

Gold

by Chris Cleave



About the Book

The latest novel from Chris Cleave --- the award-winning and international #1 bestselling author of *LITTLE BEE* --- is ?a heartstring-tugger with an adrenaline-fueled plot? (*People*) that asks: how much are we willing to sacrifice for the people we love?

An instant *New York Times* bestseller in hardcover and *Martha Stewart Living*, *USA TODAY*, and *Newsweek/Daily Beast* book club pick, *GOLD* is a ?brilliantly plotted, nail-biting, and emotional tale that dramatizes the anguish and triumphs of ambition and sacrifice, fame and heartbreak? (*Booklist*, starred review).

If your dreams pull you in one direction and your heart in another, which should you follow? This is the question that haunts Kate Meadows, a world champion athlete whose eight-year-old daughter Sophie is battling a recurrence of childhood leukemia just as Kate is about to compete for her last chance at an Olympic gold medal. For years, Kate has sacrificed everything for her family and watched her best friend and closest rival, Zoe Castle, conquer the world stage. Kate has never won gold. With her child facing a life-threatening illness, the stakes are higher than ever. How can she do what is right for her daughter without abandoning all of her dreams?

In glorious, elegant prose, Chris Cleave examines the choices we make when lives are at stake and everything is on the line.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the opening scene of *Gold* where Kate and baby Sophie are watching Zoe win the gold at the 2004 Olympics. What did you learn about Kate?s personality as a wife, mother, and athlete in this one scene? How does this scene set the stage for the rest of the novel?

2. According to Sophie, "You could play boys' games like Star Wars that had fighting and spaceships and made you look tough, even if you weren't tough enough to ride a bike." Consider Sophie's obsession with Star Wars. What attracts her to these movies? What does she have to prove by playing "tough" boys' games?
3. Consider Tom's first impressions of his two star athletes: "Bit by bit, race by race, year by year, a girl like Zoe would stay afloat in the sport while Kate slowly sank under the weight of real life. Tom had seen it a hundred times." How well does Tom predict their career successes and failures? In what ways does he underestimate Kate?
4. When Tom watches his group of teen recruits, he notices "Kate's latent strength, and Zoe's perfect flow, and Jack's incandescent energy." Compare Kate, Zoe, and Jack's athletic strengths to their personalities. How do Kate's strength, Zoe's flow, and Jack's energy help them face everyday life off the track?
5. Compare how Zoe and Kate handle the costs and benefits of being Olympic athletes. How does the press treat each of them? How do Zoe and Kate handle the media attention? What could they learn from the other about fame?
6. Discuss Zoe and Kate's competition for Jack's attention. Why does Zoe pursue Jack when he is in the hospital? Do you think it was just another opportunity to compete? Were you surprised by Jack and Zoe's relationships?
7. If you were in Kate's situation, would you forgive Jack for his affair with Zoe? Would you be able to raise Sophie as your own, knowing about the affair? Explain your answer.
8. Zoe realizes, "It was ordinary days now that frightened her --- the endless Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoons of real life, the days you had to steer through without the benefit of handlebars." How does Zoe handle real life? What is she afraid will happen to her when her racing career is over?
9. Discuss the lasting impact of Adam's death on Zoe. Why hasn't she forgiven herself for her brother's accident? How does she punish herself? How does she finally come to terms with his death?
10. When Jack decides to let Kate race Zoe without knowing that Sophie is in the hospital, "He smiled because he had given her something rarer than gold: an hour outside time." Did you agree with his decision? In what ways have these characters been racing against time their entire life?
11. During their final race, Zoe waits for Kate after Kate crashes on the track. How is that decision out of character for Zoe? Would you expect Kate to do the same for Zoe, if the situation were reversed? Why or why not?
12. At the end of the novel, Zoe's role is as Sophie's coach, not her mother. What kind of coach do you imagine Zoe to be? What kind of mother do you think she would have been to Sophie? Do you think she could have handled Sophie's illness?
13. After winning gold in Athens, Zoe realizes, "Gold came out of the ground, and she had felt the weight of it dragging her back down there." What does "gold" mean to Zoe, Kate, Jack, and Tom? What other types of gold (besides Olympic medals) do each of these characters strive for? Do they achieve it?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Visit the official website of the 2012 London Olympics to view results and complete coverage of the games at <http://www.london2012.com>

. If you want to see track cycling action, watch Britain's Victoria Pendleton compete for the gold in the 2008 Beijing Olympics: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rq-PJzo4rU>.

2. Visit the website of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society at <http://www.lls.org/#/waystohelp/> to find out more about research efforts and how you and your book club members can get involved.

Author Bio

Chris Cleave is the author of *EVERYONE BRAVE IS FORGIVEN*, *GOLD* and the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *LITTLE BEE*. He lives with his wife and three children in Kingston-upon-Thames, England.

Photo Credit: Lou Abercrombie

Critical Praise

"Cleave goes for the gold and brings it home in his thrillingly written and emotionally rewarding novel about the world of professional cycling. . . . Cleave expertly cycles through the characters' tangled past and present, charting their ever-shifting dynamic as ultra-competitive Zoe and Kate are forced to decide whether winning means more to them than friendship . . . Cleave likewise pulls out all the stops getting inside the hearts and minds of his engagingly complex characters. The race scenes have true visceral intensity, leaving the reader feeling breathless . . . From start to finish, this is a truly Olympic-level literary achievement."

? Publishers Weekly

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