami McKay brings to light the story of early, forward-thinking social warriors, creating a narrative that readers will find inspiring, poignant, adventure-filled, and utterly unforgettable.

Discussion Guide

1.Miss Everett could be seen as doing work that ?saves? girls, whether from poverty or from working the streets, and she is an established member of New York society. *What do you think of this argument, considering the few options for young girls like Moth?*

2. *What makes Moth such a survivor? Is she better or worse off without her mother?*

3.The young Moth spends a lot of time fantasizing about the lives of the wealthy and how her life could have been different. *Do Moth?s early experiences with the Wentworths dispel some of those fantasies, or shore them up?*

4.Moth?s mother tells Mrs. Wentworth that Moth?s name is ?Miss Fenwick.? Later, Moth chooses to use the name ?Ada? while she?s in the brothel. *How do these and other names change the way Moth sees herself? How does calling herself ?Ada? help her to cope?*

5. *How does Ami McKay use mystery and hidden secrets in THE VIRGIN CURE?* For instance, consider the various

characters who live secret lives, or the importance of fortune-telling, or the role of the old Stuyvesant pear tree in the lives of early immigrants.

6.Most of the girls in Miss Everett?s house believe their lives can only improve if they win the continued affection of one of her rich clients. Dr. Sadie ensures that this doesn?t happen for Moth by taking her to visit Katherine Tully. *Why do you think Miss Everett lets Moth go along with the doctor for the day?*

7. *What sorts of sacrifices does Dr. Sadie have to make in her work and her life?*

8.Discuss the title of this novel and the different ways it relates to the story within its pages. Discuss the devastating myth of the ?virgin cure? --- not only how it took hold in the New York of this novel, but how it continues today in parts of our world.

9. *What character in this novel intrigues you the most, and why?*

10. Throughout the novel, McKay uses elements like Dr. Sadie?s diary, margin notes and newspaper ads to convey information, whether about her characters or more generally about the New York of the day. Talk about the effect these parts of the narrative had on your reading, and your experience of Moth?s world.

11. Reread the *Evening Star* article that appears just before the novel?s epilogue --- a report on the debut of the Circassian Beauty at Dink?s Museum. Compare the exotic story about her past with what really happened to Moth.

12. At the end of the novel Moth lives in a home on Gramercy Park and seems to have reached her life-long goal ? yet she?s only nineteen. *What do you think the future holds for Moth?*

Author Bio

Ami McKay is the author of the number-one Canadian bestseller THE BIRTH HOUSE, winner of three Canadian Booksellers Association Libris Awards, and a nominee for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and THE VIRGIN CURE. Originally from Indiana, she now lives with her husband and two sons in Nova Scotia.

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