

Don't Say a Word: A Daughter's Two Cents

Elizabeth Roper Marcus

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Don't Say a Word is a lively, honest, and wickedly humorous memoir about the minefields of parent-child relationships.

Elizabeth Roper Marcus's memoir *Don't Say a Word* witnesses as her octogenarian parents struggle against their declines in a small Mexican town.

Marcus's memories are directed by a question: "Do all children imagine they live in a scary fairy tale?" She was the only child of two professionals whose bombastic personalities and bickering gave new meaning to the term "nuclear family," and recounts being raised most by her nanny, whom she loved. She admits to having trouble deciphering where she fit into her parents' lives, and to deciding that the safest way to navigate her family dynamics was to become a compulsive peacekeeper.

Marcus's parents started wintering in Mexico in their retirement, after which Marcus, her two warring children, and her laid-back psychiatrist husband made annual holiday pilgrimages to visit them. In Mexico, she witnessed as her parents began to cut loose. Riotous accounts show them engaging a crooked lawyer in order to purchase a derelict car, and later getting involved with a charming, shady couple who divested them of their good sense and money, which was meant to go toward the purchase of a house.

The book achieves intensity in detailing the traps laid for Marcus's parents, who bought a house on a steep slope, with staircases sans handrails, whose rooms had to be passed between outdoors. Marcus, an architect, recalls swallowing her hurt and anger as her parents continued to make questionable decisions based on dishonest advice.

Marcus's story rocks between hilarity, despair, and frustration. Throughout, she struggles to reconcile her childhood fantasies about her parents with her persistent insecurities around them. Though her family and its story are unique, the book is sympathetic in detailing the conflicted emotions, difficulties, and fears she experienced as her parents entered their later years.

Photographs are used to track the family's passing years and changing circumstances, while Marcus's incisive, sensitive analysis of her family relationships results in depth. She comes to the disturbing realization that she felt both grief and a sense of relief when her mother died; she covers her delicate handling of her father's demand for a housekeeper who would also share his bed.

Self-aware in handling her parents' declining circumstances, *Don't Say a Word* is a lively, honest, and wickedly humorous memoir about the minefields of parent-child relationships.

KRISTINE MORRIS (February 19, 2021)

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