



The Singularity

BALSAM KARAM

About the author

Balsam Karam is of Kurdish ancestry and has lived in Sweden since she was a child. An author, librarian and university lecturer, she made her literary debut in 2018 with the critically acclaimed *Event Horizon*, which was shortlisted for the Katapult Prize. *The Singularity*, her English-language debut, was nominated for Sweden's August Prize and shortlisted for the 2021 European Union Prize for Literature.

About the book

In an unnamed coastal city, the mother of a displaced family calls out her daughter's name as she wanders the cliffside road where the child once worked. The mother searches in vain. Bearing witness is another grieving woman, there on a business trip. The second woman also suffered terrible losses—of a language, a country, an identity—when her family fled a distant war.

Balsam Karam changes the way we see the world. In this moving novel, she offers a fresh approach to language and narrative as she questions our assumptions and perspectives through her gripping story. *The Singularity*, her English-language debut, was shortlisted for the prestigious August Prize and the European Union Prize for Literature.

Discussion questions

1. The two narrators in the novel seem unrelated to each other. How do their experiences intersect? Discuss the similarities and differences.
2. How does the opening of each chapter in part one, 'The Missing One', help to build a sense of time and place?
3. Why do you think the author decided not to name the places in which the novel is set? What impact does this have on the story?
4. The Missing One's siblings 'want to be held like they were held before the girl was among the missing,' (p68) but they grow distant from their mother as she continues to search for her daughter. How do the children deal with being left behind?
5. 'Inside the singularity, the force of gravity is so strong...that force pushes bodies together and renders the distance between them nil' (p123). What are the forces at play between 'bodies' in this novel?
6. The question 'What mother doesn't take her own life when a child dies?' echoes throughout the novel. What do you think this means? Discuss how this applies to the experience of both main characters, and how trauma is handled as a subject.
7. The final section of the book is called 'The Losses'. To which losses do you feel this title refers?
8. Each section of the book is written in a distinctive style. Discuss how these styles differ and what you think Balsam Karam intended by doing this.