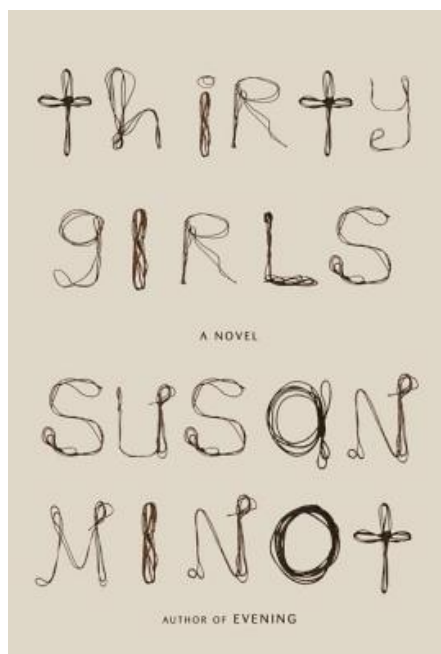




Thirty Girls

Susan Minot

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Esther is a Ugandan teenager abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army and forced to witness and commit unspeakable atrocities, who is struggling to survive, to escape, and to find a way to live with what she has seen and done. Jane is an American journalist who has traveled to Africa, hoping to give a voice to children like Esther and to find her center after a series of failed relationships. In unflinching prose, Minot interweaves their stories, giving us razor-sharp portraits of two extraordinary young women confronting displacement, heartbreak, and the struggle to wrest meaning from events that test them both in unimaginable ways.

With mesmerizing emotional intensity and stunning evocations of Africa's beauty and its horror, Minot gives us her most brilliant and ambitious novel yet.

Thirty Girls Details

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Author : Susan Minot

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From Reader Review *Thirty Girls* for online ebook

Julie Christine says

This book and the impression it left on me have not been far from my mind since I finished it several days ago. I had a feeling of déjà vu in the early pages, and realized I had picked up *Thirty Girls* and set it aside last year after only two or three chapters. I can't recall why it didn't speak to me then, but I'm so glad I returned to complete it.

The 'I've read this before' feeling also rose because I so recently read Francesca Marciano's striking *Rules of the Wild*, written several years before *Thirty Girls*. But the settings--Nairobi, East Africa--and the central character, a white, Western woman at unease in her expat surroundings, running from one past, yet colliding with her bohemian, privileged present amidst suffering and war, are one and the same. Yet the books diverge at least as much as they run parallel. They complement, rather than compete.

Whereas Marciano brought us deeply into Esme's psyche as she seeks to weave herself into the fabric of an African life and to find her calling, Minot's Jane knows she is just a visitor, and one with a specific mission: to tell the story of thirty teenaged girls kidnapped by Ugandan rebels.

Telling this story is also Minot's mission, and she does so with aching, devastating beauty. She gives voice to one girl in particular: Esther Akello. It is through Esther's eyes and ears, to the sound of her voice, that we see, hear and feel the trauma of those stolen children of Uganda. Could we not hear, too, the voices of their sisters to the north, those women and girls of Nigeria who are also casualties of fractured borders and ceaseless conflict?

Cognitive dissonance splinters the framework of the narrative, as it shifts from Jane's story to Esther's. It caused this reader considerable frustration. Jane is accompanied by a ragtag crew of bohemian whites: Lana and Don, Pierre and Harry. Harry was born and raised in Kenya. He's worked to save wild dogs, worked for this NGO and that, yet he doesn't seem to have a passion for much beyond hang-gliding. His detachment is echoed in nearly every Western-born and/or white character: they take pride in their adaptation to and knowledge of Africa, but their existence is pointless. Take them away and no one would notice--their footprints are material, their contributions immaterial. Jane slips in the mud and into Harry's arms early in the book; fifteen years her junior, Harry becomes the prism through which Jane considers her aging self, both her physical degradation and her moral lassitude. Although I was curious and followed Jane's story, I felt as detached from her and her new friends as they seemed to be from the terror unfolding in Uganda.

Where this story pulses and breathes is in the bearing witness of the horrors experienced by the *Thirty Girls*. Minot's language changes as she so beautifully captures Esther's voice; it becomes plaintive and poetic, yet strong and clear as a bell. The girls' survival becomes a thing we keen for.

The narrative weaves Esther and Jane's story in tighter and tighter braids until at last they meet. What this meeting brings, who changes, who goes on and why is something for a reader to discover. But Susan Minot does loving, compassionate justice to the girls who are taken, were taken, are still being stolen today. Whatever weaknesses this novel may have, it tells a strong, necessary story in precise, yet lovely language.

Lisa says

Esther's story merits at least 4 stars, but the self-centered writer having an Eat Pray Love experience in Kenya and Uganda seriously hurts this book. I hate the idea of a white savior, and I really hate juxtaposing a heartbreaking story with an annoying one. Minot can write, and this would have been a much better book without the prospective of the American writer.

Katie says

This book is amazing. I am a huge Minot fan, and this is her best yet. The juxtaposition of privileged white travelers against the abducted girls is a brilliant move. it's impossible to read without getting angry, but the prose will wash over you like a warm bath. wonderfully disorienting. loved it.

Jennifer says

Although this covers similar ground as works by Dave Eggers and Ishmael Beah--both remarkable in their own right--*Thirty Girls* is even more remarkable because of its fidelity to the novel genre. It is firmly based in reality, but Minot also shines as an artist with deft control of her characters, their voices and interactions, and the collision of plots that leaves the reader shattered, blinded by Esther's unfailing hope for the future and Jane's quest for love in herself and in the world.

Michael says

There is a subtle brilliance to this juxtaposition of a disaffected American woman who comes to Africa to do a story on the mass kidnapping of school girls and one of the survivors who is trying to find meaning by telling her story. Jane is recovering from a bad marriage that involved drug abuse by her husband, while Esther is recovering from years of effective slavery by a rebel cult which preys upon the civilian population. One can't help being disoriented by such an unequal comparison. We feel so much shock and sympathy for Esther as she is taken with a large group from her Catholic school in northern Uganda and marched into the bush. And admiration for the heroism of the nun Giulia as she pursues them and through praying with their leader garners the release of all but thirty. In the alternating sections from Jane's perspective we are torn between feeling the pettiness of her problems in comparison to Esther's and getting invested in her quest to make a difference by telling the world about the girls' story.

On some levels Jane's activities in Kenya before travelling into Uganda feels some kind of indictment of western civilization. She joins a circle of others who have come to Africa to escape their lives for various kinds of adventure, including partying and promiscuous sex. Though Jane hangs out with them, she more of an ordinary everyman than dissolute and decadent. She ends up homing in on a relationship with one man, Harry, a bush pilot much younger than her. She ends up serving as a fair avatar for so many of us who hear about these terrible dramas like the abductions on the news and have no meaningful way of dealing with it.

She somehow engages a group of four of the ex-pats to help her with her travel to Uganda to pursue the story. Most seem to admire her mission, though when it comes down to it, knowing the outline of the events

is their limit, and unlike her they avoid detailed knowledge and experience of the brutality and rape that the girls experienced.

Even absorbed she had a voice inside murmuring, You do not know what it is like to be pulled from your house in the middle of the night ... and another, continuous voice at the bottom of her mind like subtitles: Why did this happen to them and not me?

Worst of all the girls (and boys) are bound with them by initiation into forced participation in punishing or killing their unruly peers or by joining in on bandit raids. Boundaries are passed that are next to impossible to return from. In the heart of darkness, the Kurtz of the tale is the cult leader Kony hiding out in Sudan. He comes off as spoiled and deluded with magical thinking. A real chaos factor in the woodwork, yet behind it all motivated to grow a family he must never have had.

Throughout it all, there are eerie parallels in the resilient spirits of Ether and Jane. Jane suffers from her own sense of lost family and lack of belonging, so Esther's words must strike a chord:

You turn new in a new place. Where are you being taken? ...You wonder where you belong. It seemed you used to belong somewhere. Maybe you never did. ...

In a new place you are surprised to find a feeling of home.

You think, I cannot go on. I won't make it. Then you do.

You pray, Help me not turn into a monster.

Esther describes her methods of resilience as based on mentally escaping present horrors almost like an out-of-the-body experience, holding on to a sense of self in an imaginary marble bowl. Harry notices that Jane has a similar approach to absenting herself as an emotional defense. In the following exchange with Harry it seems she doubts the power of mental escape and is not aware of doing it herself:

Did you know that it's a myth that trauma victims block things out? It's actually the opposite of what happens. It remains engraved. You do, said Harry. What? Block things out. I do? I watch you go away and you're right here. Really?

Ultimately, we are headed toward for some mutual benefit for Jane from listening to Esther's story and Esther from telling her story to someone who listens. Esther's experience may be more real and painful, but Jane's is a hard row to hoe as well:

The stories told by the girls were engulfing her. She was filled to the brim with the images. ...Other realities were layers away, like overlapping screens ...Even the soft air fanning her damp neck was a layer away from where she really was. What was the line? To learn of another's suffering is to confront one's own shame.

The audio version of the book was well done. Despite the meaningful messages I gleaned, the overall pleasure for me I rate at a B+ (3.5). It didn't scale higher because I didn't get enough of a solid sense of Africa and its people and because several characters leaned toward caricatures. The overall impact reminds me of the response a friend got in a rejection of her poem submitted for publication: "It didn't insist enough."

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

This is a novelization of the girls abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda in 1996. I can tell the author did a lot of research, including (I think) some in-person interviews. It is a shame, then, that she felt she needed to make a female American journalist character the primary focus of the book, rather than the nuns and children the story should be about. In the first 100 pages, we get a few pages of the harrowing account of the abduction and like 80 pages about white non-Africans touring around, going to parties and having sex and not having a care in the world. I appreciate the contrast but the author seemed more committed to fleshing out those characters and story lines than what seemed like the far more compelling

story.

There is this awful moment that solidified my dislike of the book, when the American journalist talks to one of the escaped abductees ONE TIME and has a MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH that nobody else at the trauma center had been able to do. I mean really? The temporary white savior saves them all!

Except she doesn't. She can't. Even if it were possible for a green journalist from a different world to break through to one person who had suffered a tragedy at this level, what about the thousands of other children? (An interview with a UNICEF spokesperson in 2005 said there were around 40,000 children looking for shelter on a daily basis - and that was 19 years into this same group of resistance fighters still doing as they liked with the children in Uganda.

I actually waited a few days before writing this review but I find I'm still mad at the book, and at the author for focusing on the wrong things, and for making the story about a white woman's journey where there are so many more stories to tell. I feel I also made a mis-step reading books by non-African authors, and will try to do better for the rest of my year reading Africa!

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

This is one of those books that's sold as a story of atrocities in a little-known country, but that actually focuses on the mundane angst of a visiting American.

Jane is a 38-year-old journalist from New York, who travels to Uganda to recover from a failed marriage. She soon meets the much younger Harry, to whom she attaches herself like a barnacle, obsessing about the relationship while setting out with a group of aimless expats on a road trip to interview children kidnapped by Kony's Lord's Resistance Army. The children include Esther, a teenage girl taken hostage along with most of her Catholic school classmates.

Unfortunately, the book skims over the true drama of Esther's and the other girls' stories, in favor of the mundane details of Jane's trip and her affair; indeed, Esther narrates only a third of the book, for all that it's supposedly about the thirty girls. I suspect Jane's chapters are based on personal experience, because they have the ring of travel stories ("The roads were terrible, and when we finally arrived, what we thought was a hotel turned out to be a brothel! And THEN, we asked someone where to find a hotel, and he offered to let us stay at his house!"). Like many travel anecdotes, they are less interesting than the teller imagines, and the road trip drags on interminably. Even when the group arrives in what we're told is a war zone, all that seems to be at stake for them is who's sleeping with whom.

I don't blame Jane for continuing to inhabit her own life, despite being horrified by the plight of the LRA's victims; it's an honest portrayal of the way most people respond to the suffering of strangers. I do, however, blame the author for using the story of the kidnapped girls as a hook to draw readers in to the dull mid-life-crisis tale of a privileged American. Another expat tells Jane she has a "wild spirit," but this is nowhere in evidence: she's needy, insecure, content to hand over the reins of her journalistic mission to a group of pleasure-seekers she's just met, and ultimately bland. Meanwhile, though Esther's story has a few shining moments, she is so underdeveloped as to come across as little more than a standard resilient victim. The other girls hardly register except as a jumble of traditional English names (is everyone in Uganda really named this way?) attached to acts of violence. Even the deaths of children at the hands of the LRA are rushed; it's only when a white expat is the victim of violence that Minot fully develops the event and its consequences.

As for the writing, Minot does a good job of capturing speech rhythms; I immediately heard the East African accent in Esther's narration, for instance. Her style itself, however.... well, see for yourself:

"Harry turned right down a slope of flattened grass strewn with hulking boulders at the end of which sat a stone house with a thatched roof."

"A sliver of light green pool could be seen at the end of an alley of cedar trees and a gigantic palm tree rose far past the other trees like an exploding firework. Marsh stretched beyond with inky grass markings and black twisted trees. The purple lozenge of the lake lay farther."

Ultimately, this book bored and disappointed me; the story of the kidnapped girls is worthy of a novel but becomes little more than the backdrop against which Jane's identity crisis plays out, and Jane's story lacks the vitality and insight to carry the narrative itself. I recommend passing on this one.

Jenny Shank says

Some cruelties are so incomprehensible that our instinct for self-preservation often makes us want to shut knowledge of them out. "I hear their stories and feel bad," a character says in Susan Minot's new novel, *Thirty Girls*. "How does it help them if my head is filled with horrible images?" Another character counters, "It helps them if you listen."

Such is the case for the story of tens of thousands of Ugandan children kidnapped and forced to become soldiers and sex slaves for the Lord's Resistance Army, a group of rebels led by Joseph Kony that has waged a guerrilla war for two decades. In her skillful and moving sixth book, Minot focuses on a group of girls the LRA kidnapped from St. Mary's College of Aboke in 1996, a true story that she's fictionalized and personified in the voice of one remarkable survivor, Esther Akello.

Thirty Girls opens on the terrible night the rebels came and took the girls from dormitories at their Catholic school. When Sister Giulia, the headmistress, wakes to the news that the rebels have forced their way onto campus, she wants to run to the girls, but other nuns persuade her to hide with them in the garden, hoping the "giant plank" barring the girls' door will keep them safe. It does not. Sister Giulia immediately sets out on foot to confront the rebels and demand her girls be returned.

Minot conveys the particular psychological cruelty the rebels inflict through their skill at making the victims feel at fault. A rebel leader teases Sister Giulia, "So, next time I come to the school, do not run away." He says he has taken 139 girls, and he will give her 109, but she must list the names of the 30 who will stay.

She offers herself instead, is refused, and is unable to make a Sophie's choice. Strong Louise, the captain of the soccer team, lists 30 girls, including herself and her friend Esther Akello, who will narrate the sad and bewildering turns her life takes in clear, understated and unflinching prose. In Esther's graceful cadences, Minot has captured what she describes as the "sweet softness" of the northern Ugandans' voices.

Thirty Girls next introduces Jane Wood, an American writer who is unhappily unsettled at age 40 — her ex-husband died of a drug overdose. Jane arrives at her glamorous friend Lana's house in Nairobi with an assignment to cover the story for a magazine and a vague plan to find someone to drive her to northern Uganda to interview the victims. A Graham Greene-like atmosphere reigns at Lana's, where several international travelers pursuing love, freedom and the good life are tossed together. It's a "place where everyone seemed matter-of-factly to lead a life of extremity and daring."

These characters fall into bed with each other in various combinations, and as much as Jane warns herself not to, she falls hard for young Harry, who is 17 years her junior. Jane came to Africa “wanting to disappear, but now felt more vivid than ever.” Watching these people swirl about leading untethered lives is entertaining, but the counterpoint of Esther’s story gives *Thirty Girls* moral weight, like that offered in Greene’s best novels.

As the eclectic group ventures to Uganda with Harry at the wheel, *Thirty Girls* follows their eventful road trip, interspersed with chapters in which Esther, who now lives in a rehabilitation camp for escapees from the LRA, tells the story of her life with the rebels. “I remember in a soft way, as in the distance, how it was to be whole,” Esther says. “Nothing. It was like nothing. You just had wholeness, you did not feel it.”

Esther has endured being forced, on pain of death, to beat another girl; countless rapes; watching her best friend die of AIDS; and bearing a rebel’s baby and losing it.

Jane’s problems aren’t nearly as grave as Esther’s, but the reader still feels sympathy for her, especially as she comes to care increasingly for the Aboke girls throughout her journey, and that’s what *Thirty Girls* might be about: We’re all suffering humans, but our capacity for empathy offers a chance of reducing that suffering.

Thirty Girls brings faraway calamity home in the form of Esther, a character so endearing that, shutting out her story is not an option.

Jenny Shank’s first novel, *The Ringer*, won the High Plains Book Award.

<http://www.dallasnews.com/entertainme...>

“*Thirty Girls*,” by Susan Minot

By JENNY SHANK Special Contributor, Dallas Morning News

Published: 08 March 2014 04:28 PM

Alena says

I see people’s eyes slide away as I describe this book:

What are you reading Alena?

The fictionalized account of girls kidnapped from a convent school in Uganda.

Why, their eyes ask, would I want to read about that? But, it’s not really a want. I could have just as easily picked up a psychological thriller or a WWII novel or a Midwestern family saga. I read to immerse myself in worlds near and far. This brilliant novel took me across the world to the heartbreak and terror happening right this second.

Who said you choose your life? You have gone away and new things steer you. Wind, hands.
Some cruel, some kind. There is madness in the dark and madness in the morning with the
smell of smoke.

Minot brilliantly steers her two protagonists through cruelties and kindnesses. Knowing the heaviness of her material, she wisely chooses to have Esther and Jane share their experiences as a retelling...we are often

reminded they are in the future sharing their pasts, which adds a level of safety and security to the reader. Don't get me wrong, the events of this book are violent and difficult to read, but the slight remove in storytelling strikes just the right tone.

For myself I tried to keep a calm place inside of me. This place I thought of as my soul. I pictured it in the shape of a white bowl. No one could disturb that bowl, it was old and curved and only property only mine. I would keep that white bowl in my mind.

Without question, this is a novel worth reading, worth recommending.

Diane S ? says

This is a fictional account based on the actual abduction of school girls from St. Mary's College of Aboke, Uganda in 1996. It seemed like the perfect time to read this now that the world has come together to find another group of girls, abducted by another madman.

The girls in this book were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army led by the evil Joseph Kony, and after reading this book one can see what a deluded psychopath he is in fact. We first meet Esther, one of the girls taken who later escapes, when she is in a rehabilitation camp. A camp that tries to acclimate the girls back into something resembling the life they had left. We hear her story as she tells it to journalists and an expat named Jane who is interviewing the girls and boys at the camp, so that she can share their stories with the world. These stories made me cringe, what these poor girls went through, how they were told their families no longer wanted them, how they were forced to kill and so many other horrors. After this How do these girls manage to assimilate back into something resembling a normal life? At one point Esther asks, Can God see Sudan? One of the camps they were taken to was in Sudan

The story is told in alternating chapters, Jane's story and Esther's. Jane has come to Africa, at loose ends, not knowing what to do with her life, not knowing how to move forward. She too has suffered and had a tragedy in her own life. At first I did not like Jane's story very much, she meets other ex-pats and it seems all they don is drink, have sex and party. But by the end of the book, Jane somewhat redeemed herself. After hearing Esther and the others story, she cannot get the fate of these girls out of her head.

Quite frankly, neither can I. In an afterword the author explains where Kony is now and I hope only bad things happen to him. Good writing, strong and intense subject. What makes this bearable to read is that it is written in a matter of fact, somewhat distancing type of tone, one that lets the reader feel their own emotions to the subject instead of having them drawn out.

Jill says

It may seem like a contradiction in terms to label a novel that focuses on real-life atrocities in Uganda as a "hopeful novel." But indeed, there is a thread of hope that runs through Susan Minot's new novel, based on the true-life tale of the abduction of 30 girls from St. Mary's College boarding school in Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army.

There are two stories that are interwoven through alternating chapters. The first is that Esther Akello, who

has experienced and witnessed horrors that no pre-teen girl should ever be forced to endure. Now striving to adapt in a rehabilitation center, Esther has become robotic as her mind struggles to cope with what she has been forced to undergo.

“How were our days? We searched for food. We gathered vine leaves and cooked them. We ate cassava leaves, simsim, boiled sorghum. We carried the radio, carried water, and were always thirsty...” The prose is both understated and filled with precision as Susan Minot, in unflinching detail, allows Esther to relay the ritualized rapes and impregnation, the beatings, the dehumanizing of these previously sheltered and innocent girls. The story is realistic and haunting and very convincingly depicts a young girl whose tortures have not extinguished her sense of self and unrelenting hope for the future.

Esther’s story is alternated with that of Jane Wood, an American reporter, whose sense of self – in contrast to Esther’s – is very lacking. Jane travels to Uganda to interview the kidnapping victims yet the reader suspects that her unspoken purpose is to fill the emptiness in her own life. Upon arrival, Jane in short order connects with her one-time acquaintance Lana, begins a romance with a 22-year-old named Harry who is 15 years younger, and travels to the site with a group of other free-spirited Americans.

For much of this book, I was in 5-star territory. The contrast of Jane’s own rather pitiful and privileged attempts to find meaning and love seemed in direct contrast to Esther’s far more compelling story of survival and striving for self-definition (as opposed to Jane’s striving for definition-through-others). “She would never forget them, she thought, then immediately wondered how long it would be before she did,” Jane reflects...and sure enough, her obsession with Harry quickly helps her mitigate what she sees.

Yet unaccountably (for this reader), Jane’s concerns are elevated to the level of Esther’s as Ms. Minot strives to bring home the message that we are all connected with our losses and our dreams. At one point, as Jane and her entourage listen to Esther and the victims, Minot writes, “By the time the girls finished talking they were hitting at each other and laughing, the white people before them looking pale and shattered.” I wish the author had taken the more courageous option of focusing on the separateness of experiences that

Jennifer says

What a massive disappointment. The story of Esther, one of 139 girls kidnapped by the LRA from her school, was one I cared about. Unfortunately, the book was oddly structured and, worse, spent most of its time focusing on Jane, a completely unnecessary to the plot journalist from America. I found Jane (who spent moments with Esther at the rehabilitation camp but was, of course, the one who got through to her & helped her find peace) and her place in this story offensive.

Chaitra says

This book should have been called *Thirty Something Girl*. Then, it would have been accurate. This isn't a story of the thirty girls abducted by Joseph Kony's LRA from a school called St. Mary's. One of them, Esther, narrates less than a third of the book about the (severely edited I think) horrors of the LRA, wherein we're lucky if she names about 6 girls by their first name. The rest is all our middle-aged American Jane, and her love affair with a much younger Harry. She doesn't even seem emotionally mature enough to be having a mid-life crisis, to be honest. To give a glimpse of the imbalance, there are ~35 pages wasted on a contrived tragedy that happens around Jane, and about 3 lines dedicated to the little girl that Esther was made to kill by

beating with a stick. There are two characters called Sharon and Beatrice that Jane interviews who have terrible stories about the LRA, but all we know about those stories is that they left the white people pale and shattered.

I'll just say that this wasn't what I expected to be reading. 1 star.

Kristin says

Minot is a tremendous writer, and I've been a fan for years, but this novel made me angry.

UPDATE: Just read an extraordinary novel similarly focused on true life events and hardships (Anthony Marra's "A Constellation of Vital Phenomena"), and wanted to say to Susan Minot: "THIS is how it's done! THIS is how you write someone else's story without putting yourself in it!"

The story of the kidnapped schoolgirls in Uganda (so eerily and sadly similar to what just happened in Nigeria) is told beautifully and is definitely worth telling. In these pages, it's a quiet but compelling portrayal of courage and suffering, horror and love - seen in and by the girls, their teachers, and their parents. Esther's story is gripping and immersive.

So why oh why did Minot (whose acknowledgements at the end are beyond pompous - "the author" this, and "the author" that) have to insert herself into the novel? Here comes Jane/Susan, a self-centered pseudo-journalist who learns about the schoolgirls (as Minot did) at a NYC dinner party and takes it upon herself (as Minot did) to raise awareness by writing their story. Fine, but the whiny Jane/Susan narrative is unbearable, bogged down by the insecurities and tunnel vision of a beautiful woman approaching middle age (as Minot is), falling in with a hedonistic group of dilettante ex-pats (as Minot did), and falling in love with a much younger man (as I expect Minot did as well). When Esther's life intersects with Jane/Susan's life, the result is ridiculous: much wiping-away of upwelling tears by the white folk, followed by a gift to Esther that has the highly unlikely effect of jumpstarting her healing process. I almost abandoned this novel partway through, and although I finished it, I'm not sure I made the right choice.

Believe me, Jane/Susan was the last thing Esther needed - and I would have been much happier if I'd read only Esther's story.

?Karen says

Susan Minot's books in general do not have real high average ratings on Goodreads, but I've read a couple of her books and liked them more than the average reader did. Thirty Girls became available on audio so I thought I'd try a familiar author again, especially after reading some 4 and 5 star reviews by friends. But I agree with the 3.4 average rating on this one; well, actually 3.0 stars. My heart broke for the story of the African girls abducted and raped by a madman because God told him to do it. But the story of Jane, an American journalist writing their story, turned me off. I felt the girls' story did not go deep enough into their mistreatment and the injustice of it all, while Jane's story was pretty self-absorbed, until the end, when she realized....

People said that it had to be all in you, that you couldn't depend on other people to make you better. But that wasn't true. It was only through people that you learned how to be better.

