

The Trapped Daughter: A Dark and Twisted Psychological Thriller

Jay Kerk

Jay Kerk Books

(276pp)

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A troubled girl combats her father's constraints in the enigmatic psychological thriller The Trapped Daughter.

Jay Kerk's intriguing psychological thriller, *The Trapped Daughter*, explores the murky corridors and enigmatic basements of a disturbed mind as it spirals out of control.

Belle has been a prisoner in her father's house for eight days; Gabe is the love of Belle's life, as well as the reason why she is trapped. Her only means of survival is to escape—or so Belle says. But before Belle escapes, she must learn the truth about Gabe and ascertain why her father is holding her captive.

The book establishes its intrigue early, introducing Belle's disturbing situation alongside some vital information that casts doubt on her mental health and reliability as a narrator. Early conversations between Belle's father, Richard, and his partner, Marie, punctuate this. Akin to wardens in a psychiatric facility, Richard and Marie each administer Belle medication and monitor her movements and behavior, suggesting the probability that Belle is suffering from a psychotic break. Belle's fear of, and suspicion about, her father is a powerful hook; that her illness is revealed so soon dims this and results in some narrative predictability. However, Gabe, whose mysterious presence permeates the story, is an ongoing source of intrigue and a solid counterbalance to this early reveal.

Most of the book is set in Belle's sprawling childhood home, which she describes as "a hollow place" with all the "accouterments of the rich" and "more locked doors than open ones." The advantage of this single location is its metaphorical aspect: the house doubles as a representation of Belle's mind and augments her sense of entrapment. However, also because of the heavy focus on this location, the plot, pace, and characters' actions are often constrained by monotonous chores: Marie makes breakfast every morning and administers Belle's medication; Richard checks on Belle and goes to work; and Belle recalls past events while scheming ways to escape and contact Gabe. The first half of the book flags as a result.

The bulk of the narrative is told through exposition and dialogue, with refreshing breaks found in flashbacks to Belle's life with Gabe: their time together in a busy university cafeteria, outdoors under falling autumn leaves, and in lively music venues. Her vivid dreams are an additional source of interest, as is the descriptive language that's devoted to conjuring past events. Throughout, Belle's memory is a dark pathway that is "uneven and sharp beneath [her] bare feet."

As Belle hurdles closer to discovering the truth about Gabe and herself, the book's action picks up; there is a continued surge of suspense until the burning question about Gabe is resolved at the end, making *The Trapped Daughter* an enigmatic psychological thriller.

BIANCA BOWERS (September 13, 2020)

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