



## Mayada, Daughter of Iraq

By Jean Sasson

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Jean Sasson, author of the international bestseller *Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia*, met Mayada Al-Askari on a trip to Baghdad in 1998. A year later, Jean learned that Mayada had been arrested and thrown into Iraq's Baladiyah Prison -- headquarters of Saddam Hussein's secret police. Mayada's story, both past and present, is truly incredible. Her family was one of the most distinguished and honored families in Iraq. One grandfather fought alongside Lawrence of Arabia. The other was the first true Arab nationalist (admired greatly by Saddam Hussein). Her uncle was prime minister of Iraq for nearly forty years; her mother an important government official. In her youth, Mayada vacationed with Iraqi royalty. When Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party seized power in 1979, Mayada didn't foresee the devastation it would wreak upon her life and her beloved country. But she soon found herself alone, a divorced mother of two, earning a meager living printing brochures. She had no idea that she could ever become a target of Saddam's secret police ... until one nightmarish day in 1999. At Baladiyah, Mayada was thrown into cell 52 with seventeen other women -- nameless and faceless, from all sorts of backgrounds -- whose only shared connection was imprisonment without trial and the ever-present threat of torture and execution. To shut out the screams of other prisoners and to forget their fears, the "shadow women" passed each day by sharing their life stories. Mayada fascinated her cellmates with tales of her prominent family and of her own meetings with Saddam Hussein and Chemical Ali. Mayada has longed to share her story, but not until recent events was she able to speak out. Now, in *Mayada, Daughter of Iraq*, the searing and poignant story of one woman and her will to survive under the regime of Saddam Hussein comes to life. The names of the shadow women are still scrawled in charcoal onto the wall of cell 52.

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