



# Safe in Your Head

*Laura Valeri*

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Safe in Your Head is an epic story about war and love, about the hopes and ambitions that haunt us through decades as the ghosts of our ancestors thrive in our dreams, in our memories, and in our most cherished hopes. Ever since he was a boy, Vittorio wanted to live in America. He remembers cases of food filled with chocolate and peanut butter dropping down in parachutes from the sky, the camps of Americans ringing with fast rock and roll. Then in 1978, as an adult and father of three, Vittorio moves his family to New York to escape the chaos that is Italy under the terrorism of the Red Brigades. But his mother-in-law, Liliana, will have to wrestle with the most devastating loss since the death of her husband, Giorgio, who was a resistance father and died when she was still a young woman. Liliana must face again a wrenching loss so many decades after Giorgio's death when Babbo takes her daughter and her grand-children to America. They will all try to adapt to their new lives, honoring the past through their recipes, and their belief in magic and good luck. And still they are all haunted by the one decision that Giorgio took upon himself so long ago.. [Contains original cooking recipes and good luck charms from the old country.] Reviewers called Safe in Your Head "pure conjuration, a trick of light and magic, words woven and weaving, piercing the veil between."

## Safe in Your Head Details

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## From Reader Review Safe in Your Head for online ebook

### Melissa says

I received a copy of this book through the goodreads first reads program.

This was a surprising read, in the best way. Each short story is layered with emotions and tragedy, innocence and loss, war and sacrifice. Beautifully written.

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### Sandra Barron says

This book is comprised of ten short stories, most of them intertwined, linking the main character. The Italian background and stories color this book and give it the sense of intimacy that the author laces tightly with strings of lyrical prose. It can be beautiful and sad and you are endeared to the narrator, who is navigating the borderlands between her Italian childhood and her new life in New York. My favorite story in the book was "Cold War" and "A Kiss for Heaven's Sake", which are all about change, love, and loss. I particularly enjoyed getting a glimpse of everyday life at the Iowa Workshop. Valeri does a great job at connecting all these tales together and the arch of the book provides for a sense of growth in the characters. Tragedy in one story colors in the margins of another story later on. Every page is like a reflection of what came before. The recipes and remedies evoke the sensory connections to the old country, as in Like Water for Chocolate. Terrific writing. I cannot wait to read the other books by this author.

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### Alex Daniel says

I find it hard to put my feelings about SAFE IN YOUR HEAD into words, but I'll do my best.

SAFE IN YOUR HEAD is a collection of short stories, but only kind of. You see, Laura Valeri's book is kind of an anthology of sorts, and the stories here deal with details of a family, a country, and the interaction between the two. Each story feels like a chapter, or a snapshot, taken of an impossibly long and large piece of work. These stories, though, do not take place in chronological order, and this is important -- the first story follows a family during their first few weeks in a new country. The family has moved to America from Italy, and there's plenty of confusion, longing, sadness, and hope that comes from such an immigration. This isn't the first story, chronologically, but it sets the tone of the rest of the book in a big way. Similarly, the last story (again, not chronologically), is last for a reason, though I won't spoil why I think that is. :)

Valeri's prose is very knowing, and I don't know if I've read an author capture the essence of time so carefully. Stories that take place in the Old Country feel like stories passed down through generations, and some of them take on almost historical records. As the stories come closer to the present, the nostalgia and distance grow fainter in the writing. It's a really cool effect, to be able to figure out where you are in time just by the sentence structure, let alone the way people talk or interact.

Each story is followed by a traditional Italian recipe (with helpful commentary) and an Italian folk remedy (e.g., how to keep evil spirits at bay, how to ensnare someone in love). For me, these interstitials really brought the past to life, almost as much as the stories themselves.

The Rosetta's Stone that really unlocked the book for me was the penultimate story, "Cold War". The story

features the author as an adult in the early 2000's. The writing is spectacular, and in the few dozen pages written here, Valeri says more than most authors can hope for in an entire novel. It's the final story, chronologically, and it really opened up the rest of the book. SAFE IN YOUR HEAD is therapy. It's a way for the author to make sense of not only her family, but of her self.

One last thing: there's an aural description that takes place towards the end of "A Kiss For Heaven's Sake" that I don't think I will ever be able to forget. I won't spoil it, but it's a beautiful moment -- haunting, sad, and hopeful.

SAFE IN YOUR HEAD took a while to grow on me, but as soon as I finished it, I immediately wanted to read it again. Recommended!

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### **Tina Whittle says**

The stories in SAFE IN YOUR HEAD are pure conjuration, a trick of light and magic, words woven and weaving, piercing the veil between. Which is one of this book's recurrent themes -- the power of story to transcend even fact or truth, to become them after a while -- all of it tied to loss and grief, all of it leavened by the raw beauty of Valeri's words. History is permeable, chimerical, but is it ultimately knowable? As a reader, your perception shifts with each new story, each new voice, all of it becoming more than the sum of its parts. There are spells and recipes and dreams and shifting time, and I enjoyed every second I spent in these pages.

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