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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian McEwan was born in Aldershot, England, and now lives in London. Spanning ten novels and two collections of stories, McEwan's works have earned him worldwide critical acclaim, most recently for *Saturday*. He has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction three times, winning the award for *Amsterdam* in 1998. His bestselling novel *Atonement* received the W. H. Smith Literary Award, National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award, *Los Angeles Times* Prize for Fiction, and the Santiago Prize for the European Novel. He also won the Somerset Maugham Award for his first collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites*; the Whitbread Novel Award and Prix Femina Étranger for *The Child in Time*; and Germany's Shakespeare Prize in 1999.

Also by Ian McEwan

SATURDAY

ATONEMENT

AMSTERDAM

ENDURING LOVE

THE DAYDREAMER

BLACK DOGS

THE INNOCENT

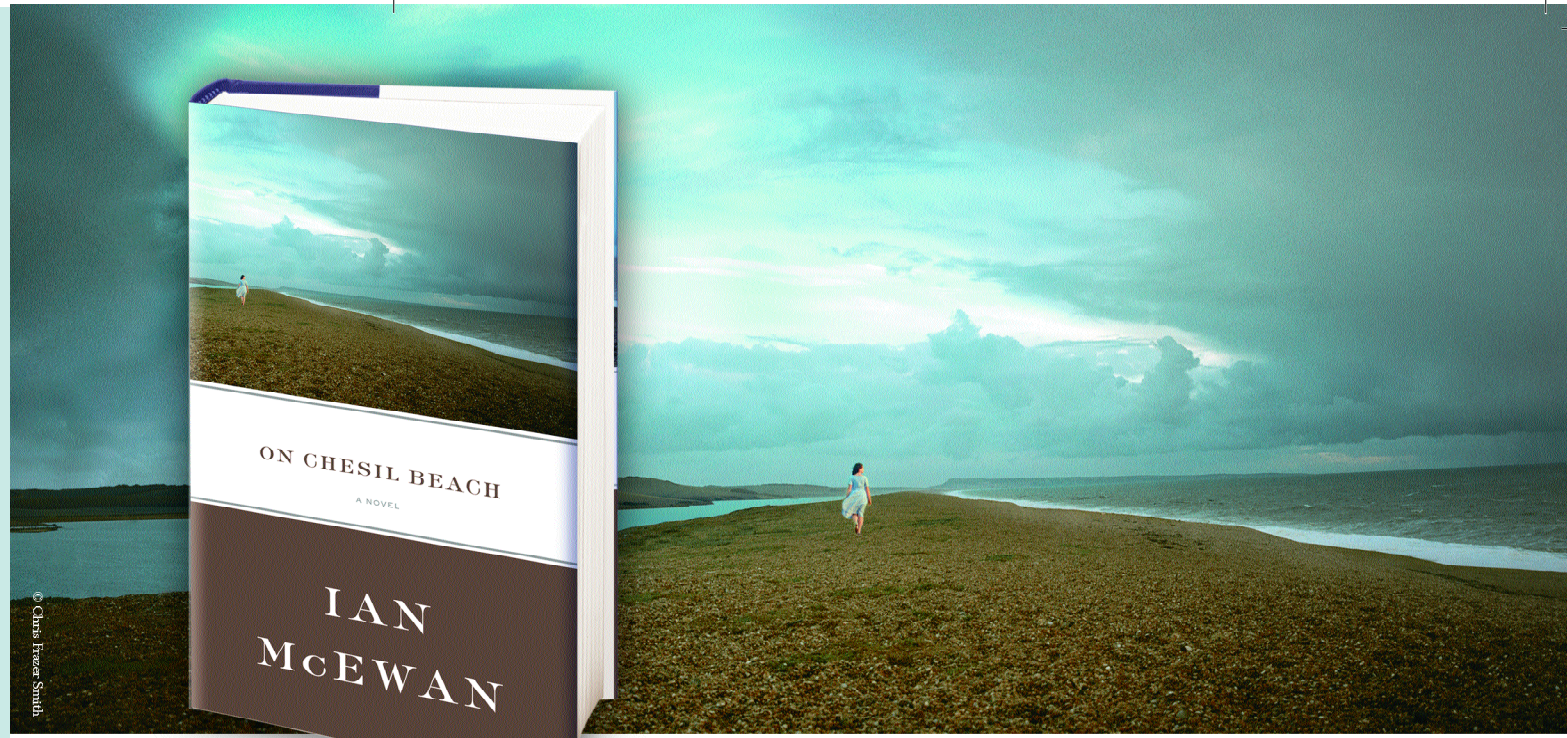
THE CHILD IN TIME

THE COMFORT OF STRANGERS

THE CEMENT GARDEN

IN BETWEEN THE SHEETS

FIRST LOVE, LAST RITES



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ON CHESIL BEACH

A Novel

Ian McEwan

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ON CHESIL BEACH

A NOVEL

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IAN McEWAN





INTRODUCTION

Unfolding with the mesmerizing, deeply human storytelling that has made Ian McEwan one of the most beloved authors of his generation, *On Chesil Beach* captures one night and two lifetimes wound into a stunning turning point. In taut yet poignantly written scenes, newlyweds Florence and Edward navigate their wedding night, coping with their greatest fears and wishes. The year is 1962; they have been steeped in a culture whose expectations for composure and maturity are high, with roles clearly defined and information about the mysteries of marriage—sexual or otherwise—rarely shared. As we watch husband and wife experience their first nuptial hours, *On Chesil Beach* illuminates the fragile dance of intimacy, a haunting ode to the true selves we so often refuse to reveal.

The questions and topics that follow are designed to enhance your reading of *On Chesil Beach*. We hope they will enrich your experience of this provocative novel. For more information about the author and his previous books, visit www.IanMcEwan.com. To explore other ideal titles for reading groups, visit us at www.NanATalese.com.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do the novel's opening lines tell us about Edward and Florence? How did your perceptions of them change throughout the subsequent pages? What details did you eventually know about them that they never fully revealed to one another?
2. Are relationships harmed or helped by cultural restrictions against sex before marriage? Would this marriage have taken place if the couple had met when birth-control pills were no longer just a rumor?
3. Edward replays the words "with my body I thee worship" in his mind. What might have been the intention of including that line when this version of the marriage ceremony was written? How does it make Edward feel?
4. Ian McEwan describes the novel's time period as an era when youth was not glorified but adulthood was. We are also told that Edward was born in 1940, while his parents contemplated possible outcomes of the war with Germany. At what point did Edward and Florence's solemnity become viewed as old-fashioned? What contributed to that shift? What are your recollections, or those shared by relatives who lived it, of the emerging youth culture of the late 1960s and '70s?
5. Were Florence and Edward incompatible in ways beyond sexual ones? What do their difficulties in bed say about their relationship altogether? Or is sex an isolated aspect of a marriage?
6. Chapter two describes how Florence and Edward met; the first paragraph tells us that they were too sophisticated to believe in destiny. How would you characterize the kind of love they developed? What made them believe they were perfect for one another? Are any two people perfect for one another?
7. What did Edward's decision to go to London for college indicate about his goals? What was Florence's dream for her future? Was marriage a greater social necessity for her as a woman? Would her career as a classical musician necessarily have been sacrificed if she had remained with Edward?
8. Compare Edward's upbringing to Florence's. How did their parents affect their attitudes toward life? How did the limitations of Edward's mother shape his feelings about responsibility and women? Was Florence drawn to her mother's competitiveness?
9. To what extent was the financial gulf between Edward and Florence a source of trouble? How might the relationship have unfolded, particularly during this time period, if Edward, not Florence, had been the spouse with financial security?
10. Chapter four recounts the moment when Edward tells Florence he loves her because she's "square," not in spite of it. Are their opposing tastes the product of their temperaments or the episodes in their young lives? What is your understanding of her revulsion to sex?
11. Discuss the novel's setting, which forms its title. What is the effect of the creaky hotel McEwan creates, and the din of crashing waves on a chilly June beach? What does it say about the newlyweds that this is the scene of their wedding night?
12. In the end, Edward explores various "what ifs." Would their marriage have lasted if he had consented to her request for platonic living arrangements? What are the best ways to predict whether a couple can sustain a marriage?
13. How would Edward and Florence have fared in the twenty-first century? Has the nature of love changed since the 1960s?
14. The author tells us that the marriage ended because Edward was callous, and that as Florence ran from him, she was at the same time desperately in love with him. Why did Edward respond the way he did? Why was it so difficult for them to be honest about their feelings? How would you have reacted that night?
15. Discuss the structure of *On Chesil Beach*. What is the effect of reading such a compressed storyline, weaving one night with the years before and after it? How did it shape your reading to see only Edward's point of view in the end? What might Florence's perspective have looked like?
16. In what ways does *On Chesil Beach* represent a departure for Ian McEwan? In what ways does it enhance the themes in his previous fiction?