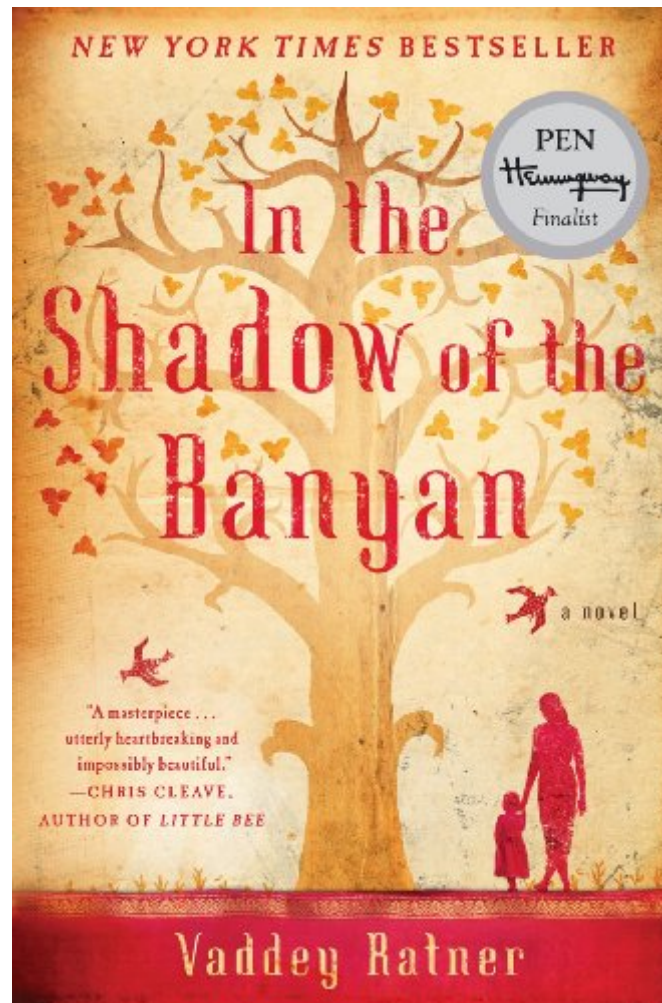


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In The Shadow Of The Banyan: A Novel



Synopsis

Told from the tender perspective of a young girl who comes of age amid the Cambodian killing fields, this searing first novel "based on the author's personal story" has been hailed by Little Bee author Chris Cleave as "a masterpiece [utterly heartbreaking and impossibly beautiful]." For seven-year-old Raami, the shattering end of childhood begins with the footsteps of her father returning home in the early dawn hours bringing details of the civil war that has overwhelmed the streets of Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital. Soon the family's world of carefully guarded royal privilege is swept up in the chaos of revolution and forced exodus. Over the next four years, as she endures the deaths of family members, starvation, and brutal forced labor, Raami clings to the only remaining vestige of childhood "the mythical legends and poems told to her by her father. In a climate of systematic violence where memory is sickness and justification for execution, Raami fights for her improbable survival. Displaying the author's extraordinary gift for language, *In the Shadow of the Banyan* is testament to the transcendent power of narrative and a brilliantly wrought tale of human resilience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Vaddey Ratner notes that while fictional, many of this book's events actually happened to her during the Khmer Rouge's Cambodian depredations. She made the right choice writing this as a novel, releasing herself from the perceived bounds of absolute truth - while clearly telling a story based on memory and experience. And, releasing the reader from the sometimes too-close proximity of a memoir's real-life author. Told in the first-person voice of Raami, a young girl, the narrative captivates, heartbreaks, but never feels overpowering or melodramatic. She is a completely believable child narrator, which is an impressive writing achievement. The narration is in a very personal and direct style that lets the story's events carry all the impact. This is most effective during some terrible early occurrences when she behaves like any child would, leading to bad ends. This also makes it a difficult book to "love" in the conventional way. A few scenes, because the narration is so all-business, are all the more tragic. You want to reach in and stop the events, because you know this happened - if it didn't happen exactly to Ratner as she wrote it, it surely happened to somebody. So I didn't finish this book impressed with Ratner's literary skill as much as sad for all the tragedies that we forget or never notice. The Cambodian genocide of 1975-79 was a slow-motion crime, somewhat different than the WWII death camps. People were moved from place to place, with the educated core of society eliminated through famine, disease or execution, as the Khmer Rouge attempted to recreate an entirely agricultural peasant society. I've known about it, but very little from up-close accounts. While not a "true" story, I think this gave a clear picture of what went on. It's horrible.

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