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General

Your Presence Is Requested at Suvanto: A Novel
Maile Chapman
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Friedrich Nietzsche once said, “He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby becomes a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.” In Maile Chapman’s debut thriller, *Your Presence Is Requested at Suvanto*, we are given characters whose loathsome qualities serve to thinly mask their own personal abysses. Set in the isolated countryside of 1920s’ Finland, the tone is as detached and frigid as the landscape, forcing readers to brace themselves against the chilling and foreboding narrative.

Sunny Taylor, an American nurse who moves to Finland after the death of her mother, takes a position at Suvanto Convalescent Hospital. Sunny is the head nurse of the “up ward,” a ward for patients who are there for mental as well as physical ailments, some finding the confines of the hospital easier to deal with than the routine of daily life. She is comforted by the demands of the patients and adheres to self-imposed strict guidelines in order perform her duties with efficiency. But Sunny’s composure is challenged when the aging, frail Julia Dey becomes her patient. Julia is a former ballroom dance instructor with her good days behind her and this has left her unamenable and manipulative. Sunny is the only person who learns to cope with Julia and help her deal with her shameful secret. Joined by the emotionally fragile Mary Minder and Pearl Weber, and the truly ailing Laimi Lehti, these women form a tragic group of social misfits.

Chapman’s taut prose enhances the subtle and disturbing tone and, in turn, makes the appearance of any newcomer seem ominous. The mutual comfort between patients and Sunny is threatened by the arrival of Dr. Peter Weber, an American doctor who has come to Finland to work on a new, controversial childbirth procedure. He informs Sunny that he wants the up patients discharged as soon as possible so that he can use the rooms for pregnant patients. The women of the up ward react negatively to him and Sunny, even with her austere front, harbors a tacit resentment. A sudden death shakes the foundation of the up ward and ultimately leads to a

macabre ending that questions the reality of the story that Chapman has so skillfully presented.

Maile Chapman has written a literary thriller that will please even the most discerning of intellects. Fans of historical fiction, suspense, and craftsmanship will not be let down by the plot, style, or pacing of this eerie Scandinavian thriller.