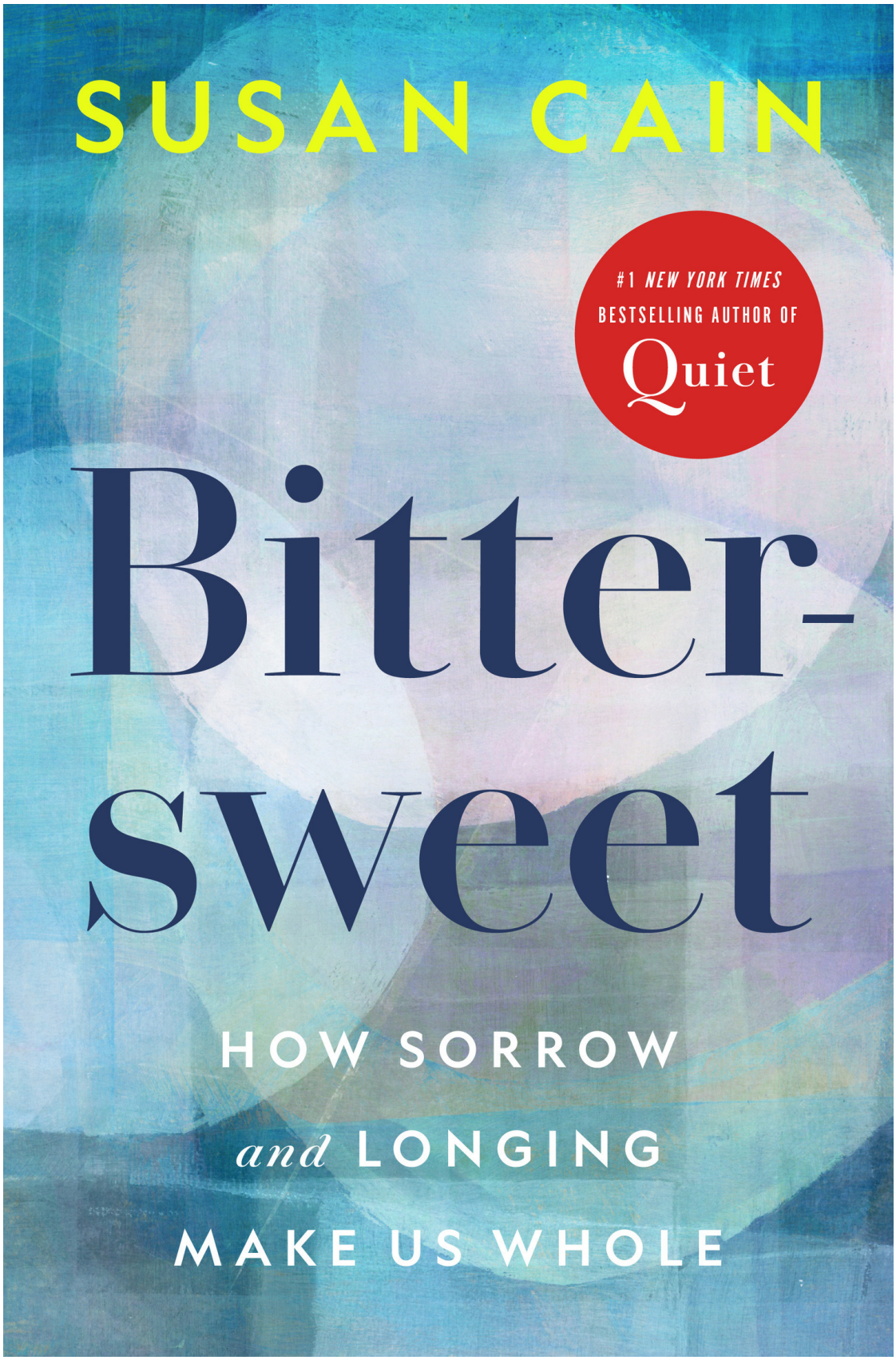
SUSAN CAIN

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *Quiet*

Bitter-sweet

HOW SORROW *and* LONGING MAKE US WHOLE


SUSAN CAIN
#1 NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
Quiet
Bitter-
sweet
HOW SORROW
and LONGING
MAKE US WHOLE

Bittersweet

HOW SORROW AND LONGING MAKE US WHOLE

SUSAN CAIN

CROWN
NEW YORK

Published in the United States by Crown, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

CROWN and the Crown colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
Names: Cain, Susan, author.
Title: Bittersweet: how sorrow and longing make us whole / by Susan Cain.
Description: New York: Crown, [2022] | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021053380 (print) | LCCN 2021053381 (ebook) | ISBN 9780451499783 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780451499806 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Grief. | Desire.
Classification: LCC BF575.G7 C274 2022 (print) | LCC BF575.G7 (ebook) | DDC 155.2—dc23/eng/20211227
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021053380
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021053381

International edition ISBN 9780593443392

Ebook ISBN 9780451499806

crownpublishing.com

Frontispiece images (clockwise from top): Sarajevo Requiem by Tom Stoddart, © Getty Images; photographer unknown; January Day: Lower Manhattan, © Thomas Schaller (thomaswschaller.com)

Book design by Dana Leigh Blanchette, adapted for ebook

Cover design: Evan Gaffney
Art direction: Jackie Phillips
Cover art: Qweek/ Getty Images

ep_prh_6.0_139749446_c0_r1

Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) spoke about *compunctio,* the holy pain[,] the grief somebody feels when faced with that which is most beautiful….The bittersweet experience stems from human homelessness in an imperfect world, human consciousness of, and at the same time, a desire for, perfection. This inner spiritual void becomes painfully real when faced with beauty. There, between the lost and the desired, the holy tears are formed.

–OWE WIKSTRÖM, PROFESSOR IN PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UPPSALA

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I've been working on this book officially since 2016, and unofficially (as you'll soon read) for my whole life. I've spoken to, read, and corresponded with hundreds of people about all things Bittersweet. Some of these people I mention explicitly; others informed my thinking. I would have loved to name them all, but this would have produced an unreadable book. So, some names appear only in the Notes and Acknowledgments; others, no doubt, I've left out by mistake. I'm grateful for them all.

Also, for readability, I didn't use ellipses or brackets in certain quotations, but made sure that the extra or missing words didn't change the speaker's or writer's meaning. If you'd like to quote these written sources from the original, the citations directing you to most of the full quotations appear in the Notes at the back of the book.

Finally, I've changed the names and identifying details of some of the people whose stories I tell. I didn't fact-check the stories people told me about themselves, but included only those I believed to be true.

Sarajevo Requiem by Tom Stoddart, © Getty Images

PRELUDE

The Cellist of Sarajevo

One night, I dreamed that I was meeting my friend, a poet named Mariana, in Sarajevo, the city of love. I woke up confused. Sarajevo, a symbol of love? Wasn't Sarajevo the site of one of the bloodiest civil wars of the late twentieth century?

Then I remembered.

Vedran Smailović.

The cellist of Sarajevo.

•••

It's May 28, 1992, and Sarajevo is under siege. For centuries, Muslims, Croats, and Serbs have lived together in this city of streetcars and pastry shops, gliding swans in parkland ponds, Ottoman mosques and Eastern Orthodox cathedrals. A city of three religions, three peoples, yet until recently no one paid too much attention to who was who. They knew but they didn't know; they preferred to see one another as neighbors who met for coffee or kebabs, took classes at the same university, sometimes got married, had children.

But now, civil war. Men on the hills flanking the city have cut the electricity and water supply. The 1984 Olympic stadium has burned down, its playing fields turned into makeshift graveyards. The apartment buildings

are pockmarked from mortar assaults, the traffic lights are broken, the streets are quiet. The only sound is the crackling of gunfire.

Until this moment, when the strains of Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor[*] fill the pedestrian street outside a bombed-out bakery.

Do you know this music? If not, maybe you should pause and listen to it right now: youtube.com/watch?v=kn1gcjuhlhg. It's haunting, it's exquisite, it's infinitely sad. Vedran Smailović, lead cellist of the Sarajevo opera orchestra, is playing it in honor of twenty-two people killed yesterday by a mortar shell as they lined up for bread. Smailović was nearby when the shell exploded; he helped take care of the wounded. Now he's returned to the scene of the carnage, dressed as if for a night at the opera house, in a formal white shirt and black tails. He sits amidst the rubble, on a white plastic chair, his cello propped between his legs. The yearning notes of the adagio float up to the sky.

All around him, the rifles fire, the shelling booms, the machine guns crackle. Smailović keeps on playing. He'll do this for twenty-two days, one day for each person killed at the bakery. Somehow, the bullets will never touch him.

This is a city built in a valley, ringed by mountains from which snipers aim at starving citizens in search of bread. Some people wait for hours to cross the street, then dart across like hunted deer. But here's a man sitting still in an open square, dressed in concert finery, as if he has all the time in the world.

You ask me am I crazy for playing the cello in a war zone, he says. *Why don't you ask THEM if they're crazy for shelling Sarajevo?*

His gesture reverberates throughout the city, over the airwaves. Soon, it'll find expression in a novel, a film. But before that, during the darkest days of the siege, Smailović will inspire other musicians to take to the streets with their own instruments. They don't play martial music, to rouse the troops against the snipers, or pop tunes, to lift the people's spirits. They play the Albinoni. The destroyers attack with guns and bombs, and the musicians respond with the most bittersweet music they know.

We're not combatants, call the violinists; *we're not victims, either,* add the violas. *We're just humans,* sing the cellos, *just humans: flawed and beautiful and aching for love.*

• • •

A few months later. The civil war rages on, and the foreign correspondent Allan Little watches as a procession of forty thousand civilians emerges from a forest. They've been trudging through the woods for forty-eight hours straight, fleeing an attack.

Among them is an eighty-year-old man. He looks desperate, exhausted. The man approaches Little, asks whether he's seen his wife. They were separated during the long march, the man says.

Little hasn't seen her but, ever the journalist, asks whether the man wouldn't mind identifying himself as Muslim or Croat. And the man's answer, Little says years later, in a gorgeous BBC segment, shames him even now, as he recalls it across the decades.

"I am," said the old man, "a musician."

SKIP NOTES

* This work is commonly attributed to Tomaso Albinoni, but was probably composed by Italian musicologist Remo Giazotto, possibly based on a fragment of an Albinoni composition.