

In the Absence of Miracles

Michael J. Malone

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Family abuse and the complex secrets surrounding it are at the heart of Michael J. Malone's new thriller *In the Absence of Miracles*.

John is struggling to live a normal life. He teaches at a local high school and spends time with Angela, a single mother who wants him to commit to her and her daughter. But John has trouble getting close to people, and his dependency on alcohol is getting worse. He sinks into dark dreams on most nights. Then his mother, whom he's always been close to, has a stroke and is confined to a care facility.

John isn't sure why he has so many issues, but he finds a clue when looking through his mother's belongings. He unearths a picture of an older brother whom he never knew existed. This discovery leads him to reconnect with his younger brother, Chris. The two begin to uncover what their mother hid, and they consider how it impacted them as adults.

This moody thriller turns assumptions around and explores the ways that families can turn on themselves. Though he's never able to face his problems, John uses his quest to find his brother as a means of rediscovering himself and all that he's lost. When it comes to the mystery of his hidden brother, layered realizations are revealed at a perfect pace. Shocking twists destroy myths about abuse, including that it's a black-and-white matter.

Compassion is generated for all of the book's characters involved. With its pitch-perfect dialogue and fast pace, this is more than a thriller—it's a meditation on the subject of dark family secrets that shines a beacon of hope as it follows John's quest for redemption.

Nothing is what it seems in *In the Absence of Miracles*, an intelligent psychological novel that's both thought-provoking and heartbreaking.

ANGELA MCQUAY (March / April 2020)

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