



Nermina's Chance

Dina Greenberg

Atmosphere Press (Oct 29, 2021)

Softcover \$19.99 (427pp)

978-1-63944-625-4

In *Nermina's Chance*, Dina Greenberg's historical novel about the Bosnian War, ongoing trauma gives people opportunities to do what is right.

In the 1990s, Nermina escapes Bosnia with a young boy who lost his family, like her, and who chooses her as his temporary surrogate mother. They wind up in Italy, where his aunt takes him; Nermina proceeds to a new life in the US, where she teams with fellow refugee, Raifa, and her family. Raifa helps Nermina execute her lifelong goal to have a biological child, Atika.

After its initial flurry of war scenes, the book maintains its drama via Atika's father, Carl's, parallel, personal story about poverty and family strife. His aimlessness exists in stark contrast to Nermina's single-minded determination. While Carl hops between jobs and women, Nermina raises her daughter alone, working and going to school to become a psychiatric nurse on a PTSD ward. These intertwining threads depict the universality and pervasiveness of trauma.

Carl and Nermina's shared pain fuels the novel, in which the relationship between Nermina and Atika, and Carl and his brother, Jeff, is fraught. They work to overcome communication barriers, and the combination of their inner thoughts with their awkward exchanges has a therapeutic effect. Their forensic details—of gestures, medical procedures, and culinary delights—result in a realistic picture of people struggling to tell themselves and others the truth. Accessible but subtle metaphors, as of butterflies, a garden, and sturdy homes, direct the characters toward a united purpose: healing.

Moments of tenderness and affection reveal family love that reaches beyond words into action. In the satisfying conclusion, the book's adhoc family members commit themselves to each other, experiencing joyful life changes. Multifaceted love wins in *Nermina's Chance*, a novel prompted by a multifaceted war.

MARI CARLSON (November / December 2021)

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