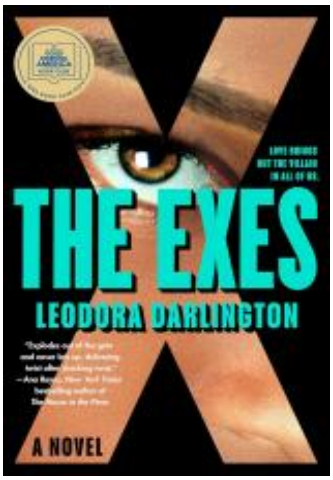
The Exes

by Leodora Darlington



About the Book

Who hasn?t wanted to murder an ex --- figuratively, at least? In this explosive debut thriller, a woman?s seemingly perfect romantic life is on the verge of collapse as she uncovers a hidden history surfacing dark secrets that have deadly consequences.

Natalie has only ever wanted to find ?the one.? The perfect man, the happy family she never had. But each time she thinks she is *finally* getting somewhere, she?s bitterly disappointed. Another red line through a list of exes. And that was before the night of the Big Fallout that left her even more alone.

Then along comes James --- wonderful, handsome James --- and Natalie thinks her luck has finally turned. Maybe he?s the one for her. Maybe he?s the one she?s been waiting for all along. Maybe he won?t wind up dead.

But the harder Natalie tries to be a ?normal? wife, the more world-upending truths are brought to her door, leaving her unsure of who she really is, and much less what she?ll do --- leaving her to question if there is a monster within her or if there is a villain toying with her from the outside.

What?s the secret story behind Natalie?s dead exes? Will she and James survive their marriage? And do either of them deserve to?

Discussion Guide

Note: These discussion questions contain some spoilers! We suggest you finish the book before you read through them.

1. In the novel, Natalie sometimes can?t remember things that happened in her past, which makes her an unreliable

narrator both for herself and for us as the reader. What do you think this novel has to say about trauma and memory intersecting? How much does Natalie?s lack of certain memories hurt or protect her?

2. Why do you think Natalie enters relationships with men who treat her badly --- a pattern that?s clear to her in hindsight but not at the time? Is she simply looking to finally be loved or does it go beyond that? How does her race and background in comparison to the men she dates affect these dynamics?

3. Natalie wonders time and again throughout the story if there?s a monster inside her, something that compels her to lash out and hurt other people. Which of the characters would you describe as monstrous? Who do you think is the biggest monster of them all, and why?

4. In what ways does the novel blur the line between love and control? How are the two mistaken for each other or intertwined? How does this manifest for different characters at different moments during the story?

5. While Natalie?s relationship with her family of origin is strained, she is focused on building a new family with James. What role does the concept of motherhood play in the book? How does Natalie?s past with her mother influence the kind of mother she wants to be?

6. ?I sometimes wonder, if we?d met at a different time, in a different place, whether things might have ended differently, too.? In this opening musing from Natalie about her husband, James, she considers how their love story might have unfolded differently if they met under different circumstances. How critical do you think ?the right timing? is in cementing lifelong relationships --- both with romantic partners and with friends?

7. We find out early on that Natalie has written letters to her past romantic partners. Have you ever written a note or message to an ex that you never sent? Do you think a one-sided exchange like that can provide closure?

8. The relationships between siblings in THE EXES are quite complex. How did your impression of James and Will, and Natalie and Claire, change over the course of the novel?

9. Trust and honesty are key themes that Natalie explores in her therapy sessions with Dimple. In one exchange, she poses this question: ?I mean, haven?t you ever lied to a partner?? Are there ever things it would be acceptable to withhold from a partner in order to shield them from certain truths? How does Natalie?s ultimate reckoning with the truth impact her perspective on future relationships, both romantic and familial?

10. How does justice play a role in guiding behavior for each of the main characters --- James, Will, Natalie and Claire?

Author Bio

Leodora Darlington is a writer from London with Ghanaian heritage. She received a distinction for her masters in creative writing from Brunel University of London, where she studied under authors like Benjamin Zephaniah and Will Self. A *Bookseller* Rising Star in 2021, Leodora is also an editor and has published a range of bestselling fiction. THE EXES is her debut novel.

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