Things We Left Unsaid show

Zoya Pirzad

Oneworld

3rd May 2011

Zoya Pirzad said that her aim in writing this book was ‘to show that Iranian women work hard, and have the same issues that any other woman in the world might have.’

A renowned Iranian-Armenian writer and novelist, Zoya Pirzad first published Things We Left Unsaid in Iran back in 2001, and has been awarded multiple prizes, but this is it’s first translation into English.

Set in 1960s Iran, the novel follows Clarisse, leads a model, middle class, content, if unremarkable, life, tending on her teenage son Armen, Armineh and Arsineh, her young and endearing twin girls, successful politically minded husband Artoush and trying to keep her critical mother and incompetent sister happy. Broadly satisfied in her role as wife, mother, daughter and sister, Clarisse is kept concerned by the fact that she exists only in her relationship to others, with ‘whatever she says, I will say she is right.’

When three generations of an Armenian family move in across the street, and the sinisterly sweet young girl captivates Clarisse’s son, the acute disparaging yet somewhat enigmatic petite elderly grandmother Elmira starts to judge Clarisse’s family things start to change. But it is the son and father Emile (along with a never fully developed metaphor of a plague of locusts) who unsettles things the most. Or at least has the potential to unsettle. Here is the frustration of the novel, perhaps meant to mirror the frustrations of Clarisse’s life. Nothing ever happens. Her twin daughters are delightful, and there are some beautiful conversations where they finish each other’s sentences and even appear in each one another’s drums. The most dramatic argument with her husband culminates in him spilling some sugar. And just as she begins to wonder whether thinking of Emile so much is a sign all is not well in her life, the enigmatic Armenian family leave, as quickly as they left.

But, although the plot does not propel forward at any pace, Clarisse is a character to whom it is easy to warm, and the first person narration means we are privy to the ‘good angel, bad angel’ dichotomy of warring voices in her head. She wants things to change, dreams of differences, but comfort, habit and social conventions means that happiness is easier to find contentment as a wife, mother, daughter and sister. Which sadly, even in days of ‘equality’ and ‘freedom’, is an issue faced by women in Iran, the UK, and around the world.

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Available here <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Things-Left-Unsaid-Zoya-Pirzad/dp/1851689257>

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