



The Everything I Have Lost

Sylvia Zéleny

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A girl experiences life on both sides of the US-Mexican border in Sylvia Zéleny's daring middle grade novel *The Everything I Have Lost*.

Twelve-year-old Julia's parents have done a thorough job of preserving their daughter's innocence. In Juarez, she worries more about her friends, homework, and when she'll be allowed to wear lipstick than she does about the escalating violence around her.

When her father gets a mysterious new job, Julia feels kept in the dark. Her mother grows distant, and she hears rumors that her father is working for a dangerous gang. Over the course of three years, Julia writes in her diary about daily events, internal struggles, and her surroundings, epitomizing the process of growing up.

Julia's voice becomes more mature as she formulates an understanding of Juarez and El Paso, where she moves halfway through the book. She explores the inner lives of her family members, too. Her world is obscured by what adults refuse to explain, and she tries to comprehend violence by writing to relay what others tell her, saying "I don't know what that means." Her attitude shifts as she develops clarity, and her language is sophisticated by the book's end.

Nothing is revealed outside of the scope of Julia's experience, yet the book feels complete. Through her eyes, her mother, father, friends, and others fit into their roles. The text hints at their motives, and they are dimensional even if Julia does not see them as such.

The Everything I Have Lost captures a girl's blossoming understanding of violence, family dysfunction, and what it means to grow up.

AIMEE JODOIN (September / October 2019)

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