

Vera Kelly Lost and Found

Rosalie Knecht

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The third installment of the Vera Kelly mystery series, Rosalie Knecht's *Vera Kelly Lost and Found* hits close to home as Vera travels the length and breadth of Southern California, fighting to recover her girlfriend and their future together.

In the spring of 1971, Vera Kelly is thirty years old—and is a former CIA operative, a private detective, and an occasional freelance film editor. She finds herself entering a kind of “psychic heath.” In a committed and illegal lesbian relationship with Max, she's unmoored from the usual requirements of women. But discontent bubbles below the surface of her life's comfortable, limited routines.

Meanwhile, Max is estranged from her family. It's a topic that Vera has learned is better left alone. When Max is contacted about her parents' impending divorce, she returns to old-moneyed Los Angeles and gets sucked back into the family drama, this time with Vera by her side.

Flavored with the auteur aesthetic of seventies films, the novel portrays Southern California as being in the grip of New Age occultists, the latest crop of bright young talents, and cultural experimentation. Max's family drama crosses “poor little rich girl” with homophobia and provides occasion for Vera to interrogate her own relationships to her present and past.

For anyone familiar with queer history and the pathological medicalization of homosexuality, the novel telegraphs its moves. Yet, in its exploration of the relationship at stake, it also includes a personalized glimpse into the struggles of a lesbian couple living openly. And it recasts visual and cultural tableaux of the era, with women occupying center stage, saving each other and functioning as heroes.

A pulpy detective novel moved by familiar, easy beats, *Vera Kelly Lost and Found* recasts cozy mysteries through a queer lens.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May / June 2022)

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