



A Girl Made of Dust

Nathalie Abi-Ezzi

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Ten-year-old Ruba lives in a village outside Beirut. From her family home, she can see the buildings shimmering on the horizon and the sea stretched out beside them. She can also hear the rumble of the shelling - this is Lebanon in the 1980s and civil war is tearing the country apart.

A Girl Made of Dust Details

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Author : Nathalie Abi-Ezzi

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Kinga says

The problems with child narrators is that they need to be authentic, because the reader wants to believe the story is told by an eight year old but at the same time the reader doesn't want to feel that the book was actually written by an eight year old. Here lies the catch-22, the book needs to be told by an eight year old but written by an adult.

Many authors resort to writing simple sentences and just dumbing down everything but that's not the way, of course. Nathalie Abi-Ezzi didn't fall into this trap. Her writing is exquisite but it is not done at cost of authenticity of her eight year old narrator, Ruba. Abi-Ezzie managed to capture the world as it is perceived by a child. There is a thin line between the real and the fantasy and the logical order of causes and consequences is often muddled.

We follow Ruba as she is trying to save her family in the midst of the civil war in Lebanon. Her father stopped speaking and caring for the world and spends most of his time sitting in his armchair and staring into space. Her mother cleans and cooks, cleans and cooks, as if afraid that if she stops she might realize the ruin that her family has come to. And her brother has secrets.

It is a beautiful story that analyses the madness of a civil war in a very interesting way. It raises an important question if you can (and should) lead a normal life when the world around you is falling apart. If you like poetic imagery and ephemeral style you should give "A Girl Made of Dust" a go.

Ray says

the writing is so simple yet profound at times, and the story just sucks you in, and you find yourself reading and reading and not wanting stop. its the most curious feeling. and i love love love the fact that this story is told from ruba's pov because the world through a child's eyes is incredible to read about. definitely recommended.

Tracie Sampson says

This book needed to be read. It changed a lot of my thinking.

Jeremy says

Nathalie writes as an 8 year old living her life in a town near Beirut. She sees the war and the terror as an 8 year old would not understanding why her friends are having to leave or why her people turn against another. And ponders on the strange way her father behaves -the family know, but won't tell her. She sees her older brother slowly getting sucked into the dark world that surrounds them. The book ends as the shelling gets nearer and nearer to their home and they all huddle together in fear. Although the book resolves the central question (about her father) it leaves you, just as a war would, feeling beaten up and with many many questions. A real gripping read. That I read this from cover to cover in less than 5 days is pretty amazing.

I found a pre-publication of this novel in the Oxfam shop on the Byres road (thanks marybel). "should have" bought it and played spot the differences. I think it might be valuable one day.

Yasmine says

first of all :the name of the book is really appealing :) loved the name

while reading the first chapters i wasnot quite interested in the book but when i kept reading i really enjoyed the book i loved the details that ruba mentioned details so precise that i felt through the whole novel i was there i smelled what ruba smelled i touched and felt the textures of what what she touched ...those details made the novel vivid and captivating

I loved the characters

ruba :her curiosity and her constant question that i felt like she is this little sister of mine who kept nagging me with questions all the time

naji: i actually love naji's character best he is the sweetest brother i would say patient and keeps answering ruba's questions all the time ,i teared up when he got injured i could have not bear the idea of him dying the grandmother :so loving i felt like i would like to sink in and have a hug from her

the mother : a strong character a patient powerful woman i would have cracked if i were in her position

The father (nabeel) :at first i was angry at his character i hated him slacking not doing anything leaving the mother doing everything which was an overload but when i found out what happened to him i felt sorry for him sad for what happened ..i teared up with him crying when naji got hurt

i loved the whole novel found out many details i didnt know about especially those considering palestine and lebanon i need to find about the whole thing cause it's alittle bit shocking

Natalie i loved your book the way you describe everything in detail i felt i was living the whole thing seeing the whole scene in front of me :)looking forward to reading another book by you

Ronni says

some people are calling this book "a coming of age story," but i'm calling it a page-turner. the *only* thing that ever took me out of the story was the occasional heavy handed and unrealistic dialogue between the eight year old narrator and her ten year old brother. otherwise, the book is great all around. two unexpected delights in this book, entwined but distinct, are the narrator's imagination and the author's descriptions of the surrounding geography and flora & fauna.

while set in a christian village in 1980's wartime lebanon and obviously commenting on this condition, the real story is a mystery involving a glass eyeball, a silent child, a sullen dad, a grandmother who has foreseen a death, an uncle who refuses to leave the dangers of beirut for implausible reasons, and some eternal questions about religious intolerance.

Nick says

"A Girl Made of Dust" starts with a deceptively slow pace. After all, it is narrated by the eight year old girl Ruba. Its power accumulates deliberately and relentlessly. The novel takes place during the early eighties outside Beirut. The slow beginning colors in the portrait of a family already in crisis over the nervous breakdown of the father whose shop feeds it. Rufa's family is Christian but not biased against Muslims; one of Ruba's friends in a Muslim boy. As the violence intensifies, the community is fractured--Muslims are

murdered or flee--then family. A brother is wounded, the father's secret exposed, a businessman uncle bankrupted despite turning to crime. In at least one sense, the violence is a symptom of an irrational and inflexible society. The sins of the past are visited on the present with a fury. And religion is no solace for this not especially churchy family for whom God is still very present, even in the midst of insanity. "What was God thinking?" asks the grandmother of a senseless death. Another character speculates that they are living through the nightmares of a sleeping God. The only balm is to take a mute girl into an already small, jammed home. This is real horror, not the kind that lulls insomniacs to sleep or gives teenagers a thrill, and it is a remarkable achievement that lingers, however painfully, in memory.

Tabark Altaie says

My favorite thing about this book is that it is narrated through first person "8 year old Ruba".

It was interesting to me because it is through her narration that you get to see all the small details that only a child would notice.

I found the main conflict isn't of much importance, in other words "not a real big problem" YET you will find yourself obliged to sympathize with her and consequently driven to finish the story to know the resolution.

Jim Glass says

Not my typical read.....I am starting at the A section of the local library and seeing what expands my reading type.....with that said it was a quick read and really a pretty nice story.

Rita says

Kinga:

civil war in Lebanon

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Meaghan says

This is a beautifully written novel that is, I think, suitable for both children and adults. The author is able to show the horrors of war without compromising the authenticity of the child's narrative voice -- and that's a very delicate balancing act. She was also able to let the reader know what was going on without being overly didactic -- I know NOTHING about Israel's invasion of Lebanon, but I could get just enough from this book to be able to understand the story, and it made me curious to learn more.

Lisa says

This book was a great surprise pick. I picked it up from the Skokie Library paperback book sale shelf to take on our trip to Florida. Since I am pretty low-tech, this is how I get my travel reading material. Sometimes I end up reading things I'd never read otherwise and sometimes I read gems. This is one of them.

I had never heard of Nathalie Abi-Ezzi, but now that I've read "A Girl Made of Dust," I will look for her other books. The backdrop of the book is Lebanon in the early 1980's during the war with Israel and several factions within Lebanon some of whom sided with Israel and some who fought against them. Ten year old Ruba and her family spend their lives dodging bullets, bombs, and shrapnel as they try to survive, living their lives as normally as they can. While before in her village, Ruba has known Muslims and Christians, now most of the Muslims have been banished. Only her friend Kareem remains there as he is subject to jeers and hatred from the other villagers. Without giving away the plot, I have to recommend this book. It will undoubtedly make you think twice before advocating getting America embroiled in any more wars in the Middle East.

Lisa says

A Girl Made of Dust is a semi-autobiographical novel by Nathalie Abi-Ezzi who, like some of the characters in her story, moved to the safety of England in 1983 when Israel invaded Lebanon. She has written the novel from the perspective of an eight-year-old, but overcame my resistance to child narrators with a vivid story. This point-of-view enables the portrayal of the baffled dismay that many of us naïvely feel about religious hatreds, and, sadly, it also shows us how children adapt to living in war zones, and have no concept of living in peace. The novel also raises issues which, since the destruction of cultural artefacts by religious extremists, have become more topical than when the book was published back in 2008.

For Ruba and her older brother Naji, living in the village of Ein Dowra outside Beirut, the civil war means the rumble of shelling in the city, and they do not connect it with her father's strange behaviour, which readers will recognise as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Papi (Nabeel) sits in his chair for most of the day, saying very little, leaving his shop closed and bringing grave financial and emotional stress to the family. The long-suffering women, (his wife and his mother), have had to make adjustments: they can no longer afford a maid so Mami (Aida) has had to learn to cook and iron (and isn't very good at either). Mami also has to put up with being patronised by a former friend who takes pleasure in complaining about the

servant problem and how difficult it is to pack her many possessions in preparation for her exodus to safety. While all around them families are leaving, Ruba's friends among them, their family has no money and must take what comes.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2016/05/15/a...>

Katie Lynn says

Favorite parts of the book:

"Teta, tell me a story."

She blinked as though I'd woken her. "what?"

"A story."

"Not now, habibti."

"Please. Tell me the one about the boy who wants the moon." Even if she didn't feel like it, she might tell her favourite story, the one she told most often.

Teta spoke slowly, as if she was making up the story for the first time. "She would look up at the moon, this girl, and my God, how beautiful it was."

"Girl? I thought it was a boy. It's always a boy."

Teta tipped her head back to say no. "Tonight it's a girl. And the moon was so beautiful she couldn't stop looking at it. Night after night, all she could do was sit and look, always up, up at the moon.

"Well, so she went to her mother and she said, "I want the moon."

There was a long silence. "Aren't you going to finish it?"

Teta nodded. "The mother said, "You want the moon?" But she couldn't do anything to help her child. So what could the girl do? She tried jumping but that didn't work. She reached up as high as she could but that didn't work either. So she got a ladder, the longest ladder she could find, and she started to climb."

I saw a girl hauling herself slowly up the ladder in Papi's shop, past the pots and pans, past the roof and up into the sky.

"There were hundreds of stars, thousands of them, but they weren't good enough--no, not good enough for this girl. This girl wanted the moon."

I crunched another almond.

"She carried on climbing and climbing, never stopping to rest, never stopping at all, getting further and further away. But then she began to miss her family."

"You mean her mother," I said.

"Yes, yes, her mother."

"What did the girl do?" I'd heard this story dozens of times, but still hoped it would end differently.

"Do?" Teta looked up. "She missed her home, that's all."

Teta never told what happened--whether the boy who had turned into a girl tonight ever reached the moon. It always ended this way.

Also loved:

"Uncle said there's no such thing as silence. He said that every silence says something: the silences between words, between notes in music and between people."

"Perhaps he's right."

We sat there, listening to the silence.

Beautifully poignant book. Very thought provoking and emotional.

Hermien says

It took a while to get into the story but it ended up being quite moving and an interesting insight into the war in Lebanon in the early eighties.
