



# Sister Seen, Sister Heard

## A Novel by Kimia Eslah

### Book Club Conversation Starters

#### Overview

This coming-of-age story captures the struggles of the Ghasemi family following an attack on its youngest member, twenty year old Farah.

*Sister Seen, Sister Heard* meets us at the intersection of who we are and how we are treated:

- Intertwines an immigrant's coming-of-age story with sexual violence on campus and the failures of law enforcement.
- Presents patriarchy as a global culture that rears predators, sanctions rape, and undermines the masculinity of men who question its effects.
- Revisits 1990s Toronto at the height of serial rapist Paul Bernardo's trial and mounting pressure on women to prevent sexual violence themselves.

Set in Toronto in the 90s, at the height of the Paul Bernardo trials, this is a coming of age story about a young Iranian-Canadian who is attacked on campus just as she is preparing to move out of her parents' home. As her family tries to protect her, she feels her independence slipping away. This novel explores rape culture, patriarchy, and how we fail to support victims. It is a must-read for anyone who has struggled for independence and justice.

#### Discuss issues that matter!

- Nurturing independence among girls and young women
- Myths perpetuated by rape culture
- Overt and covert forms of pressure to adhere to patriarchy
- Consequences for girls and women who defy norms
- Stereotypes about immigrant women of colour
- Challenges faced by immigrant women of colour
- Toxic masculinity and its effects on fathers' parenting
- Ways to address patriarchy within the family unit
- The devastating effects of silence on victims

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#### Conversation Starters

- Maiheen Ghasemi was exceptional as a head bank teller in Esfahan—a job that served as the foundation of her identity and confidence, a job she refused to give up even after the onset of motherhood. How did the move to Canada affect Maiheen’s sense of identity and self-esteem? How did Maiheen see herself in relation to her family and to Canadian society? What factors in her personal life and close relationships caused Maiheen to reconsider her career plans?
- Mustafa Ghasemi loves both of his daughters but he wishes that Farah was more like Farzana, subdued and diplomatic. Why might Mustafa want Farah to conduct herself differently, less direct and brusque? What are the social benefits of behaving like Farzana? What tactics does Mustafa use to influence Farah’s behaviour? How does his attitude toward Farzana affect their father-daughter relationship?
- Farzana Ghasemi suspects that she’s making some big mistakes in her personal and professional lives but she’s not sure who she can ask for help. What does Farzana gain and lose by serving as the mediator in her family? Why does Farzana balk at the belief that women of colour experience sexism differently? How does Farzana perceive the harassment she experienced at her last job? What are the social messages sexual assault, patriarchy, and feminism which Farzana has internalized?
- Farah Ghasemi struggles to talk about the incidents of aggression, hate, and violence to which she is frequently exposed. How does Farah interpret the incident at the bus stop? Upon overhearing her father claim, “...my daughters don’t dress like whores”, why is Farah angered? What factors contribute to Farah’s reluctance to express herself?

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