

Forgetting

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In Frederika Amalia Finkelstein's novel *Forgetting*, an insomniac grapples with the past and the future of a world perhaps beyond saving.

Alma's grandfather did not die in a concentration camp, but sometimes she says he did. And sometimes she sits up all night, thinking about the ways he could have died and the people who did die, both in the camps and elsewhere. Unable and unwilling to escape her dark obsessions, she eradicates the line between truth and lies, questioning even the most accepted facts about world history and her own life.

Alma memorizes statistics and compares the timeline governing her past and possessions to that of the Holocaust—her grandfather, for instance, was born the same year as Eva Braun. All these other lives make her afraid to live her own, leaving her trapped in a loop of numbers and pessimistic appraisals of humanity. Numbed and exhausted by the inheritance of memory, she buries herself in her own musings, abandoning a normal routine and relationships in favor of nighttime strolls around Paris and endless hours at the computer.

Among other difficult and poignant questions, Alma wonders if it's possible to have a meaningful existence when all things must stop existing. Her answers to these questions—such as the assertion that Hitler's suicide won him the war—can be twisted and seem to defy all logic, yet they make a tragic sort of sense that Alma, when considering the state of the world, cannot ignore. A frenetic final scene at a racetrack, where Alma pins all of her hopes on the outcome of a single race, sees her disparate obsessions tumble together in a phantasmagorical display of delusion and reluctant hope.

Forgetting is a novel about how past events haunt society at large and the individuals within it.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2023)

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