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Jealousy, obsession, and family honor have fatal consequences for an immigrant community on the fringes of seemingly idyllic Copenhagen society

It was clearly no ordinary drowning. Inspector Louise Rick is immediately called out to Holbraek Fjord when a young immigrant girl is found in the watery depths, a piece of concrete tied around her waist and two mysterious circular patches on the back of her neck. Her name was Samra, and Louise soon learns that her short life was a sad story. Her father had already been charged once with assaulting her and her mother, Sada, who makes it clear that her husband would indeed be capable of killing Samra if she brought dishonor to the family. But she maintains that Samra hadn't done anything dishonorable. Then why was she supposed to be sent back to Jordan? Samra's best friend Dicte thinks it was an honor killing. A few days later Dicte is discovered, bludgeoned to death, and Samra's younger sister has gone missing. Navigating the complex web of family and community ties in Copenhagen's tightly knit ethnic communities, Louise must find this remorseless predator, or predators, before it is too late.

Only One Life Details

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Author : Sara Blaedel

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From Reader Review Only One Life for online ebook

Kim Kaso says

I have a quibble with the publication of these books...the first one still has not been published in English, the publishers put out a later books as her first one. I like to read books in order as character develops and history of the main characters is established. This is common with Scandinavian mysteries, I have waited ages for enough books to be published to be able to follow this series as properly as I can, and just got an Anne Holt's Hannah Wilhelmsen book which allows me to read them in proper order, that took years. The first one I encountered had her in a wheel chair, but I discovered there was a whole stack of books with her as an able-bodied person prior to the event that put her in the wheel chair, & that felt like a real spoiler, so I put it on the stack & quietly bought the books & slotted them in their proper evolutionary spots until I got to her origin.

That being said, I enjoyed this book very much. It was dealing with the uneasy relationships Danish society has with its recent spate of immigrants from countries torn apart by war, many of them Muslim. The forward-thinking Danes are uncomfortable with what they think of as the restrictive nature of the lives of Muslim women, and the immediate response around a murder is to begin investigating it as an honor killing. Everyone has to check their prejudices and assumptions before the proper view is found to establish the motivation for the murder.

This was a good read, entertaining, thought-provoking, and well-paced. A good entry in the ongoing series. Strongly recommended for mystery fans.

Catherine says

I love this series by Sara Blaedel. The plot deals with “honour killings”, in this instance a Jordanian family living in Denmark. Only one life refers to the belief, that the life of just one girl doesn’t matter, when the honour of the extended family is at stake.

It is a well thought out, fascinating story.

Lakis Fourouklas says

Only One Life by Danish author Sara Blaedel is not so much a whodunit, I wouldn’t even say it’s a whydunit; it is, to put it gently, a “what the heck happened?” kind of book. This is one of those novels that have many layers. The first layer is made of facts, the second of hidden truths, the third is composed primarily by lies, the fourth talks about the social background and so forth.

As in her previous outstanding novel Call Me Princess, Blaedel is more interested in exploring the tortured psyches of her subjects than providing the reader with a fast-paced narrative. She wants to tell the story behind the story, to see where people are coming from and where they dream of going. She doesn’t seem to seek to impress us with her twists and turns in the plot, as much as to make us think; to think about the world that’s changing all around us, to consider seriously the issue of immigration and explore our capabilities to adapt in these new realities.

Her heroes and heroines are not extraordinary people; they are as common as they come. They live ordinary lives, lives full of small joys and great sorrows, lives which even at the best of times look unfulfilled, robbed of any potential for happiness.

Samra is a girl that arrived in a new land, with different habits, but who tries hard to adapt, despite the fact that her family doesn't seem to want her to do so. Dicta, her best friend, leads a mostly carefree life, since she has rich parents who more or less let her be, even though she's no older than fifteen. Louise Rick, the cop, is a highly intelligent yet sad woman, who tries to find solace in her job and in helping other people out. Her friend, Camilla, is a stubborn journalist, who's trying to recover from a recent break-up, do the best she can about her son Markus, and of course excel at her work.

There are quite a few other people -mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, friends and lovers, in this story- and there's drama all around. And that's exactly what makes the book so special. The people are the story, not the crimes. The crimes just serve to kick-start the process of this long journey of discovery that will lead the main characters time and again into dark places, while it will also show them that in the end not everything is lost, there's still hope in the world. Blaedel tackles the big issues of today with an open mind, and in doing so she has to give her heroes a human face. Nobody is perfect. They all have their weaknesses, they all every now and then do things that they regret and they all try desperately to understand each other, even though sometimes there's no way of making that happen.

How can people from a Muslim country find their way and start a new life in a world so much different from their own? How do they forget their traditions and their codes of honor? How do they integrate into an immoral, at least in their eyes, society? And how can the locals accept these outsiders? Do they feel threatened by them or do they really welcome them as who they truly are? Could it be that the only things that keep society from falling apart, of social tensions rising, are observing some codes of silence and every now and then turning a blind eye?

It takes a crime to burst this ideal world bubble, and another to bring it to the brink of destruction.

Only One Life is a good police procedural that tells a great story, but most of all it's a novel with a conscience, and you can't say that for every book that hits the bookshelves these days. A lot of those books try to feed on the fear of people for the unknown, while this one just tries to understand that fear and put it into context. A job well done.

Judith says

The very idea of Honor Killings...that the recalcitrant actions of one person could lead another family member to commit murder.....boggles the mind. Even though our society seems to have lost all concept of Shame and/or Honor...the thought of Murder for Honor makes me blanch. Not to mention the fact that, according to this book, most Honor Killings are perpetrated by members of the Extended Family...those living outside the country where the Killing took place..

All of which is Nice & Good.....except , in the case of this book, Honor Killings are a matter of Police Procedural...and Journalistic Hubris

.....and so it goes

Louise Rick is caught up in another Honor Killing case, after being sourced out to the town of Holbaek...where a Jordanian immigrant girl's battered corpse is discovered...awash in a cold sea. Enter Dicta Moller...dead girl's best friend (and aspiring Model....she's got the Looks)..the Linchpin of this story.....

Be Warned: Teen Angst abides in this story (in a rather Wooden manner)....as does Rape-by-a Family-Member

After much back&forth....with Samra's family (the Jordanian girl)....and the whole Honor Killing thing....and Dicta (Teenage Slut)....I was left with a "let down" feeling...mainly because the whole tone of the Narrative is dry-as-dust (but, I'll chalk that up to the translation)...or full of excess characters (Camilla-the-Journalist was present..to remind the reader of the previous novel....CALL ME PRINCESS..????)....and the fact that Samra's murder had nothing to do with Honor Killing...just Family Hubris.....and teenage ambition

The denouement wasn't unexpected..just Slow on Arrival..

My second read by Sara Blaedel.....it was better than CALL ME PRINCESS....but still too busy, in ways that didn't keep the story moving.....

I like this woman's stories...just wish they had more life..in the translation

*****This was a Net Galley*****

Jill says

Denmark has been in the news fairly often lately for conflicts between ethnic Danes and the immigrant Muslim population. This police procedural puts this cultural tension in sharp relief, providing an engaging way to glean insights into the "clash of civilizations" now occurring in the West and particularly in Europe.

Louise Rick, a 37-year-old Inspector with the Copenhagen homicide investigation unit, receives a temporary reassignment to the elite Mobile Task Force. A young Muslim girl has been murdered near Holbaek, an hour or so from Copenhagen. An "honor killing" is suspected.

[Honor killings occur in some cultures in which a family member has done something perceived to bring shame and dishonor upon the entire extended family. The "objectionable" behavior can include, among other things, any perceived sexual misconduct *including getting raped*; associating with others outside the community and adopting their values; or even disobedience. This can cause the whole family to become outcasts if the behavior is not "avenged." Some women in these tightly-knit cultures prefer that the honor killings take place rather than having to endure the loneliness and humiliation of exclusion. And many of the women, having never been exposed to different systems of thought, cannot transcend the socialization that encourages them to believe the abuse or murder is justified.

As the author indicates in an excerpt from a U.N. report of March 2010, "The United Nations Population Fund estimates that perhaps as many as five thousand women and girls a year are killed by members of their own families. Many women's groups in the Middle East and Southwest Asia suspect the number of victims

is about four times greater.”]

Louise’s best friend Camilla is a reporter, and tries to diffuse the smoldering anti-immigrant mood surrounding the murder story by writing about *non-immigrant* groups using shame to control their members, especially females. She also reports on the number of girls in these groups who take their own lives as a response to the ostracism and humiliation inflicted upon them.

Meanwhile, in the midst of the investigation, there is a budding romance between two of the characters, and here Blaedel is exceptional at capturing the emotions that accompany new relationships, as in this example:

”Let’s stop here,” she said, releasing her firm hold on him, but nonetheless willingly allowing herself to be pushed along as he guided her backward, both hands on her hips, away from the Irish coffee toward the house. As they walked slowly so she wouldn’t stumble, her eyes bore into his to determine how big a catastrophe this was. What did he think of her? Had she pressured him into this? Did he feel like he couldn’t turn her down? How crushing a failure would it be when he said this was all a mistake? That they should have stopped before they even started. . . . “

In fact, the author’s dialogue is very good when any emotional scene is involved. The scene in which Louise brought bad news to the parents of a second girl killed had me in tears.

Discussion: This turned out to be quite an enjoyable book, but it had to grow on me. Two things took me a while to get used to: (1) It has a largish cast of characters having both Danish and Jordanian names (this adjustment difficulty obviously being my problem rather than the author’s); and (2) It has a somewhat stilted narrative style, which I think could well be a function of translation. At the same time, the parts with dialogue have a much better flow. Certainly it is true that each culture and its language may have a wholly different syntax. Moreover, the arrangement of linguistic elements may be one way for dialogue and another for narration. The fact that the properties of the language may seem alien to us is not necessarily a reflection upon the skill of an author or translator.

At any rate, once I got accustomed to these constituents of the story, it became very engaging.

Evaluation: This book provides the usual suspense, humor, and romantic interludes that characterize squads of dedicated police professionals (at least in fiction!). The thought-provoking look at the tensions between two different cultures and the spotlight on gender politics adds a great deal of interest to the story. I definitely want to read more books by this author.

Rating: 3.5/5

Patricia Baker says

first time to read a book by this author. interesting facts about Muslims and Danish people. also thought that there was a lot of eating pastries, cake, herring..and much drinking of beer. liked how determined Louise was to solve the murder. felt sorry for Dicta's and Samra's parents. each parent trying to cope in different ways. so glad for a happy ending. Maybe Mik will take Louise to Paris someday.

Kristin (Always With a Book) says

Review posted on blog.

Bruce Hatton says

This was a slow paced police procedural that frequently dealt with the private lives of the investigators more than the crimes they were trying to solve. The murder of a teenage girl of Jordanian descent is suspected of being an "honour killing". Then, however, her best friend - a white Danish girl - is also murdered with similar strange marks found on her body.

There's no doubt the novel is well-researched and well-intended and it does deal with the thorny issue of the clash between Islamic and European cultures in a sensitive manner. However, as a crime thriller it fell down with a lack of momentum or focus.

Karin Slaughter says

Read it in one day, which apparently means I have a lot of time on my hands. I LOVED it. The setting was fascinating and the characters were really new and interesting to me. I ran out and got all her other books in English, then wrote a letter to her publisher to translate more, because that's easier than learning to read Danish.

I met Sara at a crime festival in Denmark a few years ago. The festival was held in an old prison, but when we pulled into the parking lot, I literally thought we were at a high school. No kidding. Americans will understand this. Anyway, that is not the point of this story. Since Danish people are normally very shy, I was very pleased and surprised when Sara came over and introduced herself. She is always stylishly dressed and full of poise, which you'd think would make me hate her, but that is not the case. There was also a guy at the crime festival dressed in black and singing Johnny Cash songs ("I Walk the Line") in Danish. Just thought I'd add that because it's one of those things that happens and you think, "is this some kind of weird dream" but I filmed him with my iphone so it must be true.

Cathy Cole says

First Line: She could just make out the blue flashes between the densely grown tree trunks, but she couldn't see how many police vehicles were at the scene.

Inspector Louise Rick is called in to help local Danish police with a drowning that's anything but ordinary. Samra, a young immigrant girl, has been found in Holbraek Fjord, a large slab of concrete tied around her waist and mysterious circular marks on the back of her neck.

Samra's life was short and sad, with a father who'd already been charged with assaulting her and her mother. There's no doubt in her mother's mind that her husband would be capable of killing Samra if he believed she had brought dishonor to the family. But Sada insists that her daughter had done nothing dishonorable, even though the girl was supposedly being sent home to Jordan.

Samra's best friend believes her death to be an honor killing. Within days this young girl is also dead, and Samra's younger sister is missing. Louise Rick and her journalist friend, Camilla Lind, have their work cut out for them in solving this case. Is it yet another honor killing in the immigrant community, or is it something else entirely?

This is the third book in the Rick/Lind mystery series and the second to be published in the United States. Author Sara Blædel is often referred to as the Queen of Danish Crime, but-- to be honest-- I could not warm up to this book or its characters. Almost from the first page, I felt as though I'd missed my bus and kept chasing after it as it disappeared down the street.

Blaedel gives the reader a lot of facts about honor killings before the book even begins. It's a horrible problem that I was made aware of here in Phoenix in 2009 when four boys (aged 9, 10, 13, and 14) lured a developmentally disabled 8-year-old girl into a shed on the pretense of getting some gum. They then held her down and took turns raping her. What was the reaction of the father of the raped girl? The man told the case worker and a police officer, "Take her. I don't want her." As horrible as that is to anyone who wasn't raised with that cultural behavior, at least the man told those two to take her away. She'd brought shame to his family. He could've killed her.

So as far as the topic of honor killings go, this is an informative book to read. However, so little background on the two main characters was given-- and enough references made to things that happened in previous books-- that I constantly felt frustrated. The plot also hinges on the reader believing in one certain outcome, and since I guessed early on that something else was going on, the false trail seemed clumsily done.

My enjoyment of this book might have been greater had I read the previous book in the series, but series books should be able to stand on their own without help from the ones published earlier. The reader should want to read the older books in order to enhance their experience, not feel as though they have to read them in order to understand the characters and what's going on. As much as I wanted to like this book, I'm going to have to quote the late, great W.C. Fields: "On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

The Writer says

The female police officer is back in Sara Blædel's third volume titled "Only one life".

This time Louise Rick is willing to move to Holbæk temporarily to investigate a dead girl case. The residents of this small town, which is located far west of Copenhagen, were in shock after a girl was found floating in the nearby river.

What even worse is the fact that the girl had a middle-eastern ancestry and was a Muslim, a combination of identities that often were frowned upon in Denmark. Soon and sure enough, the town was buzzing with the talk of "honour killing" - that is when a daughter of a family was killed by her own family members to protect the family's honour.

With the dead girl's father and brother acting suspiciously, the police investigation was naturally aimed at the closest relatives. The house was being bugged, the cars owned by the family were tracked until the victim's bestfriend was also suddenly found dead with the head cracked open.

Suddenly, everybody realised that whatever triggered the two murders was probably unrelated to culture, religion, whatsoever. There was something even more evil lurking in the motives of the two murders and they had to race with time before another dead girl was found on the street.

I love this book better than the previous one because this one portraits how paranoid the Danes can be toward anything "foreign" especially in a small town like Holbæk - although the book is purely fictitious. Blædel intelligently described what an honour killing actually was and what kind of pressure the immigrant teenagers were facing in their lives here in Denmark. Although she was brave enough to prod on the delicate matter on racism, fanaticism and all the things related to it, she managed to steer clear from it in the end by creating a whole new intelligent solution to the murders she wrote. This book, hopefully, will make Danes see the immigrants / foreigners here in the country with fresh new pair of glasses.

Laura says

Officer Louise Rick travels an hour out of Copenhagen to a small town to help the Unit One Mobile Task Force investigate the horrific murder of a young girl. She was found submerged in the bay by a local fisherman. Suicide is out of the question as she was tethered to a concrete block. Was this an act of random violence? Was she killed by someone she knew? Or was this an honor killing?

The dead teen is Muslim. Her parents live by the rules of their religion, which makes the investigation much more difficult due to their lack of cooperation due to fear and tradition. Unfortunately, information comes to light that may point to a private side of the young victim. Her parents may have found out about her secret which could have brought dishonor to their family.

Enter crime reporter Camilla, close friend of Louise. She jumps into the story and latches onto the honor killing theory. Her editor wants more of this angle, but the deeper Camilla dives into the lives of the Muslim families, the more she wants to help them by finding the truth. But her articles are stirring up a hornet's nest of preconceived notions that will result in a bigger divide between Danish and Muslims. Will this lead to more violence?

Not only is this a solid mystery, but the thread of prejudice that affects the different groups of people is woven throughout the plot. This multilayered story makes the reader pause to think about listening more and learning more about others they may fear or dislike without foundation.

Some books that are translated from a different language are difficult to read. The Drowned Girl is not one of those books. The flow and read was perfect. Even though this is the first novel I've read by Blædel, it is not the first mystery featuring Louise Rick, but I never felt as though I didn't know enough about the characters to fully understand the story. Actually, it was quite the opposite. Not only were the main characters shown doing their jobs, but personal lives, hopes and dreams are woven throughout to bring them to life and enrich the story.

This intriguing mystery is entertaining and thought provoking. The plot kept me guessing until the last chapters. Just when I thought I knew who the killer was, my theory would be debunked in the next chapter. This is a perfect multilayered book. If you like depth of characters and the tough topics in Jodi Picoult books, you will love Blædel's writing style.

Sara Blædel is a prolific Danish author, who now resides in New York. She is the recipient of several

awards including the Golden Laurel, Denmark's most prestigious literary award.

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Megan (ChroniclesOfABookworm) says

Have I mentioned how much I love Sara Blædel???

Marc Bougharios says

This novel is released on December 24, 2018

This was my first novel by Bleadel and to me, the mystery factor didn't wow me very much.

It had very intriguing storyline which is what made me want to read it, but while I was reading, I started losing interest about halfway through the novel. That being said, it was still very good. Detective Louise Rick is such an interesting character and I loved her persistence and how she never gave up on the case. It's very rare that we got a female detective in books and that's one thing that I liked about this novel. The fact that Louise was given a sort of small love life in the novel is very different to see in a mystery since usually the plot is simply focused on the murder. It's nice of Bleadel to do that for Louise!

I loved the plot of the novel but the ending was a not very good one. The killer was revealed simply out of the blue and personally, I think that it was not a very good twist. The reasoning as to why it was done was somewhat shocking since secrets were revealed and all the puzzle pieces came together.

I do think that it could have been a little more mystery based and the killer could've been a little more of a shocker. I would love to see how the relationship with Louise and Mik will work out in future novels.

Thank you to Hachette Book Group Canada and Grand Central Publishing for providing me with an advanced copy of this novel.

Kelly Hager says

Louise Rick is investigating a murder. A teen girl (Samra) was found dead and it looks like it may have been an honor killing...but her father was clearly devastated when Samra's body was identified and her mom swears that her husband didn't harm her daughter. (Well, okay, he COULD do it, but he DIDN'T.) Then Samra's friend, the one who indirectly identified the body by telling police her friend was missing, was found murdered. Louise is unsure exactly who's telling the truth and who's to blame for Samra's murder (and for her friend's murder, if they're even connected).

This is apparently part of a series, but it's the first one I've read. In a lot of ways, it's similar to The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo (only without the financial journalism subplots). There's a mystery that seems nearly

impossible to solve...until, of course, it IS solved.

To me, the most interesting part of the story dealt with honor killings. I love it when books can make me understand something, and this one did. There's also a part where Camilla (Louise's friend, who is also a newspaper reporter) is doing a series of articles on honor killings and her editor basically tells her to change that angle of the story because, essentially, it doesn't matter WHY it happens, it's wrong. And obviously it's wrong. But I think it's important to understand why something happens---not so much to condone it, but because if you understand a problem, it's easier to solve it. And while granted, I still don't 100% understand it, but I'm a lot closer now than I was before picking up this book.

I don't read many mysteries anymore, but this is a great example of a police procedural. I do enjoy reading about how murders are solved.

You can't tell people that their culture is wrong and barbaric. But if you can frame it differently, people are more likely to listen.

This is an incredibly interesting book and I definitely plan to seek out more of Sara Blaedel's mysteries.
