

his obsession with television, and the solace of the stage, *Help* develops into a discussion on the nature of being human, focusing particularly on our anxieties, our internal monologues, and our need to be accepted by others. A society infatuated by celebrities and superficial quick fixes to happiness can lead to a relentless review and readjustment of the self until we no longer know who we are, and are incapable of being what we strive daily to appear as: (what is considered to be) 'normal'.

As a memoir, *Help* provides a fascinating insight into Amstell's life, from his troubled relationship with his family and their difficulty accepting his sexuality, to exploring in detail the intricacies of his past and current relationships, ultimately ending with his ayahuasca drug-taking experience, something he found both therapeutic and traumatic. Despite this, his 'trip' ends with him quite literally vomiting forth an understanding of his true self via a series of potent and life-changing visions, and finally being able to accept his own identity.

Arguably the most illuminating aspects of *Help*, however, are the stand-up transcripts littered throughout the text. Stand-up comedy, when transcribed and taken out of context in this way, transforms into something entirely different: the self-deprecating joke becomes bleak, real, dangerous. Without a crowd of people to cut the post-joke hush with laughter, the build-up and the punchline stagnate in our minds — the wall of security created by the usual cacophony disappears, and behind the human making jokes on stage is just a human, like ourselves, fragile, sensitive, desperate for connection and to be accepted.

What are transcripts from a comedy routine soon begin to read as revealing transcripts from a therapy session, offering not only a unique discussion on the role and purpose of comedy in our society as a means to protect ourselves and others, but also as a means to reveal our most vulnerable states.

Help explores the common themes of all memoirs — childhood, identity, trauma, family, desire — yet the interspersed transcripts offer something unique to the form, elevating it from an important examination of life, anxiety, and connection to a deconstruction of the position of comedy and humour in a world plagued by tragedy, insecurity, and loss.

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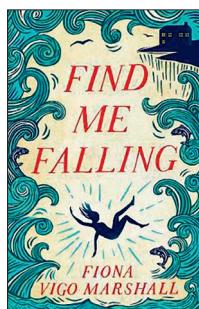
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Find Me Falling

Fiona Vigo Marshall

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REAL OR IMAGINED

Find Me Falling is a novel set on Waste Island, a fictional seaside resort off the coast of England. The story revolves around a love affair between Dominic, a road sweeper, and Bonnie, a 30-something pianist from London, who has newly arrived on the island. Both are married, and both have more going on than first meets the eye. Dominic has epilepsy, poorly controlled in part because

of his lack of compliance with medication, and Bonnie is traumatised after the birth of her son almost 4 years ago, and has become reclusive and anhedonic, much to the dismay of her husband Austin.

The prose is descriptive and beautifully written, transporting the reader to a bleak, salty, haunting place, as Bonnie and Dominic, an unlikely couple, become increasingly caught up in each other's worlds. As the book progresses, it becomes clear that neither are fully living in reality; Dominic's seizures cause him to lose touch with the world around him, and Bonnie's mental health worsens, to the point she possibly begins to have auditory hallucinations (or there could be a supernatural explanation). The reader also becomes increasingly unsure about what is real, and what is the result of the neurological and psychological make-up of the pair.

From a GP's perspective, the book contains interesting descriptions of epilepsy from a patient's perspective — the loss of career aspirations due to intractable seizures, the role of the neurologist as a malevolent god-like figure, the dismay at an ambulance being called, and the ambivalence about taking medication. The author has previously written non-fiction books on epilepsy, and clearly draws from this knowledge to create the character of Dominic.

Alongside the themes of epilepsy and mental illness, the book also touches on miscarriage, grief, and alcoholism.

Overall, this book is an entrancing, powerful read, which is very well written, and will stay with you; I found myself dreaming about it upon putting it down!

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