

Mission in Paris 1990

Bill Pearl

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A man deals with the fallout of his involvement in anti-Vietnam protests in Mission in Paris 1990, a historical novel with a heartwarming conclusion.

A jaded businessman reunites with an old lover under difficult circumstances in Bill Pearl's historical novel *Mission in Paris 1990*.

Twenty-two years ago, Robert was an idealistic, radical anti-Vietnam War activist. Today, he is a self-serving businessman who travels to Vietnam on a diplomatic mission for the United States government. He is distracted by an encounter with the Vietnamese woman whom he once loved—and whom he still does. Their unexpected meeting exposes long-buried secrets that force Robert to reckon with his own mistakes, as well as with those of his loved ones.

Though part of a series, this book can stand alone. It blends real historical events into its exciting narrative. First for his government and then for his family, Robert revisits places that hold deep, painful meaning for him. The beauty and bustle of Vietnam remind him of the war he tried and failed to stop. France, which is the last place where he saw his beloved My Hanh, brings both pain and one last chance at reconciliation with those whom he thought were lost to him, including someone My Hanh never told him about. Both places play a role as the story builds to its explosive climax, as Robert realizes that the man who he became—a bitter, closed-minded individual who measures success by profit—would repulse the man he once was.

As a lead character, Robert responds to betrayals by the women in his life with explosive anger, hypocrisy, and self-pity, all of which seem to prove he did not deserve their loyalty in the first place. His happy ending is reliant upon him learning to see beyond his pain. This makes his story complex and intriguing, even in the moments when he is at his most unlikable.

In the book's first half, Robert and My Hanh struggle to reconnect and to do what they think is best. They soon realize how much they still have in common—including the fact that their secrets and ambitions hurt each other and turned their son into an inflexible, resentful young man with dangerous associates. In the action-packed second half of the book, Robert is once again thrust into the middle of deadly international conflict (though one in which Muslim characters are depicted using stereotypes). Some of the book's secondary events are not set up well, though, including the abrupt appearance of My Hanh's mother and a conciliatory letter that Robert receives from a rival businessman.

A historical novel with a heartwarming conclusion, *Mission in Paris 1990* is about letting go of the past in order to forge a stronger, healthier future.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (June 9, 2021)

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