



Things I Know

Helena Close

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In Helena Close's contemporary novel *Things I Know*, a teenage girl battles with grief, memory, and her identity.

Saoirse's father relocated her and her two siblings from Limerick to an even smaller town after their mother's death. The sole vegetarian in a population of meat eaters, Saoirse feels like an outcast. She blames herself for her mother's death, and she also shoulders the blame when someone whom she's close to commits suicide. Her sessions with a counselor do not help. She begins to experience troubling bouts of memory loss and disorientation.

Immersion in social media and distractions of alcohol and drugs provide an uneasy backdrop for Saoirse's social life. Her best friend Jade is dating an older man who manipulates her, and most of Saoirse's friends reject her after tragedy strikes. Saoirse lies to her family, remaining friends, and counselor, attempting to hide under the cover of normalcy, but a sense of despair encroaches nonetheless. The degree to which Saoirse is lying to herself is unclear, but it is certainly greater than zero.

Wrapped in brutal, direct language and Irish slang, Saoirse's story possesses startling immediacy. She tries to unravel the truth behind the suicide, wondering whether one of her friends was supplying drugs to an already disturbed person, even as she struggles with her inevitable draw toward ending her own painful existence. Fascinated by brain science, Saoirse also always asks herself what she knows and how she knows it. What she does not know, however, is whether her grasp of science will help her to find her way back to those whom she loves.

Things I Know is a thoughtful psychological novel whose heroine careens toward disaster and languishes in loss, even as her friends and family attempt to mitigate her trauma with their support.

JEANA JORGENSEN (September / October 2022)

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