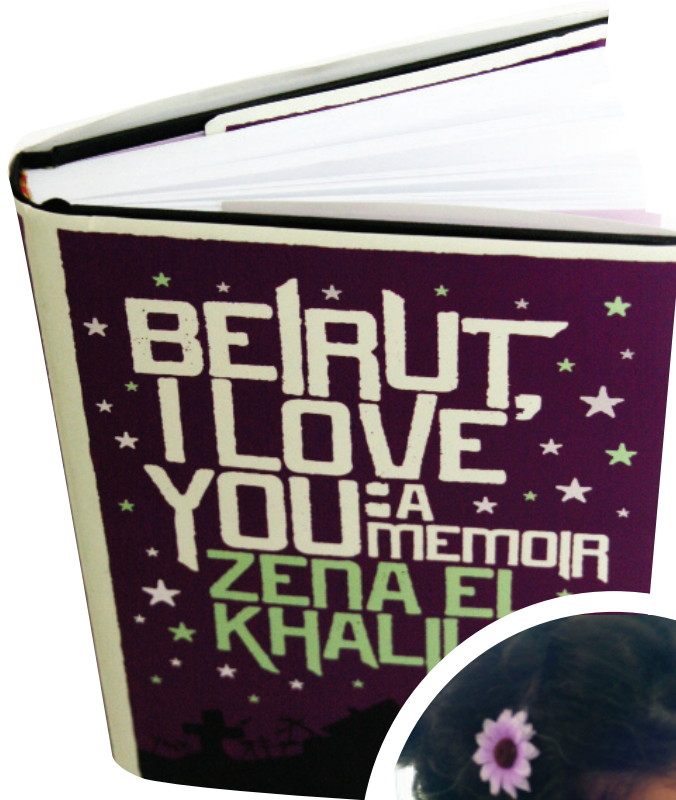


Three lifetimes of love



★★★★★

Dar Al Saqi Books, LL30,000

Not your typical romance novel, artist and writer Zena el Khalil gives us three full lifetimes of love

First, there was the war. Then there was an email. And on the third day, there was contact from the Guardian newspaper in England to reprint the emails Zena El Khalil had been sending to raise awareness during the 2006 war. The emails were syndicated and reprinted around the world, from Hong Kong to Africa to the United States. Then a blog was set up to report, in real time, what was happening in Lebanon during those 33 days. This is how a British book agent learned of Zena and encouraged her to write a book. One word to describe this memoir?

'Honest.'

The process of writing the manuscript began with thirty pages which are now somewhere in the middle of the book, and the book spans across three of Zena's lifetimes; her first reincarnation as Hussein in 1900, her second reincarnation as Asmahan in 1917, and finally, her third reincarnation as the Zena we come to know through the bulk of the book. Refreshingly, this book is not so much about war in Lebanon as it is about living in postwar Beirut. It's about the nitty gritty details of the life of an independent and independent-minded young woman living in



this adored city. It is not about groups and polarization, which are all too common motifs in our society, but about an individual and her connections - her human relations. It's about humanity, identity, and plastic surgery in Beirut. It's about double-edged swords, double standards, and sexuality. It is dirty laundry. It is about how we make best friends and lose them to ruthless diseases, how we love and must move on, and about reaching out and being pushed away only to fall into other welcoming arms. And it is about negotiating an existence with the ever-present threat of war. 'My hopes for this book,' says Zena surrounded by her artwork in her studio in Ain el Mraiseh, 'is that it might open doors for other

women without assuming too much responsibility. I hope that by being honest, we can encourage each other in our society and around the world to take responsibility for our lives and stop relying on external factors to just do things for us.' Zena spoke of the irony of having

more tools to communicate with one another in this day and age such as the internet and mobile phones, but how we are really just becoming more and more disconnected, making a lot of this new generation quite blasé. This is why her book is like sitting down and having a conversation with her. You will feel close and connected, and it will feel relevant to you. Sensual and visceral, you will smell, hear, and taste Beirut, and you will not be disappointed. It will be available in most bookstores in Lebanon this month in a limited hardcover edition and as a paperback in spring. Keep your eyes out for it!

Maria Abou Abdallah