

Yasmine

Outline

Chapter 1

In 1983, a time of hardship in Tunisia, Yasmine and her family travel to Paris. Though her mother is strict, Yasmine is prone to fantasy and daydreaming, and she is enraptured by the smells and sounds of the city, altogether different than their seaside home in Sfax. Her aunt Mariam, with whom the family is staying, is passionate about poetry and ignites a similar passion in Yasmine.

Chapter 2

Yasmine and her family return to Tunisia, where Yasmine begins attending primary school. At home, she is starved for attention as the youngest of three children, so she welcomes her days in the classroom, where she works hard to earn praise from her teachers. While her mother wishes for her to study mathematics, Yasmine struggles in the subject. However, she admires her young teacher, Miss Rhouma, and works hard to earn her praise.

Chapter 3

Yasmine has always longed to play the piano, but her mother thinks music lessons are a waste of money. She tries to teach herself to play on the school piano, and she fantasizes about playing before a rapt audience. When she plays before the students and teachers at a school music competition, it becomes clear that she has overestimated her abilities. She looks to the back of the auditorium and she sees that Miss Rhouma is laughing.

Chapter 4

When her father begins to travel to France regularly for work, Yasmine begs to go with him. Young and naive, she welcomes the chance to escape her home life and humiliation at school.

She stays with her father in Paris for a month one summer, and for the first time in her life, she has her own little room. At home, she has always shared a room with her two older sisters, but they have never been close.

Chapter 5

In Paris, Yasmine is often left alone during the day while her father attends to his work, but she doesn't mind. For hours on end, she watches the street scenes visible from the apartment window. Across the street is a small bookstore, and one day Yasmine sneaks out to visit it. The owner allows her to browse the books, and though Yasmine can understand only a little French, he reads her a poem by Charles Baudelaire, which fascinates her. When she goes back to Tunisia, she vows to return to France someday.

Chapter 6

When her elder siblings have finished their own education, Yasmine is sent to boarding school in Tunis. She does not miss her family, and she feels strange for not missing them. At school, she continues to live a sheltered life, but the library is filled with poetry. She dreams about being a poet in Paris, though her mother wants her to become an accountant so she can support herself. Yasmine compromises between her dream world and the press of reality: She resolves to attend university in Paris to escape from her family, and she works hard and is eventually admitted to the École Normale Supérieure.

Chapter 7

Yasmine begins university and becomes friends with Nadia, an Algerian student. They are both confused about their cultural identities, and their sense of apartness bonds them together and helps them survive that tumultuous first year. Yasmine experiences great loneliness and isolation

at this time, as the reality of the city is so different from her imagined ideal. At the end of their first year, Nadia returns to Algeria to be married.

Chapter 8

In her second year, Yasmine takes classes during the day and works as a tutor for students learning Arabic in the evening. She struggles with calculus and considers quitting the course, but her young professor, Jean Dumont, helps her and encourages her to continue. His mentorship turns into a genuine friendship that continues outside the classroom. Yasmine falls in love with her professor and treats him as a muse for her poetry. When he accepts a position in Germany and leaves, she is devastated.

Chapter 9

Yasmine pursues her first job as an accountant but lies during her interview, saying she has completed her degree. The firm offers her a position, and Yasmine briefly experiences the freedom of financial independence, but that is soon lost when her manager finds out about her deception and fires her. A letter arrives from Dumont, but this only cements how depressed and alone Yasmine feels. No longer able to support herself in Paris, she returns to Tunisia.

Chapter 10

Yasmine takes a job from her uncle as a bookkeeper. Living at home again in Sfax, she feels imprisoned. She longs to return to university to finish her degree, but she has no money to do so. While in Tunisia, she begins exploring the works of Arabic poets such as Imrul Qays, but her creative ability is stifled. Eventually, her mother confides that she has been strict only because she wants Yasmine to be strong and independent. She encourages her to return to school, and this time Yasmine decides to study translation.

Chapter 11

Yasmine and Dumont have kept in touch during the five years she has been back in Tunisia, and he writes that a colleague in Paris, Henri Bouchard, requires a translation assistant. Yasmine jumps at the opportunity to return to France. Once there, she is overwhelmed by memories. She visits the bookshop she snuck out to as a child and learns that the owner has since passed away. The sadness she feels inspires her to begin writing poetry again.

Chapter 12

Yasmine stays with Mariam for two weeks before she finds her own apartment. Though the apartment is unheated, Yasmine loves it because living in her own place fills her with freedom. She becomes absorbed by her work for Bouchard, who is studying the destabilizing effects of colonialism. When he finds a verse of poetry she has written idly on the back of some translation notes, he encourages her to pursue her passion more seriously.

Chapter 13

Yasmine receives a letter from her old friend Nadia and learns that she has escaped from her unhappy marriage. Having never finished her studies, she has been forced to return to her family, and her future is uncertain. With the maturity of adulthood, Yasmine views her childhood with gratitude and is thankful to her mother for teaching her to stand on her own and provide for herself. She also reflects on her blooming friendship with Bouchard, who has introduced her to new ideas and ways of thinking without demanding that she surrender her own points of view.

Chapter 14

Because her work with Bouchard occupies her for only part of the time, Yasmine takes on a second job teaching French to new immigrants. She learns that many of the children she teaches are poor, without proper clothing and food. After one of the lessons, she catches a young boy

trying to steal from her purse. Yasmine understands that the boy must be suffering great hardship, so she forgives him. The struggles of her students awaken within her a profound debate about her identity and her place in France.

Chapter 15

When her mother passes away suddenly, Yasmine returns to Sfax and is accompanied by Bouchard. She expresses her mixed emotions through poetry, and Bouchard encourages her to submit a piece to a renowned journal. While drinking spearmint tea with her siblings and her father, Yasmine is transported back to her childhood, and she reflects on her relationship with her family and how her experiences have shaped her. She knows that while France awakened her passion for poetry, her true home will always be Tunisia, and she knows she will return one day.

Chapter 16

Yasmine feels new closeness with her sisters in their shared grief. In speaking with them, she understands that she may be falling in love with Bouchard. When the two return to Paris, Yasmine relishes the uncertainty of her feelings. For the first time in her life, she realizes she is free to make her own decisions, and she will take each day as it comes. At the close of the novel, she receives a letter from the poetry journal, but its contents remain a mystery to the reader.