

Raw: One Woman's Journey Through Love, Loss, and Cancer

Fiona Finn

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A no-holds-barred memoir about overcoming illness and abandonment, Raw uses crude humor to convey tough emotions.

Fiona Finn grew up hoping to resemble the Barbie dolls she played with—indeed, her first book was *Barbie: A Parody*. Relationships with Ken-like hunks and cosmetic surgeries attested to this desire for perfection, but after three children and two bitter divorces from abusive addicts, Finn admitted she did not have it all together. A diagnosis of stage-3 colon cancer in 2009 was her wake-up call to “peel away layers of negative thinking.” *Raw* is the sexually explicit, reality TV-inspired story of how she escaped a “cesspool of amoral behavior”—while also beating cancer.

Finn maintains her story's coherence through the persistent image of a raw onion, which appears on the front cover and in most of the chapter-heading epigraphs and illustrations. Reliance on this linking idea, from the jacket to the last chapters, allows for thematic unity. However, the raw subject matter the onion prefigures will undoubtedly be difficult for sensitive readers to stomach.

The book's frequent sexual scenes—including a trip to a swinger's club and Finn's second husband's unorthodox proclivities—can feel gratuitous, and the language throughout is deliberately provocative. For instance, after the birth of her first child, Finn says, “I wanted to throw back my blankets to reveal the extensive damage to my vagina. It must have looked like the site where two trains had collided.” Zingy but foul-mouthed one-liners, such as, following many hospital injections, “Talk about feeling like a fuckin' pincushion,” may be disagreeable to the thin-skinned.

With the cursing and gross-out humor, the author is aiming for a certain kind of shocking honesty. Even when the content is not erotic, the tone is consistently sassy. Fans of Judd Apatow movies may appreciate the raunchy comedy, but it can seem inappropriate when applied, for example, to the disabled. The first chapter recounts Finn's time waitressing in Florida—a hostess she worked with there had been born without arms. Although the author claims to marvel at how her colleague coped with this handicap, she fixates on it in a teasing manner, and in a chapter entitled “Disarmed,” a joke in rather poor taste.

For every crude line, however, there is at least one cliché: “Don't we all have our own crosses to bear?”; “Keeping an open mind and an open heart allowed me to start the healing process”; “Laugh through the tears. Life can get worse.” These sunny thoughts, along with frequent Bible quotations and acknowledgments of God's blessings, can seem at odds with the memoir's coarseness.

All the same, Finn's candid, conversational prose will surely resonate with readers who have had similarly luckless experiences with health and romance. This personal account should especially appeal to fans of the *Real Housewives* TV franchise—which Finn consciously emulates—or of edgy female comedians like Sarah Silverman and Amy Schumer. Raw onions aside, this is a book to laugh over, not cry about.

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