

In my grandfather's house, there is a room at the far back, just beyond the mini bar, that is, to me, the most beautiful room in the world. The walls are the gentle yellow of early spring sunshine. A fireplace in the corner is filled with real pine logs that are ready to be set ablaze. Above them is a painting of the ocean that is more a window than art—the waves iridescent with the setting sun. Two glass doors open up to a porch which overlooks the Chattahoochee River. A plush couch is pressed against the wall, its cushioning so soft that sitting in it is sinking into almost immovable comfort. There is even a secret door that leads to the master bedroom just beyond the arm of the sofa. All of this, however, pales in comparison to the books.

These are the books from Franklin Library's list of the 100 Greatest Books of all time (as of 1984, anyway). Aristotle's *Politics* is nestled next to Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*. These books seem as if they were volumes extracted from fairytales. They are bound in real leather, in rich reds and golds, the royals of the book world. Their pages are shimmering gilded edges and each copy comes with a booklet, detailing why this particular piece of literature was chosen, giving each a sense of irreplaceable importance. The most influential books of our history line my grandfather's shelves.

Yet, when I asked my Grandfather which book is his favorite he told me he could not say. He hadn't read all of the books on those shelves. In fact, he'd never read any of the volumes decorating his library. His claim is proven when the spine of the books crack as I carefully extricated them from the shelf and reinforced by his utter bewilderment at the fact that Robert Frost, a poet of all things, could make such a collection. It all seemed like a lurid crime to me. I asked him why he had never taken the volumes down for himself. He told me in words that still ring through my head, "Some books are not meant to be read." He was concerned about the ruination that came with human handling of such novels. The ripped pages, the food stains, the folded corners and the other terrors that haunt all books. Looking at the beautiful spines of those volumes I understand his fear. But never will I agree with it. You see, there is nothing more beautiful to me than a well-worn book.

I love ruined books. I love them because the story of the reader is captured on those wrinkled pages.

I love the battle scene that is smeared with curry where the reader, rapt in the gory pages, let her spoon slip.

I love the coffee stain on the corner of page 507, where the cute barista acted as a tether to the real world, forcing her to put down the book for a cup of conversation.

I love the torn book jacket when the horror of the character's plight forced her to throw the book across the room.

I love the folded page corner where her tears stained the lines as she read.

I love the water-wrinkled edges where her damp fingers creased the pages as she bathed, unable to pause even for mandatory business of cleanliness.

I love ruined books.

Books are not meant to lie pristine and untouched on shelves. They are meant to be handled, to be loved and read and understood. Books already imbued with their own fantastic tales, deserve to be treated in the stories of their handlers just as much as of their authors. Books have so many stories to tell and lessons to teach that I believe that it is absolute folly to leave them on the shelves. It is willful ignorance and a disservice to oneself to be sure. However, the absolute truth of the matter is that books deserve stories just as much as we do.

The books in my grandfather's library, along with the painting hanging over the fireplace, are the only things I have asked to inherit from him (something he likes to tease me about, given the countless priceless pieces of silver and painted china that decorate his house). That is all I want from him because those books deserve to be read, to have new stories crinkled onto their yellowing pages. Now, just to be clear, I will take extra special care of these

books when I do inherit them. Never will they be subjected to the perils of food stains, or tea marks, much less the horror of the battles at the bottom of my violent book bags. But they will be read. Over and over and over again.