

The Night Garden of My Mother

Sandra Tyler

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Sandra Tyler's intimate and affecting memoir *The Night Garden of My Mother* is about caring for her aged mother as she slid into frailty and dementia. Nestled within this fractured daily life of emergencies and interruptions, Tyler found both mysteries and gifts.

Tyler's conflicted relationship with her mother, forged of love and will, was her measure of her own life. Her mother's dementia further fractured Tyler's sense of herself: it seemed like her best was never enough. She was devastated when her mother expressed anger over a decision made to protect her, declaring "You are not my daughter anymore"; an hour later, she was once again her mother's daughter. Her days became consumed by disruption and worry.

Tyler writes about the fear she felt while anticipating the next phone call, eighty-mile trip to her mother's house, and emergency room visit. Once, her mother almost bled out due to prescribed blood thinners but did not remember that she had fallen. Indeed, her mother dealt with forgetfulness, fear, and paranoia; she required constant vigilance. Thus, Tyler's needs, and her family's needs, were set aside. A new caregiver changed the power dynamic in their mother-daughter relationship, though. Tyler, at first resentful, came to respect this new person's skill and wisdom.

The book works toward healing: after her mother's death, Tyler discovered a clue regarding the source of her family's generational wounds. She came to better understand her mother's struggle for freedom and authenticity. Despite the horrors and cruelty of dementia, her mother, an artist, had left her a gift: memories of moments of shared ecstasy over the world's beauty. This, Tyler wrote, was what she would miss most.

The Night Garden of My Mother is an emotive memoir about the entwined nature of generational woundedness and love.

KRISTINE MORRIS (September / October 2024)

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