



Pieces You'll Never Get Back

Samina Ali

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Samina Ali's searing memoir is about how a birth gone wrong took her, a promising young writer, to the brink of death.

Ali's intuition warned her of danger to her pregnancy. She suspected bias against women of color after her requests for help went unattended, attributed to her need for drama. Her intuition proved correct. Undiagnosed preeclampsia almost took her life and that of her baby.

Ali describes feeling her brain dying during the complicated delivery of her son. She had a massive seizure and multiple strokes, and she became comatose. When she awoke, most of her memory had been wiped clean. At twenty-nine, she had to relearn how to talk, walk, and eat, as well as basic self-care. Her doctors were certain she would never write again.

Medical jargon is kept to a minimum so that the lived experience of severe brain damage can be brought to the fore. Intense, frightening descriptions of Ali's inner world reveal a cold, dark, empty place where "every moment was instantly forgotten. Every moment was brand new. Events were sliding away instead of stacking up into some semblance of meaning."

Ali attributes writing to saving her. With no recall of the novel she'd been working on before becoming "a writer without words," she forced herself to begin anew. She hoped to build new neural pathways in her brain. Her initial efforts resulted in nonsense: She wrote "peaches" when she meant "rain," and ten minutes of work felt like an hour. But the struggle proved worth it. Herein, supple, luminous prose carries a message of near inconceivable resilience and hope.

Pieces You'll Never Get Back is an inspiring memoir about rising from despair and triumphing over catastrophic brain injury.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 2025)

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