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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

The Nameless

Liza Burgess
AuthorHouse UK (Apr 18, 2012)
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In *The Nameless*, Liza Burgess crafts a heart-wrenching story of the ease of betrayal and the near impossibility of redemption.

The prologue shows a woman entering an airport with her baby. Readers watch in horror as she sets herself and the child ablaze, killing both. The woman's last words, "Oh my God," form a chilling refrain throughout the book. The refrain is repeated immediately in the first chapter by another woman as she remembers the joy of first falling in love with her husband.

Readers are eager to unravel the tragedy of the prologue, and they quickly put the pieces together as a man begins an affair while away on business. The story's events feel like a typical affair tale: A married businessman and a single, working-class woman strike up a long-distance sexual relationship to escape the confines of their daily lives, eventually getting married and having a baby. The pall cast by the prologue constantly reminds readers that this is not just any story of divorce. As the man begins to reconsider his new life and reconcile with his first wife, readers feel the narrative sliding toward its tragic conclusion.

The main characters are Muslim, and when the man strikes up the affair he says he thinks there's more to life than what he's been living. Religion does not play a large role in the action of the story, but the mention of newspapers in the airport bearing news of the 2011 uprisings in North Africa preceding the image of the fiery suicide undeniably make religion the backdrop for the novel. Burgess's message about the role of faith in his story is left open for readers to discern.

The novel consists of third-person narrative descriptions of nameless characters like "The Receptionist" and major events like "The Birth of a Baby Girl." The book has three parts: The first focuses on the lead up to the start of the affair, the second on the divorce and remarriage, and the third on the aftermath of the murder-suicide.

The lack of any names gives the book a cryptic feeling and lends the story an everyman quality, but it can also be a bit confusing for readers. However, the namelessness also helps create a cold tone that underscores the book's cold events.

In many ways, the prologue reveals too much about the story, causing readers to read on only to unravel the tragedy. This action-focused, mystery-solving reading misses the nuances of potential meanings behind the book's events.

Burgess's chilling, well-crafted novel leaves readers echoing the characters' refrain—"Oh my God"—in awe and despair about the murder suicide and the havoc caused by humanity's careless decisions.
MELISSA WUSKE (September 26, 2012)

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