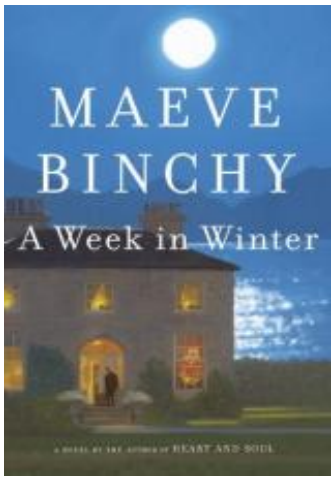
ReadingGroupGuides
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A Week in Winter

by Maeve Binchy



About the Book

Stoneybridge is a small town on the west coast of Ireland where all the families know one another. When Chicky Starr decides to take an old, decaying mansion set high on the cliffs overlooking the windswept Atlantic Ocean and turn it into a restful place for a holiday by the sea, everyone thinks she is crazy. Helped by Rigger (a bad boy turned good who is handy around the house) and Orla, her niece (a whiz at business), Chicky is finally ready to welcome the first guests to Stone House?s big warm kitchen, log fires, and understated elegant bedrooms. John, the American movie star, thinks he has arrived incognito; Winnie and Lillian are forced into taking a holiday together; Nicola and Henry, husband and wife, have been shaken by seeing too much death practicing medicine; Anders hates his father?s business, but has a real talent for music; Miss Nell Howe, a retired schoolteacher, criticizes everything and leaves a day early, much to everyone?s relief; the Walls are disappointed to have won this second-prize holiday in a contest where first prize was Paris; and Freda, the librarian, is afraid of her own psychic visions.

Sharing a week with this unlikely cast of characters is pure joy, full of Maeve?s trademark warmth and humor. Once again, she embraces us with her grand storytelling.

Discussion Guide

1.Why is Chicky attracted to Walter? Why does she defy her mother?s doubts and admonitions about going to New York [p. 6]? ?Reality was, for Chicky, this whole fantasy world that she had invented of a bustling, successful Manhattan lifestyle? [p. 9]. Do Chicky?s deceptions blind her to Walter?s true character? Does she love him? What other feelings might explain her pleas to him to stay [p. 11]?

2.After Walter leaves, Chicky vows she will never go back to Stoneybridge. Is she motivated by pride and stubbornness

or does her decision reflect realistic concerns about the reactions her return is likely to generate? How do her periodic visits home influence her feelings about her family and Stoneybridge [p. 15]?

3.Step-by-step, Chicky takes charge of her life in New York. What character traits help her succeed? Discuss Mrs. Cassidy?s observations when Chicky leaves for Stoneybridge after twenty years in New York [p. 22-23]. In what ways does Chicky?s temperament, as well as her skills, prepare her for life as an innkeeper?

4.In Winnie and Lillian?s antagonistic relationship, which woman initially has the upper hand and why? How does Teddy?s behavior affect their opinions and interactions? What do they learn about each other when they are trapped in the cave? What do they learn about themselves?

5.Why is John eager to hide his true identity during his stay at Stone House? What advantages does he enjoy as an actor and what toll has his career taken on his personal life? Do you think he represents a majority of celebrities? Are Orla?s insights about the nature of fame persuasive [pp. 155-60]?

6.Henry and Nicola are shaken by the deaths they have seen as doctors. Why have their attempts to create satisfying careers been futile? What does the prospect of practicing in Stoneybridge offer them both personally and professionally?

7.What does Anders?s story convey about the difficulties of making a choice when one is faced with a conflict between duty and desire? How do his mother?s and Erika?s actions and advice, as well as his relationship with his father, influence him? What aspects of his experiences in Ireland help him to clarify his goals? What does his conversation with Chicky reveal about the way we ultimately make decisions [pp. 226-27]?

8.The description of the Walls and their obsession with contests is at once humorous and touching. What does their story demonstrate about the foundations of a loving long-term marriage? How do their enthusiasms change and enrich the experiences of the group at the inn?

9.Nell Howe is the only guest unmoved by the charms of Stone House. What accounts for her resistance to the atmosphere at the inn and her critical opinions of her fellow guests? What do her conversations with Rigger [pp. 271-72] and Carmel [pp. 296-98] reveal about her and the reasons she is unable or unwilling to bond with other people? Does her stay at Stone House change her in any way?

10. Why does Freda try to ignore or repress the visions she has? How do they interfere with her everyday life and her hopes and plans for the future? Even without her special ?feelings,? is she foolish to embark on a love affair with Mark? Why does she decide to tell a ?group of strangers? [p. 323] about her psychic powers? Reread the predictions she makes [p. 324]. Which of them do you think will come true?

11. Talk about how Binchy introduces each of the guests at Stone House. How does she pique your interest in them? Which character makes the strongest first impression? Which one takes the longest to get to know?

12. Anders tells himself, ?Problems don?t solve themselves neatly like that, due to a set of coincidences. Problems are solved by making decisions? [p. 224]. Discuss how the various stories in A Week in Winter confirm or belie this observation.

13. Minor characters are an important part of A Week in Winter. What do Miss Queenie, Orla, and Rigger and Carmel contribute to the novel? What insights do their behavior, attitudes, and ambitions provide into the connections as well as the conflicts between traditional and contemporary Irish culture and society? Why does Nuela refuse to see her son, Rigger? What makes her change her mind?

14. Binchy is well known for making the landscape of rural Ireland as vital as the characters in her novels. What descriptions of the countryside and the coast in the wintertime are particularly vivid or evocative? How do they help set the mood of the narrative?

Author Bio

Maeve Binchy was the author of MINDING FRANKIE, HEART AND SOUL, NIGHT OF RAIN AND STARS, SCARLET FEATHER, QUENTINS, LIGHT A PENNY CANDLE, CIRCLE OF FRIENDS, and TARA ROAD (An Oprah Book Club Selection), and many other bestselling books. She wrote for *Gourmet; O, The Oprah Magazine; Modern Maturity*; and *Good Housekeeping*; among other publications.

Binchy passed away on July 30, 2012 at the age of 72, following a brief illness. Considered a national treasure in her native country of Ireland, she died in Dublin near her childhood home, where she lived with her beloved husband, Gordon.

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Publication Date: February 12, 2013
Genres: Fiction
Hardcover: 336 pages
Publisher: Knopf
ISBN-10: 0307273571
ISBN-13: 9780307273574