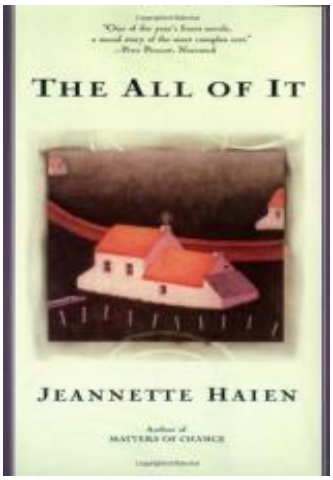
The All of It

by Jeannette Haien



About the Book

The All of It is an exquisitely told story of sin and understanding. As a frustrated Father Declan de Loughry fishes for salmon in inclement Irish weather, he mulls over the events of the previous days. Four days ago, while performing the last rites on a dying husband, he learned that the couple was never married and, in fact, are brother and sister. In a breathless retelling, Enda, the sister, recounts their terribly abusive childhood at the hands of their drunken, widowed father. As Enda relates the gripping events surrounding her and her brother's act of incest, Father Declan finds himself mesmerized by both the tale and the teller. While Father Declan struggles with an unyielding river, he must negotiate between his priestly condemnation of incest and his own heart's desires toward Enda.

Discussion Guide

1. Jeannette Haien frames Enda's "confession" with the story of Father Declan's day of fishing at the river. How does this framing device mirror, or contrast with, Enda's story? Father Declan tells Enda, "you've netted me with your telling." What analogies might be drawn between his struggles with an unruly river and her attempts at making him understand her past choices?

2. Enda goes to great lengths to insist that her retelling of her and her brother's youth does not constitute a confession. Why is she so insistent? Why might she not want to tell Father Declan her history in a confessional? Why does she persist in referring to Father Declan as her friend and not her priest?

3. Haien paints a very vivid picture of the weather. What role does the Irish climate play in both Enda's recounting and Father Declan's fishing trip?

4. Father Declan's opinion of both Enda and her past changes radically through the course of the novel. Did your opinion likewise change? What were some of the factors that contributed to your reassessment?

5. How does Haien use Enda's present day anguish to heighten the drama of her storytelling? What effect does Father Declan's rapt listening have on your own enjoyment of Enda's story?

Author Bio

After more than thirty-five years as a professional concert pianist and music teacher, Jeannette Haien, in her 60s, began her second career as a novelist. Her first novel, *The All of It*, published in 1986, garnered the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the Academy of Arts and Letters. Haien then took eight years to finish her second novel, *Matters of Chance*, published in 1997. Born in Dayton, Ohio, to a Dutch immigrant-industrialist father and a violinist mother, she received a bachelor's degree in English and a masters degree in Music from the University of Michigan. Even before Haien graduated, she was already winning renown as a professional pianist and teacher. It was through her understanding of the structure of classical music that she learned how to create her classically constructed stories. According to Haien, "the structure of a work is the essence of it. It's discipline, if you will, which makes great freedom possible. Under the laws of structure, you have the freedom to work in the freest way imaginable." Writing five to eight hours a day, she marries rigor to a highly developed sense of expectation. Says Haien, "my life has been nothing but a dawning exercise every day of expectation. I have been continuously so surprised, that I am childlike to the point of glee sometimes." Haien and her husband have a daughter and grandson and live in New York City and Connemara, Ireland.

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