

Cape May

by Chip Cheek



About the Book

A mesmerizing debut novel by Chip Cheek, CAPE MAY explores the social and sexual mores of 1950s America through the eyes of a newly married couple from the genteel south corrupted by sophisticated New England urbanites.

Late September 1957. Henry and Effie, very young newlyweds from Georgia, arrive in Cape May, New Jersey, for their honeymoon only to find the town is deserted. Feeling shy of each other and isolated, they decide to cut the trip short. But before they leave, they meet a glamorous set of people who sweep them up into their drama. Clara, a beautiful socialite who feels her youth slipping away; Max, a wealthy playboy and Clara's lover; and Alma, Max's aloof and mysterious half-sister, to whom Henry is irresistibly drawn.

The empty beach town becomes their playground, and as they sneak into abandoned summer homes, go sailing, walk naked under the stars, make love and drink a great deal of gin, Henry and Effie slip from innocence into betrayal, with irrevocable consequences.

Erotic and moving, this is a novel about marriage, love and sexuality, and the lifelong repercussions that meeting a group of debauched cosmopolitans has on a new marriage.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the anonymity provided by a mostly empty seaside town contribute to the story?
2. How does the time period inform the characters' interactions and decisions throughout the book?

3. Henry is only 20 years old, and Effie just 18. Do their ages change how you feel about them? Why or why not?
4. What role do wealth and status play in the characters' perspectives on life and on each other?
5. Discuss how you feel about Alma.
6. Marriage involves both give and take. What does Henry give? Take? How about Effie? What can this tell us about their relationship from beginning to end?
7. Is it possible to define a 'breaking point' for a marriage? What factors have to be considered? Do you think it is possible to truly forgive?
8. Would Henry and Effie's marriage have been different if they hadn't gone to Cape May for their honeymoon?
9. Discuss how you feel about the epilogue.

Author Bio

Chip Cheek's stories have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Washington Square*, and other journals and anthologies. He has been awarded scholarships to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Tin House Summer Writers' Workshop, and the Vermont Studio Center, as well as an Emerging Artist Award from the St. Botolph Club Foundation. CAPE MAY is his debut novel. He lives in El Segundo, California, with his wife and baby daughter.

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