



The Mythical Bill: A Neurological Memoir (Sightline Books)

Jody McAuliffe

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Part medical mystery, part war story, and part social and family history, *The Mythical Bill* is the story of how one man's physical and mental pain radiates outward into the life and mind of each member of his family. Weaving together diary entries, correspondence, and scrupulous research, Jody McAuliffe examines her father's life before, during, and after WWII, seeking answers to the questions of what really happened to Bill McAuliffe and what caused his disintegration. His initial postwar diagnosis was torticollis: a condition of persistent involuntary contraction of the neck muscles, causing the head to be twisted to an abnormal position. But torticollis was only the beginning of Bill's suffering and his daughter's efforts to understand it. The condition becomes a metaphor for things that refuse to fall into place: the body not in accord with the mind, the head that turns away from reality.

From this drama of dislocation and disjointed truths, two braided selves emerge: the I of Jody and the I of Bill. Through this doubleness, the writer probes a set of questions about how much we shape ourselves and how much we are shaped by forces beyond our control.

The Mythical Bill, a moving and unusual book, is for people who suffer the devastating effects of combat on the psyche, for those who encounter any debilitating disease, and for those who grow up with a father only partially present. McAuliffe's ear-catching, evocative, and often breathtaking writing forces readers to confront the most terrifying question posed by a parent's mental illness: will I get it too? Her narrative voice is searching, compassionate, and self-deprecating, but cut through with welcome bits of humor in this daughter's story of confusion, sadness, and loss.

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