

To Never Know

Thomas Duffy

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To Never Know by Thomas Duffy is a dynamic tale of loss and hope in the wake of a national tragedy. Well-developed characters and a strong, plot-driven story make this novel of unrequited love very distinct.

Steven Lewis went to high school in New York City, where he met the love of his life, Kelly Brennan, but was never able to muster the courage to ask her out. As time passes and Steven's life changes drastically, he holds on to the hope that he will one day see Kelly again. When he moves back to New York and meets Kelly's mother, Emily, Steven's plans are once again thwarted as he finds out Kelly has died. Dealing with the trauma of her death takes Steven on a journey of hope and redemption as he attempts to find a new life purpose.

When Steven is first introduced, he is irresponsible and generally apathetic to the events of his life. However, when he strikes out on his own, he is forced to grow up rather quickly as he learns that he must rely on only himself to make ends meet. Steven's money problems seem very true to life as he attempts to find employment in an unstable job market and save money in one of the most expensive cities in the world. Additionally, learning about Kelly's death shakes Steven to his core as he now must learn to let go of the past in order to move on with his life. It's through these events that Steven matures into a more decisive and outspoken adult who is able to take control of his own destiny.

This story does an excellent job of portraying different types of response to trauma. Steven tends to seek others out when times are tough. He also internalizes his feelings, not openly talking about them unless prodded. In contrast, Emily has become a shut-in after her daughter's death, not leaving her house and pushing away anyone who tries to make social contact.

Although the novel tells the physical location (cities or apartments), there is no description of what these spaces look like, skipping valuable opportunities for character development. The writing seems very mechanical and clinical. Events are described using very simple language, but with many superfluous details that detract from the overall narrative. However, in terms of pacing, the book's plot-driven narrative makes it a quick read.

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GREGORY A. LOWE (June 12, 2017)

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