



The Empty Room: Understanding Sibling Loss

Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn

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Ted is Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn's older brother, best friend, and the "ringmaster of her days." On a September morning when she is six, she wakes up and Ted is gone. Her parents explain that he went to the hospital for a while. "A while" turns out to be eight years in a plastic bubble, where he dies of a rare autoimmune disease at age seventeen.

The Empty Room is DeVita-Raeburn's unflinching, often haunting recollection of life with Ted, woven into a larger exploration of the enormous -- and often unacknowledged -- impact of a sister's or brother's death on remaining siblings.

With an inspired blend of life experience, journalistic acumen, and research training, DeVita-Raeburn draws on interviews of more than two hundred survivors to render a powerful portrait of the range of conditions and emotions, from withdrawal to guilt to rage, that attend such loss. Finding little in professional literature, she realizes that those who suffer are the experts. And in the end, it is DeVita-Raeburn and her experts who present a larger, more complex understanding of the sibling bond, the lifelong impact of the severing of that bond, and the tools needed to heal and move forward.

The Empty Room is a fascinating literary hybrid in which Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn seamlessly fuses deeply affecting remembrance with a pragmatic, lucidly written exploration of the healing journey.

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