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Second Hand Heart



Synopsis

“A fascinating premise and a lovely book. Highly recommended.” • “Chicklittings” • “A compelling, thoughtful read.” • “Choice Magazine” By the bestselling author of DON’T LET ME GO and PAY IT FORWARD, SECOND HAND HEART is a devastating and unexpected story of love and loss “of learning to live for the first time, and learning to live all over again. Vida is only 19, but she knows a lot about dying. Her weak heart has kept her on the edge of death her whole life. It hasn’t been much of a life. Thanks to her overprotective mother, Vida’s only friend is Esther, an elderly Holocaust survivor who lives upstairs. Vida’s heart is finally about to give out, unless she can get a donor heart in time. Richard is 36 and blissfully married, until he gets the call that his beloved wife has died in a car accident. His world falls to pieces. When Richard is invited to the hospital to meet the young woman who received his wife’s donor heart, he goes, even though he’s entirely not ready for it. Vida takes one look at Richard and feels she’s known and loved him all her life. Richard is horrified by her reaction and thinks Vida is just a sheltered and confused young woman. As Vida and Richard struggle to define themselves in circumstances neither ever thought they’d face, both begin to wonder if it’s possible that cellular memory, the idea that memories can be stored in individual cells, might actually be real. Could Vida’s heart retain some of the love Richard’s wife felt? Can a heart remember, at least for a time, on its own? “A first-rate read! ... Second Hand Heart is a great book about surviving despite the odds” • “Leah Graham, Chick Lit Reviews and News

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Customer Reviews

Nineteen year old Vida isn't like many girls her age. She can't go to school, doesn't have many friends, and can barely leave the house due to the fact her heart is failing and she desperately needs a transplant. When a heart becomes available, and the transplant is successful, Vida is determined to live life like never before. When Vida meets Richard, the man whose wife's heart now beats in Vida, she immediately falls in love with him but Richard dismisses her claims. How is it possible for Vida to love him when she doesn't even know him? Could it be that the heart she now has beating in her chest is remembering the love for him, is that even possible? As Vida learns to live life again properly, she can't shake the feeling that there's somewhere she has to go and visit. But where? Catherine Ryan Hyde's books definitely fall into the 'women's fiction' category than the 'chick lit' category but I read both styles of books and after reading *When I Found You*, I knew I liked Catherine's style of writing. She's been compared to Jodi Picoult which is a strange one; one I disagree with in fact as I think she has her own writing style. *Second Hand Heart*, I'm sure you can guess, is about a second hand heart and what it means to have a heart that was someone else's. It's an interesting subject and is one I've never actually thought of before but Ryan Hyde presents a great argument as to whether or not it is possible for a heart to take over memories and things into a new donor. What surprised me most about the book was how it was written. Instead of being written like a proper book, the book is actually written in the form of a journal. And while I was a little hesitant about that at first, what with the short chapters, I soon got used to it and begun to enjoy it.

Second Hand Heart isn't just a love story, it addresses the subject of organ donation and transplantation as well as the theory of cellular memory (where the donor recipient takes on memories, habits, interests and tastes of the donor, that may have somehow been stored in the cells of the transplanted organ). While I don't usually go for a love story type of book, I'm all for organ donation (as I've let my family know) and I've heard of cellular memory, so I thought this might be interesting. This book is written in journal format and each journal entry is a chapter. The first few chapters of the book are Vida's journal, then we get a few journal entries from Richard,

before going back to Vida and it carries on like that. There's also a few emails, mainly between Richard and his mother-in-law, thrown into the mix. It may sound like it could get confusing, but it isn't and the story flows seamlessly between the two journals. Much like Richard did, I found the character of Vida to come across as a bit childish for her age. However, after a while of thinking that, I came to remember that Vida had a different upbringing to most children. She was weak and spent most of her childhood at home with her mother, rather than out making friends etc. While I understood that, I did find her character to be a bit on the stalker-ish side too, in the way that she pursues Richard. Still, I found her to be a unique character (how many young girls have an elderly best friend?) Despite having never lost a loved-one as close as Richard has, I can understand his need to hang on to the life-force of his wife. His mixed emotions and on-going grief are understandable for somebody in his situation.

My thoughts: Return to Me with Minnie Driver and David Duchovny (which is about "a man who falls in love with the woman who received his wife's heart must decide which woman it is who holds his heart") is one of my favourite movies, so of course as soon as I saw what Second Hand Heart was about I knew I had to read it. I was intrigued by Second Hand Heart' theme: cellular memory. That a person's life, memories are not only stored in their brain but in every organ and cell of their body, and the heart being one of the most important organs retains thus the deepest indentation or evidence of such memories. Second Hand Heart is written through Vida's and Richard's journal entries/e-mails and while I felt such approach suited a teenager girl it was a bit harder to imagine a 36 year old man purging his innermost thoughts on paper. Vida is a very sheltered 19 year old girl, who only starts living after her heart transplant. After the successful transplant the world opens up and she can finally step out and discover it. Yes, due to her very sheltered and inexperienced upbringing she is very naive and childish, but in an endearing way, and she is pure and honest. I loved how Catherine Ryan Hyde made her a layered character: that due to her previous sufferings and all she has gone through at such a young age she had a certain wisdom and objectivity to life, then on the other hand due to her inexperience of never having "stepped out" of her room and never having lived life, she also had a certain naivety and childishness. Vida was quite a unique and definitely interesting character. Of course writing Richard must have been harder. He is the grieving husband who lost the love of his life. How can he grieve for his deceased wife yet be intrigued by this young girl?

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