



## These Nameless Things

**Shawn Smucker**

Revell (Jun 30, 2020)

Softcover \$15.99 (352pp)

978-0-8007-3530-2

In a purgatorial village that's dwindled to nine members—all of whom were traumatized in a mountainous “city of suffering”—change is brewing. Shawn Smucker's *These Nameless Things* is an enigmatic allegory on post-traumatic stress and forgiveness.

A gradual, two-part plot concerns a community's recovery of its interconnected memories, and twin brothers who were separated during their spiritual progression through the afterlife. At the start, unexpected events unsettle Dan. Mary's bound for the east, which friends see as a celebration. A mysterious woman, Kathy, descends from the mountain, which Dan keeps a secret. Lucia returns from the east for unknown reasons. No one remembers what happened in the past—until specific images surrounding a fatal plane crash resurface.

Despite remembering that his brother Adam's involvement pained his friends, Dan is resolved to bring Adam back from the abyss. The book's second half concerns Adam's rescue and everyone's trek into a promised land. This introspective, atmospheric quest hints at love's unwavering power to lift people out of their sins, though it leaves unanswered questions.

Kathy's initial, ominous beguilement bears loose suggestions of devilry, but becomes ambiguous, and Lucia's return seems to be a twist to help Dan through a difficult part of the rescue. Some of the villagers' stories are untold. Characters' griefs and absolvments unfold with seeming readiness.

Throughout, Dan's guilt about his own lies couples with windswept landscapes that mirror his mental fog. As Dan's memories intersperse with his realization that it's not only others who need forgiving, but that he must accept forgiveness, too, a poignant case for salvation is made.

In *These Nameless Things*, the edges of an earthly world bleed into the next. Trauma and guilt fold into an immersive fantasy that's eerie and precise in its world building.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2020)

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