

Get Well Soon

Marie-Sabine Roger

Frank Wynne, Translator

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A misanthropic lead makes this humorous, character-driven novel impossible to forget.

Marie-Sabine Roger, author of *Soft in the Head* and *Afternoons with Margueritte*, continues with character-driven narratives in her third novel, *Get Well Soon*, which has humor on every page. A quirky book, it deals with deep psychological and philosophical truths in a lighthearted way.

Jean-Pierre Fabre is sixty-seven, misanthropic, and hilarious—and he's stuck in his hospital bed. He was pulled out of the Seine, but thanks to a head injury, he's not sure what he was doing on a bridge at five in the morning, or how he ended up in the river.

Jean-Pierre is bothered by everyone and everything. He doesn't like the fourteen-year-old girl who shuffles in and out of his room, says little, and makes no secret that her visits are solely to use his computer. Camille, the transgender youth who saved his life and who works as a low-key rent boy, tries Jean-Pierre's patience and acceptance. And he is befuddled by Maxime, the young cop working his case who seems to think Jean-Pierre is a viable stand-in for his dead father. Most offensive to Jean-Pierre, though, is the fact that no one who enters his room seems to know how to shut a door.

Given ample time to reflect on his life and inclinations, Jean-Pierre's sparks of transformation are subtly shown. His first impressions, and his reactions to those impressions, are all challenged. He realizes that he wasn't the perfect husband, and that he has always had trouble finding anything in common with his brother, Hervé.

The novel becomes poignant when Jean-Pierre's lifelong friend, Serge, faces triple bypass surgery. The novel avoids sentimentalizing their relationship by employing a light, albeit slightly irreverent, touch of nostalgia. Roger may push it too far with scruffy, street cat Jean-Pierre adopted and dubbed Dishrag.

Get Well Soon has short, punchy chapters. Jean-Pierre's humor and voice carry the novel, easily overcoming some of its more clichéd metaphors. Roger has a definite skill for making unlikable characters endearing. With Frank Wynne's fun translation, there's no doubt of Roger's comedic flair and the memorable voice of Jean-Pierre.

MONICA CARTER (September/October 2017)

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