

September 2020



10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world has its roots in the Cemetery of the Companionless in Istanbul. It is the place where those people who are shunned by society or outcasts are buried as numbers without names. Elif Shafak wanted to reverse the process by giving them a life. The life she gave was to Tequila Leila, a victim of childhood sexual abuse, who was being forced into an arranged marriage fled to Istanbul where she becomes a sex worker. Leila is murdered and then dumped in a bin. The key idea of the novel comes into play here. The idea that when our heart stops our brain, our consciousness, can continue for up to 10 minutes and 38

seconds.

The story begins with Leila's death. And then for two thirds of the book follows her as she remembers the key incidents in her life. The book begins with her birth and takes the reader through the raw and distressing sexual abuse by her uncle and the dismissive response to it by her family. Then as she struggled through school and her father's ever-growing religious orthodoxy placing more and more constraints on the women in the family. Leila escapes and goes to Istanbul hoping for a better life but finding herself with no options and seeking the closest thing to safety, she becomes a sex worker.

Her memories introduce the reader to each of her five friends who come into her life at different times and each a social outcast in their own way. Then each friend tells their own story before moving on to the next minute of Leila's slowly ebbing life. There is some joy for Leila when she falls in love and marries D/Ali but this turns to tragedy when he is killed in a

Leila when she falls in love and marries D/Ali but this turns to tragedy when he is killed in a protest and she has to return to sex work to survive.

The final third of the book follows Leila's 5 friends, Sinan, Nalan, Jameelah, Zaynab and Humeyra as they try to come to terms with her death. It becomes evident that she is glue that binds this friendship together. They decide to dig her up and give her proper burial after her body is placed in the Cemetery of the Companionless. There is both humour and heartbreak in this part as each friend faces their own memories and battles their own demons regarding what they are doing.

The epilogue returns to Leila and the release of her spirit and its finding peace at last.

Ratings: Sandi, Janet, Linda, Di and Pauline 3.5; Margi 2.5 and Jenny 4.5.

Our next meeting will be at Preece House on 12/10/20 at 6:30PM to discuss *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens.

Hope to see you all there and happy reading!

Other Books We Read

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The Rotter's Club by Jonathon Coe, 3.5

Scrublands by Chris Hammer, 2.5

Lifespan by David Sinclair, 3

Cosmos by Carl Sagan, 3

Actress by Anne Enright, 3

Stone Sky Gold Mountain by Mirandi Riwoe, 3

The Bookshop by Penelope Fitzgerald, 4

Phosphorescence: on Awe, Wonder and Things That Sustain You When the World Goes Dark
by Julia Baird, 3.5

Any Ordinary Day by Leigh Sales, 3

A Room Made of Leaves by Kate Grenville, 4

Monkey Grip by Helen Garner, 3

Cosmo Cosmolino by Helen Garner, 3

True Stories: Selected Non Fiction by Helen Garner, 4

Joe Cinque's Consolation by Helen Garner, 4

This House of Grief by Helen Garner, 4.5

Everywhere I Look by Helen Garner, 3.5

Stories: The Collected Short Fiction by Helen Garner, 3

Ungrateful Daughters: The Stuart Princesses Who Stole Their Father's Throne by Maureen
Waller, 4

The Flatshare by Beth O'Leary, 2.5

The Orphan of Good Hope by Roxane Dhand, 3.5

Spiderweb by Penelope Lively, 3.5

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika Sanchez, 3.5

The Inland Sea by Madeleine Watts, 3

The Friend by Sigrid Nunez, 4
A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles, 4
The Leavers by Lisa Ko, 3.5
The Yield by Tara Lynch, 2.5
The Periodic Table by Primo Levi, 3.5
On Brunswick Ground by Catherine de Saint Phalle, 3.5
Poum and Alexandre by Catherine de Saint Phalle, 4
Here is the beehive by Sarah Crossan, 3.5