



## **Girls of Riyadh**

*Rajaa Alsanea , Marilyn Booth (Translator)*

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# Girls of Riyadh

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**Girls of Riyadh** Rajaa Alsanea , Marilyn Booth (Translator)

A bold new voice from Saudi Arabia spins a fascinating tale of four young women attempting to navigate the narrow straits between love, desire, fulfillment, and Islamic tradition

In her debut novel Rajaa Alsanea reveals the social, romantic, and sexual tribulations of four young women from the elite classes of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Originally released in Arabic in 2005, it was immediately banned in Saudi Arabia because of the controversial and inflammatory content, while black-market copies of the novel were widely circulated. The daring originality of *Girls of Riyadh* continues to create a firestorm all over the Arab world, and the excitement has spread far beyond the Middle East-to date, rights to this novel have already been sold in eleven countries.

The novel unfolds as every week after Friday prayers, the anonymous narrator sends an e-mail to the female subscribers of her online chat group. In fifty such e-mails over the course of a year, we witness the tragicomic reality of four university students-Qamra, Michelle, Sadim, and Lamis-negotiating their love lives, their professional success, and their rebellions, large and small, against their cultural traditions. The world these women inhabit is a modern one that contains "Sex and the City," dating, and sneaking out of their parents' houses, and this affluent, contemporary existence causes the girls to collide endlessly with the ancient customs of their society. The never-ending cultural conflicts underscore the tumult of being an educated modern woman growing up in the twenty-first century amid a culture firmly rooted in an ancient way of life.

While this novel offers a distinctly Arab voice, it also represents the mongrel culture and language of a globalized world, reflecting the way in which the Arab world is being changed by new economic and political realities. Riyadh is the larger setting of the novel, but the characters travel all over the world shedding traditional garb as they literally and figuratively cross over into Western society. These women understand the Western worldview and experiment with reconciling pieces of it with their own. But this groundbreaking novel might be the very first that opens up their world to us-their culture, their struggles, their frustrations, their hopes, and their beliefs. With *Girls of Riyadh*, Rajaa Alsanea gives us a rare and unforgettable insight into the complicated lives of these young Saudi women whose amazing stories are unfolding in a culture so very different from our own.

## Girls of Riyadh Details

Date : Published July 5th 2007 by Penguin Press HC, The (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9781594201219

Author : Rajaa Alsanea , Marilyn Booth (Translator)

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Fiction, Novels, Romance

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## From Reader Review Girls of Riyadh for online ebook

**Abdulrahman says**

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## Abdullah As says

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**Sarah says**

I had a hard time reading this book for several reasons. First, it was never intended to be translated into English and by doing so I'm sure the author had to provide tons of extra passages of explanation about Arabic culture to the english speaking readers. Second, I'll openly admit that it is not a well written book (in English)-- it reads like a middle school essay on 'how I spent my summer'. But that aside, this was an interesting exploration into a culture that I know very little about, even after traveling to United Arab Emirates. I had absolutely no idea just how much more strict Saudi culture is. The author is very opinionated about Saudi Arabia and the way 'love' is perceived in Islamic culture. But she never openly critiques it, more she just whines and complains that love is hard and causes pain (and isn't this true worldwide?). She aims to be an Arabic Candace Bushnell but given the circumstances she can't pull it off. And not because the characters' simply aren't permitted by law to live and love the way the well known SATC girls do. But because the author lacks words and descriptions and emotions to adequately write about love. It's a worthwhile read if you are looking to learn more about the Islamic culture. But otherwise, skip it.

**nourah says**

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## **Shahad AlHammad says**

### **Girls Of Riyadh**

Where could i possibly begin?

I will begin with the first time I saw it on the "Best Sellers" shelf in one of our local bookshops in Kuwait. The cover attracted me so I grabbed it and read few lines of random pages of the book and ended up liking it but i did not buy it at the time and bought "Shadow Kiss, Vampire Academy" Instead. Each time I paid a visit to the same bookshop I saw it there, laying then grabbed it and hesitated to buy it. Again. Until One time I visited Jareer's bookshop in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and decided to finally buy it with no hesitation whatsoever.

I read a few reviews about it, some of them attacked the author and some agreed with her.

I couldn't judge the book until I read it.

So I began reading the book and like most of the girls I somehow related to what was written in it. The stories that she shared are (*whether we hated it or not*) were true. It happened and it is still happening to most of the girls in our society!

I believe that the author was being judged and attacked because she was "*as the people claim*" judgmental, Over reacting, lying and the list goes on..

But what I see is that she is only telling the truth, she's telling what she's seeing!

Where went the freedom of expressing your mind and opinion? It is semi-impossible in the Arabic, Muslim society specially in the Arabian gulf due to their strict rules of following the traditions. The funny thing is that they care more about their little traditions and habits more than they care about Islam itself! I am not saying that everyone is like that but hey, who are we kidding? Most of us are like that.

Parents, Grandparents and old folks only care about what others think of them even if that costed their and their children's **freedom**.

We are under a lot of pressure. A pressure of trying to be as perfect as possible and that is just non-acceptable because no one is perfect! perfection is for god himself! So tell me how are supposed to be perfect as they want us to be?

How can we act good all the freaking time? (*I'm not saying that we are bad* but simply people just cannot control your freedom, likes and interests!)

We've reached a level that we cannot express our thoughts without being made fun of. without being judged in a very harsh way. without being eventually disappointed. So we just stopped expressing ourselves all together.

What i'm trying to say is that I really admire her courage and patience with all the attacks she was getting from everyone around her and from other countries as well.

I've also read in one of the reviews that says her English was bad but i found it rather good. At least it's *better than mine* anyways.

She tried and stood in everyone's faces so she could show the world the truth & i respect that. translations were good. The book was good!

In the end..

**I loved every single thing in it.** ^^

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## **Karen Keyworth says**

I think the author wrote a true account of life in Saudi Arabia. I am married to a Saudi, and I didn't find anything she wrote about to be in conflict with what I know from my 29 years of marriage, experience in SA, and extended family. Most importantly, her story rings true based on what my children (who are now the

same age as the author) have told me about the private world of young people. It's an exciting peek into the inner world of young Saudi women, and that is enough to make it worth the read. I know it's one particular slice of Saudi female life, but no book can be all things to all people. A good book will take you in depth and, depending on the topic, deliberately not function as a survey text. I think the book does a good job of making an unknown group more connected to others who are interested. It's a quick read, and you will find yourself caring about what happens to each character.

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### **Huda says**

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### **??? ????? says**

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### **Odai Al-Saeed says**

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## **Foodie says**

Save for the last 3 chapters, Girls of Riyadh by Raja Alsanea was a huge let down. Sensationalized and immature, the author is clearly looking to cash in on the western stereotypes of the east. The 4 female protagonists act in the most predictable, girly-movie way.

The story did nothing for me, didn't enlighten me to the supposedly hidden side of the Arab way of life and society, as the author promised in many interviews. The author assumes this self-important, holier-than-thou tone that got so annoying that after the first few chapters I skipped the introductory passage where she addresses the readers. It's only towards the very end that the characters turn fleshly. You get a slight glimpse into something profound but it lingers below the surface, at best.

The author lacks the craft to tap into the real issues, she states them out loud rather than hint at them and allow the reader arrive at his/her own conclusion, and this is where the book falls short.

There are loads of better books out there for those with a genuine interest in gaining an insight into the lives of people living in Islamic societies.

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## **Tea Jovanovi? says**

Malo egzotike... Nesto drugacije od onoga na sta smo navikli... :)

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## **Nouf Abdullah says**

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## **Keturah says**

I really enjoyed this book on several levels. I'll try to clearly explain why:

1. I like books set in India and the Middle East. This book is set in Saudi Arabia. Most of what I know about Saudi Arabia comes from what I hear on the nightly news, so it's interesting to read a book written by a Saudi woman. It's a completely different culture, but this book is about far more than just war and inequality, it's also about culture and mores.

2. It's pretty much chick lit set in the Middle East, which I think is awesome. American women get enough chick lit and soap operas and such, Saudi women deserve some too!

3. The book was an underground best-seller in Saudi Arabia and I definitely wanted to see why. I understand why it had to be kept hidden, but I wanted to see why it was so popular.

I'm definitely glad I read it. It was a fun read, but it was also really enlightening. It helps me understand a lot of things better. I could certainly make criticisms of the book, like "where are all the poor, illiterate people?" But obviously, the author didn't intend to write a book about the lower class Saudis. She was writing of the privileged class and she succeeded in showing their lifestyle and customs.

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## Ava Semerau says

When this book first came out, I was living in Saudi Arabia and it caused quite a stir - so much so that it was banned in Kingdom. I was teaching ESL at the time, and the women in my classes were frantic to get their hands on a copy of it. Turns out the enthusiasm they felt was short lived - as in as soon as they started reading it.

The book is written as a series of emails between a group of young Saudi women, and to folks who, like my students, had little experience reading fiction, it seemed too true for most of my students. Many were offended and defensive, believing the author was telling lies about them and their friends. Oddly enough, several of the women I spoke with insisted they actually knew some of the characters in the book!

Fast forward a few years and I picked up a deeply discounted English version of the book and read it in two sittings. I understood how and why my students were upset. Although fictional, the scenes and experiences portrayed happen every day in Saudi Arabia, and having the world read about them must have been scary - especially for women who live very private and secluded lives.

That said, the book is fiction, and readers need to remember that. It's well-written (albeit a translation), and the stories are compelling in a watching-a-train-wreck sort of way.

Having lived in Kingdom, there were no surprises or shocks hidden within the pages of this book, but for those unfamiliar with the culture, I'm sure it will be eye-opening. Again, however, remember it is fiction.

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**Kavita says**

This was an interesting peep into upper class Saudi culture. Many of the love stories mirrored those of my friends around 10 years ago. Of course, most are now settled into semi-forced marriages. Of course, there are major differences because the law protects Indian women and there is a lot more freedom that belongs to us by birth, unlike in Saudi. But as far as love and marriage are concerned, I could see a lot of similarities, especially in the way men reacted when the family pressure started. For every Waleed who backed out after a woman put out for him, I know an Indian counterpart. For every Rashid who is in love with another woman and allows himself to be forced into a marriage by his family and then abuses his wife, I know someone who has done exactly that. So yes, familiar ground.

The story is about four women: Sadeem, Gamrah, Lamees, and Michelle. The four of them grew up together and had an enormous impact on each other. This is a simple romance book but makes an interesting read because it isn't the usual run of the mill story of boy meets girl. Here, these four women have to hide behind their computers and their smartphones to get in touch with men. They have to navigate the minefield of male expectations while at the same time not having to disappoint social and familial expectations. All of these expectations, as always, fall upon the women to fulfil.

In a way, this book is a feminist work merely because it talks about choice for women in a society where arranged/forced marriage is the norm or even the simple fact that this book is about women and their desires. On the other hand, it is a very unfeminist work because it concentrates only on love and marriage as goals for women, especially since they have all had the privilege of having a good education and been allowed to work. But either way, it proved to be very popular across the Middle East because it does talk to youngsters about their options. Originally banned by Saudi, it is now available everywhere.

One thing that did not please me with the translation is that it was excessively Americanised in ways that really undermined the feel of Saudi culture. I simply do not understand why publishers think American readers only can deal with Americanised stuff. Give them a chance! It was really disappointing, and if I

knew Arabic, I would have reread this in original.

The tone of the writing was slightly juvenile, but that didn't surprise me. This was a book about women who were forced to act like teenagers and there wasn't much actual substance to the story, which again wasn't surprising because really, romance! But overall, I found it worth a read.

**Mashael Alamri says**

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**Nora says**

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