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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

Nothing is Ever Lost

Argyris Calbaris
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After trudging through a day at work minding his demanding business and tending to his ailing brother Aris begins his real journey. From dusk to dawn during fitful hours of sleep he embarks on a forty-day stroll that could save his soul. He is guided by an angel in the form of a long-forgotten cousin Apostolos. Aris begins a tour through the afterlife's five Kingdoms each of which represents a major religion. The road is populated with philosophers and scientists religious holy men and regular people from Aris's neighborhood. The only difference is that they are dead while Aris is only dreaming.

Part Socratic dialogue and part Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan* Aris's travels are punctuated by images straight out of the dreamer's mind. He encounters parades of people dressed in strange garments clutches of divergent leaders from various religions Albert Einstein a Buddhist Lama a naked group of high priests from his own Christian Orthodox faith trailing their long hair and beards behind them on their way to darkest caves of Hades and groups of horribly disfigured people who have been slaughtered by wars and bombs in the Middle East.

Many of the throng are headed to their own particular Kingdom be it for Muslims Jewish people Christians Buddhists or Hindus but the future of some will be evaluated by a group of Electors. Whether the destination is Heaven or Hades the soul is judged by the person's past actions. An echo of one's entire life is played before the Electors with no detail ever lost.

Calbaris layers several worlds together the present waking world where marriage and work demand attention the world of dreams where the life is reflected upon and the walking world of burning questions and Apostolos' telling answers. Most importantly the narrator absorbs the lesson "that eternal life begins on Earth. We attain it through our actions and finally we have to seek it within ourselves from the bottom of our hearts."

Originally a Greek garment exporter Calbaris began writing later in his life. He has written seven books in the last six years including works based on his experiences in Greece during the German occupation of World War II *Memories* and *Reconciliation* as well as novels *The Voracious* and *"Liokali" The Devouring*.

While the discussions that the narrator Aris engages in as he travels through these forty days are interesting unfortunately the framework holding the book together that of waking and sleeping is weak. Based mostly on dialogue Calbaris's decision to include both extensive descriptions of various religious beliefs mixed with elements of everyday speech feels strained. However the idea that each must be responsible for their actions and that actions impact the afterlife is a universal concept that sometimes seems forgotten in this fast-moving electronic age.

DEIRDRE SINNOTT (January 9, 2009)

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