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Anthony Doerr has received many awards -- from the New York Public Library, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the American Library Association. Then came the Rome Prize, one of the most prestigious awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and with it a stipend and a writing studio in Rome for a year. Doerr learned of the award the day he and his wife returned from the hospital with newborn twins.

Exquisitely observed, *Four Seasons in Rome* describes Doerr's varied adventures in one of the most enchanting cities in the world. He reads Pliny, Dante, and Keats -- the chroniclers of Rome who came before him -- and visits the piazzas, temples, and ancient cisterns they describe. He attends the vigil of a dying Pope John Paul II and takes his twins to the Pantheon in December to wait for snow to fall through the oculus. He and his family are embraced by the butchers, grocers, and bakers of the neighborhood, whose clamor of stories and idiosyncratic child-rearing advice is as compelling as the city itself.

This intimate and revelatory book is a celebration of Rome, a wondrous look at new parenthood, and a fascinating story of a writer's craft -- the process by which he transforms what he sees and experiences into sentences.

Four Seasons in Rome: On Twins, Insomnia, and the Biggest Funeral in the History of the World Details

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From Reader Review Four Seasons in Rome: On Twins, Insomnia, and the Biggest Funeral in the History of the World for online ebook

Connie says

On the day that his twin sons were born, Anthony Doerr received a letter informing him that he had won the Rome Prize. He was given a small apartment, a studio at the American Academy, and a monthly stipend to spend a year writing in the Eternal City. Six months later, he and his wife bundled up the twins and flew from Idaho to Italy.

Doerr writes about the challenges of parenting twins, especially the lack of sleep, and the love he feels for them. Communicating in Italian is another difficult task, sometimes with humorous results, and other times frightening as when he needed to get medical help for his wife Shauna. During the year the author read all 37 volumes of Pliny's "Natural History" (from AD 77) as well as many other works about Rome. His family walked and rode buses through the city with a twin stroller, marveling at the beauty they could find. The whole area of Rome and the Vatican is really a huge art museum. They were also witness to the events at Saint Peter's Square when the Pope died and another Pope was chosen.

Doerr is a keen observer of both people and nature. His lyrical writing is beautiful, and draws the reader in to experience Rome through his eyes. "Four Seasons in Rome" is an especially enjoyable travel memoir.

Ivor says

LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE this book!

The diction of the novel just feels so right and natural to me. Doerr is a true artist, knowing exactly how to blend a combination of words to make you stop and stare (and envy his talent). I read this book every time I want to get myself in a writing mood. His craft is undeniable. A must read for every writer that loves the sound of words and the compelling images it creates.

Negin says

Doerr, who wrote, "All the Light We Cannot See", wins an award to spend a year in Rome writing. His wife has just given birth to twins and their move is definitely an entertaining one.

Reading this book made me feel as if I was in Rome. His descriptions are beautiful and it was just lovely to imagine all the sights, sounds, and aromas. The book is sprinkled with wonderful moments throughout. Towards the end, however, I felt that it was becoming a bit aimless and it started to drag, but I enjoyed it overall.

Some of my favorite quotes:

“If it ever begins to snow, we should run to the Pantheon, because to see snowflakes come drifting through the hole at the top of the dome is to change your life forever.”

“To spend a day walking the streets in Rome, we’re told, is to inhale the equivalent of eighteen cigarettes.”

“The world is not a pageant: beauty is as unquantifiable as love. Geography is not something that can be ranked.”

“Roma, they say, non basta una vita. One life is not enough.”

“The only way to fall asleep is to stop trying to fall asleep. Sleep is a horizon: the harder you row toward it, the faster it recedes.”

Donna says

Anthony Doerr received a writing studio for one year in Rome as part of an award he won. WOW. So he packed up his newborn twins, his wife and spent four seasons in Rome. The man has a way with words whether he is writing fiction or nonfiction. He writes beautifully which is one of the reasons I loved his book "All the Light We Cannot See". I enjoyed the descriptive quality of his writing and I enjoyed his passion, not only for his writing and his family, but for all of his surroundings.

Wendell says

Superficiality doesn’t run much deeper than this: If you know next to nothing about Italy, are never planning to visit, and are perfectly content to allow your impressions of the country be informed by *Under the Tuscan Sun*-like romanticism and shameless, treacly sentimentality, then *Four Seasons in Rome* is the travel book for you. Otherwise, Doerr’s constant doses of high-sugar, low-fiber commentary about his and his family’s year in Rome are only going to have you reaching for your insulin pen. Are we really (I mean, are we REALLY??) still at the stage where someone can publish a book about Italy in which his entire contribution to the genre is to rehearse postcard stereotypes and Merchant-Ivory clichés? Call me simple, but I’d truly have thought the market was completely glutted with sixteenth-of-an-inch thick observations on how “wonderful” and “beautiful” Italy is—made by people who don’t speak the language, who never stop being tourists, and whose apparently unlimited financial and other resources insulate them entirely from the realities of Italian life. Being a casual visitor is a fine and respectable pastime, but it doesn’t qualify you to write a book. Doerr, however, is undaunted, awl in whimsy and wide-eyed wonder. From his innocent astonishment that tomatoes actually taste good (he does live in Boise, Idaho, after all) to his tired (and tiring) insistence that he and his wife never saw a badly dressed Italian—or a fat one—to his second-rate tour-guide rhapsodies over the Pantheon, Doerr never lets a bromide or a platitude get away from him. When a Roman waiter makes him and his wife wait 90 minutes for their dinner check, Doerr’s only reaction is to go all dewy-eyed over how “relaxed” and “laid back” people are in Italy. Please, Anthony. The waiter was rude.

There's no great mystery to it. It happens all the time in Italy, especially to tourists, especially in Rome, and especially to people who are willing, as the Italians say, to fare il fesso—that is, let someone else make an a** of them. Gird your loins as well, Gentle Reader, for page after darling, cooing page about the marvel of Doerr's one-year-old twins and for detailed descriptions of just how darn difficult it was to try to wheel them around Rome in a double-stroller that I can only imagine was a special treat for all the people who had to contend with it on buses, down sidewalks, and in museums. But let's give credit where credit is due: Doerr's prose is pretty, even poetic. The trouble is, that's often all it is: a Fabergé egg, a festoon, the rich-and-creamy icing on a cardboard cake. In his 220-plus pages on Rome, there's almost no there there. (Don't be misled, either, by the subtitle's promise of information about “the Biggest Funeral in the History of the World”; Doerr didn't actually attend, and most of what he knows about it he saw on television.) In more than a few passages, he gets so carried away making perfect little netsuke sentences that he forgets he's supposed to be transmitting actual meaning in the process. Yes; I admit it. I have a bone to pick: Doerr has nothing particularly interesting, profound, insightful, or new to say about Italy. That sure didn't keep him from getting a book contract, however, which suggests that attending the right cocktail parties is a sure shot to success. Merit, while appreciated, is not required. And **Four Seasons in Rome** is yet more evidence that, when it comes to anything with the word “Italy” stamped on it, the American public is all too willing to fare il fesso.

Amy F. says

Humorless self-important dude lives in Rome for a year with his wife and newborn twins. Dude muses about Rome. Dude muses about history. Dude muses about parenthood. Dude muses about musing. Dude thinks that writing short sentences and fragments makes. The banal. More interesting. Dude's wife passes out from exhaustion and dehydration because she's been taking care of the twins by herself while dude muses. Dude muses about this for a while before he takes her to the hospital. Dude muses about the Pope. Dude muses about leaving Rome. Dude and family go back to Boise, where I hope they get a nanny.

Dem says

What a book ! Sensual, Captivating and beautifully written. Anthony Doerr finds himself in the heart of Rome shortly after his twin boys were born. Having received the Rome Prize, an award that gave him a year-long stipend and studio in Rome he embraces the adventure and moves his family to the Eternal City.

I loved so much about this book, the writing is poetic, lyrical and so vivid, the author's descriptions of Rome through the seasons are breathtaking. This is a short read at 205 pages but Doerr never wastes a word as we walk through the streets of Rome with him and his enviable stroller containing two delightful and demanding babies. We see life in a small apartment with his wife and children and how they try to adapt to the language and customs of a foreign city where life takes on a new meaning as well as challenges. I loved the snippets of history of Rome sprinkled throughout the book and I spent almost every chapter googling places and buildings and really enjoyed this eloquent and witty little book. His descriptions of people he met on the streets on a daily basis was so vivid and real. All in all a suprisingly uplifting and delightful read and a lovely little escape to a city full of life and history and intrigue.

Rick Riordan says

After finishing *All the Light We Cannot See*, I'll confess I was a bit addicted to Doerr's lovely writing. Since we were about to take a trip to Rome, I thought I would pick up this travelogue about Doerr's year in Rome as a creative writing resident. He describes the city with love and nostalgia, capturing Rome at its funniest and most breathtaking. It's difficult to say something new about a city that has captured imaginations for millennia, but Doerr manages to do so in this story of an Idaho couple with two toddlers who are thrust into Rome for a year. Again, this is a book you read for the writing. Doerr really knows how to craft a scene and turn a phrase.

Carol says

The day his wife gave birth to twin boys, Doerr found out he won a fellowship he hadn't applied for: a year in Rome with all expenses paid so he can write. Six months later Anthony and Shauna, Henry and Owen, leave Boise and move to Rome. He lives in the same neighborhood Julius Caesar lived and sits in the garden where Galileo sat. Ponder that! The book he was preparing to write was *All the Light We Cannot See*. [Now that he's moved to Paris, I'm kicking myself for not driving a few hours to Boise for one of his readings.]

Doerr's book intersects with some of my highest interests: family, travel, the daily life of an author. It won 5 stars because of the wonder-infused writing, a blend of N.D. Wilson and Frances Mayes.

Quotes:

"Rome is a broken mirror, the falling strap of a dress, a puzzle of astonishing complexity. It is an iceberg floating below our terrace, all its ballasts hidden beneath the surface."

"I x-ray sentences, I claw away a paragraph and reshape it as carefully as I can, and test it again, and peer into the pages to see if things in there are any clearer, any more resolved. Often they are not. But to write a story is to inch backward and forward along a series of planks you are cantilevering out into the darkness, plank by plank, inch by inch, and the best you can hope is that each day you find yourself a little bit farther out over the abyss."

"I try to shape a few sentences around this tiny corner of Rome; I try to force my eye to slow down. A good journal entry—like a good song, or sketch, or photograph—ought to break up the habitual and lift away the film that forms over the eye, the finger, the tongue, the heart. A good journal entry ought be a love letter to the world."

"Without habit, the beauty of the world would overwhelm us. We'd pass out every time we saw— actually saw— a flower. Imagine if we only got to see a cumulonimbus cloud or Cassiopeia or a snowfall once a century: there'd be pandemonium in the streets. People would lie by the thousands in the fields on their backs."

"In the States, practically every time someone would stop us on the street or in the grocery store, they'd gesture at the stroller and say, "Twins? Bet you have your hands full." They'd mean well, of course, but to be

reminded of something you can't forget is debilitating. I prefer the Italian mothers who lean over the stroller and whisper, "So beautiful," the smiles of passing children, the old Roman who stopped us today and grinned at Henry and Owen before shaking my hand and saying, with a bow, "Compilmenti." My compliments."

Jeanette says

This was SO thoroughly enjoyed. Not only for the "new eyes" to Rome but also for the total Doerr grab to what infancy care feels like for a parent. In this case first time parents and also for multiples, twins.

But believe me, when you have an endless screamer or have them in steps less than 18 months apart, there is little difference. I absolutely adored that closet room they rigged up in that tiny Rome apartment so the screamer could have his dark.

He also completely "gets" insomnia. The variety that sits life-long in some of us from earliest to latest days. People who have no tendency or periods of this which they surmount- they really have little idea. I loved how the more he'd try the farther the shore "got away". Oh YES!

But the flavor of the food and life with those babies which caused reaction in so many everyday Romans! He should have made more friends and had some continued conversations- and he DID realize that fact at the end.

His poor wife had it MUCH, MUCH harder than he did. I'd LOVE to hear her report in a like manner to this little book, about 7 or 8 months after their return home. SO many reasons, and hope she is well.

Ed says

I have a love affair with Italy having had the great fortune to visit it two years in a row (2010 and 2011). Venice and Florence were easy falls/love at first sight, Rome not so much. Needless to say spectacular even the first time around (it is Rome after all!), it was much more rough and tumble -- requiring more from the tourist... a bit of work, having to earn it a bit (or a lot) more than the other two locales. But on the second time around, the city easily revealed its charm almost immediately. I knew my way around and was prepared and ready for the grit, the bustle, the attitude.

I was pretty prepared to hate, or at minimum, at least be pretty darn bitter about Anthony Doerr's *Four Seasons in Rome*. How could I possibly even like this guy who won a literary prize that awarded him a full year in the Eternal City with room, board, and a salary just to work on his craft?! But alas, Doerr defied the odds and right from the start I found myself not only *not* hating him but even liking him.

So while the "win a trip to Rome for a year" premise is still pretty annoying, I think what helped things out was that this was not one of those travel memoirs where the person is trying to "find themselves." Not that there is anything wrong with that, was/am a big fan of the mother of that genre -- Liz Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* -- but that's very "been-there, done-that" at this point, though any personal tale of travel and particularly living abroad is a life-changing/altering experience.

Rounding out the non-hate, was that he and his wife moved there with 6-month old twin boys. Being a childless person, that's enough of a personal nightmare for me anywhere in the world, let alone doing it halfway across the world where I don't speak the language. Finally what was particularly endearing, was that Doerr does not end up doing much productive writing as, no surprise, Rome and new fatherhood both end up being two pretty darn big distractions! I only became aware of this memoir having recently read Doerr's first novel, *All The Light We Cannot See* which appears to be what he fully and well-intended to work on while in Rome, but it appears that a short story and this book from his journal were the end-products of that year abroad.

I am giving the book an unofficial 4.5 stars, it really struck a chord with me and I relished most every moment of it -- tacking on my sheer/pure sentimentality/love for Italy and Rome, giving it the Goodreads bump up to 5 stars. Doerr is a helluva writer and beautiful captures the magic and spirit of this ancient city. His quite literary (but always accessible) prose might get a bit eye-rolly at times, particularly to the Rome uninitiated, but for me it is a city that deserves all the florid language and languishing descriptions. It certainly elicited audible sighs or side-smiles from this reader.

Jonelle says

I love Rome and this book reminded me why. There is a lot in here about the author's kids and his writing (it is a memoir), but it's all interesting.

I love his descriptions of Rome. One of my faves is (I think I'll get his right)--as he's describing all the contradictions and nuances of Rome, he uses the phrase..a metaphor along the lines of Rome being a dress strap that slipped off the shoulder. (obviously his wording is much more lovely). But, that's a great comparison for the City-- all at once careless but beautiful; sultry but innocent; compelling but negligent; simple but full of suggestion.

The book is short and so easy to read. I also loved his mentionings of his trips to Umbria--my absolute favorite Italian province--home to Perugia and Assisi and Spoleto...

Gina *loves sunshine* says

This was a great read - thank you Anthony Doerr for winning the award that gave you a year in Rome with your wife and babies! I definitely connected with this little memoir as I was totally soaking up the imagery and play by play in anticipation of being in Rome in about a month! I also related so well to the exhaustion of little baby boys! I loved the insight and pondering....how we view such "old world or "old history" in this modern digital society. And now I have a little bit better understanding of why and how it took you so long to write *The Light We Can Not See*, you gave a few glimpses into how you were preparing to write it, very interesting! I also have a better insight into your writing - it is heavy on the imagery and description - I can see how that worked for me in this book and was a little harder for me in your other best selling fiction novel.

Readers definitely pick this up if you want to transport yourself into the daily life in Trastevere, the exhaustion of twin newborns, the Pantheon at Christmas, the dying and re-electing of the Pope and various

other things that happen throughout the 4 seasons.

Alberto Delgado says

A veces los libros te eligen a ti y no tu a ellos. Es lo que me ha ocurrido con esta pequeña joya de Anthony Doerr. Si no hubiera leído antes "la luz que no puedes ver" (que tras leer este libro tengo claro que no hubiera sido igual sin esta experiencia del escritor en roma)y casualidades de la vida me encontrara con este libro justo después de leer "spqr" de mary beard seguro que aunque hubiera aparecido en mi camino habría pasado de largo. El libro son las memorias del año que pasó el escritor viviendo en Roma gracias a una beca justo con sus hijos gemelos recién nacidos lo que hizo que su familia se embarcara en esta aventura. Me ha servido para ratificar lo buen narrador que es Doerr y ya me quedo con las ganas de seguir leyendo sus otros libros. Para los que vayan a visitar la ciudad eterna les recomiendo su lectura antes del viaje porque van a descubrir lugares de la ciudad por los que pasar y a los que ya hemos tenido la suerte de estar Doerr con su manera de unir las historias del imperio romano , con la roma renacentista y la vida de los actuales romanos consigue que nos den ganas de volver a pasear por sus calles.

Diane says

This is a lovely and enjoyable travelogue from an American writer who spent a year in Rome on a fellowship. I picked it up not just because I like travel memoirs, but also because I recently read Anthony Doerr's excellent novel *All the Light We Cannot See*, and he had been working on that book while he was in Rome back in 2004.

Doerr and his wife moved to Italy when their twins were newborns, so besides the travel vignettes and insightful comments from a writer talking about the process of writing, there are also adventures in parenting in a foreign country. Additionally, Pope John Paul II died while they were in Italy, and Doerr marveled at the millions who flocked to Rome for the pope's funeral.

In short, there's a lot of interesting stuff in this 200-page travelogue. Doerr is an engaging writer and I enjoyed following his journey. Recommended for those who like stories of Italy or books about writers and writing.

Favorite Quotes

"We came to Rome because we'd always regret it if we didn't, because every timidity eventually turns into regret."

"The only way to fall asleep is to stop trying to fall asleep. Sleep is a horizon: the harder you row toward it, the faster it recedes.

[on visiting the grave of John Keats]

"We are hemmed by brickwork, ivy, history. A line from a Tom Andrews poem comes back to me: 'The dead drag a grappling hook for the living. The hook is enormous.'"

"A good journal entry — like a good song, or sketch, or photograph — ought to break up the habitual and lift away the film that forms over the eye, the finger, the tongue, the heart. A good journal entry ought to be a

love letter to the world."

"I agree to live now, live as sweetly as I can, to fill my clothes with wind and my eyes with lights, but I understand I'll have to leave in the end."
