



Some topics to consider while reading *just_a_girl*:

- Sexuality and identity
- Teenage friendships and relationships
- The dangers of social media and technology
- Mother-daughter relationships
- Faith and healing
- Searching for connection in a disconnected world

JUST_A_GIRL

by Kirsten Krauth

Layla is only 14. She cruises online. She catches trains to meet strangers. Her mother, Margot, never suspects. Even when Layla brings a man into their home. Margot's caught in her own web: an evangelical church and a charismatic pastor. Meanwhile, downtown, a man opens a suitcase and tenderly places his young lover inside.

just_a_girl tears into the fabric of contemporary culture. A *Puberty Blues* for the digital age, a *Lolita* with a webcam, it's what happens when young girls are forced to grow up too fast. Or never get the chance to grow up at all...



About Kirsten Krauth

Kirsten Krauth is a writer and editor whose articles on film and literature have been published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *Island*, *RealTime*, *Newswrite*, *IF Magazine* and *Metro Screen*. She has a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Sydney; *just_a_girl* is her debut novel. Kirsten lives in Castlemaine, Victoria with her husband and kids, and blogs at Wild Colonial Girl: www.wildcolonialgirl.com

Discussion Questions

- 1 Compare the narrative styles of Layla, Margot, and Tadashi. Do you think each character's style suits his or her personality?
- 2 Margot looks through Layla's computer history following her nighttime encounter with the schoolboys on the train. Was she right to do so? Would you have done the same? Why or why not?
- 3 Can you forgive Margot for her lax, detached parenting of Layla? How have depression, possible terminal illness, full-time work, and a failed marriage informed her actions?
- 4 Consider the 'domino effect' of the relationships in *just_a_girl*. How has Layla's father's abandonment affected Layla and Margot's relationship? How has Violet's treatment of Margot influenced Margot's parenting of Layla?
- 5 When describing her relationship with Mr. C, Layla asks herself, 'Do I really just want to get caught?' What do you think? Does Layla enjoy taking risks, or are the risks she takes truly just ploys for attention?
- 6 How does Kirsten Krauth portray masculinity in *just_a_girl*? Can you see any similarities between the male characters?
- 7 What was your initial reaction to Tadashi's 'relationship' with Mika, his life-sized love doll? In your opinion, is Tadashi capable of having a relationship with a living, breathing human being? Why or why not?
- 8 Does technology help or hinder the communication between the characters in *just_a_girl*? Are texting, social media, and email adequate replacements for face-to-face communication?
- 9 How do Tadashi, Layla, and Margot balance their respective fantasy worlds with reality? How are their fantasies similar?
- 10 'I never listened to the answers. It was the only questions that were important to me.' What questions does the novel leave you with at its conclusion?
- 11 How does the novel address today's pressing social issues? Did you identify with any particular opinion or point of view expressed by the characters?
- 12 Think about the fates of the three narrators at the end of *just_a_girl*. Do you think their paths are likely to cross again? If they did cross, what would be the result?

Q. What did you write as a child?

When I was a child, I wrote short stories about horses and poems about pollution. My poem on pollution was read out on Simon Townsend's TV show *Wonder World*. After that I was hooked. In Year 7 I wrote a story about all the displays at a museum coming to life at night (Hollywood stole my idea).

Q. Who inspired you to become a writer?

Writing was a part of my world. My dad was an author. My mum loved to read and has always commented on my work. My English teacher Gael Spooner was instrumental. But my greatest inspiration was my aunt, Shan, who always listened and read carefully, who took my passions seriously, and who expressed joy at anything I attempted creatively.

Q. Where and when do you write?

I write in my home office in Castlemaine with the fan whirring above my head and kangaroos appearing at dusk in the backyard. When I need some inspiration I write in bed listening to Spotify. It seems to work. I write when I can find any spare skerrick of time. I have two small children so there's no time to wait, really. I work best in the morning so if I'm in my office by 8, I can put my head down for an 8-hour stretch. I aim to do a thousand words a day (most of these fall by the wayside later).

Q. How do you overcome writer's block?

I get into bed, listen to something perky on Spotify, or read some poetry. But I find I always have ideas. It's getting the time to dwell on them that I find a challenge.

Q. What are you writing at the moment?

I'm writing book reviews for *The Australian*. Regular posts for my blog, *Wild Colonial Girl*. I'm also percolating ideas for the next novel and can't wait to start.

Q. What do you do when you're not writing?

When I'm not writing, I'm jumping on the trampoline with my kids, editing a magazine for writers, or lazing on the couch with my husband watching *Girls*.

Q. Where do you keep your published works?

I have a bookshelf where all the magazines and journals I've written for (and books I've done editing work on) sit together. Cuttings of newspapers and magazines are scattered in various places. This is my first novel so it will be exciting to see it on a shelf.

Q. What will you do on the day your book is released?

I will stroll nonchalantly into my local bookstore and check if it is displayed somewhere prominent. I will rearrange their bookshelves to help a bit. I will go out to lunch somewhere swanky in Castlemaine and toast years of hard slog! I will feel like the dream I've had since I was a little girl has come true.