

La vida sense la Sara Amat

Life without Sara Amat



UK panel's choice Year 2016

Author: [Pep Puig](#) [1]

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Who now remembers Sara Amat? She was just thirteen when she disappeared one summer night and was never again heard from. There was a single news item the following day in the *Diario de Terrassa*, and a great deal of speculation and many rumours. She is particularly remembered by Pep de Cal Sabater, the narrator of this story, because that night, as he tells us, Sara didn't disappear, but sneaked in through the back door of his house. She didn't hide for many days, but sometimes the memory of certain events last a whole lifetime, and even give it meaning. Written from the distance of the intervening years, *Life Without Sara Amat* is the confession of certain unforgettable events, a few days in the life of a village in the summer, a love-struck, obedient boy and a girl who was no longer a girl and wanted to fulfil her fierce, urgent desire to escape, even if it is through the back door.

UK panellists opinion:

La vida sense la Sara Amat is a coming-of-age story that primarily takes place over the course of ten days in August of 1981, ten days that changed the protagonist's life, marking his shift from a boy to an adolescent. The narrator is the forty-something man who was that boy, and who looks back on that summer—those ten days—as his entire life. Or as he puts it "The rest has been what it's been, and as they say, I'm not complaining."

One evening when they are playing hide and seek, the girl Pep has a crush on—Sara Amat—disappears. They imagine she's just gone home, disenchanted with the childish game. As Pep is praying for her safe return before retiring for the night, he hears someone calling his name: Sara is in his bedroom, there at his grandparents' house. He hides her under the bed while the town searches and conjectures on what has happened to precocious Sara, who never did seem to fit in in Ullastrell. Her character is rebellious, intellectually gifted, and jaded. His is innocent, trusting, and head over heels in love. Together, over ten intense days, they come to grips with what it means to leave childhood behind.

La vida sense la Sara Amat is written in a very straightforward style that reflects the narrator's naiveté, and the dialogue is spot-on, revealing the discomfiture inherent in the slim yet significant gap between Sara's maturity and Pep's innocence, and the sparks when those two tectonic plates brush up against one another. The setting is childhood, and therefore has a timelessness to it that transcends borders and could travel easily to the UK, where the Mediterranean backdrop would add to the book's allure.

The story moves at the pace of a sleepy small town in summer, the rhythm picking up somewhat after the first third of the novel, but this book is one that revels in the small details: in the home-cooked meals and Mass and gossip of Ullastrell; in the texture of olive groves and chirping crickets and the town's very delineated physical geography; in the dynamics of Pep's family visiting the matriarch and the routines of life in town and in her home, the customers who come in to buy shoes and the farmers getting their hair cut on Saturdays. There is one chapter entitled "Cinema Paradiso," and the reference is very apt; at its best moments, Puig's recreation of this small town is quite charming.

From the reader's report by [Mara Lethem](#) [3]

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