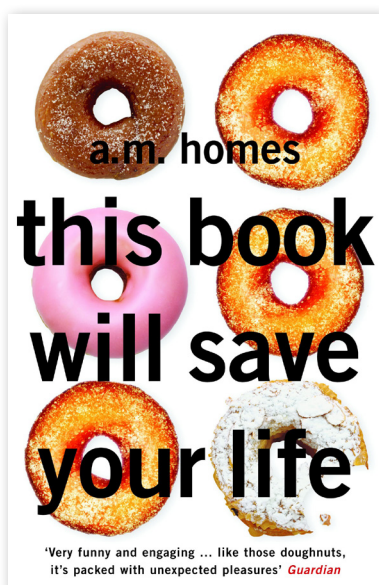


This Book Will Save Your Life

by A.M. Homes



PLOT SUMMARY

Trading stocks and shares out of his beautiful LA home, Richard Novak sees no one apart from his trainer, housekeeper and nutritionist, who delivers regular supplies of macrobiotic, low-carb food. He is so out of touch with his feelings that his life has slowed almost to a standstill.

Following an attack of inexplicable and excruciating pain that lands him in the emergency room, Richard befriends Anhil, the doughnut shop owner. His solitary routine broken, and his diet sabotaged by sugary baked goods, Richard's dramatic emotional thaw begins...

A sharp and wildly entertaining novel about new beginnings, transformation and the weirdness of LA, *This Book Will Save Your Life* reveals what can happen if you are willing to open up to the world around you.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Homes uses the symbolism of buildings representing ourselves with Richard and his house, which is slowly falling into the sea. At the start of the book, when Richard's pain begins and his life starts to change, a sinkhole appears in the garden of his beautiful, perfectly manicured house in an affluent and exclusive LA neighbourhood populated with movie stars and other elite members of society. Richard is so rich that he doesn't need to work anymore, but his money has only helped him erect a defence against the world outside.

However, as Richard's carefully ordered life continues to unravel, the sinkhole gets larger, even trapping a horse at one stage of the story; an episode that grows only more surreal when his movie star neighbour gets involved in airlifting the horse to safety. Homes seems to be suggesting that while we might build perfect houses and build seemingly-perfect boundaries to keep life manageable, natural life forces – love, regret, unprocessed emotions, as much as tar, groundwater and subsidence – have a way of intervening whether we like it or not, with the ability to destroy whatever defence we believe can protect us.



Eventually, the disruption underground causes the house itself to collapse into the ocean, where, in the final pages of the book, Richard finds himself floating in a kind of meditative calm on a piece of furniture, awaiting rescue. His previous, sterile and lifeless existence has been totally destroyed and he is returned to nature: the ocean, a symbol of emotion and the unconscious. With the total destruction of his former life, Richard can now find peace in the chaos of the new and endure the pain of living.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Joseph, the guru at the silence retreat, says: 'Suffering is normal. Pain is normal, it is part of life. Why are we afraid of suffering?'

Pain is a huge theme of *The Book Will Save Your Life*. Richard's life is disrupted by a sudden, inexplicable pain that leads him to abandon all his usual routines and seek relationships outside his hermetic existence, leading to all kinds of new experiences and adventures. However, this process of reopening his heart leads to the emotional pain that he's been avoiding ever since he left his wife and son in New York. To rebuild his relationship with Ben, Richard must experience the regret and loss he refused to feel before.

At the same time, Cynthia reaches a point of extreme emotional pain and frustration with her family when Richard finds her crying in the supermarket. Cynthia is in a similar position to Richard, but in her case, leaving her family leads to empowerment rather than regret.

Pain is everywhere: Sydney, the Gyrotonics teacher, has lost a breast to cancer; Nic, Richard's next-door neighbour, has endured a kind of crisis of identity; Anhil of the donut shop has left his country of origin to start again in America. Yet, people are continuing to live and cope with their pain: Nic organises cathartic pow-wows for men on the beach where they can express their pain; Sydney has adopted wellness as a career; Anhil has embraced his new occupation of making donuts.

How does Homes frame suffering and pain as part of the human experience? Can suffering ever be avoided? What is a life well lived, and how does suffering and pain factor? Who in the book deals with suffering most admirably? Why?

QUESTIONS

What is the significance of the scene where Richard rescues the woman who has been abducted in the boot of a car? Why do you think this is included?

Cynthia describes her experience of motherhood and being treated as a servant. Do you think this is a dated experience of motherhood, or are women today in much the same position?



If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

What function does Anhil serve within the story? How is he different to Richard? What does he observe about America and American life?

What does food represent in Homes' novel? Are the types of food she mentions significant? Why?

NEXT STEPS

Write a poem inspired by food: your favourite, or maybe a food that you dislike. Use as much vivid imagery as you can, as well as using a variety of sense-oriented description words: smell, taste, touch, sound. What can you liken the food to – in a simile? Does the food relate to a particular memory or person from your past? Are those memories and feelings positive or negative?

Alternatively, write about an experience of pain that you have had. What kind of pain was it – physical, mental, emotional? Did it lead to some kind of realisation? What caused it? What did you do to live with it, or solve it? You could write this as a letter to yourself or to a friend or member of your family. Write about the impact that your experience of pain had on your life. This might not be something you have ever told anyone before – if so, decide whether you will share your letter with someone for real, or just write it for yourself. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.M. Homes is the author of 13 books, including *May We Be Forgiven*, which won the 2013 Women's Prize for Fiction, and the internationally bestselling memoir, *The Mistress's Daughter*. She writes frequently on the arts for publications such as *Artforum*, *Granta*, *McSweeney's*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times* and is a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, *Bomb*, and *Blind Spot*. Homes was a writer/co-executive producer with David E. Kelley on *Mr. Mercedes*, and on USA's *Falling Water*. Homes was a writer/producer of the original *L Word*, and penned the adaptation of her novel, *Jack*, for Showtime.





RECOMMENDED READS

In *May We Be Forgiven*, A.M. Homes presents a darkly comic look at 21st century domestic life – at individual lives spiralling out of control, bound together by family and history. In *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman, we follow a socially isolated and awkward office worker with a traumatic past as she gradually undergoes a transformation towards self-discovery and healing.

Want more? Our website is packed full of book recommendations, reading lists, author interviews and more. And our Women's Prize library is brimming with books, both fiction and non-fiction, that will satisfy every reader from gripping mysteries and inspiring memoirs to magical romances and thrilling historical accounts.

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discusses the impact they have had on her life and career.

The Women's Prize Trust is a registered charity, and we appreciate donations of any size to support our outreach work with writers and readers from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, however you wish to, **join us and help put more books written by women into the hands of more readers.**

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