

No Turning Back

Tracy Buchanan

Crooked Lane Books (Jun 13, 2017)

Hardcover \$25.99 (352pp)

978-1-68331-163-8

Events cascade at a relentless pace in this perfectly taut psychological thriller.

In Tracy Buchanan's *No Turning Back*, a woman defends herself from a young, crazed assailant; when he is killed, her ordered small-town life becomes mired in psychological quicksand, threatening both her freedom and her life.

Anna is a radio station host in an English seaside town. Worried over a prospective divorce and raising her baby daughter alone, her life nears collapse after she accidentally kills a boy in self defense. She is cleared of wrongdoing, but in the wake of the event, class prejudices arise, and friends and the media begin to doubt her story. Then, the boy's death is tied to long-ago killings attributed to the so-called Ophelia Killer.

Anna is a sympathetic lead, fleshed out by telling touches, like her decision to name her baby "Joni" in tribute to a favorite singer. She is the linchpin of the unfolding narrative.

A cynical police detective, a doting grandmother, Anna's depressed mother, a supportive male co-worker, and a hateful radio producer also factor in. Jamie, the slain youth's older brother, is both subtly drawn and fully engaged. He ends up being one of the few people to reach out to Anna—a remarkable move, especially because of outlined class disparities.

The English seaside setting is tellingly sketched: a struggling small town, with its critical supporting industry gone, there are perceptible economic and class divisions. Dialogue is smooth, almost completely devoid of the sometimes indecipherable distinctions between American and British English.

Conflict is palpable within this story, as police concentrate on the obvious, giving lip service to Anna's innocence. Friends prove too willing to believe false accusations, and an employer is more interested in appearances than loyalty. The omnipresent media intrudes into Anna's personal disaster.

Events cascade at a relentless pace. Each time Anna finds apparent reconciliation, or assistance, or a helpful friend, a new threat looms. *No Turning Back* is a perfectly taut psychological thriller.

GARY PRESLEY (May/June 2017)

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