



A Place Far Away

Vahan Zanoian

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Spirited and beautiful, sixteen-year-old Lara Galian catches the eye of the wrong man in *A Place Far Away*, Vahan Zanoian's gritty, thought-provoking novel. Zanoian takes the reader from poverty-stricken villages in Armenia to Moscow and Dubai in a straightforward depiction of the horrors of human trafficking.

When powerful local oligarch Sergey Ayvazian spots Lara in her small Armenian village, he is struck by her extraordinary beauty and knows she would be a lucrative addition to the group of women he controls. He vows to have her, and when persuasion fails, he takes Lara's father out of the picture to get to her, enticing her and her family with promises of wealth and fame in the modeling industry. Once away from those she loves, it is only a matter of hours before Lara realizes the terrible truth of her situation. Forced into a life of prostitution and unable to trust anyone, Lara is helpless to escape even as she is sold into a wealthy man's harem.

Edward Laurian, a former investigative reporter, is drawn into the local drama caused by Ayvazian and soon befriends Lara's family. As he begins to put the pieces together and realizes Lara's probable fate, the situation sparks memories of a tragedy in his own past: "That was the incredible vicious circle of dealing with the oligarchs: they got away with murder because no one dared to question them, and no one questioned them because they always got away with murder." Propelled into action by his anger at such injustice, Laurian takes advantage of his affluence and influence and gathers a team of friends to try to rescue Lara and put an end to Ayvazian's reign of terror.

Ayvazian and the others involved in the human trafficking ring are drawn with chilling realism. The overall view of women as no more than money-making chattel is clearly depicted, easily evoking emotion in readers and engagement with Lara and other victims of such well-organized crimes. The paralyzing fear of the victimized women and the powerlessness of the poverty-stricken villagers come through clearly, and readers will be anxious to see justice prevail as they follow the fast-paced, suspenseful story line.

The well-edited novel includes a list of central characters along with a map and a glossary of foreign words—all helpful additions to the text. Zanoian's descriptions of the different lands and cultures is thorough, resulting in a credible and realistic setting. An occasional indulgence in wordiness is infrequent enough to avoid detracting from the intriguing plot.

Zanoian does not sugarcoat the horrific reality of human trafficking; from the outset, readers will be drawn right into Lara's nightmare. The author paints a vivid picture of the abuses Lara is subjected to and the network of people who seek to destroy her innocence. Characterization is detailed, and the portrayal of some of the women Lara comes to know is particularly disturbing because it shows the cost of their victimization. Zanoian is also not afraid to expose the reader to another unsettling truth: Some of the women are traumatized into believing that if they victimize other women, they will gain power of their own.

A Place Far Away is a compelling novel by a skilled writer who knows how to build narrative tension.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (March 22, 2013)

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