

Cocoa Beach

William Morrow

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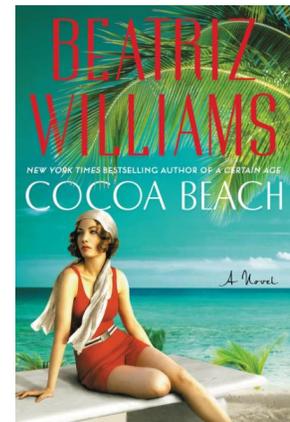
Introduction

Burdened by a dark family secret, Virginia Fortescue flees her oppressive home in New York City for the battlefields of World War I France. While an ambulance driver for the Red Cross, she meets a charismatic British army surgeon whose persistent charm opens her heart to the possibility of love. As the war rages, Virginia falls into a passionate affair with the dashing Captain Simon Fitzwilliam, only to discover that his past has its own dark secrets—secrets that will damage their eventual marriage and propel her back across the Atlantic to the sister and father she left behind.

Five years later, in the early days of Prohibition, the newly widowed Virginia Fitzwilliam arrives in the tropical boomtown of Cocoa Beach, Florida, to settle her husband's estate. Despite the evidence, Virginia does not believe Simon perished in the fire that destroyed the seaside home he built for her and their young daughter. Separated from her husband since the early days of their marriage, the headstrong Virginia plans to uncover the truth, for the sake of the daughter Simon never met.

Questions for Discussion

1. At the start of the novel, Virginia reflects that “The history of the past three years is as mysterious to me as the mangroves growing on the opposite shore of the river.” Why is that? Has ignorance been bliss for Virginia?
2. What do we learn about Virginia during the flashbacks to wartime France? How does that affect the way we think of her, and Simon?
3. Were you surprised when Agent Marshall hints that Simon's death was not “a simple act of God?” Do you think Virginia was surprised?
4. What is the meaning of the note left for Virginia at Maitland that reads Everything you seek is here? Is it reassuring? Or menacing? Who do you think left it for her?
5. Why does Virginia choose to believe what Samuel tells her about Simon? Would you have fled back to America, as she did?



6. Why does Virginia's father send Simon money once she's returned to New York? What effect does that have on Virginia's relationship with her father? What does it do to her feelings for Simon?
7. What do you make of Samuel? Why do Virginia's feelings for him seem to waver between attraction, trust, and mistrust?
8. Were you surprised to learn the truth about Clara?
9. What do you think will happen to Simon and Virginia—and their children—in the years after this novel has ended? What do you think Agent Marshall's sudden appearance on their doorstep means for them?