



## What Girls Are Made Of

**Elana K. Arnold**

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Elana K. Arnold's *What Girls Are Made Of* is realistic fiction at its most touching, following one young girl's struggles to make her way through the world using a broken frame. Her attempts to free herself from that limitation, and to discover the truth beyond, make for a compelling and heart-wrenching journey.

*What Girls Are Made Of* begins with a chilling scene in which teenager Nina Faye's mother tells her that all love—even mother-daughter and husband-wife relationships—comes with conditions. She coldly tells her daughter that sex and attraction are just two of the reasons that her father has for loving her mother, thereby lending to Nina the broken worldview that she will then use to navigate the world. A few years later, when Nina is sixteen, she uses such ideas to understand her relationship to her boyfriend—but when he dumps her, she grows lost and confused, and she struggles to understand the meaning of love.

The novel alternates chapters with brief, dreamlike descriptions that touch at Nina's inner turmoil. The chapters that she narrates, by contrast, are hard and sometimes methodical, with Nina presenting a mask of indifference to shield her inner pain. The imprint of her mother's conversation is on almost everything she does and everything she thinks about, affecting how she approaches the world.

*What Girls Are Made Of* doesn't flinch away from stark presentations of a struggling teen, from her sexual activity to her mother's unflinching coldness and struggles. The novel is stark, but relatable, and Nina's final confrontation with her mother leads to both a frustrating—and perfectly fitting—end.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (May/June 2017)

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