

Nothing Forgotten

Jessica Levine

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In Jessica Levine's absorbing and entertaining *Nothing Forgotten*, a middle-aged woman's past intrudes upon her present, despite all of her efforts to leave it behind.

Anna Stark leads a calm, seemingly happy life in California. She has a husband, a daughter, and a teaching job to fill her days, along with meditation. An unexpected e-mail from Sergio, a lover from her early twenties, interrupts this ease.

Anna reveals early on that she'd had a child and given it up for adoption; neither Sergio nor her husband ever knew. Sergio's e-mail sends Anna deep into her memories, and the narrative moves back to recapture her life in Italy in 1979.

These Italian memories take up about two-thirds of the novel, and are its most captivating portions. The young Anna has a meaningful, satisfying job teaching English, but she also wants to experience the pleasures of Rome, and most of all to meet young men. That Sergio is her boss and engaged to be married only makes their relationship that much more enjoyable. Against her better judgment, Anna meets and befriends Sergio's fiancée, and becomes enmeshed in his small-town world.

Watching Anna negotiate the complexities of her relationships and the rural, patriarchal Italian countryside provides both a compelling narrative and an intriguing glimpse into another world. The California sections of Anna's story are less fresh than the Italian ones, though she remains a layered and complex character. The pull that Sergio feels between his ambitions and his duties to his family are convincingly and movingly detailed. Levine's writing is sparkling and clear.

Nothing Forgotten is an example of women's fiction at its best. Its exploration of history, memory, family, and the particular struggles of women looking for experiences and love is enjoyable, memorable, and thought-provoking all at once.

REBECCA HUSSEY (March/April 2018)

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