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Discoveries

'The Enchanter' by Lila Azam Zanganeh

By Susan Salter Reynolds

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The Enchanter

Nabokov and Happiness

Lila Azam Zanganeh

W.W. Norton: 228 pp., \$23.95

Reading was difficult for Lila Azam Zanganeh, until she found Nabokov. Through Nabokov she learned the art of happiness and the art of reading and the art of ecstasy. "We read to reenchant the world... Deciphering, trudging into unknown regions, making one's way through an intricate atlas of sentences, startling darkness, unfamiliar flora and fauna." In this adventuring spirit, the author leads us through the work and life of her favorite author, who died when she was just 10 months old. It is a contagion of happiness, a landscape of luminous discovery. Facts, words, characters, style, invention — she writes in flashes, like a camera lens opening and closing. Here's Nabokov in pursuit of butterflies; Nabokov on the Swiss Riviera; Nabokov playing tennis on a "tawny court" surrounded by pine trees in a Russian summer in 1910. Like the character in Nabokov's novel "The Gift," Azam Zanganeh, crafts a practical handbook in one section: "How to Be Happy." She looks at various kinds of happiness found in Nabokov's work: unnatural and natural happiness, particles of happiness, happiness through the looking glass, the use of words to create happiness (the reader swallows them one at a time); words such as "cochlea," "conolorous," "gloaming" and "fritillary."

At times, one feels helpless and transported, led by the hand (two hands — Azam Zanganeh's and Nabokov's) to a very strange and glittering place.

A photograph of Nabokov closing in on a butterfly with a net the size of a full moon says it all.

Salter Reynolds is a Los Angeles writer.

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