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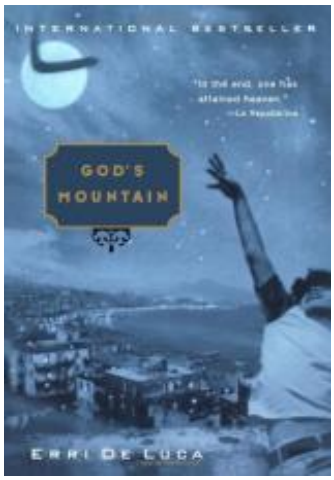
God's Mountain: A Novel

by Erri De Luca



About the Book

This is a story told by a boy in his thirteenth year, recorded in his secret diary. His life is about to change; his world, about to open.

He lives in Montedidio?God's Mountain?a cluster of alleys in the heart of Naples. He brings a paycheck home every Saturday from Mast'Errico's carpentry workshop where he sweeps the floor. He is on his way to becoming a man?his boy's voice is abandoning him. His wooden boomerang is neither toy nor tool, but something in between. Then there is Maria, the thirteen-year-old girl who lives above him and, like so many girls, is wiser than he. She carries the burden of a secret life herself. She'll speak to him for the first time this summer. There is also his friendship with a cobbler named Rafaniello, a Jewish refugee who has escaped the horrors of the Holocaust, who has no idea how long he's been on this earth, and who is said to sprout wings for a blessed few.

It is 1963, a young man's summer of discovery. A time for a boy with innocent hands and a pure heart to look beyond the ordinary in everyday things to see the far-reaching landscape, and all of its possibilities, from a rooftop terrace on God's Mountain.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the ways in which the narrator's physical, intellectual, and sexual identity are shaped over the course of the novel. What are the defining events of his development? How has he changed by time Rafaniello takes flight?

2. "In spring I was still a child and now I'm in the middle of things I can't understand," the narrator of **God's Mountain** reveals (p. 128). What things is he referring to? What, if any understanding of the events surrounding him has he come to by the end of the story?

3. What role does Maria play in the narrator's life? What is she seeking from him? Why does she say that their love is, "an alliance, a combative force."? (p.105) Against whom are they allied? What binds them together?

4. "Not everything is good about my body growing. Something evil grows up alongside it? a bitter force capable of violence?Is this what men suddenly become?" the narrator asks himself (p. 155). Do you think he has arrived at an answer by the end of the story? Why or why not?

5. Why has the author set this story among the winding alleys and high perches of the town of Montedidio? How does the narrator's perception of his town differ from Rafaniello's? His father's? What about Maria's? How do economic circumstances affect the lives of these characters?

6. Language and voice play a central part in the development of the young narrator. How does his writing practice contribute to your understanding of him as a character? What about his understanding of himself? Why does his voice emerge only at the very end of the novel?

7. This story includes a Jerusalem-bound shoemaker with wings beneath his hump, a boomerang that may have been carved from the Ark of the Covenant, and a carpenter who likes to fish. Discuss the significance of these and other religious motifs in the novel.

8. Why do you think the name of the narrator is never revealed to the reader?

9. Is **God's Mountain** is a coming-of-age story? A fairy tale? A religious allegory? All of these? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"This small novella speaks of the most common of men, the most marginal of lives, and yet becomes an echo and a reflection of the most important of all books."

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