

## **My Side of the Bed: A Memoir of Deceit, Denial, and Discovery**

**Margherita Gale Harris**

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*My Side of the Bed is a keenly felt story of moving beyond betrayal.*

In her affecting memoir, *My Side of the Bed*, Margherita Gale Harris copes with protracted marital infidelity, and struggles to get an annulment from her church.

Harris, a nurse, discovered that her husband, an Episcopal priest and doctor, had cheated on her with hundreds of strangers. Together, they settled on sex addiction treatment, couples therapy, and trying, but more shocking secrets came to light. After thirty-five years, they divorced; she then had to face a fight with the Episcopal Church to secure an annulment. Her narration recalls her feelings of betrayal, pain, and anguish; it also follows her long, winding road to recovery.

The book takes the church to task for the ways it fails women, demanding that more compassion be shown to those who have been subjected to such deceptions by their partners. While at times the text has the flavor of an extended vent session, it is also a powerful account of healing. Harris moves beyond her soured, toxic relationship and starts anew; the book sympathetically lists support groups, recommended titles, and other resources for those in similar situations.

Writing is polished and intelligent, citing authors from Shakespeare to Maya Angelou. Crisp, crystalline lines pack emotional punches, as when Harris's mom declares that she's "been a terrible mother" while leaning "slightly forward in Dad's old upholstered armchair." Well-deployed details bring the story to life: a CPAP machine forcing air into Harris's husband's lungs every night, lightning flickering as they lay alienated and alone in bed together, the freighted image of a half-empty closet.

Harris's emotions are palpable in tough scenes, as when she thrusts her husband's pornography in front of a bishop to make her case. At times, scenes are so raw that the book's overarching messages around injustice and resilience are lost.

The narrative is chronological, capturing the long, slow dissolution of Harris's marriage in a straightforward progression. It charts the grieving process well: Harris is seen letting go of anger, getting lost in yoga, going through counseling and group sessions, and "planting vegetables in the rocky soil." Hers is a realistic and sympathetic portrait of a marriage moving away from love, into betrayal, and toward an end, just as it has elements of a Kafkaesque battle against an indifferent, uncaring bureaucracy.

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JOSEPH S. PETE (July 26, 2018)

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