



Leeway Cottage

By Beth Gutcheon
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Introduction

In April of 1940, as the Nazis march into Denmark, Sydney Brant, a rich girl of the Dundee summer colony, marries a gifted Danish pianist, Laurus Moss. They believe they are well matched, but almost at once, their views of the world diverge. When Laurus departs America in 1941 to help build a Danish Resistance from London, Sydney is dismayed. By the time they are reunited four years later, Laurus's family has survived, thanks to Denmark's courageous grassroots rescue of virtually all of the country's Jews, and Sydney has given birth to their daughter, Eleanor.

In the decades to come, their three grown children will wonder what keeps these very different people together in their marriage. Laurus claims that in heaven you get to see the movie of your life, with all the blanks filled in. Sydney fears what Laurus might see that she'd rather he did not; their children fear their father will die and there won't be any movie. But there will be.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think there are such things as happy and unhappy houses? If yes, what makes it so? Do you think Sydney's family was happier in Leeway Cottage than they would have been at a house like the Elms? What part does the history of a house play in what it feels like to live there?
2. How does geography affect Sydney's life? In Cleveland? In Maine? How does geography affect Laurus and the Moss family's fate?
3. Is Candace jealous of Sydney? Does she simply dislike her? Does a relationship like theirs change over time? Could it be made to evolve?
4. Given the kind of mothering she had, do you think Sydney did the best she could in her own mothering of her children? Might she have done differently if she'd married a different kind of man? (Better? Worse?) How do you feel about Laurus as a father? How should his children feel about that?
5. What does the Leeway Cottage guestbook tell us about the real lives that are lived in the house? Do you keep journals or diaries, and if so, what kind of documents are they, public or private? Who is their intended audience, if anyone? If a guest book is part family history, part myth-making, is that a good or a bad thing?
6. How did the author's juxtaposition of the events in Denmark during the war with events in the U.S. make you feel about how geography has shaped your own life and your country's? Have you known Americans who served in WWII? If yes, did they talk about it when they came home? To what end?
7. Did Sydney and Laurus stay together because it was what their generation did? Or because in some way they really loved each other? How does their choice compare with your own generations', and was it a good or a bad thing?
8. What do you make of the way Sydney and Laurus died? Do you think, if they'd had a choice, they'd have thought that was a not-bad way to go? Do you think Laurus actually did choose that death, in a way?
9. Why do you think Laurus's movie is about what happened to Nina during the war, rather than scenes from his own life? Why do you think the author wanted the story of Nina at Ravensbruck at the end of the book instead of in chronological order?
10. There are a number of clues about Sydney's affair with Neville while it is going on. Did you catch them, or did that news come as a surprise? What do you think was going on in Sydney's mind and heart that she felt entitled to betray her husband and best friend in that way? How do you think the news will affect the children's views of their parents going forward?

About the Author

Beth Gutcheon is the critically acclaimed author of *More Than You Know*, *Five Fortunes*, *Saying Grace*, *Domestic Pleasures*, *Still Missing*, and *The New Girls*, as well as several film scripts, including the Academy Award nominee, *The Children of Theatre Street*. She lives in New York City.