It is 1950. In a devastating moment of clarity, Margery Benson abandons her dead-end job and advertises for an assistant to accompany her on an expedition. She is going to travel to the other side of the world to search for a beetle that may or may not exist.

Enid Pretty, in her unlikely pink travel suit, is not the companion Margery had in mind. And yet together they will be drawn into an adventure that will exceed every expectation. They will risk everything, break all the rules, and at the top of a red mountain, discover their best selves. This is a story that is less about what can be found than the belief it might be found; it is an intoxicating adventure story but it is also about what it means to be a woman and a tender exploration of a friendship that defies all boundaries.

About the Author

Rachel Joyce is the author of four Sunday Times and international bestsellers and a collection of short stories, A Snow Garden & Other Stories.

Rachel's books have been translated into thirty-six languages and two are in development for film. Her novels have been shortlisted for the Commonwealth Book Prize and longlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

Rachel has also written over twenty original afternoon plays and adaptations of the classics for BBC Radio 4, including all the Bronte novels. She moved to writing after a long career as an actor, performing leading roles for the RSC, the National Theatre and Cheek by Jowl. She lives with her family in Gloucestershire.

About the Book

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Other books by the author

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry
Perfect
The Love Song of Miss Queenie Hennessy
The Music Shop
Discussion points

- How does Margery and Enid's relationship change throughout the novel? How do their opinions of each other evolve?

- Enid and Margery talk a lot about the idea of 'vocation'. What do you think vocation means?

- What did the golden beetle represent for Margery?

- What was your reaction when Margery stole the boots? What do you think that decision represents throughout the course of the novel?

- Discuss the relationship between Enid and her husband, Percy.

- What did you think was in the red valise? Were you surprised when you found out what it was?

- Ending the novel with the introduction of a new character is a bold move, but the short chapter tells us a lot about Margery’s later life. Do you think Freya will make it to New Caledonia? What was it about Margery’s story that inspired her?

Suggested further reading

*My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante

*Olive Kitteridge* by Elizabeth Strout

*The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* by Jonas Jonasson

*The Rosie Project* by Graeme Simsion

*The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry* by Gabrielle Zevin

*Etta and Otto and Russell and James* by Emma Hooper

Useful Links

An interview on the Waterstones blog about the inspiration behind Miss Benson’s Beetle

From Penguin Random House's YouTube channel: Meet the Author: Rachel Joyce

An Interview in The Guardian: 'I'm drawn to people who find themselves on the outside of things'

The Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation