

# why gabrielle zevin loves books



I love the sensual pleasures of books. I love paper. I love how paper feels. I love that it can cut you. I love bookstores. I love overstuffed chairs and pots of tea. I love browsing. I love jackets. I love beautiful, simple design, but I also love gaudy, expensive jackets with lots of effects. I hold a place in my heart for the bad jackets, too. The plain, the homely, the unloved. *Poor you, my darlings, what a hard life you have ahead of you.* When I read the jacket copy and an optimistic editor has written, that a book is “unforgettable and unputdownable and life-changing,” every time I want to believe that it’s true. I love newsprint. I love the scent of newsprint. I love bookmarks. I love the edges of pages. Gold-leaf, deckle, it doesn’t matter. I love French flaps. I

love stamps and endpapers. I love fonts. I love leather bound editions. I love chatty bookstore employees. I love shelf talkers. I love newspaper book reviews. I love used books. I love writing in the margins. I love inscriptions: *To A, I’ll Love You Forever, W.* Only it wasn’t forever, because they wouldn’t have given the book away if it had been. I love new books. I love giving new books. I love receiving a new book that I know someone has picked out just for me, *just because*, just because I would love it. I love mass-market paperbacks at drugstores with their scent of tobacco and nail polish and gum. I love books from the remainder pile. I love picking up a book I’ve never heard of by an author I don’t know, and finding a new favorite. I love overpriced art monographs and overhyped first novels and overstuffed Dickensian sagas. When I was in my twenties and broke, I’d buy books before food. A meal will sustain you for a couple of hours, but a good book will sustain you for life. When I was in my teens, my boyfriend and I gave each other the same book for Christmas: *The Collected Short Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*. Reader, I am with him still.

Anya Balanchine, the heroine of my new book *All These Things I’ve Done*, lives in a world without paper books. I don’t think this makes her world a dystopia, but I do think it’s a tragedy. Call me old-fashioned.