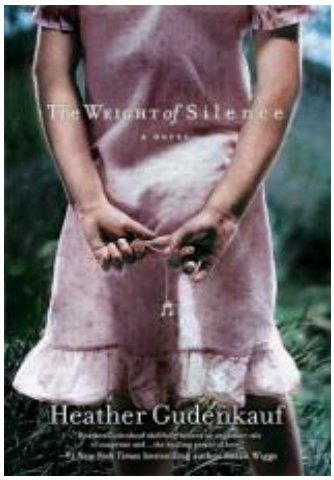
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The Weight of Silence

by Heather Gudenkauf



About the Book

Masterfully written and beautifully told, Heather Gudenkauf?s debut is a stunning novel of family devotion, honesty and regret that will linger long after the last page is turned.

It happens quietly one August morning. As dawn?s shimmering light drenches the humid Iowa air, two families awaken to find their little girls have gone missing in the night.

Seven-year-old Calli Clark is sweet, gentle, a dreamer who suffers from selective mutism brought on by tragedy that pulled her deep into silence as a toddler. Calli?s mother, Antonia, tried to be the best mother she could within the confines of marriage to a mostly absent, often angry husband. Now, though she denies that her husband could be involved, she fears her decision to stay in her marriage has cost her more than her daughter?s voice.

Petra Gregory is Calli?s best friend, her soul mate and her voice. But neither Petra or Calli has been heard from since their disappearance was discovered. Desperate to find his child, Martin Gregory is forced to confront a side of himself he did not know existed beneath his intellectual, professorial demeanor.

Now these families are tied by the question of what happened to their children. And the answer is trapped in the silence of unspoken family secrets.

Discussion Guide

1. Antonia describes herself as a bad mother while Louis reassures her that she, indeed, is a good mother. What evidence from the book supports each of their beliefs? How does Louis? history with Antonia effect his own decisions as a husband and father?

2. Antonia and Louis? long history together is integral to The Weight of Silence. As a deputy sheriff, what, if any, ethical or moral boundaries did Louis cross in the search for Calli?

3. Ben and Calli grew up with an abusive, alcoholic father. Knowing that abuse is often passed on from generation to generation, what are Ben?s and Calli?s chances of breaking the cycle of abuse in their future relationships? What instances from the book lead you to believe this?

4. How does the death of Antonia?s mother play into the decisions Antonia made as a wife and mother? How do you think Antonia?s life would be different if her mother had lived?

5. Martin Gregory, a proper, disciplined professor of economics has always valued order, predictability, and restraint in all areas of his life. How does his decision to seek retribution against the man he was sure violated his daughter fit into his belief system?

6. Antonia, Louis, Martin, and Petra?s perspectives are told in the first person present tense point of view while Calli?s is told in third person past tense? Why do you think the author decided to write the story in this way?

7. What does the title The Weight of Silence mean to you? How does the title relate to each of the main characters? lives?

8. Before Calli and Petra?s disappearance, the Willow Creek Woods was a haven for Calli, Ben, and Toni. Calli, fearful of the forest after her ordeal, asked her mother if she ever got scared when walking in the woods. Toni replied, ?It sent you back to me, didn?t it?? What did Toni mean by this?

9. Martin Gregory had worked so hard to leave behind his farming roots by becoming a college professor, but after Petra?s abduction and serious injuries, Martin subsequently moved with his family from Willow Creek to a farm. Why did Martin and Fielda decide to do this?

10. Toni describes Calli and Petra as ?kindred spirits.? What makes their friendship so special? Do you think Calli and Petra?s friendship will last into their adulthood? Why or why not? Who do you consider to be your kindred spirit? Why?

Author Bio

Heather Gudenkauf is the Edgar Award-nominated, *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of 11 novels, including THE OVERNIGHT GUEST, EVERYONE IS WATCHING and THE PERFECT HOSTS. Her debut novel, THE WEIGHT OF SILENCE, was an instant *NYT* bestseller and remained on the list for 22 weeks. Gudenkauf?s critically acclaimed novels have been published in over 25 countries and have sold over 2.5 million copies worldwide. Her books have been featured on many "Best Of" roundups, including lists by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, NPR, Amazon, Apple Books, Goodreads and more.

Heather was born in Wagner, South Dakota, the youngest of six children. At one month of age, her family returned to the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota where her father was employed as a guidance counselor and her mother as a school nurse. At the age of three, her family moved to Iowa, where she grew up. Having been born with a profound unilateral hearing loss (there were many evenings when Heather and her father made a trip to the bus barn to look around

the school bus for her hearing aids that she often conveniently would forget on the seat beside her). Heather tended to use books as a retreat, would climb into the toy box that her father?s students from Rosebud made for the family with a pillow, blanket and flashlight, close the lid, and escape the world around her. Heather became a voracious reader and the seed of becoming a writer was planted.

Heather lives in Iowa with her family and a very spoiled German Shorthaired Pointer named Lolo. In her free time, Heather enjoys spending time with her family, reading, swimming and hiking. She is currently working on her next novel.

Critical Praise

"**The Weight of Silence** is a tense and profoundly emotional story of a parent?s worst nightmare, told with compassion and honesty. Heather Gudenkauf skillfully weaves an explosive tale of suspense and ultimately, the healing power of love."

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