



Return to Dar al-Basha: A Novel (Middle East Literature In Translation)

Hassan Nasr

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Return to Dar al-Basha by the contemporary Tunisian author Hassan Nasr depicts the childhood of Murtada al-Shamikh and his return forty years later to his home in the medina or old city of Tunis. After being taken from his mother and raised in his father's home where he was physically abused and emotionally marginalized, Murtada spends a life of anxiety wandering the world. His return is prompted by a mysterious visit from one of his father's Sufi friends as he roams the desert in Mauritania. Murtada retraces his steps through the medina to his family's house in anticipation of a possible reunion with his troubled father, vividly reliving sights, smells, and sounds from his childhood and evoking his childhood initiation into Islamic mysticism as he experiences a personal journey of the spirit across space and time.

Nasr succeeds in conjuring up a Tunisian boyhood not unlike his own and brings to life in a poetic, sensual narrative the spaces, light, colors, and life of Tunis some six decades ago. Murtada searches the streets of Tunis and his memories for the decisive mistake he feels he must have made—that has left him a perpetual wanderer until he undergoes a cathartic nightmare sequence that leaves him shaken. Only then is he finally able to come to peace with his past and with himself. In William M. Hutchins' lucid translation, the novel serves as an evocation and tribute to the historic city of Tunis the novel and meditates about the position of the past in a rapidly modernizing society.

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