

THE FRUIT CURE

The Story Of Extreme Wellness Turned Sour

Jacqueline Alnes

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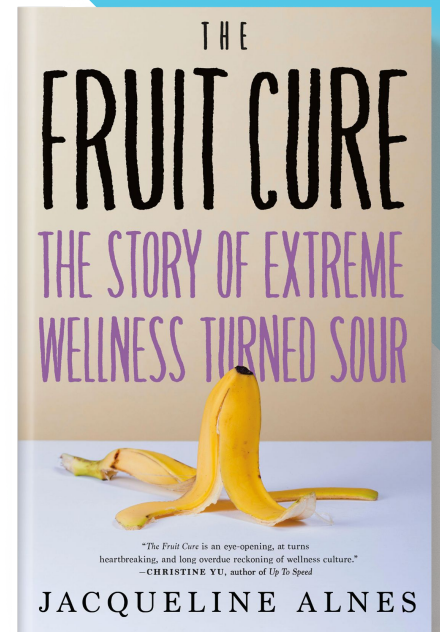
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“... a fantastic look at wellness and diet culture and the influencer economy, all done with nuance, humor, and empathy.”

— **Christine Yu, author of *Up To Speed***

“I have never been more compelled by a book, and I have never felt more moved by the offering of a self — honest, tender, and vulnerable — that Alnes presents.”

— **Devin Kelly, author of *In This Quiet Church of Night, I Say Amen* and *Blood on Blood***



INTRODUCTION

A powerful critique of the failures in our healthcare system and an inquiry into the sinister strains of wellness culture that prey on people’s vulnerabilities through schemes, scams, and diets.

Jacqueline Alnes was a Division One runner during her freshman year of college, but her season was cut short by a series of inexplicable neurological symptoms. What started with a cough, escalated to Alnes collapsing on the track and experiencing months of unremembered episodes that stole her ability to walk and speak.

Two years after quitting the team to heal, Alnes’s symptoms returned with a severity that left her using a wheelchair for months. She was admitted to an epilepsy center but doctors could not figure out the root cause of her symptoms. Desperate for answers, she turned to an online community centered around a strict, all-fruit diet which its adherents claimed could cure conditions like depression, eating disorders, addiction, and vision problems. Alnes wasn’t alone. From all over the world, people in pain, dismissed by medical authorities, or seeking a miracle diet that would relieve them of white, Western expectations placed on their figures, turned to fruit in hopes of releasing themselves from the perceived failings of their bodies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Alnes writes about how messaging from her coaches around overcoming pain in sport meant that she tried to push herself past her limit, even when her symptoms were severe. Are perceptions of mental and physical health shifting due to ongoing public conversations?
2. Because of her neurological episodes, Alnes writes that her memories of her illness are foggy, and that “holes in the narrative emerge.” Does this admission lead you to trust the author more or less? What expectations do you have around truth and memory in memoirs?
3. The author writes about how cultural perceptions of epilepsy and seizures—often historically associated with demons needing to be cast out of a person—negatively influenced her perception of her own neurological symptoms. What stigmas or stereotypes have you heard about a chronic illness or disability?

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4. Throughout the book, Alnes contemplates the differences between healing and a cure. Is there a difference? Explain.
5. Alnes incorporates historical research in which she connects present messaging around wellness to the past. What historical moments or figures in the book surprised or intrigued you?
6. Alnes was drawn into an online community of fruitarians, but later wishes she would have paused to analyze the harmful rhetoric before it sucked her in. What questions might be valuable to ask when you encounter media or messaging that seems alluring? What steps can you take to learn more about a creator or account before following them?
7. Online communities can be incredible spaces where people with similar interests can communicate from anywhere in the world. They can also become insular echo chambers that ensnare vulnerable populations. What is your perception of the 30 Bananas a Day group? What elements of the group seem positive? What elements seem unhealthy?
8. Alnes interviewed several former members of the fruitarian movement for her book. Did you notice any themes emerge in these interviews?
9. Two of the central figures in the 30 Bananas a Day community, Freelee and Durianrider, declined multiple interview requests from the author. In what ways does Alnes work to include their perspectives? Does the author's portrayal of the movement's leaders feel nuanced and balanced?
10. The author raises questions about whose responsibility it is to monitor accounts that distribute health advice on social media platforms, as she reflects on the potential harm caused by creators who advocate for diet plans with no credentials to back up their claims. Who should be held responsible for monitoring accounts on social media that dispense health advice? Is it up to viewers to think critically, creators to prove their credibility, or social media companies to provide content warnings?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacqueline Alnes is a writer, runner, and assistant professor of creative writing. Her work has appeared in publications like *The New York Times*, *Guernica*, *Jezebel*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Longreads*, *Ploughshares*, *Tin House*, *Electric Literature* and *The Boston Globe*. She has a PhD in creative writing from Oklahoma State University and an MFA in nonfiction from Portland State University. She teaches at West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

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