

Tell Me, Signora

Ann Harleman

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Ann Harleman's *Tell Me, Signora* is about heartbreaking loss, second chances, and resurrecting and righting the past.

Kate, an archaeologist who's still reeling from the death of her husband, is awarded a three-month fellowship in Genoa for the purpose of researching a sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance painter, Sofonisba Anguissola. She lives in a villa with the others who've been granted fellowships, too, though not everyone is as they appear to be.

Though Kate's stated purpose is to restart her stalled career, she also hopes to rediscover herself and reestablish her self-worth. She has a complicated relationship with her daughter and her sister, and many of her choices are influenced by her attempts to heal those fractured relationships. When she meets refugees from Kosovo, where she and her late husband used to live, she makes an impulsive decision that impacts many lives, including her own.

Within this layered and rewarding story, the Italian setting is a prominent feature. Descriptions of the villa and the surrounding countryside are immersive. Kate's research into Sofonisba Anguissola's story adds an element of intrigue, especially when Kate begins to have visions of the artist, which she likens to the feeling of travelling back in time. These visions, described in great detail, flesh out the artist, showing that her life paralleled Kate's in some ways, and illuminating how discoveries about her could be career or life-changing for Kate. Kate's grief and allusions to her past make her all the more complex. Even when she's frustrating, she's authentic.

Tell Me, Signora is an atmospheric and satisfying story about a search for an artist's hidden history.

HILARY DANINHIRSCH (January / February 2020)

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