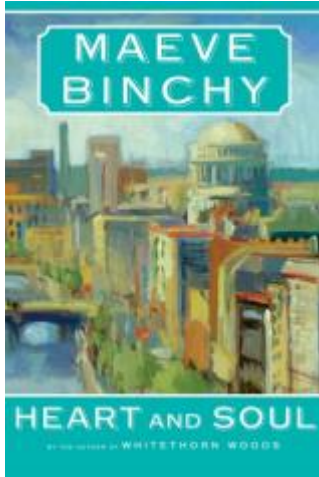


## Heart and Soul

by Maeve Binchy

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### About the Book

With the warmth, humor, and compassion we have come to expect from her, Maeve Binchy tells a story of family, friends, patients, and staff who are part of a heart clinic in a community caught between the old and the new Ireland.

Dr. Clara Casey has been offered the thankless job of establishing the underfunded clinic and agrees to take it on for a year. She has plenty on her plate already --- two difficult adult daughters and the unwanted attentions of her ex-husband --- but she assembles a wonderfully diverse staff devoted to helping their demanding, often difficult patients. Among them are: an infectiously cheerful nurse; an indispensable office manager who can't quite manage her own life; a Polish girl who's come to Ireland to put a bad love affair firmly in her past and the booming Irish economy in her future; a young doctor who has a special touch with his patients; and a physical therapist who undertakes a very different kind of therapy involving a local priest and a stalker.

Before long Clara and her staff manage to establish the clinic as an essential part of the community. In the end, Clara must decide whether or not to leave a place where lives are saved, courage is rewarded, and humor and optimism triumph over greed and self-pity.

**Heart and Soul** is Maeve Binchy at her heartwarming best.

### Discussion Guide

1. Have you read any of Maeve Binchy's other books? If you've encountered any of these characters before, how did this new novel deepen your understanding of them? If you haven't, which characters would you like to spend more time with?
2. It's clear what the "heart" of the title refers to, but who—or what—is the "soul"?
3. The heart clinic is the embodiment of a new idea that advocates teaching people about their health without having to go to a hospital or to a doctor who may not have much time to spend with an individual patient. Why do you think the heart clinic is a good idea? Is there such a thing in your town or neighborhood?
4. There are many different mothers in the novel. Who does Binchy portray as a good mother? In what ways? Which mother would you most like to have as your own?
5. How are Binchy's mother-daughter relationships different from her mother-son ones?

6. Why does Clara find it easier to be kind to Ania than to her daughters Adi or Linda?
7. Clara is a firm believer in the “curative powers of being busy” (page 23). How does this affect her in her career? In her personal life?
8. It is very difficult to make decisions about your parents when they are older. Was Hilary right to try to keep her mother at home with her?
9. There are two car accidents in the novel. How does each one change the course of the story?
10. What role does the “new Ireland” play in Heart and Soul? Is Quentins part of the new Ireland and if so how? What other aspects of this novel reflect the new Ireland?
11. Discuss the bigotry Ania faces, especially by Rosemary. In what ways is the treatment of new immigrants different in Ireland than it is in this country?
12. Several of the women have had relationships with abusive and entirely untrustworthy men. How does their prior history affect their current romances? Are these relationships healthier than the previous ones because of the men involved, or have the women themselves changed?
13. The pharmacist, Peter Barry, seems as if he would be a good husband. What made Clara realize that he wasn't the man for her? Do you think she was right in her decision?
14. On page 148, Ania says, “I like this word peaceable. It's what I would like to be.” Does she achieve this goal? How does her new-found peace help in her encounters with Rosemary?
15. Was Eileen Edwards genuinely delusional, or do you think she had another reason for blackmailing Father Flynn? What did you think of Johnny's solution to Father Flynn's problem? Who benefited the most from the resolution?
16. Twice in the novel, characters state, “We always regret what we don't do, rarely what we do do.” Who follows this code to the greatest advantage? Is there anyone who should apply it but doesn't?
17. Who is the most contented character in the novel? The most disappointed? What role does money play in their happiness?
18. On page 393, Declan says to Rosemary “May you get what you deserve in life.” Does she? Which of Binchy's characters doesn't?
19. Who was your favorite character and why?
20. What do you imagine happens next between Clara and Frank?

### **SUGGESTED READING**

Related titles by Maeve Binchy: **Whitethorn Woods**, **Nights of Rain and Stars**, **Scarlet Feather**, and **Quentins**; **Irish Girls About Town: An Anthology of Short Stories** by Maeve Binchy, Marian Keyes, and Cathy Kelly; **Home to Holly Springs** by Jan Karon; **The Light of Evening** by Edna O'Brien; **Mothers and Sons** by Colm Tóibín.

### Author Bio

Maeve Binchy was the author of MINDING FRANKIE, HEART AND SOUL, NIGHT OF RAIN AND STARS, SCARLET FEATHER, QUENTINS, LIGHT A PENNY CANDLE, CIRCLE OF FRIENDS, and TARA ROAD (An Oprah Book Club Selection), and many other bestselling books. She wrote for *Gourmet*; *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *Modern Maturity*; and *Good Housekeeping*; among other publications.

Binchy passed away on July 30, 2012 at the age of 72, following a brief illness. Considered a national treasure in her native country of Ireland, she died in Dublin near her childhood home, where she lived with her beloved husband, Gordon.

### Critical Praise

"Interweaving the domestic narratives of a dissimilar collection of individuals is beloved Binchy's stock-in-trade, and once again, she does so with sublime ease, inventively engaging readers through a reassuring

and persuasive combination of gracious warmth, gentle humor, and genuine affection."

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