



Mouths Don't Speak

Katia D. Ulysse

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No one was prepared for the massive earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010, taking over a quarter-million lives, and leaving millions more homeless. Three thousand miles away, Jacqueline Florestant mourns the presumed death of her parents, while her husband, a former US Marine and combat veteran, cares for their three-year-old daughter as he fights his own battles with acute PTSD.

Horrified and guilt-ridden, Jacqueline returns to Haiti in search of the proverbial "closure." Unfortunately, the Haiti she left as a child twenty-five years earlier has disappeared. Her quest turns into a tornado of deception, desperation, and more death. So Jacqueline holds tightly to her daughter--the only one who must not die.

Mouths Don't Speak Details

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Author : Katia D. Ulysse

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From Reader Review Mouths Don't Speak for online ebook

Denise says

This book is a devastating and heartbreakin look at PTSD, Haiti, and marriage. The writing is quick and engaging and I was immediately sucked into Jaqueline's story. The narrative jumped around a little bit to hear the perspectives of the people closest to Jaqueline, but it didn't bother me.

Be warned this could be a triggering novel if you've suffered loss of a child. This scene alone made me gasp and broke my heart although you could tell leading up to it that something was coming.

Thank you for sharing @theloudlibrarylady.

Page says

The book tackles a number of issues—wrapped around the tragedy of Haiti's 2010 earthquake—including grief, the emotional struggles of post-war veterans (most notably the effects of PTSD), cultural appropriation, and classism. To name only a few.

It's a lot to take in, in less than 300 pages, but Katia Ulysse does a pretty good job.

Jacqueline and Kevin live in Baltimore with their three-year old daughter, Amber. Kevin has had trouble readjusting to being home, after his last tour in Iraq, and his marriage to Jacqueline is not what as it once was. However, the two still love each other and find a tether to that love via Amber.

After an earthquake rocks Jacqueline's homeland of Haiti, she finds herself pining for the land she abandoned, and concerned for her parents (Paul and Annette)—with whom she has a complicated, and also contentious, relationship—but whose survival is yet unknown.

The book unfolds in quick, succinct chapters, with a lot of imagery offered via the inner thoughts of Jacqueline (an artist).

Jacqueline is a somewhat motherless child, and she holds a great deal of resentment for the way her parents disappeared from her life in favor of becoming jet setters.

At the same time, she's worried she may no longer have the chance to mend that relationship, in the face of such a devastating catastrophe, and wonders if she'll even have the opportunity to return to the home she once knew.

There's an unspeakable tragedy, a reckoning, and a good deal of emotional insight throughout this book. At one point or another we're given a glimpse into the psyche of each of the major characters.

Even so, most of that happens quickly, and by the the story comes to a true "fork in the road", it ends altogether.

You get a bit of understanding, but not nearly enough, so a lot of inferring is going to be done.

In the end, a good story, with a lot happening, but one of which I would've liked to have seen more depth offered at certain points.

Jherane Patmore says

Will be writing a review for Rebel Women Lit soon + they'll be doing a giveaway. Follow them on Goodreads, Twitter and Instagram.

Molly says

This is not the book I thought it was going to be. The promotional literature is woefully misleading for this book.

First, Jacqueline is not your average Haitian. Somehow (it's unexplained how or why exactly) her family is rich. Like really rich (a la Duvalier). It just seems very fake to me, particularly because of the way the book was advertised.

Second, she seems to spend most of the book upset that there was an earthquake in Haiti, but because of various family issues, she doesn't actually go to Haiti. When she actually does go to Haiti at the end of the book, she spends it on her parents very luxurious property.

Third, this is not so much a book about Haiti or the Haitian earthquake or Jacqueline's relationship to Haiti. It's a book about (view spoiler) Except that (view spoiler) and the book pretty much ends. The end. No explanation. (view spoiler)

Finally, there are A LOT of similes and metaphors that seem overdone. It reminded me of elementary school where I was forced to practice making them up as part of a literary techniques lesson. Examples:

Suddenly, the anchorman became as animated as a child at the circus seeing for the first time a real-life lion jump through circles of fire without getting burned.

She had listened attentively while he spoke as if from the sinner's side of a confessional.

In the twenty years since that trip, she'd circled the world several times—by ship and by air—passing by Sweden like one going by a neighbor's house without the slightest inclination to knock.

Jacqueline picked up her mail from the lobby on her way upstairs, but didn't bother to open the envelopes, now piled in a corner like snowdrifts.

Reality, like a wave of impatient passengers in a crowded airplane, would rush past her.

Would not recommend.

Diane S ? says

3.5 review soon.

Read In Colour says

A bit of an abrupt ending, so more like a 4.5 but not a 5.

Diana says

MOUTHS DON'T SPEAK by Katia D. Ulysse is one of Akashic Book's newest releases.

Ms. Ulysse has written a powerful story about "the massive earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010, taking over a quarter-million lives, and leaving millions of others homeless. 3,000 miles away, Jacqueline Florestant mourns the presumed death of her parents, while her husband, a former Marine and combat veteran, cares for their three-year-old daughter as he fights his own battles with PTSD. Horrified and guilt-ridden, Jacqueline returns to Haiti in search of the proverbial 'closure'. Unfortunately the Haiti she left as a child 25 years earlier has disappeared. Her quest turns into a tornado of deception, desperation and more death. So, Jacqueline holds tightly to her daughter - the only one who must not die." (Press Kit)

The earthquake statistics and descriptions are very horrifying.

The book opens with the earthquake and there is a sense of foreboding right from the get-go. I just knew the book was going to end badly.

I was never that sympathetic towards Jacqueline. She didn't seem overly engaged with her daughter, Amber, or her husband, Kevin. Once she met Leyla (the cafe owner with whom she studied Creole), Jacqueline seemed to be too focused and attached to her.

Although she seemed enthusiastic about her work as an art teacher, she just threw her job and students 'under the bus' if and when she was inconvenienced.

Jacqueline's parents, Annette and Paul Florestant, were beyond belief - hateful, selfish, self-absorbed, prejudiced, spiteful and lazy. The very painful and despicable class and economic divide in Haiti seems to be told through the Florestant elders.

I don't think Kevin comes off that great, either. Yes, he suffers from PTSD, but doesn't seem to want to help himself. He wants drugs from an old friend - drugs that seem to make him more unstable.

The long-suffering Pachou. I hope he was able to gain some solace.

MOUTHS DON'T SPEAK held many highlights for me.

a strong sense of place - both in Baltimore and in Haiti

the layering of personalities in each character; sometimes multiple layers in 1 character

Leyla and Jacqueline dancing the Yanvalou to voodoo jazz music

While looking at photos with Annette, Jacqueline thinks that "each picture was a shovel of dirt in the excavation of a childhood she had buried long ago" (p. 140)

Immediately "The word immediately had a different definition in Haiti. Things moved at the speed of the heat, slow and punishing." (p. 153+154)

The translation of Jacqueline's vivid memories of Haiti into her artwork.

The book is very powerful and emotional. A painful pleasure to read at times.

Bogi Takács says

[Possibly the biggest plot point involves the death of a child (hide spoiler)]

Beverly says

This was a 3.5 read for me.
Thoughts coming shortly.

Elliott Turner says

3.5 stars. This was a really good novel!

Ulysse has things I love in multicult fiction --> unapologetic codeswitching, vivid details about life in Haiti including customs and cuisine, plus the POV of both an American seeing another country, but an immigrant seeing America for the first time.

The humor about the white Creole speaker was great. The dialogue was mostly on point. I felt frustrated that the main character was surrounded by some pretty flawed relatives - mom and hubbie - but these types of people do exist in real life and can be insufferable.

The twist at the 2/3rd mark totally blew me away and I really dug the very short chaptering to end this. Of course, I wanted more, but in a good way.

Also, the marriage dynamics for the main character (individualist) and between her parents felt really, really well sketched.

Kate Olson says

3.5 stars • I requested this title for review because I am woefully under-read on Haiti, and a book written by a Haitian about the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 sounded like JUST the book to change that status. Written almost like a novella, this 200 page story (also set in Baltimore) is an incredibly fast read while managing to pack in more grief and drama than I would have thought possible. While at times overly descriptive and more dramatic than I perhaps would prefer, MOUTHS still exposed me to two worlds fairly new to me - Haiti and that of a former US Marine suffering from PTSD. Although both of these, in my opinion, could have been fleshed out much more to create a longer work, they combined for a fast-paced and heartbreakingly moving story.

If you are looking to expand your reading and prioritize #ownvoices stories (as I do), add this one to your reading list.

Thanks to Akashic Books for the review copy!

Dana Blazsek says

Mouths Don't Speak was a book I saw on Instagram through @theloudlibrarylady. This wonderful booklover

then started a bookchain with the book. I received it on Saturday and devoured it between Sunday and Monday.

I have never read a book that had Haiti as its main focus. Our main character, Jacqueline, is Haitian, but has lived in America since she was ten. Haiti has been hit by a devastating earthquake and we open the story with Jacqueline trying to get a hold of her parents. Besides this, she has a husband who deals with PTSD from the war in the middle east.

I liked this book. It was fine. I felt the plot skips around a bit trying to fit all the pieces of Jacqueline's life in. There are times we are listening to the thoughts of other characters and I felt that was a bit random and intermittent. The last 1/4 of the book had a very rushed feel.

Carol says

I love to read books about diverse cultures and this one is about Haiti, the earthquake in 2010, the rich and the poor and Haitian culture. The story brought out all of that out. It started with Jacqueline Florestant in Brooklyn weeping and sobbing at the news about the earthquake. She had only spent the first ten years of her life there. Her parents, being very rich, sent her away to boarding school.

Jacqueline remembers Haiti as being a paradise behind the walls of her home. Her husband, Kevin, took care of their daughter, Amber while Jacqueline sobbed over the news. Kevin had PTSD and only felt attached to his daughter while she seems detached or seems to take Amber for granted. It was hard to identify with either character right from the beginning of the story. She was from the privileged elite in Haiti. The rich elite are a small part of the total population, but they seem only interested in perpetuating their wealth and enjoying life. They were not interested in helping the enormous amount of poor people.

Jacqueline worries about her parents but she also has bad memories of them. She tried calling them for weeks and thought they might be dead. Then she got a call from her mother. Her father had to have his legs amputated because he was trying to save the employees in their factory. Her mother seems to have no empathy for her husband, Jacqueline, or for the poor of Haiti.

Jacqueline lets go of her job and heads for Haiti. She leaves with Amber and has much to learn. This book is very fast paced and holds onto your interest fiercely. I learned more about the Haitian culture and the financial divide. That encourages me to read more about this unusual country. I never felt sympathetic to the main characters except for her father who had begun to care. The language was very rough when the author had the Jacqueline talk about her students. This is realistic though, I know from when my mother taught grade school in the inner city. I just thought that it could have been handled differently, maybe shortened. But it is a valuable book to read and learn from.

I received this Advance Copy as a win from LibraryThing from the publishers in exchange for a fair book review. My thoughts and feelings in this review are totally my own.

Rebel Women Lit says

Katia D. Ulysse's sophomore novel, *Mouths Don't Speak*, is a heartbreaking symphony of place, time, relationships and messy drama. The story follows Jacqueline?—a daughter of suspiciously wealthy Haitian parents?—?after the Haitian earthquake of 2010. To say the earthquake “rips her family apart” is a bit dishonest because they were never really together.

The complexity of the different relationships in this novel is what will draw readers to keep turning each page. From living with a husband she doesn't really seem to like who suffers from PTSD, her infatuation with her blue-eyed language teacher and her repulsively pretentious parents. Though the novel follows Jacqueline, we often get to see the perspectives of different characters and it's admirable at how smoothly the author makes these transitions. Each character has an interesting worldview, particularly her husband and mother who I found easy to pity and sometimes hate.

The pacing of the book was largely enjoyable. Even when Jacqueline spent a long time focused on her memories the plot never felt like had to slow down. Sadly, while the novel was entertaining, a lot of the drama in the book felt like it was reserved for the last quarter of the book. There is a unexpected twist and many deep revelations towards the end that I only wished the author would've spent more time on.

This is the first Katia D. Ulysse novel I've read and I'm definitely interested in picking up her debut novel, *Drifting*, which also sounds like it'll have all the messy drama I enjoyed in *Mouths Don't Speak*. If you're looking for a novel that is so interesting you can read it in a day, this should be on the top of your list.

Thank you to Akashic Books for an advanced readers copy of in exchange for an honest review.

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Jherane Patmore

Andre says

A massive earthquake has shaken Haiti and everyone is affected. “They did not die alone. Black, white, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, sacatra, and griffe met the same fate, but there was no comfort in that. Spilt blood ran as red as the Massacre River.” That is the opening of this novel and kind of sets the tone for what is an arousing look at contemporary Haiti and Haitians both home and in the US. Jacqueline was not in Haiti, during the earthquake, in fact she hadn't been there in 25 years. She was sent away at ten by her mother to a boarding school to presumably give Jacqueline a better chance at life. However her parents are still in Haiti and Jacqueline now living in Baltimore, MD is frantic trying to reach them in the days after the earthquake. Hundreds of calls, messages go unreturned and unanswered. The only thing Jacqueline can rightly assume is her parents must have perished in the rubble like thousands of others displayed on nightly newscasts. After about a month her mother calls her and nonchalantly informs Jacqueline that they are well and have been in Miami for the last month. What the....?

This interaction makes the reader perk up and pay full attention. You know that point in a book where you start speaking to yourself, I said hmmn this is going to be interesting. How could a mother be so callous, so indifferent. What could have possibly transpired between Mother and daughter to cause such behavior? So

pain and worry quickly turn to anger and disappointment. Katia D. Ulysse does a good job here of drawing you into a story of grief and family dynamics. To tell you more would be spoiling the story, in fact I may have already written too much. Just know that it is a quick and engaging read with some heartbreaking moments, but it is a book that will sit with you for some time after you've put it down. Do we make the right choices as parents? How do our decisions affect our children later in life? Questions you will ponder as your heart aches along with Jacqueline. Thanks to Edelweiss and Akashic Books for an advanced ebook. Book is out and available now.
