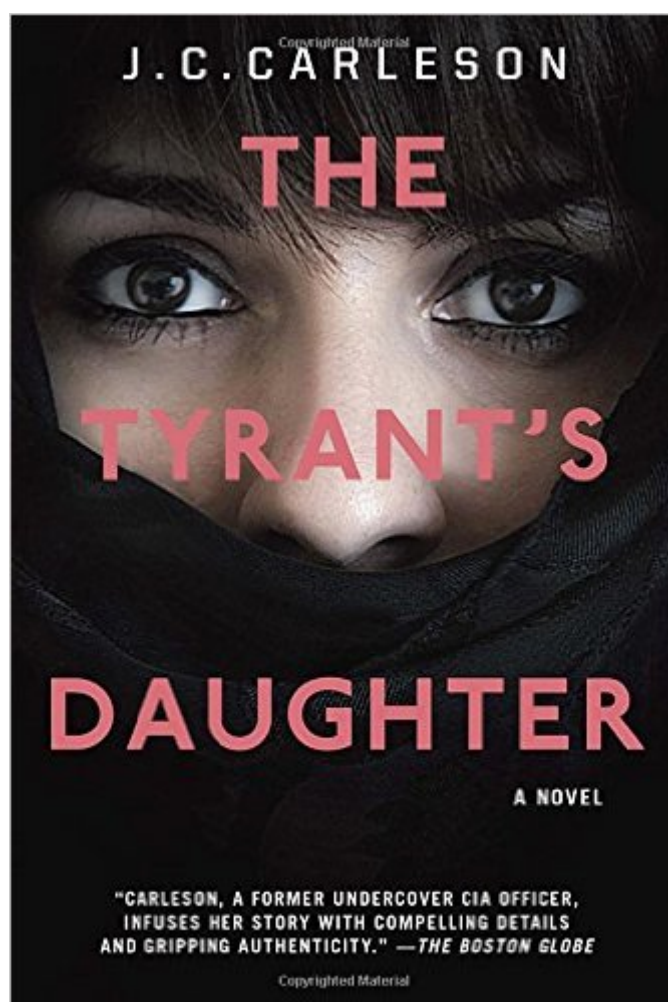


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The Tyrant's Daughter



Synopsis

â€œFilled with political intrigue and emotional tension, Carlesonâ€™s riveting novel features a teenage refugee caught in a web of deceit and conspiracy.â€• â€”PW, starred review

When her father is killed in a coup, Laila and her mother and brother leave their war-torn homeland for a fresh start in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. At her new high school, Laila makes mistakes, makes friends, and even meets a boy who catches her eye. But this new life brings unsettling facts to light. The American newspapers call her father a brutal dictator and suggest that her familyâ€™s privilege came at the expense of innocent lives. Meanwhile, her mother would like nothing more than to avenge his death, and sheâ€™ll go to great lengths to regain their position of power. As an international crisis takes shape around her, Laila is pulled in one direction, then another, but thereâ€™s no time to sort out her feelings. She has to pick a side now, and her decision will affect not just her own life, but countless others. . . .Praise for *The Tyrantâ€™s Daughter*: â€œCarleson, a former undercover CIA officer, infuses her story with compelling details and gripping authenticity.â€•

â€”The Boston Globe

â€œEvery American should read this book. Itâ€™s an eye-opener.â€•

â€”Suzanne Fisher Staples, Newbery Honor-winning author of *Shabanu*

From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

I shall make a valiant attempt at keeping this spoiler freeI can easily see this becoming a required reading in US high school English classes - or even in a modern history class for that matter. That said, it's hard to pin down the target audience. They say 12 and up, but I haven't decided if I agree with it or not. I thought it was fantastic, but I'm an adult and a teacher to boot. Summary: Laila's father is assassinated, so she flees to the US in exile with her mother and younger brother, Bastien. She's used to living like a princess and now she's struggling to adapt to normal suburban life and it's biggest trial, namely high school. The Things that Could be Better/ Things I think Might Annoy Readers: Occasionally, the teen drama got old, but the narrators unique perspective often rescued these sections for me. Having less teen-drama sections in need of rescuing would have been nice. The big end twist was so subtle I think I missed it. Literally. I'm willing to blame this on the fact that I was slightly distracted while reading, but nevertheless, it shouldn't be that easy to miss the huge betrayal. A few subplotlines are left to rot in that nebulous state of unresolvedness. Generally speaking, that ticks me off, but once again, I find myself defending this book because the themes woven throughout are in part about how life's changes don't always allow for neatness and closure. Still, I can see that being a point of irritation. There are at least 2 passages I think guys would find awkward. End Commentary Included: I read it and felt it was okay, but I don't see anybody in the target audience (pre-teen to teen) caring one whit about Dr. Benard's commentary.

Fifteen-year-old Laila, the daughter of dictator of a (purposely) unnamed Middle Eastern country, is newly arrived in the US with her mother and younger brother, Bastien, the heir to his father, the "King," after their father is killed in a coup. Her brother mostly adjusts well to his new country, and being six, does not really grasp what has happened, still believing the story that their parents have always told them. Her mother refuses to acknowledge the reality of their much less lavish circumstances and continues to engage in dealings with a CIA figure, as well as relatives who still hold power or are prepared to fight dearly for it. Laila finds a friend in Emmy, her American guide in school, and develops an interest in Ian, whose parents are missionaries and understands what it's like to feel un-rooted. However, the inevitable culture clashes and contrast between America and her war-torn homeland cause Laila to struggle. While she is able to negotiate much of American social life at least semi-successfully, she is devastated when she learns the truth about her family's role in causing destruction back home, and feels increasingly powerless, as her mother continues her machinations and Laila begins to snoop into her affairs. Ultimately, Laila must figure out how to

be more than a pawn in her mother's games, as not just her future, but that of her country is at stake. This is a very bleak book and does not have any kind of happy ending for anyone involved. Upon finishing it, my first thought was that Laila was still, if perhaps unconsciously, being manipulated, which may have been the author's intention.

A CIA operative whisks a dictator's family out of the country when the tyrant's brother grabs power. In a flash the blood-stained widow and her two children shift from a life of secure luxury to humdrum apartment life in suburban Washington D.C. Laila, the murdered leader's 15-year old daughter, tells the story through the eyes of a young, very intelligent, and aristocratic middle-eastern woman experiencing American-style freedom and the high-school social scene for the first time. An astute observer and articulate narrator, one might imagine her modeled on other near-eastern female political leaders educated in the west (Golda Meir - U. Wisconsin, Indira Ghandi - Oxford, and particularly Benizar Bhutto - Harvard/Oxford). I found this book fascinating on many levels. The basic story line focuses on Laila's observations, relationships and cultural challenges as she acclimates to her new surroundings. Author J.C. Carleson, a Cornell U. psychology graduate as well as a former intelligence operative, crafts engaging dialog filled with subtle insights and perspectives. As other reviewers mention, there is a good deal of teen drama, but it is not overdone. On the contrary, Laila's interactions with her peers are believable, help build her character, and add to the suspense about how this bright young woman will evolve. This, however, is only the top layer of a more complex story simmering beneath the surface. Scene shifts from chapter to chapter at times feel contrived, as in too abrupt or unexpected. One gets the sense of a movie or a play that is a bit too carefully scripted. There are only a few characters whom we get to know well. Others, important ones, are vaguely described and left to imagination to fill in the details. The same is true for events.

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