

★ The Last One

Fatima Daas

Lara Vergnaud, Translator

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The Last One is a mesmerizing, semiautobiographical novel about the meanings of identity, family, and sexuality.

The story of eponymous character Fatima Daas is slight, but there's depth and substance in her struggles to find paths toward internal and external acceptance. The novel reads like bursts of reportage, with each chapter beginning with declarative personal statements, akin to incantations. Fatima begins with basic statements of who she is: she lives in a Paris suburb, Clichy-sous-Bois, is Muslim, is Algerian, is a daughter, is a lesbian, and is asthmatic. These statements change as the novel leaps back and forth in time, focusing on pivotal moments of Fatima's life.

Fatima's family consists of Kamar, her unsatisfied mother who rules the kitchen; Ahmed, her abusive father; her two older sisters, Douina and Hanane; Rokya, her best friend; and Nina, a girlfriend, who's twelve years older than Fatima, and whom Fatima claims is the heroine of her story. In each chapter, Fatima makes discoveries about who she wants to be to herself, her friends, and her family. These revelations about her identities transform as she oscillates between pleasing herself and pleasing her family and her faith.

Fatima states facts about herself as if she's addressing herself and another in an intimate setting. Woven throughout the novel are rich etymologies, folklore, and religious beliefs. The straightforward style is accentuated by the repetition of biographical information and the nuanced changes in the history of her identity. Fatima's fears and desires impact her relationships as she grapples with her truths. The structure is taut, showcasing the passage of time and Fatima's shifting identities.

The Last One is a fresh addition to queer fiction—a deep and original debut novel featuring a Muslim lesbian who is looking for acceptance and belonging.

MONICA CARTER (November / December 2021)

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