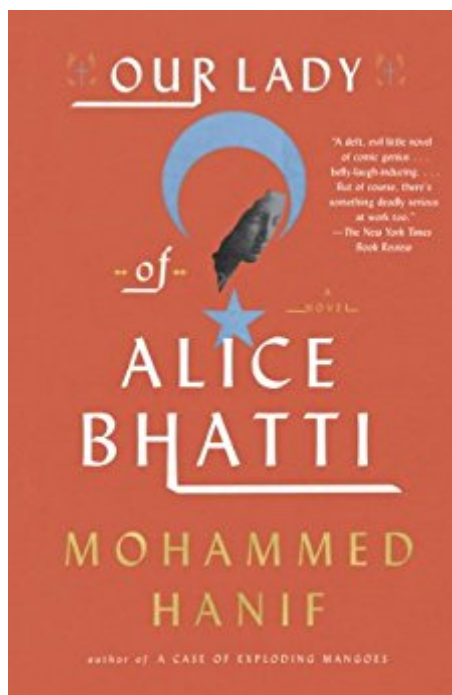


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Our Lady Of Alice Bhatti



Synopsis

From the author of the acclaimed *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (‘‘An insanely brilliant, satirical first novel . . . Belongs in a tradition that includes *Catch-22*’’) (The Washington Post), a subversively, often shockingly funny new novel set in steaming Karachi, about second chances, thwarted ambitions and love in the most unlikely places. The patients of the Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailments need a miracle. Alice Bhatti may be just what they’re looking for. She’s the new junior nurse, but that’s the only ordinary thing about her. She’s just been released from the Borstal Jail for Women and Children. But more to the point, she’s the daughter of a part-time healer in the French Colony, Karachi’s infamous Christian slum, and it seems she has, unhappily, inherited his part-time gift. With a bit of begrudging but inspired improvisation, Alice begins to bring succor to the patients lining the hospital’s corridors and camped outside its gates. But all is not miraculous. Alice is a Christian in an Islamic world, ensnared in the red tape of hospital bureaucracy, trapped by the caste system, torn between her duty to her patients, her father and her husband—who is a former bodybuilding champion, now an apprentice to the nefarious ‘‘Gentleman’s Squad’’ of the Karachi police, and about to drag Alice into a situation so dangerous that perhaps not even a miracle will be able to save them. But, of course, Alice Bhatti is no ordinary young woman . . . At once a high comedy of errors and a searing illumination of the seemingly unchangeable role of women in Pakistan’s lower-caste society, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is a resounding confirmation of Mohammed Hanif’s gifts of storytelling and of razor-sharp social satire.

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Customer Reviews

Reading this novel felt to me somewhat like my movie experience with "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel" with that delightful, energetic Indian hotel manager--or mis-manager. Of course the novel takes place in Pakistan, not India. And Alice is certainly not like the hotel manager, but the author's narrative voice most certainly is. It is a wonderful voice. This is a funny-sad novel written in the style of an Pakistani speaking English--by the way it is published in England's English, i.e., humour. Potential readers need to be aware that you may need to be patient getting into the syntax as well as the style, one in which the reader isn't always that certain what is happening when a new scene emerges, but then suddenly the reader has the ah-ha enlightenments. The novel is set in Karachi's Christian slum, the French Colony, with Alice Bhatti, skinny from malnutrition except large in breasts, is the delightful main character, "an underpaid junior nurse in an understaffed" [very, very understaffed] "welfare hospital, The Scared. The cast is wonderful including Alice's father, Joseph, who isn't really very wonderful at all--her mother died when Alice was young--but then emerges in a very unique and very surprising role at the end in the epilogue. (The reader will not easily forget the ending of this novel, an ending that gives meaning to the title.) Noor is a 17-year-old hospital worker who simultaneously is caring for his mother, dying of cancer, often the only way to swat away the pests that inhabit the unsanitary place. The not-so-skilled main doctor, Dr. Pereira, and the sardonic nurse supervising Alice, Sister Hina Alvi. Alice, by the way, was, in the corrupted view of the administration of the nursing school where she was "trained" "its most troublesome student." Delightfully so for the reader. "Sometimes it seems to her [Alice] that the seven thousand patients in the hospital, hundreds crawling in the corridor, thousands more out in the compound using bricks as pillows, are feeling a bit better because they are in the hospital compound, only a few metres away from operating theatres, labs and drug dispensaries." In other words his hospital is on the edge of the section of Karachi where the wealthy live and work and are cared for. The novel is filled with back stories, sometimes told obliquely in unexpected places, giving the reader a sudden jolt of

additional pleasure--or sadness. Alice meets Teddy Butt, an underling policeman who waxes his body-builder being and is in charge of getting criminals to and from places including not-Abu Zar. (I will not explain the not-Abu because that is part of the fun of the novel if you like your fun to be on the flip side of tragic. And Teddy's boss is Inspector Malangi who has a rather, well, I won't tell, last day on the job, on the day he retires. And then comes the epilogue. And I won't say more except that this is a really underrated novel by some of the reviewers here.

I don't know how Mohammed Hanif does it. He is a journalist in Karachi who works for the BBC and contributes to The New York Times. He is also a novelist who pours his despair, anger and wild creativity into phantasmagorical riffs about Pakistan, a country I would not care to visit. I am grateful for his voice. "Our Lady of Alice Bhatti" is a riff on Pakistan's brutal oppression of women as seen through the brief life of a hospital nurse from one of Karachi's slums. It is cleverly structured and somehow Hanif manages to leaven his tale with dark humor. As I said, I don't know how Hanif does it. This novel is brilliant.

Well done Mohammad! I loved "the Case of Exploding Mangoes" & you've managed to out-do yourself with Alice Bhatti. It's a rarity to find a writer who can convey a difficult topic with such wit & irony, which leaves me looking forward to your next book. I'm not going to give away the plots to Alice Bhatti or The Case of Exploding Mangoes because readers need to explore for themselves...I will say though, if you want to read a story conveying the reality people live with in the Far East but don't want the mental drain of Khaled Hosseini (whom I loved reading, but left me exhausted) read a Mohammad Hanif book...he's a fantastic storyteller.

What makes this book interesting, is how Alice lives in such a violent, hard, seemingly heartless war zone, and somehow seems to survive without appearing as damaged as her life is shown to us. I have never been in a war zone, and was sometimes shocked at what I read. But then, one must survive the only way they can. Alice has no idea about her 'miracles', but has no time to consider this with her busy life as a nurse in an understaffed, overpopulated hospital with corrupt staff and patients! It's a tough world over there, count your blessings for those of you in a country free of war!

Very strange book but compelling. Unique. Written about a place (Pakistan) and people (Pakistanis) that are as alien to me as Martians and yet the writer made them come alive and be believable. The ending was thought provoking.

I do not think that any woman would find the abuse Alice suffers to be humorous. The book is, on occasion, absurd. The characters are memorable. The story is well told, just not comic.

this novel will keep you laughing, but it will also teach you more about life for women in Pakistan than you might want to know. Most interesting is Hanif's show the reader how Alice adapts to the severe constrictions of her life...some of them idiosyncratic and others cultural..right to the end. I mean the end.

While it did give a glimpse into the socio-religious structure in Pakistan, overall a very disappointing, disjointed read from a promising author.

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