



# Zabelle

*Nancy Kricorian*

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## **Zabelle** Nancy Kricorian

As Zabelle's family assembles for her funeral in present-day Massachusetts, it becomes clear that her children hardly knew her. But as this alternatively comic and heartbreaking novel unfolds--beginning with Zabelle's survival of the 1915 Armenian Genocide in Turkey and her subsequent emigration to America for an arranged marriage--an unforgettable character emerges.

## **Zabelle Details**

Date : Published March 1st 1999 by Harper Perennial (first published 1998)

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Author : Nancy Kricorian

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## From Reader Review Zabelle for online ebook

### Aria says

I was surprised at how interested I was in this tale. I read the entire thing in a day. It held my attention the entire time. I can't think how it could be made better. I considered giving it 5 stars, but I know a year from now it won't live in my memory the way those stories do to which I give that extra star. (Harry Potter, Tolkien, Anne Rice's vampires and witches, 1984, The Handmaid's Tale, Fahrenheit 451, The Brothers Karamazov, Harrison Bergeron, Something Wicked this Way Comes, Living My Life, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, Heavier Than Heaven, etc.)

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### Nataly Mariam Arakelian says

This book is amazing, I couldn't put it down, I finished it in less than 24 hours. I truly recommend it, it's written beautifully, and as an Armenian I was over whelmed by everything, every detail, every word. Definitely one of those books that I don't mind reading again.

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### dianne says

A wonderful book. It read much as i imagine the diary of a woman like Zabelle might actually read. She allowed herself to feel, a bit, what she actually felt deeply, hugely; because had she allowed herself that real emotional latitude, life's pains, disappointments, disasters, dearths would have been lethal. She was a survivor; first of the Armenian Genocide - hers of 1916 - but it went on for years - taking somewhere from 1-1.5 million Armenians, previously living at peace for untold generations in the Ottoman Empire. But then, as now, when lives, governments, situations become, or seem to become, more difficult, some majorities blame random minorities - even if they had been friends or neighbors last week. Many sensible become afraid, and the bully - the Turk, the (1938) German, the Trump, take charge.

At her death, her children know nothing, apparently, about what she had been through. She either chose not to tell them, or was waiting for them to ask, and they never did. This is such clear contradistinction to friends of mine who are the children of survivors of other genocide attempts / holocausts, whose parents seemingly never let the sun set without reminding them of their alleged duties as the offspring of survivors to..what? make up for the millions lost? This crippling pressure never seemed anything but a burden for my friends to overcome. So where is the balance between learning one's history and burdening the next generation with unhealthy and unrealistic expectations?

Like most survivors, Zabelle rolled with what came - she took the Turkish name she was given, but was happy to be rescued and re-Armenian-ified. She married, sight unseen and was shipped to the USA to live a difficult life - again, tolerating and finding her level of survival in a honest way. A huge disappointment was her eldest son. Typical was this beautiful insight about her son who is embarrassed of her, avoids her: *"What can you do? They spend a small time in your body, a small time in your arms, and a lifetime walking away...There was a small room that I visited once in awhile in the house of memory where he remained."*

As i try to learn important parts of history that were redacted from my state education -both the beautiful, but

heartbreaking "Birds Without Wings" and this sweet book are important notes of the horrible Armenian genocide.

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### **Kathy Sebesta says**

A part of 20th century I really didn't know much about, the Turkish slaughter of the Armenian people during WWI. I would like to think that the horrors of this story are truly fiction, but I know they weren't. It's a slim novel that flashes back and forth along Zabelle's life and it's done quite well. As usual for this technique it suffers a bit in straightening out the characters, but that's my only criticism. I would read Kricorian again.

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### **Zabel says**

What I enjoyed about this historical fiction is that it discusses the Armenian Genocide in a way that I could digest quickly and easily. So many of the non-fictional books which discuss the horrors of the genocide leave one feeling despair for the senseless and brutal deaths that occurred, but this book rather takes the reader on a journey that ends in hope and happiness. It is a beautiful story which can shed light on the life of a survivor of the Armenian genocide.

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### **Sara says**

A haunting tale of genocide, emigration and immigration examined through the experience of an Armenian woman caught between three continents and three generations. Most people are entirely unaware of the atrocities committed against the Armenian people in recent history -- I take that back, most people have never even heard of Armenia to begin with -- so this book is also a personal exegesis and seems to have been directly inspired by the author's own family history.

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### **Lisa Savage says**

Great women's history of Armenian immigrants to New England in the early 20th century. Nice job of layering the stories of the different generations and time periods. I am eagerly awaiting my copy of *All The Light There Was* which is Kricorian's latest novel. It's about Armenian families living in Paris under German occupation, and the advance chapter I read has stayed with me for months.

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### **Nora Murad says**

This novel-told-as-memoir of one Armenian woman's story gives touching insight into how the Armenian genocide propelled a traditional community into Watertown, Massachusetts, and how their identities, relationships and dreams were shaped by culture and history. Simply written, you come to love the characters and care about what happens to them, realizing that all our life stories have deeper meaning that

we usually grant them. As someone who lived in Watertown, the places and situations are vivid and endearing. A really nice read.

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### **Alice says**

not particularly well written but an interesting story none the less.

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### **Margaret says**

I found this book to be moving and touching. The author managed to seamlessly weave humor into a story that depicts human suffering. Because of my Armenian heritage and familiarity with the culture and history, the characters and events were exceptionally meaningful. I could not put this book down. Excellent read.

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### **Alyssa says**

I thought this would be just another book about the Armenian Genocide, but somehow it was both more and less than that at the same time. At first i was annoyed by the lack of facts about the genocide and how very small the author made it seem. But as I continued I was thankful for it. This is a tale of an immigrant family in Boston. Zabelle's, the narrator endured atrocious, inhumane acts and survived by the skin of her teeth to begin a new life in America with a husband she had never met and a devil of a mother in law. Though this story is uniquely Armenian, right down to the evil, abusive mother-in-law, it is also very 1st generation American, and in that aspect not so different from any other immigrant story of finding old world and new world balance. I enjoyed this book and red through it in a day, but I did wish there was more bite to it. It left me feeling that too many things were left unsaid.

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### **Soseh says**

The story Zabelle is about a young girl who survives through the Armenian Genocide, loses her parents through the Genocide, and then leads a hard life in America with a busy husband. Zabelle is a young Armenian girl who goes through the Armenian Genocide. She has to walk through the hot dessert, where her baby brother, mother, grandmother, granfather, and father all die. She finds two kids that were from her old town. Then she is sent to an orphan house. She stays there until she is hired in a Turk's house as a worker and later saved by an Armenian man. Afterwards, she gets sent to America for an arranged marriage. While there, she gets married and has three kids. Overall, this was a great book, and Zabelle leads a very hardworking life.

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### **Julie says**

Reading this book is like reading someone's private diary. There's almost zero character development, plot, or, frankly, history (even though it's historical fiction), but it is an unbelievable page-turner!

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## **Barbara says**

I have read several narratives of this horrifying period in Armenian history, but I have found that it is underrepresented in most accounts of genocide and war. Most of my reading on these topics has been focused on WW II and that Holocaust. I have noted that the generations which followed both abominations have tried to preserve and honor those who died and those who survived. Krikorian dealt with these atrocities for the Armenian people realistically but sensitively.

Zabelle survived the death of most of her loved ones, starvation, illness, slavery and the Death March to Ottoman Turkey. Through an arranged marriage, she found herself in a strange land- America. Her adjustment to her new world and the customs are typical of immigrants from any country to the US. Learning the language, relating to others and discovering new modes of education and different foods had to be negotiated. Yet for her generation, many clung to their familiar fare, speech and people of their own ethnic origin.

I enjoyed the discussions of the meals and the treats they consumed and some of the ethnic celebrations. I must note that much of this narrative focuses on Watertown, Massachusetts, a town nearby where I live. It is a wonderful close-knit community still, with ethnic restaurants, shops, bakeries, schools and churches. The Charles River flows near there and the streets surrounding this area and many of the companies are still in existence.

This is a touching, often humorous account of Zabelle, her family and her life. Krikorian captured the essence of the Armenian experience well in this slim offering.

Note: At the conclusion of the narrative, the author included acknowledgements, in which she thanked "Mrs.Alice Kharibian" for relating her story and what she knew of Krikorian's grandmother's. So, as we often see in today's films, this was "based on a true story"!

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## **Myersakrawiec says**

Fast read, great ethnic (Armenian) fiction. I never tire of reading the "American immigrant" story, it just never gets old. I was very sad about Zabelle's son Moses separating himself from her and the family, though. Also after comparing my mother-in-law with Zabelle's, I feel much better about mine!

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