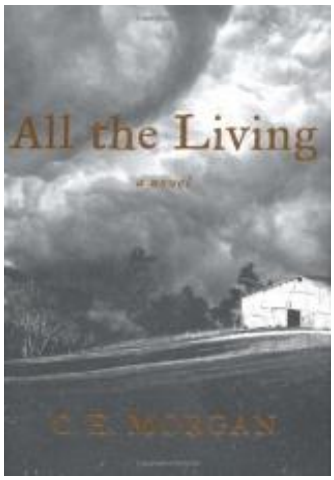
All the Living

by C. E. Morgan



About the Book

An unforgettable novel from a mesmerizing new voice in fiction, **All the Living** defies the traditional notions of a love story. Set in rural Kentucky, in a landscape that is by turns lush and isolating, this is the tale of a young woman named Aloma, who has always been left to fend for herself, and a grieving man named Orren, whose family died recently in an accident. Together, Aloma and Orren try to invent a new life on the land he inherited. Immersed in a combative, erotically charged relationship, they grasp for a fragile sense of trust while enduring the realities of managing a hardscrabble tobacco farm. Their community looks upon unmarried lovers with disdain, forcing the couple further into the shadows. As Aloma debates the emotional toll of staying with Orren, she confronts the timeless question of whether it is better to fight for freedom or to submit to love. The answer that emerges is one of startling tenderness, in haunting scenes that will make for provocative discussion for your reading group.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the novel?s title and epigraph. What truths about hope and mortality are captured in this passage from Ecclesiastes? How does this passage relate to love?

2. How are Orren and Aloma defined by tragedy? How is Aloma affected by the many voids in her past? How is Orren affected by constant immersion in traces of his past?

3. What does sex mean to Orren and Aloma? Is their mutual attraction sparked by a physical hunger, or an emotional hunger? How does this shift throughout the novel?

4. What does Orren think of the two houses on his property? What aspects of himself are represented by each one?

5. How do power and money shape Aloma?s role in this relationship, and in many relationships, regardless of wealth or

poverty? Does Orren want Aloma to be financially dependent on him?

6. Though **All the Living** unfolds in the 1980s, many members of this community hold fast to old-fashioned attitudes. What are the costs and benefits of living in a locale that is removed, in some ways, from the modern world?

7. How did your understanding of the characters? circumstances change as you read **All the Living**, based on what was revealed and withheld in the opening scenes? Were your first impressions of Aloma and Orren accurate?

8. Discuss the role of religion in the characters? lives. Is Bell an unconventional preacher? Do he and Aloma share any common ground in their perception of God?

9. Why does music have such a powerful effect on Aloma? How is she transformed, even healed, by playing the piano? Do any of the novel?s other characters fully understand what music means to her?

10. How is Orren affected by the reminders of his family that remain on the farm? Is it healthy for him to feel so determined to make the farm successful?

11. How do Orren?s memories of his mother influence his expectations of Aloma? How does Bell?s mother influence his sense of self?

12. What is special about the novel?s backdrop of pure nature? What aspects of this landscape, and the livestock?s cycles of birth and death, become characters in themselves?

13. In what ways do Orren and Aloma share similar temperaments? In what ways are they fundamentally different?

14. Would you have left Orren for Bell?

15. In the closing scenes, Orren commands Aloma to remain faithful to him. What insecurities lie beneath his jealousy? What role do jealousy and insecurity play in most relationships?

16. As Orren led Aloma up to the old house on the novel?s last page, what did you predict for their future?

Author Bio

C. E. Morgan lives with her husband, Will Guild, in Berea, Kentucky. She is the author of ALL THE LIVING.

Critical Praise

"As I read the opening pages of **All the Living**, I was suddenly no longer in my study but gazing out at the leafy tobacco plants of a small Kentucky farm where a young couple are struggling to make their living, and their lives. In seemingly effortless prose, C. E. Morgan captures both the complexity and the simplicity of Orren?s relentlessly hard work and Aloma?s dangerous drift toward another man. A wonderful debut."

All the Living

by C. E. Morgan

Publication Date: March 31, 2009
Hardcover: 199 pages
Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
ISBN-10: 0374103623
ISBN-13: 9780374103620