



## Anything but Yes: A Novel of Anna Del Monte, Jewish Citizen of Rome, 1749

**Joie Davidow**

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In Joie Davidow's harrowing historical novel *Anything but Yes*, there are costs to maintaining convictions in the face of oppression.

Anna was in the kitchen when the religious police arrested her and brought her to Casa dei Catacumeni, a convent for the conversion of Jews in the city of Rome. Ignorant of the cause of her arrest, Anna endures thirteen days of sleep deprivation, verbal abuse, and manipulative interrogations with the intention of making her a convert. Standing firm in her religious beliefs and trusting in the love and support of her family and community, she resists. On the brink of mental collapse and physical destruction, Anna is released without explanation, becoming one of the few to return to the ghetto.

*Anything but Yes* is based on the diary of Anna del Monte, a young woman who lived in Rome's Jewish ghetto in the eighteenth century. At the age of eighteen, she was offered to the Catholic Church as a convert by a scorned suitor and suffered torture at the hands of Church officials bent on saving her Jewish soul from damnation. The book's title refers to the advice to never answer yes to any question if taken to the Casa dei Catacumeni: doing so will be taken as a willingness to convert.

Written with the clarity of rage and indignity and blending prose with letters, petitions, and prayers, *Anything but Yes* is a story of integrity, love, loyalty, and strength, made all the more gripping because it is based on true events. The vibrant life and history of Rome's millennia-old Jewish community are shared, demonstrating the oppression exercised upon its people by the Church.

*Anything but Yes* is a gripping historical novel in which a woman faces discrimination with strength and dignity.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (September / October 2023)

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