

Last Things: A Graphic Memoir of Loss and Love

Marissa Moss

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Marissa Moss shares the brutal experience of her husband's deterioration from ALS, in her unflinching graphic memoir, *Last Things*.

Moss, a successful author of many children's books, including the Amelia's Notebook and Young American Voices series, finds a subject closer to home in *Last Things*—her husband Harvey's diagnosis and eventual death of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. After symptoms emerge during an overseas trip, Harvey Stahl, a distinguished professor of medieval art at the University of California, Berkeley, quickly declines, slurring words and having trouble walking. Moss relates the story through her eyes, but also through Harvey's and their children's when possible, giving a complete view of the tragedy from all sides.

Harvey alternates between active denial of the seriousness of his condition, and withdrawal from the family as he attempts to finish a book. Moss juggles parenting her three children and taking care of Harvey. The stress and emotional tension is palpable throughout the book, a testament to Moss's honesty; she openly reveals her resentment at the obstacles to her own writing, or Harvey's lack of involvement with the kids. It's these very human reactions that make it all the more affecting when she steps back from the heavy household demands to reflect on her relationship with her husband:

"We remember 'firsts,' are aware of them by their very nature. But last things sneak up on you, slip away, unnoticed ... Harvey and I share a lot of 'lasts' and we don't even know it."

Moss's black-and-white illustrations are simple but expressive, perfect for telling this story. *Last Things* is difficult to read at times, grueling in its emotional detail, but ultimately it stands as a moving memoir and a guide not just for those caring for someone afflicted with ALS, but anyone seeking a better understanding of the processes of dying or grieving.

PETER DABBENE (May/June 2017)

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