



Girls of Riyadh

By Rajaa Alsanea

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When Rajaa Alsanea boldly chose to open up the hidden world of Saudi women—their private lives and their conflicts with the traditions of their culture—she caused a sensation across the Arab world. Now in English, Alsanea’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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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Four upper-class Saudi Arabian women negotiate the clash between tradition and the encroaching West in this debut novel by 25-year-old Saudi Alsanea. Though timid by American chick lit standards, it was banned in Saudi Arabia for its scandalous portrayal of secular life. Framed as a series of e-mails sent to the e-subscribers of an Internet group, the story follows an unnamed narrator who recounts the misadventures of her best friends, Gamrah, Lamees, Michelle and Sadeem—all fashionable, educated, wealthy 20-somethings looking for true love. Their world is dominated by prayer, family loyalty and physical modesty, but the voracious consumption of luxury goods (designer name dropping is muted but present) and yearnings for female empowerment are also part of the package. Lines like the talk was as soft as the granules in my daily facial soap or Sadeem was feeling so sad that her chest was constricted in sorrow appear with woeful frequency, and the details about the roles of technology, beauty and Western pop culture in the lives of contemporary Saudi women aren't revelatory. Readers looking for quality Arabic fiction have much better options. (July)

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From [Booklist](#)

Four close girlfriends from upper-class Saudi families attend university and medical school in Riyadh and in Chicago and San Francisco. They talk in chat rooms, IM on their mobiles to their boyfriends and each other. But even with all the hip technology, they cannot escape deep-seated oppressive traditions after they return to Riyadh. Sadeem's fiancé dumps her after she has sex with him. Gamrah's husband divorces her after she discovers he is having an affair. Michelle and Faisal adore each other, but he gives her up when his family says so. The Religious Police arrest one couple in a coffee bar. But most families don't need official help to interfere in women's lives. Translated from the Arabic, this debut novel was immediately banned in Saudi Arabia. The 25-year-old Saudi writer (now studying in Chicago but planning to return home) tells it from the inside, complete with the contradictions and betrayals that define daily life. The Sex and the City-type drama is fast, wry, witty, and anguished. And so are the politics: "He appreciates her independence. But can't find his." Rochman, Hazel

Review

The daring debut by a young Saudi Arabian woman imagine Sex and the City, if the city in question were Riyadh

a"Time"

a [The] work of a brave, intelligent young woman. One of those rare books with the power to shake up an entrenched society.a

a"Los Angeles Times" aEngaging, enlightening, enjoyable.a

a"The Seattle Times" aA taboo-breaking novel.a

a"The Washington Post"

a A rare glimpse into ordinary life for young women in Saudi Arabia.a

a"San Francisco Chronicle"

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? "San Francisco Chronicle"

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gary Cornejo:

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