
A LITTLE LIFE A LONG REVIEW

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TW!: please note that this article contains themes that could be distressing, such as, Rape, Child-sexual abuse, Trafficking, Domestic abuse, Drug abuse, Ableism, Self-Harm and Suicide.

'Things get broken, and sometimes they get repaired, and in most cases, you realize that no matter what gets damaged, life rearranges itself to compensate for your loss, sometimes wonderfully.' – Hanya Yanagihara

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If you are looking for a literary classic that is of the likes of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* or Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat*, you are sadly looking in the wrong place.

Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* is a heart-breaking tale surrounding the lives of four young men living in New York city and their lifelong struggles; JB, a struggling black artist whose chosen medium is working with black hair, turns to drugs as a means of coping with being isolated from his friends' success; Willem a devastatingly handsome unfound actor whose past and family relationships shadow his life in surprising and unexpected ways; Malcolm a well-off architect who comes from a stable and entirely loving family struggles with defining his sexuality at a young age and Jude, an entirely loveable orphan with a gut-wrenching past that is sure to make you throw-up all your Chinese takeaway into the Wetherspoons' toilet and ruin perfectly good mascara over, and over and over again.



Yanagihara's ethereal way of transcribing traumatic and extremely harrowing events onto a page has its own unique way of leaving a lasting mark on our hearts in a fashion that is much more painful and permanent than any tattoo could ever be.

What I particularly both hate and love about this book is its dedication to make you fall in love with each of the characters (especially within the first hundred or so pages); for example, 50 pages or so in I adored Willem, his charisma and love for his late brother had captivated my sympathies un-yielding as there was nothing he could go on to do that would make me hate him (... well maybe one thing). But, unlike some other characters who we begin to love and eventually grow to hate (we're looking at you JB) Willem continues to grow from his mistakes and always regains his status as an elite friend.

Hanya Yanagihara purposely and quite cruelly uses the first few-hundred pages in order to eventually break our hearts with what is coming next.

This is true in particular for Willem and Jude stand out amongst the four of the friends, both are sweet-centred and care deeply for their friends, often putting their needs above their own. It is quite impossible to not adore them and when they eventually start dating, we grow to love them even more together. Even though their relationship has its struggles; mainly because of the self-harm Jude inflicts upon himself because of a traumatic past with being sexually and physically abused as well as being trafficked from a young age. This is a fact which he chooses not to share with any of the friends (including Willem) because he finds it hard to bring up his past without feeling as if he is a burden on them. Willem does something particularly fucked-up and eventually regains his senses and runs back to Jude in order to patch up their relationship (which they do) with Willem now knowing about Jude's past, they continue in a non-sexual relationship, and everything is perfect.

Until... yes people until...

Hanya Yanagihara is one cruel mistress, and with every small victory our happiness is soon to be stripped bare by tragedy;

Willem dies, you heard it here first people, in a car crash along with Malcolm, leaving Jude alone in this world with one friend (JB) who he does not talk to anymore. His happy life is destroyed, and he only has the one stable relationship with his adoptive-father Harold (who does not know of Jude's past) and Jude continues to live on for three more years, eventually turning to suicide and taking his own life.

The novel finishes with a narration from Harold reading Jude's suicide note, a heart-breaking turn in the novel as we watch Jude's father figure who unconditionally loved Jude learn of his son's traumatic past and his feelings. Harold specifically learns **WHY** Jude kept his past under-wraps, even from the people who loved him most. And we the audience learn that even during these three years and at the point of his death, Jude feels like a burden to others and believes he owes them an apology for his past.

Jude is a character that has always felt guilty for his past as a victim, making it hard for us the reader to not adore him in his final moments and want more than anything else to comfort him and keep him safe from the cruel world that has always sought to take everything good away from him;

'There were times when the pressure to achieve happiness felt almost oppressive, as if happiness were something that everyone should and could attain, and that any sort of compromise in its pursuit was somehow your fault.'

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A Little Life overall is a book about love, all kinds of love from familiar to platonic to romantic; A book that shows a faceted view on relationships, from the good to the evil, and how they impact us as people. With that being said, *A Little Life* is not a book that I would easily recommend, and perhaps I never will, no matter

how the beautifully robust the writing of Yanagihara persuades me so, I will not willingly put another soul through the heartbreak that I experienced whilst reading this book.

If you have been affected by any of the fore-mentioned topics or know of anyone who is at risk, please seek or urge them to seek professional help.

If you or another have attempted suicide/self-harm please contact **911** immediately, If you or another have been raped/sexually abused please either contact or urge to contact **911** immediately and if you or another is at risk of self-harm/suicide or causing harm to others call **111**.

If you need help within a domestic abuse situation, please call 0808 2000 247

If you know of someone or are currently being trafficked, please call 0800 818 3733 (confidential) or 1-888-373-3888.

If you are a child, please call 0800 1111 if you need to talk (if it is occurring self-harm, suicide, domestic abuse, sexual abuse or trafficking please call the appropriate helplines).

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If you need any professional help or wish to seek advice regarding your own health, please contact your GP.

Mental Health Helplines

Samaritans: 116 123 <https://www.samaritans.org>

SANEline: 0808 164 0123

The National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK: 0800 689 5652

Childline: 0800 1111

LGBT+ specific helplines

Switchboard: 0300 330 0630

