

ONE MOVIE A DAY KEEPS THE DOCTOR AWAY IS A DO-BOOK. IT WORKS IN TWO WAYS.

First, there are 12 lists of 10 films, each one built around one of life's challenges: love, beauty, friendship, slowing down, letting go, or becoming yourself. They are films you can turn to whenever life calls for them.

Second, there are 52 films, all explored in greater detail, one by one. Each comes with a reflection and a movie prescription: something small that you can actually do yourself with what you've just seen. It's an experiment to try out in your own life and a new way to look at the film, and to see where it takes you.

You can return to these films again and again. Notice what they do to you, how they hit differently the second time, and how their meaning shifts as your life shifts with them.

This book asks you to treat films as companions. Their characters will be your friends, the kind you learn from just by watching them closely. Some of them will be so different from you and others will be more like you than you realise.

Every great film already knows something about you. Go find out what that might be.

LE FABULEUX DESTIN
D'AMÉLIE POULAIN

Jean-Pierre Jeunet
2001



Amélie: [after
describing the whole
street to a blind man]
“Now we’re at the kiosk
by the metro. I’ll leave
you here. Bye!”

USE: indicated for patients who have forgotten that small, invisible acts carry weight. Administer when life feels too large to change and too small to matter.

WARNING: may cause compulsive anonymous generosity, an inexplicable attachment to *crème brûlée*, and the unsettling realisation that you have been watching your own life from a safe distance.

THE INVISIBLE GIFT

We learn who Amélie Poulain is before the story begins. She likes to collect flat stones inside her pockets wherever she can find them, saving them for whenever she happens to pass one of Paris's canals and can skip them across the water. She eats raspberries off her fingertips, one by one. She plunges her hand into a sack of grain at the market just to feel it. She is truly happy when she breaks the hard crust of a *crème brûlée* with a spoon. The film lists her pleasures like a doctor listing symptoms – the small things that make her who she is. Small things that make each of us unlike anyone else. Before you know it, you're thinking of your own.

Then the film moves on.

Amélie is a young woman now, living alone in her first apartment in Montmartre. She works as a waitress in a café more Parisian than Paris itself. One day, the cap of a perfume bottle slips from her hand and rolls across the bathroom floor. It hits the wall. A tile comes loose. She kneels down, curious, and finds a hollow behind it. Inside the hollow is a small metal box, dusty and forgotten: someone's secret treasure chest, from a very long time ago.

She opens it carefully and finds a marble, a tiny plastic cyclist from the Tour de France, a photograph, and a lock of hair inside. Someone's entire childhood, sealed away and left behind – a time capsule. The boy who hid it there must be an old man by now.

She has no name, only a box and the apartment where he once lived. The shy girl who usually watches the world from a distance decides, for once, to walk straight into it and go in search of this mysterious man. She asks neighbours, studies old photographs, and, eventually, finds him. Dominique Bretodeau.

She doesn't ring his doorbell, and she doesn't write him a letter. Instead she arranges things – carefully, invisibly – so that he stumbles upon the box himself, almost by accident, as if the world simply decided to return it to him. She manages to lure him to a telephone booth. And there it is. He can barely believe it. His hands tremble. Fifty years collapse into a handful of objects. He cries, in broad daylight, and quickly looks around. Who did this? Who gave him back this piece of himself, his childhood? No one. Amélie is already gone.

She watches him from a distance, but doesn't wait for him to look up. She quickly turns and walks away, with a smile, a beautiful smile. She has found her life's work.

Amélie understands this without knowing it. She gives and then she leaves. She returns a photo album without revealing who found it. She writes anonymous letters. She moves pieces on a chessboard that isn't hers. Always without signing; always without waiting. A little like the two elves in the old fairy tale, who crept into a poor shoemaker's workshop every night while he slept, and quietly made the most beautiful shoes he had ever seen. Every morning he found them there, perfect and unexplained. He never saw who made them. He never knew who to thank. And that was exactly why the magic worked. Until one night, the shoemaker and his wife stay awake to see who it is. They have to know. They watch in secret, and the next day, out of gratitude, they make small clothes for the elves as a gift. When the elves find them, they dance with joy, and then disappear. They never come back. The magic stops the moment they are seen.

For Amélie, it is exactly the same. She disappears before Bretodeau looks up. She disappears before the gratitude needs a name, not because she is modest, but because she instinctively understands

something most of us forget: that the best feeling doesn't come from being thanked, it comes from the giving itself. Because when you wait to be thanked, your happiness depends on someone else. But when you walk away before they look up, the feeling is entirely yours. No one can take it away.

We find this almost incomprehensible nowadays. Every act leaves a trace; every kindness can be documented, liked, and timestamped. The good deed and its proof now travel together, inseparable. But somewhere between the gesture and the record of the gesture, something gets lost: the very thing Amélie holds on to.

She doesn't want to be seen. She wants to see.

In a world that has almost entirely confused the two, that might be the rarest kind of wisdom there is.

LE FABULEUX DESTIN D'AMÉLIE POULAIN / AMÉLIE CONTENTS

ACTIVE INGREDIENTS INCLUDE: a screenplay by Guillaume Laurant and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. **CONTAINS:** Audrey Tautou as Amélie Poulain, Mathieu Kassovitz as Nino Quincampoix, Rufus as Raphaël Poulain, Serge Merlin as Raymond Dufayel, Maurice Bénichou as Dominique Bretodeau, Jamel Debbouze as Lucien, Dominique Pinon as Joseph, Isabelle Nanty as Georgette, Yolande Moreau as Madeleine Wallace, and Urbain Cancelier as Collignon.

INACTIVE INGREDIENTS INCLUDE: cinematography by Bruno Delbonnel, editing by Hervé Schneid, an original score by Yann Tiersen, and production design by Aline Bonetto. **MANUFACTURED BY:** producers Claudie Ossard and Jean-Marc Deschamps in partnership with Claudie Ossard Productions, UGC, and France 3 Cinéma; distributed by UGC-Fox Distribution.

PRESCRIPTION

Leave a Trace Without a Name

Amélie Poulain lives in Montmartre, watches the world through enormous eyes, and has decided – quietly, stubbornly – to make it a little bit better, without anyone knowing it was her.

This week, you'll do the same:

Choose one person – someone close, or a stranger.

Do something kind for them, small is enough: a note, a gesture, something left where they'll find it.

Don't tell them it was you. Don't tell anyone else either.

At the end of the week, notice what has happened – not in them, but in you.

Amélie watches the man open his box from a distance, but she doesn't wait for him to look up. She's already gone.

1. HOW TO LOVE

Here are ten films about love that you can watch again and again, and they only get better. No sugary romance, just the real thing: love that is awkward, brave, stubborn, alive. Watch them when you are falling in love, when you are losing it, or when you have simply forgotten what it feels like. These films will not teach you how to love perfectly, nobody can, but they will remind you why we keep trying and why we should.

WILD AT HEART – DAVID LYNCH, 1990

USE: take when your love might have become a little boring. Sailor and Lula love each other like the house is on fire – on the run, chain-smoking, and against everyone’s advice. This film restores the conviction that love is not a savings account, it’s a snakeskin jacket and a stolen car. **WARNING:** may cause speeding, loud Elvis impressions, and the urge to call someone ‘peanut’ in public.

LICORICE PIZZA – PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON, 2021

USE: take when you are afraid you’re falling for someone not quite ‘right’ for you. Two people who have no business being together keep running back to each other across the San Fernando Valley. A reminder that love rarely checks your criteria beforehand. It just shows up, badly timed and grinning. **WARNING:** side effects include running through the streets at night and a sudden interest in waterbeds.

BEFORE SUNRISE – RICHARD LINKLATER, 1995

USE: take when you have forgotten that a stranger can change everything. Two people meet on a train, step off in Vienna, and spend one night talking until dawn. There’s no plot, no promised future, just two humans paying total attention to each other. It will remind you of your first holiday romance and how that same reckless openness could breathe new life into the love you have now. **WARNING:** may cause sudden faith in strangers and an urge to get off at the next stop with someone you just met.

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING – PHILIP KAUFMAN, 1988

USE: take when you have confused freedom with never committing. Tomas loves lightly, without weight, without consequence, until life quietly presents the bill. This film asks whether love that costs nothing is worth anything. Prescribed for charming people with one foot out the door. **WARNING:** side effects include rethinking your entire romantic history and a sudden weakness for bowler hats.

I AM LOVE – LUCA GUADAGNINO, 2009

USE: take when you have furnished your life so perfectly that you forgot to live in it. The perfect wife, living in a flawless Milanese villa, discovers desire late in life and it arrives like a demolition crew. Prescribed for anyone whose marriage is envied by everyone except themselves. **WARNING:** may cause you to leave a beautiful house. Prawns will never taste neutral ever again.

HER – SPIKE JONZE, 2013

USE: take when something has started loving you back a little too perfectly. A man falls for an operating system that grows with him, agrees with him, and never gets in his way. What’s that worth, an affection that never contradicts you? It’s becoming less science fiction every year. **WARNING:** may cause you to start talking to your phone in public places. Do not panic when it stops answering.

ABOUT TIME – RICHARD CURTIS, 2013

USE: take when the people you love have become furniture. A man can relive any day he wants and his final discovery is that he no longer needs to. Loving well is mostly a matter of being mindful right from the very first attempt. Best taken with your family in the room. **WARNING:** side effects include hugging people for slightly too long and crying about table tennis.

ARIZONA DREAM – EMIR KUSTURICA, 1993

USE: take when your passion has been set to a sensible temperature. Everyone in this film wants something impossible – a homemade aircraft, movie stardom, a love the world forbids – and they all go after it at full throttle. Nobody here does anything half-heartedly, least of all when it comes to love. **WARNING:** may cause you to hear unexplained accordion music in your head, see the occasional halibut floating past your bedroom window, and fall passionately for someone well outside your own age bracket.

THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT – LISA CHOLODENKO, 2010

USE: take when a long relationship is being tested and you wonder if this is where it ends. A marriage takes a direct hit and both women choose to fight for what they built together. One apology in this film is worth a hundred love scenes. Best consumed with white wine. **WARNING:** side effects include an overdue conversation with your partner, with the severe risk of ending up closer than before.

CALL ME BY YOUR NAME – LUCA GUADAGNINO, 2017

USE: take when you have learned to want things only half-heartedly. One Italian summer, one first love, lived fully, with no protective layer. The pain afterwards is not the price of love, it’s the proof of it. Better than a life spent carefully feeling nothing. **WARNING:** side effects include staring into fireplaces and a complicated relationship with peaches.

THE MATRIX

Lana and Lilly
Wachowski
1999



Morpheus: “This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill – the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill – you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”

USE: for acute episodes of existential numbness, compulsive sleepwalking through daily life, and the persistent inability to question the nature of one’s own reality. Also effective in cases of mild red-pill deficiency.

WARNING: may cause irreversible loss of faith in everyday life. Once you start seeing the water, you cannot unsee it. Do not take if you are currently dependent on the comfort of routine, the illusion of free will, or the belief that your commute has any meaning whatsoever. Not recommended for people who have recently signed a mortgage, started a pension plan, or told themselves things are basically fine.

ON WAKING UP (OR NOT)

One of the most famous commencement speeches ever given begins with two fish. Two young fish are swimming along when they happen to meet an older fish coming the other way. The older fish nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” The two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

David Foster Wallace told this story in 2005, in a speech that has become known as *This Is Water*. Water, in his telling, is everything that surrounds us so completely that we stop noticing it – our assumptions, our default settings, the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, what we deserve, and what is normal. It’s the automatic pilot we live on, day in, day out. His argument is that a real education – a real life – begins the moment you start to see the water. The most essential realities are often the ones we are completely blind to, not because we are ignorant, but because we are swimming in it.

The Matrix is the same story, just with a lot more special effects.

The film is about a man who thinks he is living a normal life. His name is Thomas Anderson. (*) He goes to work, comes home, and stares at his

screen. He is, by all appearances, nobody special. But something feels off, and he can’t say what – a nagging feeling, like a splinter in his mind that he cannot quite reach. Then one day, a stranger named Morpheus finds him and offers him the one thing he wasn’t looking for: the truth. And what he discovers is almost too much to bear: the world he thought was real wasn’t real at all. Everything around him – the streets, the people, his job – was nothing but a simulation, a story written by machines, and he had been living inside it like a fish in a tank, without ever knowing there was a world beyond the glass.

Thomas Anderson is not nobody. Online, he goes by the name Neo, and he is exactly the person Morpheus has been searching for. The real world, it turns out, is nothing like what he thought. Humanity lost a war against artificial intelligence long ago. Humans are kept in pods, their minds connected to a fake world to keep them quiet and under control. What follows is part action film, part philosophy class. But the whole story hinges on a single moment, early on, before any of that: a man sitting across a table with two pills in his hand.

The red pill or the blue pill. That is the choice. And it turns out to be the only choice that matters. The blue pill means staying asleep and going back to the world you know, the one that feels safe and normal, even if it was never real. The red pill means waking up and seeing things as they actually are, even when what you find is frightening or hard to accept. Morpheus doesn’t tell Neo which one to take, he only explains what each one means, because that is the whole point – in the film and in life. No one can make that choice for you.

What both David Foster Wallace and the Wachowskis understood is that the hardest prison to escape is the one you cannot see. Philosophers have known this for centuries: Plato put people in a cave, staring at shadows on a wall and mistaking them for reality. But neither a cave nor a simulation is really the point, the point is the comfort. The reason most people stay asleep is not that waking up is impossible, it’s that waking up is uncomfortable. The water is warm, the routine is familiar, and the blue pill costs you nothing – it only asks you to behave, to follow the script, to obey and keep living a life you might not have written yourself.

The red pill, on the other hand, asks everything. It asks you to look at your life – your habits, your assumptions, and your automatic pilot – and to take responsibility for what you find. That is what makes *The Matrix* more than a science fiction film and *This Is Water* more than a

commencement speech. They are both, at their core, an invitation, not to escape the world, but to finally, honestly, show up in it. And that is also what this film can do, if you let it. It can be the cold water thrown in your face. The question is not whether Neo wakes up, the question is whether you do.

(*) What follows contains plot spoilers – although we do not believe in them. Films are not puzzles but places, and the best ones are never really about the plot, they are about everything else – which is, coincidentally, what the rest of this book is for. You can watch *The Matrix* ten times and find something new every time. We are also reasonably confident you have already seen it. If not: you have been warned.

THE MATRIX CONTENTS

ACTIVE INGREDIENTS INCLUDE: a screenplay by Lilly Wachowski and Lana Wachowski, directed by Lilly Wachowski and Lana Wachowski. **CONTAINS:** Keanu Reeves as Neo/Thomas Anderson, Laurence Fishburne as Morpheus, Carrie-Anne Moss as Trinity, Hugo Weaving as Agent Smith, Joe Pantoliano as Cypher, Gloria Foster as The Oracle, Marcus Chong as Tank, Matt Doran as Mouse, Belinda McClory as Switch, Julian Arahanga as Apoc, and Paul Goddard as Agent Brown.

INACTIVE INGREDIENTS INCLUDE: cinematography by Bill Pope, editing by Zach Staenberg, an original score by Don Davis, and production design by Owen Paterson. **MANUFACTURED BY:** producer Joel Silver in partnership with Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, Groucho II Film Partnership, and Silver Pictures; distributed by Warner Bros.

PRESCRIPTION

Take the Red Pill

This week, pay attention to the moments where you answer ‘fine’ without thinking – not just in words, but in actions. The things you do because they are expected of you, not because you actually want to.

Make a short list. The role you play at family dinners that stopped fitting you years ago. The tradition you keep because no one has ever questioned it. The friend group you show up for out of loyalty more than joy. The version of yourself you perform for certain people, because it's just easier than explaining who you've become.

Pick one, just one.

The next time it comes up, say no, or say something true instead of ‘fine’. Then ask yourself, honestly: what would I do here if no one was watching and nothing was expected of me? What would I do if it was completely up to me? Start there. Do that thing, however small.

Neo's first act of rebellion wasn't fighting an agent. It was refusing to follow the script. Start there.