

Legacy of Shadows

Preface

"Now that I stand in this sunlit clearing beyond a forest, menacing and deep, why do I want to take your hand and walk again through these woods? Perhaps because I've found they can only threaten me if I try to leave them behind forever; and while I've learned to travel alone from light into darkness and back again, it would be lovely to have a companion now and then."

With these words as introduction I began, twelve years ago, to write a factual account of a desperate emotional breakdown - my own. Though it was well behind me, I hoped that probing its mysteries would protect me from a recurrence of the horrific symptoms which had seemed to strike from nowhere. As I reopened my past, I was overwhelmed by memories and startling insights. Eventually I came to understand that my illness had not been mine alone, but the inexorable culmination of a story set in motion with the death of my grandmother's two-and-a half-year-old child, eight decades earlier. Stunned by this discovery, and torn by issues of accuracy and privacy in relating the lives of others, I put my writing aside.

But the story would not let me go. In exploring the particulars of my psychological history I had awakened, ironically, to its universality. Understanding the causes of my prolonged fragmentation ended my feeling of isolation, reconnecting me to the human family. I realized that the severity of my symptoms cast in high-relief a pervasive but illusive truth: that each of us is deeply directed by the legacy of unresolved emotion passed from generation to generation.

The book you are about to read is very different from my original attempt. Years after I abandoned my documentation, I approached the work as fiction, giving myself license, at last, to broaden the scope of the story beyond my own lifetime. I began to project myself empathically into the minds of the two women whose lives had funneled into mine, calling up images which might have captured their emotions at pivotal moments in their lives. A reader searching for the sensational will not find it in these pages; the story is not one of abuse, but of the best parental intentions gone awry - the most common of all human tragedies.

To release my unconscious understanding of an emotional legacy so deeply silent and encoded in symbol, I needed to call upon metaphor and meter. The resulting work is as much poetry as prose. Focusing on the interior lives and perceptions of a mother, daughter and granddaughter in turn, I adopted the format and intentions of the journal rather than the novel. As a granddaughter's transformation of family tragedy, *Legacy of Shadows* is an expression of faith that in our deepening self-knowledge lies the hope of liberation for ourselves and our children.

Lillian Moats, 1999