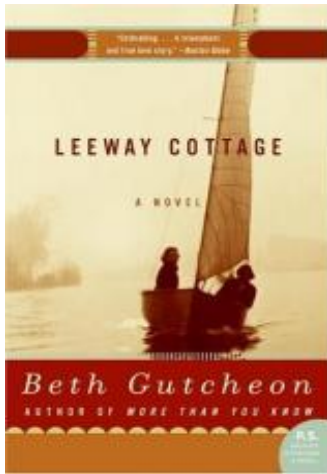


# Leeway Cottage

by Beth Gutcheon

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## About the Book

Hailed as a writer of extraordinary talent and vision, Beth Gutcheon is renowned for storylines that open our hearts and stir our imaginations. In this beautifully written tour de force of a novel, Gutcheon takes readers back to the coastal village of Dundee, Maine. There, in a Victorian summer house called Leeway Cottage, we witness the scenes of a long 20th century marriage.

In April of 1940, as the Nazis march into Denmark, a rich girl of the Dundee summer colony named Sydney Brant marries a gifted Danish pianist, Laurus Moss. They believe they are well-matched, as young lovers do, but almost at once, their views of the world and their marriage begin to diverge. Laurus's beloved family is in Copenhagen, hostage to what the fortunes of Hitler's war will bring, especially as his mother is Jewish. When Laurus chooses to leave Sydney in the fall of 1941 to help build a Danish Resistance from London, Sydney is dismayed. By the time they are reunited four years later, Laurus's family and the reader have been through one of the most stirring stories of the war, Denmark's courageous grass-roots rescue of virtually all 7000 of the country's Jews. Sydney in America has led a group knitting for the war effort, and had a baby.

In the decades to come, many people, especially their three grown children, will wonder if these two very different people understand each other at all. If they do, how do they stay together? Laurus likes to claim that in heaven you get to see the movie of your life, with all the blanks filled in. In their old age Sydney fears what he might see and why he wants to know; their children fear he'll die and there won't be any movie.

But there will be.

## Discussion Guide

1. How would you characterize the narrator's voice, which sometimes echoes the sentiments of the characters? Describe

the storyteller you envision as the novel unfolds. How does this narration compare to that of the many contributors to the **Leeway Cottage** Guest Book?

2. What do you make of the fact that Sydney's musical talent does not evolve into a profession for her, despite her desire for an unconventional role in the world? Do she and Laurus have a similar appreciation for the arts? In what way does she embody a shifting chapter in American cultural history?

3. From joining the Resistance to integrating his local YMCA, Laurus is willing to be an agent for justice at every turn. From where does he derive this courage? How does his understanding of compassion compare to that of the other men in Sydney's life, including her father, her son, and Neville?

4. **Leeway Cottage** captures the jealousy Candace feels regarding Sydney's relationship with her father, an emotion Sydney comes to understand when she is a mother herself. Do you believe this dynamic is common or rare? What factors contribute to it?

5. What theories do you have about the reason for Berthe Brant's suicide? Did her marriage to James mirror Sydney's marriage to Laurus in any way?

6. Discuss the role of Gladdy and her family in Sydney's life. What is the significance of Sydney and Laurus making their home at **Leeway Cottage**, rather than the house built by Sydney's ancestors?

7. Were you surprised by Sydney's infidelity with Neville? How do you interpret the scene in which she and Anselma have an awkward run-in with Gladdy? Do you consider Laurus to have been unfaithful to Sydney during the war?

8. What is the effect of Nina's closing chapter and its position in the novel? Why did Sydney so dislike Nina? What is your understanding of the bequest Nina made to Hans Katz?

9. The novel focuses on many little-known aspects of Nazi occupation, such as Niels Bohr's ultimatum and the Rosh Hashanah plot against Danish Jews. What history did you learn from Gutcheon's telling of it? In what way is this history the centerpiece of the novel?

10. What was your reaction to the death of Sydney and Laurus? Do you believe their deaths were due to dementia and accident, or would it have been in character for them to take their own lives? Why do you think Laurus' "movie" was about his sister, rather than about events that came later in his life?

11. In the last paragraph of her notes regarding the novel's historical inspiration, the author writes "their marriage lasts, as did so many in their generation, but whether it actually worked, and if so, how, becomes the mystery at the heart of their family." Gutcheon also reminds us of how little Sydney understands about her husband's inner life. Is the Moss marriage a product of its generation? Do contemporary couples have different expectations of love and relationships?

12. How does Gutcheon's use of Dundee in this novel compare to her use of it in **More Than You Know**? What makes Maine an appropriate setting for both books?

## Author Bio

Beth Gutcheon is the critically acclaimed author of the novels THE NEW GIRLS, STILL MISSING, DOMESTIC PLEASURES, SAYING GRACE, FIVE FORTUNES, MORE THAN YOU KNOW, LEEWAY COTTAGE, GOOD-BYE AND AMEN, GOSSIP, DEATH AT BREAKFAST and THE AFFLICTION. She is the writer of several film scripts, including the Academy-Award nominee *The Children of Theatre Street*. She lives in New York City.

## Critical Praise

"A rich saga of an American family told with moving clarity."

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