

★ The Coin

Yasmin Zaher

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In Yasmin Zaher's novel *The Coin*, an immigrant navigates a bizarre sociopolitical web of glamour, obsession, filth, and tragedy.

After both her parents are killed in a quotidian accident, a wealthy woman leaves Palestine and fitfully attempts to establish a life in New York City. She teaches English in a middle school for underprivileged boys, where she uses unconventional methods to help her students grapple with their intricate, ever-shifting social reality. Adrift in a new and abrasive environment, she attempts to maintain a façade of refined glamour and leave the violence and political turmoil of her childhood behind. Her only friend in the city is her Russian boyfriend Sasha, whose devotion stifles her. She struggles to find companions who understand her strict, distinctive lifestyle.

When her Burberry coat is stolen by an elegant vagrant, the heroine is sucked into an elaborate scheme reselling Birkin bags. Amid this turmoil, she becomes obsessed with cleanliness, going to extremes to remove all traces of filth from her body. As she attempts to hone her body and self-image into her version of perfection, she begins to converse with a coin that she swallowed on the day of her parents' death. In the book's triumphant final act, the narrator's body and mind reach the far edges of displacement as her world implodes and her sense of self erodes into unruly chaos.

In lyrical and corrosive prose, this exquisite novel probes the space between the tragedy of statelessness and the neurotic glow of affluence, proving that in this overlap lies a rich and bewildering landscape of human behavior. Strange and luminous, it weaves an elegant tapestry from disparate threads, touching on class, fashion, lust, grief, and violence with wit and poise.

Funny, unnerving, and decadent, *The Coin* is at once an intimate character study and a startling portrait of contemporary America.

BELLA MOSES (July / August 2024)

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