FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Literary

The Dervish
Frances Kazan
Opus
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Mary Di Benedetti is out sketching the poor indigenous population of Istanbul. She scurries back to the US Consulate before curfew, wrapped in shawls like a Turkish woman. A sheaf of papers is suddenly thrust into her hands by a teenage boy fleeing his pursuers.

Even as he is killed before her astonished eyes, Mary has the presence of mind to shove the secret documents into the leaves of her sketchbook. It isn't until she meets the woman they were meant for, Halide Edib, at an embassy party that Mary understands she either has to turn the papers over to Halide or turn them in to the Allied authorities occupying Istanbul. It's 1919, and the former Ottoman territories are being divvied up as part of the spoils of World War I.

Such is the beginning of Frances Kazan's engrossing tale of Mary's involvement with the nationalist movement in Turkey. Mary is an artist, not a politician. She doesn't grasp the subtleties of the situation. She only senses the tensions after the defeat (Turkey having aligned itself disastrously with the German Kaiser). The Allied forces are backing the Sultan and Caliphate. In the middle of the country, a little-known firebrand named Mustafa Kemal (Attaturk) is rallying people to bring down the old regime and create a new, modern Turkey.

Mary is swept up in these events, and they provide a suitably stirring backdrop for her adventures as eyewitness and participant in the resistance. "I like to think of myself as an impartial observer rather than an amateur spy," she says at one point. By then, she is writing daily dispatches back to the American consulate, desperate to raise awareness of the cause for independence.

Composed as if a memoir, this novel unfolds over the space of a couple of years, from Mary's fateful encounter with a revolutionary cell to her involvement with a man at the forefront of this Arab Spring-type revolution.

The author interweaves the lives of these fictional and historical figures like threads in a carpet. Although Mary becomes a devoted follower, she cannot shed her identity any more than

she can assume the mystic garb of the dervishes in whose monastery she and Halide take shelter. In the end, her story becomes “a testimony to existence” and a fine starting point for anyone interested in the human drama behind early struggles for independence.

Trina Carter