

Whisper of Hope, Cry of Despair

Vicky Bedi

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About refusing to be overwhelmed by the demands of an abusive mother, Whisper of Hope, Cry of Despair is a short but affecting memoir.

Vicky Bedi's brief, spare memoir *Whisper of Hope, Cry of Despair* is about generational trauma following child and spousal abuse.

Written with sympathy for other survivors of abuse, this steady, chronological book focuses on family members and family relationships in turn. The chapter dedicated to Bedi's father, for example, begins with a recitation of facts about his ancestry and birth before covering the murder of his father by his mother and his eventual stay in an orphanage. The chapter centered on Bedi's mother is organized in a similar fashion, revealing that she grew up with an abusive father—a former member of the tsar's military who took his nostalgia for those bygone days out on his family members. Both fed into their families' cycles of abuse—habits that Bedi recognized and sought to break. Indeed, the prose upholds empathy for others—and for oneself.

Instances of brutal abuse run throughout these chapters, as does evidence of the consequences of such violence. Bedi's mother, for example, tried to kill her spouse with a knife twice; she is recalled for having degraded and abused him for the entirety of their marriage. Bedi notes that she was also subject to her mother's physical abuse.

Photographs, newspaper clippings, and other ephemera complement the book's family sections. However, these chapters often read as flat, imprecise reportage, establishing or suggesting details rather than telling stories. Theories are raised, as with the notion that Bedi's paternal grandfather may have been murdered as the result of a love triangle, but without the benefit of evidence or context. Further, the book's family member–dedicated sections consume most of its space; they are intended to ground Bedi's own story, but instead they overshadow it. Still, the book asserts with conviction that this intergenerational abuse did impact her childhood—and that its effects lingered into her adulthood.

As the book progresses, its prose becomes more self-assured, incorporating more details and setting scenes in a more immersive manner. It moves between active scenes and reflections on them, following Bedi's mother's worsening condition and the deepening fear that she instilled in her daughter. Still, the space is too limited to fully convey how Bedi avoided the empathy vacuum that her mother spent a lifetime creating.

About cycles of family abuse, the memoir *Whisper of Hope, Cry of Despair* exemplifies great strength and endurance in its story of rising above.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (April 5, 2024)

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