ReadingGroupGuides
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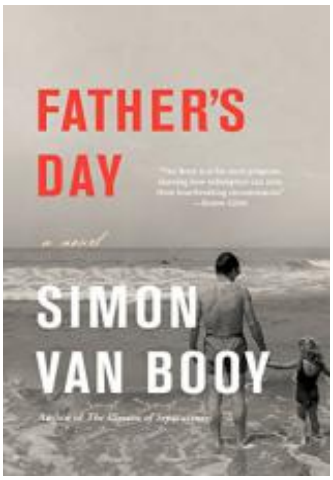
Father's Day

by Simon Van Booy



About the Book

The moving story of an orphaned girl named Harvey and the troubled uncle who raises her --- an unforgettable tale of loss and redemption from the author of THE ILLUSION OF SEPARATENESS.

At the age of six, a little girl named Harvey learns that her parents have died in a car accident. As she struggles to understand, a kindly social worker named Wanda introduces her to her only living relative: her uncle Jason, a disabled felon with a violent past and a criminal record. Despite his limitations --- and his resistance --- Wanda follows a hunch and cajoles Jason into becoming her legal guardian, convinced that each may be the other?s last chance.

Moving between past and present, FATHER'S DAY weaves together the story of Harvey?s childhood and her life as a young woman in Paris, as she awaits her uncle?s arrival for a Father?s Day visit. To mark the occasion, Harvey has planned a series of gifts for Jason --- all leading to a revelation she believes will only deepen their bond.

With extraordinary empathy and emotional impact, the award-winning writer Simon Van Booy has crafted a simple yet luminous novel of loss and transcendence, second chances and forgiveness: a breakthrough work from one of our most gifted chroniclers of the human heart.

Discussion Guide

1. Early in the novel, Jason is said to have been ?born with bad in [him].? What might this mean? What else might explain Jason?s anger and violence?

2. Despite his crimes, what good qualities has Jason demonstrated throughout his life? How might these have remained in him even through his difficult experience?How might you explain such resilience?

3. During the abusive time with his father, Jason ?had no safe place --- only safe things, like his flick-knife, the toys he stole for Steve, and the wax that allowed him to style his hair.? How can such ordinary objects provide a feeling of safety or be important?

4. How does losing both of her parents affect Harvey? What personal qualities does she possess that seem to help her with such a tragedy?

5. What makes Wanda from Social Services good at her job? What do her instincts tell her makes a good parent? Why, in particular, does she think Jason would make a good parent?

6. In what ways does Jason turn out to be a good parent or not?

7. On several occasions Wanda circumvents or even breaks the official rules of her government position in a way that she believes necessary to do what?s right. Why is this necessary? What determines if she is right to do so?

8. When thinking of his own father, Jason suggests that happiness might simply be to feel ?safe and that somebody cared.? What does this say about Jason?s experience? What else might be necessary for happiness? What else does he provide for Harvey?

9. When visiting Harvey in France, Jason admits to loving only three people, but says that?s ?a good number.? Is it? Why or why not? How many people might someone genuinely be able to love?

10. At one point in the challenging experience of raising Harvey, ?Jason realized that it was also the little things, like pizza night, playing the drums, and watching cartoons, that made life worth living.? To what extent is this true? In what ways might larger goals or experiences be necessary or valuable?

11. What do we learn about Harvey from how she interacts with her dolls and stuffed animals? What?s the role of fantasy in a child?s life?

12. What?s the importance of the motorcycle that Jason works on over the years? Why is Harvey so angry when he finally sells it?

13. Harvey is responsible for forging the unlikely friendship between Jason and Vincent. What motivated her? What did she learn that made it possible? How do apology and forgiveness actually work?

14. When visiting Harvey in France, Jason observes that kids of her generation seem to ?fight with themselves more than with other kids.? What might he mean? What might explain this turn inward?

15. What role does Harvey?s drawing and art play in her life? What about her can be learned from her final thesis: ?a full-length comic about an outlaw motorcycle gang whose members all had disabilities??

16. What?s significant about the fact that Harvey lives and works in France? What does it add to the novel?

17. When confronted with Harvey?s adoption paperwork Jason says truth is ?not what?s written on a piece of paper or in blood too small to see --- but the memory of how it felt being together.? In what ways is this true or not?

Author Bio

Simon Van Booy is the award-winning, bestselling author of more than a dozen books for adults and children, including THE ILLUSION OF SEPARATENESS and THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE. Simon is the editor of three volumes of philosophy and has written for *The New York Times, The Financial Times, The Washington Post* and the *BBC*. His books have been translated into many languages and optioned for film. Raised in rural North Wales, he currently lives in New York where he is also a book editor and a volunteer E.M.T. crew chief.

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