



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"Rebecca Serle is
a maestro of love
in all its forms."

—GABRIELLE
ZEVIN

A Novel

One Italian Summer

REBECCA SERLE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
IN FIVE YEARS



BOOK
CLUB
FAVORITES

by SIMON &
SCHUSTER

READING GROUP GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

When Katy's mother dies, she is left reeling. Carol wasn't just Katy's mom but her best friend and first phone call. Even Katy's husband can't seem to get through to her—she is lost without her anchor. Her mother was her true north.

To make matters worse, their planned mother-daughter trip of a lifetime looms: going to Positano, following the very same route Carol did as a young woman. Katy has been waiting years for Carol to take her, and now suddenly she is faced with embarking on the adventure alone. But as soon as she steps foot on the beautiful Amalfi Coast, buoyed by the stunning cliffsides, delectable food, and charming hotel staff, Katy begins to feel her mother's spirit.

And then Carol appears for real—in the flesh, healthy and sun-tanned...and thirty years old. Katy doesn't understand what is happening, or how. But over the course of her time in Italy, Katy gets to know Carol in this new form, and soon she must reconcile the mother who knew everything with the young woman who does not yet have a clue.

One Italian Summer is Rebecca Serle's next great love story, a transcendent novel about how we move on after loss, and how the people we love never truly leave us.



TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



- 1.** The novel begins with “Carol’s rules to live by” (page 1). How does this set up the story and both Carol’s and Katy’s characters?
- 2.** Katy describes her mother as “the great love of [her] life” (page 3). How does their relationship change over the course of the novel?
- 3.** When Katy married young, Carol told her, “You have so much time. Sometimes I wish you’d take it” (page 6). How does this sentiment recur throughout the story?
- 4.** Katy finds herself in something of a time slip, as if she has “stumbled into some kind of magic reality where we get to be together. That time here does not only move slower but in fact doubles back on itself” (page 81). How does time operate in this novel? Why do you think the author made the choices she did to allow Katy and her mother to take their trip to Positano in the end?
- 5.** Observing Carol, Katy understands that she is “watching her becoming” (page 89). How does the Carol in Positano differ from the one Katy presented as her mother at the beginning of the book? Do you see glimpses of a younger Carol in the one the reader only hears about?
- 6.** Positano itself acts as a character in the novel, “full of very real magic” (page 101). What makes Positano distinctive? What is its draw for each of the characters, both locals and tourists?
- 7.** A large subplot focuses on the struggles of Hotel Positano and Italy itself, a place out of “some era that is unmarked by modernity” (page 142). What did you think of Adam’s plan to purchase the hotel? How do the local characters interact with Adam, Carol, and Katy?
- 8.** Adam admits that he’s “really good at travel and less good at what happens when you stand still” (page 152). How do each of the characters grapple with their own restlessness?
- 9.** Reflect on how mythmaking—in reference to Capri’s rocks of Faraglioni and the Amalfi Coast’s Path of the Gods—plays a role in this novel, especially in Katy’s relationship with her mother.
- 10.** In Katy’s final interaction with Carol as a young woman, Carol asks, “Did I leave you?” and Katy responds, “No, you never did” (page 226). What was your reaction to that scene?
- 11.** Much of this novel is about belonging—where and if we belong to whom. Katy notes at the end of the novel that “I do not belong to anyone” (page 239). Does that ring true to you?
- 12.** What did you think about the two major twists toward the end of the novel—one about Katy’s mother and one about time? Did either of those surprise you?

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

- 1.** Celebrate *One Italian Summer* with an Italian-inspired feast. Bring pasta and pesto, calamari, and don’t forget the Aperol spritz!
- 2.** Bring in a photo of a mother figure in your life. Share any stories you have of her as a young woman with your group.
- 3.** Visit rebeccaserle.com to learn more about the author and the inspiration behind this book.



A Conversation with **REBECCA SERLE**

This novel is dedicated to your own mother. What made you want to tackle a mother-daughter story?

My mother is truly the great love of my life, and my greatest fear is her dying. This book is part love letter to her and part love letter to my future self—the one who will have to live in this world without her. To me mother-daughter stories are extremely intimate, rich, heartbreaking, and challenging. Our mothers are our first blueprint of love, but they are also people. So many of my readers have lost their mothers or have challenging or nonexistent relationships with them. I want to pay tribute to how we honor this very deep connection, and then also how we break away. Because we must.

Some early copies of *In Five Years* and *One Italian Summer* arrived with a pack of tissues. How do you create these emotional, wrenching moments that speak to a wide swath of readers?

I try to write the truth, as I feel it. If my books touch people and I can say to them: “Yes, that thing you feel? I’m going to name it. I feel it, too”—that’s a beautiful connection. Tears are not bad, you know? They don’t always convey sadness. They are just an expression of emotion.

All of your novels start with a compelling question: which five people, dead or alive, would you invite to dinner; where do you see yourself in five years; what if you knew your mother as a young woman. Where does your inspiration come from?

If you’re asking where the conceits of my books come from, they come from a theme I want to explore—usually that’s the dialogue between fate and free will. How much is in our control, really, in life? I’m not sure if I come to the same answer every time or if the answers vary. Sabrina (*The Dinner List*), Dannie (*In Five Years*), and Katy (*One Italian Summer*) are all very different people with very different lessons to learn. But they are all, probably, facets of me. I see writing as a kind of communion—with the universe, my intuition, whatever you’d like to call it. It’s a magical process by which I get to tap into something beyond me, and come back with

the words to show other people what’s there.

A lot of this novel is about grief, and how Katy is able to move forward after her mother’s death. Grief is a theme that shows up in a number of your novels. What draws you to that subject matter?

Andrew Garfield recently said about the death of his mother, “Grief is unexpressed love,” and I think that’s it. I write love stories. There is grief

in love stories, because of course there is. I’m also interested in probing the seam of the human experience—the very edge. I write about things I’m afraid of, maybe.

Why did you decide to set this book in Positano? Given that the setting is so vivid, what kind of research did you do?

In the summer of 2019 I took a trip to Italy with my mother. She and I spent a week in Rome, and we got to meet her ex love from

“
I wanted to travel
somewhere and live in
a world filled with salt
air and hugs and lots of
fresh tomatoes.”

when she was twenty years old! She always talked about how special Positano was to her and how much she loved it. When I went back, I understood why. I had no plans to write a novel set in Italy, but on my last day in Positano I took photographs of every street sign. That's how I knew eventually I would want to tell this story.

This novel is coming out at a very different time than your last (the week the pandemic began to shut down the US), and this book features a time slip. Did the events of the past couple of years have anything to do with that choice?

Honestly, no. I didn't even know that I was writing this book in a different time until Katy realizes it. We literally uncovered that at the exact same time! It worked out, I guess, but it was not intentional. I started *One Italian Summer* in April of 2020. I wanted to travel somewhere and live in a world filled with salt air and hugs and lots of fresh tomatoes. It is my sincerest hope that this book will bring that same sense of escape to my readers.

You've spoken before about the question of fate or free will in your novels. At the end of the book, Katy realizes that her mother has to make her own choices. How has this theme continued to resonate in your work?

It is the central question of the human experience I am most interested in. I am probably tormented by trying to determine what I can control in life. I have this sense I can stop bad things from happening if I just do it "right." I think a lot of people can relate to that. But it's not, of course, a fair way to go through life. Life is going to happen. I think what I keep coming back to is that how we react to what happens is what really matters.

What was your favorite scene to write and why?

I loved writing this entire book. I really mean that. I enjoy writing in general, and this book was particularly special, given the time in which it was written. But the final scene of Katy and Carol is probably my favorite.

The process from first draft to publication is a long one. Were there any major changes or revisions you didn't foresee?

I am twelve years into this career and I am lucky to now have a team that trusts my process. They push me when I need to be pushed but they always read my books on their own terms. For now, in where I'm at in my professional journey, my first draft really has to sing for the book to work. I've never had a book published where the first draft really didn't work. Because of

this, my editorial process is about broadening the scope, adding details, rounding it out. The plot does not often change in a meaningful way.

What are you working on next?

A love story. Would you expect anything else? ♦



One Italian Summer

PLAYLIST

When I think of the musical mood of *One Italian Summer* I think of pop with the soul of Frank Sinatra. Here is my own personal playlist for Katy and Carol's adventure. Listen while you're reading then pop over to Instagram and tell me what songs you'd add. I hope you enjoy!

Big Love! @ Rebel

LET'S GET OUT OF THIS COUNTRY

Camera Obscura

BEYOND THE SEA

Bobby Darin

REFLECTING LIGHT

Sam Phillips

CUT TO THE FEELING

Carly Rae Jepsen

FEELIN' SO GOOD

Jennifer Lopez

THE PROMISE

When in Rome

FLY ME TO THE MOON

Frank Sinatra

YOU'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Blood Orange

ANNA BEGINS

The Counting Crows

LAST SUMMER

Wish Key

BUONA SERA

Louis Prima

ILY (I LOVE YOU BABY)

Surf Mesa, feat. Emilee

MY CHERIE AMOUR

Stevie Wonder

LISTEN NOW AT
bit.ly/OISplaylist

“IT’S **ICONIC POSITANO**. Definitely the most famous hotel here, and probably on the whole coast, as well. Everyone must go once. Your trip wouldn’t be complete without it.” —**ONE ITALIAN SUMMER** on Le Sirenuse Hotel in Positano, Italy

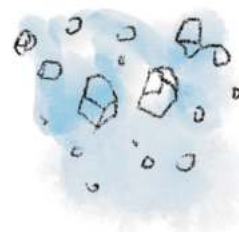
INGREDIENTS



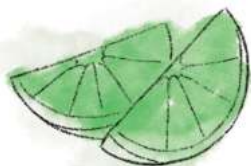
1 oz redcurrant or
pomegranate juice



Prosecco
for topping up



Crushed
Ice



0.5 oz
lime juice



1.5 oz Gin

DIRECTIONS

Put the first three ingredients in a cocktail shaker and shake with ice cubes (or grab a glass and stir away). Pour into a tumbler half-filled with crushed ice. Top up with Prosecco, stir with a bar spoon, grab your copy of *One Italian Summer* for an Instagram photo brag (of course!)—then sit back and enjoy the Positano vibes.

LINGUINE PASTA WITH SCAMPI AND CHERRY TOMATOES

from Chez Black

Below we propose the perfect recipe for this typical Positano dish. A refined and tasty dish despite the few ingredients: here is an easy and quick recipe to prepare, perfect for a dinner with family or friends. Linguine with scampi is a great classic, often prepared for special occasions. Given the simplicity of the recipe, it is essential to use top quality products, such as very fresh scampi and pasta that cooks well.

INGREDIENTS

16 Langoustines

8 Cherry Tomatoes

1 Fresh Red Pepper

1 Glass of White Wine

1 Clove of Garlic

Extra Virgin Olive Oil



Rebecca with the owner of Chez Black, Gianfranco Russo

RECIPE

1
To make linguine with scampi, start washing the shellfish under water and pat them dry with kitchen paper. Shell 12 and leave 4 whole. Clean them well, eliminating the intestines. Heat the oil with the chilli pepper in a saucepan together with the heads and shells of the shelled prawns.

2
When they are hot, add the wine and let it evaporate by applying a little pressure with the ladle on the crustaceans. Let it go for a few minutes on a high flame then filter the sauce obtained, through a sieve, into a bowl.

3
Transfer the sauce to a pan and add the halved cherry tomatoes. Season with salt and in the meantime boil the linguine. In another pan, sear the prawns with oil and the crushed clove of garlic: first put the ones with the shell in the pan, let them sear for a minute then add the others and sear everything for another minute.

4
Drain the pasta al dente and sauté it on the heat in the pan with the cherry tomatoes. Add the peeled prawns and mix everything by sautéing for a minute. Serve the linguine with prawns by composing each plate with 3 shelled prawns plus one whole and serve immediately.



◀ Rebecca and the real-life
Monica at Hotel Poseidon



One Italian Summer enjoys ▶
a sunbath on the terrace!

