

Transformed: San Francisco

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A CIA agent and a dominatrix connect in this vibrant and exciting novel.

Transformed: San Francisco is both a romance and a thriller. With rich characters and a fast-paced plot, coauthors Suzanne Falter and Jack Harvey deliver a story of self-discovery set in the vibrant culture of San Francisco.

The novel begins with Charley, a transgender man who works as a CIA agent, rushing to stop a bomber during a teeming San Francisco festival and race. The scene creates a sense of urgency that doesn't go away, even as the story jumps back to detail preceding events and introduce other characters.

An aging New-York-socialite-turned-dominatrix, Electra, joins Charley as one of the leading characters. Together, the two begin a relationship that is simultaneously gentle and passionate. Their friendship becomes the emotional core of the novel, keeping the story grounded as police conspiracies and terrorist plots are introduced.

Although it features a complex web of plot threads and supporting characters, *Transformed* is truly about self-discovery and overcoming fears. This is most apparent with Electra, who, over the course of the novel, accepts being rejected by her peers and family and comes to honor her sexuality and desires. She does this first by shedding her given name, Pamela Delacroix, in favor of her chosen moniker, Electra. Charley is the friend at her side—and the lover in her future—who helps her accept herself, and Electra, in turn, does the same for him.

Similarly, minor characters explore their own identities and desires. Each of these characters, from Charley's boss to Frankie, a cop trying to end corruption in the San Francisco police department while mourning her wife, is fleshed out and feels genuine. Even the antagonist, Randy "Evangelical" Tytus, is fully realized. His struggles with his father and his religion are explored seriously and thoughtfully so that by the end of the novel, he is almost sympathetic.

One of the highlights of *Transformed* is the San Francisco setting. Bursting with details, the descriptions of the city render it an important part of the plot. In a particularly standout scene, Charley and Electra climb a winding set of stairs and find themselves at the top of Russian Hill. The description of the old, graceful steps, of the "small jewel of a lawn," and of the wild parrots that live there all create a sense of intimacy for the characters, almost as if the city is drawing them together and encouraging their friendships.

Functioning like this, San Francisco becomes just as well developed as any of the characters, both layered and complex. This strong setting sometimes seems to carry the story, which suffers from an overall lack of imagery. Though the language is efficient and suits the fast pace of the novel, it is also a little dry at times.

Transformed: San Francisco follows characters through some of their most challenging times, exploring their fears, their hopes, and, ultimately, their triumphs. With brisk pacing and engrossing character arcs, the novel is both exciting and touching.

CLARISSA GOLDSMITH (January 28, 2016)

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