



Stella Mia

Rosanna Chiofalo

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Rosanna Chiofalo's poignant, beautifully written novel evokes the stunning scenery of Sicily and the Aeolian Islands and tells of mothers and daughters, love and sacrifice--and the choices that resound across continents and through generations.

Julia Parlatone doesn't have much to remember her Italian mother by. A grapevine that Sarina planted still flourishes in the backyard of Julia's childhood home in Astoria, Queens. And there's a song, *Stella Mia*, she recalls her mother singing--my star, my star, you are the most beautiful star--until the day she left three-year-old Julia behind and returned to Italy for good.

Now a happily married school teacher, Julia tries not to dwell on a past she can't change or on a mother who chose to leave. But in an old trunk in the family basement, she discovers items that belonged to her mother--a song book, Tarot cards, a Sicilian folk costume--and a diary. Sarina writes unflinchingly of her harsh childhood and of a first, passionate love affair; of blissful months spent living in the enchanting coastal resort town of Taormina and the unspoiled Aeolian Islands north of Sicily as well as the reasons she came to New York. By the diary's end, Julia knows she must track down her mother in Italy and piece together the rest of the complex, bittersweet truth--a journey that, for better or worse, will change her own life forever.

Stella Mia Details

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Author : Rosanna Chiofalo

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From Reader Review Stella Mia for online ebook

Lost Girls says

Stella Mia is a beautifully written bitter sweet story that takes you on a journey from Astoria, New York to the streets of Sicily and Taormina, dancing with gypsies on the beaches of Italy, and breath taking views exploring various islands. Reading this book was almost like taking a trip to Italy.

Julia has lived without a mother since she was 3 years old. Her mother left and never returned. Her father refused to talk about her mother or why she left. Julia is in her 40s and married when she stumbles on a box of her mother's things. Inside is a diary documenting her mother's life. We learn about Sarina's difficult life, childhood, abusive father and how she escapes her terrible circumstances. She makes friends with the gypsies who take her in and teach her to read tarot cards to earn a living.

We learn so much about Sarina's interesting life and I really wanted Sarina to have her happy ending after so much suffering. There were several choices that she made throughout the book that I had trouble understanding or sympathizing with. I can only mention one of those choices here in order to keep things spoiler free. In all those years she could have contacted her daughter. She has her reasons for not doing so I just didn't fully agree with or understand them.

Julia decides to finally track down her mother and get her answers. The end of the story tied up all the loose ends and all of my questions were answered. I didn't walk away from this book feeling particularly happy but I did feel satisfied. Overall, I felt this book was well done.

-SW

Pat says

Full review to follow on <http://www.tbqsbookpalace.com>

Angela says

Stella Mia is a novel about love, gypsies and looking for a home, and the beautiful beaches of Italy. But mostly it's a hauntingly beautiful tale about mothers and daughters.

Julia finds her mother's diary, and because her mother left when she was young, it's a treasure to Julia. The book opens with Julia's story, but really pulls you in during the flashback to Julia's mother's life. The flashback is the bulk of the story.

We find out how Julia's mother Sarina grew up, how she made her own way, how she fell in love, and how she sacrificed her own happiness for someone else.

The end poignantly brings the story back to Julia. I didn't know how invested I was until I felt tears running down my face, in sorrow and joy at Julia and Sarina's love for each other.

Stella Mia is sad, I'll be honest. It's harsh at times, disturbing, and heartbreaking. But it's all worth it when you get to the parts about holding hands on the beach, singing Stella Mia, and feeling the love when someone says *Ti voglio bene*. Kinda just like life.

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

NetGalley provided an advance copy in exchange for an honest review.

Ann Boytim says

Julia doesn't remember much of her Italian mother since she left when she was very young and Julia was brought up by her father and Aunt. Julia discovers a trunk in the basement of her father's home and finds a diary and clothing that belonged to her mother. As Julie begins to read the diary her mother's life unfolds and she has an amazing story to tell. Julie discovers her mother is still alive and she decides to go to Sicily and confront her past.

eyes.2c says

...the continuing tradition of the grapevine

A story of lives that meet and part and meet again, like the ebb and flow of waters kissing the sands. Of daughters lost and found, of mothers and sisters, lovers and husbands.

Abandoned at 3 years old, Julia Parlatone comes to know her mother Sarina's story through a battered diary and others belongings she finds locked away in a trunk in the basement of her childhood home in Queens. Stella Mia, the song her mother sang to her, the part of her mother Julia remembers.

As Julia journeys to discover the lost part of herself and the truth about her mother we are carried willy nilly with her. And what a story Sarina's is. A story of an abusive childhood, of change and family, of sacrifice and love. I ached for them all. For Sarina and her siblings, for Julia and her father, for Julia and her mother, for Carlo and Sarina.

Poetic in its description of Sicily and the Aeolian Islands, I truly felt the warmth of the sun and the dazzling light of the clear seas.

A moving and compelling story that pulls you in, that doesn't let go and doesn't give an inch. At the last we come to understand with Julia the symbolic allusion of the grapevine, and of love and loss and life.

A NetGalley ARC

Etcetorize says

This book wasn't really anything like what I expected it to be, but I still enjoyed reading it.

I expected more back and forth between the storytellers of the past and the present, but the majority of the novel is set in the 1960's. There are parts that give you the stereotypical dream views of Italy but overall it's a pretty sad tale.

From time to time I felt that the author went into just a bit too much detail describing a scene, descriptions that seemed to have little to nothing to do with the storytelling or the outcome of the scene. That being said, the writing itself is good and you can easily imagine everything going on.

I would say there are mixed messages about the choices we make in life out of responsibility. Is it the right and moral thing to do or do you end up suffering for it in the end? The characters in this book seem to receive both the suffering and the rewards, so in the end, I was left not really knowing.

Overall, it was a good book and I will probably give this author another go in the future.

Italo Italophiles says

Stella Mia is a novel written as a memoirs. All in the present tense, the past and the distant past events recounted in the book enjoy equal immediacy. A grown U.S. American daughter tells her version of the events surrounding the departure of her Italian mother back to Italy. When she discovers her mother's diary, the daughter and the reader discover the mother's version of events.

Astoria, New York's, first, second and third generation Italian-Americans make up many of the characters in this story. The other characters are Sicilian and Calabrian. The events recounted occur in America and in Italy, in the near past and in the distant past. This is so-called women's fiction, which I think is a rather insulting category name. So I will describe this in more traditional terms: a family drama.

The mother's childhood in Italy is an excruciating story to read. Physical and psychological abuse takes a toll on the woman not just in the past, but throughout her whole life. It is a relief to read of the happiness she finds, here and there, in her life. But the overall feeling is that she is doomed from the start to suffer.

The story takes on the feel of a family saga when the story of the past takes over. The visits to Astoria, New York, with the grown daughter are fleeting. I think I enjoyed the last part of the story the best, when the grown daughter meets her aged mother in Sicily, and learns the rest of the story directly from her mother. There is, of course, a heartwarming ending.

I'm a bit older than the 42-year-old protagonist, Julia, but I still think she is a childish woman. Her reactions to what she learns about her mother feel like the reactions of a child, not a grown woman. Perhaps that is the case these days: the perpetual adolescents of America? I like to think that her experience in this book will make her a real grown woman.

There are recipes at the end of the book, and a Question & Answer section with the author. Reading clubs are provided questions to accompany Stella Mia. The reader is told about the author's other books, and we learn that some of the characters in Stella Mia appear in the other books. I received the book from NetGalley.

Please visit my full and illustrated review at Italophile Book Reviews.

<http://italophilebookreviews.blogspot...>

Bonnie says

Enjoyable read. Setting is in Italy and New York which makes for pleasant reading.

Marissa says

Goodreads Paperback Win

This is the story of a young woman Salina running away from an abusive father in Italy and the choices she made along the way. That love and life comes full circle in the end.

We meet her married daughter Julia who finds her mom diary and finds out the life she lead before her and her dad married. She tries to understand why her mother left her when she was young.

It is a tale of pain and doing things to survive along the way. Befriending gypsies at the beach and learning to tell fortunes in order to eat. Singing at a hotel and telling fortunes when she does not sing there she ends up falling in love with the owner's son. From the owner giving her back to her abusive father as she gets beaten up when they arrived at her parents' house.

She is then rescue that night by the owner's son as they move to a different place where he lands a job at a smaller hotel and pretend they are married. When he hears that his Noonie is dying they go back and eventually she passes away. Meantime owner's dad tells her if she does not leave without his son that he would disown him even though he is his only child and that she is nothing but a gypsy and that he would be better off marrying his childhood friend who been taking care of his Noonie.

So she flees once again to another place where she meets Julia's dad who offers her a new life in America after spending time with her. He marries her and moves her to New York where he lives despite his parents who were against the marriage.

Eventually they have a daughter but Salina suffers from depression and misses her family. So she goes back to Italy, leaving behind her daughter and husband saying she will be back but that never happen. Julia finally confronts her dad about her mother and he tells her that he has kept in contact throughout the years but the last he heard from her was when she got married several years ago. She blames her father for hiding the truth and later on herself.

Julia decides she needs to go to Italy and see her mother as she hires a private investigator to find her. She surprises her mother as she did not warn her of her arrival as she meets her mom's sister. A bittersweet reunion as her mom tells her of her life when she returned and her mom's death and how she became a well known

singer and the lives of her siblings.

How the love of her life returned right before she was going to visit her in America. That he wanted to say goodbye while he still remembers her as he has Alzheimer. But she could not let him go this time and now years later he barely remembers her name and calls her Gemma the childhood friend he married and who had died before they reunite.

Julia makes peace with her mom as she ends up spending more than a month catching up. But right before she is to leave her mom dies as she buries her and goes back to America.

Stella Mia or beautiful star is about living, loving and letting go in life. No matter where our paths may go, they come back when we least expect it.

Kahea says

2.5 stars

This is a book that falls under the “It’s not you, it’s me” category because it just didn’t move me as much as I thought it would. The description of Sicily, 1969 was done beautifully and felt like I was walking the streets and beaches of Taormina and the other islands Sarina visited, I just couldn’t fully connect with Julia and Sarina for that full emotional rollercoaster experience that the blurb promised. Of the two, I felt less of a connection with Julia. Though we meet her first and she explains how she felt about being abandoned by her mother, how she came to accept it and where is now in her life, it wasn’t enough for me. She tells us about her relationship with her husband and father, but we don’t get to experience it because we delve right into Sarina’s story and as we are reading it we never get to experience Julia’s reactions to what she learns until the very end of it. I can understand why it was done this way, but I think that’s part of the disconnect for me. I wanted to know about her immediate reactions and how she processed them all, but not experiencing that part of Julia’s story was disappointing. Sarina’s story is heartbreaking and I was sickened by how her father treated her, but I did admire her will to live despite all she went through and the strength that it took her to take that first step to find something better even if it meant leaving those she loved. The romance between Sarina and Carlo I found to be sweet, maybe a little forced at times, but since Sarina was all about going with her gut, I can see how what they felt for each other could turn into something soul deep. The ending is sweet and does give closure to both Sarina and Julia’s stories that will leave you with a sense that everything has come full circle.

Sue-Lynn Voigt says

I picked up and read this book to complete a reading prompt challenge for 2018. The prompt was pick a book from the cover art. I loved the cover and I love Italy. While I think this story had great potential, it got bogged down and lost. It often fell into rambling pages of esoteric data that was distracting and really not important to the story. I really enjoyed many parts of the book and the overall story would have been great, but by the end I was just glad the journey was over. But I have ticked off a 2018 prompt.

Mirella says

Once in a while, I stumble across a book so exceptional, I know it will become one of my lifetime favourites. *Stella Mia* is one such book. The stunning cover alone will draw you in. This book has everything - a fabulous and emotional storyline, unforgettable characters, a beautiful setting, and even a collection of wonderful Italian recipes at the end. From its lush cover to every wonderful page, it kept me spellbound and I could not put it down.

In Astoria New York, a young woman named Julia discovers the diaries of her mother who abandoned her in childhood. From its pages, she discovers the secrets of her mother, Sarina's, past.

In Sicily during the 1960's, a young girl named Sarina lives in severe poverty with her parents and siblings. Her father is an extremely violent, abusive man directing most of his physical beatings on her and her mother. Set to work doing laundry and caring for her younger siblings since she was a small child, Sarina dreams of saving her family from her cruel drunkard of a father. She knows she must escape and when she turns seventeen, manages to run off for a nearby resort town named Taormina where she struggles to find work. Near starving, she is taken in by a family of gypsies where she learns to dance and read tarot cards. It is then that she meets and falls in love with a young man.

What unfolds is an incredibly poignant, multi-faceted love story of two women and their lives. Heartbreaking at times, loving at others, the novel is a roller-coaster ride of emotion, entertainment, and delight. Rich details make it feel as if you are travelling in Sicily. The characters are so real, you can reach out and touch them. They provide the fodder for a fascinating plot that culminates in utter and complete satisfaction. Definitely one of the best books I've ever read - and I read hundreds! Very highly recommended!

Eileen says

This is really 2.5 stars. I thought I would find this book somewhat moving. It was not. It stirred not one emotion. I would not recommend this book to others.

Dana says

I first came to appreciate Rosanna Chiofalo's novels where she expanded upon her Italian heritage in *Carissima*. It was so comforting to read about characters who embodied traits of my own Italian culture, I eagerly picked up Chiofalo's newest book, *Stella Mia*. This novel began when Julia stumbled upon her mother Sarina's diary that revealed her turbulent youth in Italy. Julia eagerly read every word to understand why her mother walked out on her family in America when Julia was a child.

Reading this novel was like traveling through the Aeolian islands of Italy. Each town was described with details that made me feel that I was walking with the characters. The stunning settings were starkly contrasted by the dark life Sirena lived. I had no idea that her early childhood would be filled with so much physical violence inflicted by her father, a subject I really try to avoid in books. Sirena's struggle to escape his tyrannical rule was admirable, but she came across as very childlike. The story was told through long

portions that quickly summarized major events, which didn't allow me to get invested in the story as much as I would have liked. The subplot, if you could call it that, was scarcely present and was nothing more than Julian interested in finding her mother.

I enjoyed the parts of the novel where Sirena found love. But later, the author tried to make a statement about female empowerment and making choices based on love that left me feeling conflicted about the ending. While some characters live happily ever after, their happiness came at the expense of others. The bittersweet ending was no what I would have preferred. Overall, this one was just okay.

Please read more of my reviews on my blog: <http://fastpageturner.wordpress.com>
or follow me on twitter at @dana_heyde

Rosalie says

This was a great book. Being Italian I appreciated all the scenes described and the language. Wonderful story.
