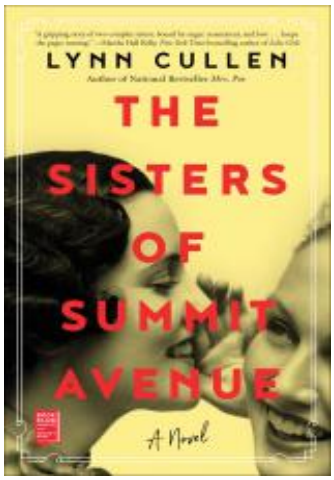
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Sisters of Summit Avenue

by Lynn Cullen



About the Book

From Lynn Cullen, the bestselling author of MRS. POE and TWAIN'S END, comes a powerful novel set in the Midwest during the Great Depression, about two sisters bound together by love, duty and pain.

Ruth has been single-handedly raising four young daughters and running her family?s Indiana farm for eight long years, ever since her husband, John, fell into a comatose state, infected by the infamous ?sleeping sickness? devastating families across the country. If only she could trade places with her older sister, June, who is the envy of everyone she meets: blonde and beautiful, married to a wealthy doctor, living in a mansion in St. Paul. And June has a coveted job, too, as one of ?the Bettys,? the perky recipe developers who populate General Mills? famous Betty Crocker test kitchens. But these gilded trappings hide sorrows: she has borne no children. And the man she used to love more than anything belongs to Ruth.

When the two sisters reluctantly reunite after a long estrangement, June?s bitterness about her sister?s betrayal sets into motion a confrontation that?s been years in the making. And their mother, Dorothy, who?s brought the two of them together, has her own dark secrets, which might blow up the fragile peace she hopes to restore between her daughters.

An emotional journey of redemption, inner strength and the ties that bind families together, for better or worse, THE SISTERS OF SUMMIT AVENUE is a heartfelt love letter to mothers, daughters and sisters everywhere.

Discussion Guide

1. The book begins with June?s story and her job in the Betty Crocker kitchens. What is your first impression of her? What do you think of the Betty Crocker persona and the act June and the other women put on?

2. Ruth has worked hard running the family farm since her husband John fell ill, but she is still anxious about her sister?s

impending visit. They have a difficult past, but what do you think June is most worried about?

3. Dorothy acts as John?s primary caregiver. She is an extremely private and introverted woman, but as she cares for John, she tells him about her past. Why do you think she chose John to share her stories with?

4. June was an ambitious and proud teenager, but we hear only a few stories from that time. Chapter 9 tells the story of her experience as a window model. Why was this story important to tell? How did that experience shape June?

5. When June and Ruth reunite for the first time in almost a decade, tensions are high. How does each behave? Who acts more honestly?

6. John and Ruth?s daughter, Margaret, compares her father?s life to Edgar Allan Poe?s ?The Tell-Tale Heart.? Why does the comparison disturb Ruth so much? Is it compassion for John or her own guilt?

7. In a series of flashbacks, we learn that John was engaged to June before he married Ruth. Discuss how this happened. Do you think John would have married June if Ruth had not come to Chicago that night? What do you think of Ruth?s behavior?

8. Do you sympathize with one sister more than the other? Do your sympathies change over the course of the book, and if so, why?

9. It is no small miracle when John wakes up. How do Ruth, the children and Dorothy each handle this development? What does John have to say about his time ?asleep??

10. As John and June dance in Chapter 38, we glimpse more about their current relationship and his relationship with Ruth. Describe how he feels about each woman. Is it possible for him to love them both?

11. Ruth believes June has always been gifted anything she wants, while Ruth has to fight tooth and nail for everything. How has this belief affected their relationship and the course of their lives? How does it all come to a head in Chapter 39?

12. Dorothy had been waiting half her life for June?s father, Edward Lamb, to rescue them, but when he finally arrives, she rejects him. What has changed for Dorothy? Why has June never sought out her father and her inheritance? What do you think Ruth would have done if the roles were reversed?

13. We see June and Richard?s relationship at many different stages. What were they like when they first met? How did they treat each other after they had been married for several years? How has their relationship evolved over time?

14. We end with a small glimpse into the future, when both sisters are working for Betty Crocker and living on Summit Avenue. How do you think they were able to mend the rift between them? Discuss how their relationship with their mother has changed.

Author Bio

Lynn Cullen?s bestselling novels, including THE WOMAN WITH THE CURE, THE SISTERS OF SUMMIT AVENUE, MRS. POE, TWAIN'S END, THE CREATION OF EVE and REIGN OF MADNESS, have been translated into 17 languages and are the recipients of various honors, including NPR Great Read, Oprah.com Book of the Week, *People* magazine Book of the Week, Indie Next List selection, and *Atlanta* magazine Best Books of the Year. She lives in Atlanta.

The Sisters of Summit Avenue

by Lynn Cullen

Publication Date: April 21, 2020
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Gallery Books
ISBN-10: 1982129859
ISBN-13: 9781982129859