

READERS GUIDE

THE HEART SPECIALIST BY CLAIRE HOLDEN ROTHMAN

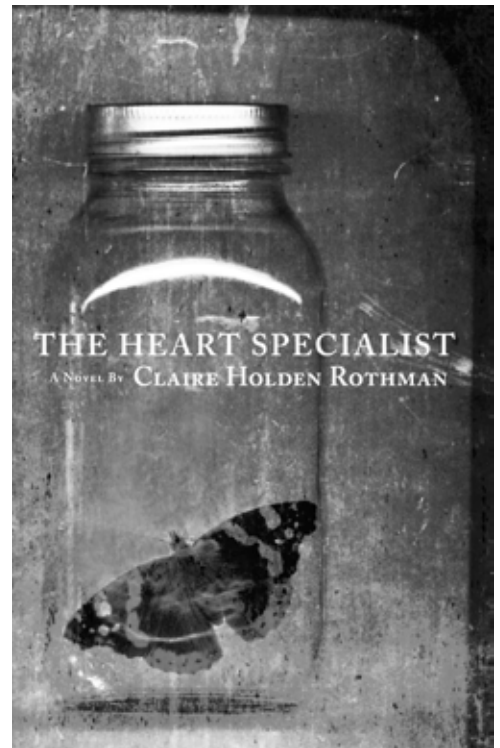
Introducing *The Heart Specialist*:

Agnes White understands that her life isn't going to be easy. As a young girl, she finds herself drawn to her father's medical practice and its unlady-like characteristics: microscopes, dissections, anatomy, and more. When her father is accused of murdering his sister, he is forced to flee from his wife, Agnes, and his unborn daughter, Laure, forever.

After the death of their mother, Agnes and her sister are raised by their grandmother, who tries to correct Agnes's affinity towards science. However, Agnes is fortunate enough to have a governess willing to encourage her desires and help her on her path to becoming a doctor. As a result, she soon finds herself enrolled at McGill University, only to be denied access to their medical program.

Eventually accepted to medical school elsewhere, Agnes begins to establish herself as an expert in the field of cardiology but still feels something is missing from her life. She gradually begins to realize that her fascination with her father doesn't stop with his profession — she wants to see him, to understand why he completely shut out his family to start anew. On the way to rediscovering her father, Agnes must deal with a series of events that change her life forever.

Inspired by the life of Dr. Maude Abbott, one of Canada's first female physicians, *The Heart Specialist* is testament to the power of will and perseverance. Agnes White is proof that in a world on the brink of change anything is possible.



Important Themes:

Perseverance and Success

Several characters in the novel are determined to be successful. Agnes is willing to devote her life to medicine, but she is continually thwarted due to her gender and the society she lives in — beginning with her grandmother, who is convinced Agnes is doomed to the life of a spinster if she pursues her passion for science. She must overcome social hurdles just to be admitted to McGill, and although she maintains a high level of success throughout her life, nothing is simply handed to her. Not one to be deterred, Agnes continues to excel and succeed. Jakob's devotion to medicine is mirrored by Agnes's; he excels academically and as a result gains the reputation of a "loony." These characters are willing to sacrifice their personal lives to achieve their success.

Abandonment and Isolation

Abandonment is at the root of many of the character's problems. Agnes is abandoned by her father at a young age and it affects her greatly, prompting her to live a life largely isolated from others. Unattractive even by her own standards, Agnes accepts early on that she will never be an object of desire. Outside of the members of her family, she has few friends that she seeks for emotional comfort. Agnes's isolation is, in a sense, comforting to her; she feels at ease spending long hours alone working in her museum. Laure, unlike her older sister, is beautiful and popular. However, she is abandoned by her husband early in their marriage which leads her to isolate herself. Other characters also isolate themselves, such as Jakob or Miss Skerry. Although many of the characters long for one another, their continued feelings of abandonment and isolation indicate that they have made peace with their solitary lifestyles.