

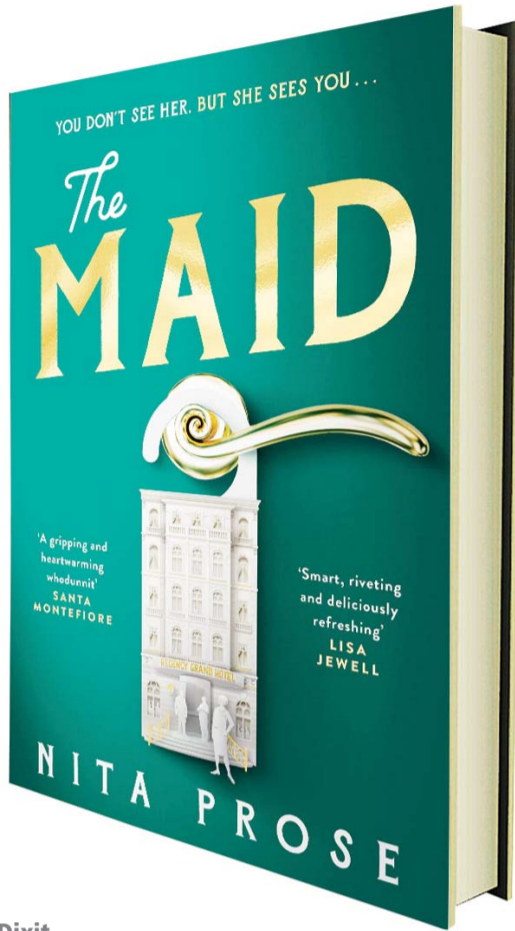
#BOOKWORM

The Maid by Nita Prose

"When all else fails, tidy up."

About the Book
Publisher: Harper Collins
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Pakhi Dixit

"Life & time sorts all misconceptions."

Have you ever realised that the person who helps you around in the house knows more about you and your family than you comprehend? They know about your eating habits, your likes and dislikes, people who visit you, where you keep your things and pretty much everything. They keep an ear on your conversations and an eye on your movements. This thought alone is terrifying enough but what if they are nice bubbly people, contrary to what we automatically tend to assume. 'Maid' by Nita Prose revolves around somewhat similar theme.

Molly, the maid, our protagonist, is 25 years old and she falls on the borderline of autistic spectrum. She was raised by her grandmother who passed away suddenly a few months ago and because of



Nita Prose

that Molly is somewhat a draftee but she has her routines - house chores and a job at The Regency Grand Hotel, which she loves. Opposite to ambitions for life what most people have, she always wanted to be a maid. She loves her job to the extent that she looks forward to wearing her crisp hotel uniform every day, she looks forward to arranging her tray with little hotel shampoos and soaps in absolute meticulous fashion for the guests, she looks forward to arranging rooms as if it is a window to strangers, she comes across every day, as if she is trying to help people rather unusually if that may be. She loves cleaning, which to her, bring some order to her own chaotic life.

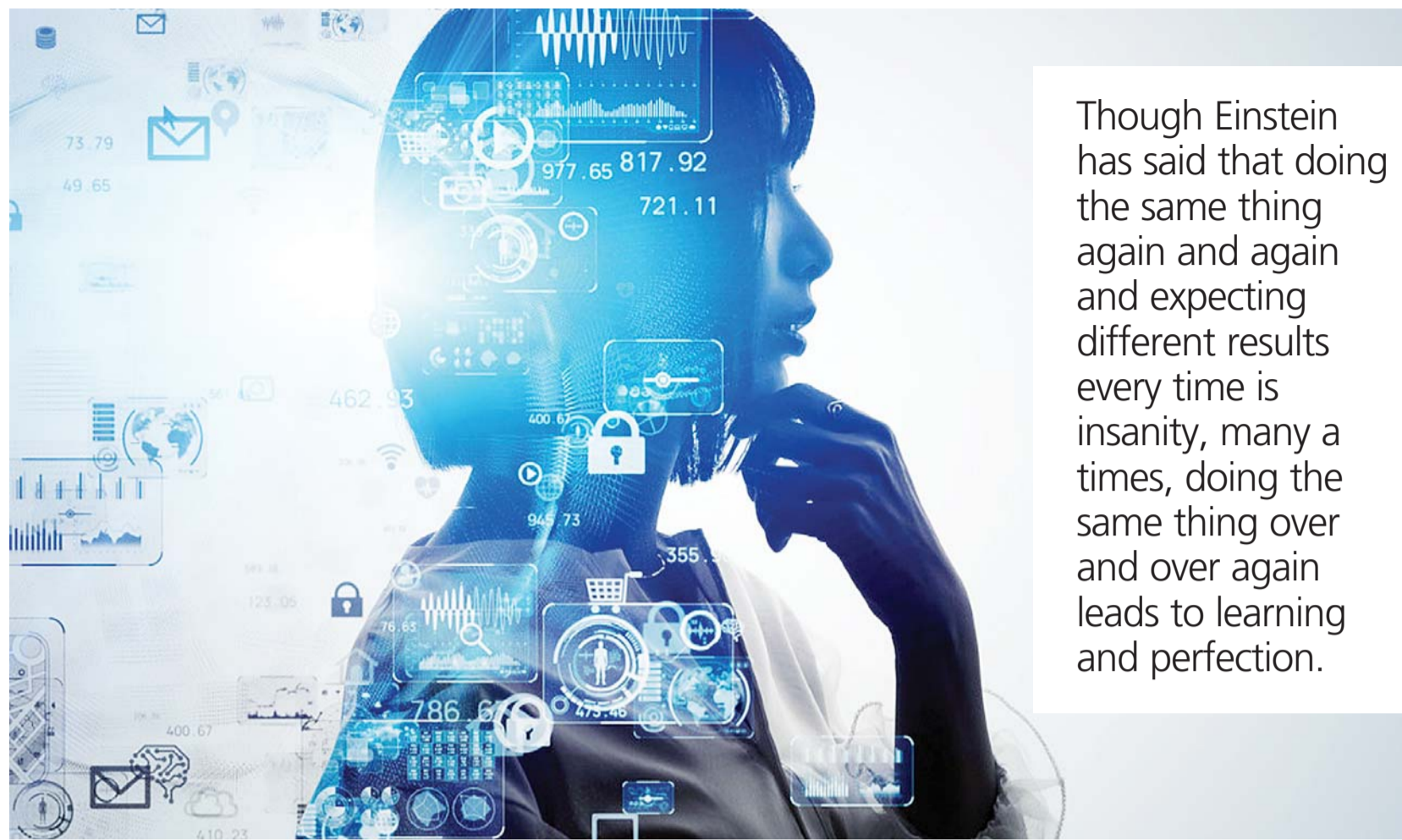
Our star of maids is often invisible to others and is a subject of continuous taunts, laughs, tantrums and ridicule from her peers because she perceives situations differently. She doesn't know how to play around with words and speaks straight from her heart, no matter how harsh or

straightforward it might be sometimes. She is terrible at reading social cues, intentions, and what means what, but she had her grandmother to help her sail through, and now that she is gone, she is slowly learning on her own to navigate through situations and interpret people from a place of intuition and not logic. Something that sets her apart from rest of the hotel staff is her diligence in following instructions to the letter given to her by hotel manager Mr Smith. Because of her non-literal sense, she was already duped of money before and now with her grandma gone, she has started leading her life with absolute caution. But her monotonous life takes an unexpected turn, when she walks into the room of a wealthy guest called Mr Black for housekeeping and finds him dead. She faints on the spot and is woken up by a buzz of voices. And behold, she is now the prime suspect! Her inability to communicate clearly and express her emotions makes detective leading on the case believe that she is the murderer. But how can a socially distanced, delightful Molly kill someone? Throughout the story we come across her grandmother, and his caring daughter Charlotte, an attorney out of the blue, when she needs a helping hand the most. Hanging on to everything she learned from her grandmother and her teachings from all the crime shows she watched, she keeps her head high and continues to do her job, far exceeding the expectations of her employers. Luckily, her love for solving puzzles in free time and an increased intuition (partly out of necessity) to see through people is going to help her find her way out of this mess.

This book is a sweet, heart-warming, and an unusually delightful mystery. Molly's story makes us realise the inner strength we have in us, and that sometimes unfortunate events are just tap-ins for us to realise them sensibly. It entails many handy life lessons. For example, and the most important one truly is to never judge people by their looks or behaviours. Sometimes the brash ones, the meek ones, the invisible ones, turn out to be the kindest, strongest and the smartest of lot in their unique ways and that help comes from unusual places.

Life is an exciting journey. Sure, it will throw at us bricks from time to time but dodging them is where the fun lies. Life ought to be a mystery; but a cheeky lovely one.

About the Author
Nita Prose is a long-time editor, serving many bestselling authors and their books.



Though Einstein has said that doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results every time is insanity, many a times, doing the same thing over and over again leads to learning and perfection.

The Underrated Art of Repetition

Nisha Susan

We have reached the stage of the pandemic where we know it is tasteless to complain about monotony when people all around us have unwelcomed the changes forced on them. We are embracing the idea that no news is good news. But when crises pass and the unholy biases of tragedy and over again. Nothing changes even when a catastrophe strikes.

In the household I grew up in, the idea of 'natural talent' was an unexamined belief. My grandfather bought my brother and me a book on chess. It was really a well-written book from Russia. I loved the book; my brother and I started playing chess. My grandfather taught us the basics and the book did the rest of the job. Then one day I overheard my grandfather telling my grandmother: "Teach two kids chess at the same time and you will find out who is more intelligent. He (pointing towards my brother) is playing better because of natural talent."

Secret Agenda

Both the assessment and the secret agenda bothered me for quite a long time. How could playing chess be a sign of superior intelligence? In retrospect, it was very similar to a Russian child psychology experiment. My brother was, in fact, very good at chess and even played competitively. I stopped playing. Even if I had continued playing, I don't think I would have posed any threat to Konert Humpty, so no loss there. However, what the natural talent theory left out was the possibility that if I had continued playing chess, I might have become better at it than I was. But at that time I hadn't realized the importance of doing

#PERECISION

the same thing over and over again and people around me didn't understand that it was not important to be perfect at something. I took swimming lessons to divert my mind. I grew up thinking you didn't do the things you are 'not good at' because there lies the path to humiliation. As an adult, too, many of my friends looked down on striving. They believed that either you are 'made for it' or 'you are not'. It was uncharacteristic when I signed up for swimming lessons but I loved it right away. The incremental, infinitesimal improvements that I observed over the years while swimming gave me something when the bravado of being young and clueless disappeared. And it's in the pool that I learnt you can never be naturally talented or particularly good at anything but you can get better at a many things.

But the other day, I found myself thinking 'three-fourth cup of tur



dal' as I fished a pressure cooker out of the cabinet at 7 am. I find it very hard and usually have to look up measurements over and over again when cooking something. I also have to look at the method because sometimes I don't remember what to put next. This was a satisfactory development but unexpected only if you had thought making sambar six times in a row, it wouldn't teach you more than making sambar once in six months.

As if you had thought you needed, what is the phrase 'natural talent' to make sambar (in the same way that many of my brilliant, talented women friends have their days constricted by the belief that their husbands and fathers can't make sambar).

Creating Shortcuts

This week I hit Day 50 of practising Spanish on Duolingo. On Day 50, I sailed into a 20-minute conversation in a new language you come to think of a friend. The conversation was fragmented at my end but I managed to make a topical joke about Georgette

Heyer, Gretna Green and the Scotland border (you had to be there). I was enormously pleased with myself. I thought I was now ready to make new friends in Spain. The ones that don't speak English at all! Later, I put on the first episode of a Spanish TV show, and found, I understood not a single word spoken by the characters. Ah well!

I don't even remember the route to any destination at the very first go. Even after years of driving, most of the times, I have to fumble my way through Google Maps (sometimes those are grossly inaccurate too) or ask the kind auto drivers. And it is not just once, each time I visit a new place, I inadvertently take the wrong turn or miss the turn or get the directions wrong. It is only after those few misses that I actually start remembering the lanes and the turns. But then, I remember them and start creating my own shortcuts to the destination. All this happens when I take that route over and over again.

To repeat the same thing and to expect different results is insanity, that goes apophorism. But I am here to say that doing the same thing over and over again can give you so much joy. First, you get to the stage where you don't have to swipe your phone with a turmeric-stained finger to get the chili powder measurements. Then you might get to the stage where you decide the recipe has too much chilli powder. Or you might not.

And while making the same sambar over and over again may not qualify you to be a master chef but it will definitely tell you something more about the sambar you are making. Meanwhile, when you are eating sambar and making bad jokes versus with an old friend in a new language you come to think of a friend. The conversation was fragmented at my end but I managed to make a topical joke about Georgette

It's less then a question of loving the familiarity then that of discovering newness which wasn't so familiar after all the previous repetitions; funny but absolutely true.



do that, he does it over and over again. No one talks about natural talent or repetition here. Why?

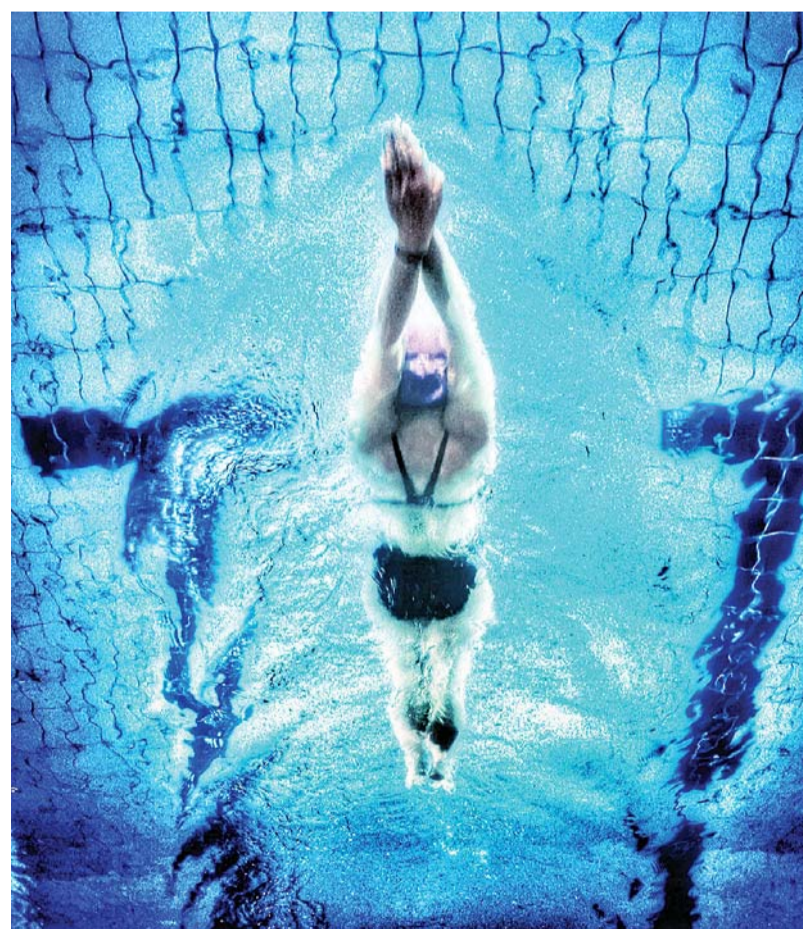
New Experiences

Few days earlier, I read about new research by Ed O'Brien from the University of Chicago. He exposed people to new experiences (movies, museum visits, videogames) then asked some of them to predict how much had they enjoyed doing the same thing again. To cut a long story short - people do enjoy repeating experiences more than they predict they will. And not because they use the likeness to lull themselves into a comfortable trance, but because they discover new things that they'd missed the first time around. As Ed O'Brien puts it: "Doing something once may engender an inflated sense that one has now seen 'it', leave people naive to the missed nuances remaining to enjoy." It's less then a question of loving the familiarity then that of discovering newness which wasn't so familiar after all.

My 'ah well' approach has liberated me to the extent that I recently joined a belly-dancing class. The other people in this class are two frighteningly fit, trained dancer

friends. And belly dance requires learning how to move all the muscles in isolation. I felt none of the panic any reasonable person should feel. Instead, when our kind and glamorous teacher shruti in her shimmering studio squints into my Zoom window and says, "I see a tiny improvement in your range of motion," I grin like a fool. "She had a tiny improvement in her range of motion" is a word tattoo, T-shirt and epitaph. Repeat after me. |||||

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Ring Of Fire



The Ring of Fire, also referred to as the Circum-Pacific Belt, is a path along the Pacific Ocean characterized by active volcanoes and frequent earthquakes. The majority of Earth's volcanoes and earthquakes take place along the Ring of Fire. Located along the earthquake-prone Ring of Fire, Japan-Asian island nation experiences 20 percent of the world's 6.0-magnitude or higher tremors annually. Earthquakes of such magnitude (and do) cause major destruction.

#TECHNOLOGY

Developing the 'Ultimate' Chickpea

Researchers genetically mapped thousands of chickpea varieties, and then used this information to identify the most valuable gene combinations using artificial intelligence (AI)

Using artificial intelligence, researchers have developed a genetic model for the 'ultimate' chickpea, with the potential to lift crop yields by 12%. Researchers genetically mapped thousands of chickpea varieties, and then used this information to identify the most valuable gene combinations using artificial intelligence (AI). Researchers wanted to develop a 'haplotype' genomic prediction crop breeding strategy, for enhanced performance for seed weight.

"Most crop species only have a few varieties sequenced, so it was a massive undertaking by the international team to analyse more than 3,000 cultivated and wild varieties," says Ben Hayes, professor at the University of Queensland.

The study confirms chickpea's origin in the Fertile Crescent and provides a complete picture of genetic variation within chickpea.

"We identified 1,582 novel genes and established the pan-genome of chickpea, which will serve as a foundation for breeding superior chickpea varieties with enhanced yield, higher resistance to drought, heat, and diseases," says Rajeev Varshney from the



International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics in Hyderabad, India. Varshney is a lead author of the paper in Nature.

Researchers used the data to model a chickpea with perfect genetics for seed weight, a trait linked to yield, Hayes says. "This additional data led to the increase in yield predicted by our model, which is still being fine-tuned."

FATstack combines AI with genomic prediction technology to identify the combinations of genes most likely to improve crop performance.

Chickpea is the largest pulse crop in Australia after lupin, both in terms of planting area and production. It ranks second in area and third in production among the pulses worldwide.

The global demand for protein-rich pulses was increasing, says Lee Hickey, associate professor, plant breeder, and crop geneticist at the University of Queensland.

"Improving the productivity of chickpea for Australia offers opportunities for our farmers to supply local food industries and export markets," he says.

"Using this AI-generated chickpea model for increased seed weight in the field will be challenging, given the number of generations it will take in cross-breeding for optimal chickpea genetics, and the impact of different environments and management practices on crop growth.

New genomic breeding approaches, including the haplotype model, are expected to redefine chickpea breeding strategies for developing high-yielding and nutritious chickpea varieties, Hayes says.

Chickpea is an important rotation crop in farming systems, as it is self-fertilizing for nitrogen, reducing the need for nitrogen fertilizer.

#MIND & BODY



Having discovered a gut cell called the neuropod cell, researchers have pursued this cell's critical role as a connection between what's inside the gut and its influence in the brain.

Our taste buds may or may not be able to tell real sugar from a sugar sweetener substitute like Splenda, but there are cells in your intestines that can, and do distinguish between the two sweet solutions.

And those cells can communicate the difference to your brain in milliseconds. Not long after the sweet taste receptor was identified in the mouth of mice 20 years ago, scientists attempted to knock those taste buds out. But they were surprised to find that mice could still somehow discern and prefer natural sugar to artificial sweetener, even without a sense of taste.

The answer to this riddle lies much further down in the digestive tract, at the upper end of the gut just after the stomach, according to Diego Bohórquez, an associate professor of medicine and neurobiology in the Duke University School of Medicine.

"We've identified the cells that make us eat sugar, and they are in the gut," Bohórquez says in a new paper in Nature Neuroscience. Infusing sugar directly into the lower intestine or colon does not have the same effect. The sensing cells are in the upper reaches of the gut, he continues.

Having discovered a gut cell called the neuropod cell, Bohórquez and his research team has pursued this cell's critical role as a connection between what's inside the gut and its influence in the brain. The gut, he argues, talks directly to the brain, changing our eating behaviour. And in the long run, these findings may lead to entirely new ways to treat diseases.

Artificial Sweetener

Originally termed enteroendocrine cells because of their ability to secrete hormones, specialized neuropod cells can communicate with

neurons via rapid synaptic connections and are distributed throughout the lining of the upper gut. In addition to producing relatively slow-acting hormone signals, these cells also produce fast-acting neurotransmitter signals that reach the vagus nerve and then the brain within milliseconds. "The latest findings further show that neuropods are sensory cells of the nervous system just like taste buds in the tongue or the retinal cone cells in the eye that help one see colours."

"These cells work just like the retinal cone cells that are able to sense the wavelength of light. They sense traces of sugar versus sweetener and then they release different neurotransmitters that go into different cells in the vagus nerve, and ultimately, the animal knows 'this is sugar' or 'this is sweetener'."

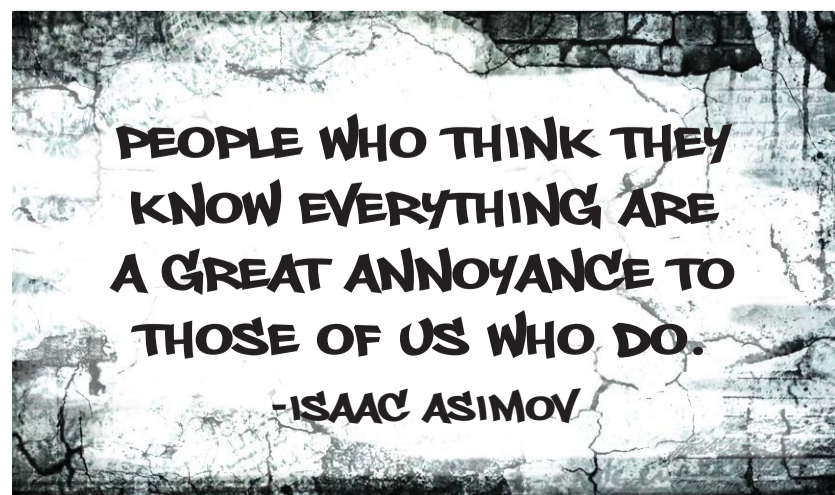
Using lab-grown organoids from mouse and human cells to represent the small intestine and duodenum (upper gut), the researchers showed in a small experiment that real sugar stimulates individual neuropod cells to release glutamate as a neurotransmitter. Artificial sugar triggered the release of a different neurotransmitter, ATP.

Using a technique called optogenetics, the scientists were able to turn the neuropod cells on and off in the gut of a living mouse to show whether the animal's preference for real sugar was being driven by signals from the gut.

The key enabling technology for the optogenetic work



THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman