



*The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro

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I was first introduced to 'the remains of the day' when it was selected to be discussed at book club, and I admit, I was wary. The narrative of an ageing butler, obsessed with dignity and deference, accompanied with complex descriptions of the most minute details proved to be exhausting, and I frequently found myself questioning why it was such a lauded novel, being the recipient of the prestigious awards like the Booker Prize and even a film being created in its name. There seemed to be a lack of movement, or a driving force, in the novel, and despite this being the period in which Stevens was, for the first time, venturing outside of Darlington Hall, it felt rather stagnant and trapped, as the majority of the novel is spent, not recording his adventures (as Stevens claimed it was meant to), but in fixating on events of the past. I simply cannot relate to such devotion, which is perhaps why I initially didn't connect to Stevens as a character- he abandons his freedom to build relationships (for instance with his own father), to fall in love (perhaps with Miss Kenton), to travel, to live his own life, all for a man who, despite Stevens' idolisation of him, betrays his country by sympathising with the Nazis, and offers Stevens no gratitude in return. What is even more frustrating is that Stevens acts as an observer in his own life, being cruelly stripped of his identity and acting simply as a pawn for the upper classes, and yet not once does he complain, or shout, or express any outright emotion. Yet even though I found Stevens tedious, pedantic, snobbish, and generally unlikeable, my heart slowly began to warm to him. This novel is not one that you will immediately be hooked by; it is not flashy, it is not divided into 'good' and 'bad' characters, and though seeming to be stoic and emotionless, is authentic, morally complex, and tinged with pain as we watch hopelessly as a man sacrifices everything and is left with nothing. It is more than just a tragedy. It is a comedy too, as Stevens's demeanour is humorous as he endearingly attempts 'banter', and by the end, I did not

know whether to laugh or cry- a sure sign of a good novel. In some ways, the ending isn't satisfying- Stevens does not reveal his true feelings, quit his job, and dramatically run into Miss Kenton's arms. The novel concludes quietly, not with his master at Darlington Hall, but with a stranger on Weymouth Pier, and in a touching scene he finally is able to acknowledge the meaninglessness of everything he thought was important, something that heartbreakingly took him forty years to realise. And yet despite this horrifying revelation, there is a sense of hope, as Stevens, for the first time, looks to his own future. Ishiguro captures human nature, and the inner turmoil that lies within us all- the struggle between heart and head- and it will take you the whole novel to really appreciate its true beauty.