

Further Reading

Wintering (Nov 2020)

by Katherine May

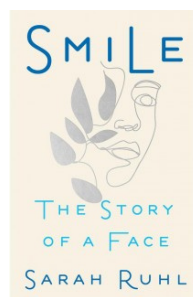
Sometimes you slip through the cracks: unforeseen circumstances like an abrupt illness, the death of a loved one, a break up, or a job loss can derail a life. These periods of dislocation can be lonely and unexpected. For May, her husband fell ill, her son stopped attending school, and her own medical issues led her to leave a demanding job. *Wintering* explores how she not only endured this painful time, but embraced the singular opportunities it offered.



Smile: the Story of a Face (Oct 2021)

by Sarah Ruhl

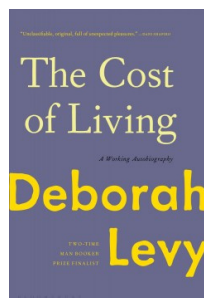
The extraordinary story of one woman's ten-year medical and metaphysical odyssey that brought her physical, creative, emotional, and spiritual healing, by a MacArthur genius and two-time Pulitzer finalist.



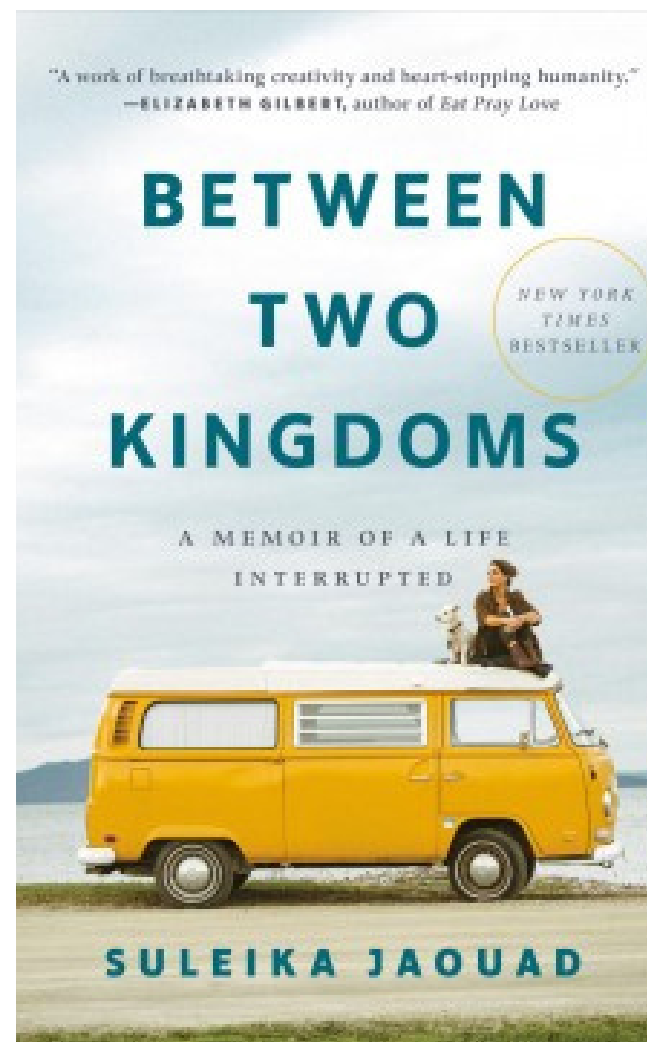
The Cost of Living (Jul 2018)

by Deborah Levy

Drawing on her own experience of attempting to live with pleasure, value and meaning, the two-time Booker Prize finalist, in a "living autobiography," critiques the roles that society assigns to us and reflects on the politics of breaking with the usual gendered rituals.



BOOK DISCUSSION



Discussion Questions

- 1) After her diagnosis, Suleika finds that many people—from friends to healthcare providers—don't know how to react or say the "right" thing to a cancer patient. Her friend Jake rushes off the phone, and a nurse tells Suleika about another young patient who'd been around her age when she died. What do you think would have been more helpful for Suleika to hear from these people? How did these passages make you think differently about empathy and the way you can support people going through something difficult? How have you been supported while going through something difficult?
- 2) "When you are facing the possibility of imminent death, people treat you differently," Suleika writes. "All of this attention can feel like you are being memorialized while you are still alive." What was it like for Suleika to be mourned like this before she was gone? Do you fault her friends and family for acting this way, or do you think it's a human impulse? How, if at all, does Suleika try to avoid this trap of pre-memorializing with her group of cancer friends?
- 3) How does Suleika's writing help her throughout her treatment? How does it hurt her?
- 4) Suleika writes about the pressure to be a model patient, "to be someone who suffers well, to act with heroism, and to put on a stoic facade all the time." Why do you think we put these expectations on cancer patients? Who do you think this performance is actually for?
- 5) The book's title comes from a Susan Sontag passage: "Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport,

sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place." Have you used your "kingdom of the sick" passport yet? What was it like there, and what did you learn about yourself? What are the benefits of experiencing this "other" place?

6) What does Suleika's breakup with Will represent for her? What does her relationship with Jon come to represent?

7) Suleika feels a strange sadness at the end of her treatment, even feeling bereft at the loss of her port. Discuss this sadness. How does it subvert our expectations of what survival and healing are like?

8) Eventually, Suleika realizes that she can't wait until she's "well enough" to start living again. What sparks this realization for her? When have you wanted to wait until you were "enough" of something—rich enough, thin enough, well enough? How can we learn to embrace where we are at present? What do we lose by constantly striving, without satisfaction?

9) Even though Suleika knows exactly what her friend Max needs from her when her cancer returns, she can't bring herself to be there for him right away. "Right now, my impulse is self-preservation," she writes. "The thought of more heartbreak makes me want to cut myself off from the world." When do we need to prioritize our friends? When do we need to prioritize ourselves? How can we learn to tell the difference?

10) Which of the stops, and people, on Suleika's road trip stayed with you the most? Why? What did she learn from that particular person? What did you learn?

Questions provided by <http://www.randomhousebooks.com/>