



A Little Something

Rich Haddaway

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Haddaway stays tightly focused on characters who deal with tragedy in a way that feels real.

Richard Haddaway's *A Little Something* opens with a random and seemingly minor accident. While waiting on deck at his youth baseball game, eleven-year-old Justin gets hit in the head by a foul ball and has to go to the dentist for emergency work. While he seems fine on the way there, something goes wrong at the dentist, and what started as a small injury instead leads to the boy enduring a long coma. This instigates a moving story about life, death, family, and the meaning of love between a parent and child.

What makes this story work so well is Haddaway's laser focus on the characters and how each deals with the impact of Justin's coma and the uncertainty about his future. Nearly the entire book takes place in the hospital, while Haddaway fills in the characters with flashbacks to their lives before the accident. Justin's parents, Sam and Katherine, bring very different perspectives to the situation. Katherine, a doctor herself, understands the clinical reality of Justin's condition, while Sam relies on optimism and focuses on best-case outcomes.

Through their dialogue with one another—and their discussions with other characters—the book makes both perspectives and both parents truly relatable without making those differences too stark, so the couple remains compatible.

There are times when the book presents signals that it's going to wind up with a clichéd story line, but those thankfully prove mere ways to play with audience expectations. Justin's coma has no easy solution, and what makes *A Little Something* work so well is the way it takes readers inside the minds of family members in various stages of accepting that difficult reality.

The medical aspect of the situation is explained with a journalistic style that reveals all that needs to be known without becoming too technical. The doctors and other supporting characters feel like real people, and the flashbacks show both parents as well intentioned without turning them into too-perfect victims.

Perhaps most impressively, *A Little Something* realistically portrays its characters coping with grief in myriad stages—from lashing out at the dentist whose error might have caused the coma to grasping at Justin's small movements as signs of hope for recovery.

The book addresses a sad story without veering into melodrama, and it does real character work in showing how its subjects handle their increasingly difficult ordeal.

JEFF FLEISCHER (April 30, 2014)

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