

*Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro deals with a very difficult subject matter; the harvesting of organs for transplant. There are hints of this in the first page when the narrator, Kathy H, talks of being a carer for donors. She also mentions sitting with someone after their third donation who is likely to 'complete'.

The book is written in three parts, the first part dealing with Kathy's memories of life at a boarding school called Hailsham. The writing style is conversational and delivered in a simple style. It soon becomes evident that this is no ordinary boarding school. The children have no surnames, only a capital letter. They never leave for holidays and no parents come to see them. The school grounds are surrounded by high fencing which the pupils never consider trying to climb over or break through. The teachers are known as guardians and lessons are almost always on artistic subjects. As the pupils get older, the issue of sex arises and they are told that, in their case, it will never result in children.

The book then concentrates on three of the pupils and the second part deals with their time at a place known as the Cottages. Here they meet with other donors who they call veterans and Kathy gets to sleep with several of them, while Ruth and Tommy stay together. Yet, as the book progresses, it becomes evident that their relationships don't have real depth of feeling.

During their time at the Cottages, Ruth hears about someone who looks exactly like her and might be her 'possible' – someone from whom she was cloned. They make a trip to Cromer to see her but realise that the woman they see is very unlikely to be a 'possible'. She was clearly middle-class and they believe that clones came from 'lower-class' people since they face prejudice if they revealed their background.

The final part of the book deals with Kathy as a carer, who looks after donors as they go through their procedures. It is left to the reader to imagine which organs are taken during a donation, but donors never make it past four before they 'complete'. She cares for Ruth and later, after developing a relationship with Tommy, she cares for him when he becomes a donor. During their time together, they track down Miss Emily, who had been the head guardian at Hailsham, in the hope that she could help them to receive a deferral before becoming donors. This was based on a rumour that clones in love could be granted three years' grace. In the most telling part of the book, they learn about the whole programme of creating clones for the provision of organs for transplant. Hailsham had been an exception in the treatment of clones as children in that it provided pleasant surroundings, a degree of education and aimed to treat them as human. It had been forced to close when attitudes changed and funding dried up. Most other establishments had simply treated clones as potential donors.

There was a long discussion about the book. No-one could be said to have 'enjoyed' reading it since it created feelings of discomfort. It raises many issues, not least what it means to be human. It was remarked that the clones showed little sense of survival; they all knew that their lives would be limited and end in an early death, yet they did not question this. Comparisons were made with *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. Their lack of questioning echoed Stevens in *Remains of the Day*; they never really felt that their position was ethically unacceptable. Society had less of an excuse, but responsibility had been passed on to those in authority *and people preferred to believe that these organs appeared from nowhere ... (a)nd if they did [think about you], they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us.*

*Never Let Me Go* deals with large ethical issues. It is told from the point of view of someone who is outside 'society', but on whom society often depends. Many people are regarded as different

and discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, caste or even occupation. In this case, Kathy H and her compatriots had been created with no opportunities, simply with the function of ultimately dying for the benefit of a thankless society.

February – *The Kalahari Typing School for Men* by Alexander McCall Smith

March – *The Secret Barrister* by A Barrister

April – *The Milkman* by Anna Burns

May – *The Perfect Golden Circle* by Benjamin Myers