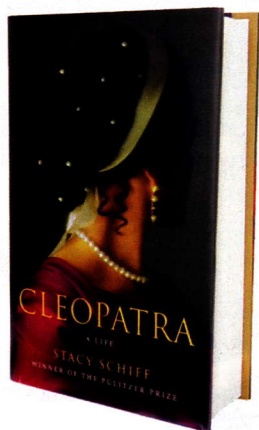


/ her story /



THE ONCE AND FUTURE QUEEN

> Here's a shocker: Cleopatra wasn't beautiful. Her nose was too long, her chin too strong. But she was one smart first century BC cookie, who spoke eight languages and managed Egypt's government and economy for two decades. Stacy Schiff's dazzling, meticulous biography, *Cleopatra* (Little, Brown), reclaims the queen from

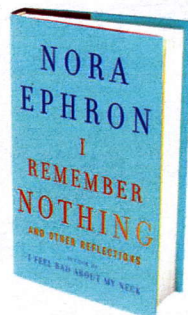
myth and gives her back her brain.

Yes, she hosted lavish dinners and romanced Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, but Cleopatra was no slut, contrary to what history and Hollywood would have us believe. She exploited her sexuality—her liaisons saved Egypt from Rome's domination—but also made other shrewd political maneuvers, such as strategically lending out her fleets and revaluing the country's currency to stabilize the economy. Schiff wryly notes that the queen also had her royal siblings killed, a standard gambit showing that Cleopatra “faithfully upheld the family tradition but was, for her time and place, remarkably well behaved.” When she ran out of power plays and Rome conquered Egypt, she swallowed poison. The tale of her suicide by asp is mere fable, evoking a malicious link between snakes and sneaky women that goes back to Eve. Who needs legends anyway when the real Cleopatra was a fearless, bejeweled Wonder Woman come to life? —CARYN JAMES

/ we're buzzing about /

I REMEMBER NOTHING BY NORA EPHRON (KNOPF)

In Ephron's delicious new collection of riffs and reminiscences, she's graduated from feeling bad about her neck to feeling bad, or rueful anyway, about encroaching foggy-hood (“I have no idea who anyone in *People* magazine is”), her inability to recognize old friends, and her failing memory, which is, luckily, upgradable (“The Senior Moment has become the Google Moment”). In fact, Ephron's memory serves her well. Her discourses on divorces, alcoholic parents and her early days as a journalist in 1960s New York are gleaming with youthful innocence. “Looking back,” she writes, “it seems to me that I was clueless until I was about 50 years old.” —AMANDA LOVELL



Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand (Random House) The author of *Seabiscuit* has picked a real dark horse this time. Olympic runner, World War II hero, POW and petty thief Louie Zamperini has the ambitious heart of a Thoroughbred. Hillenbrand recounts his feats and torments with such brio, you'll be lucky to catch your breath.

THIS BOOK IS NOT JUST FOR BOYS

/ great reads /



1 **HOW TO READ THE AIR** by Dinaw Mengestu (*Riverhead*) “History sometimes deserves a little revision, if not for the sake of the dead, then at least for ourselves,” claims Jonas, this novel's protagonist, who weaves three powerfully resonant narratives about confinement: his father's escape from Ethiopia, his mother's defiance of her abusive spouse and Jonas's own struggle with his fractured marriage and fracturing mind. That these stories rely on his talent for invention makes them more beguiling, exposing “truth” as a collapsible thing, chimerical and brief. —PAM HOUSTON

2 **FRAMING INNOCENCE** by Lynn Powell (*The New Press*) In 1999, Cynthia Stewart dropped off several rolls of film at a drugstore. A lab tech, disturbed by prints of Stewart's daughter in the shower, called the police. This gripping true story details Stewart's arrest on abuse charges and the six months it took to get the case dismissed. “You don't have to be guilty to have your life trashed,” Stewart's husband says—chilling words today, when children's photos abound on the Internet. —MEREDITH MARAN

3 **YOU HAD ME AT WOOF** by Julie Klam (*Riverhead*) In this appealing memoir of one woman's love affair with dogs, Klam worries that people will see her as a “dog person.” By the end of the book, they undoubtedly will, as she goes from besotted owner of a Boston terrier to frantic animal advocate. The most memorable canine character is the bedraggled Dahlia, who amazes everyone, including the vet, with a stunning feat at the ripe old age of nine. Klam can relate: “We were all happy to know that life could surprise us just when we thought we were done.” —A.I.