



## The Good Life

*Jay McInerney*

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## The Good Life Jay McInerney

In *The Good Life*, Jay McInerney unveils a story of love, family, conflicting desires, and catastrophic loss in his most powerfully searing work thus far. Clinging to a semiprecarious existence in TriBeCa, Corrine and Russell Calloway have survived a separation and are wonderstruck by young twins whose provenance is nothing less than miraculous. Several miles uptown and perched near the top of the Upper East Side's social register, Luke McGavock has postponed his accumulation of wealth in an attempt to recover the sense of purpose now lacking in a life that often gives him pause. But on a September morning, brightness falls horribly from the sky, and people worlds apart suddenly find themselves working side by side at the devastated site. Wise, surprising, and, ultimately, heart-stoppingly redemptive, *The Good Life* captures lives that allow us to see—through personal, social, and moral complexity—more clearly into the heart of things.

## The Good Life Details

Date : Published April 24th 2007 by Vintage (first published January 1st 2006)

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Author : Jay McInerney

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## From Reader Review The Good Life for online ebook

### **Dana Al-Basha ???? ?????? says**

One of the book Felix recommends to Diane on her trip to Ireland... Happy People Read and Drink Coffee brought me here.

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### **Christina says**

I really loved this book. My first reaction was, "why are there so many bad reviews of this book on goodreads?" Then, I thought how there are so many times that books are given rave reviews by so many people and I end up hating them and there are times when there are books everyone hates and I love them. That is the beauty with books...there are books out there for everyone...some books speak to certain people and they don't speak to others.

There is nothing super exciting about the book...it just deals with everyday life. It deals with how people carry on with their lives, and reevaluate their lives after a tragedy - in this case the tragedy of 9/11. Even when the world around us falls apart, we still must go on with life- the good and the bad.

The story and the characters pulled me in...but not immediately..It starts off with a pretentious bunch of characters, but they slowly change over time while dealing with the after effects of 9/11...so if you are bored and hate these people when you start reading...hang in there..they develop into real people you can relate to, or at least sympathize with. As for the storyline...lovely - it was beautiful and ugly all at once. I am pleased that it had a real- life type ending , that is messy, anxiety ridden, and not all wrapped up in a nice bow, like so many stories are guilty of.

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### **João Da silva says**

Li uma edição deste livro em português, lançada em 2008 pela Teorema. A tradução e a revisão são uma lástima. Fica aqui apenas um exemplo, neste caso de um erro básico. "Eventually" é sistematicamente traduzido por "eventualmente" em vez de "finalmente", que seria a solução correcta. Os erros e a ignorância da língua portuguesa são inúmeros, como o uso de "haviam" e não de "havia". O livro, sobre a vida e as vidas numa Nova Iorque em estado de choque no pós-11 de Setembro, não merecia ser tratado com tão escassa competência. Fica o aviso. Quem tiver interesse em ler este livro deve optar pelo original. Evitará ter de tropeçar com demasiada frequência nos alçapões de uma tradução indigente.

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### **Laurel-Rain says**

Life in TriBeCa in the late summer and early fall of 2001 seems precarious to Corrine and Russell Calloway, whose marriage may be on the skids.

Corrine has returned to her career, while still juggling motherhood and other commitments; Russell seems detached and distant, arousing all of the suspicions that have accompanied the two of them since their separation a few years previously.

"When she had yearned to be a mother, imagining what it would be like to be a parent, it had been easy to conjure the joy...the scenes of tenderness, the Pieta moments. What you don't picture are the guilt and the fear that take up residence at the front of your brain, like evil twins you didn't bargain for. Fear, because you're always worried about what might go wrong, especially if your kids were born, as hers were, three months early."

In the opening pages of "The Good Life," we sense who these characters are, with their privileged lifestyle that should make them the objects of envy. However, we can also see the fraying seams of their existence.

Suddenly and totally out of the blue, their worlds are shattered by the events a few days later. The 9/11 events that turned a city into a shocking inferno, and the rest of the world into a frightening place to live.

In the aftermath, Corrinne happens upon a man near Ground Zero. "Staggering up West Broadway, coated head to foot in dun ash, he looked like a statue commemorating some ancient victory, or, more likely, some noble defeat--a Confederate general, perhaps. That was her second impression...."

And she thus meets Luke McGavock, a man who will become a central part of her life in the weeks ahead. His life, too, is unraveling.

In these moments when the two of them connect, the tragic events seemingly open them to new possibilities. A little while later, they become connected further when they volunteer at a kind of soup kitchen for the rescue workers.

What will next happen between them? Will their common goals lead to something more? Will they reach out for the comfort of each other to assuage the ills of their marriages? Or will the baggage of their lives prevent a fresh start?

The author's prose captured my attention and kept me turning pages. I soon came to care about Corrinne and Luke, and less so about their spouses, Russell and Sasha.

I wanted the journey to continue, with everyone learning valuable lessons from what had happened. But in the end, would the old habits and expectations cling to them all like the ash from the inferno? Would only a residual of the experience remain to remind them of what could have been? A story that seemed to promise much, but didn't quite deliver what I hoped for. Four stars.

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### **Tami says**

yes

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## **Kristen says**

This book was recommended to me because of my love for Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close. The Good Life is about love, loss, self discovery post 9/11. Just like ELIC, the focus is not on 9/11 but the characters are dealing with the magnitude of the event.

However, unlike ELIC, I did not fall in love with the characters. They were almost too flawed and too complex. Lots of extra storylines that were unnecessary but probably included to fully develop the flawed nature of the characters. At times, the descriptions of love/feelings/loss were really lovely. But other times the writing really dragged. The story kept me moving and anxious to get to the end, but I didn't find it to be outstanding.

I almost gave it 2 stars but ended up going with three because the prose in the last three pages was incredible. Very, very beautiful and moving. The concluding remarks made me ache for the characters. Unfortunately, I had to get through over 300 pages to feel that!

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## **Rachel Louise Atkin says**

I guess I expected a lot more from this novel, and who can blame me after reading Bright Lights, Big City? I read this because I'm interested in post-9/11 fiction and whilst this book deals with this as an event, the real focus of this novel is the characters and their relationships. Whilst that was fun to read about, I don't really enjoy domestic dramas especially in the time period it was set in.

I was underwhelmed by this simply because I expected it was going to be something else. But McInerney has still proved himself as a wonderful writer of humanity and its complexities.

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## **Erik Raschke says**

I've always liked Jay McInerney and Bright Lights Big City was an incentive to move to NYC. However, I only read three chapters of this and couldn't read anymore.

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## **Katie says**

This book was chock-full of McInerney's self-important bullshit. All names and brandnames. Hated the two main characters and felt gross after I read it.

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## **Merry Mercurial says**

Given that Jay McInerney's Calloway trilogy (Brightness Falls; The Good Life; and Bright, Precious Days) calls heavily on the notion of phosphorescence, it's hard to miss the near absence of that quality in the stories themselves, or to resist comparing them to another book of McInerney's that likewise takes its title from all that shimmers: Bright Lights, Big City. Fair or not, that first notable work, in its supremacy if not outright

perfection, casts a harsh shadow over the novels that follow, which feel in their worst moments like less-ambitious F. Scott Fitzgerald redux.

I read *The Good Life* after *Brightness Falls*, and I'll likely go on to read *Bright, Precious Days* as well, because there's certainly not a dearth of literary talent in the trilogy. These are well-paced books with enough tension, adept scene shifting, and secrets riding the undercurrent that once you set sail, you will likely want to see them through to conclusion. Jay McInerney is no faded star when it comes to structure and momentum.

Where he fails, in my opinion, is in providing revolutionary, or even sturdy, enough content that you can easily remind yourself of why you're reading these stories—why exactly you care.

Again in this book, we drop in on Corrine and Russell Calloway's marriage. They're still in NYC, though now they're middle-aged with young twins. The opening is strongly reminiscent of the first chapter from *Brightness Falls*, enough so to highlight the characters' external changes from that time period, but unfortunately every bit as boring.

*The Good Life* is a 9/11 novel, and once we actually get to that doomed day—in part II, chapter 6, on page 69—the novel seems to begin. Suddenly there are stakes. Vivid emotion, even if plenty of it is confusion or horror. Some heart and soul in the description. Inasmuch as this novel examines the fallout from communal disaster—how it does and does not impact private catastrophes, how it doesn't bend to our wishes and produce or sustain even the attenuated positives we would hope it would, etc.—I can see how it was necessary to establish for readers the peacetime attachments, goals, and existing issues of the character cast. It was not, however, necessary to expand that over five drifting chapters, which do little except echo the theme of relationship insecurities and the theology of NYC's faded but ultimately indestructible charms that were covered, thoroughly, in *Brightness Falls*.

Sometimes the similarity of an author's books can beautifully draw attention to just how much variation—in terms of the meaningful story, in terms of gossamer emotion and detail—can exist in parallel circumstances. John Irving is the master of this (also see: everything else). The ante is upped considerably when you put the same contingent of characters in circumstances very similar to those we've seen them in in the past: now the revelations need to be next level. Readers need to turn the last page thinking, I thought I knew these characters, but maybe I really didn't; readers need, ideally, to accompany the characters on journeys that build on those exhausted in the previous novel and that, in the present one, end at a higher plane of self-realization.

(view spoiler)

While *Brightness Falls* seems a more ambitious, sweeping novel, with bigger storyline payoffs, there's more

heart in *The Good Life*, which I attribute almost exclusively to Luke. There's no story and no soul without him.

Reckonings—psychological, emotional, familial, even vaguely spiritual—in McInerney's work tend to occur when someone leaves the city for lands more bucolic and stripped of frills, or when someone from out of the pastoral blue shows up to the city. *Bright Lights, Big City* is the only book I've read of McInerney's that, in its odd way, graphically defines the inexorable pleasures and awakenings of the city that may, however unsustainably, counterbalance the city's acne, hives, and deep diseases; in *BLBC*, it was clear: the city will never leave you undistracted, and rarely in your proper mind, and for someone aching to flee from home troubles, that is PERFECT. With the others, you kind of have to wonder, if it's this shitty, if it's everyone's undoing and its allure lies solely in the nostalgic resurgence of younger, stupider thrills . . . what's the point? Is the point of living in the city, as sticking it out in one's marriage, to be constantly smoothed around one's edges by misery-making pressure?

There are issues when it comes to the finer points of this, overall, expertly structured novel. The orchestration of conversations is too obvious. Same goes for emotional revelations. (view spoiler)

Fortunately there are at least sporadic reminders of that *BLBC* wit: Amber, a friend of Luke's daughter with whose mother Luke has history, is like “a jewel with a prehistoric bug inside.”

There's at least one substantial nod in this novel, written in 2006, to why the #MeToo movement has rained up like hellfire on Hollywood.

And as always, Jay McInerney has a vocabulary like nobody's business. Who do you know who uses “uxoriusness” appropriately?

What's handled well in this novel is overwhelmed by focus on the numbing circuitry of the Calloways' marriage and city life.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

Evocative and totally unforgettable, *The Good Life* is a book capturing the light in the darkness of a horrible disaster.

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### **Scott says**

So, I've got this little disorder. Just this one: Once I begin reading a book, I am compelled to finish it. Regardless of how much I dislike it, I continue to pick up the book... continue to read.

After finishing Brett Easton Ellis' excellent *Lunar Park* (see previous post), I wanted to read something by Jay McInerney. Jay is a character in *Lunar Park* and is best known for his breakthrough novel *Bright Lights, Big City*. Not sure what possessed me, but rather than going for the easy bet and reading *BL, BC*, I made the error of picking out *The Good Life*, Jay's latest.

Bleh.

The Good Life reads like Bridges of Madison County for the middle-aged urbanite. Set in NY, NY around the time of 9/11, the novel tells the story of a couple of priveledged New Yorkers too lazy to work at their own marriages that fall easily into illicit love amongst the Ground Zero soup kitchens. If "illicit love" makes you think "Harlequin Romance", then you've got the right idea: there's enough trashy bodice-ripping in there to satisfy the requirements of the genre.

There's also a large helping of grief porn if you're into that sort of thing. The jumpers, the flee-ers, the diggers and the body bags... Jay's got it covered.

Learn from my mistake. Read Bright Lights, Big City. It really is as good as you've heard.

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### **Ted Burke says**

Jay McInerney, Brat Pack novelist, Manhattanite extraordinaire and famed party goer, got the urge to step up to the plate and write a Great American Novel, a work that would raise him finally from the middle rungs of the literary ladder and allow him to reach the top shelf where only the best scribes--Hemingway! Fitzgerald! Thomas Wolfe!-- sit and cast their long collective shadow over the fields of aspiring geniuses, furious scribblers all. McInerney has selected a large subject with which to make his reputation, the catastrophe that was and remains 9/11. Acutely aware that the minor league satires and soft coming of age stories that made his name were less commanding than they had been because "9/11 changed everything" (a phrase destined to be the characterizing cliche of this age) he offers us The Good Life, a mixed bag of satiric thrusts, acute social observation, two dimensional characterizations and wooden generalizations about the sagging state of society, of culture, of our ability to understand one another, locally and globally.

I agree that Jay McInerney is a better writer than he's been credit, but history will judge his novels as minor efforts at best. Witty and observant, yes he is, but the manner in which he conveys his best lines, his choicest bon mots have the thumbed-through feeling of a style borrowed. Fitzgerald, Capote and John Cheever are his heroes, true, but there's nothing in McInerney's writing that honors his influences with the achievement of a tone and personality that is entirely his own, an original knack of phrase making that makes a reader wonder aloud how such wonderful combinations of words are possible. His influences, alas, are visible and seem to be peering over his shoulder. Even what one would praise as sharp and elegant observations from his keyboard creaks not a little. The style sounds borrowed, and our author sounds much, much too dainty to make it really cling to the memory:

"The hairstylist was aiming a huge blow-dryer at his wife's skull, which was somewhat disconcertingly exposed and pink--memento mori--in the jet of hot air ... "

"He developed an interest in the arts as well as a taste for luxury and was never hence quite able to make the distinction between the two, so that his ambitions oscillated between the poles of creation and connoisseurship."

McInerney is compared to Fitzgerald relentlessly since his career as a professional writer began, in so much he, like F.Scott, was bearing witness to a generation of conspicuous consumption and waste, but one notices that any random paragraph from The Great Gatsby contains more melody by far. The writing genius of Fitzgerald, when he was writing at his absolute best, was his ability to make you forget the fact that you're reading elegant prose and have you become entranced by it. It was a means to put you in a different world altogether. It's this simple, really; you didn't see him writing,

you didn't see him sweat. Able craftsman as well as peerless stylist when he was performing best, Fitzgerald's prose seemed natural, buoyant, unstrained. McInerney's writing reveals that strain, that slaving over phrase and clever remark, and often times the effect seems calculated. In his best moments, he rarely sheds the sophomore flash; after all these years our Manhattan golden boy still writes like the most gifted student in a Kansas City composition class. After all these years he is still trying to outrace the long shadows of those who brought him reading pleasure.

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### **Christopher says**

As a New York writer, McInerney attempts his obligatory 9/11 novel. I have never read any of his other works, but here he reprises some characters from an earlier, more famous work. His sense of place is strong: This story takes place between New York and Nashville (the latter only in the last few chapters), two places I happen to know well, and he captures the locations well. His writing is graceful, and overall the book was pleasurable to read. The main drawback is thematic. A "9/11 Novel" should probably address some weighty themes. Don DeLillo does so in a book I found barely tolerable (*Falling Man*), and Jonathan Safran Foer does so magically in a book that is an all-time favorite (*Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*). Probably because this book is in some ways a sequel, McInerney fails to get at the deeper implications of the tragedy, making the central tension two characters who want out of their lives and spend a lot of time trying to justify the affair they end up having with each other. However, given the at times vacuousness of the themes, I would reread this book over DeLillo's in a heartbeat for the following reason: The story is set in the months after 9/11, the time when I lived in New York, and his settings in the city overlap with places I went. At times, I wondered if maybe I had crossed paths with these characters, before remembering that they are fictional. That kind of fluidity in storytelling trumps theme to me every time.

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### **B the BookAddict says**

All the low 'starred' reviews of this novel that feature first on Goodreads have agitated me to the point that I cannot properly formulate my own full review.

I can tell you this: I read this novel and felt achingly sad when it ended, not for the story's end but because I'd finished the novel. I roamed the house unable to settle with a new novel and finally gave up. Picked up *The Good Life* again and started to re-read it. Yes, I read the book, and then read it again, straight away! I think that might tell you how much I enjoyed the book, loved the characters and the setting and lives McInerney constructed for them.

James Frey (whose novel, *Bright Shiny Morning*, I did not like) says about *The Good Life*: "*People wonder what kind of writer F Scott Fitzgerald might have been had he lived. McInerney, his closest successor, is starting to show us... [...] A very subtle, incredibly insightful, heartbreakingly story about life in New York.*"

Keir Graff of Booklist says "*McInerney is a master at finding truths we barely even admit to ourselves: without moralising, he explores the ways we use disaster to our own emotional ends, and above all, whether we're really capable of change. A day that most people said would change us forever seems now to have provided only vacation from our bad habits... There have been a number of 9/11 novels lately, as writers grapple with what that terrible day means to us. This one is essential.*"

Remember Kier Graff's last sentence "*This one is essential!*". Do not be swayed by the 2★ and 1★ reviews. I recommend you read this novel. 5★

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### **Andreas Steppan says**

Eins lässt sich über "Das gute Leben" mit Sicherheit sagen: Man kann gut leben, ohne es gelesen zu haben. Ein Stern ist zwar etwas hart, weil das Buch auch nicht weiter stört und sich über weite Strecken ganz geschmeidig runterliest. Aber diese Belanglosigkeit des Inhalts, diese klischeehaften, uninteressanten Figuren - nicht mal aus dem Hintergrund von 9/11 in New York holt der Autor etwas Substanzielles raus. Ich erfahre hier auch nicht mehr über jene Tage, als ich verschwommen aus den damaligen TV-Berichten in Erinnerung hatte. Dass die Hauptfiguren bei den Anschlägen Freunde verloren haben, wirkt hier eher nebensächlich, bringt sie jedenfalls nicht aus dem Tritt, liefert höchstens einen Vorwand, noch ein Gläschen Rotwein mehr zu trinken.

Ansonsten ist der Terror hier nur ein erzählerischer Kniff, damit sich die Wege der aus unterschiedlichen gesellschaftlichen Sphären stammenden Protagonisten kreuzen und sich eine ziemlich konventionelle Liebesgeschichte entwickeln kann (wobei die "Unterschicht" hier gleichbedeutend damit ist, in einem etwas heruntergekommenen, aber eigentlich wahnsinnig coolen Loft in Manhattan zu leben und Salman Rushdie zum Abendessen zu empfangen - ein ziemlich müder Abklatsch zum faszinierenden New Yorker Intellektuellen- und Künstlerleben, wie es etwa Siri Hustvedt schildert).

Immerhin schreitet die Handlung zügig, wenn auch vorhersehbar voran, man verfolgt das Geschehen mit demselben matten Interesse und gelegentlichen Amüsement wie die "Bunte" im Wartezimmer des Arztes. Bestenfalls könnte das Buch als angenehm sinnlose Zeitverschwendungen mit ein paar Durchhängern durchrutschen.

Einige Passagen sind aber tatsächlich völlig misslungen, vor allem die "erotischen" Szenen. Da stöhnt man als Leser nur noch auf - und bestimmt nicht lustvoll. Tiefsinnigkeit sieht hier so aus, dass die Liebenden abwechselnd versponnen ins Kaminfeuer starren. Dass eine der Hauptfiguren die Schwester seiner Frau attraktiv findet, erklärt der Roman so: "Wenn man Roquefort mag, ist es kein Wunder, auch auf Stilton Appetit zu haben." Käse!!

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### **Jeroen says**

I really, really loved this book. A far cry from Bright Lights, Big City in writing style, this is a warm and moving story against the backdrop of 9/11. Together with The Emperor's Children, this is the best novel that came in the post-9/11 flow.

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### **Glenn Sumi says**

Like his obvious influence, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jay McInerney has always been an astute social chronicler. His previous novels, one about the coke-filled club scene of the early 80s, for example, and another about the post-boom stock market mini-crash, seem almost trivial next to the loaded setting of *The Good Life*: the day before and the months after September 11, 2001.

The story centres on two contrasting couples, familiar from some of McInerney's earlier fiction. Gracefully

aging hipsters Corrine and Russell Calloway are raising their twin kids in TriBeCa, while socialites Luke and Sasha McGavock barely see their troubled teenager daughter in their Upper East Side co-op.

When Corrine and Luke, who have both taken themselves out of the rat race to pursue more meaningful work, meet in the debris-filled aftermath of the attacks and consequently start working in a relief-effort soup kitchen, they find an emotional bond that's lacking at home. What to do?

Like John Cheever, quoted in one of the book's epigraphs, McInerney dissects encroaching middle age and marital infidelity with special care. He brings a whiff of glamour to adultery, but he knows that it exacts a price. His people have made choices and, when faced with catastrophe, must examine whether they're the right ones.

Written in lyrical, almost elegiac prose, the book begins well, covers the WTC disasters with understated tact and also delivers some rich satire about Manhattan's pretty people. The denouement is exquisite.

But there's something missing at the book's heart. McInerney is a good satirist, but I'm not sure he's a fine portraitist. We know where his characters went to school, what they wear and who they know, but they never jump off the page. This is fine for a pop novel like *Bright Lights, Big City*, but here he's trying for something more and doesn't quite succeed.

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### **Skip says**

It was trite fast reading.

You never really care that much for the characters and they all seem pretty miserable.

And then using the Sept. 11 disaster as a reason to launch into an affair is just kind of a cliche.

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### **Emi Bevacqua says**

Lightweight novel about adultery in upscale America, where no character is sympathetic (well, maybe the six-year old twins) and everybody including the author's cynicism is off-putting. Corinne and Russell Calloway have twins and imagine themselves to be middle class; upper echelon Luke and Sasha have a teen aged daughter, and the not so meet-cute is set amid 9-11 aftermath when Corinne bumps into ash covered Luke and their love, lust and desire threaten to obliterate both their marriages - which are barely holding together anyways, so it's no big stakes.

I used to love reading McInerney, but in light of present political climate and seething against Trump ugliness, I found so much here insufferable:

- "Washington still liked to say that men had four needs: food, shelter, pussy, and strange pussy. Whereas Russell believed there were two kinds of men-those who cheated, and those who felt guilty afterward"

- No one had ever said of Sasha that she was nice, ultimately you knew she wasn't, and this made her dangerously attractive.

- as he savored the unfamiliar taste of marital guilt...

I was outraged at weirdness like allowing ones daughter a splash of champagne upon her release from rehab, or feeling relieved that the boy you caught your daughter sucking off is not her boyfriend, or practical strangers greeting each other with a kiss on the lips, etc. I was irritated by inconsistencies like on page 252 "They say it was a bucket brigade. But the first day, we had no buckets - at least I didn't see any. We used our hands. We formed a human chain, passing along pieces of rebar and concrete, hand to hand... Eventually, I don't know when, we got these plastic buckets. We were going stone by stone across West Street... By the end of the day, I was five feet over the median divider..."

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