



Malkah Job: Part One: Red Dragon

Vasilissa Wladowsky

Vasilissa Wladowsky (Nov 9, 2021)

Softcover \$19.99 (480pp)

978-953-497411-7

Malkah Job is a slow-burning thriller in which an Israeli spy has erotic encounters with men from her past.

In Vasilissa Wladowsky's erotic novel *Malkah Job*, a hardened spy embarks on a mission to save her husband from the bosses she betrayed.

After being seduced by an adult man, thirteen-year-old Leda is thrown into the world of espionage and forced to spy for the Russians. Now, nearly twenty years later, she assigns herself the most dangerous job of all: rescuing Caleb, her long-missing husband, from her vengeful former handlers.

Leda's mission takes her around Europe, where she has affairs with two men from her past. As she gets closer to Caleb's jailers, Leda puts aside all distractions to face the reality that, no matter what Caleb meant to her, he may no longer be the man she remembers.

Minor characters come and go, emphasizing the breadth of Leda's international experience and ultimate independence. Leda struggles with, and interrogates elements of, her Judaism, too, but this work includes offensive stereotypes: Leda, the book says, is beautiful because she is blonde, rather than "typically Jewish."

Further, the narrative is too expository when it comes to developing its background and relationships. Its prose is distant, passive, and unemotional, and tends to switch between the present and past tenses. Its unusual word choices are awkward rather than evocative, and its repetitive scenes that show men praising Leda, or Leda waiting for new developments, slow its progression. And while there are many sex scenes, they, too, are distant and of limited appeal. The fact that one of Leda's lovers is also her adoptive father, who still thinks of her as his "daughter" and a "half child," is disturbing.

The cast's decisions are underexplored, including Leda electing to wait six years before she begins to hunt for Caleb. Inconsistencies also arise: Leda confirms her pregnancy internally, for example, but it is later revealed that she lied about being pregnant. Leda herself is off-putting and arrogant: she will do anything, no matter how unpleasant or immoral, to rescue Caleb, and anyone who stands in her way pays a heavy price. But the ease with which she cheats on and abandons men whom she claims to love reflects a fractured worldview, and her cruel, abusive behavior is unsympathetic. She looks down on others based on their nationalities, too. It becomes difficult to believe that so many men would worship her without reservation.

Leda is portrayed as so superior to everyone else that all potential excitement disappears: she intimidates and outmaneuvers every opponent—and even reluctant allies—without fear or trouble. Only the cliffhanger ending contains a real sense of danger, but this tension comes too late to revive excitement in the tale.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (December 16, 2021)

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