



A House without Walls

Books Reviewed:

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[Nicholas Tucker](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Now out in paperback, this novel is told in the voice of Safiya, a twelve-year-old from contemporary Damascus in Syria. Without a mother, she lives with Baba, her comfortably off lawyer father plus older brother Tariq in an area of the town spared constant bombing. But serious threats come from the legions of secret police on the look-out for anyone out of sympathy with the regime. After a tip-off the family flees to neighbouring Jordan, and on the journey Baba is robbed of all his money. Their new home is now a tent pitched on a patch of ground outside the house of some better-off relatives. What started as something of an adventure has ended in disaster.

Deprived off any further schooling, Safiya now works cleaning the tent and cooking skimpy meals. But she remains an ever-lively presence with plenty of other diversionary interests and concerns going on in her young life. Why will no-one tell her anything about her dead mother? Will she ever find her lost twin sister? Is she being set up for an unwished-for early marriage? Chapters often end on these or other urgent questions still hanging in the air, hopefully to be answered in the next. This is story-telling at its most skilled and experienced.

Things do improve via a number of happy coincidences. Finally united with Saba, her twin sister, Safiya still has to work hard to make this new relationship viable. Her own angry and envious emotions that sometimes burst out render her all the more human and believable. In [an afterword the author](#) [4] tells of working with present-day refugees and some of the memorable characters, young and old, she met while doing so. This excellent story does them all proud.

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