Best Boy

by Deborah Goodrich Royce

About the Book

A gripping psychological thriller, BEST BOY teeters on the knife-edge of memory and identity when the arrival of a shocking letter threatens the carefully constructed life of a woman desperate to outrun her past.

Viveca Stevenson has it all: a handsome and successful husband, an adorable 10-year-old son, and a coastal dream house in Greenwich, Connecticut. She has a solid group of girlfriends and is content with the afterglow of the film career she?s left behind. But when a threatening letter arrives --- from a man she does not remember --- it cracks open a part of her past she thought was buried for good.

A terrifying chain of events is set in motion, forcing Viveca to confront what happened on a shattering Halloween night in high school when she had a different name, a different face and a different voice. Who is the man contacting her now, and was he really the best boy on her most famous film, *Misty*? Why can?t she remember him --- or that night?

A taut psychological thriller, BEST BOY explores identity, memory and the dangerous power of forgetting.

Discussion Guide

1. The prologue of BEST BOY finds teenage Ingrid in a hospital bed after she has been violently sexually assaulted. She has no memory of the specific events of the evening, though she keenly feels their painful effects. Why do you think the author began at this particular moment in the story?

2. As a girl, Ingrid is mesmerized by *The Streets of Old Detroit*, a permanent exhibition at the Detroit Historical Museum. There, she feels safe and unseen, protected by the background darkness contrasted with the warmly illuminated streets and storefronts. Why do you think this type of setting is so captivating for her given what you know of her family situation?

3. Ingrid creates shadow boxes made from old shoe boxes, dolls, bits of found fabric, and other items. Again, she finds comfort in creating (and controlling) such staged settings. Later, Viveca continues with a similar behavior in her meticulous attention to fabrics and colors in her home, as well as in the large doll house in her office. Have you ever tried to feel safe by exerting control over your physical surroundings? Does it work?

4. After the severe trauma of rape, Ingrid doubts her own memory due to past migraine-induced memory lapses and the fact that she was drinking the night it happened. This sets her up to question herself in profound ways and renders her vulnerable to the suggestions of the cops who believe Sebastian raped her. Do you understand this type of self-doubt and suggestibility in a young person? How does it affect the rest of her life?

5. Ingrid disappears into Viveca and sheds her past when she goes to Los Angeles. This is made possible by the fact that her voice has been forever altered by the attack and the subsequent plastic surgery that changes her appearance. Do you think it would be possible to disappear today in a similar way? Have you ever wanted to leave your past behind?

6. The title, BEST BOY, refers specifically to a job in the electrical department on a film set. Mark Remington, the man who contacts Viveca, claims to have held that job on one of her movies. The author also plays with the concept of Theo, Viveca?s sweet son, being her own personal best boy. On top of that, she alludes to the pejorative connotation of calling a young man a boy, specifically when he is Black. Did you reflect on the many levels on which any word (or event or person) can be understood? And misunderstood?

7. There is a classic 1950s Japanese film by Akira Kurosawa called *Rashomon*. In it, a rape occurs in a forest, and there are three eyewitnesses to the act. When it comes time for the trial, there are three completely different recollections on behalf of those witnesses. Have you observed this phenomenon in real life? How about in our current world climate, where many of us cannot agree on what happened in a given situation?

8. Henry Stephenson, Viveca?s husband, is not who Viveca thought he was. But he is not a completely evil villain either. How did you feel about the shades of gray in his character? Do you think Viveca?s inability to see him clearly has something to do with her own perceived moral failings and guilt over what happened to Sebastian because of her?

9. In early drafts, Rachel, Viveca?s former Hollywood agent, was barely a ?walk on part,? to use a Hollywood term. As the author was writing, the voice of Rachel just came through, stronger and stronger, until she became quite important to Viveca?s story. Do you like her as much as the writer does?

10. There is a belief in literature today that a writer can only tell a story from a point of view that he or she has actually had. For example, a white man would be unable to tell a story from the point of view of a Black woman. Historically, there is a different way of looking at this in the acting world, where actors are encouraged to take on parts that differ from their own life experience. A Native American man should be able to play Hamlet in an interpretation of Shakespeare?s play. And an actress should be able to play a serial killer even if she is not one! In BEST BOY, the main character is a white woman, like the author. But there are other important characters of different ethnicities and gender.

What do you think of this?

11. The author felt it was very important for Sebastian to be Black --- for Emilia and their entire family to be Black --- to be able to really delve into the levels of suggestion and vulnerability of memory, as well as guilt and feelings of responsibility that she wanted to get at. Do you think these deep questions would have been adequately explored had Sebastian and Emilia been white?

Author Bio

Deborah Goodrich Royce?s REEF ROAD, a national bestseller, was named one of the best books of 2023 by *Kirkus Reviews* and an Indie Next pick by the ABA. RUBY FALLS won the Zibby Award for Best Plot Twist, and FINDING MRS. FORD was hailed by *Forbes, Book Riot* and "Good Morning America." Her latest novel is BEST BOY.

Her Ocean House Author Series --- in partnership with Martin House Books and WCRI --- brings world-class authors like Sarah Ferguson, Emma Straub, Chris Bohjalian and Katie Couric to Watch Hill. With fellow authors Luanne Rice and Amy Scheibe, she created the Deer Mountain Writers? Retreat in the Catskills.

Deborah writes a book column for *Providence Monthly* and *Hey Rhody* magazines. She began as an actress on "All My Children" and in multiple films before transitioning to the role of story editor at Miramax Films, developing *Emma* and early versions of *Chicago* and *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Deborah holds a bachelor?s degree and two honorary doctorates, from both Lake Erie College and the University of Rhode Island. With her husband, Chuck, Deborah restored the Avon Theatre, Ocean House Hotel, Deer Mountain Inn, United Theatre, Martin House Books, and numerous Main Street revitalization projects in Rhode Island and the Catskills. She serves on multiple governing and advisory boards.

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