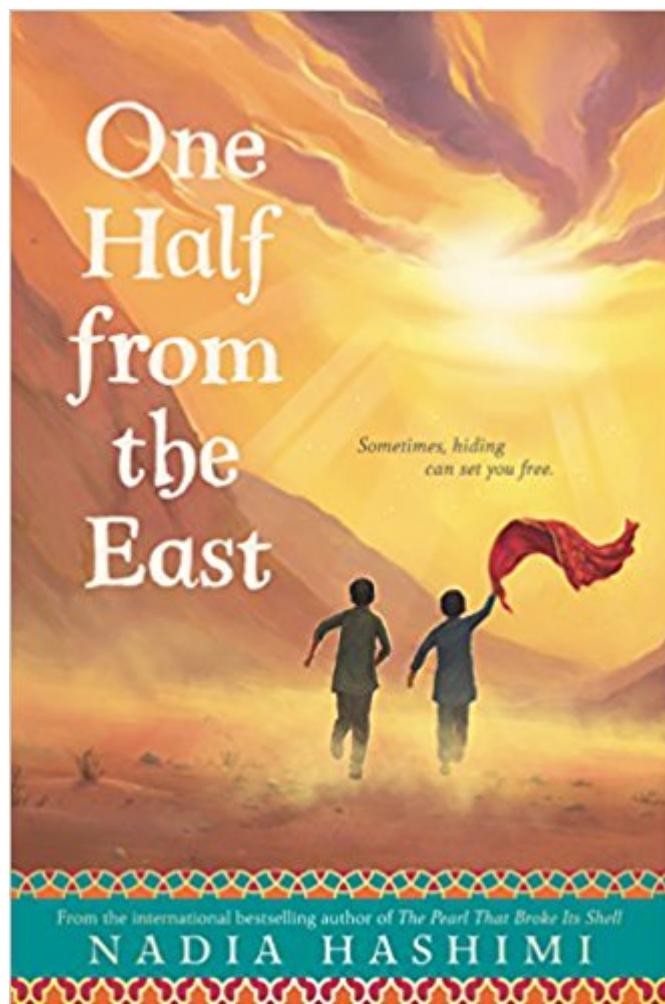


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# One Half From The East



## Synopsis

Perfect for fans of Rita Williams-Garcia, Thanhha Lai, and Rebecca Stead, internationally bestselling author Nadia Hashimi's first novel for young readers is a coming-of-age journey set in modern-day Afghanistan that explores life as a *bacha posh* — a preteen girl dressed as a boy. Obayda's family is in need of some good fortune, and her aunt has an idea to bring the family luck — to dress Obayda, the youngest of four sisters, as a boy, a *bacha posh*. Life in this in-between place is confusing, but once Obayda meets another *bacha posh*, everything changes. Their transformation won't last forever, though — unless the two best friends can figure out a way to make it stick and make their newfound freedoms endure. Nadia Hashimi's first novel for adults, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, was a bestseller that shares a *bacha posh* character with *One Half from the East*.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Fall in love with *One Half from the East*!

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Gr 4-8 After Obayda's policeman father loses a leg in a car bombing in Kabul, her family moves to a rural village to be near their extended relatives. When her father retreats from life

because of his injury, an aunt suggests that the girl be allowed to be a *bacha posh* and live as a boy. Obayda would have a better education and more opportunities, and the presence of a boy would bring luck, and perhaps a baby brother, to the family. "Obayd" struggles at first, but once she makes friends with Rahima (another *bacha posh*), she gains confidence and enjoys her new life. Their joy is short-lived. When Rahima is married off to a local warlord at the age of 13, Obayda makes a desperate attempt to keep her freedom. Told in clear, vivid prose that combines detailed descriptions of daily life with a good dose of adventure, this story has more information about *bacha posh* than Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner* and is a welcome addition to books about Afghanistan such as Trent Reedy's *Words in the Dust* and Andrew Clements's *Extra Credit*. The depiction of a country and family in turmoil is realistically handled, and Obayda's father does recuperate from his injuries with her help. **VERDICT** This is an excellent title that will offer students a window into life in Afghanistan and open interesting, age-appropriate conversations about gender expectations and roles in different countries. —Karen Yingling, Blendon Middle School, Westerville, OH

"Like its young protagonist, *One Half from the East* dances between hope and hard realities. Obayda's struggle to define herself in a world that is all too eager to do the job for her is captivating. (Cassie Beasley, author of *Circus Mirandus*) "Told in clear, vivid prose that combines detailed descriptions of daily life with a good dose of adventure, this story... This is an excellent title that will offer students a window into life in Afghanistan and open interesting, age-appropriate conversations about gender expectations and roles in different countries." (School Library Journal (starred review)) "By focusing on gender inequality as seen through the lens of a traditional society, Hashimi lets readers see themselves in Obayda's emotions, even as the outcomes remain true to the Afghan culture Hashimi portrays so fluently. (The Horn Book) "The first-person point of view in this novel will be impactful and meaningful to readers. Hashimi's Obayda will provide readers with insightful information about Islamic culture, and particularly the Afghani culture, as it relates to girls. (Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)) "With beautiful language, rich characters, and a perspective not often seen in children's literature, this heartbreak story will leave a lasting mark. (Booklist)

This is the 3rd of her series I have now read. I've learned a great deal, and now have insight when the news reports the various glossed-over issues of a young girl being kidnapped/given by family to a war lord. or forced to take the role of a boy (men rule society). My heart goes out to these female

children/women and their families. I, unfortunately, do not see their customs changing in our lifetimes.

Love the author. Loved each book she has so far written and published.

This book is so incredibly thoughtful and well written. The subject matter is very mature, however Nadia has framed it in a way to be very readable for a young reader. Perfect book for a mother daughter book club as it is thought provoking, heartfelt, and smart. I can't wait to read The Pearl That Broke Its Shell as a follow up.

I highly recommend all books by Nadia Hashimi.

Friendship ... is born at the moment when one man says to another "What! You too? I thought that no one but myself . . .". C.S. LewisNadia Hashimi, an internationally bestselling author, pens a terrific and extremely heart rending yet enlightening tale of love, friendships, child marriage, bacha posh in her new middle grade contemporary fiction book, One Half from the East where the author weaves a tale centered around a ten year old Afghan girl who encounters a bomb blast that claims her father's leg that led that girl and her family to shift to the villages where the little girl is forced to dress as a boy in order to bring good fortune to her falling family.Synopsis:Internationally bestselling author Nadia Hashimi's first novel for young readers is an emotional, beautiful, and riveting coming-of-age journey to modern-day Afghanistan that explores life as a bacha posh—a preteen girl dressed as a boy. Obayda's family is in need of some good fortune. Her father lost one of his legs in a bomb explosion, forcing the family to move from their home city of Kabul to a small village, where life is very different and Obayda's father almost never leaves his room. One day, Obayda's aunt has an idea to bring the family luck—a dress Obayda, the youngest of her sisters, as a boy, a bacha posh. Now Obayda is Obayd. Life in this in-between place is confusing, but once Obayda meets another bacha posh, everything changes. The two of them can explore the village on their own, climbing trees, playing sports, and more. But their transformation won't last forever—unless the two best friends can figure out a way to make it stick and make their newfound freedoms endure. Obayda faces the tragic bomb blast in a market in Kabul that claimed her policeman father's leg, thereby stripping away their family's financial source and means of living, which finally led Obayda, her one legged

father, her mother and her three elder sisters to shift to their father's village house. In the village Obayda's and her family's life resumes normally with the financial help from her father's brother. But one fine day, Obayda's aunt proposes her mother to turn their youngest daughter into bacha posh (a preteen girl dresses as a boy) in order to support their financial condition, as the girls are not allowed to work in Afghanistan, instead being a boy, she has the freedom to bring money into her family by doing odd jobs. Obayda reluctantly turns into a boy with a reformed name, Obayd, and in the beginning, Obayd faces a lot of challenges to settle into the lifestyle of a boy who can run freely, eat more food, stay outside his home until nightfall and can be exempted from any household and domestic chores. So gradually Obayd learns the ropes to be a boy dresses in shirts and pants, and in the process, he finds a new friend, Rahim, in school who is also like him, and together they embrace the freedom, run wildly through the mountains to pass below the rainbows, chase other boys, do anything they like, but all until puberty and they would do anything to stay a bacha posh forever. But there is no forever for a bacha posh. This is the first Nadia Hashimi that I got an opportunity to read, although in my tbr shelf, a copy of The Pearl That Broke Its Shell is lying there for over months now, as I have not yet found the time to read it. And after reading the prequel of The Pearl That Broke Its Shell, I'm definitely looking forward in reading about Rahima's painful journey into marriage, love and womanhood. This story that is centered around Rahima's friend, Obayda is a real gem that is polished, flawless and shinning brightly through its equally evocative emotional and psychological aspects. Right from the very first page, the story swept me away into the dusty and rugged terrain of Kabul along with Obayda and her adventures as a bacha posh. This is a must read not only for all children but also for the adults that will let them see brutal truth behind the life of a woman/girl living in a misogynist society. The author's writing style is coherent yet exquisite, rich with myriad of emotions that will make the readers feel the pain, joy, happiness and the challenges of the protagonist till the very last page. The narrative is very simple and easy to comprehend with and the author has strikingly captured the voice and mindset of a ten year old girl that is not only honest but is quite thought provoking, that will force the readers to think about the protagonist's situation from their hearts. The pacing of the book is really swift as the author unravels the story through some layers and twists that will surprise the readers. As a whole, this is a fulfilling read, but it is bound to leave the readers with a hangover and lasting impression for the protagonist and her family. The backdrop of the story is vividly arrested into the plot with the tiny and minute details about the landscapes, the food, the culture, the religious beliefs, the societal stigmas, the prejudiced ideals, the streets, the people, the traditional attire and everything, that will let the readers visually imagine the scenes unfolding right before their eyes. So this story will transport the

readers right into the middle of a forgotten village in Kabul where people are dominated by a cruel and vicious warlord. The characters from this story are equally well developed, laced with flaws and dynamism in their demeanor thereby making them look real and believable in the eyes of the readers. The main character, Obayda is flawlessly depicted with enough realism and flaws, the readers can easily comprehend with the feelings of this little girl, who is learning so much about the double standard world she lives in without a question, although she is quite mature compared to her tender age. The other supporting characters are also equally fantastic and enlightens the story with their unmatched charm. In a nutshell, this is a captivating middle grade story that is not only poignant but will keep the readers turn the pages of this book frantically to learn about a girl treading her way into the world bravely and freely like a boy, even though she knows that her freedom isn't long lasting.

Entering a whole unfamiliar culture by reading a good story that takes place in this culture is nothing less than an adventure. This takes place in the middle East and is a touching story of a family enduring serious hardships while following all the rules that are required by their culture. When things don't always work out the way that is acceptable, there are actually traditional underground practices that some will resort to. For their survival, the family in this story resorted to one of these, turning their youngest daughter into a Bacha Posh. Do you know what a "Bacha Posh" is? If you have never heard of it, please read and learn what does take place in some cultures, how it helps the family in many ways and the Psychological effects it has and leaves on the child in the end. The story moves well and keeps a fascinating interest going.

In a poem so old it's widely thought of as a nursery rhyme, we learn that little girls are made of "sugar and spice and everything nice," while "snips and snails and puppy dog tails" constitute little boys. Gender differences are noted and supported nearly from birth in every society. It is one culture's connotation of these differences which is so poignantly addressed in Nadia Hashimi's ONE HALF FROM THE EAST. Life in Kabul is good for Obayda and her sisters; her father is a police officer, the family lives in a balconied apartment and the girls attend a school with new blackboards, desks and a playground. One morning, Obayda's dad walks her to a pharmacy to fetch medicine. A car bomb explodes, nearly killing her padar, who loses a leg and is hospitalized for weeks. Forced to move to the small remote village of Padar's relatives, Abayda

and her sisters find their new life difficult. Unfit to work and severely depressed, Padar cannot provide for the family, and without a “backup father,” i.e., a son, they must rely on handouts from an uncle. There is less room, less food, and much less money. Relatives convince Obayda’s parents that their streak of bad luck would end if they had a son; they believe that the presence of sons in a family is a blessing which wards against bad luck and reverses bad circumstances. Obayda’s parents agree to perform the cultural practice known as “bacha posh,” the outward conversion of a pre-adolescent girl child into a boy, hoping to reverse the poor fortune they have experienced since losing Padar’s livelihood and their home. Obayda’s hair is shorn, her dresses replaced with pants, her food portions increased, and she is given freedom to ride bikes, climb trees, make (male) friends and explore outdoors. Now called Obayd, she has all the privileges she never had as a girl, and which her older sisters continue to be denied. When she meets Rahima, another bacha posh three years her senior, Obayda’s life changes irrevocably, as they both count down the days until they will lose their privileged lives and return to what Obayda calls their “girl-ness.” Hashimi’s tale is a heartbreak treatment of the impact of powerlessness as experienced by those who do not have the freedom to control their own fate, told through the eyes of a loving, sensitive 10-year-old girl whose entire life is defined by that very condition. The custom of bacha posh, as practiced in Afghani and Pakistani culture, is explained from the perspective of adults who believe in the process and its ability to reduce the social stigma of having no male children. Obayda’s experience as she reinvents herself is voiced impeccably. Hashimi has written a pitch-perfect character in Obayda as she accepts the limitations of her life as a girl, all she has ever known, then is awakened to what might have been when she experiences life as a boy. Her friendship with Rahima rings of genuineness and validity. It is a testament to the quality of Hashimi’s writing that the reader who has no knowledge of Obayda’s culture can understand how she finds herself in her circumstances, and how Obayda is able to resolve herself to what she can and cannot control, all the while holding on to her hope, her optimism and her spirit. Hashimi’s characters are, quite simply, unforgettable. When a shocking circumstance results in the possible end of Rahima’s period of bacha posh, she tells Abayda that their fates are not their own because “I’m a girl. Because people think they can do what they want to us. They think we should have no say in what happens to us. That’s why I don’t want to be a girl. That’s why I would have”

done anything to make myself a boy forever. A powerful, honest yet never melodramatic, Rahima's and Obayda's observations and experiences in this story are searingly impactful. I highly recommend ONE HALF FROM THE EAST to all readers of every age; it is among the most thought-provoking and affecting children's fiction I have read. One may read this story and note the differences between Obayda's culture and one's own. For this reader, the most meaningful comparison is the fact that Obayda and Rahima wish, in their deepest hearts, for the same things which all children hope for: the opportunity to be free to learn and play and grow, to express themselves, and to have, as Rahima relates, a say in what happens to them. Hashimi challenges us all, in a most respectful and intelligent way, to consider the fact that, whether made of sugar and spice or snips and snails, do not all children deserve that same opportunity? (Note: Hashimi has written three adult novels, including THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL, which tells Rahima's story into adulthood.)

Reviewed by Donna Rasmussen

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