

## ★ **The Runaways**

**Fatima Bhutto**

Verso Books (Aug 18, 2020)

Softcover \$19.95 (432pp)

978-1-83976-034-1

Three teenagers, bent by circumstances beyond themselves, run headlong into the dark realities of the modern world in Fatima Bhutto's stunning novel *The Runaways*.

Anita Rose is "everything and nothing at once," according to her friend Osama. Born into a poor Karachi family and given a name meant to evoke the glamour of movie stars, her early years are uneasy, spent yearning to belong in the vaunted worlds that her mother's tiring work exposes her to. Her family relies on the kindness of a Muslim neighbor to meet their basic needs. But her brother, Ezra, is not content, and his dishonorable methods for improving the family's fortunes end up costing Anita Rose everything.

Across the city, Monty leads a much different life, coddled by his religious mother and resented by his worldly father. And in England, Sunny, whose father left Pakistan before his birth, exists in uncomfortable spaces, rendered other by his religion and his brown skin. Sunny struggles with his attraction to men, and with the demands of Islamic adherence—demands emphasized by his cousin, who's just returned from training in Syria. All feeling like misfits, the three teenagers are pushed toward Iraq: Anita Rose wants to feel protected again. Sunny wants to be a warrior. And Monty believes that love will give him meaning.

Bhutto's descriptions trade between stark beauty and restrained horrors, encompassing the damp of a rain-soaked slum, the wonder of self-caging birds, and the pure brightness of moonshine over the desert. She tracks Monty and Sunny's pain and hunger along their dangerous trek toward Nineveh and Anita Rose's heartbreak and reformation. Her pages are brutal and surprising, and their revelations stand to unmake and rebuild their audiences. *The Runaways* is a shocking novel that humanizes the so-called radicals of younger generations.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2020)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*