Brave Girl Rising

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OPEN:

This is Nasro. She's 17 years old. She plays herself in a story from her own life that you are about to see. She is the latest in a remarkable group of young women whose stories Girl Rising began to tell in 2013.

And their stories are important. Because these girls hold our future in their hands. If they, and the millions of girls like them, succeed in getting the kind of education they need, incredible things will happen. For them, for their families. For their community. For all of us.

Girls in school stay healthier, get married later, and have fewer children. As educated women they earn more, raise healthier families, and make sure their children go to school.

The fight for girls education has made incredible strides. But one group of girls remains uniquely vulnerable: Refugees.

Every day, people around the world are forced from their homes in search of safety and better lives. More than 68 million people have been driven from the place they once called home. 17 million of these are girls.

In east Africa hundreds of thousands of Somalis have fled famine and violence to a refugee camp in Kenya. Some have been here for more than 25 years. Many were born here. It’s called Dadaab.

In 2018 the acclaimed poet Warsan Shire, herself a refugee, worked with Girl Rising to tell the story of one girl. Nasro.

TITLE:

BRAVE GIRL RISING

EXTREME GIRLHOOD IN FIVE POEMS

EXT. HAGADERA STREET – EARLY MORNING

The camp is waking up. Early light.
NASRO exits her compound through the corrugated tin door. Tentative. Wary. We hear the voice we will come to know as Nasro’s voice.

NASRO (V.O.)
My name is Nasro.
I am my mother’s daughter.
The doll within the doll.
I carry my mother’s fears in my feet.

On the street she meets, FARDHOSA and ANISA. They walk together to fetch water. Carrying empty jugs. They chatter softly to each other. This is a daily routine. The dusty streets are sparsely populated.

NASRO (V.O.)
I love cats, my favourite colour is green, I love to dance.

I’ve lived here almost my whole life.
Stuck between two worlds, this damned asylum.

We watch Nasro’s face as she walks. She has a quiet intensity, her mind always working. Eyes searching. She’s thinking about her situation, her world. (There’s no close up on her face here?)

Where the other girls keep their eyes down, Nasro watches for danger. Always watching. (Again, as above. She only turns back after she’s passed the woman with a baby.) She passes a woman with a newborn. The distant sound of a baby crying.

NASRO (V.O.)
My life is defined by absence.
I’m a child with no mother.
From a people with no home.
I have a present with no future.

Nasro’s thoughts – and the sound of the crying baby – lead us back-

INT. MATERNITY WARD – NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

CARD: I. Sowdo Gives Birth to a Girl

A memory – though not exactly a real one because nobody remembers their own birth. A woman, NASRO’S MOTHER, surrounded by other women, a doctor, and nurse gives birth. But something is going wrong.
At last the BABY GIRL emerges. Alone. Helpless. Innocent. This is baby Nasro, beginning a journey into the world.

But this is not a moment of joy. They don’t cry. There is just a shot of her mother alone in the room.

NASRO (V.O.)
Mother was my first loss
Bless my hooyoo who bled to death.

Mother was a cocoon
where my cells sparked,
my limbs formed -
mother swelled
and stretched
to protect me.
She sacrificed herself.

A shot of the nurse with baby Nasro.

The baby is silent, unaware of the loss she has suffered.

NASRO (V.O.)
I am my mother given a second chance, born into this world over and over again, searching for a way out.

EXT. HAGADERA WATER STATION - DAY

We are back with Nasro and the other girls, filling water jugs at the public pump. There is a community vibe here, but the talk is quiet. Always somehow subdued and demure.

NASRO (V.O.)
What type of loneliness is it, when you’re between two places but belong to neither one?
I vibrate between this world and the next.
I vibrate between girlhood and womanhood.

Nasro sees a young girl, maybe 8 or 9. She seems lost. Overwhelmed.

NASRO
(in Somali)
Do you know her?

ANISA
(in Somali)
She’s new I think.
Nasro moves to her, speaks quietly. Kneels beside her. Holds her hands.

NASRO (V.O.)
Children are born here,
they grow into adults here.
I am scared we will die here.

There are many names for
this place between heaven and hell -
Limbo,
Purgatory,
Dadaab.

Nasro’s words again take us back to a memory.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF HAGADERA – DAY (FLASHBACK)
CARD: II. The Lost and Found of Humanity

Under a bright blue African sky, young Nasro (7) and her grandparents are at the end of a long and difficult journey. They have walked here. The journey was brutal and long. People die or turn back to Somalia.

NASRO (V.O.)
Home was my second loss.
It spat us out.
Nineteen days to walk here from Somalia.
I didn’t know where I was going.
Or if I’d ever get there.

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.

At every checkpoint
We were asked – are you human?
We felt we were still human,
but worried that overnight,
while we walked,
They changed the classification.

They are moving past armed soldiers. Security. The looks on the faces here are haunted. Lost. Those who have made it, are grateful but also trying to understand their new identities. REFUGEES.

NASRO (V.O.)
We were the sin of memory and the absence of memory.
We are the lost and found of humanity.
Young Nasro is in a state of shock. Fear. Eyes cast down, under the wing of her grandparents - very much a vulnerable girl.

EXT. SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

III. Girl Must Find A Way to Survive

Nasro, Fardhosa, Anisa and a group of girls are leaving school together. A few more give her money. Everyone seems to implicitly trust Nasro.

NASRO (V.O.)
There are a few good things in my life. School.
Wearing red because red is for the girl who is at the top of her class.
The soft faces of my friends smiling back at me.
And sometimes there are weddings and we dance.

She is heading to the market with Fardhosa. The girls stay together in groups for safety. There is joy here, but also a wariness.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

Nasro’s eyes are constantly checking the dangers (in a humble way). Avoiding the eyes of men.

IRC MAN
Attention! Residents of Hagadera!

NASRO (V.O.)
Anything to forget where we are for a little while.

An IRC truck passes. The man in the truck speaks over a loudspeaker reminding girls to never go anywhere alone.

IRC MAN
It is dangerous for girls to walk alone. Girls should stay in groups at all times.

NASRO (V.O.)
We’re reminded everyday
That because we are girls we must walk fast,
(MORE)
NASRO (V.O.) (CONT' D)
must lower our gaze,
must stay in the light,
must get home before dusk.

EXT. NASRO’S HOUSE - DUSK

Nasro performs some evening rituals. Washing her face.
Tending the fire.

NASRO (V.O.)
We are forgotten here, left to go
on living in the in between.
We have forged a life where others
would not be able to.
I live twice, imagining my life.
If the war had never happened,
if my skin were a different colour.
Would life be so hard?
Would hunger and thirst still
feel like a birthright?

Nasro works in the kitchen as the day winds down.

INT. NASRO’S HOUSE - NIGHT

CARD: IV. Dreams in Which Mother Appears

Nasro, reads her Koran and prays. Finally alone now as the
day winds toward it’s end, she steals a moment to look at
herself in the mirror.

NASRO (V.O.)
I used to dream of snakes entering
the camp. Now I sleep and I dream
of hooyo macaan, sweet mother.
In the mirror I look like my
mother, the Ghost inside the girl.
I’m 17 years old, dreaming of
growing wings.

The last thing we see Nasro do is tuck the green fabric
safely beside her mattress. Then she lies down to sleep.

EXT. DREAM TREE - DAY

Nasro sits beneath a tree with her mother. Mother lovingly
paints henna on the open palm of Nasro’s hand.

NASRO (V.O.)
This dream with hoyoo is different.
I can see her face.
(MORE)
NASRO (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I can smell her Uunsi.  

We wrap our arms around our  
body, connected again like when I  
entered this world. She holds my  
hand in her hand, draws a flower on  
my palm.  

In this dream hooyo says,  
what will you do with your one life  
Nasro?  

The dream mother looks into Nasro’s eyes and speaks.  

SOWDO  
(in Somali)  
You must pledge allegiance to  
yourself.  

NASRO (V.O.)  
You must pledge allegiance to  
yourself.  

EXT. HAGADERA STREET - NEXT MORNING  

Nasro waits for her friend Anisa to meet her for the walk to  
school.  

NASRO (V.O.)  
Mother says education is worth  
risking your life for.  
That it is my right.  
I keep this in my head, trying to  
conjure up the scent of her  
sandalwood.  

Her friend notices the HENNA on Nasro’s hands. A glorious  
KING PROTEA. The national flower of Somalia – there on her  
hand. Just like in her dream.  

ANISA  
(in Somali)  
Where did you get this henna?  

NASRO  
(in Somali)  
It happened in my dream. Thanks to  
Allah.  

Anisa is surprised and interested. Even Nasro doesn’t know  
how to explain it. She is embarrassed to say that her mother  
visited her in a dream.
NASRO (V.O.)
It’s not enough to say a prayer here. If you walk alone, you are the prey.

They are at a fork. Must choose a path of least danger.

NASRO (V.O.)
We move in numbers—
shoal of fish, murmuration of birds.
We stay alert, looking for signs,
an omen - a black snake, slick eel of dust.
Taking one path over another can seal your fate.

They choose and proceed to the right.

EXT. HAGADERA STREET - MORNING

Nasro and Anisa alone now moving through the bush. Somehow the area seems too deserted. They are more alone than they should be. Fear in their faces.

NASRO (V.O.)
There is death. And there are things you imagine might feel worse than death.

They are suddenly surrounded by boys. Dangerous. Leering.

NASRO (V.O.)
Some people have turned into monsters here, and some were always like this.

Nasro, infused with the spirit of her mother, steps forward to protect Anisa. Her outstretched hand, hennaed by a ghost in a dream, is like a talisman warding away evil. The KING PROTEA. It seems to imbue her with her mother’s strength.

The boys run away.

When they are gone, Anisa is crying. Nasro comforts her.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

CARD: V. How to Bloom in Dark Places

In the classroom is row upon row of boys and girls, all clad in green except for Nasro’s bright red.
The TEACHER is at the blackboard - his words received by a sea of students dressed in green.

TEACHER
What does this figure have?

STUDENTS
Length and width.

TEACHER
This length?

STUDENTS
(unintelligible)

TEACHER
This width 11. And here is?

STUDENTS
Length.

TEACHER
Length.

But then the camera finds Nasro. Writing furiously in a notebook. Anisa, still shaken, sits beside her.

NASRO (V.O.)
How many arms do I need to grow to fight off what scares me?
How many legs to leave?
How many dreams until mother tells me how to escape this place?
Mother has given me a message.
I must tell the girls, so they can memorise it too.
If I ever forget, they will remind me.

Anisa, sitting bedside her, looks again at the henna on Nasro’s hand.

INT. WOMEN’S CENTER - AFTERNOON

That afternoon the girls gather at the women’s center. Fardhosa says that Nasro has had something important happen. She wants Nasro to tell the story of the attack - but Nasro wants to talk about her dream. Her mother.

She tells them of her dream and her mother. And then she describes how she fought. They listen in rapt attention.
FRIEND
What happened, Nasro?

NASRO
We were walking to school.
Some boys came at us.
When they came towards us, I fought
with one.
(beat)
This henna from my mother gave me
strength.
From the dream.

Finally, Nasro presents them with the pledge she has written -
passed from her dream mother. They recite the allegiance and
become a sisterhood of empowered young women.

NASRO (V.O.)
I read to them the words as my mother
said them.

We pledge allegiance to our bodies,
We pledge allegiance to fortifying our
girlhood.
We pledge allegiance to water,
to it's dutiful scarcity,
we do not bow to thirst and the shadow it
casts over our lives.
We will be our own mothers,
We will be the big sisters we never had,
We will be the fathers we almost had
We will fortify our own walls,
We will protect the vulnerable,

And her voice continues into...

EXT. HAGADERA WATER STATION - MORNING

The next morning back at the water station. Nasro is filing
water with Anisa, when the young girl from earlier sees
Nasro. She smiles broadly.

NASRO (V.O.)
We will protect ourselves,
so, we will protect each other.

Then seemingly from nowhere, three much OLDER WOMEN approach.
They are like mythical witches or crones. Oracles. Fairy
godmothers.
OLD WOMAN
(in Somali)
We’re looking for the girl named Nasro.

NASRO (V.O.)
Our mothers are our talisman in this unholy place.

Then, seemingly from nowhere, one of the women produces a bundle. A bolt of GREEN FABRIC. As she hands it to Nasro, we see that she too has a KING PROTEA in henna painted elegantly on her wrinkled hand.

OLD WOMAN
(in Somali)
We’re proud of you.
This is for your celebration today.

NASRO (V.O.)
Our mothers, guide and guard us from the next world. Helping our safe passage from girl into woman.

Then the women are gone. Nasro and Anisa watch them go.

NASRO (V.O.)
Bless us
born girls,
born black,
born into war,
born to no home.
May we find love, everywhere we go.

EXT. SCHOOL – DAY

The students sit on the ground for a graduation ceremony. Nasro, red in a sea of green, sits among the girls on one side. The boys are on the other.

NASRO (V.O.)
Love always finds a way to exist, even in here.

The PRINCIPAL, microphone in hand, is making some announcements. He begins to call out the names of students. When Nasro’s name is called – she goes forward. Everyone claps.

PRINCIPAL
The best girl in class seven is Nasro. Can you clap, everybody. She deserves it (?).
Nasro walks up toward the principal.

**PRINCIPAL (CONT’D)**

Keep up, eh? (unintelligible). So,
I wish you well in your future, so
keep the continue (?). Ok, thank
you!

She receives her prize, smiling broadly, and then returns to her seat.

**NASRO (V.O.)**

Joy is ours to find and keep.
Tenderness is ours to raise.
Love is not a myth.
Loss is not our mother tongue.

The clapping continues - growing into a joyful sound of celebration.

**NASRO (V.O.)**

We’re looking for a way out –
our mothers unused wings on our
backs.

A group of girls dancing. Their energy vibrating.

In their midst, the flag - the green fabric - unfurled to reveal the embroidered shape of the KING PROTEA...

Nasro is dancing with it in her hands. Smiling. Joyful.

**NASRO (V.O.)**

This is a flag for our pledge of allegiance,
for our mothers sacrifices,
for our daily acts of courage,
for our future and the futures of our daughters.
May they know a world outside this place.

The flag catches the wind and the sun, full of hope and light.

**NASRO (V.O.)**

May we see them soar.