



The Face Tells the Secret

Jane Bernstein

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In Jane Bernstein's thoughtful, character-driven novel *The Face Tells the Secret*, a woman struggles with new knowledge about her unhappy childhood.

Roxanne was never close to her mother, Leona, who prided herself on not being maternal and who is now going senile. She is reluctant about caring for Leona, but then she learns something unexpected: she has a disabled sister whom her parents gave up decades ago. As she grapples with this news and what it reveals about her parents, Roxanne learns to bond with the family she never knew and grow past her parents' mistakes.

In the sometimes stream-of-consciousness narrative, Roxanne's complex feelings about her mother and her family are crystal clear. Raw and soul-baring, she expresses a desire to help those around her. She feels selfish for having needs of her own, and attributes this unhealthy attitude to neglectful Leona, whom she both loves and hates.

Roxanne's struggles are enhanced by her setting. Much of the story takes place in Tel Aviv, a locale that is filtered through Roxanne's divided state of mind. Captured as a mixture of beauty and tragedy, it produces both positive and negative associations.

Characters come alive through anecdotes large and small. Leona, in particular, pervades the story. Each of her acts of callousness gets under Roxanne's skin, and her former sharpness becomes a tragic counterpoint to her decline and ultimate fate. In the end, despite her lingering regrets, Roxanne is able to come to terms with the past and live the life that's best for her and her loved ones.

The Face Tells the Secret is a poignant novel about moving ahead when the past won't stop bleeding into the present.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2019)

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