



More Than You Know

By Beth Gutcheon
ISBN: 9780060959357

Plot Summary

In a small town called Dundee on the coast of Maine, an old woman named Hannah Gray begins her story: "Somebody said 'True love is like ghosts, which everyone talks about, and few have seen.' I've seen both, and I don't know how to tell you which is worse." Hannah has decided, finally, to leave a record of the passionate and anguished long-ago summer in Dundee when she met Conary Crocker, the town bad boy and the love of her life. First love often brings astonishment, joy, and frustration, but theirs is somehow also mixed with something frightening. Hannah discovers, as Conary and others in the town soon suspect, that there is a very unquiet and angry spirit inhabiting the house that Hannah's stepmother has rented for the summer.

This spare, piercing, and unforgettable novel bridges two centuries and two intense love stories as Hannah and Conary's fate is interwoven with the tale of a marriage that took place in Dundee a hundred years earlier. Hannah says, "I don't suppose you have to believe in ghosts to know that we are all haunted, all of us, by things we can see and feel and guess at, and many more things that we can't." But she knows that ghosts are utterly real, as well as metaphoric, and is haunted by the sense that if she could have learned who this ghost was, and what it wanted, she might have made a difference.

Ghosts haunt places where they have been deeply happy or intensely bitter in life. But this one's places have been disturbed. The house where it is seen was no one's home; it was first a schoolhouse, and originally stood not in Dundee but in an island village now abandoned and lost. What happened in that place, to a family trapped in a murderous pattern that seems to echo eerily through time, becomes the question that haunts Hannah and Conary and will keep you guessing until the last, chilling page.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the title mean? To whom, other than the "boy of my heart" (p. 229), does it refer?
2. Hannah begins the story by writing "Some-body said 'True love is like ghosts, which everyone talks about, and few have seen.' I've seen both, and I don't know how to tell you which is worse" (p. 1). What does this mean? Why doesn't Hannah know how to tell which is worse? What prevents her?
3. Both Amos and Conary die tragically at young ages. What are the similarities and differences between the two deaths?
4. Much of the tension in *More Than You Know* derives from knowledge and mystery. What do characters' relationships to the search for truth and truth itself reveal about each character? What is your relationship to the truth in this novel?
5. Misunderstandings and arguments between Edith and her stepdaughter leave Hannah feeling utterly alone and desperate to get out of the house. What is Sallie's relationship with her mother? What role do Hannah's and Sallie's rather detached fathers play in their daughters' lives?
6. Hooks probes the gap between the values many people "claim to hold and their willingness to do the work of connecting thought and action, theory and practice" (p. 90). How does our culture reward those who nurture this gap? What changes would we have to make in society to nurture and inspire the closing of this gap?
7. Why does the ghost serve as the catalyst for Conary's death just as he's chosen to return to Dundee with Hannah?
8. If Hannah is the narrator of her own story, and if Mercy takes over the telling of the Haskell family story with excerpts taken from her manuscript, who is the narrator from whom Mercy's manuscript takes over? Who is telling that story? What is the effect of switching perspectives?
9. Discuss the way in which Beth Gutcheon uses music in this novel.
10. Hannah, Claris, and Sallie struggle with their families and feel hemmed in by parental strictures. How do their familial relationships prepare them for love? Is romantic love any less true if it serves as the vehicle for escape from troubles at home?
11. What binds the two stories together? Is it an accident of geography, or is there a greater force at work?
12. "I know there are feelings that survive death, but can they all? What if only the bitterest and most selfish are strong enough?" (p. 266) are Hannah's final questions. Does the novel provide answers?

Recommended Further Reading
The House of the Spirits
 Isabelle Allende
The Laughing Place
 Pam Durban
Somewhere Off the Coast of Maine
 Ann Hood
The Inn at Lake Devine
 Elinor Lipman
Evening
 Susan Minot
While I Was Gone
 Sue Miller
Beloved
 Toni Morrison
Complete Stories and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe
 Edgar Allan Poe
Drinking the Rain
 Alix Kates Shulman
This is my Daughter
 Roxana Robinson
Ethan Frome
 Edith Wharton

About the Author: Beth Gutcheon is the critically acclaimed author of five novels: *The New Girls*, *Still Missing*, *Domestic Pleasures*, *Saying Grace*, and *Five Fortunes*. She is the writer of several film scripts, including the Academy Award nominee "The Children of Theatre Street." She lives in New York City.