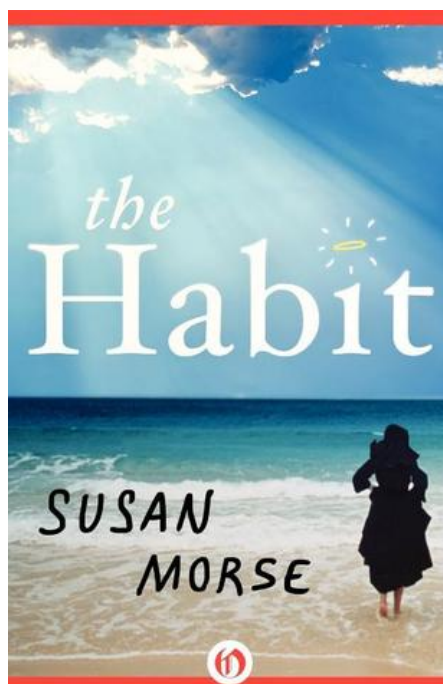




The Habit

Susan Morse

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The Habit Susan Morse

There is an unmistakable gleam in Ma's eye, and her absolute composure both appalls me and rips my heart from its root. I burst into tears. The gauntlet is thrown. From the time she was conceived, Susan Morse was her mother's "special" child. For Susan, special translated into becoming her incorrigible mother's frazzled caretaker, a role that continued into adulthood. Now she finds herself as part of the sandwich generation, responsible for a woman whose eighty-five years have been single-mindedly devoted to identifying The Answer To Everything. And, this week's Answer looks like it may be the real thing. Susan's mother is becoming a nun. Mother Brigid is opinionated and discerning (Don't call them trash cans. They're scrap baskets), feisty and dogmatic (Stop signs and No Parking zones are installed by bureaucratic pencil pushers with nothing better to do), a brilliant artist (truly, a saving grace), and predictably unpredictable, recently demonstrated by her decision to convert to Orthodox Christianity and join its holy order. Dressed in full nun regalia, she might be mistaken for a Taliban bigwig. But just as Mother Brigid makes her debut at church, a debilitating accident puts her in a rehab center hours from Susan's home, where Susan's already up to her neck juggling three teenagers, hot flashes, a dog, two cats, and a husband whose work pulls him away from the family for months at a time. Now Susan gets to find out if it's less exhausting to be at her mother's beck and call from one hundred miles away or one hundred feet. And she's beginning to suspect that the things she always thought she knew about her mother were only the tip of a wonderfully singular iceberg. In this fresh, funny, utterly irresistible memoir, Susan Morse offers readers a look at a mother-daughter relationship that is both universal and unique. For anyone who's wondered how they made it through their childhood with their sanity intact, for every multitasking woman coping simultaneously with parents and children, for those of us who love our parents come hell or high water (because we just can't help it), Susan Morse's story is surprising, reassuring, and laugh-out-loud funny. A beguiling journey of love, forbearance, and self-discovery, *The Habit* introduces two unforgettable women you'll be glad to know-from a safe distance. "Susan's epic effort to differentiate herself from the consuming power of this unique woman is every woman's struggle, but writ large, crazy, and funny." -Rosanne Cash, author of *Composed* "Susan Morse writes in a dream state, and *The Habit* is funny and moving and wise. After reading it, you'll see Susan's mother in a whole new way, and your own mother, too." -Michael Bamberger, author of *The Swinger* "In her portrait of her hilarious and heroic struggle with an almost impossible mother, Susan Morse has captured the mother-daughter paradox like no one else in recent memory." -Rebecca Pepper Sinkler, former editor of the *New York Times Book Review* "Morse's caustic, changeable, demanding, smarty-pants mother is a late-life Sharon Sedaris, had Sharon Sedaris lived and become an Orthodox Christian nun in her eighties, and Morse herself is a crackerjack guide." -Cynthia Kaplan, author of *Why I'm Like This* "A page-turning, humorous account of one woman's experience during her difficult mother's turbulent journey into old age. . . . A lively testament to a complicated though loving mother-daughter relationship." -Kirkus Reviews "A sometimes searing, often hilarious account of a mother-daughter relationship Hallmark probably doesn't have a card for." -Ellen Gray, *Philadelphia Daily News* Susan Morse was educated at Williams College and has worked as an actress in L.A. and New York. She now lives in Philadelphia with her husband, David, and their three children. She has edited fiction, although this book is nonfiction. Mostly. She promises.

The Habit Details

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From Reader Review The Habit for online ebook

Liz says

Still Laughing!

My mom lived until she was 94. Our family story was not as fraught with "craziness" and yet so much of Susan and her mom's story resonated with me!

The love and the laughter are what is most important!!!

Diane Lybbert says

This is a delightful memoir, written by actor David Morse's wife Susan. She tells of her uneven relationship with her mother as she was growing up, and now finds herself in the role of caretaker as her mother ages (85 yrs) and develops health issues (broken bones from falling and cancer). With a good dose of humor and open-eyed confusion when embroiled in the health care bog - Medicare vs HMO vs Medicaid; assisted living vs skilled nursing vs home health - she at once amuses us, educates us, and occasionally touches our hearts. I am a big fan of memoirs anyway, but this one was truly remarkable. I would HIGHLY recommend this book.

John Haake says

Not for me. I picked this book so that my wife and I could read it together and I was thinking my wife would like this because she has an interesting relationship with her mother.

Sadly, I learned that's really not what this book is mostly about -- not about relationships, but instead about the frantic and frustrating life of a care manager for a parent approaching the end of her earthly life -- i.e. health care and the medical world is the antagonist in this drama.

The whole time I was ready of the author's troubles dealing with her mother's health issues by the money-sucking life savers of the American Medical establishment I couldn't help but think back to a conversation I sat in on while I was in France. A room full of elderly people sitting around discussing their concerns and wants before the end of their lives -- some with obvious and apparent health issues. -- How many of those elderly French were concerned about such things as: "how will I ever pay for Dr. xxxx's bills?" "What is going to happen to me when I can't take care of myself anymore?" -- Nope, not one of those elderly people even mentioned ANYTHING related to health care or payment for health services. The reason why: because France does it RIGHT and Americans are funding a bunch of wealth mongers.

This book screams the need for a Government control public health system. America needs to wake up and take lessons from the rest of the world's 1st world countries -- we have a LOT to learn -- and a lot of humility we have to beat into all AMA members.

Catherine says

Morse's strong-willed, quirky mother becomes a nun at the age of eighty-five. She ends up being the principal caregiver of her mother and writes about her struggle with their relationship while she frantically attempts to balance her own busy life.

Many reviews raved about how humorous and poignant this book was. I couldn't get past Morse's neurotic, obsessive nature. For me, the book was more annoying than enjoyable, and definitely not funny.

Wendy says

The sandwich generation will appreciate this memoir. Loved the fact this is not a sentimental sappy story. Fighting insurance companies and finding long term care are enough of a hurdle without adding old childhood anxieties to pile on the frustration. Plus your teenage son needs help with his homework and dinner and is learning to drive so when your heart attack happens he can save your life! I literally laughed out loud like I do when reading David Sedaris.

Mimi says

Huh. This is a wildly zany memoir from the daughter of a woman who becomes an Orthodox nun in her 80s. Obviously written from the perspective of someone who is not Orthodox, I was intrigued by how things that make sense to me, or I understand were perceived and I thought it added an interesting dimension.

However, this is truly a small part of the story. The bulk of the story is the sandwich generation and how women (and men, but that's not the focus) juggle being a parent and child at the same time, and taking care of the needs of each.

Witty, sarcastic, tender, bawdy, and honest, it was a great read.

Ann Chenhall says

This was a fun memoir, but I came to believe the author was very funny and maybe a bit nuts, the way she imagined herself being when she was busy advocating for someone dear to her. I could relate to the sandwich generation and actually liked her take on the medical/residential choices available for elderly and how our system is not very clear or supportive. I enjoyed the final comments from her mother too. "No one dies," a very spiritual message.

Barbara says

part biography, part autobiography, Susan Morris humorously traces her "special" relationship with her difficult mother from a challenging childhood to the change in her mother which begins with her conversion to Orthodox Christianity and taking the vows of a nun at age 84. While the mother faces several health

challenges with faith and acceptance, Susan throws herself into managing her mother's health care and finances, running herself ragged in the process. All turns out well and Susan is thrilled with her mother's new outlook on life and aging but she fails to give her mother's Christian Orthodox faith enough credit for the transformation.

Leslie says

Reading "The Habit" was like sitting at a cozy café with a good friend, drinking coffee, sharing our souls and lives and laughing our asses off. The book begins and ends within the span of one year, but Susan Morse's narrative on her life, and that of her mother's, covers 150+ years, which gives this very personal account its heart and soul. It was difficult to put "The Habit" down to eat, sleep and care for my family. Ms. Morse's writing style is reminiscent of David Sedaris and Nora Ephron, yet her voice is a unique and strong one.

I read "The Habit" nine months after my mother died. I did not have a good relationship with her so I was initially hesitant about reading Ms. Morse's chronicle of her relationship with her mother. My hesitation was unfounded and reading "The Habit" turned out to be surprisingly cathartic. The mother-daughter relationship envy that I anticipated never surfaced. In fact, instead of feeling sad and angry about what I didn't have with my own mother, I laughed and cried (good crying) and celebrated with Ms. Morse as she took me on irreverently poignant adventures through her life and her mother's life, which includes "Ma" becoming a nun at 85 years old!

"The Habit" can be appreciated by all, whether or not you're a parent, a daughter, a son, or a nun, if you enjoy an honest, well written and marvelously witty book then you'll enjoy "The Habit".

Miranda says

The Habit is the story of a woman who becomes a nun in her 80s. She has tried and been fanatical about several religions in her life before she becomes a Greek Orthodox nun.

When I selected this book, I missed that it was non-fiction. I mean - who really becomes a nun at that age?

It is an interesting look at the balance of caring for your aging parents and managing your own family. I didn't relate to it all that well.

Kristen says

You might appreciate this book if you are the daughter of a difficult and narcissistic mother, and your filial sense of responsibility means that you are the person who is primarily responsible for helping wade through the shark-infested waters of insurance issues and medical appointments when your elderly mother becomes ill. I identified with the author who was trying to juggle family and work responsibilities while really trying to help her mother deal with a life-changing illness. Some people might find this a work of fiction; but those of us who have lived similar circumstances will realize that sometimes you just can't make this stuff up.

Lori says

This had moment of humor, empathy, enlightenment. It was well written. Unfortunately, the author misses something trying to write about the intimate details and emotions of the past while having the perspective of the present. We readers can't quite see how her mother's ways affected her and her siblings (or other people). I trust the author about this, but I can't sense it for myself. Which in turn makes it hard to appreciate how far things have come in the end.

So certainly not a waste of time to read, but it could have been better.

Emily says

Call me crazy (crazy!), but I usually rely on the book's synopsis to tell me what the book will be about. This was a case of false advertising by the synopsis. It's not about her mother's spiritual journey and her 6 attempts to become a nun in different religions. Rather, it was about 10% about when the mother finally becomes a nun and 90% about Morse's elder care for her mother and her mother's medical issues.

Although Morse's writing is witty, I found all the medical and HMO ordeals to be stressful and anxiety-inducing, because I know it actually happened and someday could happen to me. Not how I wanted to spend my relaxed reading time.

Priscilla says

Finished in less than a week warrants an "excellent" rating.

Jennifer says

I thought this book was about an 85 year-old-woman who becomes a nun (which could make a great story), but this is really a story about the author's having to take care of her aging mother as she battles cancer. What a whiner! There were a few humorous parts when Susan Morse was dealing with the HMOs, but mainly she talks about how difficult her mother was (which I couldn't see from the examples she gave). She complains about her Mother's spirituality, when really her spiritual community gave her mother a lot of support and love during her bout with cancer.
