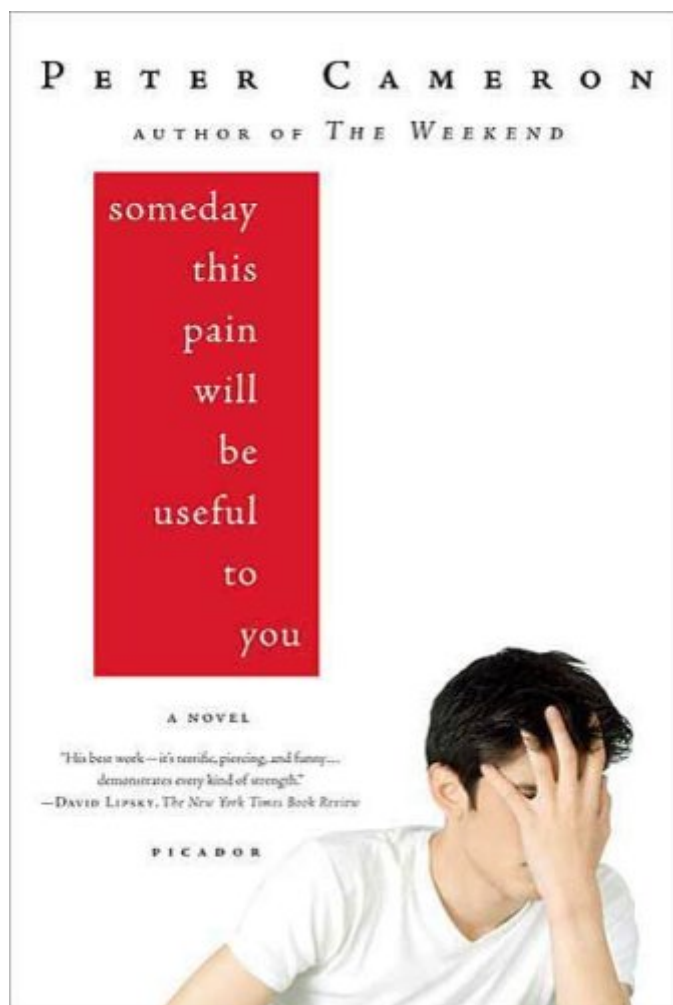


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# Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You: A Novel



## Synopsis

Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You is the story of James Sveck, a sophisticated, vulnerable young man with a deep appreciation for the world and no idea how to live in it. James is eighteen, the child of divorced parents living in Manhattan. Articulate, sensitive, and cynical, he rejects all of the assumptions that govern the adult world around him—including the expectation that he will go to college in the fall. He would prefer to move to an old house in a small town somewhere in the Midwest. Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You takes place over a few broiling days in the summer of 2003 as James confides in his sympathetic grandmother, stymies his canny therapist, deplores his pretentious sister, and devises a fake online identity in order to pursue his crush on a much older coworker. Nothing turns out how he'd expected. "Possibly one of the all-time great New York books, not to mention an archly comic gem" (Peter Gado, LA Weekly), Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You is the insightful, powerfully moving story of a young man questioning his times, his family, his world, and himself.

## Book Information

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[Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Self-Esteem](#)

## Customer Reviews

Once I started reading I enjoyed the book being told in the protagonist James voice. James is an eighteen year old well to do New Yorker who is the child of divorce. The book opens with the sentence "The day my sister Gilian decided to pronounce her name with a hard G was, coincidentally, the same day my mother returned early and alone from her honeymoon." This sets us up for a family where James feels disconnected from both his parents and his sister who is now in college at Brown. We get glimpses of To begin with the title of the book drew me in, made me curious about delving into the pages. the Art-World, James's mother runs an art gallery and believes an art gallery should contain things no one really needs, and carries items from a person from Japan who refuses to have a name. James father is a partner at a law firm who is having plastic surgery for his eyelids and lives in one of the Trump apartments. The one person James feels connected to is his grandmother who lives in New Jersey and always has time to listen to James when he visits. Within the first third of the book, James pronounces that he is not sure he wants to go to college and would like instead to move to the Midwest and own a house there that would be less expensive than what his father has to spend on college. This is not a plot heavy book with steamy sex and a murder a minute. The plot is subtle, it is a post 9/11 New York story but does not talk about terrorism or wars, instead only halfway through the book do we realize that James actually was in school where he saw the towers collapse and a woman who no one even bothered to realize was missing for many days afterwards. As a parallel James goes missing twice, once during an American Classroom event in Washington D.C that we hear about in backstory. And then another time when he goes to his grandmother's place and neither his sister nor mother realize his absence and there is the line that they would have noticed had he been gone longer. The voice is simple, engaging and in James Peter Cameron creates a narrator who is an astute observer of those around and has opinions on others and emphasizes precision in language. However while James is particular about language and its use one also gets the impression that he is hiding behind words. The climax of the novel comes when James sets up a profile on Gents4Gents to match the dream that John, his mothers gay gallery assistant is looking for. But this again is not plot heavy and don't expect a big coming out event or a hot and heavy romance. The book has some wonderful dialog and there were sections where I laughed out loud. There was something about this book, the way it deals with issues with both gravity and levity that made me think of Nick Hornby's 'A long way down.' To sum up this is a small gem of a book that is an easy read with an engaging narrative voice, that at first does not seem to be about much but stays with you a long time.

The closest I could get to a one sentence review/summary of Peter Cameron's "Someday This Pain

Will Be Useful To You" is to describe it like this: "Catcher in the Rye" for the post-9/11 world. The narrator, James Sveck, is an anti-social 18 year old male living in New York with his-let's say eccentric-art gallery owning divorced mother and an older sister who's busily caught up in being a young 20-something in New York. Oh, and their dog MirÃfÂ , a standard black poodle. Yeah, I'm sure you can kind of imagine the family from that. The first page starts the novel up with so much promise: "The day my sister, Gillian, decided to pronounce her name with a hard G was, coincidentally, the same day my mother returned early and alone from her honeymoon. Neither of these things surprised me." Seriously. I fell in love with the story after those two lines, but the narrator was so perennially detached from the world around him that it became difficult to identify with anything other than his frustration or angst. As a reader, I struggled to find some investment in who James was, or how he felt about the world around him. Because of this detachment the climax was unfulfilling. Many of the plot lines are simply left hanging or wrapped up in an entirely unsatisfactory and hasty manner. For example, his grandmother saw an emotion that I do NOT believe was adequately conveyed in the writing. Hell, I would not have assumed James felt it until his grandmother explicitly stated it, and that is my over all issue with the novel. I understand feeling painfully out of place, (believe me, I really do,) but even under these circumstances I felt something: pain, sorrow, loss, frustration, SOMETHING. James never does, and because of this I could never fully connect.

The sarcasm in the title sets the tone perfectly for this coming-of-age story of an intelligent but extremely cynical, moody and socially antagonistic 18 year old son of emotionally-distant, self-obsessed, divorced upper-class parents in New York City. It's the summer before James is to go away to college at Brown (which he does not want to do, primarily due to the necessary interaction with his peers this will require), and he is spending it "working" at his mother's art gallery, taking the train for frequent visits to his grandmother (the only relative he seems to be able to relate to), and seeing a therapist (his parents' idea, after he had a reported "breakdown" on a school trip to Washington DC earlier in the year.) In almost lyrical fashion, author Cameron spins the convincing web of James' fears, dreams, compulsions, and - perhaps - unrequited passions (Although he does not identify as gay, he seems to have a need to be desired and loved by the older gay man who manages his mother's gallery). It's likely that every reader will see some part of his own coming-of-age frustrations in James, making this a surprisingly comforting as well as witty and entertaining read. Rate it five stars out of five.

I plan to read it again very soon. Things about this book and the protagonist spoke to me loudly in a way no other book has. I kept thinking, "This is the book I've been trying to write all these years." There's a bit of *Catcher in the Rye* to it, but it's definitely original and an amazing portrait of the angst, longing and discomfort of the teenage years, particularly for someone who sees the world in a way that doesn't seem to mesh with everyone around him. But it's not just a book about or for teenagers. I'm a grown woman without kids and it spoke to me deeply. So well written, with an easy-to-read flow that took me through it in just more than one sitting.

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