

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*

LITERARY BITS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KAZUO ISHIGURO

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan, in the city of Nagasaki in 1954, but moved to Britain with his father when he was five. He graduated in English and Philosophy at the University of Kent and attended a post-graduate master in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, where he met the novelist Angela Carter, who encouraged him to write.

In 1982 he published his first novel, “A Pale View of Hills”, on the bombing of Nagasaki.

His third novel, “The Remains of the Day”, published in 1989, won the Booker Prize for Fiction and became a great success. It became an award-winning film with Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson.

“Never Let Me Go” was published in 2005 and became a film in 2010.

He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017.



K. Ishiguro



From the film, Kathy (top), Tom and Ruth.

ABOUT THE NOVEL

NEVER LET ME GO

The book is a deeply moving original science-fiction, dystopian novel. The story is set in England in the 1990s. Human life has been prolonged thanks to a program of human cloning. The clones, who are called students, grow up in special institutions. Once they are adults, they have to donate their vital organs. All the donors receive assistance from other clones who have not started the donation process and who are called carers.

The clones continue to donate their organs until they complete, i.e. they die, after three or four donations.

The reader gradually discovers who donors and carers really are. At the beginning of the story we only know that Kathy H. is a 31-year-old carer and that she has been a carer for more than eleven years, but that she will change her role in a few months.

THE TEXT

KATHY H.

This extract is the beginning of the book, when the protagonist introduces herself to the reader.

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying **to boast**. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated', even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe *I am* boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying 'calm'. I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just **to shrug** and tell them **to snap out of it**. Anyway, I'm not making any big **claims** for myself. I know carers, working now, who are just as good and don't get half the credit. If you're one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful – about my bedsit, my car, above all, the way I get to pick and choose who I look after. And I'm a Hailsham student – which is enough by itself sometimes to **get people's backs up**. Kathy H., they say, she gets to pick and choose, and she always chooses her own kind: people from Hailsham, or one of the privileged estates. No wonder she has a great record. I've heard it said enough, so I'm sure you've heard it plenty more, and maybe there's something in it. But I'm not the first to be allowed to pick and choose, and I doubt if I'll be the last. And anyway, I've done my share of looking

after donors brought up in every kind of place. By the time I finish, remember, I'll have done twelve years of this, and it's only for the last six they've let me choose. And why shouldn't they? Carers aren't machines. You try and do your best for every donor, but in the end, it **wears you down**. You don't have unlimited patience and energy. So when you get a chance to choose, of course, you choose your own kind. That's natural. There's no way I could have gone on for as long as I have if I'd stopped feeling for my donors every step of the way. And anyway, If I'd never started choosing, how would I ever have got close again to Ruth and Tommy after all those years.

But these days, of course, there are fewer and fewer donors left who I remember, and so in practice, I haven't been choosing that much. As I say, the work gets a lot harder when you don't have that deeper link with the donor, and though I'll miss being a carer, it feels just about right to be finishing at last come the end of the year.

There have been times over the years when I've tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I've told myself I shouldn't look back so much. But then there came a point when I just stopped resisting. I had to do with this particular donor I had once, in my third year as a carer; it was his reaction when I mentioned I was from Hailsham. He'd just come through his third donation, it hadn't gone well, and he must have known he wasn't going to make it. He could hardly breathe, but he looked towards me and said: 'Hailsham. I bet that was a beautiful place.' Then the next morning, when I was making conversation to keep his mind off it all, and I asked where *he'd* grown up, he mentioned some place in Dorset and his face beneath the **blotches** went into a completely new kind of **grimace**. And I realised then how desperately he didn't want reminded. Instead, he wanted to hear about Hailsham.

blotch: *macchia sulla pelle*

to boast: *vantarsi*

to claim: *affermare*

to get people's backs up: *irritare*

grimace: *smorfia*

to shrug: *infischinarsene*

to snap out of it: *liberarsene, scuotersi da*

to wear down: *logorare, consumare*

COMPREHENSION

1 Read the text and answer the questions.

1. What's Kathy's job?
2. How old is she?
3. What does her job involve?
4. How long has she been doing her job?
5. Kathy is proud of her job. Find examples from the text.
6. She refers to some privileges. Quote them.
7. Is it true that she has always chosen her donors?
8. When is her work harder?
9. Where do her happy memories go?
10. What happened with her third year donor?

ANALYSIS

2 Read the text again and answer the questions.

1. Identify the narrator and the point of view given.
2. This text seems like the transcript of a spoken monologue. Can you find examples in the text to support this idea?
3. Kathy changes the topic frequently. Can you identify the device that she uses to do it?
4. What are the main tasks of a carer?
5. How can we understand that Hailsham was different from the other institutions?
6. When Kathy says 'They've been pleased with my work', who do you think 'they' refers to?
7. In which lines is Kathy claiming her humanity? Why do you think she is doing it? Why is her surname just H.?

DISCUSSION

3 The book deals with human clones who are created to provide vital organs to 'real' human beings.

1. What do you think of cloning, both of parts of bodies and complete beings? What do you think are the moral and ethical implications?
2. Kathy H. and the other carers and donors are examples of artificial intelligence. Do you think that biological computers can have feelings? If so, what are the implications?
3. What do you think of the use of IT and technology in medicine?