



These Things Happen

Michael Eon

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Traumas can be escaped via acceptance in the heart-stopping novel These Things Happen, about cycles of abuse and addiction.

In Michael Eon's novel *These Things Happen*, a recovering alcoholic struggles to help his troubled older brother and himself.

As a child, Daniel dreamed of escaping his abusive father and distant mother by becoming a professional trumpeter. Twenty years later, all he has is a girlfriend he keeps secrets from, a tenuous hold on sobriety, and a suicidal brother nobody else wants to take care of. After a lifetime of evading responsibility for his actions, Daniel also reconnects with Brie, his first love, and begins to accept that he can control his own destiny, though not the destinies of others.

Brie is stereotyped as a saintly disabled person whose tragic story others can learn from; the effect is off-putting. At first, Daniel does not appreciate Brie's unshakable faith in God and in him. He wants to remain sober, but after a lifetime of having only himself and his brother to rely on, he has difficulty trusting others (with predictable results). Only a devastating loss—expected, yet still shattering in its emotional impact—could force him to commit to sobriety once and for all.

After a heart-stopping beginning in which the aftermath of Max's suicide attempt is laid bare in grotesque detail, the story reveals, piece by piece, all of the events that shaped Daniel and his addiction. Ever since childhood, he has been bitter, angry, and prone to self-pity. His relationship with Max forms the crux of the story; it is painful and affecting. The two sometimes battle as brothers do, but they are more often each other's sole source of support in an inhospitable home. They stick together through death, abuse, and teenage rebellion. Only the brothers' addictions and mental health problems, which worsen as they get older, drive a wedge between them.

Moving between the brothers' tumultuous childhood in the 1970s to their stormy relationship in the 1990s, the story conveys the raw, complex cycle of addiction and untreated mental illness that Daniel was born into. Nothing is ever simple, not even Daniel's feelings for his father, who made the family miserable but was capable of showing kindness to others. It is this ability to see shades of gray that could save Daniel in the end, whereas Max's black-and-white viewpoint leads to a dead end with only one irreversible way out.

Tragedies are illuminating in *These Things Happen*, a novel about the long-term effects of abuse and addiction that comes to a gentle and bittersweet conclusion.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November 13, 2023)

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