

The Far Side of the Desert

Joanne Leedom-Ackerman

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Joanne Leedom-Ackerman's ambitious and thrilling novel *The Far Side of the Desert* concerns deep-seated family strife, the tentacular roots of global terrorism, and the psychology of reconciliation.

Sisters Monte and Samantha Waters, whose respective home lives are askew, are on a rare vacation with each other in northwest Spain when their serenity is usurped by a siege masterminded by an international arms and drug operation. One of the sisters is kidnapped, after which the peripherals of their complicated lives are given sharper focus. But they also have fortunate resources to draw from: Monte is a US foreign service officer whose presence in Santiago de Compostela comes on the heels of a stint at the US Embassy in Cairo, while Samantha is often on the move thanks to her stature as an international TV correspondent. Indeed, the Waters family is favored by enormous political reach and endless resources.

The story achieves swift forward movement thanks to its action scenes and its attention to the psychological tolls twisting between the relationships of an enigmatic abductor, Samantha and Monte, and their privileged American family's dynamics. Attention to the humanity of all characters involved allows the seesawing perspective—which moves from the depths of secret Saharan camps into the labyrinthine alcoves of Gibraltar and toward aristocratic Washington, D.C.—to expand beyond the core terrorism plot into a story focused on the motivations and worldview transitions of children of privilege—and, conversely, of those swept up in the lure and tumult of geopolitical turmoil.

Global terror plots and interfamily dynamics are centered in *The Far Side of the Desert*, a propulsive thriller with myriad levels of intrigue and suspense.

RYAN PRADO (March / April 2024)

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