Whale Harbor

by Mary Beth Keane

About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of the ?magnificent? (*Fresh Air*) ASK AGAIN, YES, a sweeping multigenerational saga inspired by the author's own family history, following 11 brothers as they are set on different paths between Ireland, England, Montana and New York.

1960s, Ireland. In the wake of tragedy, a father makes choices for his 11 grieving sons. The older brothers will emigrate to England for work, while the younger ones will stay behind. The second eldest, Macdara, is offered a job on a Montana cattle ranch and sets off. His spirited younger brother, Rian, begs to come along, and Mac promises to bring Rian to America as soon as he?s old enough. But then one day Mac gets a call that Rian has gone missing. His disappearance will haunt Mac and his family across decades.

Spanning lifetimes and continents, WHALE HARBOR is ?tender, immersive and exquisitely written? (Florence Knapp, author of THE NAMES) with award-winning author Mary Beth Keane?s signature wit, eloquence and attention to the emotional resonance of family, brotherhood and the choices that echo across generations.

Discussion Guide

1. The story begins with Mac pushing his younger brother, Rian, to practice his English in place of Irish. What do these initial interactions tell you about the Cuan and its community?

2. How does meeting Professor Browne --- who insists on being called Vincent --- shape Mac and his ideas about his future in Ireland?

3. Discuss how Cathal?s character develops after their lives are upended. Recall how his presence around his sons changes, especially once he introduces the boys to Nuala.

4. After spending some time in Montana, Mac says he ?stopped dreaming of [his brothers] --- their nightly drownings and burnings, their cries for help? (page 117). How do you think Mac?s life would have been different had he stayed in Ireland?

5. On page 170, Mac learns that Cathal is now regarded as a more dependable, better neighbor than he once was. Instead of feeling proud or relieved about his father?s improved reputation, ?all it did was bring to mind his mother, a baby in her arms...no doubt praying to glimpse her husband cycling toward home.? Why do you think Mac feels this way?

6. Mac often compares his time in Montana to the probable loneliness Rian felt after Mac left. How does this guilt shape his adulthood and future relationships?

7. When their brother, Vincent, arrives in New York, some of the Joyces resent the welcome he is given. Did you think this was justified?

8. While visiting Honnie on page 232, Mac asks if she feels lonely, to which she replies she couldn?t be lonesome in the place where she was from. How does Mac feel about the Cuan after so many years away? What does he think of as home?

9. How does the loss of Eamon affect the relationship between the Joyce brothers and reignite the search for Rian?

10. We see Mac?s daughter, Mary, grow up into a strong yet stubborn young woman. Discuss where she gets these traits and if you see any similarities between her and any other Joyce family members.

11. Do you think Cathal?s final conversation with Rian changed either of their perspectives about each other and their past?

12. Discuss the symbolism behind the 11 whales who appear at the end.

Author Bio

Mary Beth Keane is the author of five novels, including the *New York Times* bestseller ASK AGAIN, YES. She was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for fiction writing and has received citations from the National Book Foundation, PEN America, and the Hemingway Society. Born in the Bronx to parents from the west of Ireland, she lives in New York with her husband and two sons.

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