

'Wonderful' *GUARDIAN*

'We're hooked' *PSYCHOLOGIES*



# THE NOVEL CURE

An A-Z of Literary Remedies



Authors of *The Story Cure*

**Ella Berthoud & Susan Elderkin**

*The*  
**NOVEL CURE**

An A-Z of  
Literary  
Remedies

ELLA BERTHOUD and SUSAN ELDERKIN



CANONGATE  
*Edinburgh · London*

Published in Great Britain in 2013 by Canongate Books Ltd,  
14 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1TE

[www.canongate.tv](http://www.canongate.tv)

This digital edition first published in 2013 by Canongate Books

Copyright © Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin, 2013

The moral right of the authors has been asserted

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available on request from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 85786 420 8

ePub ISBN 978 0 85786 426 0

Designed by Here Design

# CONTENTS

## [Introduction](#)

---

## [A-Z of Ailments](#)

### [A](#)

[abandonment](#)

[accused, being](#)

[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](#)

[adoption](#)

[adultery](#)

[age gap between lovers](#)

[ageing, horror of](#)

[ageing parents](#)

[agoraphobia](#)

[alcoholism](#)

alopecia

SEE: [baldness](#) • [stress](#)

[ambition, too little](#)

[ambition, too much](#)

[amnesia, reading-associated](#)

amputation

SEE: [limb, loss of](#)

[anally retentive, being](#)

[anger](#)

[angst, existential](#)

angst, teenage

SEE: [adolescence](#) • [teens, being in your](#)

anorexia nervosa

SEE: [eating disorder](#)

[antisocial, being](#)

[anxiety](#)

[apathy](#)

[appendicitis](#)

[appetite, loss of](#)

[arrogance](#)

attention, seeking

SEE: [neediness](#)

B

[bad back](#)

bad blood

SEE: [anger](#) • [bitterness](#) • [hatred](#)

bad manners

SEE: [manners, bad](#)

bad taste

SEE: [taste, bad](#)

bad tempered, being

SEE: [grumpiness](#) • [irritability](#) • [killjoy, being a](#) • [querulousness](#)

[baldness](#)

[beans, temptation to spill the](#)

[bed, inability to get out of](#)

bereavement

SEE: [broken heart](#) • [death of a loved one](#) • [widowed, being](#) • [yearning, general](#)

biological clock ticking

SEE: [children, not having](#) • [children, under pressure to have](#) • [shelf, fear of being left on the](#)

[birthday blues](#)

[bitterness](#)

blocked, being

SEE: [constipation](#) • [writer's block](#)

[blushing](#)

book-buyer, being a compulsive

boredom

boring, being

SEE: anally retentive, being • humourlessness • organised, being too • risks not taking enough • sci-fi, stuck on • teetotaller, being a

bossiness

SEE: bully, being a • control freak, being a • dictator, being a

brainy, being exceptionally

breaking up

broke, being

broken china

broken dreams

broken friendship

SEE: friend, falling out with your best

broken heart

broken leg

broken promise

SEE: trust, loss of

broken spirit

bulimia

SEE: eating disorder

bullied, being

bully, being a

burning the dinner

burning with desire

SEE: lust

busy, being too

busy to read, being too

## C

[cancer, caring for someone with](#)

[cancer, having](#)

[career, being in the wrong](#)

[carelessness](#)

[carnivorousness](#)

[carsickness](#)

[change, resistance to](#)

cheating

SEE: [adultery](#)

[childbirth](#)

children, having

SEE: [broke, being](#) • [busy, being too](#) • [busy to read, being too](#) • [childbirth](#) • [children requiring attention, too many](#) • [cope, inability to](#) • [family, coping with](#) • [fatherhood](#) • [motherhood](#) • [motherhood-in-law, being a](#) • [noise, too much](#) • [single parent, being a](#) • [trapped by children](#)

[children, not having](#)

[children requiring attention, too many](#)

children, trapped by

SEE: [trapped by children](#)

[children, under pressure to have](#)

[Christmas](#)

[city fatigue](#)

[claustrophobia](#)

[coffee, can't find a decent cup of](#)

[cold, common](#)

[cold turkey, going](#)

[coming out](#)



[coming too soon](#)

[commitment, fear of](#)

[common sense, lack of](#)

[concentrate, inability to](#)

confidence, too little

SEE: [bullied, being](#) • [confrontation, fear of](#) • [coward, being a](#) • [neediness](#) • [pessimism](#) • [risks, not taking enough](#) • [seize the day, failure to](#) • [seduction skills, lack of](#) • [self-esteem low](#) • [shyness](#)

[confidence, too much](#)

[confrontation, fear of](#)

[constipation](#)

control, out of

SEE: [adolescence](#) • [alcoholism](#) • [carelessness](#) • [drugs, doing too many](#) • [rails, going off the](#) • [risks, taking too many](#)

[control freak, being a](#)

[cope, inability to](#)

[coward, being a](#)

[cry, in need of a good](#)

[cult, being in a](#)

[cynicism](#)

D

[Daddy's girl, being a](#)

[death, fear of](#)

[death of a loved one](#)

[demons, facing your](#)

dependency

SEE: [alcoholism](#) • [coffee, can't find a decent cup of](#) • [cold turkey, going](#) • [drugs, doing too many](#) • [gambling](#) • [internet addiction](#) •

[neediness](#) • [shopaholism](#) • [smoking, giving up](#)  
[depletion of library through lending](#)  
[depression, economic](#)  
[depression, general](#)  
[despair](#)  
[determinedly chasing after a woman even when she's a nun](#)  
[determinedly chasing after a woman even when she's married](#)  
[diarrhoea](#)  
[dictator, being a](#)  
[different, being](#)  
[dinner parties, fear of](#)  
[disenchantment](#)  
dishonesty  
SEE: [lying](#)  
[dissatisfaction](#)  
[divorce](#)  
[DIY](#)  
[dizziness](#)  
[dread, nameless](#)  
dread, of Monday morning  
SEE: [Monday morning feeling](#)  
dreams, bad  
SEE: [nightmares](#)  
dreams, broken  
SEE: [broken dreams](#)  
[drugs, doing too many](#)  
dumped, getting  
SEE: [anger](#) • [appetite, loss of](#) • [breaking up](#) • [broken heart](#) • [cry, in](#)

[need of a good](#) • [insomnia](#) • [lovesickness](#) • [murderous thoughts](#) • [sadness](#)

[dying](#)

E

[eating disorder](#)

egg on your face

SEE: [blushing](#) • [idiot, feeling like an](#) • [regret](#) • [shame](#)

[egg on your tie](#)

egotism

SEE: [arrogance](#) • [confidence, too much](#) • [dictator, being a](#) • [misanthropy](#) • [selfishness](#) • [vanity](#)

[eighty-something, being](#)

embarrassment

SEE: [egg on your tie](#) • [idiot, feeling like an](#) • [regret](#) • [shame](#) • [shame, reading-associated](#)

[emotions, inability to express](#)

[empathy, lack of](#)

[empty-nest syndrome](#)

English, being very

SEE: [stiff upper lip, having a](#)

envy

SEE: [jealousy](#)

[exhaustion](#)

existential angst

SEE: [angst, existential](#)

[extravagance](#)

F

[failure, feeling like a](#)

failure to seize the day

SEE: [seize the day, failure to](#)

[faith, loss of](#)

falling head over heels in love

SEE: [appetite, loss of](#) • [concentrate, inability to](#) • [dizziness](#) • [infatuation](#) • [insomnia](#) • [lovesickness](#) • [lust](#) • [obsession](#) • [optimism](#) • [romantic, hopeless](#)

[falling out of love with love](#)

falling out of the window

SEE: [alcoholism](#) • [bad back](#) • [DIY](#) • [drugs, doing too many](#) [hospital, being in](#)

falling out with your best friend

SEE: [friend, falling out with your best](#)

[family, coping with](#)

[family, coping without](#)

[fatherhood](#)

[fatherhood, avoiding it](#)

fear of being left on the shelf

SEE: [shelf, fear of being left on the](#)

fear of commitment

SEE: [commitment, fear of](#)

fear of confrontation

SEE: [confrontation, fear of](#)

fear of dinner parties

SEE: [dinner parties, fear of](#)

fear of death

SEE: [death, fear of](#)

fear of doing tax return

SEE: [tax return, fear of doing](#)

fear of finishing

SEE: [finishing, fear of](#)

fear of flying

SEE: [flying, fear of](#)

fear of sci-fi

SEE: [sci-fi, fear of](#)

fear of starting

SEE: [starting, fear of](#)

fear of violence

SEE: [violence, fear of](#)

[fifty-something, being](#)

[find one of your books, inability to](#)

[finishing, fear of](#)

[flatulence](#)

[flight, missing your](#)

[flu](#)

[flying, fear of](#)

[foreign, being](#)

[forty-something, being](#)

[friend, falling out with your best](#)

friends, in need of

SEE: [left out, feeling](#) • [loneliness](#) • [outsider, being an](#) • [unpopular, being](#)

G

[gambling](#)

gas, excessive

SEE: [flatulence](#)

genius, being a

SEE: [brainy, being exceptionally](#)

give up halfway through, refusal to

give up halfway through, tendency to

giving birth

SEE: childbirth

giving up

SEE: give up halfway through, tendency to • hope, loss of •  
smoking, giving up

gluttony

goody-goody, being a

greed

grief

SEE: broken heart • death of a loved one • sadness • widowed,  
being • yearning, general

grumpiness

guilt

guilt, reading-associated

H

haemorrhoids

hangover

happiness, searchin for

hatred

haunted, being

hayfever

headache

hiccups

high blood pressure

holiday, not knowing what novels to take on

homelessness

[homesickness](#)

[homophobia](#)

honest, being too

SEE: [hatred](#) • [judgemental, being](#)

[hope, loss of](#)

hormonal, being

SEE: [adolescence](#) • [cry, in need of a good](#) • [menopause](#) • [PMT](#) • [pregnancy](#) • [teens, being in your](#) • [tired and emotional, being](#)

[hospital, being in](#)

[household chores, distracted by](#)

[housewife, being a](#)

humility, lack of

SEE: [arrogance](#)

[humourlessness](#)

[hunger](#)

[hype, put off by](#)

[hypochondria](#)

I

[identity crisis](#)

[identity, unsure of your reading](#)

[idiot, feeling like an](#)

ignorance

SEE: [homophobia](#) • [idiot, feeling like an](#) • [racism](#) • [xenophobia](#)

[indecision](#)

indifference

SEE: [apathy](#)

[infatuation](#)

[innocence, loss of](#)

insanity

SEE: [madness](#)

[insomnia](#)

[internet addiction](#)

[irritability](#)

irritable bowel syndrome

SEE: [constipation](#) • [diarrhoea](#) • [flatulence](#) • [nausea](#) • [pain, being in](#)

[itchy feet](#)

[itchy teeth](#)

J

[jam, being in a](#)

[jealousy](#)

jetlag

SEE: [dizziness](#) • [exhaustion](#) • [headache](#) • [insomnia](#) • [nausea](#)

job, hating your

SEE: [bullied, being](#) • [career, being in the wrong](#) • [job, losing your](#) • [Monday morning feeling](#) • [stuck in a rut](#)

[job, losing your](#)

[judgemental, being](#)

[jump ship, desire to](#)

K

[killjoy, being a](#)

knackered, being

[busy, being too](#) • [busy to read, being too](#) • [children requiring attention, too many](#) • [exhaustion](#) • [fatherhood](#) • [motherhood](#) • [pregnancy](#) • [tired and emotional, being](#) • [workaholism](#)

knocked up, being

SEE: [pregnancy](#)



## L

laziness

SEE: [adolescence](#) • [ambition, too little](#) • [bed, inability to get out of](#)  
• [lethargy](#) • [procrastination](#)

[left out, feeling](#)

[lethargy](#)

[libido, loss of](#)

[limb, loss of](#)

[live instead of read, tendency to](#)

[locked out, being](#)

[loneliness](#)

[loneliness, reading-induced](#)

[long-winded, being](#)

losing hope

SEE: [hope, loss of](#)

losing your faith

SEE: [faith, loss of](#)

losing your job

SEE: [job, losing your](#)

losing your marbles

SEE: [drugs, doing too many](#) • [madness](#) • [senile, going](#)

losing yourself

SEE: [fatherhood](#) • [identity crisis](#) • [identity, unsure of your reading](#) •  
[lost, being](#) • [motherhood](#) • [selling your soul](#) • [trapped by children](#)

[lost, being](#)

[love, doomed](#)

love, falling head over heels in

SEE: [appetite, loss of](#) • [concentrate, inability to](#) • [dizziness](#) •  
[infatuation](#) • [insomnia](#) • [lovesickness](#) • [lust](#) • [obsession](#) • [optimism](#)

- [romantic, hopeless](#)

love, falling out of love with

SEE: [falling out of love with love](#)

love, looking for

SEE: [happiness, searching for](#) • [Mr/Mrs Right, holding out for](#) • [Mr/Mrs Right, looking for](#) • [shelf, fear of being left on the](#) • [single, being](#)

[love, unrequited](#)

[lovesickness](#)

[lust](#)

[lying](#)

M

[madness](#)

[malaise, twenty-first century](#)

[man flu](#)

[manners, bad](#)

[married, being](#)

meaning, lack of

SEE: [pointlessness](#)

melancholia

SEE: [sadness](#)

[memory loss](#)

[menopause](#)

[midlife crisis](#)

[misanthropy](#)

[miscarriage](#)

missing someone

SEE: [breaking up](#) • [death of a loved one](#) • [family, coping without](#) •

[homesickness](#) • [lovesickness](#) • [widowed, being](#) • [yearning, general](#)

missing your children

SEE: [empty-nest syndrome](#)

missing your flight

SEE: [flight, missing your](#)

[Monday morning feeling](#)

money, not having any

SEE: [broke, being](#) • [tax return, fear of doing](#) • [unemployment](#)

money, spending too much

SEE: [book-buyer, being a compulsive](#) • [extravagance](#) • [shopaholism](#) • [tax return, fear of doing](#)

morning sickness

SEE: [nausea](#) • [pregnancy](#)

[motherhood](#)

[mother-in-law, being a](#)

[mother-in-law, having a](#)

[moving house](#)

[Mr/Mrs Right, holding out for](#)

[Mr/Mrs Right, looking for](#)

[Mr/Mrs Wrong, ending up with](#)

[mundanity, oppressed by](#)

[murderous thoughts](#)

N

Napoleon complex

SEE: [short, being](#)

narcissism

SEE: [arrogance](#) • [confidence, too much](#) • [selfishness](#) • [vanity](#)

[nausea](#)

[neediness](#)

[neighbours, having](#)

neighbours, not having

SEE: [loneliness](#)

[new books, seduced by](#)

[nightmares](#)

[ninety-something, being](#)

nobody likes you

SEE: [unpopular, being](#)

[noise, too much](#)

[non-reading partner, having a](#)

[nose, hating your](#)

O

[obesity](#)

[obsession](#)

[old age, horror of](#)

[one hundred, being over](#)

[optimism](#)

[organised, being too](#)

organised, not being

SEE: [carelessness](#) • [cope, inability to](#) • [find one of your books, inability to](#) • [overwhelmed by the number of books in your house](#)  
• [risks, taking too many](#)

[orgasms, not enough](#)

orgasms, too many

SEE: [sex, too much](#)

[outsider, being an](#)

[overwhelmed by the number of books in the world](#)

o [overwhelmed by the number of books in your house](#) [esity](#)

overwork

SEE: [busy, being too](#) • [busy to read, being too](#) • [career, being in the wrong](#) • [cope, inability to](#) • [exhaustion](#) • [insomnia](#) • [nightmares](#) • [stress](#) • [tired and emotional, being](#) • [workaholism](#)

P

pain, being a

SEE: [adolescence](#) • [antisocial, being](#) • [Daddy's girl, being a](#) • [cynicism](#) • [grumpiness](#) • [humourlessness](#) • [hypochondria](#) • [killjoy, being a](#) • [lovesickness](#) • [man flu](#) • [misanthropy](#) • [neediness](#) • [querulousness](#) • [teetotaler, being a](#) • [teens, being in your](#) • [vegetarianism](#)

pain, being in

panic attack

paranoia

parent, being a

SEE: [children requiring attention, too many](#) • [fatherhood](#) • [motherhood](#) • [mother-in-law, being a](#) • [single parent, being a](#) • [trapped by children](#)

parents, ageing

SEE: [ageing parents](#)

perfectionism

SEE: [anally retentive, being](#) • [control freak, being a](#) • [organised, being too](#) • [reverence of books, excessive](#) • [risks, not taking enough](#)

pessimism

phobia

SEE: [agoraphobia](#) • [claustrophobia](#) • [homophobia](#) • [xenophobia](#)

piles

SEE: [haemorrhoids](#)

PMT

pointlessness

pregnancy

pretentiousness

SEE: arrogance • brainy, being exceptionally • confidence, too much • extravagance • vanity • well-read, desire to seem

procrastination

Q

queasiness

SEE: nausea

querulousness

R

racism

rage

rails, going off the

read instead of live, tendency to

recklessness

SEE: adolescence • alcoholism • carelessness • drugs, doing too many • gambling • rails, going off the • risks, taking too many • selfishness • twenty-something, being

redundant, being made

SEE: anger • bitterness • broke, being • failure, feeling like a • job, losing your • unemployment

regret

relationship issues

SEE: adultery • age gap between lovers • commitment, fear of • jealousy • love, doomed • married, being • Mr/Mrs Wrong, ending up with • non-reading partner, having a • wasting time on a dud relationship

resentment

SEE: [anger](#) • [bitterness](#) • [cynicism](#) • [dissatisfaction](#) • [hatred](#) • [jealousy](#) • [rage](#) • [regret](#)

[retirement](#)

revenge, seeking

SEE: [bitterness](#) • [hatred](#) • [vengeance, seeking](#)

[reverence of books, excessive](#)

[risks, not taking enough](#)

[risks, taking too many](#)

[road rage](#)

rolling stone, being a

SEE: [wanderlust](#)

[romantic, hopeless](#)

rut, stuck in a

SEE: [stuck in a rut](#)

S

sacked, being

SEE: [bitterness](#) • [broke, being](#) • [job, losing your](#) • [murderous thoughts](#) • [rage](#) • [unemployment](#)

[sadness](#)

[scars, emotional](#)

[scars, physical](#)

[schadenfreude](#)

[sci-fi, fear of](#)

[sci-fi, stuck on](#)

[seduction skills, lack of](#)

[seize the day, failure to](#)

[self-esteem, low](#)

[selfishness](#)

self-satisfied, being

SEE: [arrogance](#) • [confidence, too much](#)

[selling your soul](#)

[senile, going](#)

[sentimental, being](#)

[seventy-something, being](#)

sex drive, low

SEE: [libido, loss of](#)

sex-life, issues with

SEE: [coming too soon](#) • [libido, loss of](#) • [orgasms, not enough](#)  
• [seduction skills, lack of](#) • [sex, too little](#) • [sex, too much](#)

sex on the brain

SEE: [lust](#)

[sex, too little](#)

[sex, too much](#)

[shame](#)

[shame, reading-associated](#)

[shelf, fear of being left on the](#)

[shopaholism](#)

[short, being](#)

[shyness](#)

[sibling rivalry](#)

[single, being](#)

[single-mindedness](#)

[single parent, being a](#)

[sixty-something, being](#)

[skim, tendency to](#)



sleep, too little

SEE: [busy, being too](#) • [depression, general](#) • [exhaustion](#) • [insomnia](#) • [nightmares](#) • [pregnancy](#) • [sex, too much](#) • [snoring](#) • [stress](#) • [tired and emotional, being](#) • [workaholism](#)

sleep, too much

SEE: [adolescence](#) • [ambition, too little](#) • [apathy](#) • [bed, inability to get out of](#) • [depression, general](#) • [lethargy](#) • [seize the day, failure to](#) • [unemployment](#)

[sleepwalking](#)

[smoking, giving up](#)

[snoring](#)

[social climber, being a](#)

[speech impediment](#)

speechlessness

SEE: [words, lost for](#)

spinelessness

SEE: [coward, being a](#) • [selfishness](#)

spouse, hating your

SEE: [adultery](#) • [divorce](#) • [DIY](#) • [midlife crisis](#) • [Mr/Mrs Wrong, ending up with](#) • [murderous thoughts](#) • [snoring](#)

[stagnation, mental](#)

[starting, fear of](#)

[stiff upper lip, having a](#)

[stress](#)

stubborn, being

SEE: [single-mindedness](#)

stuck in a relationship

SEE: [Mr/Mrs Wrong, ending up with](#)

[stuck in a rut](#)

[superhero, wishing you were a](#)

sweating

T

taste, bad

tax return, fear of doing

tearful, being

SEE: cry, in need of a good • PMT • tired and emotional, being

tea, unable to find a cup of

teens, being in your

teetotaller, being a

tension

SEE: anxiety • stress

thirty-something, being

tinnitus

tired and emotional, being

tome, put off by a

tonsillitis

toothache

traffic warden, being a

SEE: nobody likes you

trapped by children

trust, loss of

twenty-something, being

U

unemployment

unhappiness

SEE: *The Novel Cure* ELLA BERTHOUD AND SUSAN ELDERKIN

unpopular, being

SEE: [traffic warden, being a](#)

## V

[vanity](#)

[vegetarianism](#)

[vengeance, seeking](#)

[violence, fear of](#)

## W

wagon, falling off the

SEE: [alcoholism](#)

[waiting room, being in a](#)

[wanderlust](#)

[wardrobe crisis](#)

[wasting time on a dud relationship](#)

wedding

SEE: [broke, being](#) • [children, under pressure to have](#) • [jealousy](#) • [single, being](#) • [shelf, fear of being left on the](#) • [wardrobe crisis](#)

[well-read, desire to seem](#)

[widowed, being](#)

wind, having

SEE: [flatulence](#)

[words, lost for](#)

[workaholism](#)

work, not having any

SEE: [unemployment](#)

worry

SEE: [anxiety](#)

[writer's block](#)

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.

---

\* 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 sidelines 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



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 longterm 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.

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 youthful 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.

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 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.



## 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.

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