



Ordinary Light: A memoir

By Tracy K. Smith

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National Book Award Finalist

From the dazzlingly original Pulitzer Prize-winning poet hailed for her “extraordinary range and ambition” (*The New York Times Book Review*): a quietly potent memoir that explores coming-of-age and the meaning of home against a complex backdrop of race, faith, and the unbreakable bond between a mother and daughter.

The youngest of five children, Tracy K. Smith was raised with limitless affection and a firm belief in God by a stay-at-home mother and an engineer father. But just as Tracy is about to leave home for college, her mother is diagnosed with cancer, a condition she accepts as part of God’s plan. *Ordinary Light* is the story of a young woman struggling to fashion her own understanding of belief, loss, history, and what it means to be black in America.

In lucid, clear prose, Smith interrogates her childhood in suburban California, her first collision with independence at Harvard, and her Alabama-born parents’ recollections of their own youth in the Civil Rights era. These dizzying juxtapositions—of her family’s past, her own comfortable present, and the promise of her future—will in due course compel Tracy to act on her passions for love and “ecstatic possibility,” and her desire to become a writer.

Shot through with exquisite lyricism, wry humor, and an acute awareness of the beauty of everyday life, *Ordinary Light* is a gorgeous kaleidoscope of self and family, one that skillfully combines a child’s and teenager’s perceptions with adult retrospection. Here is a universal story of being and becoming, a classic portrait of the ways we find and lose ourselves amid the places we call home.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Smith is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, a talent evident in every line of this crystalline memoir. Hers is not the dysfunctional family story we've grown accustomed to reading; in fact, Smith recalls her family of seven as ‘steady, steadfast, happy, and whole.’ In loving detail, she recalls both the happiness and the complex questions of her childhood. Religion is a force to be reckoned with again and again [and] questions about race are also ever-present . . . Smith’s honest, unflinching book offers an inspiring model for seeking the light in an ‘ordinary’ life: ask the tough questions, look in the hidden corners, *allow* yourself to understand, and never stop searching for faith.” —Dawn Raffel, *O, The Oprah Magazine*

“This forceful memoir by a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet relates her experience of growing up in a bookish family, and the dawning of her poetic vocation. It begins and ends with the death of her deeply pious mother. The hurts (and caresses) of life are rendered indelibly.” —*The New Yorker*

“Transcendent . . . deceptively simple, deeply affecting. Most of the time, *Ordinary Light* seems to be a coming-of-age story about a middle-class black girl with a relatively idyllic life. If this were all that her memoir were, Smith would’ve succeeded in publishing something revolutionary: a book about a happy, financially solvent, high-achieving black family—more specifically, the story of the healthy, nurturing bond between a black mother and daughter. Too few books that fit this description exist. Black family memoir more often explores overcoming poverty, bad parenting, substance abuse, and trauma related to racism. Stories about black mothers and daughters are even scarcer. . . . Though I don’t get the sense that Smith was concerned about the ways in which her memoir might serve to ‘normalize’ the black parenting experience, it succeeds at doing so—for those who would need the existence of healthy black families confirmed—just by focusing on her parents’ presence and encouragement. But the memoir is most powerful when it returns to the subject of her mother’s illness and Smith’s slow-dawning realization that she will not recover . . . It seems that, in writing about her [mother], she’s combing through the minutia of her childhood, adolescence, and early womanhood, searching for things she wishes she’d shared, instances when she might have been more honest, moments when she could have revealed more of her doubts or challenged her mother’s authority. And only in viewing those earlier, prosaic scenes through this retrospective lens does the ordinary become sublime. These later descriptions of small discoveries are profoundly moving—finds that threaten to unravel the reader . . . *Ordinary Light* is lovely, languid, and painful, at turns—much like the memory of a beloved and long-deceased relative. Grief breaks open in the smallest of moments, but it can result in gorgeous revelation and in an acceptance that can almost mimic peace.” —Stacia L. Brown, *Slate*

“Engrossing . . . subtle and evocative . . . a luminous memoir about Smith’s early years with her own mother and protector, and the rites of passage a daughter and mother must endure as the child grows and finally breaks free. You don’t have to know Smith’s Pulitzer Prize-winning poetry to appreciate her ability to interpret life in a way that feels both unique and universal . . . Smith is the youngest child among five in a loving black family suffused with a father’s dignity and a mother’s faith. She has the gift to see herself clearly, without apology or judgment. In her visits home from college, she developed disdain for her upbringing . . . Some two decades have passed since Smith’s mother left her. Smith now has three children of her own. When they were born, she began to pray again, and this memoir feels like part of that prayer. There are many things we say and wish we could take back. *Ordinary Light* is about finally uttering what we left unsaid for too long.” —Carlos Lozada, *The Washington Post*

“A lyrical reminiscence of an almost idyllic childhood in Northern California. The memoir overflows with

memorable stories: a trip to Alabama; a trip to a ranch to pick fruit for her mother's preserves: the love of books instilled by her father, an engineer with the U.S. Air Force who would go on to work on the Hubble telescope." —Rege Behe, *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*

"A memoir of race, faith and a mother's devotion, by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet . . . The youngest of five children, Smith grew up like an only child, her siblings already away at college by the time she began to think about her place in the world. In *Ordinary Light*, she offers her reflections on what went into the making of her, from the chapters of *Little Visits With God* she used to read with her mother, to Seamus Heaney. . . An awareness of herself as a black girl breaks in on Smith by degrees. She would have her militant phase at Harvard. Her reading list was much like the one Barack Obama described in *Dreams From My Father*: Ellison, Hughes, Hurston, Baldwin, Wright. But in *Ordinary Light* her understanding of herself as a black American cannot be separated from her knowledge of herself as a woman and the experiences that contributed to it . . . No doubt the greatest influence on Smith's maturity as a woman was her mother. She writes as a daughter who has lost her mother and is thinking of her own daughter . . . Her inclusive lists of influences—Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Frost, Philip Larkin, Yusef Komunyakaa—testify that black identity these days is way past black and white." —Darryl Pinckney, *The New York Times Book Review*

"Compelling . . . It's rare that a memoir is so emotionally engaging that a reader may wish to reach back through time and envelop the author in a warm personal hug. But that's the impulse Smith engenders in this account of growing up as a dutiful daughter in a small town in northern California during the 1970s and '80s. But she's more than a compliant child—she was preternaturally attuned to everything happening around her, and determined to find a place for it in her rich imagination . . . The fact that she is black does not immediately loom large on her mental horizon, but little by little, idle remarks from white friends and overheard family conversations knit themselves into a perspective that keeps her aware and on guard . . . At Harvard, she revels in the 'small freedoms' of being on her own. But always at the center of her life is her overwhelming love for her mother, who dies soon after Smith graduates." —Edward Morris, *BookPage*

"Evocative, moving, thought-provoking . . . a subtle, elegant meditation that reveals the profound in the quotidian—the layers of meaning in everyday events . . . The star here is the writing itself: Like a Noguchi table, Smith's prose is sturdy, functional and at the same time exquisitely beautiful . . . The two big themes of *Ordinary Light* are race and religion, but Smith avoids the clichéd treatment these hot-button issues too often receive. Smith is black and proud, but she doesn't so much tackle issues of race as resolutely face them down. As a result her account of the corrosive power of subtle racism rings truer than more overtly politicized treatments . . . Her reflections on religion are even more illuminating and unexpected. The child of an especially devout mother, she accepts the gospel and the conventional moral strictures that accompany it for most of her childhood. But as a young adult, she must attempt to reconcile her more cosmopolitan sensibilities and experiences with a religious faith that, for her, has always come with short apron strings attached. She does not reject the church in favor of easy liberated atheism; instead she quietly insists of a faith replete with human complexity . . . *Ordinary Light* glows not from the flare-ups of dramatic conflict and trauma, but from the steadier supply of insight derived from the habits and gradual transformations of everyday life." —Richard Thompson Ford, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"At the heart of *Ordinary Light* lies a loss that shakes Smith's faith in the solidity of the world. Her mother has been gone two decades, and her quiet, questioning memoir is an act of recovery and devotion. [In] her mother's last hours, Smith finds herself 'both frightened and reassured,' and 'both crushed and heartened' that death does indeed look and feel the way it's described in hospice literature, even as it remains a mystery and a miracle. Throughout the book she often returns to this kind of paradox. Her journey from childhood to Harvard and to poetry is also a journey from her mother's version of God to her own more expansive and characteristically questioning concept. 'Is God each of the many different things we seek in life?' she asks

herself after the birth of her own daughter. ‘Family for a short time, and then independence, and then love?’ Her book is full of such questions, always reaching across the gap from daily life to the eternal.” —Joanna Scutts, *Newsday*

“One of the most-anticipated books of 2015. Though best known as a poet (and a damn good one), Smith never felt the medium allowed her to fully reflect on her family, her upbringing or the loss of her mother just after she finished college. So she turned to memoir. In *Ordinary Light*, Smith imparts tremendous grace and eloquence through an honest, unyielding consideration of her past . . . Revealing.” —*Time Out New York*

“Exquisitely written . . . eloquent, poignant. Smith grabs you from the first sentence. Her memoir is a search for her mother, through memories—visiting grandparents, interacting with much older brothers and sisters, encountering poetry for the first time, always aware of her mother’s presence. Smith folds us into her reveries and reminiscences with enormous grace, revealing the particularly vulnerable moments she experienced when she became a motherless daughter, and the lingering, everlasting question of what might have been, had her mother been with her into her own experience of becoming a mother herself. *Ordinary Light* is a lament, an homage, a discovery, a blessing.” —Jane Ciabattari, *BBC.com*, “Ten Books to Read in April”

“Smith, who won the Pulitzer for poetry, tells her life story so far, tracing her girlhood in a mostly white suburb to her years at Harvard, where she developed ‘an intimate proximity’ with her African-American identity. *Ordinary Light* shines bright because of the warm glow the memoir casts on the simple everyday life of a young girl yearning to do great things . . . Her spare yet beautiful prose transforms her story into a shining example of how one person’s shared memories can brighten everyone’s world.” —Carol Memmott, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“*Ordinary Life* begins with a harrowing scene at the deathbed of Smith’s mother, [then] circles back to Smith’s early childhood, tracing her growth not just as a writer, but as someone who must learn the hard lessons of puberty and early adulthood, as well as what it means to be a black woman growing up in suburban California. Her discovery of poetry is part of this. But the most remarkable moments in this book are the ones in which Smith deals with ordinary trials, which she treats with rare insight and heart . . . This is not a chronicle of shock of loss. Rather, it is a celebration of Smith’s life, a chronicle of a big family with five children, and a story of coming of age amid deep and abiding love.” —Craig Morgan Teicher, *Publishers Weekly*

“Smith’s memoir is about a life in many ways ordinary—suburban California upbringing, elite college education, upward mobility and black assimilation. Even her mother’s untimely death isn’t all that anomalous. But her writing is both precise and transcendent, so that when Smith digs deeper into her black rural roots—origins her parents were eager to put behind them—her revelations about identity, religion, and family feel as momentous as anything Barack Obama once put between covers.” —Boris Kachka, *Vulture*, “8 Books You Need to Read This March”

“An emotion-packed narrative . . . Since Smith is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, one expects eloquence in her prose, and she adroitly delivers . . . Her story, of a young girl intent on discovering her own identity while trying to be the person her mother wanted her to be, is a timeless one full of love, worry and the need to call a place home.” —Lee E. Cart, *Shelf Awareness*

“Sublime—a feast of startling insight . . . When good poets write memoirs, we get the benefit of experiencing actual events as filtered through a transcendent art form . . . Smith writes about her childhood with humor and acute insight; though raised in a military family with Christian values, she accepts nothing at

face value. Her childhood self sees through human hypocrisy with laserlike precision . . . A trip to Alabama, where her mother grew up, brings an awareness of what went before: the Civil Rights movement, segregation, slavery itself. Smith's attempts to reconcile this legacy with her own journey into the hallowed halls of the highly educated makes for a riveting read.” —Terre Roche, *O, The Oprah Magazine*

“A nuanced memoir, with a quiet emotional power. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Smith reaches around the deep Christian piety of her Alabama-born mother to the author’s own questions about faith and her black identity. The work opens with the death of her mother shortly after Smith graduated from Harvard; then it looks back to the 1970s, when she was growing up in California near the Travis Air Force Base, where her father was stationed as an engineer. Each chapter takes a memory of youth and holds it to the light for scrutiny . . . Throughout, there is the strong sense that Smith’s mother’s love and faith held the family together. And, though God could not cure her mother, Smith finds her own way back to her faith by searching for a more expansive way to understand her relationship with her mother, which she found in writing poetry.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Smith, winner of the 2012 Pulitzer Prize, has now crafted a book of prose, which travels from the comfort of the California suburbs back to the cotton culture of Alabama, and through her mother’s terminal illness. It begins with an exquisitely detailed narration of [that] ending, perhaps echoing *A Death in the Family* by James Agee.” —*Harvard Magazine*

“An extraordinary new memoir by the Pulitzer-Prize winning poet . . . a book of excavation and navigation [that] returns to the wrenching loss of Smith’s mother in light of her father’s death . . . In *Ordinary Light*, Smith embraces a fuller sense of herself as a writer while cementing the connection between her children and her ancestors using the best glue she knows: words. She opens her memoir with the family’s vigil during the final hours of her mother’s life, remembered twenty years later. From that solemn moment, she circles back to her childhood as the adored and indulged baby in a family of five children and, further back, to her parent’s coming of age in Alabama at the dawn of the Civil Rights movement. Dedicated to her daughter, *Ordinary Light* began as a way for Smith to bring her parents back to life, ‘to reconstruct them’ as characters for her. . . . Smith is known for sharpening a political edge in her poetry, whether she’s writing about science fiction, pop culture, or current events, and *Ordinary Light* is no exception . . . Through writing it, Smith has come to peaceful terms with the fierce religious faith that guided her mother’s life; [it] helped her to speak honestly about how she sees God—and to decide what elements of her religious inheritance she wants to offer her children. [It also] helped her appreciate the key role of the African American church of her parents’ era in fostering a sense of family, community, and discipline ‘in a world full of disparities’ . . . Smith explores for herself and her own children the moment when we hear the tiger at the door.” —Renee H. Shea, *Poets & Writers*

* “A gracefully nuanced, strikingly candid memoir about family, faith, race, and literature . . . meticulously structured, philosophically inquisitive. Smith grew up in Northern California, snuggled close to her elegant and devout mother; challenged by her engineer father; and enthralled by books. As one of few African Americans in their community, she navigated a ‘sea of white faces,’ in stark contrast to the world she discovered when staying with relatives in Alabama. Smith holds our intellectual and emotional attention tightly as she charts her evolving thoughts on the divides between races, generations, economic classes, and religion and science and celebrates her lifesaving discovery of poetry as ‘soul language.’ Smith’s intricate and artistic memoir illuminates the rich and affecting complexity of ‘ordinary’ American lives.” —Donna Seaman, *Booklist* (starred review)

“Deeply engaging and brilliantly written, *Ordinary Light* tells how a young woman, encountering ‘the miracle of death,’ explores and expands her own vibrant life—and discovers her voice as a gifted writer.”

—Elaine Pagels

“Smith’s memoir takes us so far into the dimensions of experience that the reader feels a remarkable intimacy with this narrator, who brings to all life has to offer a tenderness and intelligence rarely so closely intertwined. Her self-scrutiny, her empathy, and her lifelong quest to figure things out—in particular our bedeviling national aches, religion and race—make for an indelible self-portrait: moving, utterly clear and compulsively readable.” —Mark Doty

“With an abundance of love and wisdom, and in a poet’s confessional prose, Tracy K. Smith has recalled her life and the lives of the people who made her into the person she now knows to be her own true self. The title of her book is *Ordinary Light*, but that is a conundrum, for there is nothing at all ordinary in its beautiful sentences, its beautiful paragraphs, its beautiful pages. This memoir is big and significant because it reminds us that the everyday is where we experience our common struggles, and that the everyday is at once common and ordinary, while also being singular and unique. A poet is uniquely positioned to know this, and now the remarkable Tracy K. Smith has shown us just that.” —Jamaica Kincaid

“A candid, gracefully written account of a daughter’s journey to claim her identity [and of] a dawning black consciousness. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Smith grew up in a solidly middle-class California suburb sheltered by her community and family. She had little sense of her black identity until she spent two weeks visiting relatives in Alabama. Her grandmother still cleaned for a white family; her own house smelled of ‘cooking gas, pork fat, tobacco juice, and cane syrup.’ Suddenly, Smith was confronted with a new image of her parents’ Southern roots, and it frightened her. Back in California, though, that visit receded into memory. Teachers encouraged her, including one who remarked that as an African-American woman, she should ‘take advantage of the opportunities that will bring you.’ Smith resented the idea that her success would be based on anything other than her own talents, but when she was accepted at Harvard, the comment gnawed at her . . . Smith’s memoir probes her relationship with her mother, whose illness and death from cancer darken the edges of this light-filled memoir.” —*Kirkus*

“*Ordinary Light* is a lyrical, evocative and poignant memoir that is the best of that genre. Tracy K. Smith has created a poem in stunning prose, a book in which she holds the child she was in her adult hands, examining the things that bridge the two: memory, parents, siblings, time—and of course her extraordinary eye. The result is something quite beautiful.” —Abraham Verghese, author of *Cutting for Stone*

“When a poet of Tracy Smith’s considerable lyric talent turns her attention to prose, she sets the bar ever higher for those of us who consider ourselves lifelong practitioners. Emily Dickinson once claimed that she wouldn’t think of exchanging poetry for prose, for ‘she dwelt in possibility,’ poetry being ‘a fairer house than prose.’ All I can say is that she didn’t live long enough to read Smith’s new memoir. *Ordinary Light* is no ordinary book. Moving, engaging, full of flashes of insight and passages that could be poems, this is the kind of keeper memoir you don’t just read to get to know more about the private life of an author, but to illuminate your own understanding of the world, our country, our communities, our selves. Smith is a first-rate storyteller, and when lyricism and storytelling come together, expect Dickinson’s delight as a reader: gathering paradise in your hands as you turn the pages. Along with her place as one of our best young poets, Smith can now claim a place among the best writers of prose.” —Julia Alvarez, author of *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

About the Author

TRACY K. SMITH is the author of three acclaimed books of poetry, including most recently *Life on Mars*, winner of the 2012 Pulitzer Prize, a *New York Times* Notable Book, a *New York Times Book Review* Editors’ Choice, and a *New Yorker*, *Library Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year. A professor of

creative writing at Princeton University, she lives in Princeton with her family.

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Prologue: The Miracle

She left us at night. It had felt like night for a long time, the days at once short and ceaselessly long. November-dark. She'd been lifting her hand to signal for relief, a code we'd concocted once it became too much effort for her to speak and too difficult for us to understand her when she did. When it became clear that it was taking everything out of her just to lift the arm, we told her to blink, a movement that, when you're watching for it, becomes impossibly hard to discern. "Was that a blink?" we'd ask when her eyelids just seemed to ripple or twitch. "Are you blinking, Mom? Was that a blink?" until finally, she'd heave the lids up and let them thud back down to say, *Yes, the pain weighs that much, and I am lying here, pinned beneath it. Do something.*

Did we recognize the day when it arrived? A day with so much pain, a day when her patience had dissolved and she wanted nothing but to be outside of it. *Pain*. The word itself doesn't hurt enough, doesn't know how to tell us what it stands for. We gave her morphine. Each time she asked for it, we asked her if she was sure, and she found a way to tell us that she was, and so we were sure—weren't we?—that this was the end, this was when and how she would go.

I was grateful for my brother Conrad and his wife, both doctors. None of the rest of us would have known how to administer the drug in such a way as to say what we needed it to say—*Take this dose, measured out, controlled, a proven means of temporary relief*—rather than what we knew it actually meant. Grateful, and hopeful that the training might stand guard against the fact that the patient was our mother.

The nurse who came by each day was a cheerful person who knew not to be cheery. Calm, available, knowing, pleasant. But she stopped short of chipper. She must have been instructed not to bring that kind of feeling into a home that was preparing for death. Not to bring hope. Instead, she brought mild comfort, a commendable gentleness that helped to rebuild something inside us. The nurse cared for our mother the way we sought to care for our mother: with no signs of struggle, no stied rage at God and the unfair world, no tears. In changing our mother's bandages and handling her flesh with such competence and ease, the nurse cared for us, too. Once a day for only an hour at a time, she came and eased our load just enough to get us to the next day when we knew she'd come again.

I had sat and read the hospice literature one morning at the dining room table. A binder with information about how to care for the dying at home. It said that as death approaches, the body becomes cool to the touch. The limbs lose their warmth as the body concentrates its energy on the essential functions. Some-times when I was alone with my mother, I'd touch her feet and legs, checking to see how cool she had become. I was both frightened and reassured that the literature was correct, as if her body was saying goodbye to the world, preparing itself for a journey—though that's not it, exactly, for the body goes nowhere, merely shuts down in preparation for being left. I could sense my mother leaving, getting ready for some elsewhere I couldn't visit, and like the cool hands and feet I'd check for every day, it both crushed and heartened me. Every day, she spoke less, ate less, surrendered a little more of her presence in this world. Every day, she seemed to be more firmly aligned with a place or a state I believed in but couldn't decipher.

When the dark outside was real—not just the dark of approaching winter, and not just the dark of rain, which we'd had for days, too—her dying came on. We recognized it. We circled her bed, though we stopped short of holding hands, perhaps because that gesture would have meant we were holding on, and we were finally

ready to let her go. Each of us took a turn saying “I love you” and “Goodbye.” We made our promises. Then we heard a sound that seemed to carve a tunnel between our world and some other. It was an otherworldly breath, a vivid presence that blew past us without stopping, leaving us, the living, clamped in place by the silence that followed. I would come back to the sound and the presence of that breath again and again, thinking how miraculous it was that she had ridden off on that last exhalation, her life instantly whisked away, carried over into a place none of us will ever understand until perhaps we are there ourselves.

It’s the kind of miracle we never let ourselves consider, the miracle of death. She followed that last breath wherever it led and left her body behind in the old four-poster Queen Anne bed, where for the *rst* time in all of our lives it was a body and nothing more.

After it was clear that she was gone, my sister Wanda rose from the *oor* where she’d been sitting—we’d all gone from standing around her to sitting or huddling there on the rug around the bed; perhaps we had fallen to our knees in unconscious obedience to the largeness that had claimed our mother, the invisible power she had joined—and crawled into bed beside her, nestling next to her under the covers just as we’d all done when we were children. The act struck me then as futile. In those last many weeks, I’d grown used to looking at my mother, changed almost daily, it seemed, by the disease. And every day, I’d fought to *nd* a way to see her as herself, as not so very far from whom she’d always been to me. But now she was something else altogether. Wasn’t it obvious? The body already stiffening, the unnatural, regrettable set to the jaw, as if the spirit had exited through her mouth. Still, Wanda, the *rst*-born, clung to her, crying, eyeing each of us as if to say, *She was mine *rst*. Which of you is going to drag me away?* It was the type of gesture I’d have expected my father to chastise her for, though of course he didn’t; none of us did. He was just as undone as any of us, though he’d done his best. In the moments after it was clear what had happened, when we found ourselves coming to in the bleak and unreal reality of her death, he’d said to my sisters and me, “You must be brave”—the thing fathers tell children in old wartime movies. I’d tried my best not to judge him as lacking in imagination, for I knew that while what he’d said was patently unoriginal, it was also true. I tried not to judge Wanda, either, but I admit that I took her invitation to even the possibility of struggle as in questionable taste. Perhaps, after a moment, she came to the same view herself, at which point she stood up and agreed to wait upstairs with the rest of us.

We all instinctively wanted the strangers who were already on their way to *nd* our mother as presentable in death as she had always been in life, and so Conrad had agreed to stay behind to prepare the body, to change her clothes and the bed linens. He and his wife, Janet, the doctors, doing what nurses do in order to protect the shell, the empty shape, the idea of our mother from even the slightest tinge of scorn or even simply the rote disregard the attendants might have brought to their work. He’d cried doing it. Readyng her to be taken away had been his moment of realization, his genuine goodbye.

There was a moment when I found myself alone with her in the room. Had I crept back down to steal a last look, or had we all agreed to give one another that much? It’s been twenty years now. I’ve forgotten so much that I once forbade myself to forget, but I do remember this: snipping *ve or seven strands of her hair with a pair of nail scissors from her bureau. Just a few short hairs from the nape of her neck.* Suddenly, those few strands, things I’d have once thought nothing of brushing off her shoulders or discarding from among the tines of a hairbrush, were consecrated, a host. For a moment, I contemplated eating them, but then they’d be gone and I’d have been left with nothing, so I placed them in a small plastic bag, the kind of bag in which spare threads or extra buttons are provided when you purchase a sweater or coat, and tucked that into the *ap* of my address book.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Gibson:

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