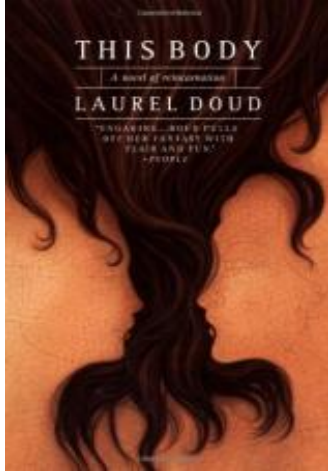


This Body

by Laurel Doud



About the Book

What if you had life to live over again...

What if you were young...

What if you were skinny...

What if you were beautiful...

What if you had a second chance to find true love...

But it wasn't your life?

The arms are pale, thin but shapely, the long fingers tipped with ragged nails. Dancer's hands even she can make them pirouette like butterflies. She looks down, and the almost nonexistent breasts with the very dark nipples are not hers. The flat--nay, concave--stomach, the thin thighs, the knees are not hers. She stumbles into the bathroom, closes the medicine cabinet door, and stares at the reflection in the mirror.

The face, the hair, the eyes, are not hers. This is not Katharine.

Katharine Ashley, dutiful wife and mother of two troublesome teenagers, dies in her sleep one night and wakes up a year later on the floor of a strange bathroom in a strange city--in a stranger's body. This body she now inhabits is young, single, and skinny. But Katharine has inherited not only Thisby Bennet's lovely body but also her drug addiction, her abusive boyfriend, and the family she has disappointed and alienated for years.

Katharine decides that before she can return to her own family, she must make reparations for Thisby's past behavior. She kicks Thisby's habit and reconciles with the Bennets--but does so with deceptive ease, obscuring the fact that she has more in common with Thisby than her body, that it wasn't just Thisby's life that was awry and needed to be set straight.

A delightful act of literary ventriloquism, *This Body* is also a deeply wise, deeply resonant novel about the love between

parents and their children, the tricky relationship between the body and the mind, and the never-ending battle for self-knowledge we all engage in, each with varying degrees of success.

Discussion Guide

1. Katharine's situation might strike some readers as a dream come true: the chance to start one's life anew. Put yourself in Katharine's shoes for a moment. If you were to find yourself awakening as someone else tomorrow morning, what kind of person would you want to be?
2. At first Katharine has a hard time seeing her predicament as an opportunity. How does she eventually manage to use this "reincarnation" to her advantage? Do you think that, in the end, this mind/body switch was an enriching experience for Katharine?
3. At the heart of **This Body** is a constant struggle between the responsibilities of parenthood and the recklessness of youth. Did the novel instill in you a new appreciation for either youth or middle age?
4. Katharine was allowed to peek into the future--to see her husband with his new family. Would you want the opportunity to see how your family survived without you? Why?
5. We hear so much today about the importance of the mind/body connection. Does it seem even remotely possible that one person's mind could thrive within another person's body? Take Thisby's addiction as an example; Katharine initially dismisses it, but then falls prey to the physical cravings herself. What does this suggest about the mind/body connection? Have Katharine's mind and Thisby's body made peace with each other by the end of the novel?
6. There are times when Katharine seems to enjoy being in Thisby's young, thin, attractive body--most notably during her sexual encounters. What do these encounters suggest about the mind/body connection?
7. Quince seems to accept the "new" Thisby with surprising ease. She is apparently so starved for a sister, any sister, that she doesn't even ask questions about the "new" Thisby's attitude and approach to life. What is the significance of this relationship? What do Katharine and Quince learn from each other?
8. In the course of the novel Katharine makes choices about what is right for herself, for her family, for Thisby, and for the Bennet family. Do you agree with Katharine's choices? Do you think she should have been more honest with the Bennets? Do you think that Thisby's parents had the right to know their daughter was dead?
9. The Shakespeare play **A Midsummer Night's Dream** figures prominently in the life of the Bennet family. How does Katharine use her knowledge of Shakespeare's play to better understand both the Bennet family and herself as a member of it?

Courtesy of Warner Books

Author Bio

I'm a research librarian with a tattoo of a two-faced woman on her chest. I refuse to wear make-up, but I like to dye my hair interesting colors. I play the classical flute, but listen to alternative rock. I've written a book, but I like to work with my hands. I've restored a carousel horse and I'm currently working on a 1941 Plymouth automobile replete with suicide doors, a two-dead-body trunk, and a backseat girls can get pregnant on. (I grew up in a VW Bug and I always thought, "Yeah, right!")

I have two grown children who I adore and who are into their own versions of body ornamentation and have their own views on life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I like Shakespeare but I love movies, and I'm having a wonderful time following the very slow but fascinating process of Hollywood adapting **This Body** for the silver screen. My middle name is Marian, and the tattoo I got is the same tattoo my character Katharine gets--a Janus symbol of one face looking into the future, the other face looking into the past and both of them guarding the portal into my heart. Life imitates art.

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