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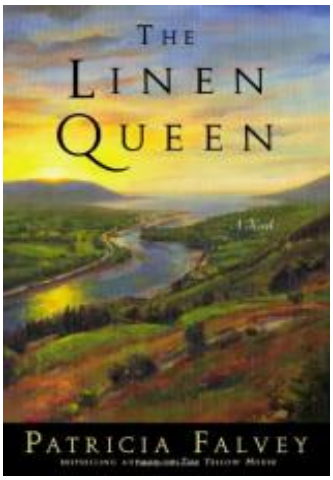
The Linen Queen

by Patricia Falvey



About the Book

Abandoned by her father and neglected by her mother, Sheila can?t wait to escape village life in Northern Ireland. Working in the local linen mill and living off the reluctant charity of relatives is well enough for her mother, but Sheila craves a place where she will get the attention and love she deserves. London may be under attack by the Germans, but it still offers far more opportunity for a clever and attractive young woman such as herself. Winning the title of Linen Queen doesn't just validate her self-confidence; the prize money provides the funds to get away. Though she's ready to leave immediately, her ma has other plans for her money and it seems her looks aren't enough to get the necessary papers to enter England in the midst of the war. Deferred but still determined, Sheila continues to look for a means of escape, and finds it in the arrival of American troops who set up base in her home town.

As the war moves steadily closer to those she has grown to love, Sheila will not only confront more abandonment and loss, but also find true strength, compassion, and a meaning for her life outside of herself.

Discussion Guide

1. Was Sheila justified in wanting to escape her life in Northern Ireland?

2. Did she have a duty to stay and take care of her mother?

3. Should Sheila have given her mother the Linen Queen prize money?

4. How did Ma?s behavior shape Sheila?s actions and her view of herself?

5. How did winning The Linen Queen crown change Sheila?s view of herself, and others? view of her? How would her life have been different if she had not won?

6. Should Grainne have been more grateful to Sheila?

7. Were Patsy and Kathleen really Sheila?s friends?

8. What was the real reason Gavin was angry at Joel? Was it patriotism or jealousy?

9. Was Gavin a patriot or a traitor? Did he redeem himself?

10. Did Joel mean it when he told Sheila he would come back for her?

11. Was Sheila in love with Joel?

12. Is it possible to be in love with two people at the same time? Was Sheila?

13. How would Sheila?s life have been different if she?d gone away with Joel when he first asked her?

14. Do you think Sheila and Gavin were meant to be together? Why? Why not?

15. Did your opinion of Sheila change over the course of the story? How?

16. How do you think the people of N.I. were different before and after the war?

17. How were Sheila?s Ma and Mrs. Hollywood different as mothers?

18. What would your version of a ?Happy Ever After? be for Sheila?

Author Bio

Patricia Falvey was born and raised by her grandmother in Newry, Northern Ireland.

Critical Praise

"The early scenes of Eileen?s and James? lawless exploits for the Catholic resistance make for thrilling reading?her research is flawless, and she perfectly balances the fictional story with the real-life characters and events that populate it. She also staunchly declines to make easy division between the good guys and bad guys, instead trusting the reader to appreciate the complexities born of neighbor turned against neighbor and brother against sister."

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