

# **BOOK CLUB TO GO!**

## **On Chesil Beach**

### **By Ian McEwan**

#### **Introduction**

The year is 1962. Florence, the daughter of a successful businessman and an aloof Oxford academic, is a talented violinist. She dreams of a career on the concert stage and of the perfect life she will create with Edward, the earnest young history student she met by chance and who unexpectedly wooed her and won her heart. Edward grew up in the country on the outskirts of Oxford where his father, the headmaster of the local school, struggled to keep the household together and his mother, brain-damaged from an accident, drifted in a world of her own. Edward's native intelligence, coupled with a longing to experience the excitement and intellectual fervor of the city, had taken him to University College in London. Falling in love with the accomplished, shy and sensitive Florence – and having his affections returned with equal intensity – has utterly changed his life.

Their marriage, they believe, will bring them happiness, the confidence and the freedom to fulfill their true destinies. The glowing promise of the future, however, cannot totally mask their worries about the wedding night. Edward, who has had little experience with women, frets about his sexual prowess. Florence's anxieties run deeper: she is overcome by conflicting emotions and a fear of the moment she will surrender herself.

([ianmcewan.com](http://ianmcewan.com))

#### **About the Author**

Ian McEwan was born on 21 June 1948 in Aldershot, England. He studied at the University of Sussex, where he received a BA degree in English Literature in 1970. He received his MA degree in English Literature at the University of East Anglia. McEwan's works have earned him worldwide critical acclaim. In 2006, he won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his novel *Saturday* and his novel *On Chesil Beach* was named Galaxy Book of the Year at the 2008 British Book Awards where McEwan was also named Reader's Digest Author of the Year. McEwan lives in London and is currently writing a new novel. His most recently published work is *For You*, a libretto.

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## Reviews

“In his newest book, *On Chesil Beach*, Ian McEwan has taken the narrow-scope novel to its pointiest tip.” - *januarmagazine.com*

“*On Chesil Beach* is the latest achievement from one of the best authors of our time, and it should not be missed.” - *about.com*

“Through the use of flashback (and flash-forward) and an impeccably crafted omniscient narrator, McEwan gives readers a surprising level of insight into his main characters, who serve not only as representations of their time but also as well-developed individuals.” - *bookreporter.com*

## Further Reading

*The Gathering* by Anne Enright

*Atonement* by Ian McEwan

*Divisadero* by Michael Ondaatje

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz

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#### **Possible Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think McEwan chose to set *On Chesil Beach* in 1962?
2. How does McEwan build suspense despite the limited setting and action in the story?
3. Why do you think Florence was "frigid?"
4. What do the flashbacks to Florence and Edward's childhoods reveal about the characters?
5. What details from their courtship were important to understanding their actions?
6. 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?
7. Were you surprised that Florence and Edward divorced?
8. How does this story speak into our modern culture despite being set more than 50 years ago? Is there any continuity in fears and feelings about marriage, sex, and identity?
9. 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?
10. How would Edward and Florence have fared in the twenty-first century? Has the nature of love changed as western society has evolved?

*(complete-review.com & litlovers.com)*