



# A Hole in the Heart: A Novel

*Christopher Marquis*

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"Midafternoon on a Tuesday, it occurred to Bean Jessup that she was forgetting her husband's face."

So begins this smart and charmingly written debut novel about a young woman trying to start over amid the grandeur of the Alaskan landscape and the creaky confines of an isolated fishing village and its relentless and pungent salmon cannery.

*A Hole in the Heart* is the story of what happens when Bean arrives after accepting a last-minute elementary-school-teaching job in a town of 2500 people on Alaska's southern coast. Love and marriage follow in short order, surprising Bean, who feels that her husband is not only the best thing to happen to her, but the only good thing.

Then Mick vanishes leading amateur hikers--or "tuna" as the guides call them--up Mt. McKinley. Suddenly, Bean is thrown back upon herself and into the company of Mick's mother Hanna, an arthritic woman in her seventies who believes that "a little larceny is good for the circulation."

The pair chafe at first, but eventually become partners in a road trip back to California. Mike's disappearance feels like a hole in the heart, they decide, and Hanna tells Bean to prize that hole; it's something no one can take away from her. With gentle humor, pathos, and boundless stores of hope, Marquis writes of Bean's struggle with early widowhood, loss, and moving on.

An avid bird-watcher, Bean takes much of her wisdom from the Pemberton Guide to Alaska Birds. Like the globe-crossing birds she so admires, she has struggled to get aloft, but for a delicious, perhaps fleeting moment in this marvelous novel, we see her glide.

*Book Magazine* selected Christopher Marquis as one of "Ten To Watch In 2003" for this "Proulxian saga." With its first-rate evocation of landscape and its affectionately drawn characters, *A Hole in the Heart* marks the publication debut of a prodigiously talented writer.

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