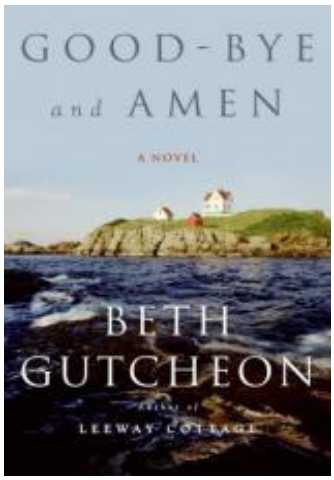
Good-bye and Amen

by Beth Gutcheon



About the Book

In the wake of their parents? death, the three Moss siblings are left a house full of memories and treasures to sort through. While they are determined not to let bickering tear their family apart, their mutual desire for the summer house allows the cracks between them to widen. Told in a multitude of voices, this is a rich and diverse narrative of family and home.

Discussion Guide

1. Every family goes through a passage, one way or another, in which the younger generation becomes the older. What do you think of the way the Moss family handled the division of the spoils? What's the worst story of family inheritance politics you ever heard? What's the best?

2. Eleanor seems to have survived being the child of her parents with the least damage. Do you think that's true, or not? Either way, why? Does birth order have anything to do with it?

3. Why do you think Monica married a man with whom she had such a rocky start? Do you see her role in her marriage as admirable, or something else? Do you think there is a happy marriage in her future?

4. The issue of charisma is important in this novel. Clearly Laurus had it as a performer, so Eleanor, Monica and Jimmy grew up with it. What do you think of the way charisma in themselves and others affects their lives?

5. We all know entirely too many stories of people in positions of moral leadership whose private behavior doesn't match their public claims and roles. What do you think of the way Norman exemplifies this? Do you think these stories all have much in common, or all they all different? Do you think that people like Norman sleep fine at night as long as they don't get caught, or are they privately tortured?

6. Jimmy was a musical prodigy in childhood, and turned his back on his gift. Have you ever known a child prodigy? If yes, how did the prodigy's life work out? Norman too was a child prodigy?what do you think about the way this played out in his life as compared to Jimmy's?

7. The parable of the Prodigal Son is a difficult one for many. Do you think the way people read it has to do with faith? Birth order? Something else? What do you think of Jimmy as a prodigal (and does it have anything to do with his being a prodigy?) Were his parents right or wrong to indulge him as they did?

8. The story is told in the form of an oral history or biography, which is usually a non-fiction form. How do you feel about that form for this novel, and why do you think the author chose it?

9. An interplay of thoughts about spirit, spirits, and ghosts are important in this novel. What do you think of the voice that opens the story ? Who and where is it coming from? Do you believe in ghosts? If so, what are they?

10. Do you think Jimmy did the right thing about Leeway Cottage? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Beth Gutcheon is the critically acclaimed author of the novels THE NEW GIRLS, STILL MISSING, DOMESTIC PLEASURES, SAYING GRACE, FIVE FORTUNES, MORE THAN YOU KNOW, LEEWAY COTTAGE, GOOD-BYE AND AMEN, GOSSIP, DEATH AT BREAKFAST and THE AFFLICTION. She is the writer of several film scripts, including the Academy-Award nominee *The Children of Theatre Street*. She lives in New York City.

Critical Praise

"Gutcheon?s gift is for pure storytelling... Her characters and settings are alive, sparkling with deft touches of period detail; her narrative voice is knowing and wry, exasperated and affectionate."

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