

What I Know About You

Éric Chacour

Pablo Strauss, Translator

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Forbidden love tears apart an Egyptian Levantine family in Éric Chacour's novel *What I Know About You*.

Tarek always followed the path laid out by his family: he became a doctor to please his strict father, and he married the woman his caring younger sister liked best. Then he meets Ali, a sex worker living in the slum where Tarek provides medical care. Though their time together proves all too brief, the affair has tragic, lifelong consequences for everyone involved, even those whom Tarek never met and knows nothing about.

The novel is set in Egypt and Canada over a fifty-year period. Tarek's personal troubles unfold against a backdrop of wars, political assassinations, and religious oppression. Most members of his family—including his class-conscious mother, his bitter ex-wife, and even Tarek himself—must scheme against the others to get what they want, unable to trust in the support and sympathy of their closest relatives. Expectations and prejudices taint relationships from their beginnings, leading to inevitable misery.

Years of dysfunction unleash an emotional whirlwind of hopes raised and dashed, of chance encounters and rare opportunities lost forever. Across decades and continents, Tarek strives to escape all that caused him such pain and loss. His past returns in a most unexpected form, dragging him and his estranged loved ones back together to complete the drama begun long ago. That drama, rendered in astute prose that reveals as much through words as it does through silences, lays bare the sense of longing at the heart of each character—longing that only the most curious and open-minded among them can ever hope to shake.

What I Know About You is a heartrending novel in which unanswered questions and unvoiced feelings take on a life of their own.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2024)

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