

Your Voice in My Head: A Memoir

Emma Forrest

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“The point of psychiatry,” writes Emma Forrest, “...is the outside observer. The person to whom you can tell your secrets because you will never have to face them at the dinner table.” We live in an age when everyone and their mothers are telling secrets in therapists’ offices. In Forrest’s case, the outside observer is Dr. R—a reputable New York City psychiatrist who brings Forrest back from the edge. *Your Voice in My Head* is memoir, but it’s memoir told against the backdrop of a woman’s relationship with her psychiatrist and his longstanding influence after his death.

Elegiac in nature (eulogies written by Dr. R’s patients frame many chapters throughout the book), *Your Voice* takes us right onto Dr. R’s couch near the time of Forrest’s suicide attempt. Dr. R—a believer in Forrest’s courage and ability to do “the work” of getting well—counsels Forrest through, and eventually beyond, a pattern of self-abuse, an abortion, and relationships with the wrong kind of men. More stable, Forrest moves across country for a job, maintaining less frequent contact with Dr. R. In her new environment she meets the man she refers to as “Gypsy Husband” (“GH”). The relationship with GH is notably different from prior relationships and blossoms into talk of children and ever-after—just as Forrest learns of Dr. R’s death from his hidden battle with cancer. But when the relationship with GH unexpectedly bottoms out, she must rely upon the strength and wisdom garnered over the years as a patient of Dr. R—and his voice in her head.

While *Your Voice* explores the unique relationship between patient and therapist, it is not a “therapy memoir.” Forrest wards off sentimentality and reader-pity by handing readers the hard facts: “...it took a little while to realize...that my quirks had gone beyond eccentricity...I was cutting my body with razors—my arms, legs, stomach...I was binging and purging six, seven, eight times a day.” On the other side of mental illness, she is without bravado about her recovery: “I walk all the time. I’m working my ass off to eat right, and some of my ass comes off. I’m weight training with a batshit-crazy Russian girl...Sounds privileged, but you can do it for free too, running along the river, not buying the chocolate cake.” Her pace is quick, and her story peppered with the minutiae that authenticates a life—flight details, emails, blog entries, voicemail greetings, and lists—which together pay homage not only to her Dr. R, but to a life in recovery

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