



Bengal Hound

Rahad Abir

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Grieving lovers navigate mental illness and political upheaval in Rahad Abir's novel *Bengal Hound*.

East Pakistan in the late 1960s is an impoverished place marked by unrest, but life continues on, for better and for worse. Mere days after running away to get married, Shelley and Roxana are caught and separated forever. Bereft, Shelley ends up spending more time with Maya, the sister of a friend who never got over the disappearance of her fiancé. Their bereavement will either draw them together...or push them apart into different forms of maladaptation that will diminish them both.

Set amid a charged atmosphere of escalating political violence, the story's main focus is the more intimate yet just as devastating tragedy of lost love. Shelley obsesses over Roxana and seeks hope in the student protests sweeping East Pakistan. The protesters aim to topple the military government and achieve a measure of justice for families like Shelley's that were ripped apart by the Partition, by riots, and by religious differences. Maya, meanwhile, finds a confining solace in religion that leaves no room for anyone but her own views and her own god.

For all the sorrow that life has laid at Shelley's feet, his world also contains moments of perilous beauty. As he struggles to cope with his loss, he encounters dreamy and soothing yet disturbing delusions, a fateful confrontation, and a final vision that prompts him to try to regain control in the only way he knows how. But control, once lost, is not easy to take back, and Shelley is met with the realization that there may be no way to escape the limbo in which love and politics have placed him.

Bengal Hound is a novel about becoming trapped within boundaries that are too big for any one person to break through.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2023)

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