Seven Strangers Press the Same Elevator Button in Woodrow Odom Lucas's Birds of Flight

In room 817, a theology student is delighted to meet a therapist who shares his faith. The woman sitting near him has good reason to distrust almost everything he believes.

Before Suzanne can get to her first group therapy session, she has to get off the phone with her ex-husband. What starts as a question about who can pick up their child from school turns into an argument about why an atheist would work at a mission. Suzanne thinks the answer is pretty simple. People need help. She has a late shift to work, an appointment to keep, and very little patience left for Peter. Then she gets into an elevator, presses eight, and heads off to meet a therapist who believes in miracles.

In Birds of Flight, a novel by Woodrow Odom Lucas published by The Ewings Publishing LLC, seven strangers make their way to the same office. Lucas lets readers meet each one before they meet each other. Ted's mother has to wake him up to get him there. Once the recipient of an MIT scholarship, he now finds lines of computer code crossing his mind when all he wants to do is get dressed. Crystal, a nonprofit executive who is almost never late, tells her secretary when to expect her back. She can extend kindness to nearly anyone. Extending a little to herself is another matter.

Waiting for them is Dr. Tamika Woods, a psychotherapist and theology scholar who asks everyone to call her Tamika. She tells the group where she stands on God, talks about what they'll be doing together, and turns to Garrick to start the introductions. A divorced father studying for his doctorate in theology, Garrick is thrilled to have found a Pentecostal therapist who shares his belief that everyone will ultimately be welcomed by God. Suzanne helped build a church in her living room and lost her marriage after she began questioning what she'd been taught. She'd have plenty to say in a debate with Garrick. What surprises her first is how attractive she finds him.

That spark follows them to a coffee shop called the Galactic Tea Cup. Garrick opens with what might be the least promising line for a date with an atheist: has she seen the light of Universalism yet? Suzanne suggests she might understand it better than he does. After all, she's the one who made friends across religions, and here she is having coffee with him. It's a funny exchange that gives Suzanne something she rarely gets in conversations with her ex: the pleasure of finishing her thought and hearing the man across from her laugh.

Across ten group sessions, Lucas keeps returning to what happens between appointments. For Garrick, one of the hardest things he sets out to do is take his daughter Aria to a basketball game. From the bleachers, he might look like any father who showed up to watch his child play. Readers who made the trip with him know what it took to get there.

Birds of Flight brings faith, doubt, mental illness, and romance into the same circle of chairs. It also leaves room for the ordinary things these seven people want: to make it through a workday, be there for a child, or have coffee with someone they'd like to see again. Those wishes give readers a reason to follow them back to room 817.

Book information

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