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????? ??? ?????, *Fatima Sharafeddine*

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The story is set during the civil war in Lebanon and Faten, a 15 year old, is being transported from her village in South Lebanon to Beirut to work as a maid. She is forced to leave her school and start a new life in Beirut. She works in a home where a middle-aged couple lives with their two daughters. Her father shows up at the end of each month to collect her salary and she despises him. She falls in love with the neighbour, Marwan, who helps her get information on how to do home schooling in such a way that she accomplishes the remaining two years of her schoolwork to complete her Baccalaureate which will grant her access to university to become a nurse. Faten succeeds and ends up sharing a small apartment with her close friend, going to university, and working evening shifts at the hospital reception. Faten presents the struggle of post war and the overcoming of difficult circumstances by being persistent and pursuing one's dream and achieving future goals.

???? Details

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This novel provides a look inside a young woman name Faten's life as she struggles with balancing her family expectations and completing her own goals. During her early teenager years, she is force to work as a maid in Beirut amidst chaos and war. This centra question is: How can Faten complete her goals while obtaining her independence and securing her lover's attention? This is a great read for young adult readers because it discusses the complexities that one endures when taking ownership of their life. In addition, this will be great to utilize in a middle school environment as an opportunity to expand students' knowledge of other cultures. Also, this novel can be used in a classroom to discuss themes of risk versus safety and internal happiness versus external happiness.

Salam Ch says

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highly recommended for young adults :-)

Barbara says

Fifteen-year-old Faten quits school, leaves home, and becomes a maid for a wealthy family in Beirut. She does all this at her father's behest since he has decided that she must be the family breadwinner. In fact, all of her earnings go to home, leaving her with little financial resources to find a way out of this dead end. Often, the family members treat her with disdain and can't even be bothered to call her by her name when they want her to do something. As the years pass, though, Faten continues to dream of having more, and with the help of some old and new friends, she fashions a plan to attend the university and become a nurse. The author does an excellent job of describing war-torn Lebanon in the late 1980s as well as creating a likeable character in Faten. What makes this story engaging is how determined, resilient, and resourceful she is, studying on her own, and clinging to hope for a bright future even while her love interest, Marwan, a musician and engineering student who lives across the way, seems unable to stand up for himself and his own dreams since those clash with what his parents want for him. Ultimately, this book celebrates the power education has to provide better, brighter futures for women such as Faten who deserves so much more than serving others for menial wages that she never even gets to keep.

Carol says

The Servant tells the story of Faten, a 15-year old girl living in a village in Lebanon with her parents and several siblings, whose father arranges for her to move to Beirut and work as a maid/servant, 24/7, for a family with two teen daughters. Faten's paychecks are paid to her father. As a result of her father's dictate, Faten's education abruptly ends, and she is thrust into a world where she has no family and one friend. The primary focus of The Servant is on how Faten develops and executes on her plan to pursue her education, with the ultimate goal of becoming a nurse.

The first half of the novel focuses on Faten's constricting circumstances – her lack of free time off to explore Beirut or pursue other interests, her lack of money since her earnings are going to her father -- and the barriers these circumstances present to Faten's educational attainment. She pursues a relationship with a young engineering student, Marwan, living in a neighboring building – not initially or primarily for romantic reasons, but as a means to gain his knowledge and access to information, in order to determine how she can complete her high school education and be accepted into a college-level nursing program. Ultimately, as the

GR description above indicates, a romance of sorts develops between Faten and Marwan. The second half of the novel is all about how Faten obtains her short-term educational goals with the assistance of Marwan and another female friend in Beirut, including establishing independence from her father so that she can remain and study in Beirut. Not only does *The Servant* offer a, “you can be anything you want to be if you are diligent and put your mind to it” message, it gift-wraps for the reader a happy ending in every respect.

So . . . why only 3 stars for the Servant? The Servant has as its clear purpose empowering young Lebanese women to pursue their education and independence first, and romance and marriage only once education and independence have been secured. I applaud these goals and they square with my politics and values 100%. Having said that, I expect an author as esteemed as Fatima Sharafeddine to present, first and foremost, authentic characters who act consistently with their own context, background and values, and to put those characters in the Beirut of 1987, e.g., give the reader a strong sense of place. Here, in her first YA book after a long string of successes with books targeting children under 12, she did not meet my expectations on either count.

Taking the second issue first – Beirut in 1987 -- If not for the dust jacket and the GR blurb, I wouldn't have learned that *The Servant* takes place in 1987 until at least halfway through it, and then only because of a reference to music popular at that time. There's one scene in the first third of the book where a bomb lands in Beirut, but the family with whom Faten is staying are relatively unconcerned, and there is no mention for the remainder of the novel of any stress, worry or change in behavior, or any dialogue at all indicating concern about the war, the outcome, personal safety or the safety of friends and family. Prior to *The Servant*, I have not read a single novel set during a time of war that was so absent any indication of war or its effects on society. Candidly, it seemed as though Sharafeddine picked a year in which to set her story and then promptly forgot about the civil war and unrest that continues to impact Lebanon today. Fatima Sharafeddine was born in Beirut, but lived elsewhere for her childhood, returning to Lebanon 3 years before the Lebanese civil war commenced, and moving time and time again over the next 15 years within Lebanon for survival. Hence, given Sharafeddine's personal experience living in Lebanon during the 1987 war, her choice to avoid the topic almost entirely is odd. As a reader, I was incredibly disappointed. I anticipated gaining from this novel a sense of what it was like to be a 15 – 19 year old woman living for the first time in a major city, away from my parents and siblings (are they okay?), during a civil war, wondering whether it mattered if I pursued an education, whether the universities would survive the war, whether I would live to the age of 25. Similarly, Sharafeddine creates Marwan as a Christian character, but doesn't disclose this fact to the reader until 75% of the way through the book when Marwan is explaining to Faten that his mother has selected a Christian girl to be Marwan's wife. Was Faten oblivious to the significant impediment her being Muslim and Marwan being Christian presented for long-term romance and marriage – in 1987? I didn't buy it.

In terms of lack of authenticity, two key points are representative. The first is a sudden shift in the approach and decision of one of the daughters (of the family with whom Faten lived), that results in her marriage and departure from the household. We're given an explanation, but there's insufficient foundation for it. Then later we see why. This was the most glaring example in *The Servant* of Sharafeddine's use of a character to hammer home her point that women shouldn't marry (or reproduce) until they achieve their education. This character's actions have as their sole purpose showing teen female readers “what not to do”, or “Be like Faten, not like The Daughter.” The second plot point that wasn't believable for me was Faten's father's prompt (and nigh unto effortless on Faten's part) forgiveness of not only her lying to him but also the loss of

income for the family that results from her prioritizing her goals over helping her family. A Lebanese dad in 1990 or so interpreting his daughter's aggregate actions not as a betrayal, but excusable – without the passage of any time, any heart-rending pleas from her for forgiveness? Perhaps, but Sharafeddine's choice to make Faten's father's disapproval a non-issue ducked what could be a major impediment to independence and education for many young women – the struggle to achieve their independence and educational goals without losing the love and respect of, or letting down, their families. How will Faten's mother and siblings fare without her income contributing to the family pot? She doesn't ask and no one expresses worry. In fact, Sharafeddine makes every potential obstacle -- war, lack of resources, homesickness, family disapproval – every one but how to sneak out and take 3 days of tests -- melt magically away for Faten. She could have made *The Servant* a 5-star book, as well as supported her moral tale, by giving Faten more depth and showing Faten addressing and overcoming at least one of those obstacles, given her target YA audience.

The Servant is written in a simple, straightforward style. YA readers though deserve more from an author of Sharafeddine's talents than a patently moral instruction to women to make sure they don't let boys get in the way of obtaining their education, and thereby securing their independence. I hope we see the day when she writes the YA or adult tale she has the talent to write.

Int'l librarian says

There's a good foundation for a story here. But it would be a lot better if it was written like a good story. Instead, it too often reads like a director's prompts for a TV documentary. Faten is the main character, an admirable strong-willed Lebanese teenager. Her father has hired her out as a maid in Beirut, but she has plans for a better life. There's a fairytale romance tangent, but the rest of Faten's efforts and obstacles are entirely believable, and interesting.

Or at least it's interesting as long as I focus on the events, and not the words. Sharafeddine originally wrote this book in Arabic, and provided her own translation. She has taught culture classes at Rice University in the US, but she still could have benefited from a more thorough Arabic-to-English overhaul. The 3rd person narration is very detached, as in the following scene, when one of the family members is about to get married. "Here is May, surrounded by the seamstress, the hairdresser and the makeup person. Faten hopes with all her heart that May is not making a big mistake that she will soon regret."

The telling significantly outweighs the showing through most of the book. By the time I reached the final page, I wasn't really sure how much I cared about what just happened.

Elise says

This book would have been a 4- 4.5 star book had the ending gone down differently. By that I mean that it seemed rushed. "The Servant" is a shorter book, but the plot was progressing with just the right amount of

detail and timing until about 100 pages in. Suddenly, once the protagonist starts to resolve her circumstances (which I was loving!) the author seems to breeze us through towards the end. Is there a sequel planned? If so, then the ending makes sense.

Other than that, this was a pretty great YA novel. I would have loved to learn a little more about the conflict happening in Beirut during the setting of this novel, but the author doesn't really go into it. The protagonist, Faten, is inspiring. She was forced into a confusing situation by her family right in the middle of her high school years to work as a maid. Faten realizes that she's far too ambitious to be able to live as a maid for the rest of her life. She takes life into her own hands and makes strides towards fulfilling her dream of becoming a nurse.

So, because of the way the book ended, I am only going to give it 3 stars.

Rihab Sebaaly says

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Hoda Marmar says

I read it in one day. Such a beautiful book for young teens and young adult. Can hardly wait to discuss it with the bookclub members ♥

AgnesO says

The Servant is an international young adult novel written and translated by Fatima Sharafeddine. The book was recommended by Professor Quiroa, RLL520 course instructor. This realistic-fiction novel is set in war-torn Lebanon during the late 1980s. When Faten's father arranges for her to work as a live-in maid for a wealthy family in Beirut, the fifteen-year-old Faten is forced to leave her village life. Suddenly, deprived of her family, friends, and education and treated callously, Faten feels trapped and hopeless. At least, she has Rosalynn, an African immigrant working in Beirut, to confide in. And there's the mysterious young man whom Faten gazes at adoringly from the apartment window. The novel's plot unfolds when Faten, now seventeen, decides to seek help from the young man, Marwan, as she plans to secretly continue her education and follow her dream of becoming a nurse despite the obstacles she must face.

The story draws in the reader awakening sympathy for this brave and ambitious protagonist who, despite her socioeconomic status and personal fears, strives to achieve her goals and escape the life of servitude. Additionally, the novel promotes self-determination and independence as Faten's choices set her free from a rather conservative way of life. I think this novel would resonate with adolescent readers who may, just like Faten, struggle to determine their futures. Furthermore, the author portrays the quarrel between modern and patriarchal society shedding light on Faten's dilemma as she struggles for autonomy and freedom. Student discussions about the differences in class, wealth, and society's strict expectations would also be appropriate.

Kimberly says

Back in December and January I signed up for many (too many) reading challenges and as per usual I am drastically behind especially with my Middle Eastern Reading Challenge which is why when I saw that my library had *The Servant* I had to read it.

The Servant was a really wonderful coming of age story about a young Lebanese girl named Faten working in Beirut during the late 1980's during a turbulent time in the city's history. Faten is a maid for a family but dreams of bigger and better things for herself and wants to be a nurse. Unfortunately her father forces her to work and takes all her pay leaving her stuck as the lives of others seem to pass her by in her two years of servitude.

I really enjoyed this book because I love reading novels no matter the genre set in different places and this was the first book I've ever read set in Beirut and it won't be my last. There is such a sense of hope in Faten's story and I really connected to her as a character. I hated the way she was treated as a servant not as a human being but I loved how strong she was and how determined she was to get her education even if it got her into trouble I liked how the novel ended. It definitely ended on a brighter note and there was a lightness to it that was absent in the beginning.

This was definitely Faten's story and she was the main character and the most developed out of the rest of the cast of characters and I just wish they also had a little more substance which is why I did not give this book 5 stars. I enjoyed seeing Faten grow and become a strong independent young woman and thought her story was inspirational.

The writing is what surprised me most since I'm not usually a fan of shorter novels but author Fatima Sharafeddine created such a realistic story I was very drawn to the story. While the book was a short and quick read it did pack a punch and there was a lot of skill demonstrated in the way the author chose to tell her story.

Overall, this is probably one of the best YA books I've read this year. It was a nice change to read a book set somewhere else in the world and see life through another person's eyes during a hard time in history. Plus I loved learning about a culture that while I'm not totally unfamiliar with still has some mysteries for me and I enjoyed being exposed to it through reading Faten's story.

I would highly recommend this book to fans of contemporary young adult fiction that is set in a unique place with a strong heroine and a story about discovering one's own sense of self.

Solveig says

Dette er en veldig god ungdomsroman som jeg leste på kun en dag og som jeg gjerne vil anbefale alle tenåringer å lese. Teksten er lettlest, men Sharafeddine klarer likevel å formidle en historie som får meg til å heie på hovedpersonen Faten og håpe, slik hun håper, at hun skal nå målene sine.

Den gir innsikt i livet, drømmene og ønskene til en libanesisk jente i Beirut på midten av 1980-tallet. Faten

har jobbet som hushjelp siden hun var femten, men begynner etterhvert å drømme om å skaffe seg en utdanning og bli sykepleier. Hun har lite frihet i jobben sin. Er det da mulig for henne å nå målet sitt?

Marcia Lynx says

The "Best Book" prizes are out at the 2010 Beirut Book Fair, and Fatima Sharafeddine's first young-adult (YA) novel, *????*, has very deservedly taken first prize.

The book follows a bright, ambitious, sensitive young girl---????---as she is brought by her parents to Beirut for the first time and placed into service with a wealthy family. What happens to her and to the family's elder girl, Dalia, form the center of the novel.

The novel is both a breakthrough for Sharafeddine, who had not previously written YA, and for the entire YA genre in Arabic. Sharafeddine's book---along with two by Samah Idris, and another by him released at this year's Beirut fair, ????? ??????---provides a model of simple, beautiful, straightforward prose, written in short sentences for easy and enjoyable digestion by adolescent readers.

Oh! And ??? ?????? ?? ??????. We all can't wait for the next one!

(Oh, and although I felt it was a bit heavy on denouement, I loved the end.)

Melissa Powers says

The Servant is an engaging coming of age story. Faten moves away from her home, family, and friends when she is seventeen years old to become a slave for a wealthy family. She feels like any other seventeen year old would in this situation, hopeless, but instead of letting that hopelessness sink in she begins to dream. She dreams about how her life could be if she were not a servant anymore. She even falls in love with someone who is of a different socioeconomic status, and in Lebanon that does not happen. The Servant is a story of hope. Hope when you may think there is none.

The Servant would be an interesting book to do a culture study on with students in the classroom. They would be able to compare Faten's life as a seventeen year old, and the life of a seventeen year old in America. They would be able to empathize with young adults from other cultures, and see the hope they have in their own lives.