



## ★ **The Last Syrian**

**Omar Youssef Souleimane**

**Ghada Mourad, Translator**

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The freedom to live life on its own terms is at stake in Omar Youssef Souleimane's novel *The Last Syrian*, about the Arab Spring in Syria.

When Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in desperation over the situation in his native Tunisia in December 2010, his act sparked a conflagration across the Middle East known as the Arab Spring. In March 2011, the protests reached Syria, where demonstrations and protests against the repressive al-Assad regime swept the country.

Sensing the opportunity for a life on his own terms, Youssef joins a group of young activists who want to overthrow the current dictatorship and build a new society based on democracy and freedom. Together with his friends Josephine, Khalil, Bilal, and Adel, Youssef organizes protests while expressing his dreams of a nonviolent revolution in emails to Mohammad, a sexually repressed shopkeeper he met for a secret one-night stand.

But as the Syrian revolution rolls on, the regime closes in on its dissidents. Adel is murdered, Khalil is imprisoned, Bilal joins the Muslim Brotherhood, and Mohammad tries to survive as a gay man in an ever-changing status quo after having been shunned by his family. Youssef and Josephine know their time is running out; soon the secret police will catch up with them. They are forced to make a fateful decision that will forever alter their lives.

Ghada Mourad's beautiful translation succeeds in demonstrating how oppression works on several levels at once while portraying the disintegration of revolutionary optimism when the ruthless dictatorship's heavy hand strikes down its own citizens. The torture scenes and sex scenes are graphic, serving the narrative and propelling it forward.

Set against the backdrop of the Syrian Revolution, *The Last Syrian* is a sensual novel about the yearning to live a life of love and freedom.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May / June 2024)

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