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These Things Happen



Synopsis

These Things Happen is set in Manhattan and focuses on two couples; one gay, one straight. They share a 15-year-old son, Wesley, who lives on the upper East Side with his mother and doctor stepfather. Trying to get to know his impressive, distant father better, he moves in for a semester with him his male partner in a mid-town brownstone. George, the partner, is a former actor; by his own account fifteen years past fabulous. • Charming, funny, smart and compassionate, George manages a struggling theater district restaurant and becomes the model for the kind of man Wesley would someday like to be.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This book was a controversial one in my reading group. We are 8 moms, in Winnetka, Illinois, all of us with sons in their 20ths and early 30ths, two of whom are married to each other, which is how we met. These things happen, it seems? We have recently read THE GOLDFINCH, and MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA, and GONE GIRL, to name just a few. This book got us more worked up than any other we've read. My son (one of the gay ones) recommended it, and when I read it I knew it would be perfect for our group. For us, in our discussion, this became a book about parenting, and about the hell you can go through when you have a teenage son whom you deeply love and because he is a teenager suddenly decides you are the worst person in the world. (p.s. We all survived that). The boy in this book, Wesley, reminded me SO much of my son at sixteen (and Wesley isn't gay). I read parts out loud to my husband who couldn't believe the resemblance, either. In the book Wesley leaves his mother (more on that in a minute) and his stepfather to live with

his father for a while. His father is gay, and has a partner of ten years or so. Wesley badly needs a relationship with his father but it proves to be very hard to get. Not to ruin anything, but something happens that is VERY dramatic and the mom finds herself at the center of a very big deal. What she does when faced with the dilemma of protecting her child shocked us all. The group got pretty heated, which has never happened before. We all wound up in tears and we all wound up pretty much thinking the mother was a wonderful person and wondering if we could have been like her in that situation! Personally, I doubt it.

And I apologize for the use of that word, but this is not hyperbole. This book truly is a beautiful little gem of a novel. I wished I wasn't reading it on my Kindle because I often found myself wanting to quickly flip the pages and return to that sentence that made me laugh out loud or the one that took my breath away. One that made me laugh: "Only Maggie Smith can answer this question properly and since she lives inside me, I have no trouble summoning her up." That belongs to George and he is the hero of the story. I wanted him to be my best friend. I wanted to hang around at his restaurant and eat his focaccia and pasta fagioli. If he weren't gay, I would be the one proposing to him. I could have highlighted his entire dialogue if I knew how to use the highlight option on my Kindle. I also wish I had him around when I was raising my teenagers. This is a line I could have kept in my pocket and referred to often during those years: "I've learned that about kids; never let them know you already know something; let them believe they've brought it to you." I love coming of age stories. Wesley is a character who belongs right up there with Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He is a highly intelligent, thoughtful young boy who lives with his Dad, Kenny, and his partner, George. Richard Kramer does an excellent job bringing us into their intimate moments. One of my favorite scenes in the book was a work day morning when George taught Wesley to make waffles and Kenny fielded dozens of phone calls. The dialogue sang here and as a writer I know how difficult it can be to get dialogue pitch perfect. The characters were nuanced and real. Kenny reminded me of my uncle and godfather who was also married before he "came out."

Kramer has had a career as a television writer (my beloved *Thirtysomething* and *My So-Called Life*, so he knows how to deliver bits of character without a ridiculous amount of description. We either hear what the characters are actually saying (dialogue) or we hear what the characters are thinking, as if *Meredith Grey* were narrating at the the start and end of a weekly episode of TV. There are no four-page descriptions of flowers or rooms or street views. Thank goodness. This has the advantage of giving us a greater sense of the characters from their first appearances, but also a realization that

we're getting unreliable narrators. Without an omniscient third-person narration, we never really know whether more about anyone than what they thinking of themselves or what others think of them is at play. This works well for characters who need not have a lot of depth -- because of their peripheral role to the plot -- but it leaves us wanting to know more about these characters. These Things Happen -- well, the *thing* that happens -- is ugly, and normally would have been expected in a piece of darker literature, except we're led to believe that something like that won't happen in this kind of story because we're past all that -- and then it happens, making it all the more shocking. And then the things that happen spin off from that thing -- self-revelations, relationship discussions, poor behavior from people who should know better. It all happens over the course of three days: the day before, the day, and then the day after. Over time, we get to hear from the two people I see as the real protagonists, Wesley (the son of divorced parents, Kenny and Lola), and George, Kenny's boyfriend. George and Wesley, you realize, are magnificent people.

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