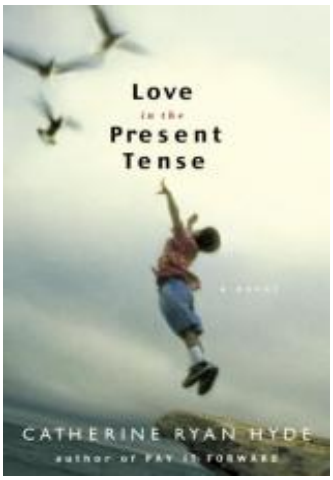
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Love in the Present Tense

by Catherine Ryan Hyde



About the Book

For five years Pearl has managed to keep the past from catching up to her and her bright, frail five-year-old son. Life has given her every reason to mistrust people, but circumstances force her to trust her neighbor Mitch with watching Leonard while she goes off to work. Then one day Pearl drops her son off...and never returns.

They are an unlikely pair: Mitch is a young, unattached business owner, and Leonard is a precocious, five-year-old boy. But together they must find a way to move forward in the wake of Pearl's unexplained disappearance. Their bond as parent and child shifts and endures, even as Mitch must eventually surrender Leonard to a two-parent home.

Is it possible to love the people who can't always be there for us? The answers will surprise and move you. As their lives unfold, profound questions emerge about the nature of love and family. Ultimately, this novel's richest reward is watching Mitch and Leonard grow up together, through the power and the magic of the human heart.

Discussion Guide

For five years Pearl has managed to keep the past from catching up to her and her bright, frail five-year-old son, Leonard. Life has given her every reason to mistrust people, but circumstances force her to trust her neighbor, Mitch, with watching Leonard while she goes off to work. Then one day Pearl drops her son off --- and never returns.

Pearl, Mitch, and Leonard each have a story to tell. As their lives unfold, profound questions emerge about the nature of love and family. Is it possible to love the people who can't always be there for us? The answers will surprise and move you. But this extraordinary novel's richest reward is watching Mitch and Leonard grow up together, through the power and the magic of the human heart.

1. If Leonard had been born with good health and perfect vision, to what extent do you feel his life would have been different and why?

2. Why do you think Pearl places such a value on cleanliness?

3. If you had been in Mitch's position, and didn't believe Leonard's assertion that Pearl was still "with him," would you want to help Leonard face the truth, or would you consider it kinder to allow him that delusion?

4. Do you think Leonard's "forever love" is possible in a romantic involvement? Or do you feel that such a totally selfless love is reserved for parental situations or other more "pure" devotion?

5. Because of the three separate character viewpoints, you knew what Mitch and Leonard initially didn't: Pearl's fate. If you had not seen this through her eyes, what would you have believed?

6. What do you think Leonard is looking for in his scrapes with death?

7. Have you ever felt an ongoing emotional connection with a loved one after his or her death?

8. Mitch's home environment was not ideally stable, but Leonard certainly didn't lack love in Mitch's care. Do you agree with Leonard's adoption into a two-parent home?

9. Harry was cast in a fairly negative light through most of the book, as seen through Mitch's eyes. Did you feel any empathy for him and his situation before Mitch did? If not, why do you think that was the case?

10. What do you think Barb means when she says of her long-standing relationship with Mitch "Maybe it's the stress that holds it together"?

11. Why do you think Mitch didn't fight back against Harry in their final meeting? Do you agree with Barb that he didn't feel entitled?

12. Leonard is in search of a last name and an identity through most of the book, but in Mitch's dream, Pearl says, "Leonard knows who he is." Do you agree with that statement?

Author Bio

Catherine Ryan Hyde is the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and #1 Amazon Charts bestselling author of more than 50 books and counting. An avid traveler, equestrian and amateur photographer, she shares her astrophotography with readers on her website.

Her novel, PAT IT FORWARD, was adapted into a major motion picture, chosen by the American Library Association (ALA) for its Best Books for Young Adults list, and translated into more than 23 languages for distribution in over 30 countries. Both BECOMING CHLOE and JUMPSTART THE WORLD were included on the ALA?s Rainbow Book List, and JUMPSTART THE WORLD was a finalist for two Lambda Literary Awards. WHERE WE BELONG won two Rainbow Awards in 2013, and THE LANGUAGE OF HOOFBEATS won a Rainbow Award in 2015.

More than 50 of her short stories have been published in the *Antioch Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Glimmer Train* and many other journals; in the anthologies SANTA BARBARA STORIES and CALIFORNIA SHORTS; and in the bestselling anthology DOG IS MY CO-PILOT. Her stories have been honored by the Raymond Carver Short Story Contest and the Tobias Wolff Award, and have been nominated for *The Best American Short Stories*, the O. Henry Award, and the Pushcart Prize. Three have been cited in the annual *Best American Short Stories* anthology.

As a professional public speaker, she has addressed the National Conference on Education, twice spoken at Cornell University, met with AmeriCorps members at the White House, and shared a dais with Bill Clinton.

Critical Praise

"A sweet and honest look at the pains and pleasures of love, and who could not fall in love with Leonard --- what a beautifully drawn character."

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