



## A Little Piece of Ground

*Elizabeth Laird, Bill Neal (Illustrator), Sonia Nimr*

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*A Little Piece Of Ground* will help young readers understand more about one of the worst conflicts afflicting our world today.

Written by Elizabeth Laird, one of Great Britain's best-known young adult authors, *A Little Piece Of Ground* explores the human cost of the occupation of Palestinian lands through the eyes of a young boy.

Twelve-year-old Karim Aboudi and his family are trapped in their Ramallah home by a strict curfew. In response to a Palestinian suicide bombing, the Israeli military subjects the West Bank town to a virtual siege. Meanwhile, Karim, trapped at home with his teenage brother and fearful parents, longs to play football with his friends. When the curfew ends, he and his friend discover an unused patch of ground that's the perfect site for a football pitch. Nearby, an old car hidden intact under bulldozed building makes a brilliant den. But in this city there's constant danger, even for schoolboys. And when Israeli soldiers find Karim outside during the next curfew, it seems impossible that he will survive.

This powerful book fills a substantial gap in existing young adult literature on the Middle East. With 23,000 copies already sold in the United Kingdom and Canada, this book is sure to find a wide audience among young adult readers in the United States.

## A Little Piece of Ground Details

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22.10.2017

**Marcy says**

This is a middle school story about Karim, his family, and his friends, all Palestinian, facing the roadblocks and bullets of the Israelis. I have read so many books from the perspective of the Israelis. It is important to remember that there is no single story. When countries and people are at war, the innocent always suffer, by all the countries involved in conflict.

Karim's grandparents' land was taken, olive groves and all. Curfews were a daily part of Ramallah, the small town in Palestine where Karim and his family lived. Karim's uncle spoke of truth when Karim spoke of his hatred of the "enemy" as he watched his father being humiliated at a border, and his grandparents were barred from picking olives from their land. "Watching them, I see what we humans are capable of. I know that we could be like them too. They've shown me how bad human nature can be. If we had power over them, or over anyone else, for that matter, we'd do the same things that they do. It's what happens when the conquerors rule the conquered. the powerful hate their victims or they wouldn't be able to bear the thought of what they're doing to them In their eyes we're nothing-inferior, barely human. They can't abide the knowledge that I learned long ago-that we're all the same." These words ring true for me when I think about the evil rulers of empires throughout history.

Karim's uncle also spoke words of wisdom when he said, "Endurance, that's what takes courage. Decency among ourselves. That's where we must be strong. When they steal from us and try to humiliate us, the real shame is on themselves."

American children need to read more global stories in order to discover all of the true stories of war-torn countries and the people who live in constant danger throughout the world. Reading these stories from all perspectives gives students different coming of age stories, those of fear, courage, and in some cases, understanding.

## Rebecca says

It is difficult to talk about Palestine and Israel without being polemical. The conversation often falls into policy, politics and history that maintains an impossible place of resolution for many.

Laird paints a picture of occupation that is both relevant and frustrating. Her story holds a human element that often gets lost in ideology and politics.

Laird walks her audience through exhaustive curfews inflicted on Ramallah, Palestinians by the Israelis through Karim, a twelve year old boy protagonist. Karim's teeth begin to itch after two weeks of being detained in his home. His aching for life beyond his home is expressed as he and his siblings find small ways to antagonize one another and his inability to concentrate. The curfew creates further tension in the home as his parents are unable to work during this time and their children are not in school. Small little details like this began to work on my imagination. As I read the book, I realized how much I had neglected to think about the day to day life of those living in places like Ramallah and Bethlehem.

The choice to use a twelve year old boy as the protagonist worked well. Laird proved to be highly adept at characterization. Karim was neither precocious or overly adult. Instead, he read like a twelve year old boy looking to be free (*hurriyah*) to play with his friends. Karim still holds a youthful admiration of his father, that time where his father is still a bit of a hero. But he is forced to reconcile his father's limitations as he watches his father suffer under the fear and anger of the young Israeli soldiers and settlers who inflict humiliation and fear on the Palestinians.

What I appreciated most about Laird is her willingness to nod at the complexity of the issue in this region. While it would have been easy to show the Israeli soldiers as unilaterally violent and ruthless, Laird takes time to paint a human face on those occupying Palestine. Yet, there can be no question that Laird is clearly sympathetic to those being placed under curfew and whose land is often boldly taken with impunity. Despite this, she points to a young soldiers shaking hand from fear and seeing his brother's face in that of a young soldier who was feeding a stray cat after having taken siege Karim's soccer field.

It is the human face at every angle that left me feeling a deep sense of tragedy for the conditions that exist in this region. After all the political and historical conversation settles like dust, there are the human lives that are left in the wreckage of battle. There are people searching for the simple routine of a day and the ability to simply live their lives on their terms, like all of us.

As I read this book, I was reminded of Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*. While his prose are a bit more smooth, the focus on occupied people looking to push out the perceived oppressor is the same.

A good book for all ages. I think it could easily be read in a fifth grade class with a teacher skilled at helping students discuss nuanced and challenging ideas about human nature and politics.

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## Amr Mohamed says

**Sarah S says**

This is a very good book. It is narrated in the eyes of a Palestinian boy. The Israelis have taken over Palestine and have set down curfews. The boy Karim works on a little piece of ground called Hopper's ground. Karim goes there every day. His parents are worried and interested in where Karim is going and they think that he was being harassed by the Israelis. When the second curfew is set, Karim doesn't make it to his house so he hides out not an abandoned car with no food or water. Karim is shot while trying to escape after his second day in the car. His brother rescues him and takes him to the hospital and then finally goes home when the second curfew is lifted. The rest of the book I won't say because I might spoil it. Overall, this is a great book and I suggest that you read it.

**Janet says**

For someone who has read *The Diary of Anne Frank* too many times to count, this was an important book to read. The book follows the lives of a Palestinian family and their friends, told primarily through the eyes of an adolescent young man who aspires to become a professional soccer player, despite curfews that curtail his ability to spend time outside doing much of anything.

If the mark of an educated person is to consider all sides of important issues, we probably need more books like this one--books that help our adolescent students consider the lived lives of the "enemy."

## Ghada Arafat says

A really great book that made me feel that no matter what my kids will make it in their lives. I wish they will be as strong as Karim. I believe that parents should read this book to get an idea of how our kids survive here.

asdewi says

Buku Elizabeth Laird yang ketiga yang saya baca dan tetep aja : sukaaaaa.  
Semua buku dia tuh (sejauh yang saya tahu) cerita-ceritanya humanis dan menyentuh hati.  
Sungguh sayang rata-rata buku dia under rated di sini.

Berhubung lagi males (errrr....), maka saya mo kasi cuplikan dari buku ini aja. Semoga cuma cuplikan aja, udah bisa membuat anda tertarik membacanya :).

*Karim duduk di ujung tempat tidurnya. Kepalanya dikelilingi sekumpulan poster sepak bola yang menempel di dinding. Dahinya mengerut saat membaca selembar kertas di tangan.*

*Sepuluh hal terbaik yang aku inginkan dalam hidupku, tulisnya, oleh Karim Aboudi, Apartemen Jaffa 15, Ramallah, Palestina.*

*Di bawahnya, dengan tulisan tangan terbaik, Karim menulis:*

1. *Pemain sepak bola terbaik di dunia.*
2. *Keren, populer, ganteng, dengan tinggi minimal 1,90 meter (yang jelas lebih tinggi dari Jamal).*
3. *Pembebas Palestina dan pahlawan nasional.*
4. *Pembawa acara televisi dan aktor terkenal (yang penting terkenal).*
5. *Pencipta game komputer terbaik sepanjang masa.*
6. *Jadi diri sendiri, bebas melakukan semua yang aku suka tanpa diawasi terus-terusan oleh orangtua, kakak, dan guru-guruku.*
7. *Penemu formula asam (untuk menghancurkan baja yang digunakan dalam persenjataan, tank, dan helikopter milik Israel).*
8. *Lebih kuat dari Joni dan teman-temanku yang lain (ini tidak terlalu berlebihan).*

*Karim berhenti sambil menggigit ujung bolpoinnya. Dari kejauhan, bunyi sirene ambulans meraung melintasi udara siang. Karim mendongakkan kepala, lalu memandang keluar jendela. Matanya yang besar dan hitam, menatap tajam dari bawah rambut hitam lurus yang membingkai wajahnya yang kurus kecoklatan.*

*Karim mulai menulis lagi.*

*9. Hidup. Kalaupun harus tertembak, hanya di bagian-bagian yang bisa disembuhkan, tidak di kepala atau tulang belakang, insya Allah.*

*10. ...*

*Karim berhenti di nomor sepuluh. Dia memutuskan untuk membiarkannya kosong, siapa tahu ide bagus menclok di kepalanya nanti.*

*Karim membaca ulang tulisannya sambil duduk dan mengetok-ngetokkan ujung bolpoin ke kerah kemeja wol bergaris-garis, lalu mengambil selembar kertas baru. Kali ini, dengan lebih cepat, dia menulis:*

*Sepuluh hal yang tidak aku inginkan:*

1. *Tidak jadi pemilik toko seperti baba.*
2. *Tidak jadi dokter. Mama terus-terusan maksa aku jadi dokter. Padahal, mama tahu kalau aku benci darah.*
3. *Tidak pendek.*
4. *Tidak menikah dengan perempuan seperti Farah.*
5. *Tidak tertembak di punggung dan duduk di kursi roda seumur hidup seperti salah satu teman sekolahku.*
6. *Tidak jerawatan seperti Jamal.*
7. *Tidak dihancur-ratakan (maksudnya rumah kami) oleh tank Israel dan mengungsi ke tenda kumuh.*
8. *Tidak harus sekolah.*
9. *Tidak hidup dalam penjajahan. Tidak dicekal terus-terusan oleh tentara Israel. Tidak takut. Tidak terjebak di dalam rumah atau gedung.*

## 10. Tidak mati.

*Karim membaca ulang tulisannya. Seperti ada yang kurang. Dia yakin, ada yang terlupakan.*

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Tokoh utama di buku ini adalah Karim Aboudi, seorang anak Palestina biasa yang tinggal di Ramallah, yang saat itu sedang dalam pendudukan Israel.

Walopun tinggal di daerah konflik, Karim mempunyai mimpi layaknya anak-anak lain. Dia juga berusaha menjalani hari-harinya senormal mungkin.

Nantinya, diceritakan tentara Israel memberlakukan jam malam. Saat diberlakukan jam malam itu, Karim terjebak di dalam sebuah mobil tua yang berada di "a little piece of ground" ato sebidang tanah kecil yang biasa jadi tempat dia bermain bola. Saat dia berusaha melarikan diri dari situ untuk sampai ke rumahnya, dia tertembak.

Seperti yang dia harapkan, dia gak tertembak di bagian vital. Dia tertembak di bagian kaki dan kakaknya Jamal berhasil membawanya ke rumah sakit. Di bawah ini adalah kutipan lain dari buku yang sama (hal. 264-265)

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*"Pagi yang luar biasa panjang merangkak pelan. Terkadang, Karim berusaha tidur, tapi tidak pernah berhasil. Dia mencoba membuat permainan baru, merangkai cerita, dan melamun. Saat itu, dia teringat kembali pada daftar yang dibuatnya, pada segala hal yang ingin dia lakukan dalam hidupnya. Kapankah itu, beberapa minggu yang lalu? Tapi rasanya paling sedikit seperti setahun yang lalu. Karim coba mengingat-ingat apa saja yang telah ditulisnya.*

*Semua itu, pikirnya, semua yang pernah kuimpulkan – membebaskan Palestina, menjadi pemain bola, menciptakan game computer, menjadi penemu – semuanya sampah.*

*Karim ingat, daftar itu belum selesai. Ada satu lagi yang perlu ditambahkan agar bisa lengkap jadi sepuluh. Sekarang dia tahu. Setelah mengalami semua kejadian ini, cuma ada satu hal yang paling dia inginkan.*

*Menjadi orang biasa, gumam Karim. Hidup sebagai orang biasa di negeri biasa. Di negeri Palestina yang merdeka. Tapi itu nggak bakal berhasil. Mereka nggak bakal memberikan apa yang menjadi hak kami.*

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Dan tidakkah kamu bersyukur, tinggal di negara yang merdeka?

Dimana kamu bebas keluar malam, bebas merancang mimpi mu setinggi langit dan bebas berpendapat?

Tidakkah kamu bersyukur hidup sebagai orang biasa di negeri biasa?

*"Dan nikmat Tuhanmu yang manakah yang kamu dustakan?"*  
(QS Ar-Rahmaan)

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### **carrietracy says**

I can't remember the last time I read something that offered me such a different perspective than the one I am used to hearing about. I don't know this is something typical of most people in the United States due to media coverage, or whether it's more personal because I know more Jews than Muslims, but the plight of the Palestinians has never really been something I knew very much about. You hear the news reports of bombings, the words West Bank and Gaza Strip, but I personally was ignorant about what life was like for Palestinians and I expect many readers in the target age group are as well.

Karim and his family live in Ramallah, a city which is frequently subjected to tight curfew. The book opens with all of the families completely trapped within their homes while Israel tanks patrol nearby. When everyone is finally given an hour outside, people rush to buy food and medicine for loved ones. School is rarely in session; students pick up work to complete at home, at first due to the restrictions about leaving their homes and later because their school has been destroyed. Karim longs for some normalcy, hanging out with his friends, playing soccer, things that many kids are liable to take for granted. One day he meets a classmate on the outskirts of town by the refugee camps and they begin clearing rubble to make a place of their own. But their days of freedom are short-lived as tanks roll back in imposing another curfew. Karim does not make it back home in time and must hide, waiting and hoping he will be able to safely make his way back home.

For a book that deals with children leading an almost unthinkable life, *A Little Piece of Ground* manages to convey the gravity of the situation without resorting to graphic violence or sensationalism. Laird shows the psychological effects that living in an occupied zone has on both children and adults. The only thing that was very difficult for me were the parts where Karim rejoices in Israeli deaths, talks about how suicide bombers are martyrs and where people shout Death to Israel. These are hard things because this is how the news often depicts Palestinians, fervent, violent, jubilant at the deaths of their enemies. But I think Laird manages to show why Karim and his brother might feel this way. I also think it's important for kids to consider why during violent and longstanding conflicts like this people sometimes find themselves unable to just wish for peace.

For age recommendation and all possibly objectionable content see full blog post: <http://bit.ly/1Lztz1z>

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### **Illyria says**

Boys will be boys, even in Israel-occupied Ramallah. In the days when Israeli tanks enforced long curfews that keep him cooped up at home with his bullying brother Jamal, his obnoxious sister Farah, piles of homework from school that keeps getting disrupted, and news of skirmishes, death and injuries on TV, Karim dreams of becoming world-class footballer, a successful businessman, and inventor of special acids to destroy the Israeli barbed wire fence.

But, as his uncle Abu Feisal said, in the night after their brush with Israeli forces that shot at them when they came to pick olives from groves that had been owned by the family for hundreds of years, life is not that simple. Karim's meeting with Hopper, a boy from the refugee camp, and later, their crusade to carve out a niche of their own, will teach him that life, and heroism, is anything but simple.

While the book bluntly delineates the kind of terror, frustration, fear and boiling rage that comes with living

under an occupation, it also manages to delicately discuss the issue of hatred, enmity, and ultimately courage and martyrdom, while giving the readers a candid glimpses of how life goes on, and children grows, even in the most atrocious of circumstances.

I am fascinated by the dialogs in this book. In my opinion Laird had managed to capture the way Middle-eastern people speak amongst themselves, rapidly, with fierce emotions, and equally fierce love.

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## **S10\_Abby Alley says**

Protagonist: Karim, 12

Grade Level: 7-10

This book is about Karim, a twelve-year-old Palestinian boy living in Ramallah during the Israeli occupation. Karim's number one love in life is soccer. When he meets a boy named Hopper he stumbles on the perfect place to create a soccer field – an abandoned lot filled with rubble. Hopper, a boy living in the refugee camp, Karim, and Karim's best friend Joni (a boy from a Christian family) decide to work on the lot to make it into a soccer field, and more importantly, into somewhere they could call their own. Ramallah is under Israeli curfew and becomes incredibly tense when Karim is trapped in the lot past curfew with no way out. This incredible story about life from the eyes of a Palestinian is powerful and realistic. It is a perspective that deserves attention and discussion.

Elizabeth Laird does a great job of developing realistic characters. I liked that Karim developed a lot of anger and hatred for the Israelis. It is only natural that would happen, and I am glad she didn't hold back. It was also a nice combination to have the perspectives of a boy living in the refugee camps compared to Jani – a Christian boy, who's family eventually left Ramallah. I think it's important to show how diverse Palestinians are and how the Israeli occupation affected people in different ways. I am so fascinated by the conflict between Israel and Palestine so it was an enjoyable book for me to read. If I were a middle school or high school teacher I would love to read this book with something written from the Israeli perspective. It is really easy to take sides when you hear just one side of the argument, but it would be an interesting discussion to try to figure out a way to make it right, or solve the conflict. Some other books that could go well with this one are *Habibi*, by Naomi Shihab Nye, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*, by Ibtisam Barakat, or *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*, by Deborah Ellis. Also, there are plenty of other times in world history that one country has occupied another, and I think it could be worthwhile to read other accounts similar situations to compare experiences, precipitating events, and discuss why this is such a recurring theme in world history.

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## **Tony says**

I picked this up because it's about Palestinians and soccer, both topics I have an interest in. However, I was a little leery of it being a book pitched at teenage readers -- I was worried that it would either be too simplistic, or didactic, or mawkish. Fortunately, it is none of those things -- rather, it is a nuanced story with a Palestinian boy at its center that any reader can relate to.

Karim is a pretty typical 12-year: obsessed with soccer and video games, constantly annoyed by his younger

sister and older brother, and chafing at life under constant threat of military occupation and curfew in Ramallah. The story follows his new friendship with a refugee boy in parallel with his close friendship with a Christian schoolmate. Their antics are both entirely plausible, and utterly chilling in the stakes that are involved. What the book does best of all is portray the difficulty of trying to live a normal life, let alone build a future, in a place where an outsider's tanks might roll down the streets and destroy your school at any moment. To be sure, I suppose most would consider this a "pro-Palestinian" story -- but it's really a pro-humanity story.

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### **Aisha A 140A571 says**

A boy called Karim Abodi made a list of things which he would like to do in his life. The most important thing in this list is to destroy the Israel tanks which block the street and not allowed people to go out. Karim and his family couldn't do anything except sitting at home till the curfew ends. He couldn't play football which is his passion or even see his friends. He has an elder brother who was always annoying him his name was Jamal. Karim was about to go insane because his brother in addition to cant go out side. When the curfew ends Karim was so happy and went out with his new friend Hopper to play football. They found a piece of ground which is a wasteland, and decided to play football on it. However, the tanks and gun shoots came back and Karim and his friend couldn't escape from there. To know what happened and if Karim could go home you should read it. It's really an interesting story, and u can learn a lot from it. whatI learned is to fight for life and my aims whatever it takes to be alive and achieve them.

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