

Sick
Porochista Khakpour

Harper Perennial
2018
272 pages
ISBN: 978-0062428738

Chronic Pain

Summary

Sick is Khakpour's arduous, emotional journey--as a woman, a writer, and a lifelong sufferer of undiagnosed health problems--through the chronic illness that perpetually left her a victim of anxiety, living a life stymied by an unknown condition. Divided by settings, Khakpour guides the reader through her illness by way of the locations that changed her course--New York, LA, New Mexico, and Germany--as she meditates on both the physical and psychological impacts of uncertainty, and the eventual challenge of accepting the diagnosis she had searched for over the course of her adult life.

Questions

Identity

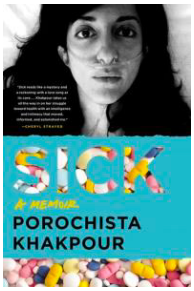
1. How is the theme of identity explored in the author's experiences?
2. What does the narrator mean when she says, “the body feels out of place it will cling to anything that looks like life”? What does it mean to feel like one is in the wrong body? How does the author’s perception of their body evolve throughout the narrative?
3. What does the author mean when she refers to herself as a 'sick person' in relation to her identity?
4. How does the author connect their illness with experiences of race and identity?
5. How does the narrator's experience reflect the struggle with identity and self-perception?
6. How does the author illustrate the journey to self-acceptance through her challenges?
7. What impact do external perceptions and societal attitudes have on the author’s health experience?

Relationships

1. How do relationships impact the author throughout the narrative?
2. How does the experience of illness reshape the author's relationship with her friends? In what ways do friends play a different role compared to family when it comes to supporting someone with a chronic illness?
3. What lessons about asking for help can be gleaned from the author's experiences? How did crowdfunding impact the author's relationship with her family?
4. In what ways did the author's health issues manifest during her childhood? What role did storytelling play in the author's childhood, and how did it help her cope with trauma?
5. How did the author's relationship with her parents influence her writing and creative pursuits? How does the author’s relationship with her mother change throughout the narrative?
6. What does the story suggest about the complexity of friendships and support? What personal challenges did the author face regarding her support system during illness? What does the author reflect on when thinking about emergency contacts in their life?

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7. How does the narrator's health impact her choice of partners? What realization does the narrator have about her relationships over time?

Place

1. How did the sense of place affect the author? What does feeling 'at home' mean, especially in the context of your upbringing?
2. What role does community play in the author's healing journey?
3. What does the author suggest about identity and belonging in a new environment?
4. How does moving to a new place symbolize both hope and uncertainty in the author's life?
5. What did the author learn about the importance of recognizing when to leave a situation?
6. What does the narrator's journey illustrate about the importance of community and connection in recovery? How does the open road symbolize the journey of recovery for the narrator?

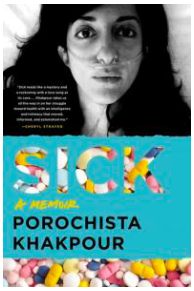
Substance Use and Mental Health

1. What does the author mean by saying 'I keep myself sick'?
2. How does the author illustrate the link between psychological stress and physical illness?
3. How does the author connect her cultural background to her relationship with toxins?
4. What insights can be drawn about mental health and medication management from the narrator's experiences? What role does medication play in the narrator's journey? How does the author's relationship with medication evolve? What pivotal moment led the narrator to reassess her relationship with drugs?
5. What does the narrator's encounter with the bathroom and their contemplation of self-harm indicate about their mental state?
6. What does the narrator's experience with sleep and medications reveal about their mental health journey?

Health System

1. What physical symptoms did the author experience that indicated something was wrong with her health?
2. How does the author depict the healthcare system's response to her condition?
3. How does the narrator's visit to doctors convey the complexities of understanding illness?
4. How did the doctor's response in the ER differ from the author's previous experiences with
5. healthcare?
6. How does the author's understanding of her health issues evolve throughout her journey, especially regarding Lyme disease? What insight does the author share about the healthcare system and access to treatment for Lyme disease?

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7. Why is being seen and acknowledged by loved ones important for someone with a chronic illness? Why do you think some people react dismissively to chronic illness?
8. How did the author's cultural background affect her experience with illness and support? What does the author imply about societal perceptions of health and wealth?
9. What internal conflict does the author experience regarding her health and lifestyle choices?
10. How does the author illustrate her rebellion against traditional health recommendations?

Healing

1. What role does healing play in the narrative? In what ways does the narrator's story emphasize the importance of self-awareness in the healing process?
2. What does the experience of having anxiety and chronic illness teach us about vulnerability?
3. What lessons about resilience can be drawn from the author's experience?
4. What is the importance of experiencing and articulating one's pain? How can engaging with stories during tough times serve as a source of hope?
5. How does the author portray the importance of nature and the outdoors in her recovery and relationship dynamics?
6. What role does the environment, particularly the issue of black mold, play in the narrator's health crisis?
7. How do running and yoga serve the narrator in their time of distress?
8. How does the author connect the concept of 'setting' to the experience of chronic illness and PTSD?
9. What evidence does the author present about the relationship between chronic illness and trauma, particularly for women?

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