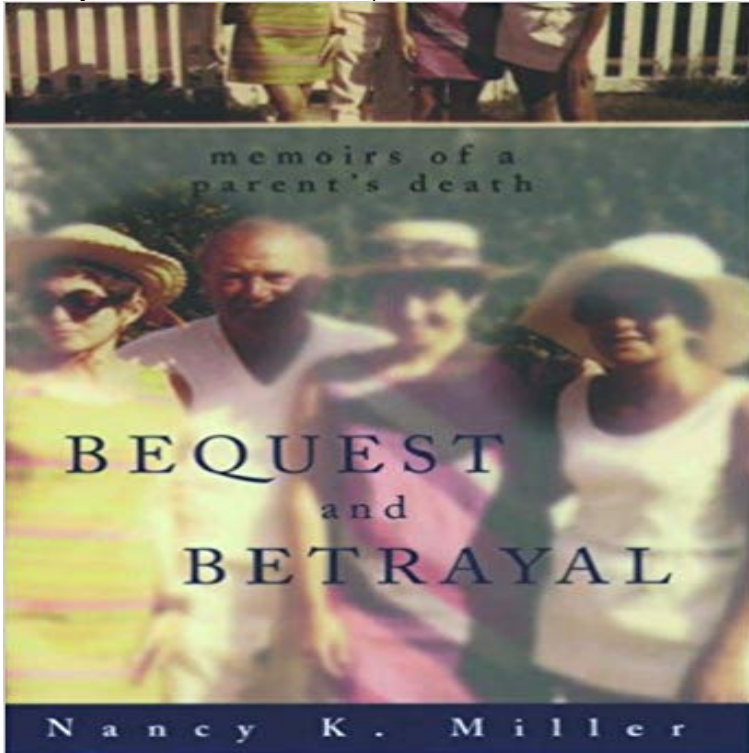


Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parents Death



My mothers death was a shock--an athletic non-smoker, she was diagnosed as having lung cancer days after her sixty-eighth birthday and died a few months later. It was only in the years following her death, when my father became physically and mentally crippled by Parkinsons disease, that I began to think and to write about the end of life. So notes Nancy K. Miller in the opening pages of *Bequest and Betrayal*, an innovative form of memoir that blends astute literary criticism and gripping autobiographical passages as it illuminates an experience that is both universal and intensely private: the death of a parent.

Bequest and Betrayal is composed like a tapestry, weaving together insightful readings of books like Philip Roths *Patrimony* with harrowing autobiographical material about the last years of Millers own parents. By incorporating her own deeply felt memories into the text, the author gives weight to her examination of the central themes that emerge: the relations between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and fathers and daughters; the crisis of aging and of bodies in decline; what it means to write about someone elses suffering; how questions of class and religion shape the relationship between parent and child. With great sensitivity, she shows how the adult child--confronted with the loss of parents--comes to terms through autobiographical narrative. To do this, Miller examines a series of autobiographical works in which a parents death is central to the family plot, including Simone de Beauvoirs *A Very Easy Death*, Susan Cheevers *Home Before Dark*, and Art Spiegelmans *Maus*. Telling the story of a parents death, Miller demonstrates, is a way of rewriting ones own sense of history, ones present self in relation to childhood.

Whether she is shedding light on the memoirs of other contemporary writers or relating a detail of her fathers struggle with

Parkinsons disease, Miller captivates us with her fearless, original intelligence. Combining Millers broad knowledge of literature, her wry sensibility, and engaging prose style, Bequest and Betrayal is a book of outstanding grace and complexity, highly readable and often very moving.

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