



## A Girl Like That

*Tanaz Bhathena*

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*A timeless exploration of high-stakes romance, self-discovery, and the lengths we go to love and be loved.*

Sixteen-year-old Zarin Wadia is many things: a bright and vivacious student, an orphan, a risk taker. She's also the kind of girl that parents warn their kids to stay away from: a troublemaker whose many romances are the subject of endless gossip at school. *You don't want to get involved with a girl like that*, they say. So how is it that eighteen-year-old Porus Dumasia has only ever had eyes for her? And how did Zarin and Porus end up dead in a car together, crashed on the side of a highway in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia? When the religious police arrive on the scene, everything everyone thought they knew about Zarin is questioned. And as her story is pieced together, told through multiple perspectives, it becomes clear that she was far more than just a girl like that.

## A Girl Like That Details

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Author : Tanaz Bhathena

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## From Reader Review A Girl Like That for online ebook

### Elise (TheBookishActress) says

*A Girl Like That* begins as we see Zarin and Porus holding hands and walking off to their deaths. It's a moment that is horrible and beautiful all at once, and the book never quite stops being that.

So first of all, this is one of the most intense & heartbreaking books I have read, ever, and I think that's worth knowing going in. But at the same time, it's an incredibly important book about how the culture of Saudi Arabia is tailor-made to alienate its people; how it teaches boys that sexual assault is right, just as in America; how it teaches girls that their only power is in backstabbing; how it doesn't give others the money to make a living; how it forces girls into the role of victim and outsider.

There are four narrators to this book, and then several important side characters - one of the narrators, if I'm being honest, made literally no impact on me and could have been replaced by a different side character and I would have liked it far more. But I'm going to be honest, I was most compelled by two narrators.

Zarin's arc is a gorgeous story about how we can internalize our own belief that we are lesser, that we are not worth love, because we don't fit cultural norms or we don't keep our mouths quiet as women or because we are simply outsiders in a country with a different majority. As a Zoroastrian victim of abuse, there is a suffocated & claustrophobic quality to her writing, as she feels herself drowning in an environment where she cannot be herself. I... love Zarin. Like, I would give my life for Zarin. She's such a fantastic character and I adore her. She has a moment where she gets to stand up, and it is everything. It is worth the entire book.

Mishal's arc is far more complex, and I really think I would need to reread this to analyze the whole thing because it took me a while to love her. But by the end of this book, I was... *incredibly* invested in Mishal. She's a Muslim girl who has internalized a belief in her own lack of power, so she uses her power in subversive ways - she runs a tumblr blog for school gossip @blueniqab, and she gossips, and she tries to wield power in all the subtle ways, but she is *struggling* and I love it. Her story is far less of a tragedy than perhaps any other character within this book and I sort of... love that. I love that Tanaz Bhathena is so willing to look at her actions and realize they were bad but also understand them and not make her suffer more. Because I love Mishal.

I do want to note that at least one Muslim reviewer has pointed out her dislike of the portrayal of Islam and Saudi Arabia by an author who is Zoroastrian, not Muslim. Which I... both get and don't get. There's an implication in one of these reviews that the author knows nothing about Saudi Arabia, which is incorrect - Tanaz Bhathena actually grew up in Saudi Arabia, as stated in her author bio. This review also states that there are no sympathetic Muslim characters, which is somehow both a fair reading and absolutely not my personal experience with the book. Mishal is Muslim, and though she is a school bully, I think you might be able to tell she was kind of my favorite character? Her brother, Abdhullah, was also a character I found a lot of sympathy for.

I will also say that the romance between Zarin and Porus, though really, really sweet, went too close [for me] to the love-cures-abuse trope. This is a really big and recurring problem in YA and I really want it to stop. And as my trusted reviewer friend Ilsa pointed out, there are literally no positive relationships in this book besides one m/f ship, which did bother me.

But for me personally, this was an intense, heartbreaking book about rape culture and cultural alienation and internalization of a belief that we are lesser, that we are undeserving, and I adored it. Mishal and Zarin

especially will stay with me for a very, very long time. *A Girl Like That* is an absolutely horrifying book and I am so glad I read it.

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### **Carlie Sorosiak says**

*A Girl Like That* completely broke my heart in a million ways, some expected and others not. I was not prepared for the sheer beauty of this writing, which—coupled with the plot—tore me to pieces yet also left me with a profound sense of hope. Every sentence is so carefully constructed, but at the same time, everything feels effortless and smooth. I don't think it's a stretch to say that **Tanaz's writing is of the most elegant I've ever read in YA.**

You will love some of these characters. You will hate some of these characters. But above all, you will form an unbreakable attachment to their complexity and realness. The book begins with a terrible road accident, narrated by two teenagers who are newly dead. You know this from the beginning, and yet Tanaz's writing is so unbelievably special that I couldn't help but bond with them, even when I knew their eventual fate.

**This is an important book**, and it's also a difficult one: difficult in that it exposes the reader to a variety of topics (rape culture, religious expectations, domestic abuse) that other writers may not tackle so openly, so courageously, and with such grace. It is shocking and eye opening and honest and so very needed. It's also an #ownvoices novel, which I especially appreciate.

I recommend *A Girl Like That* without hesitation for any reader who wants to dive head first into a complex tale of love, religion, and culture.

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### **Paige says**

Full review here: <https://youtu.be/YubfXUoXZi0>

One of the best books I've ever read. So sad yet so beautiful.

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### **April (Aprilus Maximus) says**

More like a 4.5 stars. This was so different from anything I've ever read before. I learnt so much reading it and it really brought out a lot of different emotions in me!

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### **S.A. Chakraborty says**

I have been looking forward to this book for over a year, and it left me just as emotionally devastated as I expected. This is a heavy book, one that left me continuously having to remind myself that these people were

not real and I should not be grieving them like they were... but damn. A beautiful, sad story about young love but also the terrible ways we box in both our girls and boys with adult insecurities around sex and honor. One of those stories that will haunt me for a long time.

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## Noor says

This is officially the worst book I've read, ever, which is not something I say lightly. It's a contemporary young adult novel set in Saudi Arabia that's supposedly meant to bravely expose rape culture, but all it does is expose the author's own islamophobia and girl-on-girl hate. Now, it's a subtle islamophobia, and I suppose a subtle hate if you're not looking for it, and maybe that's why it's gone largely unnoticed so far. But if anything, it's more glaringly harmful for its subtlety. Let me take you on a tour through this novel, across the dozens upon dozens of quotes and bookmarked pages, and maybe I'll be able to make myself a little more clear.

Let's begin with the fact that Tanaz Bhathena clearly did no research when it came to Islam – which is sort of concerning considering she wrote an entire novel set in an Islamic country. Oh, sure, it seems she knows lots when it comes to the religious police, throwing around everyone's favourite word, Sharia law, but the history? Apparently the accurate portrayal of that is beyond her. She seems to know a wonderful amount about bridges in hell and eternal damnation, but when it comes to common burial practices? No, not possible, sorry.

Okay, whatever, these are little things, right? Who cares if she doesn't know that Muslims don't get buried in coffins or that the three wise men were indeed Zoroastrian priests, that's not harmful is it? Well, if only it ended there, I could have forgiven this book its shortcomings and moved on with my life.

Let's move on to the actual Muslim characters portrayed in the novel, shall we? The main character, Zarin, is Zoroastrian, as is the love interest, Porus. The main Muslim characters you see throughout the novel are 1) the religious police 2) Mishal's family and 3) Farhan's family. And as far as fucked up representations go, these three really take the cake.

The religious police: do I really need to say much about them? It seems pretty self-explanatory. They're a constant threat lurking throughout the novel – reminders that girls must cover up their hair, that unchaperoned interactions between unrelated boys and girls are Not Allowed (funny, that this is only mentioned when Zarin is with other boys, but never when she's with Perfect Porus), and... that's pretty much it. Is there any talk of the Muslims who are oppressed by the religious police for their beliefs? The fact that the religious police don't follow any religion, and are pretty much one step short of being ISIS? Of course not, that would be an almost... positive and accurate portrayal of Islam wouldn't it? And we can't have that, obviously. But, ultimately, the religious police are a background thing – they don't really take centre stage in this novel. That's where the two families come in.

Enter: the two Muslim families closest to the heart of the story. In one, you've got a man who abandoned his first wife for a second, because polygamy is a totally common and normal thing (spoiler: it's not). You have Mishal, a sixteen-year-old girl whose marriage prospects are "limited to creepy grooms nearly twice or thrice [her] age." (spoiler: this is also not common, despite what every wonderful portrayal of the middle east would have you think). Mishal, whose brother tells her, after his friend attempts to assault her, "Have you learned nothing about men and the necessity of a proper hijab? Or did you want his attention?". A brother who says that "A woman's honor is like a tightly wrapped sweet. If you unwrap a sweet and leave it lying around, you expose it to everything out there. If, by accident, it falls into the dirt – tell me, Mishal, will anyone want to eat it?" Mishal, who lives in a society that believes that sex is something that a girl should

“[suffer] through like a proper virgin.” (spoiler: also not true). All this, while Abdullah reads porn magazines, smokes, dates multiple girls, and Mishal the prude watches, scandalized. Not to mention the fact that since their father moved out to live with his new wife, he’s legally the “guardian of the household” and this is something that’s not questioned, even once, by anyone. What a great, wonderful, functional family, right? What a fantastically positive portrayal. But it gets worse.

Farhan’s family is where things start to get properly disgusting. How is it first introduced? Here are the actual first lines of Farhan’s point of view in the entire book, no joke: “They were going at it like dogs, Abba and the maid. My father, who my mother said I would look like when I got older – tall, dark, and handsome – banging the maid so hard that he banged the headboard against the wall and left a mark in the paint.” Yeah, a great start, isn’t it? So aside from a cheating father (because the only two Muslim fathers portrayed in the novel have to be these disgusting men who can’t possibly have a healthy relationship with a single wife, it’s impossible), you have the disgustingness that is Farhan himself. Farhan, who’s most renowned as being the school heartthrob. But unlike your usual YA contemporary heartthrob, because all these characters are Muslim, and thus must be degenerate somehow, right, this one drugs girls to get with them, sexually assaults them, and rapes them. On a regular basis. How wonderful, right?

Thus ends the part where I talk about how terrible each of these characters are, and we can move on to more of the general horrors that make up this book. If my above description hasn’t been clear enough, I’m just going to say it: you have the female characters portrayed as these sexually repressed individuals, completely lacking agency, while pretty much the only reason any of the male characters (aside from Perfect Porus, who wants to get to know Zarin for who she is, like the great non-Muslim guy he is) live is for sex.

In general, this book’s obsession with sex is seriously ridiculous. The entire first third of the novel, the only things that happen are that different people have sex, think about having sex, or judge other people for having sex – that is literally it, I’m not exaggerating in the least. Yes, teenagers are hormonal. Yes, they think about having sex a lot. But that is literally the only thing these characters are characterized by. None of the girls have any hobbies, other than gossiping about boys and hating on other girls (and by other girls I mean Zarin). There is not a single healthy girl-girl relationship in the whole book. In fact, the only relationship in the whole book that can actually be termed healthy is the one between Zarin and Porus. Funny, isn’t it?

There’s a lot more I could go into, honestly – the astonishing relationship between Zarin and her aunt (who started shaming her niece at the age of four for “spreading her legs and sitting like a boy”), the slut-shaming rampant throughout the whole book, the idea that a girl has to bleed when she loses her virginity, the inevitability of arranged marriage for not only Mishal but all the female characters, the objectification of girls for their boobs (seriously, there is a concerning hyperfixation on boobs for some reason, you’d think this was written by a white man because this is almost titting down stairs level boobery), a debate that only seems to show domestic abuse as normalized in this society, and more.

I can hardly begin to explain how damaging something like this is – a book that’s being lauded as this brave exposure of misogyny and rape culture, but is written in such bad taste. The context of this book makes the whole discussion fraught with damaging implications, and the lack of any good, or positive, or normal characters in the whole book to counterbalance all the shitty ones is really inexcusable.

In conclusion, this book is cancelled.

Thanks for coming to my Ted Talk.

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## Saajid Hosein says

"Hola, can you help me find my weave?"

- Dora, the shookethed explorer (2018).

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## Korrina (OwlCrate) says

Phew. That was a book that required 100% of my attention. It wasn't an easy read for me, but definitely a worthwhile one. I feel like this story is really important and will stay with me for a long time.

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## Laurie says

STOP EVERYTHING YOU ARE DOING AND READ A GIRL LIKE THAT by Tanaz Bhathena. This is one of the most important works of fiction I have ever read – right up there with THE FAULT IN OUR STARS in its depth, complexity and powerful beauty. I sat down to read a few pages of this incredible book and tore through the story in one sitting.

A GIRL LIKE THAT is told from the alternative points of view of a group of teens living in Saudi Arabia. The teens are of a variety of ethnicities and religious affiliations – Muslim, non-Muslim, Arab, Indian and mixed-race.

**\*SPOILER ALERT\***

The narrative revolves around a 16 y.o. girl named Zarin, the other teenagers' interactions with Zarin, and the teens' reactions to horrific incidents that happen to her. These incidents result in Zarin being bullied at school and online by virtually the entire community.

Talk about high stakes - how about teenaged hero Porus (with his false birth certificate) who sticks by Zarin and stands up to her bullies even though it may mean deportation.

**\*END SPOILER ALERT\***

This is a book about what it means to love and about standing up against injustice at huge personal risk. It's about the effects of the oppression of young women on everyone (men and women both) and the consequences of dividing ourselves by strict cultural, religious and racial lines. And, ultimately, it's a book about daring to step outside those lines to choose humanity over division.

I came away from reading this #ownvoices book changed and wanting to be more like Porus.

BE AWARE – This book deals frankly with bullying, racism, rape, sexuality in an oppressive environment, mental illness, illegal drugs and the systemic abuse of women.

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## Hiba says

**Trigger Warning** Bullying, Sexual Abuse, Domestic Abuse

*When people say you're wrong so many times over so many years, when they call you a bad person, you begin to believe them. You begin to hide your face again – to anyone – you will*

*be judged. Sometimes, it gets so bad that you begin to wonder if life is worth living.*

Zarin Wadia was a 16 year-old Zoroastrian from Mumbai who's living in Jeddah with her aunt and uncle. Her mother was a bar dancer and her father was a underworld Mafia Boss. Both of her parents are dead. Her aunt used to hate her mother because of her profession and her marriage and blames Zarin for everything. Her aunt is mentally ill and her uncle doesn't try to protect her. Due to endless tortures abuse inflicted at her home, Zarin become rebellious. She began to date boys and started smoking. First, it was to infuriate her aunt but then it become a way to become something else other than what people tell her to be. She became a target for pupils at school due to her scandals and lies she told them related to her parents.

The book open with Zarin and her male friend, Porus being dead in a car crash and what follows is the Zarin's story told through multiple POVs including herself, her only friend Porus, and multiple people who had been in her life. Through their eyes, we see Zarin is not just a cold and rebellious girl everyone thought her to be. She is a victim of child abuse, sexism and sexual abuse who's scared and in trauma. She's like every other girl who's frustrated how this world judges boys and girls differently. She's like any other teenager who is curious about love and sex and just trying to find out more.

I mostly don't read contemporaries, because they're set in America and Europe and have completely different cultures which are really difficult to relate to. I live in Pakistan, and this book is the closest I've seen myself represented. Well, not the smoking and boys part, certainly not being Zoroastrian part, but the ways of talking and subtle gestures made this really relatable. I've always thought that bullying was something restricted to American school systems because apparently, in East mostly some people don't go around teasing others like that but this book showed differently. Talking about someone behind their back, calling them names, snickering at them behind the books and hands, giving them cool stares, is all too common in my country too. Sometimes, shamefully I've been a part of this too. This book also discusses rape culture and double standards that are so deeply ingrained in our society. I am really glad the author mentioned the example of uncovered and covered lollipops that some people give in comparison to veiled and unveiled women. That's the most disgusting way women can be objectified. Seriously, I mostly wear niqab, but even I feel very insulted when such examples are made.

*A Girl Like That* is ultimately a romance, and here is where it loses a star. Porus was Zarin's childhood friend and they came across each other accidentally in Jeddah. Porus eventually fell in love with Zarin, and despite Zarin's continuous rude behaviour, didn't leave her, claiming that he remembers that sweet 7 year old Zarin from Mumbai and she's just misunderstood. There are so many things wrong with their romance. First off, how can Porus remember Zarin so vividly? He was 10 year old when they last met. I have trouble remembering someone from two months ago. Secondly, Porus almost obsession with Zarin was unhealthy. I understand their friendship, I understand if Porus wants to protect Zarin from the stupid boys she sees, but he leaves his job for her. I mean, I have many relatives living in Saudi Arabia so I know it's not easy for person like Porus who is inexperienced to get a job. Foreigners have to work extremely hard to get decent income in Saudi Arabia. Also, he's not alone. He has his mother to feed but he leaves everything so he can marry Zarin. And that's definitely not okay. A mother who have take care of you single handedly after your father's death is more important than a girl. I would have enjoyed it more if they were just good friends who care for each other and not star crossed lovers.

Another thing I don't like in this book was that every other muslim was badly portrayed. It's not suppose to be a happy book, and all characters were really complex, but there wasn't a single good, sane muslim here. Only good character was Porus, and as I explained above, he was just way too good. Other muslim people were Abdullah and Mishal, who were brother and sister, and Farhan, and they were assholes. They were realistically portrayed, yes, I mean I have come across fair share of stupid men and women who use religion to disguise their misogyny, but it didn't help that there wasn't a single sane, happy muslim character who (a) doesn't want to go into Zarin's pants, (b) was making fun of her and (c) belongs to good, sane, not abusive families.

Overall, it's a very powerful and very important book that will leave an lasting impact on you. If there were just few good muslim characters and some more good representation of Jeddah, it would have gained a 5 star. I wish I had read it in my school years. I would recommend it to curious and confused teenagers, especially of Eastern heritage.

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## Lola says

This is **not a feel-good book**, and Zarin is **not your happy-go-lucky heroine**.

It is fantastically refreshing to be reading a YA contemporary story that is not set in North America. Instead, the reader is heading to Saudi Arabia to meet the controversial Zarin who is more than she appears to be.

Zarin has had a tough life. Her father was a criminal and her mother died when she was still a child. Living with her aunt, who abuses her physically, and her aunt's husband, who only sometimes defends her, she does not feel safe. One would say that she is being self-destructive by being involved with guys continuously when she knows she could easily get into trouble with the religious police, but Zarin would tell you that she is compensating for having never grown up with a father and trying to fill as much as she can the emptiness in her heart caused by the lack of love in her life.

The reason why I am speaking about Zarin's life and not her death is because this is a story that focuses more on what led to her death than her funeral. In other words, the before is more important than the after. Her story is told from multiple perspectives, herself included.

This story fascinated me. The fact that I knew Zarin died in a car accident before I even picked the book up, and was reminded of it again in the very first chapter, did not at all temper my interest. Actually, it sparked my curiosity even more intensely. The characters are three-dimensional, seeing that the author does an impressive job of giving them all a back-story and a reason for us to be interested in them.

What an incredible debut novel. I am eager to see Ms. Bhathena publish more books in the future. Dark themes appear to be her go-to, though, so I'll admit that I'm also a little apprehensive. I better be prepared to have my heart be shattered once more. Poor heart.

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## Aimee ♥ | Aimee, Always says

Well, this book is HEAVY! Lots of dark themes, and the writing made it a bit harder to absorb. That, plus the fact that nothing happens in the entire first half of the book made this so hard to get into, but after a while I think I managed to appreciate this book a lot. Plus I adored the sort-of-love-interest-but-not-really, Porus. ♥

Full review to come!

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## K. says

Trigger warnings: death, car accident, slut shaming, bullying, mental health, date rape, drugging of

unknowing girls, domestic violence/child abuse, misogyny, death of a parent (in the past).

This was a way tougher read than I anticipated it being. I mean, given that the story starts with the main character being dead, it was never going to be a particularly easy read. But there was so much more going on here than I'd anticipated.

It's an incredibly compelling story, essentially told in reverse from the perspectives of multiple characters who contribute in some way to Zarin's death. It's set in an Indian community in Saudi Arabia, which is such a FASCINATING setting and a fascinating community to get to know.

I had so many feelings about Zarin and the way her story unfolds, and those feelings only got stronger as the story progressed. Because Y.I.K.E.S.

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## Dahlia says

WOW. Not that I wasn't expecting the book to be really good, but it was just...really good in ways I wasn't expecting. There's so much interesting discussion of cultural nuance re: India and the Middle East and being an expat and mental health and sexism and different religions that rarely get rep in YA (I had incorrectly assumed the main character would be Muslim; she is in fact Zoroastrian) and then on top of that you get the whole BEFORE I FALL/IF I STAY conceit *and* a book that stands up there with some of the best #MeToo YAs *and* there is just so much interesting characterization, especially with 4 POVs being juggled and a decent amount of insight into a 5th character, and...man. Yeah. Way to enter YA with a bang, Tanaz Bhathena. I look forward to literally whatever you bring to the table next.

CW: (view spoiler)

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## Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

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There were a lot of upcoming titles for 2018 with PoC leads that I was highly anticipating, and Tanaz Bhathena's A GIRL LIKE THAT was one of them. All I knew about it was that it was set in Saudi Arabia(!) and featured a female protagonist who was being slut-shamed for not fitting in with cultural norms, despite other much more interesting aspects of her life, like being an Indian Zoroastrian(!), and both a good student *and* a rebel.

I did not read the summary or the reviews very carefully beforehand, so you can imagine my SHOCK when in the first chapter I find that this is like a BEFORE I FALL set in the Middle East: Zarin *and* her male friend, Porus, are **both dead**, standing over their bodies in spirit as their friends, family, and the police examine the wreckage and decide where to place the blame.

The story then goes back and forth in the timeline. We get a better picture of what Zarin was like, and the role her classmates's bullying played in how she ended up. Zarin's parents were both criminals who are now dead, and she lives with an aunt and uncle who only really grudgingly tolerate her presence in their house (her aunt is mentally ill and abuses her physically; her uncle is an enabler who neither seeks his wife help nor gives his niece the protection she needs). Zarin started looking at boys because it made her aunt angry, but after a while it becomes a way to rebel. She chafes at the double-standards in her society that lets men do whatever they want, but dictates that a woman must be held responsible for guarding against unwanted detention. She goes through several boyfriends - two of them are absolute d-bags, the only difference between them is that one plays by society's rules for objectifying women and the other doesn't - and the third loves her and by the end of the story, it's clear that he would do anything for her.

Obviously, this is a very upsetting story and given the beginning, it's pretty obvious that it isn't going to have a happy ending. There are trigger warnings across the board, because the content in this book runs the gamut of rape, domestic abuse, colorism, racism, mental illness, bullying, slut-shaming, rape culture, and some other stuff that I probably forgot. That said, while this is a book I would never say was "fun" and probably won't ever reread (D:). I would recommend it to pretty much any queering teenager I happened across because the messages it sends are so important. Particularly if you're the type of person who reads stories like these, notices the location, and says to him- or herself, "Whew, I'm glad that type of thing doesn't happen *here* (in "my" country)." Then you *have* to read this book. Consider it assigned reading on how to be a better human being.

Here's the thing: the objectification of women and the blaming of the victim is not exclusive to certain regions. It is a global epidemic, and while it might be better or worse in certain regions, *nobody* has it down pat, so in my opinion nobody should read about these issues and walk away feeling smug. We know we live in an unequal society when we hear about a woman who was a victim of sexual assault and one of the first things we ask is, "What was she wearing? What was she doing out late at night?" We know we live in an unfair society when people publish PSAs about how women can avoid being raped when they go out at night - instead of publishing PSAs telling men (or anyone) not to be fucking rapists. We know we live in a society that blames its victims when we hear about bullying incidents and think, "Well, they shouldn't have let it get so bad. They should have reported it to the teacher. Maybe they had something to hide or are doing it for the attention."

The bullying in A GIRL LIKE THAT is really well done in this book - and I could see some critics saying that nothing the girls did was really that bad... but it doesn't have to be. People who are really successful bullies don't have to throw your shoes on the school roof or even do something ridiculous like hire gang members to beat you up (a shockingly common trope in shoujo manga). All they have to do is get inside your head and make you doubt, question, and hate yourself, and you'll do 90% of the work for them. That's exactly what Zarin's classmates did. They didn't say a whole lot, but they made sure to be consistent in what they said, and eventually she almost started to take it for granted. That's how I was bullied in high school, too. They made cruel remarks specially tailored for me, and me alone, and went out of their way to assure me that everything I did, thought, and liked made me worthless. And, like most of Zarin's teachers, mine were complicit. Either they did nothing, or they participated in it themselves, or they enabled it by punishing or shaming *me* instead of the people who were attacking me. My first two years of high school were a special brand of hell, and I had parents who loved me and tried to draw me out. Zarin had absolutely no one, except for Porus, and my heart absolutely ached for that girl, and for everyone else who feels that alone and helpless.

You should definitely read this book. I'm still shaken by the utter unfairness of the ending.

4 to 4.5 stars

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**ilsa ↗** says

Ilsa: Hello

Ilsa: Why are you speaking to yourself?

Ilsa: can you please just let me be!! We need to speak

Ilsa: about??

Ilsa: A Girl Like That

Ilsa: ...and I care because?

Ilsa: BECAUSE I'M A MIXED BAG OF SPRINKLES AND NEED TO GUSH MY FEELINGS ABOUT THIS BOOK, that one the one hand, is great and tackles sexual assault and rape and a lot of important topics, whilst on the other hand was also very islamophobic and don't get me started about the implications of the religious police.

Ilsa:...the religious police?

Ilsa: Yep, and it's never explained what the religious police IS. But we get subtle hints about Islam obviously but it's never tackled that what they do is very extreme and not Islamic at all!! It is never discussed that the religious police AREN'T ISLAM!!!

Ilsa: but you loved this book a day ago

Ilsa: I know, but the more I thought about it, the more annoyed I got

Ilsa: just because of the religious police?

Ilsa: no, i mean i think the story as a whole was important but all the girls hate each other basically! I see no strong friendship between ANY of them! Zarin has a really good friendship with Porus and you're like...HEY a m/f friendship that doesn't include romance and shows boys and girls can be friends...OH NO WAIT. Everything is about romance here! Because of spoiler, if you are not interested in kissing, you are NOT normal. BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT EVERYONE WANTS APPARENTLY. ugh.

Ilsa: anything else you need to get off your chest

Ilsa: THE CHARACTERS have no hobbies, no things they like to do. Well, Zarin likes to smoke and all the other girls like to be mean about it!! Zarin has no hobbies outside of boys which was not a problem for me,

because her character was still so developed as we see the inner depths to her and how abuse and other things have affected her!!

Ilsa: so you like Zarin

Ilsa: yes, I liked Zarin a lot but EVERY SINGLE DAMN MUSLIM CHARACTER is portrayed as super messed up and evil...and wow

Ilsa: every single one

Ilsa: Farhan rapes girls, Abdullah oppresses his little sister loads whilst also being such a hypocrite and Mishal is just there to show that look Islam forces girls into marriages and they have no choice ETC. gosh I am angry.

Ilsa: but Muslims can be evil and horrible, they are HUMANS

Ilsa: Yes I KNOW but when every single muslim character is potrayed negatively, that's messed up.

Ilsa: you have a point

Ilsa: and all the developed and wonderful characters who we are supposed to sympathise with??? HAHAHA, they are ALWAYS non-muslim. Zarin and Porus are pure beautiful souls who are misunderstood. Every other Muslim guy is a perv. But Porus is not Muslim so of course, he's a good guy!!

Ilsa: but you really enjoyed this book yesterday

Ilsa: yes but I slept on it, and I realised all these subtleties. YES, I did still enjoy the book and thought it was powerful but the underlying messages and implications here are horrible. All Muslim women are oppressed and all Muslim men, cheat on their wives, are evil and rape people and oppress their daughters!!

Ilsa: ... yikes

Ilsa: Yikes indeed

Ilsa: so do you still recommend this to people?

Ilsa: Well, Yes. I still hold my opinion that it does have some good in here and it made me just feel ver whole but please acknowledge the very harmful aspects of this book

Ilsa: What is that good stuff??

Ilsa: Well I liked that it starts off with Zarin and the love interest dying in a car crash!! And then it explains everything that happened before that point

Ilsa: so basically the author spoils the ending at the beginning, WHAT IS THE POINT??

Ilsa: can you please shut up, it's supposed to hook the reader and make it even more emotional when the ending really happens and i really liked it

Ilsa: Fine, Fine, what's the other good bits.

Ilsa: FEELS

Ilsa: if you want me to care, you've got to be less vague

Ilsa: it tackles rape and how horrible it is and sexual assault and there are some really horrible MEN in this book and IT BROKE MY HEART

Ilsa: that sounds...bad

Ilsa: i could almost cry and it talks about stereotypes and double standards!! which i think is really important!! REAL GOOD DISCUSSIONS

Ilsa: this author is not the only one to write about stuff like this

Ilsa: YES but she has this unique writing style and it's from different perspectives and I NEVER got confused which is so weird because normally all 1st person POV's sound the same. SO HA, this author IS a genius writer!!

Ilsa: I'm a genius too

Ilsa: thanks for the compliment but also have i mentioned that this book talks about how women in are treated in middle eastern countries which i think is an interesting discussion. it's so messy and painful and heavy and i think it's got a point to exist

ilsa: unlike u

ilsa: ur not funny

ilsa: i never said i was

ilsa -\_-

ilsa: i think we should end this

ilsa: okay

ilsa: you literally have so many conflicting emotions about this

ilsa: i cant even remember which ilsa im supposed to be

ilsa: bye

ilsa: OKAY IM REALLY GOING NOW

ilsa: bye

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## **Trevor says**

1.5 stars

Honestly, I was bored for almost the entirety of the book. Several POVs caused the narrative to spread too thin; too many ideas going on at once. For a novel heavy on rape culture, there is absolutely nothing in the synopsis that tells this. There is one little mention of it before the title page, in little print that can easily be overlooked, especially when using the ebook version. That wasn't enough for me & is very misleading. It left a bitter taste in my mouth. I also was a bit confused at some of the lines in here. For example: "Her smile would have given nightmares to diabetics." Um, what?

I had high hopes for this, unfortunately they all fell flat. Giving a generous .5 stars because I did begin to like Zarin towards the end & wanted more of her character, particularly for it to just be from her POV.

## Romie says

### *Trigger warnings:*

Sexual Assault — Rape — Child abuse (physical abuse) — Death — Bullying — Domestic Violence — Graphic Car Accident — Death of a pet — Depression

### *Author's Note*

*My own story is different from Zarin's and Mishal's. Yet it does not make their stories any less true, nor does it diminish the reality of living in a world that still defines girls in various ways without letting them define themselves.*

*This book is a love letter to them all.*

I really have to start reading the synopsis of the books I buy. This is truly a book I wanted to read first for the absolutely gorgeous cover ... shame, Romie. But for once, the outside matches the inside. I added this book to my tbr first and foremost because the cover looked extremely pretty and I was glad to see a woman of colour on it, and then with my book club we decided to make it one of our April BOTM. That was really exciting considering I just needed an excuse to read it.

Not knowing what I was getting myself into made this book even more impactful to me. I had no idea the story would be about a dead girl. Which it is. The book opens our protagonist's death in a car crash. Zarin is a 16 years old girl from Mumbai living in Saudi Arabia with her aunt and uncle. Her mother died when she was 4, she left for Saudi Arabia when she was 7, everything happened pretty fast. There, she tried to be someone else, not half Hindu, not an orphan, not someone her aunt is beating when she does something her aunt doesn't agree with. But Zarin learns pretty fast that her past doesn't want to let her go, it follows her wherever she goes, relentlessly. There, she goes to a school for expatriated children, especially Indian or Syrian children, but let's say making friends isn't something she's good at. People see her as a liar for not telling about her mom's death, they see her someone who thinks too much of herself, a bad person, someone with a bad influence who likes to smoke and hook up with boys in their cars. She is so much more than that.

This book is also, yes, a love story. Zarin isn't the only in the car when the accident happens, there is also Porus, the boy she met when she was 4 and met again when she was 16. He dies as well. And we know from the beginning that what unites both Zarin and Porus together is more than a simple friendship. And if this book is a love story between two non Muslim teenagers and takes place in Saudi Arabia, it would be impossible to talk about this book without mentioning the very important feminist aspect of it. This book deals with misogyny, it tells the story of girls who are oppressed by the men in their lives, girls who are seen as having less rights than boys, girls who have to play by a different set of rules because they belong to the 'lesser gender.' This book is a critique of this misogynistic way of life. More than once, this book describes all the ways girls are treated differently than boys when it comes to living their lives. Driving? Nope. Being seen with someone of the opposite gender whom they're not related to? Don't think so. Choosing who they're going to marry? Not even their dreams. This book puts its finger on what is profoundly wrong in the way women are treated.

I know I'm not exactly talking about the story between Zarin and Porus, but I think everybody needs to enter this book without knowing too much. It's much more powerful this way. Experiencing the story with no expectation is the way to go.

4.5

## **Laurie Flynn says**

I had the privilege of reading A GIRL LIKE THAT in advance of its 2018 release date, and I was completely enraptured by its beauty and power. The story starts with the aftermath of a car accident that kills that two main characters, Zarin and Porus. It's certainly not a traditional beginning to a story, but that just adds to the uniqueness of this book- there's literally nothing else like it out there. Different perspectives- from Zarin, Porus, and other people in their lives- unravel the events leading up to the accident and unearth more details about each character and their relationships with each other.

Tanaz Bhathena writes complicated girls with such mastery and complexity. Zarin is not your traditional female protagonist, and I loved her for her feisty, rebellious, spontaneous nature. I liked that she wasn't perfect and was sometimes cruel to the people who loved her, because this just made her feel more real. I wanted to underline so many passages in this book, because so much struck a chord with me. Not to mention, the writing is utterly beautiful. Tanaz writes with such elegance and command, and is able to use language in such an original way.

Everything about A GIRL LIKE THAT is incredibly evocative, including the setting in Jeddah, which plays its own role in the story as much as the characters. I felt totally transported to a place and culture I have never visited, but could visualize so well in my head thanks to rich, lyrical details.

I don't want to give too much away, but A GIRL LIKE THAT doesn't shy away from heavy issues. It's a brave book, a story that will resonate with so many readers. I can't wait to read whatever Tanaz Bhathena writes next.

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## **Anna Priemaza says**

A GIRL LIKE THAT completely blew me away, but be warned: this book will break your heart a thousand times, so that by the time you're done reading, a thousand and one little heart pieces will be thrumming in your chest cavity like tiny, weeping hummingbirds.

Abuse. Death. Rape culture. Religion. Bullying. Mental health. Cultural norms. There is so much heaviness in this book, but Tanaz writes about it all with such profound honesty and depth that although you're forced to confront the ugly terribleness of it all on every page, you don't feel burdened down with it. Aside from the fact that your heart constantly breaks, of course.

The book starts with the two main characters already dead, then goes back and tells the story of how it all came to be, so as I read the book, I kept telling myself to not get attached to the characters. "They're going to die; don't get attached" was my mantra. And I failed miserably. Tanaz makes it absolutely impossible to not get attached to these brilliant, complex, flawed but still wonderful characters.

I am completely in awe of this book, and of Tanaz's ability to craft a complex, riveting, vivid, heartbreaking, terrible, honest story. Do not miss reading this one.

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