



by Rasha Khayat  
DuMont Verlag  
August 2024 / 176pp  
Fiction

## I'm Not Coming Back

*Ich komme nicht zurück*

### review

Rasha Khayat's *I'm not coming back* is a slim, poetic novel exploring friendship, racism and the words we leave unspoken, which will appeal to readers who enjoyed Zadie Smith's *NW* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*.

Ever since her grandmother died almost a year ago, Hanna has been seeing doppelgängers of Zeyna – her former best friend – everywhere: at the petrol station, in the supermarket, on the bus. It is lockdown, and Hanna, who moved back into her childhood home to care for the grandmother who had brought her up, is consumed by loneliness, and by the memories of the friendship that defined her life.

Hanna and her friend Cem are nine when they meet Zeyna for the first time. Zeyna and her father Nabil have just moved to their estate from a refugee centre. The three children are uncertain of each other at first, but quickly become inseparable, and Nabil and Zeyna soon become like family to Hanna's grandparents.

It is an intense, seemingly unshakeable friendship, but for Hanna, it is woven through with hot prickles of jealousy; Hanna's grandmother and Cem's mother, understanding better than their children what Zeyna has been through, are always giving her treats. When Cem and Zeyna share their experiences of racism, Hanna doesn't know what to say.

Racism is never far away. On Zeyna's twelfth birthday, the adults turn on the news and their celebratory mood vanishes: a German-Turkish family have been killed by a neo-Nazi firebomb. Eleven years later, Hanna and Zeyna are on holiday when the twin towers collapse. While Hanna watches the news in tears, Zeyna is already anticipating the racist attacks that will follow. In the coming weeks, Zeyna loses her job, and Cem's parents' shop is repeatedly vandalised.

A few years later, Hanna, now a teacher, has moved away to live with her boyfriend, and Zeyna has become a photographer, trying to show the world its unseen people and places. The three friends are reunited for the funeral of Hanna's grandfather, but when Hanna and Nabil, distraught with grief, end up sleeping together, Zeyna cuts Hanna out of her life.

In the present day, Hanna finally confesses to Cem what she did, and tries once again to reach out to Zeyna. It is Christmas, and Zeyna finally replies, with at least a hint of potential reconciliation. This engaging, evocative and lyrical narrative tells a contemporary story of loneliness and grief, and the difficulty of connecting with others in the Covid-19 era.

Find out more:

<https://www.dumont-buchverlag.de/buch/rasha-khayat-ich-komme-nicht-zurueck-9783755810643-t-6033>

## about the author



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Rasha Khayat was born in Dortmund in 1978 and grew up in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. When she was eleven, her family moved back to Germany. She later studied Comparative Literature, German Studies and Philosophy in Bonn. She has worked as a freelance author, translator and lecturer since 2005. Her debut novel 'Weil wir längst woanders sind' was published in 2016. She has received numerous awards for her work, including the Robert Bosch Stiftung Grenzgänger scholarship, residencies in Marseille and New York and the German Literature Fund working scholarship for 'Ich komme nicht zurück' (I'm not coming back).

Since 2022, she has also hosted the feminist literary podcast 'Fempire – the podcast about women who write', which has over 10,000 subscribers.

Previous works: Weil wir längst woanders sind, DuMont (2016).

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DuMont Buchverlag (Germany)

Amsterdamer Strasse 192

50735 Cologne

Contact: Judith Habermas

judith.habermas@dumont.de

Tel: +49 (0)221 224-1942

[www.dumont-buchverlag.de](http://www.dumont-buchverlag.de)