



## One Last Time

**Helga Flatland**

Orenda Books (Jun 24, 2021)

Softcover (276pp)

978-1-913193-69-0

In Helga Flatland's formidable novel *One Last Time*, three generations of women are forced to reckon with each other—and with resentment, love, and loss.

Anne, the mother of Sigrid and the grandmother of Mia, is diagnosed with metastatic cancer. Though everyone in Sigrid's family handles the news in their own way, they decide to come together to care for her. Sigrid, a middle-aged doctor, herself takes the news with a sense of detachment, as she is still simmering with resentment towards her mother for her perceived neglect. Sigrid struggles to communicate with Anne without letting her resentment color her responses.

Meanwhile, nineteen-year-old Mia spends increased time with her father, Jens, who left Sigrid when she was pregnant with Mia, but has just returned. Elsewhere, Magnus, Sigrid's older brother, cares for Anne with rose-colored optimism. And Aslak, Sigrid's put-upon partner and the father of their four-year-old son, Viljar, tries to endure Jens's presence in Sigrid and Mia's lives. As Anne decides to take control of her fate, they all embark on a family trip to Nice. It goes awry. Once they return to Oslo, the family members faces their own truths about, and feelings over, Anne's death.

The chapters alternate between Anne and Sigrid, delving into their emotional interiority. They express incisive, unvarnished feelings about each other. The result is a virtual conversation between two people who are not listening to each other, but who are desperate in their desires to love each other. With elegance and precision, the prose mines the patterns of speech and silence. Though the end feels predetermined, Anne, Sigrid, and Mia circle each other, their bleakness mirroring the landscape, nursing their pain and making flawed attempts at connection.

*One Last Time* is a tough, honest novel about the complicated messiness of mother-daughter relationships.

MONICA CARTER (July / August 2021)

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