



A Land of Permanent Goodbyes

Written by Atia Abawi

Philomel, 2018, 276pp

ISBN 978-0-399-54683-9

"Your borders were devised by man. A rain cloud or even a bird does not recognize the barriers created by the human mind."

--p. 73-74

The struggle for survival tests all who attempt to find safety outside of Syria. The journey is painful, harrowing and seemingly never-ending, at least to Tarek, as his family is torn apart, first by the bombs that destroyed his home, and then by the journey to Germany. Happiness may never be in the plan for his life as he loses his mother and one of his sisters in the bombing. He cannot find his younger brother, but he must leave the country with his father and younger sister before it is too late. They leave without knowing the fate of Tarek's brother. Their travels highlight actual circumstances of those who flee Syria in hopes of finding safety in Europe.

Tarek and his family represent the terror many Syrians experience as they first travel to territory held by the Daesh (Al-Khada) to borrow money from family members willing to wait out the civil war. It is in this place that Tarek and his cousin witness a public beheading. Dashing back to his uncle's home, the family, along with Tarek's cousin, narrowly escape a further encounter with the Daesh, who suspect anyone who does not profess loyalty to their cause. The family travels to Turkey, but discover they have too little money to travel further. Working for months to garner additional funds, the family decides that Tarek and his young sister will be the first to traverse the rough seas to Greece where international aid workers can help with relocation. Tarek's cousin also decides to stay in Turkey, closer to Syria, which will always be their home. The trip across the Aegean Sea is especially treacherous as the rafts hold too many people wearing life vests that do not work. It is from there that Tarek and his sister encounter further disaster on their way to safety. What they encounter along their escape include elements of both terror and compassion. Looking for "helpers" along the way gives Tarek, and readers, hope.

A Land of Permanent Goodbyes pairs nicely with *Escape from Aleppo* by S.N. Sensai (2018). Both address escapes from Syria but while *Aleppo* ends with crossing the border into Turkey, *Permanent Goodbyes* takes readers to Europe and the further struggles encountered by Syrian refugees at a time when parts of Europe begin to close their borders. This would make a wonderful addition to a text set about the current situation in Syria that could also include *The Dance of the Banished* by Marsha Skrypuch (2015) and the graphic novel *Escape from Syria* by Samya Kullab (2017). Additional pairings could include *The Girl from Aleppo: Nujeen's Escape from War to Freedom* by Nujeen Mustafa (2017) and Christina Lamb or *Dear World: A Syrian Girl's Story of War and Plea for Peace* by Bana Alabed (2017). If readers want to read more about refugees from across the world, the books *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017) and the picture-book *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna (2016) would also be of interest.

Atia Abawi is a foreign news correspondent for NBC and CNN who has lived and worked in the Middle East and Asia for over 10 years. She was born to refugee parents who escaped to West Germany after fleeing Afghanistan, but grew up in the US. She currently lives in Jerusalem with her family while she covers news from the Middle East, but was based in Kabul, Afghanistan for over five years. She wrote another novel for teens entitled *The Secret Sky: A Novel of Forbidden Love in Afghanistan* (2015), and she contributed to the collection *Hope Nation: YA Authors Share Personal Moments of Inspiration* (2018) edited by Rose Brock. More information about Atia can be found at her website: www.atiaabawi.com.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH