



Good-bye and Amen

Beth Gutcheon

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In a summer cottage on the coast of Maine, an unlikely love was nurtured, a marriage endured, and a family survived. Now it is time for the children of that marriage to make peace with the wounds and the treasures left to them. And to sort out which is which.

Beth Gutcheon's critically acclaimed family saga, *Leeway Cottage*, was a major achievement: a vivid and moving tale of war and marriage and their consequences that enchanted readers. *Good-bye and Amen* is the next chapter for the family of Leeway Cottage, the story of what happens when those most powerful people in any family drama, the parents, have left the stage.

The complicated marriage of the gifted Danish pianist Laurus Moss to the provincial American child of privilege Sydney Brant was a mystery to many who knew them, including their three children. Now, Eleanor, Monica, and Jimmy Moss have to decide how to divide or share what Laurus and Sydney have left them without losing one another.

Secure and cheerful Eleanor, the oldest, wants little for herself but much for her children. Monica, the least-loved middle child, brings her youthful scars to the table, as well as the baggage of a difficult marriage to the charismatic Norman, who left a brilliant legal career, though not his ambition, to become an Episcopal priest. Youngest and best-loved Jimmy, who made a train wreck of his young adulthood, has returned after a long period of alienation from the family surprisingly intact, but extremely hard for his sisters to read.

Having lived through childhoods both materially blessed and emotionally difficult, with a father who could seem uninvolved and a mother who loved a good family game of "let's you and him fight," the Mosses have formed strong adult bonds that none of them wants to damage. But it's difficult to divide a beloved summer house three ways and keep it too. They all know what's at stake—in a world of atomized families, a house like Leeway Cottage can be the glue that keeps generations of cousins and grandchildren deeply connected to one another. But knowing it's important doesn't make it easy.

Good-bye and Amen Details

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From Reader Review Good-bye and Amen for online ebook

Marigold says

Oh yeah, I'm a sucker for this kind of thing. This is a novel - but there's a family tree, and family photos! And mini-biographies of each character, in the back of the book!

I loved the way Gutcheon uses oral biography to tell the story - having each character speak for him/herself, telling the same story from different perspectives. Since this is a family story with characters of different generations, & also a story of siblings, that really worked. Of course it means there's no descriptive narrative - but that was OK for a story of this type.

My mom recently left this book behind when she visited me, so I didn't know anything about it, & didn't realize it's a sequel to another book. So now I have to read the first one! The story begins when grown-up siblings Eleanor, Monica & Jimmy have to divide the estate of their parents, after their mother's death. As the opening sentence reads, "The trouble started when Jimmy took the piano." It seems mama was kind of a witch, so the three have a lot of issues to sort out. Eleanor is a wealthy housewife with a fabulous husband & kids; Monica is a down-trodden pastor's wife; Jimmy is an entrepreneur & emotionally sort of a Zen guy. They're all very different but each is deeply attached to the idea of their family. I love stories about big extended families - maybe because I don't have one myself! I find them fascinating. There's a lot in the book about the deceased parents, who apparently are the subjects of the first book - so I can't wait to find out more about them - looking forward to witchy mama doing some evil deeds!

The only mildly annoying thing about the book is that for the most part, the family is fighting over who gets the "summer house" on the coast, who gets the boat, etc. You know, "trials & tribulations of the rich kids". Take away a star for that but I definitely added one for the family tree & photos!

Karen says

My Review of Good-Bye and Amen by Beth Gutcheon

As the sequel to Leeway Cottage, Good-Bye and Amen is the continuing drama about the Moss family. The story is still a fascinating stand-alone novel even if you haven't read Beth Gutcheon's first tale about this captivating New England family.

Good-Bye and Amen is written in a unique format and recounts how three siblings reunite at their family summer home in Maine to decide how to divide up their parents' estate. The story begins with the Moss children, now adults, going through their parents' possessions following Laurus and Sydney Moss's death. The marriage of well to do American Sydney Brant to talented pianist Laurus was a mystery to most people who knew them but especially to their children. Both their parents influenced the three children but their domineering mother was the one with the greatest influence on how they grew up.

Pressed by their own families to get their fair share of their inheritance, the siblings struggle with how to reasonably divide up what their parents left them while keeping their love for each other intact. This

“lottery” of their inheritance also brings the siblings together as a way of saying goodbye to their parents. Things get off on the wrong foot when the son, Jimmy, takes the baby grand piano that middle sister, Monica, wanted very much. Jimmy is the youngest and for years was off on his own, said to be involved with drugs, but has now settled down with a respectable job making computer games and living in California with his wife Janice. Surprisingly, Jimmy wants to be fair with his sisters, even though he isn’t yet sure he wants to have a relationship with them again. This trip is one in which he decides they may all learn more about each other and come away better off in the end.

Eleanor Applegate, the eldest Moss child, is well mannered and very secure in her marriage to Bobby, a banker with a laid-back manner about him. Eleanor is not as much interested in what she can get for herself but rather for her children.

Middle child, Monica, is married to Norman Faithful, who just may not live up to his name. He is a pompous minister from a rather dubious background and is basically unpopular with the rest of the clan. Monica herself wants whatever she can get. Her desire to possess so much may be a substitute for what she is lacking in her troubled marriage. Although Monica is loyal to Norman, even after he quit his law practice to take up the ministry, it is easy to see that he is deeply disturbed and not what Monica thought he was when they married.

As mentioned, the story is told in a unique format using short sections conveyed by the characters in the story. They each tell about what is going on from their own point of view and when you then read the next part told by another character, one can see that everyone may have a difference of opinion on what is really going on. This way of writing makes the reading of Good-Bye and Amen an extraordinary and outstanding book to read as it brings you right into the family. It makes you wish you were in that house in Maine with them so you could share your idea of what is going on.

Who will get what is a main part of the story as every item, no matter large or small, plays an important role as it reflects bitterness and hard feelings that Eleanor, Monica, Jimmy and their families feel toward one another. The final decision of dividing the actual home into thirds leads to the outcome of where this family will go from here and what it will mean for their family and generations to come.

The story is open and amusing and memorable. The middle section of the book contains photographs of the family and that adds to the reader really seeing “the whole picture” of the Moss family.

Submitted by Karen Haney, July, 2008

Heather Dugan says

This is one of the books I send to friends. Well-crafted and beautifully written, the author creatively develops her story through the voices of both main characters and peripheral observers. She exposes the bruises and wounds of three adult children with gentle humor as they seek to divide their parent's estate and come to terms with choices made by themselves and one another.

Sandie says

It is obvious from the outset that it would have proven useful to the readers of Good-Bye and Amen to have also read Beth Gutcheon's previous offering Leeway Cottage. Perhaps then we would have had some inkling of who the characters in this saga were and how they related to the other characters. This reader was about 60 pages into the book, and continuously flipping back and forth in the story in an attempt to ascertain who each person speaking was and what their connection was to the other characters. (Had I realized that the BACK OF THE BOOK included "biographies of the contributors" that explained the background of each "speaker" in the book, it might have been a help, but alas I read the book from front to back and not from back to front).

Initial confusion aside, I ultimately did enjoy this story of the three siblings and their respective spouses, children, friends and adversaries once I got everyone sorted out. I even enjoyed the flow and structure of the tale. It reads like a diary from a group therapy session with everyone defending or justifying their actions while questioning the motives and actions of others. Ultimately we find that it is not the family the prays together, stays together.....but rather that blood is thicker than water.

Overall - 2 1/2 stars

Antoinette says

I have read several Beth Gutcheon books in a row, and though I enjoyed this one, it wasn't her strongest. I do like the way she wrote it, as a follow-up to Leeway Cottage, with interviews from the various family members from that book. It filled in some blanks from the previous novel and offered a look at what happened with the family after the parents died. It went pretty quickly, though the various characters were hard to keep straight (but there is a list of them in the back). One thing I love about Gutcheon is that she assumes you're an intelligent person and makes you work a bit for the answer. If you're new to her writing, you start to think you missed something, but you soon realize that she has spelled it out for you between the lines or she will get to the answer eventually. This probably makes sense only to those who have read her. All in all, it's a pretty satisfying conclusion to this family's saga.

Linda Marie Marsh says

3.5 STARS.....i enjoyed but i would not suggest anyone rush out to buy it sad to say. I read Leeway Cottage awhile back and am glad i did, it's almost a necessity.

Fiction based on fact including pictures, this is a generational story about a family and a summer home in Maine. Good story! But there were so many references to people from the other book, the past, that it made the reading a wee bit confusing.

Diana says

Interesting but I didn't like the characters.

Roz says

I am so tired of reading about dysfunctional families! Give me a break!

Wendy Stockard says

A complicated story of love, loss and legacies. The family dynamics were well developed, and I loved the story told by different POVs. Looking forward to reading the prequel, Leeway Cottage.

Hannah H. says

This is debatably the most ingenious novel structure I have ever experienced! “Good-bye and Amen” is written in continuous stream of consciousness, an interview-esque reflection of family events. Each family member- and the occasional bystander- offers a paragraph or two of perspective on their lives together. Through these lenses, the reader sees the past and present woven together in a comprehensive way- from birthday parties to marital affairs.

The only drawback I saw to this book, was the sheer volume of perspectives. I appreciated it, but I also got lost and confused. I found myself flipping back and forth at the beginning, trying to remember who was related to who and where everyone fell on the family tree. But it was a small price to pay for such an awesome reading experience.

For other conservative readers: There was a bit of drug discussion, but very few curse words at all (maybe 3 or 4?) I was really intrigued by the overtones of faith as well! It’s not a Christian book, but it does show “religion” playing out as a binding set of rules, one that leaves characters longing for a true relationship with God.

Audrey says

Interesting, but not deep or engrossing.

Ariella says

I tried listening to this book. Actually I was excited to listen to it because I had just reread the first book. However I had to stop listening - there were too many voices and too many characters and just way too confusing. It was written so differently from the first book which was more narrative. Too bad but I don’t think it’s my loss. I’m not going to even bother getting it as a regular book. I’ll just skip this one.

Su says

If I could, I would give this book at least a 3.5 rating. This novel is a sequel to Leeway Cottage which I read several months ago and really did not enjoy all that much. I found this story to be much more interesting and involved. The author chose a very unusual style of writing and she had me hooked from the beginning. I was a tad confused about the character that was always referenced in italics. Was this person dead, was it several dead people, or what the heck? But I would recommend reading it, although you probably should slog through Leeway Cottage first, so you are aware of the background of the characters.

Jackie says

I would have devoured this book in one sitting if I didn't have to do pesky things like sleep and go to work. This is a story, told in wonderfully chaotic 12 or so voices, of a family. It begins with 3 grown children dealing with cleaning out their parents' houses after their surprise dual death (gas leak) and it blossoms into this complex view of their lives (and those of their children, friends, coworkers, etc) both past and present. What is truly amazing is that the author has even included photos of these fictional characters in one section of the book! It deals with family issues in every possible form: parents, children, step children, siblings, inlaws, grandchildren, marriage, money, divorce, addiction, depression, grief...it does on and on. The story is creative and exuberantly told and I would recommend it to anyone who has strangers in their lives that they happen to share parents with. Oh, and everyone else too!

Sheila says

Family interactions through the years. zzzzz
