

Nothing Lasts Forever

Althea Foster

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This compelling historical novella examines Australia's development through the story of one young man.

Nothing Lasts Forever is an engaging historical novella by Althea Foster that imagines the life of a young Samoan warrior taken far from his home by slave traders at the turn of the twentieth century.

Amid the chaos of civil uprisings and the plans of outsiders to divide up the Samoan islands, a large cargo ship appears in the bay, recruiting young men for work that is promised to be both of short duration and lucrative. Mel Milo, the firstborn son of the king of Samoa, is volunteered by his father. But the ship is actually engaged in “blackbirding,” an illegal scheme to secure slave labor. *Nothing Lasts Forever* is the story of Mel's life in Australia, and his trials and tribulations as well as his triumphs.

The plot of *Nothing Lasts Forever* is outwardly simple, though it includes well-placed plot twists and a touch of the supernatural. Briskly paced, the third-person point of view is well chosen to convey Mel's narrative. Exemplary research is evident in the way the story is imbued with authentic historical and cultural details, both in Samoa, including the death of Robert Louis Stevenson, and in Australia, where anthropological information regarding the Aborigines is skillfully incorporated. Scenes detailing the treacherous sea passage to Australia are suspenseful and heartbreaking. Mel's reactions to his new and strange environment are touching and humorous.

The cast is small but diverse, and all characters possess backstories that lend them depth and help explain their motivations—from the conflicted King of Samoa trying to do the right thing for his people to the curmudgeonly ghost who helps Mel learn the way of money and commerce.

Many of the white Australians are afraid of the Aborigines, as they are reputed to be savage and primitive, but Mel sees the similarities between them and the people he left behind in Samoa, realizing they are not that different from each other. The author uses the narrative of Mel's life to compellingly address ongoing issues between indigenous peoples and immigrants, regardless of how they arrived on the island. Foster also successfully employs Mel's story as a metaphor to tell the history of Australia's development, as he progresses from isolated plantation to rural sheep farm and finally to a modern city.

Nothing Lasts Forever is a quick, satisfying historical adventure.

MICHELLE NEWBY (August 31, 2016)

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