



**BOOK CLUB KIT**

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- 1.** When Kasey returns to Goldie for the first time in fifteen years, she expresses many conflicting emotions. “How could the place she’d grown to hate so much look so pretty? How could even the rotten parts make her wistful?” How does this complex sense of home shape her character? Do you find Kasey’s attitude toward her hometown relatable?
- 2.** This story is told in parallel timelines and several different points of view, with the narrative jumping back and forth between 2004 and 2019 as well as between RACK’s perspectives. What impact do these choices have on the book and how you experience it?
- 3.** Rosemarie prides herself on being an open and honest person, but she keeps several weighty secrets over the course of the novel. How do these secrets affect her relationships with her loved ones?
- 4.** What are the different ways love and loyalty are expressed in this book?
- 5.** Ada is the main person taking care of her mother in the 2019 timeline, and she eventually has to ask her brothers for more support. What factors do you think contribute to the expectations—either explicit or implicit—Ada’s family has for her?
- 6.** How is Caroline’s relationship to motherhood impacted by her relationship with her own mother? What other kinds of mother-daughter relationships do we see?
- 7.** *Goodbye Earl’s* subtitle is “A Revenge Novel.” Discuss the role of revenge in the book. How does each girl/woman justify it? When do you think revenge is necessary? Do you agree with the characterization of RACK’s actions as “revenge,” or would you describe them in a different way?
- 8.** Rosemarie, Ada, and Kasey all have different ways of coping with their emotions after they murder Trey. What do their reactions say about their characters?
- 9.** Many people in the town of Goldie are quick to jump to Caroline and the rest of RACK’s defense when Trey is found dead. What other benefits are there to this type of small-town community? What drawbacks are there?
- 10.** What are the many ways women in this novel demonstrate agency?
- 11.** How does Rosemarie’s cancer affect her perspective on life?
- 12.** Music plays a big role in *Goodbye Earl*, from the novel’s name to the mentions of other songs and artists scattered throughout the story. What were the most fundamental songs of your own teenage years? Do you return to them as an adult?

# A CONVERSATION WITH LEESA CROSS-SMITH

**The title *Goodbye Earl* references The Chicks song of the same name, and RACK are all big fans of their music. What impact did The Chicks have on the creation of this novel?**

I remember the exact moment I heard “Goodbye Earl” for the first time. I remember exactly where I was and who I was with. I was in college, at work at the coffee shop and one of my best friends, Sarah, was listening to The Chicks on her Walkman, and I listened to it on there. We loved it so much and laughed about it a lot and it instantly felt like a song we’d loved forever. I absolutely love those sorts of moments and all that nostalgia! And when I saw the video, I just loved how campy it was...how it was filled with so much intense girl power...how it brought up a dark, serious issue and “fixed” it quickly in the way that only dreams can. I love the sisterhood of The Chicks and the sisterhood I have with the women in my life. I wanted all of that in a novel too—a friendship book...a revenge novel...a quirky, romantic small town in the summer—a book that feels like all the best parts of a country song.

***Goodbye Earl* traverses a lot of ground, due to the the dual plot arcs and the character development across two timelines. Could you talk about your planning and writing process? Was there anything unique about the planning for this book in particular?**

When it comes to my writing process, I usually have a word count I want to hit and I just write until I hit it. While writing *Goodbye Earl*, I aimed for about two thousand words a day...no matter what...even if I didn’t “feel” like it. Writing is my job so it doesn’t matter if I “feel” like it or not; I have a job to do. And when I was sitting down to write, I had an outline—certain points I needed to hit for the day, or chapters I needed to finish.

The planning for this book was definitely unique because it’s the most time I’ve ever covered in a novel. My novels usually take place over a short, intense period. Before this book, the most time I’d covered was a year. I made a lot of detailed timelines and outlines and spent a lot of time going over those points and making sure I knew exactly what I was doing and how to pull it off.

**Though there’s a lot of pain and hardship in this novel, overall it is a story about love in all its forms. Did you have a difficult time balancing the light and dark parts of the story, or striking the right tone?**

I really didn’t have a hard time balancing the light and dark parts because life is so light and dark! One moment, the funniest thing could happen and the next...the saddest. People can laugh at a funeral or be at party and feel crushing sadness. Life is so rarely one total thing without being another, so letting the story and the characters experience every shade of their light and dark emotions—sometimes at the same time—didn’t scare me off at all. It made the most sense for me and the characters.

**When writing, what thoughts did you have about revenge and when it's needed or justified?**

In the book, I have Ada think of the Bible verse "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." I thought about that a lot while writing the book. I completely understand the desire for revenge and I love that desire in books and movies and country songs! My faith won't let me justify it in real life; even when it's needed...I have to let God take care of it. But wow, I love writing fiction...and letting these women get their revenge. I *loved* it.

**The idea of sisterhood is a big driving force in this story. What inspired the creation of RACK, and what do you want readers to take away from the friendship among these four women? Did you have your own "RACK" growing up?**

I write about girlfriends often in my work and have written a lot of short stories about friendship, so writing a whole novel about friendship was dreamy. I love all of the women in RACK individually and I love their little sub-units and the group as a whole too. There's so much to love and they are so dear to me...they're a part of me forever now.

And I did have my own "RACK" growing up, yes! I'm still in touch with those girls and love them so much. I've been lucky enough to always have some amazing women in my life. My girlfriends are so very important to me, forever and ever.

**How did you approach dealing with the sensitive topics of physical and sexual abuse through a fictional lens? Was there anything you wanted to convey—or any tropes you avoided?**

I always want to make sure I'm being *extra* sensitive to those topics when they appear in my work...and I try very hard to leave/make room for a lot of big feelings. I was very careful to avoid any sort of victim blaming, and even in the moments when Caroline wanted to blame herself I had her girlfriends correct her very quickly. And later, when other women blamed themselves for something a man had done to them, I always had a character remind them that it wasn't their fault. That was important to me because these are the characters and the world I created, and it's *not* the real world, so I *could* make a gentler, more understanding space for them, so I did it. The world is the world and I cannot control the world, but I do get to control what happens in my books.

More than anything else, I wanted to convey how big and important love is (no matter what kind of trauma a character has been through)...how healing love is...how real love doesn't give up on people...how people *can* heal and hope. Those things are possible. I don't think I could sit down and write anything (or remain a well-adjusted human) if I didn't believe those things, even if just a little bit.



Photo: © Leesa Cross-Smith

# RECIPE

## EARL HAS TO DIE PIE

Add a scoop of ice cream to serve this dish cold.

Recipe courtesy of Peter Sterk, [The Food Network](#)

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Yields one 8" pie

### INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups fresh or frozen tart cherries
- 1 to 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 4 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1/8 tablespoon almond extract (optional)
- Your favorite pie crust or pie dough recipe for 2 crust pie
- 1 1/2 tablespoons butter, to dot
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar, to sprinkle

### DIRECTIONS

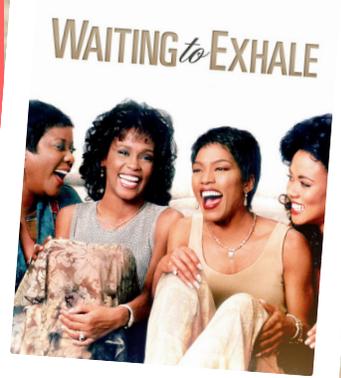
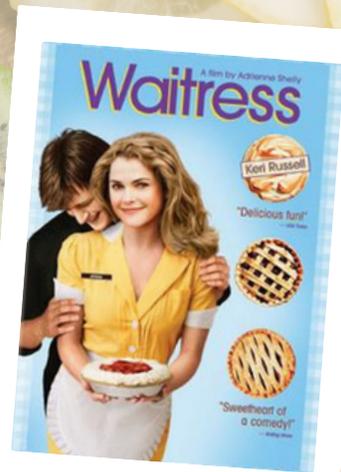
1. Place cherries in medium saucepan and place over heat. Cover. After the cherries lose considerable juice, which may take a few minutes, remove from heat. In a small bowl, mix the sugar and cornstarch together. Pour this mixture into the hot cherries and mix well. Add the almond extract, if desired, and mix. Return the mixture to the stove and cook over low heat until thickened, stirring frequently. Remove from the heat and let cool. If th
2. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.
3. Use your favorite pie dough recipe. Prepare your crust. Divide in half. Roll out each piece large enough to fit into an 8 to 9-inch pan. Pour cooled cherry mixture into the crust. Dot with butter. Moisten edge of bottom crust. Place top crust on and flute the edge of the pie. Make a slit in the middle of the crust for steam to escape. Sprinkle with sugar.
4. Bake for about 50 minutes. Remove from the oven and place on a rack to cool.



# MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOKCLUB

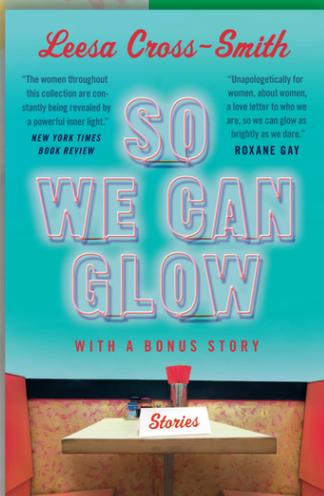
## FRIENDSHIP/SISTERHOOD BOOKS:

*The Baby-Sitter's Club* by Ann M. Martin  
*Just As Long As We're Together* by Judy Blume  
***Firefly Lane*** by Kristin Hannah  
*Sula* by Toni Morrison  
*Circle of Friends* by Maeve Binchy  
***So We Can Glow*** by Leesa Cross-Smith  
*The Color Purple* by Alice Walker  
*The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan  
***The Secret Life of Bees*** by Sue Monk Kidd



## FRIENDSHIP/REVENGE MOVIES

*The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*  
***Waiting to Exhale***  
*Thelma and Louise*  
***Waitress***  
*Now and Then*



# MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOKCLUB

## LISTEN TO THE OFFICIAL GOODBYE EARL PLAYLIST ON SPOTIFY NOW



*Of course!*

- "Goodbye Earl" – The Chicks
- "Cowboy Take Me Away" – Brittney Spencer
- "Wrong Mr. Right" – Julie Williams
- "Wide Open Spaces" – The Chicks
- "Better Than You Left Me" – Mickey Guyton
- "Breathe In, Breathe Out" – Rissi Palmer
- "Strawberry Wine" – Deanna Carter
- "Breathe" – Faith Hill
- "Fearless" – Taylor Swift
- "Cowboy Take Me Away" – The Chicks

# NOW IN Paperback

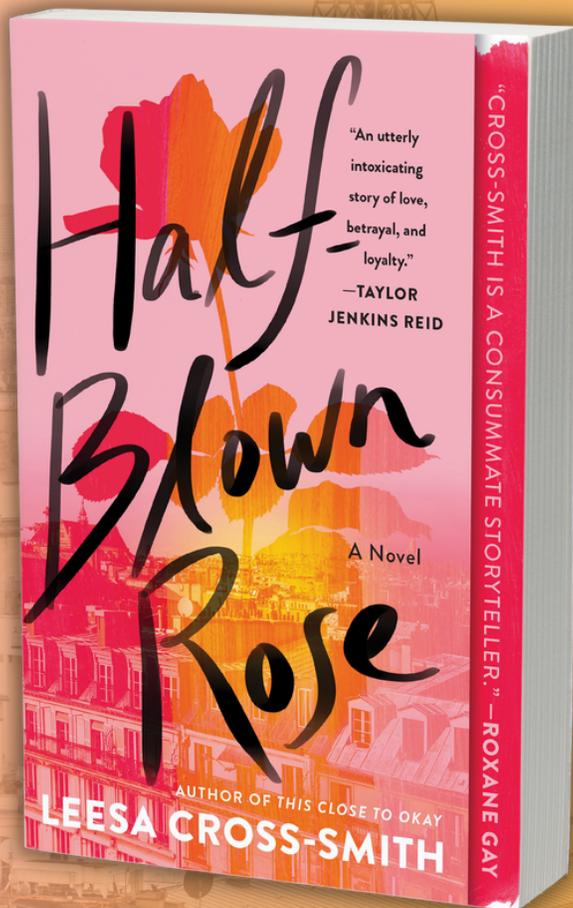
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—Lily King,  
New York Times bestselling author of  
*Writers & Lovers*



## ALSO AVAILABLE FROM LEESA CROSS-SMITH

A Book of the Month,  
Good Housekeeping, and  
Marie Claire book club selection  
recommended by *The Today Show*,  
*Shondaland*, *Elle* and more!

