

Mouthing the Words: A Novel

By Perseus

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Mouthing the Words: A Novel By Perseus

By turns harrowing and hilarious, this adroitly narrated winner of the Toronto Book Award re-creates the world in the imagination of Thelma. It's a world in which she can escape some of her more painful childhood realities, like those games her father likes to make her play, where he's the boss and she the naughty secretary. And her mother so fiercely favors her younger brother, the cherubic Willy, that Thelma finds herself perpetually in emotional exile. No wonder Thelma asks practically every adult she meets to adopt her. Along Thelma's bumpy way from a rural English village to Canada to a law degree at Oxford, she meets many potential parents and even makes some friends, but it is with the companions of her fertile imagination—with the scaredy-baby Janawee, moody and timid Ginniger, and big, strong, stoic Heroin—that Thelma finds comfort. With them, too, she loses an already tenuous connection to reality, though ultimately Thelma's spirit and humor prove to be as indomitable as her wit. "Moving and comic at once. . . . Hallucinatory, hilarious, and haunting."—Boston Globe "Prickly, unsentimental. . . a portrait of terrible comic humanity."—New York Times Book Review "Mesmerizing. . . . Lush, visceral prose . . . rings with an authority rarely found in first novels."—Washington Post Book World "A novel of astonishing power An instantaneous classic."—Baltimore Sun "Elegant . . . sings with an almost Victorian delicacy and sophistication."—San Francisco Chronicle

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A crystal-voiced young narrator and the saving grace of humor distinguish Gibb's stunningly assured debut novel (already winner of the Toronto Book Award) from similarly conceived stories about dysfunctional families. Thelma is but five years old when her story begins in the small English village of Little Slaughter. Her mother, a model who resented her pregnancy with Thelma, has a lover who she says is just pretend. Her father holds Thelma over a bridge by her armpits and has her play secretary to his boss, a game that involves French kissing and, later on, worse. It's little wonder, then, that Thelma invents three imaginary friends Ginniger, Janawee and Heroin each with her own function for helping Thelma to cope. When the family moves to Canada, things worsen, and Thelma commences poignantly asking other adults to be her parents. In spite of her horrific childhood, Thelma attends law school and wins a scholarship to Oxford. But psychological fallout from her past including bouts of anorexia and self-mutilation stand in the way of her progress until at last she reclaims the life she should have had all along, finding her own voice. Gibb intimately understands the child's need to reinvent the personal world as normal, however topsy-turvy the reality. The novel has already been compared to Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*, but it more closely resembles the film *Shine*. Thelma is a compelling heroine, her tale too well-told and too wide-ranging, both in content and affect, to be pigeonholed as "just another coming-of-age story." Foreign rights sold in the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway.

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Review

"Gibb seduces the reader with sparky prose and charming storylines before drawing us onto a heart-wrenching rollercoaster ride" Guardian "Beautiful and compelling... an insightful and humane exploration of the space between reason and imagination" The Times "This is a bold and ambitious debut from a writer who sows the seeds of great promise" Daily Express "Fresh and original" Sunday Times "It's sassy, it's smart... Go girl!" Jeanette Winterson

About the Author

CAMILLA GIBB is the author of four novels—*Mouthing the Words*, *The Petty Details of So-and-so's Life*, *Sweetness in the Belly*, and *The Beauty of Humanity Movement*—and a memoir, *This Is Happy*. She has been the recipient of the Trillium Book Award, the City of Toronto Book Award, the CBC Canadian Literary Award and has been shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and the 2016 RBC Taylor Prize. Camilla has a Ph.D. from Oxford University, has been writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto, the University of Alberta, and the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia, and is an adjunct faculty member of the graduate creative writing programs at the University of Toronto and the University of Guelph-Humber. She is currently the June Callwood Professor in Social Justice at Victoria College, University of Toronto. The author lives in Toronto, Ontario.

Users Review

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