



## Nothing Is Quite Forgotten in Brooklyn

By Alice Mattison  
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### Introduction

One quiet spring day in 1989, Constance Tepper arrives from Philadelphia to watch over her mother's Brooklyn apartment and her orange cat. Con's mother, Gert, has left town to visit her old friend Marlene Silverman in Rochester. Marlene has always seemed alluring and powerful to Con, and ever since Con was a little girl, the long-standing bond between Gert and Marlene has piqued her curiosity. Now she finds herself wondering again what keeps them together.

Con's week in Brooklyn will take a surprising turn when she wakes to find that someone has entered her mother's apartment and her own purse is missing. Stranded, with no money, she begins to phone family and friends. By the end of the week, she will experience a series of troubling discoveries about her marriage, her job, and her family's history, and much of her life will be changed forever.

In the fall of 2003, now living in Brooklyn and working as a lawyer, Con has almost forgotten that strange and shattering week. But a series of unsettling reminders and surprising discoveries—including traces of a lost elevated train line through Brooklyn—will lead to grief, love, and more questions. At last, a confrontation between Marlene and Con's daughter will unravel some of the mysteries of the past.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What do the excerpts from Marlene's letters reveal about her motivations and character? What does the tone of her writing suggest about her ability to persuade and manipulate those around her?
2. Gert is never physically present in the novel; she is only heard as a voice on the phone. How does Mattison draw a portrait of Gert's character? How do Con, Marlene, Joanna, and Peggy each come to see Gert, and how does she affect their lives?
3. Mattison describes being "fascinated by friendship and the complexity and difficulties of friendship," and she often writes about changing friendships among women. Which characters are closer to one another, and which are truly friends in this novel? How does Mattison juggle the many shifts over time in her characters' friendships?
4. In what ways does Con ignore the signs of Marlene's criminal intentions? Can you think of similar times during which you have overlooked critical signs of a mistake or misdeed? What enabled you to see the situation more clearly?
5. Con's opinion of Jerry is constantly changing through the novel. How would you characterize Jerry's behavior toward Con both during and after their marriage? What explains Jerry's need for the historical trips, and what do they represent to Con?
6. How does the epigraph at the beginning of the book play upon Mattison's themes of truth-seeking and revelation? Are "periodic infusions of light" cast upon the circumstances of Marlene and Gert's friendship in the closing scene?
7. Mattison began her writing career as a poet. What aspects of her writing style or structure might suggest this? Did any phrases or sentences strike you as especially poetic?
8. Mattison tells her story by shifting back and forth in time, recounting both the breaking news of different decades and the personal dramas that frame the individual lives of her characters. What does this technique reveal about memory and loss? After fourteen years, how much has been truly forgotten, and how much is remembered? What does Joanna's confrontation with Marlene reveal about the reliability of Con's recollections?
9. Con's purse in 2003 is a perfect time capsule of that fateful week in 1989. Can you think of similar once-lost objects that have evoked memories of a specific time or place?
10. What does Marcus Ogilvy's Brooklyn Circle represent to Jerry and Con? To the book as a whole? How does the search for its missing tracks bring the novel to its climax?

### About the Author

Alice Mattison is the acclaimed author of four story collections and five novels. Her collections *In Case We're Separated* and *Men Giving Money, Women Yelling*, as well as her novel *The Book Borrower*, were named *New York Times* Notable Books. Raised in Brooklyn, she teaches fiction in the graduate writing program at Bennington College in Vermont and lives in New Haven, Connecticut.