

The Memory of Loss

A Novel

by

Dana K. Haffar

Chapter 1

Wheat fields. Farmhouse. Pastures. Cows. Factory. Another factory. Low-cost housing. Washing lines. *Le Creuset. Le Creuset.* An abandoned steam train on the tracks. Lines converge. The train judders over an intersection. *Clankety-clank.* Industrial area. Suburbia. The greenness of open space.

I sit back and enjoy the landscape whizzing past. I've never experienced this form of travel before. Trains in South Africa are not as common as in Europe. Oh, I've travelled by car many times. Crisscrossed the south of the continent, in fact. But that was different. When you're on the road, you have to be vigilant, careful of other drivers, cattle, pedestrians. You go through villages and towns, and inevitably get a feel for what they are like. Whether you want to or not, you interact.

I've also flown, often domestically, and once overseas, when I left Cape Town for London. But between take-off and landing, there's not much to look at. And on planes you feel suspended. You have no sense of motion, of covering stretches of land or sea. Unless you're flying low.

Not so trains. Riding on one is like being on a rocket shooting into outer space. The feeling of being whisked off full throttle with nothing in the way is exhilarating, so much so that I don't want it to stop. I don't want it to arrive. I want to go on and on, watching the towns fly past, and imagining what it would be like to live in them.

Trains are so mysterious, the magic of them outside as much as inside their carriages. The best ever movies were made on trains. They were a hallmark of David Lean's epics. In Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, a dual murder was hatched in a rail carriage. The unexpected can happen on a train. The unexpected can happen when you arrive. Sometimes, nothing has to happen at all. And that's okay, too.

I can't think of what's waiting for me at the other end. For now, I want to lose myself in the journey, the bullet-speed transience. If I choose to, I don't even have to get off at my destination. I can carry on, see where the TGV takes me. But I couldn't realistically, not after the trouble and the expense my grandparents went through to

get me a British passport and a ticket that burns in my palm with their savings. I promised I would make a go of it. Earn good money.

When the family handed me a pink envelope at the end of my matric year, I honestly expected no more than a few rands tucked in a card. With a father as an employee for the government and a mother who's been a Grade 5 teacher for as long as I can remember, birthday and graduation gifts have tended to be modest. As was our home. A nondescript house in the seaside town of Fish Hoek, abutting a cottage where my grandparents lived. We were snug, happy, and wanted for nothing. Our roots as deeply entrenched in the soil as the oak tree in our garden where I read novels that painted a world beyond Cape Town, across the seas from South Africa.

Now, on the train, I can pretend. In this centuries-old mode of transport, I could be in Tolstoy's and Pasternak's Russia or E. M. Forster's India. I could be headed anywhere and don't have to admit, at least not yet, that I'm on my way to the French Riviera in the year 1986.

The vacancy had been sent to the agency in London where I'd trained as carer for a month. The owner, Sally, thought it suited my qualifications since the patient was neither an invalid nor terminally ill but had merely had a hip replacement and needed assistance for a few months. She was an English woman who lived in Mougins, near Cannes, Sally had said, so language was not an issue. I could start earning good money to put towards varsity but first and foremost to start repaying Grandma and Grandpa for everything they had done for me.

I looked it up on the map. Mougins, seven kilometres from Cannes, tourist destination of film stars and the *crème de la crème* during the Cannes Festival. Heaven! A bundle of joys dropped in my lap by the proverbial stork. Temperate climate, which I seriously hankered for after the incessant rain in London where summer had been like our worst winter in Cape Town.

So Sally put the call through to Dr. Lilly Somerville. She ran through my CV before handing me the receiver.

"Nadine, don't you think you're too young for the job?" Lilly Somerville got straight to the point in a throaty voice.

"I've been well trained, Dr. Somerville, and I'm a hard worker. I've also grown up with my grandparents, so looking after people is not new to me."

"Sally tells me you're South African. What brought you to England?"

"I'm on a gap year."

“And you’re prepared to come to France.”

It wasn’t *just* France. This was the French Riviera. Cannes, for heaven’s sake! I swallowed back my excitement and tried to sound professional.

“Definitely.”

A moment of excruciating silence. *Please say yes.* “All right. You’ll be on probation to start with. See if it works out. Could you put Sally back on, please?”

Then came another envelope, this time an A5 manila with an airline ticket, London-Paris, and a train ticket from the capital to Cannes. And like a hermit crab, I set off on my own, slouched beneath my rucksack. I did my homework and read up on hip replacement surgery and postoperative care, but all I could really think about was being spirited once again up into the skies, and later watching the new world from the train car as sneakily as Jeff tracks his neighbours’ activities in *Rear Window*.

The train slows down and grinds to a halt. Steadying myself on the back of the seat, I stagger to my feet, woozy from all the daydreaming. *Beep, beep, beep.* I automatically switch off the watch alarm and disembark. On the platform, an elderly man who looks as if he’d been dragged out of bed holds up a board with my name on it: NADINE HALL. He mumbles something in French and hobbles, bowlegged, to a white Renault 11.

I climb in the back while he sinks low in the driver’s seat. All I can see are knobby fingers wrapped around the steering wheel, and his head so far forward I get the impression he’s about to kiss the windscreen. I thumb through my English French phrase book but soon change my mind when he misses a few pedestrians by a whisker and nearly takes off a couple of side mirrors. Only once we’re out of the gridlocked city centre and coasting along pine-shaded streets, do I dare search for the question I was after.

“Is it far?” I ask in French.

“About twenty minutes.” Between the aspirations and the *bofs*, I make out *vingt minutes*.

I’m dying to know if Lilly Somerville lives in a villa or an apartment and whether she’s with family or alone. But shuffling through the pages to put together those simple questions is a mission. I drop the book in my lap and follow our climb up to Mougins.

Rebecca's arrival at the imposing Manderley estate flashes through my mind, Mrs. Danvers' stone-cutting face materialising out of nowhere. I feel a flutter in my chest like the faint batting of a butterfly's wings when I realise I'd never actually stayed with strangers before. Although I spent my time in London with my grandmother's sister whom I didn't actually know, she was still family. But now I was to board with someone as an employee and the strangeness of the idea is creepy. It hits me then that as much as I'd like to pretend, this is definitely not a movie. It is as real as life gets.

The car dives in and out of the dappled shade of pine and cedar trees through a suburban area very similar to leafy Constantia back home. We drive through two low white pillars, gateway to a villa at the end of a gravelled road—a double-storey stone house with ochre-coloured shutters and box windows. Ivy and creepers cling and snake around the edges of its exterior walls. A damp smell wafts through my open window and I can hear the spit of sprinklers somewhere on the property. A gardener bent over a bed of roses by the entrance draws himself up, secateurs in gloved hands, and gawks at me.

The front door opens to reveal an aproned elderly woman with silver corkscrew hair pinned back. To my relief, she looks nothing like Mrs. Danvers, and more so that she is English.

"I'm Agnes," she says, smiling broadly. "Come on in, pet. Leave your bag here for now."

She takes small steps, waving me along. Her worn low heels clack on the floor boards while my canvas shoes squeak, driving me nuts. I hear the muffled TV-filtered voice of Laurence Olivier somewhere in the distance. The wall-to-wall musty smell of piled-on decades reminds me of my grandparents' home and I have a sudden craving for Gran's milk tart.

Agnes stops at an open door to a bedroom. "Lilly, the young lady is here."

A Yorkshire terrier leaps off the bed and bounds towards me. I scoop him up in my arms and tousle his hair. He wriggles out of my grip, scurrying back to his owner's side. The duvet shifts. A head lifts slightly. As Lilly Somerville tries to raise herself on her elbows, I rush to help her. She groans as I support her and prop up the pillows. They're flat and clammy. All the while, the Yorkie is agitated, nuzzling her and sniffing my hands.

"Stop it, Cassis," she says, pushing him away. "Agnes, where's Viv?"

“Watching her film.”

A director? A movie star?

“Bring us some tea, will you? And some sandwiches for Nadine. You must be hungry,” she says to me in a feeble voice. “Teenagers always are.” She shuts her eyes and reaches down to her thigh. “Could you move my leg a touch, please?”

I lay it at an angle, wedging a cushion between her knees. I rearrange her nightie and smooth out the covers. Except for the space she occupies, the double bed is flattened by tomes on archaeology, notebooks, index cards and pens.

“Are you in pain?” I ask.

“It’s bearable. Pull up a chair. Let’s talk.”

I move the crutches off an armchair and sit down, leaning forward.

Lilly Somerville’s coiled hair is a mesh of barbed wire though she’s younger than I’d expected and her complexion only mildly wrinkled. Her eyes, glossy and round as black olives, are so like her Yorkie’s, it confirms my belief that dogs tend to look like their owners.

“So, Nadine, tell me a bit about yourself.”

I start off by saying that I was born and raised in South Africa, and have a younger sister, Claire. As I’m about to blurt out that it’s my first trip outside SA, I decide I might appear unworldly. Instead, I run through my education adding that after matric, while boys do their military service, a gap year for others is not unusual.

“Why choose to be a caregiver?” she asks.

“Well, it was between au pairing and caregiving. I prefer to work with older people. They’re less likely to throw tantrums,” I joke, but she doesn’t seem to have heard me.

At which point, Agnes reappears with a tea tray. I take it from her and place it on a side table next to the medication. I pour a cup for Lilly. While I help myself, I drool over the country bread stuffed with cold cuts and lettuce. Besides the snack offered on the plane, I’d only had one stale croissant. Travelling on a slim budget is not kind on the stomach.

“Would you like something to eat, Dr. Somerville?”

Lilly stirs sugar in her cup. “No, thank you, but you go ahead.”

Although I could scoff a sandwich whole, I take small bites, expecting to have to answer more of her questions. But, probably giving me time to satisfy my hunger, she does most of the talking.

“I worked on excavation sites in your part of the world. Back in the early fifties. South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mapungubwe, Aksum. I loved the vastness of it, the people.” Her words are strung out in a hypnotic monotone. “It’s a pity what’s happening in your country at the moment. But it’s for the best, don’t you think? It’s time things changed.”

There’s no hint of blame in her tone of voice, but it’s hard not to feel responsible. I wish someone had warned me about the world’s low view of South Africans. The sanctions against the country made that clear on the political level, but seeing it firsthand in London was like walking straight into a glass door. Somehow, I’d found myself smack in the middle of a crowd picketing at the South African embassy in Trafalgar square, and all I could feel was shame. To the point that when a demonstrator asked me for the time, I pretended I didn’t speak English. He would have recognised my accent for sure. Did they realise that although we, the people, were being ostracized and branded, we wanted change as much as everyone else? It is hard enjoying unfair benefits without feeling guilty. It’s even harder to know that, regardless of how well you treat the black people you come in contact with, any good deed is as Grandpa says “a piss in the ocean.”

Lilly takes a sip of her tea and hands me her cup. “I can’t drink this. Too nauseous. It’s all those bloody pills they’re making me take.”

She shifts in the bed, wincing. “Well, Nadine, I suppose you’ll want to know your duties. I get up quite early, sixish, at which time Agnes brings me coffee and toast. I then take a shower, when I’ll require your help.” She stops and gives me a crooked grin. “Agnes can actually help me wash but I have to rely on you to move around. She’s as old if not older than I am and leaning on her is like leaning on a twig.” She takes in a deep breath. “For most of the morning, I work on my research papers. Usually in my study, but that’ll have to wait, I suppose, until I’m mobile. You’ll be on call, but it may be a good time for you to run errands for me, do the shopping and so on, since I’m not allowed to drive. I normally do it all.” She slips an arm underneath her spine and presses against it. “Your CV says you have a driver’s license?” I nod. “Good. The therapist comes twice a week. But I’m hoping you’ll be able to take over from her. I hate intrusions. What else?” She looks up at the ceiling. “You’ll be staying in the room close to mine. I only ask that you leave your door open at night, should I need anything. This is my first hip replacement so I’m as much in the dark as you are. We’ll have to take it one day at a time.”

“And the stitches? When are you due to have them removed?”

“Two weeks’ time, I believe.”

I peer at the bottles on the side table. A pain-killer, an anticoagulant and an antibiotic which, as I learned from my research, are usually prescribed after the surgery. “Any medication you need to take now?” I inspect the label on the antibiotic.

“Not until this evening.” Her eyelids droop. “I think I’d like to rest now. Make yourself at home. Agnes will show you to your room.”

I take the tray and leave the door ajar. Retracing my steps, I pass a closed door and a bedroom which probably looks out on the driveway. I cross the entrance hall, the lounge to my left, and find the kitchen. It’s a bright sunlit space with unstained pinewood cabinets. Copper pots and pans, strings of garlic and red peppers dangle over an island in the middle. To the right of it, a wooden table and matching chairs with slatted backs and colourful cushions occupy an alcove decorated like a doll-house. I carry the tray to the sink beneath a window. The view of the garden, purple hydrangeas and steel-coloured ground cover muted by the afternoon sun is calming in its familiarity. Gran would love it.

I wash the dishes and stack them, although the dishwasher stands empty. The silence of a deserted house settles in after I turn off the tap. I set out to find Agnes.

Instead of snooping down the passage leading from the kitchen, I stick to the public sections of the house. Double doors from the entrance hall open to a lounge and dining room. The suite is an eclectic mix of two deep sofas patterned in maroon, rust and tangerine, two high-backed chairs and an ottoman bearing two separate piles of books. Countless scattered cushions in tapestry fabric and a large Persian carpet that extends beyond the borders of the furniture create the cosiness of a lair. Everywhere are tasselled lampshades, throws, and a display of ornaments from parts of the world I haven’t been to. The urge to curl up on a settee under a mohair blanket is so tempting I realise that the sooner I locate Agnes the better.

Past French doors, I step onto a porch where a wrought-iron oval table and chairs provide yet another eating area. Without going further, I scan the sweep of lawn and conifers for Agnes. Just as I spot her by a hedge beside another woman wearing a wide-brimmed sunhat, she notices me and waddles back in my direction.

“Come along, dear,” she says. “I’ll show you to your room.”

She waves me on as before in a gesture like swatting a fly away from her ear which I find sort of comical. I retrieve my rucksack and follow her to the bedroom I

had previously passed. I could not have wished for better accommodations. Compared to the dungeon in the Bayswater flat, this is pure luxury, spacious and bright with a full-size double-bed.

Agnes opens a cupboard wide for me to see. “The bathroom is down the hall. The closed door to the right there.” She wags a finger in that direction. Hands on her hips, she flashes me a smile, causing her plump cheeks to swell and lift. “Well, I’d better get on with dinner. I’ll be in the kitchen when you’re ready.”

The view from beyond the casement window is the same as that from the kitchen. I check my watch—six thirty and the sun hasn’t set. To use my sister Claire’s favourite expression, *I’m happy as a pig in shit*. When I write the folks back home, I’ll be sure to tell them that I’ve landed with my bum in the butter.



I hear the tinkle of cutlery on china and guess that Agnes is taking breakfast to Dr. Somerville. Such a kind woman old Agnes turned out to be. For dinner the previous night she’d made a tasty chicken stew and then produced a generous helping of the best apple pie I’ve ever had. Quite the talker, she offered up information on the household without my even asking. I learned that Mr. Somerville had passed away a few months ago, after which Dr. Somerville decided to relocate from Oxford to her ancestral home here in Mougins. Until then, it had been occupied by her older sister Viv, and Agnes. Finding the place in a state of disrepair, she cleaned it up and gave it a facelift. Pascal, the elderly man who’d picked me up from the station, was a handyman who came three times a week to tend to minor repairs and problems. Other than that, Dr. Somerville had one daughter and a grandson. Agnes mentioned them with a grimace and stopped at that.

Before I’m called to Dr. Somerville’s room, I knock on the gaping door to her bedroom.

“Nadine, just in time.” She’s pushing herself off onto her feet with Agnes’s arm hooked in hers. She’s half-bent and unsteady. I take over, making sure she has a good grip on the crutches. Staying close, I shadow her to the en-suite bathroom. The progress is slow but she’s determined to walk unassisted. “I was told to move around as much as possible,” she says. “This is as good a time as any to start.” Upright, she is taller and fitter than I’d thought. Her developed calves tell me that she’s a hiker or

walker. With every push on the crutches, the sinews contract on her forearms. Her hands are noticeably spatulate and strong, cobwebbed with raised veins and formed of stubby fingers that almost look masculine.

Through the bathroom door, I hear the water spitting against the tiles and the glass of the shower stall, punctuated by Agnes's huffing and puffing. Something lands on the floor with a bang. I pray it's one of the crutches and not my charge. The two women's voices rise, arguing, one blaming the other. "For heaven's sake, Agnes. Just leave it. You can pick it up later." It's a circus! And I can't help but laugh, knowing that they're unlikely to hear me above the commotion.

I pass the time checking out the framed photos on the dresser. In one, Lilly poses, hands on her hips, in a field of ruins, a shirt tucked in her pants, and a safari hat throwing a shadow over her face. Another of her and a young girl on a lawn, with a house in the background. A sepia photo of the family; Lilly standing in front of their father, and Viv in front of their mother. Lilly, ten maybe, has her father's large features, while Viv appears to be a carbon copy of their more delicate mother.

Agnes emerges from the bathroom, asking me to take over. I find Lilly sitting on a high stool, pale, drained from the exertion. As I comb her hair back, I see that it's thinning on the crown. At close range, the liver spots on her skull and forehead are visible. I figure she's probably a few years shy of seventy, my grandmother's age. But the rich quality of her voice and her strong jaw remind me of someone. And then it hits me: Lauren Bacall. Automatically, Dr. Somerville rises in my esteem. In a flash, I'm in the carriage of the *Orient Express* along with the suspects being questioned by Hercule Poirot.

"Nadine!"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Somerville." I snap out of my daydream, hand her the crutches and help her to her feet.

In the time it takes us to reach her bed, I catch glimpses of Agnes cleaning the room. She slips a feather-duster between picture frames and ornaments, tickling the exposed spaces of the chest of drawers and side tables without removing a single item. All the while, she hums tunelessly.

Dr. Somerville stops a moment at the edge of the bed. "Agnes, have you got the shopping list for Nadine?"

"Right here." She reaches into her apron pocket and holds out a crumpled piece of paper.

Dr. Somerville scans the list. “If you carry on having sugar with your tea, it’ll be the death of you. How is it possible that we’ve run out again?”

“You know Marcel and Viv have a sweet tooth . . .”

“You can fib all you want,” she interrupts. “You’re the diabetic, not me.”

I picture the quarter slice of pie Agnes had wolfed down the previous night, and I feel complicit to a crime. Not a few minutes after she’d been told off and had given me the car keys and a map, Agnes sneaks up behind me in the driveway.

“*Psst*, Nadine.” She stuffs a banknote in my pocket. “Grab a few pear tarts from the bakery, won’t you? They’re to die for.”

Though the route to the supermarket is quite straightforward, I manoeuvre the car with extra care, not being used to left-hand driving. It’s especially difficult when I turn into an empty road where I can’t rely on another car to lead the way. Eventually I work out that the solid white line must always be to my left. Confident now, I toy with the idea of driving further to Cannes once the shopping is done. It’s an opportunity to get my bearings and familiarise myself with the lie of the land.

What I don’t anticipate is the time it takes me to locate the items in the aisles. Everything is in French and the choice so wide that it boggles the mind. I inspect yoghurt containers forever, unable to read the labels and going by the fruit displayed to select the right flavour. Fortunately, when it comes to the cheeses, Agnes has written the names in French. I steeple my fingers into different size triangles to indicate the amount to the vendor. I do my best, realising in this painful process the urgency of having to learn the language. I may as well be dumb, carrying out my mission with rudimentary sign language, fingers pointing, hands fluttering. The race with packing the goods at the cash till follows. There are no baggers here as we have back home, and even though it’s something I had to get used to in London, the French seem far more impatient than their reserved neighbours. A good two hours later, with all the items on the list ticked, I load the car, wedging the carton containing Agnes’s pastries in the corner of the boot. The entire expedition has taken up the better part of the morning so I simply head back to the villa.

There on the steps, a woman perches like a bird with a broken wing. Talon fingers clutch a boxlike handbag similar to the ones my grandmother has long banished to the storeroom. Despite the shopping bags pulling at my arms, I stop to introduce myself.

“Hello, I’m Nadine.”

She squints at me through cat-eye glasses. "Why, hello, Nadine. I'm Viv."

"Dr. Somerville's sister."

She nods and looks past me. I crane my neck to see what has caught her attention. Nothing stirs in the garden.

"Are you expecting someone?" I ask.

"He should be here any time now."

"Who?"

"Why, Richard, dear. He promised. He's taking me to the pictures."

Pictures?

"We're going to see *Wuthering Heights*," she adds, her pencil-thin lips, smudged in red, stretching for an instant. Her attention reverts to the driveway. "I told you I belonged to him, that he was my life, my being," she recites from the movie, trancelike.

I put down the shopping bags and sit next to her. The arm of her glasses is taped to the hinge and completely crooked. Rouge on her pale cheeks gives her the appearance of an aged porcelain doll in a horror movie. And despite the fact that she's fully decked out for an occasion, she is wearing slippers.

"You know, it's one of my favourite movies, too," I say.

"You've seen it!" Her eyes come to life.

I'm touched by her childlike excitement. "Twice."

"Isn't it just wonderful? And Laurence Olivier is so dashing in it, don't you think?"

I'm about to answer when the front door flies open and Agnes emerges in a state. "I've been looking all over for you, Viv. Come along, pet. You, too, young lady, Dr. Somerville has been asking for you." She guides Viv up the steps, stopping for a brief moment to ask me whether I'd remembered to buy the pear tarts. When I tell her they're in the car, the tension seems to wash off her body. Now she's all reassurances, excitedly promising Viv a nice cup of tea.

Once I've deposited the bags in the kitchen, I head straight to Dr. Somerville. She's leaning on her crutches in the centre of the room, raising and lowering one leg to the side.

"*Bon effort*. One more time," a female voice eggs her on.

"Dr. Somerville, you were looking for me," I say from the door.

Her head remains lowered. She's concentrating on the movement of her leg. "Come in, Nadine. This is, erm . . ."

"Patricia," the woman offers.

I nod in greeting. "Nadine," the physiotherapist pronounces my name the French way, with an "ah" not an "ay." "You must make sure Lilly moves regularly. We've only started so you can watch the exercises you can do with her."

For half an hour, Patricia instructs Dr. Somerville to circle each leg, stand and sit unaided, and raise her toes off the floor. "When she does this last exercise, you must remember to place something like a folded towel under the good leg, which is now a little shorter than the other. Hips must stay squared. So, especially with the side kicks, the leg must be lifted only as far as it can without the hips tilting."

Before she leaves, she gives me an exercise chart. "Three things you must keep in mind. In a seated position, knees should be at a ninety-degree angle. No crossing of legs and no kneeling. Also, it's very important that Lilly regularly flexes and circles her ankles to avoid clotting. Please call if you have any questions. I'll be here same time on Thursday."

While Dr. Somerville takes a nap, I make myself a sandwich and take it out to the garden. Save for the chirp of birds from their hideaway and the odd rumble of a passing car, it's incredibly quiet. Miles away from home, a lot about this place reminds me of it. The gentleness of the sisters and Agnes, the sense of well-being in the house, its convivial atmosphere. Had any of it been different, I doubt I would've settled as easily. Three o'clock. Mom would still be at school, busy with administrative work while Claire played hockey. Gran might be making her preserves and Grandpa having a kip in the lounge. No doubt they will have had their morning swim in the sea, despite the fact that it's winter and the water is freezing. I start composing a letter to them in my head, then realise I haven't got much to say. Not yet.

When I take my plate back to the kitchen, I find Agnes seasoning a roast for dinner.

"Who's Richard, Agnes?"

She clucks her tongue. "A bastard who broke Viv's heart, he did. Went off to war and was never heard of again. Of all the things she's forgotten, poor dear, he should've been the first."

"Maybe he went missing?"

“Nothing of the sort,” she says as if incensed at the suggestion. “We’d have known if he had.”

“Were they engaged?”

“As good as. Back when a man’s word was worth something, and promises were honoured.”

“Did he ever take her to see *Wuthering Heights*?”

“Nope. As I said, never showed up, the lowlife.” She jabs the garlic cloves into the meat. “Now, it’s all she ever wants to watch. Lilly bought her the video to keep her happy. Seems to calm her down.” Moving to the sink below the window, she grabs the peeler and a potato, then just as quickly drops them. “Oh, God! There she goes wandering again.”

I peer out and see Viv rounding the pillar. I overtake Agnes and sprint towards the driveway. “I’ll get her.”

“Wait! You mustn’t . . . ,” I hear her say, missing out on the rest of her sentence.

Viv is moving at a clip, handbag cradled in the crook of her arm, straw hat bobbing up and down. I’m amazed at her sprightliness. Typically, my wristwatch beeps at the worst moment. I shut it off.

I catch up with her on the pavement and keep pace. “Where are you going, Viv?”

“Lots of things to do and no time,” she mutters to herself, shaking her head.

“Can I help?”

She’s not listening. Her head is bowed and she’s addressing the pavement. “No, no, no. Nobody can. Got to do it. Got to go. Table to set. Tea to prepare. He’ll be here soon.”

I slip my arm through hers to stop her. Wide, manic eyes shoot back at me. “Who are you? I don’t know you.” Then she yells at the top of her lungs, arms spinning like windmills: “Aggie!”

Reviews

"The Memory of Loss" is a wonderfully written story. I had read Haffar's "Leah" and found this book, like that one, to be a masterful exploration of human nature and personal loss. This story takes place in modern-day south of France as well as in WWII Paris. The flashbacks and the alternating narrator voices work beautifully. Highly recommended.

A richly textured story of love and loss in the present and the past. Very moving and skillfully told.

<https://www.amazon.com/Memory-Loss-Dana-K-Haffar-ebook/dp/B01N2QZBO7>

About the Author

Born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon, Dana K. Haffar obtained an MLitt in English literature from Oxford. She is coeditor of ***Lebanon: A History of Conflict and Consensus*** (IB Tauris, 1988) and author of two novels: [*Beirut in Shades of Grey*](#) (Ameera Publishing and Amazon Kindle, 2007) and [*Leah*](#) (Amazon Kindle, 2011).

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