

The Island of Missing Trees

Elif Shafak

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In Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*, a father and daughter reconnect after years of secrecy and a devastating loss.

Ada has only ever known her parents: her father, Kostas, and her mother, Defne, who died. Her other relatives are in Cyprus, and seem to be an impenetrable mystery. The unexpected arrival of her Aunt Meryem during a bleak winter storm sends Ada, who's already on edge, into an anxious quest to understand her family's dark past—and to find a way to reconnect with her grieving father.

The book is a modern fairy tale. It contains forbidden love, a dash of fantasy, and secrets that, once exposed, change people forever. But the events that surround the family's saga are all too real: the ethnic and political violence that engulfed Cyprus in the mid-1970s, and its unintended consequences for future generations of animals, plants, and humans, are a constant presence.

The story alternates between its human characters and the fig tree that Kostas smuggled into England from Cyprus seventeen years ago. Ada and the fig tree could not be more different. The tree, nostalgic and just a bit proud, still has searing memories of the many tragedies that precipitated Kostas and Defne's flight to London. Ada, a teenager who's struggling with her mother's death, is often angry and petulant, especially with her long-absent aunt, who is now looking to bond with her. Quiet and reserved, Ada is further distressed by an embarrassing incident on her last day of school. But in the end, the very qualities that make Ada such a stubborn, even prickly girl enable her to learn the truth and find her own path to healing.

The Island of Missing Trees is a poignant novel about the power memory has to harm and to heal.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2021)

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