



Inheritance

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This exquisitely written novel asks a simple question: How well do we know our parents? One half of the story begins after the death of Luigi Bonocchio, an Italian immigrant whose daughter, Olivia, discovers a mysterious deed among his possessions. The deed is to a house in Urbino, Italy---the hometown he barely spoke of. Intrigued, Olivia travels there. At first she is charmed by the historic city, the relatives she's not met before, and the young lawyer she's hired to help her investigate the claim. But when Olivia tries to sort out the deed, she is met with a puzzling silence. Everyone in the town remembers her father, but they are not eager to tell his story. However, Luigi tells his part of the tale directly to the reader as the chapters alternate between Olivia's search for the truth and Luigi's account of his history. By the end of this skillfully constructed book, the reader understands both sides of a heartbreaking yet ultimately satisfying love story.

Inheritance Details

Date : Published January 9th 2007 by St. Martin's Press (first published 2007)

ISBN : 9780312349028

Author : Natalie Danford

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Cultural, Italy, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, War, World War II, Holocaust, Book Club

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Shourik says

This is a really a good book, especially for those dreaming to move to Italy.. one way or the other..

Karin Tracy says

A quick read but really rewarding. Danford deftly straddles 1940s Italy and current day. Both stories (father and daughter) are well-crafted, interesting tales and I found myself slowing down towards the end to savor the finale of each.

Beth says

I have had this book on my shelf for several years intending to read on the recommendation of a friend. I liked the premise of the book and the Italian setting. Once I started reading it, I had a hard time getting into it. Although a fairly short book, it was not a quick read for me. The author goes back and forth in time frequently and the book was way too descriptive for me. The book seems to get weighed down with how everyone felt, looked and especially how things smelled. The author seems obsessed with smells, constant descriptors in this area to the point where it became distracting. The characters seemed rather bland, especially the daughter and there is a depressing quality to the book. I realize that the subject of the book, the father's experiences in the time right before World War II is not always uplifting reading, but there seemed to be generally a flatness or lack of joy in life throughout this story. About halfway through the book I was ready for it to end as I found it too tedious, but I am glad I stuck with it as the ending was interesting and the best part of the book. Ultimately I would not recommend as there are much better books out there.

Martha says

I found this book at the library in the section the library staff puts together including "staff picks". Usually they have a book mark stuck inside with a note from the staff, letting us know why they had selected it, but alas, this one was sitting there with no words of recommendation.

Just the same, the book sounded promising. Having just returned from Italy, I was sold on the notion that in this book, the daughter returns to the village her father left some 50 years ago, a property deed in hand, curious to uncover some mysteries of her father's youth. Seems her father fled his town in disgrace soon after WW2, settling into the suburbs of New York, marrying and having one daughter. The father has now passed away, and in closing out the house, the daughter discovers this property deed and she sets off to return to Italy to learn more about this deed.

That's the general plot and sadly, not very original in that I've read other books with a similar story line.

Like others, this author used a back-and-forth style to tell her story. She did a good job of labeling the

chapters so the reader could easily note going into a chapter which story thread she was picking up on, but what I wasn't sure was why she picked so many different time lines in the father's past to tell her story. Luckily, by the time the book ended, all the threads could be woven together and I finished the book feeling like those detours now made sense. But while reading it? I found myself pondering "what's she trying to do here?".

It is a well crafted story, while not necessarily original, the author did leave me with plenty of things to ponder. Should we go digging into the past of our parents? What if we uncover only part of the story and that part paints our parent in a light very different than our own memories and experiences.

Overall, it is a quick read, finishing it in just over a day or so, with no late night binge reading involved. Would I call it my "favorite?" read? No, for a similar read, check out something like Sarah's Key. But for a quick trip to Italy, with a sad little historical lesson being woven into this adventure, you should find it to be a good enough read.

Peacejanz says

This small compact book is about a father's secrets during World War II. A gentle Italian man, Luigi, makes it to the US, gets cheated, survives and has a wife who dies young and a daughter he raises on his own. Sadly, Luigi, has Alzheimers and leaves nothing of value to his daughter when he dies except an old fashioned key and a deed to some land in Italy. The daughter rushes off to Urbino, the place of her father's birth. And there she finds relatives who have boxes of photos he sent back home to show his relatives his success: home, wife and daughter. She never knew any of this. Of course, Luigi came to the US at a time when Nazis were taking all property from Jews and Luigi had befriended a Jewish family. They hid and were eventually sent to a concentration camp and most believed that Luigi had betrayed them. The daughter, Olivia, continues to learn about her father long after his death. How many of us have had this same experience and wish we could ask our parents or grandparents about what we discover? This is a gentle book and would be a great book club discussion.

JoAnne says

I really had a hard time getting through this. I stuck it out because I wanted to know the ending.

The author went back and forth in time so much I became dizzy, also throwing in so much Italian in the first few chapters without translation! I hate that (but that part did get better toward the end).

In most books I can feel what the characters are feeling. This, I felt nothing after the first chapter or two. There were so many characters, I found myself asking "who is that again?" and having to reread sections. As I entered the final pages I sighed and said FINALLY all finished!

It was one of many discard books from the library that I gave a donation for. I think I'll donate it back to see if someone else might enjoy it.

Stephanie Gilbert says

I liked it... but then I didn't. The story is interesting and had potential, and while I liked the father, his daughter was a BLAH character that I didn't really care much about. Much of the story was predictable, and I felt like there were a lot of unanswered questions that left the story a bit unbelievable. The exhaustive details in some parts were unnecessary, and there were times when I asked myself, "Why is this even included in the book? It didn't contribute anything to the story or characters!" The end was totally predictable and to me, everything tied up a little too neatly and unrealistically. The last half of the book seemed kind of rushed and not as well thought out as the beginning. The father's chapters were much more interesting than the rest, which is really what kept me reading.

Carolynn says

This was sort of slow and unimaginative, but I enjoyed it nonetheless.

Patricia Kitto says

This book has a lot going on:

A search for family and family history

The complexities of a father/daughter relationship

A family secret

An immigrant experience

A bit of Italy during WWII

A love story

Even so, the author wove all of these elements into the story in an easy to digest way that made this a quick and very enjoyable read.*

*Be prepared for the father in this story to stay with you!

Gretchen says

This is a first novel, and it reads like it. After I was 3/4 of the way through it, I decided it was an example of unrealized potential. It comes alive the last 30 pages, and they are riveting. I wondered if Danford wrote them first, then had to put in the backstory. The characters aren't engaging until the end. The novel seemed undecided about what kind of novel it wanted to be – rigid immigrant story, uninventive 20something love relationships, travelogue of Italy. Then the ending splashed me in the face and I realized I was selling it short. Danford is highly educated, and has a significant background as an editor. I expect this novel would have undergone a great deal more editing if she hadn't had such a respected reputation. It is the story of a lonely Italian immigrant to the US (Luigi) and his daughter's (Olivia) search, after he dies, for who he was. With a great deal less attention to trendiness and a great deal more attention to characterization, this could have been a remarkable book.

Laura says

Creative story, but I wasn't crazy about it. Here is a good review from Publisher's Weekly: After her Italian immigrant father, Luigi, dies, Olivia Bonocchio discovers among his effects the deed to a property in his hometown of Urbino, Italy, though what she finds out in Danford's debut complicates her idea of who her father was. Olivia, mysterious deed in tow, travels to Urbino to learn if the deed is "a fluke." What she learns about her father's family's wartime lives shocks her. Olivia's travels are interwoven with flashback chapters that chart Luigi's life, from his teenage years in Urbino as the Germans approach, to his immigrant experience in America, where, in 1959, he settles in Shaleford, N.Y., and marries a local store owner's daughter. The perspectives of Luigi and Olivia provide intriguing takes on each other's hometown, and the tension roiling beneath the surface should carry readers through the moments of awkwardly handled Italian-sprinkled dialogue. Danford (a PW contributor) handles her wide canvas-war-time Italy, postwar America and the tricky terrain of dark family secrets-with confidence.

Kelly McCloskey-Romero says

This little book jumped off the library shelves at me, and I'm so glad it did. There's so much that I loved about it. First of all, Danford captures the mysterious, dreamlike state of traveling to another country where you speak the language and where you straddle the vaguely familiar and the shocking. Olivia is at home in Italy because she was raised speaking Italian by her immigrant father, but she is also disoriented as heck by his hometown and the secrets buried there. The descriptions of Urbino are downright delicious. Secondly, I appreciate the pacing of this story -part stroll, part page-turner, and the fact that the characters of Olivia, her father Luigi, and the intriguing GianFranco make the story more than the engaging plot. Finally, Olivia is a teacher, and the telling details of her vocation and how they shape who she is rang so true to me. What a delightful book.

Chris says

I was looking for some low hanging fruit in the genres of contemporary/set in Italy/not too dark in tone while recovering from a terrible flu. This book ended up having a slightly darker tone and not being quite what I expected but was enjoyable and immersive.

Prose is solid enough that I didn't notice it, allowing you to focus/lose yourself in the story. Portrayal of Urbino as a less than romantic place... while beautiful, kind of a dusty gray fishbowl with a lot of unfulfilled locals was unexpected but enjoyable in that it expanded my way of thinking about central Italy beyond the typical tourist motifs and reflected the author's ambition to write a book with more depth. Luigi's story was not what I began interested in, but turned out to be the best written component and was well done.

I would have enjoyed more focus on exploring Italian culture and living through Olivia's eyes in the same way the author did with US culture through the eyes of Lou. That half of the story could have been improved in my opinion. Her cousin and family were a bit thinly portrayed and more about their motivation and then describing Olivia's reactions and decision with the house in greater detail would have made sense from a

narrative perspective. And I think given the book's short length it would have borne all of that while deepening the enjoyment of exploring those cross cultural differences and adding a deeper story.

Overall a pleasant read, almost feels like reviewing two books and I'd give 4.5 on Luigi's story and a 3.5 for Olivia's.

Anne says

Inheritance begins as the story of an Italian immigrant who has lived in the United States for years and who finally gets married and has a daughter. The story then jumps to years later when the man passes away and his daughter travels to a small town in Italy to follow-up a deed she found among her father's possessions. The woman slowly learns (or believes she is learning) truths about her father's life and the reasons he came to America in the first place. The story itself is intriguing, though the character of the daughter was annoying in her seeming inability to understand the obvious. But, the shifting back and forth between the father's past and the daughter in the present time was too much for me. I felt like I was reading two different books, and I wasn't sure I liked either one. The idea that the gossip about the father rumbling around the Italian small town aren't quite right was also a little too predictable. I think this book caught me at a bad time and I just wanted in the mood for the style. It is, however, well written and a nice story about the immigrant experience in America - and that even though they say you can never go home again, sometimes it's better that way.

Stephanie says

Inheritance was easily the best, most well-written book I've read so far this summer. I really enjoyed how the book was written - the story weaves a father's story with his daughter's story at different periods of time. The inclusion of Italian words, culture and food made the story truly come alive for me. All the themes of the book were realistic and I thoroughly enjoyed immersing myself in this story! Highly recommended for some thoughtful summer reading!
