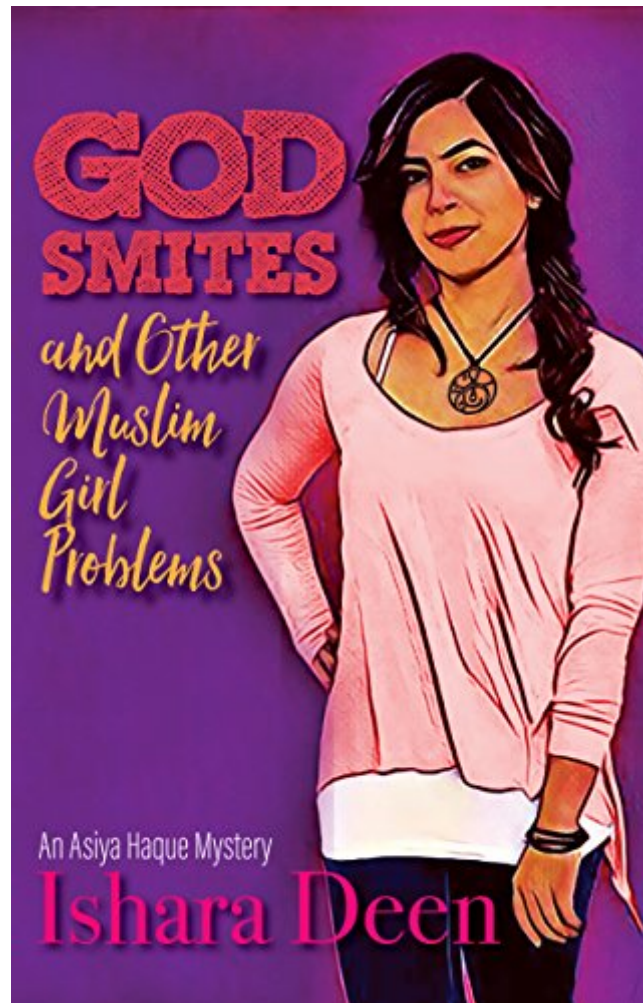




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God Smites And Other Muslim Girl Problems: Asiya Haque Mystery #1



Synopsis

“I have never laughed so hard. Genius! Highly recommended!”
• Ausma Zehanat Khan, Author of The Bloodprint
“What I love is how Deen manages to make this a cozy crime, a coming-of-age story with a hilarious protagonist and also a book of social commentary on Islamophobia. That’s not an easy feat.”
• Bina, WOC Reads
“[A] very basic but intense struggle, wanting to live up to the expectations placed upon her, but also wanting to do make the right choices for herself and people she cares about, even if her choices go against those expectations.”
• Sarah Wendell, Smart Bitches Trashy Books
“[Asiya] has none of the self-pity or victimhood that sometimes characterises protagonists who juggle two worlds/cultures.”
• Manasa, Not Chai-Tea
LIKE NANCY DREW, BUT NOT...Craving a taste of teenage life, Asiya Haque defies her parents to go for a walk (really, it was just a walk!) in the woods with Michael, her kind-of-friend/crush/the guy with the sweetest smile she’s ever seen. Her tiny transgression goes completely off track when they stumble on a dead body. Michael covers for Asiya, then goes missing himself. Despite what the police say, Asiya is almost sure Michael is innocent. But how will she, the sheltered girl with the strictest parents ever, prove anything? With Michael gone, a rabid police officer in desperate need of some sensitivity training, and the murderer out there, how much will Asiya risk to do what she believes is right?

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Customer Reviews

I can't even begin to say how much I adored this book! The author does an amazing job of making you feel fully immersed in the story, as if you are standing right beside Asiya. The beginning of Chapter 37. ... what what?? And that ending! I'm bouncing from one foot to the other waiting for the next book!!

God Smites and Other Muslim Girl Problems follows a female protagonist named Asiya Haque, who is a Bengali-Canadian Muslima. One lovely day while at her volunteer job, Asiya defies her parents and goes on a small, innocent walk with her boy-crush, Michael, during her break. Her cute, little transgression through the woods takes a huge turn for the worse when the duo stumbles onto a dead body. Soon after the incident, Michael disappears without a word, complicating matters quite severely. Convinced of Michael's innocence, Asiya embarks on a highly delinquent adventure to locate Michael, as well as to prove him to be guilt-free. Her only obstacles are a pair of super-protective parents, a rabid police officer who hates her guts, and a mysterious murderer. How hard can this be? I read this book in two lengthy sittings. It was just so good, I didn't want to stop reading it. One of the main reasons for this infatuation is Asiya herself. From the very beginning we get a taste of the young lady's witty, sarcastic humour and it bewitches you very fast. Everything about her is charming as can be. She isn't afraid to poke fun at her intermittently exasperating situation in regards to her overly-protective and culturally conservative parents. This helps to break a lot of the tension that could arise, making everything less anxious and awkward. Unlike a lot of other YA leading ladies, Asiya is smart. Her intellect shines in the methodical way that she deals with complicated things that keep sprouting up to slap her in the face. While occasionally those very same decisions aren't always the greatest of ideas, it never stops her from being an independent and admirable, exquisitely capable, protagonist. Damsel-in-distress never crosses your mind ever, and it's so refreshing to see this sort of lady character. Some other facets that make Asiya so amazing include her capacity for compassion. Understanding that people can make mistakes and learn from said mistakes, helps in connecting

Asiya to the reader in an intimately empathetic way. The capacity to recognise that humans are flawed creatures, while still maintaining an intelligent perspective about it, is something that's rarely portrayed in young adult via such an accessible means. Most of the time it comes off terribly forced, or is repeatedly reiterated. Yet in this novel, it's something that's implied by the power of storytelling. Asiya's chit-chats with God gave me so much life, and I think they are some of the most relatable aspects of the novel (at least for me). Frequently laced with humour that's clever, you really can't help but chuckle along, especially if you're someone who's spoken to God when you've been in a bind. But I think non-religious folks will also appreciate these scenarios simply for the fact that they are candid and realistic. Super religious superlatives never touch her tongue. She's just a gal talking to a higher authority for advice and safekeeping, which falls apart more often than not. Asiya's awesomeness aside, I loved the incorporation of family in *God Smiles and Other Muslim Girl Problems*. She has parents who are real and involved in her life quite actively, rather than being the "mandatory background prop." They do the parental job and discipline her when she does things that you really wouldn't want your adolescent doing, no matter their faith or culture. They care about their daughter, a lot, and it plays to plot progression in fantastic ways, albeit it can be slightly frustrating at times. The romance is subtle. There aren't any sticky or stupid triangles. There's no unrealistic instalove. The emotional aspects, while slightly complex due to Asiya's cultural position, never steal the spotlight of the narrative. It's there, but it's not the main focus; it's not the full driving force of Asiya's actions. In regards to the cultural representation of the book, I loved it. While Asiya's mom can be a tad bit vehement in her goal of protecting Asiya from the male flesh at all costs, it doesn't portray Islam or Muslims as being anything other than human beings. That's it. I know, what a concept, right? Yes, there's some gossip culture within the mosque that Asiya attends, and her parents are quite serious in regards to their reputation amongst the close religious circles, but is this really any different than Christians who attend church regularly, or Jewish families and the synagogues, or Hindus who go to temple? Where there's a strong religious community, there's always going to be chatter. One doesn't have to be a Muslim to experience this sort of social civilisation. It humanises Asiya and her family; making them normal even if they seem abnormal to some. Plot progression itself felt very genuine.

It's not extremely hasty, or painfully snail-paced. One event after another, unravelled seamlessly with a satisfying blend of atmosphere building, the perfect level of tension, and character distinctions. In regards to any cons, I wouldn't really call them cons because that's too strong of a word. I could see these being issues for some readers and there are only two that I could really distinguish from everything else. The first is Asiya's mom. She has a very powerful and strong personality that can feel a bit suffocative during particular scenes. Her logic in regards to boys, especially, has a real nagging-like aura that can be immensely grating. Yet, I also found it to be endearing once in a while, due to the fact that she really does love her daughter very much. Her affection really shines, specifically towards the finale. Secondly, it would be Michael, Asiya's romantic interest. His character felt relatively tropey to me in the way that he ping-ponged back and forth with a few things in relation to his interactions with our leading lady. To be perfectly blunt, it's a very minor issue, however, it did make it hard for me to empathise with him sporadically throughout the novel. All in all, *God Smites and Other Muslim Girl Problems* is a really, really great novel. It's suspenseful and engaging, with imperfect characters, a strong and intelligent female protagonist, and a fun plot that'll keep you guessing. 4.25 stars outta 5!

I went in with high expectations for this book, and by and large, it did not disappoint. The decision to make this a first-person narrative was absolutely perfect. Asiya has a very distinctive character voice that made her so real to me. Her internal world is rich and complex and compelling. On top of that, she is downright hilarious. I lost count of the number of times that I busted out laughing because of something she said aloud or in her head. And though she's not perfect, she does have a sense of justice and tries to do the best thing. Asiya's narration also brought to the fore an insider's perspective on Islam. There are the congregations at her masjid, where you get to follow along with the communal prayers and witness the true foundations and tenets of the religion: peace, generosity, empathy, etc. There are also the interactions between Asiya and individual Muslims in her life. And of course, the internal dialogue she has with God as she faces her troubles. From these passages, it's clear that Asiya has an intimate relationship with her faith and God, but it's complicated by other people's cultural and individual biases that favor certain interpretations of God's word. Through Asiya, her family, and her fellow Muslim community members, the author shows how Muslims are not a monolith. Even Asiya's parents interpret certain lines from the Quran differently from one another and from their imam. *Speaking of

the parents, I really liked the way Asiya's relationships with her parents was developed. Although they don't see eye-to-eye on everything, they do care for one another and stand up for one another when it counts. Her parents were flawed but sympathetic characters, giving the scenes of family tension emotional weight because they're more complicated than one side being right and the other wrong. I really loved her relationship with her father, who clearly has a soft spot for her. I have a similar relationship with my dad, and I wish there were more representations of such relationships when it comes to Asian dads in diaspora, who tend to be stereotyped as distant or controlling. Asiya's relationship with her younger brother was also a surprising positive. Although he definitely has his annoying brother moments, he still respects her, and Asiya in turn stands up for him when their parents disparage him over his academic performance. She's the one to validate him and what he brings to the table in terms of talents and skills. This is so important in an Asian diaspora narrative because I think second generation kids internalize so many toxic beliefs about the value of grades, where we're not just being encouraged to succeed in our education but are punished for every mistake made, to the point where we feel like we're never good enough because of some numbers and letters. There were a lot of little moments like this, little critiques of the harmful norms and practices around Asiya, including Islamophobia, body-shaming, and even the theft of indigenous children by the government. It was like an Easter Egg hunt for little nuggets of Keeping It Real. The mystery elements didn't take a backseat to all of this, of course. Between the different competing murder suspects and the obstacles to Asiya's attempts at investigating, there was plenty of suspense to go around. The clues were laid out very cleverly to spring one on the reader when the dots are connected to reveal the whole picture. Maybe I'm not that great at piecing things together, but I definitely did not expect the answer to the whodunnit question. And then at the end of the book, I got a cliffhanger that just ruined me. I'm eagerly anticipating the second book, Mutaweenies and Other Muslim Girl Problems!

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