

Volver Is to Return

Rebeca Rios-Kohn

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With its focus on love, family, and forgiveness, this memorable work instills a feeling of hope even in the darkest of times.

In Rebeca Rios-Kohn's engaging, multifaceted saga *Volver Is to Return*, a devoted woman deals with unforeseen tragedy before returning home in hopes of reconciling family conflicts.

America is a smart and well-respected children's rights advocate with UNICEF. She is also a devoted wife and mother, though the demands of her job take her far away from home. After a global mission, America is looking forward to a vacation with her husband and son. But in the wake of unfathomable news, her life instead changes. She travels to South America, where her estranged family maintains a ranch. Here she searches for solace and answers. Against a culturally rich backdrop, revelations of heartache, deception, obsession, and betrayal come to light. A gradual spiritual awakening leads America toward hope, faith, and forgiveness.

Rios-Kohn draws upon her own experiences to impart a realistic tone. The use of first-person narrative proves a satisfying choice as it weaves among a colorful, international playing field. Whether describing a solemn day under the shade of the Eiffel Tower, a myth surrounding the creation of a brocaded Indian sari, or the Vietnamese fishing boats likened to a Renoir painting, the informative and poetic details artfully highlight the sense of place.

As the story moves between America's career and personal life, her interactions with a barrage of characters, from coworkers to Parisian in-laws, keep the plot steadily moving. Extensive background about past generations weighs down the tale, though, and some has no bearing on the story's outcome.

There is a stark contrast between the characters of America's personal and professional worlds. A tough boss with a less-than-desirable reputation presses for America's return to work, even in the midst of a dire family crisis. America's family is clearly an emotional clan, many of whom struggle with past regrets. Rios-Kohn smartly brings the story full circle by reintroducing individuals from America's New York life into the book's final chapter.

A large portion of the book is set against the sweeping vista of Uruguay, and lyrical prose captures the triumph and tragedy of multiple generations in South America. It is a place described as "a land for one to lay down roots and a land to come home to." Dialogue is amply sprinkled with Spanish terms, adding another layer of cultural nuance. As a counterbalance to tumultuous events, religion serves as a running theme, delivered in the form of priestly counsel, spiritual visions, and through the power of prayer.

Volver Is to Return is a memorable, emotionally charged novel. With its overlapping twofold plot, this is a well thought-out drama, intricately layered with rich and rewarding characters. Its focus on love, family, and forgiveness instills a feeling of hope even in the darkest of times.

CAROL DAVALA (April 18, 2017)

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