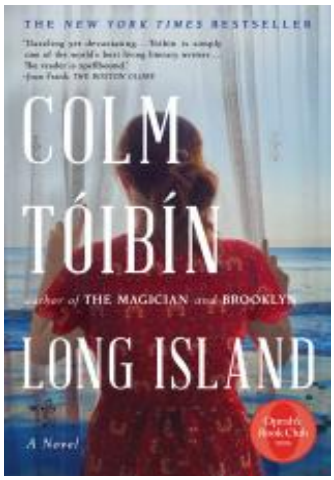
Long Island

by Colm Tóibín



About the Book

From the beloved, critically acclaimed *New York Times* bestselling author comes a spectacularly moving and intense novel of secrecy, misunderstanding and love. LONG ISLAND is the story of Eilis Lacey, the complex and enigmatic heroine of BROOKLYN --- Colm Tóibín?s most popular work --- 20 years later.

Eilis Lacey is Irish, married to Tony Fiorello, a plumber and one of four Italian American brothers, all of whom live in neighboring houses on a cul-de-sac in Lindenhurst, Long Island, with their wives and children and Tony?s parents, a huge extended family that lives and works, eats and plays together. It is the spring of 1976, and Eilis, now in her 40s with two teenage children, has no one to rely on in this still-new country. Though her ties to Ireland remain stronger than those that hold her to her new land and home, she has not returned in decades.

One day, when Tony is at his job and Eilis is in her home office doing her accounting, an Irishman comes to the door asking for her by name. He tells her that his wife is pregnant with Tony?s child and that when the baby is born, he will not raise it but instead deposit it on Eilis? doorstep. It is what Eilis does --- and what she refuses to do --- in response to this stunning news that makes Tóibín?s novel so riveting.

LONG ISLAND is about longings unfulfilled, even unrecognized. The silences in Eilis? life are thunderous and dangerous, and there?s no one more deft than Tóibín at giving them language. This is a gorgeous story of a woman alone in a marriage and the deepest bonds she rekindles on her return to the place and people she left behind, to ways of living and loving she thought she?d lost.

Discussion Guide

1. Eilis quickly decides she wants nothing to do with Tony?s illegitimate baby. How does she arrive at this decision, and why does she feel so strongly about it? What would she lose by caving to the pressure from Tony?s family to accept a

future with the baby in their lives?

2. Discuss Eilis? fraught relationship with Tony?s large, tight-knit Italian American family. In what ways have they made her feel welcomed --- or more isolated?

3. Compare Eilis? relationship with her mother to Tony?s relationship with his. Which aspects do you attribute to cultural differences and which to the unique circumstances of their lives?

4. How does Eilis use silence to communicate throughout the novel? Consider, for example, her car ride with Tony to the airport on pages 133-34. How does Colm Tóibín?s writing give language to the weight of these wordless moments?

5. After Eilis left Jim behind in Ireland, he began seeing another woman, Mai Whitney. Compare what ultimately happened between them to his experience with Eilis.

6. Reflecting on the events of 20 years ago, Jim considers that he never asked Eilis about her life in New York. Similarly, we learn that when she returned, Tony never inquired what happened that summer. Now back in Ireland, Eilis fantasizes about Jim ?asking her quietly what it had been like, being away all the years. No one else had asked her this, not her mother or Nancy or anyone? (p. 169). Why do you think this is? ?No one really knew anything about her,? Tóibín writes of Eilis (p. 171). Is this true?

7. What did you think of the way Mrs. Lacey?s behavior changes when Rosella and Larry arrive in Enniscorthy? How does Eilis make sense of this and her children?s response to being in Ireland for the first time?

8. Domestic spaces play a major role in the novel, as characters redecorate a sitting room, install new appliances and furniture, and consider buying, selling and building homes. What do these actions reveal about the aspirations and values of characters like Eilis, Mrs. Lacey, Nancy and Miriam?

9. What did you think of Eilis? decision to meet Jim in Dublin? Is she justified in her choice because of Tony?s betrayal? Do you think she will ever tell him about it?

10. Discuss the role of secrets in the narrative. How would the story have changed if certain love affairs and future plans had been shared --- or revealed --- earlier? Alternatively, what might have happened if certain secrets never came to light?

11. ?[Jim] understood something about people, he thought, because he owned a pub? He watched them doing what made no sense, unwilling to listen to argument or reason? (p. 219). How does this quote resonate with the choices Tóibín?s characters make (or refuse to make)? Does Jim understand people as well as he thinks he does?

12. Compare Eilis? decision to hide her marriage to Tony when she came home to Ireland 20 years ago with Jim?s choice to hide his relationship with Nancy in 1976. Is one character more sympathetic than the other? In the end, how do they each deal with the consequences of the truth being revealed? Who had more to lose?

13. What did you think of Nancy?s plan in the final chapters? Why doesn?t she confront Jim directly? What would you have done?

14. Discuss Jim?s final question to Eilis on page 292 and her decision not to answer it. What do you think will happen to these characters next? Imagine them 20 more years in the future. Would you read a third novel from Tóibín about them at that stage of life?

Author Bio

Colm Tóibín is the author of 12 novels, including LONG ISLAND, an Oprah?s Book Club Pick; THE MAGICIAN, winner of the Rathbones Folio Prize; THE MASTER, winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize; BROOKLYN, winner of the Costa Book Award; and NORA WEBSTER; as well as two story collections and several books of criticism. He is the Irene and Sidney B. Silverman Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University and was named the 2022?2024 Laureate for Irish Fiction by the Arts Council of Ireland. In 2021, he was awarded the David Cohen Prize for Literature.

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