All the Good and All the Bad
Author:
Care Santos
Reader's name:
Lisa M. Rodríguez

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Care Santos is a popular writer in Spain. She has been writing for decades in both Castilian Spanish and Catalan, with dozens of publications to her credit, from adult fiction to poetry to short stories, as well as young adult novels and books for very young children. Her work has already been translated into over 20 languages.

Born in Mataró, Barcelona, her full name is Macarena Santos i Torres, and she is the recipient of numerous literary awards in Spain. Her novel *Deseo de chocolate* (*Desire for Chocolate* is the title of the English translation) won the 2014 Ramón Llull prize, the same year that her novel *Habitaciones cerradas (Closed Rooms)* was turned into a television mini-series in Spain.

Todo el bien y todo el mal, which in English means *All the Good and All the Bad*, was published by Editorial Planeta under the Destino imprint in 2018.

This new novel is fast-moving and exciting. An epilogue promises a sequel to this story of Reina Gené, a woman from Barcelona, who is trapped in a Romanian airport during a monster snowstorm.

A mother and wife, Reina works as a human resources consultant. Her job has taken her to Bucharest to conduct interviews with a group of international applicants for a corporate position. While there, she receives the shocking news that her teenage son has attempted suicide. Impeding her return home to Barcelona is the dangerous snowstorm that leaves her trapped in the airport for a day.

Upset, exhausted, and armed with only her mobile phone, Reina does everything in her power to understand what has happened, arrange for counseling for her son, and manage the strained relationship between the young man's father and stepfather, all while continuing to manage her corporate client's demanding expectations.

Two added complications are present. One of the job candidates she has interviewed has followed her to the airport, attempting to influence her decision. It becomes clear that he has in fact been stalking her for months. A separate concern comes from the persistent requests of a university researcher for information about her father, who died when Reina was only a child.

As the snow falls outside, Reina's personal and professional concerns are more than many could easily bear, and her reaction is to begin working toward solutions using her mobile phone. The reader is at times uncomfortable with Reina's forceful approach and her unrelenting demands on others to provide the information and services she needs.

Gradually, her conversations and actions reveal a backstory that explains how Reina Gené has become the woman she is. Her phone calls, instant messages, and emails, little by little, show that her current situation is the result of every decision, good and bad, that she has ever made.

With each revelation, the reader is left with the same feeling one has when playing a game like Tetris or Candy Crush, a sensation of falling, landing, and then immediately starting again. With each readjustment in perspective, the reader gains a deeper understanding of Reina's life. Just when the reader is sure of knowing exactly where the imperfect Reina has made her most serious mistake, the game board shifts again.

Care Santos is an expert writer. One of the great strengths of this novel is her ability to carry the reader along at a break-neck pace for 400 pages. The achievement is all the more amazing, because almost all of the action of the story takes place electronically and within the confines of Reina's memory. She is physically trapped by wind and cold that threaten to separate her from her son, from the profession she loves, and from the aspect of herself of which she is most proud: her ability to keep it together, solve problems, make compromises, and move forward.

This book deserves translation into English for its superb narration: lightning-fast and yet broad and deep, full of twists, yet coherent and believable.

By the end of the story, the reader has no choice but to wish Reina and her loved ones the best, in spite of grave past mistakes and secrets of many types. The story would be easily appreciated in English translation without adaptation or explanation. Reina lives in today's world, a mother, a wife, a professional, an imperfect soul who will not give up on herself, her family, her profession, or on life itself.