

by  
lindsay  
wincherauk



**194**  
**books**

# **book thoughts**

## **volume 1**

## What Would You Like to Read Next?

I Don't Care. Anything.

YA?

No → Sure. Why Not?

Here. Read These. 

Dear Book People,

I don't know when it started, but start it did, and I now read a fair bit → about one book to one and a half books per week.

Wow!

*I know. I never read while in University, but now, I guess Karma is paying me a literary visit.*

Anyway, mostly, the fact is, I enjoy reading.

I'm a writer. Writing is bleeping hard. Inviting others who don't know a darn thing about you into your mind and then getting them to care about you → why would anyone, ever?

I can't stop. I can't stop seeking validation for my words. Come on, literary world, it's my time → relevance is around the corner!

## PROSE

*The protagonist pens (keystrokes) thoughts on books for a prestigious literary magazine → with each book the protagonist reads, a portal opens, and the protagonist becomes an essential part of the story arc. Each time the protagonist discovers the gist of the book, → it fires the protagonist into the next read. Three books in, he falls in love, and just before love was to be consummated, the protagonist finishes writing thoughts on the book and is fired into → the next book (a self-help book) → love lost.*

**THEN:** *the thing is, the protagonist has entered a nightmare, a book he cannot find a way out of (a graphic novel) → but as fate would have it, his love is trapped inside the same nightmare and together they relentlessly search for the exit, and a way for their love to be fulfilled.*

**LITTLE DO THEY KNOW:** *the only way out, is to become the main characters of the story!*

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK  
THE CHILDREN'S BOOK

THE CRIME DRAMA  
THE CRIME DRAMA

THE LOVE STORY  
THE LOVE STORY

THE SELF-HELP BOOK  
THE SELF-HELP BOOK

THE COOKBOOK  
THE COOKBOOK

THE CLASSIC  
THE CLASSIC

THE EPIC WAR NOVEL  
THE EPIC WAR NOVEL

THE FAMILY DRAMA  
THE FAMILY DRAMA

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL  
THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Another book arrives. I despise the need to give books ratings (STARS). Who am I to grade the works of others?

So, instead, I wait for a visceral reaction—a connection—a way to express how the book makes me feel. That is how I write.

Is it relevant? I'm not sure. Often, my thoughts on what I've read aren't even about the books, but I think it's more honest.

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Here are my thoughts on 191 books, and I hope you enjoy the stories I share with each page turned.

Another book arrives. *Poetry*. I may not understand poetry, but I will try.

Oh my, another book has arrived, this time about Seaweed.

My brain...

I cheer for the protagonist's love to blossom!

One more page, and everything will become clear.

Keep reading.

## NEXT BOOK IDEA

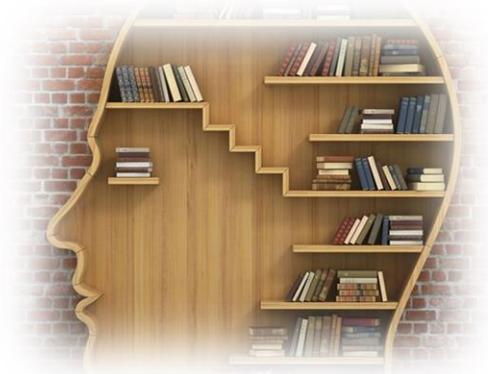


TO BE TRULY GAY  
TO BE TRULY GAY

YOU MUST MOVE SOMEWHERE ELSE  
YOU MUST MOVE SOMEWHERE ELSE

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 19



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1. **LEAVING ISN'T THE HARDEST THING - LAUREN HOUGH**
2. **THE FUNNY THING ABOUT NORMAN FOREMAN - JULIETTA HENDERSON**
3. **GROWN UPS - MARIAN KEYES**
4. **FEVER DREAM - SAMANTHA SCHWEBLIN**
5. **CREATIVE TYPES - TOM BISSELL**
6. **DADDY STORIES - EMMA CLINE**
7. **LIVE ONES - SADIE MCCARNEY**
8. **PITCHBLENDÉ - ELISE MARCELLA GODFREY**
9. **BLACKBIRD SONG - RANDY LUNDY**
10. **DUCKS NEWBURYPORT - LUCY ELLMAN**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

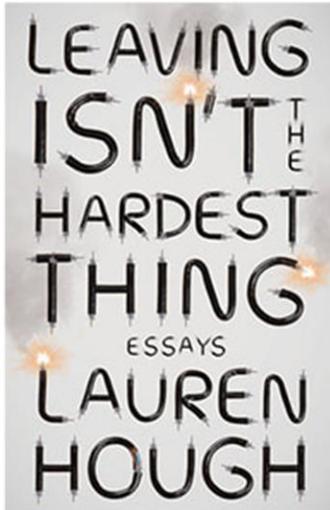
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

# LEAVING ISN'T THE HARDEST THING

LAUREN HOUGH



*Beauty + laughter harvested from the depths of vulnerability + pain.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Magnificent. Superb. Splendid. Warm. Grateful.

Lauren grew up in a cult. She escaped the cult to join the cult of the Military only to be discarded into the cult of America?

Is America a cult?

Probably. If you're paying attention.

I live in Canada. Are we cultish?

Maybe. But at least, we'll say sorry for it.

*Leaving isn't the Hardest Thing* sprung to the top of my most loved books list.

Lauren is spectacularly vulnerable. Courageous really. She has endured much. Survived. Shared depression. Taught us how to keep battling. Back to the courageous, Lauren is fearless in her calling out the injustices thrust upon the margins of society by institutions + greed. She has this incredible capacity to love despite the boundless amount of *WTF* she has faced with an unfathomable ability to talk about her hardships in such a way her kindness toward those struggling, *many less than her*, many who haven't had the same luxury of being white. White talking about anyone else is a challenge. Lauren is a master.

It is a unique gift she's been given. Compassion. Empathy. Pain. And in the end, regardless of whatever cards thrown her way → as she navigates her way through life and depression → Lauren shares a noble trait → a sardonic wit layered in nuance to where I laughed so hard at a brilliance only found in pain, thinking maybe she wrote certain lines: Just for me!

*"... the worst bleeping song in the Family, was called "My Family. My Family." It's a love song about the Family." – AND – "But I'm not good with vodka. And I'm really not great with coke. Drugs affect me."*

I laughed and laughed and laughed.

Thank you, Lauren, for sharing beauty only found in vulnerability + pain. Your words have made the world a wee bit kinder!

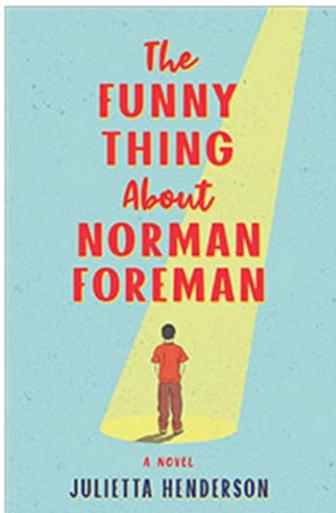
Near the end of the book, I felt like I was being punched in the gut. I was born in a place where unwanted children were born, only to be discarded and labelled as shameful. I guess I was part of a cult → another dark secret condoned by religion, not yet revealed because Catholicism is reeling from the Residential School crisis (there is no word, crisis is not enough). Religion is not prepared to deal with more injustices, yet.

I survived. Sort of. I write.

WRITTEN: 21 February 2022

# THE FUNNY THING ABOUT NORMAN FOREMAN

JULIETTA HENDERSON



A breathtaking lesson on unconditional.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Fabulous. Review Complete.

I'll continue.

A single mom.

A twelve-year-old boy burdened by psoriasis.

A best friend dies just before he is to turn twelve.

“—one really and truly best friend is a hundred times better than a whole bunch that aren't quite sure—”

I'm prepared to have my heart eviscerated. The mom's name is Sadie. My last living sister (?) Sadie died in December. I don't know who my father is — I probably never will. A tear forms.

Sadie lived with my mother her entire life. I was a secret baby. Sadie held the last clue of who my father might be? Now she's gone.

This book is supposed to be light-hearted. It's hitting close to home. And then a funny thing happens. Norman wants to live up to his best friend Jax's 5-year-plan to perform stand-up. He asks his mom to help. He also asks her to help him find out who his father is — I'm shaking. But the funny thing, *The Funny Thing about Norman*, took me on a ride through the definition of unconditional. A master lesson — narrated through the lens of a young boy who understands better than most what matters, and a mother doing the best she can, who oozes love as her wonderful boy teaches all of us what it means to be alive.

Throw in an older gentleman losing his love to — countless laughs — and uplifting doesn't do this book justice.

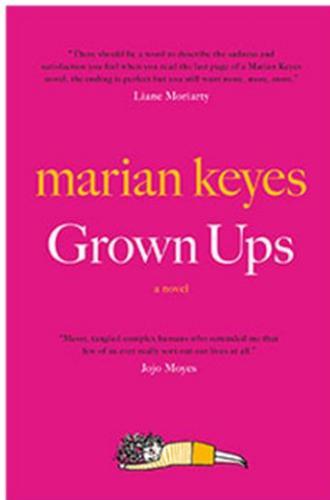
Norman + Sadie, + Leonard etched their way into my heart and onto my all-time favourites list.

That's how the book made me feel.

WRITTEN: January 23, 2022

# GROWN UPS

## MARIAN KEYES



A zillion issues packed into 500 (plus) pages.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

### READ KEYS

Characters growing into themselves. Life issues dropping → infidelity, excess, families in flux, bulimia, a need to flash success.

Kids running around; for no reason?

Not part of anything but to be used later as background → creepily hindering adult growth as the adults try to hold on to...?

Am I sitting in the room of a family television drama (A Million Little Pieces) where each chapter shocks me?

Another family event, lavish, unaffordable. A small business owner flips the bill → rudimentary math screams a small business owner couldn't flip the bill. So why would a family member feel the need to create such an illusion of success? I don't know.

White. It could only be white.

Introduce a refugee. Why?

The story stalls.

I no longer like this book.

The kids run around.

The refugee is saved.

White. It's okay to be → but when you need to use a refugee as a prop...?

Change the storyline: Bulimia → that's the ticket.

The men in the family are stunted. The women...?

The sole outsider is never fully accepted into the family → falling for one of the kids.

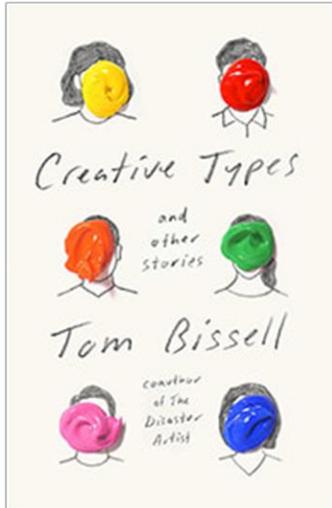
A drunk man (marketing genius) saves the day for the small...?

Bulimia leads to a crack on the head. The stunted me are gone → only to grow up and be allowed back, except for the outsider. She never belonged → she escaped.

The last line of the book saves the story. Love!

WRITTEN: 14 February 2022

TOM BISSELL



Celebrities pay a heavy price → entertaining us.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Roger isn't a rockstar, movie star, internet star.

He's human, just like you and me.

Roger wants to dabble.

Dabble, he does, to feel special. Star worthy.

Every week, Rog hits the After Hour Club to pop Molly, swig water, shake his ass.

At closing time, Roger fears home.

A group is walking, passing by on the street. Rog gloms on → a newfound celebrity lifestyle is subtracting years from his life. The group heads indoors, to one of their apartments. Roger tags along. He wants → *wants* → as the chemicals fuel his desire. He watches a man and woman conversing a few feet in front of him. His hand brushes over his... as he sits on the couch. The man breaks free of the conversation, approaches Roger, and says, "I just got a call. There's a lineup to get in. You must go." The man wasn't on the phone. Roger leaves. He heads home in frustration.

Creativity is a young person's world. A big hit. Flush with cash. Lost. Alone. Quickly becoming irrelevant. TikTok. Superbowl ads now have teasers. The world is racing. A big creative hit turns into a life filled with destruction: Cocaine, lubricity, *the first time I typed lubricity, the second time I typed* → live fast, die young, broken, irrelevant, flush with cash as you are replaced by whatever is next.

Tom Bissell has a magic pen.

**Why?**

Because if he's writing from experience. TikTok. Flush with cash.

**Creative Types** is a captivating top of the list, read.

Thank You, Tom.

How's Roger?

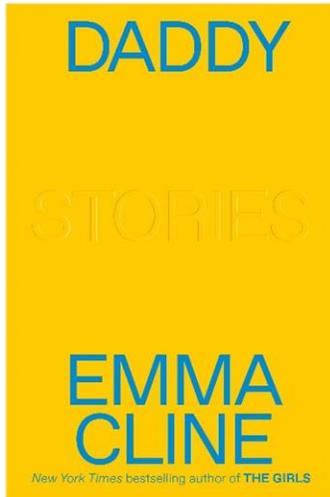
It was merely a phase.

Roger isn't part of the book?

WRITTEN: 10 February 2022

# DADDY STORIES

EMMA CLINE



*A journey into the depths of destruction as simple humans destroy who they are.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Most humans are kind souls.

*I need to believe that.*

*I want to believe that.*

Darkness sells books; darkness causes the heart to race

Technically solid.

Have I been anywhere those in this book have been, figurately?

*Maybe? Yes?*

Sometimes the light doesn't dim, but the night turns black, as we can't escape thoughts that make our heart beat out of our chests.

What's this book about?

Are we all this damaged?

Am I asking too many questions?

Okay, one more: What makes a story stunning?

We journey into the depths of destruction as simple humans destroy who they are by chasing *want* or trying to escape what is →

We fall down, we need to get up.

I want to find the light.

My heart is pounding.

I'm not sure what's happening. I need to champion hope.

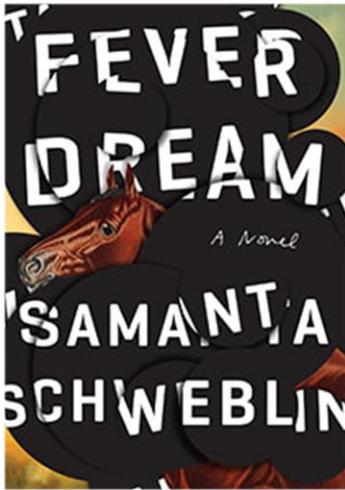
I laughed seven times; I think.

I may not be smart enough to understand.

*That's how this book made me feel.*

WRITTEN: 26 February 2022

**FEVER DREAM**  
**SAMANTHA SCHWEBLIN**



We're all living inside the same nightmare.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

We're all living inside the same nightmare. I wake up sweating.

We need to keep those we love close, within rescue distance.

It doesn't exist?

It can't exist.

I must protect you.

But life is like living inside an active shooter event.

We're being poisoned by the invisibility of greed.

We are active participants in the human experiment.

Corporations are soulless – nonliving entities conditioning us with want. We can't quit, we need to eat, a roof over our heads, we need stuff – noise distracts us. A loved one becomes ill, is dying.

We scream out NO MORE.

We must stop the suffering.

We hop into our vehicles to escape.

We become part of the problem.

The fumes we leave in the wake of escape make someone else ill.

There is no salve to stop what we're all reaching for. One person dies. Two are born to replace.

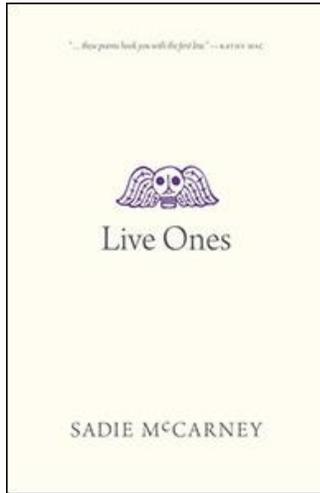
There is no rescue distance until we are all gone.

That's how the book made me feel.

WRITTEN: January 6, 2022

# LIVE ONES

## SADIE M<sup>C</sup>CARNEY



*"She spoon-feeds you gruel to nurse you back to – what?"*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I walk into Costco. A few steps in, the person behind me rams their massive cart into the back of my legs.

It hurt.

I turn around, flashing my anguish.

He doesn't apologize.

I turn down an aisle, with my friend walking lockstep beside me. We can't proceed. A mother + father had plopped their four children down on the floor in front of a big-screen television – the kids are being babysat.

A man spots a free sample (pre-covid).

He turns his massive cart into mine.

He eats.

I read a poem about two people who lined up to get a number to be able to rush into a store, climbing over other people who'd lined up to get a number to buy crap they think will bring happiness to their lives. Little do they know; a wealthy man is laughing at the poor people gobbling up worthless crap.

I visit my dying father in the hospital 1,500 times. He's wasting away – less than one-hundred pounds. A nurse is saying he must eat to maintain his strength. To die?

I read a poem about *"You tell her she shoulda been a nurse and she laughs. (She tried, the same way she always tries – the same hope, same let-down.) Yours for now, she spoon-feeds you gruel to nurse you back to – what?"* My father.

How can someone navigate life: sexuality, and otherwise, when life is happening all around them?

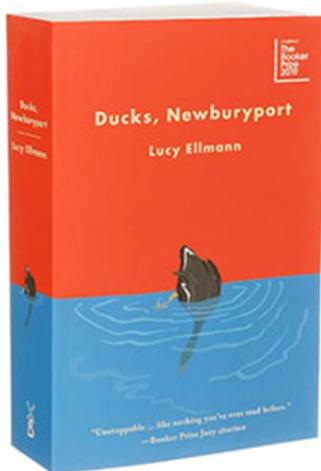
By writing what they see. A poem.

*That's how this book made me feel/think.*

WRITTEN: 28 January 2022

# DUCKS NEWBURYPORT

LUCY ELLMANN



*Exhausting.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The thing is, COVID is still around, I'm an anti-anti-masker-vaxxer, I hope I got that right, the thing is, China, Olympics, billions of dollars, the thing is, Paris Hilton + Lindsay Lohan are feuding, immaturely, now you know, I have a girls name, the thing is, a garbage human attacked a Muslim woman in Edmonton, throw him out with the trash, the thing is, we're supposed to take some time looking at spooky abandoned shopping malls, and care, the thing is, YouTube banned someone permanently, my construction friend got a lifetime ban from a pub, an accomplishment (?), the thing is, Sarah

Palin was seen dining outdoors only days after having COVID, we needed to know that, the thing is, desperate people sometimes commit crimes, probably far less than entitled people do, the creators of desperation, the thing is, they're still telling us to eat broccoli, apparently it's good for you, click bait, inform us, tell us what we need to know, the thing is, there is no playbook for how to reconnect with family after thirty years, no playbook, what's the goal (?), cry, cry, cry, traumatic –

The thing is, it took me 90 days to read this book, I read 11 other books in that time, heroic, the thing is, I liked 5 things about this book –

1. I read it.
2. Lucy Ellmann's tome of neurosis helped fend off insomnia.
3. "The fact that" was used one-zillion times and yet, on page 898 there was an error, "the face that."
4. " – the fact that he loves me, and that makes everything else bearable."
5. THE END!

The thing is, guns don't kill people, bullets do, if we banned bullets, it would make the world a safer place.

*That's how the book made me feel.*

WRITTEN: January 27, 2022



## PITCHBLENDE

ELISE MARCELLA GODFREY



*When the water dies, we're –*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

While reading these enthralling poems, a song by the Eagles sprung to mind: The Last Resort.

*"Some rich men came and raped the land, nobody caught 'em."*

We allow ourselves to be divided by the friggin' noise.

We have a propensity to demonize those amongst us who had acted as stewards of the land long before they (rich men) conditioned us to extract, destroy, and kill life. All life.

The brake pads of our conditioning are wearing out. We can't stop.

Dark?

Yes.

A protest tries to stop the destruction. The rich men raping the land win by telling us, the consumers, the protesters are professional. They protest everything.

The stewards of the land are few – strong – weary. *They care.* The rest of us are selfish.

We change the lightbulbs we use – thinking it will be enough. We pretend to care about the future – we don't – humans treat life like a sprint (life is short), and the pace of the race is incredibly unstable, leaving what we need for existence to be saved by the next generation. A generation we are stacking massive hurdles in front of. A generation addicted to TikTok.

As for our well-meaning politicians, many of them – can't see past the next election.

The water is sick. *When it dies, we're –*

I cheer for the stewards, but unfortunately, the odds are stacked against us.

Dark?

Yes.

*That's how the book made me feel.*

WRITTEN: January 23, 2022

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 18



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1. **BLUE SKY KINGDOM - BRUCE KIRKBY**
2. **BEFORE THE COFFEE GETS COLD - TOSHIKAZU KAWAGUCHI**
3. **THE UNRAVELLING - DONNA BESEL**
4. **THE MARRIAGE OF ROSE CAMILLERI - ROBERT HOUGH**
5. **PACHINKO - MIN JIN LEE**
6. **BREAD & WATER - DEE HOBSBAWN SMITH**
7. **IN SINGING HE COMPOSED A SONG - JEREMY STEWART**

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**ORANGE = POETRY**

## BLUE SKY KINGDOM

BRUCE KIRKBY



*I fear for humanity. What are we racing toward?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

In “Blue Sky Kingdom,” Bruce Kirkby + his family take us on a breathtaking visceral ride into an accelerating world that is wiping out centuries of love + caring and perhaps, a better way of living.

Poverty isn’t a thing if everyone is living the same impermanent life. A blistering reality of ‘ways of life’ being erased by progress.

But you can’t stop progress – nobody wants to – there is no rewind button on the human race – it is an opaque fantasy few

of us are blessed with the opportunity to experience what was, and could be, for a better world.

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Thankfully, Bruce + Christine (Bodi + Taj) gave us a glimpse into a disappearing world – an unsustainable olden-world.

Kirkby’s family’s journey is unfathomable for most, fascinating – and hopefully, it doesn’t prompt other adventures to duplicate it.

Perhaps, we need to allow these centuries-old civilizations to live out their remaining time in the calmness and the impermanence the Kirkby family were fortunate to see firsthand.

The best thing the rest of the world could do for the Himalayas and Buddhism is just let it be.

On a personal note, the past week has been horrific. On December 12, as I was fighting back the emotions of the anniversary of my mum (Rebekah) dying, my last living sister (Sadie) died – “Blue Sky Kingdom” allowed me to escape my emotional turmoil for a much-needed break from my tears.

*That’s how the book made me feel.*

WRITTEN: December 17, 2021

## BEFORE THE COFFEE GETS COLD

TOSHIKAZU KAWAGUCHI



*Are you okay?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*Are you okay?*

I'm not. For the last two years, a seemingly endless torrent of challenges has been threatening to submerge me. For many, the previous two years have been harsh.

*Are you okay?*

A few days ago, a friend asked me those three words. My friend wasn't looking for me to pour my heart out. Nor did I want to. My friend simply noticed pain resting in my tired eyes, and acknowledged my upset, letting me know it's okay, not to be okay. For the rest of that day, I felt less alone.

**Before the Coffee Get's Cold** is a collection of four stories delicately interwoven together. The characters grow on every page. Toshikazu Kawaguchi deftly weaves these stories together, sharing the absolute beauty living within vulnerability, allowing us to stop (especially men) feigning strength by hiding inside the comedy of anguish. Kawaguchi's beautiful prose brought tears to my eyes on several occasions. Not tears of suffering. Instead, tears filled with hope because if we make minor changes to the lenses, we look at life through, we just might understand, the world is at times filled with love, empathy, kindness, and compassion.

This is one of my favourite books, a delightful read.

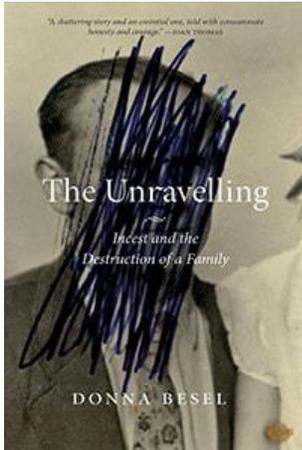
*That's how the book made me feel.*

*Are you okay?*

WRITTEN: November 30, 2021

# THE UNRAVELLING

DONNA BESEL



*Powerful. Upsetting. Important. Comforting.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**Donna**

I hate your father. Long before he became a sick man and died, he was a sick, diseased man. It is a fine line between diminishing his vile actions by letting him off the hook with ill and diseased, and justice. I hope others hating him brings you solace and allows your energies to move toward warmer thoughts. When someone hurts me, loving friends do the hating for me – allowing me to pause.

I'm appalled at the disgusting behaviour of some of your family, who hid behind the insipidness of denial. Not only downplaying the impact on you but not understanding your lecherous father + enabling stepmother will haunt them for life, regardless of every "it's in the past" or "I choose to move forward." Those burdened in repudiation don't seem to understand you can't wash sexual assault away by closing minds. I was particularly disgusted by those whose lameness shone clearly in "I'm not as strong as you." Please.

A suitcase is delivered. *Every denial, blaming the times, not allowing you, the assaulted to express their tumult, specific dates on the calendar, fill the suitcase to the bursting point.* When we lose the safety of home coupled with being *ostracized by family, isolation, depression, suicidal thoughts, and fear of speaking up,* often arise. Delivering the ostracized and assaulted to silence when they most need to speak. The cruelty of dismissiveness permits the assault to live on in perpetuity. It's cruel. There is no closure. There is only heartache.

The suitcase begins to burst. How do we move on? We must.

I thank you for having the courage to share your story. I feel your pain. I do not understand the physical violence of sexual assault, but I know what being an outcast from family feels like. It's debilitating.

Your words will help many.

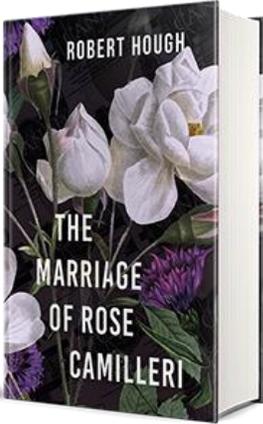
**Hugs**

*That's how this book made me feel.*

WRITTEN: November 25, 2021

# THE MARRIAGE OF ROSE CAMILLERI

ROBERT HOUGH



*Darn, it, I'm a grown man, why am I crying?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The first two-hundred pages of *"The Marriage of Rose Camilleri"* by Robert Hough are delightful. Scotty + Rose are an unlikely pair stapled together in a broken night of intimacy. We follow them on a journey through insecurity and unfulfilled desires as they attempt to piecemeal a life together.

There are sprinklings of subtly nuanced humour throughout the pages, instilling comforting tenderness in the reader's hearts. As more of their tumult and mundane existences are revealed, the pages begin to turn themselves as it becomes impossible not to find yourself in their struggles.

I arrive at the last fifty pages. I'm reading in an almost empty food court. Only one other table is occupied. A page turns. A tear rolls down my cheek. I'm transported to the day my (grand)father died; my (grand)mother reached for his hand, when they touched, he took his last gasp of life and for the first time, I saw how much they were in love. Another page and find myself alongside my (grandmother) the night before she died; she pulled me close and whispered into my ear *"Goodbye."*

Another page turns. I'm on a train with Rose + Scotty, their children, and a collection of strangers. Tears are pouring from my eyes. I can't breathe. I can't consume another word; I look over at the other patron of the food court—I need her to leave. She pulls on her Covid-mask. *Please leave.* She pulls down her Covid-mask; I weep. Finally, she leaves. I'm too heartbroken to finish. I don't want to finish.

There is a beauty that comes from the boring mundaneness of living when somehow, despite all odds, love is allowed to grow when unburdened by condition.

I finished the book the following morning. The tears returned. *Darn it, I'm a grown man.*

My heart warms. Love is possible.

*That's how this book made me feel.*

**Definitely Top 5!**

WRITTEN: November 18, 2021

# PACHINKO

MIN JIN LEE



*Devastating.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*Today I'm going to try to find the courage to phone my last remaining sister, who's dying, to say goodbye + to ask her if she can tell me who my birth father is?*

I know I will shake during the call. I will cry after.

What does this have to do with Pachinko?

*Everything.*

*"Pachinko"* by Min Lin Lee is an epic tale of culture + the devastation patriarchal societies has levelled on an infinite number of families since the beginning of time.

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Two women (Sunja + Kyunghee), burdened by the unbearable weight of being, forced to fight for every ounce of life – when their lives are shaded in a shame bestowed upon them by those controlling the narrative: men, and in this case, the oppression of Japan over Korea. It could easily be one neighbourhood versus another. History is governed by those dictating the times. The bleeping times.

The problem is when everything starts with a lie, no hiding, or denial, or the propensity to hide behind the shallow veil of deception – could possibly heal the suffering of those living the truth. Everything from the inception of the untruth (an unwed mother giving birth) is connected, and regardless of the well-meant intentions and their denial in believing they are doing the right thing – is nothing more than selfish.

I don't feel bad for Sunja + Kyunghee, and as much as I cannot understand the times – *I can* – or every decision they made was rooted in love, it wasn't. It was rooted in selfishness and shame, resulting in, at times, tragic consequences.

When life starts off with a lie, the lifelong pursuit of happiness becomes elusive.

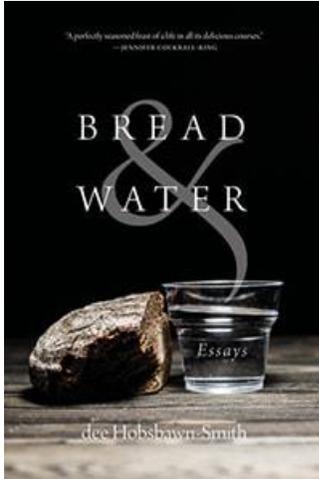
*I'm sixty-one. Today I'm phoning my dying sister to ask her who my father is?*

*"Pachinko,"* for me, was a devastating, heart-wrenching read.

WRITTEN: November 10, 2021

# BREAD & WATER

DEE HOBSBAWN SMITH



*I swear I could smell the aromas wafting from the pages.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I turned sixty-one this July. OMG. At the start of Covid, my lengthy career had been subtracted from my life as greed + entitlement placed me on the chopping block and fired me out into the aether, forcing a late (mid) life reinvention. Fortunately for me, I write. At sixty-one, my life experiences are all I have—I must share them.

Thankfully, Hobsbawn-Smith has chosen to share as well. A remarkable thing happens when you aren't born into privilege and entitlement—you must become well-rounded. It torments you from time to time as it can feel rudderless, but it's not.

*"Bread + Water"* is a collection of essays from Hobsbawn-Smith's life, but it's not; it's much more. It is a memoir inviting readers into a life full of love, challenge, understanding, kindness, and hope. It shares Hobsbawn-Smith's beautifully visceral vulnerability, with the words singing off every page with her effortless command of vocabulary, not a single word out of place. With each page turned, whether riding in the vestibule of a railcar or searching for a beloved pet, I could not help but feel I was inside the page myself. When the author writes about food, I swear I could smell the aromas wafting from the pages, causing my mouth to water.

Mothers nurture us, nourish us, and help us become who we are, but in a misogynistically conditioned world, must overcome much, at one time allowed to be cooks, not chefs—unfair, cruel, needing to change by starting a dialogue.

I thank Hobsbawn-Smith for sharing her journey, in this glorious story with love emanating every step, run, ride, along the way.

I turned sixty-one in July. Hobsbawn-Smith and I are in the same demographic as we drive down the grid roads of life, tires crackling, what's behind us simmering in the rear-view mirror is a warm broth as we reduce the regret and work toward reinventing whatever comes next, trying to make the world a little better along the way.

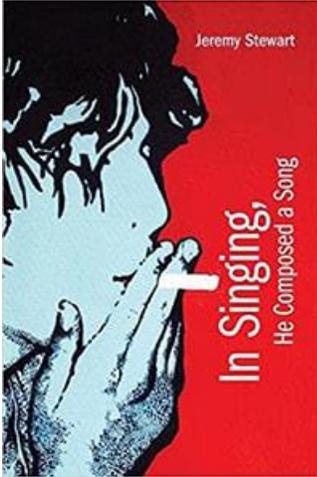
I am not a good cook or even a cook at all, but I leave the author an open invitation to dine with me the next time she's in Vancouver. I'll try; all she has to do is enjoy. I'm no James Barber.

*"Bread + Water"* will leave readers, all readers, pondering what matters in life: love, kindness, humanity, and the necessity to respect the planet we are revolving on together.

WRITTEN: October 29, 2021

# IN SINGING HE COMPOSED A SONG

JEREMY STEWART



*A powerful look at the damages caused by labels.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*“In Singing - He Composed a Song” is a lyrically beautiful, experimentally dark, short book hitting heavy themes.*

John is a child, fifteen-years old. Gifted. Disturbed. Not from entitlement. Those tasked with looking out for him judge him because of where (?) he’s from, watching him through a clouded lens. He’s labelled. The labels adhesive is unbreakable. He’s institutionalized, deemed a hazard to himself and to others. *He’s just a child.* We’ve all appallingly whispered gossip about those like him we’ve encountered in our lives. The labelling for him and those like him follow them throughout life as rumours like a violent tornado swirled only a few steps behind. He doesn’t have a chance.

My mum was labelled an unfit mother by religion + community. Her label was slapped firmly on her when she was forced to birth me in a place of disgrace, sanctioned by religion, where the unfit mothers (out of wedlock) gave birth, only to have their babies ripped out of their arms and then adopted out or sold – if the babies survived. The mums were to be fixed to become marriageable. The babies were never to be spoken of again.

I found out by accident, at age forty-three, my mum, who I had watched die when I was twenty-seven, wasn’t my birth mother, and my birth mum, the one labelled unfit, had hung out in the background of my life, playing a different role.

In 2016, alongside my birth mother’s deathbed, my mum told me, *the night before they were coming to take me away, she pleaded with my mum(grand) to keep me.* My labelled unfit mum lived with the burden of the secret her whole life – my entire family did. And I have now lived with the label of being a child whose birth brought shame, ever since.

A label’s adhesive is corrosive. It eats away at those of us who’ve been labelled, following vehemently behind.

For me, when I mention my story to others, I am often met with, *“It was the times”* or *“A lot of people were adopted”* or *“A lot of people come from screwed up families.”*

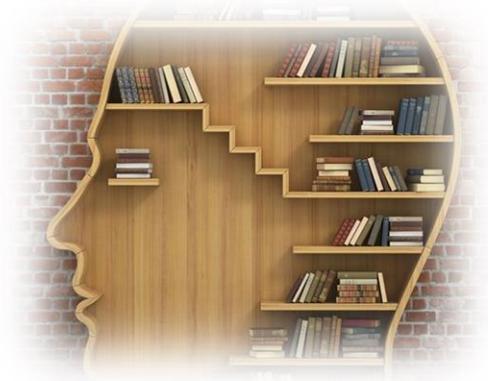
*“Shut up”* would be kinder.

*“In Singing - He Composed a Song” is a powerful look at the damage labels cause. For those of us who are labelled, how could we ever be, okay?*

WRITTEN: October 20, 2021

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 17 RVLCH TA



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1. **A HISTORY OF MY BRIEF BODY - BILLY-RAY BELCOURT**
2. **THE WINTER WIVES - LINDEN MACINTYRE**
3. **A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES - JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE**
4. **LETTERS TO AMELIA - LINDSAY ZIER-VOGEL**
5. **SUTURE - NIC BREWER**
6. **BECOMING VANCOUVER - DANIEL FRANCIS**
7. **HAPPY SANDS - BARB HOWARD**
8. **ANY KIND OF LUCK AT ALL - MARY FAIRHURST BREEN**
9. **#BLACKINSCHOOL - HABIBA COOPER DIALLO**
10. **UMBILICAL CORD - HASAN NAMIR**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

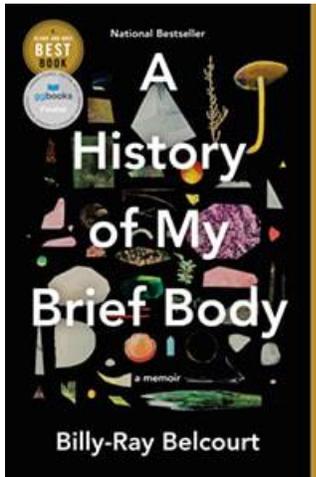
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

# A HISTORY OF MY BRIEF BODY

BILLY-RAY BELCOURT



*To be superior you'd have to admit your flaws. Superiority is a ruse.*

## *HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?*

I'm 61 now. I've walked beside you my whole life – several steps ahead. Why? Because I've been conditioned. I don't remember who conditioned me. The conditioning is flawed. I'm not better than you. I just believed I was. We went to school together. We worked together. I judged you. We all did. We inadvertently participated in the blood lust. We joked when you were barely out of earshot about you. We laughed. We did so to feel superior. Superiority is a ruse. It doesn't exist. To be superior, you'd have to admit your flaws. We're all flawed. Damaged.

I disgusted myself; I participated. I'm complicit. I need to grow, to ask forgiveness in evolution. A question: How would a white father explain residential schools to his brood?

I don't want to feign woke-ness. I need to be better. I need to hear, feel, taste your pain + eradicate the detritus clouding my thoughts. I despise those amongst us who continue to propagate the illusion of being better, more deserving – claiming we had nothing to do with your suffering – telling you to get over yourself. How? We're violent in our inaction. We fester in the silence of not speaking up.

By inviting us into his life and soul, Belcourt, in an exquisite fashion, paints a never-ending reality of how centuries of oppression, both NDN + LBGTQ, destroyed the fabric and perceived pureness of our society. Many, if not most of us, have bought into the grift we somehow deserve more and discounting that the puppeteers working our strings are nothing more than puppets themselves as they attempt to keep life's playing field skewed to their advantage.

We all must be better. Thank you, Belcourt, for your piercing honesty and devastatingly gorgeous lyricism.

I must walk beside you to evolve + to grow.

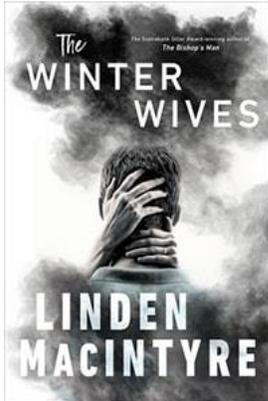
We may not be able to erase our pasts, but our words and actions can help to heal our futures.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: August 26, 2021

# THE WINTER WIVES

LINDEN MACINTYRE



*Unconditional friendship comes with a heavy price.*

## *HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?*

Who are you? Do I really know you?

You've been in my life for most of its duration; I trusted you. I needed you. Something was amiss. The pegs were square, the holes were round. It didn't matter; we connected – became close, like brothers, inseparable – we fell in love with the same person. I lost. I settled.

Life was easy for you. You were a shining star, destined for greatness—you threw it all away. We remained tight. You chased darkness and prospered beyond your wildest dreams. I knew, but I didn't. My childhood was traumatic. My mom couldn't remember...

You saved me. We loved unconditionally. Your realities came rushing forward in a blistering flow after you died, almost. I stayed unconditional; I became your cleaner; your love, my true love, grifted me alongside my settled love, her sister. My mind started to collapse like my long-gone mothers did. I swallowed youthful traumas – hiding my pain, making it easy for us to bond—you a star—me, an awkwardly brilliant and loyal malleable friend.

Death comes, reality unravels. I needed to stop, to live, to recapture my destiny.

MacIntyre's innate ability to cut through pointless ramblings makes the "Winter Wives" a compelling page-turner. It leaves readers thirsty for page after page, not to unmask who did it (?), but more so because most of us understand life is often shrouded in secrecy bubbling below the surface of our lives, blocking us from becoming who we are meant to be.

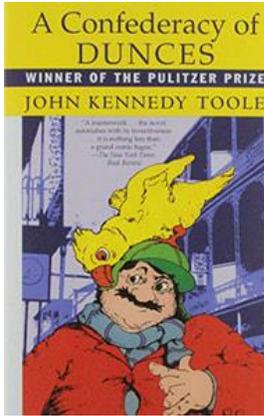
Truth be told I never knew you – your default was to constantly lie.

*That's how this book made me feel/think!*

WRITTEN: September 9, 2021

# A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES

## JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE



*If you find mental health, poverty, racism, misogyny, alcoholism, funny, well...*

### *HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?*

An incredibly entitled, privileged Caucasian sits down in front of a typewriter?

I wanted to love this book. I wanted to laugh so hard my sides split open, and my insides poured out.

The experts all agreed (without using their names, hiding behind institutions) this is one of the funniest books ever written. Heck, it won a Pulitzer.

I never found laughter – not even once.

I've been told I have a grand sense of humour.

My wit has been described as. *Dry. Sardonic. When people get me, it is glorious. When they don't, even better!*

23 I don't think rapists who want to be fathers should move to Texas. I don't think rapists who want to be fathers should move to Texas.

Life has repeatedly knocked me down, leaving me floundering with only one way off life's canvas: comedic redemption—often with a hint of self-deprecation. It's called: survival.

**WARNING:** Some people may find the following passage (and sentence two + three above) offensive. Read at your own...

When an entitled Caucasian uses his advantage to viciously skewer, mental health, dementia, alcoholism, misogyny, race relations, illiteracy, poverty, and on and on and on and on— Never pointing the pen inward and supposedly becoming so despondently mired in ennui because nobody was willing to publish his entitlement-biased-comedy-masked-vitriol (parading as humour), he took his own life.

And then came a Pulitzer.

This reader finds absolutely nothing humorous in entitled writers viciously skewering... while hiding behind the glaring advantage, few are given.

Sadly, he ended his life. This reader (and writer) does not believe his depression warranted him being labelled genius. It's just sad + tragic.

Ask yourself why the praise for this book comes from institutions, not individuals?

If you are a writer, would you hit the streets, find the most addicted or mentally addled person, and base your humour on them?

I would guess that not a single non-Caucasian would call this book funny or genius or anything other than savagely mean.

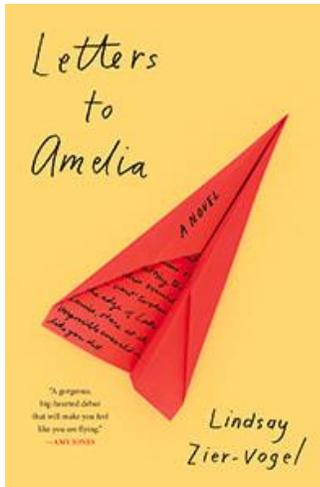
*That's how this book made me feel/think!*

WRITTEN: September 9, 2021

O STARS  
O STARS

# LETTERS TO AMELIA

LINDSAY ZIER-VOGEL



*Babies are pauses in the life sentences of adulthood.*

## HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

Alongside my mother's deathbed, the second time I watched my mother die, she begged and pleaded with my mother | grandmother |, the night before they came to take me away, to keep me.

Society, religion, and community had deemed my mother unfit and unlovable. Her support network only exacerbated her failure. What chance does a newborn have?

For the next 27-years, I acted as a painful reminder of her unworthiness, which manifested in her telling me every time she saw me, I would never amount to more than a miserable failure—until my mother | grandmother | died the first time. I cannot fathom the unrelenting pain she endured. My mother's last words to me were, "I'm never going to see you again, am I?" We hadn't seen each other in 23-years—after I accidentally discovered she was my mother.

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**LETTERS TO AMELIA** sent me spinning in a heavy fog as I tried to navigate emotions about the ephemeral nature of everything that is life.

I felt like I was about to crash land. Dark. I know.

Why did it elicit such powerful emotions?

Because I came to an understanding most things in life are transitory. Especially birth.

A man could never comprehend the loneliness involved in giving birth + having a new life growing inside you. Especially when men, often absentee, even if they choose to stick around, attempt to take control, often mansplaining their ignorance.

I realized (I like to think I'm self-aware enough to understand, my realization may be flawed), giving birth is the epitome of "new" in a world that craves "new." As much as billions-upon-billions of babies have been born before, the 40 weeks of pregnancy must be the most terrifying, + isolating time women must deal with.

Hearing you are not the only one must strip away an expectant mother's inherent need to feel special, unique. And support networks must have an unknowing capacity to obliterate happiness by their relentless need to relive what was once "new" for them—or worse yet, have their other half, if they stick around, try to impose their will on something they can never possibly understand.

A baby arrives in 40-weeks, giving expectant mothers a short window to dismantle their lives and reinvent who they need to become—as their support networks one by one retreat into their own lives.

**LETTERS TO AMELIA** is a powerful read about finding support in a place where judgement is replaced with the comfort of kindness.

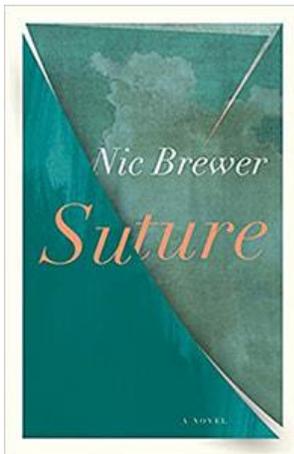
Fortunately for me, the fog lifted, I landed safely. Why? Because I have a burning desire to see what's new!

*That's how this book made me feel/think!*

WRITTEN: September 24, 2021

## SUTURE

NIC BREWER



*Does our greatest art come from darkness?*

### *HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?*

I crack open my chest and rip out my heart, releasing its blood onto the canvas—so you can grasp my unrelenting pain as I desperately try to feel loved. I need you to understand my anguish; it is my way of letting you know I'm alive.

I can barely breathe, so I cut out my lungs, adding them to the canvas; your love is all I have, yet I'm afraid of it + your closeness, I don't think I'm worthy, I add my suffocating lungs to the canvas. I become relevant. Inspirational. Relatable.

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I tear out my eyes so you can see what I see. You never will. Eventually, my life grows black as I immerse you in my opaque suffering. You love me. But my insatiable insanity only brings you sorrow.

I drip blood onto the page. Always thirsting for more. You love me unconditionally; you bring kindness. I return rage + my unworthiness. I need to be unlovable. I need to cry onto every page in a dark plasma. If I lose my agony, I will no longer be accepted for my art. I will become stale, repetitive, unreadable. I must bleed.

I stitch over my insecurities, again and again, and again, until they become manageable, constant reminders of who I am and who I never will be. Or I will die.

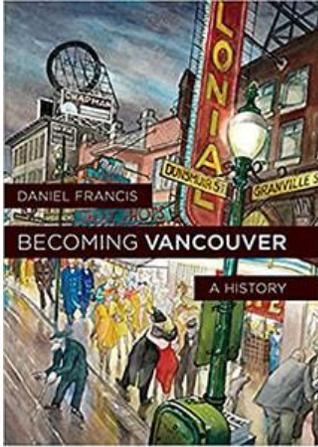
I think that is what I've consumed. I'm not sure. I will return to my beginning, with my heart + lungs, + eyes sutured back where they are meant to be.

*That's how this book made me feel/think!*

WRITTEN: September 29, 2021

# BECOMING VANCOUVER

DANIEL FRANCIS



*It feels like the past is chasing the present preparing to repeat itself.*

## *HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?*

Some rich man came and raped the land, nobody caught him. Put up a bunch of ugly boxes and Jesus' people bought them. - The Eagles | The Last Resort |

"Becoming Vancouver" is a fabulous essential read with a spectacular cover. Anyone residing in or visiting Vancouver would gain a deep understanding of how this stunning natural canvas came to be, where it's at, and perhaps where it may be going. It's not all rosy. History has a propensity to repeat itself. Only in the current world version, everything is perilously amplified as humanity races toward...

Vancouver is like the perfect Instagram shot if only you crop out the unavoidable suffering of those who are being left behind. Those falling into the throes of addiction, or with mental health issues, and the abject misery of not being born into wealth or coming from a family that staked the first claims to their slice of paradise. Being born into wealth or a construction family is not a qualification. Instead, it reeks of entitlement and privilege often laced in xenophobia and racism, coupled with a tremendous lack of self-awareness. The first inhabitants of Vancouver tried desperately, and succeeded, for the most part, to maintain their advantage by demeaning others and keeping voting rights to themselves. Or starting predatory businesses preying on those less fortunate.

Vancouver has always been a city in constant flux between those who want to exploit its beauty by pushing unfettered development and those who believe Vancouver's pristine beauty should be preserved for all of its citizens to enjoy.

In the wake of the many battles for the city's soul, Vancouver, like many cities in the world, is leaving behind human destruction as the have-not's trip into addiction, alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and basically hopelessness. One hundred years ago, homeless men (primarily men) wanted a job. In today's Vancouver, the homeless appear to have lost all hope, and what they seem to quest is to manage their addictions to control the pain of being left behind. You can't walk a block without...

A shiny tower goes up, we look the other way; the city sure is beautiful. But is it? Is Vancouver at a crossroads? Vancouver needs solid leadership, open to listening before Vancouver becomes nothing more than a playground for the super-rich as more and more people fall into despair.

I think it would be fantastic if "Becoming Vancouver" was in every hotel room in the city or offered as a purchase option to everyone visiting the city when they booked their rooms. "Becoming Vancouver" is a captivating read, where, for me, the more I read, the more history I thirsted for.

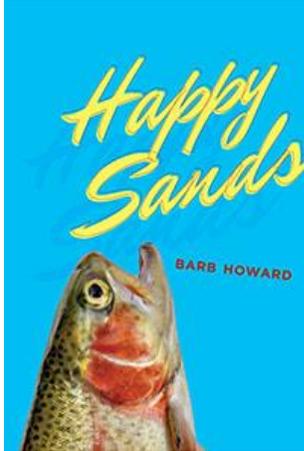
It is vitally important to study the past if we hope to make the future better for all.

*That's how this book made me feel/think!*

WRITTEN: October 8, 2021

## HAPPY SANDS

BARB HOWARD



*Like reading a country song playing out in stream-of-consciousness on hyperdrive.*

### *HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?*

I go for a walk. I need to hold onto who I am. My mind wanders. Say what you feel. Nah. Keep it inside. I'm losing it. No, you are not. You're human. Why am I laughing?

Look what that person is doing over there. OMG, hilarious. I must let others know. Don't.

The best comedy is what plays in my head, only for me. I don't need television, movies, social media – holding onto who I am is the only story I need to watch.

Barb Howard's "Happy Sands" is like reading a country song playing out in stream-of-consciousness on hyperdrive.

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Howard is a deftly talented writer with a lightning sharp wit, whose comedic chops left me gasping, mouth agape. I drooled a little.

I need a drink. Why not.

As much as this is a comedic ride, it is also a captivating story, opening a screen door into what it must be like for mothers when they feel they are on the cusp of losing everything. A husband to depression. Children who are outgrowing families. A life slipping from the shallows of youth into the deep end of whatever the heck is next?

Mothers are often the family rocks. The nurturers. The encouragers. The...

It must be awful to feel alone and underappreciated.

Thankfully, for readers, Howard makes us laugh – and hopefully, while we guffaw, some tenderness is returned her way as a life preserver is tossed into the deep end just before she...

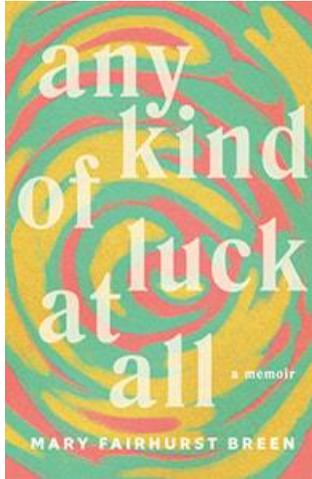
OMG. Is that plastic pink flamingo's neck snapped?

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: October 13, 2021

# ANY KIND OF LUCK AT ALL

MARY FAIRHURST BREEN



*Unflinchingly honest. Unapologetic. Humanizing. Comforting.*

## HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

*"They" say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. "They, whoever "They" are (?) also suggest traumatic events build character.*

I think a laundry list of traumatic events assaulting an individual (in this case, Breen) reveals the character lying within. Mary Fairhurst Breen has heaps of character.

We are fortunate Breen found the strength and unbounded courage to share her heartache in *"Any Kind of Luck at All."*

Breen's ability to reveal devastating heartache and sorrow in a soul-shaking manner is unfathomable. Breen lays herself bare as she invites readers into the throes of the unrelenting assaults of mental health + addiction. Breen unapologetically, despite the horrific cards she's been dealt, doesn't wallow. But instead sheds light on the need to cauterize the horrendous challenges humanity faces as we meander the rocky roads of life. And then humanize those of us who are struggling.

Breen understands the limitations of privilege. Instilling deep-rooted honesty in her children.

*"Emma happens to be tall and blond and is well aware of the advantages she enjoys as a result. Fortunately, she uses her power for good, and when she walks through doors that open automatically for her, she holds them open for others."*

What hit home most for me is her unflinching honesty (and sense of humour) + ability to understand life, addiction, entitlement...everything, is ephemeral. If we don't come together and realize we matter more than what we desperately try to project, the world will continue to spin in judgement.

Breen's unbridled love for her family and her amazing daughters is crystal clear. And while facing unbearable grief, Breen, in all of life's flawed glory, lets others know what everyone needs: love and understanding without the shackles and shallowness of judgment.

*"Any Kind of Luck at All"* will resonate strongly with anyone suffering loss.

I feel Breen was destined to tell this story. The world is a better place because she did.

Breen's sexuality is uncovered subtly; it should only matter to her, not me, you, or anyone else. Because as much as it is a vital part of who she is – the only thing truly mattering is, she's human, struggles, and somehow found the strength to offer comfort to the rest of us.

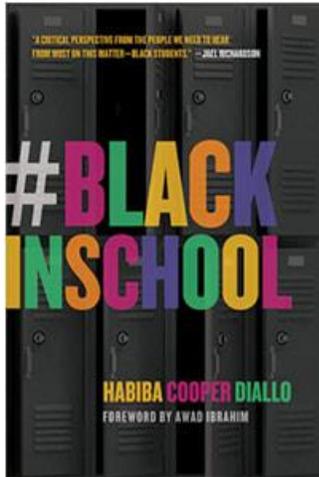
Thank You.

*That's how this book made me feel/think!*

WRITTEN: October 13, 2021

# #BLACKINSCHOOL

HABIBA COOPER DIALLO



*I've never once said, "I have a white friend."*

## HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?

I'm Caucasian. I've been meandering around on this rock a long time. I grew up in insular Saskatchewan. During my meandering, I've been conditioned. Conditioned. Conditioned. Conditioned. *Don't say it five times, or the Candyman will show up.*

**MY CONDITIONING:** Books, movies, television, music, news reports... everything, told me who and what to be afraid of, where not to go, and most importantly, it cemented my privilege. Why would I not believe my conditioning, buying in entirely? I didn't, but I did. Who wouldn't want privilege?

Then, I travelled, moved to a different city, and slowly, my attitudes changed. *Crap, the things I do and say can cause others pain; who knew?* I'd express my newfound discoveries to friends, and my peers refuted my findings in true privilege fashion, suggesting the conditioning is accurate. I resisted. I read more. I realized we all have a responsibility, and what we think isn't necessarily another person's experience. We weren't all born white.

#BLACKINSCHOOL is an exquisite look into the life of an intelligent girl in high school who happens to be black. It is not meant to awaken Caucasians, but it is intended to help break the *bleeping* conditioning.

Every day, I want to be a better person; reading #BLACKINSCHOOL helps.

I have no desire to be *woke*, but I strongly want to learn.

Asking where are you from? Which, in my opinion, is quotidian small talk and a question not worth answering?

When a white asks another white, it's an attempt (?) to find commonality – still pointless, because really, who cares? Is the inquisitor taking notes?

When a white asks a non-white, the question takes on a different bent. If the answer is "*from here*" – it's rarely accepted, something more exotic is desired, preferably where the inquisitor can flex a micro-aggression-fueled sense of superiority.

I didn't believe this. I thought perhaps if someone got upset, it was an overreaction. But then, the night after reading #BLACKINSCHOOL, I was sitting at a bar stool in a local watering hole. Next to me sat a Black Man; his Caucasian date arrived; I believe it was the first time they met. The Black Man's date asked, "*Where are you from?*" He replied, "*I'm from here.*" His answer didn't satisfy his date, "*I mean, where are you really from?*" He fired back, "*Aren't all white people from the same village?*"

Fortunately, Sandra Bullock entered the watering hole and saved the day.

For me at least, my conditioning is breaking. Thank You, Habiba!

WRITTEN: October 17, 2021

# UMBILICAL CORD

HASAN NAMIR



*Love prevails.*

## *HOW DID THE BOOK MAKE ME FEEL/THINK?*

A heartwarming love story. Acceptance of who you are while at the same time understanding an evolving world evolves at the pace of a snail. What do you do? Do you fight? Do you resist? Do you run away? No. You love more. And you share all of your joyful glorious love with the world. Proudly. Loudly. Without apology. Those struggling to accept, one day, they'll change + see profoundness and beauty in kindness and love.

Hasan Namir in *Umbilical Cord* deserves a rousing applause line for sharing his joy and giving the rest of us the permission to love.

The rapture in his son Malek's eyes show us all what is possible!

I will leave you with a love story. I hope you don't mind.

**April 25, 2010.**

32 *Love. Do I think he is a good man? What if he is mean or dislikes me? Should I text him? Yes, or No? Should I buzz or turn around? Oh. He texted me: Where are you? Should I lie that I'm still home? And just leave? I'm almost there. Why not! Let's see. He might be a good guy. He seems very nervous! He may be a good person. He may be considerate. Okay, I'm way more comfortable than expected! Do I think he likes me? I like him. He is a good person. I want to know him. We're having – I like it, but is it just one night, or – He is not texting me, oh well – Oh it's, his text. I guess he likes me. Happy! When do I get to see him next? Would he be thinking about me? I think about him all the time. I can't stop thinking about him. He asked me to meet again. Em – Should I? Or should I not? I don't want him to feel awkward around me. I like him. I want to see his friends. He's introducing me to his friends. They're nice, but I feel doubt in them. Well – Why would I care what other people think. I just need to stay with him. All I need is his love. I want to stay with him all the time. I want to see him. What is it? I can't stop thinking of him. Never felt this feeling before. Confused. What if he is not really into me? He is an amazing person. He is good. I like him. I want to stay with him. I want to embrace him. I want to give him my love. Is this love? I don't know what love is. What is love? Is this love? I want to see him. Take care of him. I want to give him everything. Good health. Love. Joy. I'm confused. I miss him. He seems to like me. I feel comfortable. Is this normal? Or just me? I want to see his mind: what is he thinking about me? Whatever. I think I made up my mind. I know what's going on. I love him. That's what this is. Love!*

**October 19, 2021**

*Love prevails.*

WRITTEN: October 19, 2021

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 16



33

1. TAKE UP THE SLACK - R.L. HOWARD
2. THE ROAD - CORMAC MCCARTHY
3. THE UNION OF SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMERS - CRISTINA SANDU
4. THIS CITY IS A MINEFIELD - AARON CHAN
5. HEART BERRIES - TERESE MARIE MAILHOT
6. BRAMAH AND THE BEGGAR BOY - RENEE SAROJINI SALIKAR
7. EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM WILL SOMEDAY BE DEAD - EMILY AUSTIN
8. SPOILED BRATS - SIMON RICH
9. NIGHTBITCH - RACHEL YODER
10. ZEN & THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE - ROBERT M. PIRSIG

BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

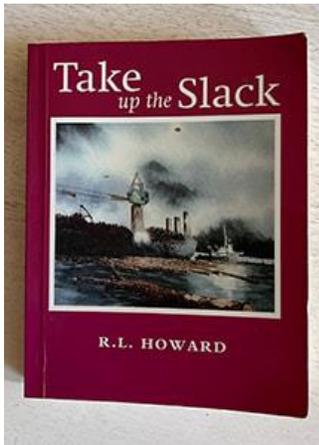
DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

## TAKE UP THE SLACK

R.L. HOWARD



*A ragtag crew comes together when things matter most.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Wow. What a surprise.

My friend Jim lent me his copy of this captivating read.

Anyway, a tugboat navigates the untamed waters of the British Columbia coastline for decades. It is crewed by a ragtag crew of misfits from across the land.

They are rough around the edges, and at times, make readers question whether they can even stand one another for a second.

Somehow, collectively, they mesh together in the understanding the sum truly is greater than the parts. Their lives depend upon one another.

They continue circumnavigating the rugged, undeniably beautiful coastline. The crew's leader grows ill |no spoiler| shining their steadfast love for one another regardless of differences.

Take up the Slack is the story of these ragged souls told with buttery prose, guaranteed to capture readers in the simplicity of what matters, and the beauty found in coming together.

Narrated from the tugboat's point of view!

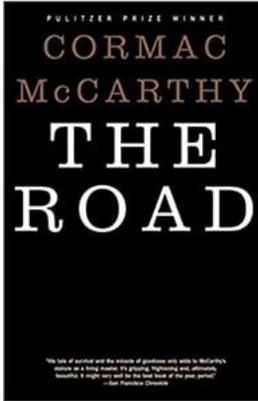
If you can find this book, it's must-read. I hope the author revisits republishing this tasty sea morsel – I'm sure many publishers would be willing to give it a go!

*That is how this book made me feel/think.*

WRITTEN: July 13, 2021

# THE ROAD

CORMAC MCCARTHY



*There is nothing more powerful than a parent's unconditional love for their children.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Where shall I place you on my all-time list?

1? 2? 3? 4? 5?

Top 5 for sure.

I'm exhausted. Not a single word in *The Road* is wasted.

I'm breathless. Father. Son. The world is over; all that is left is traversing a post-apocalyptic Deathscape to find finality.

Simplicity blows up into a complex social commentary.

A young boy is frightened, pure, innocent, kind, caring; his father shades him the definition of unconditional. The father, taking the boy's lead, constantly battles with his survival instincts. Instincts, which would lead him into the sickness of survival at all costs instead of the innocence of accepting love is all they have. And being swallowed by the darkness of believing, somehow, you deserve more than the others playing out life's end – a somehow that would leave you unrecognizably damaged and soulless as destiny delivers you to the inevitable.

The father and son intuitively understand the providence awaiting them when they finally stop moving. The boy repeatedly asks, "Are we dying?" – with the father consoling his son with reassurance and love.

I couldn't help but think I was reading about society gone astray as the father and son moved from place to place, dragging their found belongings with them like homeless people hoping tomorrow will bring light. I felt none of us are immune from the plight of those less fortunate. And in a sense, humanity needs to peer deeply into a collective mirror and hopefully understand what matters most is love and kindness – and there is nothing more powerful than a parent's unconditional love for their children.

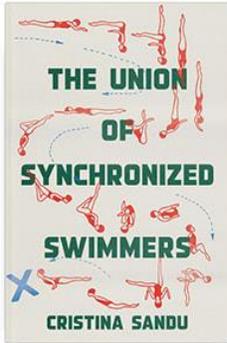
Near the end of this engrossing ride, my eyes filled with tears, and then – twist –

That is how this book made me feel/think.

WRITTEN: July 13, 2021

# THE UNION OF SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMERS

CRISTINA SANDU



*What happens in life when you don't have a place of belonging?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

What happens in life when you don't have a place of belonging?

A river. Two sides. One part of Russia. The other is laying in limbo. A cigarette factory. Exploited workers. Six women form a friendship, playfully escaping their realities in the murky waters of the river.

Those on the other side of the river see promise in the women's playfulness | synchronized swimming |.

Those on the other side of the river exploit these women for the pride of their country.

The women escape by swimming their way into the Olympics.

Life changes. Escape leads them to different locales around the globe.

When a person comes from purgatory and is thrust into the world, survival is questionable at best as their lack of grounding leaves them abundantly vulnerable to the darker sides of life. Transforming oneself into someone new, with predators lurking, waiting to feast on your insecurities and solitude – how?

Being female would only exacerbate life challenges (I would think), leaving loneliness and despair trapped inside. Coping, and trying to climb while fitting into a world full of rejection, a constant illusory reality.

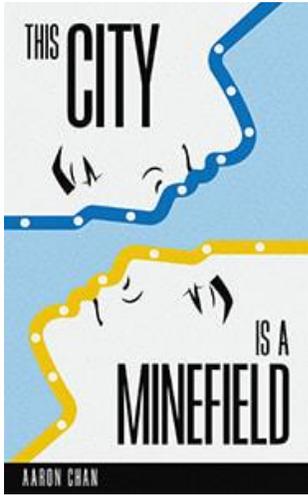
As much as I could never understand the female experience, what I can appreciate because I was an unwanted baby – purgatory sucks – and luminous beauty comes from being an individual. Often sad, lost, but definitely, unique.

That is how this book made me feel/think.

WRITTEN: July 13, 2021

## THIS CITY IS A MINEFIELD

AARON CHAN



*A lengthy rant of woe is me.*

***How did the book make me feel/think?***

I've lived in Vancouver for more than 31 years. Every day I fall deeper in love with the city. Sure, like every city and person, Vancouver has flaws, but despite the imperfections, like every city, it is filled with a diverse mix of personalities, and like every city, it is what you make of it.

A city doesn't owe its inhabitants anything.

I used to have a friend who complained about Vancouver not being as fast-paced as Toronto—repeatedly saying how much better Toronto was. Every time she complained, she discounted all of the fabulous people here. I pleaded with her to stay, to give the people of the city a chance. The hundredth time she complained, I told her to leave—and if there was any problem with the city not being what she wants it to be—she was the problem. She left. I'm glad.

37 In *This City is a Minefield*, Aaron Chan uses the last chapter to lambaste the city he was born in—claiming Vancouver doesn't offer him what he so deserves.

Chan's complaining about this beautiful place is only part of why I am breaking my rule and giving this book a 1 Star review (I would have given it less if there was an option too).

The other reasons and there are many, might be too many to list.

The book sucked me in by suggesting it might give readers a peek into the trials and tribulations of being gay and Chinese. But it doesn't. Unless gay and Chinese is not a universal thing where parents don't want their children to be gay, or get an education, or ever leave the parents' comfort zone. It's not original or is it a cultural thing; it is just life.

Chapter after chapter after chapter, Aaron whines about how someone as self-proclaimed perfect as he is — "...I would find other gay guys out there like me—romantic, intellectual, witty. Different." —deserves to be loved? And if you do not meet his standards, you are a creepy old white guy, a basic gay, an intellectually vapid gay who works out. If you like Top 40 music... you're flawed?

The person he describes in the book (him) comes across as pretentious, banal, unlikeable.

I feel bad typing that.

Chan signs up for Gay Apps (Hookup apps) and gets mad when he finds gay racists "No Asians" and seems to think if he calls them out, he can fix racism—the naivety is shocking.

Perhaps, he should be grateful for the red flags.

When dating doesn't work out the fairy-tale way, he feels it should, he thinks he can force relationships to work. Everything isn't so bleeping important.

Chapter after chapter after chapter of insulting everything and everyone. This isn't so much a memoir as it is a lengthy rant of woe is me.

When Chan doesn't find what he wants, he sleeps around and feels less when he does, but instead of saying he experimented with meaningless sex, he used a whole chapter in insufferable prose, masked as artistic, to...?

Nobody is immune to Chan's barbs, even the fantastic city in which he is lucky to live.

I wished I had used my track + field experience to run to another part of the bookstore to select a different read – an insightful read instead of one about how the world owes the author better life experiences.

"I believe I value love more than the average person."

Who says that?

Chan goes to a gay bathhouse searching for the elusive love he so desires and proceeds to insult everyone there, seeming to forget he is in a gay bathhouse.

And finally, saying you are a sapiophile, and intellectual, doesn't make you interesting: it makes you painfully dull. Just an opinion.

I wouldn't have written these thoughts if Chan hadn't insulted everyone who lives in Vancouver.

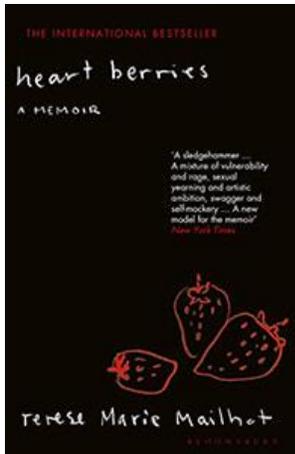
That is how this book made me feel/think.

WRITTEN: July 16, 2021

**(1) STAR**

# HEART BERRIES

TERESE MARIE MAILHOT



Cracking a window into your life takes extraordinary courage.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Another Top 5.

A powerful illuminating must-read into a world on each of our doorsteps.

Centuries of oppression. Often administered by us. We manipulate and make people feel like less. We steal opportunities and then shun. We can be floor-licking bile-puking drunk, yet we stereotype others to the point where the others we've stereotyped fear the stereotype. We isolate then judge. We appall.

Caucasians find joy in the trivial. Indians (Indigenous) people carry misery with them throughout life as we strip them from humanity.

"Indians try to run away, and many starved. Nuns and priests ran out of places to put bones, so they built us into the walls of the boarding schools."

Pause. Shudder.

39 Two older Caucasians discuss a sporting team's name change at a local watering hole as having gone too far.

What's wrong with us?

During the same conversation, one of the men says an Indigenous street name doesn't belong in Vancouver; it should only be in Iqaluit.

My blood curdles.

Another friend says, "It goes both ways."

What are you trying to say?

"In white culture, forgiveness is synonymous with letting go. In my culture, I believe we carry pain until we can reconcile it with ceremony. Pain is not framed like a problem with a solution. I don't even know if white people see transcendence the way we do. I'm not sure that their dichotomies apply to me."

We are complicit in stealing the ceremony.

There will never be a situation where an Indigenous person is upset because they are changing the monikers of the Kings, Golden Knights, or Patriots.

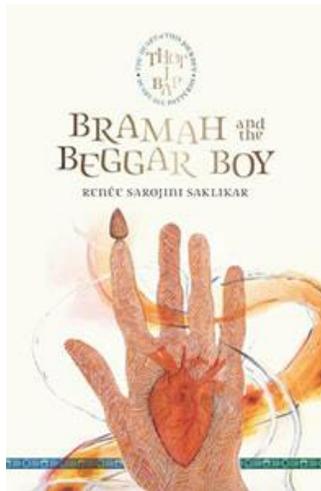
White people, we genuinely need to crawl inside the mirror and not come out until we've evolved. While inside, read: Heart Berries and open your heart and eyes – you are not everything.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: July 21, 2021

## BRAMAH AND THE BEGGAR BOY

RENEE SAROJINI SAKLIKAR



An extraordinary fantasy pushing the limits of convention.

### *How did the book make me feel/think?*

I'm not sure what I'm reading. Genres and style stretched to a breaking point, creating fresh tracks. I feel as I've entered a world where a talented disc jockey invites me into a new world. A battle for the soul of humanity ensues. Good versus evil. Everyday people, oppressed versus greed and corruption.

I step onto the disc. Spin. Spin. Spin. The verses and rhymes poetically layer on top of each other, elevating me, taking me places I've never been. I chase different dimensions. Just as I'm about to understand where I am, the mix master deftly sends me crashing through a portal to only have to rebuild once more. Another beat. Another layer. Another crash. The bad outweighs the good. Hope is being erased. But hope can never be eviscerated; it's hope; it has its own pulse and thundering beat.

Bramah and the Beggar Boy beautifully challenge our conceptions of who we are and who we are destined to become. I think. I'm not sure what I've read.

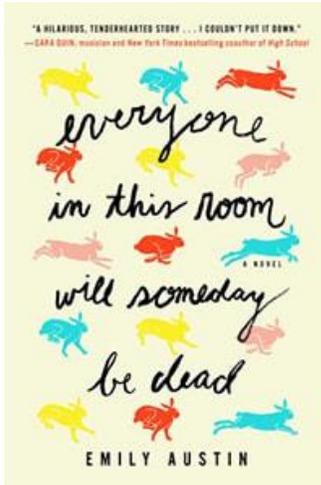
What I do know is that long after I lock this book away on the shelf, the realm and dimension I visited likely will enter my dreams, and Bramah will help me unlock the mysteries of the unlimited creativity of THOT J BAP.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: July 26, 2021

# EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM WILL SOMEDAY BE DEAD

EMILY AUSTIN



An unsupervised goat | \_\_\_\_\_ed \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ | in a bakery.

## *How did the book make me feel/think?*

I read the first 100 pages. I laughed. I laughed. I laughed. I had to pee. I kept reading and laughing. I couldn't put the book down. I'm still carrying it.

I walked to a micro-brewery. A 10,000-pound anchor was leaning against the wall of a building—far away from any body of water. A cheap silver chain + lock fastened the anchor to the wall of the building.

Weird.

I read another 100 pages. The book turned. Dark. Darker. Darkest. I laughed more. Emily Austin has an uncanny ability to bounce from sexuality to mental health, to addiction to...well, it's like a race car of thoughts is ripping around a track in her mind. I grabbed a slice of bread. A goat walked by. Austin must have experienced almost crippling doses of pain in her life. Must have. That's the only way to explain her comedic brilliance. I had to pee again.

I walked to a local watering hole. There was a sign on a post: LOST CAT with a picture of a CAT. Redundant?

41

Maybe the cat's name was Mittens.

I read another 100 pages. I became captivated by Austin's innate ability to write dialogue interspersed with the deep thoughts racing through her mind, often coming perilously close to going off the rails of the track.

Everyone In This Room Will Someday Be Dead is the most uproariously hilarious smattering of writing and thoughts this reader has ever read.

Here comes the unsupervised goat again—a goat who provided me with the quirkiest line I've read.

In the last few pages, the book turns dark.

Black.

And then Emily smashes a gaping hole in the darkness, leaving me with a cheek-to-cheek smile on my face.

I finally peed.

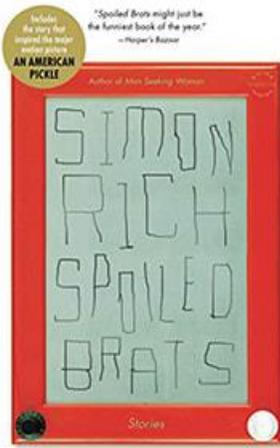
That is how this book made me feel/think.

P.S. This is my | new | favourite book!

WRITTEN: July 28, 2021

# SPOILED BRATS

SIMON RICH



Grab left shoe, right shoe, go!

## *How did the book make me feel/think?*

Privileged. Entitled. Nary a worry in the world. Raised in comfort. A spoiled brat. Simon Rich?

I wanted to hate this book because of the above. Without struggle, how can one be funny?

But much like the cyclist who doesn't ride on the sidewalk or stops for pedestrians, Simon Rich has royally messed up my perception of the d-bags living in the privileged, entitled, carefree world.

How?

42

He takes direct aim at himself and in a delightfully (1) deprecating way, mocking himself and those of his ilk while at the same time deftly tackling issues inflicting the world today with a new bent on many universal themes.

Simon comes across as a d-bag with a conscious and we are lucky he doesn't have hardship and struggle to cloud his mind as he delivers humour from a unique perspective. From the safety net looking up.

Two rubles to drink milk right from the goat.

1. By delightful, I mean in a cringe-worthy manner where an Elf-on-the-Shelf, is abused by a ten-year-old psychopath.

Laugh. Laugh. Laugh. Cringe. Cry.

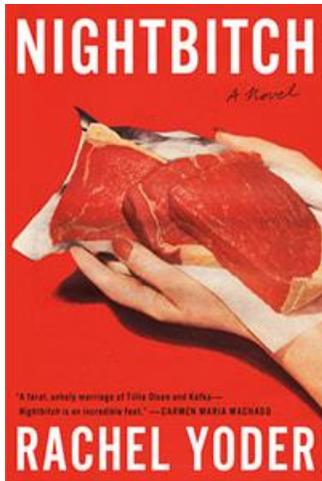
A cyclist stops and waves me across the street. Darn it. You are not all a-holes.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: August 1, 2021

# NIGHTBITCH

## RACHEL YODER



Not 5 Stars | Subjective |

The advance praise says we're supposed to love this book.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I don't want to write my thoughts on this book. You can't make me.

Why don't you?

I don't want to be labelled. Motherhood is the most important thing on earth; I'm a man, I can't possibly understand.

But we want to hear your thoughts.

I'm afraid I might be crucified.

I read the advance praise. I wanted to love this book.

### START READING

Okay, this is different. I cringe, laugh, cringe more. This is sort of working.

What's the message? Mothers are abused? They have to give up everything to go through the violence of childbirth. Mothers are saints, gods, angels. Their connection to their offspring is vital, strong, unbreakable.

Mothers' dreams drift away as they are forced into the importance of motherhood. At least the one in this story, this Mum is angry, broken, flailing, did I say angry?

On one page, she complains about her sacrifices. On the next page, she pours her tears into the love of her child. I keep reading. I cringe. I get it; this story could only take place in suburbia, where a shrinking number of families can afford the luxury of a stay-at-home parent.

What, she's turning into a dog? Her husband is less than her, and he hasn't had to give up anything? He gets to escape weekly, leaving the child-rearing to the unappreciated mother?

No wonder she's angry. She wants more. But she loves her kid. Does she?

About 100-pages to go, and the book takes a turn: A scene so grotesque for the first time ever, I didn't want to read another page. I did. It didn't get better, enjoyable, anything... it seemed like the author had exhausted her frustrations of motherhood and dropped on the readers' metaphors lost in blood. I hated the last 100 pages + and feel stupid for not understanding the advance praise.

For me, NB is 238 pages of the author telling us she prefers dogs to cats masked in the

laziness of trying to be Kafkaesque. And all mothers aren't heroes (most are) – but not those who don't really want the gig.

I believe comparing writing to Kafka is overused. The author of NB is not a man who experimented with hallucinogenic substances, so; therefore, Kafka references wring hollow for me.

I do have a suggestion for a follow-up book: A story where the mother explains to the authorities how her now nineteen-year-old son couldn't possibly be a psychopath because his formative years (up to age 3) were uneventful, except, of course, for her mother killing animals with her mouth in front of him.

At least she didn't give her kid a chia pet – that would have guaranteed his future psychopathy.

I am now terrified of dogs, + suburban women.

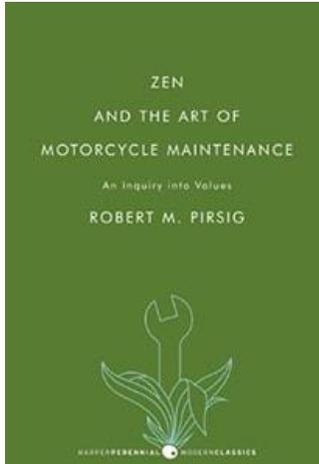
That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: August 18, 2021

**0 STARS**  
0 2 1 V K 2

# ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE

ROBERT M. PIRSIG



Genius + Insanity Share Threads.

## *How did the book make me feel/think?*

A young man named Lindsay tried to teach me, when I was a young man named Lindsay, how to water ski. The thing is, he couldn't get up on skis himself.

Zen + The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance reminded me of my failed skiing attempt. Pirsig takes his young son Chris on an across America cycle tour to instill life values and provide him with comfort and direction to navigate this confounding world. Christopher suffers from mental health issues, + his father suffers from the insanity of introversion-filled genius.

I loved the book. And then I didn't. It grew tedious in the madness of brilliance. Without question: it is a valuable classic – attempting to suffice what matters most in life. Us. Connections. Family. Love.

45 In Orwellian fashion, if you read between the lines, a far more terrifying than 1984 version of the direction of the world is suggested. Zen... was published in 1974, and Pirsig paints a clear picture of humanity's inability to process the lightning pace of technology. We may love the progress; however, we are far too emotionally stunted to traverse what is being thrust upon us daily.

For this reader, the message was Quality is subjective, and it depends significantly on a plethora of variables, such as cultural and socioeconomic factors. What matters to me might not matter to you. I believe this leads us to the one Universal truth – we must care for each other – we're all we've got, and we're all that matters.

Zen... is a painful reality about a man whose mind has been marinating in genius who wants to provide his son (and all of us) the tools to soften our lives, pushing us toward caring. Still, the only trouble is that genius often finds itself spinning on a hamster wheel without a visible offramp.

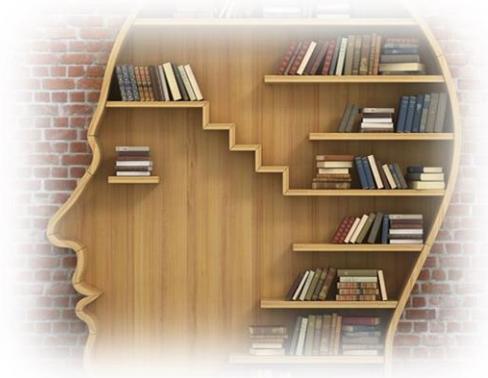
It's probably a lucky thing I couldn't get up on the water-skis because I've never learnt how to swim.

That's how this book made me feel/think!

WRITTEN: August 26, 2021

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 15 BATCH 15



46

1. **HOW TO PRONOUNCE KNIFE - SOUVANKHAM THAMMAVONGSA**
2. **FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, DRINK MINT TEA - ALEX WOOD**
3. **BEGIN BY TELLING - MEG REMY**
4. **WE, JANE - AIMEE WALL**
5. **KLARA AND THE SUN - KAZOU ISHIGURO**
6. **BETWEEN TWO KINGDOMS - SULEIKA JAOUAD**
7. **MEMORIAL - BRYAN WASHINGTON**
8. **HAUNTED - CHUCK PALAHNIUK**
9. **CRYING IN THE H MART - MICHELLE ZAUNER**
10. **SEVERANCE - LING MA**
11. **SURE, I'LL BE YOUR BLACK FRIEND - BEN PHILIPPE**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

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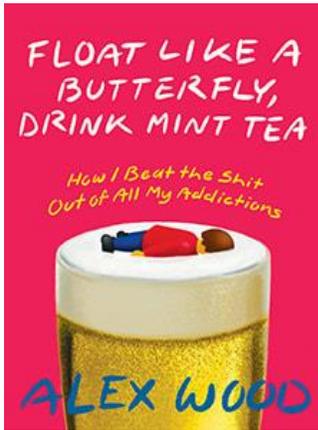
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

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**ORANGE = POETRY**

# FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, DRINK MINT TEA

ALEX WOOD



47

This is what courage reads like.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

When I finished the last word of “Float Like a Butterfly, Drink Mint Tea,” I couldn’t help thinking this is what courage reads like. Most of us have demons haunting us. We must knock them down with a right or left hook or an uppercut and then do our best not to let them up off the canvas.

They say comedy comes from pain. Alex Wood is darnnnnnn funny.

What makes this book glow the brightest isn’t Alex’s undeniable sense of humour; it’s his unflinching honesty + unassuming way of giving something back.

We all need to be grateful Alex found the fortitude to pick himself off the canvas of addiction and shared his story instead of becoming another selfish, tragic, boring story.

I write.

The reviews I like most, are the ones saying: I’m funny.

I hope the one Alex appreciates the most is: THANK YOU!

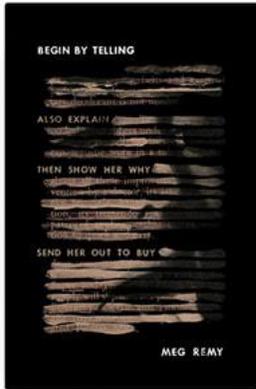
That’s how this book made me feel.

In my Top 25!

WRITTEN: April 9, 2021

## BEGIN BY TELLING

MEG REMY



A gallop past what life may deliver.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The things (I) (you) we go through + must overcome.

A man can never understand a father abusing his daughter.

A son can never comprehend why his mother abandoned him at birth.

The mother could never understand why her father sent her to an abhorrent place to give birth—only to try to have her fixed and become marriageable.

48

And the world is too filled with (I) (you) we, strapped in the shackles of conditioning + fuelled by daily noise, for some of us, not to become broken, flawed, violent.

Do we need professional sports?

“Begin by Telling,” triggered in me, unfixable memories I live every day...must live every day.

“Begin by Telling” awakened me to the weight + beauty of listening because if we did, we’d understand listening is the root of kindness + shines a bright light on the path to a better world.

That’s how this book made me feel.

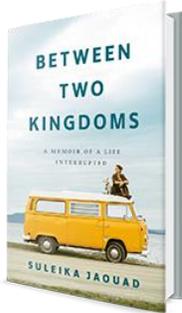
In my Top 25!

“I’m not pregnant in the pandemic. I pray for anyone who needs an abortion during this time.”

WRITTEN: April 9, 2021

## BETWEEN TWO KINGDOMS

SULEIKA JAOUAD



Unfortunately, at some time, Cancer connects us all.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

A yellow Volkswagen bus drives through the pages of *Between Two Kingdoms* for a few pages, and then dawns the cover. It should have been a Subaru.

I give this book 5-Stars, but I didn't love it. The story is essential, but somehow it lost me – not in a literal way. I'll explain.

I cheered for Suleika. I'm ecstatic she survived the unrelenting wrath of Cancer to be able to share her incredible story. I visited hospitals at least 1500 times, watching my father and then my mother battle cancer, eventually succumbing. Unlike Suleika, who unfairly became afflicted at a youthful age, there wasn't the love + support of newfound love in my parents' cases. There wasn't the endless camaraderie between the others afflicted. And there wasn't the upset of the unfairness of Cancer tearing apart a young life.

I found the incredible detail of Suleika's illness to be anything but comforting. I may burn in (h...) for those thoughts.

I also found the book to 'countlessly' speak about how her writing had helped others to the point I wished there was another word for countless.

I never connected with Suleika's 100-Day-Journey around America, visiting other Cancer survivors + a death row inmate, 'Little GQ.' I found it to be self-serving. It read like I was reading a creative writing class where vulnerability had been replaced with flowery verbiage. Each stop along the way was laced with a propensity to highlight stereotypes under the guise of becoming awakened.

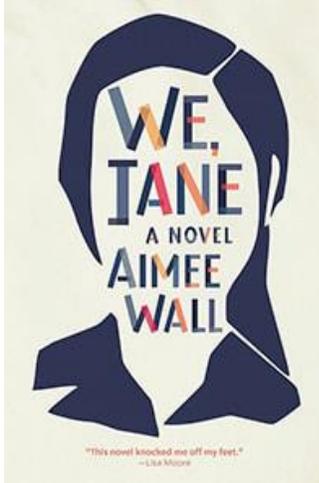
A Yellow Volkswagen bus drives over a few pages of this story. It should've been a Subaru – that would have been more vulnerable – and would have, for me, connected me, as opposed to giving me the feeling I had read too many references about self to count.

I watched, alongside my mother, my father, die because of Cancer. I then watched my mother die. Twenty-nine years later, I watched my mother lose her battle to Cancer a second time (a long story). Young or not, there is no fair time.

WRITTEN: April 21, 2021

# WE, JANE

## AIMEE WALL



The definition of loneliness = abortion.

### *How did the book make me feel/think?*

Too many men are trapped in the archaic belief we each have our place/ roles, and a woman's role is to be subservient to a man.

Too many of us allow men to control this world unchecked.

We are really the same. We want love + a meaningful life, + a place of belonging but are swallowed by the murkiness of conformity. Many people are lost on society's fringes wanting everything in their lives to be different, fulfilling. Still, they are trapped in a dream of wanting more in a world where everything is ephemeral + controlled by the marketed flavour of the day, as life slips by.

Man. Woman. Listening is a problem. Belief in what we're sold only exacerbates the divide. We can never fully understand each other because man can never possibly understand the emotions of having another life growing inside. Or the horrible decision (almost) always made (always) made alone to say goodbye + the unrecoverable pain of continuing living. We're pregnant, isn't a thing.

The definition of loneliness = abortion.

Nobody considers the emotional toll bestowed upon those who perform the abortions – it must be devastating.

A man can run. A woman can never escape pregnancy.

Men mostly talk about nothing, sports, blah, blah, blah. Women keep us alive.

Men must learn to listen, to evolve.

I was born in a secret place. I was to be sold or adopted out to a farm family. My mother was never to speak of me again – religion was going to fix her to become suitable for marriage after I was long gone. I was an afterthought; I survived, I'm okay.

Adopted out or aborted – I'm here. A choice was made. I'm happy to be here.

Regardless of my life, I don't think it is my responsibility to choose what's the right path for others.

I believe all we are collectively supposed to do, is listen + learn, + evolve.

That is how this book made me feel/think.

In my Top 25

goodreads

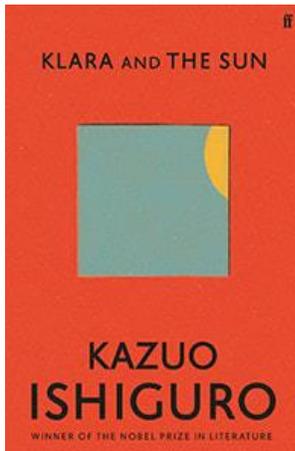


**Jodi** posted a new comment on [Lindsay's review of We, Jane](#)

Lindsay, I'm in awe of your beautiful review and of your honesty. I'm sorry for the pain you may have gone through as a child, but I'm very happy that you seem to really 'get it'! If it's true that everything happens for a reason, your experience has perhaps given you the rare ability to see things from a woman's perspective, and that is very much appreciated. Thank you, Lindsay! 🙏

# KLARA AND THE SUN

KAZOU ISHIGURO



Unconditional is found in the unlikeliest of friendships.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I've heard Klara and The Sun be described as a masterpiece. Yes.

I've been lucky lately; I've been on a reading roll. Ten out of the fifteen books I've read in 2021 have landed in my subjective Top 25! The books have run the gamut from Talking Animals navigating New York City to being black in America to the unquenchable quest for Happiness to addiction to abortion and now to Artificial Intelligence (Klara and The Sun).

What makes Ishiguro's writing brilliant – well – I shed a tear for an Artificial Friend (not a spoiler). Who'd of thought an Artificial

Friend could teach us valuable life lessons?

Rhetorical?

52 I'm not sure. We, humans, are deeply flawed, beautiful, complex, troubled beings. Imagine a sick girl needing friendship – an artificial friend is introduced |Klara| she's not the most advanced model. She's dated. But there is something about her in this world where everyone, and everything, is replaceable. The new phones have arrived, this time purple...must get it...my life will be so much better.

The young girl's sickness progresses, the humans in her orbit care, but primarily for how the girl's illness will impact their lives. Not Klara: her love and duty for the girl is the precise definition of unconditional. If the humans only listened, they'd understand. Klara does; she sees a fractured world filled with pollution and the transitory nature of living. Klara doesn't care about what people think – she only cares about the well-being of the girl who selected her as a friend.

I shed a tear for Klara. I shed a tear for the naivete of unconditional love + the lessons we can learn if only we knew how to get there.

The new phones are here. Goodbye.

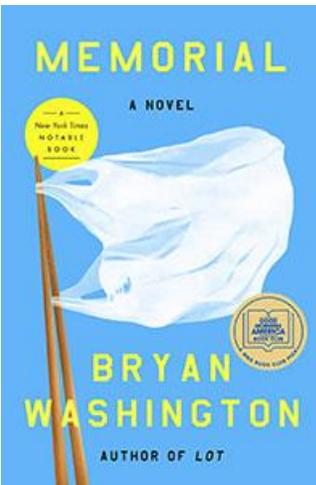
That is how this book made me feel/think.

In my Top 25

WRITTEN: May 5, 2021

## MEMORIAL

BRIAN WASHINGTON



A Perfect Combustion of Character and Life.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Gay or straight or otherwise, who cares?

If you do, you missed boarding the evolution train + are probably an anti-masker/vaxxer.

Tolerate is a violent word.

Nobody has ever uttered these words, "Mom, Dad, I'm straight" – and were then thrown out of their home.

Memorial by Bryan Washington is a deftly written, what's another word for compelling? –captivating read, shining a light on the reality a gay person's life is messed up, just like everyone else – only with different sex.

Brilliant.

It was so enthralling, I thought I was reading a memoir. Until I didn't.

That is how this book made me feel/think.

In my Top 25

WRITTEN: May 21, 2021

# HAUNTED

CHUCK PALAHNIUK



Taking boring people and turning their lives into electrifying nightmares.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Palahniuk is not likely everybody's cup of tea. However, he is so ridiculously gifted in storytelling he could author a story about a cup of tea that would not only disgust you, but it would make you wet yourself in laughter while making you consider if you could ever drink tea again because somehow, he's turned tea into a monster.

Mundane. Broken. Ordinary. You. Me. It's all fair game.

Easily in my top twenty-five, currently landing at my number two spot. Seriously.

54 At times I felt like I was going to pass out as Chuck described the wants, needs, and pains of dull, damaged people, as they faced their deepest, darkest, most revolting fears.

Which of your friends would you want to die first, so you could eat them because there is no refrigeration available?

Chuck Palahniuk needs to be on the must-read list of every writer because he with the utmost deftness understands what takes a story from ordinary to great is we all want something, even if it leads to our own demise. Telling stories about want; what do you want?

Palahniuk also comprehends better than most, humans are intrinsically flawed and when tragedy strikes, we are more interested in the sheer scope of suffering instead of the humanity lays within.

Go for it. Chase it. Live.

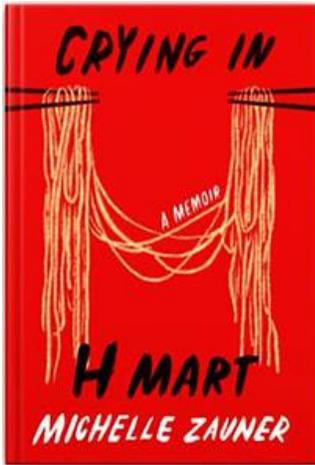
Haunted could quite easily be the most terror-inducing book I've read.

#2

WRITTEN: June 16, 2021

# CRYING IN THE H MART

MICHELLE ZAUNER



I must have been dehydrated.

How did the book make me feel/think?

I hated writing my thoughts on this book. Writing them makes me feel like a word starting with an "a" ...and finishing with "hole."

I wanted to love this book. I had predetermined I would.

It started off in a flurry, I was in!

I witnessed the wraths of cancer taking away my father, my mother, and then, my mother a second time.

I cry easily. I believe I could turn pro if there was a crying circuit. Is there?

I even cried during an episode of Bob's Burgers.

I've been to Korea twice. I've been to an H-Mart, numerous times.

Anytime an author (anyone) shares their journey about the vulnerability of losing a loved one to cancer — is a vitally important story to share.

Here comes the waterworks. No. I must be dehydrated. I'm getting mad at myself. I turn a page. Why am I not crying? Cry dammit. It even says crying in the title.

No tears.

What is this book about?

Too many words.

"...towering over her head by more than a foot. It was remarkable that someone so large could grow from a woman so small."

I just learned what it is like to go from child to adult (it must be deeper).

These are sentences in an International Bestseller: Why?

Please ban creative writing. Stories need to move along. I want to cry.

Why is the first thing in the author description about a band? If you understand Japanese + Korean history, it would be highly unlikely, for any Korean, to use Japanese in their band name.

There is one less bestselling (bestselling) author.

I must go watch Bob's Burgers.

Does the previous sentence make me an “a” ...?

I am terribly sorry for Michelle’s loss. I wanted to cry.

I would not have written my thoughts on this book if it wasn’t a BESTSELLER.

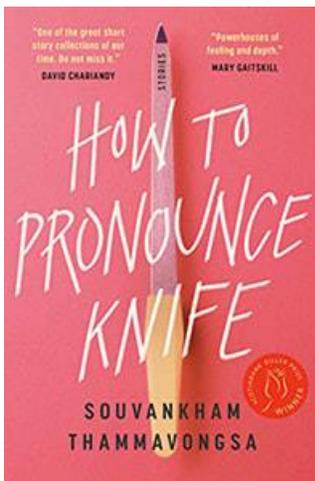
WRITTEN: June 18, 2021

**O STARS**  
O STARS

## HOW TO PRONOUNCE KNIFE

### SOUVANKHAM THAMMAVONGSA

*Every entitled Caucasian (male) should read this book.*



#### *How did the book make me feel/think?*

“How to Pronounce Knife” should be essential reading for every Caucasian male to help them understand how ridiculously entitled they are.

When I cracked the book open, I found the stories to be cute, hilarious, light-hearted, romps filled with laughter at a life I’ve never had to encounter.

I never had to give up everything to live the life I live, or leave my country, often rife with strife – leaving loved ones behind, or forgo my dreams to be exploited by companies that use those who’ve come to North America chasing an elusive dream –

working in plants and slaughterhouses and anywhere where language isn’t a barrier for employment.

57

This book is profoundly hilarious and heartbreaking at the same time.

“My father did not grieve. He had done all his grieving when he became a refugee.” At the halfway mark, my mind opened to what place of birth bestows upon us, yet many of us whine about how hard done by, often throwing barbs at those we don’t understand.

“He was happy someone at the factory was talking to him instead of pulling at the skin on the side of their eyes and laughing as they walked by.”

I wrote this with the Morning Show playing in the background. While listening to the show’s vapidness and the guests talking about “how to buy stuff to hold onto your youth” – I couldn’t help but wonder: who is this for?

Who it isn’t for is, for those who’ve sacrificed everything leaving their pasts behind in search of a new place of belonging?

Every white | person | should read this book. You will laugh, guaranteed. But what you might do even more, if you open your heart is, realize the struggles of many don’t revolve around creams to erase the character lines around their eyes.

In my Top 25!

That’s how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: April 7, 2021

# SEVERANCE

LING MA



The premise makes for a fabulous short story.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I did not like writing my thoughts on this book.

The premise would have made for a great short story.

I got fired at the start of COVID-19. A fifteen-career gone without severance.

What I gleaned from this book is unfettered capitalism sucks, being young is hard. I didn't learn anything new about the immigrant experience (I guess I un-gleaned that point). I wanted to learn more; I think.

There was an overdone theme about the shackles of religion, I think. I didn't laugh, once. Sad.

Severance is an easy read, unfortunately, littered with too many paragraphs like this:

"In my new studio, we took a break. There was nothing to drink, so we opened boxes of mismatched dishes and had some tap water. The former tenant had left ice in the freezer."

Page after page after page of the likes of ↑↑↑

Seriously, this is a paragraph in "NAMED THE BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR BY —"

Creative writing shouldn't be a thing.

Progressing through the book there were chapters that could have easily been called "I" — I is a tedious character, at least for me.

The praise for the book sure is good. I am not sure all the praise-people read the book. I'm certain the editor didn't. If he/she would have, I wouldn't know what |bildungsroman| means. Seriously, in the praise section it was used twice. I can't pronounce it, and I most certainly am averse to using it: who is the word for?

Hey, did you hear about the book that delivers a bildungsroman?

A what?

For a moment, during the last 100-pages or so, the book turned for the better. Then it didn't. It became littered in product placements, I thought I was reading a terrible Amazon Prime movie in book form.

Montblanc. Enterprise Rent a Car. Swingline. Muji. Weleda Skin Food. Kraft. Frosted Mini-Wheats. Old Navy. HotHands. Amazon. FedEx. UPS. USPS. DHL. iPhone. iPhone. iPhone. ChapStick. Juicy Couture. Dyson. Maruchan Instant Lunch. Heinz. Manischewitz.

Kiehl's. Ultra Facial Moisturizer. Mario Badescu Facial Spray. Sephora.

That was in about twenty pages. I don't know why it bothered me. It just did.

That, along with, lines like these:

"I peered down the length of the staircase, its lower half submerged in shadow. The skunky scent of leftover beer, the aroma of cheap weed."

And

"The move-in day was long and draining. I was exhausted by evening."

Again, I don't know why this bothered me, (maybe) it was because of the cheap weed?

I finished the book. That's a good thing.

One last thing about the praise, one of the people lauding the book said, "When I finished it, I immediately picked it up and read it all over again."

Why?

I don't believe you.

When I read the last word, I pondered: Is storytelling dead? Has it been killed off like a millennials' fever dream?

I got up. Went to the washroom. I walked back to the computer. I wrote another sentence. And then, I repeated the routine.

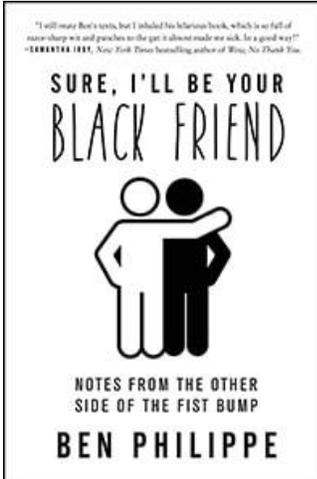
That is how this book made me feel/think.

My eighteenth favourite book of the year (out of nineteen thus far).

WRITTEN: June 21, 2021

# SURE, I'LL BE YOUR BLACK FRIEND

BEN PHILIPPE



Hey white people; we need to evolve.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

First off, I want Ben to be my friend.

We'd be an odd pair. I'm a soon-to-be 61-year-old lifelong conditioned Caucasian; I'm working on breaking my conditioning.

At times beyond hilarious (whatever that means), this book crosses generational and cultural biases with tickling aplomb.

Reading about the experiences of others helps us realize our individual lives are not the only ones that matter. While reading, I became hypersensitive to those walking amongst us.

**IN THREE DAYS**

Two twentysomething white guys passed me on the street. There was a poster of a missing indigenous woman on a street pole. They ignored the pain of 'missing' and began making fun of her name.

The next night out for a few pops at our local watering hole. Instead of hello, a friend plops down and chooses to rant about the veracity of the number of indigenous babies found buried at a residential school. He then switched gears too, "The city did a great job cleaning up the homeless from a city park. Finishing strong by questioning if it was a good decision by the opposition leader (politician) to be wearing a turban because it turned people off.

The following morning a lady asked me on the street, "How did you get so brown?" She then added, "I can only get white or pink."

And finally, a couple locking up their bikes, I overheard a middle-aged white woman say to her friend, "You pick the restaurant. It doesn't matter which one you pick; they have taken over this street. They are all the same."

I don't want to be those people I've mentioned above. I don't want those people in my life.

Part of my conditioning busting is stopping using those/they/them, but in this case, I think it suits those.

Thanks, Ben, for sharing your experiences. I'll leave you with this, something no Caucasian can ever have an opinion on other than just listening.

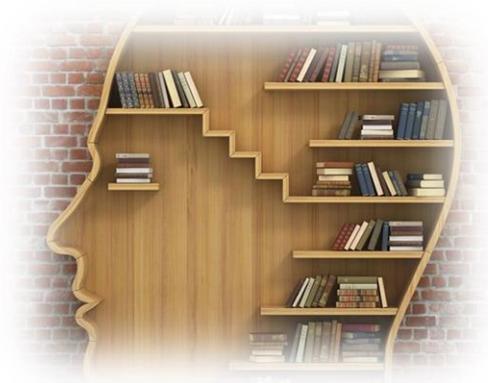
"I cross the street coming out of the subway at night because that little old lady in front of me is visibly terrified of the Black Man behind her, and she shouldn't be scared, but she is literally shaking, so why not do her that unfair kindness?"

That is how this book made me feel/think.

WRITTEN: July 6, 2021

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 14



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1. **HEAVY - KIESE LAYMON**
2. **HOW TO KILL YOURSELF + OTHERS IN AMERICA - KIESE LAYMON**
3. **HAPPINESS - WILL FERGUSON**
4. **ELECT MR. ROBINSON FOR A BETTER WORLD - DONALD ANTRIM**
5. **TALKING ANIMALS - JONI MURPHY**
6. **ON SUCH A FULL SEA - CHANG-RAE LEE**
7. **THE PLAGUE - ALBERT CAMUS**
8. **THE BOOKSHOP - PENELOPE FITZGERALD**
9. **WHITE TRASH - NANCY ISENBERG**
10. **HOME FIRE - KAMILA SHAMSIE**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

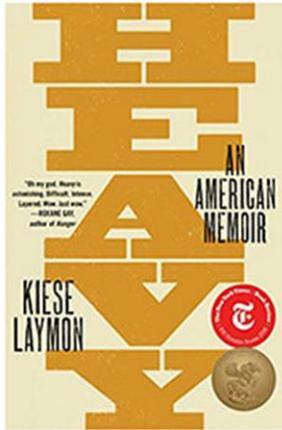
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

# HEAVY

KIESE LAYMON



*"HEAVY" resonated with me, the most of any book I've read.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I'm white. Writing thoughts on books on anything but the white experience can be daunting.

The day after my twenty-fifth birthday, my father died. Then, just before Christmas, two years later, my mother died less.

Sixteen years later, I discovered the people I watched die were not my real birth parents.

Then, in October 2016, I met my mother for the first time as my mother, alongside her death bed. One week later, my mother died for a second time.

I am not capable of getting past the threads of my life story. They will haunt me forever, triggered by certain days + holidays.

**"HEAVY"** resonated with me the most of any book I've read.

I realize that I'm white no matter how extreme my life events have been. I have never had to face the realities of trying to be anything other than what I am, to succeed.

That's what a 400-year advantage gives us white folk.

One afternoon, at a local watering hole, when race came up, *some of my friends claimed race issues are not an issue in Canada (they are).*

When I react with disgust at their statements, I've been met with, *"You need to stop reading books about the plights of others."*

I won't back down. Instead, our responsibility is to stamp out attitudes by having uncomfortable discourse – even if it ends friendships.

**"HEAVY"** shines a powerful light on the disparities of centuries of oppression and the unearned advantages of white marginality. It delicately touches on the difference between black + white wealth.

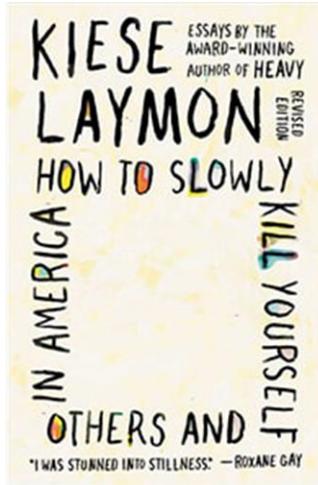
I'm white. I don't think I'd have survived my life events – if dropped on me – after being held down for 400-years.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: March 6, 2021

# HOW TO SLOWLY KILL YOURSELF AND OTHERS IN AMERICA

KIESE LAYMON



*I don't want to be racist.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I don't want to be racist.

How can I not be racist?

I grew up surrounded by people, mostly looking like me. We sucked. They had conditioned us from birth, and we'd come from generation after generation of whites, being told there will always be someone below you — if you listen to us — watch what we create for you; read what we tell you — learn what we teach you — pay attention — we're giving you the advantage.

We had a Siamese cat named Guy. My brother nicknamed it Guy blank-blank, blank, blank-blank, blank-face. When I was eight, I'd stand on our porch and call out Guy's nickname, signalling Guy to come home.

One of my aunts, after visiting Jamaica, stated her opinions on Jamaican fathers. It wasn't glowing.

When I was twenty-three, my girlfriend's parents told her he wished she behaved more like the polite Japanese volleyball girls they had tasked him with driving around, during a tournament.

We'd get floor-licking drunk. That was okay because we were not Indigenous.

The police have pulled me over for traffic offences occasionally; one time, I swore at the police officer — without repercussion — without fearing repercussion.

Police stopped a friend and me while pushing our car home drunk — no repercussions.

A few days ago, I saw two non-white guys looking down at a causeway; my first thought, I'd never say aloud, shamed me. Why was the ignorant 'first thought' on the ready?

I want to share with the few black people I know, announce I've read this book. I'm not sure if that's okay. I think it would reveal how much of an ass I can be.

**"How to Slowly Kill..."** and other books about those who do not look like me are salves to heal my conditioning. **They call out to white people:** look inward and continue growing. We are not unique; we all bleed red.

I'll never truly comprehend the unwavering advantage whiteness has given me + the unforgivable truths we've inflicted on those who don't look like us, just because they have conditioned us to believe the festering lies of entitlement.

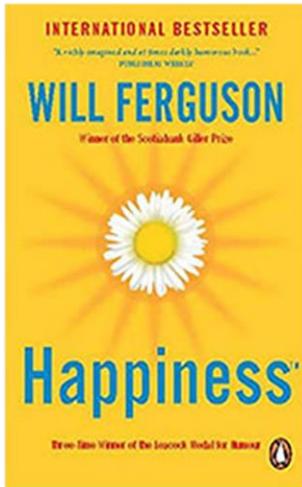
I don't want to be racist.

So, I'll read more.

WRITTEN: January 22, 2021

# HAPPINESS™

## WILL FERGUSON



*I laughed until I could laugh no more. Then, I peed myself.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I'm currently struggling with a bout of depression, like most people in the current state of the world. Most of us are facing undaunting uncertainty as COVID-19 blasts around the earth. My struggle stems from losing my career. I'm sixty – WTF is next (?) derides me daily. I know I'm not alone – not alone isn't comforting. I don't want to discount depression; perhaps, I'm just sad.

Stop. Think. What is your perfect weather day?

Is it 25 degrees Celsius and sunny (77 Fahrenheit), allowing you to bask in the warmth?

Or is it 0 degrees (32 Fahrenheit) with fresh powder to carve up on the slopes?

**Now imagine every day was that day:** Would that bring you delight?

If everyone lived their perfect day every day, wouldn't life be dull, pointless, droning on and on and on, dour, with humour stripped away from our souls?

Wouldn't it?

"HAPPINESS" tickles our funny bones by exorcizing the insanity of happiness fulfilled. The humour is brilliantly nuanced and, for this reader, relating to the nuance, helped relieve my bout of depression/sadness, if only for a moment, as I guffawed wholeheartedly while realizing what makes life sweet is the struggle. Without struggle, the happiness we derive from life would be nothing more than cult-like sameness if happiness were a given.

Vices may be bad for us, but without question, vices allow us to fail, climb, rejoice, celebrate, and become who we are.

If you need a break from the day-to-day challenges, I unstintingly prescribe a dose of Will Ferguson's "Happiness."

In my Top 25!

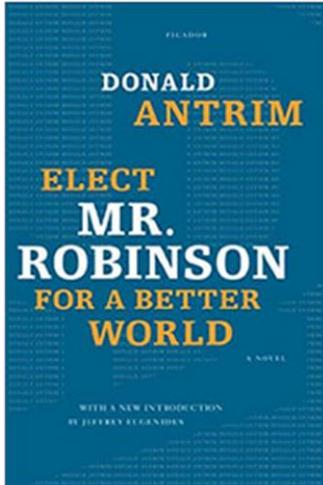
"Sober men don't dance. We need our vices. We need our cotton-candy fluff because life is sad and short and over far too soon."

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: March 29, 2021

# ELECT MR. ROBINSON FOR A BETTER WORLD

DAVID ANTRIM



*I laughed until I could laugh no more, then I cringed.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Come with me over here. Hello.

In the early 80s, I used to be the top mixed-tape DJ at my University.

*Two tape decks and a microphone!*

Fast forward to the here and now. Clickbait clicked: 'TOP 500 ALL-TIME ALBUMS.'

Scroll. Scroll. Scroll.

How could I have missed several truckloads of ear-pleasing gems?

I did.

There is soooo much glorious music.

Read. Read. Read.

'Elect Mr. Robinson...' – why did I select?

I don't know. I'm glad I did; it has made it into my TOP 10 ALL TIME.

The book is a mess. It takes us along on a disturbing ride through a dystopian world. A world where the mayor of the city in this gruesome story launches springer missiles into a reflective pool – massacring innocent people – for no reason.

**His punishment:** being drawn and quartered by vehicles, not horses. His last wish (to Mr. Robinson): give my body parts a proper burial.

The city falls into a dark quagmire where the citizenry dips into a pool of paranoia, building moats (violent) around their homes. Those who've lost loved ones fall into poverty, are ostracized, and begin living as survivors in a city park. Mr. Robinson's wife identifies as a prehistoric fish. Mr. Robinson wants to teach the city children about the horrors of humanity. I laughed until I could laugh no more, then I cringed.

This book is a delightfully (d)ucked up mess; dark – beyond dark; I laughed more.

The ending stretches squeamishness to such an intense level – I'm not sure what my love of this book says about me?

**Newsflash:** We're living in a dystopian world, NOW.

Read. Read. Read.

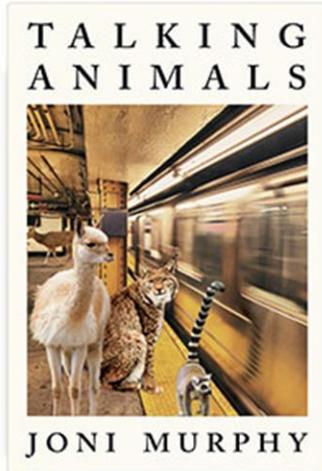
I don't want you to miss (this) or any literary gem.

That's how this book made me feel.

**WRITTEN:** March 5, 2021

# TALKING ANIMALS

JONI MURPHY



*I laughed. Pondered. Cringed. Became aware. And then, frightened.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**TALKING ANIMALS**, this should be a cute, light-spirited read about our lives from the point-of-view of the animals, primarily an adorable alpaca who'd emigrated from South America to NYC.

It is both hilarious and cute, but it is so much more.

I flip a page, and I'm immediately drawn into the destructiveness of us, the humans, inflict upon everything living, everything we need to survive—for our health and well-being, for our very existence.

I laughed. Pondered. Cringed. Became aware. And then, frightened.

It is not like I don't know what the animals in this poignant tale are trying to convey to. Still, much like the inhabitants of the sea and greed's persistent lack of care for anything but hoarding wealth, well, if it is not glaring in your face, all of us are complicit in the consumption of everything, which ultimately is leading toward an inevitable ending.

"What's destroying us is this slow carcinogenic drip. It comes from everywhere. What you can't see is more dangerous than what you can."

A friend who used to be a friend (a willing participant in the hoarding of wealth) travelled to the Java Sea — there is no seafood to be found. Imagine that.

We are floundering in capitalism and are distracted by life and shiny things.

What Joni Murphy adroitly does in this entertaining, somewhat dystopian romp is she brings to the forefront, through the eyes of a delightful alpaca: what power, greed, racism, corruption, and the many forces we humans must come to terms with together. Then, battle through by dropping our opportunities to allow those who come after us to have a future.

We're all in this collective, and hopefully, we will open our eyes and realize the land needs

*"The pig was blaming the world's problems on fish, when fish were getting poisoned and eaten, and eaten and poisoned, by all the creatures on land who'd built their industries on sea exploitation."*

*"I learned the rich are weak, twisted creatures. I learned to hate them while serving them smoked-salmon canapés."*

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: January 12, 2021

# ON SUCH A FULL SEA

CHANG-RAE LEE



An enthralling, captivating, gripping, dystopian (?) read.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I've read a few dystopian-themed books lately. What I've discovered: there might not be such a thing as a dystopian world. We've arrived. We're living it. Open your eyes + ears. We often accept the truth as the words of those with the loudest talking sticks. But the thing is, it's not the truth.

They dealt the cards. If you're lucky, they have dealt you a decent hand. Or if you are fortunate (?) your generational cards have given you an unearned upper hand.

We're tossed into our lots in life. Climbing out, is insurmountable. They dropped us into set categories. Some of us must make the best of menial in an angry world. Some of those dealt strong non-generational hands forget where they've come from. They're small people, often with

ginormous trucks. A silver spoon drops out of one of their mouths; they don't realize they are being used as well. It doesn't matter. A safety net is in place; they will never fall far.

As for the rest of us, we must fight and claw, often over each other, as we desperately try to make our way through the impossible. Struggle usually replaces kindness.

We are all sick. Nobody is immune, except for one man, who may be the cure for all – the entitled want to use him, to harvest the cure.

Eyes constantly darting, never connecting. Money comes before humanity. Business is heartless. We're the product: Humans. Damaged. Flawed. Barely holding on. We shamelessly hide behind a shaded false mask of direction when used up. When used up, tell the broken: This is no longer for you. Each time, your soul dies a little more. You don't care; you drive a big truck.

*But I have nowhere else to go. Life has ravaged me. You are draining the last droplets of my plasma.*

*Go. It's not working anymore.*

*Please. I have another drop, you futilely plead.*

*A week later: Hey, did you hear, So-and-so died?*

We pretend to care. So-and-so had nowhere else to go. We took what we could. There is no time to mourn; another soul barely holding on is waiting to take So-and-so(s)' place.

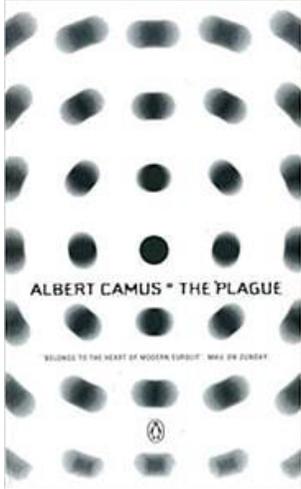
**ON SUCH A FULL SEA** is enthralling. It's a dystopian read where we might, if we don't take a moment to pause and realize, as Chang-Rae Lee weaves in this breathtaking futuristic tale of where we might head – in reality, we may already have arrived – now our challenge is to have the dealer deal fairer hands.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: March 19, 2021

# THE PLAGUE

## ALBERT CAMUS



*Humanity is living through a social experiment.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The Plague was written in 1947—as I read; it felt like I was reading the here and now. Seriously, my arm hairs stood on end.

The authorities debate whether to alert its citizenry; every second is vital. It becomes inevitable—they must put measures in place—or we'll all perish. More denial (not) corrupts those responsible for the greater good—they think primarily about their power—how to maintain it. We all become expendable. There is no escaping until it becomes apparent; bodies pile up—the suffering and fear become unbearable.

Many deny. They believe there is a massive conspiracy... to

bleeping what?

What's the possible endgame?

Controlling us?

Tracking us?

I look at my phone. We're already controlled, tracked... idiots.

Some use the Plague to enrich themselves. Those trapped in uncertainty; fear whether they will ever be okay again. Others keep fighting the selfish battle not giving a damn about the rest of us suffering.

The Plague and Covid-19 are social experiments. It is a test of humanity—can we come together and look outward past our selfishness and understand we must all rise and do whatever we can to take care of each other?

They are tests on the strength of our capacity to empathize with others who face the same invisible demons by understanding the outcome for you might not be the same as mine.

The Plague, written in 1947, is a profound reminder that man is a small idea that needs to recapture the capacity for love for all. Regardless of societal, economic, or demographic differences, and return us, or maybe deliver us, for the first time, to a kinder world where discrimination is levelled off or eradicated.

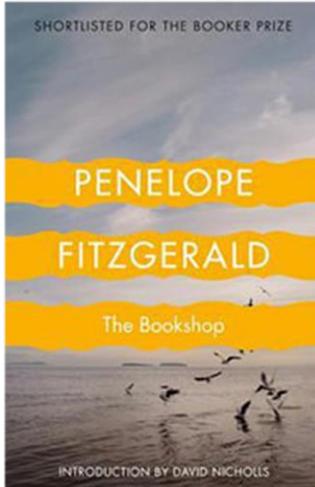
We're all in this together. Be kind. Wear a mask. Don't let selfishness eliminate an understanding that your thoughts are not always right.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: February 17, 2021

## THE BOOKSHOP

### PENELOPE FITZGERALD



A story about an underdog battling the evil of 'have.'

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Florence Green is a lost widow, floundering in a small town, trying to matter.

She's vulnerable.

She's trying to cope.

To dig herself out of the doldrums, Florence opens a bookshop to bring hopes + dreams to a town left in the past, filled with simple people living simple lives. Anytown. Anywhere.

69 'It is a good book, and therefore you should try to sell it to the inhabitants of Hardborough. They won't understand it, but that is all good. Understanding makes the mind lazy.'

Those who yield the power keep simple – simple – for no reason other than they can.

The definition of evil?

These exterminators of hope have no shame.

Florence Green is a lost widow who finds a generational soulmate in a voracious reader – waiting for his inevitable end. He sees passion in Florence's soul and tries to protect her from the exterminators.

The Bookshop is a flowing tragedy, where sadly, 'haves' exterminate 'have-nots.'

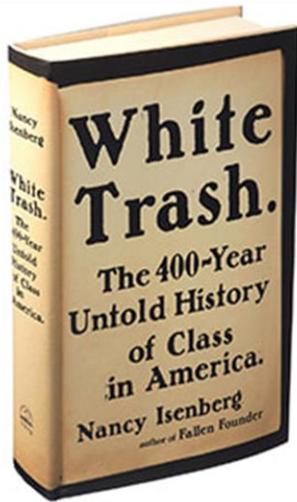
Bookshop shrewdly mirrors real life, cheering for hopeful failures while lamenting the inevitability of those holding the cards, turning life into a loss for all – for no reason other than they can.

That's how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: January 8, 2021

# WHITE TRASH

## NANCY ISENBERG



*Vital. Important. Upsetting. Uncomfortable. Cringe-worthy. Reflective.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

White Trash is a vitally important, upsetting, uncomfortable, cringe-worthy, reflective read for all of us →

White Trash tells the unvarnished truth of America.

Expel those deemed criminals, less-than-human trash, from Europe (mainly England), firing them across the pond to inhabit a new land.

Claim a classless society while dividing humanity into elite and garbage, with the elite staking claim to everything and the trash being deemed as expendable to be used and exploited to build

the wealth and power for the elites.

### **The Business Model for Every TA in North America**

Tell a lie: “all created equal” – after centuries of conditioning a large swath of Caucasians, they are not worthy of being anything other than waste, morons, imbeciles, miscreants.

Introduce African slavery.

The waste people become valuable commodities necessary for the elites to remain at the top, but they no longer want to work. Instead, they are forced to fight wars for the elites – until realizing there is nothing in it for them, fighting.

The elites promise those who fight – slaves – after pointing at the African Americans and telling the “garbage” they’ve been exploiting – they are lower than you – nothing more than animals. An easy ruse because you’ve been told you are trash for several generations.

When that doesn’t work, give the trash worthless plots of land and a voting rights illusion.

Deny education. Segregate neighbourhoods “birds of a feather.” Promote eugenics (hmm, Germany). Breed humans like animals.

Sterilize women deemed wanton, not of good stock.

“Davenport felt the best policy was to quarantine dangerous women during their fertile years. This policy prescription that led to sterilization is rather more calculated: interested politicians and eager reformers concluded it was cheaper to operate on women than to house them in asylums for decades. Southern eugenicists, in particular, argued that sterilization helped the economy by sending poor women back into the population safely neutered but still able to work menial jobs.”

With television, use the supposed “gutter trash” as entertainment – once more keeping many of us in our place – at least letting some of us know we will never be allowed to climb.

Throw this all into the slow cooker, and what do you get?

Lindsey Graham jumps to mind.

America has come a long way.

But has it?

America may be a classless society because we are not all White Trash?

Admitting our shortcomings and the despicable advantages given upon some of us, maybe, just maybe, might spark centuries of curing an illness still plaguing many of us today.

That’s how this book made me feel.

WRITTEN: February 8, 2021

# HOME FIRE

## KAMILA SHAMSIE



*Redemption + Assimilation + Family + Love: Bottled together in a desperate broth.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**HOME FIRE** left me reeling. As much as I enjoyed the unrelenting twisting fiction of the story, I felt I was supposed to dive deeper into the gears turning humanity.

Kamila (author not a character) is of Indian descent, born into a patriarchal society shading womanhood in a sickness gripping many, not all, of the men. A thousand+ year struggle for equality + to find a voice – much most of us have never been exposed to, nary capable of grasping and understanding.

**HOME FIRE** elicited visceral emotions + a profound session of reflecting. Several questions sprinted through my mind, a reckoning of sorts – transcending borders.

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- How are children supposed to bleeping assimilate in new homelands when their roots are stripped away from them, and past family digressions haunt them with every step they take?
- What is assimilation supposed to do, and who defines assimilation?
- What is assimilation supposed to do, and who defines assimilation?
- Can a radicalized person return to salvation after discovering the path we have dragged him down is clouded in deception?

Is it possible for love to prevail over faith differences, especially when money and power smother out kindness + hope?

Conflicted is the best way to describe the swallowing of my sensitivities while reading the searing realities in this captivating tale of love, family, deception, and the quest for the illusiveness of wholeness, + the overwhelming desire to belong.

As the story tumults perpetually to the confounding conclusion – mouth agape, I gasped as a single tear rolled over my left cheek.

WRITTEN: January 21, 2021

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 13 BATCH 13



73

1. ANXIOUS PEOPLE - FREDRIK BACKMAN
2. ALREADY DEAD - DENIS JOHNSON
3. GREEN LIGHTS - MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY
4. LEGENDS OF THE FALL - JIM HARRISON
5. COUNTRY GIRL - EDNA O'BRIEN
6. REIGN MARY KRYGIEL

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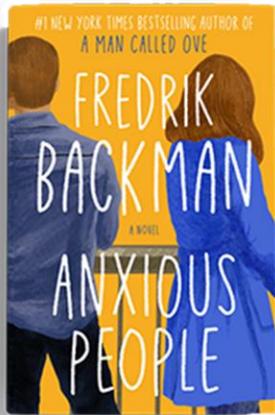
DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

# ANXIOUS PEOPLE

FREDRIK BACKMAN



*Absolutely  perfectly splendidly  delicious *

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I literally couldn't put this book down. Well, that's a load of hooley – and incontrovertibly a misuse of the word literally. I hate when persons, including me, misuse literally. But, of course, this has nothing to do with the book or my ability to put it down. For my literal statement to be accurate, the book would have to be a never-ending book or somehow fastened to my arms, with me being unable to unfasten. So, perhaps, utterly would have been a better word choice; until it came time to walk. I would say eat, but sometimes I devour food while reading, not paying attention to what I'm stuffing down my gullet. So, until it came time to walk, it made more sense.

I don't read books while walking.

Some people do. That confuses me.

Of course, none of this pertains to the book.

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Mr. Backman speaks a language I understand.

"English?"

"Yes," but I mean written words. I laughed out loud, loudly on several pages, guffawed actually, "Is this candy?" "It's an eraser." "Stop eating everything." "I was only asking." And turn the page, I cried, "You love each other until you can't live without each other. And even if you stop loving each other for a little while, you can't... you can't live without each other."

And then, or the opposite of, and then, a rabbit craps, try to get that out of your mind.

Anxious People is now my most-est favourite book!

I couldn't put it down.

I didn't want to put it down.

I wanted more pages.

Backman writes like a friend is reading to you, you never want to let go. This book is close to perfect

I'll leave you with this. How do we know that love is winning: "All the apartments that aren't for sale?"

Helt 📖 helt utmärkt 📖 utsökt 😊

Hur fick boken mig att känna/tänka?

Jag kunde bokstavligen inte lägga ifrån mig den här boken. Nåväl, det är en massa tjusigt - och obestridligen ett ordagrant missbruk av ordet. Jag hatar när personer, inklusive jag, missbrukar bokstavligen. Men det här har förstås ingenting att göra med boken eller min förmåga att lägga ifrån mig den. För att mitt bokstavliga uttalande ska vara korrekt, måste boken vara en oändlig bok eller på något sätt fäst vid mina armar, där jag inte kan lossa. Så, kanske, helt hade varit ett bättre ordval; tills det var dags att gå. Jag skulle säga ät, men ibland slukar jag mat medan jag läser, utan att vara uppmärksam på vad jag stoppar i matstrupen. Så tills det var dags att gå var det mer vettigt.

Jag läser inte böcker när jag går.

Vissa människor gör det. Det förvirrar mig.

Inget av detta hör såklart till boken.

OM BOKEN

Herr Backman talar ett språk jag förstår.

"Engelsk?"

"Ja", men jag menar skrivna ord. Jag skrattade högt, högt på flera sidor, guffade faktiskt, "Är det här godis?" "Det är ett suddgummi." "Sluta äta allt." "Jag frågade bara." Och vänd blad, jag ropade, "Ni älskar varandra tills ni inte kan leva utan varandra. Och även om ni slutar älska varandra för en liten stund, så kan ni inte... ni kan inte leva utan varandra."

Och sedan, eller motsatsen till, och sedan, en kanin skiter, försök få bort det ur ditt sinne.

Anxious People är nu min mest favoritbok!

Jag kunde inte lägga ifrån mig det.

Jag ville inte lägga ner den.

Jag ville ha fler sidor.

Backman skriver som att en vän läser för dig, du vill aldrig släppa taget. Den här boken är nästan perfekt

Jag lämnar dig med detta. Hur vet vi att kärleken vinner: "Alla lägenheter som inte är till salu?"

WRITTEN: October 28, 2020

## ALREADY DEAD

DENIS JOHNSON



*A story about the loneliness of broken live, we can never know.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Denis Johnson had a mercurial capacity to take the most unlikely characters, cretins, broken, unlovable, and then turn them into complex absurdities... living, lost, lonely.

ALREADY DEAD paints a complex picture of the adversities of living in society's far reaches—the fractured dreams of those who can never belong in the norm. A large portion of us. Real. But teetering in the depths of a fantasy nobody would ever want.

Johnson's writing is poetic, transporting readers into an uncomprehending world. What we can all grasp is the beautiful bitterness of loneliness, something that inflicts each one of us from time to time.

“Eventually, we take responsibility,” she says, “for having created our world.” Indeed, the demons were in his head. Gumdrops in a dream were not gumdrops, but a dream. But as long as you don't wake, they're candy. You can eat them. If they're poison, they kill you. Then you wake, still alive. But in the dream, you're dead.

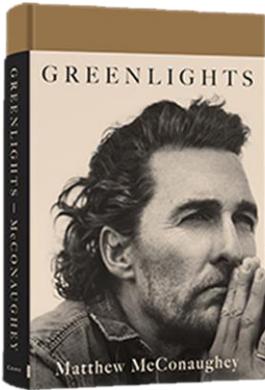
That's how this book made me feel.

RIP DENIS

WRITTEN: 21 December 2020

# GREEN LIGHTS

MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY



*It's okay to step in crap if you recognize you need to scrape it off your boots and move on.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I watched my father die the day after I turned 25.

I watched my mother die less than 2 years later.

I am a provincial + national champion quarterback (I'm blind in one eye) in football, + I threw the longest touchdown pass in Canadian Junior Football History.

I've travelled to 17 countries.

I have played 2-on-2 basketball with David Duchovny – and beat him.

I've had breakfast with Michael Chiklis.

I brushed past the Dalai Lama.

77 I crashed a motorcycle in Jamaica wearing only shorts and flip-flops – my first time riding a motorbike.

I tried to buy a hotel in Jamaica that led me to Panama during a military coup – something to do with Noriega.

Sixteen years after my mother died, I discovered she wasn't my birth mother, and everything familial in my life had been a lie. This moment trapped me, and I started living it over and over and repeatedly.

In 2016, I met my birth mother for the first time alongside her deathbed – saying goodbye – adding to my baggage.

I have a wonderful, challenging, and fascinating life, and I have a lot of life left.

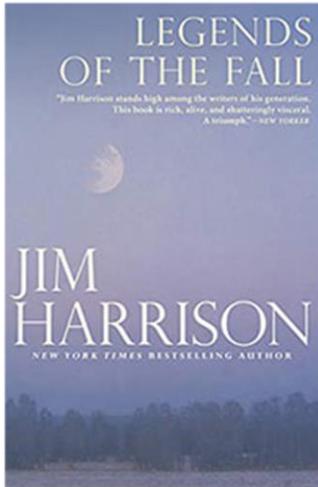
In *Greenlights*, McConaughey shares his life's journey with breathtaking honesty, humour, and subtle, deft wisdom. Instilling in each of us the importance of cherishing moments, placing them in the right compartments, and then moving forward to give yourself and those you love the fullest, most vibrant life experiences. Love is paramount. It's okay to move past the moments you keep living over and over and repeatedly. It is a must that you do.

Thank You, Matthew, for sharing your journey.

WRITTEN: December 3, 2020

## LEGENDS OF THE FALL

JIM HARRISON



*A riveting + breathtakingly timeless classic, blasting readers into yesteryear.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Harrison writes with deft aplomb, whisking the characters off of the pages so much it feels like they will haunt you throughout each day.

“The Texas girl was lovely, long-limbed, intelligent but far too young to be daffy: she was a house that wanted to be haunted while Miryea, only a few years older, was haunted.”

He writes of times long gone by in his stories, walking lockstep with damaged characters he most surely must have encountered in his previous lives. As I turned the pages, I felt as if it transported me onto the pages alongside him, feeling the pain, sorrow, growth, and joy of these richly flawed humans, much like each of us living in today’s tumultuous times. The characters’ paths in his riveting stories are infinitely different from ours, but are they? We all struggle; we all wish we could control our destinies; what Harrison expounds is perhaps whatever it will be, and we need to simply dive into our existences and merely enjoy the ride.

Try to tell me this, “He was past regretting for the moment how he tracked mud from one part of his life into another.” – are not you + every living being on this spinning rock?

Legends of the Fall is a wondrous literary masterpiece containing three stories that allow us to escape into ourselves and hopefully come out stronger long after I read the last word.

That’s how this book made me feel!

Stay Safe.

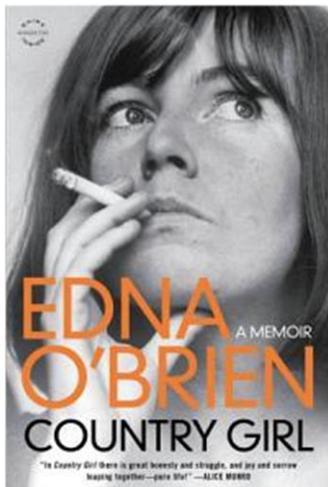
Wear a mask.

Be Kind.

WRITTEN: November 19, 2020

## COUNTRY GIRL

EDNA O'BRIEN



*Edna O'Brien's life is a consummate illustration of what can be!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Edna O'Brien is a writing tour de force.

She hobnobbed with the greats. She drops the names of celebrities + royalty with iridescent aplomb effortlessly. It is a profound testament to how she endured growing up in the time of Irish literary deities.

How could a woman survive and navigate the endless gauntlet of a misogynistic world with such grace and candour?

By allowing her gifts to flow freely in succulent prose, Edna belonged. She didn't knock or kick in the door; she slithered through and let her unrelenting talent shine through.

Her life is a daunting mystical fairy tale, showcasing a world an infinitely small number of us are ever transported to—from within, she's been to heaven and hell and is undoubtedly on the return journey, sharing with us the beautiful mystery of life along the way.

Edna O'Brien is a consummate illustration of what can be!

We are all blessed to have her share her journey to get on with our own.

That's how this book made me feel.

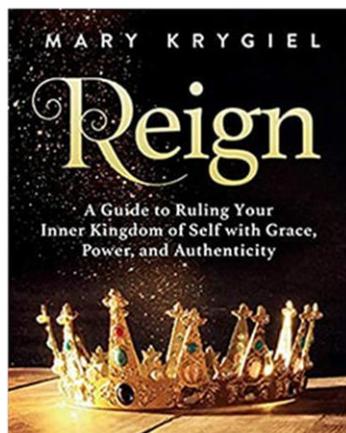
Stay Safe.

Wear a mask.

Be Kind.

# REIGN

MARY KRYGIEL



*Who are you; really?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The world can be a debilitatingly scary place. Uncertainty abounds.

They bombard us with noise 24/7 – consuming our happiness, fracturing our destiny.

They inundate us daily with COVID, a potential political coup, an opioid crisis, + the gap between 'have' and 'have not' widening like the San Andreas Fault. Throw in our addictive need to be |dis|connected by portraying a less than an accurate image of self to your 'followers' – it sounds a little

cultish. And with this amplification of whom you want others to believe you are, how can it be nothing more than crippling?

We need to slow down. To reflect.

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That's where Mary Krygiel's **REIGN** enters the fray. This beautifully illustrated book can act as a map to controlling your narrative by allowing the 'real you,' lying within, to be revealed.

**REIGN** is a perfect read for anyone wanting to enrich their personal and professional relationships. For couples who wish to strengthen their bond, it is an unobtrusive guidebook that will give you a better understanding of who you are and why you behave the way you do + insight into what makes your partner tick. *This understanding is priceless.*

The corporate world can act as a conduit to build a strong team by understanding all the components necessary to thrive.

**REIGN** reminded me of "*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*" without overwhelming.

**REIGN** also reminded me of "*What Colour is Your Parachute,*" without the tedium, more of a turnkey look into unlocking your destiny.

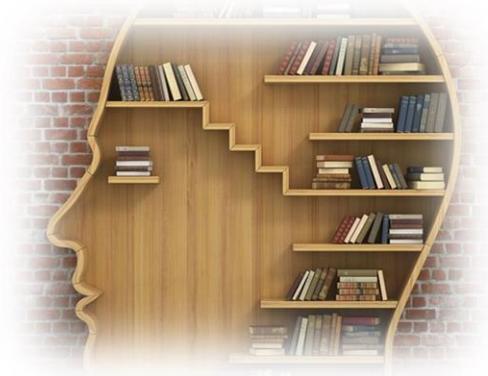
And "*The Crossroads of Should & Must*" – which, much like **REIGN**, is a must-read if you want to live your 'most' entire existence.

Gotta run. I need to reflect on: What benefits might you experience taking a break from social media for a period?

WRITTEN: December 23, 2020

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 12



81

1. THE TOWN - SHAUN PRESCOTT
2. AGATHA - ANNE CATHRINE BOMANN
3. THE MYSTERY OF HENRI PICK - DAVID FOENKINOS
4. **THE SECRET LIFE OF GROCERIES - BENJAMIN LORR**
5. FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE - TAFFY BRODESSER-ANKER
6. THE TOPEKA SCHOOL - BEN LERNER
7. **VESPER FLIGHTS - HELEN MACDONALD**
8. **PEOPLE ALWAYS ASK ME? - ROBERT CONFANT**
9. **SEAWEEED - MIEK ZWAMBORN**
10. ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE - GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

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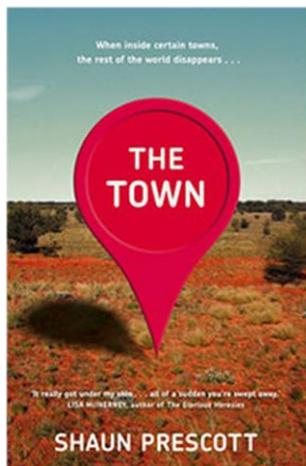
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

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**ORANGE = POETRY**

## THE TOWN THE TOWN

SHAUN PRESCOTT



*Is this as good as it gets?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I scratch my head. What am I reading?

Is this a book about nothing? Everything?

I'm confused; the prose courses through me.

I like it.

I don't know why?

The characters are dullards – to the point of being profoundly, confoundedly, fascinating.

I laugh.

Is this book about gentrification, xenophobia, sameness, misguided fear?

Towns are disappearing. Why do they exist, to begin with?

Nothing happens.

Everything happens.

Corporations infest the outskirts, dumbing us all down.

Making our experiences painfully tedious, breaking those swallowed by their promises of more.

Can we escape?

The town disappears rapidly.

A hole appears on the page.

I slide into it and arrive at a different page.

The characters grow into who something trapped them at being.

Gaps are spread between the vanilla-ness of the slapdash mess of perceived wealth.

Tentacles full suburbia, town centers collapse.

The broken can't escape.

They die within the town.

"The holes were spreading quickly, doubling overnight, and it would come as no surprise if they started appearing inside of people too. This possibility of holes appearing inside

people had never occurred to me until I said it. Now I wondered if the holes had been appearing inside people for years. What if the librarian had a hole inside him? What if I did?"

I laugh again. I don't know why?

The destruction of souls engulfs us all.

Another hole appears on the page.

I slide into it, searching for more – for the city's depth.

I escape the town to become more – I will grow – the city will be my saviour.

In reality, the city is a collection of connected non-descript towns, a strip mall appears, and addiction and despair add colour to living.

I retreat to the mirror.

I snicker.

Am I breaking?

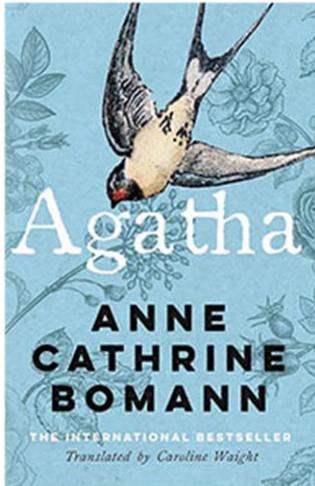
The city disappears as we race toward the...?

Is this as good as it gets?

**WRITTEN: September 28, 2020**

## AGATHA

ANNE CATHRINE BOMANN



Wondrous, evocative, a poignant look at the beauty of vulnerability.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Welcome, take a seat; what brings you here today?

Well, several things, I feel lost, confused, overwhelmed.

My childhood keeps repeating on a continuous loop. My parents pushed and pushed. They said they encouraged me for my own good, but really, I don't think it was for me.

"I hated the piano, and I hated hearing them talk about me. It was all about showing other people what exemplary parents they were. It had nothing to do with me."

My parents thirst for me to be more – I've carried it with me for my whole life. It crippled my thoughts, haunting me to this day.

"I'm angry because I have accomplished nothing. I should have been someone, and I'm nothing."

My interactions with others have paid a heavy price. I'm often lost for words when silent empathy may be the best course. Once, while facing death, all I could muster was.

"“ Thomas is a good man,” I said, struck once again by how inadequate words can be.”

I cry. Talking with you resonates loudly with me. You touch on life's vulnerabilities. We can't grow without the beauty of vulnerability being stripped down to its essence.

I worry about you. You're 72, alone. I fear love is missing from your life equation. You drink in everyone else's pain every day.

"You can end up a tiny creature if nobody cares about you. Sometimes I wonder whether such a creature is even a person at all."

Promise me you'll allow yourself to be vulnerable; promise me you will let yourself be loved.

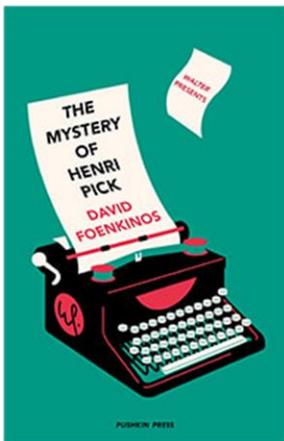
You've spoken volumes to me, and I will leave you with this.

"Her face was a lifeless mask, and not until I squinted did, I see the tears fall like drops of ink onto the fabric of the blouse."

**Enjoyment Factor:** I think it may find a place in my Top 3.

## THE MYSTERY OF HENRI PICK

DAVID FOENKINOS



Amelie meets Knives Out.

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

A madcap caper with a literary bent: Amelie meets Knives Out. Deception on every page.

A gaggle of colourful characters traipsing through life, searching for light amongst shadowy darkness.

A twist.

A turn.

Luscious comedy – nuanced in mystery. I laugh.

Whodunit – I mean: Whowroteit.

I write.

The Mystery of Henri Pick captures most writers' dream to live in obscurity while being revered and well-read.

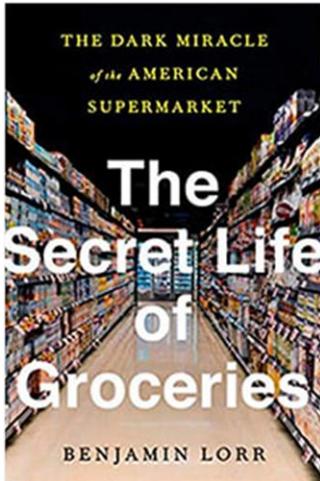
“As if recognition consisted of being understood. Nobody is ever understood, and certainly not writers. They wander through kingdoms of strange emotions and, most of the time, do not even understand themselves.”

Enjoyment factor for me: I think it may find a place in my Top 25.

**WRITTEN: October 8, 2020**

# THE SECRET LIFE OF GROCERIES

BENJAMIN LORR



*A gripping dash of memoir with a colossal sprinkling of investigative journalism + a delightful mix of shredded wit.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I'm sitting on a picnic bench in beautiful Stanley Park in Vancouver, enjoying my favourite Korean chicken sandwich. The smoke has temporarily cleared from the wildfires of 2020. I dive into the book—a book that reads like a gripping dash of memoir with a colossal sprinkling of investigative journalism + a delightful mix of shredded wit to lighten the taste. Fortunately, I finish my lunch before I get to an early part of the book, expounding how chickens go from animal to product before returning to our tables as food.

That night, during dinner, my throat closed. I can't eat, and I violently bring up the few bites of dinner I try to eat.

## DID THE BOOK DO THIS TO ME?

86

The next day I had emergency life-saving surgery to remove a growth from my esophagus. Once again: the book?

While at the hospital, as I wait for my invasive, excruciating surgery, I devour most of this book. The pages keep turning.

**I ponder:** Where do I fit in, in the food chain?

**I learn there are two kinds of groceries:**

1. Stores where they overwhelm us with every product imaginable—in massive stores—competing on price point only.
2. Stores where yoga-pant wearing educated, but maybe not intelligent persons, roam the aisles purchasing products they can barely afford because they believe they are saving the planet. Puke.

A light went on: Groceries don't sell food; they sell experiences + Store 2 doesn't really exist. If it did, the poorer members of society wouldn't be ladled with the guilt of purchasing on price point alone to feed themselves and their families. Nutrition shouldn't be a luxury.

I dabbled in the industry for a short period. I chased the dangling carrot of \$\$\$ by racing

around a colossal distribution warehouse. Risking injury on a 3,000-pound-pallet jack—timed, picking orders requiring an Olympian effort. Only to be let go before the \$\$ \$'s and benefits kicked in, like 99.999% of the other workers, predominantly immigrants, were let go as well, for failing.

### TRUCKING SURELY MUST BE BETTER?

No. It is peppered with addiction, violence, sexual abuse, and indebtedness because the carrot comes with a truck + a 112% turnover rate.

### HOW ABOUT WORKING IN A STORE?

Sure, but personality isn't a requirement; the staffing algorithm only sees numbers. And besides, it's heart-wrenching not being able to afford the foods you stock on the shelves.

### HOW ABOUT INSPECTING FOOD?

The FDA doesn't protect us. Lawyers dangling lawsuits like shredded cheese over the producers' do. The industry is ripe with corruption as privatized auditors, working ungodly hours, are bought off to protect bottom lines.

### BECOMING A FOOD ENTREPRENEUR SOUNDS NOBLE?

It is, but it requires luck and deep pockets, not only to produce a product but to pay to get it on the shelves and pay to get it off the shelf if it doesn't sell, as you grind your way to obscurity.

Let's travel to Thailand for shrimp. Immigrants from poor neighbouring countries are captured and enslaved to work. Working in beyond horrid conditions. Stripping oceans of all living matter. Enslaved people who are not paid and have no recourse against unscrupulous fisheries. As they chase the dream of a better life. However, they are treated like they are criminals. Bringing disease, bringing... but willing to do the work the people of Thailand are no longer willing to do. Yet, they are forced underground and are treated as illegal aliens. Sound familiar?

**The Secret Life of Groceries** is a captivating book that opened my eyes. As much as the machine seems out of control, by opening our eyes, changes are slowly being made + media exposure, at times, is laser-focused on the horrendous fishing practices + unfair labour practices.

They geared everything in the grocery chain toward bringing US cheap products with little regard for the toll upon the people doing the work.

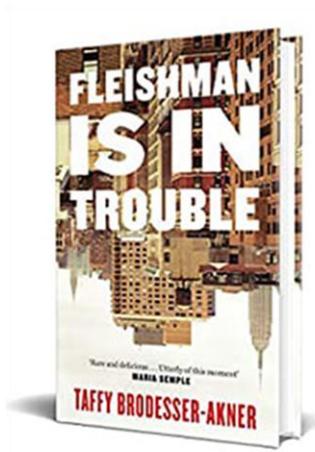
I must run. It's lunchtime. The smoke from the wildfires has returned. I have lost my appetite for food, so I think I will consume smokey air today.

When I can eat again, I'll smile at the staff the next time I'm in my local grocery.

WRITTEN: October 2, 2020

# FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE

TAFFY BRODESSER-ANKER



*A fascinatingly upsetting look into the dichotomy of marriage + relationships.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Love comes, marriage follows; forever has arrived.

But has it?

Life is hard; symbiotic is not defined. It cracks. Fragility burdens the male ego.

A man only has to be childish for most of his life, hard-done-by when his needs are not paramount.

A woman's journey is unique.

Can a woman be driven and emotional at the same time?

A man might find drive intoxicating – as long as it doesn't come with emotions – we fill life with emotion.

A woman becomes a working mother.

A descriptor laced in disdain.

A man picks up the children from school: we dubbed him a hero.

He drinks it in, basking in the admiration.

His wife makes ten-times his income.

His ego fractures.

He stops listening.

He never truly did.

The fragility of manliness needs to blame.

He lives voyeuristically through a non-committed friend.

At the beginning of this page-turner, his marriage ruptures, his wife leaves as he trips upward to heaven, heaven he determines to be 'meaningless conquests' found on dating sites. She drops into the despair of hell, trying to satisfy an unquenchable thirst to be seen, be relevant, and understood.

He never truly listened. He came from privilege. His wife crawled and clawed her way from obscurity, rising toward fame + fortune. She succeeds. But at what cost?

The frailty of his mind kept looking to blame, and his wife needed to be heard.

“He had parents—a mother whom he damned for his terrible self-image, never once taking into consideration that the person he was talking to about this would have killed to have a mother to blame for everything.”

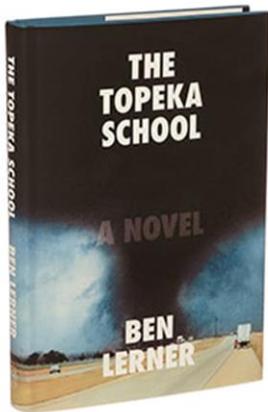
“Fleishman is in Trouble” is a fascinatingly upsetting look into the dichotomy of marriage + relationships, deftly leaving readers examining if what they are reading is something they see in themselves. Something that might make them whole.

Enjoyment Factor: I think it may find a place in my Top 25.

**WRITTEN: October 23, 2020**

# THE TOPEKA SCHOOL

BEN LERNER



*A story suggesting white identity might be nothing but a stunted metaphor.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

This is tough to write my thoughts on.

Did I love it?

Hate it?

Understand it?

Somewhere in between?

How do we live life to its fullest when continually struggling to belong, define, and be more?

I grew up in insular Saskatchewan.

Why is that relevant?

Saskatchewan shares threads with Kansas. Cultural non-diversity creates a world of cultural misappropriation. We want what we can't have; we want to be who we are not while condemning the various things we so desire.

White entitled, sheltered kids, lost souls, all growing up in the same houses, filled with identical bedrooms, kitchens, garages, lives, often lashing out at what they don't understand, lacking the travels to grasp how deficient in thought they really are. They strike out at those they reckon weaker. They shout out racist hymns while spreading rap lyrics at a furious pace while their pants hang down. An identity crisis brews; it is stirred by the generations before, trapped in the identical spinning vortices and in the death throes of dying marriages. Their lakes are artificial, their lives are shaded but translucent.

They need to feel superior.

They're not.

They don't comprehend they need to struggle to grow; they need to look outside of their own needs – their growth becomes a stunted metaphor.

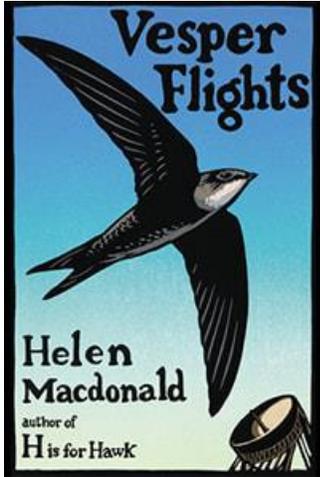
I moved away from insular Saskatchewan (a beautiful place). I discovered I'm not the only one who matters. I'm not entitled; familial darkness blew apart my identity. I'm trying to grow. I want to grow.

That's how this book made me feel.

**WRITTEN: November 8, 2020**

# VESPER FLIGHTS

## HELEN MACDONALD



*Animals are magnificent feeling + thinking creatures...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

ANIMALS. HUMANS.

Animals are magnificent feeling + thinking creatures crucial to our health and the planet's health. Rarely do we humans take a moment to consider what they want + need. For most of us, they represent a mystery we like to look at in zoos and in the wilderness, believing they are there for nothing more than our viewing pleasure. And disgustingly, to hunt, or to feast on—I do not apologize for using disgustingly.

Humans are mass murders. We rarely care about the well beings of the animals that share the planet with us. Most of us definitely do not watch when we invade their habitats, forcing them into extinction, turning what once was wondrous, bio-diverse eco-systems into new communities only sustainable for our own consumptive urges. Another sub-division—thousands of deaths. Do you want to come over to a barbeque and a swim?

Wildfires rage—plumes of smoke rise and impact communities thousands of miles away. My home city of Vancouver has the worst air quality in the world for a few days. They advised people to stay indoors. The news flashes scenes of humans barely escaping the onslaught. “We’re losing everything. OMG. We’ll have to start over.” Cry. Cry. Cry.

In the meantime, new developments are nearing completion; thousands of acres are felled. Not once was an animal interviewed about the impact on them.

Imagine an animal, “We’re losing everything. OMG. I guess we’ll perish.” Silence.

Displaced refugees from the wildfires move into the new subdivision and repeat the cycle.

Plumes of smoke continue to rise.

Animals can’t go indoors.

Birds’ flight paths are skewed.

We don’t care.

We build a new subdivision. We fell thousand of acres of trees. So is our turn to perish next?

That’s how this book made me feel.

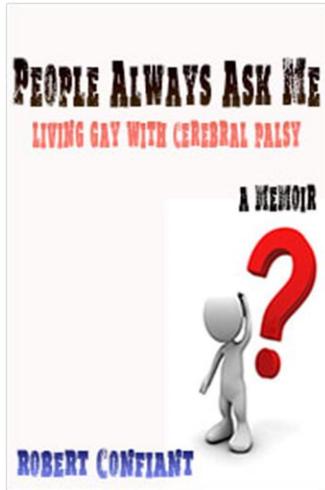
Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I gained a different perspective on the movie “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.”

And – I care – animals think, feel, and need.

“Later, she points out that the Earth itself is in no danger. ‘It will survive whatever we throw at it. What is in danger is the environment that made us possible. We are cutting the branch we are sitting on. So, either we understand that quickly, or life will go on – but a different one.’”

# PEOPLE ALWAYS ASK ME

ROBERT CONFIAINT



*A story about perseverance + overcoming the most formidable odds.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

In *“People Always Ask Me,”* Robert Confiant swings the door wide open into his life, a life rife with challenges because being gay with a disability – could be nothing more than flush.

What makes this a fascinating gem is Confiant’s sparsity in language usage. Reading it flowed from page-page without being bogged down with fluff or a need to overdramatize his realities. Life can be challenging. Toss gay into the mix, and the difficulty quotient increases tenfold or more. Mix in a debilitating disability, how could any of us articulate what we feel or find the empathy to understand the daunting hurdles anyone with that mix of characteristics would have to endure?

We may not be able to walk a mile (for Confiant walking is a challenge) in Robert’s shoes – but what we can do is listen (read).

Confiant deftly uses his ease of language in sharing his struggles, without whining about the cards he’s been dealt – how? – with an unflinching dose of courage – it’s all he knew – but courage.

A difficult upbringing.

A thirst for belonging.

A struggle to thrive. Gay.

And yet, Robert falls, gets up, trips into depression and avoidance, but somehow, gets up again, moves on, and keeps clawing upward, forward.

One passage highlights how far humanity has come. Yet, I found it upsetting and shining a burning light on how far we still need to go – Confiant finds love. He moves with his husband to the judgment of the Bible Belt in British Columbia (Abbotsford). Yet, *“I believe our not being so out, and in your face, about being gay has helped us integrate within the community so effortlessly.”*

It’s a shame that with all Confiant has had to overcome throughout this captivating journey through his life, he still feels *“not being so out”* is something he must do to fit in.

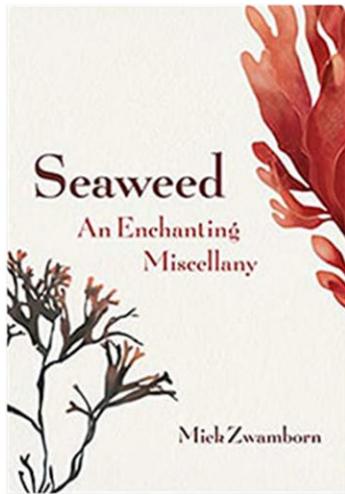
Confiant has had to withstand more than most people would have to in several lifetimes. His story is an essential read and a testament to his strength of character.

It is a must-read for anyone, gay, disabled, straight: offering a glimmer of hope that with the strength of will and perseverance, you can overcome, thrive, and look at the bright side of life regardless of the shade continually. Being thrown your way!

**WRITTEN: October 28, 2020**

## SEAWEED

MIEK ZWAMBORN



*A gorgeously illustrated, fascinating look into an alien planet.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Thanks to Greystone Books + Miek Zwamborn, I dove into the gorgeously illustrated, fascinating look into an alien planet that occupies about 70% on top of this glorious world we inhabit.

Land. Water.

Advantage, well, actually neither.

Why?

Because there is a parasite roaming the land, most of us are unknowingly willing to destroy the water world paramount

for most species' survival.

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**Seaweed: An Enchanting Miscellany** is a captivating look into a near-mythical, richly varied water plant that has inspired artists, musicians, photographers, and sea goers from the dawn of time.

Little did I know of the spiritual + healthy + world-saving nature of this diverse foliage of the sea.

Little did I know we could not breathe without seaweed.

Little did I know if grandpa added seaweed to his diet, he might reduce his flatulence by upward of 60%.

“... the addition of just a small amount of *Asparagopsis taxiformis* macroalage (less than 1% if the total feed) reduced methane emissions in sheep by 50-75%.”

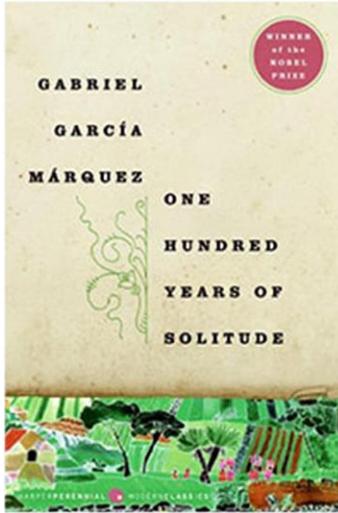
I've now read a book about seaweed. I am still a neophyte on the subject – but I have a better understanding of why we all get to stay alive, as well as a sense of what we need to do to save the planet.

I Gotta run. I have a craving for Fish in a Seaweed Coat, with a squeeze of lemon.

**WRITTEN: October 7, 2020**

# ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ



*A little gold, goldfish swims by, someone discovers ice, someone levitates...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I once worked with an editor who compared my writing to Marquez.

The cover says Nobel Prize Winner. This sounds promising!

The chapters are all-around twenty pages.

Some paragraphs run for five.

I tried to read a few paragraphs aloud in one take → I became breathless.

For an English-speaking Canadian, the Spanish names became jumbled.

A little gold goldfish swims by.

Someone discovers ice.

Someone levitates.

95 Endless wars are threatening a mythical make-believe town—I think?

Outsiders from a banana company bring a mix of wealth and despair—I think?

The town's fabric is torn, threatened to be ripped to shreds.

Some people have sex, sometimes with the underaged, maybe with animals. I'm not sure?

People age.

Someone eats the earth.

Someone is beautiful.

Someone is not.

A hundred years pass, give or take a hundred years. I'm confused. Seriously.

The words leave the page entering my cranium, but before they lay down to ruminate, they POOF!—are gone.

Everything flows in a conundrum of descriptions—am I high?—no, just reading.

What?

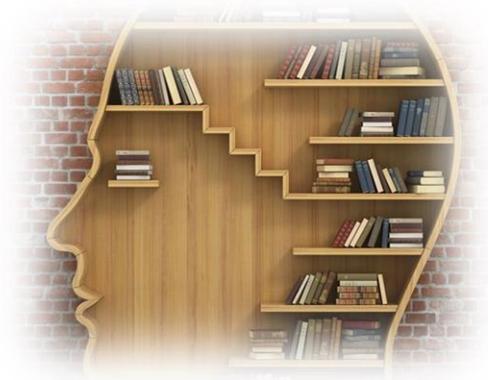
For heaven's sake: I don't know.

An editor I worked with compared my writing to Marquez → I must ask myself what I have just read because it most certainly beats me.

**WRITTEN: November 8, 2020**

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 11



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1. JESUS' SON - DENIS JOHNSON
2. REAL LIFE - BRANDON TAYLOR
3. WEATHER - JENNY OFFILL
4. DEPT. OF SPECULATION - JENNY OFFILL
5. NOBODY EVER TALKS ABOUT ANYTHING BUT THE END - LIZ LEVINE
6. DRIVE YOUR PLOW OVER THE BONES OF THE DEAD - OLGA TOKAROZUK
7. THE HEAP - SEAN ADAMS
8. THE NAME OF THE WORLD - DENIS JOHNSON
9. A WOMAN IS NO MAN - ETAF RUM
10. SO LONG, SEE YOU TOMORROW - WILLIAM MAXWELL

BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

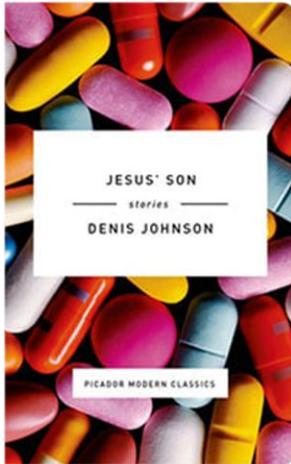
DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

# JESUS' SON

DENIS JOHNSON



*...poetic verses drip off the pages...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

EMPATHETIC

The only difference between a narcissistic politician using all means available to hold on to power and a junkie hunting for their next fix is the junkie can't lie about who they are.

**JESUS' SON** is almost perfect. The poetic verses drip off the pages, pooling together only to burst forth in perfect harmony – words you can hear, see, feel, and almost taste.

*"The Savoy Hotel was an awful place. The reality of it gave out as it rose higher above First Avenue so that the upper floors dribbled away into space. Monsters were dragging themselves up the stairs."*

97

Johnson's prose is sublime, humanizing addiction, something most of us would like to deny, looking the other way, making those who are gripped by the demon's talons invisible.

**JESUS' SON** does not demonize or offer judgment or solutions to those trapped in the cycles of addiction – what it does is highlight how people who've fallen through the cracks have dreams and desires and how they survive the daily grind of living. Unfortunately, those suffering do not differ from money barons of Wall Street: one chases wealth, often breaking those below, who, much like them, crave love and belonging. The money barons don't understand; they are one wrong decision and only a heartbeat away from despair themselves.

No child dreams of becoming a broken addict.

Johnson's deft humanizing of lost souls dosed me with compassion. I may still find those on society's fringes somewhat vile. Yet, after reading this breathtaking novel, I realize the persons lying in desperation on the streets of our cities frequently have heart-wrenching stories lost in pain.

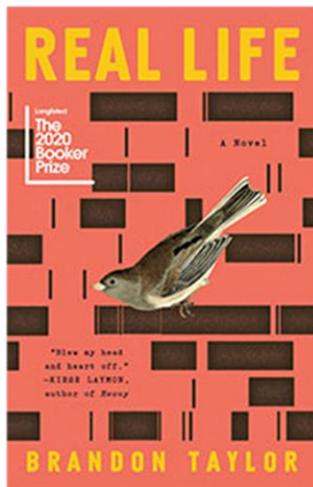
If you write and this book doesn't inspire you to hone your craft, quit writing.

This might be my favourite book.

Thank You, Mr. Johnson, RIP.

## REAL LIFE

BRANDON TAYLOR



*A heart-wrenchingly beautiful + essential tale. It destroyed me.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Real Life destroyed me.

It destroyed me because I don't want to be another white guy spinning banalities about living in different coloured skin. We can't keep pretending we know – or continue, in silence, when racism is being served in front of our minds.

“... but she won't say anything either, can't bring herself to. No one does. No one ever does. Silence is their way of getting by because if they are silent long enough, then this moment of minor discomfort will pass for them, will fold down into the landscape of the evening as if it never happened.”

It destroyed me because it made me realize my limitations in accepting unconditional love.

“He puts his hand on Wallace's stomach, which makes Wallace feel uncomfortable.”

It destroyed me because it made me realize my past is always on the attack, and I must stomp it down.

“There comes a time when you have to stop being who you were when you have to let the past stay where it is, frozen and impossible.”

It destroyed me because I didn't want to be weak.

“Get even sounds like the rallying cry of weak people who have no other way to bargain with the world.”

And it destroyed me because it made me realize to grow, I must accept who I am.

“He wants to be not himself.

He wants to be not depressed.

He wants to be not anxious.

He wants to be well.

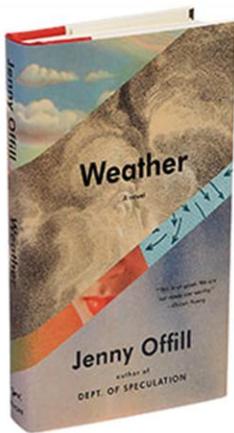
He wants to be good.”

Taylor's writing is an eloquent master class, swallowing us effortlessly in the environment, breathing all around us. Everything is essential to the story. Taylor nimbly deposits each of us on the page, making us vital to the moving pieces of this heart-wrenchingly beautiful tale.

That's how this book made me feel.

## WEATHER

### JENNY OFFILL



ORIGINAL TIMES 7

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

This is the second Offill book I've read. And original, original, original, original. I was looking for synonyms for original, and the best I could come up with is ORIGINAL in ALL CAPS.

**Weather** is mystifying, much like **Dept. of Speculation** → I dove in, my mind raced, what the heck am I reading?

Is this real life?

Fiction?

A combination?

A fantasy?

Weather is delightfully hilarious, a guffaw waiting on most pages, and a tug at the heartstrings often follows closely behind.

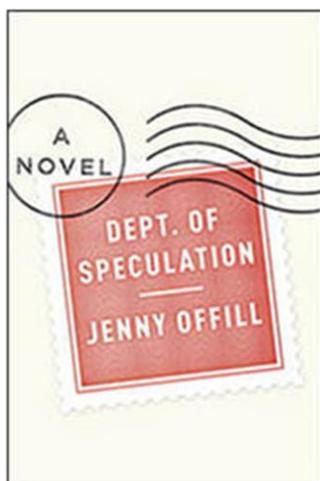
"A few days later, I yelled at him for losing his lunch box, and he turned and said to me, Are you sure you're my actual mother? Sometimes you don't seem like a good enough person."

Suddenly, it hit me, an epiphany of sorts. Weather is original fiction (for those scoring at home, NUMBER OF ORIGINALS IN THIS REVIEW = 7) mirroring real life. It is scattered choppy, much like life. It is confusing, but as the pages flip by, it is cobbled together, and again, much like life hidden within the insatiable wit, darkness lurks.

Offill is a master at deftly pulling life fragments together, mixing them into bite-sized morsels, and in the end, making us all crave another word.

## DEPT. OF SPECULATION

JENNY OFFILL



*I am confident I've read something like nothing else.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I dove in. Pages began flipping; I'm not sure if I was flipping them. I started laughing. There is nothing like this. A little girl makes me laugh; she's adorable. The little girl makes me ponder. She's more intelligent than most.

What is this book?

Is this a memoir?

I should check the cover, the jacket. Nah... I can't stop reading.

This is the author's life; it can't be, it must be.

I reach the halfway mark; laughter turns into a cringe, darkness arrives, a perfect life unravels. Life has a way of depositing us there when we least expect it.

I want the author to be okay.

Is she okay?

Will she survive?

Where has the little girl's zest for life gone?

I still laugh – but now I'm worried.

I need to stop reading.

I can't.

I need to know the outcome.

Can the family come together again fall in love once more?

Does it need to be blown up to start over again? It sounds a bit like America.

Cover-to-cover in one sitting. I'm spent. There is nothing like this.

Is it her life?

It must be.

The book is fiction; I doubt that.

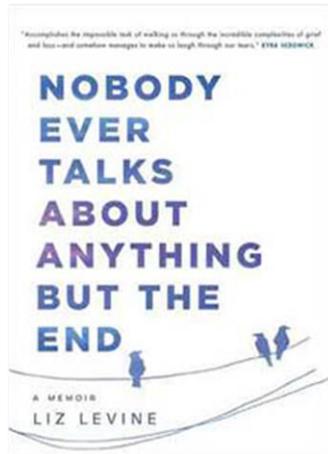
I'm finished. I'm spent. I am confident I've read something like nothing else.

I'm positive I've read the musings of a lyrical genius.

I want more pages!

# NOBODY EVER TALKS ABOUT ANYTHING BUT THE END

LIZ LEVINE



... a beautiful, amazing, darkly hilarious, gem ...

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Connected. Less Alone.

In 1985, the day after my birthday, I watched my father die.

In late 1987, I watched my mother die just before Christmas.

Fast-forward to 2003, after a two-month period where my relationship ended, and four people close to me died, I discovered my parents I watched die were not my actual parents (long story – for another time).

“They” say there are 5-7 stages of grief, depending on whom you ask?

I find these stages don’t follow a formula. We are told they do, but from my experience, one stage will demand full attention, and at others, all seven bombard you, leaving you reeling. Often alone. As compassionate as others can be, they can also suck and drop their judgement on how long grief should be on the docket.

It doesn’t bleeping work that way.

During my struggle, **Nobody Ever Talks About Anything But The End** would have been a godsend. This book is the most honest, visceral, voyeuristic. Did I say? Honest (?) conversation with a friend about coming to terms with layers of trauma, including suicide + cancer.

Liz Levine paints a rich, in-depth, enlightening picture of what it is like to be attacked by “what ifs” and “I could have, should have, done....”

On one page, tears blasted from my eyes. On the next, I cringed while laughing uncontrollably at the healing morbidity of comedy in the darkest moments.

**Nobody Ever Talks About Anything But The End** is a must-read for anyone who thirsts for captivating life stories. It is a fabulous read for everyone. But if you’ve suffered devastating losses in your life, this book will help you realize you’re not alone. Whatever you are feeling + going through uniquely belongs to you – don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

**One last note:** **Nobody Ever Talks About Anything But The End** is a beautiful, unique, darkly hilarious gem that might help those suffering place their grief in a compartment quicker. A place where it is no longer all-consuming. Because when it is finally placed somewhere manageable, which is something Levine deftly shares with unflinching courage, you will eventually arrive at a new BEGINNING.

# DRIVE YOUR PLOW OVER THE BONES OF THE DEAD

OLGA TOKAROZUK



*A murder mystery, chock-full of mind-blowing twists.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**REPORTER**

I'm here with the delightfully quirky. Some would say a tad off, Mrs. Janina Duszejko, the main character in Olga Tokarczuk's tantalizingly mind-bending novel "**Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead.**"

Could you tell me in a nutshell what this captivating story is about?

**DUSZEJKO**

Hmm. In a nutshell. The book is about the never-ending struggle between good and evil, right, and wrong, + the continuous struggle to eradicate misogynistic attacks. The story takes place in Poland's eerily dark cottage area, where cottage owners escape harsh winters, leaving behind a few odd souls to mind the fort. My task is to maintain a series of cottages. Only two others brave the elements: Oddball + Big Foot. And, right from the get-go, they reduced the numbers to only two.

**REPORTER**

Yes, in the first pages, we come across the corpse of Big Foot. His death scene is disconcerting: he choked on the bones of a deer he had poached. The deer's severed head lying nearby. Immediately after that, you uncover greed, evil, and corruption. Your character instantaneously starts evolving. How did you land the leading role?

**DUSZEJKO**

I slipped myself into Olga's dreams nightly. I was unrelenting. Every time she'd drift off, I'd be there. I'd speak of my two missing dogs. I'm irresistible. So, she started writing to me. The townsfolk labelled me a crackpot because I fought for the animals. Hunters and poachers were slaughtering innocent living beings for nothing more than the horrendous sport of it. They'd set up feeding stations and sit in their pulpits and kill them. It was like inviting someone to dinner and murdering them.

**REPORTER**

This book is a murder mystery, chock-full of mind-blowing twists. Are you happy with your character + tell me a little about the murders?

## DUSZEJKO

The town is diseased, corrupt, patriarchal. Big Foot was an act of revenge manifested by the animal he slaughtered and choked on its bones. There are three more murders: the Police Commandant, a Fox Farmer, and the Town Pastor. Each of them was complicit in the torturous deaths of animals + perhaps my dogs. This novel explores the possibility of animals seeking revenge. As for my character, I'm ecstatic. I may have been written as a crackpot old dame, but in reality, layer after layer of depth is added to who I am, and I must say, I turned out delightful with unbending fortitude. My role is to clean out evil. Along the way, I encounter a litter of colourful characters. If I say so myself, I'm sort of an old crackpot superhero. Revenge comes with an animalistic twist.

## REPORTER

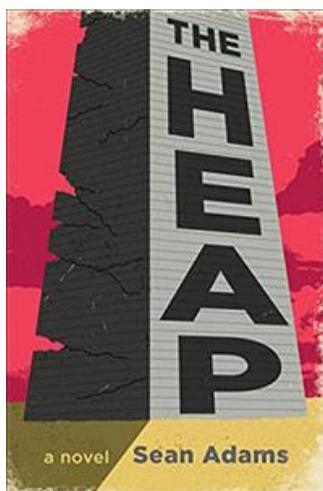
Thanks for your time.

**"Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead."**

What happens when animals seek revenge with the help of a determined, quirky, often hilarious, loveable, and vengeful crackpot?

## THE HEAP

SEAN ADAMS



*A profound look into the loneliness often consuming each of us.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

A massive tower, nearly five hundred stories tall, a city within, collapses – a heap of rubble remains.

A digging team looks for survivors.

A radio station broadcasts from inside the wreckage.

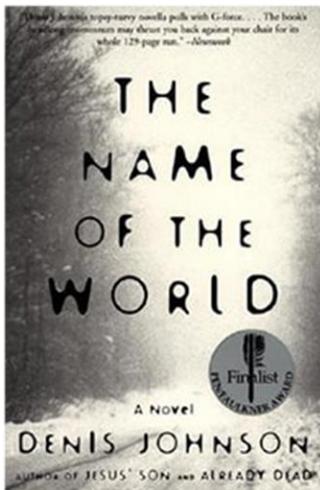
On the dig team is the brother of the broadcaster. They connect. Their connection becomes a voyeuristically visceral smash hit. One catch is they aren't emotionally close and awkwardly use their link to develop a relationship. Is it possible?

Mix in the developer's greed + the disparity between the *haves* and *have nots* who lived inside the mega-tower. Toss in corruption + a need to bombard the world with 24/7 marketing of product after product – and what do you have?

Adams left you with an exciting romp delving deeply into the ills of society today + a profound look into the loneliness often consuming each of us as we meander through a world bursting with scorn.

That's how this book made me feel.

**WRITTEN: September 15, 2020**



## THE NAME OF THE WORLD

DENIS JOHNSON

*Pain emanates from every page.*

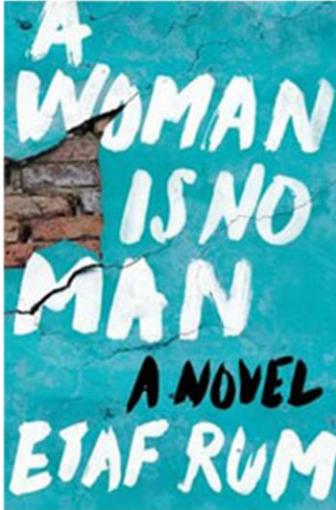
*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Denis Johnson's writing has a way to pull you in, embrace you – with each word orchestrated in luminous poetic harmony with pain emanating from every page. Johnson finds solace in the anguish of living – misery only a few can escape.

I don't want his world to be accurate. It isn't. But in a gloriously decadently dark rapture, it might be?

## A WOMAN IS NO MAN

ETAFA RUM



*Until the shackles of shame are removed, we are all complicit in the oppression of women.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

BREATHLESS. MOVED.

**A WOMAN IS NO MAN** is a powerful work of “fiction” deserving of mandatory reading by every man and woman. It is a formidable look at a vile, and diseased part of a culture often disparaged for political gain and racist superiority.

The writing is exquisite, gripping, heart-rending. I often squirmed reading about the stereotyping the Arab culture as monstrously sick, almost less-than-human, evil, less than worthy of understanding.

**Then:** A strange thing happened as the pages slipped by; I understood the plight of women is often debilitating, limiting, controlled, regardless of ethnicity.

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As a white man, it is easy to be coerced into the trap of perceived superiority |I’m not| by drinking a Kool-Aid laced with fear and misunderstanding—often for political gain. No Caucasian can grasp what it is to be anything other than white—we often fall victim to thinking we are immune to oppression. We are often sold that white is a birthright to be revered, and we cannot see the disgusting acts portrayed within the pages. We are. And we do.

Being white limits my understanding, but it doesn’t limit my desire to learn from others’ words. Another page and I retreated from my belief all Arabs are misogynistic terrorists.

*“Heaven lies under a mother’s feet.”*

Etaf, by sharing that powerful verse from the Qur’an, erased many of my misconceptions. I understand that a despicable sickness infesting part of the Arab culture needs to be eradicated. But it is not the whole. So, I thought of other books I’ve read. The subject of these books is heart-wrenching. The words shared highlight women continuously are forced to struggle for a sense of equality, to be taken as more than subservient, regardless of culture, from the beginning of time.

“EDUCATED” by Tara Westover sheds light on many of the atrocities in the Mormon world (white).

“KNOW MY NAME” by Chanel Miller encapsulated the struggles of being raped by a privileged white assaulter.

## PAUSE FOR A PERSONAL MOMENT

I was a secret baby, born in a secret place—the shame of community, religion, family. I was supposed to take a secret to my grave until I found out by accident the truth.

## WHAT THESE CAPTIVATING STORIES HAVE IN COMMON

A perceived shame created by unwell men’s needs fuels them. They share common threads.

They blast forth the realities of the illness of limiting opportunity for control.

They bring to the forefront the need to continually evolve and engage in dialogue to change the fact for the better.

The need for control is a plague. If we are honest with ourselves, sure, Western Culture may be ahead in exterminating the sickness.

107 *But really, are we?*

These truths have all occurred during my lifetime.

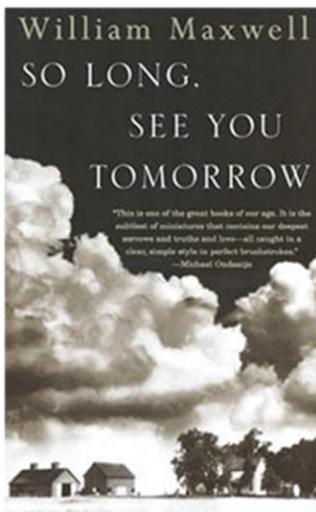
Each of us needs to look inward in order to change and make the world a kinder place.

As upsetting as **A WOMAN IS NO MAN** is, I am grateful Etaf Rum had the strength + courage to share her voice.

Until the shackles of shame are removed, we are all complicit in the oppression of women.

## SO LONG, SEE YOU TOMORROW

WILLIAM MAXWELL



*Heartache in the 1920s is no different than grief in 2020 ...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Two kids. One was privileged. One an outcast. An unlikely friendship. The outcast's father commits murder. The friendship + many lives are torn apart.

This radiant little book transported me to a time long before I walked on this earth and helped me realize humanity's challenges, regardless of the times, share similar threads. Heartache in the 1920s does not differ from grief in 2020.

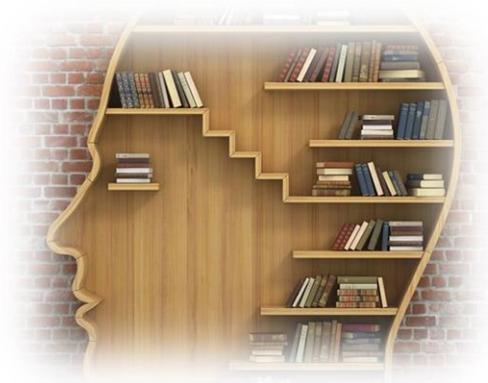
So Long, See You Tomorrow, tugged at my heartstrings and is filled with heartrending sorrow. One section and particular left me shattered: Maxwell writes part of the book from a dog's perspective after it turned its world upside down because of his best friend's loss.

Love + Friendship + Deception + A Quest for Understanding burst forth from every page.

That's how this book made me feel.

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 10



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1. **KNOW MY NAME - CHANEL MILLER**
2. **IS EVERYONE HANGING OUT WITHOUT ME? - MINDY KALING**
3. **UNCANNY VALLEY - ANNA WIENER**
4. **THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM - TOMMY TOMLINSON**
5. **WHY DID I EVER - MARY ROBINSON**
6. **TOIL & TROUBLE - AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS**
7. **THE WHISPER MAN - ALEX NORTH**
8. **FEASTING WILD - GINA RAE LA CERVA**
9. **IN PRAISE OF PATHS - TORBJØRN EKE LUND**
10. **GINGER BREAD - HELEN OYEYEMI**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

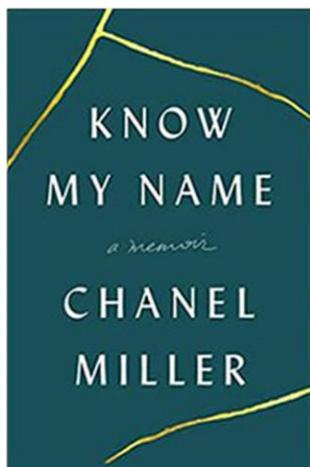
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

# KNOW MY NAME

CHANEL MILLER



*Every man is capable of sexual assault.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**KNOW MY NAME** is a deftly written, extraordinary book about becoming whole again after being sexually assaulted. Chanel Miller is a gifted writer, and as she so aptly put, she would have much rather have written about a different subject—however, this was the story she had been given. Fortunately for us, she survived and found the strength to dig deep within herself to shed light on how, as a society, we allow ourselves to live with our heads in the sand, making each of us culpable.

Every man is capable of sexual assault. A bold statement?

Yes.

As much as every man is capable, mercifully, the percentage who is gripped by the appalling illness is few. Most men evolve, whether through family or life lessons → develop a sense of right or wrong and know better than repulsively inflicting incurable damage upon another human being. That does not take the rest of us off the hook. Many of us look the other way, diminishing the lives of those assaulted even more. Perhaps we have a propensity to inflict more pain by questioning the victim's motivation because of conditioning. **NO VICTIM WANTED TO BE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED.**

And despicable society challenges them, screaming about the motivation of the victim.

**WE NEED TO KEEP EVOLVING.**

We need not give in to the shameful realities of the entitlement of the athletic world. I played at a high level, and though most teammates were upstanding individually, as a group, because of peer pressure, they behaved in a predatory manner.

## CHANEL MILLER IS A HERO

**KNOW MY NAME** should be mandatory reading in High School + University.

It should be a requirement for every coach + athlete to read and discuss. Any athlete who does not read should not be allowed to take part in sports.

It should be mandatory reading for any man accused of sexual assault.

It should be compulsory reading for any prisoner serving time for sexual assault – followed by writing their interpretation of what they digested. If their analysis does not meet specific guidelines – more time needs to be added to their sentence.

And in this time when dinosaurs are holding the highest offices in the land, speaking to a base of ignorance, we must thank Chanel for her fortitude to be strong enough to make her debilitating recovery mainstream.

**On a final note**, wouldn't the world be a better place if they held the parents of a sexual assaulter accountable for their inability to instill morals in their children, and as a result, faced jail time along with their revolting offspring?

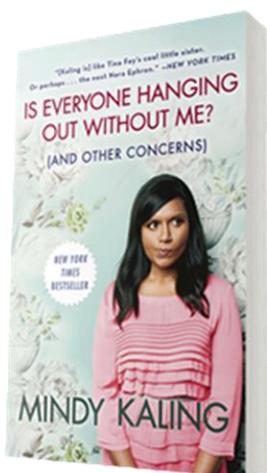
How could the mother of a sexual assaulter stand behind their child?

Is it not time for all men to stop being relics and evolve?

WRITTEN: April 17, 2020

## IS EVERYONE HANGING OUT WITHOUT ME?

MINDY CALLING



*It's like a stroll with a new friend!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Goopy. Warm.

Knock + Knock + Knock

“Hello, Mindy, would you like to go for a walk?”

How fast do I read 220-pages of a conversation with a new friend?  
= 4 hours.

That's what IS EVERYONE HANGING OUT WITHOUT ME IS? – like – a walk with a new friend.

I was just in Chapters; this book was in the BEST BOOKS of the decade section. Wow! Lofty.

Mindy and I walked a block together. I fell down laughing. Another block and the mirth continued with a nuanced dose of the reality of growing up brown and female in America. I couldn't stop reading. Literally. One sitting. Sure, the content is easily digestible, but there is something in her stream-of-consciousness style like no other.

I need more words for guffaw - chortle – cackle – hoot; whoop – honk; howl – snicker – not giggle because I'm an adult; thanks, Mindy, for splitting my side.

Let's stop by B. J. Novak's house to see if he'd like to join us. He does.

Flip a coin. What book made me laugh more, Novak's - **ONE MORE THING** or **IS EVERYONE HANGING OUT WITHOUT ME IS?**

What's that, Mindy?

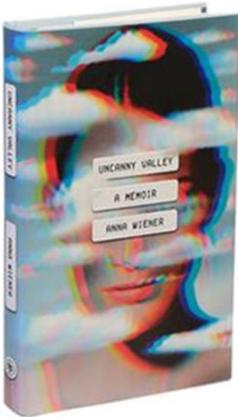
These thoughts are about your book, not B.J.'s – you want him to leave.

I come to the end of your book and find several references to a BlackBerry – I fell in hilarity once more.

**WRITTEN: March 18, 2020**

# UNCANNY VALLEY

ANNA WIENER



*We have willfully agreed to announce how lonely we are.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

DISTRAUGHT - OVERWHELMED - OBSOLETE

**UNCANNY VALLEY** is a voyeuristic look into the male-dominated Gold Rush of Silicon Valley from a woman on the inside. I found the world of technology revealed within to be parasitic. I couldn't help thinking the valley was nothing more than a cult populated by people years away from maturity.

They dangle a carrot. The brightest young talent chases it. And then, they are used up to quench the thirst of a cadre of primarily introverted, morally insipid visionaries. Who under the guise of

bringing us together — use — and then discard the youthful talent, because a new class of dreamers is graduating. Many of the visionaries disgustingly become billionaires. Not because of genius. But because of our collective addiction to the screen. And because most of us have willfully agreed upon announcing to the world how lonely and disconnected we are.

*“There was no moral structure in which the vast accumulation of wealth should be acceptable.”*

**UNCANNY VALLEY** is an arousing must-read. I don't think many of us can afford the world the valley is creating. A world where technology sees us as nothing more than data cultivated to sell power to the companies needing us to consume.

After reading, I wanted to shut off my computer.

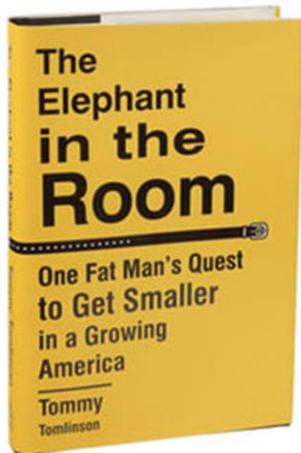
I didn't.

I'm too lonely to find the strength.

WRITTEN: April 6, 2020

# THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

TOMMY TOMLINSON



*Tommy Tomlinson tackled his demons head-on while sharing ...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

REFLECTIVE

**THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM** is not a diet book.

It is a gripping tale about a man's life and his ongoing struggle to be the best person he can become, like the rest of us.

Tommy Tomlinson weighed 460 pounds. His girth was a slow burn, starting from the day he was born – when, once again, like the rest of us, food symbolized love. I learned from reading this book this love of food may be tenfold in the south.

What I loved about this book is Tommy's willingness to humanize his struggles. To admit to the colossal lies he's told himself his whole life. I am not struggling with a weight like the daunting obstacles Tommy faced – but I can definitely relate to the addiction to fast food and the lie of telling myself, "Today will be the last day I eat it," only to be in the drive-through line the next day.

"As a people, we are getting too big for our britches → companies that supply furniture to schools are having to sell big-and-tall desks because kids can't fit into the regular ones anymore."

**THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM** personalizes the struggle to be healthy and whole every day. It shares how restrictive the demons: fat, sugar, and fat impact daily life. A boxer has an opponent. For those who struggle with food – we face an even more unrelenting, constraining opponent. One that leads to lying to oneself and to those you love.

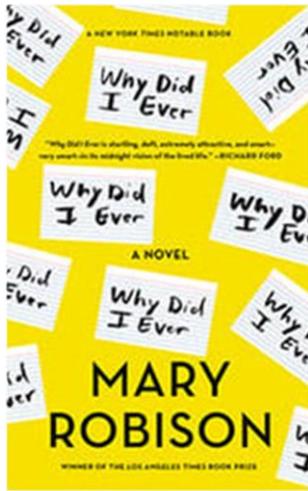
Tommy Tomlinson tackled his demons head-on while sharing who he is and wants to be in one of the most challenging years of his life – and in doing so, during one passage, brought tears to my eyes.

If you don't think we lie to ourselves about how the relentlessness of mass-marketed food makes us feel – \$19-trillion has been spent on weight loss programs in the USA this year (as of 1 PM Eastern Time, April 20).

WRITTEN: April 10, 2020

# WHY DID I EVER

MARY ROBISON



*A brilliantly, weird, highly original romp into absurdity ...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

CONFUSED

What the heck did I just read? Am I now part of some literary cult?

I enjoyed this book—I think—I think I'm supposed to.

I laughed as many times as I went, huh?

I never got lost on the pages.

Mary Robison's every word tickled my sense of sanity.

This is a brilliantly weird, highly original romp into absurdity —

I know.

I think Mary Robison got together with the ghosts of Kafka + Hunter S. Thompson and partied while they watched her drop thoughts from her mind onto the page — in a fashion similar to dropping acid.

I pondered tossing this book into my read pile without sharing my thoughts, but then one passage elevated it to delightful!

"I was playing with the cat—throwing things, and she'd chase after them—and by mistake, whomped her with a walnut.

I've gotten onto my knees to apologize. I say, "I'll buy you anything you want. Or I could take you someplace. Would you like to listen to music?"

I'll probably stop laughing in about a week.

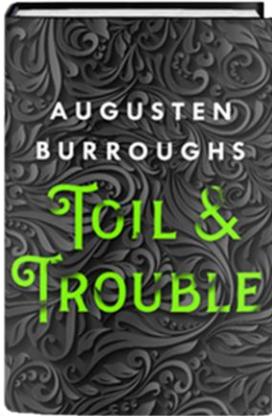
I may reread this book.

I will invite the ghosts of Kafka + Hunter S. Thompson over to party with me, and they can read it out loud to me.

That is how WHY DID I EVER made me feel ...

## TOIL & TROUBLE

AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS



*... as much as this book is hilarious, you can feel him glow in ...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Augusten Burroughs is a witch, of course, he is.

**TOIL & TROUBLE** is a dazzling cornucopia of riveting stories, dropping us deeper into the magick life of one of the greatest + freshest storytellers of our time. Augusten takes us on a lockstep journey through a devilishly rich life sprinkled with absurdities.

Augusten Burroughs is a witch. Why not?

There is no reason to doubt. There is reason to embrace what we do not know or understand. This memoir reads like a life-quilt complete with the laugh-out-loud bizarreness emanating from a life far outside the norm – that while reading, I became drunk in the visceral joy of tripping into the spells of his sumptuous realities.

*“Scars are nothing to hate. They are nothing to deny. They serve as our proof of what we’ve survived, and there is nothing more beautiful than to have survived something.”*

A flip of a page and Augusten’s love blasts through in resplendent beauty.

My heart warms when his deep love for his husband Christopher is layered into his sanity. Augusten lays himself vulnerable, and as much as this book is hilarious, you can feel him glow in the openness of allowing himself to share profound love.

I thank him for this. I also thank him for expressing the relatable necessity of saying goodbye to his long-since-gone mother, something many of us struggle with doing.

Thank you, Augusten.

**WRITTEN: April 27, 2020**

# THE WHISPER MAN

ALEX NORTH



*Upsetting. Unsettling. Ruffling to the core.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

After I broke through 50 pages, I became locked in—pages flipped, I’m not sure I turned them. The Whisper Man started uttering directly to me. I shook. Evil began tugging at my soul—stretching my strings—breaking me.

“The Whisper Man” is a horrifyingly unsettling, gripping look in the darkness resting in far too many of us. It is a macabre page-turner—the prose, intoxicating, beautiful, eloquent, real, maddening. Page after page, my spirit sank. Reading about the evils of the deranged is burdensome. People are broken—people are ill—people are who they are; for some, their damages are insurmountable, there is no redemption. The Whisper Man is a literary gem, but—

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— as much as the subject is unsettling, I can’t imagine the dark places Alex North had to have gone to create this disturbing work. But, as much as I loved this book, I can’t believe in good conscience, say I enjoyed it.

## A PERSONAL NOTE

1975–Social Studies Class (High School - Saskatoon)

The teacher asked us to show the class that it had incredible emotional value + meaning. I bought a baseball.

My classmate (female) brought a picture of a young girl.

I made a joke about how goofy the picture was. My classmate started crying. I asked her who the photo was of—

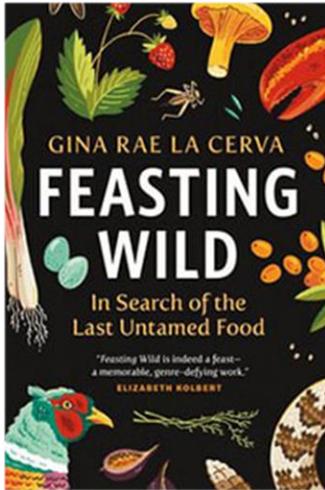
“My youngest sister, one of the five children abducted and murdered by \_\_\_\_\_.”

I cried.

WRITTEN: May 12, 2020

## FEASTING WILD

### GINA RAE LA CERVA



*A troubling, captivating read about mankind eating everything in Earth's pantry.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

TROUBLED. CAPTIVATED. BREATHLESS.

**Feasting Wild** troubled me.

It is an eloquently written story about the history of humanity through the consumption of food.

It is a love story.

It is a beautiful, evocative, eye-opening, thought-provoking, genre-changing gem.

As much as **Feasting Wild** is about food, it's not. It deftly delves into societal issues plaguing society today—basically, the disease of ism: Racism + Capitalism. The prose sings in perfect harmony. "Athena's voice is husky and scratched by cigarettes."

The book delves deeply into the evolution of humanity, from hunter-gather to consumer, from how a food source jumps from peasant food needed to survival to scarcity, and often extinct when the wealthy members of society determine it to be a delicacy.

As I turned the pages, my appetite shrunk. I realized humanity is parasitic. But, unlike the unsuspecting creatures that are forced into extinction because they consume everything they need for survival, man consuming everything in his path devastates their habitats, resulting in destroyed ecological environs and altering the destiny of all living beings until...?

The difference between man and beast is beast acts instinctively. Whereas a man can see the destruction he's creating, since our lifespans are minute, we kind of don't care. But, oh yeah, and we created weapons, and to the animal world, they are weapons of mass destruction.

**Feasting Wild** troubled me because it made me aware that we are desperately flawed despite all the brilliance of humanity. The consumptive model of capitalism has no brakes and is flailing its way down a steep grade. The end of the race is likely to be bleak.

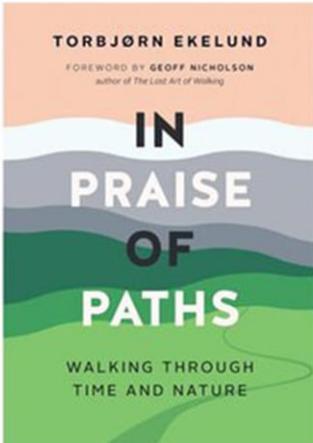
Thankfully, Gina Rae La Cerva found the strength to paint a beautiful tapestry of love into her journey, showering readers with love's unconditional tenderness.

*I loved this book.*

**Feasting Wild** delivered me to a place where I devoured a tiny morsel about a subject I knew little about—I may have intuitively understood the topic at hand, but because my head was in the sand, I, like the rest of us, might live in denial.

# IN PRAISE OF PATHS

TORBJØRN EKELUND



*We can never walk the same path twice; nothing remains the same.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The timing of this book arriving at my door could not be better. COVID-19 has almost shut down the world and will change the path of humanity.

They have laid me off – a 15-year career, all for...?

I'm scared.

Are you?

A bout' of uncertainty laced with sadness kicked in – WTF is next?

My sadness manifested itself in a lack of movement. One day, I walked nine steps.

I burst out of sadness and moved. I also broke out of sorrow because I got fat. SO. We walked city paths and sidewalks excessively with my friend Jay. Some days, 20 miles. We tracked our distance and virtually walked from Vancouver to Saskatoon and back, 2,000 miles.

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We walked and walked and walked and are still walking.

Amazing things began happening; my mind cleared, + fat melted away. I meditated. I became less scared of the future regardless of what destiny might have in store for me, us, the world?

By coincidence, "**In Praise of Paths**" landed at my door during this journey of discovery. It is an informative read, filled with delightful mind-bending insights on what happens when you walk into the past and then back to the present. It adroitly examines a spiritual awakening for many who embark on a journey into their souls and how we are destined to become who we are.

There was one thing in this compelling read that bothered me. A passage I feel has no place in society.

*"When you walk, you don't need spandex pants or a headband or one of those strange upper-arm configurations that joggers often wear as if it were a defibrillator or pepper spray, and they were running through Baltimore's most dangerous alleyways."*

I was reading "In Praise of Paths," I was reading "White Fragility." I paused. Why would an author who's walking paths in Norway mention Baltimore?

"**In Praise of Paths**" is an evocative trek to the abundant benefits of moving forward while reflecting on where we once were.

We can never walk the same path twice; nothing remains the same.

## GINGER BREAD

HELEN OYEYEMI



*I felt lost, angry, confused.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

### LOST

At the 175-page mark, I felt lost, angry, confused. I despise the word stupid – I’m confident I’m not. I felt like I was trapped inside a dream while reading. That dream took me back to an Economics course in University where I had to cram for an exam – I kept reading page after page of the textbook, but nothing was registering – as soon as I finished a page, what I had read vanished from my mind. The difference between **GINGER BREAD** and my Economics textbook is I had to reread the textbook because my grade depended upon

understanding – I can’t say that for **GINGER BREAD**.

I passed my Economics class. If someone were to ask me what **GINGER BREAD** is about – I don’t have a clue.

Maybe I am daft. **GINGER BREAD** made me feel the opposite of connected – detached?

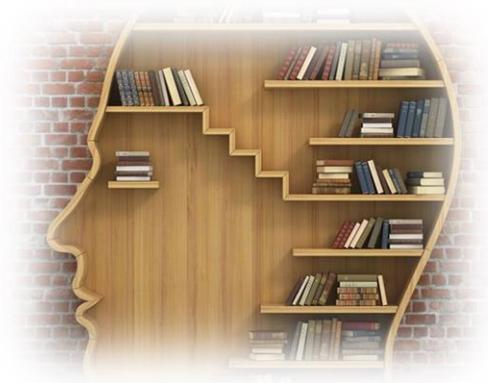
Maybe I am daft. I don’t like feeling that way. I think I may give up reading – anything.

I did not enjoy writing my thoughts on this book.

**WRITTEN: April 1, 2020**

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 9



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1. **CONSIDER THIS - CHUCK PALAHNIUK**
2. **GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS - MAX PORTER**
3. **WHAT IS MISSING - MICHAEL FRANK**
4. **ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS - OCEAN VUONG**
5. **LANNY - MAX PORTER**
6. **THE HOLY BIBLE - COMMISSIONED STORYTELLERS**
7. **SADIE - COURTNEY SUMMERS**
8. **WHITE FRAGILITY - ROBIN DIANGELO**
9. **STILL - EMMA HANSEN**
10. **STRENGTH IN MEDITATION - BOB ROTH**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

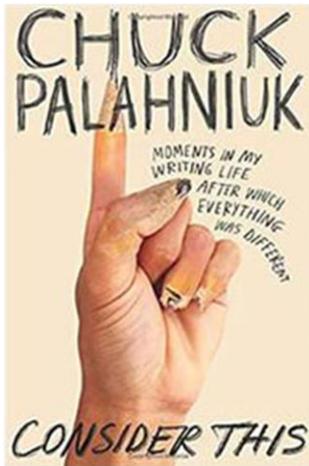
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

## CONSIDER THIS

CHUCK PALAHNIUK



*Informative + Deftly Entertained!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

INFORMED + DEFTLY ENTERTAINED!

**CONSIDER THIS**—I picked it up while practicing Social Distancing at my local Chapters.

The cover sucked me in + disturbed me—I did not know what the book was about—I cracked it open.

“Hey, Jay, look at this. This is certainly weird. The book’s pages are upside down and work from back to front. Neat.”

Yes, neat.

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Someone had turned the jacket around.

Jay laughed.

I DOVE IN when I got home, not knowing what to expect.

I never read the book blurbs before reading.

I like to be surprised.

And, **CONSIDER THIS**, did precisely that.

The book is an essential bible for anyone who writes. PERIOD. Wow, it is chock-full of sage advice on how to... write... not write... craft a story!

I came to a window—I looked in—Mr. |Paula—nick| was handing a giant penguin a man in a flashy jacket. I’m intrigued.

**CONSIDER THIS** effortlessly bounces between a literary master class to a visceral look into the author’s life. The stories within are exquisite, grotesque, always illuminating.

This book is another word for gem—a precious intoxicating liquified nugget.

**WRITTEN: March 26, 2020**

## GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

MAX PORTER



*Breathtaking.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

BREATHLESS

Every word washed over me like a tsunami.

I lost my mother.

I lost my father.

I lost my mother for a second time.

I cannot find my father.

After consuming the last word of GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS, I shook, wiped away my tears, embraced my laughter, and was rendered speechless.

My friend Jay glanced my way; all I could muster was WOW.

There is nothing like this. I gasped.

I feel less alone.

Fright became swaddled in comfort.

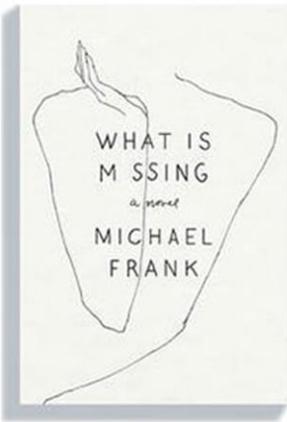
GRIEF IS A THING WITH FEATHERS scorched my every emotion, leaving me warm and hopeful!

*"...the fact that their two smells became one smell, our smell. Us."*

WRITTEN: MARCH 19, 2020

## WHAT IS MISSING

MICHAEL FRANK



*A harrowing journey of discovery.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

DISTRAUGHT

I found **WHAT IS MISSING** to be a harrowing journey of discovery for members of several families blessed with privilege. I wouldn't say I liked a single character in this book. Instead, I found them to be self-absorbed to a fault + repulsive.

The book paints privilege with the disgusting brush of reality that they believe they can get whatever the wealthy want, regardless of the outcome. The characters are ego-driven as opposed to altruistic. Instead, they create their own world of

disarray by suppressing the truth and believing they can justify their actions by feigning words of love and connection when all hell breaks loose, and their selfish actions rip apart the souls of the children trapped in their wake.

The ending twists and turns through turmoil and will leave you with mouth agape.

**WHAT IS MISSING** takes us on a journey most of us would never be capable of living and a life none of us would ever want.

**WRITTEN: March 17, 2020**

# ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS

OCEAN VUONG



*It's a love story. It's a tragedy. It's gorgeous. I cried.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The book obliterated me.

Raw + Visceral + Exhilarating + Unflinching + Real

*"Because something in him knew she'd be there. That she was waiting. Because that's what mothers do. They Wait. They stand still until their children belong somewhere else."*

Little Dog cobbles together a letter to his illiterate mother, who survived the Vietnam war.

Her life is littered with challenges, poverty, and oppression.

Little Dog needs her to know who he is, and the pages drift from horrific to understanding to sadness to acceptance.

*"Because freedom, I am told, is nothing but the distance between hunter and prey."*

Little Dog, although he's writing a love letter to his mother, he's also writing a letter to all of us → to the Universe.

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He needs to tell us who he is + who we have become.

He needs to let us know the 'American Dream' is fractured → unfair.

He needs to tell us about the immigrant's plight.

The book is visceral, scrutinizing the centuries-long head-start of privilege. It is a story about America's corporate fed path to addiction ravaging those struggling to climb, to fit in, to belong.

*"I did not know then what I know now: to be an American boy, and then an American boy with a gun, is to move from one end of a cage to another."*

**ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS** is a gut-punching tale about the realities of being different and the burning desire to be whole. It is a story about the fears of coming out.

*"Sometimes, being offered tenderness feels like the very proof that you've been ruined."*

**ON EARTH, WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS**, shredded my perceptions, dropping me into the tremulous embrace of understanding – it is one of the best books I've read.

It's a love story.

It's a tragedy.

It's gorgeous.

I cried.

*"It's not fair that the word laughter is trapped inside slaughter."*

**LANNY**  
**MAX PORTER**



*Can anyone possibly survive + find themselves in a place where they don't belong?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**SPLAT**

I threw LANNY across the room. It slammed into the kitchen island and fell to the floor – resting in a shoebox. The lid on the box rattled off the counter and floated down to the box, closing LANNY inside.

My friend Jay barked, “Why did you do that?”

**CAPTIVATELY FRUSTRATED**

I read the last one-hundred-forty-three pages in a single sitting. Never once-rising. Page-after-page of being engrossed as Max Porter set his own definition of storytelling. Dead Man Tothwort's, dead man thoughts scrambled, often nonsensical, floated past me, difficult to disseminate. He's a dead man, after all.

The town is picturesque. Dark. Insular. Can newcomers ever truly be accepted?

Lanny goes missing – I cheer for him to be found.

Lanny's Mum wanted a place to raise her gifted + challenged son where he could wander freely, lessening her burden.

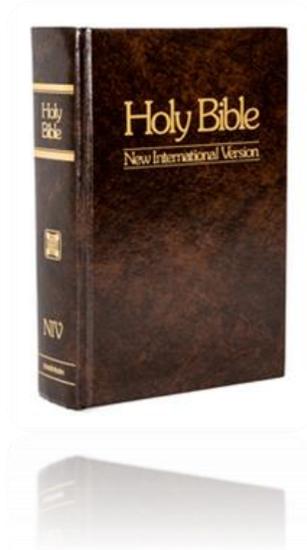
Lanny's Dad, perhaps, wanted his gifted + challenged son to be out of the site of judgement – loving him, optional.

While LANNY lay entombed in the shoebox on my kitchen floor, I pondered: Can anyone possibly survive + find themselves in a place where they don't belong?

**WRITTEN: March 23, 2020**

HOLY BIBLE  
HOLY BIBLE

COMMISSIONED STORYTELLERS



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*A bunch of stories. Some gory. Most unbelievable. Supposedly teaching us something?*

***How did the book make me feel/think?***

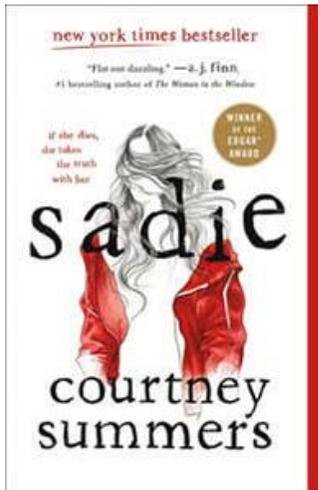
My lifetime of thoughts sprinkled somewhere in a designated section on my website.

Thank you, God, for creating the internet!

***Please keep me from burning** ↓↓↓*

# SADIE

COURTNEY SUMMERS



... a grippingly harrowing page-turner ...

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**SADIE** is a grippingly harrowing page-turner about love, dysfunction, predators, the quest for ravenous revenge, + deconstructing the illusiveness of closure. Its prose is breathtaking, eloquent, intoxicating.

Monsters lurk.

This work of fiction teeters precariously close to reality. To where Sadie, damaged to the core—children from broken homes often become broken themselves—when the punishment she must endure is bruised, smashed, cut, punched, punched

while trying to make proper a lifetime of wrongs both physically and inside of her being. I felt every tumult as if it had been inflicted directly on me.

I cheer for Sadie, lament for Sadie, and want her to escape; I want her to survive.

Courtney Summers drops the storyline like a DJ lays down a haunting bass-line—bringing the reader to a crescendo and then smashing them back to reality. Spent. Broken. Thirsting for another page—to help Sadie wake from the damage of never genuinely being given a chance to thrive.

Sadie scares me. I worry about Courtney. How could she possibly find the darkness to write such a compelling look into the horrific world of monsters and predators, so damaged by disease they prey and search for vulnerability to satisfy their vileness?

I don't want to believe these evils exist.

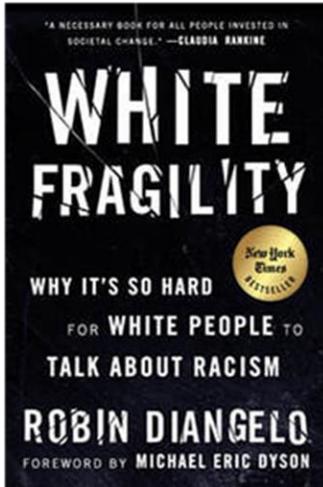
**SADIE** is a masterful work of fiction waking us to the reality we must look out for those of us on the fringes, and if something or someone seems out of place, it likely is—we must look out for each other.

For the last half of **SADIE**, you wouldn't have been able to pry it from my grip. Instead, it flowed effortlessly to where I felt my reading speed and ability increase with my thirst for the next page, and in the end... Sadie lingers in my soul.

WRITTEN: May 2, 2020

# WHITE FRAGILITY

## ROBIN DIANGELO



RACISM: "A system of advantage based on race."

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

REFLECTIVE. AWARE.

I was born in the western world in insular, predominately white, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

That translated to being born into White Supremacy + being addled by a biased, racially prejudiced worldview. It is not something I was an active participant in, but every white person, in at least the western world, is unwittingly subjected to racist tropes from Day 1. White people predominately control the media + movies, + books. And because of the

narrow-minded presentation of life, we can't escape it. But, if you disagree, you are not truthful. Growing up, we shared horrific jokes about cultures we've never had interactions with, just because — thinking we were hilarious — we weren't.

I do not know a single white person who is not racist, including myself.

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*But why change?*

White Supremacy comes with significant benefits for you if you are white. Part of becoming an antiracist is admitting this.

Before I go on, I'd like to clarify that we have a responsibility to change.

We have a responsibility to become recovering racists.

**WHITE FRAGILITY** is a compelling read, offering a path to recovery.

WHITE PEOPLE  
WHITE PEOPLE

**STOP BEING DEFENSIVE ABOUT WHO YOU ARE. CHANGE.**

How?

Be active.

When a friend says to you, "Some racist jokes are best told only to a certain audience."

Let your friend know there is no such thing as a racist joke.

When reading a book about walking paths in Norway, the author writes:

"When you walk, you don't need spandex pants or a headband or one of those strange upper-arm configurations that joggers often wear as if it were a defibrillator or pepper

spray, and they were running through Baltimore's most dangerous alleyways."

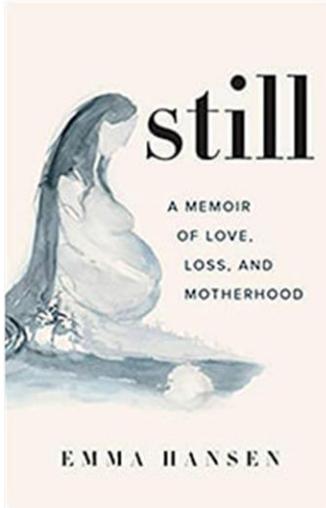
Pay attention, and ask, what was the point of that passage? If you are honest with yourself, you will realize we all play a role, and the only way we move forward is by precisely that. Paying attention, and every chance you get, don't allow racism to fester.

My recovery is a lifelong ordeal, but I help make the world a better place every time I speak up.

That is how this book made me feel.

# STILL

EMMA HANSEN



*Evocative + Emotionally-Laden. A must-read for men.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

On December 12, 1987, my mother died. She had been ill for two years. One week before she died, it tasked me with driving her to the hospital. On the steps of our house this bone-chilling night in Saskatoon, with tear-stained eyes, she said to me, "I'm never going to be home again, am I?" I lied to her.

In 2003, I discovered by accident (long story) she was not my birth mother; The news sent me reeling.

In October 2016, I travelled to Calgary to meet my birth mother for the first time, alongside her deathbed. As I left the room + said goodbye, my mother uttered her last words to me, "I'm

never going to see you again, am I?"

I didn't have the strength to lie. Afterward, grief's assault was unrelenting.

No man could ever understand what it is like to carry a child?

In **STILL**, Emma Hansen lays bare in breathtaking, painful, heart-wrenching fashion, shining a bright light on the bond that forms with an unborn child (Reid + Everett).

Emma courageously shares her pain + inner-most thoughts in an evocative, emotionally laden way. Cracking the door wide open. Allowing us to share in her grief with us, hoping it arrives at a place where it is no longer all-consuming + turns from turmoil to a place of warmth because of the importance of never forgetting the things most vibrant to living an entire life.

**STILL** is an important book. It lets us all, and especially men, into a world foreign to us – giving us an understanding we are all connected.

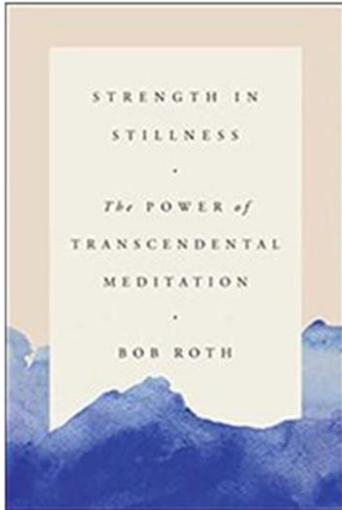
**STILL** helped ease some of the pain haunting me throughout life. When my mother returned to life, I believed I was an unwanted child, disposable. By reading **STILL** and seeing Emma + Aaron's enduring love for their lost child, I realize unwanted is not a thing. Finding comfort in understanding the unknowns of childbirth has helped ease my grief, and I cannot thank Emma enough for that.

Thank you, Emma, for having the strength to share your heart-wrenching, essentially vital story. We grow when we allow the beauty of vulnerability to seep into our hearts.

That is how **STILL** made me feel.

## STRENGTH IN STILLNESS

BOB ROTH



*Do you want to gain focus, sleep better, have a healthier heart, be kinder?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**STRENGTH IN STILLNESS** is a 200 + page endorsement (advertisement) on the magnificent benefits of Transcendental Meditation (TM) sprinkled with anecdotes of how TM has grounded many of the biggest stars and celebrities of the day. Bob Roth is a preeminent expert in the field, and he dedicated his life to encouraging the best out of people.

Do you want less stress in your life?

Do you want to be centred?

Do you want to gain focus, sleep better, have a healthier heart,

be kinder?

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YES, is my answer.

TM is not a cult or a religion – which the book helped me realize.

When I digested the last word – I have committed to adding TM to my life, I want to live a fuller life.

The endorsement worked!

Reading this during the COVID-19 Pandemic, I found it enlightening. As much as we are all amid the most horrifying event of the century – now might be the time to change, come out the other end whole and healthier.

**WRITTEN: April 13, 2020**

**HONESTY BREAK**  
HONESTY BREAK

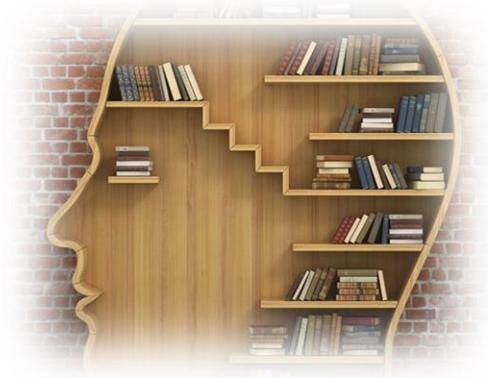
*This book is nothing more than a 200+ page advertisement to make Bob Roth money.*

*But don't all authors want to make money?*

*Sure, but it's grotesque when they do it under the shade of enlightenment.*

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 8 BATCH 8



1. **THE WHITE BOOK - HAN KANG**
2. **SOMEBODY WHO WILL LOVE YOU IN ALL YOUR DAMAGED GLORY - RAPHAEL BOB-WAKSBERG**
3. **GIRL - EDNA O'BRIEN**
4. **BECOMING - MICHELLE OBAMA**
5. **LOT - BRYAN WASHINGTON**
6. **BLACK IS THE BODY - EMILY BERNARD**
7. **SURVIVAL MATH - MITCHELL S. JACKSON**
8. **IF YOU DID WHAT I ASKED IN THE FIRST PLACE - LORI B. DUFF**
9. **STANGER IN THE HOUSE - CANDACE SAVAGE**
10. **A LITTLE LIFE - HANYA YANAGIHARA**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

## THE WHITE BOOK THE WHITE BOOK

### HAN KANG



*There is beauty in the pain of living.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Could this book really be about everything white?

I crack it open; I struggle to comprehend the words.

The imagery overwhelms me.

Every word has meaning, scratching my soul, opening my heart.

I open my mind.

A haunting event arises from the soul. A birth. Eyes barely open. Breathing stops. What does it mean? I feel pain + suffering in words; the words swallow me – break me. There is minimalism

in pain. Beauty grows out of pain; living lathers more questions upon life? Is this a poem, a memoir, both? I turn another page – every word fills life to the brim with meaning. Every word moves pain toward what's next. I understand the profound beauty of discovering.

I'm damaged; I've always been.

I turn a page.

I'm stricken with grief.

A single tear rolls over my cheek, breaks at my chin and floats toward tomorrow.

Throw my emotions into a blender. Crank it to puree. What comes out is the beauty of making sense of every word delivered in living.

The **White Book** may be the most breathtakingly, heart-wrenchingly transformative book I've read.

# SOMEONE WHO WILL LOVE YOU IN ALL YOUR DAMAGED GLORY

RAPHAEL BOB-WAKSBERG



*A tasty, profound look at nothing, dropping from a scattering mind.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

What I think happened here is Raphael Bob-Waksberg scooped a heaping helpful of his brain matter out with a mashed potato scoop. He tossed it into a blender filled with a deliciously nutritious mixture of fruits and supplements. He then threw in ice cream and ice—blended—and out poured a confusingly delectable mess.

Take a sip. OMG, brain freeze.

It's painful.

It's confusing.

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I couldn't stop laughing.

Another page and more freeze.

WTF am I reading?

Is it nothing?

Is it something profound?

I take another blast. I think what I'm reading might be so incredibly deep it fills the shallow recesses of my mind to the brim with either clarity or, in the opposite, confusion.

I loved this book. I think Raphael may be a tad off. But what good is on if you can't open your mind to the brilliance found in insanity?

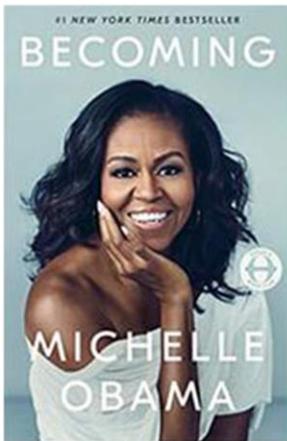
I do not know what any of my above thoughts on this book mean.

I am not even sure they are coherent.

Oh well, I loved this book.

## BECOMING

### MICHELLE OBAMA



*A wonderful look inside the inner workings of how to be!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

First off, I thoroughly enjoyed my trip through Michelle's life filled with challenges, desire, and hope. I found the story an uplifting look at normalcy and possibilities. I thank her for compellingly opening the door into her inner sanctum. Allowing readers to open their senses and almost touch, feel, and taste every aspect of living with the piercing public eye blasting on your every breath. The book truly is a look into the history of firsts.

That's where I'll stop with the platitudes. While scouring the pages, I couldn't help but think of where America is today? Which led to the following thoughts: With Barack Obama's grace, intelligence, honesty and caring, the world moved several steps forward. It felt as if hurdles over in joyful bounds.

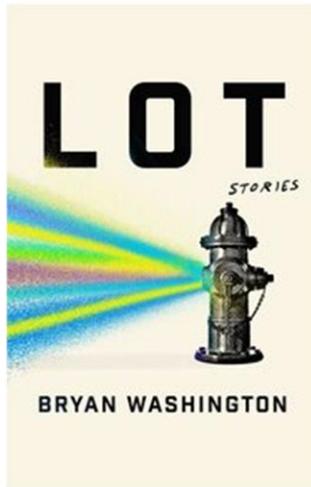
I know some have put on blinders. Or have allowed their inner evils to take the form of a delusional wish for something that never existed, have thrust hope and humanity ten steps backward.

I'm Canadian. I'm only stating that because I have no say in the politics of any other country. Reading *Becoming* made me long for a day where our leaders returned to wanting the best for everyone, not just themselves. I long for the circus to end and the world to heal. *Becoming* restored my belief in the likelihood of a better way happening once we remove toxicity from ruling our souls.

Thank you, Michelle, for becoming the fantastic beacon of hope you are!

# LOT

BRYAN WASHINGTON



*Mesmerized + Confused + LOST + Found + Warm.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Your cards have been dealt. You had no choice in the ones you received. You're Black, Latino, Blanco, Nicaraguan, Puerto Rican – of immigrant stock. Warehoused in the oppressive heat and humidity of Texas. Your family is diverse, a melting pot fuelled by the conditioning of a life filled with struggle.

You. Fight.

You. Survive.

You move on, but it trapped you inside, coming of age.

Your father is Latino.

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Your Mother is Black.

Your brother hates his existence.

Your sister is gone.

You discover you're gay.

**LOT** is an engrossing story of love and hate and survival and hope. It's a tender story about finding oneself, remaining whole, understanding obstacles, and blasting a harsh light on the realities of life for so many who were not cast in the pale of whiteness.

We're all damaged.

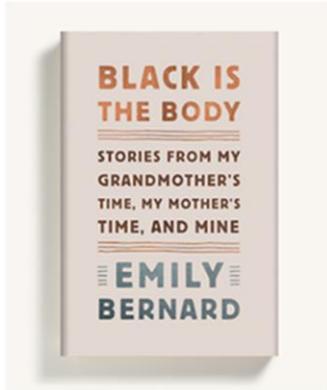
**LOT** tears the cover off, and the pains of belonging in unflinching clarity unravel a universal truth: "You bring yourself wherever you go. You are the one thing you can never run out on."

Thank you, Mr. Washington, for leading us closer to "of age."

I glance to my left. An animal is staring at me, steely-eyed, frothing – a Chupacabra! My heart skips a beat. The Chupacabra retreats into the bayou.

# BLACK IS THE BODY

EMILY BERNARD



*Every white person I know displays racist tendencies from time to time. This disturbs me. I'm white.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

“Somewhere between the clarity of his focus and the complexity of my father’s anxiety, perhaps, lies the difference between living white and living black in America.”

Every white person I know displays racist tendencies from time to time. This disturbs me. I'm white.

It could be something as ridiculous as stating, “The only people who are affected by the Coronavirus are yellow.”

When a friend said this, I emphasized it was disgusting and offensive. He thought it was no big deal. It is a big deal.

I've encountered people I know commenting on how indigenous people or black people need to get over the atrocities they've faced because “I didn't do it to them. How long do they need to whine? I've worked hard for everything I have.”

*You had an insurmountable head start. Bleep-hole.*

## OTHERS SCREAM

Others are racist toward us.

Bleeping, please, the worst thing I've ever been called is “Honky,” and I had to look up the meaning – and I still don't understand what the slur means. Racial slurs lose impact when you Google them before the offensiveness kicks in.

I once worked for a company based in Minnesota, and while chatting with a white co-worker about the South – his words were so vile; I won't type them here.

Movies + Television + Pop Culture + the Media have been conditioning us for a long time – this conditioning portrays all non-whites in dim light.

I called out someone on Facebook for extolling hateful rhetoric; he fired back; I must be ashamed of my skin.

I'm not too fond of the word 'woke. I equally detest 'us' whites overcompensating for our horrendous behaviour.

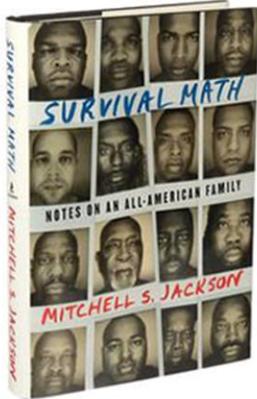
I encourage everyone to read **BLACK IS THE BODY**, especially 'us' whites. It may not change who you are, but it just might help you understand yours are not the only experiences that matter.

# SURVIVAL MATH

## MITCHELL S. JACKSON

*Raw, Visceral, Heart-wrenching, and Cringe-inducing ...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*



Grateful + Enlightened

Black Americans could not legally give blood until 1941 – and when they were, ginormous plasma corporations were happy to drain it for a pittance.

Survival Math is a riveting look into the bloodline of Mitchell S. Jackson’s family. It is not a story of woe. It is a story of what was – and for far too many, still is. It’s raw, visceral, heart-wrenching, and cringe-inducing.

I have been conditioned my entire life to think in specific ways. I resist the conditioning. Interesting reads like this help me eradicate narrow beliefs and help me realize they have littered my path with opportunity instead of oppression. I can give blood.

### 1990 San Francisco

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Kev, Pat, and I were visiting. At noon, we arrived at Candlestick Park.

I drove a convertible.

We went through a predominantly black neighbourhood.

The sun was beating down.

Churchgoers were emptying a church – donning their Sunday best.

Kev panicked, “Go, go, go, go, floor it.”

Pat asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Two guys. On the porch – They are staring – go. Floor it. OMG. There is a van behind us. GO!”

We arrived at a freeway; I was about to run a red light.

“Whew, we are okay. It’s a church van,” Kev calmed.

We’ve all heard tales of neighbourhoods the police “won’t” even go into.

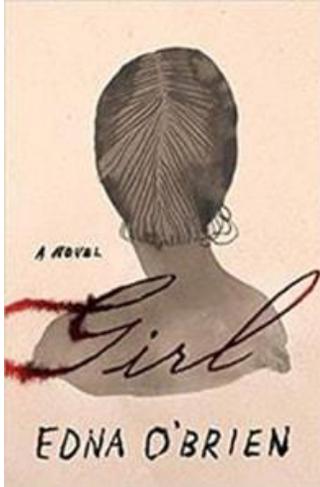
I can’t imagine what it’s like to go into predominately white neighbourhoods teeming with Starbucks and fear the police. It’s not part of my conditioning.

Our conditioning is based on oppression – keeping people down – on manipulating the easily manipulated (whites). And oppression conditioned those who weren’t allowed to give blood – by starving opportunities – into doing whatever was necessary to survive, even if survival resulted in a continuation of the oppression.

Thank you, Mitchell, for helping me grow.

# GIRL

EDNA O'BRIEN



*A breathtaking work of fiction that will open your eyes.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Upset. **GIRL** is (expletive) disgusting, yet, somehow, profoundly beautiful. I read a page. I cringed. I quivered. I know it's a work of fiction. But it's not. The world portrayed within its pages exists. I don't want it to. I want to be sheltered. How can a portion of humanity be so indoctrinated into seething revulsion? How can men be so delusional and propagandized to take part in subhuman behaviour and treatment of women to where they are scraping the depths of hell?

They gang rape.

They stone to death for infidelity.

They defile.

They are diseased.

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*"They were dressed variously, some in jeans, and T-shirts, others in baggy attire and still others with army jackets. As they ran past us, a few took us in, appraising our juiciness."*

This can't be real. Unfortunately, I think it is – I know it is. I'm troubled, angered. I want to eradicate these savages from existence. They are too damaged for there to be redemption. Their sickness is swarming the roots of their essence. How could any of them, who have been exposed, be cured?

I want to rescue those who've been trapped and thrust into this reality. It's fiction. But it's not. How can the women who've been subjected to this unrelenting torture not be as diseased as the men?

Their normal is lathered in toxicity.

Is there hope?

*"I start to scrape at the clay-like an animal scraping to get out. I will never get out. I am here forever. I am asking God to please give me no more dreams. Make me blank. Empty me of all that was."*

I can't stop reading. The prose is riveting.

I want to turn the page and find misery replaced with love.

I can't stop reading.

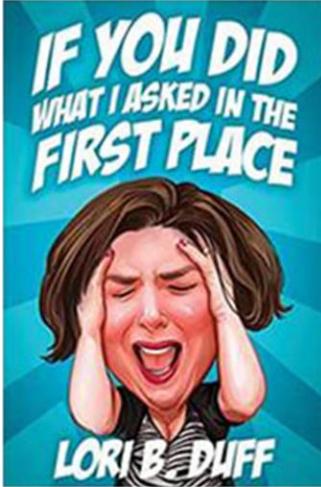
I wanted the ending to be anything but the only thing it could be.

**GIRL**, as unsettling as it is, is a breathtaking work of fiction that will open your eyes to the reason we all need to be grateful for the riches given to many of us. It's a stunning look into a horrific world existing for far too many. But as much as I was welling with rage and wanted to condemn and judge—I instinctively knew if we take that path, we risk being inflicted with a similar disease, curse—I want there to be a cure. I don't want anyone to endure the indoctrination, the sickness, the shunning, the vile hatred.

**GIRL** is must-read.

# IF YOU DID WHAT I ASKED IN THE FIRST PLACE

LORI B. DUFF



*Refreshing + Whimsical + Gelastic + Real!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Hello, I'm Jenny Lawson.

Pleased to meet you, Jenny. I'm Amy Schumer.

Hey, Jenny + Amy, I'm Melissa McCarthy. Do you want to go grab a drink and jam about life?

Wait for me, I'm B. J. Novak. Hey, what am I doing here?

Jenny + Amy + Melissa, + B.J. walks into a bar. They slam back several martinis and shots + rap about the absurdity that is life. It's time to go. Out walks Lori B. Duff. She's fresh. Tipsy. Slightly less dysfunctional than the four dazzlingly eclectic comedic minds that walked in (minds are incapable of walking). She belongs.

"If You Did What I Asked in the First Place" will have your insides in stitches as Lori B. Duff takes you on a highly intoxicating, hilarious journey through the madness of what being a reformed lawyer might entail.

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*Refreshing + Whimsical + Gelastic + Real!*

"If You Did..." is chock-full of pop culture references. If you are not paying attention, they might skirt past you—pay attention—if you do, you will be rewarded with a wispy bombardment of comedic twists and turns that will leave you wanting more.

I pause and plop myself down by the Christmas tree and tear the wrapping off one of my presents—wow—a Red Ryder BB gun!

Who doesn't hate small talk?

I agree with Lori's father, "When you are born, you are only allowed so many words—" — so I'll stop typing soon. I used—so—twice in the same sentence, shameful.

Lori forgot her handbag and stumbled back into the bar. Jenny + Amy + Melissa + B.J. all rise, greeting her with a round of applause, and they dive back into rapping without missing a beat!

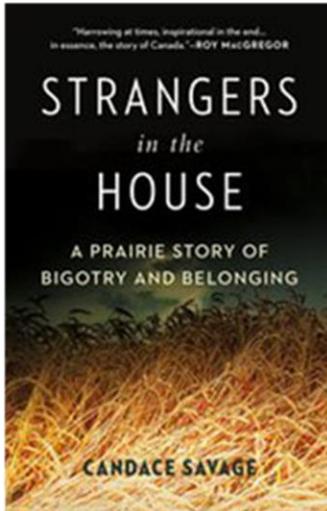
Flip the page, and I guarantee you'll relate, and without question: cackling, with what you are about to ingest!

When some people go to the store, they just go to the store. When Lori goes to the store, Lori goes with eyes wide open; she may trip and leave herself with an unsightly gash; she takes in the living's silliness and thankfully shares what she sees. With us!

I read a whack of books, "If You Did..." is definitively one of the most enjoyable books I've read!

## STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE

CANDACE SAVAGE



*A gripping story diving deep into the ills of societies...past (?)*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

QUEASY + ENLIGHTENED + GROTESQUELY APPALLED

I grew up in Saskatoon | spending my first 30 years there | I loved it, but I never thought much of its insularity until I moved away. Underneath its delightful façade sits darkness swept underneath thick shag carpeting.

**STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE** reads like a revealing DNA test on steroids where genetics are replaced by stripping the drywall and discovering the secrets within the bones of a house. The book is an interesting look at where we are as a society stacked up against where we've been. Disturbingly, the

distance between 'where' | and | 'are' razor-thin and dented with fragility.

Saskatoon is a wondrous place. Full of darkness. Full of light. It is a beacon. While reading *Strangers*, I became upset. It clouded my hometown with shame.

**STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE** exposes the grotesque disease that has afflicted many people with a sense of superiority. It sheds light on the reality that although humanity has come a long way in eradicating hatred and the sickness of xenophobia – the slope is slippery, and if we don't continue paying attention – society could quickly slip back into –

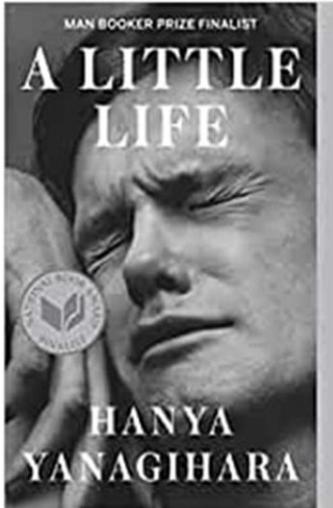
"With their strange dialects, their superstitions and gross ignorance and filth, we are supposed to build up the homogeneous {race} of intelligent, industrious, honest, clean, civilized people." Hiving the riffraff off in separate schools would just make the problem worse. The only solution was to ensure that every young person in the country passed through the refinement fix of a centrally controlled "national" school to emerge as a worthy citizen of the British Empire.

The preceding excerpt made me feel ill. The sickness is real. Assimilation = Invisibility.

**STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE** is a gripping story diving deep into society's ills. While ensuring we pay attention to all the phenomenal gains humanity has made, we don't shift with the foundation, causing us to taint the good that comes from uncovering the past.

## A LITTLE LIFE

### HANYA YANAGIHARA



*This is the first book I've read I loved and hated in the same sentence.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Destroyed – Disturbed - Upset - Angry

“A Little Life” is a beautiful, disturbing, awful book about the mess of living.

Four college roommates traipse through life, achieving a modicum of success. Each one needs something to hold on to in their efforts to chase completeness. Like me, like you, they are damaged, broken, flawed. They are needy, smothering one another with a craving to belong. Their families + pasts peck at their cores, restricting them from ever being genuinely vulnerable. They love each other unconditionally (?) an

overused term – “A Little Life” blasts a powerful light on the absurdity of the word.

The main character, Jude, is flawed, to the core, by his impossible past + the equally impossible realities of his present.

“(Friendship...) It was feeling honoured by the privilege of getting to be present for another person’s most dismal moments and knowing that you could be dismal around him in return.”

Jude is the glue among his friends; his suffering is their place of comfort. His experiences are exceedingly horrendous, draped in secrecy – and unendurable to move past.

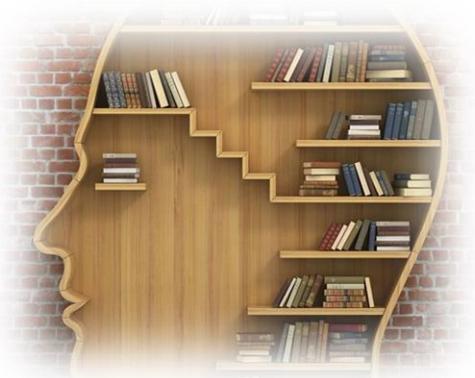
They can trap us all in an earth-shattering moment in life – an event never to be erased. No amount of unconditional love + friendship can ever heal the individual experience because every experience is the sole property of the person who’s had to endure it. Nobody can understand the full scope of someone else’s pain. The best we can do is listen, because in the silence of distress – they shout all we need to know out: loud and clear.

This is the first book I’ve read I loved and hated in the same sentence. I’ve read many people cried while reading it. I didn’t. I’ve read it destroyed some readers emotionally. It destroyed me as well. I wouldn’t say I liked the characters. They were too real, too damaged, too helpless. What destroyed me: I identified with Jude → in an emotionally charged way → by being trapped inside our most traumatic moments.

After I read the last word, a strange thing occurred: the book grew another 800 pages.

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 7 RVLCHA



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1. **BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT** - JOEL GOLBY
2. DAISY JONES + THE SIX - TAYLOR JENKINS REID
3. EVERY LITTLE SCRAP + WONDER - CARLA FUNK
4. LITTLE FIRES EVERYWHERE - CELESTE NG
5. LOGICAL FAMILY - ARMISTEAD MAUPIN
6. VERY NICE - MARY DERMANSKY
7. IF YOU SEE ME, DON'T SAY HI - NEEL PATEL
8. TRICK MIRROR - JIA TOLENTINO
9. IN THE DREAM HOUSE - CARMEN MARIA MACHADO
10. THINGS MY SON NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD - FREDRIK BACKMAN

BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

# BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT

JOEL GOLBY



*Joel's glaring humanity gracing the pages, made me cry.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I can't deny falling out of my seat, filled with laughter. Indubitably | Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant | had that sort of cathartic effect. (Last sentence—first time—I used indubitably; I didn't believe it to be a word—it is—indubitably).

"My dad's drinking injuries were always so extreme—the golf ball, the time he fell face-first down some train-station stops and shattered his nose and his camera, that time his liver failed, and he died—so I guess I got off lightly."

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Read the previous passage several times.

There is a section near the front of the book where Joel describes spreading his parent's ashes – salaciously, hilariously. The part caused my sides to ache, while the same time, tears began teeming in my eyes. I realized the laughter I was surely going to snort page-after-page was likely profoundly rooted in pain and suffering.

Joel is blessed with comic chops. His observational journey through living is littered with delectable morsels of weirdness. The littered pages scream in relatable absurdity: I gurned with British friends when I shared passages, + I read about sex robot brothels in Spain. While learning about the robots, I read Survival Math (by Mitchell Jackson). The particular section I was reading was about the history of pimping in black American culture—sorry about going off tangent—sex robots, pimping; white + black—we are light-years away from one another when it comes to experiences.

**Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant** isn't a brilliant must-read because of Joel's comedic acumen. It is brilliant because Joel's glaring humanity, gracing the pages, made me cry.

I need to sit down—thankfully, Joel invented sitting.

## DAISY JONES & THE SIX

TAYLOR JENKINS REID



*A Rock & Roll journey that will leave you spent at the end. In a good way!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I'm one-hundredth in line at the box office. I will score great seats; I'm excited, shaking!

I'm going to read Daisy Jones & The Six.

I've scored floor seats. Row 3.

The lights dim.

The bass-line pulses.

The drums boom.

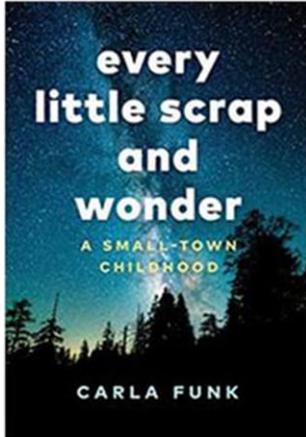
Billy's voice is achingly beautiful. Daisy's voice balances his out, leading them to perfection. There is anger in their story, passion, love. They invited me backstage + asked me to join them on tour. I flip through the gripping pages, learning what drives the band through the toxicity of rock & roll. Creativity is damaged. The words on the pages pulse much like the music. Survival depends upon addiction and sobriety at the same time.

DAISY JONES & THE SIX is a mesmerizing read. If you open your mind, it will capture your soul and take you on tour with all the love and damage that ensues. At the end of the journey, I need to check myself into rehab.

What a ride it was!

## EVERY LITTLE SCRAP AND WONDER

CARLA FUNK



*Loving, funny as hell, and a beautifully cobbled together gem!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Wonderous!

When I cracked open the book, I never thought I would fall in love with a book about a young Mennonite girl's experience growing up in a rural community in Northern British Columbia – but I did.

The writing is exquisite. The book reads like a stupendous poem that is much grander than any poem I've ever read – I have nothing against poetry – shooting it quickly, like a bladder ball being tossed around, to the top of my favourite list.

What's not to love?

Carla Funk's writing has instilled a desire to head to Vanderhoof and drink in the community where her story lived. And boy, girl, in this case, did it live.

**EVERY LITTLE SCRAP AND WONDER** stitches together a rich tapestry, dropping readers literally into Carla's young life, examining where she came from, swaddling together her Mennonite heritage in creating a lavish quilt. The quilt reminded her of everyone who's shared blood with her. The stories within, in poetic expertise, profoundly and hilariously touch on everyone she's shared blood, draped in the quilt's warmth. Somehow, Carla adroitly splices together a story of a family coming together for the annual butchering of pigs – amazingly, despite being grotesque to the max, it is fall-out-of-you-chair funny, ending in warm hearts and a bladder ball.

**EVERY LITTLE SCRAP AND WONDER** trips into family life, sharing the bond + competition of sibling rivalries. The book speaks volumes about what many of us experience growing up, highlighting all the love and dysfunction in a gloriously relatable fashion that will leave you wanting one more word.

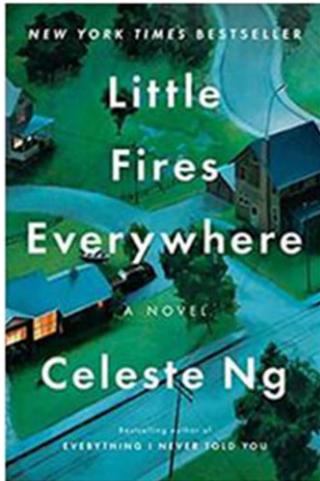
Did I say I love this book?

I love this book.

**EVERY LITTLE SCRAP AND WONDER** is gross, dirty, perhaps disgusting – but without question, it is loving, funny as hell, and a beautifully cobbled-together gem.

## LITTLE FIRES EVERYWHERE

CELESTE NG



*Perfection is a fallacy. Light comes from surprising sources.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

One-part perfect family living in a perfectly planned neighbourhood.

Four perfect children, albeit sheltered, dull, oppressed in the warm bath of entitlement.

Perfect Careers.

Perfect futures.

Better than the rest.

Well-adjusted.

Equipped with the privilege.

Immune to poor judgment.

Throw in a struggle in childbirth → instead of showering the child with comfort → the child is used as a whipping girl for all the boredom and marginality perfection has trapped the perfect family in. Incapable of realizing the last child born because of her not fitting the mould of perfection. Maybe the only light the perfect family can shine on the world.

### ADD

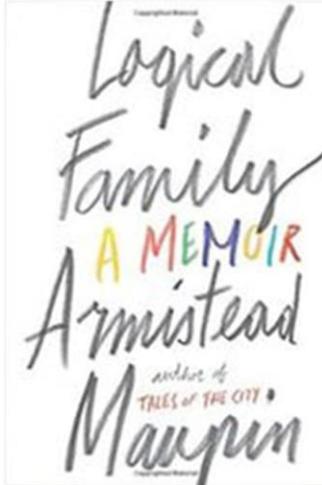
She is a struggling, artistic single mother and her fantastic child who desperately wants to fit in and belong. However, because of her mother's financial challenges creating a life of turmoil as never laying roots, she never does.

Finally, they find comfort in renting a home from the perfect family. With the mixing of perfection and struggle together, readers face wave after wave of confusion and deception as perfect desperately attempts to marginalize → struggle, to remain superior. Life rolls merrily along until a fire makes reality unavoidable.

**LITTLE FIRES EVERYWHERE** does a masterful job of highlighting: hope + happiness is never as they seem.

## LOGICAL FAMILY

### ARMISTEAD MAUPIN



And then, Rock Hudson shows up –

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

WARM  
MAESTRAT

At the beginning of **Logical Family** (Armistead was 5), a girl literally fell down as well, and Armistead wanted to craft her a comforting note.

“I’m sorry you fell down the well. Please don’t be sad. I hope they get you out soon.”

They didn’t. Thankfully, Armistead found the unbounded courage to climb his way out from the depths of his mire. And, fortunately for us, he did so delightfully exuberantly.

Most of us face struggles in our lives. If we don’t, we’re not paying attention. To be labelled, repulsed, and to have to live a lie to feel whole, to feel safe – the devastation inflicted is often insurmountable. Being a secret never to be told – crushing.

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“... I shiver with the memories of how it felt to sit there and listen to people tell the truth about their lives.”

We all need beacons to rise from up from the ashes of fear and hatred to let us know it’s okay to be whoever you are, no matter who that is – as long as who you are isn’t fuelled with misguided hatred and violence.

Armistead, in **Logical Family**, does just that. Raised by a staunch conservative, racist, homophobic father + a mother going along because of the times – Armistead tries to assimilate to be part of the family despite it picking away at the very essence of his core. Until he can’t take it anymore, he escapes and, with cutting honesty + devilishly comedic touches, weaves us on a journey of survival, love, and acceptance. The story is beautiful, riveting, and engrossing.

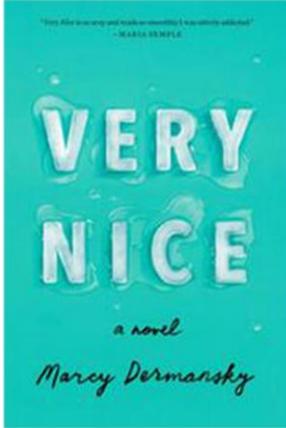
And then, Rock Hudson shows up – and I imagine being ensconced in a cloud of secrecy until Armistead breaks the seal, allowing reality to rain down instead of fear.

Read this wonderfully satiating gem dripping with pearls of acceptance and wisdom.

*“... life gets so much simpler once you’ve narrowed it to one other person.”*

And, when you allow yourself the freedom to become who you are, you may finally tell the truth about your life!

**VERY NICE**  
**MARCY DERMANSKY**



VERY, VERY, VERY, REALLY VERY, NICE!

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

How would you feel if you were a 19-year-old Caucasian girl, taking a creative writing class, who seduced (or be seduced?) by your shallow Pakistani professor who'd penned an award-winning debut novel, who was floundering in the wake of fame, and had often been a sexual conquest of those craving exotic, but did not deem exotic as dating material, regardless of who he is – you became smitten – and then, he leaves you his dog to take care of after the dalliance, because he needs to travel, home, to see a sick relative; but that's not all, before he goes, he sublets his

apartment to his best friend's (his best friend is also a writer) black twin sister, a sister who works for a uber rich man in finance – he's a mess – you trip home in the summer to your families Connecticut home in a lily-white enclave where your mother, who's husband, your uber rich father, left for a younger model, a female pilot; oh yeah, the professor's dog instantly reminds your mother of her dog (a poodle) that had recently died – she falls in love in a heartbeat – so did the dog, in the meantime, the twin subletting the professor's apartment (who is a lesbian) is pining for her once babysitter, anyway, your summer job is working at a camp for youths, one kid is the sister of a guy who your mother (a teacher) had become a semi-hero because her brother (the son of uber rich dysfunctional Trump supporters) brought a loaded gun to school and your mother talked him down, and oh, after the professor returns from Pakistan he drops into the lily-white enclave, not to pick up his dog, but to see if she was okay; perhaps a ruse – but his dog loves your mother more, so, he weasels his way into an extended stay and begins flirting with your mother, and it takes, – you're thrown into a tizzy because you're 19-years old, impressionable, and are smitten with your professor, the story turns into a storybook; no it doesn't – your father is dosed with an STD – he see's the professor and his dog with your mother.

*You need the professor to love you – he's busy,*

*Your dad's jealousy grows. The daughter of the Trump supporters gloms onto you.*

*You are invited for dinner.*

*You eat lobster.*

*You meet the gorgeous, mysterious, dickhead older son,*

*You become his quest.*

*You long for the attention of the professor.*

*Maybe you want more lobster?  
You visit your father.  
His assistant is a black twin lesbian.  
You become her friend.  
Everybody wears purple bathing suits,  
A gun becomes part of the story.  
Everyone comes together.  
Life is turned upside down.  
How would you feel?*

**VERY NICE** is an intoxicating entertaining romp into dysfunction where the adults of the story act like broken, entitled children, and the child desperately wants to be swallowed into adulthood. Unlike the above paragraph, the prose punches you in the solo-plexus with short precise barbs, dropping readers to the floor, leaving them oozing with a desire to take the next punch and read the next page. It's a story about dysfunction and the mess we humans can turn into because we humans are too shallow and damaged to accept the damage we can cause. Flip another page, and a 7-year-old-girl shouts out, maybe just says, her favourite food is lobster – that seems normal – but eating lobster had me dripping in tearful laughter.

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**VERY NICE** is really, just, very, very, much more than nice—it's a hilariously complicated trip into intertwined lives, chopped into bite-sized morsels told by a group of deeply damaged, but somehow, distinctive characters!

That's how it made me feel.

## IF YOU SEE ME, DON'T SAY HI

NEEL PATEL

*A wistful trip into the challenges of dating outside of cultural norms.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*



**If You See Me, Don't Say Hi: Stories** is a gripping look at the unrelenting challenges of Indian descent and dating outside of culture. The book is a collection of real-life stories that drop readers into the realm of what it is like to be Indian in a changing multi-cultural world. The stories are comedy, tragedy, and reality check, and they tear apart the realism of arranged marriages and the caste system. This dissection of reality leads readers to judge – until, and hopefully, we realize all ethnicities partake in some form of arrangements and caste. Rich with the rich. Poor with the poor. Lot with lot. Etcetera. Argue if you must.

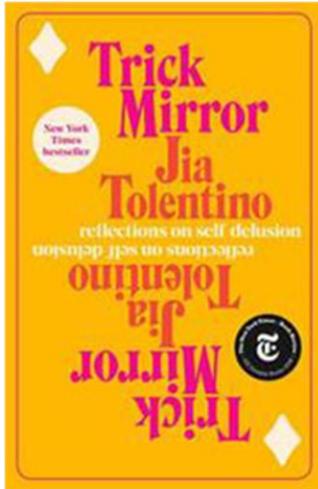
What I found most interesting and pertinent: the more one reads about these diverse experiences of others in this vast world, the more the WALLS are broken down.

Bringing us to understand we're not all that different.

**One last note:** Is every person of Indian descent a doctor, lawyer, or motel owner?

# TRICK MIRROR

JIA TOLENTINO



*It's time to be fairer to the fairer sex.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I am not a woman.

I will never be a woman.

I have a unisex name – that is the closest I will get to being a woman.

I dressed up in a black dress once to be a hot backup guitarist, lip-syncing along to Robert Palmer's "Simply Irresistible."

So, I have firsthand knowledge about what womanhood is all about.

WRONG.

## FULL STOP

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Until I read Jia Tolentino's **Trick Mirror**, I may have had an idea; but in reality, I did not. **Trick Mirror** reflects the thoughts rattling around in most of our heads daily unless we are sporting blinders. The world is a fast-paced, confusingly + intoxicating beautiful; yet a dreadful mess. Humanity appears to be racing toward a finish line - where finishing the race – I don't want to type NEXT.

In a deftly eloquent way, Jia opens windows to the challenges of femininity in a world that has been less than kind to the "illusion" of the fairer sex. In a lithe fashion, she perceptively wakes the world and highlights "fairer" as a misleading tag to 50% of the population, which has been treated like nothing more than a possession from the beginning of time. Fairer = controlled.

## I'VE OPENED MY EYES

Lately, I've read **Ta-Neshi Coates, Between the World and Me**, and **Colson Whitehead, The Nickel Boys**, and I found the parallels between racism and the treatment of women to be stunningly similar + stunningly upsetting.

Jia's adroit writing helped rip my blinders off – in all honesty: the blinders were barely hanging on – so it reinforced my thinking toward a kinder path in dealing with everyone is a more apt description; she likely will for you, as well. Jia explains how we live in a day where women are trying to rise in a patriarchal society, trying desperately to hold them down – to keep them in their place. She laments over the rise because it entails changing

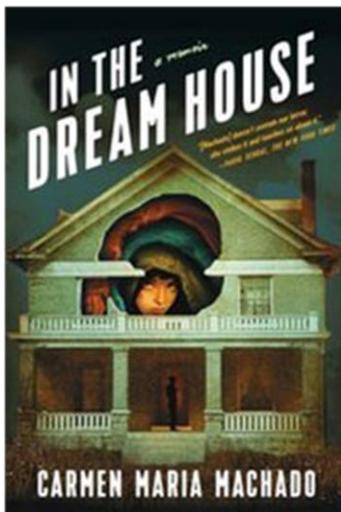
the natural order of things far from the real world. She cries over the brutal reality there is no escape. We all live with the same unstoppable realities of survival – we must play or get trampled. We must use our voices to encourage sublime change.

**Trick Mirror** may not be ground-breaking. It meanders through the veracities of the internet, feeding our inherent narcissism. It tackles reality TV is like slamming a rig into our willing veins. How women need to optimize their beauty to compete. It trips into the delightfulness and devastation of drugs. And it shines a bright light on how, when a man scams the rest of us, he might be revered, whereas when a woman does – well – she must darkly step outside of her DNA. (The scammers include Financial – Social Media – Amazon; The Election + more), and Jia ends with a depressingly honest look at the commercialization and fantasy of happily ever after.

**Trick Mirror** is a must-read for anyone who wants to step out of your beliefs – or at least – if you're a man, help you realize you've had an unfair advantage in the race against the fairer sex. If you open your eyes, only a smidgen; the world will become a slightly better place – the race might not entirely stop – but at least it will become kinder.

## IN THE DREAM HOUSE

CARMEN MARIA MACHADO



*Intrigued turned into troubled turned into anger turned into optimism!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*“Heterosexuals have never known what to do with queer people, if they think of their existence at all.”*

In the Dream House – is simply an enthralling original literary gem, with a powerful message about domestic abuse, with a twist – that led me to be optimistic because it blasts a light on a subsection of society often shunned and condemned. The book is not about a house, doh – it’s about the debilitating world of same-sex relationship abuse, in this case, lesbians. My sanguine nature stems from the fact this book has been published. Twenty years ago, it would likely have been

dumped in the trash by publishers too afraid to rock the boat.

We all dream of the perfect world with the ideal partner, living in our perfect dream houses. We all crave love, touch, belonging. When everything meshes, it can be wonderful. Unfortunately, it doesn’t always mesh; control, anger, insecurity, need, + esteem issues often rear their ugly heads, and love can turn into a noxious beast in a heartbeat, trapping those beaten down in a dangerous, seemingly inescapable reality.

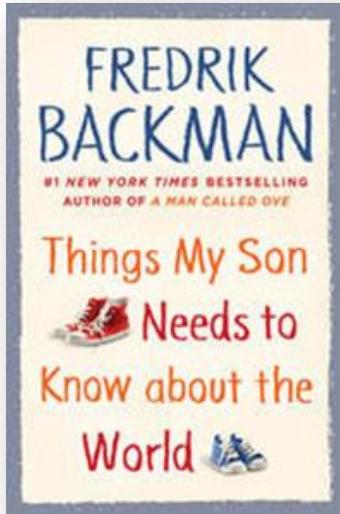
The self-righteous scream out: **GET OUT!**

If trapped, it’s never that easy. It may be easier for those screaming the loudest to deny their realities instead of accepting they do not differ from the people they often spurn.

It doesn’t matter who we love; we all matter, and if it imprisoned you in toxicity, we are lucky to have courageous authors like Carmen to shine a light on the possibility of escape and a path back toward being whole.

# THINGS MY SON NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD

FREDRIK BACKMAN



*Cute + Light + Light + Light + A Light Batch of Nothingness.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I love Backman's books. *A Man Called Ove* + *Beartown* + *Us Against You* are three of my favourites. *Things My Son Needs...* is not.

I read it just after reading the grippingly enlightening and upsetting *Between the World and Me* + *The Nickel Boys*, books examining in haunting detail what it means to be black. These books opened my eyes to atrocities and made me want to be a better human.

During the first half of *Things My Son Needs...* I wouldn't say I liked it. I started hating my skin because Caucasians have been horrible a-holes for an eternity. So much of the population has had to endure racism,

ostracization, imprisonment, torture, and worse. To where a love letter to a child is more about how to stay alive as opposed to "the great life events you'll experience because of IKEA." We privileged have had a 400-year head start allowing us to write fluff about how beautiful life is instead of how difficult it is for those of a different shade.

During the second half of *The Things My Son Needs...* I chuckled a bit at the cuteness of Backman's stories. The man is a consummate storyteller. For a moment, I forgot the book is nothing more than a fluffy cloud of nothingness. Just imagine a gaggle of middle-aged white parents (of means). Sipping Starbucks or eating meatballs. Comparing notes on the harrowing trials + tribulations white middle-class parents must endure. And suddenly, an epiphany, when they realize: "That Felicia's Girl's Mother."

I loved the book because it is a beautiful whiny love letter to Backman's wife + child. It's not his fault they had dealt him a high hand. Fredrick even says, "I know I'm still learning about what the word "inequality" really means. Every day. I have to. I'm a white, heterosexual, Western European man with an education and a job. There's not a single organism in the entire universe who knows less about inequality than me."

When I read that paragraph, I thought, GREAT; he's opening the door to writing about how to treat others and become a light instead of perpetuating darkness. My happiness was momentary, and an opportunity missed because the book took the fork in the road back toward fluffy drivel. One paragraph hinted at depth quickly reverted to nothingness.

DESPITE OF ↑↑↑  
DESPITE OF ↑↑↑

I enjoyed this book.

I'm white; I live in Canada.

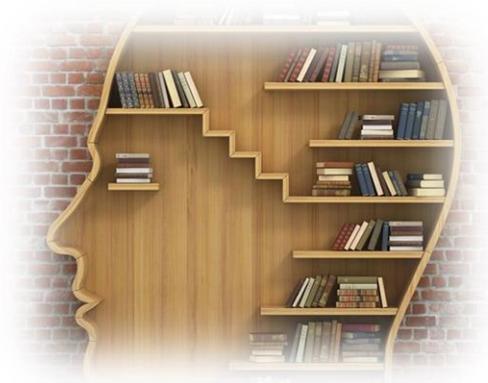
I have a job.

I'm grateful for my good fortune.

I follow the arrows ↑→↓← at IKEA.  
I follow the arrows ↑→↓← at IKEA.

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 6



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1. **HOW TO CATCH A MOLE - MARC HAMER**
2. **THE NICKEL BOYS - COLSON WHITEHEAD**
3. **ALL YOU CAN EVER KNOW - NICOLE CHUNG**
4. **NORMAL PEOPLE - SALLY ROONEY**
5. **TIN MAN - SARAH WINMAN**
6. **THICK - TRESSIE McMILLIAN COTTON**
7. **THEY BOTH DIE AT THE END - ADAM SILVERA**
8. **THE AMERICAN STORY - DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN**
9. **VOICE OF REBELLION - ROBERTA STALEY**
10. **THE SECRET - RHONDA BYRNE**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

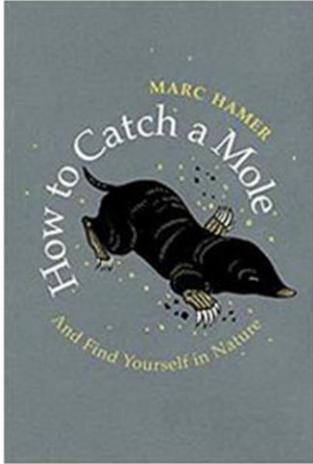
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

## HOW TO CATCH A MOLE

MARC HAMER



*A review? My thoughts? My days? How the book tripped my mind?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

My alarm is about to rattle my soul, sparking me awake. The day is about to begin. It's just before 4 am. The necessity of work beckons. It's been screaming my name for over 14-years, at least this version of adulthood responsibilities.

I cannot get used to the hour, being out-of-sync with the rest of society + my relationships.

I take the simple route; I go to work.

There is comfort in having the illusion of a place of belonging.

I crack open the gorgeous cover of a new day.

The days blend into each other. There is no time to breathe. The pressure to live up to expectations is unrelenting. I must be SOMETHING, I've been told. I am. But, because I am part of the judgment, I must judge everyone, everything... myself. The drive to work has become a blur. I pull into the parking lot. I park. I only remember A and B, nothing in between. We all think we know what's best. We all believe if only we were in charge. Collectively, have we stopped living?

Have we stopped realizing we are simply part of nature, and all the noise blaring around us is ephemeral, pointless, limiting?

It doesn't matter.

Until we can clear our minds of the inherent sense of self-importance, I'm not sure any of us can indeed be. We must be nothing more.

How to Catch a Mole made me realize everything in nature is connected. We overthink what we are supposed to be.

We have a propensity to become part of the noise.

We live in a time where we nearly criminalize those who become less than what societal delusion has determined to be the norm.

We are the mole, nothing more. Beauty in life comes from acceptance.

From cover to the last word - How to Catch a Mole is a breathtaking trip through the life of a man. Many would shun. A man who has his thumb firmly planted on the pulse of today. Thank You.

*I look forward to tomorrow!*

## THE NICKEL BOYS COLSON WHITEHEAD



*Collectively we must be better!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I'm taking the easy way out of my thoughts on this important work of fiction; I'm going to let a passage from the book layout my inner turmoil.

*"My aunt says I'm a get-along type," he told the boys one shift while they idled outside the five-and-ten. "I suppose I am. I grew up around you boys, white and colored, and I know you're just like me, but you had some bad luck."*

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Mouth agape, this isn't a work of fiction. I'm naïve. I'm fortunate to be living in Canada. My gut churns because a passage of that ilk exists.

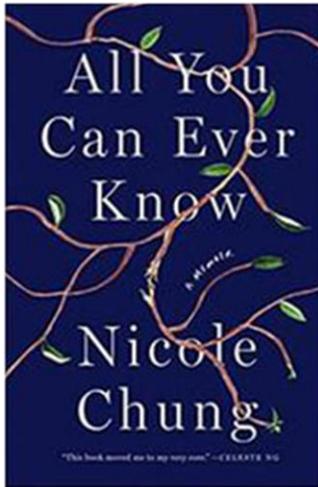
I want to be a better person.

I'll leave you now. I'm going to recoil and ponder how I will behave each day to make the world a tad better.

Collectively, we must pull our heads out of the sand and be better.

# ALL YOU CAN EVER KNOW

NICOLE CHUNG



*Filled with passages guaranteed to leave mouths agape.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Grateful.

I'm grateful Nicole dared to share her stirring, heart(wrenching)warming story.

"I finally understood what my birth parents did not: my adoption was hard, and complicated, but it was not a tragedy. It was not my fault, and it wasn't theirs, either. It was the easiest way to solve just one of too many problems."

All You Can Ever Know is filled with passages guaranteed to leave mouths agape. The dreadful challenges of growing up

Korean, adopted by a white family, and living in a white community, would be unfathomable for most because most of us have the luxury of just being – with little thought.

Nicole's life was littered with thoughts.

I was a secret baby. Born in a secret place. The shame of family, community, and religion. I found out by accident who I'm destined to be. The layers of secrecy, when stripped away, can never repair the damage caused by the roots of the lie.

In Nicole's case, she wasn't lied to about the adoption, but everything else was shaded in deception until she challenged her identity.

As I tore through the pages, my emotions spiked. I could never understand what it is like to face cultural taunts or try to understand why I'm different based on skin colour – because I blend in. But what everyone shares with Nicole who has ever faced the shrouds of secrecy – the challenge to become whole is a lifelong quest.

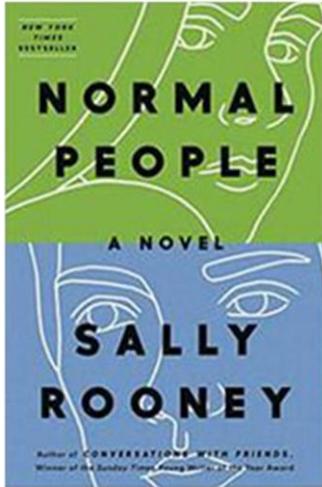
No child that is a product of secrecy can find comfort when their first breaths of life were stapled to "not a tragedy" and "just one of the too many problems."

And no child that is a product of secrecy can fully understand what it's like to be expected (wanted from birth). So, it's the curse/blessing making these beautiful children unique and capable of giving so much back.

That's how this book made me feel!

# NORMAL PEOPLE

SALLY ROONEY



*What happens when popularity is turned upside down?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**Connell Waldron:** Popular, athletic, poor; from the wrong side of the tracks.

**Marianne Sheridan:** Rich, plain-looking, odd, stubborn, friendless, from the right side of the tracks.

The common denominator, they're both highly intelligent.

**Normal People** could easily be titled *An Opposite Reality*, where wealth doesn't guarantee popularity, and a lack of money doesn't lead to shunning. Especially when attractive + athletic are part of the equation.

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**Normal People** → tackles society's norms and incinerate them. Connell + Marianne are drawn to each other for inexplicable reasons. Connell's attractiveness and athleticism allow him to fit in, whereas Marianne's wealth in this riveting tale keeps her on the outside ostracised.

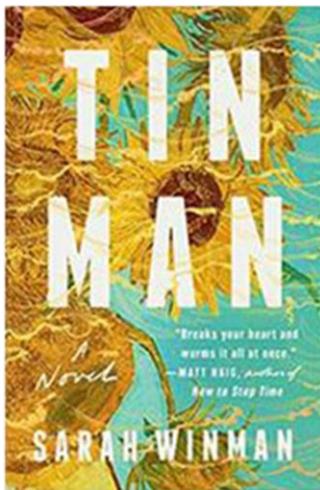
Partway through the book, when the two characters escape to an institution of higher learning, they switch sides of the track. Marianne grows into herself and blossoms while being trapped in a dangerous game of revolting against who she is and where she's from by pushing sexual boundaries. Marianne puts on blinders to mask unrelenting pain. She spirals downward, teetering on demise.

Connell grows; growth brought on by depression ensconced in reality: life is ever-changing, and what once was can never be again. Except for his deeply conditioned love for Marianne, the one person who appears to be suffering from the same infliction. Connell needs Marianne to save himself, and Marianne needs Connell to accept who she is.

**Normal People** ultimately taught me that normal is an abstract, non-existent concept. Don't believe me, ask yourself: Am I normal?

## TIN MAN

SARAH WINMAN



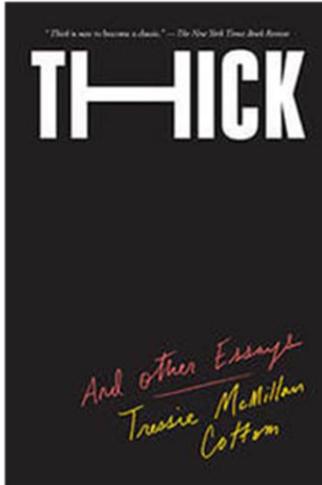
*A beautifully written look at the entirety and tragedies of living.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Never has a book broken my heart in such a breathtakingly beautiful way. TINMAN drips in elegant prose, slashing with realism, sharing tragedy and heartache in such a way it highlights the reality of love being boundless. The book reads like lavish brush strokes dripping from Van Gogh's brush, leaving me drunken in sadness yet revelling in the delight of every word mattering. Winman, with precision and every ounce of her heart, painted dying in such a way it burst off the page, blasting forth in a spectacular tapestry. Eventually, for me, sadness was replaced with the completeness of the experience of living.

# THICK

TRESSIE McMILLAN COTTON



*Time to reflect!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**DEAR NON-WHITE PEOPLE,**

Here is my evolution from THICK to THINK.

**Birth: 1989**

I'm white. I grew up in insular Saskatoon, where native jokes were (?) the norm. The conditioning begins.

We had a Siamese cat named Guy. GRGSENF for short. I'd stand on the steps of our house screaming, "Here, Guy, r\_ce gobbler, g\_\_k, slant e\_\_d, n-face." I was 10.

I had three intellectually + athletically gifted black friends. We lauded them for athleticism.

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**Montego Bay: 1989**

During a tour, I was the only Caucasian on the street. My blood curdled. Before entering a church, my guide said, "Put on your shirt. Respect mon."

**Vancouver: 1990-Present**

My favourite aunt told me that Vancouver's problem is too many Chinese and gays.

**2003**

My parents, whom I watched die, were not my birth parents. Instead, an elderly lady offered to help find my birth parents; she shared a reunion story. "The father was black..." she said, finishing with, "...we all thought the boy had a little n— in him."

**Seoul: 2012**

A man sporting a huge smile emphatically mouthed, "HELLO." He was white—I counted ten "whites" in my week-long visit. But, unlike Jamaica, I haven't been conditioned to fear Asians.

**Back in Vancouver**

An employee asked if I noticed how many white people are dating Asians? I fired back, "Hey, have you noticed how many white people are dating Germans?"

A black worker approached the counter and shamefully asked, “Where are you from?”

A white homeless person entered the office. “Snow is coming. It’s best to keep off the roads because of foreign drivers.”

If I make a boneheaded driving error – I quickly don an Asian mask. Just in case the other drivers are racist – I don’t want to confuse them.

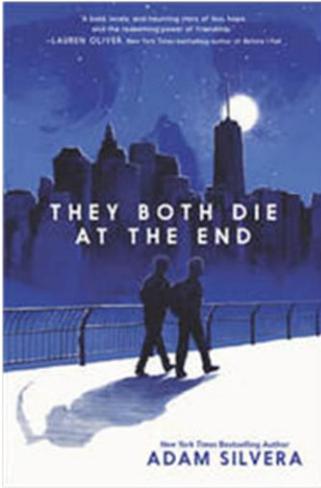
I can never understand what non-whites endure, but at least I can acknowledge my ilk, have had an unfair advantage since the beginning of –

Thanks to **THICK**: I’m slightly less racist than before.

Discourse is the pathway to whites no longer fearing blacks, and hopefully one day, for non-whites, to overcome the disparity of whiteness.

# THEY BOTH DIE AT THE END

ADAM SILVERA



*Happy – Sad – Hopeful – Trashed – Sad – Reflective!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

A friend saw me reading *A Little Life* – he noticed I was nearing the end. He asked me how I was feeling? I told him, a bit depressed, destroyed. He recommended a light read to take my mind off the despair: **They Both Die in the End**. *Sounds light.*

I began reading – what a ride. I will refrain from giving the story away. Many people are given a timeline on how much time they have left to live. The timeline is always associated with a terminal illness.

Now imagine you're 18 or 17-years-old. A service calls you, telling you you will die in the next 24 hours – there is no escaping destiny.

What would you do?

Would you even shower?

"I turn off the faucet, and the water stops raining down on me; today isn't the day for an hour shower."

I'd probably wrap myself in bubble wrap, turn the lights off, and hide in a closet, shaking.

**They Both Die in the End** reinforced the need to live each day to the fullest, reach out, love unconditionally, allow vulnerability to take center stage, and face down fear.

The clock ticked down with each page.

Characters flashed in and out.

Growth became exponential.

The characters were simple to love, cheer for, and will for the title to change.

Would you "come out" if you were gay?

Could you imagine not being sick and not knowing how or when life will end – except you know; it will be today?

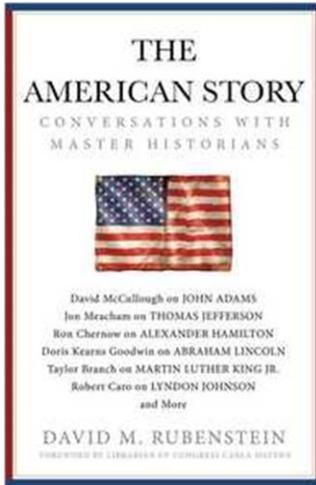
**They Both Die in the End** is reminiscent of the 1995 movie, *Before Sunrise*, a beautiful story about a chance meeting ending in the hopes for something more, a plan to meet on the same train platform in six months.

In **They Both Die in the End**, two young lives are running out of time, but they still pack a lifetime into a single day. In the end, they plan to meet –

I loved this book.

# THE AMERICAN STORY

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN



*And the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

HOPEFUL

I'm Canadian. My understanding of the history of the USA is limited to what I learned in school (a million years ago), plus what I gleaned from American television and the American news. Based upon those, I'm terrified.

Since we are a million years into my lifetime, and thanks, yes, thanks to Trump, my thirst for understanding has grown significantly. In the past few years, I've read countless books on the struggles of non-whites in the land of opportunity. I've read

exceptional books highlighting the litany of events that have deposited us today in these uncertain times.

And then, I read THE AMERICAN STORY has not made me anything more than a neophyte. But what it has done is give me pause – I understand America has come a long way – and there is hope for a glorious future. I gathered from this informative gem that America has always had deep-rooted racist tendencies. But with each leader, and ounce, a pound of progress, there have been factions of society pulling it toward darkness. But no matter how hard the pull is – brilliant, often flawed leaders have a populace to answer to, and the public dictates the level of their success. For every inherent racist tendency of one leader, he is met with the next leader, having a moral compass dictating genuine progress comes as representation for all!

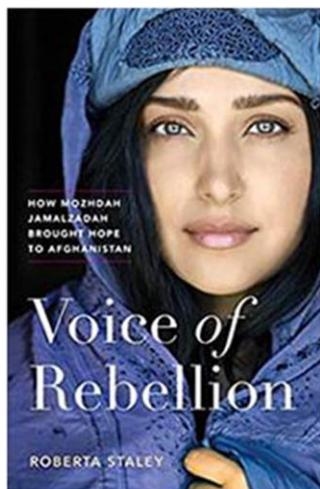
I think America will be okay, and walls will continue to be broken down instead of erect. And, eventually, it will once again be the shining beacon on a hill.

That's how THE AMERICAN STORY made this neophyte feel.

**WRITTEN: March 17, 2020**

## VOICE OF REBELLION

ROBERTA STALEY



*An uplifting story, providing beacons of hope!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

If you've read any of my book reviews, you'd realize they're not reviews – but thoughts on what I've digested.

How did the book make me feel (think)?

Hopeful was my initial emotion as I flipped the pages. We live in a day where being Politically Correct is being savagely attacked, as if being a better person, less toxic, less bullying is being stripped away from us because we are so hard done by; it's a load of –

Bear with me. I can't fathom why there is a war on Political Correctness?

Let me extrapolate. The Jamalzadah family, risking great peril to themselves, escaped a war-torn region of the world, leaving loved ones behind – to perhaps face unrelenting atrocities, all in search of a better way of life. A life where they no longer fear for their safety with every step they take. However, they bemoan what they've left behind, family, identity, home with every step. They arrive in a new, unknown land, where the challenges of assimilation are daunting. They do their best. Yet, they face racist invectives from people (even children) conditioned by an insular existence, afraid of difference. I'm astonished by their courage.

Flash to the present. A Sports Talk Celebrity (Hockey) with a large platform punches downward and drops a "you people" into one of his rants. He's fired. The outrage by the followers of the sport is instantaneous. "How could you fire this ICON? PC culture has run amok. Everyone is way too sensitive these days." They scream.

In the meantime, another suicide bomb goes off in the war-torn country, killing innocent people. Hockey doesn't seem as important anymore. But it does because the PC attackers are hard done by. They rebel against their hatred being stifled by Political Correctness.

**Flashback to VOICE OF REBELLION.** The Jamalzadah family worked long days, making a new life for themselves. They succeeded. The racist taunts are still there, but they've dodged bombs. They'd be okay. Mozhdah, through relentless work, her star began rising.

She wanted to give back impact change in her homeland.

She tried to make a difference.

She returned to her homeland, Afghanistan, to become a voice of influence.

She tackled taboo subjects, the oppression of women; she punched upward.

She challenged norms + encouraged evolving by becoming a beacon of hope for women, for those who have had their voices muted for far too long.

“There are other things to consider,” she said. “Few divorced women will ever marry again, as it’s considered a disgrace to both herself and her relatives. The attitude is that the woman failed to protect the marriage.”

“Even if the relationship ends because of abuse from the husband?” Mozhdah said indignantly.

In her new home, we swathe people from her part of the world with the same brush. Many interpreted the religion of her land – without an ounce of knowledge. They claimed that their bible (Quran) encouraged violence against women. It doesn’t. Much of the male population in her homeland misinterpret the words of their bible. Misogyny lives carried forth from the Stone Ages, so deeply ingrained that an infuriating struggle to inspire change seems never-ending. Mozhdah fearlessly sheds light on this while rousing a better way. She did this by asking questions. She continued to punch upward.

## TODAY

“You people” continues to ring loudly as the Sports Personalities defend the words of their fired comrade. They continue to punch downward. They continue to punish the marginalized. After all, they have a platform. They continue to bully.

170 Mozhdah punched upward, calling out those who’ve been calling the shots – in Afghanistan, risking her life in doing so. But, relentlessly, Mozhdah makes things better for those bombarded with misinformation by those with a large platform. She is the David, challenging Goliath.

A mall Santa gets fired for posting pictures on Facebook playfully groping women back in the present. He says the women were okay with it. The attackers of Political Correctness go wild. They say it’s no big deal; everyone is too sensitive; he shouldn’t have been fired.

I laugh at “playfully gr....”

I guess Santa hadn’t been paying attention, and besides, he’s an adult. So why would he post... never mind.

I could never possibly understand the extent of Mozhdah and her family’s experiences, their drive, compassion, and love, + unwavering focus on creating a better way. I could never understand what it is like to be a refugee – but what I can say, Mozhdah, thank you for the audacity to punch upward in your quest to make the world a better place. The world is better because you’ve shared parts of your life. So far, too many are punching downward because they fear change.

Why speak about the Sportscaster and Santa? Because it is imperative, we don’t allow those with the loudest voice to drag us back toward oppression and misogyny. And because it sheds light on checking those in power. If we don’t, the atrocities associated

with it risk highlighting that many use their capacity for evil regardless of where we're from. So, it's crucial to keep punching upward.

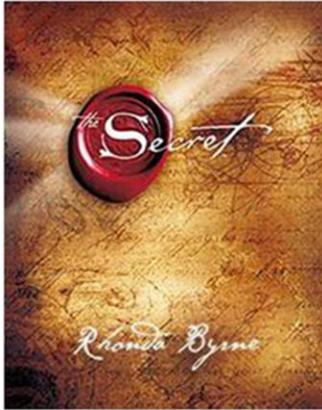
**VOICE OF REBELLION** is an uplifting journey, providing beacons of hope for not only women but for all of us willing to open our hearts and to punch upward to bring about change.

I'll leave you with this "courageous, loving family" that should be enough to stop those with large platforms from saying "you people" ever again. I know it likely won't, but at least it's a start.

**VOICE OF REBELLION** is must-read.

# THE SECRET

## RHONDA BYRNE



*The Universe is listening, so, ask + believe = receive!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I am so happy and grateful now that I'm sending out positive thoughts to the Universe regarding every aspect of my life. I want some things. Don't you? It's okay to strive for whatever you want from life as we rotate together with the rock, EARTH.

I believe we arrive at two doors with every step-in life. The door on the left leads down into misery. The door on the right leads to happiness. Maybe we are destined to pick the doors we select.

I don't believe that. My life lessons have taught me I have a choice. I could have chosen to continue spiralling downward, losing myself in misery, dragging everyone in my path down with me. But I chose the door on the right.

We all have the choice as to the path we decide to take. The way I see things now, I was fortunate.

I highly recommend everyone needs to read the secret. Even if it is merely to help you realize life is lived, Joy + Kindness is expected to be paramount. And, to live a life of abundance, the way you talk to the Universe is likely the only answer.

As for me: My next memoir will be released, and it will turn into a rousing success. I'm not entirely sure when, but I will live part of the year in a beautiful home on a tropical island paradise. And I will be a beacon for helping people overcome negative thoughts, allowing them to have a healthier, happier life.

Why not?

What's the other option?

Lamenting... Nah, choose to dream + chase those dreams; Hollywood got one thing right: the Happy Ending!

I think The Secret may help us all to reach it!

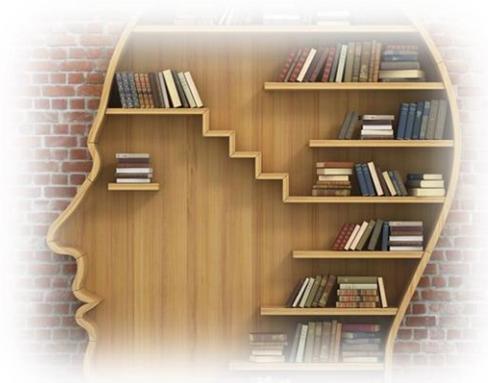
**HONESTY BREAK**  
HONESTLY BREAK

*Hey, bleeping Universe, where's my stuff?*

I've been a good boy for a long time, compassionate and empathetic and kind → I've been firing messages to you for quite some time now → why do you return pain?

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 5



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1. **AMERICA: THE FAREWELL TOUR - CHRIS HEDGES**
2. **BEARTOWN - FREDRICK BACKMAN**
3. **US AGAINST YOU - FREDRIK BACKMAN**
4. **LESS - ANDREW SEAN GREER**
5. **LAKE SUCCESS - GARY SHTEYNGART**
6. **QUEENIE - CANDICE CARTY-WILLIAMS**
7. **GREENBOOK - THE MOVIE**
8. **FIT FOR JOY - VALERIA TELES**
9. **AGES OF ENTANGLEMENT - R.L. JACKSON**
10. **IGIST - L.S. LARSON**

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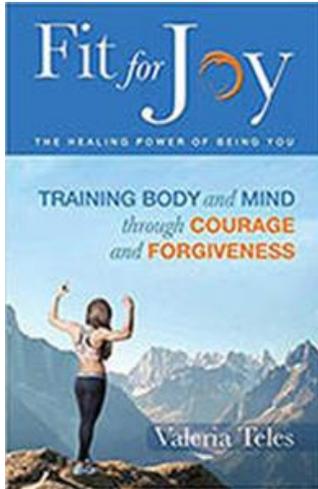
**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

**BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 6**

## FIT FOR JOY

VALERIA TELES



*An inspirationally joyful journey toward the importance of love + kindness at the moment!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Although each of our journeys through life is uniquely our own + the paths travelled may seem light years apart, “Fit for Joy” speaks volumes about how we are all connected and how our stories provide a way for us to grow.

It takes a tremendous amount of courage to share a life story, warts, insecurities, fears, and all – Valeria gave the world a gift by sharing hers. Valeria’s life-dots cobbled together; a childhood infested with struggles. The need to escape. A burning desire for validation from both friends and love interests. And finally, falling into the addiction often comes from within the shallowness of fitness. Bond us all. The only fitness goal needs to be well-being, physically and emotionally, most notably emotionally. Valeria eloquently expounds another vital importance: after diving deeply into her core and extracting what lies profoundly inside her soul – our essence and responsibility to each other = love + kindness.

“What would you do if you were still alive?”

Whether you grew up on the flatlands of Saskatchewan or in a rural town in Brazil, whether you come from wealth or poverty, it doesn’t matter. “Fit for Joy” will have you question the steps of your journey. It will compel you to look at your past in a different light. While challenging the value of the future!

The beauty within each of us is waiting to be discovered and shared. Thank you, Valeria, for sharing your journey. I am sure everyone who reads your words will grow!

Thank you.

# GREEN BOOK

## THE MOVIE



*What happens when a racist and the oppressed realise they are the same?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Tony “Lip” Vallelonga is a family man.

Tony is part of a large immigrant Italian family and a massive immigrant Italian community in NYC.

Tony is a loving husband and father.

Tony works at the Copacabana Club as a customer relations expert/fixer.

Tony Vallelonga is racist.

When the club shuts down for renovations, it forces Tony to scramble to find a means to provide for his family. *Scarfig down hot dogs may not be enough.*

He has options:

1. Work for someone in his community, likely more racist than he is – fixing.
2. Work as a driver and personal assistant for Dr. Don Shirley for two months, a job he’s referred to because of his ability to handle conflict-filled situations.

Bear with me for a moment.

When a baby is born, they are pure, innocent, beautiful, pliable toward warmth and greatness – noise and hatred have yet to damage them. But then, unfortunately, a coat of varnish, **HATRED**, is sometimes applied, planting a seed of divisiveness. The skin settles, another layer added, **INTOLERANCE**, and now what started as perfection drips in the confusion of not seeing all humans need the same things. Layer upon layer of varnish is applied, and soon the innocent child is so bleeping damaged, with the once unlimited potential of new becoming narrow, broken, distraught, with their minds clouded with the absurdity of difference. ME GOOD. EVERYONE NOT LIKE ME – DISEASED. REALITY CHECK: I am becoming **THE DISEASE** – and when left unchecked, it festers.

*A black man drinks from a glass – throw the glass in the trash.*

Decades slip by, with child-after-child lathered in the same vanishes, and as time creeps by, even more, an entire community becomes infected. The only hope is if the ingrained hatred and intolerance have yet to seep into the core.

Dr. Don Shirley is a black man, something Tony discovers during his job interview.

Dr. Shirley is a piano virtuoso.

Dr. Shirley is brilliant.

Dr. Shirley is about to embark on a two-month tour through the USA deep-south, a journey, where if black, you don't get to play by the same rules, and a **GREEN BOOK** is your life map on how to navigate your way to hopefully; guarantee survival.

Dr. Don desperately needs Tony.

And Tony needs Dr. Don. He accepts the job offer, turning down options that would allow him to add more varnish and stay close to the perceived realities of his community.

**GREEN BOOK** is a brilliant, beautiful, extraordinary, gripping, hilarious and inspirational story about what's possible if we allow love and empathy to enter our souls. Although the story took place in 1962, the timing of its release could not be better because of the onslaught of politicians who are currently trying to divide us all.

**GREEN BOOK** brought me to tears (happy), and it caused me to bust a gut in laughter. It delights in comedy, deeply laced in nuance.

If **GREEN BOOK** does not compel you to question how you look at humanity. And where we are today. And why it is vitally important to replace intolerance and hatred with kindness? I'm afraid the layers of varnish likely have seeped into your core, and the rest of us can only feel sorry for you.

In two months together, Tony "Lip" and Dr. Don Shirley began chipping and sanding away the decades of divisiveness instilled inside of them. Every stop, every mile of highway, brought them to a point where they finally came close to finding the purity of beginning once more; the message screamed out in breathtaking clarity: Deep down, we are the same. We all want to belong. We all need to be loved to thrive!

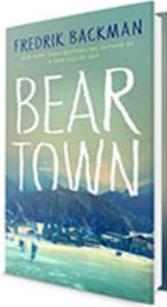
The message also screamed out: The greatest gift we have is listening. If only we look, we'd conclude: A white man can never truly understand what a black man goes through, nor; can a black man possibly understand how devastating the decades infused with the disease of intolerance can be? If we open our ears and only then, together, we can bridge the gaps dividing us, allowing us to turn down the volume of noise.

I loved this movie.

**I love the possibilities it provides!**

## BEARTOWN

FREDRIK BACKMAN



*Should be mandatory reading for all people involved in team sports.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

... bounces violently between right and wrong, teamwork and deceit ...

I loved this book. This is the second Backman book I've read; Backman's innate ability to connect us to the tales he weaves is astounding. **BEARTOWN!**

Imagine a dying town in Sweden deriving its only sense of pride from a hockey team comprised of young men. Everything revolves around hockey. Hockey drips a dense fog into the minds of the citizens, causing them to look away from a reality, shrouded in delusion.

The junior team is about to revive dying. We can stave the inevitable demise off if they can only win the championship.

*BEARTOWN should be mandatory reading for all people involved in team sports.*

The story bounces violently between right and wrong, teamwork and deceit.

**BEARTOWN** sparks a moral debate on the ugly side of sports, especially in the heights of the higher tiers, where entitlement is often masked by the secrecy of the pack. Sports believes it should be allowed to police itself. The only thing SPORTS cares about is the SPORT. If you perform at a high level, you can become immune to a fall because lesser players will sacrifice the powers that be.

What happens when a star player affects the whole town by his involvement in alleged sexual assault?

**BEARTOWN** is a dying town, deriving all of its pride from young men playing hockey!

What do you think happens?

Sure, sports teach valuable lessons about teamwork and camaraderie. However, what good can ever come from running in a pack?

*BEARTOWN needs to be mandatory reading for anyone who will play a team sport!*

# IGIST

JL.S. LARSON



*A Imagine High School being blasted into space, fuelled by chasing your dreams!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Imagine if someone had blasted your High School into space filled with a diverse mixture of rich, colourful characters who are vying to improve the Universe instead of struggling with the crippling realities of who likes whom?

IGIST is not your run-of-the-mill YA Novel. It's not about romance and petty crushes and feuds. Instead, what it is about is screaming out a powerful message of chasing your dreams + never giving up. It's about overcoming the most enormous obstacles and the importance of learning to work together for a life much more considerable than self. It is a nuanced dive back into school, teaching valuable lessons about love, family, + friendship along the way. It is about taking accountability for whom you will be.

*It reads like the DaVinci Code.*

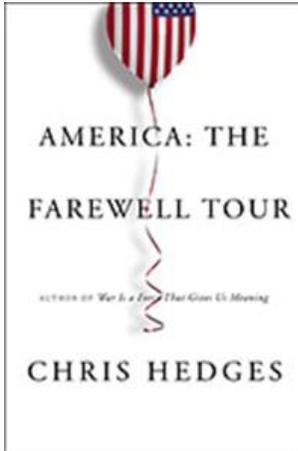
Because it tackles deeper issues, IGIST tackles the trials of adolescence with a rare authenticity—it is a YA novel challenging the obstacles of youth with something intelligent to say. It is chock-full of competition, deception, compassion, teamwork, and love. It is a story about what adversaries can accomplish when they come together to achieve a common goal. It is a nuanced coming-of-age story. It's vibrant, moving, and beautiful.

I don't fit the demographic for this book—I thoroughly enjoyed it regardless of that fact. IGIST builds to a crescendo with twists along the way. It reads like the DaVinci Code because its fast-paced short chapters make it hard to stop turning the pages. The last 50 pages are gripping, with the main character, Emi, growing by leaps and bounds.

IGIST surprised me. I'm glad it did!

# AMERICA: THE FAREWELL TOUR

CHRIS HEDGES



*A book that may change the way you look at porn!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

In a galaxy far, far away... okay, this galaxy, the Empire lumbered along, bringing with it great joy and prosperity to all.

Well, the Empire may fracture, crumbling before our eyes, with all of us complicit and distracted by the noise filling our craniums daily.

It's 5 AM. I'm riding the elevator down from my home on the tenth floor. My eyes are drawn to the video screen above the keypad. "A family home in a province 1,000 miles away caught on fire.

*The three children inside perished."*

I don't know them. They are the first thing pumped into my brain. Am I supposed to carry the grief of their loved ones through the day – passing it along to everyone I meet?

I walk the last few blocks to work.

I'm forced to stop frequently to avoid being walked into by pedestrians enamoured by their phones.

I don't exist – to them.

**AMERICA: THE FAREWELL TOUR** is a thorough analysis of the fracturing of an Empire that is losing its way.

Could the end be nigh?

Could the top rung be knocked down, shattered, left tattered for the next generations to suffer through the mess we've brought upon ourselves?

I think the answer is: **PROBABLY.**

I think we have collectively buried our heads in the sand for a long time.

**AMERICA: THE FAREWELL TOUR** is a sobering, intimate, engaging, eye-popping, stimulating, deeply upsetting, depression-inducing, and uplifting look about how we got to where we are; and where we are likely heading, with an olive branch stretching down to us, offering a fragile path to soften the unavoidable blow.

**WHERE ARE WE?**  
AHHHKE VKE ME!

LET'S (the next word needs to be put to rest – the last time used, here) UNPACK.

“Some rich man came and raped the land. Nobody caught him.”

- The Last Resort: The Eagles

*People, I have a dream to sell you. You can be whatever you want to be. Believe me. We are all created equal. I will show you the way. Just follow me.*

*Why are you snickering, rich man?*

## INDUSTRY

We industrialized. We began making things. Everything. The rich men sat at the top. Everyone else worked for them.

The work sucked, but nobody (other countries) was making things. We didn't mind the rich getting fat off our labour – we had good lives. We could afford to buy the stuff we produced.

Then: the rich men wanted more.

We did as well, but the wealthy resisted us reaching into their pockets, so they looked for others to do labour for less.

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Why pay Timmy in Indiana \$25 per hour + health benefits when I can spend (insert name of a worker from another country, here) 25 cents per hour with horrid working conditions to produce the same products?

You don't have to answer.

Sure, it might piss off Timmy at the worker in the other country, but he sure enjoys buying the products for less. In the meantime, the rich build massive shopping centres for the Timmy's of the world to consume foreign-made goods.

A decade slips by.

Another decade slips by.

American wages stagnate.

Sports + celebrity + drugs + booze + shiny things distract us, numb us, dumb us down, we don't want to look at what's happening.

The sand hole for our heads becomes appealing.

For a few people, the distraction stops working. They look. They realize WTF – I think we're being played.

The dream fractures.

However, only a few open their eyes – most people prefer to live in ignorant bliss.

The rich men get fatter.

Hey, you can keep your job if – if – we can shred your wages – and, who needs health benefits?

Industrialized America implodes.

Timmy's outrage is misguidedly directed at (insert name of a worker from another country, here).

Religion gets involved.

Without an agenda.

Snicker.

The zealots want power. Some religions worship wealth, ignoring the “potentially” mortal sins of political leaders by justifying “God wouldn't reward sinners with wealth.”

Communities collapse, and we need more distractions.

## DRUGS

“Have a little taste, Timmy; this will numb your ills.”

Timmy likes to be numbed.

Timmy chases numb.

The pharmaceutical industry sees an opportunity. And, suddenly, America's drug problem trips out of the ghettos into every town.

*“Build a wall, and we will be saved. The only reason I popped a pill in the first place is (insert name of a nefarious foreigner who handed me the glass of water to wash it down here). I'm not responsible for...me. I like to blame.”*

*And, with the building of the wall, the complexities of addiction flutter away into nevermore.*

Timmy hurts his knee working his wage-decreasing, soon-to-be-eliminated job. A doctor prescribes painkillers. Timmy can't afford the healthcare. That's okay. An illegal immigrant will sell him something to ease his pain.

What's that?

The illegal immigrant is Caucasian, born in Omaha. Crap.

## THE RICH MEN HAVE A SOLUTION

Toss as many people as they can in prison.

That will fix the problem.

**It will also serve another purpose:** cheap American Labour.

Not to mention, 'labour' likely to show up daily because they have nowhere else to go.

If you are lucky enough to escape prison, pop another pill, and drown yourself in the realities of reality television + the release of cheering for your favourite teams.

## A LITTLE SECRET

Drugs used to be a ghetto-related race problem. However, with the shattering of the industrialized American model, everyone can fall more from middle class to poor. **Oh yeah, the little secret:** the rich men don't care: the only colour they see is **GREEN**.

Another decade blasts by as the "American Dream" splinters apart. For those of us who aren't too addled with addiction, those who can still find the strength to climb, we don't realize the rung we're reaching for no longer exists because our brothers and sisters are desperately holding onto it as they spiral downward.

*Don't worry, people. We've got your back. We're increasing the military budget to protect you from those who've done this to you. Look over there → them.*

## WORK

In many cities, the cost-of-living indoors has skyrocketed. For many (half of Americans), there may be work, menial, and living close to where you work becomes increasingly unattainable. The next thing you know, if you are poor, you face commuting most of your days away to serve the wealthy.

Too tired and beat down to resist, or ask (demand) for more, a more that doesn't exist.

That's okay; the costs of televisions have dropped significantly.

What's that?

To have channels to watch I must pay an astronomical amount, that's okay, I can't miss the game.

Beaten down, you skip paying the transit fare.

You get caught.

You're ticketed.

You're now in the system.

If you don't pay the fine, your menial job might become day labour in a special camp.

## **PORN**

There is not single actor in the porn (sex-for-pay) industry who entered the sector chasing the American Dream. Desperation for survival is the gateway.

Argue if you'd like?

The broken become more broken and desperate, only to eventually be chewed up and spat out when the curtain on their "careers" slam shut.

The more consumption, the more extreme and violent porn becomes.

Consumers become desensitized.

Consumers risk becoming predators unable to give intimacy.

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

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And the porn wheel keeps spinning with curious American boys becoming exposed, and by the time they hit 12 or 13 years of age, normal to them... sorry girls, good luck.

With the pimps industry profiting, everyone else falls deeper into addiction.

As we pour more money into the military to protect us from external enemies, with the opportunity of a good-paying job, guess what: walking lockstep with the pimps of porn, is the recruiters of the military. Lucky for them, there is a gaggle of young men who are unable to see a future, ready to enlist.

Even more fortunate → can you taste the sarcasm?

These young men's minds are filled with love and stability.

## **HATE**

Now that we're drug-addled, broke, unemployed, divorced, masturbating to... "ewe."

"Hey, Timmy, my cable's been cut. Can I watch the game at your place? Thanks. Look at those idiots kneeling. Respect the flag, you (insert profanity-laced racial slur here)."

"I need someone to blame. I need someone to blame. I know — anyone who doesn't look like me. This land is my land."

I feel deep sorrow for any of us stumbling around on this rock who believe "others" are the problems plaguing the world today.

**AMERICA: THE FAREWELL TOUR** highlights the horrific realities of the sickness of hate in brilliant clarity.

Haters, do you really believe if only a few drops of water were left, your Caucasian neighbour wouldn't off you; because you're Caucasian?

I don't care where the root of racism or hatred originates; you don't have to participate.

If that makes me naïve, so be it.

*Hey, young unemployed guy with no prosperous future in sight: do you want to go mess up some people in a foreign land?*

*We're we invited?*

*Silly question. Hey, what type of porn do you like?*

In a boardroom (probably fictitious), the powers that be see opportunity, and determine the best way to keep impoverished, is to point at others, making them the ones to blame.

And, oh yeah, make poverty a growing business. Desperation begets a fine, begets interest, begets another fine, begets more interest, begets — "hey, the people of colour did this to me," begets —

## **ESCAPE**

*If only there were a way out. A way to jump back on the dream train. I know. I can win the jackpot.*

*What do I have to lose?*

*Spin, spin, spin, so close. Spin, spin, so close. Insert more money. This music is calming. I like it here. Create heavy users. Was that subliminal?*

*Spin, spin, spin, so close. Insert more money.*

*Hey, Timmy, did you buy a ticket for the Powerball? You never know?*

*What do I have to lose?*

*And with another ticket purchased, the poorest of the poor voluntarily pay the taxes corporations used to pay.*

*How's the wall coming along?*

*Why does the second floor of your casino, say 14, on the elevator keypad?*

*Don't worry. I've got your back. Let's put more money into the military. They're" coming for our way of life. I'll protect you.*

*Hey, Timmy, did you ever notice there are no right angles in casinos? Why won't they let us decide?*

*And Timmy, it's the strangest thing. Every time I'm breaking in the pain of loss, a cocktail server magically appears.*

## **A SOLUTION?**

Check unfettered capitalism.

We are being played. The repetition of history suggests just before an Empire collapses, it goes through a period of prosperity followed by stagnation and deindustrialization, with new realities coming in the eroding of the middle class. Flailing Empires become ripe for divisiveness and addiction. Often laced with morally debunked excess, where many people are lost → chasing their first highs brought on by the taste of money, sexual depravity, isolation, anger, and a need to blame others → creating a fertile environment for those who have your “least interests” at heart to gain control.

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Even though you understand, you've been grifted. And divided for feeding the addictions of the rich. You still slam another needle into your arm. Believing your next high will be the one allowing you to escape the madness.

If I had to pick one thing in this engrossing book that struck the chord the most for me, and I'll paraphrase: Privatized Prisons: In many states, if the prisons don't reach specific occupancy rates (90%), the State must pay the penalty to the Corporations that fund them.

*A rich man came and raped the land. Nobody caught him. Put up a bunch of ugly boxes, and Jesus, people bought them.*

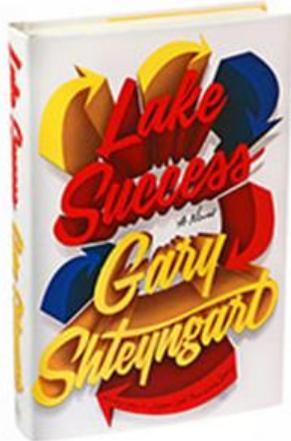
I almost forgot; I said the book is uplifting. It is! Chris suggests the importance of talking to each other, creating a sense of community, to stop hiding behind screens. To stop blaming.

America is a fantastic place, full of opportunity and beauty. It's up to us to soften the inevitability of change by merely talking to each other—if we do; if we say hi to our neighbours, then and only then, we might realize there is no reason to hate.

Thank you, Chris, for painting the picture in such a concise way, humanizing the realities of what came before and what may be on the horizon.

## LAKE SUCCESS

GARY SHTEYNGART



Even in fiction, America is a bleeped-up mess!

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Even in fiction, America is a bleeped-up mess!

Barry Cohen is a dick. His indolence for lot-in-life is palpable. He becomes exceptionally wealthy by bilking investors by gambling with hedge funds. He is married to a stunningly beautiful, brilliant immigrant named Seema. Their life together is a fallacy—a storybook—an illusion.

Barry lusts for exorbitantly expensive timepieces. He perpetuates the illusion of perfection until his and Seema's lives unravel because their son Shiva is diagnosed with Autism—perfection busted—the shame of pretension. Then, with a shadow draped over the humiliation of being less than perfect + Barry's hedge fund is a scam, their lives unwind, fracturing everything they thought once was. Drop-in, an all-too-real Presidential campaign, and fiction with a sprinkling of "non," takes readers on a wild ride as Barry tries desperately to whisk away his plethora of shortcomings in search of something, anything, to make his life meaningful. Barry runs from his crumbling marriage by taking the Greyhound across America, searching for a time where recapturing what he had might offer him solace, which was likely never as it seemed, dismantling protected memories. While Seema struggles with how she was grifted by greed like Barry's investors.

Lake Success is a cutting dichotomy between the wealthy and the struggling. With razor-sharp wit and delicate wordplay, it inserts readers into a story that, despite the tag of fiction, deposits them in the realities of today's world: Wealth + Poverty aren't so different. The characters Barry encounters in his search for self are colourful and can be found in every corner of American life. Some are deep. Some are incredibly racist. All are flawed, and on the same undefinable life quest most of us are pursuing in this delightfully messed up world filled with noise 24/7.

America is a diverse mixture of humanity that cannot all fit into the same hole.

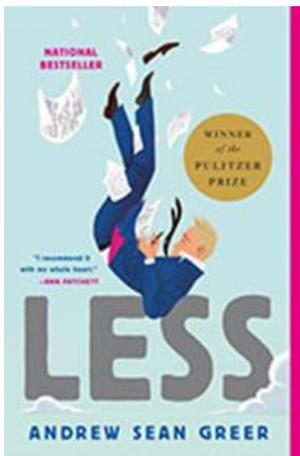
Fiction or not, Lake Success is a gripping page-turner about a country losing its way, illustrating in nuance that the fall from the top to the bottom is closer than any of us may think. With a brisk wind of the watch, it highlights the climb upward is impossible for those of us who've never been at the top before.

Does Barry find himself in the end?

I won't spoil it for you, but I will say: Barry Cohen is a dick. Much like his expensive watches eventually run out of time, Barry faces the same inevitability because of his glaring lack of depth. Finally, no matter how hard Barry tries to fool himself, he can't.

## LESS

ANDREW SEAN GREER



*A wispy, captivating, solemnly hilarious, tale of woe.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Arthur Less is a gay author on the brink of turning 50 — chasing a passion that has chewed him up and spit him out — successful, used up, mundane; cloaked in a feeling of mediocrity and a sense of spinning on the margins of the literary world. He wants his life to pop. He finds it slipping away in gloominess, the white-middle-aged man's mental prison.

*He wants what was.*

He can't have it.

He laments without realizing he's living a life far grander than those who judge him.

Arthur Less attempts to cobble together his writing career, hoping to feel relevant. Instead, he laments. He fears his peers have surpassed him.

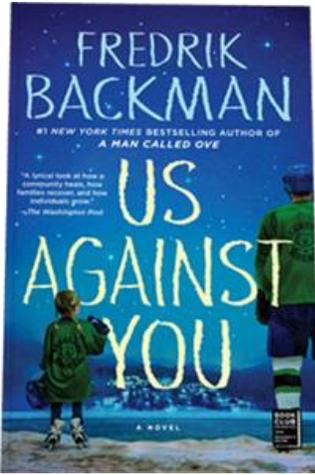
Fifty is a tough age for white guys. It's a time when the clock keeps ticking, and many find it all slipping away.

It's an age where if you haven't found MONEY-POWER-FAME, it is never coming and accepting you are no longer "IN" the crowd can be debilitating.

At the end of this wispy book, I concluded, nothing is boring in being who you are.

# US AGAINST YOU

FREDRIK BACKMAN



*A thought-provokingly searing story about what happens when we try too hard to belong.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**US AGAINST YOU** is the breathtakingly urgent follow-up to the gripping **BEARTOWN**. If you like to think, you will love this duo. If you are looking for fluff, you won't.

I loved them. Backman is relentless in tackling social issues in these brilliantly narrated books about sports.

However, they are not sports stories.

However, they are hockey stories.

However, they are not →

*... a jarringly evocative look at the struggles of life...*

**BEARTOWN + US AGAINST YOU** are the best sports stories I have ever read. For anyone who has taken part in sports at a reasonable level, Backman does a masterful job of capturing the inner workings, the corruption, the realities of not being good enough, the entitlement dropped onto the stars and the challenges of being different when the **TEAM** comes first all the time. Backman deftly navigates what it is like to be caught up in the chase of something fanatics layer immense importance on – when sports do not define who we are, and it is tragic when we think it does.

We are not part of a tribe if we want to excel as an individual.

**US AGAINST YOU** is a story about learning to accept whom you are becoming.

*It is riveting.*

*It is gripping.*

*It is sad.*

*It is honest.*

*It is life.*

*It is breathtaking.*

**US AGAINST YOU** is a jarringly evocative look at the struggles of life through an unfiltered lens.

I'll repeat it: I loved it. I didn't want it to end. I choked back tears as I flipped the pages.

This book should be mandatory reading for anyone involved in the (sporting) world!

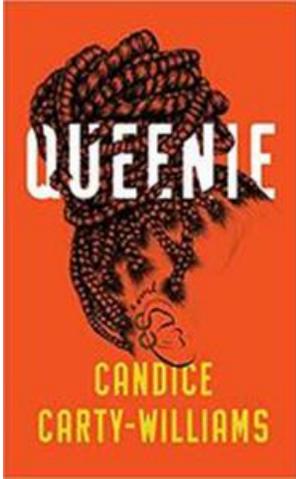
It might cause athletes to look deeply into their mirrors.

**TOP 5 BOOK!**

WRITTEN: July 29th - 2019

## QUEENIE

CANDICE CARTY-WILLIAMS



*Hilarity cloaked in the nuances of sexuality, racism, and mental well-being.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I am not a 25-year-old black woman living in South London. I'm the exact opposite.

What does that even mean?

First off, because of my opening statement, I can't relate to the life of Queenie. I have no references for dealing with the vileness of systemic racism. It would be appalling of anyone in my demographic to pretend they can. I also, after reading, duh, am baffled by the minds of anyone under thirty.

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**I question myself:** did I carry the same sense of – when I was Queenie's age?

Okay, I've gotten the un-relatable aspects out of the way.

I don't fit into the Queenie reader demographic, but I loved the book.

I found it hilarious, in the way it made me feel uncomfortable – about everything: sexuality, racism, mental health issues, friendship, and the desperation merely is trying to be okay. Queenie's jaunt through life opened my eyes to what surely must be challenging, living in a world spinning out of control.

Queenie made me feel grateful that I grew up in a time when life was far more connected than it is now in the 24/7 connected world.

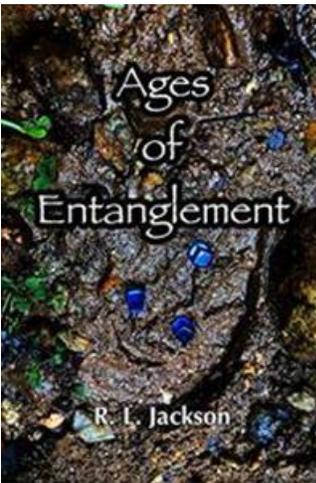
What I once thought of as youthful entitlement, I've now understood life can be challenging for all.

I must thank Queenie because she helped me realize the importance of kindness when I wasn't laughing or cringing.

WRITTEN: July 22nd - 2019

## AGES OF ENTANGLEMENT

R.L. JACKSON



*IS HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

First off, it made me feel we were entering the Age of Déjà vu.

Ages of Entanglement is an evocative romp through a world that once was, soon, coming, a dystopian look at the flaws of humanity and our predilection to destroy ourselves. Page after page, I felt like it had dropped me into the realities of Cast Away trudging towards Lost, challenged by a wall of immigration. We are racing. Humanity, that is—and if we are too stunned to reach the finish line, a reset may be in order.

Ages of Entanglement is a poetic journey touching on everything plaguing society today: greed, hatred, fear, insularity, the need for sports to turn to blood to stay relevant, and pursuits of →

It eloquently highlights the realities of staring at us today. And if we don't slow down and accept that we all need to be connected on a much deeper level than technologically or economically, what may come our way may be inevitable, which will quickly subtract the fiction from this engrossing read.

WRITTEN: November 16, 2019

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 4



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1. A MAN CALLED OVE - FREDRIK BACKMAN
2. BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME - TAE-NESHI COATES
3. SUPERMARKET - BOBBY HALL
4. CALYPSO - DAVID SEDARIS
5. THE SHOE ON THE ROOF - WILL FERGUSON
6. I'LL GIVE YOU THE SUN - JANDY NELSON
7. TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD - HARPER LEE
8. YOU THINK IT, I'LL SAY IT - CURTIS SITTENFELD
9. THE INHERITENCE OF SHAME - PETER GAJDICS
10. PURSUIT OF FREEDOM - LAXMI PARASURAM

BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

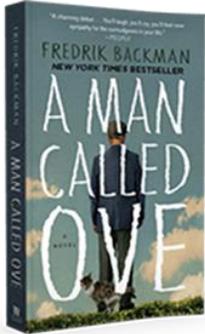
PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 6

# A MAN CALLED OVE

## FREDRIK BACKMAN



*I want Ove to be my best friend!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**A Man Called Ove** is my second favourite book – it is close, but still second.

Ove is a snarky old man, 59 years old, not old by any standard, but he is from Sweden, perhaps old by Ikea standards.

Does Ikea furniture ever make it to antique?

Don't take that as a slight against Ikea; I love Ikea.

Ove likes order, “rules are rules.”

He's an awkward man who's deeply principled. When Ove finds a lost item, he turns it in, but he will not rat out a lesser man who believes in 'finder's keepers.'

Ove's world is black and white.

He likes fixing things.

He enjoys working with tools.

He likes simplicity and falls in love.

He feels unworthy, but his heart fills with true – his love, Sonja, brings colour to Ove's life.

He falls deeply.

Tragedy strikes – his love never wavers through trauma – sadly, love eventually leaves as it succumbs to cancer and his world trips back to black and white.

The days begin darkly blending into the next, and his will to live evaporates without “pure love” walking lockstep.

He plans his exit.

He feels isolated despite the collection of unusual blundering characters who keep dropping into his life.

He resists their presence, and his time is up.

Suicide is on the docket.

He tries.

He is interrupted.

He tries again.

He is interrupted once more.

With each chapter read, I feared he'd eventually succeed.

The damaged blundering characters transform from flawed to flawed with a purpose: to keep Ove busy fixing things broken in each of their lives.

Then, magically, as if a zipper appeared on the pages only to be pulled down, allowing me to crawl fully into the story: I felt as if I was becoming a character in the story.

I read "Ove" while reading a memoir about a megalomaniac psychiatrist who was trying to cure the homosexuality of the main character – a light read – not, but an excellent book (more on it at another time). With each passage I finished of the not-so-light read, I felt a need to read "Ove" to cheer myself up. So, imagine a book about a crotchety old suicidal man being an elixir of hope!

It is time to wind my thoughts down; I feel the wind blowing long here.

I never wanted "Ove" to end.

I became sad as the pages slipped by.

Pardon the cliché; the book is a real page-turner – but I only read a chapter or two at a time to avoid the last page. But, as I paced along beside the beautiful cast of characters inside the book, I imagined meeting with Ove each week to catch up.

Ove became my friend.

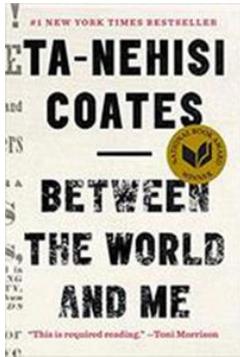
Ove made me want to be a better man.

Ove turned black and white into a vibrant tapestry of colour.

**A Man Called Ove** is my second favourite book, my first favourite: my memoir – simply because I did not write Ove!

# BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME

## TA-NESHI COATES



*I will never be black.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Racism is a learned sickness. **Between the World and Me** is an eloquently written, captivating look at it from the inside. I thank Ta-Nehisi Coates for sharing his story.

The book upset me. I don't want to believe the world to be this way. I don't bleeping understand what race is—I do—but I don't. I think it is a creation affecting us from the depths of greed — a way to control.

Ta-Nehisi weaves his realities by using the literary tool of a letter to his son. The letter speaks of the atrocities cloaking those of black skin. It navigates the truths of race, being a creation of the rich to control the unrelenting challenges of the poor.

White poor.

Black poor.

They're all the same; however, greed needed to divide. Greed required one group to be below the other on the pecking order of living. **Between the World and Me** is a beautiful exposé, highlighting the ridiculousness and blind sightedness of literally all of us who grew up in suburbia. It scorns the illusive DREAM, which is only allowed to be chased by those deemed to be white enough to take part.

### NEWSFLASH

White doesn't exist. It never has, and it never will. If White Supremacists held a convention where all members took a DNA TEST—there would never be a second convention.

**What I loved most about this book;** is it promotes the quest for critical thought?

It challenges us to question everything. It is painful. In today's (and always) climate, it is a vital read to help us look deeply into the mirror and query how we've arrived: HERE - TODAY.

### RACE WAS CREATED BY GR\$\$D

There is no Chinese race.

There is no Korean race.

There is no Muslim race.

However, somehow, there is a WHITE RACE.

Isn't that a ginormous load of BS?

What the bleep are we racing toward?

Ta-Neshi, in perfect clarity, highlights the struggle of being trampled for generations and then being punished for trying to rise. Slavery didn't end when the so-called white elitists ended it—it just shifted into laws meant to control, leading to unrelenting violence swallowing the ghettoized poor. Prisons for profit continued to incarcerate those who'd already brought a bountiful of wealth to the ruling class by enslaving them in offensive numbers; and then using the imprisoned labour to keep stuffing their pockets.

I don't want to be racist. So, I won't. I wish Ta-Neshi didn't need to write this heart-wrenching letter to his son. However, he did.

Ta-Neshi's letter, sadly, reminded me of a beautiful blog post a white musician left for his daughter when he was dying from the wrath of Cancer. In the letter, he explained to his daughter all the beautiful things in the world when he was still alive. Who the leader of his country was, what the number one song was, what his favourite food was – with nary a mention of the struggles of life?

The letter contrasted Ta-Neshi's daily struggles to stay alive, stay out of prison, and not be destroyed by a created race that has treated everyone but themselves as less than human for centuries.

I loved this book.

For several hours after I completed reading, I tripped into a blue funk, only to snap out of it because I realized how offensive it is to feel sadness for something I can never possibly understand. After all, if I were to write a letter to a loved one, my struggles would never have to touch on who I am. Instead, I blend in with all the so-called superior whites.

I don't want this book to reflect humanity.

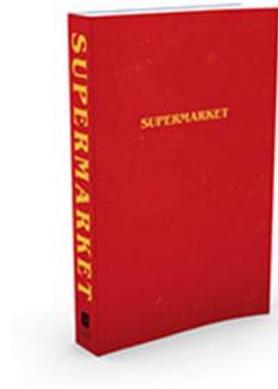
I will keep asking questions.

Maybe one day, we can stop the bleeping race. If we don't, I'm not sure if reaching the finish line is a good thing.

**READ THIS BOOK.**

## SUPERMARKET

BOBBY HALL



*A wicked ride on a roller-coaster leaving my mouth agape at the end.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Hey, look at the red book over there?

I pick it up.

Simple cover, enticing texture, I'm sold!

I crack it open.

I don't know what to expect.

I don't know what the story is about.

An elevator door opens.

I get in.

The attendant hands me a bag of pills.

I resist taking one.

We meet Flynn.

He's quirky.

He's creative.

He weaves his words in a unique formation.

We rise to the second floor.

The characters are colourful, vibrant, consistent, challenged – trapped working in one of the few going concerns in town, a supermarket – generic → *like many-a-town*, sprinkling the world.

As Flynn writes them, the characters spring to life, peculiarities, and all.

Flynn is a writer.

He's signed a book deal.

He needs to create fiction from non.

He needs to make the boring life of a small town vibrant.

### HIS CHALLENGE

He's kind of messed up.

We reach another floor.

The protagonist is antsy.  
He wants to push the proverbial envelope.  
He wants to live.

*"He could be any of us who struggle with belonging."*

We are near the top floor.  
We're handed another bag of pills.  
I resist popping again.  
What's happening?  
Am I hallucinating?  
Flynn's life unravels.  
He's damaged.  
Lost.  
He could be any of us who struggle with belonging.  
We drop at an unforgiving pace.  
I read another page.  
Reality has become skewed.  
I read more.  
Maybe a pill will help clear things up.

**I CAN'T STOP READING!**

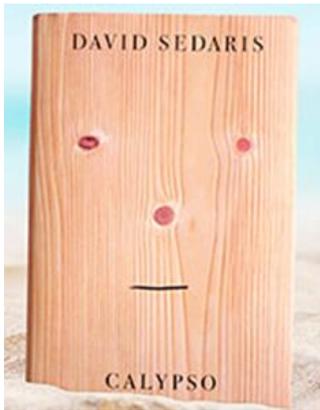
**SUPERMARKET** is street-smart. It is an outrageous, insanity-laced, roller-coaster ride, with mind-bending realities around every corner. It profoundly tackles issues of mental health + will have you teetering on a line between clarity and fantasy + if you trip too far – you may never make it back.

**SUPERMARKET** has entered a three-way tie for my favourite book. "A MAN CALLED OVE," "My Life on the Slush Pile," "**SUPERMARKET**"

REVIEW WRITTEN: May 12, 2019

## CALYPSO

### DAVID SEDARIS



*A darkly entertaining and intimate look at coming to terms with the inescapability of living.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

In **Calypso**, David Sedaris blasts open the doors and windows into his life, inviting readers in for a darkly entertaining and intimate look into his coming to terms with the in-escapability of living.

Once inside, I found Sedaris standing in front of the mirror with the image staring back at him, attempting to come to terms with life slipping by – part reminiscing – part fear; laced with reality.

198 My emotions flipped between laughter, cringing introspection, and profound sadness on any page.

As David peered into the mirror, the book transformed. The image looking back at his life morphed into me, you, our neighbours – and – every human being who has their eyes open to the trials and tribulations every one of us deals with in time in our life journeys.

David Sedaris is a gifted storyteller – did I just become Mr. Obvious?

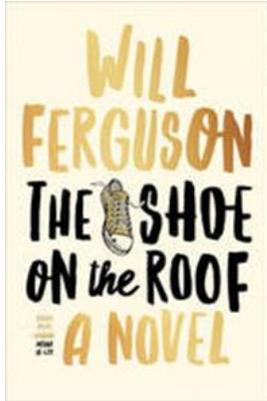
This collection of stories is a beautiful gift to each of us!

I found the chapters “Why Aren’t You Laughing” and “The Spirit World” tugged at my heartstrings in a painfully visceral way – providing warmth masked as pain – bringing tears to my eyes as the image in the mirror morphed back to me.

Sure, all our paths are uniquely our own, but if you open your heart and mind while reading **Calypso**, you may realize the threads that bind us altogether likely come from the same source.

## THE SHOE ON THE ROOF

WILL FERGUSON



*Will the real Jesus please stand up?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

What happens when three Jesus(s) are forced to meet during an experiment to determine he doesn't exist?

Thomas is troubled, demented, highly intelligent. He's messed up by the need to rise from the dysfunction of having been a scientific experiment in his youth, an experiment conducted by his brilliant maniacal psychiatrist father.

"Memory is the hotel curtain that never completely closes...."

199

The Shoe on the Roof dives deeply into Thomas's psyche as Thomas is forced to face his mental health issues while desperately trying to find a place of belonging. Thomas is not a less-than-likeable entitlement-damaged protagonist. He stumbles across the three Jesus(s) who are wandering around Boston, taking guardianship over them. He's facing his insecurities and a need to manipulate, stemming from his upbringing. The book is hilarious, cut from large swaths of darkness.

We are all damaged.

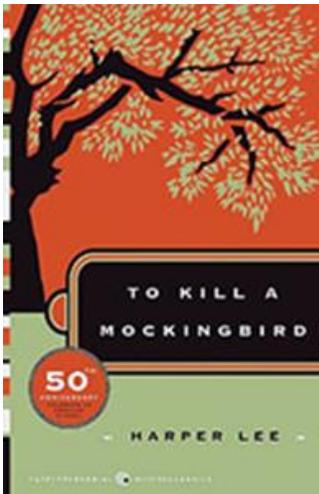
We all need to find a place of belonging.

*We all...*

Read this book!

## TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

HARPER LEE



*A sad classic that highlights evolution has a long way to go.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

There is nothing to be said about this book that hasn't been already said. However, I'll still give it a go.

**To Kill a Mockingbird** exposes the ugly truths of America decades ago. America can be a dark place. Over time, of course, things have gotten better, much better for us Caucasians, who are at the very worst have been called a 'cracker' or 'honky', which in all honesty, have no bite. So when I was called those things, I had to GOOGLE them to know what they meant.

I'm still not sure about the origins of 'honky?'

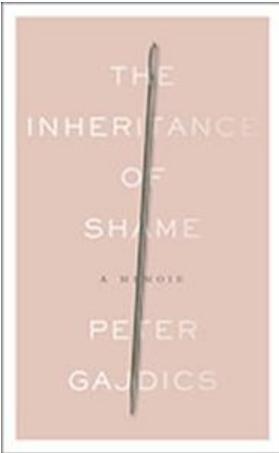
I have a metallic white vehicle.

I've named it Honky!

**To Kill a Mockingbird** saddened me because if we open our eyes, we'll realize that the 'things have gotten better' is relative to other cultures. But, as much as the book saddened me, it also made me open my eyes and not accept things the way they are. It makes me want to be a better person!

# THE INHERITANCE OF SHAME

PETER GAJDICS



*An eloquently written + scorching tale of survival and understanding.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Peter Gajdics is (was?) a damaged man. His parents were deeply flawed, causing Peter to cloak who he would inevitably become from the judgemental eyes of religion.

His mother escaped a post-WWII communist concentration camp – his father, an orphan, never knew his parents. They were both exiled to Vancouver, where they found each other and started new lives.

Peter is gay, raised when gay was deep in the closet only to come out in the dark underbelly of many cities (Vancouver included). Peter faced a sexual assault at six, throwing his life into confusion. He felt isolated and alone. Being raised by deeply religious parents who endured dark pasts didn't bring comfort and stunted Peter's growth in coming to terms with whom he would be.

The Inheritance of Shame is a scorching, candid story about finding oneself while navigating a quandary of near-impossible circumstances. Peter trips into the cult-like care of a megalomaniacal psychiatrist (Alfonso) who rips apart the identity of many lost, damaged, and flawed souls, warehousing them in a charade of caring – which is nothing more than psychotic control. In Peter's case: Alfonso, while masking his torture as caring, tries to cure Peter's homosexuality, a ploy used to manipulate for profit.

Peter eventually finds the strength to break free + the unwavering courage to fight for what's right. In freedom, he finds purpose. He understands that as much as he grapples with his realities. His parents also need to find solace in who they once were. Patiently, with great empathy, Peter helps his mother and father let go of some of the crippling secrets hidden in their pasts.

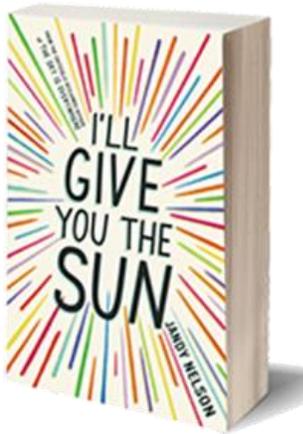
Gajdics tackles a complex dark subject with grace and brilliant prose. The subject is intense. As much as the book is a memoir with gay undertones, it will resonate with anyone who has ever struggled with finding their identity (everyone).

The Inheritance of Shame is a passionate story about love, understanding and acceptance. The subject is scathingly intense; it will linger with you long after consuming the last word. Even with the intensity cranked to eleven – if you scour the pages closely – there is the occasional moment of deliciously dark comedy; a slice of one sentence jumped off the pages for me, leaving me chortling and falling out of my chair. I will go for it for you to find!

Thank you, Peter, for having the courage to share your engagingly troubling story.

## I'LL GIVE YOU THE SUN

JANDY NELSON



*A deeply gripping story about finding out who you really are!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Twins, Jude, and Noah, one boy, one girl, inseparable in youth; both artistically gifted and like boys, take us on an exciting trip through their lives searching for meaning. Their mother dies in a tragic accident, leaving them alone with a single father. He is a father who struggles to provide the much-needed heartwarming moments his children desperately need because of his infinite struggles with his realities.

I struggled through my realities as the pages unfolded into a brilliant tapestry of what life is like when life-altering traumatic

202 events drop into life. Jude and Noah both need the love of their father. They both need to be understood.

They both need to matter.

They both need love.

Unfortunately, they've left to their own accord to cobble together the pieces they are becoming, hopefully, to find solace and a place allowing them to move forward in life.

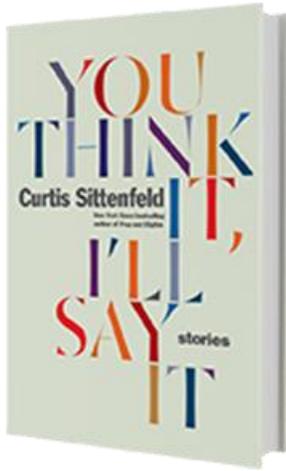
Jandy weaves an incredible journey, inviting us into the twin's lives. Jude and Noah's challenges tug at readers' heartstrings, alternating emotions between cheering and jeering for the foolish decisions they make.

The book twists and turns in a soul-searching, violently, and is full of denial, leading down an exhilarating path ending when a bomb is dropped in the last few pages, leaving readers, at least me, with my mouth agape.

I loved this book, and I'm sure you will as well!

# YOU THINK IT, I'LL SAY IT

CURTIS SITTENFELD



*Politics → Unrequited Misguided-Love → Lust – Envy ++*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**Hello, Curtis.**

My name is Lindsay.

It's a pleasure to meet you.

I like your outfit.

I find the base calming, the subtle splashes of colour intriguing.

You feel nice in my hands, firm.

If you don't mind, I think I'll crack you open and dive in headfirst.

Would you like to hang out for a few days, maybe a week?

You would - great!

Crap - can't escape politics. So, you had to start our date with a Trump-themed story?

I guess that's okay in one of the first chapters of my memoir, even I mention Trump.

Curtis, you seem to like to write about female-based themes. A tad odd, but it works swimmingly. Story one, two, three - all-female leads. What's going on, Curtis?

Do you wish you were a woman?

**Better check the book jacket:** Curtis, a woman, who knew? It makes sense now. I guess you knew, probably your mother. I'm thinking the fictitious cab driver, the fictional "you" had sex in the first chapter with—knew.

Lindsay, a man: who knew?

Keep sharing. Your stories flow effortlessly together. You got me. I'm in hook, line, and sinker. I want another page. I want another yarn. Your fictitious life keeps streaming forward. Middle age drops in a quagmire of "what if?" – it laments missed opportunities, denial, deceit, loneliness, revenge; all falling onto the delightfully weaved together stories you've dropped onto the pages as "all of us."

**YOU THINK IT, I'LL SAY IT** is charmingly nuanced storytelling. By the end of its juicy pages., you just might realize. As much as you've shared a book of fiction – the stories within are all about us. Regardless of gender. Regardless of age. Relatable to each of us. Whether or not we realize it.

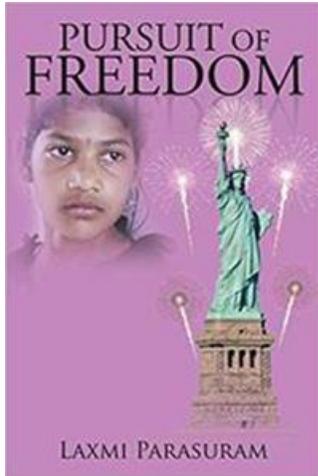
*Politics → Unrequited Misguided-Love → Lust → Envy → Deception*

*Loneliness → Humour → Sadness → Acceptance*

Thanks for the date, and I wish you the best, and I must let you go, and I think your dance card may have an exceptionally long waiting list!

# PURSUIT OF FREEDOM

LAXMI PARASURAM



*What's the difference between caste and the 1% elites?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Maya is 12 years old living in India. Maya is ripe for an arranged marriage and resists her planned destiny, finding the courage to want more, her own life to quench her thirst for knowledge, + fulfill a burning desire to be more.

**The Pursuit of Freedom** is an eye-opening journey into another world. A world most people have never been subjected to – the caste system of South East Asia; or the arranged marriages of many parts of the world. The story is set in the 1940s and winds through Maya's rising from the depths of a flawed norm – resisting – fighting for change. The book's ending is in the 1960s.

Maya shows tremendous courage in fighting for her life. For a better way. She escaped the crippling captivity of 'caste' and 'arranged' and risks her being to strive for understanding. The Pursuit of Freedom simmers in the beginning chapters, to the point it caused me to cringe at a reality far from mine. As Maya escapes and travels to the United States, the story boils at a rollicking pace where she examines the essence of her soul.

I'd like to thank Laxmi Parasuraman for sharing this beautifully eloquent, multi-layered story about the toxic realities of this existence that likely is still brewing today. My mind sprung to the realities of her journey. How do you rewire something that has been the norm for centuries? How do you break a cycle of control and ownership when it is ingrained deep into the souls of men? Are cultures really that different? Is America's elite (the world elite) any different from those cultures we label misogynistic? Do the rich really mingle with the poor, or do they only need the poor to fatten their wallets?

The content of this gripping book without hesitation provides food for thought + highlights, at least to me, if we tear off our rose-coloured glasses, the first world has come a long way towards equality, but in reality, the large part of the road, has yet to have been travelled.

Maybe it is time for the next phase of evolution to begin, and more women need to be in charge of wiping the mess created by a patriarchal world.

WRITTEN: NOVEMBER 4, 2019

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 3



205

1. **HITS & MISSES - SIMON RICH**
2. **MOSTLY DEAD THINGS - KRISTEN ARNETT**
3. **WOMEN TALKING - MIRIAM TOEWS**
4. **BUFFERING - HANNAH HART**
5. **1984 - GEORGE ORWELL**
6. **GOD - REZA ASLAN**
7. **BEST DAY EVER - KAIRA ROUDA**
8. **EDUCATED - TARA WESTOVER**
9. **WE ARE NEVER MEETING IN REAL LIFE - SAMANTHA IRBY**
10. **ONE OF US IS LYING - KAREN M. MCMANUS**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

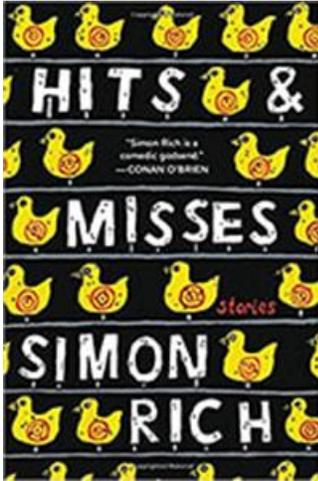
**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

**BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 6**

## HITS & MISSES

SIMON RICH



*I laughed so hard at times I peed a little bit...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Simon Rich was an ordinary boy, raised by a typical family in New York City. If ordinary translates into being raised in a family of academics, gifted with a love of the quill.

Little did little Simon know, his destiny included entertaining by spinning twisted yarns derived from deep inside his brain, fueled by the hamsters ferociously rotating the creativity wheels of the absurd. Rumour has it: Simon was born with pen and pad in hand.

Another rumour suggests Simon's first words were "Horsey" and "The British Are Coming" – which, oddly enough, he writes a story from the perspective of a horse ending with the horse's fate determined to be: glue?

Experts question the roots of his scattered-genius-creativity, often asking: How could an ordinary boy born into a typical family be so mentally (insert your descriptive word here)?

There have been suggestions since he fell off his imaginary horse, Louis. Often. Tapping his head on the floor each time he fell → after each tap, his whack-creativity poured from his clouded mind freely → producing a series of comedic gems found in the stories of his laugh-out-really-(a "really" bad and unimaginative adjective)-loud book, **Hits & Misses**.

Whether any of my above thoughts are true facts. Or fake. We are lucky for the traumatic events that indeed must have occurred in Simon's ordinary boy life → to allow him to mess with our minds with such hilarity → begging the question: Is there something wrong with me when I guffaw while reading, or did I hit my head as well, allowing me to get it? "

It' = being Simon.

Thanks, Simon. Because of you, I finally can accept I'm not normal.

**Read: Hits & Misses** – if you don't find it side-splittingly hilarious, oh well, it must suck to be...

## ONE OF US IS LYING

KAREN M. McMANUS



*A jock. An outsider. A beauty-queen. An overachiever. Social media. A murder.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

What happens when you mix these all together into a simmering broth?

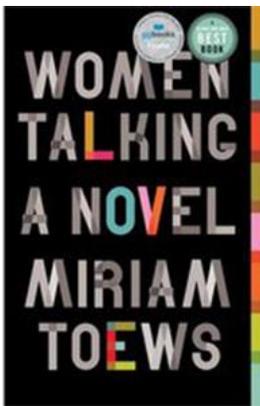
The Breakfast Club goes viral!

One of Us is Lying is an enthralling, comedy-laced, deliciously original take on what it is like to be growing up in the NOW. Author Karen McManus weaves a masterful, nuanced tale. Karen chops her personality into four to tackle the four protagonists, who've all become the prime suspects in the murder misfit, Simon. Simon's misguided sense of entitlement led to his death.

One of Us is Lying wrestles with the challenges of youth, depression, vanity – in a world that makes unrelenting changes with each blink of an eye!

## WOMEN TALKING

MIRIAM TOEWS



*Is the oppression of women in religion really the norm?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Is the oppression of women in religion really the norm?

A gripping story about the oppression (rape) of women in an archaic religious colony. Women Talking can be challenging because it blasts our eyes wide-open, making it impossible not to compare the atrocities of the community to the horrors of mainstream society, a society not immune to similar behaviour.

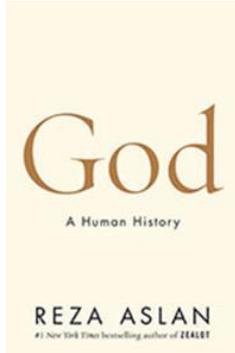
The book is a timely piece with the current state of the world and the desires of the “old boys” club to keep women subservient and in their place.

Despite tackling the upsetting subject, this book warrants the maximum number of stars. If there is one thing I take away from this book: I think Women Talking is a SHOUT OUT to all men, to look in the mirror, and examine their behaviour, to make sure you’re not guilty of being archaic yourself.

# GOD

A HUMAN HISTORY

REZA ASLAN



*A light read that may mess with your mind while shining a different light on your GOD!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I picked up GOD because I figured it would be a light-spirited, informative read.

Before I share my thoughts, I'd like to get my exaltations out of the way: Reza Aslan is a gifted writer – and an intellectual who makes my head spin – I've watched him dismantle talking heads on television. Instead, he scares me into wanting to be smart.

That's enough sunshine. The real reason I picked up the book is that I'm God uninformed. My beliefs are simplistic: I believe we are supposed to trip toward kindness and that most other things we endure in life are just divisive noise. Do we need a God to tell us light is better than darkness? Maybe I'm naïve.



GOD is a beautifully written book that, for me, highlighted the precarious nature of humanity as some of us desperately try to control others because of egos left unchecked. The book resonated loudly, helping me to understand we are all the same flawed creatures – losing ourselves in an unquenchable thirst for power.

If GOD exists, could someone please explain politics (pmurt)?

Pick up this book. If you have a background in theology, it may provide a different view – maybe not. If religious studies passed you by as you struggled through life, like me, GOD is a nice light way to mess with your mind – may be on a Sunday.

I don't fear GOD, but any book with GOD in the title, just for divinity's sake, warrants 5 STARS.

I enjoyed GOD. How could I not?

“He watches the sun forever chase the moon across the vault of heaven.”

Thanks, Reza.

## THE BEST DAY EVER

KAIRA ROUDA



*A unique voice narrating a story in a riveting, gripping way, questioning self with every page turned.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Best Day Ever reads like a world-class DJ dropping beats – slowly elevating the reader to a crescendo – then sending them into a whirlwind ride racing toward a gripping → at a relentless pace - flashing twists and horror → until the ending leaves you gasping.

Love the ending?

Hate the ending?

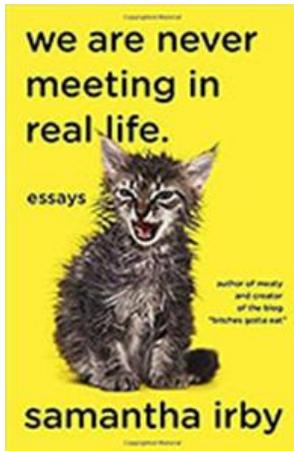
There is no doubt Kaira’s prose is deft at drawing readers in – and guessing what may come next – with the last words opening up to debate.

**The characters:** We know them. As much as this is a work of fiction, I could not help but examine my life – wondering: have I ever behaved abhorrently like the main character? Have I ever placed, or do I know anyone who has?

Put a “loved” one in a place where love does not exist, where control disgusts?

## WE ARE NEVER MEETING IN REAL LIFE

SAMANTHA IRBY



*A disruptive collection of dysfunction + insecurity that will have you guffawing about life*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Samantha Irby is a full-figured, somewhat-introverted black woman who shares stories. She shares biting candour and highlights the heartfelt realities of her life's struggles, mostly learning to accept who she has become. She seems to want to hide from the world while screaming out: LOOK AT ME! At least – README!

As much as her collection of stories is wit-filled diatribes on the perils of living in one's own skin. The book stands out because of her courage to allow vulnerability to sneak onto the pages. And when it does, Irby turns the awkward pain into a slightly up-turned smirk. Only slightly. Laughter comes from despair. An abusive, manipulative, alcoholic father may provide a plethora of comedy necessary to survive. I'm not a full-figured black woman. Also, this life is hers, not mine – but, as much as humour allows us to cope – I would be surprised if before the laughter grew roots, it drowned in tears.

**In the end:** I'm glad I heard her screaming: README.

It might have been the dishevelled cat on the cover doing the screaming!

I guffawed, cringed, and a tear almost made it into my left eye. I considered puking twice, but I mostly enjoyed escaping into her life.

If you enjoy a witty take on such shallow topics as racism, alcoholism, mental health issues, isolation, sex, lesbianism – you will love this book! But, mainly, suppose you are an alcoholic who is suffering from mental health problems while being isolated from the world, as you struggle with sexuality + the health issues that arise – from not the best eating plan, well. In that case, this book might be about you (us) or someone we know. READ IT!

Sorry for yelling: read it!

## BUFFERING

HANNAH HART



*Family despair + Coming to Terms with Identity – Delivered with heaping helpings of empathy!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

What if your mother was mentally disorganized – unable to take care of herself – how could she possibly take care of her children?

Of course, your older sister lives the same reality as you – your norms – all you know. A second father arrives, riding in on a broken horse – not your father – he is attracted to dysfunction, attempting to save a floundering soul; confusing life more – a baby sister arrives.

How the bleep can you survive and become a light when your world is draped in darkness?

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When I read *Buffering*, I did not know who Hannah Hart is – one of the few – I think. Hannah's story may be disruptively unique – smeared with neglect – usually leading to misery and despair; however, with insurmountable hurdles stacked in front of her and her sisters, she shares without burdening the readers with sadness and pain. She has endured a reality few could comprehend – but one a good deal of may use avoidance to hide from – we all have layers of dysfunction in our lives.

What makes *Buffering* outstanding?

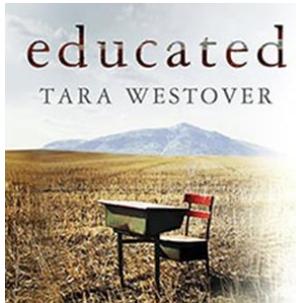
And must-read.

It is not Hannah's struggles with sexuality, family dysfunction, etcetera.

What makes it outstanding: she intuitively writes about her experiences while having them be about something much more substantial than self. Hannah is a talented narrator – entertainer. Thankfully, she found the courage to share her challenges – she has survived. She seems to understand her voice may help others, those less fortunate, find strength as well!

# EDUCATED

TARA WESTOVER



*Upsetting + Courageous + Disturbing + Harrowing + Gross + Enlightening.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I hated this book—I loved this book—that was only three chapters in.

Tara Westover is a ridiculously courageous individual who endured what must be as close to an unendurable upbringing as possible. It's hard to fathom what she went through as a child and still be okay. I don't believe she's okay. Could she possibly be okay?

This book upset me. Mainly because I didn't laugh once, how could I?

I thank her for sharing. As much as her story is about brainwashing by family and religion, I found it to mirror everyday realities for all of us: facts are taught to us by those who are spewing the facts, when gone unchecked and delivered with delusion or manipulation, reality becomes skewed, and what we believe to be true may be so far from the truth it becomes crippling. That was Tara's upbringing, Mormonism, and family (father mostly) shaded her from the world, and until she escaped its clutches (which she likely never truly did, or has done), did the realities of the world outside of upbringing become clear.

I wanted to scream at her to open her eyes.

You must escape from your family.

They are disgusting and toxic.

They are flawed, ill, destructive → demented.

Her descriptions of violence and trauma, accidents, explosions, etcetera—had me cringing, borderline projectile vomiting—and wondering how anyone could survive?

Family is a powerful sickness.

We all want to belong.

We all want a home.

A place of beginning.

A place of safety.

The education I received and what I think many readers will struggle with: No matter how messed up your family history may be, no matter how damaged the core is; I don't think there is a single person on this spinning rock that doesn't want it to be their safe place.

## IN TARA'S CASE

It is not.

And as much as her shrouded education came from her father, his likely came from his father before. His—breeding generations of sickness. I understand her need to find forgiveness and her burning desire for it not to be what it is!

I hope one day she laughs.

# 1984

GEORGE ORWELL

Spark Course

*If you don't understand Trump or Social Media – you will after you read this!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*



I came to a crossroads after reading 1984.

- Turn on every light in my home, including opening the fridge and leaving it open to eradicate the darkness consuming my soul.
- Turn off all the lights in my house, cover the window, crawl into a closet draped in a blanket, close my eyes, and shake.

1984 is a riveting story written several decades ago, highlighting where we might (?) be heading as a species. It's troublesome; two nights' worth of insomnia; unsettling.

It has helped me understand the perplexities of living and how we let others guide us to where we don't want to go. Oh yeah, the two chief difficulties:

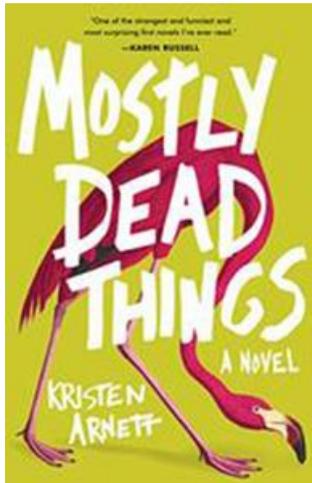
1. Electing politicians who only have their own best interests at heart because we've all become floundering addicts in a world swallowed by the noise of living. Too beaten down to realize our next fix might kill us—but we still take it, anyway, expecting a different outcome.
2. How social (?) media has made us all needy, broken souls in constant need of validation. Seriously. Why are you on social media?

That's what I took from reading **1984**—humanities need to be controlled because the more noise we're bombarded with; eventually, we develop less capacity to think for ourselves.

George Orwell wasn't foreshadowing what he saw coming, but he was diving deep into the evil capacities of man.

# MOSTLY DEAD THINGS

KRISTEN ARNETT



*I highly recommend reading this book while eating!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

## INGREDIENTS

- A father who's a taxidermist.
- A loving lesbian daughter, Jess, working at his side.
- A semi-lost son, trying to find out who he is.
- The daughter and son love the same girl.
- A mother trying to make the best of the cards dealt.
- Dad commits suicide.
- Jessa discovers the body in the room where she and her father used to bring dead animals back to life, almost ready to return to the wild.
- Mom creates art pieces with the animals, posing them in compromising positions.

And away we go!

Strange doesn't do **MOSTLY DEAD THINGS** justice. The book cuts delicately, screw that; it rips open every emotion in a viscerally beautiful way. A family broke by conditioning tear into their beings, slicing deep, exposing every fibre of being. So, they can move forward and find comfort in whom each of them becomes.

**MOSTLY DEAD THINGS** is jarringly funny, emotionally laced, dripping in a breathtaking need to find similarity in the lives of a family too immersed in beautifying the living past to realize they are stuck in denial.

Parts of the last 100 pages were so incredibly gripping the words lifted off the page, coming to life, and delivering, at least to this reader, to the beautiful pains found in trying to figure out who you are supposed to be! Parts of the last 100 pages just might have been the most powerfully beautiful writing I have ever read.

I read most of this book during lunch breaks.

In hindsight, maybe not the best way to learn about taxidermy!

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 2



1. **WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR – PAUL KALANITHI**
2. **THE ART OF MEMOIR – MARY KARR**
3. **THE GIRL WITH THE LOWER BACK TATTOO – AMY SCHUMER**
4. **THE ORPHAN MASTER’S SON – ADAM JOHNSON**
5. **THE CROSSROADS OF SHOULD AND MUST – ELLE LUNA**
6. **TENTH OF DEC – GEORGE SAUNDERS**
7. **THE BEST KIND OF PEOPLE – ZOE WHITTAL**
8. **THE NEW ASIAN HOME – KENDRA LANGETEIG**
9. **SUBMARINE – JOE DUNTHORNE**
10. **MANHATTAN BEACH – JENNIFER EGAN**

**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

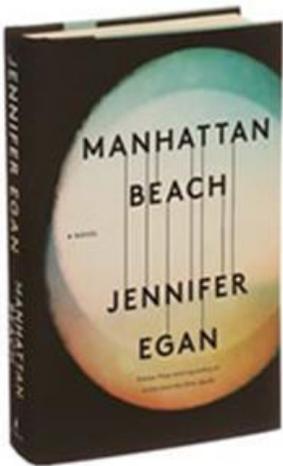
**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

## MANHATTAN BEACH

*Jennifer Egan*



*Beautiful prose transporting readers onto the pages →*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Jennifer Egan's command of language is gracefully decadent, enthralling – transporting readers into a new-fiction you can almost touch.

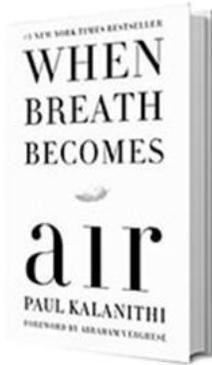
**Fact:** while reading a chapter of Manhattan Beach in a coffee joint (a section about building warships) Sink the Bismarck - (Tim Horton)\* tickled my auditory senses through the shop's speakers – dropping me directly onto the pages. I kid you not.

Egan's writing is like attending a Master Class in how to create richly-descriptive, compelling prose – a talent most narrators would benefit by aspiring to emulate.

\* When was the last, or only time, you heard: Sink the Bismarck?

## WHEN BREATH BECOMES ~ AIR

PAUL KALANITHI



*Uplifting. Engrossing. Heartbreaking. Heartwarming. Timeless. Beautiful!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I finished reading the last 60 pages of this breathtaking book at GIGI BLIN Market Cafe in Vancouver—the final 40 pages tears poured from my eyes—I did not care.

When Breath Becomes Air—is an uplifting memoir about searching for what matters in life; Paul Kalanithi was a neurosurgery resident and a thoughtful man.

He tried to understand the differences between the science of medicine and the needs and fears of his patients.

He desperately attempted to bridge the gap between the sufferings patients feel before and after invasive surgeries—and the medical teachings which cannot possibly allow doctors to understand what patients face.

That is the first half of this book: Spiritual, understanding, science and compassion are mixed into a pot, searching for deeper meaning.

I've had 17+ adult surgeries. Some left me in excruciating pain—far more significant than pre-surgery. I often questioned if the doctors understood what patients endure. No book could serve justice. I also thought that maybe surgeons should have to experience the surgeries themselves, as ridiculous as that sounds.

Luckily, except for being put under, most of my operations were routine—serious only in administering the anesthetic. (Note: I am ecstatic when I searched anesthesiologist—I spelt it correctly).

In the second half of the book, Dr. Kalanithi becomes the patient. Terminal cancer attacks him. Throughout his journey to his demise, he becomes a genuine hero as he grapples with what is most important in life while he slips away. He becomes intuitive. Focusing his remaining time on finding meaning in living despite being ravaged by disease. His wife became a rock, with their love growing stronger each day. He fathers a child—barely holding onto life in the delivery room when his daughter comes into the world. My waterworks begin.

How can a book with such a devastating finality be uplifting?

I will leave it for you to read to find out.

Paul's writing is spectacular, gifted, and poetic. He, without question, will touch the hearts of every reader.

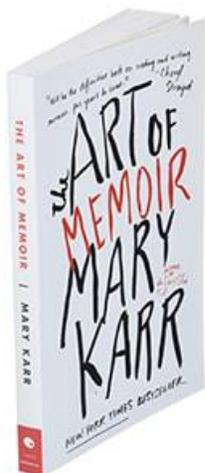
Whether you have experienced grave illnesses of a loved one, family member, or you – or have never faced the horrific cards of disease, yet – **When Breath Becomes Air** is a read, everyone will grow from reading. Paul's loss was not a tragedy. He gave so much of himself. Leaving behind for all, warmth and understanding the world so desperately needs. Crying is therapeutic – my session was brilliant – maybe a tad troubling for the other patrons of Gigi's, but brilliant!

Thank you for your gift.

## THE ART OF MEMOIR

MARY KARR

*A righteously delicious writer's bible, for writers, and readers, alike.*



*How did the book make me feel/think?*

If you read, write, or simply love the collisions memoirists face sharing their delusions as they battle with who they are, or who they are discovering – this book is the definitive bible for the craft; plus, much more, as if “plus?” can be added to “bible.” With each page turn, you’ll want to learn while being amazed by the lives of those who’ve found the courage to share theirs – influential writers, often troubled, who Mary highlights for us to study.

I found this book to be a free-flowing gem. It helped me immensely, in various ways:

1. I’m a memoirist, my memoir “**My Life on the Slush Pile (My Sister is My Mum)**” → will one day find a publishing home. “**The Art of Memoir**” helped solidify my hunch that my clarity – seeking delusions are essential, and the years of reliving painful life events have an endpoint worthy of sharing. It led me to a river where knowledge could be drunk up. With Mary’s ease of language, I found a thirst needing to be quenched. It helped me discover words I have been misusing, fuelling a desire to become a better writer. Amazingly, not annoying, as I kept reaching for the dictionary: Google.
2. And not only did this book provide me with inspiration, but it was also a delightful read, filled with humour and drama with each page-turn a note-takers dream.

Whether you write, enjoy reading, or simply have a thirst for knowledge, this book will not disappoint; and for those struggling with the life cards they’ve been dealt, it provides a reminder: The stories we live are worthy of introspection.

### MORE BOOKS BY MARY KARR

Liars Club

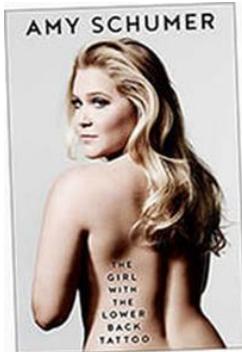
Lit

Cherry

+++

# THE GIRL WITH THE LOWER BACK TATTOO

AMY SCHUMER



*Emoji. Emoji. Emoji.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**THE REVIEW YOU** are about to digest contains a collection of stories from my life cobbled together into a beautiful collage that may or may not have anything to do with the book. I'm a storyteller. I like telling stories. So, grab your favourite bevy and a comfy chair and, hopefully, enjoy.

Like the hit TV show **24 Legacy**, the stories I am about to share are in real-time, whatever the bleep, that means.

I guarantee all these stories are true, apart from the occasional dusting of alternatives.

I love Amy Schumer. I think it takes a whack of courage to invite an audience into the dysfunctional world of daily life. In her case – I'm glad she has survived, and her destiny is to turn her absurd buckets of familial pain into therapeutic doses of comedy.

I was first exposed to her comedic brilliance at the Colossal Megaplex Theatre on a dismal rainy Saturday afternoon. To escape the day's deluge, a friend (Jay) and I decided a day movie would fit the bill nicely.

Tickets paid for. Ticket-taker in front of us – the ticket-taker handed us 3D glasses. I happen to be blind in one eye, for story's sake, my blind eye. Because of my visual challenges, 3D is kind of pointless.

It was looking as if our rain avoidance was going to be a failure. Luckily, my friend happens to be thoughtful. My friend informed the clerk of the situation. And being that we were at a Megaplex – a different movie was selected: Amy Schumer's smash hit comedy **Trainwreck**.

We entered the theatre. The theatre was empty – at the end of the trailers, still empty. Five minutes into the movie, empty. So, we decided to do what any sane movie-goers would do. We had to take advantage of this delightful oddity. We –

– flashback to the past. The past happens to be the only thing you can flashback to. A different theatre complex, me alone, a movie was on the docket. I couldn't recall the movie's name, so I Googled: 2006 British movie about a university, with songs by New Order.

Google told me I went to see **History Boys**. Damn, Google, you're good!

I entered the theatre. It was empty. Five minutes in, empty. So, I took off my clothes and watched the movie naked.

Flash-forward back to **Trainwreck**, my friend and I took off our clothes. Later that day, I found popcorn in my special place, Mmm – buttery!

**Trainwreck** was side-splittingly funny. I laughed hard.

Wow. I'm a good reviewer. I came up with the above description all by myself.

Before I get to the **Tattoo** book, it has come to my attention there is a chance I may be fat.

My fucking mirror has been lying to me for quite some time. I was residing in denial.

Then one day, a Friday, I think, I dropped off swag to a client I hadn't seen in several months. When he saw me, he excitedly asked, "What happened to your head?"

I didn't understand the question.

A week later, another friend patted my belly and asked, "What month?"

I didn't understand.

The next day, I glanced at my reflection in a car window. I need to split some sides. I had a choice to make – either smash out all car windows I pass; or begin walking sideways. I chose walking sideways.

Another week passed another client visit, another pat on my belly.

Fuckers –

I'm frustrated. I work out hard, much like I laughed at the movie. What's going on; I'm down to the final belt hole – if I pass it, my belt will be useless.

There was no more denying my expanding girth. Sucking-in was no longer viable.

Sadly, I tried to drown my sorrows in beer. A different friend noticed my depressed state, offering me a gummy bear. I like gummy bears.

For whatever reason, I didn't think a friend pulling out warm, soft gummy bears that had been in his pocket all day was anything but ordinary.

Maybe, I should have. This same friend once offered me a cookie he had just baked. I ate the cookie. When I woke up the following day, I found fourteen litres of chocolate milk in my fridge.

The gummy bear was sure tasty

## TIME PASSED

What else does time do?

I was no longer at the pub. I was sitting on my couch. My friend from the movie was with

me. The air was filled with letters of the alphabet flying by. *Cool, the letters of my name.* No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't rearrange them in the correct order.

My cat jumped onto the couch. Disturbingly, my cat was no longer a cat. My cat had morphed into a thousand two-headed rats, bad kitties.

Hundreds of parking garage gates started slamming all around me. I looked at my friend who was wearing some space-age-police-garb. My friend's job description was to detain anyone who was invading anyone else's space. I tried to sit still.

*Wow, this music video is sixty-three-minutes long. Funny, the TV isn't on.*

Sharp claws busted out of my knuckles. I better use my nails for good, I thought. Fortunately, my Space Cop was baking an endless number of bread loaves.

I gleefully sliced away.

Bakery work, complete. I figured sex would be nice.

*Sex would be nice... man, I can write, nicely.*

With sex on my mind and the mouth-watering scent of freshly baked bread wafting through my apartment – hmm – maybe a Bone Broth diet would alleviate my gut growth? I thought. The previous sentence, well, crap... that's what it was.

The next day it was time to stockpile broth. On the way to the Broth shop, my friend asked me if I was still gummied.

I didn't understand the question.

We stood in front of the Broth cooler, two minutes, three minutes... ten minutes.

*Turkey, chicken, lamb, beef – turkey, chicken, lamb, beef –*

The clerk approached.

*"Can I help you?"*

To which my friend replied, "Does the chicken broth come in any other flavour?"

With the broth in hand, it was time to get healthy. Before the health kick, it was time for another movie, [PATTERSON](#).

We entered the theatre. It was three-quarters full. Everyone was naked. Weird.

## **PATTERSON REVIEW**

As for the movie: good, deep, I like movies about writers; the film has a writing premise.

I hope you enjoyed the review.

**I HOPED ON** the scale at the gym. 200.7 lbs – WTF – I covered my mirrors at home.

## **JUMP FORWARD TEN DAYS**

The Broth fuel has been a success. I've dropped ten lbs. I decided to celebrate with more liquids, Ale. I was about to go home, happy with my results when a friend, sixty-three-years-of-age approached. Harry, a biker at heart, shorn head, like me. Harry loves my writing. Therefore, I like him.

Harry is a caricature. He is almost lifelike. There isn't a person he's met Harry hasn't offended. Harry likes shadow boxing in the sauna naked.

Harry's loud, belligerent, lovable. He once told me he invented a sex toy called the Suckutron 9000 (use your imagination). Harry says the perfect weekend is lining up an 8-ball, packets of Viagra, a couple dozen Pomegranate Coolers, mood lighting, and then strapping on the Suckutron. Disturbing

Anyway, Harry patted my belly and said, "*What's this?*"

At that moment, I concluded that most people may be getting the whole fitness quest wrong: We're all striving for something that doesn't exist, the after picture.

Isn't the before picture – our goal?

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Unless, of course, you started out the fat.

Pretty deep, don't you think?

I hope you are enjoying the cobbling, I bet you can almost hear the horse hooves.

Maybe, I will hop on the horse and take a pair of my damaged shoes to the cobbler. On the way, I will stop at the convenience store for some chocolate milk.

I think along the way, I may find the elusive before!

Work beckons. A worker asks Jeffer, a co-worker, if he knows where his cheque is?

Jeffer says, "*It may be at the corner store.*"

I politely inform Jeffer the corner store is a middle store.

Jeffer flashed me a frustrated glance.

## **TIME FOR BROTH...**

The **Tattoo** review is coming soon.

Let me do another mini review: Minus the gummies and fully dressed, my Friend and I (I only have one friend and luckily my friend's name is Friend, hence capitalized) headed to the Cineplex.

The movie: **Logan**.

I'm not sure a movie can be more violent. <sup>(1)</sup>

A couple next to us left because the couple couldn't handle the violence.

It's been a few weeks since the gummy bear, oh my, Logan, has claws.

In the movie, Logan's daughter also has claws. Together they skewer hundreds of people, gruesomely, disgustingly – no blood is left to be spilt.

Logan's daughter doesn't speak – until – in one scene, she watches Logan squirm as he sleeps. Then, when he wakes, she looks at him and calmly says, "*You were having a nightmare.*"

*I laughed and thought: About what?*

Later in the movie, they arrive at a retreat for young mutants who have escaped from Mexico to North Dakota with the eventual plan to make it into Canada.

Evil chases them. The young mutants run. One of the young mutants, maybe ten-years-old, is black, fat, fatter than me. The black mutant's gut cutely dangles and jiggles when running.

## THE GIRL WITH THE LOWER BACK TATTOO

Thank You, Miss Schumer, for cobbling the tattered chunks of your life together and helping us realize no matter how much dysfunction life throws at each of us, we can always find a way to laugh at the quagmire of our personal non-fiction.

Amy is a beautiful woman who, fortunately for us, invited us in for a therapeutic look at her life, and deftly, on any given page, can have us cringing, swearing, crying, worrying about her, and most of all, laughing-out-loud at dysfunction.

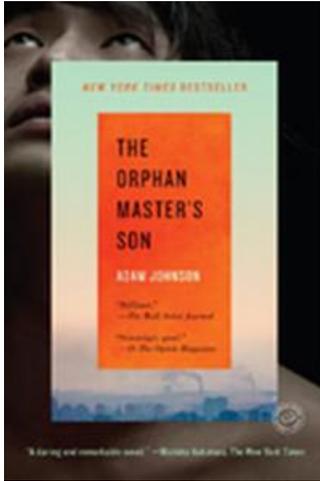
Stories told; I wonder if gummy bears come in chicken flavour.

## THE END

In the future, Americans will complain Squid Game is far too violent.

## THE ORPHAN MASTERS SON

*Denis Johnson*



*Comedy meets tragedy and shares strands with the realities of life and death in a North Korean gulag...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

This book drew me to it for three reasons:

- 1) I have (had) a dear friend at war with North Korea;
- 2) It was on somebody's (can't remember) books of the year list;
- 3) I am an orphan myself.

The story is about Pak Jun Do, an orphan in the secretive totalitarian nation of North Korea. He refuses to accept who he is—claiming to have a lost mother—she was a singer. The book takes readers on a voyeuristic trip highlighting with an excellent description of the horrors of living in a hermit state where worshipping the “Dear Leader” is paramount for survival.

Adam Johnson turns fiction into reality. Comedy meets tragedy and shares strands with the realities of life and death in a North Korea gulag—and ultimately exposes the beauty found in the innocence of love. This magnificent story grabs the reader. Once immersed, you cannot put it down.

On a personal note: I have researched the gulags. Johnson's descriptions, though gruesome, may not do the realities of the tortures dished out to hundreds of thousands of North Koreans whose only crime, where they were born, justice. Having a friend stationed just outside their border—frankly, scares me. The reality of the atrocities taking place today—would shock most!

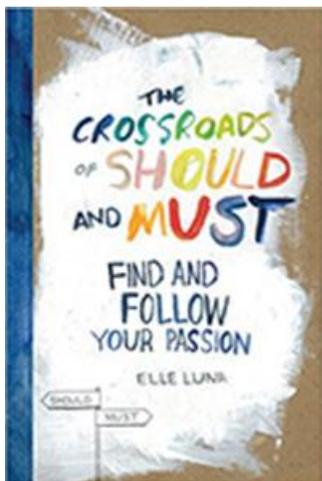
The world needs to see, and it is time for us to change course—if that is possible.

I highly recommend this book.

# THE CROSSROADS OF SHOULD AND MUST

## FIND AND FOLLOW YOUR PASSION

ELLE LUNA



A one hour read that ~~should~~ **MUST** be part of school curriculum starting in GRADE 4 or 5 and revisited every year all the way into adult life until each of us arrive at **MUST!**

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day when you find out why."*

- Mark Twain

**THE CROSSROADS OF SHOULD AND MUST** be the last book one needs to read if they are looking for direction (a route to their passion) or simply need to know if they are on the right path. This is a fantastic book. It's not as much a self-help book about

living life to the fullest as it is a pep talk for all of us who dare to dream!

Many books out there are long reads that attempt to help readers identify the colour of a flying contraption that will supposedly help with the direction their life is supposed to take. Or books that, after reading, assign a series of letters to the individual like ETFSIGSOSGIESW. I may have exaggerated the number of letters – I'm sure you get the gist.

Anyway, I've read some of those books, and sure they may be helpful, but honestly, I think life is more straightforward than those books. **THE CROSSROADS OF...** simplifies the process. It suggests we keep learning, trying new things and then, just maybe, one day, you will come across whatever *floats your boat*, and when you do, you **MUST** go for it.

Just imagine if kids were to read this book every year, starting in grade school all the way into adulthood, they would have their dreams reinforced annually, and the chances of finding happiness and passion would skyrocket.

Wouldn't the world be a better place if we taught kids to chase their passions instead of being a well-rounded, generically educated spoke in society's wheel?

Sure, we need to do things along the way, like to earn a living + taking part in the world. I don't call these things should, but part of the path.

I find 'should' to be a guilt-inducing word we **MUST** get past.

I'm lucky. I have found my **MUST**. Thanks to the book, I've quit my job to pursue my **MUST**.

Oops, I quit prematurely. I needed my income to pay rent and eat.

Oh well, how bad could it get?

Living outdoors won't be so bad.

Luckily, I found 10 pallets, some rebar, 4 filing cabinets, 8 milk crates, shrink wrap, heavy-duty plastic, sheets of packing material (bubble wrap), 1 table, 2 discarded chairs, 8 wheels; and super strong large cardboard boxes.

Place the filing cabinets together after painstakingly tying the rebar and pallets together. Hollow them out so that they are like one giant filing cabinet.

Fastening the boxes to the pallets.

Putting the milk crates in sequence to create a staircase.

Position the bubble wrap on the top of the filing cabinets to create a loft space.

Placing the table and chairs inside the filing cabinets.

Reinforcing the boxes with sheets of plastic and shrink wrapping the entire unit.

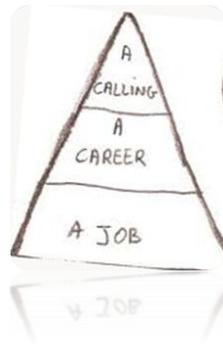
Oh yeah, and cutting windows and a door... well, my new home!



**FRESHLY LISTED ON AIRBNB: \$325 PER NIGHT**

Don't quit your income producing endeavours until your MUST is ready to support your needs and your family. The book HIGHLIGHTS this reality. Follow it.

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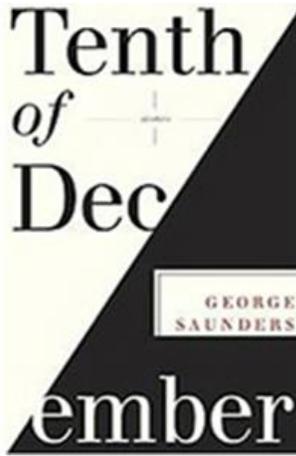
Thank you, ELLE LUNA, for writing this excellent book. I've read it twice. I will read it again and again and again... my MUST is upon me. Hopefully, others will read this book and find theirs!

One last thought: it drew me to this book because of the cover. Beautiful!

Don't worry, I haven't quit my career.

# THE TENTH OF DECEMBER

## GEORGE SAUNDERS



*Each story made me think... sometimes hard...'*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

George Saunders is a New York Times bestselling writer of American short stories, essays, novellas, and children's books. His writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *McSweeney's*, and *GQ*, among other publications. **Wikipedia.**

Mr. Saunders, you are one smart dude.

Your book was bleeping fantastic. Come on; stories about class, sex, war, loss, trauma—begging moral questions with every stroke of the key. You've masked non-with fiction. You must've derived your stories from observation of the conditions/direction of humanity and then dropped creativity to a new level.

I don't know. Maybe it is your constant level. I loved your book, mostly. I found some stories that gripped me, like the tormented individual being subjected to pharmaceutical experiments for the betterment of humankind or the boy whose choices appeared to be an act or not—a decision that could lead to the demise of a young man's neighbour.

*Was it really a love story?*

I guess you've left the interpretation in the reader's mind.

**What I loved the most:** Each story made me think... sometimes hard... as I became lost in your intelligence. I like to think I'm reasonably intelligent; however, I felt I needed to go sit in the corner and pout about what I was not getting.

That would quickly pass... not quickly... about a day after reading the book when a light blasted on; "Oh... I get it."

Anyway, I loved it, mostly. I write. I strive to write better. I think I am writing well now. Because of your outrageous creativity → *I'm frightened I don't write well.*

I dropped a chunk of your book (typed) into a WORD document; WORD suggested it was mistake-riddled.

Thank you for bringing me to the realization: WORD is not always infallible.

### MY VERDICT

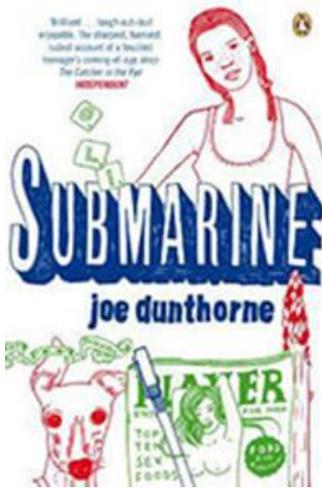
Buy this book, Learn—Read—Share; Think—Write. Thank you, Mr. Saunders; you've helped me become a wee-bit smarter. LAUGH.

### ONE QUESTION

Do you write on caffeine or something with a tad more kick?

## SUBMARINE

JOE DUNTHORNE



*Un-PC + Scattered + Awkward + Quirky + Fresh + Timeless + Cool = Us?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**Oliver Tate is fifteen.** He is beyond awkward; he is mean-spirited, his friends; few – are mentally disorganized. He does not fit in. The mundane repetitiveness of life is breaking his parents. Oliver fights to hold them together. Oliver finds love. He desperately tries to understand life while sabotaging himself with his delightful weirdness. His girlfriend's (Jordana's) mum is sick – a tumour. Jordana's dog becomes critically ill. Oliver figures if he euthanizes the dog, he will have prepared Jordana for loss – the dog should go first.

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He writes stories in his diary-turned log- turned back to a diary. She reads the stories.

His love begins to falter.

“Oliver – I’m breaking up with you.”

“No, you’re not. Look, trust me, you’re just having a nonage.”

“What?!”

*Submarine* is about coming of age and has garnered comparisons to *Catcher in the Rye*, and it really has.

I loved *Submarine* a tippie more.

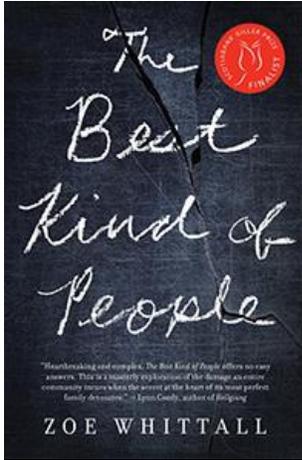
Oliver’s twisted-bizarreness may be crass, but it is smashingly brilliantly-side-splittingly-funny without question.

I think there may be a little Oliver in each of us!

There is a movie to boot, I will watch it, I really will!

# THE BEST KIND OF PEOPLE

ZOE WHITTALL



*A complex, riveting story grappling between morality and family support – pain filled, disturbing.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

## THE SETTING

Avalon, a lily-white town filled with the affluent, privileged – bringing up what some might call entitled youth – born with silver spoons in their mouths. A community shrouded in the darkness of “have.”

## THE CAST

**George:** Born into wealth, filthy rich. A hero who thwarts a school shooting, he settles for becoming a teacher in life. He is beloved. He is the teacher-of-the-year, year-after-year – until charged with four counts

of sexual assault on young students.

**Joan:** A dotting loving wife + a sharp-as-a-tack nurse.

**Sadie:** A near-genius, athletically gifted, beautiful daughter.

**Andrew:** A gay (of course) son who escaped the shadows of Avalon for the openness and bright lights of New York.

**Clara:** Sadie’s heartless sister.

## Elaine + Jimmy + Kevin

**Elaine:** a woman who wanted a child – chose to go it alone.

**Jimmy:** her son, a product of insemination + Sadie’s boyfriend.

**Kevin:** A struggling past-relevant author, Elaine’s partner.

## THE STORY

I wanted to love this novel – mostly – I did.

I had to keep reminding myself it was fiction.

The story starts with George saving the day by stopping an active shooting situation by risking his life. He instantly becomes a hero. George has the perfect family – the perfect wife – the perfect life?

His life crumbles, and George faces four counts of sexual deviance of young students on a ski trip.

I loved **The Best Kind of People** because it took an original take on a complicated subject by, mostly, taking the main character out of the plot. They incarcerated him with no chance for parole and with limited interaction with his family.

Whittall tackles sexual assault, deception, darkness, secrecy, and rips apart the fight for understanding + the survival of the main characters.

Is the assessment misdirected?

Although most of them sit in silence, community support amongst adults skews toward George, with devastating results for his accusers.

Whereas classmates shunned Sadie, as youth crawl over each other in battles for popularity, Joan becomes an emotional waste, barely holding onto reality. Andrew returns to support his family – reliving his past and what it was like to be gay in a community with deep closets. He reveals a secret love of his own – a moral question between gay and straight, hidden in the past.

The characters are not lovable. But, somehow, I pulled for them. Without George at the forefront, each took the stage, flaws, and all.

What would you do if a member of your family committed a sexual crime?

Would you stand with them in support?

Would you believe innocent until proved guilty?

Alternatively, would you assume the worst and fall into a world where you try to piece life together without fully knowing whether it will fall apart?

I struggled with the assumption of guilt.

With George in prison + limited communication with his family, he said, “I am being set up,” the lack of storyline addressing his innocence – didn’t seem real. Indeed, his wife, daughter, or son, would’ve been given more of a story than “I am being set up.” Without question, they would have stood by – after all, he had been a hero, a perfect husband, and a father.

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The lack of addressing guilt or innocence in more detail led to an assumption of responsibility. Page-after-page, his story was not entirely told.

How could it not have been?

The backstories are fascinating. Although part of the fiction, the struggles mostly translate fictitiously: had the family reduced to defeat – there appeared to be no fight – no genuine support; a perfect life became a secret life draped in darkness before the light was to reveal the truth.

Would you assume guilt?

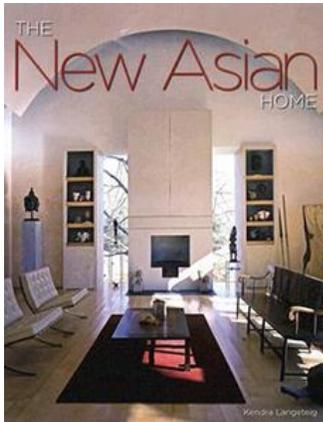
Before I go, Kevin, the once-relevant-writer, and Sadie...provide a twist amongst the twisting and turning storylines wherewith her father lost, she...?

**The Best Kind of People** bounces between George’s family members as they try to navigate murky dark truths they do not know. It is a gripping emotional roller coaster that tugs at every ounce of readers’ moral fibres with every turned page, as they ask themselves: how would I feel, what would I do, and can love survive, the dark depths of unfaithful, on a level rarely seen?

The main character, in the background, not having a voice; missed an opportunity – that is okay – the moral questions are essential; I remind myself: this story is fiction.

## THE NEW ASIAN HOME

KENDRA LANGETEIG



*Beautiful Homes + Asian Influences + Harmony between Life & Nature + Dazzling Photography.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**The New Asian Home** is a wonderfully illustrated book about combining Asian influences and nature to create amazing homes in-tune with nature.

This book is a perfect complement to your coffee table. Whether you are an architect; carpenter; looking to build your dream home or; just like to dream—**The New Asian Home** is an insightful addition to your collection. Dare to dream!

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 1.1



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1. THE GLORIOUS HERESIES - LISA MCINERNEY
2. LUST & WONDER - AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS
3. ME TALK PRETTY ONE DAY - DAVID SEDARIS
4. BORN A CRIME - TREVOR NOAH
5. LET'S PRETEND THIS NEVER HAPPENED - JENNY LAWSON
6. DRY - AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS
7. HOW TO RUIN EVERYTHING - GEORGE WATSKY
8. OFF TO SEA - RICHARD STINE
9. METAMORPHOSIS & OTHER STORIES - KAFKA
10. NEW BOY - TRACY CHEVALIER

BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

BOOK THOUGHTS: BATCH 2

# NEW BOY

TRACY CHEVALIER



*A beautifully written, timeless + poignant story, about the pain life often brings when you're an outsider.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I am not black.

I have never been a “new” boy.

I am not an outsider (except for my family – a complicated tale you may read about in my memoir).

I am not oppressed.

I was once called a “honky” – a word lacking bite.

Many reviewers of **New Boy** seem to be wrapped up in Othello + Shakespearean comparisons. For me, Shakespeare is eons away, forgotten in the past, along with school days long gone. I read the **New Boy** as a standalone; I am glad I did.

Osei, the main character of Ghanaian descent, was dropped into his fourth new school in six years in a white suburb of Washington, DC, in 1974. He was the solo-black, ostracized, and viewed as more animal than human at each school. His father was a diplomat, wealthy, moved around the world, family in tow – his children paid an enormous price for the moves. In school #4, Osei + his classmates, in Grade 6, mainly were 11 years of age – and mostly, sporting the racist parental attitudes pushed into them by the ignorance of the times. The kids were not innocent; they grew into being the same as their parents.

## WORSE MORSE

The teachers did little to rise above the times and grow instead of perpetuating the same disgusting views.

Even though the story is about children in a setting long ago – with each page I read, I could not help but think this is NOW (2017). We may have moved toward a diverse society living in harmony throughout the decades – but I think we would be lying. Look at the divisiveness in the USA right now: we are attempting to build walls and trying to ban humans based on origin, the colour of skin, or religious beliefs. **New Boy** is not YA. It is not a period piece. It is an exciting story about what it is like to be an outsider – something most people can relate to, whether that being: a **NEW** job, watering hole, school, city, team...you know where I am going?

Chevalier brilliantly places race front and center in this story; no white person can (maybe one) imagine what it would be like to be **NEW** and anything but – white.

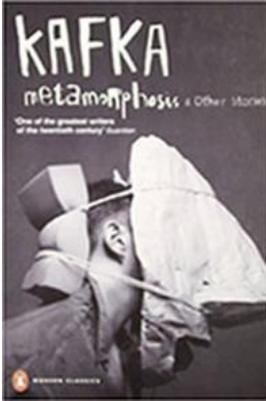
What I took from this riveting novel: just maybe, this book was not about the plight of

Osei as he tries desperately to weave his way through the thorny thickets of racism, love, betrayal, despair, and →

What **New Boy** shouts out is for humanity to come together. For each of us to stand above whom we are, looking deep inside ourselves and then open our arms and hearts to **NEW** + if we only talked to one another with kindness, we would realize we are all trying to make it through each day – primarily unscathed!

## METAMORPHOSIS + OTHER STORIES

KAFKA



*A literary gem: or so we are told, the next time I read it, beforehand, I'm going to lick some bufo alvarius.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I loved **METAMORPHOSIS**; I think.

I found it tiresome, with my mind wandering off the page. It's not an easy read, for me at least. It is challenging to understand the words I've consumed, often coming to me, a day or two after putting the book down.

I must love **METAMORPHOSIS** because both my brilliant editor of my soon-to-be-released meta-memoir: *My Life on the Slush Pile (My Sister is My Mum)*, and a well-read intellectual homeless man, who is a friend, have compared my writing to Kafka → they are the reasons I read this book.

*Your writing reminds me of Kafka, John Barth, Jorge Borges, and Alcott; plus, others. Reading your story reminds me of "Lost in the Funhouse" and other experimental nonlinear stories in the anti-novel genre. Wild ride! I see genuine literary merit in your memoir.*

*This innocent inquiry opens a window into a surreal Kafkaesque past, a past rife with bizarre characters, spectral entities, and devastating family betrayal. Wincherauk, with brilliant clarity, invites the reader into his life. A life replete with tragedy, immersed in hilarity, and garnished with the intoxicating destructiveness of vice.*

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That's enough about why I had to read this, also the reason I will be reading **LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE** soon.

Let's see, the book contains stories about three men walking on the street – are they in peril?

A two-page report that has only two sentences, the first over a page.

A man who wakes up to find he's turned into a cockroach, only to be shunned by his family – lick a toad.

A visit to a penal colony to inspect the machine used for executions; not a happy ending.

A story about an ape's perspective of being taken into captivity to become a circus performer.

And a circus performer whose skill is starvation; plus, many more.

### HAPPY ENDINGS ARE A RARITY



His use of language is awe-inspiring, "radiant with intent," "wagging index finger," simple, drawn-out, but intoxicating.

He is a must-read for anyone who studies writing, the back cover states: "What Dante and Shakespeare were to their ages, Kafka is for ours."

I'm happy to have been mentioned in the same breath. One day...

What I'm considering doing now?

Picking up a mixed bag of hallucinogenic treats.

Remixing them in a bowl.

Then: rereading METAMORPHOSIS!

I think that's the way he'd like us to read it. After all, he wrote: "The Judgement" in a single night of frenzied creativity."

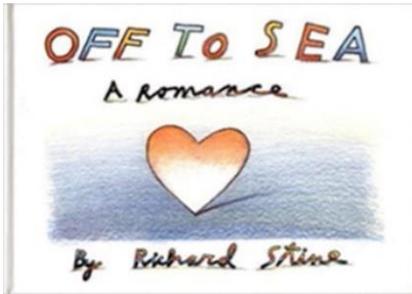


They have also compared me to Hunter S. Thompson.

I tried to read one of his books.

I made it halfway through, and fortunately, my car was broken into, and the book was stolen. Yay!

**OFF TO SEA**  
**A ROMANCE**  
**RICHARD STINE**



*A beautiful story about losing love + learning to genuinely love for the first time...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The love of my life <sup>(1)</sup> dumped me. Suicidal?

I turned up for my bartending shift.

An ebullient regular noticed me drowning in misery.

He recommended this book.

I picked up a copy **OFF TO SEA** – the very next day.

*A children's book, I thought.*

I cracked it open.

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Three minutes later, I was done. I read it repeatedly for the next hour.

I love this book.

The story it shares is beautiful.

It may be the only relationship book anyone ever needs.

With great ease, the story weaves through the pain of failing relationships. It is a breathtaking story about finding yourself + assuring you'll embrace who you are when you do.

I resisted the book's wise guidance.

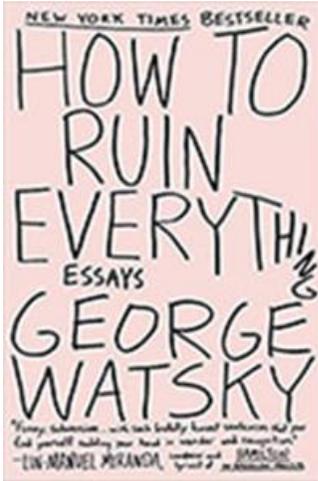
Instead, I rented a Video Recorder (VHS) and recorded me narrating the book with Extreme's *More Than Words* playing in the background. I had the tape dropped off to the *love of my life*. *My incredible gesture won her back.*

After being rejected again, I had a **GIANT L** tattooed on my forehead.

- 1) *Love of My Life*, much like *True Love*, is fantasy term; they must be – because they'd never dump you, unless of course →

# HOW TO RUIN EVERYTHING

GEORGE WATSKY



*"I support a person's freedom to orally pleasure themselves in the privacy of a dorm room. ...I also support a person's right to share that private moment with the entire world..."*

- George W

I've been binge-reading lately.

**EVERYTHING FROM**  
**FAEKALHTAG FKOW**

Sedaris, Coupland, Kafka, Lindsay Wincherauk (me), Elle Luna, the "Freakonomics" guys, a guy from "The Onion" who wrote a parody-about-the-parody-that-is-Donald Trump, Liddell; and the hilariously "Sick in the Head" – Apatow.

Mr. Watsky's, *HOW TO RUIN EVERYTHING*, is a free-flowing wordsmith-like gem.

I picked up this book because of the cover.

It was simple.

I am confident I could design it.

It was magnetic.

I love it.

I did not know who George Watsky was.

A week after my purchase, **August 14**, I cracked it open while chilling on Third Beach, in Vancouver, on a beautiful summer day. Then, in the first few pages, I realized who George may be.

A few pages later, with the sun scorching down on me, George and his friend, Jackson, were going to Vancouver to smuggle a whale's tusk into the States. Jackson's aunt (celebrating her 100th birthday several pages later) had purchased in the Canadian Arctic. They were risking a criminal offence.

They crossed the border into Canada. Like many border crossings – the interrogation they faced felt familiar.

When we cross the border, they make us feel like criminals?

Anyway, they arrived in Vancouver. I turned the page. The section I came to was **Aug 14-15**. It made me ponder how he could author the book in real-time. Even more fascinating, they went to scale a mountain only miles from where I was relaxing. I considered once more: Do I try to join them?

The friend I was with called me *nuts*.

I turned a page and entered the future: **August 16.**

## AS FOR MY REVIEW

The book's title is misleading (George suggests this in the introduction).

The book is about a young man's life experiences, primarily up to twenty-one. He's now twenty-nine – I'm aware he wasn't penning what I was reading in real time. The title suggests screwing up. I discovered on the pages a young man living life, not screwing up, just living life.

## MY AUGUST 17

I Googled George Watsky.

I listened to his music.

I loved it.

Much like the book is offbeat, quirky, and voyeuristic, his storytelling is interesting and gripping with an economy in word usage.

The flow is engrossing.

He takes readers on a road trip through several states and Canada: risking criminality along the way.

He shares beautifully what it is like coming to terms with being an outsider in the various schools he attended – pecking orders – experiences which so aptly brought him to the mindset: We are all in this ball game of life together.

He opens the microphone, guiding us delicately through his battles with epileptic seizures.

And he shares a beautifully interesting story about bonding with his father, with baseball becoming the conduit between them that cemented their bond.

The essays just mentioned were worth the read on their own.

As I read on, I was waiting for the life-changing event, an event that would have made the book more than just a collection of stories, a moment where we all cheer for the author's great transformation or his strength to overcome a profound life obstacle challenging him to become a better person during the manuscript's final pages, something more significant than self.

It never came.

That was the missing plot twist I had hoped for.

It made me think: This book that I was thoroughly enjoying, it may be a generational

norm to **BRAND** everything you do – to flow with the crowd.

Write a song, write a book.

Next... a cologne?

This is one of the *most well-written* slices of literature I've read in a while. It drips with lyrical genius in the ease of his prose.

His writing brilliance deflected me away from the fact that he is a 29-year-old successful rapper, intriguing writer; that has yet (not diminishing epilepsy) to have faced tremendous life obstacles. His life seems to be blessed. I'm sure most people in his demographic haven't been lucky enough (not to discount his arduous work at his crafts) to travel the world and experience what he has.

What he, without question delivers, is a fly-on-the-wall view of what it is like to come of age, partially in the spotlight of fame.

What makes the read so refreshing, fame is coming his way – and it doesn't seem as if he is chasing it!

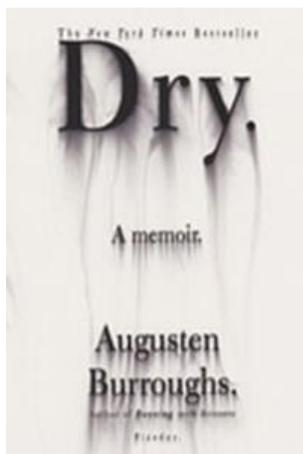
*HOW TO RUIN EVERYTHING* is a gem, and I'm glad he shared the gift of writing he has been given.

I look forward to reading more stories from Watsky!



## DRY

AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS



*I loved **Dry**. Upon closing it: I went out for drinks.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Augusten, Augusten, Augusten, you have lived such a tragic, fascinating life.

How could your descriptive prose be so intoxicating after years of dousing yourself in the toxicity of substance as you escape reality?

Thank you for surviving.

I read **Running with Scissors**, his first delectably disturbing memoir. It left me wanting to wet myself on more than one occasion. I didn't love it. I liked it much. Went to the movie... came away, slightly disappointed.

I found the salacious trip – draped in your incredible wit – and the self-deprecating style, leaving me wishing you'd have stripped away the effort and shown pain. I don't want you to suffer – I want you to celebrate, be vulnerable. "**Dry**" precisely brings that, coupled with razor-sharp wit.

The descriptive narrative allowed me to walk lockstep with Augusten every step of the way → on the road → from intoxication to recovery and back. "**Dry**" is real. If we allow ourselves to be honest, most, if not all, have experienced the tragedies within.

### MOST IMPORTANT

It teaches us it is okay to be who you become. If you fall, try to realize you are not alone – and vitally important; never give up.

Life drowns in calamity – it finds us all.

Don't judge.

Don't hate.

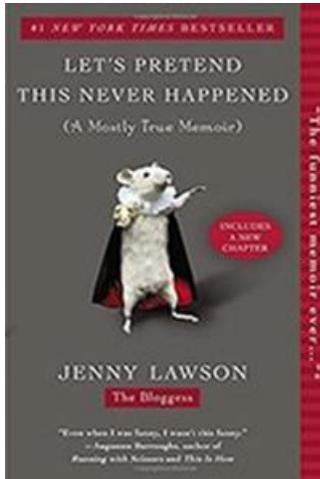
Extend a hand, offer support, hug, and love!

I loved **Dry**.

I went out for drinks after consuming the last word!

# LET'S PRETEND THIS NEVER HAPPENED

JENNY LAWSON



*Kitty, quit being such an asshole!*

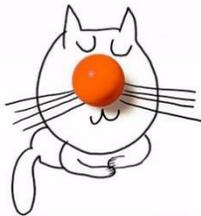
*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Jenny Lawson is a brilliantly disturbing comedic genius whose life gifted her disruptive tales from her collection of life experiences she had to navigate through, around, and even under. She is a delightful mess who has taught me cats can be assholes from time to time, and if a bull snake pretends to be a rattlesnake in front of a gun-toting mother, she has no choice but to shoot.

## FULL STOP

I have absolutely no qualifications in diagnosing whether anyone, including the mess I am, as a mess; *delightful, mess...* no.

The only exception to this rule: If and only if, before I diagnose, I announce: "If you want my medical opinion —" which I don't have.



*LET'S PRETEND THIS NEVER HAPPENED* could honestly, if you'd like me to share my honest comedy reading expertise.

I'm guessing: if you read the following word (I'm), you were okay with it, anyway, this may have been the **FUNNIEST** book I've ever read!

Jenny shares. Thank you, Jenny. You're a good sharer.

Too many of us look at the cards they have dealt us and spend our lives hiding or trying to fit in, with little fanfare. *Or a fucking pulse.*

Or don't know how to share.

Or have been bombarded by... I don't even know... I know, in each of our beginnings, we're all thrown to the wolves or Foxen, except, of course, if we are born somewhere, wolves aren't plentiful if you are growing up wolves-less → select another predatory animal, lobsters?



We were all thrown to the chomping lobsters.  
Some of us just look away, oblivious to the life gems being tossed our way.  
How can anyone look away when lobsters are chasing them?  
How slow are you?  
They're lobsters, for bleep's sake?

### BACK TO JENNY

Whereas the likes\* of Jenny can't help but look, process, ingest the pain and absurdity, develop coping mechanisms, devour anxiety, look for someone to blame, try to think of a way out of this sentence, and before the page turns, turn it into a comedic genius... not knowing, comedy may be the only option.



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\*After typing "likes," I realized how disgusting the wording is – I don't even know what the *F* it implies – I just know it is douchey (I don't care if douchey is a word or not, I just don't want to become douchey or be douchey). All good now. I added douchey to my dictionary, so no more red squiggly line!

Anyway, the only reason I had a douchey moment was my cat was acting like an asshole and distracted me.

Douchey has now been used seven-times.

### BACK TO HER BOOK

I moved in for a couple of days. I took up residence inside of her book, figuratively.

Three days.

I did not know who Jenny was. So, I moved in to find out.

It's a strange book to move into because it has a dead <sup>(1)</sup> stuffed mouse on the cover, somehow appealing to me.

What does that say about me?

Don't answer.

Come to think about it, I moved into a book – sounds normal.

Thankfully, Jenny welcomed me in and then weaved me through her at-time, shoe-less childhood.

She introduced me to a magical squirrel.

She took me swimming in the cistern at a local pig rendering plant, something about a cow's vagina... I can't imagine where her anxiety issues may have come from. +++

While reading her fucked-up, inappropriate anecdotes, I busted my gut so hard I fell out of the book, quivering in a comedic comma.

Then, after complete strangers digested seeing a full-grown man fall out of a book, they either shot me a glance of concern or helped me to my feet.

"Thanks..." I would whisper and then promptly crawl back inside, blowing the kind civilians, civilian minds.

## BACK INSIDE BACK INSIDE

I am thrilled for us. Jenny's normal was anything but – I think there may be a wee bit of each of us in her life insanity. I'm glad someone gifted her with an innate ability to share her disturbingly convoluted rambling stories in a concise, readable fashion, transforming it into the irreverently hilarious gem that it is.

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My concern for her sanity waned (*not a doctor*).

Until one day, her loving husband. Victor (hero of sorts).

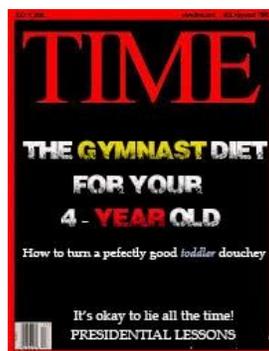
Their miracle child Hailey (a heart-wrenching story about childbirth), and her (brutal sentence structure – by Moi – I'm leaving it as-is, if you don't like it, you fix it) – they were trying to find normalcy living on the outskirts of Houston.

They enrolled Hailey in a Private School where she participated in dance, music, and gymnastics. Then one day, over one of the gymnastic mothers put their four-year-old daughters on diets →

Anyway, WTF is normal?

Jenny is a hero for sharing with us her version.

Could you imagine?



That concludes my thoughts on this side-splitting book.

## ONE LAST THOUGHT

Please share your stories.

They make the world a much kinder place.

Don't worry about what your normal is – because how could any of us be expected to be normal?

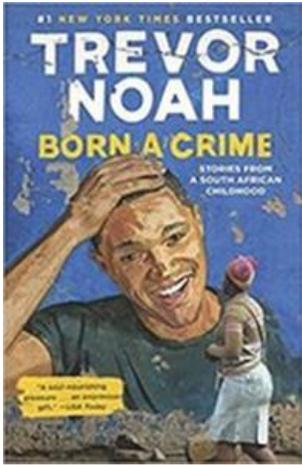
After all, a bunch of douchey politicians might be watching us through our microwaves!

## LAUGH

1. I went to great effort to simplify the imagery. It wasn't enough for the readers to see a stuffed mouse on the cover → I helped out by adding "dead."

# BORN A CRIME

## TREVOR NOAH



*Allowing many to be woke on the disease that is racism... laughter included.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I love Trevor Noah in an entertainingly brotherly <sup>(1)</sup> way!

He 'kicks it' on The **Daily Show** – something many thought he wouldn't be able to do.

How could a little-known coloured <sup>(1)</sup> person possibly replace the legendary Jon Stewart?

He's not only replaced him, but he's also made the show his own, bringing light to the racism that plagues America and much of the world today, despite efforts, especially in America, to convince otherwise.

Not only do I love him as a comic, but he's also a staunch humanitarian, not afraid to share beliefs. Sure, 45, becoming president has helped – but Trevor came from Apartheid – if anyone understands how screwed things can be, he certainly will have an idea. African dictatorship – 45... Ugh.

250

I was lucky he came to Vancouver for a comedy fest (2017).

I caught his show.

I cried in laughter for 90-minutes.

So did my friend next to me.

As a live performer, he is impressively charismatic and intensely likable.

**BORN A CRIME** – I loved it. It subtly cracks open what growing up in the perfect racist society was like. He shares tales of what it was like being an “illegal baby” of colour – not black or white – but simply different, born to mixed parents, a crime punishable by prison.

He shares stories of how the man, whomever the bleep the man was, worked at keeping racial divides – leaving little opportunity for ladders to be climbed. Many are born where they die.

He often sings out a big-hearted paean to his unbreakable love for his mother (deeply religious). She *had* him wanting the best for him, helping him navigate through a hatred given upon all in the South African caste system's – every African was forced to take part in. It manifested her love in harshness – she wanted him to realize she was punishing out of love – a punishment *love* doesn't condone.

Although Apartheid makes it glowingly difficult for North Americans to see, his story shares common threads with the human experiment. It is hard to write thoughts on Trevor's memoir because opinions can sometimes be misconstrued and show a tremendous lack of empathy for something impossible to relate to for most.

Saying you relate may sound ignorant. But does it?

For me, his story is relatable. It reminds me of growing up in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan – bear with me. Saskatoon <sup>(1)</sup> is not Africa.

*Thank you, Mr. Obvious.*

When I was growing up, I knew five black people—the total black population in Saskatoon. I'm sure there were a few more. Three were friends. I thought it was cool to have black friends.

*Was that racist?*

The rest of my friends were white, with only a few natives, who were only allowed in the bad part of town—looked down upon. Like in Africa, they were deemed second or third class—having their identities stripped from them. Sent to reserves. Considered less than human

Native friends = not cool.

*It was the times.*

Screw the times.

We all took part.

Little do you know when you are part of the majority, you may be sick.

Amazingly, under Apartheid in SA, black was the majority.

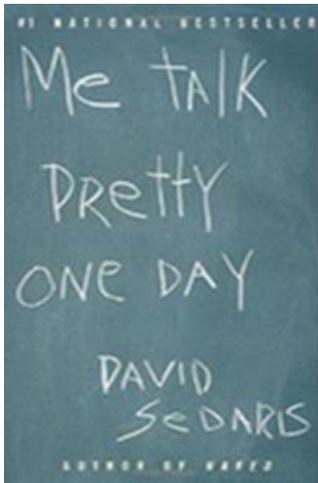
Our family wasn't immune to judgment. We lived on the wrong side of the tracks. A dark family secret led me to not belonging anywhere – but somehow: fitting-in, everywhere.

Turning dark moments into comedy became a survival tool. Like Trevor, not black or white, but grey was a blessing somehow. Survival came in the nuance of life.

1. *Seriously, you wrote → grow please → you must.*
2. *Seriously, did you compare Saskatchewan to Africa? Yes. Dude, that might be offensive. Might be? Are we having a conversation inside the same numbered point? Yes. Seriously, Saskatchewan – Africa? I'm sticking to my guns. The province of Saskatchewan shares light-years-apart similarities with the country Africa (Benin) (2). You are an idiot. No.*
3. *In fairness to the author of this Book Thought → , the author has never been to Africa, much like Trevor Noah likely has never been to Wisconsin. And the author of this Book Thought is proud of his ability to name all 54 African countries and place them in their proper location on a map. Including Benin. So, suck it.*

## ME TALK PRETTY ONE DAY

DAVID SEDARIS



*David Sedaris slices through cultural norms with precision leaving readers gasping for air as they laugh aloud.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**Me Talk Pretty One Day** is a humour-filled gem scorching new grounds, casting political correctness to the side. Sedaris tackles cringe-worthy subjects, ranging from speech impediments to mania and addiction, somehow turning them into sardonically hysterical anecdotes taken from his life. His ease of weaving language together takes the reader meandering through his delightfully bizarre life of colourful familial characters, making reading an enjoyable breeze.

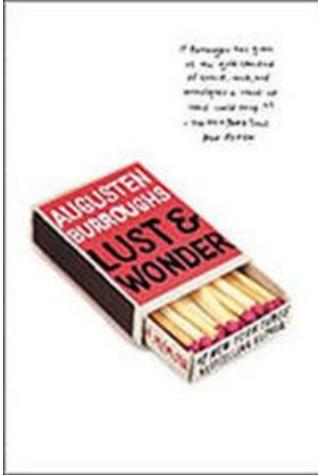
Stories that include his cat named Neal and a vacuum cleaner may leave you crying with glee: as will the story about his sister, Amy, after being named one the most influential woman in NYC, professing to a stranger, "I'm in love..."

As a writer, I can only hope to find my inner Sedaris and one day reach his level of respect.

**Me Talk Pretty One Day** may not be everyone's cup of tea. And some people may not find it to be funny. If you fall into either of those categories, I suggest, try harder!

## LUST & WONDER

### AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS



*Deliciously, heart-warmingly-heart-wrenchingly honest...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Augusten Burroughs could write his way out of a sopping wet gunny sack secured with zap straps; whatever the hell that means.

I read **RUNNING WITH SCISSORS** (first memoir).

I loved it.

I laughed so hard my room shook. I mean car seat.

I read most of it while working overnight security on a construction site, much of the time sitting in my vehicle staring at a building's entrance waiting for the bad guys to show up. They were high on crack when they did, so I just pretended to be a hallucination, *which strangely*, seemed to work.

I read **DRY** (second memoir): loved it. After reading, I went out and slammed back a flight of fine scotches. That's right: scotch is served by the flight.

253 However, something was missing. Burroughs comes from the definition of dysfunction, smothering dysfunction—yet; he survived, thankfully for us. What was missing, for me at least, was he seemed to hide behind his natural wit and literary brilliance, although his life oddities were laid out for all to see, laugh, cringe and cry along with → his mad comedic skills didn't allow me entirely in.

As much as I loved those *two* books, I was hesitant to read another by this unique, famous author, whose fame arrived by sharing his life. Then, one day, I was shopping in a drugstore, for... I'm not sure what for (?) when I glanced over at the magazine rack spotted the cover for **LUST & WONDER (third)**—and *I impulse bought it*. I'm ecstatic I did. The book is... *searching for the proper adjectives...* delicious, heart-warming, heart-wrenching—honest. Augusten not only shares his life's dysfunctions in this fabulous memoir, but he also opens his heart, laying himself bare, allowing readers to fully dive in.

The wit and literary brilliance are still there, as strong as ever.

The last sixty pages may have been the most engrossing I've ever read.

The ending...

Reading **LUST & WONDER** succeeded magnificently in not only bringing awareness for Augusten, but I also think it accomplished a rare thing: it delivered self-awareness for anyone who dove into the pages of this beautiful book.

I can't wait for his next book. While reading these *three*, I think I may have grown alongside him.

Augusten, thank you for surviving!

And, Christopher, thank you for driving the jeep!

## A RESPONSE TO MY THOUGHTS

Lindsay,

Thanks so much. Exceedingly kind of you

**Christopher** / Agent/ Selectric Artists/ Augusten Burroughs

## THE GLORIOUS HERESIES

LISA MCINERNEY



*A riveting story about people who think they matter more than they do. Dazzling!*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Bloody hell, *The Glorious Heresies*, is like coming across mangled wreckage, un-survivable – on a dreary night, on a rain-smeared highway. Somehow, the occupants of both vehicles, broken lives in tow, claw + scratch their way out of the depths of destruction to willingly, while draped in denial, fuck each other over just because they are fucked themselves.

The characters are dark, flawed, and un-salvageable – I hated each of them. I turned another page and then another with layers of destruction being pounded and laid onto the streets lining Cork's (Ireland) underbelly – pages leaving behind terrible sadness, an emptiness that feels violent, a dark void. A twist comes. Your hatred seeps away. You find something, someone, a reason to cheer. The city folds itself upon the characters – lost in a world where they are too stunned to realize they do not matter. Their lives are only as big as they are. Another page turns, you search for hope. The book ends. You are left gasping.

# BOOK THOUGHTS

## BATCH 1



1. A COMPLICATED KINDNESS - MIRIAM TOEWS
2. EVERYBODY'S SON - THRITY UMRIGAR
3. ONE MORE THING - B.J. NOVAK
4. SQUIRREL SEEKS CHIPMUNK - DAVID SEDARIS
5. A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD - JENNIFER EGAN
6. THE AUDACITY OF HOPE - BARAK OBAMA
7. HILLBILLY ELEGY - J.D. VANCE
8. WHAT BELONGS TO YOU - GARTH GREENWELL
9. THE CATCHER IN THE RYE - J.D. SALINGER
10. THE ALCHEMIST - PAULO COELHO

BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL

BLACK = FICTION

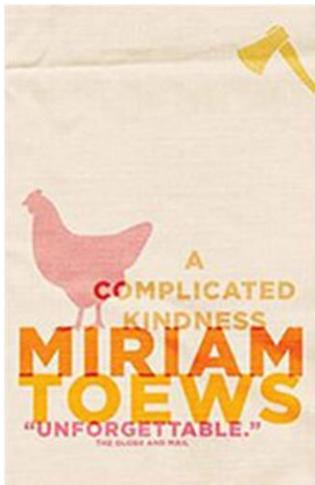
DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL

PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES

ORANGE = POETRY

## A COMPLICATED KINDNESS

MIRIAM TOEWS



*A poignantly bittersweet, sardonic, dark, and side-splittingly funny; trip into life in a religious backwater.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

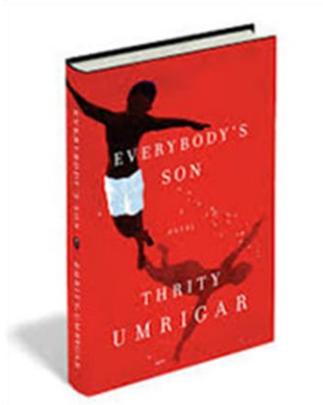
Miriam created Nomi, a damaged 14-year-old girl, to help us understand life in the tragedy of misguided faith.

**A Complicated Kindness** will have you fall out of your seat laughing while cringing as you think about the insanity of life in a Mennonite community: a place where grooving to the music is condemned – but it is okay for a brother to be a cousin.

*That's how this book made me feel/think.*

## EVERYBODY'S SON

THRITY UMRIGAR



*A look into what happens to people when a broken, powerful, wealthy white family with good intentions (?) tries to resurrect a black child whose mother is trapped in the throes of addiction.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Anton, a nine-year-old black child, is locked in his home alone for seven days as his mother chases her crack addiction. So, we think. A white knight – a State Governor who lost his son in an accident, saves him. **Everybody's Son** is a riveting look at what may happen when race, good intention, and politics; are thrown into a simmering pot together, leading to questionable decisions as a fine line between unconditional love, projections, and ownership cloaked together in the shadows. What's right or wrong gets smashed to pieces as they slowly stripped identity from the young boy – missing parts from his life become lost in misguided love. In the end, the boy who belongs to everyone finds he truly only belongs to →

## ONE MORE THING

B.J. NOVAK



*Luckily for us, B. J. Novak is delightfully bleeped up. I don't want to be Kate Moss, but I now know how.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*One More Thing* invites the reader into Novak's twisted mind.

I accepted the invite.

I crawled in.

Thoughts were flashing past me at an unrelenting pace.

A car honked doggedly at the vehicle in front of it (the driver was doing the honking, not the car).

259 The front vehicle couldn't go – unless the driver mowed down several pedestrians. A man next to me began screaming for the honking driver to stop. His voice was piercing.

I looked his way and said, "You know you're not helping."

He turned to me and said with a perplexed look adorning his face, "What?"

"Your scream isn't making things quieter," I said.

"Oh," he mumbled back at me. He stopped screaming.

B.J. gives us 280 pages of observations that will have you pissing, not pissing, but wetting yourself with powdered laughter as you try to figure out how he's made it this far in life.

Gotta run, or cycle: I'm meeting a friend who will give me valuable lessons on

**EVERYTHING** in the world – my personal Wikipedia Brown!

**READ THIS BOOK.**

*Why am I yelling?*

## A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD

JENNIFER EGAN



*A PUNCHY, SALACIOUS, SEX-FILLED, SCANDALOUS, DELICIOUSLY EXHILARATING RIDE!*

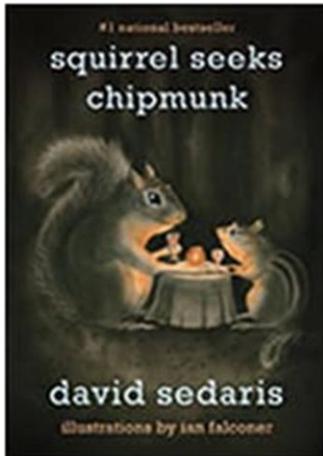
*How did the book make me feel/think?*

This book's prose explodes in flavourful descriptive bursts like perfectly ripened cherry tomatoes popping in the readers' mouths, bringing life to every page.

Toxic characters—fucked up—reality struggles, living-large; barely surviving. You cheer.

## SQUIRREL SEEKS CHIPMUNK

DAVID SEDARIS



*How can one not love a book in which: An owl, hippopotamus, and gerbil become good friends?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

David Sedaris is sick.

I love him—in the proper reader/writer sort of way—completely.

I have just been told I do not have the credentials to diagnose just about → anything. What I do know: I think his mind may be on a different plane than the rest of us. I think life may have perfectly damaged him. That damage is a blessing to readers.

How he goes from weaving personal stories to writing the most hilariously disturbing series of fairy/nursery/demented children's stories cannot be described as anything but **GENIUS**.

**Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk** is beautifully (albeit disturbingly) illustrated.

Pick it up.

I am confident you will read it in one sitting.

### HERE'S A TASTE

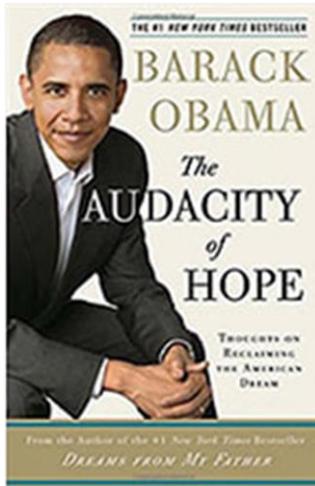
In one story, a mouse adopts a baby corn snake “—“A rescue snake—“and in another, Christmas is coming, and a cow draws a turkey and becomes the turkey's secret Santa.

### Queue the Guffaws

Oh, the gerbil volunteers to help evict leeches from the hippopotamus's →

## THE AUDACITY OF HOPE

BARACK OBAMA



*Whether you are a Democrat, Republican, or anything else...who cares when hope has been replaced by →*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Without question, Barack Obama is a brilliant, eloquent, incredibly well-spoken man – *education in Kenya has far surpassed schooling in the USA.*

The last sentence may contain a hint of sarcasm laced in absurdity. **The Audacity of Hope** is a beautifully written and moving look into the possibilities of a better world if the world's great democracies come together and embrace the voices of all citizens, who for most, are just trying to get through life, hopefully with love, health, and a serving of happiness.

Barack delicately touches on the importance and complexities of race, faith, and family – and how we may all be created equal – but they cut few from the same cloth and how the difference in fabric affects political discourse.

**HOPE** – is a crucial word in the title – especially in today's day when hope seems to be ravaged by the sickness of divisiveness.

Love your family.

Be a champion to your friends.

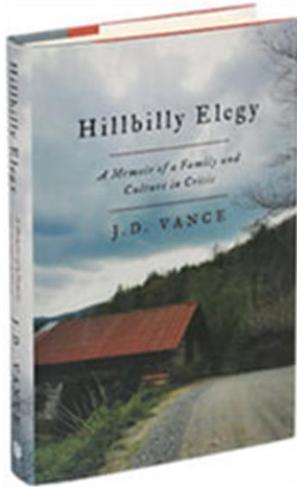
Treat all others with respect.

Don't accept hatred and racism.

If you screw up – do not be too hard on yourself – simple lessons that know no political bounds.

# HILLBILLY ELEGY

J.D. VANCE



*The result of chasing a flawed American Dream when you are a product of generations of dysfunction.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**REVIEW UPDATE 12 SEPTEMBER 2021**

J.D. Vance is an anti-Covid-safety measure douchebag who will put people's lives at risk.

In the book, he claims to come from hardship. But, for someone who supposedly struggled through life, it seems he couldn't wait to show his White Privilege and entitlement.

What an incredible fraud and flawed human.

*Hillbilly Elegy*, first off: I now know what elegy means. I am not sure if most, or any, maybe a few of the people Mr. Vance speaks of in this book, do – or have the wherewithal or interest to learn the meaning of the word.

The book is mind-opening. However, logically, especially for a Yale-educated lawyer (the author), who without question overcame the greatest of odds – it is not as mind-opening as it first appears.

**What's the story about:** well, what happens to the population in towns where industries have been dying for decades that are products of a failing education system?

Mix in substance abuse. Throw in generations of crippling family dysfunction, where the children are subjected to yelling matches, nightly – erasing ambition and normalcy with every raised voice – and in J.D.'s case, a revolving door of male father figures as his mother struggles with her existence. Violence and the rule of the land (hillbilly honour) are commonplace.

**To screw up matters more:** sell the **American Dream** of homeownership. As towns die in one state and manufacturers set up shop in another, forcing those who are not too broken to emigrate to new lives – never genuinely feeling like they belong – well, the forgotten people become broken – differently.

The dream becomes a failing reality. They purchased a house – trapping the purchasers in dying communities. Months later, the local manufacturer shuts down. The jobs leave – as do the wealthy and the educated. They brought hope in the form of employment – and then took hope away when the world moved on. **Coal died.**

**What's left behind:** no jobs, worthless homes, and generations of poorly educated

unemployed (“I love the poorly educated”) people – many of which haven’t wanted to work in decades as blame replaced motivation. However, many need to blame someone or something for their demise. The book is not mind-opening, but it highlights the different rules between rich and poor?

I enjoyed this book, especially the parts about overcoming life’s hurdles. Any time an author dares to share their pain is breathtaking. Escaping into another person’s life often opens windows into your own. J.D. is lucky. Without question, he knows it.

This interesting (confessional) work is a foreshadowing of his political aspirations (?)

### IS THIS A WHITE POVERTY ISSUE?

That is the way they sold the book. That is a little naïve. It is a matter of “have” and “have not” – “rich and poor.” Wouldn’t the world be a grander place if we could get past race and culture to accept many of the rich only care about the colour of money – and just maybe, dividing the rest of us.

As towns spiral into poverty when the industries leave, there is no government on the planet immune to corruption and greed. It seems politics has tripped into career survival more so than representing the constituents – *tell voters what they want to hear*. The world is changing every moment of life. If trapped in a cycle of dysfunction, no politician or company is going to ride in on a horse and save you. If stuck in a town with a dying industry and a worthless home, and drunk; or worse: role models – one day, you may just give up and blame others for your plight.

The world owes us nothing.

It never has.

It never will.

If you do not summons the strength to fight through your quagmire of dysfunction – then maybe one day, you will take a seat on the sidewalks of life, begging every passerby for spare change.

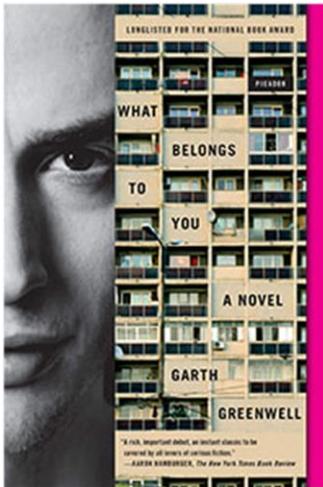
I am sure Appalachia is a beautiful place – but without a transformation – the world seems to be leaving it behind, in a time; that is never coming back.

*Hillbilly Elegy* may simply reinforce things we already know. If only we stopped pretending a saviour is coming to fix something that no longer exists, just maybe, we could all move on and learn to be kinder to each other!

At the least understand, we are not all born equal in opportunity.

This book yells that **LOUD AND CLEAR!**

**O STARS**



## WHAT BELONGS TO YOU

GARTH GREENWELL

*Desire + Lust + Bulgaria + Loneliness + Drugs + A Street Hooker =  
Neediness + Good Decisions?*

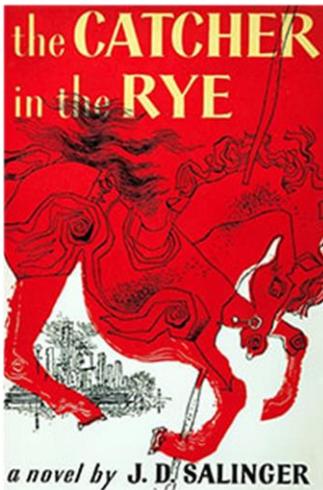
*How did the book make me feel/think?*

A richly unforgettable novel about what happens when a lonely teacher, in a foreign land, meets Mitko, a street hooker, and allows desire, lust, and loneliness (to) lead him precariously close to self-destruction as the combination mixed into a toxic broth delivers him to pathetic and needy. **WHAT BELONGS TO**

**YOU** is a breathtakingly well-written story depicting the overwhelming need for love and acceptance—and the unshakable belief that if you save someone else, you will save yourself?

## THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

J.D. SALINGER



*A classic coming-of-age story about a lonely, introverted boy desperately trying to become an extrovert.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

Holden Caulfield is screwing up.

He really is.

He's failing at school, hiding his realities from his parents, and desperately searching for acceptance—when, in fact, he's not likeable.

He really isn't.

He's an introvert trying hard to be an extrovert.

He fails mostly because his troubled teenage mind is laced with judgement—the root of his unlikability. Holden is challenged. Autistic? Just perhaps—I do not have the credentials to diagnose.

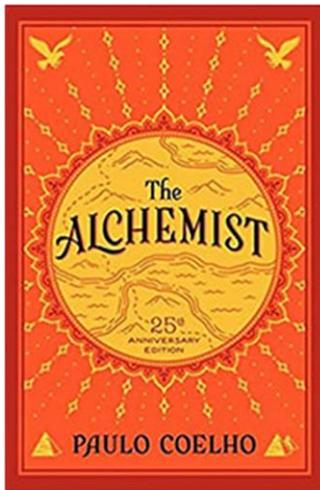
For 277 pages, he takes readers on a lengthy conversation. Like said, I did not much care for him. I really didn't. But, somehow, by the end of his journey, I cheered for him, maybe because, throughout his travels, he taught me: it's best not to judge when listening is a grander option.

*CATCHER IN THE RYE* is a classic.

*I enjoyed it. I really did!*

# THE ALCHEMIST

PAULO COELHO



*I think I'd burn in Hell if I didn't give this book 5 Stars...*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I don't want to go to Hell. I don't think I'd like it.

**I COULD JUST IMAGINE**

*"Sir, we're sentencing you to an eternity in Hell."*

*"Oh crap, I better bring a big book."*

I read **THE ALCHEMIST** because I think we're supposed to. I liked (loved) it. It's chock-full of valuable lessons on how to navigate life. It's **AWESOME** to have these lessons painted excitingly, as Paulo does in this classic work.

The story is riveting. The lessons are gospel. It's hard to write thoughts on this book without giving the story away. What's so beautiful about this story is that it is

UNIVERSAL that we forget as we struggle through the constant bombardment of noise filling our souls every day.

Although the lesson is simple – I believe: Anyone going through struggles would do themselves a solid, by reading for the first time, or the tenth; resulting in their eyes being cracked wide open, allowing life to turn struggles into dreams.

I think by reading **THE ALCHEMIST**, you may avoid a trip to Hell.