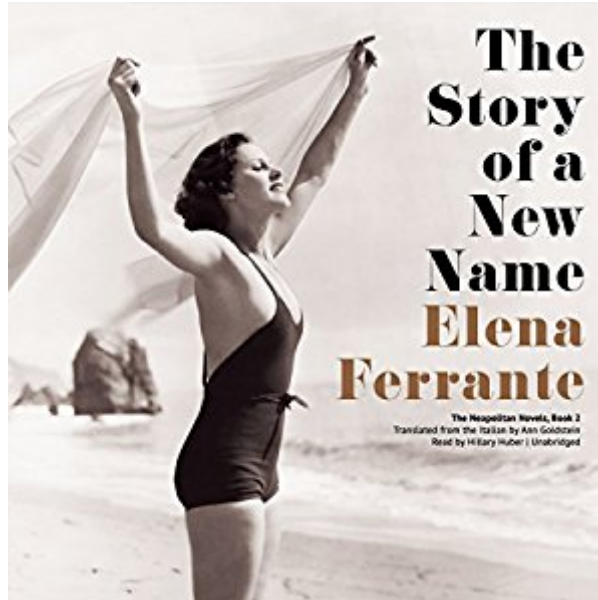


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The Story Of A New Name: The Neapolitan Novels, Book 2



Synopsis

The Story of a New Name follows Elena Ferrante's critically acclaimed My Brilliant Friend, featuring Lila and Elena. The two protagonists are now in their 20s, and marriage appears to have imprisoned Lila. Meanwhile Elena continues her journey of self-discovery. These young women share a complex and evolving bond that brings them close at times while driving them apart at others. Each vacillates between hurtful disregard and profound love for the other. With this complicated and meticulously portrayed friendship at the center of their emotional lives, the two girls mature into women, paying the sometimes cruel price that this passage exacts.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 19 hours and 4 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: April 21, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00WHGCYZO

Best Sellers Rank: #70 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Historical Fiction
#205 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Coming of Age #611 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical

Customer Reviews

I turned off the phone, locked the door - two days of intense bliss. THE STORY OF A NEW NAME is part two of Ferrante's masterful trilogy and it DOES NOT DISAPPOINT! The writing is brilliantly lyrical and relentlessly candid, the focus is intensely personal, but the sweep of the story is vast. We track Lina and Elena, now beyond childhood, into young womanhood -- lovers, husbands, children, accomplishments and tragedy as they discover sex and romantic love. In the vein of Garcia Marquez and Bellow, the intimate stories refract into detailed murals of a society, a nation. I can't think of a writer working today more adept at turning a story with shock, at making the reader gasp. Great, great, great. And the release date for part three is WHEN??????

I loved the first book, My Brilliant Friend, and didn't believe it could get better, but it does! The drama

of the two teen-age girls is more painful, more heartbreaking, and perhaps hard for some to take. But their strength and beauty shines through, and we get to learn more about the history of post WWII Italy. Some of this may be difficult to follow for those who are unfamiliar with Italian political and intellectual life. But if you've read some Gramsci, you'll eat it up. It also deals with issues that are virtually universal among young women growing up all over the world. The book deals with frankly and insightfully with the challenges that teenage girls face as they grow into women, sexual, intellectual and political. It's feminist writing that doesn't wave any banners or slogans or propose any easy answers; it presents us face to face with the real challenges. Finally, I think Lila is one of the greatest heroines I have ever encountered, I love her every step of the way. It's all so personal and heart-felt, it's hard not to believe that much of it is based on the anonymous writer's own life. After all, the narrator is named Elena, and becomes a writer. But don't let the hype over the author's identity distract you: read these wonderful books for their own merits.

It took me a little time to get used to Ms. Ferrante's writing style. I will say this trilogy is not for the weak of heart. She has an incredible way of making the reader hold a mirror up to their own soul and it's not usual a pleasant experience. Time and time again you feel the rug being ripped out from under you as you get more involved with the characters. It got to the point where I really didn't want to go on but I couldn't help myself. Well done Ms. Ferrante. And if you're reading this perspective...hit the dang button already. Worth it!!!

Having now read two of the four Neapolitan novels, I feel reasonably certain that the books do not represent great literature. The outcomes of the characters' experiences are repetitious and predictable. Is it just their childhood that keeps these woman friends because they are often competitive with each other or use each other in ways that true friends would not do. Why is Lenu still so insecure despite her academic achievements and why is she so easily manipulated by selfish Lila? Why is Lila so impulsive? Has she learned nothing from her previous mistakes? This reader grew very impatient with the main characters and found it a real chore to complete the novels. Maybe things change in the final installments.

This second installment is even more intense than "My Brilliant Friend" and, after a couple of pages, picks up right where the first left off. It is even more engrossing and emotionally compelling. The girls are in a stage of their lives where sexual encounters and complicated feelings of desire and pride are felt so deeply. And I suspect this book is also deeply enmeshed in the politics of social

strata, gender, nationhood, the portrait of an artist--yet I can't recite any specific cases or agendas, as I read these so quickly for the characters and the plot, and the language is so natural it feels devoid of art until you hit upon a passage that is so artful in its keen evocation of human motive and behavior. Or just the way the grass was wet and how it smelled. And the plot hides any artful mechanics as well. Sometimes the propulsion of storytelling makes me surprised this is not some middlebrow fiction, not so hailed by critics. But with any other author, you would've seen something coming. Maybe I'm reading this with no notions, but I never see anything coming. I am always freaking surprised. And then I see it was set up to be this way all along. I kind of love the way these end like TV seasons--there is really no closure or elegiac endings to the first two. If you like them, you must just keep reading the next. And I shall. (I do think critics are partly enamored with these books because they exalt the inner life, the life of the mind. Reading, writing, the way you speak and express yourself is the way these girls set themselves apart from their origin story and hardscrabble neighborhood.) The American paperback editions are handsome in the way the paper and the cover feels. But I do not understand the covers at all. It's like they just used a stock photo.

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