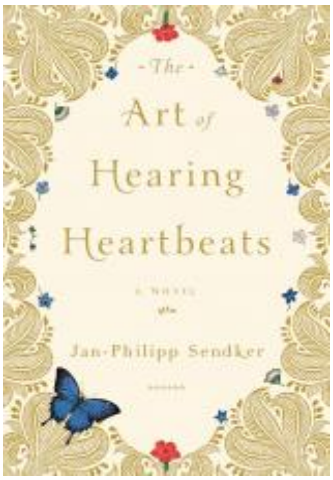
The Art of Hearing Heartbeats

by Jan-Philipp Sendker



About the Book

When Julia Win?s father disappears one morning without a trace, on the day after her graduation from law school, her family is left unsettled and confused. It?s not until a few years later that her mother finds a piece of the puzzle --- an unmailed love letter to a Burmese woman named Mi Mi.

Intent on solving the mystery and coming to terms with her father?s past, Julia puts her career and her life on hold to travel to the village where Mi Mi once lived. Her journey takes her to the small mountain village of Kalaw, where she is approached by a man who claims to know her father, and who seems to have an uncanny knowledge of Julia herself. Intrigued, she returns to meet him every afternoon and listen to his incredible tales of her father?s youth --- of his childhood blindness, his education at a monastery, and, most of all, about his passionate relationship with a local girl.

At first Julia is unwilling to believe that the romantic boy in this poignant story has anything to do with her reticent father, but soon she can no longer withstand the almost mystical invoking of mysterious past events, entwined as they are with the influence of the stars and with a love larger than life.

The Art of Hearing Heartbeats is a magical and uplifting tale of hardship and resilience, and the unyielding power of love to move mountains.

Discussion Guide

1. In your opinion, what does the back-and-forth between Julia?s and U Ba?s narratives add to the telling of the love story between Tin Win and Mi Mi? How do these stories interrelate?

2. Tin Win is born to parents who abandon him as a child but Mi Mi is born into a close-knit family. Mi Mi?s mother, especially, adores her daughter. Do you see this developmental difference reflected in the adult each one becomes, or in

the way the two relate to one another?

3. After he loses his sight, Tin Win spends several years in a monastery under the tutelage of the abbot, U May. In your opinion, what does U May model for Tin Win? How does Tin Win grow in these years?

4. Tin Win?s wealthy uncle, U Saw, finances Tin Win?s eye operation and subsequent education abroad. But to U Saw?s discredit, his motives are self-interested, and for his own convenience, he obstructs all communication between Tin Win and Mi Mi. Is U Saw portrayed as a villain --- or is he even villainous?

5. A portion of the novel is in the form of letters. Does this change the mood or the flow of the novel? The way you see the characters?

6. Tin Win and Mi Mi develop an intense, literally symbiotic relationship: he walks for her; she acts as his eyes. They become inseparable, but then they are separated for decades. Given what you know about each character, how do you think they are able to withstand the time apart?

7. Discuss the role of memory in the novel, both individual and collective.

8. Burma (now known as Myanmar) was occupied by the British from the 19th century until 1948. How important is this colonial history to the major events of the novel?

9. Prophecy and superstition play a significant role in Burmese culture. Do you think this belief system inspires a fundamental feeling of security or of anxiety in the main characters of the novel, and why?

10. The novel contrasts Western and Eastern values: individualism and personal achievement versus kinship and transcendence. Where and how are these differences brought to light?

Author Bio

Jan-Philipp Sendker, born in Hamburg in 1960, was the American correspondent for Stern from 1990 to 1995, and its Asian correspondent from 1995 to 1999. In 2000 he published CRACKS IN THE WALL, a nonfiction book about China. THE ART OF HEARING HEARTBEATS, his first novel, is an international bestseller. He lives in Berlin with his family.

Critical Praise

"Set in Burma, **The Art of Hearing Heartbeats** is a rare novel. Telling the story of a young blind man?s journey through a world of auditory intensity, Jan-Philipp Sendker renews one?s faith in the possibility of real, pure love. I finished the book in tears."

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