

Slow Slide into the Truth: A Therapist's Tale

Kim St. Clair

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(252pp)

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Slow Slide into the Truth is a suspenseful thriller in which a psychologist with possible information about a school bombing wrestles with her personal and professional boundaries.

In Kim St. Clair's taut thriller *Slow Slide into the Truth*, a psychologist confronts questions about her origins and her possible connection to a local bomber.

Beth is a psychologist who carries around a slew of secrets, leaving her feeling isolated and, at times, desperate for someone else to lean on. Prodded by a close friend, she takes a DNA test to discover the true identity of her parents. At the same time, she and her siblings struggle with the impending death of their imposing, cancer-stricken father.

Meanwhile, at work, under a boss who lacks empathy, Beth counsels "the Queen," a supercilious educator who claims to be married to an abusive man with a fanatical hatred of religion. Such hatred has been reported as the motive behind a school bombing, though Beth has her suspicions about whether the Queen is being honest with her. Beth also advises her supervisee, Michael, who suspects that one of his clients might be the bomber but is unsure of what he can do about it in view of client-therapist confidentiality.

Indeed, the friction between personal and professional considerations is a major source of conflict in the book. Beth and her colleagues work to balance their humanity with a sense of objectivity as a professional imperative. In one scene, after one of Michael's clients dies, he and Beth meet with their boss, who "cheerily dismis[s]e[s]" them after listening to Michael's update. Michael is incredulous, but Beth notes, "You don't know if she cares ... She's been a therapist for thirty years. Maybe she just hides her feelings."

Many of the novel's distinctive characters are haunted, including three other clients of Beth's—a young woman struggling with manic depression and a married couple at war over the husband's sexual voyeurism. Beth's parents are compelling, too: her mother exudes fortitude, love, and patience as she copes with a stubborn, irascible spouse, four often-warring offspring, and her fear that a monumental secret from her past may be exposed. Still, Beth is centered. She's constructed as smart, independent, and compassionate; she struggles with an accumulation of anxieties over a broken romance, possibly duplicitous clients, her dying father, uncertainty about her true parentage, and the nagging fear that she is sitting on a clue about the bombing. Still, Beth is a source of strength for her patients, her family, and her coworkers.

The book weaves between storylines well, prolonging the suspense right up until its dramatic conclusion. Most of its prose is pensive, subtle, and understated, revealing pieces of the story through differing points of view as the mysteries mount, including about Beth's parents, what the Queen is hiding, and whether the team's clients are acting in cahoots. The conclusion, which includes a dramatic showdown and a gun-toting villain, feels like part of a different novel because of its tonal differences, though.

A Midwestern therapist tackles duplicitous clients and a high school bomber in *Slow Slide into the Truth*, a compelling

thriller with elements of a family drama.

DAVID BUSHMAN (September 3, 2024)

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