

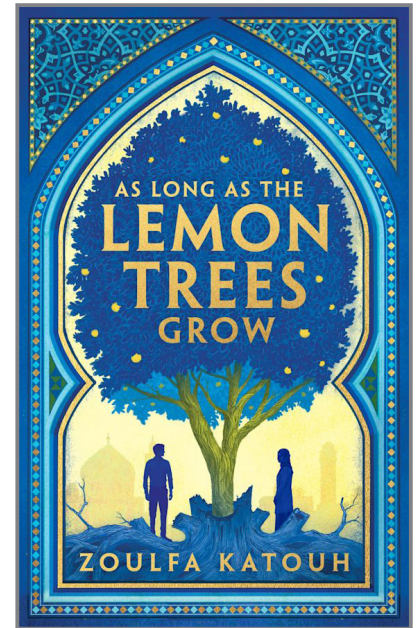
As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow

AUTHOR
ZOUFKA KATOUH

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
(Graphic Violence, Sexual References)



SYNOPSIS

Salama Kassab was a pharmacy student when the cries for freedom broke out in Syria. She still had her parents and her big brother; she still had her home. She was even supposed to be meeting a boy to talk about marriage.

Now Salama volunteers at a hospital in Homs, helping the wounded who flood through the doors. She knows that she should be thinking about leaving, but who will help the people of her beloved country if she doesn't? With her heart so conflicted, her mind has conjured a vision to spur her to action. His name is Khawf, and he haunts her nights with hallucinations of everything she has lost.

But even with Khawf pressing her to leave, when she crosses paths with Kenan, the boy she was supposed to meet on that fateful day, she starts to doubt her resolve in leaving home at all. Soon, Salama must learn to see the events around her for what they truly are—not a war, but a revolution—and decide how she, too, will cry for Syria's freedom.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zoufka Katouh is a Canadian writer with Syrian roots. A trilingual pharmacist, currently pursuing a master's in drug sciences, Zoufka is the first Syrian author to be published in both the US and the UK in the young adult category. When she's not talking to herself in the woodland forest, she's drinking iced coffee, baking aesthetic cookies and cakes, and telling everyone who will listen about how BTS paved the way. Her dream is to get Kim Nam-joon to read one of her books. If that happens, she will expire on the spot. *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* is her debut novel.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, answer the following questions:
 - What prominent images or imagery do you see on the cover?
 - Where do you think the book might be set?
 - Can you guess any prominent themes or concepts that might be explored in the book?
- Themes are the main ideas that lie beneath the surface of a text. Below are some of the key themes that run through the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. Can you think of any more themes explored within the novel? See if you can add at least two more to the list.
 - Syria
 - War and conflict
 - Trauma
 - Hope

- Refugees
- Plants and botany
- Love
- Belonging.
- Extracts and quotations from a novel can help us to understand its themes. Below are some quotations from *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. Underneath each quotation, write down which theme (or themes) you feel it relates to.
 - 'It's not a war, Salama. It's a revolution.' – Layla, p 12
 - 'He's a defence mechanism my brain has provided, trying to ensure my survival by any means necessary.' – Salama, p 35
 - 'As soon as I allowed myself to think about leaving, seedlings of hope grew in my brain, taking over my imagination.' – Salama, p 115
 - 'No matter what happens, you remember that this world is more than the agony it contains. We can have happiness, Salama.' – Layla, p 152
 - 'Germany is not the answer to a life of guaranteed joy. It's not home. But it's safety.' - Salama, p 160
 - Can you pick out some more interesting quotations from the book? How does each quotation help you to understand the underlying themes and characters in the book?
- Read the following extract and then answer the accompanying questions: In this extract, Salama has said goodnight to Layla and is going to bed...

The sun's feeble rays have vanished from my room's scratched floorboards, and the dark cloak of the night takes over Homs. My teeth chatter for a bit with anticipation before I clamp my lips shut, swallowing thickly. Whatever control I exude during the day falters when the sun sets. I sit on my bed, close my eyes and take deep breaths. I need to clear my mind. I need to focus on something other than the fear and pain that have taken root in my soul.

'Sweet alyssum. Sweet as their name,' I murmur, praying for my nerves not to fail me. 'White petals. Used for pain relief. Also for colds, abdominal cramps and coughs. Sweet. Sweet.'

It works. My lungs begin distributing the oxygen evenly to my blood. I open my eyes and watch the thicket of grey clouds outside my window. The glass is chipped at the sides from when Layla's home took the impact of a nearby bomb, and the frame is splintered. When I moved in, I had to wash blood from the pane.

Despite the window being locked, a chill sweeps the room, and I shiver, knowing what's about to happen. The horror I see isn't just confined to the hospital. My terror has mutated in my mind, bestowed with a life and a voice that never fails to show up each night.

'How long are you going to sit there without talking to me?' The deep voice comes from beside the window sill, sending gooseflesh all over my neck.

His voice reminds me of the freezing water I splash over myself when I come home drenched in the martyrs' blood. It's stones weighing on my chest, sinking me to the earth below. It's heavy as a humid day and deafening as the bombs the military throws on us. It's what our hospital is built on, and the wordless sounds we make.

I turn towards him slowly. 'What do you want now?'

Khawf looks at me. His suit is crisp and clean. It troubles me, though, the specks of red lining his shoulders. They've been there since we met, and I still haven't got used to them. But I don't like looking at his eyes either – icy blue.

With his midnight-black hair, he doesn't look human, which I suppose is the point. He looks as close to human as he can try to be.

'You know what I want,' his voice ripples, and I shiver.

- Can you find any evidence in the text to suggest that Salama feels and acts differently during the day than during the night? Why do you think this is?
- Why do you think Salama repeats the name of the plant 'Sweet alyssum'? How does reciting information about the plant help her?
- What do you think Salama means when she says, 'My terror has mutated in my mind, bestowed with a life and a voice that never fails to show up each night'?
- Can you underline any words or sentences that tell you how Salama feels when she hears Khawf's voice?
- Do you have an image of Khawf in your mind? How would you describe him? Where do you think he comes from?

- In the above extract, Salama repeats the name of the plant 'Sweet alyssum'. As you read the novel, keep a list of the different plants that Salama speaks about.
- On p 84 we learn that Salama used to keep scrapbooks containing information about medicinal plants, pressed flowers and drawings. Create your own flower scrapbook containing pictures or drawings of the plants in your list and any information you can find out about them.
- Why do you think plants are important to Salama?
- How is the theme of 'plants' linked to the themes of 'trauma' and 'hope' in the novel?
- Read the scene when Kenan takes Salama up onto the roof of his old home, then answer the following questions:
 - Why do you think Kenan brings Salama to watch the sunset?
 - What does the word 'serene' mean? Can you give some synonyms and antonyms of the word 'serene'?
 - Kenan points out the contrast between the destruction on the ground and the beauty of the sky. How many other contrasts can you find within this extract and within the novel as a whole?
 - What signs or symbols of hope can you find in this extract?
 - Photocopy this section and then underline all the colours in this extract.
- What is the significance of colour in the novel?
- Can you find any more quotes from the book that help you to understand the theme of colour?
- Look at the front cover of the book. What colours has the cover designer chosen to use in her design? Why do you think she has chosen each of these colours?
- Imagine you're a cinematographer and you're adapting *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* into a film. What colour palette will your movie have? How will you use colour to convey the character's emotions and tell the story?
- Note down where each of the colours below appears in the novel. For example, brown—Mama's hair, Salama's eyes, etc. Feel free to add any extra colours you come across as you read:
 - Brown
 - Black
 - Grey
 - Red
 - Blue
 - Yellow
 - Green
 - Purple
 - Pink
 - Gold
 - Orange.
- Kenan says, 'Syria was once the centre of the world.' What do you know about the history and culture of Syria? What would you like to know? Research the history and culture of Syria using books and online sources. If you know anyone from Syria, you could talk to them too.
 - Use your research to create a collage about Syrian history and culture. You could include drawings, photos, maps and facts you have discovered about Syria.
- How do Salama and Kenan feel about Syria?
- How does the idea of leaving Syria make Salama and Kenan feel?
- In what ways do Salama and Kenan's thoughts and feelings about Syria change throughout the novel?
- What risks will Lama and Yusef face when they leave Syria?
- Can you write a list of Kenan's reasons to stay in Syria and a list of his reasons to leave? How do you think Kenan feels as he is faced with this choice?
- Kenan has been acting as a citizen journalist. What is the difference between a citizen journalist and a traditional media journalist? Why is journalism important during war and conflict?
- Can you think of three examples of love in the novel? What forms of love are expressed in this extract?
- Create a mind map to help you explore the theme of stories and storytelling. Write down all the stories contained within the novel including the stories that characters read or watch and the stories they tell themselves, each other

and the world.

- Why are stories important to the characters in the novel?
- How is the theme of 'stories and storytelling' linked to the other themes of the book?
- What impact has reading *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* had on you as a reader? Have you learnt anything that you didn't know before? Has reading the book changed you in any way?
- What do you think about the end of the story? Was it the ending you expected, or did it surprise you?
- If you could speak to Salama and Kenan at the end of the novel, what would you like to say to them? What do you hope the future looks like for Salama and Kenan?
- Imagine Salama and Kenan have been asked to give a talk to a group of students about Syria and their experiences. What are the key points you think they would want people to know and understand? Write a list of the main points you think they would like to communicate.
- Why do you think the author chose the title, 'As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow'?
- Compare Salama's thoughts about the conflict on p 12 to her thoughts on p 243–244. How have her thoughts and beliefs changed throughout the novel? Why do you think this is?
- Have a look back at the themes. Which do you think is the most important theme in the novel? Can you put the themes in order from most to least important? Compare your order with a partner or group and discuss.
 - Which themes are closely related to each other? Can you put the themes into pairs? Compare your pairings with a partner and discuss.
- Can you find out more about the experience of Syrian refugees? Do you know any other books, films or art created by Syrian refugees? Do you know any organisations that help and support refugees from Syria and elsewhere?
- Who might you recommend this book to and why?
- If you could ask the author, Zoulfa Katouh, five questions, what would you like to ask her?