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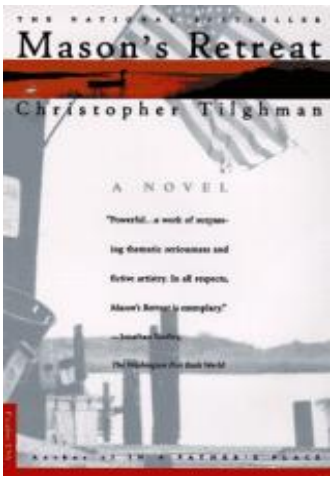
Mason's Retreat

by Christopher Tilghman



About the Book

Unfolding with grandeur and suspenseful inevitability, ***Mason's Retreat*** tells the story of a family on the shore of Maryland on the eve of World War II. After many years of extravagant expatriate living in England, Edith and Edward Mason and their two sons sail back to America to take up residence at the Retreat, a crumbling family estate on the Chesapeake Bay. Although Edward fails as a gentlemen farmer, his wife and sons -- unnoticed by him -- begin to flourish in America, making unbreakable alliances with both land and people. Yet with the coming war, the family's drift toward destruction inexorably quickens, exposing the corrosive effects of silence on love.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the imminence of World War II parallel the lives of the characters? How does it parallel the fate of the old aristocratic families on the Eastern shore?

2. Why do Simon and Sebastian have such differing feelings toward their father, Edward?

3. Why does Edward fail so miserably at the role of gentleman farmer?

4. In what ways does the house itself, the Retreat, act like a character in the novel?

5. How does Tilghman illustrate the tense race relations of 1930s Maryland? Is Sebastian's attachment to Robert, the hired hand, an exception?

6. Even though Edith loves the Retreat and Tom Hazelton, she feels compelled to follow her husband back to England, and to sacrifice her feelings to social propriety. What other literary heroines have faced the same dilemma?

7. Living in the same historical context, would you have made the same decisions Edith did?

8. Tilghman said, "Fiction is about trouble, and people who don't have a real beef with the world will never be able to write." Do you agree?

9. The frame of the novel is a story told by Simon's grown son, Harry. Why does Tilghman use this device?

10. Does place and landscape necessarily impact one's childhood? How did the place where you were raised impact yours?

Author Bio

Christopher Tilghman is the author of two short-story collections, **In a Father?s Place** and **The Way People Run**, and two novels, **Mason?s Retreat** and **Roads of the Heart**.Currently the director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Virginia, he lives with his wife, the writer Caroline Preston, in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Critical Praise

"Beautifully written . . . fully imagined . . . Few fist novels are narrated with the clarity, economy, and masterful assurance Tilghman brigs to this remarkably moving and persuasive tale. "

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