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One quiet spring day in 1989, Constance Tepper arrives from Philadelphia to watch over her mother's Brooklyn apartment and her orange cat. Con's mother, Gert, has left town to visit her old friend Marlene Silverman in Rochester. Marlene has always seemed alluring and powerful to Con, and ever since Con was a little girl, the long-standing bond between Gert and Marlene has piqued her curiosity. Now she finds herself wondering again what keeps them together.

Con's week in Brooklyn will take a surprising turn when she wakes to find that someone has entered her mother's apartment and her own purse is missing. Stranded, with no money, she begins to phone family and friends. By the end of that week, she will experience a series of troubling discoveries about her marriage, her job, and her family's history, and much of her life will be changed forever.

In the fall of 2003, now living in Brooklyn and working as a lawyer, Con has almost forgotten that strange and shattering week. But a series of unsettling reminders and surprising discoveries—including traces of a lost elevated train line through Brooklyn—will lead to grief, love, and more questions. At last, a confrontation between Marlene and Con's daughter will unravel some of the mysteries of the past.

Nothing Is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn Details

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From Reader Review Nothing Is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn for online ebook

Laurie says

THIS book sets up an interesting premise and story but the denouement is anti-climactic, and the ending wasn't satisfying to me.

I was interested in seeing how Mattison moved between 2 times periods within the same chapters. Again, I like the idea of doing this -- stories are never really limited to the here and now, and often what happened in the past is critical to illuminating and understanding the present -- but I thought the jumps between decades were often confusing.

Stephanie says

Interesting book. I think it's one of those that I can't say that I liked exactly but that stays with me. It has an underlying eeriness but then nothing really eerie happens. It has a bit of modern gothic in it and that's a crafty effect. Good portrayal of the complexities of relationships -- mother/daughter, husband/wife, friend/friend. The most compelling story thread is how little we know about the history of those we love and how it can affect us -- personal mythology, in a way. In the end the plot doesn't come to any neat conclusion or resolution but leaves the characters moving on through life having learned (or not) from their interactions.

Reading over this I make it sound boring. It's not. It would make a good book group book or one for a women's lit class because there's a lot of meaty stuff to talk about. Not something I'd want to read everyday but the characters were really well done and it was a bit like looking in on someone else's life -- the good, bad and banal all there on display.

Jessica says

This book's protagonist (Constance/Con) was not very likable. She is very self-centered, almost to the point of narcissism. It jumps back and forth between Con's mother's apartment in Brooklyn in 1989 and Brooklyn/NYC in 2003. What bothered me the most about Con was the way she treated, or rather tended to ignore, her daughter. Con seems to condescend to her mother and just sort of brush her off as well. I don't think there is one favorable description of her mother by Con in the whole book.

In 1989 Con is staying by herself in her mother's apartment when nearly every aspect of her life falls apart. In 2003 she hardly remembers anything about that week in 1989. The author tries to make the point that we don't remember things, even important things, very clearly or sequentially, which I agree with. But Con's memory of that week is nearly wiped clean, and I found that too unbelievable.

Gabrielle says

Nothing Is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn (reviewed for the New York Post)

By Alice Mattison

Harper Perennial

Reviewed by Gabrielle Danchick

There's a hint of irony in the title of Alice Mattison's latest novel, "*Nothing Is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn*," a delightfully suspenseful domestic drama. In fact, former Brooklynite Constance "Con" Tepper, a lawyer who handles women's rights cases, nearly instantly forgets—or shall we say, "overlooks"—the alarming discovery she makes while alone in her mother's Park Slope apartment.

The novel flip-flops between two different periods in Con's life. The narrator explains in the book's no-nonsense yet melodic prose: "I want to tell it this way . . . for reasons that will become obvious, but also because what interests me most about Con is not exactly that she could remember and learn—who can do that?—but that when she discovered, in middle age, that more than fourteen years earlier she'd failed to pay attention, she tried to find out what she needed to know, even though she didn't want to."

One period unfolds in April 1989. Con, 45, married, the mother of 16-year-old Joanna, is cat-sitting for her mother, Gert, away visiting her friend Marlene, a charismatic woman Con has admired since childhood. During Con's stay, her purse mysteriously vanishes, along with a single small locked box. As Con realizes she is trapped (with the purse went keys, money, credit cards, ID, etc.), her life begins to unravel—job, marriage, a distressingly forgetful mother and missing Joanna. While attempting to stay calm, Con stumbles upon the unsettling tidbit, reading some of Gert's longtime correspondence with Marlene. But the unsavory matter is soon eclipsed by what appears more pressing.

The other period takes place in November 2003. Con, now twice divorced, with a flighty artist daughter, has come to live alone in a Brooklyn apartment, where the stolen purse and box are returned all these years later.

Mattison's novel summons the same exhilarating feeling as sitting on a stoop a sultry New York City evening, enraptured by a neighbor's gripping tale of someone she knew. You cannot turn away and go upstairs. A deliciously appalling secret is about to be revealed.

Unfortunately, weaknesses arise in the novel's denouement, which appears rushed as the characters repeatedly "shrug" in and out of jackets and coats, hurled toward a contradictory conclusion. The secret is horrific, but why has the usually outspoken Joanna, who thrives on being incendiary, kept it from her mother since learning about it as a teen? The explanation is too brief and out of character: "'What was the point?' said Joanna. 'Mom, I'm sorry. You couldn't hear this. You wouldn't.'" It's not as if Joanna were missing a vital piece of evidence inside that locked box to close her case before presenting it to her lawyer mother; she had already accrued enough for a slam dunk.

In the end we are told Constance's eyes are open. But are they? Does she seethe with her newfound knowledge as she sits in her opera chair about to watch *Turandot*? Does she rise and scream along with the arias as it all sinks in? No, she placidly decides to take on a case, which appears slight in the grand scheme and impossible to substantiate, for her daughter. Con seems just as blinkered as she has from the get-go, although the author is signaling she isn't, that she's finally seized an opportunity to change.

Mattison offers an interesting study in denial but only up to a point. Had she plumbed a tad further, or stirred, those murky depths where uncomfortable truths lie hidden and protected, she might have produced something more complex and complete.

M says

I took this out under the impression that a title with the word 'quite' in it must bespeak a decently written book. Well, yes, and a quirky one.

This story is pretty interesting but borders on the absurd quite (hehehe) frequently. Told in back and forth between two scenes fourteen and a half years apart, the story slowly pieces together of a young woman who loses her mother, marriage and daughter and job one awful week, and later as the past catches up with her. Well written enough, engaging and all that, but fairly strange. Constance and her mother are both obsessed with this woman, Marlene, whose charm completely escapes me, and her horrible actions are all pretty clearly spelled out yet no one seems to mind, and eventually it all is ACTUALLY spelled out and STILL no one cares. I think the word for this book is surreal. A lot of happening with little to no consequence. Passes the time but nothing special.

Jessica says

I'd give this 4.5 stars if I could. Brent bought me this book on a recommendation from a colleague; I'd never heard of this author but now I look forward to reading more of her work. The novel jumps back and forth between two life-changing weeks in the life of Constance Tepper. In April 1989, the middle-aged Con is apartment-sitting for her mother when her purse is stolen, setting off a string of events that link back to her mother's relationship with a longtime friend in the years during and after World War II.

Fast-forward to November 2003, and Con is coping with her opposition to the war in Iraq and her tempestuous relationship with her grown daughter, Joanna. Her mother's friend, Marlene, reappears and the three generations meet for a day of Coney Island, opera and some revelations about the elder women's lives during the 1940s.

I love how Mattison draws the relationships between and among the women and allows for generational differences without bonking you on the head with them. She is a master of showing and not telling--her characters appear through their actions and words. Mattison also incorporates news headlines of the day both as background noise and as plot elements. She gives the reader just enough information to reach her own conclusions about the characters' past. Nothing is neatly signed, sealed or delivered.

This book featured many of my favorite themes: mothers and daughters, female friendship, family secrets and a taste of 1940s New York, all folded together by a skilled fiction writer.

My edition of the book featured an interview with the author that went beyond the banal, "How do you get your ideas?" questions and revealed some fascinating bits about the workings of Mattison's mind and the evolution of her career.

Lara says

Although I might not gush quite as effusively about Nothing Is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn as I did about Who By Fire, I loved it as well (although I must confess that I kind of hate the title. I thought maybe I'd like the title more after reading the book, but alas, no.). It flips back and forth between two times in the main

character's life, so essentially tells two stories at once, weaving them together as the present-day protagonist makes sense of the past. In the past, a woman who goes to stay in her mother's apartment in Brooklyn to care for her cat while mom visits her best friend out of town. On her first night there, her purse is stolen from inside the house while she is sleeping, which indirectly leads to a new friendship, relationship revelations, and more. In the future, that same woman is confronted again with the lasting effects of that strange weekend years before.

The book meanders through its story without feeling too deliberate about it, and it made me want to read more by Alice Mattison.

With either of these books, you can't really go wrong.

Bookreaderljh says

Interesting story as the reader sees one woman's week about 14 years apart. In the later year she revisits some of the earlier year and discovers how much she has forgotten (or maybe not). At first each time period stretches out for longer scenes as the story of each time period is developed. Later in the book the switching between times becomes more frequent as the memories shift back and forth. It was an interesting format though a couple of times the author intervenes with 3rd person narrative that I found really jarring. But the story itself is about a woman and her relationship among her family (mother, daughter, husband) and also her interactions with her friends. Con is a woman whose life was shaken in the early story as her mother dies, she loses a job and her husband, and for a while thinks she has lost her daughter. The later story she has her life back on track but is still driven by these various relationships and revisits that earlier time when her daughter goes through her own crisis. The story driving character though is Marlene - the old friend of her mother - and what she may or may not have done to the various relationships with this family. Not until the end does the reader get the whole story and maybe not the whole story even then. Memories change by circumstances and different times and the "truth" is often overshadowed by selective remembrances.

Julie Failla Earhart says

The voice of Brooklyn is back with another complex and fascinating novel, *Nothing is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn*. Author Alice Mattison is known for her short story collections and novels. Among my favorite was *The Book Borrower*. Brooklyn is again the setting for this tale that alternates between 1989 and 2003.

In 1989, Constance "Con" Tepper comes to Brooklyn to mind her mother's apartment and feed a constantly shedding cat. Gert has gone upstate to visit her dear friend, Marlene. On the first night, a stranger walks into the apartment and takes Con's purse. Con is left with no keys and no money. She cannot leave the apartment; she is afraid to leave without locking the door. She cannot call a locksmith because she has no money to pay the bill. She turns to her only connection to the world, the phone.

In 2003, Con has moved into the apartment. She has divorced her husband, Jerry, but they remain somewhat good friends. Con has continued her work as a lawyer---not for a corporation but, like in 1989, for a non-profit. Marlene is coming to visit and Jerry is coming to crash on her couch will in New York. Con is also expecting her daughter, Joanna. The arrival of these three at one time throws Con into a state of depression and near regret.

The alternating time frames are easily to follow. In the 1989 sections, I was quite intrigued with the World War II-era letters from Marlene to Gert that Con found in the apartment. They provide an enigma to the relationship between Gert and Marlene. Con was fascinated with Marlene when she was a child and the letters shed a new light onto that secondary friendship. As for the 2003 sections, I was fascinated by the relics of a lost elevated train that was supposed to be a time-saver back in the 1920s.

I gave Nothing is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn a four-star rating because there is a major discrepancy in how Con meets Gert's neighbor, Peggy, one of the novel's secondary characters. Except for that issue, this is a story worth a reader's time. The surprises and twists add a deeper layer.

Review originally published on www.armchairinterviews.com

John says

A while ago I read a review of another book, along the lines of "Now that I'm finished, I have no idea what it is I just read!" ... which pretty much sums up my experience here.

First, let's get the most glaring weakness out of the way. Mattison has attempted (sadly, failed in my opinion) to incorporate two time periods into one book. Unfortunately, she goes back and forth between them quite abruptly, giving this reader a severe case of mental whiplash (it might be the ebook formatting, but there have been other reviewers complaining about this as well); she would've been far better off alternating shorter chapters.

Then there are the characters. Her protagonist, Con, I had trouble believing was at all a successful attorney; when legal issues arose (regarding her mother), she seemed almost intimidated by them. I got the impression Mattison settled on her profession arbitrarily, just to give her one. In general, she seemed a weak, confused person. Her daughter Joanna seemed a whiny brat. Jerry, Joanna's dad (Con's ex), was actually likeable, along with the Brooklyn neighbor Peggy. Her mother's old friend Marlene seemed almost stereotypical to me as a villain - if there were some redeeming feature in her presence, I missed it, except for facing down Joanna at the end. I never lost the feeling that she and Gert were ... more than just friends, explaining Gert's attachment to her, though Mattison never actually goes there except for one brief reference.

Would I recommend the book? Not really, no. Would I try more of Mattison's writing. Yes, as her descriptions of New York City (Brooklyn in particular) were quite good. There's a longish section where Con and Jerry go off tracking down a Brooklyn historical feature that held my interest quite well; that part would rate three - four stars on its own. My verdict: this was an idea that just didn't transfer well from the author's head to the written page.

Lori Paximadis says

As other reviewers have said, this is a slow-developing story. I like the author's writing style, and the back-and-forth didn't bother me much -- it was interesting to see how some events were remembered years later vs. how they were originally related. But I couldn't quite develop any sympathy for any of the characters, and I was extremely disappointed in the ending, or lack of an ending. I don't mind having to draw my own conclusions once in a while, but leaving so many loose ends flapping out there in the breeze was irritating. Without giving anything away, it seemed to be building up to a couple of big confrontations, but in the end it

just fell flat.

Pbwritr says

A book that kept me interested, but had to overcome some incredulity. I didn't like the back-and-forth in time separated by 14 years, as it got confusing. I also really didn't like the nickname Con for Connie (since that's my name and I've never heard it used). Very annoying. A purse that shows up 14 years after being lost? Deciding to separate from her husband over the phone? Not leaving her mother's apartment because she has no key? Not knocking on doors to borrow money? Not getting her friend to drive there and bring money? Too many intimations and unresolved issues afterwards. But absorbing nonetheless.

Nancy says

In two episodes fourteen years apart Constance deals with family secrets that change her life and her view of the people in it dramatically.

In the first, she has gone to care for her mother's cat while her mother goes to visit her best friend, and ends up dealing with her mother's unexpected death while away, the dissolution of her marriage, and the temporary disappearance of her teenage daughter all in the period of the same few days. In the second episode, Constance, her daughter Joanna, her ex-husband, and her mother's friend Marlene, are brought together once again, with a confrontation between Joanna and Marlene leading to further revelations about the past, and reevaluations of all the relationships in question.

Chloe says

Let me begin by saying that I would not recommend this novel to a friend, UNLESS my friend specifically asked for a book about sad older ladies going about day-to-day business. Which is what the majority of this book included. There was actually a very intriguing plotline involving black market schemes and fraud, but those bits sort of felt like an after-thought.

I also found the protagonist dim-witted and exhausting. In fact, the ONLY character with any charisma whatsoever was the antagonist, who still, being the villain, did exactly as she was expected.

The format of the novel was perplexing to me as well. The author decided to break the work up into only five very long paragraphs, which made my progress seem daunting. Each of these chapters were broken into several fragments that bounced back and forth between two periods of the main character's life, which was confusing to me. (But maybe I am an imbecile).

Now, the writing style was unique and definitely intellectual, and I am still willing to attempt some of the author's other work. I just didn't particularly enjoy this one as it left me sad and confused.

Kathy says

A snowstorm is a great excuse to spend the day inside reading! I was interested enough to plow through this book quickly, but in the end, I didn't really like the characters or story enough to recommend this to anyone. The story, told in equal parts in 1989 and 2003 (often jarringly going between the two time periods), is about

a woman who discovers and then buries painful revelations about her mother's past under emotional layers. The main character, Con, I just wanted to shake, her daughter Joanna I wanted to smack, the mother's friend Marlene I didn't find to be believable. And by the end, I didn't care enough to be moved by climax of the story.
