



Every Minute Is a Suicide: Stories

Bruce McDougall

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This book reads like memory itself, a mixture of obviously key moments and seemingly innocuous ones that take on meaning later.

With *Every Minute is a Suicide*, Bruce McDougall succeeds in the difficult task of putting together a series of stories that track how a man's life was influenced by his parents splitting up when he was young. McDougall adeptly changes perspective, using different narrators and reflections from different times, all while maintaining his evocative prose and making the characters' journeys relatable but not predictable.

McDougall tells his story using a clever and effective structure. The first and longest story in the collection, "Mom Takes a Husband," ushers readers through the life cycle of an unsuccessful relationship—introducing the backstories of both partners, describing their courtship and marriage, and detailing how the husband's vices and violence toward his wife cause her to take the kids and move away. A few of the pivotal scenes in that story, such as the father's last attempt to see his children before committing suicide, are told again in future sections, but from the perspective of different narrators who flesh out the details.

The vast majority of the stories are told from the perspective of the couple's younger child, a son who was close with his father and still a boy when they were separated, but who is also very aware of the problems between his parents. As the book goes along, the son becomes more aware of how his whole life story was influenced by his mother's decision and his father's flaws. In one memorable story, he describes his mother and uncle arguing about which childhood neighbors lived on which streets and reflects on how the fight was really about the uncle having introduced the former couple.

By jumping in time, McDougall is able to make some interesting narrative choices. The narrator's two marriages are discussed, but only after their demises. He ascribes meaning to childhood experiences in retrospect. Combined with McDougall's strong description and honest dialogue, this approach makes *Every Minute is a Suicide* a worthy collection and a compelling read.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Spring 2015)

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