



★ **Her Here**

Amanda Dennis

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In Amanda Dennis's melancholy literary novel *Her Here*, a wounded graduate student translates the story of a fellow wanderer.

Since her mother died, Elena has shuddered her way through daily existence. She's assigned herself new tasks, but has no clear sense of purpose. Her introduction to Siobhán, an old friend of her mother's from her Parisian days, comes with an opportunity to escape this awkward, suspended state. Siobhán asks her to translate the poetic, near impenetrable diaries of her missing daughter, Ella, into something like a story.

Years ago, Ella ran away to Thailand, escaping the searing revelation that she was adopted. But life in Thailand was no pure escape. She made new friends at her teacher's posting, all of whom were living with their own versions of deep pain. She fell into dangerous love with Seb, an expat afflicted with ennui and given to random acts of cruelty. In addition to monastic retreats, insightful discussions of Hemingway with her students, and long, hot, celebratory nights, Ella staggered her way toward new betrayals and disappointments. Eventually, the world lost track of her.

Immersing herself in Ella's diary, Elena becomes something of a vehicle for Ella's agonies and desires. She translates by night, and wanders the streets of Paris by day, seeing only the jungles of Thailand, hearing only the voices of Ella's coworkers and found friends. And somewhere between Ella's decision to relinquish the pain that is life, and the reemergence of her own buried memories, Elena is faced with a choice: to follow in the footsteps of the hurt women whose spirits she dwells among, or to choose vitality.

Wrenching and revelatory, *Her Here* is a novel about the barbs and possibilities that follow from the unexpected loss of what's familiar.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2021)

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