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Note from Roger Durling â?? Fatima

Description

Post by Larry Gleeson

Dear Cinephiles,

FATIMA was the â??small miracle of a filmâ?• that won the Best Picture at this yearâ??s Cesars â?? Franceâ??s equivalent of the Oscars. Itâ??s such a profoundly enriching experience watching this tale about mothers and daughters and immigrants in France.

It plays tonight at 7:30pm at the Riviera Theatre.

See you at the movies!
Roger Durling

Review: In â??Fatima,â?? a Muslim Mother Working in France Hits Her Limit



By Stephen Holden â?? The New York Times

â??If my daughter is a success, my happiness is complete,â?• declares the title character of â??Fatima,â?• a small miracle of a film from the French director Philippe Faucon.

Divorced from her husband, whom she followed to France and with whom she is still friendly, Fatima (Soria Zeroual) is a 44-year-old North African woman raising two teenage girls in Lyon. The oldest, Nesrine (Zita Hanrot), 18, is a first-year medical student, and the younger, Souad (Kenza-Noah AÃ¯che), is a sullen, sexy 15-year-old rebel ashamed of her mother for working as a housecleaner.

Souad sneers that Fatima is â??a useless she-donkeyâ?• and â??a living rag.â?• But her mother, however stung, endures the abuse and chooses her words carefully when firing back. Fatima loves her daughter despite her insolence. Steeped in North African Muslim culture, Fatima has traditional notions of what she calls â??respectableâ?• female behavior that donâ??t apply in France, and she is upset when Souad insists on baring her shoulders.

If the movie, loosely based on two books by Fatima Elayoubi, tells a familiar story of immigrants struggling to make something of themselves in an alien culture (Fatima speaks some French but reads only Arabic), it does so in a tone that is kindhearted but clearheaded, and the performances are low-key and believable. (Mr. Faucon picked Ms. Zeroual, a nonprofessional actress, to play Fatima.) It makes you feel the intense pressures facing Fatima and her family from all sides. When a young man flirts with Nesrine on a train, she politely but with a tinge of regret explains that she has to study.

Some of those pressures come from gossipy female neighbors who are envious, and judgmental. One Moroccan woman fumes that Nesrine didnâ??t greet her at a bus stop, an incident that Nesrine, lost in her thoughts of school, doesnâ??t recall. While on the job 12 or more hours a day, Fatima is treated with barely disguised contempt by female employers who brusquely order her around and who, she rightly senses, suspect her of petty theft.

Nesrine nearly cracks under the strain of her studies, which require her to absorb complex medical terminology. She worries most about not disappointing Fatima, who is sacrificing everything to pay for her schooling. Nesrine simply canâ??t afford to fail.

Eventually Fatima, exhausted, falls down stairs with her cleaning equipment and takes a paid five-month medical leave. But when the time is used up, she complains of continuing shoulder pains, although tests indicate she has recovered. She has simply reached her limit.

To bolster her morale, Fatima has been keeping a bedside journal, written in Arabic. As she reads aloud from it to a sympathetic doctor, her reflections on hardship, sacrifice and lifeâ??s unfairness have the tone of a humble manifesto.

â??Be proud of all the Fatimas who clean working womenâ??s houses,â?• she reads, and her words resound with the determination and quiet nobility of a woman who, however downtrodden, knows her own worth.

Fatimaâ?• is not rated. It is in French and Arabic, with English subtitles. Running time: 1 hour 19 minutes.

(Source: http://www.sbiff.org)

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