

Ask Again, Yes

by Mary Beth Keane



About the Book

A profoundly moving novel about two neighboring families in a suburban town, the friendship between their children, a tragedy that reverberates over four decades, the daily intimacies of marriage, and the power of forgiveness.

Francis Gleeson and Brian Stanhope, rookie cops in the NYPD, live next door to each other outside the city. What happens behind closed doors in both houses, the loneliness of Francis' wife, Lena, and the instability of Brian's wife, Anne, sets the stage for the explosive events to come.

ASK AGAIN, YES is a deeply affecting exploration of the lifelong friendship and love that blossoms between Kate Gleeson and Peter Stanhope, born six months apart. One shocking night their loyalties are divided, and their bond will be tested again and again over the next 40 years. Luminous, heartbreaking and redemptive, ASK AGAIN, YES reveals the way childhood memories change when viewed from the distance of adulthood --- villains lose their menace, and those who appeared innocent seem less so. Kate and Peter's love story, while haunted by echoes from the past, is marked by tenderness, generosity and grace.

Discussion Guide

1. ASK AGAIN, YES grapples with the idea of learning from the past. What lessons do Kate and Peter learn from their parents' experiences? What mistakes did they repeat?
2. Do Francis Gleeson and Anne Stanhope --- both Irish immigrants --- experience things differently than their American-born spouses? Do you think this contributes to tensions within the couples, and between the two families?
3. ASK AGAIN, YES is set over the course of four decades. How do attitudes toward mental health and addiction

change over that time? How do these changes affect the characters? For example, how do Brian and George Stanhope differ in their attitudes toward drinking?

4. Francis marvels at how many pieces had to come together for a woman like Lena to exist and for him to have met her (page 7). What role do you think fate plays in this novel? Do the characters have free will to make their own choices? Why or why not?

5. When Kate learns about the episode at Food King, she momentarily thinks that it couldn't have been as dramatic as Peter was making it out to be. Then she realizes that it was, in fact, the opposite, "that it was such a big deal that the adults had been careful not to talk about it in front of the kids" (page 85). What role does keeping secrets --- from children, parents, partners --- play throughout the novel? Do you think certain events could have been avoided if the characters had been more open with each other?

6. The idea of inherited traits and characteristics appears frequently in the novel. Trauma is another thing that is passed down from generation to generation. Do Kate and Peter address the legacy of trauma they've inherited from their parents?

7. Redemption is an important theme throughout *ASK AGAIN, YES*. Discuss the many ways in which the characters forgive each other.

8. The novel is divided into four parts. Discuss the significance of each of the part titles --- "Gillam," "Queens," "Two by Two" and "Muster." Why do you think Mary Beth Keane chose to structure the story this way?

9. At the end of the book, Francis thinks, "It was always the same. People didn't change" (page 385). Do you think he really believes this?

10. What does the book's title, *ASK AGAIN, YES*, mean to you?

11. This novel is specific to these two families, yet it also feels universal in its themes. Do you see echoes of your family's history in the Gleesons or the Stanhopes?

Author Bio

Mary Beth Keane attended Barnard College and the University of Virginia, where she received an MFA. She has been named one of the National Book Foundation's "5 under 35," and was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for fiction writing. She currently lives in Pearl River, New York, with her husband and their two sons. She is also the author of *THE WALKING PEOPLE* and *FEVER*.

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