



Farewell Tangier

Salma El Mounni

Lynn E. Palermo, Translator

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In Salma El Mounni's sinuous novel *Farewell Tangier*, a young Moroccan woman struggles with self-doubt, body dysmorphia, and cultural and sexual repression.

From the age of ten, Alia notices men pursuing her with territorial aggression, as, in Tangier, men can fondle, accost, and sexually assault women with relative impunity. The leers and advances increase as she becomes more curvy and mature. Mystified by such behavior in her late teenage years, Alia uses her cellphone camera to take intimate photographs of her body. The photographs are for her own contemplation; she does not share them. She also worries about Moroccan law, which prohibits "voluntary nudity" and punishes violators with imprisonment.

After a brief involvement with Quentin, a fellow student and French expatriate, Alia is shocked to discover her photographs on Instagram. Though she cannot verify whether manipulative Quentin posted the pictures, she watches as the view counts for the images increase with unnerving rapidity. Terrified of being arrested, she also dreads her father's impending wrath regarding the pictures.

Narrated with detached urgency, the taut and spiraling narrative conveys Alia's feelings of yearning and entrapment well. After moving to Lyon, she feels like she lives in "the crack" between "two worlds"; though she has more freedom in France, she is haunted by Tangier's "salty air" and "streets scented with incense." Further conflicted by neocolonial "inferiority" and her bisexual attractions, Alia's observation of Lyon's Pride Parade is depicted with poignant intensity. Amid exuberant crowds and colorful flags, "bare-breasted women" march with confidence; Alia's eyes flood with tears as she realizes that liberation is "within reach," if she can "stop feeling shame."

A sensual and unsettling novel, *Farewell Tangier* centers a woman moving beyond cultural and technological subjugation to seek her true self.

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