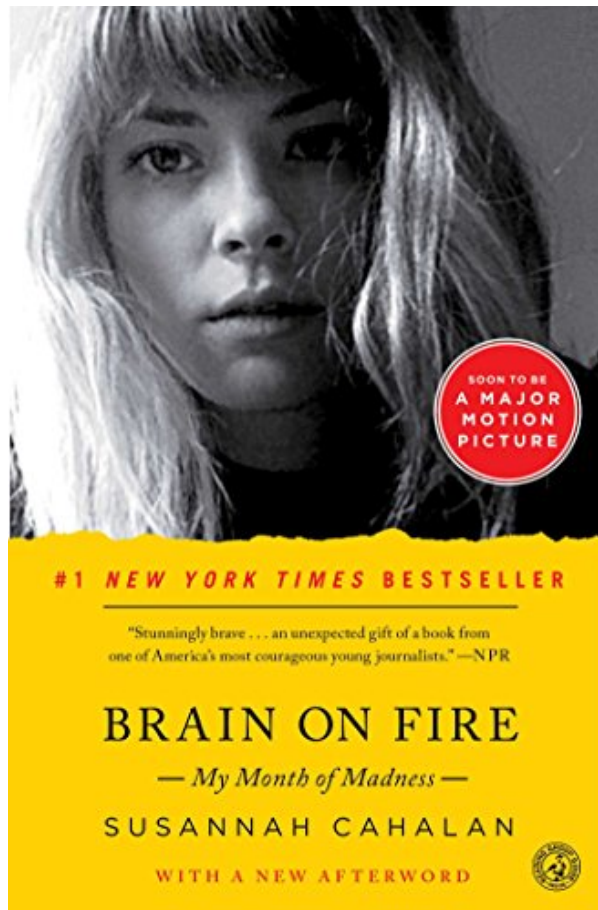
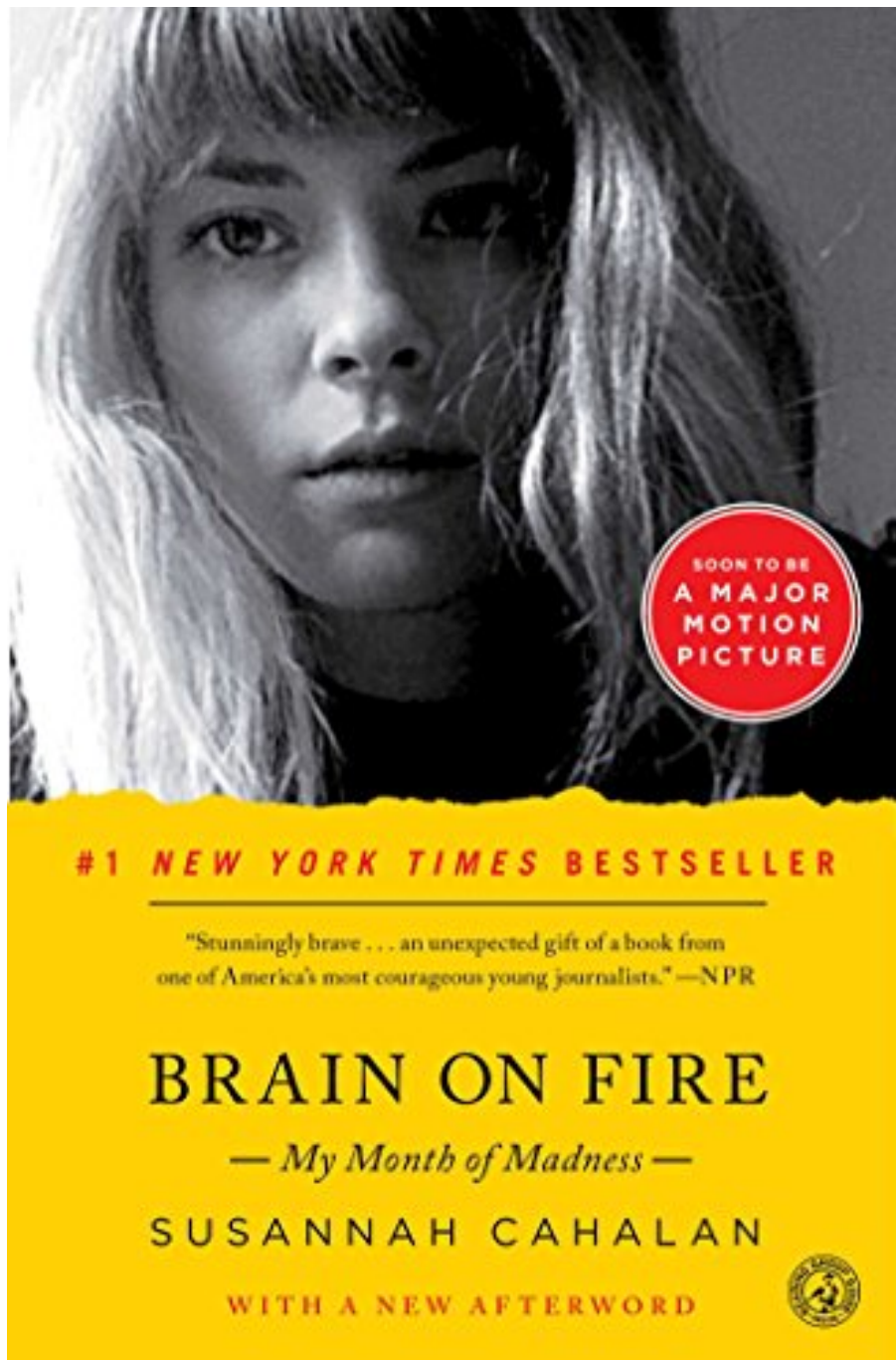


# BRAIN ON FIRE: MY MONTH OF MADNESS BY SUSANNAH CAHALAN



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An award-winning memoir and instant New York Times bestseller that goes far beyond its riveting medical mystery, *Brain on Fire* is the powerful account of one woman's struggle to recapture her identity.

When twenty-four-year-old Susannah Cahalan woke up alone in a hospital room, strapped to her bed and unable to move or speak, she had no memory of how she'd gotten there. Days earlier, she had been on the threshold of a new, adult life: at the beginning of her first serious relationship and a promising career at a major New York newspaper. Now she was labeled violent, psychotic, a flight risk. What happened?

In a swift and breathtaking narrative, Susannah tells the astonishing true story of her descent into madness, her family's inspiring faith in her, and the lifesaving diagnosis that nearly didn't happen. "A fascinating look at the disease that . . . could have cost this vibrant, vital young woman her life" (People), *Brain on Fire* is an unforgettable exploration of memory and identity, faith and love, and a profoundly compelling tale of survival and perseverance that is destined to become a classic.

- Sales Rank: #1563 in Books
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- Published on: 2013-08-06
- Released on: 2013-08-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.37" h x .90" w x 5.50" l, .55 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

## Features

- Used Book in Good Condition

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## Most helpful customer reviews

195 of 211 people found the following review helpful.

Freaky Good

By Julie Merilatt

What makes this book so terrifying is its reality. Witnessing Susannah's descent into her bizarre illness is effing frightening, but what's even more disconcerting is that people throughout history have probably suffered from her condition but have been misdiagnosed as autistic, schizophrenic, or even possessed. This type of autoimmune disorder is becoming more identifiable, but much about it still remains a mystery, especially since the broad range of symptoms so resemble mental illness.

Cahalan's background as a journalist enables her to reconstruct her ordeal despite not forming memories for a month-long period. She interviewed her family members, doctors, nurses - anyone who witnessed her seizures, her slurred speech, her neurotic, paranoid delusions, and her awkward, uncontrolled movements. She deftly narrates a period of her life that changed her forever, as her body attacked her brain and she completely lost all control of herself. But she also successfully brings awareness to her readers. So if I start exhibiting strange behavior in the next few weeks, it's probably psychosomatic sympathy symptoms.

I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher.

290 of 328 people found the following review helpful.

Scary story, extremely well told

By Philly gal

Brain on Fire is Susannah Cahalan's reconstruction of her harrowing year with a brain inflammation. Cahalan was a 24 year old reporter with the New York Post in 2008 when she began to exhibit signs of mental illness. She was living on her own in NYC and had recently begun a serious relationship with Stephen. Cahalan's symptoms were a mixture of the physical (weakness on her left side, difficulty speaking) and the mental (paranoia, violence and psychosis). Her condition was undiagnosed for an agonizing period of time. Some of her physicians thought she was suffering from alcohol withdrawal despite the fact that she told them she was only an occasional drinker. She came very close to being diagnosed as a schizophrenic. Both of her parents but especially her father insisted that her illness had a physical cause and only with this advocacy was she admitted to NYU. There she was diagnosed as having an autoimmune inflammation in the one hemisphere of her brain. In a marvelous nod to medicine as an art not a science she is finally diagnosed by a physician who administers a simple straight forward test - she is asked to fill in numbers on a drawing of a clock. Because she writes all of the numbers on one side of the drawing the physicians now have proof that the half of her brain is inflamed. So after over one million dollars worth of laboratory tests, she is diagnosed by a savvy MD with pencil and paper! Once the diagnosis of autoimmune disease is confirmed by researchers at Penn, Cahalan has a slow but steady recovery. There are two back stories going on that deserve a mention. One, her new boyfriend Stephen sticks around even when her strange behavior appears to have a mental origin not a physical one. Surely a guy worth knowing! Secondly, Cahalan renews her strained relationship with her father as he is tirelessly at her bedside throughout her illness. As they say - it is an ill wind that blows no good.

The strength in this story is Cahalan's meticulous research. In reviewing her medical records, reading a journal her parents kept through the illness, interviewing friends and family for their perspectives, and piecing together the little that she remembers she has told a story that reads like a suspense novel. She is very good at synthesizing complicated medical issues into readable prose. For me this was a quick read not the



medical tour de force that was Henrietta Lacks but good nonetheless. The one lesson I take from all of these nonfiction stories that deal with our health care system is don't enter it on your own. You must get an advocate (and not a timid one) who will fight for you and insist that you get top notch attention. It is easy to be shunted off to the easiest diagnosis. Cahalan makes the point that there are more than a few people with her syndrome who have been misdiagnosed and either did not recover or sit in psychiatric institutions today. Scary for sure!

165 of 186 people found the following review helpful.

I am speechless. Excellent.

By Cindylou

I didn't put this book down after I started it. I couldn't. I finished it in all one sitting. This book will stick with me for a long time. Most disturbing is had I been her, I know that my parents would have called it possession. What would have become of me?

I have just finished reading it and haven't reflected on what I've read yet but felt compelled to leave this five star review with a thank you to the author for writing this book and making herself so vulnerable for us.

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