

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Peterson, Tanya J.

Inkwater Press (334 pp.)

\$17.95 paperback

ISBN: 978-1-59299-883-8; May 6, 2013

## BOOK REVIEW

Following the untimely death of his wife and son and a failed suicide attempt, a grief-stricken father is admitted to a psychiatric hospital where he struggles to find renewed hope and meaning in life.

Peterson's touching second novel (*Losing Elizabeth*, 2012) begins with a dramatic fall. The one thing that Oliver Graham wants in life is to die. Stepping from the ledge of an 18-story building in downtown Chicago, he plummets toward the sidewalk, taking with him the police officer who was attempting to talk him down. The crowd of onlookers watches both men crash safely into an inflatable landing pad before Oliver is handcuffed and taken to an institution the book calls Airhaven Behavioral Health Center. He meets Penelope, a fellow patient who experiences auditory hallucinations. Penelope refers to the voice as Eleanor Roosevelt, which controls, demeans and beleaguers her on a daily basis. Oliver and Penelope both find their situations to be hopeless; that is, until they begin to relate to and encourage one another. Penelope's fiancé, William, is at first jealous of Oliver, but comes to recognize the therapeutic benefits that spring from their friendship. Meanwhile, William must fend off the advances of his attractive new neighbor, Mariska, and steel himself against his best friend's suggestion that Penelope is a lost cause. The novel charts the emotional setbacks and triumphs of both patient and caregiver as Oliver and Penelope move toward their release from the institution. The author, a certified counselor, emphasizes the importance of human connection and creative endeavor in group therapy as a stimulus for recovery. Peterson succeeds in demystifying the world of psychiatric care and challenging the stigma that continues to surround mental health. A protracted and soapy melodramatic denouement sadly contradicts the book's measured, sensitive tone, but this flawed ending cannot detract from the fact that this novel will offer hope to many of its readers.

A heartrending, realistic story about grief, depression and schizophrenia that finds positivity in the darkest of moments.

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