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Where the Silver River Ends

Anna Quon
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In Anna Quon's novel *Where the Silver River Ends*, travels abroad lead to incredible self-discoveries.

Joan, Canadian and of Chinese heritage, works as an English teacher in Budapest. Her friend Edna's dying wish is that she deliver a letter to her estranged husband. When the letter leads to tragedy, Joan flees to Bratislava. There, she meets Milan, who's Roma and working in his family's hotel. Then another of Joan's friends, Adriana, shows up. The three form a bond that helps Joan to deal with her losses and face the future.

Joan herself is a complex heroine who faces complicated decisions. Her conversations with others, and her internal monologues, reflect how she struggles with her choices. But while the story follows her as she connects with others in the midst of her personal upheavals, its real conflicts are nuanced ones of loss and alienation. Living between two cultures, Joan is unable to exist fully in either; but as a world traveler, she comes to feel connected to fellow outsiders, all of whom are developed in interesting, realistic ways.

Descriptive flourishes arise in the prose, which is otherwise straightforward. Some of these do double duty, describing settings as well as capturing people's states of mind. Still, Bratislava itself is an under described location, and Joan seems to under explore it; she visits its cafés and markets, but avoids tourist sites. It becomes tangential to, rather than pivotal to, her personal discoveries.

Where the Silver River Ends is a rich, engaging novel about the difficulties of being an outsider. In it, a distressed woman finds that people who love and accept her should be treasured.

KATERIE PRIOR (January / February 2022)

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