



Like a Woman

Debra Busman

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Busman makes her gritty characters' experiences specific yet universal, to expose the difficulties of lower-class women.

Uniquely blending first-, second-, and third-person narration, Debra Busman jumps around in time and place to tell the gritty, engrossing story of a Caucasian girl named Taylor. *Like a Woman* poignantly chronicles Taylor's growth from abused youngster to street-smart, tough, yet drug-addled survivor. A middle-school dropout, she possesses an amazing amount of wisdom born out of experience.

Secondary players include Taylor's first girlfriend, Jackson, an African American self-styled author who prefers the street life, and C. N., a Hollywood socialite older than Taylor who hooks up with gay actors to bolster their reputations as heterosexual men.

These characters swear, do drugs, cheat, lie, and steal; yet, these women have the strength to survive and move on after incredible hardships, thus rendering them easy to empathize with. Their coping strategies are dangerous, such as staying high and choosing prostitution. Busman's raw portrayal of poverty's ramifications clearly delineates how these horrible options represent the only choices for these women. When faced with deplorable decisions, the characters maintain agency; for example, Taylor decides to wear pants rather than a dress when she works the streets, because she knows the johns won't look at her as hungrily, and she chooses to be stoned while she makes money on the set of amateur porn movies because she would rather be high than have to think about being objectified.

LGBT readers especially will appreciate the natural way in which Taylor discovers her lesbianism: Jackson declares, "I mean I gotta' get out of here ... L.A. The strip, Tricking. The hustle ... I'm not like you, I just can't take it anymore." To which Taylor responds, "Can't none of us take it. You just do it anyway."

Set in LA's past somewhere between the 1960s and the 1980s, the book's no-holds-barred treatment of racism, abuse, sexual orientation, and living on the streets makes it timeless. *Like a Woman* will resonate with anybody who is surviving despite hardship.

JILL ALLEN (Spring 2015)

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