Tim Welch is a popular history teacher at the Montague Academy, an exclusive private school in Brooklyn Heights. As he says, I was an odd-looking, gawky kid but I like to think my rocky start forced me to develop empathy, kindness, and a tendency to be enthusiastic. All of this, I'm now convinced, helped in my quest to be worthy of Kate Oliver. Now, Kate is not inherently ordinary. But she aspires to be. She stays home with their two young sons in a modest apartment trying desperately to become the parent she never had. They are seemingly the last middle-class family in the Heights, whose world is turned upside down by Anna Brody, the new neighbor who moves into the most expensive brownstone in Brooklyn, sending the local society into a tailspin.

Anna is not only beautiful and wealthy; she's also mysterious. And for reasons Kate doesn't quite understand, even as all the Range Rover-driving moms jockey for invitations into Anna's circle, Anna sets her sights on Kate and Tim and brings them into her world.

Like Tom Perrotta, Peter Hedges has a keen eye for the surprising truths of daily life. The Heights is at once light of touch and packed with emotion and depth of character.

My Personal Review:
"Nine years and two boys later, I still had the ring. And what did Kate and I have? A great, ordinary love we both fought for and guarded. Somehow in these bumpy, broken early years of the twenty-first century, we had navigated our way to something good and simple." -- From The Heights

When I realized that the author of The Heights was Peter Hedges of What's Eating Gilbert Grape? and Pieces of April fame, I just had to snag
this book. Pieces of April (starring Katie Holmes) is one of my favorite movies—a simple, moving peek through the window at a family navigating dashed expectations and exasperating attempts at familial connection.

In The Heights, history teacher Tim Welch (who slid into his position thanks to a last-minute death) is admired by his students. And he gets a rush out of bringing history to life. His wife, Kate, is brilliant and well-educated in her own right, and has decided to raise their two small boys at home.

That is, until a former associate, Bruno Schwine, invites her to work with him for an obscene amount of money while they give away a gazillionaire's money to various charities. What a great solution to their money troubles! (Tim's quip to Verizon over a past-due bill didn't go over as well as he'd like; in short, the Welch's are over-their-heads in debt).

Of course, when beautiful, mysterious, super-wealthy Anna Brody buys up several apartments, reverting it back to a huge house in Brooklyn's Heights—not to mention takes a special interest in Kate and then Tim--the Welch's already tenuous "good thing" begins a rapid fray...

Well, I've finished The Heights and let me tell you, it's a SUPERB book. As a writer, I'm super-conscious of when a writer is "writing" (and I tend to dissect it for my own benefit) but with The Heights, I honestly wasn't aware I was reading a "book". It went down so smooth, like a milkshake—which is a testament to Peter Hedges amazing writing prowess.

But make no mistake: smooth and breezy doesn't mean "lightweight"; it takes a genius, in my opinion, to write so well that the reader isn't aware of the author.

In The Heights, Hedges addresses universal themes (e.g. idealizing others, especially "successful" or "rich" ones, by thinking the grass is greener on their side), but what he gets oh-so-delectably right is the details. I love how each chapter is from a different point of view; for example, one minor character calls Kate Welch and one short chapter is her side of the "conversation". So believable! So palatable a technique! (In fact, it's making me re-think the style of my own novel that I'm working on.)

Keeping the reader slightly off-kilter, hinting at one thing when something altogether different is going on (and just as bad)—The Heights has the finely-strung tension of a literary mystery. But we end up discovering throughout the book and at its end is that the greatest mystery of all is truly ourselves.

-- Janet Boyer, author of Back in Time Tarot

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