

Imperfect Endings: A Daughter

by Zoe FitzGerald Carter



About the Book

Zoe Carter's busy life on the West Coast with her husband and daughters takes an unexpected detour when her glamorous, independent-minded mother, Margaret, decides she wants to "end things." Tired of living with Parkinson's disease, Margaret declares she is no longer willing to go where the illness is taking her. Unsure how --- or when --- she will end her life, she is certain of one thing: she wants her three daughters there when she does it.

Stunned by the prospect of losing her mother and concerned about the legal ramifications of participating in her suicide, Zoe does what she can to convince her mother to abandon her plans. But for nearly a year, Margaret will talk of nothing else. Calling Zoe at random times of the day, she blithely asks which would be better: overdosing on morphine or Seconal? Getting help from the Hemlock Society or doing it on her own? And when would be a good time --- February or May? Or how about June?

Shuttling between her family in California and her mother's house in Washington, D.C., Zoe finds herself increasingly drawn into her mother's "exit plans." She helps Margaret procure a lethal dose of drugs from a local psychiatrist and endures a bizarrely funny encounter with Bud, the Hemlock Society's "Caring Friend" who seems a little too eager to help Margaret kill herself.

Anxious to maintain her role as "the good daughter," Zoe finds herself in conflict with her older sisters, both of whom have difficult histories with their mother. As the three women negotiate over whether or not they should support Margaret's choice and who should be there at the end, their discussions stir up old alliances and animosities, along with memories of a childhood dominated by their elegant mother and philandering father.

Capturing the stresses and the joys of the "sandwich generation" while bringing a provocative new perspective to the assisted suicide debate, *Imperfect Endings* is the uplifting story of a woman determined to die on her own terms and the family who has to learn to let her go.

Discussion Guide

1. Mother/daughter relationships are the backbone of this story. Skim pages 80-84. Talk about each daughter's relationship with her mother, and with the other daughters. Does Zoe really resent being pigeonholed, or do you think she finds comfort in her role in the family?
2. This book is about life, as well as death --- the flashbacks give glimpses of the young family, and Zoe's children are full of energy and excitement. How did this contrast with her mother's desire to die?
3. The sisters, and their mother, all have different reactions to Jonathan's alcoholism. Discuss their different ways of dealing with his problem. Are any effective?
4. Zoe's mother, Margaret, does not seem to notice significant problems with those around her, such as her husband's affairs and Zoe's anorexia. Yet she is very picky about little things, such as appearances. Do you believe she was innocently naïve and unaware of those larger issues, or was she perhaps willfully blind?
5. Zoe and her husband and sisters express feeling that Margaret is being selfish in her wish to die and have them help her. Is that too much to expect from a loved one? Does she truly have the right to end her own life, even though it has such an impact on those around her? Is there anything she could have done to make it easier on her family?

Author Bio

Zoe FitzGerald Carter is a graduate of Columbia Journalism School and has written for numerous publications including *New York* magazine, *The New York Observer*, *Premiere*, and various national magazines. ***Imperfect Endings*** is her first memoir. The book was excerpted in *O magazine* and is a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers pick.

Critical Praise

"I love this book! Zoe Carter has taken what could be a very sad story and turned it into something beautiful and incredibly insightful. Her portrayal of her mother is wonderful, and reveals in moving and illuminating detail a slice of Washington life."

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