



Fatima Tate Takes the Cake

By Khadijah VanBrakle

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

“Skillful examinations of the intersections between culture, gender, and religion, as well as nuanced perceptions of one Black Muslim community, round out VanBrakle’s searing debut.”

—Publishers Weekly

ABOUT THE BOOK

Fatima Tate wants to be a baker AND enjoy some innocent flirting with her hot friend Raheem—but her strict Muslim parents would never approve of either . . .

Seventeen-year-old Fatima Tate, aspiring baker, leads a pretty normal life in Albuquerque: long drives with BFF Zaynab, weekly services at the mosque, soup kitchen volunteering, stressing about college. But everything changes when she meets a charming university student named Raheem. Knowing the ‘rents would FREAK, Fatima keeps their burgeoning relationship a secret . . . and then, one day, her parents and his parents decide to arrange their marriage. Amazing! True serendipity! Except it’s not amazing. As soon as the ring is on Fatima’s finger, Raheem’s charm transforms into control and manipulation. Fatima knows she has to call the whole thing off, but Raheem doesn’t like to lose. He threatens to reveal their premarital sexual history and destroy her and her family’s reputation in their tight-knit Muslim community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the Tate family. Contrast Fatima’s relationship with her mom and dad. Explain how her relationship with her parents, Adam and Sharifa, is shaped by Muslim culture. Which parent is more understanding of Fatima’s dream to become a pastry chef? Explain the following simile: “Sharifa Tate’s will is as strong as platinum . . . while mine is more like tin” (p. 23).
- Fatima is graduating high school. In what ways is she similar to most seventeen-year-olds? How is she different? Discuss why her parents sent her to the computer-based high school instead of the nearby traditional school.

- Discuss the beliefs and laws of the Islamic faith. How does Fatima feel in conflict with the Islamic view of women's roles? What is the religion's view of dating? Fatima's faith is challenged when she starts seeing Raheem Harris. How does the couple break Islamic law? What is Fatima's opinion of the dowry tradition?
- Describe the friendship between Fatima and Zaynab (Zee). How does Zee have more confidence than Fatima? Discuss what Fatima means, "She's [Zaynab] always in the light; I'm always in the shadows" (p. 33). Discuss Zee's efforts to put Fatima more in the light. How does Zee convince Fatima to follow her dreams and enter the baking competition?
- What is Zee's opinion of Raheem? How is he judgmental of Zee's lesbian relationship with Amber? Zee sees Raheem with a girl and a baby. At what point does Zee realize that she must tell Fatima what she witnesses? What is Fatima's reaction?
- How does Zee worry that Fatima is bowing to parental pressure by moving forward with the marriage plan? How does Sarah, Zee's mom, realize Fatima's hesitancy about her impending marriage to Raheem?
- What is the first hint that Fatima has doubts about marrying Raheem? Why are her parents convinced that the match is good? Debate whether they are blinded by the lavish lifestyle that Raheem can provide Fatima.
- Fatima describes Raheem's face as a "mask" (p. 211). Masks can reveal or hide a person's true self. What does Raheem face reveal and hide?
- Describe Jameela, Raheem's mother. Cite passages from the book that illustrate her view of Fatima and her parents. Jameela Harris wants to host the engagement party. What is Fatima's reaction when she learns that Jameela has done the planning without consulting her? Debate whether this foreshadows the life Fatima would have with Raheem. Why does Jameela want to move the wedding to an earlier date?
- How does Raheem threaten Fatima when she confronts him about Umar, his baby son? Debate whether Fatima is surprised when she learns that Jameela Harris knows about the child. Explain what Fatima means when she says, "I'd better work it out with Mr. Harris because if we break up, I'm used goods" (p. 195). What is the role of Chloe, Umar's mother, in Fatima's decision to call the wedding off? How does Raheem's effort to blackmail Fatima backfire on him?
- At the end of the novel, Adam and Sharifa Tate show up at the baking competition. Adam Tate tells his daughter, "I can't think of one thing you could do that I wouldn't forgive" (p. 255). How does Fatima forgive her parents for not supporting her dreams earlier?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Khadijah VanBrakle is a proud New Mexican, mother of five, and Black Muslim woman. She is active in running her local SCBWI chapter and as an administrator at the Black Creators HQ, and she was also selected for the Highlights Foundation Muslim Storytellers Fellowship in 2021. She lives in Albuquerque with her family. Visit Khadijah at KhadijahVanBrakle.com.