



# The Garbage King

By Elizabeth Laird

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Inspired by the true story of an African childhood lived on the edge of destitution, award-winning Elizabeth Laird's *The Garbage King* takes readers on an unforgettable emotional journey.

When Mamo's mother dies, he is abandoned in the shanties of Addis Ababa. Stolen by a child-trafficker and sold to a farmer, he is cruelly treated. Escaping back to the city, he meets another, very different runaway. Dani is rich, educated - and fleeing his tyrannical father. Together they join a gang of homeless street boys who survive only by mutual bonds of trust and total dependence on each other.

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## The Garbage King By Elizabeth Laird Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up-The harsh reality that faces countless children in developing nations is confronted head-on in this powerful and moving novel, as is the gross disparity between the haves and have-nots. Set in Ethiopia, it brings together the stories of two very different boys whose lives converge and are changed forever. After his mother dies, Mamo, 13, is tricked by a slaver and sold to a farmer in the country miles away from the only home he has ever known. After months of brutal treatment, he escapes and makes it back to Addis Ababa where he meets Dani, a chubby boy who has spent his life cloistered in the world of privilege. He is a talented writer, but other areas of his studies elude him, leading his strict father to send him away to be disciplined. Dani runs away to avoid this fate and meets up with Mamo. They meet a gang of street children, led by a boy named Million. Street life with this group is difficult and dangerous, but the boys become a family and both their tragedies and triumphs are painted in vivid, authentic, and often horrific detail. Background for the story's inspiration is included in an introduction and an afterword. Readers are sure to become involved in this compelling story, and teachers will find a wealth of inspiration to lead their students in further research.

*Genevieve Gallagher, Orange County Public Library, VA*

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 5-8. Laird has lived and worked in Ethiopia, and this contemporary survival story is rooted in the true-life stories of street children she knows in Addis Ababa. Dani is a rich, fat kid, failing at school, who runs away from his bullying dad. Orphan Mamo, kidnapped and sold as a slave to a cruel farmer, escapes and returns to the city. The runaways meet in the city cemetery, where they hide out until they join a gang of homeless kids. Under the direction of their stern leader, the gang members care for one another and share everything, including what they scavenge from the garbage and beg from passers-by. The cast is huge, but the characters are so strongly individualized that it is easy to keep them straight. The ending is a bit too happy, at least for Mamo and Dani, who go home and handle the powerful adults. It's the elemental friendship story of fear and hope that will draw in readers. *Hazel Rochman*

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Review

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