

The Beautiful Fall



Hugh Breakey

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ABOUT HUGH BREAKEY

Hugh Breakey is an award-winning and widely published philosopher. He has previously worked as a kitchen hand, editor, airport construction worker, theatre director, ethics consultant, pinball repairer, disk jockey, tennis-court builder and university lecturer. Hugh lives in rural Australia with his two children and his wife, novelist and *New York Times* bestseller, Kylie Scott.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Every 179 days Robbie forgets everything. He knows this because last time it happened he wrote himself a letter explaining it. The disorientation. The fear. The bizarre circumstances imposed by the rare neurological condition he lives with.

To survive the forgetting—to cope with his recurring loss of identity—Robbie leads a solitary, regimented life. Lives alone. Speaks to no one if he can avoid it. Works to complete a strange herculean task set for him by his former self.

And then, with twelve days left before his next forgetting, Julie invades his life. Young, beautiful—the only woman he can ever remember meeting.

As the hour draws near, Robbie is forced to confront the fact that his past is very different from how he had imagined it. And when Julie reveals her own terrible secret, he must find a way to come to terms with the truth about himself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The novel opens with Robert learning who he is – ‘Your name is Robert Penfold. Age 31. The apartment you’re standing in is your home’ (p. 1). How does this introduction shape the way you perceive Robert as a character? What are your first impressions of him?
2. As the narrative unfolds, three versions of Robert emerge – his present self, the self who wrote the letter, and his pre-amnesia self. What is present-Robert’s relationship with his past selves? Do you think he sees them as separate or a part of his current self?
3. How much of who we are is shaped by what we remember? Reflect on our societal response to dementia in light of the way that memory and identity are explored in the novel.
4. Robert describes having someone else with him at the time of the forgetting as ‘the ultimate loss of control’ (p. 69). Is he right to fear this the way he does? How is trust represented in the novel?
5. Robert first uses the phrase ‘the beautiful fall’ to describe the flow and waves of eighty-three thousand dominoes cascading (p. 108), but it might just as well describe the nature of his fall into forgetting, or falling in love, or (as Julie believes) dancing. Discuss the significance of the title, and the way it appears in various ways throughout the novel.
6. How is Julie’s struggle with addiction in some ways antithetical to Robert’s condition? What does this imply about the nature of addiction?
7. Which version of Robert does Julie want back in her life? Should Robert be given the chance to decide who he wants to become with each forgetting, or is he being untrue to himself by turning his back on the past?
8. Is Robert trapped by his condition, or does it free him?
9. The novel ends the day Robert is due to forget. What do you imagine happens next? What do you think he wants for himself?