



A Perfect Armenian

Keri B. Topouzian

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The hatred, wars, and loss of life faced by Armenians are not commonly discussed, but in his novel, *A Perfect Armenian*, Keri Topouzian brings this history to the forefront, showing the way difficulties can bring people together to help them survive.

In 1914, Tavid Kaloustian disguises himself to get around Constantinople without being killed. His grandfather has been dead for a year, and Tavid feels the loss. He goes to a friend of his grandfather, but his enemies know he's coming, and Tavid must kill or be killed. This begins a string of events set in motion by his grandfather in an elaborate plan to help bring his family together. But World War I begins, and Tavid must work harder and become shrewder to help spare his family—as well as the Armenian people—more death.

Throughout this epic novel, Topouzian takes a fast-paced approach to sharing Tavid's story. With very few low points in the plot, there's a risk the pace will overwhelm the heart, but the writer balances the fast pace with familial love and hope for a culture facing cataclysmic loss. He manages this by avoiding sentiment while bringing the characters to life, making their triumphs and losses seem like reality. As an example, one character tells Tavid, "It is difficult being hated. The Turks hate everyone. Luckily for me I do not have many relatives living here, but your people, Tavid...there are so many. Millions." With such simple dialogue, Topouzian sets the stage for loss.

One factor that does detract from the story, as well as the pace, is the frequent footnotes designed to define terms. The glossary at the end of the book should make these footnotes unnecessary. As well, some of the terms are footnoted repeatedly, within only a few pages of one another. In a few instances, the footnote describes what a character's name means. In both of these examples, there is a pull away from the story without relevance to the story itself.

Although the novel is told mainly in Tavid's point of view, a few other characters have an opportunity to share the story from their perspective. At times, the point of view change comes in the middle of a scene, a startling occurrence that creates a stumbling block and momentary confusion.

Topouzian states in the introduction that this is his grandfather's story—perhaps a true story—that the author and his mother painstakingly translated. While this could prove a story worthy of a personal family history, the story of Tavid is a much broader narrative, one that will help breed understanding of Armenian history.

KANDY ALAMEDA (April 21, 2014)

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