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The Heart of the Matter

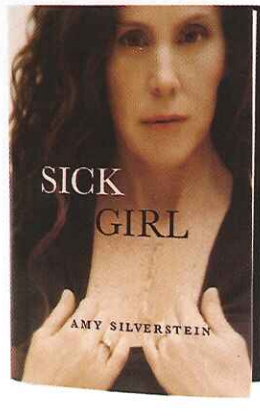
SHE HAD EVERYTHING TO LIVE FOR, BUT HER BODY WANTED TO DIE. A HEART-TRANSPLANT SURVIVOR'S GUTSY TESTAMENT OF SURVIVAL

At age 23, Amy Silverstein was a Phi Beta Kappa scholar who had just finished her first year of law school at New York University. She was madly in love with a fellow law student who was a summer associate at the same prestigious firm. When a palm reader in Atlantic City told her she would have four children and a long, healthy life, she was only months away from experiencing the tightness in her chest, the fainting spells, and the episode of temporary blindness that heralded her rapid, harrowing descent into early heart failure. After an eight-month wait, Silverstein had a heart transplant and was told she could expect to live no more than 10 years. The new heart, she learned, had come from a 13-year-old girl.

Now 44, married to her law student love, with an adopted son now in his early teens, Silverstein has lived with her transplanted heart, far beyond all expectations, for almost two decades.

The odds confronted in Silverstein's memoir, *Sick Girl* (Grove), are daunting, and the crowning miracle is that she wrote this feisty, insightful, improbable book at all. A daily regimen of immunosuppressant drugs makes her sick while keeping her alive. She has endured unending rounds of doctor appointments, painful and invasive procedures, and emergency hospitalizations.

In her words, "The illnesses that managed to get resolved did so in spite of never having been diagnosed and understood in the first place.... Even the ways in which I managed to stay healthy...



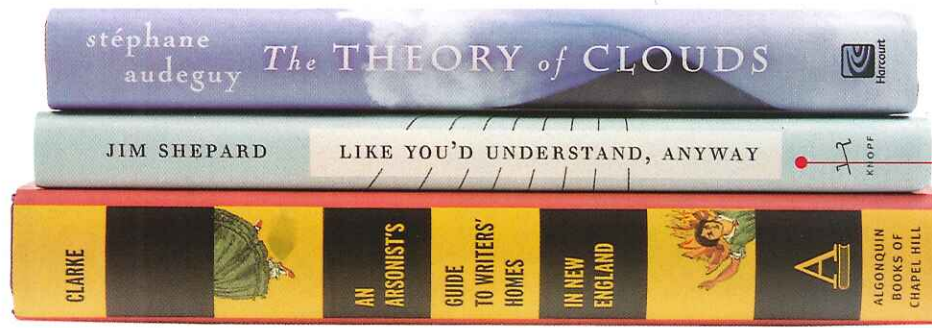
remained unexplained mysteries that challenged my doctors and made them feel uncomfortably less than omniscient."

What is clear is that Silverstein has cheated death to thrive in her post-transplant existence and to write about it with incredible courage, determination, self-scrutiny, and verve.—LISA SHEA

• Jim Shepard's playfully titled *like you'd understand, anyway* (Knopf) showcases 11 cannily crafted tales, such as "Proto-Scorpions of the Silurian," about a typical morning in the life of a volatile family bonded by emotional tenderhooks. The stories couldn't be funnier—or deadlier—in this mad-smart, wildly inventive set.

• Brock Clarke's darkly hilarious, high-spirited mock-memoir mystery *An Arsonist's Guide to Writers' Homes in New England* (Algonquin) revolves around unlikely hero Sam Pulsifer, who has settled down after serving time for having torched Emily Dickinson's house. Or did he?

• French writer Stéphane Audeguy's audaciously atmospheric first novel, *The Theory of Clouds* (Harcourt), pairs an eccentric Parisian ex-couturier and his waiflike assistant in a quest for every book ever written on clouds. They must go to great lengths to track down one long-lost tome in this dazzling ode to the conundrums of cloud lore and human enchantment.—L.S.



Getting Lost

One of Mason's most defining and destructive traits has always been his competitive streak. He sees everything, from predicting the color of the next car to pass a lemonade stand to winning the adoration of his adopted daughter, as a prize he must claim. The title of *The*



Worst Thing I've Done (Simon & Schuster), the latest novel from Ursula Hegi (*Stones From the River*), refers to one of the many daily bets Mason makes with his wife, Annie. But when Mason hangs himself, unable to understand that love has no fixed quantity and angry that Annie may love their mutual childhood friend, Jake, more than she does him, is that his most despicable action? Or is it leaving Annie with the guilt that she let him do it? "The worst thing I've

done is not keeping him alive," Annie says to her aunt, who replies, "Oh, Annie. No. None of us could have kept him alive."

As it did in Hegi's best-selling *River*, war, this time the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, forms a backdrop, and we can't help but wonder about the parallels. Taking us into the minds of Mason, Annie, and Jake, Hegi demonstrates that old adage: Even if you win, you lose. —MEGAN DEEM

