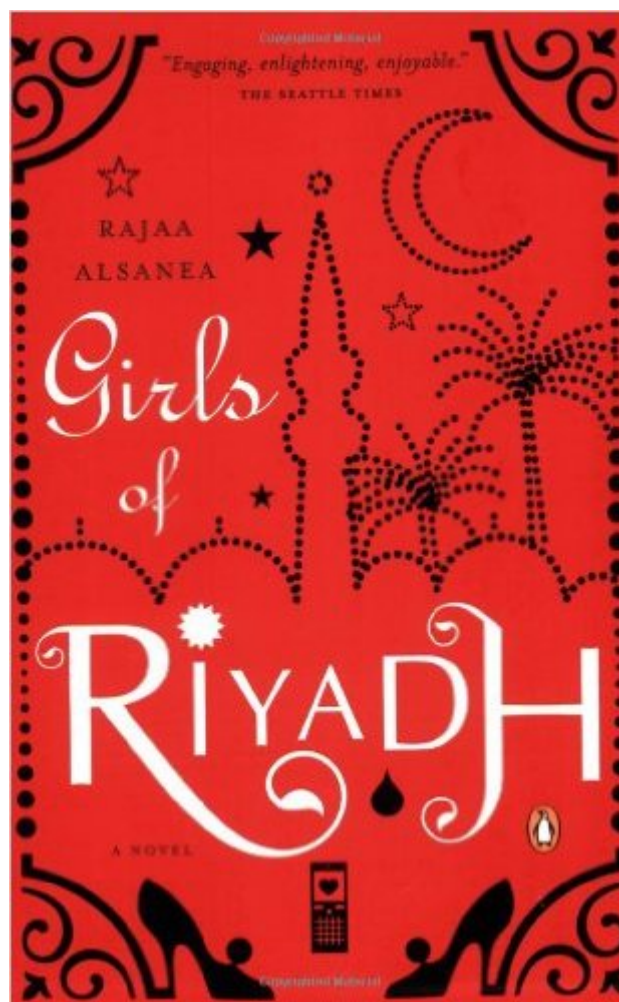


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Girls Of Riyadh



Synopsis

When Rajaa Alsanea boldly chose to open up the hidden world of Saudi womenâtheir private lives and their conflicts with the traditions of their cultureâshe caused a sensation across the Arab world. Now in English, Alsaneaâs tale of the personal struggles of four young upper-class women offers Westerners an unprecedented glimpse into a society often veiled from view. Living in restrictive Riyadh but traveling all over the globe, these modern Saudi women literally and figuratively shed traditional garb as they search for love, fulfillment, and their place somewhere in between Western society and their Islamic home.

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Customer Reviews

What I found most interesting about this book was not only the portrayal of societal expectations (and their contradictions!) of women in Saudi society, but how true these expectations are, even in more "western" countries, including the US. I grew up in Mexico, and many of the attitudes of conservative older women as well as supposedly "liberated" men mirror those depicted in this book. And the descriptions of "weak" men, who marry uneducated, unremarkable women in spite of loving and admiring stronger, educated women, the hypocrisy in this, the feminization of men who become subservient themselves to their families and societal expectations of what a "real man" should be, which in reality has NOTHING to do with what really determines a real man, are things I observed even while dating many American (US born and US raised) men. I found it wonderful, how what Alsanea observes about Saudi men, is applicable even to the contemporary Western, supposedly "modernized" man. Her story is not the story of "girls of Riyadh", but the story of any girl,

in any country.

I'm a Saudi girl, I live in Riyadh and I was really eager to read this book but when I read it I was disappointed in away ..I have to admit it that the book was fun to read but it doesn't relate to Saudi girls that much, a lot of facts that have been mentioned in the book are in someway shocking to even imagine it happening in Saudi Arabia ...The author is talented but she didn't look at the big picture.This book reflects Saudi girls and what she wrote is 1% of Saudi girlsothers will read this book and think this is what Saudi girls are ,and what they are facing which is not true ...

I picked up the Girls of Riyadh after hearing about the uproar it caused in Saudi Arabia and for the fact that few pop-fiction books from the Arab world seem to show up in English. It's the story of four women of the "velvet" class of Saudi Arabia and their exploits of marriage, romance, and relationships in their early 20s. The story is narrated as if it occurred on a yahoo group/list serv and provides an interesting look into the secular upper class. It's an interesting read and despite the cultural look the book has a lot of fluff to it. It's an easy and fun read but differs little from young adult fiction in the U.S. (excepting the age group of the women involved). If you're looking for a light "beach read" go for it.

This is really a fun book to read. If you are not familiar with the Saudi culture, which differs tremendously from other Arab cultures, this book will give you a glimpse of it. Girls in Saudi Arabia are brought up with different principles from girls in other countries of the world. For example, virginity must be guarded at all cost, not necessary because the girl feels it is her moral and religious duty to do so, but because no man would marry her if she wasn't a virgin...at least this is the theory.I first heard of the stories, which were transmitted through emails at the time, through friends when I used to work in Riyadh. At the time, it was the gossip of Riyadh, but I never was interested in gossip, so I paid no attention. I never chatted on the internet in the first place, except a few times on AOL with close friends, and I viewed this practice as a total waste of time. I couldn't understand the kick people got out of speaking to complete strangers whom they were unlikely to ever meet, and who were probably lying through their teeth. How would one really know whether the person online is male or female, or a hermaphrodite for that matter? Is the person lying about his or her age, looks, education, nationality etc...? My conclusion was that chatting was a complete waste of time. It was better to socialize with people in the physical world.I admit! I was wrong! Totally wrong! Having read this book, I now understand the world of chatting better. Saudi Arabia is a

society where women and men are forbidden to mix. Even in restaurants, there are sections just for single men and others for families only. Movie theatres are forbidden because of the fear of having both males and females, God forbid, in the dark!!! It doesn't matter that the country is corrupt, that innocent men and women are put in jail because of their political or social views; never mind the fact that Moslems all over the world are being unjustly killed by imperialist countries; never mind all that...the important thing is that men and women don't mix and women (and men too) remain virgins. This is the number one priority of the government, and Saudi Arabia has even special police to enforce this. A woman caught with a man is a trip straight to jail, with a phone call to her father and public humiliation. See now the difference in upbringing of Saudi women compared to Western women? Back to internet chatting. How can girls and boys meet in Saudi, and get to know each other? You guessed it: the internet. The internet offered the Saudi society a way of meeting girls (and boys) that they would otherwise be unable to meet. And thus start the scandals...to some; to others they are not scandals at all but simply Saudi girls living their life and doing nothing wrong. Here's an article that appeared in a Saudi newspaper that best describes what this book is all about: "Eminent national newspapers are writing about a prevailing uproar here and behind it is an anonymous young woman who sends an e-mail every Friday to a large number of internet users in Saudi Arabia. In these e-mails, she tells the stories of her four female friends, Gamrah Al-Qusmanji, Sadeem Al-Horaimli, Lamees Jeddawi and Michelle Al-Abdulrahman. The girls belong to society's "velvet class," an elite whose behavior is normally kept hidden to all but themselves. Each week, the writer reveals new and thrilling developments, leading her ever-widening circle of eager readers to await Friday noon prayers breathlessly. Every Saturday morning, government offices, meeting halls, hospital corridors and school classrooms metamorphose into arenas for debate about the latest e-mail. Everyone weighs in. There are those who support this young woman and those who object to her. There are those who believe that what these girls are doing is perfectly natural (and also is no secret) and there are others who boil with rage at the revelation of what they consider to be the excesses that are going on around them in our conservative society. Whatever the outcome, there is no doubt whatsoever that these strange and unusual e-mails have created a furor in our society, which has never before experienced anything like this. It is clear that these emails will continue to furnish fertile material for exchange and debate for a long time to come, even after the e-mails cease to appear." (p. 101-102). The author says, "Frankly, I did not anticipate all of this flurry, all of this back-and-forth, around my modest little e-mails! A number of you ask how I conceived of this project. It all started in my mind about five years ago in 1999, that is, around the time when the story of my friends, as I am writing it to you and for you now, started. I didn't do anything to turn this idea

into a reality until very recently, however. What got me going was that I saw my brain's capacity to hold anything reaching DISK FULL, The time had come to squeeze out the sponge of my mind and my heart, to really wring out that sponge so that I could absorb something new." (p. 75). The author further adds, "I heard that King Abd Al-Aziz City (internet provider company) is trying to block my site to dam up the channels of communication and ward off malicious acts, scandalous deeds and all causes of corruption or evil. I know that most of you know a thousand ways to get into blocked sites. But I just might die of electrocution if this blockage happens before I can empty out (and load onto you) the charges--positive and negative--I carry in my chest, which have refused to balance each other out to neutral inside of me. I only ask for a small space on the World Wide Web to tell my stories through. Is that too much to ask?" (p. 82). The book is full of funny anecdotes, and the author's writing style is both elegant and stylish...and let's not forget sincere! Consider the following excerpt, "Brother Adel-who, I will hazard a guess, is a statistician, sent me a message criticizing my e-mails for being of varying lengths and not symmetrical like the hems of dresses in vogue this year. Adel says that in order for the lengths of my e-mails to be even, they must show evidence of natural distribution. According to him, natural distribution means that 95 percent of the data contained therein will center around the mean (taking into consideration of course the standard deviation), while the percentage of data outside the area of normal distribution on both sides of the mean does not exceed 2.5 percent in either direction, such that the sum total of standard deviation is 5 percent. Shoot me!" (p. 208-209). There is beautiful love poetry from Nizar Qabbani in this book. I have heard of this poet before, but never read any of his books. The quotes the author used of Nizar Qabbani (that left my body in shivers) made me go to .com and order the two books of Nizar Qabbani that are sold online: 'Arabian Love Poems' and 'On Entering the Sea: The Erotic and Other Poetry of Nizar Qabbani'. Will this book appeal to all readers? If you find yourself identifying with this book, you will love it. If you are unfamiliar with Arab culture and especially Saudi culture, you might not understand the psychology of the characters. In this case, either you will find it fascinating and informative to learn about a new and totally alien culture, or you will just not understand it, and thus not enjoy this book. Not everybody likes eating broccoli or understands its health benefits. For example, a newly married bride on her first night is busy in the bathroom preparing herself for her husband. When she gets out of the bathroom, eager to please her husband (and herself), she finds him fast asleep. I found this hilarious and just thinking of this scene later that day made me almost fall out of my treadmill. But many western readers will not understand this scene, for they will not grasp the psychology at play in such a scene. Here's a girl saving her virginity for this one night alone; a girl who was told all her life that sex was taboo; a girl who has had very limited contact with

guys throughout her upbringing; a girl who probably learnt about sex from her married friends. What a bummer! Replace now the characters of this scene with western characters, let's say John and Jude, and this scene would appear normal, and the reader would not give it a second thought. A western reader might thus miss the flavor of this book and might not appreciate it. I loved this book and rank it as the best novel and memoir I have read this year. This author is very talented and I can't wait to read her next novel.

"Girls of Riyadh" is a fun, easy read that gives you a glimpse into the world of four Saudi girls. I think the takeaway from this novel is that girls are girls anywhere--be they Saudi or American, Muslim or Christian. We all long for love and happiness. We all go through heartbreak. We all have societal conventions and expectations to uphold, even those of us in the West. And don't worry, there's a happy ending for many of the girls. Buy this book for a fun summer read which just might humanize Saudi and Muslim girls in your eyes just a bit. Which isn't a bad thing, BTW. ;)

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