

## Different

**Datta Groover**

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*Different is an entertaining novel about a family growing closer through understanding and spirituality.*

In Datta Groover's spiritual novel *Different*, a family grapples with extraordinary truths about reincarnation.

The novel tells the complex story of a family becoming truer versions of themselves by opening their minds and hearts to the miracles around them. Frank and Sofia sincerely love each other and their three children, but their life is far from perfect. Frank is a shameless flirt with a troubling past, Sofia is anxious and plagued with painful memories, and both are concerned for their son, Sam. The young boy was diagnosed with autism, and though he doesn't speak, he is acutely aware of the inner lives of those around him and has some life-changing secrets of his own.

At the story's core is a unique view of Catholicism that praises empathy, forgiveness, and acceptance but also embraces ideas like reincarnation and healing as introduced through Sam. Interesting allusions to historical texts within the narrative assert that reincarnation was an early tenet of Christianity. The book illustrates its religious ideas well, and Sofia and Frank's embrace of these ideas is a moving and satisfying resolution to the novel.

Much about Sofia and Frank's enigmatic past is hinted at during their couple's therapy sessions. Through tense dialogue, they struggle to keep up the lies they have told one another. It becomes clear that each is hiding dark secrets—for Sofia, about her father's brutality and prejudices; for Frank, about how his own dangerous past has followed him. Sofia's mysteries propel the plot, and flashbacks of her childhood in Barcelona give a specific texture and historical context that is immersive and emotional.

The novel falters in its depiction of Frank as an action hero as he confronts the violent people from his childhood who continue to haunt him. The resolution of Frank's past and a strange encounter with a person from his childhood is too brief to feel complete.

The narration shifts with skill between Sofia and Frank's perspectives, sprinkled with diary entries, emails, and texts. Frank's texts and emails with his boss's wife build tension as he goes from flirting with her to urging her to stop communicating with him.

In its present, the novel is set in the Pacific Northwest, and the drizzly backdrop helps set a moody tone. But much more of the book's characterization, conflict, and world building is accomplished through conversations and dialogue, which meld separate story lines together. The storytelling is diverse and propulsive, and both Sophia and Frank's motivations come through in an organic way. Communication as a whole is what drives the novel, down to body language.

With entertaining historical context and fascinating characters, *Different* is a tale of a family growing closer through understanding and spirituality.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (March 6, 2019)

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