



## **A Love That Disturbs**

*Medeia Sharif*

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Maysa Mazari is alarmed by her mother's talk about arranged marriage. As a hijab-wearing Pakistani-American, she wants to find love on her own. Her judgmental Muslim clique has protected her from racist taunts, although the leader is turning on her as Maysa strays from the group because of her attraction to Haydee.

Haydee Gomez is a former gang member and juvenile detention student. Now living with a clean-cut aunt, she wants to turn her life around, even though one person will never let her forget her roots—Rafe, her abusive pimp. Haydee attempts to pull away from a life of prostitution when she develops feelings for Maysa, although Rafe isn't willing to give her up too easily.

Finding themselves in danger from Maysa's friends and Haydee's pimp, it's apparent their love disturbs everyone around them as they fight to stay together.

## **A Love That Disturbs Details**

Date : Published June 17th 2016 by Evernight Teen

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Author : Medeia Sharif

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Lgbt, Young Adult, Romance, Contemporary, Realistic Fiction

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# From Reader Review A Love That Disturbs for online ebook

## Endlesscribbles says

Highly recommended read. This book is an emotional roller coaster of two people. One who is trying to live the life she wants and not the past she comes from. While the other finds herself and the strength by pulling away from her small minded (due to religion and culture) friends  
Not your average coming of age and coming out book

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## She Writes She Reads aka Thinking M & some other things... says

Beautiful love story that feels authentic and real-world. The book is very well written and is not formulaic. The author created a diverse cast of characters that skillfully show diversity of individuals even from the same cultural and religious background. Full review to follow but in the meantime I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS BOOK! I received a free copy for an honest review.

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## Sinead (Huntress of Diverse Books) says

I chose A Love That Disturbs because I wanted to read an f/f romance and I liked the sound of the blurb.

Maysa, a Muslim girl, starts to feel attraction for Haydee, the new girl in school. Maysa's friends don't approve of her friendship with Haydee and try to convince Maysa to ignore the new girl.

### The Good

There aren't many f/f romances that feature two women of colour. Maysa is Pakistani American and Haydee is Latina.

### The Bad

I felt like most of the representation was not realistic at all or not nuanced enough.

Since I have poor eyesight, I'll talk about that representation first. Haydee also has poor eyesight and doesn't have glasses during the story. She sees everything as fuzzy but everytime she looks at Maysa her vision sharpens. Excuse me? What! This isn't how it works. If you don't see clearly, you won't see your crush clearly. If this had been a one-off phrase, I'd have let it go, but it wasn't.

The first sex scene was unrealistic in my opinion. Spoiler: Maysa has her first kiss with Haydee and immediately has sex with her, even though she hadn't thought that she was a lesbian before that.

Disclaimer: I'm not Muslim. I think the Muslim representation was lacking in this story. All of the Muslims were terrible people except for Maysa, who wasn't religious. The Muslim characters were stereotypes and one-dimensional.

I would be interested in reading reviews written by Latinx people and by people who have worked in the sex industry because I was unsure about these representations as well.

### **Reviews from Muslim people**

Marilla's review (contains spoilers, queer Muslim girl)

Shouni's review (Muslim girl)

### **All in all**

I was very unsure about posting this review and also very unsure about how to feel about the lesbian, Muslim, Latina and sex worker representation – so basically almost everything. I have thought about it for a long time, and think that this book is harmful towards to people that it is representing. It perpetuates stereotypes.

Trigger warnings: physical violence, homoantagonism, Islam antagonism, sexual abuse.

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### **Amy says**

3.5 Stars

Imagine a life full of rules and being told what you can and can not do.  
Now imagine the life you want, where you can be free to make choices.  
Where you decide your future.  
Both girls are struggling with their lives and the rules forced on them.  
Haydee and Maysa have more in common then they realize.

My heart broke for both girls.  
There were highs and then there were some deep scary dark places.  
The writing is quite lovely and the characters could be any high school student. It was easy to like them. Easy to understand.

More on my blog!

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### **Shiku says**

I received a copy via Netgalley for an honest review.

Hier geht's zur deutschen Rezension.

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### **Content Note:**

The characters are confronted by Islamophobia, homophobia and brutal violence (partially because of these prejudices) – people are beaten, others raped and there's much more. Furthermore, there's a rather detailed

description of someone's nightmare, in which the several of the character's body parts melt away. The book isn't always easy to read in that regard. If you need more information, please let me know!

### **About the book:**

Maybe I should start with what I liked: the main characters. Both Haydee and Maysa were instantly likable without being 100% perfect. Haydee made a lot of bad decisions in her past and is plagued by her – justified – guilt. This leads to her constantly belittling and punishing herself. It is quite opposite that she truly regrets what happened in the past and that she isn't a bad person, that she wants to do better.

Maysa has different issues: as one of the very few Muslims at school, she feels alone and left out – which is why she's friends with Aamal, Imani and Ruhah, the three other Muslim girls at school. And yet, she doesn't even like most of them. She wants out, wants better friendships and especially her dislike of Aamal, a truly resentful and self-absorbed character, shows us that her heart is in the right place. Sadly, all of her friends are less fleshed out characters, but they bring some variety with them. All four of them may be Muslim, but there are differences. Imani and Maysa's families are Pakistani, whereas Aamal's parents are from Syria. Those three also wear a hijab, but not Ruhah – the book lets us know that this isn't usually done by women in Iraq, where her parents are from.

In terms of diversity, "A Love That Disturbs" has much going for it. Haydee's also a Latina (with Puerto-Rican roots on her grandfather's side), and both her and Maysa are lesbian, and even bisexuality is considered a valid option if only for a moment. There's no "oh damn, I'm into girls!" moments – both just accept it and roll with it, which is great to read for once.

One thing should still be mentioned, though: Haydee is also a sex worker, but the book shows the negative side of it. There's nothing inherently wrong with that since there are workers out there whose experiences match Haydee's. But if you were hoping for a narrative that deviates from the one we usually see in society, this is the wrong book. Haydee has to deal with a violent and abusive pimp. Originally, she worked for him on her own free will but it's more of a punishment for her, something she "deserves". She also never gets the chance to forgive herself: everything she changes, she changes because of Maysa and not herself. And often, she blames herself and her work for things that aren't remotely linked to it.

And so we get to the bad stuff. It's usually linked to how this book was written. There's often a lot of telling – but hardly any showing. For example, there's Haydee making assumptions about Maysa's family based on them being Muslim. And she's usually right, which we know because we have Maysa as a second narrator. But Maysa and Haydee don't ever talk about it, not on page – it stays an assumption that is never brought up again. It's also quite obvious that both girls are attracted to each other, but suddenly there's talk of love and we had hardly any conversations between those two on page.

Sometimes I wasn't even sure how much credit the author gives her readers. For example, it is mentioned that Maysa and Imani are closer to each other than the other two in their group because they're both less resentful. Then Imani is, all of a sudden, and we get told twice how unusual that is. (Funnily enough, just a few pages later we're told – almost in the exact same words – that they're closer because they're Pakistani.) Later on, Maysa is insulted as "terrorista" – and then the author explains that this is meant as an insult, that they're calling her a terrorist.

The book is lacking a bit of balance between too many and too little details. I don't quite understand why Aamal's nose and her nostrils are brought up again and again, even though there's so much more to be said about her. I'd rather have more details about how people feel. Example: Maysa asks her sister for help and when she agrees to do that, Maysa is ... relieved? Thankful? We don't know because nothing is mentioned.

I'll also have to disappoint non-binary and polyamorous readers. The author only ever talks about boys and girls (mentioned in that binary), and then there's this passage: "How could Darla share her body with

other men when she seemed to be into Rafe? Ever since meeting Maysa, Haydee didn't want anyone else touching her. Darla and Rafe couldn't possibly be in love like she was." It's perfectly fine for Haydee to think like this about her own sex work and Maysa, but Darla and Rafe? There is so much that makes their relationship an unhealthy one: Rafe is abusive and violent, they aren't equals in terms of power ... it's not unhealthy because they aren't monogamous. And yet, the author proves Haydee right. Just why.

In the end ... "A Love That Disturbs" had a good start and Maysa and Haydee can certainly carry their story. It's the details where it's lacking. Sometimes there's too much of them, too many repetitions, other things aren't mentioned at all. It's distracting while reading and not a positive influence.

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### **Stephanie Faris says**

A Love That Disturbs is an intense read. Throughout, I was amazed at the author's range. She can write lighthearted stories, adventures, and gut-wrenching dramas like this one. The story alternates between Maysa's and Haydee's point of view. Maysa is a Pakistani-American whose old-fashioned parents want her to marry someone from her background. Haydee is a former prostitute trying to turn her life around. The two fall in love--and must deal with the consequences of that love. This is an important book that breaks down stereotypes, while also being a page-turner.

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### **Verechnaya says**

Review written & published on [www.criticalwrit.com](http://www.criticalwrit.com)

*Content warning for physical abuse, rape, emotional abuse & blackmail, sexual trafficking, and extreme violence against women. Genre : Drama, Contemporary, Romance, F/F Fiction*

Before we start, I feel that we need to go back over the content warning header— because this is not an easy read at all. This book features some of the worst things human beings do to one another and some pretty gut wrenching abuse. This book is a good example of an emotional rollercoaster, with heartwarming cuteness at times and disaster at others. Despite this, the violence pictured is violence that happens every day against women in every part of the world.

I feel we should also take time to talk about Muslims— one of the lead characters of this book being a hijabi woman after all— in the LGBTQI community. In the aftermath of the Orlando massacre, it is obvious that violence and abuse will impact a community that is not responsible for the actions of the few. But we, as the non-Muslim LGBTQI community, should be even more wary of not alienating and pushing away those among us who are both Muslim and LGBTQI. Making it about “us” and “them” in regards to Muslims has always been hateful and bigoted, and disregarding Muslims LGBTQI people is just as terrible.

This is the first day for Haydee in her new school. She's back from alternative and juvie schools after a hard life as a gang member— a life she firmly wants to leave behind. But she's not quite out of it yet and there remains the matter of her abusive and extremely violent pimp who still maintains control over her. As a sexually trafficked minor, she doesn't get any say at all— what had first been for her a means of survival has become a trap. But she still needs the money to get out and start anew. At school, she meets Maysa Mazari, a

charming and bright hijabi student. Maysa is the first person that sees her for who she is, without judgment or prejudice about her past. However Maysa's friends don't like Haydee and do everything within their power to separate the two. So when their friendship turns into something more and Haydee decides to fully cut ties with her past, danger arises for both girls as violence escalates.

As I said, *A Love That Disturbs* elicits strong emotions. Both of these girls, who are attending the last year of high school are victims of some form of abuse. Maysa is slowly realizing how evil and mean her friend Aamal is; she's a manipulator and an abuser with venom on her tongue and as soon as Maysa befriends Haydee, she turns their mutual friends against her. Haydee is controlled by her pimp, Rafe, a violent and manipulating man who won't let her stop sex work. Both of these girls are very believably written teenagers although Haydee was forced to grow up by the horrifying experiences she's had and remains chillingly mature for her age. The experiences they face will force them to grow up further and their romance will start a journey towards independence and freedom from their respective abusers.

Their friendship builds quickly— Maysa is a kind soul who refuses to let her judgmental friends paint Haydee as a “walking STD” or a delinquent drop out. She's more curious and interested in Haydee than anything. I liked that Haydee was initially awkward and a bit insensitive about Islam, even telling Maysa that “she has really pretty hair and shouldn't cover it”. Her reading about Islam afterwards to get to know Maysa's religion better was a very endearing and cute move. I liked how their relationship plays out too— it's not one saving the other from their life, it's about each girl finding the strength and hope in their relationship to cut ties with their abusers.

Medeia Sharif's writing is tight and an easy read. Points of view alternate each chapter between the two girls and while it is sometimes a little awkward due to some chapters going backwards in time, it remains a very pleasant read. I however felt that she tells too much, which is surprising because she shows just enough— A few times the narration would repeat what I felt was obvious but that too was a minor problem.

To sum up *A Love That Disturbs* deals with difficult subject matter that may not be easy to read and will certainly be extremely triggering to some readers but it is still powerful and an excellent read

Review written & published on [www.criticalwrit.com](http://www.criticalwrit.com)

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## **Marilla says**

(tw: assault)

As a queer Muslim, my first thought upon finishing *A Love That Disturbs* (after I stopped being in total shock) was "Fuck this."

Let me start out by saying that I don't know anything about the author of this book, Medeia Sharif. I don't know if she's queer or even a Muslim, but I'm going to assume the latter based on her previous works. And let me say this: *A Love That Disturbs* does not read like a book written by a Muslim author. It reads like a straight non-Muslim's imagining of how a queer Muslim's life is like.

There's a lot that I could say about the writing (so stilted it hurts), the characters as characters (one-dimensional cardboard cutouts), the instalove (Jesus Christ), the plot solely in terms of plot (holy shit, Maysa, a hijab-wearing Pakistani-American who's never had sex much less KISSED anyone, kisses Haydee

out of the blue and says she's ready to have sex at a point when their friendship isn't even developed, much less their romance!), and so much more, but I won't. I could talk about Haydee, the queer Latina MC of this book, who also happens to be a sex worker, but that's not my area of expertise. I'm going to talk about the queer Muslim representation. This isn't a formal review or critique; it's just my thoughts and questions. A lot of it was written immediately after finishing the book, while I was furious and upset, but my opinion hasn't changed much.

*A Love That Disturbs* is about two girls, Maysa, a queer hijab-wearing Pakistani-American, and Haydee, a queer Latina running away from an abusive pimp, who fall in love. My main issue with this book is all the gratuitous violence, specifically a scene near the end where Maysa is held down by two of her friends, Imani and Ruhah, while a third, Aamal, throws acid in her face.

This is not what a "realistic" portrayal of a queer Muslim looks like. I've always said I wanted "realistic"—being kicked out, not being accepted, whatever. But to be held down by two of your closest friends while a third throws acid in your face? What?

I've always thought "realistic" (by my standards, of course, hence the quotation marks) was important because, let's be real, queer Muslims DO go through a lot of shit. It's highly unlikely our parents and families accept us with open arms upon coming out, and I think it's necessary that queer Muslim teenagers see that being rejected by the people you love because of your queerness is A THING THAT HAPPENS, and that you can deal with it. The world doesn't end, and you will be okay. And yeah, acid attacks happen in some parts of the world, but how does it serve the narrative besides forcing Maysa to come out? How does it serve teen readers other than to paint a horrific picture of what it's like to be a queer Muslim and to make them afraid of ever being themselves? Because, in the end, is it really worth it when Maysa is brutally attacked and loses everything she had—her friends, her family, her community, her culture—for a girl she's only just met?

(And why is it presented as an either-or? Why does she have to choose to sacrifice either her Muslim identity or her queer one?)

Something I really, truly believe and love about YA is that it's meant to uplift teenagers and let them know they're not alone. And this novel ends on a hopeful note, but what about all the violence the two MCs have to endure to get there? I'm not saying this story couldn't happen in real life, but why do we have to teach young queer Muslims, and young queer people in general, that they can't be happy until they've suffered for it? Until they've earned it? Don't we have enough stories like that?

Who is this book for?

Is it for queer Muslims? What would I, personally, when I was a queer South Asian Muslim teenager, have gained from this book other than a sense of hopelessness and dread? Would I think I have to suffer to be happy, and that I have to leave behind my family, my friends, and my entire life's framework in order to run away and be with the one I love, that I have to sacrifice my Muslimness and my culture for my queerness?

You don't—you can't—leave your Muslimness and your South Asianness at the door to the Rest of Your Life. That's not how it works. As a queer Muslim, you don't ~overcome~ your upbringing so that you can finally be free. This book's view of Muslims and Islam is so laughably one-dimensional that I honestly can't believe a Muslim wrote this book.

So yes, after the acid attack, there IS hope. Maysa's face is sort of healing. She and Haydee move out and get loads of money from "LGBT charities" and are in love. But it's highly troubling, and not just because it



teaches queer Muslims that they have to suffer first in order to be happy. It seems as if Maysa has abandoned her Muslimness entirely. Why is there no mention of it at all after her attack besides one moment in the hospital, when she wonders about the purpose of hijab? Why does it seem as if she's become secular in order to accommodate for her out-and-proud lifestyle? This points to a bigger problem within the narrative: Why does it not grapple with what it means to be a queer Muslim, both at once, instead of having Maysa constantly flit between Muslim and Lesbian? Why is it that Maysa's faith is never explored? Why is it that her Muslimness mirrors her previously-assumed "heterosexuality" in that it's proof of her shelteredness and naiveté?

Even before the acid attack, Maysa's Muslim identity is an external one, evident only in her hijab and her family's expectations. Where is Maysa's faith? Where are the parts of Islam that give her strength in trying times? Where are the parts of the Qur'an that she's still grappling with as she comes to terms with her queerness, and the parts that give her hope?

Why, in this book, are Maysa's friends and family the physical manifestation of an Islam that must be fought against to gain freedom?

There's a way to write homophobic Muslim parents and friends without turning them into evil caricatures like Aamal and Ruhah and Imani. If, at the last moment, Imani or Ruhah had stood up for Maysa and stopped the attack, I could dig it. But these girls who Maysa's known for YEARS go along with a plan to throw acid in her face. Aamal is clearly implied to be a sociopath, but what about the others? If you're going to write about an acid attack perpetrated by three Muslim girls, you sure as HELL need to fully address homophobia in Muslim communities and how, for these three, it progressed to the point where they felt it was necessary to brutally attack their best friend.

In the end, what does this do but paint all Muslims, with the exception of Maysa (who, let's face it, like I said, is barely even Muslim), as barbaric and backward? Why not address the issue of homophobia in Muslim communities head-on instead of implying that there's something inherently homophobic and violent about Muslim girls like Aamal, Ruhah, and Imani? Ordinary Muslim cultures don't teach KILL YOUR GAYS 101, so the one-dimensionality of these characters shows Islam and American Muslims in a very bad light, and that's dangerous.

So, again: Why is the Islam in this book defined by moments of abuse and hatred? Why is it so external and why do we never see the personal, spiritual aspect of it?

Over the years, I've grappled a lot with what it means to write about my culture and queer Muslim characters. I've wondered: How do I talk about homophobia in Muslim communities without damning my own people? And you know what? This book helped me realize that no matter what, even if I tried, I couldn't write a book that condemns All Muslims, Everywhere. I'm a queer Muslim surrounded by Muslims that I love and respect, and even if some of them are homophobic, I know that they're human and I know that their homophobia is rooted in our culture—that it's not a problem with Islam itself or with them as people. Unlike the author of *A Love That Disturbs*, I would showcase their humanity in spite of their homophobia, and their potential for change.

I still don't know who this story was written for—queer Muslims, or people who want to be titillated by the story of one? Because I'm a queer Muslim, and let me tell you: This story fucking hurt.

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## **C. McKenzie says**

From cover to finish, *A Love That Disturbs* carries out its intent to keep the reader disturbed and turning the pages.

It addresses the issues of teenage prostitution and lesbianism, then heightens both in the context of two cultures in contact: a Haydee, broken-family-style of life with that of Maysa, who come from a traditional Muslim home with strict rules and expectations.

In her other books, Sharif has always given us excellent insights into America's teenage Muslim world, but this time she pulls all the stops. Told from alternating points of view, we follow Haydee's struggle to rebuild her life and Maysa's struggle to become the person she wants to be. Both girls gather strength and determination from each other, and even when their lives are about to be completely shattered, they come together for each other. *A Love That Disturbs* is a well-written story of the triumph of love against all odds.

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## **Evelyn G. says**

3.5/5

Thanks to NetGalley for giving a free copy to review.

'*A Love That Disturbs*' is a story about two girls falling in love, one of them a hijab-wearing Pakistani-American - Maysa, and the other one - Haydee, a heavily tattooed former gang member and a current prostitute. They slowly form a relationship that is not so well-taken by Maysa's family and friends, and they both begin to change for the better.

Overall the story was enjoyable (it read like fanfiction), the writing was quite simple, but good.

Some things I didn't enjoy:

- a few unbelievable and unrealistic things happened;
- a little bit of insta-love.

I would recommend picking up '*A Love That Disturbs*', it's a fun and easy read that you can get through in one or two days.

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## **artemis says**

I read this book at four am and went immediately to sleep, because my thoughts were a jumble and I was feeling really emotional about everything. So, expect a lot of rambling.

First of all, I just want to say that as a bi Pakistani Muslim, this is perhaps the first time I've read something that features us as part of the LGBT community, and it honestly feels so good! I wish I could carry this feeling for the rest of my life. I also really love that Maysa's girlfriend, Haydee, is Puerto Rican. Life is good and nothing hurts.

This book was wonderful, and it serves as perfect intracommunity discussion for the Muslim community - the majority of the community behaves in exactly the same way as Maysa's ex-friends, and it's really sad and heartbreaking, especially when you consider what Islam actually teaches.

My only problem with this book was the way sex work was portrayed, especially the misogynistic way that Haydee thought about her fellow sex workers, and truth be told, at times, I felt like she was actually talking about being in a gang rather than being a sex worker.

I am also disappointed that there wasn't any commentary on LGBT Muslims and how we are not haram - this was the perfect opportunity to lay it all out and assure everyone that the two are not mutually exclusive (as is the common belief), and yet, there wasn't any mention of Islam beyond Maysa's friends and family.

I also wish we'd seen something of Maysa and Haydee's respective cultures, but I guess you can't have everything.

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### **Kai Strand says**

This is a heavy book. I don't review a lot of books, but I was enticed by the dark subject—Muslim girl falls in love with a prostitute—and even though I knew it would be a tough read, I was still surprised by how tough. I wanted Maysa to give up her fight for her independence and go back to being the good little Muslim girl to save everybody the heartache, but of course I didn't really want that. My reader emotions and loyalties were pulled and tugged on through the entire story and then what happened to Maysa at the end was a complete surprise. Holy cow.

I've read several books by Medeia Sharif and I know she is capable of handling tough subjects with beauty and care. The writing in this book felt a little stiff. I never really fell into either character. I always felt like I was watching through a window and there was a lot of repetition.

I love that Muslim girls have reading material. I love that Maysa so quickly embraced her gayness and even if she didn't shout it from the rooftops at first, when she came out she was committed, not cowed. I love that Haydee set a goal to turn her back on her lifestyle, though I'm in no way condoning her method – it's fiction, let's keep it that way.

And I really want to know what hot chips are.

Recommended to readers who like dark contemporary and who don't have triggers with violence or sex.

I received the book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **CR Daylex says**

This book is very well-written but very very violent and a little bit traumatic. I kind of feel like it would be more appropriate for adult readers rather than a YA audience. The title is an accurate representation of the content.

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## **Jana says**

I received a free copy from the publisher through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Trigger warnings for violence, sexual violence, violence against women.

This book took my heart and tore it into thousands of little pieces. Set in the US, it follows Maysa, a Muslim girl whose parents worry her with talk of an arranged marriage and who isn't necessarily too happy in her friend group of four Muslim girls including her as the friendship is more out of necessity to stick together and protect each other from hateful comments and actions than out of real sympathy towards each other. The other main character is Haydee, a latina who comes from a terrible past, she doesn't know who her father is and her mother is in jail, she is staying with relatives, starts at a new school and is trapped in prostitution. Against all odds, Maysa and Haydee fall in love. Haydee starts to leave her past behind her, leaving her pimp behind, while Maysa is standing up to her "friends". If only it were that easy.

This was so so so beautiful but heartbreaking. I LOVED reading about a lesbian couple that is TWO WOC, and their stories were so terrible and sad and heartwrenching, and the emotions behind it were conveyed really well. I will say the writing felt a bit clumsy, especially in the beginning, and some of the dialogue felt a bit forced, but it didn't really take away from my reading experience with this amazing book.

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## **M says**

*"Maysa, her looks, her personality, her very being, and the way Haydee reacted to all this changed how she viewed her sexuality. Having Maysa in her life felt right and downright blissful."*

This book made me go through so many different emotions. It had some really sweet parts in the beginning and the end was heartbreaking and bittersweet at the same time.

Both girls go through some difficult stuff in their lives. Maysa is a pakistani muslim living in the US; when she starts coming out she has to deal with both her friends judging her and her parents not accepting at first. Then there is Haydee, a latina girl (from a Puerto Rican family) who had to become a prostitute after her mother went to jail and is being stalked by her pimp.

Their relationship was so cute and well written, I loved every interaction they had. The story never makes their problems come from their relationship and this is something that is definitely lacking in lesbian media (and LGBT+ in general). They stay together all the way through even the worst of times and help each other.

A Love That Disturbs is a wonderful book that made me cry for several pages and a reminder that there is hope out there for people who live in fear.

*"She made headlines in her head, although none of them sounded quite right. To her it was more like this: Girl in love graduates high school and is ready for the next chapter of her life."*

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