

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: STORIES AND ARTICLES FROM ANGLOPHONE KUWAIT BY NADA FARIS



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About the Author

Nada Faris represented Kuwait at The International Writing Program, USA, and at London's Shubbak Festival, UK. Nada has placed in the top two on four National Slam Poetry Competitions. As a performance poet, Nada has headlined everywhere in Kuwait, from KU, AUK, GUST, and AOU, to private and public schools, hotels, and cafes, to Kuwait's National Book Fair and Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah. She also performed abroad at Busboys & Poets, Spit Dat, Iowa University, Senior College and more.

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First, let's address the elephant in the room. I am a Kuwaiti who writes in English. Does this make me 'Westernized?' Or worse, a traitor to 'authentic Arab heritage?' Since publishing the first edition of this book, which was then titled *Before Young Adult Fiction*, I've been asked by a number of well-meaning individuals why I neglected the language of the Koran (and of heaven, apparently) and 'the richest language in the world' to propagate the language of infidels. This book includes stories and articles that explain my point of view.

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A highly engaging collection, full of emotion, from this very talented young writer, writing across different genres

By Jay Lewis Allchin

Ms. Nada Faris is an up & coming, award-winning, and provocative writer of social articles, poetry, short stories, and a highly promising new young adult novel currently in serialization. Born and living in Kuwait, Ms. Faris chooses to write in English, showcasing not only her culture and related issues but wider social, human issues for both a home and an international audience.

So what do we have here in the interestingly titled 'Before Young Adult Fiction'? Well, what we get is, in truth, sometimes a mixed bag of goodies, but a product that is always honest nonetheless. First up is the short-form prose: 1 novella and 4 short stories. The themes vary, taking in social status and expectations; the role, identities, and expectations of women; decaying relationships; the dangers of being highly outspoken; and the role of the media--themes that variously weave themselves in and out of stories about a divorced man shamed by his runaway wife and who is afraid of losing his teenage daughter; a bona-fide superhero who, tired of having to be constantly be available to everyone, seeks help from a psychiatrist; an witnessing the conversation between 2 Nazi soldiers; a role model who tries to conform but is undone by the media; a long-

married couple decaying in their relationship. The opening novella, featuring the abandoned father, whilst full of interest is perhaps the weakest of the bunch, with its themes never quite fulfilled. Still, kudos to Ms. Faris for including this, for as her preface says, all the writing here represents her evolution as a writer over a number of years. It might have been too easy to go back and plug the holes, but that would be less honest than she's being in this collection.

The most memorable story for me was 'A Melancholic Superhero'. I mean, what a great idea for a story! Full of heart, this neatly showcases people's expectations of others and the issue of taking responsibility.

Whilst all the stories are thematic, they are nonetheless stories, designed to entertain. The prose is rich, the narrative voices varied and textured, the characters diverse and distinct. These are not fictional excuses to rant or convey opinions. They may do the latter, but these are all highly readable and enjoyable stories.

Next up are a collection of 4 poems, all them placed or winners at festivals. 'Artemis' is a standout, with its impassioned cry of pain for a failed relationship. A clear strength that pervades all of Ms. Faris' writing is the emotion that runs through it, never clearer than in her poetry. Unconstrained at times by strict rhyme and pentameter, they do nonetheless have clear, changing rhythm. But for me, not usually a fan of poetry, it's the raw emotion of 'Artemis' that I enjoyed so much. Another stand out is 'Dear Ms. English Teacher' in which Ms. Faris challenges her teacher to make language and literature relevant to her, to inspire her--all done with a good dose of wit and fun.

The collection then moves on to a group of 4 articles, dealing with adoption in Kuwait, workers' rights, the influence of literature over the ages, a plea for responsible capitalism, and finally a brief discussion on the importance of the specificity of words. Throughout these, Ms. Faris hasn't quite yet found her true narrative voice consistently; nonetheless, a wide range of topics is covered with the central issue clearly conveyed, which is why they've all been published (if I'm not mistaken).

Ms. Faris' compilation ends with a preview of her new young adult novel 'Fame in the Adriatic'. Opening in Corfu and set mainly in Venice in 1533, it features a vivid and lively young female protagonist. Promising much early on with its satisfying prose and highly engaging first-person narrative voice, this is getting a lot of positive buzz from readers so far.

Overall, 'Before Young Adult Fiction' showcases the development of a very talented young writer, writing across different genres, finding her style, and developing her voice. What I love is the honesty of the collection and, above all, the pervading emotion that resonates both throughout the book and after its final page... Ms. Faris' writing never fails to engage.

Already beginning to gain some national recognition in her home country, Nada Faris is a fresh new writer who doesn't want to conform to the same, tired formulae, at last not here. Taking risks, showing us how she's learned and developed, she wants to wake us up and get us to think.

What struck me after I'd read this was if she's as good as this now, just how good is she going to get down the line? I, for one, am looking forward to finding out.

Ms. Faris writes a blog, and a synopsis of 'Before Young Adult Fiction' can be found here:

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