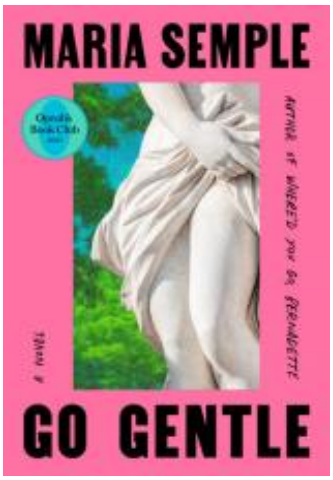
Go Gentle

by Maria Semple



About the Book

***The New York Times* bestselling author of WHERE'D YOU GO, BERNADETTE returns to form in her most exuberant and life-affirming novel yet with the story of one woman?s cheerful determination to live a life of the mind only to have the heart force its way in.**

Adora Hazzard has it all figured out. A Stoic philosopher and divorcée, she lives a contented life on New York City?s Upper West Side. Having discovered that the secret to happiness is to desire only what you have, she?s applied this insight to blissful effect: relishing her teenage daughter, the freedom of being solo, and her job as a moral tutor for the twin boys of an old-money family. She?s even assembled a ?coven? --- like-minded women who live on the same floor in the legendary Ansonia --- and is making active efforts to grow its membership. Adora?s carefully curated life is humming along brilliantly until a chance meeting with a handsome stranger.

Soon, her ordered world is upended by black-market art deals, secret rendezvous and international intrigue...and her past --- which she has worked so hard to bury --- lands like a bomb in her present. Inflamed by unquenchable desire, Adora finds herself a woman wanting more...and she?ll risk everything to get it.

Adora Hazzard?s journey of self-discovery will grip you from the start. Romantic, hilarious, intelligent and bursting with the stuff of life, GO GENTLE is a thrilling story of one woman?s mid-life transformation, cementing Maria Semple in the pantheon of our most exciting and important contemporary writers.

Discussion Guide

1. When Adora hits her lowest point, Stoicism feels ?obvious and reasonable.? How much did you read her philosophical turn as a genuine intellectual awakening or as a trauma response? What ?hole? in her life does Stoicism seem to fill?

2. Between Adora?s lectures, books and billionaire clients, she is practically the face of Stoicism. How does being a public philosopher shape what she can admit to herself privately? Where do you see the gap between the woman on stage or in the classroom and the one at home, and how does the novel play with that double life?

3. Adora insists that externals cannot be the basis of a good and truly content life. Then Digby walks in, extremely external and extremely inconvenient. In what specific ways does their relationship stress-test her Stoic rules? If Adora were to update her philosophy so she can keep both Stoicism and the boyfriend, what might that revised doctrine sound like?

4. In a similar vein, parenting Viv short-circuits Adora?s usual Stoic strategies. Why do those tools seem to work so badly here? Is Viv just another ?external,? or does the mother?daughter relationship demand a kind of porousness and mess that Stoicism doesn?t quite allow?

5. Maria Semple loves a woman on the verge. Why do we, as readers, find female chaos compelling? Where did you feel the book was inviting you to laugh with Adora, and where did it tempt you to laugh at her?

6. Layla moves between roles: she is mother, caretaker, hostess, curator and pseudo influencer, all wrapped up in one. How does the novel complicate a simple ?evil billionaire? read of her? When did you feel genuine sympathy for Layla, and when did you feel yourself judging her alongside Adora? Do you think Layla ever fully grasps the moral stakes of the scandal she?s bankrolling?

7. The book orbits around an art scandal that pulls in collectors, curators, philosophers and hangers-on. What does GO GENTLE seem to be saying about who gets to decide what something is ?worth?? If you had to pick one person or institution the book finds most culpable, who would it be?

8. Some of this novel?s bleakest material, be it personal, professional or marital collapse, is filtered through a whimsical, comic tone. How did that humor shape your experience of Adora?s worst moments? Did the jokes cushion the blow?

9. Celine?s story about her family hiding the Mona Lisa turns history into a highly intentional narrative. How does that story echo what the Lockwoods are doing with their dynasty --- and what Adora is doing with her ?coven?? By the end of the novel, who is best at curating their life into a story, and who is most willing to let the mess show?

10. Dog walkers; cleaners; drivers; doormen; people like Dante, Ziggy and Julio are always there, rarely centered, but never purely a part of the scenery. What does the book quietly suggest about class and labor through these background presences? How would you describe Adora?s relationship to the people who make her life function?

11. Over time, Adora becomes admirably clear-eyed about what actually brings her joy. What moments of genuine joy stood out most to you while reading? Did GO GENTLE make it easier for you to pinpoint what joy looks like in your own life?

Author Bio

Maria Semple is the bestselling author of GO GENTLE; TODAY WILL BE DIFFERENT; WHERE'D YOU GO, BERNADETTE; and THIS ONE IS MINE. Her novels have been translated into 40 languages. Before writing fiction, Maria wrote for TV. She lives in New York.

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