



After River

By Donna Milner
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Introduction

Growing up in the mountains of British Columbia in the '50s and '60s, just north of the American border, Natalie knew little of the outside world. But she knew family. A family so close and loving that Natalie believed they were the envy of the nearby town of Wakefield—particularly her eldest brother Boyer, whom Natalie held especially close to her heart.

But Natalie began to question her family's existence the summer she turned fifteen. The arrival of a soft-spoken stranger, an American draft-dodger called River, would test the morals and beliefs of the family and the community to the breaking point. The series of events following that summer day would leave relationships shattered and the Ward family changed forever.

Thirty-five years later, Natalie receives a late-night phone call from her now-estranged brother Boyer asking her to come home. Their mother is dying. Reluctantly, Natalie agrees to return to Wakefield, the town she has spent most of her adult life avoiding. And as she travels back to her childhood home, she steels herself to face the horrors and secrets of a past she's desperately tried to forget.

After River is a gripping yet lyrical tale of the love that bound a family together—and the secret that tore it apart.

Questions for Discussion

1. When we are first introduced to River, the author places significant emphasis on his voice. What other impressions of River did you draw from that scene? How do your impressions change throughout the story?
2. Everyone but Natalie's father is fond of River. Why do you think her father instinctively disliked River? What does this suggest about the dynamic that follows between them?
3. Natalie's daughter, Jenny, is described as looking just like Boyer and Nettie. Given what has transpired between Natalie and her family, how do you think Natalie must feel when she sees her mother and brother's features in her own daughter? Does this make it harder for Natalie to leave her past behind?
4. Throughout most of the story, Natalie seems torn between her brother Boyer and River. What do you think draws her to these two men? How do these relationships change over the course of her lifetime and how do they shape Natalie as an adult?
5. Why do you think Nettie got rid of the rosebush outside of her house? What is the significance of this act?
6. What were your thoughts on the scene where Natalie meets Gavin? Why do you think the author chose to write that scene right after Natalie confronts Mr. Ryan?
7. How did you feel about the author's choice of ending? Can you think of other compelling ways to end this story?
8. The novel's epigraph reads: "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends . . . What unites us is far greater than what divides us." Do you think it's an appropriate introduction to the story that follows? What does it add to your understanding of the book?

About the Author

Donna Milner lives in British Columbia with her husband. *After River* is her first novel and she is now researching and writing her second.