



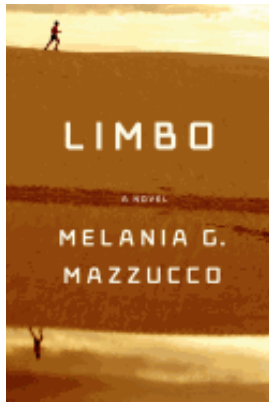
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★ **Limbo**

Melania G. Mazzucco, trans. from the Italian by Virginia Jewiss. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$28 (416p) ISBN 978-0-374-19198-6



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Mazzucco (*Vita*) dazzles in her latest novel, treating readers to a wonderfully paced love story set against a backdrop of modern warfare. On Christmas Eve, Sgt. Manuela Paris has returned to her home, a beach town outside of Rome, still recovering from serious injuries from an attack in the final days of her posting as a platoon leader in Afghanistan. The narrative smoothly alternates between Manuela at home with her family, which includes her vivacious sister Vanessa, and her first-person account of her time in the field. While Manuela copes with her injuries and the undetermined future of her military career (a career that had given her the “certainty of having a destiny” after an unhappy, defiant childhood), an encounter with a mysterious stranger, a solitary guest at the Bellavista Hotel whom she can observe from her window, jolts Manuela back to life in ways she never expected. Her training as a soldier means her assessments are clear-eyed and unsentimental, which only adds to their emotional weight. Mazzucco’s finely drawn portraits of soldiers are excellent, but her aim is broader: a love story for rational people, providing complex answers to universal questions about recovering from trauma. (Nov.)

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