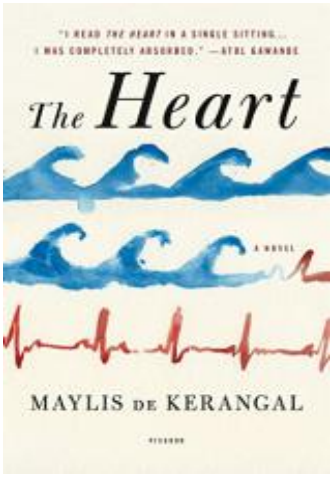
The Heart

written by Maylis de Kerangal, translated by Sam Taylor



About the Book

Just before dawn on a Sunday morning, three teenage boys go surfing. Returning home, exhausted, the driver lets the car drift off the road into a tree. Two of the boys are wearing seat belts; one is sent through the windshield. He is declared brain-dead shortly after arriving at the hospital. His heart is still beating.

THE HEART takes place over the 24 hours surrounding a fatal accident and a resulting heart transplant as life is taken from a young man and given to a woman close to death. In gorgeous, ruminative prose it examines the deepest feelings of everyone involved --- grieving parents, hardworking doctors and nurses --- as they navigate decisions of life and death. As stylistically audacious as it is emotionally explosive, Maylis de Kerangal's THE HEART has mesmerized readers in France, where it has been hailed as the breakthrough work of a new literary star.

Discussion Guide

Introduction

A profoundly beautiful meditation on destiny, mortality and the body?s intricate miracles, THE HEART takes place in the aftermath of a fatal accident. As a once-vibrant young man lies comatose, a transplant team goes into action, ensuring that his death will mean new life for a woman diagnosed with heart failure. In gorgeous, ruminative prose, the novelist Maylis de Kerangal explores the experiences of the donor?s grieving parents and the seemingly fearless doctors and nurses charged with ending a life so that another one can endure.

A book that mesmerized readers in France, where it was hailed as the breakthrough work of a new literary star, THE HEART speaks powerfully to the mysteries of what it means to be human. We hope the following guide will enhance your discussion of this extraordinary journey.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Did the novel change the way you experience life and perceive mortality?

2. What image of Simon emerges in the opening scenes? What aspects of that image endure after the accident?

3. Pierre Révol loves *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* because of its ?powerful combination of hallucination and science.? How does that description apply to his life as a physician? In the film, which also provides the novel?s epigraph, the protagonist (a down-and-out single mother) exclaims, ?My heart is full!? in an attempt to express love. How does the metaphor of a full heart permeate the novel?

4. What motivates Christophe, Johan and Simon to set out in the middle of the night to experience the mid-tide session? When is the last time you experienced sheer exhilaration?

5. In her supporting role, what does Cordélia Owl demonstrate about the nature of working as a team, despite individual differences and unique personal lives?

6. How does the accident illuminate the contrast between Marianne and Sean? What is distinctive about the way Marianne endures the shock and grief of losing their child?

7. As Marianne and the other parents confronted the role of chance in the van?s seating arrangement, what did you observe about fate? How do you explain the nature of survival?

8. Thomas Rémige raises the question of organ donation with Marianne and Sean. As the author describes Thomas?s rural upbringing, his passion for song, and his sojourn in Algiers, what do we see in him that Simon?s parents aren?t aware of? What does it mean to him to fulfill the request for track 7 on the iPod? How did the novel shape your perception of the medical community?

9. When the novel shifts to Claire?s point of view, how does the tone change? How does her story transform your understanding of Simon?s death?

10. What sets apart doctors like Emmanuel Harfang and Virgilio Breva, and the pioneers before them (including William Harvey, invoked in Harfang?s Latin ritual)? What is the source of their courage?

11. How did you react to the moment when Simon?s heart begins to beat in Claire?s body? What is particularly mysterious and meaningful about the heart? What makes this transplant different from the others that resulted from Simon?s death?

12. The novel illustrates France?s ?presumed consent? approach to organ donation, which uses an opt-out registry. Should the United States adopt this method?

13. Discuss the closing image of daybreak and the surf. Is the medical world in sync with the natural world? Why is it especially appropriate for the goldfinch to have the last word?

Author Bio

Maylis de Kerangal is the author of several novels in French, including JE MARCHE SOUS UN CIEL DE TRAÎNE (2000), LA VIE VOYAGEUSE (2003), CORNICHE KENNEDY (2008) and NAISSANCE D'UN PONT (published in English as BIRTH OF A BRIDGE, winner of the Prix Franz Hessel and Prix Médicis in 2010). She has also published a collection of short stories, NI FLEURS NI COURONNES (2006), and a novella, TANGENTE VERS L'EST (winner of the 2012 Prix Landerneau). In addition, she has published a fiction tribute to Kate Bush and Blondie titled DANS LES RAPIDES (2007). In 2014, her fifth novel, RÉPARER LES VIVANTS (THE HEART), was published to wide acclaim, and won the Grand Prix RTL-Lire and the Student Choice Novel of the Year from France culture and Télérama. She lives in Paris, France.

Critical Praise

?I read THE HEART in a single sitting. It is a gripping, deceptively simple tale --- a death, a life resurrected --- in which you follow along as everyone touched by the events is made to reveal what matters most to them in their lives. I was completely absorbed.?

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