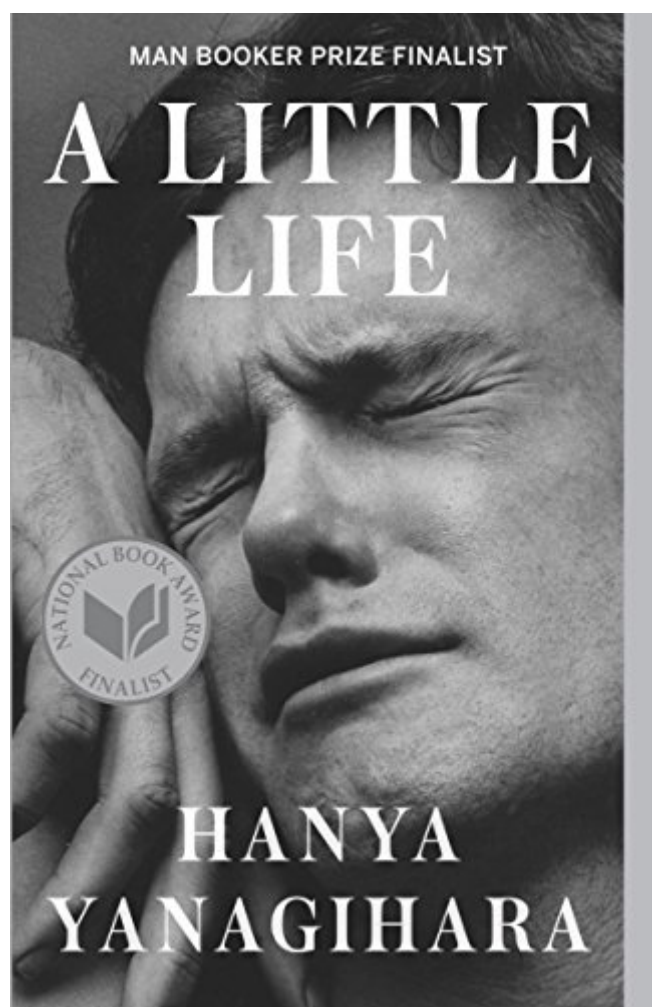


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A Little Life: A Novel



Synopsis

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST
SHORT-LISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE
Brace yourself for the most astonishing, challenging, upsetting, and profoundly moving book in many a season. An epic about love and friendship in the twenty-first century that goes into some of the darkest places fiction has ever traveled and yet somehow improbably breaks through into the light. Truly an amazement and a great gift for its readers. When four classmates from a small Massachusetts college move to New York to make their way, they're broke, adrift, and buoyed only by their friendship and ambition. There is kind, handsome Willem, an aspiring actor; JB, a quick-witted, sometimes cruel Brooklyn-born painter seeking entry to the art world; Malcolm, a frustrated architect at a prominent firm; and withdrawn, brilliant, enigmatic Jude, who serves as their center of gravity. Over the decades, their relationships deepen and darken, tinged by addiction, success, and pride. Yet their greatest challenge, each comes to realize, is Jude himself, by midlife a terrifyingly talented litigator yet an increasingly broken man, his mind and body scarred by an unspeakable childhood, and haunted by what he fears is a degree of trauma that he will not only be unable to overcome but that will define his life forever. In rich and resplendent prose, Yanagihara has fashioned a tragic and transcendent hymn to brotherly love, a masterful depiction of heartbreak, and a dark examination of the tyranny of memory and the limits of human endurance. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I wanted to write a review of this book, even though there are many other reviews already in place, because it obviously brings up a lot of extreme emotions in people and has been pretty divisive, and I wanted to add some food for thought. Overall, I found it to be an engrossing read; I felt for the characters, I thought it was well written (though not fabulous or outstanding, but decently done, very little purple prose, which I appreciate), and it generated a lot of response from me. I was okay up until the penultimate section "Dear Comrade," which I spent bawling my eyes out over. But the book made me think about larger issues, regarding art and class and sexuality, and I want to address just a few of those issues in my review. I don't give this book a higher rating, however, because I do think there are some flaws. Certainly it could have been edited more tightly and thus been shorter. Two of the main characters are somewhat short-changed, and I would have liked to have seen further development with them. The initial meeting of the four friends is never fully explained, nor is the meeting and buildup of trust between Jude and Andy, and I would have liked to see just how Jude came to trust his friends, particularly Andy and Willem, so deeply. Jude's career definitely needed more flushing out; he's a bigshot lawyer but what we see of his personality and private life doesn't fit with that, and I would have liked a better exploration of his life in the courtroom, to make him more three-dimensional as a character. I was also really irked that the novel has no historical setting.

My thoughts about this book are complicated. On one hand, it's beautifully written in many ways. On the other hand, it's a bit overblown in its writing, too. There are lovingly rendered details that create a lovely mental picture... and then the passage goes on... and on... until sometimes it devolves into lists. Lists that sometimes feel endless in their length and actually don't end up contributing much of anything to the story. I really did come to care for the characters in the book, which I think makes the book all the more cruel. I was prepared for a harrowing story. The book blurb broadcasts that loudly enough. I thought the portrayal of abuse and its consequences and the reverberations of it throughout a life were well done in many ways. The interplay between the characters and how their lives intertwine feels so real. But there is a point in the book where it all just starts to feel like tragedy porn. Tragedy porn that feels a great empathy for all those involved and is filled with well-defined characters... but tragedy porn none the less. In the end, it just feels sort of crassly manipulative... or,

at least, misguided. I went from being a bit confused by the book juggling the four main characters (something that, structurally just ends up being kind of weird since two characters are basically dropped for most of the story... though I guess I understand their detailed set-up to an extent) to getting really involved in the characters we WERE following and being absorbed into the book and then, finally... almost hating the book by the end. The sorrow inflicted on the main character (and then to the characters around him) becomes, frankly, almost laughable. But not mirthful laughter.

I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher (via Netgalley) in exchange for review on my blog. I confess that I had no idea what I was getting into when I started *A Little Life*. I basically thought it was going to be a male version of *The Interestings*. And, there are similarities, but *A Little Life* is much, much darker. It's disturbing, harrowing, relentless, and powerful, but also portrays a strong, hopeful version of friendship. The writing is absolutely gorgeous and it will most likely end up on my Best Books of 2015 list come December. There is nothing little about *A Little Life*. In fact, it's such a sprawling book that I had trouble distilling my thoughts into a coherent review. Yanagihara threw the kitchen sink at this thing, but she made everything work together seamlessly. To varying degrees, she addressed class, race, sexuality, disability, life purpose / career, secrets, mental issues, and abuse...all overlaid on a foundation of enduring friendship. And, she made all this seem harmoniously complex instead of frustratingly complicated. The lifeblood of this novel is the characters. The four friends met in college, come from disparate backgrounds, and have varying life ambitions. The beginning of the book focuses on introducing each character in bits and pieces (hint: keep a list of key background information on each character as you learn it, because it's hard to keep them straight initially). As the story goes on, Jude becomes the focal point. He's kind, heartbreaking, proud, tough, and maddening. He's a character unlike any other I've encountered in fiction and will stick with me for a long time. I realize that this review is a bit light on plot details and that's intentional.

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