

My Life in a Nutshell: A Novel

By Tanya J. Peterson
Inkwater Press, \$3.99, 384 pages

Interested in psychology and mental illness? Look no further. *My Life in a Nutshell* by Tanya J. Peterson, follows the life of the lonely yet gifted Brian Cunningham over the course of a couple of weeks. Told in first-person narration, Brian is a lonely man suffering from an anxiety and depression related illnesses and has managed to isolate himself from much of humanity so as to limit as many human interactions as possible. His small, secure world is rocked when he discovers seven-year-old Abigail Harris hiding in his closet at work. Abigail has hopped from one foster home to the next over a period of five years. She is in need of major stability and love when she latches on to Brian. Suddenly finding himself a prominent person in her life, their relationship acts as a much-needed catalyst of change for the both of them.

Peterson delves into the mind of Brian so effectively that the reader may find it difficult to read more than thirty to forty pages at a time, simply because the anxious thoughts reeling through Brian's head can sometimes be overwhelming. But it is certainly worth the intense experience, as this book is utterly engrossing and will creep under your skin. As a Certified Counselor who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, Peterson provides insight into living and dealing with mental illnesses. By placing the reader into the story as Brian Cunningham himself, the reader enters a world in which they can become intimately aware of the hardships of living with anxiety and depression.

According to Peterson, her goal while writing is to change the way the world views mental illnesses and those who live with them. In *My Life in a Nutshell*, her goal is certainly reached. No other text, unless it is her acclaimed book *Leave of Absence*, leads the reader into the world of mental illness in such an impactful way. This is a masterfully written book that everyone should read.

Reviewed by Kristin Urban