ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

The Bite of the Mango
Mariatu Kamara
Susan McClelland
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Twelve-year-old Mariatu Kamara often prayed for new clothes, for a good harvest, or for a nice man to marry when she got older. Then, one day in 1999, the Sierra Leone native prayed for something quite different: “Please let me die quickly. Let it be over quickly. Let my family, if they have been captured by the rebels all die quickly, too. Don’t let the rebels cut my body piece by piece.”

Her prayers went unanswered. When members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked their village, she did survive, as did her family, but the rebels chopped off both her hands.

It’s a time and place probably unfamiliar to most readers, not to mention incomprehensible. Before the attack, Mariatu lived simply, spending mornings working in the community garden, afternoons playing hide and seek with cousins. After the attack, she recovered in a hospital in Freetown, the nation’s capital, but quality of life slipped even further when she discovered that she was pregnant.

Mariatu moved to Toronto in 2002, sponsored by a local family. She currently attends college, is a representative for UNICEF, and tours North Amer-ica in speaking engagements. Mariatu narrates her story by intertwining two time periods: life before the attack and life after. When using words unique to her culture, she always defines what she’s referencing. For example, she mentions a tamalangba, “what we call a whipping stick, made from a long thick weed that grows everywhere.”

This is the story of the results of war as seen through a child’s eyes, re-told by a young woman who lived through it. Despite the intense sub-ject matter, the book is not overly graphic or gratuitous. It’s recommended for older teens, but adults won’t be able to put the book down either. It appears Mariatu took her mother’s advice: “It’s bad what happened to you. But you must see the positive in every-thing.”

Robin Farrell Edmunds