ADRIANA TRIGIANI

The Good Left Undone

a novel

BOOK CLUB KIT
A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

When *Tony’s Wife* was released in 2018, I had completed a creative arc of three novels about American ingenuity and creativity: *All the Stars in the Heavens* centered around a story of complicated love in the Golden Age of Hollywood; *Kiss Carlo* was about a young veteran’s return home after World War II to a new life in theater and television; and, finally, *Tony’s Wife* explored the lives of a crooner and a songwriter, who leave their factories for fame, success, and heartbreak during the Big Band Era.

The trio of sagas followed the success of *The Shoemaker’s Wife*, based on the true story of my grandparents’ emigration to America from the Italian Alps. I wanted to bring readers into the worlds of working-class immigrants, whether they worked in auto plants, blouse mills, or in recording studios. Those stories gestated for years and were fueled by my family history. The making of the art forms themselves was a thread in the narrative of the novels.

I had a notion to expand the landscape of my work in this next cycle of novels, to dramatize the deeper roots and context that compels a family to emigrate, and to examine the meaning of home. It isn’t an accident that *The Good Left Undone* is also personal, a result of working in Scotland, where this story was born. I stood where the Scot Italians were rounded up in 1940 when Mussolini declared war on the Allies. I went to Italy to understand why it happened. The story is framed through the characters in a present-day Italian family whose reach extends (for starters) to France, England, Scotland, Ireland, and the faraway dream of America.

The characters herein came alive in a fever that has, over these many months, become the most passionate storytelling of my career. Matelda Roffo, Anina Tizzi, John McVicars, Domenica Cabrelli, Silvio Birtolini, the nuns of Saint Joseph of the Apparition, the sailors of the *Arandora Star*, and the horror of a war that changed their lives forever have, in fact, changed me. It began with a free Sunday afternoon as a tourist in Glasgow.

I was alone, so I made a list of places to visit in the city. My first stop was Saint Andrew’s Church. When I arrived, a wedding was in process. I went inside because I’m a wedding crasher (I’m also a funeral crasher, but that’s another story, for another novel). I slipped into the back of the church and stood against the wall. Across the way, a bagpiper leaned against the baptismal font.

I took a few pictures but soon was compelled to stay for the entire Mass. I wept at the vows and followed the bagpiper outside before the recessional. I found a good spot on the sidewalk and took a video of the bride and groom as they emerged, when a voice behind me asked, “Who are you?” I turned to the village priest and said, “I’m a tourist, Father.” He asked my name. “Oh, you’re Italian. You must see our garden.”

What I found in that garden on that Sunday afternoon became this novel.
Discussion Questions

1. How do shifts in Italian culture create tension between Matelda and Anina? Why was it so important to Matelda to tell her family stories from the past? How do the secrets she shares help heal and strengthen her family bonds?

2. Were you familiar with the history of British Italians during World War II and the *Arandora Star*? What surprised you most about the story?

3. “Love, it turned out, can shelter the banished and lift the broken spirit.” How does love—both romantic and platonic and, most importantly, self-love—change the course of the characters’ lives? How do their decisions about who to love and when to follow their hearts affect generations to come?

4. “A family is only as strong as their stories.” How do you see the Cabrelli family’s story changing over the years?

5. Women from different generations are at the heart of this novel. Despite history changing around them, do these women feel different in the way they react to life circumstances to you? Why or why not?

6. In addition to stories, heirlooms are passed down in this family. Did the book make you think about relics in your own family? What ending do you imagine for Anina? How did you experience her character’s evolving over the course of the novel?

7. How did you understand the title, *The Good Left Undone*, upon finishing the novel?
Crostini Yolanda

INGREDIENTS
1 long baguette (a classic two-footer), sliced thin in rounds

TOPPING
3 yellow peppers, chopped fine
3 red peppers, chopped fine
3 anchovy fillets, chopped fine
1 tablespoon olive oil, plus extra for the baguette rounds

RICOTTA SPREAD
2 cups fresh ricotta
1 tablespoon fresh mint
1 lemon, grated for zest (save juice)

Serves 8-10

DIRECTIONS
Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Place the baguette rounds on a cookie sheet, drizzle with olive oil, lightly toast, and remove from oven. Set aside.

To make topping: Mix the yellow and red peppers with the anchovy fillets and olive oil in a bowl until well combined.

To make ricotta spread: whisk the ricotta, mint, and lemon zest until creamy. Squeeze lemon juice over the mixture, and stir thoroughly.

Dollop the ricotta spread onto the bread slices. Create a small well in the ricotta and fill with the pepper and anchovy topping. Garnish with a mint sprig and serve.
Agnese’s Strawberry Bellini

INGREDIENTS
½ cup sugar
3 tablespoons water
4 cups chilled fresh strawberries
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 bottle prosecco
6 fresh strawberries, deleafed

Serves 6 in champagne flutes

DIRECTIONS
Boil the sugar and water to make a simple syrup.

In a blender, puree the strawberries and the lemon juice; strain. Add the simple syrup to the strawberry mixture.

Add prosecco and stir.

Drop one fresh strawberry into each champagne flute, and pour the prosecco mixture equally into each of the six flutes.
Wedding Cookies

INGREDIENTS

COOKIES
- ¼ pound (1 stick) unsalted butter
- ¼ pound (1 stick) unsalted margarine
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- ½ cup milk
- 3 ¼ to 3 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- Pinch of salt
- 5 teaspoons baking powder

ICING
- ½ pound (half box) confectioners’ sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon milk, plus more if needed
- Almond extract to taste
- Food coloring, if desired
- Shredded sweet coconut, for dipping (optional)
- Sprinkles, for dipping (optional)

Makes 3 dozen

DIRECTIONS

For cookies: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

In a large bowl, cream the butter, margarine, sugar, and eggs together. Then add the almond extract, milk, flour, salt, and baking powder.

Keeping your hands wet, shape a piece of dough into a ball (Baci-style—a little higher in the middle). Bake on an ungreased baking sheet for 13 minutes, or until lightly browned.

For icing: Mix all icing ingredients except coconut and sprinkles together until a frosting consistency is reached. Ice the cooled cookies, and dip into shredded coconut or sprinkles.