
Opening Extract from...

The Novel Cure

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INTRODUCTION

This is a medical handbook – with a difference.

First of all, it does not discriminate between emotional pain and physical pain; you're as likely to find a cure within these pages for a broken heart as a broken leg. It also includes common predicaments you might find yourself in, such as moving house, looking for Mr/Mrs Right, or having a midlife crisis. Life's bigger challenges such as losing a loved one or becoming a single parent are in here too. Whether you've got the hiccups or a hangover, a fear of commitment or a sense of humour failure, we consider it an ailment that deserves a remedy.

But there's another difference too. Our medicines are not something you'll find at the chemist, but at the bookshop, in the library, or downloaded onto your electronic reading device. We are bibliotherapists, and the tools of our trade are books. Our apothecary contains Balzacian balms and Tolstoyan tourniquets, the salves of Saramago and the purges of Perec and Proust. To create it, we have trawled two thousand years of literature for the most brilliant minds and restorative reads, from Apuleius, second-century author of *The Golden Ass*, to the contemporary tonics of Ali Smith and Jonathan Franzen.

Bibliotherapy has been popular in the form of the non-fiction self-help book for several decades now. But lovers of literature have been using novels as salves – either consciously or subconsciously – for centuries. Next time you're feeling in need of a pick-me-up – or require assistance with an emotional tangle – reach for a novel. Our belief in the effectiveness of fiction as the purest and best form of bibliotherapy is based on our own experience with patients

bib•lio•ther•a•py

noun \ bi-blē-ə-'ther-ə-pē, -'the-rə-py:

the prescribing of fiction for life's ailments (Berthoud and Elderkin, 2013)

and bolstered by an avalanche of anecdotal evidence. Sometimes it's the story that charms; sometimes it's the rhythm of the prose that works on the psyche, stilling or stimulating. Sometimes it's an idea or an attitude suggested by a character in a similar quandary or jam. Either way, novels have the power to transport you into another existence, and see the world from a different point of view. When you're engrossed in a novel, unable to tear yourself from the page, you are seeing what a character sees, touching what a character touches, learning what a character learns. You may *think* you're sitting on the sofa in your living room, but the important parts of you – your thoughts, your senses, your spirit – are somewhere else entirely. 'To read a writer is for me not merely to get an idea of what he says, but to go off with him and travel in his company,' said André Gide. No-one comes back from such a journey quite the same.

Whatever your ailment, our prescriptions are simple: a novel (or two), to be read at regular intervals. Some treatments will lead to a complete cure. Others will simply offer solace, showing you that you are not alone. All will offer the temporary relief of your symptoms due to the power of literature to distract and transport. Sometimes the remedy is best taken as an audio book, or read aloud with a friend. As with all medicines, the full course of treatment should always be taken for best results. Along with the cures, we offer advice on particular reading issues, such as being too busy to read and what to read when you can't sleep; the ten best books to read in each decade of life; and the best literary accompaniments for important rites of passage, such as being on your gap year – or on your death bed.*

We wish you every delight in our fictional plasters and poultices. You will be healthier, happier and wiser for them.

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* As PJ O'Rourke said, 'Always read something that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it'.

A–Z OF AILMENTS

'One sheds one's sicknesses in books — repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be master of them.'

DH Lawrence (*The Letters of DH Lawrence*)

A

abandonment

Plainsong
KENT HARUF

If inflicted early, the effects of physical or emotional abandonment – whether you were left by too-busy parents to bring yourself up, told to take your tears and tantrums elsewhere, or off-loaded onto another set of parents completely (see: adoption) – can be hard to shrug. If you're not careful, you might spend the rest of your life expecting to be let down. As a first step to recovery, it is often helpful to realise that those who abandoned you were most likely abandoned themselves. And rather than wishing they'd buck up and give you the support or attention you yearn for, put your energy into finding someone else to lean on, who's better equipped for the job.

Abandonment is rife in *Plainsong*, Kent Haruf's account of small-town life in Holt, Colorado. Local school teacher Guthrie has been abandoned by his depressed wife Ella, who feigns sleep when he tries to talk to her and looks at the door with 'outsized eyes' when he leaves. Their two young sons, Ike and Bobby, are left bewildered by her unexplained absence from their lives. Old Mrs Stearns has been abandoned by her relatives, either through death or neglect. And Victoria, seventeen years old and four months pregnant, is abandoned first by her boyfriend and then by her mother who, in a back-handed punishment to the man who'd abandoned them both many years before, tells her 'You got yourself into this, you can just get out of it,' and kicks her out of the house.

Gradually, and seemingly organically – though in fact Maggie Jones, a young woman with a gift for communication, orchestrates most of it – other people step into the breach, most astonishingly the McPheron brothers, a pair of 'crotchety and ignorant' cattle-farming bachelors who agree to take the pregnant Victoria in: 'They looked at her, regarding her as if she might be dangerous. Then they peered into the palms of their thick callused hands spread out before them on the kitchen table and lastly they looked out the window toward the leafless and stunted elm trees.' The next thing we know they are running around shopping for cribs – and the rush of love for the pair felt by both Victoria and the reader transforms them overnight. As we watch the community quicken to its role as extended family – frail Mrs Stearns teaching Ike and Bobby to make cookies, the McPherons watching over Victoria with all the tender, clumsy tenacity which they normally reserve for their cows – we see how support can come from very surprising places.

If you have been abandoned, don't be afraid to reach out to the wider community around you – however little you know its inhabitants as individuals (and if you need help turning your neighbours into friends, see our cure for: neighbours, having). They'll thank you for it one day.

accused, being

True History of the Kelly Gang
PETER CAREY

If you're accused of something and you know you're guilty, accept your punishment with good grace. If you're accused and you didn't do it, fight to clear your name. And if you're accused, and you know you did it, but you don't think what you did was wrong, what *then*?

Australia's Robin Hood, Ned Kelly – as portrayed by Peter Carey in *True History of the Kelly Gang* – commits his first crime at ten years old, when he kills a neighbour's heifer so his family can eat. The next thing he knows, he's been apprenticed (by his own mother) to the bushranger, Harry Power. When Harry robs the Buckland Coach, Ned is the 'nameless person' reported as having blocked the road with a tree and held the horses so 'Harry could go about his

trade.' And thus Ned's fate is sealed: he's an outlaw for ever. He makes something glorious of it.

In his telling of the story – which he has written down in his own words for his baby daughter to read one day, knowing he won't be around to tell her himself – Ned seduces us completely with his rough-hewn, punctuation-free prose that bounds and dives over the page. But what really warms us to this Robin Hood of a boy/man is his strong sense of right and wrong – because Ned is guided at all times by a fierce loyalty and a set of principles that happen not to coincide with those of the law. When his ma needs gold, he brings her gold; when both his ma and his sister are deserted by their faithless men, he'll 'break the 6th Commandment' for their sakes. And even though Harry and his own uncles use him 'poorly', he never betrays them. How can we not love this murdering bushranger with his big heart? It is the world that's corrupt, not him; and so we cheer and whoop from the side-lines as pistols flash and his Enfield answers. And so the novel makes outlaws of its readers.

Ned Kelly is a valuable reminder that just because someone has fallen foul of society's laws it does not necessarily mean that they are bad. It's up to each one of us to decide for ourselves what's right and wrong in life. Draw up your personal constitution – then live by it. If you step out of line, be the first to give yourself a reprimand. Then see: guilt.

addiction to alcohol

SEE: **alcoholism**

addiction to coffee

SEE: **coffee, can't find a decent cup of**

addiction to drugs

SEE: **drugs, doing too many**

addiction to gambling

SEE: **gambling**

addiction to the internet

SEE: **internet addiction**

addiction to sex

SEE: **sex, too much**

addiction to shopping

SEE: **shopaholism**

addiction to tobacco

SEE: **smoking, giving up**

adolescence

The Catcher in the Rye
JD SALINGER

Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?
LORRIE MOORE

In Youth is Pleasure
DENTON WELCH

Hormones rage. Hair sprouts where previously all was smooth. Adam's apples bulge and voices crack. Acne erupts. Bosoms bloom. And heart – and loins – catch fire with the slightest provocation.

First, stop thinking you're the only one it's happened to. Whatever you're going through, Holden Caulfield got there first. If you think that everything's 'lousy'; if you can't be bothered to talk about it; if your parents would have 'two hemorrhages apiece' if they knew what you were doing right now; if you've ever been expelled from school; if you think all adults are phonies; if you drink/smoke/try to pick up people much older than you; if your so-called friends are always walking out on you; if your teachers tell you you're letting yourself down; if you protect yourself from the world with your swagger, your bad language, your seeming indifference to what happens to you next; if the only person who understands you is your ten-year-old sister, Phoebe – if one

or more of those things is true for you, *The Catcher in the Rye* will carry you through.

Adolescence can't be cured, but there are ways to make the most of it. Lorrie Moore's *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?* is full of the usual horrors – the narrator, Berie, is a late developer who hides her embarrassment by mocking her 'fried eggs' and 'tin cans run over by a car'; and she and her best friend Sils roll about laughing when they remember how Sils once tried to shave off her pimples with a razor. In fact, laughing is something they do a lot of together – and they do it 'violently, convulsively', with no sound coming out. They also sing songs together – anything from Christmas carols to TV theme tunes and Dionne Warwick. And we applaud that they do. Because if you don't sing loudly and badly with your friends when you're fourteen and fifteen, letting the music prepare your heart for 'something drenching and big' to come, when do you get to do it?

A teenage boy who makes no friends at all yet lives with incredible intensity is Orvil Pym in Denton Welch's *In Youth is Pleasure*. This beautifully observed novel published in 1945 takes place against the backdrop of an English country hotel over the course of one languid summer where Orvil, caught in a state of pubescent confusion, holidays with his father and brothers. Aloof and apart, he observes the flaws in those around him through a pitiless lens. He explores the countryside, guiltily tasting the communion wine in a deserted church, then falling off his bike and crying in despair for 'all the tortures and atrocities in the world'. He borrows a boat and rows down a river, glimpsing two boys whose bodies 'glinted like silk' in the evening light. New worlds beckon, just beyond his reach, as he hovers on the edge of revelation – and for a while he considers pretending to be mad, to avoid the horrors awaiting him back at school. Gradually, he realises that he cannot leap the next ten years – that he just has to survive this bewildering stage, and behave in 'the ordinary way', smiling and protecting his brothers' pecking order by hiding his wilder impulses.

Adolescence doesn't have to be hell. Remember that your peers are struggling to cross the chasm too and, if you can,

share the struggles together. Friends or no friends, be sure to do the silly, crazy things that only adolescents do. If you don't get the chance while you're at school, then take a gap year while you're still in your teens (being sure to take the right books when you do). Then, when you're older, at least you'll be able to look back at these heady, high, hormonal times, and laugh.

THE TEN BEST NOVELS TO READ ON YOUR GAP YEAR

Cult books, hip books, books that will define your life. You'll always have something to talk about with one of these in your backpack. They'll set the standard for your future relationships – and we're not talking just to books.

Purple Hibiscus CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE
The Master and Margarita MIKHAIL BULGAKOV
On the Road JACK KEROUAC
Flowers for Algernon DANIEL KEYES
Lucy JAMAICA KINCAID
Dusty Answer ROSAMOND LEHMANN
One Hundred Years of Solitude GABRIEL GARCIA MÁRQUEZ
All the Pretty Horses CORMAC MCCARTHY
Moby-Dick HERMAN MELVILLE
Cloud Atlas DAVID MITCHELL

SEE ALSO: **bed, inability to get out of** • **internet addiction** • **irritability** • **rails, going off the** • **risks, taking too many** • **teens, being in your**

adoption

Run
ANN PATCHETT

The Graveyard Book
NEIL GAIMAN

Children's literature is strewn with adoptees. Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* is a spoiled adoptee who learns to love in her new cold climate; Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* is brought up by wolves; Tarzan in the novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs is reared by apes. A romance seems to surround these lost and found – and indeed who, as a child, hasn't had a run-in with their parents and fantasised that they too were a foundling? Adoptees find their way into adult literature

too: there's James in Grant Gillespie's *The Cuckoo Boy* – a novel with some disturbing views on adoption, but a riveting read nonetheless; Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* who upsets the delicate balance of his adoptive family; 'Wart' in *The Once and Future King* by TH White who is one of the rare success stories in this list – an adoptee who turns out to be Arthur, King of Camelot.

In reality, adoption is less romantic and can be hard for all concerned – for the natural parents who decide to give their child away; for the child who finds out in a non-ideal way (see: abandonment); for the child who blames their adoptive parents for their confusion, and who may seek out their natural parents only to be disappointed; and for the adoptive parents who have to decide when to tell their children that they are 'special' and not blood-related. The whole matter is fraught with pitfalls – but also with love, and it can bring an end to childless grief (see: children, not having) – and anyone involved would do well to explore its complexity via those who have been there before.

One of the loveliest modern novels featuring adoptees is Ann Patchett's *Run*. Doyle, the white ex-mayor of Boston has three sons, Sullivan, Teddy and Tip – one a white red-head, and two black, athletic and extremely tall. His fiery-haired wife Bernadette, Sullivan's mother, is dead. Teddy and Tip's real mother is 'the spy who came in from the cold' – she has watched her sons grow up from a distance, aware of their successes and failures, their friendships and rivalries, presiding over them like a guardian angel.

When eleven-year-old Kenya – the runner of the title – unexpectedly comes to live in the Doyle household, the complex family dynamics begin to move in new directions. Teddy and Tip seem to be successful, as a scientist and a would-be priest, but Doyle wishes they had followed him into politics. Their older brother Sullivan has been in Africa for some time trying to help in the battle against AIDS, running away from a terrible incident in his past. With the new issues raised by Kenya's presence in the house, the stories of the brothers' different origins gradually emerge – and it is Kenya's simple but overwhelming need to run, beautifully

portrayed by Patchett ('she was a superhuman force that sat outside the fundamental law of nature. Gravity did not apply to her') that brings them all together. The overall message of the novel is clear, and delivered without sentimentality: blood matters, but love matters more.

Confirmation that even the most unconventional parents can make a good job of adopting a child is found within the pages of *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman. When a toddler goes exploring one night, he manages to evade death at the hands of 'the man Jack', who murders the rest of his family. Ending up in a nearby graveyard, he's adopted by a pair of ghosts. The dead Mr and Mrs Owens never had children of their own in life, and relish this unexpected chance to become parents. They name him 'Nobody', and refer to him as Bod. During his eccentric childhood, Bod picks up unusual skills such as 'Fading, Haunting, and Dream Walking' – which turn out to be very useful later on.

Bod's ghostly parents do an excellent job. 'You're alive, Bod. That means you have infinite potential. You can do anything, make anything, dream anything. If you can change the world, the world will change.' Their wisdom from the grave gives Bod the impetus to live his life to the full, despite the tragedy of his early years; and he certainly does.

Adoption is never a simple thing. Honesty on all sides is essential to allow those involved to come to terms with who they are, and what relationship they have to whom. Whatever part you play, these novels will show you you're not alone. Read them and then pass them round your family – however that family is defined. Encourage everyone to air their feelings. See: confrontation, fear of; and emotions, inability to express if this feels daunting; and empathy, lack of to ensure you're coming to the table with an open, compassionate mind.

SEE ALSO: **abandonment** • **outsider, being an**

adultery

Madame Bovary
GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

Anna Karenina
LEO TOLSTOY

Patience
JOHN COATES

The Summer Without Men
SIRI HUSTVEDT

The temptation to have an affair generally starts when one half of a pair feels dissatisfied with who they are – or who they feel themselves perceived to be – within their current relationship. If only they could be with someone new, they think, they would be a sparklier, wittier, sexier version of themselves. Perhaps they justify their betrayal by telling themselves that they married too young, when they were not fully grown into themselves; and now their real self wants its moment on the stage. And maybe they *will* be that sexier, shinier person – for a while. But affairs which break up long-term relationships usually go the same way in the end, as the old self and habits catch up, albeit within a slightly different dynamic. Often insecurities creep in too. Because if the relationship began as a clandestine affair for at least one of you, it's easy to become paranoid that infidelity will strike again.

For Emma Bovary, the temptation to stray comes almost immediately after tying the knot with doctor Charles, stuck as she is in her adolescent preconceptions of what a marriage should be. Instead of the calm existence she discovers, with a husband who adores her, she had expected love to be 'a great bird with rose-coloured wings' hanging in the sky. These absurd notions, we are slightly embarrassed to admit, were picked up from literature – Sir Walter Scott is named and shamed – for at the age of fifteen Emma swallowed down a great number of romantic novels, riddled with tormented young ladies 'fainting in lonely pavilions' and gentlemen 'weeping like fountains'.* When she meets the lustful, false Rodolphe, full of clichéd flattery and the desire to serenade her with daisies, she is putty in his hands. If you suspect you are harbouring similarly unrealistic ideas of romantic love and marriage, you need to dose yourself up with some contemporary realists: the works of Jonathan Franzen and Zadie Smith are a good place to start.

* Novels are not the only culprit, however: she knows by heart all the love songs 'of the last century', glories in the heady rites and rituals of the Catholic church; and likes the countryside only when it involves ruins – the responsibility for which we lay squarely at the foot of eighteenth-century art.

Anna Karenina is not actively looking for a way out of her marriage to the conservative Karenin, but she certainly finds the full expression of her vivacious self with Vronsky. When, on the way back to St Petersburg after having met the young officer on her visit to Moscow, she sees him on the platform, she is unable to stop the animation bubbling forth. And when she next sets eyes on her husband, she can't bear the customary 'ironical' smile with which he greets her (or, now she comes to think of it, his 'gristly' ears). More strongly than ever, she feels that she is pretending, that the emotion between them is false – and it's herself she feels dissatisfied with as a result. Now that she has seen herself around Vronsky, how can she go back to being the Anna she is with cold Karenin?

What Anna also finds, of course, is that loving Vronsky involves guilt. In fact (and this time we take pleasure in pointing it out), it is while she is reading a novel about a guilty baron that she first becomes aware that the emotion has hatched within herself. Guilt and self-hatred ultimately bring the stricken heroine crashing down: for she can never shake the principles and values that formed her, particularly with regards to the love she owes her son. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, be aware that guilt is hard to live with. See: guilt for how to survive a stricken conscience and still come out standing the other end.

A more devious way of dealing with guilt is to ride in the slipstream of a partner who has been unfaithful first. In 1950's London, the eponymous heroine of *Patience* is a contentedly married woman, whose stuffy husband Edward expects little more from her than keeping house, cooking regular meals, and performing her duties in the bedroom, which she does while planning which vegetables to buy for tomorrow's lunch. The revelation that Edward is having an affair with the not-so-Catholic Molly leaves her feeling oddly relieved. Her sense of imminent liberation rapidly finds a focus in the form of Philip, a handsome, intriguing bachelor, who awakens her to what sex can be. Patience somehow brings about the end of her marriage and embarks on a new life with Philip in an almost painless way. Even

her three young children remain unscathed. Her suggestion that Philip keep his bachelor flat going – where he works and where they sometimes have an assignation – seems to be particularly full of foresight. Perhaps a second home is the secret to an enduring second love.

Sadly, Edward doesn't come off so lightly: he is deeply thrown, his whole tidy world turned upside down, and is landed, somewhat unfairly we feel, with the blame for it all. There is a chance that adultery may free you from a loveless marriage and catapult you into a fine romance. But there's a chance it won't. You may simply take your problems with you, be capsized by religious or personal guilt, and leave at least one wreckage behind, apart from yourself. The fact is, unless you married late or were very lucky – or are one of the fortunate few whose parents raised you to be fully in your skin by age twenty – you probably will hit a time when you feel there is more to you than your marriage, at present, allows (see also: midlife crisis).

Having an affair does not always destroy a long-term partnership. If you're the aggrieved spouse who suspects or knows that your partner is having an affair, it's worth taking courage from Siri Hustvedt's *The Summer Without Men* – an intriguing take on the cliché of older man leaves wife of thirty years to try a younger version on for size. When her husband Boris announces he wants a 'pause' in their relationship, Mia feels all the things you'd expect, and which you may feel too: humiliated, betrayed and enraged. She ends up spending time in a psychiatric unit (see: anger; rage; and broken heart for help in dealing with this phase and thereby avoiding temporary madness yourself). But then she takes herself off to the backwater town in Minnesota where she grew up, and where her mother still lives in an old folks' home. Here, surrounded by various women who for one reason or another are living without men, she heals a vital part of herself. Sometimes, a relationship can be better for a dramatic 'pause' in which grievances are aired – by both parties. And if you don't want to return to a partner who has abandoned you, temporarily or otherwise, a summer without men

(or women) may well give you the strength to forge ahead alone (see: divorce).

The breaking of trust causes deep wounds and, for many couples, recovery is just too hard. If your partner has been unfaithful, you have to be honest with each other and decide between you if your trust can be rebuilt (see: confrontation, fear of to get you started). If you're the one considering or having an affair, have a go at unleashing your unexpressed self within your marriage instead (see: stuck in a rut, to get some ideas.) You'll save everyone a lot of pain and trouble if you achieve it, and your partner may take the opportunity to become someone they like more, too.

SEE ALSO: **anger** • **dissatisfaction** • **divorce** • **guilt** • **jump ship, desire to** • **midlife crisis** • **regret** • **trust, loss of**

age gap between lovers

A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian
MARINA LEWYCKA

May-to-December romances tend to worry those observing the relationship more than those actually having it. But the disapproval and suspicion of others can be undermining, and if you are on the verge of falling into the arms of someone significantly older or younger than yourself, it's worth asking whether your relationship will be strong enough to withstand the ingrained cultural prejudice against large age gaps that persists in the West.

The first thing to establish is what you're both in the relationship for – and whether either of you are in any sort of denial about your own or your partner's motivation. When Nadia's eighty-six-year-old father announces his engagement to Valentina, a thirty-six-old Ukrainian divorcée with 'superior breasts' and an ambition to escape her drab life in the East, she gets straight to the point: 'I can see why you want to marry her. But have you asked yourself why she wants to marry *you*?' Papa knows, of course, that it's a visa and a posh car in which to drive her fourteen-year-old son to school that she's after, but he sees no harm in rescuing her and Stanislav in return for a little youthly affection. She will cook and clean for him, and care for him in his old age

too. That she'll also clean out his meagre life savings and bring them all to their knees with boil-in-the-bag cuisine is something he refuses to acknowledge, however. It takes a good deal of teamwork between Nadia and her estranged 'Big Sis' Vera to persuade him to open his rheumy eyes to the damage this 'fluffy pink hand-grenade' of a woman is doing to their family.

You'd have to be a bit mean-spirited to begrudge the elderly tractor expert the new lease of life that Valentina, for all her faults, gives him; and as long as both parties understand and accept one another's motivations, a relationship between people at opposite ends of the innocence-experience spectrum can be a wonderfully symbiotic thing. There needs to be openness on both sides, though, with no game-playing going on. If that's in place, you have our blessing. Fall away. Whatever the age of those arms.

ageing, horror of

Jitterbug Perfume
TOM ROBBINS

In an age where almost every person in the public eye has ironed away their wrinkles, botoxed their frowns and banished grey hair forever, we can understand King Alobar's need to flee the first signs of ageing like a hare from a fox. In fact, Alobar has more reason than most to escape the approach of senescence in his life – it is customary in his tribe to commit regicide with a poisoned egg at the first sign of their ruler's middle age. Here we distil the essence of *Jitterbug Perfume* in order to give you Alobar's recipe for eternal youth. For a fuller exposition, read the novel in its entirety.

Ingredients

1 eighth-century king on the brink of middle age
1 immortal, goaty god with a pronounced pong
1 vial of perfume that has the power to seduce whole cities when released
1 measure of Jamaican jasmine, which must be procured by the bee-keeper Bingo Pajama
1 most vital part of beetroot

Method

Fold ingredients earnestly inside a French perfumery until combined, adding at the last moment your beetroot's vital part. Breathe in a never-ending loop while you fold. Now ensure that the Bandaloop doctors preside over your potion while you take a hot bath. Then achieve orgasm with your sexual partner, drawing all the energy from this act up into your brain stem. Repeat daily for a thousand years.

If you have not by then achieved your aim, take Alobar's best advice of all: lighten up.

SEE ALSO: **baldness** • **birthday blues** • **old age, horror of**

ageing parents

The Corrections
JONATHAN FRANZEN

Family Matters
ROHINTON MISTRY

We wish this ailment on all of you. To have aged parents is something to celebrate, the alternative being to have faced their deaths before their time (see: death of a loved one). However, one can't deny that people can sometimes get annoying when they get old. They become crankier, more opinionated, less tolerant, more set in their ways. And on top of it all, they become physically incapacitated and need looking after, forcing a quite disconcerting reversal of the parent-child relationship. To that end, we address ageing parents as a condition requiring a salve as well as a celebration. We recommend two excellent novels with this theme at their heart, revealing the practical and psychological effects of ageing parents on the caring – or uncaring – children.

All three children veer heavily towards the latter in Jonathan Franzen's painfully funny *The Corrections* – though maybe Alfred and Enid Lambert had it coming. We first meet the Lambert parents in the final, most troubled stage of their lives. Alfred has Alzheimer's and dementia, and Enid joins the children in worrying about how to look after him (he has taken, amongst other things, to peeing in bottles in his den, because it's too far to get to the toilet). The driving force behind the narrative is Enid's desperation that all her children – and grandchildren – should come home for Christmas, as if this alone will reassure her that life is

still worth living. But her eldest son, Gary, pretends that one of his children is ill in order to avoid the trip home. Daughter Denise has her own fish to fry with her new restaurant, Chip, the youngest, has fled about as far away as you can get – Lithuania – on the back of a highly dubious internet business.

As we move towards the inevitable Christmas showdown, we re-visit significant moments in the past of this seemingly conventional family: Alfred refusing – out of meanness – to sell a patent that could have made his fortune; Alfred dominating Enid in an increasingly worrisome fashion; and Enid taking out her misery on her children by feeding them the food of revenge (rutabaga and liver). Perhaps it's the memory of this meal that persuades these three grown children to put Alfred into a retirement home – which, never one to miss an opportunity for a joke, Franzen calls 'Deepmire'. It works well for everybody except Alfred. The terrorising experience of reading this novel will remind you that avoiding such poor parent-child relations in the first place is highly recommended.

Mistry's Bombay novel begins with a celebration: the seventy-ninth birthday of the patriarch of the Vakeel family, Nariman. Nariman is a Parsi, whose religion prevented him from marrying the woman he has loved for thirty years, and in fact lived with for many of these, until he gave in to his family's dogma and married a woman of his own faith. Now widowed and suffering from Parkinson's disease, he finds himself increasingly dependent on his two step-children, Jal and Coomy, who have always resented him because of his imperfect love for their mother. When one day on his daily excursion he breaks his leg, he's forced to put himself in their hands entirely. Soon he is lying in bed wishing that one of them would wash him, change his clothes, and play him some music – but is too worried about disturbing them to ask for help. When they hear him crying at night they realise he is depressed and, finding the management of his personal hygiene intolerable – loathing the details of bed-pans and bed-sores which they know come from their own neglect – they send him to live with his blood-daughter

Roxana in the far smaller flat which she shares with her husband and two sons.

Here Grandpa Nariman has to sleep on the settee with Jehangir, the nine-year-old, while Murad the older boy sleeps in an improvised tent on the balcony, which, luckily, he finds a wonderful adventure. Roxana and her husband do an infinitely better job, embracing Grandpa and his fastidiousness over his dentures with compassion. And years later, Jehangir remembers the time that his grandfather lived with them with fondness and affection.

Family Matters is a wonderful example of how to look after one's ageing parents with compassion – and how not to. And even though Nariman's stepchildren do a poor job, at least they take him in. In our Western world of dependence on care homes and hospitals, we would do well to take note of this example of a family caring for its elderly at home. Aged parents: don't be so objectionable that your children and spouse want to hole you up somewhere you can't embarrass them. Children of these parents: listen to their pleas for dignity and privacy, and do your utmost to help them retain these last vital assets. Both parties: try to forgive one another's different moralities and expectations. And, if possible, make it home for Christmas (see: Christmas to help you survive).

agoraphobia

The Woman in the Dunes
KOBO ABE

Agoraphobics experience great discomfort when they find themselves in new places. Surrounded by the unfamiliar, the fear that they could lose control can trigger a panic attack (see: panic attack). And so they prefer to stay at home – resulting in isolation, depression and loneliness. Kobo Abe's novel is the perfect antidote.

Jumpei Niki, an amateur entomologist, takes a trip to a coastal desert at the end of the railway line, on the hunt for a new species of insect. While he searches for invertebrates, he stumbles upon a village hidden among eternally shifting dunes. Here he finds a unique community who live in houses nestled at the bottom of holes fifty foot deep in the

buff terrain. To prevent their homes from being submerged, the residents must dig bucketfuls of golden dirt every day, which they send up on ropes to the villagers above.

Their work takes place in the moonlight, as the sun makes their shafts unbearably hot. Jumpei is lured into one of the burrows for the night, where he helps a young widow in the endless battle against the fluid sand. In a twist of fate, Jumpei wakes the next morning to find the ladder that should have been his exit has been removed. His escape attempts are alternately heroic, sadistic and desperate. Slowly he accepts his fate as one who must work all day, sending buckets of sand up on ropes to helpers above – in between eating, sleeping and having sex with the widow. By the end of the novel you have shared Jumpei's humiliation – for the villagers above find his inadvertent life-change highly amusing – and his gradual acceptance of his bizarre new existence. And it's not all bad, for he does make a discovery under the sand.

Let Jumpei teach you to submit to the unexpected. And once you've experienced being hemmed in by imaginary walls of sand, you may be glad to take some tentative steps beyond your own, less imprisoning, walls.

SEE ALSO: **anxiety** • **loneliness** • **panic attack**

alcoholism

The Shining
STEPHEN KING

Under the Volcano
MALCOLM LOWRY

Once a Runner
JOHN L PARKER, JR

Alcoholics knock around in the pages of novels like ice cubes in gin. Why? Because alcohol loosens tongues. And because it's always the old soaks who collar us to tell a tale. When they're on the page, we can enjoy their ramblings without having to smell their beery breath. But let's agree to keep them on the page. Nobody wants a real one in their home; if you find yourself heading that way, we suggest you terrify yourself with a couple of graphic portrayals of bottle-induced ruin. Our cure is to be imbibed in three parts: two heady cocktails that will show you a glimpse of your potential fate to sober you up quick smart, followed by an

enticing shot that will prompt you to put on your trainers and run yourself into a new, clean life.

Jack Torrance, the writer in Stephen King's spine-chilling *The Shining*, has been on the wagon for some years. Though his wife has stayed with him, he lost her trust when he broke his son Danny's arm in a drink-fuelled rage. By working through the winter as caretaker of the Overlook Hotel in the Colorado Rockies, he hopes he can reconnect with his wife and now five-year-old son, and get his career back on track by writing a new play.

The two big obstacles to Jack's happiness have been an excessive reliance on alcohol and an explosive temper – not a good combination to take to a vast, spooky hotel where you are likely to be cut off from the outside world for several weeks once the snow hits. Jack starts his work with the firm conviction that he will stay sober. But one of the Overlook's ghostly attributes – apart from architecture that re-designs itself regularly – is an ability to produce cocktails from out of nowhere.

At first these are merely imaginary, but soon Jack is confronted with a genuine gin served to him by the (deceased) bartender, Lloyd (see: haunted, being). Looking into the gin is 'like drowning' for Jack: the first drink he's held to his lips in years. In the company of increasingly malign spirits, the spectre of Jack's lurking alcoholism is delighted to break out and let rip. Observing Jack's disintegration will put the fear of the demon drink into you in more ways than one and will have you heading for the orange juice rather than the hooch.

Drunks tend to be either intoxicating or infuriating. Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano,* set on the Day of the Dead in the Mexican town of Quauhnahuac, shows us both aspects of the psyche in dipsomaniac hero Geoffrey Firmin. The British Consul of this volcano-shadowed town, he spends the day juggling his drinking needs with the complicated reappearance of his estranged wife, Yvonne. This ought to be the most important day of his life, he suspects, but all he can do is drink, telling himself he's downing a beer 'for its vitamins' (he doesn't really bother with food), and

dreading the arrival of guests who fail to bring fresh supplies of liquor.

The events cover just one day and take place largely inside the consul's head, but the scope of this enormously powerful novel attains to the epic. As the Day of the Dead celebrations build to their feverish climax, the consul plunges tragically and irredeemably towards self-destruction, his thoughts laced always with whisky and mescal. His musings are at times blackly funny, and references to Faust are frequent; Firmin is heading gleefully to hell, and his last words, 'Christ, what a dingy way to die' – foretold at the opening of the novel by Firmin's filmmaker friend Laruelle – echo with a ghastly reminder of what a horrible route this is to take in life.

Enough warnings! Those seeking to break such damaging habits need a glowing, inspirational model too – an alternative way to live. To this end, we urge you to read *Once a Runner* by John L Parker, Jr. An underground classic when the author self-published in 1978, it was taken up as a sort of novel-manual for competitive runners (bibliotherapy at work in the world). It tells the story of Quenton Cassidy, a member of Southeastern University's track team, training under Olympic Gold medal winner Bruce Denton to run the mile. Denton pushes him and his running cronies to limits they never even knew existed. Quenton revels in the countless laps that Denton forces him to run, pushing himself so much that he urinates blood and openly weeps, his 'mahogany hard legs' pounding the track all the while. At his peak, he is 'vital, so quick, so nearly immortal' that he knows that life will never be 'quite so poignant' as it is now.

Let *Once a Runner* inspire you to change your relationship with your body completely – to push it to the limits in a positive way, to put it to work, and see what it can do. While Firmin in Lowry's novel wishes away the minutes between drinks, Cassidy in John Parker's breathes space into every second, getting the very most he can out of each one. The pure joy – and pain – of running, the sweat and ruthless determination of the race, are as far a cry as you can get from the nihilism of the alcoholic. Buy yourself a pair of trainers

and serve this novel up to yourself instead of after-dinner drinks. May it be a symbol of your commitment to ditching the booze.

SEE ALSO: **antisocial, being** • **cold turkey, going** • **hangover** • **hiccups** • **libido, loss of** • **rails, going off the** • **sweating**

alopecia

SEE: **baldness** • **stress**

ambition, too little

The Crimson Petal and the White
MICHEL FABER

If you find yourself watching everybody else's race but your own, or even that you're still standing on the starting line, you need a novel to galvanise you into setting some finishing posts, then pelting towards them. There's no better novel for the job than *The Crimson Petal and the White*.

Our young heroine starts life in a place most would say was so far from the possibility of even competing that she might as well give up before she starts. Sugar was forced into prostitution by her mother at the tender age of thirteen, and grows up believing she has no choice but to submit to the gentlemen who come to her bed 'to keep her warm'. But she yearns to rise above this base existence. Her way of going about it is to become the best in the brothel – and then the best in Britain. Soon she has not only acquired phenomenal accomplishments in the bedroom, but she knows how to make a man feel eloquent, witty, and full of vitality, simply by the way she listens and flirts. But underneath her charming exterior, she still finds her work grotesque and pours her disgust into a novel she writes in secret at her desk.

Her big break comes when she meets William Rackham of Rackham Perfumeries, who discovers her through the pages of the gentleman's magazine, *More Sprees in London*. Rackham is so smitten with Sugar that he arranges to keep her for his exclusive use. Eventually she becomes invaluable to him, not just for her charms and beauty, but for her brains, being more astute and more in touch with his customer's

needs than he is himself. It's not long before Sugar is the guiding force behind his advertising campaigns and overall business strategy.

Faber portrays a Victorian world of social inequality and rigid convention in minute detail: 'Watch your step. Keep your wits about you. You will need them', he exhorts at the start of the novel. Follow Sugar (though not into prostitution), and rise wisely, determining your own fate rather than those of others. As Oscar Wilde put it: 'Our ambition should be to rule ourselves, the true kingdom for each one of us.'

SEE ALSO: **apathy** • **bed, inability to get out of** • **lethargy**

ambition, too much

Great Expectations
CHARLES DICKENS

Some of us have too little of it, others too much. According to the Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu, ambition – in its best ratio – has one heel nailed in well, 'though she stretch her fingers to touch the heavens'. When neither heel is nailed down firmly, and we overreach our innate talents and social limitations, we are in danger of losing our purchase completely.

This is what happens to Pip in *Great Expectations*. Orphaned Pip lives with his older sister, the harsh and unsympathetic Mrs Joe, whose face looks as if it has been 'scrubbed with a nutmeg grater' and who believes in bringing him up 'by Hand' (though she is tempered by her gentle husband Joe, who shows kindness to Pip throughout his turbulent life). When Pip meets Estella, the beautiful but ice-hearted ward of eccentric Miss Havisham, who is still wearing the wedding dress in which she was jilted at the altar forty years ago, Pip is encouraged by his sister to nurture a hope that this strange old lady has plans to groom him for Estella. The hope turns to a conviction, giving him the green light to behave 'like a gentleman' – not necessarily of the best sort – and look down on his origins, including his friend Biddy, who sees the way that Pip is going and doesn't like it.

Pip and his sister are proved horribly wrong. Though Pip does land a surprise inheritance, and outwardly this makes him a 'gentleman', worldly success is shown to be naught

to success in love. Fortunes can be lost as easily as they are won. Pip would have saved a lot of time and heartache if he had never been 'raised up'. Let Pip's mistake stand as a warning. By all means look to the skies. But keep at least one foot on the terra firma of your origins.

SEE ALSO: **greed** • **selling your soul** • **social climber, being a** • **workaholism**

amputation

SEE: **limb, loss of**

anally retentive, being

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy
LAURENCE STERNE

If you're anally retentive, you'll know all about the importance of order, logic and neatness. A maker of lists, your life consists of accomplishing tasks that you can then tick off. Anything that comes between you and your task – an unexpected telephone call, a sun-lit field calling you to take a stroll, an uninvited guest dropping round for tea – is grossly unwelcome. Your single-track mind cannot wander from its course. Now is your moment to swap psyches with Tristram Shandy. After 480 pages of living inside the head of this loveable philosopher, and accompanying him on his remarkably prolix ramblings, you will be cured of your anal retentiveness forever.

Published in successive volumes from 1760 to 1767, *Tristram Shandy* is perhaps the first interactive novel, inviting the reader to take Sterne's proffered hand and join in the author's game. Like Italo Calvino's two hundred years later, the authorial voice intrudes often and merrily, asking the reader to consider the ways in which he has advanced their understanding of a character.

Shandy's determination to write his memoirs is unstinting, but it takes him until volume three to arrive at his birth. Because this memoir, and indeed his life, consists entirely of diversions from the point. While still a mere homunculus inside his mother's womb, the road to his existence is

amnesia, reading-associated

KEEP A READING JOURNAL

Sufferers of reading-associated amnesia have little or no recollection of the novels they have read. They come home from the bookshop, excited by the crisp new novel in their hands, only to be struck five or twenty pages in by a sense of déjà vu. They join a conversation about a classic novel they believe they've read, only to be posed a question they can't answer – usually what happened at the end.

What you need, blancmange-brained reader, is a reading journal. A small notebook to carry with you at all times – ideally one that's beautiful and pleasing to the touch. Dedicate one page to each book you read and on the day that you turn the last page, write down the book's title, author, the day's date and the place that you read it. You might like to sum up the story in one headline-grabbing line: MAN MURDERS PAWNBROKER, FEELS GUILTY FOR NEXT FIVE HUNDRED PAGES, for example. Or you might opine at length on the motivations of a character you found particularly intriguing. You may also want to make a note of how the book left you feeling – uplifted or downhearted? Like taking a walk on the windy moors, or emigrating to New Zealand? If words don't come easily, use images to summarise your feelings, or give it marks out of ten, or write a list of the words that you found in the book and liked.

This journal will be a record of your reading journey. Over the years you can flip back and recollect the highs and the lows. And if an author or title eludes you mid-conversation, make an excuse to go to the bathroom and look it up.

disturbed, at the very moment of procreation, by his mother asking his father if he had remembered to wind the clock. This interruption to the act of conception results, he believes, in his prenatal self falling prey to 'melancholy dreams and fancies' even before he came to fully exist. And when his name, which his father considered of enormous importance to his nature and fortunes, is accidentally mangled by the time it reaches the curate, and he is inadvertently christened Tristram – apparently the least auspicious of names – rather than Trismegistus, as intended, he believes himself to be even less blessed by the fates.

All of which, perhaps, explains why Sterne's prose is so unruly: a page left blank for the reader to draw their own version of Widow Wadman, the paramour of Uncle Toby; asterisks where the reader is invited to imagine what a character is thinking; and an entirely black page that supposedly 'mourns' the loss of Parson Yorick. There are even squiggly loops indicating the shape of the narrative digressions themselves.

One cannot help but come under the spell. 'Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine. They are the life, the soul, of reading!' says Tristram at the start of the novel. And we wholeheartedly agree. Interrupt the reading of this book by opening *Tristram Shandy*. Go on, just for a chapter. Although after a few pages, perhaps, it'll be time for a cup of tea. And then a spontaneous excursion might take your fancy. You might forget you were reading this book in the first place. (That's OK; you can come back to it in the middle of some other task, some other day.) A digression a day keeps the doctor away – and so will *Tristram Shandy*.

SEE ALSO: **control freak, being a** • **give up halfway through, refusal to** • **humourlessness** • **organised, being too** • **reverence of books, excessive** • **single-mindedness**

anger

The Old Man and the Sea
ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Because even after eighty-four consecutive days of going out in his boat without catching a single fish, the old man is cheerful and undefeated. And even when the other fishermen laugh at him, he is not angry. And even though he now has to fish alone – because the boy who has been with him since he was five, and whom he loves, and who loves him, has been forced by his family to try his luck with another boat – he holds no grudge in his heart. And because on the eighty-fifth day he goes out again, full of hope.

And even though when he does hook a big fish – the biggest fish that he or anyone else has ever caught – and it pulls on his line so fiercely that the skin on his hand is torn, he still lets the fish pull him further out. And though he wishes to God that the boy were with him, he is grateful that at least he has the porpoises that play and joke around his boat. And even when it's been a day and a night and another day stretches ahead, and it's only him and the fish and there's no-one to help, still he keeps his head. And even when he has been pushed further than he has ever been pushed in his life, and he begins to feel the edge of despair, he talks himself round, because he must think of what he has, and not what he does not have; and of what he can do with what there is. And though his hand becomes so stiff it is useless, and though he is hungry and thirsty and blinded by the sun, he still thinks of the lions he once saw on the beach in Africa, like some sort of heavenly vision. Because he knows that there is nothing greater, or more beautiful, or more noble than this fish that tugs him ever on. And even when it is dead, and the sharks come to feast – first one, then half a dozen – and the man loses his harpoon, and then his knife, in his attempts to fend them off; and even when he has ripped out the keel of his boat to use as a club; and even though he fails to save the flesh of the fish, and the ordeal leaves him so tired and weak he is nearly lost himself; and even though when he finally makes it to shore all that is left of the fish is a skeleton, he accepts what has happened, and is not broken, or angry, but goes, rather gratefully, to bed.

Because by immersing yourself in the simple, calming prose of this story, you too will rise above your emotions. You will join the old man in his boat, witness at first hand his love for the boy, for the sea, for the fish – and allow it to fill you with peace and a noble acceptance of what is, leaving no space for what was or what you would like to be. Sometimes we all go out too far, but it doesn't mean we can't come back. And just as the old man is made happy by his vision of lions on a beach, you too can have your vision – perhaps of the old man, and the way he talks himself round. And after you have read it, you will keep this novel on your shelf, somewhere you will see it whenever you feel angry. And you'll remember the old man, the sea, the fish, and you'll be calm.

SEE ALSO: **rage** • **road rage** • **turmoil** • **vengeance, seeking** • **violence, fear of**

angst, existential

Siddhartha
HERMANN HESSE

As anyone who has stood at the top of a cliff will tell you, alongside the fear of falling to your death is an equally strong and entirely conflicting emotion: the urge to jump. The knowledge that nothing is stopping you from making that leap, the leap into possibility – the realisation that you have absolute freedom of will, infinite power to create and to destroy – fills you with horror and dread. It is this horror, according to Soren Kierkegaard, that lies at the root of existential angst.

If you are unlucky enough to have been struck with this debilitating affliction, you will be in urgent need of spiritual refreshment. You need to pare back the possibilities, to renounce the world and join, at least for a while, the ascetics. You need *Siddhartha*.

Siddhartha, the young son of a fictional Brahmin in ancient India, brings joy and bliss to everyone – except himself. Leading a seemingly idyllic existence surrounded by a family who love him, he appears destined for great things. But despite his material and spiritual wealth, young Siddhartha feels that something is missing.

And so, as young men in ancient India were wont to do, he goes on a spiritual quest. First he joins the Samana, a band of self-flagellating ascetics who deny the flesh and seek enlightenment through renunciation. Fully flagellated, but still discontented, he encounters Gotama the Buddha, who teaches him the eightfold path that illuminates the way to the end of suffering. Not content with this knowledge alone, and wanting to reach his goal through his own understanding, he meets Vasudeva, a ferryman with an astonishing inner light, who seems content with his simple life. But this, too, fails to satisfy. Even after living a sensual and happy life for many years with the beautiful Kamala, still something is missing for Siddhartha. For a while he contemplates death by drowning. But then he remembers the astoundingly happy ferryman, Vasudeva, and learns that he must study the river.

Here he finds revelations to last a lifetime – including the true cycle of life and death, and what it is to be part of a timeless unity. And from that day on he radiates transcendent understanding, self-knowledge, and enlightenment. From all over the world, people come to him to seek wisdom and peace. People like you.

SEE ALSO: **anxiety** • **despair** • **dread, nameless** • **pointlessness**

angst, teenage

SEE: **adolescence** • **teens, being in your**

anorexia nervosa

SEE: **eating disorder**

antisocial, being

The Bone People
KERI HULME

So you'd rather stay home with a book? Well, of course we have no problem with that. But do you promise you're going to read and not feel sorry for yourself, because nobody seems to *get* you, and because everyone's having fun except for you?

Stay home and take *The Bone People* off your shelf. Meet the unapologetically antisocial Kerewin Holme, who lives by herself in a starkly-furnished six-floored tower, a crucifix in the hallway. Prickly, impatient, gruff, estranged from her family, odd in that way that sometimes people who spend too much time by themselves become odd (she talks to herself all the time), Kerewin is not everyone's cup of tea.

And neither is Simon everyone's ideal little boy. A strange urchin who breaks into Kerewin's tower, he is mute, stubborn, sullen, 'nasty', 'gnomish', and a 'smartass', Kerewin concludes when she first sets eyes on him, pinioned stiffly into a high slit window. 'Emotionally disturbed,' as the local telephone operator puts it. 'A right stubborn illnatured mess of a child.'

Then enter Joe Gillayley, Simon's father, a nice enough bloke, in fact, but an alcoholic who descends into rages and beats the boy – then tortures himself with the guilt. Not an attractive triumvirate, really. But Kerewin, because of her own strangeness, is able to accept Simon and Joe. The three of them slowly start to forge a bond, becoming an odd little family who share a warmth and companionship and ease that their antisocial tendencies had previously denied them.

Allow their friendship to make its mark on you. Being intrinsically antisocial doesn't bar you from having strong and wonderful bonds with other people. Next time there's a party, go. You might meet someone just as antisocial as yourself.

SEE ALSO: **cynicism** • **dinner parties, fear of** • **killjoy, being a** • **misanthropy** • **read instead of live, tendency to**

anxiety

The Portrait of a Lady
HENRY JAMES

To live with anxiety is to live with a leech that saps you of your energy, confidence and chutzpah. A constant feeling of unease or fearfulness – as opposed to the sense of frustration that characterises stress (see: stress) – anxiety is both a response to external circumstances and an approach to life. While the external circumstances cannot be controlled, the

internal response can; laughter, or a big intake of oxygen (the former leading to the latter), usually relieves systems at least temporarily, as well as offering an encouragement to relax. The cause of the anxiety, however, determines whether laughter or breathing and relaxing is the appropriate cure. Luckily, our cure offers all three.

Of the fourteen causes of anxiety that we have identified,* the first chapter of *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James can be expected to ameliorate ten. Opening as it does with a description of the civilised and serene institution of afternoon tea in an English country garden – complete with 'mellow' late afternoon light, long shadows, tea cups held 'for a long time close to [the] chin', rugs, cushions and books strewn on the lawn in the shade of the trees – its indirect invitation to slow down and have a cup yourself (helpful for causes 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12 and certain elements of 13) is re-enforced by James's unhurried, elegant prose, a balm for anxiety arising from all of the preceding causes, and also serving to begin the complete eradication of anxiety arising from cause number 8.

To say that James's prose spreads itself thickly, like butter, is not intended to suggest turgidness, but rather creaminess – and let us make that *salted* butter. For the pleasures of both prose and afternoon tea are made complete by James's dialogue, which contains both frankness and sharpness of wit (a curative for causes 1–4, and also excellent for cause 7). For the banter between the three men – the elderly chair-bound American banker, Mr Touchett, his 'ugly, sickly' but charming son Ralph, and the 'noticeably handsome' Lord Warburton with his quintessentially English face – is always aiming to trigger a chuckle, and the characters are not afraid of teasing (note Lord Warburton's markedly un-English reference to Mr Touchett's wealth). Freed of the chains of propriety

* 1) Trauma, including abuse, and death of a loved one; 2) Relationship problems, either at home or work; 3) Work/school; 4) Finances; 5) Natural disaster; 6) Lack of oxygen at high altitude; 7) Taking life too seriously; 8) Gnawing feeling that you should have read more of the classics; 9) Negative self-talk; 10) Poor health/hypochondria; 11) Taking too many drugs; 12) Being late/too busy; 13) Inadequate food, water, heat or comfort; 14) Threat of attack by wild animal/person.

and form that had been shackling dialogue on similar lawns three quarters of a century earlier, it is the sort of conversation which puts you at your ease (again, addressing causes 1–4 and 7, while also ameliorating causes 6, 9, and 10–12).

Once the little party are joined by Ralph's American cousin Isabel Archer, recently 'taken on' by Mrs Touchett, the conversation loses some of its ease but gains in spirit – for Isabel, at this stage in her life, has a lightness, a boldness and a confidence both in herself and others that cannot fail to rub off on the reader. Those suffering anxiety from cause 9 will find her presence in the story especially curative.

Indeed, we recommend this novel for all sufferers of anxiety except those made anxious by causes 5 and 14 (for the latter, in particular, a novel of any sort is unhelpful, except perhaps to use as a weapon), though readers suffering anxiety from causes 1 and 2 should be warned that the ending may backfire, and prompt their symptoms to get worse. In which case, they should immediately turn back to the beginning for another dose of afternoon tea.

SEE ALSO: **angst, existential** • **panic attack** • **stress** • **turmoil**

apathy

The Postman Always Rings Twice
JAMES M CAIN

Although it can manifest as physical sluggishness – like its heavy-limbed cousin, lethargy – apathy is essentially a mental condition, characterised by an attitude of indifference towards outcomes, both for oneself and the world at large. Its cure, however, is best tackled by addressing the physical sluggishness first, thus further distinguishing it from its other near relations, pessimism and existential angst, which require an overhaul of the mind. This is because apathy is also characterised by a suppression of positive emotions and to re-engage them, and re-kindle the desire for things to turn out well, one has to stir up the sediment at the bottom of the too-sedentary soul.

It's not that it all ends well for Frank Chambers, the itinerant chancer and jailbreaker in James M Cain's 1934 masterpiece *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Indeed if one was to

adopt his philosophy of life, you'd end up (as he does) with a price on your head and several angry women in hot pursuit. But the novel is written with such rattling exuberance that it's impossible to read without becoming physically buzzed. By the end, you'll be up and about with a bounce in your step, throwing caution to the wind in your determination to have a hand in fate, setting you on a more spontaneous and proactive – if slightly reckless – new tack.

From the moment Frank Chambers is thrown off the hay truck, the story is up and running. Within three pages he's swindled the honest owner of the Twin Oaks Tavern into fixing him a colossal breakfast (orange juice, cornflakes, fried eggs, bacon, enchilada, flapjacks and coffee, if you're interested), got himself hired as a mechanic, and set covetous won't-take-no-for-an-answer eyes on Cora, the tavern-owner's sullenly sexy wife. One thing leads to another – and then another – and Cain does a splendid job of keeping up with Frank, capturing his immoral inability to say no in short, snappy sentences laced with slang. The combination of story and style hits you like a triple espresso, and at only a little over a hundred pages, it's also a very quick fix. Rip through it in an afternoon, then jack your apathy onto your back and chuck it out on the street as you go. You'll be inspired by Frank's irrepressible interest in each new moment – even when things aren't going so well – and determined not to blow, as he does, the opportunities that arise.

SEE ALSO: **ambition, too little** • **bed, inability to get out of** • **lethargy** • **pessimism** • **pointlessness** • **zestlessness**

appendicitis

Madeline
LUDWIG BEMELMANS

If one day you're feeling fab
Then suddenly you sense a stab
Of searing pain in nameless parts
That never stops but comes in starts
Filling you with throbbing pain
Running down your abdomen
And you feel no end in sight as

Clearly you've appendicitis
The only cure we can advise
Is *Madeline*. So very wise
A book by Ludwig Bemelmans
Who's written rhymes that don't quite scan
But with his wry and charming tale
Leaves you feeling very hale.
For Madeline is tickled pink
She has a scar that will not shrink
To show to her eleven friends
After her appendix meets its ends
She's given flowers and sweets and toys.
The illustrations Lud deploys
Are very touching, and the book
Will keep your surgeon off the hook.

SEE ALSO: **hospital, being in** • **pain, being in**

appetite, loss of

The Leopard
GIUSEPPE TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA

Losing one's appetite is a terrible thing. For one's appetitefor food is part and parcel of one's appetite for life. A result of various kinds of physical and emotional sickness (the latter including lovesickness, depression, heartbreak and bereavement), total loss of appetite can only lead in one direction. To bring it back, and solicit a re-engagement with life, whet and tempt with one of literature's most sensual novels.

The Leopard, Don Fabrizio Corbèra, Prince of Salina, feels as if he has been dying for years. But even now, in his old age, he is Appetite writ large. He still has the energy, at seventy-three, to go to brothels; and is still delighted to see his favourite dessert – a rum jelly in the shape of a fortress complete with bastions and battlements – on the dining table (it's rapidly demolished beneath the assault of his large, equally lusty family). There are ravishing descriptions of desire of many different kinds: the daily pursuit of a hare in the 'archaic and aromatic fields'; and the intense and overwhelming attraction of young Tancredi and Angelica as they chase each other around the palace, forever finding new

rooms in which to yearn and dream, for 'These were the days when desire was always present, because always overcome'.

One cannot help but revel in the old patriarch's appreciation of the sensual world. This is a novel that will help you rediscover your appetite: for food, for love, for the countryside, for Sicily with all its history and rampant beauty; for a lost, unfair world before democracy; and most importantly for life itself.

arrogance

Pride and Prejudice
JANE AUSTEN

Angel
ELIZABETH TAYLOR

Mildred Pierce
JAMES M CAIN

Arrogance is one of the greatest crimes in literature. We know this because when Mr Darcy snubs Elizabeth Bennet at Bingley's ball – refusing to dance with her, dismissing her beauty as just 'tolerable' and generally turning sour on the inhabitants of Longbourn – he is immediately written off by everyone, even Mrs Bennet, as the 'proudest, most disagreeable man in the world'. And this is despite being much more handsome than the amiable Mr Bingley, despite his having a large estate in Derbyshire, and despite his being by far the most eligible man for a twenty-five-mile radius – which, as we know, means a great deal to Mrs Bennet with five daughters to marry off.

Luckily, the playful Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen's heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, knows how to bring him down to size. She uses a combination of teasing ('I am perfectly convinced . . . that Mr Darcy has no defect,' said to his face) and blunt, hyperbolic rejection ('I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry') which not only corrects his flaws but displays the 'liveliness of [her] mind' to such a degree that he falls in love with her all over again, and properly this time. If you are inflicted with similar arrogance, learn from this novel how to spot intelligent teasing and courageous honesty – and welcome it. You should be so lucky to be turned into the perfect man/woman by someone like Elizabeth.

Sometimes, the arrogance is so deeply instilled, however, that nothing and no-one can shift it. The eponymous

heroine of *Angel*, by Elizabeth Taylor – not the Hollywood actress but the mid twentieth-century British writer – is just fifteen years old when we meet her, and to say she thinks she's the bee's knees is an understatement. An incorrigible liar, this strange child is vain, bossy and utterly devoid of humour. She feels nothing but contempt for her classmates, is unmoved when one of them is taken to hospital with diphtheria, and fantasises about a future in which, dressed in emeralds and a chinchilla wrap, she'll be able to employ her own, tiresome mother as her maid. Naturally, her mother is pretty appalled by the daughter she's raised – just as Mildred is horrified by her similarly monstrous daughter Veda in James M Cain's *Mildred Pierce*. Veda drains the family coffers to support her extravagant lifestyle and steals her mother's new man. It's not hard to see why Mildred tries to kill the monster she's created.

Fascinatingly, Angel's uber-confidence carries her a long way – all the way to those emeralds, in fact. Veda, too, gets exactly what she wants. Neither discovers humility. Rejection – in Angel's case, from publishers and then critics; in Veda's by her own mother – has no sobering effect on either of them.

Do not be an Angel or a Veda. When you inspire rejection, question what you might have done to deserve it. Instead, be a Darcy. Though he's initially angered and mortified by Elizabeth's refusal of his proposal – and her accusations against his character – he knows the difference between right and wrong, and craves the good opinion of someone he admires. Be glad when someone pulls your leg – the chances are, they'll be improving you.

SEE ALSO: **confidence, too much** • **vanity**

attention, seeking

SEE: **neediness**