

Booklist

Lovely, Stephen. **Irreplaceable**. Voice: Hyperion. Feb. 2009. c.352p. ISBN 978-1-4013-2282-3. \$24.95. F

When 30-year-old archaeologist Alex Voormann's bright, ambitious wife, Isabel, is killed in a bicycle accident, he is faced with a momentous decision. She had filled out a donor card, and the hospital staff are requesting his permission to take her heart for a woman who would die without a transplant. Even a full year after he signed off on the procedure, Alex is still conflicted about the decision, so when Janet Corcoran, the mother of two whose life Isabel saved, contacts him, he becomes angry. Her gratefulness reminds him all over again of his grievous loss, and he can't help but feel resentful that her good fortune came at his expense; meanwhile, his mother-in-law has a totally different reaction, believing that her daughter's generous spirit lives on in Janet. Author Lovely patiently and tenderly details all of the emotions of his principal characters as they deal with grief, loss, and survivor's guilt. A sensitive debut novel that assiduously avoids the sentimental while facing up to the difficulties of finding one's way back to emotional and physical health. --Joanne Wilkinson