

## The Book of Otto and Liam

**Paul Griner**

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In his heartwrenching novel *The Book of Otto and Liam*, Paul Griner traces the hard-fought healing of a school shooting victim's father.

The story is told through short snippets and vignettes. It starts on an anniversary of the event, shrouding the emerging story line in mystery. Hoaxers, who believe that the school massacre was staged as part of a government conspiracy to take guns away from citizens, prevent its full media coverage. Otto narrates; he is the father of Liam, one of the injured children, whose recovery process is fragile. Otto's marriage disintegrates, and he is plagued by letters and pranks accusing him of being a crisis actor. Between work, bouts of despair, and hunting for the hoaxers' leader, Otto finds a new love.

The novel's colorful scenes are as intricate and painstaking as the sketches that Otto makes for his graphic marketing business. A shooting range, a bakery run by ex-prostitutes, fishing trips in Vermont, and evenings binge drinking in jazz clubs are among the many vibrant scenes. Otto's imaginative renderings add a dreamy, often alcohol-soaked, element to the story. As his art aids his turnaround from avenger to lover and trusted friend, the book lifts the soul.

Dark humor, as with Otto's plot to gift hoaxers a pile of pink dildos, results in eerie unease, a reminder of the fine line between victims and perpetrators, justice and injustice. Letters from hoaxers reveal the enemy's humanity, as well as their evil. With interim chapters that cite school shooting statistics, the book rides the line between fact and fiction, asking pointed questions about race, guns, violence, and forgiveness that sometimes reach beyond the scope of its story.

*The Book of Otto and Liam* is a biting literary novel that protects a fragile truth with its endearing story of fatherly love.

MARI CARLSON (May / June 2021)

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