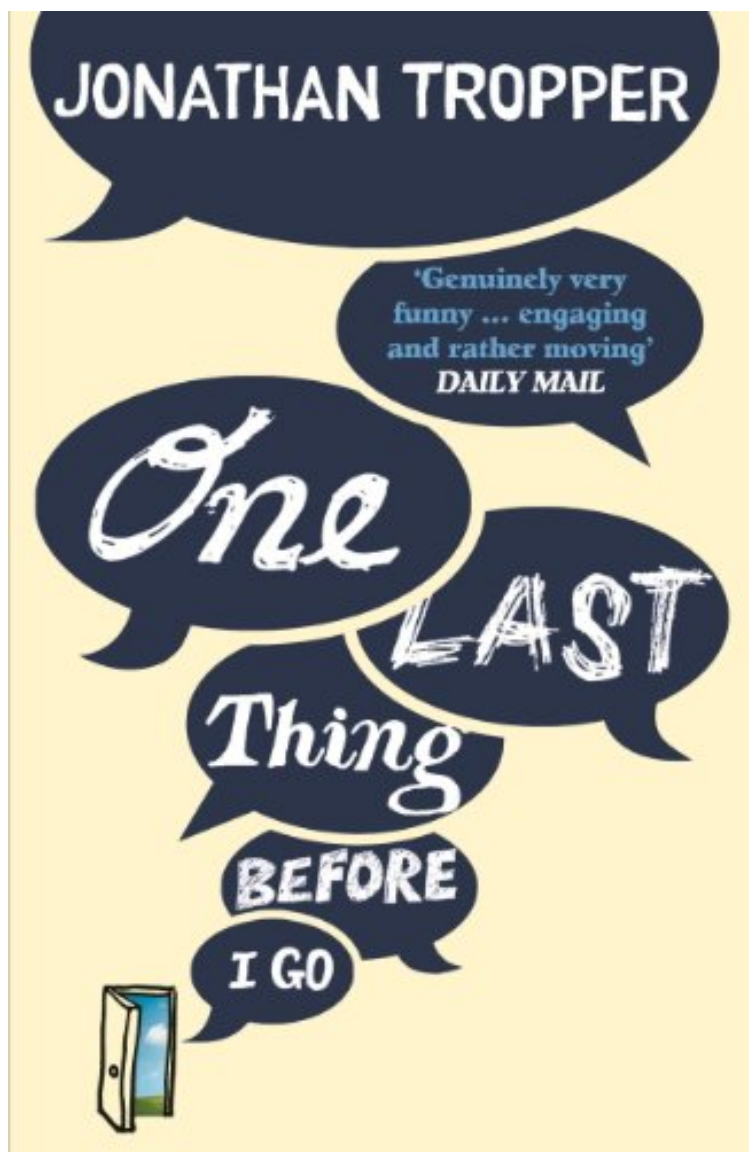


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# One Last Thing Before I Go (English Edition)



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFor fans of David Nicholls, a brilliantly funny and touching new novel from the bestselling author of HOW TO TALK TO A WIDOWER, selected for the Richard and Judy Book Club.Meet Silver. Forty-four, divorced and living alone. His once celebrated music career is now a faded memory and his ex-wife is about to marry another man. The only good thing in Silver's life is his Princeton-bound teenage daughter, Casey - and she would probably say the exact opposite about him. So in Silver's opinion, things could be going better ... a lot better.Then Casey drops a bombshell: she's pregnant. Yes, it was her first time, and, no, she hasn't told her mom. Silver knows things have got to change, and when he discovers he has a fatal heart condition that means he could drop dead at any minute, he decides it's time to

make a list: 1. Be a better father 2. Be a better man 3. Fall in love 4. Die

But the question is, can Silver rebuild his life, regain the respect of his family, and be there for Casey when she needs him most, or has he left it all too late?

Chapter 1 This is Tuesday, just under three weeks before his wife will be getting married, and a few days before Silver will tentatively decide that life isn't necessarily worth living when you've been doing it as poorly as he has. It is seven years and four months or so since Denise divorced him for a host of valid reasons, and roughly eight years since his band, the Bent Daisies, released its only album and became rock stars overnight on the strength of their solitary hit, *Rest in Pieces*. For one blessed summer it seemed as if the entire world was singing that song. And then they went, and then he couldn't get arrested although, actually, Silver did get arrested twice; one DUI and once for solicitation, and he would tell you about it if he could, but he was, at best, fuzzy about the details back then, and now it's like an oral history long forgotten. Then, with a little back-channel manipulation from the record label, Pat McReedy, their lead singer, quit the band to launch his now epic solo career, dropping Danny (bass), Ray (lead guitar), and Silver (drums) back home in Elms-brook to stare down the barrel of the rest of their painfully unglamorous lives. With nowhere else to go, Silver went back home to discover that Denise had already changed the locks and retained counsel. But that was then, and this is Tuesday, eight years and countless mistakes later. Silver is forty-four years old, if you can believe it, out of shape, and depressed although he doesn't know if you call it depression when you have good reason to be; maybe then you're simply sad, or lonely, or just painfully aware, on a daily basis, of all the things you can never get back. And, this being Tuesday, Silver and Jack are on their way to jerk off. Is that a wedding ring? They are speeding down the highway in Jack's ten-year-old BMW convertible when Jack notices the band on Silver's finger. Jack is blasting hip-hop music and pretending to know the words, while Silver absently taps along on his knees to the automated beat. They are the same age, seasoned veterans of epically bad decisions and poor follow-through. He forgot to take off the ring. God only knows how long he's been wearing it. Hours? Days, maybe. His finger still bears the groove from when he was married, and whenever he slips it on, it slides into place like a machined part, and he forgets about it. Chagrined, he pulls it off his finger and sticks it into his pocket, to jingle around with his other loose change. What the fuck, Silver? Jack says. He has to shout to be heard above the din of the interstate, the hip-hop, and the incessant ringing in Silver's ears. Silver suffers from a moderate to severe case of tinnitus. There is no cure and, as far as he knows, no one is running any triathlons to raise awareness or fund research. He suffers alone. I was just playing with it. Is that your actual wedding band? As opposed to what? I don't know, I thought maybe you went out and bought one. Why the hell would I buy a wedding ring? Why would you wear your old one, ten years after your divorce? Seven years. Sorry. Seven years. I stand corrected. Jack flashes him a sly little smile, the one that says I know you better than you know yourself, the one that generally makes Silver want to plunge his index finger through Jack's eye socket, around the back of his nose, and out the other eye, creating an effective handle with which to rip his face off. Something wrong there, Silver? What could be wrong? I'm a forty-four-year-old man on my way to masturbate into a cup for seventy-five dollars. Living the dream. Jack grins. Easiest money you'll ever make. A good amount of his time with Jack is spent wondering whether Jack actually believes his own particular brand of bullshit. They are two middle-aged divorced men, their friendship born of mutual inconvenience, because they happened to live on the same floor of the Versailles. Jack thinks Silver is depressed and Silver thinks Jack is an idiot and, at any given moment, both of them are generally right. They are on their way to a satellite office of the Blecher-Royal Medical Research Facility, where they will check in, submit to the prick of a blood test, then submit their own pricks to a quick, sterile flurry of self-abuse and gracelessly come into specimen jars. They will accomplish this without the aid of any chemical lubricants, in the name of science, and for the weekly seventy-five-dollar stipend. The drug trial in which they are enrolled Jack found it online is purported to be a new nonhormonal treatment for low sperm motility. Possible side effects include mood swings; dizziness; and, strangely, decreased libido, a fact the test administrator told them during the twenty-minute orientation without the slightest hint of irony. You don't want to hear about his deposit, about the small room overwhelmed by the liberal spraying of industrial-strength disinfectant, about the weathered porn magazines he won't touch because of all the sticky hands that have already handled them. About the depressing little television on its teetering IKEA stand, and the small stack of DVDs, each case marked with either an H(etero) or a G(ay). Or about how he doesn't sit in the chair or watch the discs, but just kind of stands in the center of the room with his pants around his ankles, calling up the images of girls he slept with back when he was young enough to be wholly consumed by a deep, passionate kiss, the sight of a freshly unsheathed breast, the smoky half-closed eyes of a girl in heat, looking up at you as she hungrily takes you in below. But as always, just before his ejaculate hits the bottom of the

specimen cup with a soft plastic burp, no matter how determined he is to avoid it, he sees Denise, frowning at him with her customary scorn, depleting the moment of whatever lingering molecular pleasure it may have retained. A last sad grunt and squeeze, the cold damp of the baby wipe, and then the warmth of his semen against his fingertips through the thin plastic walls of the cup, more alive than anything coming out of him has any right to feel.

Chapter 2 Out in the lobby, Jack, already finished, is chatting up the receptionist. She isn't his typemousy-looking with a light smattering of adult acne across the edge of her jaw but Jack likes to stay sharp. You never know who might be in the market for a house. Jack is a real-estate agent, always with a business card tucked between two fingers, slipping it into your hand like a reverse pickpocket before you even realize he's done it. He carries himself with the cocky swagger of someone who is always closing, whether he's trying to talk someone into bed or a center-hall colonial. In fact, he is somewhat famous for often accomplishing both simultaneously. This went on back when he was still married, so it was only a matter of time, really. There was a Puerto Rican bartender. She showed up to his house at dinnertime, cursing at him in Spanish. His wife went after him, first with a meat tenderizer, and then with a team of lawyers from her father's white-shoe law firm. There he is! Jack says, announcing Silver's presence to the entire office. What, did you have to buy yourself dinner first? I was about to send Vicki here in to expedite things. Vicki smiles, embarrassed, maybe even offended, but somehow flattered too. That is Jack's gift. Im fine. He hands Vicki his deposit without making eye contact, she hands him his check, and just like that, he has sold his seed. The cup is opaque, but still, the act of handing your sperm to a woman is one of those things that will never stop feeling creepy. Good job, Jack says, slapping his back as they step out of the office into the afternoon sun. This is my life, Silver thinks to himself, and, as always, tries like hell not to panic. Mistakes have been made. It's hard to know where to start. Things have been a mess for so many years that trying to pin down a starting point is like trying to figure out where your skin starts. All you can ever really know is that it's wrapped around you, sometimes a little tighter than you'd like. But clearly there have been some mistakes. Bad ones. You can tell that just by looking at him. For one thing, he has gotten fat. Not obese, not People magazine fat, but still. He has been on an extended hiatus from any kind of physical fitness. Do they even say physical fitness anymore? He isn't sure. He hasn't quite fallen apart yet, but the cracks are fast becoming fissures: an increasingly pronounced gut, incipient jowls, and the strategic application of baby powder in the warmer seasons to avoid chafing. So as not to smell like baby powder, he uses excessive amounts of deodorant and generous helpings of Eternity, by Calvin Klein. He applies the cologne by spraying it into the air and then walking through the vapor, like he saw his mother do when he was a boy. So, yeah, now he's the fat guy who smells like baby powder and too much cologne, who sits alone in Manny's Famous Pizza leaving greasy fingerprints all over the book he isn't actually reading while blotting the oil off his poorly shaved chin with a napkin, keeping an eye on all the pretty girls who come in. You could be excused for thinking he is somewhat pathetic. Or maybe a pedophile. Which is why lately he has gotten into the habit of wearing his old wedding band. Not because he misses Denise—he doesn't at all, which is maybe a sad confirmation of what she always suspected about his overall emotional wherewithal—but because that gold band around his finger alters the whole picture, confers upon him some faint glimmer of respectability. It implies that he goes home to someone who finds redeeming qualities in him, who is ostensibly not averse to at least occasional physical contact with him, and that makes all of his obvious flaws seem more superficial, less ingrained. It could complicate things if he happens to strike up a conversation with an attractive woman, but the women he tends to engage these days are not, generally speaking, the sort who are going to blanch at a wedding band.

Chapter 3 His habit is to while away the depressing afterglow of his sperm deposit at The Last Page, a large independent bookstore in the quiet downtown area of Elmsbrook. He generally sits in the store's small caf, reading Rolling Stone and drinking a large soda, replenishing his fluids while he waits. Lily arrives at a quarter to three, her long hair haphazardly tied into a loose ponytail knot that is already coming undone, blondish wisps spilling out and trailing her like a comet's tail. Her hair has been dyed different shades of blond for so long that it has lost all genetic memory, so that her visible roots aren't so much dark as confused. Her black tights are tucked into black cowboy boots, and her lean torso swims in a loose-fitting cardigan the color of dirt. She wears her guitar on her back, neck up, in a soft black case, like a ninja sword. Silver watches her closely from his perch in the caf. Imperfections abound: her prominent forehead, her small fighter's nose, a misaligned lateral tooth. But the overall package has a pleasing composition to it, a fractured beauty that lingers for him even after she has moved past him into the Children's Books section. He loves her as much as any man can love a woman he's never spoken to, which is significantly more than you'd think. It's a pure love, epic in its own way. If the situation called for it, he'd step

in front of a speeding bus for her. The only other person he would ever do that for is Casey, his daughter, whom he imagines might actually enjoy the spectacle. In eighteen years, he hasn't exactly proven himself in the father department. The sad truth is, dying for Casey might be his only shot at redemption, and even then he doesn't think it would help his case very much. Any idiot can die, right? He moves furtively through the aisles of books like a shoplifter. He can already hear the soft sounds of Lily's guitar, punctuated by the occasional hiss of the espresso machine in the bookstore's caf. She plays this gig twice a week, for the handful of three- and four-year-olds who sit in a small circle around her low styrene chair, sipping at their juice boxes and singing along while the assorted mix of nannies and au pairs chat softly amongst themselves in island dialects. Silver stands in the Self-Help aisle, where he can listen without alarming anyone. Thirty Days to a Flat Stomach, Eating Your Way to a Thinner You, The Self-Esteem Workbook a billion-dollar industry built on the questionable notion that people can be fixed. He pretends to browse while he watches Lily play. Her whole body moves as she strums, her light hair falling over her face like a curtain, and then she looks up at the kids and starts to sing. The cat came back / the very next day / The cat came back / we thought he was a goner / but the cat came back / He just wouldn't stay, away away away yeah yeah . . . There is no way to explain this. It's an inane kids song. And her thin voice wavers on the high notes and occasionally runs flat. But she sings with passion, like it's a raw and earnest love song, her deepest pain set to music. The ridiculous song is much too small to contain her energy, and so it spills over, filling the room, filling him. The kids sing along tunelessly with the chorus they've been here before but her voice rises above them and floats around the ceiling fans of this scrappy little bookstore still clinging fiercely to life in the digital age. He can feel the familiar lump forming in his throat, the paradoxical sense of having lost something he never had. By the time she hits the third verse he is undone. The man around the corner swore he'd shoot the cat on sight / He loaded up his shotgun with nails and dynamite / He waited and he waited for the cat to come around / Ninety-seven pieces of the man was all they found . . . / But the cat came back . . . Every so often, clarity washes over him in a wave, drenching him with realizations and reminders of what he's lost and who he has turned out to be. He lurks there, beyond help in the Self-Help section, a middle-aged mess of a man with restless legs, ringing ears, and an aching heart, fighting back the tears elicited by a woman he's never met singing her heart out about the attempted murder of a cat. The way he sees it, he's teetering on that edge. By his estimation, he's got maybe one last shot at any kind of real and lasting love, and that's before you take into account his warped and deeply compromised faculty for it to begin with. He has loved more women than any man should. He doesn't so much fall in love as dive-bomb it like a kamikaze pilot, fearless and at full throttle. He used to look at this propensity as a gift, then a curse, and now understands it to be just another way in which he is broken. He's been alone for a long time now, more than seven years. At some point, loneliness becomes less a condition than a habit. In time, you stop looking at your phone wondering why you can't think of anyone to call, stop getting your hair cut, stop working out, stop thinking that tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life. Because tomorrow is today, and today is yesterday, and yesterday beat the shit out of you and brought you to your knees. The only way to stay sane is to stop hoping for something better. But there's still something in him, a small pocket of insurgency that hasn't fully conceded. There's a part of him that still believes she's out there, the woman who will see the man behind this shifting, splitting land mass, the woman who knows exactly what to do with the hopeless paradox of a kamikaze lover like him. And he knows that's the part of him that has to finish dying if he's ever going to sleep soundly again. The first girl he ever loved was Sofie Kinslehour. She had a pixie haircut and a pink, horn-shaped birthmark on her neck, and the first time they kissed, she let out a small moan that conveyed a world of carnality he had only vaguely intuited up to that point. They were sixteen years old, in a dark corner of the parking lot behind the high school there was a game of some kind going on and when she moaned, he heard himself answer in kind, like she'd woken something up in him he didn't know was there. She pressed the full length of herself against him, opening her mouth to accept his tongue. For the next few weeks, she occupied him like a conquering army. At home he tugged on himself so furiously and so often that at one point he feared real and lasting damage. When they were together they kissed themselves raw, until their lips were swollen, flaking husks, their tongues charley-horsed. And then, one day, it ended. He doesn't remember the salient points, but statistical evidence and the cold spasm of regret in his belly whenever he thinks about it assure him that it was he who blinked first, who found a random flaw in her to cling to until it swallowed him whole. Chapter 4 Its summer, the air thick with that virulent East Coast humidity that shortens your breath and dampens the back of your shirt as soon as you step outside. He is sitting with Jack and Oliver in their usual chairs by the Versailles pool, trying, like everyone else, to look

like he isnt looking at the college girls.Or maybe they are college women? He doesnt know. They defy categorization, this gaggle of bronzed, bikinied students, stretched taut like pulled taffy on lounge chairs near the deep end of the pool. He is sitting in his usual spot between Jack and Oliver, catty-corner to the girls, pretending to read a magazine. All around the pool, other men sit, alone and in clusters, and they are all the same, all sad and depleted, abusing themselves with stolen glances at forbidden fruit.Will you look at those girls, Jack says, probably for the third time. Silver tends to tune him out.They dont need him to tell them. They are men after allnot the men they once might have been, and not the men they maybe could bebut men, after a fashion. And these girls, these women . . . well, they glisten with nubile perfection under their SPF 15, baking their soft, unblemished skin to a honeyed glaze as they read from textbooks and tabloid magazines, tap away at texting devices encased in pink and red rubber, or listen to their iPods, their bare, manicured feet twitching to the music. They do that thing with their lips that girls do when they feel the music, puckering their lips, kind of kissing the air as their heads bob up and down.The pool is supposed to be exclusively for residents of the Versailles, an efficiency hotel just off the interstate, but the girls come daily as Jacks guests, and no one ever complains. They come from Hudson College, situated just four blocks away on the other side of Route 9. The semester is just starting up again, and the proximity of so many young, ripe women to a place like the Versailles is like keeping your matches and blasting caps in the same drawer.Yes, he is living in an efficiency hotel. Mistakes.The Versailles, a drab monolith that rises like a tombstone fourteen stories above the sailors knot of parkways and connecting ramps that feed into I-95, is the only apartment building within the Elmsbrook city limits. Years ago, it was converted into a residential hotel, where rooms can be rented at a weekly or monthly rate. As such, it has become the inevitable destination of all the sad, damaged men of Elmsbrook, banished from their homes in the wake of disintegrating marriages. An aura of failure hangs over the placemiddle-aged men living on their own in small, sparsely furnished, subdivided hotel rooms. Hes living in the Versailles, now, people say, and everyone knows exactly what they mean. It is that building. The pool, the gym, the concierge, the plush lobby furniture; none of these amenities can obscure the fact that this is a place where broken men come to lick their wounds as the battles over marital assets and custody arrangements are slowly lost at a rate of roughly six-fifty an hour plus expenses.In the framed architectural drawing that still hangs in the lobby, the building is rendered in a soft white that glints in the sun, surrounded by emerald lawns and a lush canopy of ash and oak trees. But the zoning board required a larger parking lot, so the lawn and trees and the little kids flying their red and yellow kites never made it off the drawing board, and the diesel exhaust rising off the nearby expressways has gradually turned the Versailles into a vertical slab the color of a thunderhead. Its hard to fathom the logic of displaying this picture of the building in all its unrealized splendor, someones idea of a cruel joke, maybe, a blunt metaphor designed to effect a kind of subliminal torture on the residents.Back when Silver was married, the building, in better shape then, was still something of a punch line, fatuously tacked onto the end of arguments. If Im so horrible, why dont you just move out? Im sure theres a vacancy at the Versailles . . . Like that. Cut to seven years later and here he is, the sum total of his existence confined to a two-bedroom efficiency eight floors up, alongside his brothers in arms, the men exiled from Elmsbrooks tree-lined residential streets, from the carpeted and curtained warmth of solid, creaking Tudors and colonials, stripped of marriage and family but still paying for it in ways large and small. Paying the mortgages on houses in which they are no longer welcome, paying for their ex-wives new wardrobes and haircuts and facials and body waxings and gym memberships, all to tone, smooth, and buff bodies that they no longer get to touch, paying for the personal trainers who are probably fucking their wives and for their wives lawyers who are fucking them, and for their own lawyers who seem powerless to do anything about any of it except explain in lay terms exactly how theyve been fucked. Paying for Little League and soccer and piano lessons and ice-skating and karate and Gap Kids and private school and speech therapy and tutoring and after-school programs and health insurance. Standing in the lobby, you can feel the building vibrating with the collected agitation of desperate men living in a constant state of subdued panic, in a permanent frazzle, avoiding bank statements, selling off dwindling assets, knowing that they can only keep this colossal mess aloft for so long before the whole thing comes crashing down in a miasma of courtroom vitriol and bankruptcy.And so the men of the Versailles, brothers in disgrace, reach out to one another in the invisible ways that men do, and small, fragile friendships of convenience form like desert moss. They bitch and moan to sympathetic ears, preaching to the choir about the courts, the antiquated laws, the goddamn fucking lawyers, and this new, enforced, seemingly insurmountable poverty in which they have all landed. And when they arent bitching, they try like hell to believe that this isnt a permanent state of

affairs, that they can and will find love again, that they wont die alone, that they will have some version of sex in the near future. But in the meantime, they will mope, drink to excess, and stare at women of an inappropriate age, searching for the silver lining, wondering when the perks will finally kick in.\*\*\*Which brings us back to the college girls. I mean, just look at them, would you, Jack says. Jack is handsome in a manner that allows him to get away with this unabashed leering. He is tall and slim, built for shirtless lounging, with dark, wiry hair and the dimpled chin of a superhero. He and Silver had been casual acquaintances in their old lives, part of a loosely associated ring of husbands and fathers connected less by genuine friendship than by the friendship of their wives. And now they are connected by their absence. No one was happier about Silvers divorce than Jack, who practically did a jig right there in the lobby when he took up residence in the Versailles. You look at them, Oliver grumbles from beneath the crumpled baseball cap resting on his face. Im napping here. Oliver is in his late fifties, tall and beefy with loosening skin, tired eyes, and an ocean of whiskey under his belt. He is one of the few men who doesnt have to live there; he is rich enough to live anywhere, really, but he likes the camaraderie. He has been married count em three times, has grown children who dont speak to him, grandchildren he has never met. Oliver is fourteen years older than Silver, and Jack is an oversexed misogynist, but somehow, in a way he couldnt retrace if he tried, they have wordlessly become a unit. And here they lie, every day baking in the sun: Jack, long and lean, only now beginning to lose some of the definition in his abs and chest. Silver, thickened everywhere, like an aging baseball pitcher, and then Oliver, long gone to seed, his sagging beer gut rounding him out into something vaguely pear-shaped. Jack and Oliver are like Before and After pictures, and he is the softening middle stage, the moment it all went wrong. Sure, theres the obvious, Jack says, ignoring Oliver. The anatomical advantages go without saying. But go deeper. Look at their eyes, the way they move, the way they laugh. Theyre brimming with this . . . unspoiled sexuality. They still love men. Theyre at least a thousand fucks away from the bitter, cynical women they all eventually become. Or one night with you. Ah, fuck you, Oliver. Theyre kind of young for you, arent they? Silver says. Fuck no, Jack says. Who do you think is going to gratify these girls, college boys? Think back to when you were twenty. Sure, you were a walking hard-on, but were you any good? Did you really know how to please a woman? Did you even care to? No, all you knew was where to stick it, and nine out of ten times, you were finished before shed even gotten started. Silver thinks of a girl, he cant remember her name, lying beneath him in the sweaty confines of her cramped dorm single, her wide eyes looking up at him with unrestrained desire, and he feels something hes become accustomed to lately, a dull, humming grief for all the things he can never get back. Forget what you think you know. Jack is gathering momentum now, which is never a good thing. These are not the girls you and I went to college with. This is an evolved species. They love sex. They love it and they want it, and they feel its their inalienable right to have it. These girls are feminists, God bless em. Will you quit speechifying? Oliver says. Im trying to relax over here. Come on, Oliver, you know youd take any one of these girls. A bottle of wine, a couple of Viagra, youre good to go. Oliver pulls the cap off his face and squints at Jack. But would any one of them take me? What are you talking about? Youre a handsome man. I am old and fat, and I survive by knowing my role in the jungle. And whats that? The rich old toad who pays to occasionally have his cock munched, Oliver says, pulling his cap back over his face. And right at that moment, Silver thinks, there is something vaguely toad-like about him. The girls stretch and roll on their chairs, expertly opening the clasps on their bikini tops to avoid tan lines. They swing their legs, they rub lotion into their cleavages, lick their lips, play with their long hair. Jack lifts his Ray-Bans to squint at them, then laughs at the wonder of it all. God in heaven, he says. Oliver farts, long and high, like air escaping from a pinched balloon. Christ, Oliver, take a pill, Jack said. This is what passes for his friends these days. They are still sitting there, two hours later, when Casey shows up. The sun is high above them, the smell of tanning oil sizzling on the skin of the college girls wafting across the pool to tease their senses. Heard from a certain vantage point, the tractor-trailers thundering down the interstate can sound like the pounding surf. Silver is, as he so often seems to be these days, adrift in a hazy fog of memory, fantasy, and regret. Silver. And maybe, on his better days, the faintest glimmer of hope. Silver! Casey is walking purposefully toward him, in shorts and a breezy halter top, her almond-colored hair pouring down her back and billowing slightly in the faint summer breeze. As she gets closer, he can see that her face is lightly dusted with a horse-shoe-shaped constellation of freckles. Jack grunts, making a big show of not checking out his friends daughter. Hey there, Casey says with that jaded nonchalance she reserves exclusively for him. As always, in the first instant he sees her, he can feel his heart suddenly shut down, the way you do in those first moments after impact, or, he supposes, when youre drowning. Love or panic. The two have always been fairly indistinguishable to him. Hey, Casey. He

sits up in his lounge chair, suddenly self-conscious of his rolling gut, his unshaved face, the haircut he's been meaning to get. What are you doing here? She smiles as if his question has triggered a private joke. What indeed? It will surprise no one to learn that he has not been anyone's idea of a model father. In the seven years since his divorce he has missed, by design or neglect, more than his share of birthdays, recitals, varsity games, and more dinner dates than he dares to recall. His relationship with Casey gradually evolved from playful to strained to distant, and once puberty had had its way with her, her once habitual forgiveness became somewhat more elusive. He knows this is all his fault, knows he deserves far more contempt from her than she is capable of, but still, there's something about hearing your little girl look down her nose at you and say What indeed? that makes you feel fractured beyond repair. Casey looks them over, and he can see them through her eyes; Jack, the aging lothario, coasting on a witless charm that started to fade sometime in the late 90s; Oliver, doughy and dour and old enough to be her grandfather; and himself, sweating through an extra-large T-shirt commemorating a band that stopped being cool before she was born. Her eyes briefly flit over to the college girls, then back to them with a cynical gleam and they are busted for being the sad, drooping ball sacks that they are. It's hard to get up smoothly while simultaneously straddling a lounge chair and sucking in your gut. He achieves verticality, but only after some graceless jostling with inertia, and somehow this simple effort leaves him flushed and breathless. The Versailles has a decent gym, and with all the time on his hands, you'd think he'd have wandered in there by now. He kisses her cheek. She doesn't cringe outwardly and he is ridiculously overjoyed. Look at you, Jack says to her. How old are you these days? Eighteen. Wow, that makes me feel old. No, I think it's probably your age that's doing that. Shazam! Jack says. He does that sometimes. They don't know why. Casey rolls her eyes, essentially negating Jack's existence, and looks at Silver. I need to talk to you. Is everything OK? She appears to contemplate that for a moment. Everything is peachy. You want to go sit by the cabanas? he says. Sure. As she walks ahead of him, he catches a glimpse of color, a flash of red on her shoulder. What's that? It's just a rose, she says defensively. As far as tattoos go, it's fairly restrained; a bloodred rose, with a single leaf, tattooed onto her scapula. Even shitty fathers can cry from something like that. But he has long since squandered any rights to paternal indignation, so he figures he might as well score a point. Nice. Casey smiles wryly, on to him. You should see the one on my ass. Jesus. Focus, Silver. We've got bigger fish to fry. Such as? She turns to face him, still smirking, but her eyes are wide and he can see her trembling. Such as, she says, I'm pregnant. There are moments when you can literally feel the planet spinning beneath you, so much so that you instinctively need to hold on to something. He gently grabs Casey's arm and looks into her eyes and they stand there, with the world coming apart around them, both of them waiting to see what it is that he is going to say. Revue de presse Genuinely very funny, as well as engaging and rather moving (DAILY MAIL) Witty story of Silver, a lonely middle-aged ex-rockstar with a pregnant teenage daughter. (HEAT) Another tear-jerker that's told with great wit, this time written from a bloke's point of view. Jonathan has been a pick on the Richard and Judy Book Club before, and this is a nicely observed poignant take on learning to be a man and a father before time runs out. (STAR magazine) Tropper is a master of the mid-life male coming-of-age story, and his latest is full of the charm and wit his readers cherish (BOOKLIST) It's amazing what can happen in the hands of the casually brilliant author. . . . Read and weep with laughter (ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY) 'A poignant story about facing death and celebrating life, even when things seem well beyond repair' (THE DAILY BEAST) 'Eminently quotable, hilariously funny, and emotionally draining, this arresting tour de force will entertain well after the book is done' (LIBRARY JOURNAL) 'A tender and unexpectedly hilarious take on the messiness of family life' (PEOPLE) Very well-observed . . . fabulously entertaining (THE TIMES on THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU) Consistently witty, often insightful and full of strong and engaging characters (DAILY TELEGRAPH on HOW TO TALK TO A WIDOWER) Sad, funny, brilliant (EVENING HERALD on HOW TO TALK TO A WIDOWER) 'Darkly entertaining . . . fast and fresh' (NEW YORK TIMES on HOW TO TALK TO A WIDOWER)