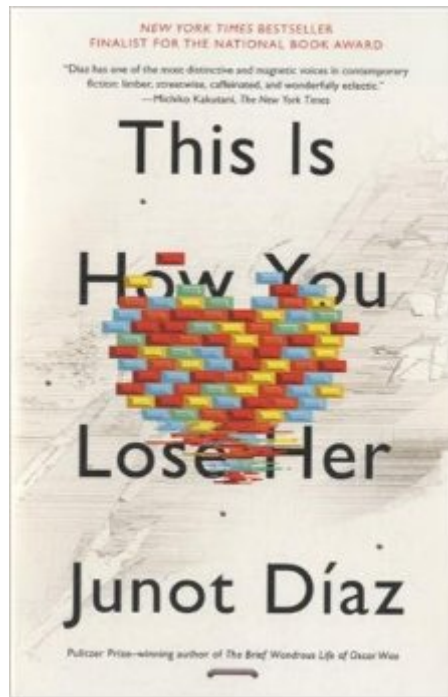


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This Is How You Lose Her



Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize-winner Junot Díaz's first book, *Drown*, established him as a major new writer with "the dispassionate eye of a journalist and the tongue of a poet" (Newsweek). His first novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, was named #1 Fiction Book of the Year by Time magazine and spent more than 100 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list, establishing itself "with more than a million copies in print" as a modern classic. In addition to the Pulitzer, Díaz has won a host of major awards and prizes, including the National Book Critics Circle Award, the PEN/Malamud Award, the PEN/O. Henry Prize, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and the Anisfield-Wolf Award. Now Díaz turns his remarkable talent to the haunting, impossible power of love "obsessive love, illicit love, fading love, maternal love. On a beach in the Dominican Republic, a doomed relationship flounders. In the heat of a hospital laundry room in New Jersey, a woman does her lover's washing and thinks about his wife. In Boston, a man buys his love child, his only son, a first baseball bat and glove. At the heart of these stories is the irrepressible, irresistible Yunior, a young hardhead whose longing for love is equaled only by his recklessness--and by the extraordinary women he loves and loses: artistic Alma; the aging Miss Lora; Magdalena, who thinks all Dominican men are cheaters; and the love of his life, whose heartbreak ultimately becomes his own. In prose that is endlessly energetic, inventive, tender, and funny, the stories in the New York Times-Bestselling *This Is How You Lose Her* lay bare the infinite longing and inevitable weakness of the human heart. They remind us that passion always triumphs over experience, and that "the half-life of love is forever."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anyone familiar with either of Junot Díaz's previous books will remember Yunior, the Dominican kid coming of age in *Drown* who goes on to become the narrator of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Back for his third starring role in Díaz's work, Yunior is the link connecting most of the stories in *This Is How You Lose Her*. People who read *Oscar Wao* got a chance to see how compulsively self-destructive Yunior was in his relationships with women. In *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yunior's doomed relationships take center stage, as does the tenuous relationship he has with his older brother, Rafa. It's always an encouraging sign when someone you admire begins something by quoting someone else you very much admire. In this case, the book's epigraph is from the Sandra Cisneros poem, "One Last Poem for Richard." But even better, *This Is How You Lose Her* opens with one of my favorite short stories, "The Sun, The Moon, The Stars," which was originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1999. It was written well before readers got to know Yunior in *Oscar Wao*, but in the story we can already see the effects of his lying and cheating as he tries in vain to earn back his girlfriend's trust. I had already read a few of the stories in this collection, but reading them all at once and seeing how they fit together was a wholly different experience. One of the most striking things about it was getting to see the way that Yunior's views and his interactions with women were shaped by (and, at times, in response to) his older brother's womanizing ways. In *Drown*, we got to see a little bit of what Yunior was exposed to as a child; he bore witness to his father's philandering. With his father largely out of the picture in *This Is How You Lose Her*, it is now Rafa who sets the example for Yunior. While Yunior will never become the abusive person his brother is -- he's often shocked by the cruel ways Rafa treats his girlfriends -- his life experiences, personal traumas, and cultural pressures all have an impact on the way he will eventually begin to treat women. Then there's the added layer of a cancer story: Rafa fights a losing battle with cancer during some of Yunior's most formative years, but instead of bringing the brothers closer, Rafa shuts everyone out; the loss is something that Yunior reflects on as he gets older. However, the book's cancer story -- and I use "story" here collectively, as Rafa's illness is subtly weaved into several of the stories -- is unlike any other cancer story I've ever read. As with many other difficult topics Díaz has written about, Rafa's battle provides both life-changing and flat-out hilarious moments. There are elements of levity in Rafa's story that I just can't see being told by anyone other than Díaz. The story's true allure comes from its multiple layers, subtly pulling from both *Drown* and *Oscar Wao* in ways that made me want to immediately go back and reread all three of Díaz's books in a row. That last story, "The Cheater's Guide to Love," shows Yunior years down the road. Rocked hard after being (rightfully) dumped by his fiancée, he is finally learning the

error of his womanizing ways. The pain of this heartbreak is brutal and sends him spiraling into depression, but it is this emotional rock-bottom that might finally offer Yunior a way out of the hole he's dug himself into. Since most of the stories feature Yunior, the narrative as a whole is very male-centric. Only one of the stories, "Otravida, Ortravez," features a female point of view; this is also the only story that is not tied in with the others. Still, to dismiss Yunior's crassness and boneheaded machismo would also dismiss the very human portrait that Díaz has created. More importantly, it would dismiss the nuanced portrayal of the outside factors -- culture, sexism, marginalization -- that feed into Yunior's many faults. Ultimately, the book shows that Yunior's way just isn't going to work. It's not sustainable. Finally, a note on language. Because I saw so much nonsense regarding the Spanglish in Oscar Wao and have already begun seeing nonsense regarding the Spanglish in *This Is How You Lose Her*, I want to end not with a quote from the book, but with a quote from Gloria Anzaldúa's "Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza": "So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity -- I am my language... Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without always having to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate." Remember that, because Díaz's playfulness with language is not only legitimate, it's vivid and marvelous. And it's pure Junot.

I once saw Junot read at the Enoch Pratt library in Baltimore. He has a dynamic presence and is a fearless reader. He was able to calm and fully captivate a room full of twitchy, cafeteria-smelling high school students and grumpy senior citizens. It was hard to look away from Junot at the podium, but indeed, I had to watch the slightly-Amish-looking woman who was signing the story for the hearing impaired. I couldn't help but wonder how one actually signs such fresh sentences as, "You, Yunior, have a girlfriend named Alma, who has a long tender horse neck and a big Dominican ass that could drag the moon out of orbit. An ass she never liked until she met you. Ain't a day that passes that you don't want to press your face against that ass or bite the delicate sliding tendons of her neck. You love how she shivers when you bite, how she fights you with those arms that are so skinny they belong on an after-school special." After reading *THIS IS HOW YOU LOSE HER*, I wanted to close down my facebook page, shut off Twitter, leave the oily, grimy dishes in the sink, let the wet laundry sit in the washing machine (and ignore the fact that the clothes end up smelling like a dank, rotting basement), and just write like mad with the hope that I could push out one single sentence as great as every sentence in this book.

Don't understand all the hype on this book. It was well written and easy to read...however, I was hoping to get insight into Yunior's horrendous treatment of women (and infidelity in general), but it just didn't click for me. I understand the notion that we repeat the mistakes of our parents, but it feels more like a long-winded excuse that even Yunior doesn't quite believe. For Rafa, I can buy that, as he's kind of obtuse. But we're led to believe that Yunior has some self-reflective qualities and a notion of what's right and wrong. He occasionally seemed quite sensitive, particularly when bad things were directed at him (like prejudice, poverty, slights of pretty girls who liked his brother, etc.). But I never quite understood the cheating still (and sort of wondered who'd want to with him?). I feel like there's something missing -- even the book itself feels cowardly. Also, the ending where he's pining away doesn't ring true given his history. The strongest feeling I had was -- I'm SO glad the girl got away. While we hear lots about Yunior's suffering, what isn't brought to light is what his fiancée had to go through. It's very hard to trust after a trauma like that. May she find a man who doesn't betray her. And may all the Yuniors in the world grow the bleep up. I'm just saying.

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