

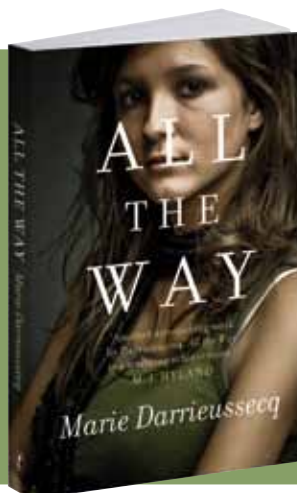
# All the Way

Marie Darrieussecq

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Fiction paperback



## Praise for *All the Way*

'There are few writers who may have changed my perception of the world, but Darrieussecq is one of them.' *The Times*

'The internationally celebrated author who illuminates those parts of life other writers cannot or do not want to reach.' *Independent*

## About Marie Darrieussecq

Marie Darrieussecq was born in 1969 in Bayonne, France. Her debut novel, *Pig Tales*, was published in thirty-four countries. Four other novels have also been translated into English: *My Phantom Husband*, *A Brief Stay with the Living*, *White* and *Tom Is Dead*. She lives in Paris with her husband and children.

## A reader's introduction to *All the Way*

'It was Solange is on a mission to lose her virginity. She doesn't really mind whom she does it with—her friend Rose's English boyfriend Terry would be okay, dreamy and philosophical Arnaud would be even better—she just wants the next stage of her life to begin. Because everyone knows that having sex changes you, and what Solange desperately needs is a change. Something new and exciting, that will take her away from the sleepy French coastal town of Clèves, where her dysfunctional parents continually embarrass her and everyone knows everyone else's business. Well, that's one reason, anyway. There's also the small matter of the powerful and relentless desire that is threatening to overwhelm her...

Here are her options:

1. Terry, whom Rose ignores but who is so good-looking
2. The fire-fighter, from that night in Milord's Bar
3. Arnaud, who understands her like no one else does
4. Monsieur Bihotz, her AC/DC loving, tattooed neighbour who has also been her babysitter for as long as she can remember

It shouldn't be too hard—all she has to do is pick one and do it. But Solange is discovering that things are

not always as simple as they appear. And when does anything in adolescence work out the way you plan it?

Candid and controversial, *All the Way* is a thought-provoking read for adventurous book clubs. Told in three stages, the novel is an engaging account of one young girl's sexual awakening. Readers who grew up with the forthright writing of Judy Bloom will embrace *All the Way* and the chance to revisit the awkwardness and confusion of adolescence with the benefit of hindsight.

## Questions for discussion

1. In the first stage of the novel, Solange is ten years old, looking up dirty words in the dictionary and not understanding much about sex. How does her awareness develop through each stage of the novel?
2. In what ways do you think Solange's parents' relationship informs her own interactions with men and sex? What does the novel reveal about the sexual dynamic between men and women?
3. The novel also explores the evolving nature of friendships and family relationships during adolescence. Were there any scenes that you particularly related to, or that reminded you of your own teenage years?
4. Arnaud tells Solange at the party at the chateau that 'You can only define yourself in relation to others' (p 168). What does Solange discover about her own identity through comparing herself to others? Is this method of self-appraisal unique to teenage girls? In your opinion, which three characters have the most impact on Solange's perception of herself?
5. How would you describe Solange's relationship with Monsieur Bihotz? Do you feel that Solange is a victim, the instigator, or are they are both consenting? To what extent do you think Solange's interest in sex is the result of natural curiosity and desire, or the result of having been exposed to various sexual behaviours from an early age?
6. Nabokov's *Lolita* also examines the relationship of a young girl and older man, but from the perspective of the man. Had *All the Way* been written from

Monsieur Bihotz's point of view, how do you think your impression of their relationship would have been different? Is Bihotz comparable to Lolita's Humbert?

7. *All the Way* is about the lies that get told and believed in childhood, and the larger secrets that adults keep. What are some of the lies that Solange uncovers as she grows up and what do you think she has yet to discover?
8. How do you feel about Solange by the end of the novel? Did your feelings towards her change as the book progressed? What do you think will happen to her next?
9. On reflection, there are no positive male characters in the novel. How do you think this affects the story? Are there any female characters that you think are encouraging role models for Solange?
10. Was the novel confronting for you to read, and if so, in what ways?
11. Consider Rilke's quote in the epigraph: 'Is it possible that we know nothing about girls, who exist nonetheless?' After reading the novel, discuss your own view of adolescent girls and sexuality.