



Special Exits

Joyce Farmer

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A major, original graphic memoir in the vein of *Fun Home*.

Joyce Farmer's memoir chronicles the decline of the author's parents' health, their relationship with one another and with their daughter, and how they cope with the day-to-day emotional fragility of the most taxing time of their lives.

Elderly parents Lara and Rachel, who have enjoyed a long and loving married life together, are rendered in fine, confident pen lines. Set in southern Los Angeles (which makes for a terrifying sequence as blind Rachel and ailing Lars are trapped in their home without power during the 1992 Rodney King riots), backgrounds and props are lovingly detailed: these objects serve as memory triggers for Lars and Rachel, even as they eventually overwhelm them and their home, which the couple is loathe to leave. *Special Exits* is laid out in an eight-panel grid, which creates a leisurely storytelling pace that not only helps to convey the slow, inexorable decline in Lars' and Rachel's health, but perfectly captures the timbre of the exchanges between a long-married couple: the affectionate bickering; their gallows humor; their querulousness as their bodies break down.

Though Lars and Rachel are the protagonists of *Special Exits*, Farmer makes her voice known through creative visual metaphors and in her indictment of the careless treatment of the elderly in nursing homes. *Special Exits* gracefully deals with the hard reality of caring for aging loved ones: those who are or who have been in similar situations might find comfort in it, and those who haven't will find much to admire in the bravery and good humor of Lars and Rachel. Joyce Farmer, best known for co-creating the *Tits 'n Clits* comics anthology in the 1970s, a feminist response to the rampant misogyny in underground comix, spent 11 years crafting *Special Exits*, a graphic memoir in the vein of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* or Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner, and Frank Stack's *Our Cancer Year*, about caring for her dying father and stepmother. 208 pages of black-and-white comics

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