

Certain and Impossible Events

Candace Jane Opper

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Candace Jane Opper's memoir centers on a pivotal event: the suicide of a friend from her teenage years, who's internally referred to as "Brett," and whose real name she has tattooed between her shoulder blades.

Brett shot himself following the 1994 death of rock icon Kurt Cobain, who struggled with depression and substance abuse. Brett's suicide, however, seemed inexplicable. There were no apparent warning signs or prior attempts, just the horrific finality of a young life ended on a warm April day.

In her varied and compelling narration, Opper reveals that she had a secret crush on Brett. She recreates the headiness of such feelings, like how every sidelong glance or casual comment was exulted over. Her recollections also evoke the New England town where she and Brett grew up, whose "supernatural folklore" was "as culturally integrated as thin-crust pizza and the history of Plymouth Rock." And there are hallmarks of a 1990s adolescence, including touch tone telephones, watching *Beverly Hills, 90210*, and hanging out at the mall.

Though Opper questions her continued obsession with Brett, her decades-long vigil led her to significant research on suicide and its impact on others. Her book reveals causative factors like illness and financial worries, as well as deeper issues, like a sense of worthlessness or a fixation with dying. Copycat suicides, like those that followed Cobain's death, are also common. The narrative shifts between her raw, eloquent confessions and its more expansive, informative work. Opper's impressions of Brett, which remain seared in her consciousness, are shared to honor both his memory and ideas of who he might have become.

The intense and perceptive memoir *Certain and Impossible Events* explores complexities and tragedies of suicide, its sense of compassion focused; Opper's close narration is haunting.

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