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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ LITERARY

Nine Rabbits

Virginia Zaharieva
Black Balloon Publishing (Apr 15, 2014)
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Feminism, memory, and political and domestic distress merge in this engaging, perceptive tale.

This fictionalized memoir brings the pain of the past to the brink of tolerance then dissipates bad memories by celebrating simple pleasures in life. An ingenious approach to personal distress, *Nine Rabbits* is a perceptive examination of family and tradition, while exposing the underlying abuse behind social niceties.

The story revolves around Manda, a six-year-old girl growing up in 1960s communist Bulgaria. Subjected to poverty and a difficult childhood at the hands of an eccentric grandmother, she learns to survive and find joy in her surroundings. Later, as a middle-aged artist and writer, she adapts to a democratic government but still fights off the mental anguish of her early years. This poignant work is a catharsis, a revealing look at an important Eastern European historical transition through the eyes of a gifted woman.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of this book is the collection of recipes peppered throughout its pages. This may seem corny at first, but closer scrutiny will allow the reader to ascertain that the food is part of the story itself, not just superfluous material to fill the pages. Each dish is carefully integrated into a well-crafted vignette, each event triggering the memory of a specific culinary enjoyment. Typical of many cultures, the preparation and consumption of a meal signifies more than a life-sustaining need. Entwined with emotion and laced with symbolism, the act of eating transcends the biological process.

Zaharieva evokes mental associations through descriptive passages that are honed to perfection, such as this one: “I used to love going to the monastery on the shores of the sea. Its whiteness thumbed its nose at the blue, it burned eyes at noon, while in the evening the shadows of the cypresses crept over it.”

A native of Sofia, Bulgaria, Virginia Zaharieva has woven her own experiences and her knowledge as a psychotherapist into her first North American release in translation, enhancing the novel’s authenticity.

Divided into two parts and forty-seven chapters with creative titles such as “Siamese Cats in Brocade Jackets” and “Ash Rose,” as well as titles that allude to food, like “Cherry Stain” and “Dolphins and Lemon Cream,” this innovative prose will delight those looking for a new take on breaking away from damaging customs without losing the ability to love. Engaging, with a decidedly feminist tone, this enlightening journey will inspire anyone dealing with trauma suffered within a domestic or a religious sphere.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (Spring 2014)

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