



# **Torn**

*Stephanie Guerra*

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Stella Chavez is your classic good girl: straight As, clean-cut boyfriends, and soccer trophies . You'd never guess that Stella's dad was a drug addict who walked out when she was a kid. Or that inside, Stella wishes for something more.

New girl Ruby Caroline seems like Stella's polar opposite: cursing, smoking, and teetering in sky-high heels . But with Ruby, Stella gets a taste of another world—a world in which parents act like roommates, college men are way more interesting than high school boys, and there is nothing that shouldn't be tried once.

It's not long before Stella finds herself torn: between the best friend she's ever had and the friends she's known forever, between her family and her own independence, between who she was and who she wants to be.

But Ruby has a darker side, a side she doesn't show anyone—not even Stella. As Stella watches her friend slowly unravel, she will have to search deep inside herself for the strength to be a true friend, even if it means committing the ultimate betrayal.

## **Torn Details**

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Author : Stephanie Guerra

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## From Reader Review Torn for online ebook

**Amanda (Good Choice Reading) says**

3.5 Stars

Torn was an engrossing read, but I can't say I enjoyed it. It certainly captivated me, I couldn't put it down, but "enjoyed" would not be the right word. But don't take that as negativity, because Torn was certainly worth the read.

Ruby's story is a train wreck you can't look away from, told through Stella's eyes. Stella has things going on in her own life but in this situation, they paled in comparison to what Ruby was going through. Or rather, what Ruby was putting herself through. These girls were hauntingly naïve—both of them—and it disturbs me to think that there are actually things like this going on out there. It was painfully realistic. I applaud Guerra for that. And now I can't stop thinking about the fact that the world is a train wreck you really can't look away from.

I thought the way the girls handled the bullying was a nice touch. Ruby was a lot of things—wild, self-destructive—but her impulsiveness was calculated and her retaliations were effective.

My only complaint about the book was the way it jumped lumps of time. Days or weeks would go by and Stella would tell us what happened in those weeks. Rather than seeing her relationship build with Ruby, we're told about it later. Rather than seeing her relationship build with Mike, we're told about it later. It made me feel a bit disconnected from the story.

There were moments in this story that disgusted me, but I think they were supposed to. Torn definitely made its mark, and I would recommend it.

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**Heather \*Awkward Queen and Unicorn Twin\* says**

I normally like reading about friendships and good girl/bad girl themes, but this novel was a little boring for me. It had some interesting ideas, like college guys dating high school girls, and a creepy older man, but these things just weren't enough to carry the novel to the end. I think the author should have explored these things in more depth. Also the characters, while likable, weren't entirely believable. The main character was too sure of herself, which is to be admired, but she acted like a grownup in certain situations. Her best friend was too wild and crazy, and she seemed *too* confident to fall for the tricks of a skeezy older guy. Overall there were some interesting ideas, but I thought it just fell flat.

*An ARC was provided by the publisher via NetGalley for review.*

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**Farah Hanani says**

Review on blog: [Tumbling In Books](#)

Stella Chavek was pulled towards Ruby as soon she sets her eyes on her. OK. That was a weird way to start a review but seriously. Ruby is this wild girl who breaks all kinds of rule and make her own. Stella is the opposite. Keeping up a good 3.8 GPA and dates clean cuts boys, she needed to get away from her organized self and Ruby was the perfect escape.

Now, this book isn't the all swoony type. Torn is more to friendship. Stella and Ruby's oppositeness is what keeps their friendship together. Stella is loyal and really hardworking. She helps her mom at home as her siblings are useless at cleaning up the house. But I hate the fact that she follows what Ruby saids so much. That she let Ruby pushes her.

Ruby is a mysterious person. Ruby doesn't let anyone in except Stella. Ruby is full of rumours. Ruby got the kids in her school curious about her. But when her image was tainted, she unfortunately bring Stella down with her. But Ruby isn't all this bad image. She has her loyal moments towards Stella too.

Ruby and Stella's relationship is something I adore in Torn. Overall, it was a pretty enjoyable read.

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## **Amy Armstrong says**

Review: Torn by Stephanie Guerra

Published by Marshall Cavendish

Pub Date May 15, 2012

263 pages

**\*\*This review is based on an uncorrected digital proof received through NetGalley\*\***

In her debut novel, Torn, Stephanie Guerra shares the story of an unlikely friendship between Ruby Caroline, a badass redhead out of Utah, and Stella Chavez, a soccer champ who has lived in South Bend, Indiana for all 17 years of her life. Stella is both terrified and fascinated by Ruby. She's beautiful, brave, and more hip and "advanced" than just about anyone Stella has ever known. For Stella, Ruby is a lot like chocolate: tempting, addictive, and bad for your health in large quantities. After one lunch together, Stella and Ruby become inseparable. They go on what Ruby refers to as "adventures" that include things like trysts with the college boys from Notre Dame, and flirtations with an even older guy, aka the "Silver Fox."

For Stella, Ruby is such a refreshing break from her normally structured and responsible life where she goes to several AP classes, dates the nice guys, and goes home to take care of the house and her siblings while her mother works double shifts as a waitress. However, as Ruby's behavior becomes more erratic, Stella starts questioning her loyalty to an increasingly stressful friendship. Is Ruby fun or just a sociopath?

So, what did I think? Honestly, I didn't think the writing in Torn was as strong as it could have been in spots, but so many of the observations were spot on, and I ended up reading the whole thing in one afternoon because I couldn't put it down. Guerra's snippets about the catty tactics of high school girls, and the sleazy older guys who try to pick them on kept making me laugh, and sigh in recognition.

I rarely comment on covers, but I've got to say that I don't think the cover or title give a good idea of what the book is about. If I hadn't read the summary on NetGalley, I don't think I would have picked this up in the bookstore.

What really hooked me was the main character, Stella Chavez. She's so strong, thoughtful, spunky and all

around amazing, it's impossible not to fall in love with her. Don't be put off by the generic title and the wimpy-looking girl on the cover.

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## **Lacey says**

### **First thoughts:**

It was an enjoyable read, there were moments that were inspiring but there were moments where I didn't agree with the characters line of thinking. There were definitely moments in this book where I wanted to knock some sense into them and then moments I wanted to hug them and tell them everything was alright. I'll admit this wasn't a book that made me cry but it did manage to stir some of those uncomfortable feelings.

### **Plot:**

This book held all the key elements, the end was concluded if not a bit rushed. The sub-plots were minimum but essential to the overall storyline. I do wish that some of the sub-plots were explored more; I think if the author could have done that we the reader would have learned even more about the characters. The action was average, there wasn't a ton but there wasn't little either, it was in a way balanced and perfect for this book. The story itself did feel lengthy and I had no trouble reading this book, this was essentially a fast read for me. But the ending like I said was conclusive but I felt that the author rushed it; it needed a smoother conclusion, the climax was solved too quickly; it needed a more drawn out resolution.

### **Characters:**

The characters each had their own personalities, some more than others. The main character Stella was weak at times and annoying but I guess when you go from a certain life style to another it can do some damage to a person and takes some adjustment. As for Stella's best friends Ruby she was the character I really enjoyed the most, she was a firecracker and a half, she had enough flare and spunk for all of the characters. Though she isn't someone who I would essentially allow to be my role model she is one I would enjoy to meet. As for some of the minor characters they were okay but at times fell flat.

### **Transformation of the Character:**

The main characters did transform some more than others. Stella for instance changed minimally but enough that the reader was able to see it. As for Ruby hers was more noticeable and enjoyable. I loved seeing all the transforming and the steps it took to get the end result. Though there were some transformations I didn't enjoy I believe that they were true to the character, life isn't all neat and tidy there will always be those jagged edges. And I won't reveal which character but there was one surprising transformation that I didn't see coming, it was so amazing and unexpected.

### **Description:**

There wasn't too much description; the author did a good job on describing the scenes and characters, I wasn't left empty handed. I actually thought the description was really what allowed the reader to connect better with the characters to sympathize with and understand them better. I really enjoyed that the author made some strong statements in a simple matter; it was like I was being educated on a serious issue without

feeling the pressure that these issues can sometimes cause. It wasn't one of those books that made you feel uncomfortable and self-conscious.

### **Style:**

The author's choice to write this story in first person and only from one point of view was good, it left the element of curiosity, I believe if she would have given us Ruby's POV this whole story wouldn't be worth reading. I mean what's the point of reading when you already know what's happening? Also I liked how this author chose to be more descriptive at times and then at others more dialogue formed, the author chose to keep the reader distant at times and then up close and personal at others; definitely a fun experience.

### **Quote of the book:**

"I don't think you're weak." Mom gave me a curious look. "Believe me, I am. And it's only when you realize how weak you are that you can even start to be strong."

### **Goodreads Summary:**

Stella Chavez is your classic good girl: straight as, clean-cut boyfriends, and soccer trophies. You'd never guess that Stella's dad was a drug addict who walked out when she was a kid or that inside, Stella wishes for something more.

New girl Ruby Caroline seems like Stella's polar opposite: cursing, smoking, and teetering in sky-high heels. But with Ruby, Stella gets a taste of another world—a world in which parents act like roommates, college men are way more interesting than high school boys, and there is nothing that shouldn't be tried once.

It's not long before Stella finds herself torn: between the best friend she's ever had and the friends she's known forever, between her family and her own independence, between who she was and who she wants to be.

But Ruby has a darker side, a side she doesn't show anyone—not even Stella. As Stella watches her friend slowly unravel, she will have to search deep inside herself for the strength to be a true friend, even if it means committing the ultimate betrayal.

### **Last Thoughts:**

I would recommend this to readers who enjoy realistic like readings and who want to be educated more on internal struggles, it was a way to learn the mind of a person and to see another's POV. I wouldn't recommend this to anyone who is a romance reader, the romance was very different in this book and there wasn't any of that gooey kind, it was all jagged edges and dark. I enjoyed this book, it was worth the time to read but it just wasn't all that I thought it was going to be, I guess that's my fault for drawing expectations about a book, it sets you up for some form of disappointment. But I did enjoy it and would read more books by this author if given the opportunity.

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**Brooke (The Cover Contessa) says**

I received this ebook via Net Galley for an honest review.

Estella Chavez is a clean cut girl: straight A student, plays soccer, clean cut boyfriends. She comes from a broken home where her father left due to drug use. Ruby is Stella's opposite: cursing, smoking, cutting school, dating college and older men, wearing high heels, who believes there isn't anything that shouldn't be tried once. Stella suddenly finds herself torn between her new friendship with Ruby and the friends she has known almost all her life. Stella watches Ruby slowly unravel and eventually has to make a decision to interfere, even though it might cost her their friendship.

When I first started reading the book, I really liked it. It moved well. I quickly became acquainted with Stella and her life, understanding her relationship with her mother, sister, brother and the father who no longer is part of her life. Guerra created realistic characters. Stella being the typical middle of the road high-school girl, while Ruby is that make-up wearing, school cutting, smoking, outcast rocker type.

When Stella becomes friends with Ruby, she changes. We see her seeking more independence. She tries new things, such as dating a college guy named Mike, and is willing to step outside of her circle of comfort. Stella's friends quickly show their unhappiness with her pulling away, but Stella can't seem to stop herself. We watch her struggle with the push and pull of keeping her old friends while making new ones. We watch her become acquainted with a real relationship and all the turns it might take.

Ruby is a force that pulls Stella into another world. Some would say she's a bad influence, but really Stella freely makes her own decisions to do those things she has never done before.

The book is peppered with references to G-d and how Stella's relationship with G-d affects her decisions. About half way through the book, the story reaches it's pinnacle and then quickly starts to deflate. The ending is nothing short of boring and unrealistic, in my opinion. Guerra took an otherwise engrossing, contemporary, realistic young adult story and blew it up with conclusion that is disappointing. Guerra leaves us with a completely open ending to a book that has no sequel. There is no resolution to the problems the characters encountered during the story.

I give this book 3/5 stars. Thank you Net Galley for the chance to read and review this book.

My review can also be found on the following sites:

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/torn-...>

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0761...>

<http://thecovercontessa.blogspot.com/>

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## **Ais says**

Stella & Ruby are two entirely different people.

Stella is a goody two shoes type. She avoids fights , drama and confrontation She sticks to the rules, her curfew ,does her homework, her chores, goes to football practice and looks after her siblings.

Ruby is the opposite. Shes loud , bold and boisterous. She doesn't care about what people think of her. Shes given no rules to adhere to. Her life ends up being an unregulated melee of trouble, alcohol and drugs.

Yet these two girls end up becoming best friends.

When Ruby begins to date a much older man , Stella's alarm bells ring loud in her head. Whenever she questions Ruby about Ken she is shot down. Ruby drinks more, does drugs and has physical wounds on her body.

Can Stella get through to Ruby and can Ruby get out in time?

Low Mark due to the drag in the plot. It just seemed to be the same lines over and over. Plus the ending was on the disappointing end of the scale.

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### **Debbie I Heart YA Books says**

Torn is a Contemporary about two girls in their last year of high school who become friends even though they're total opposites of each other. But they do have one thing in common, though. Both their loser dads left them when they were very young. But where Stella has a mom with strong faith and a love to put her children first, Ruby's step-mother only focuses on her next boyfriend. Stephanie Guerra has written a beautiful story about unconditional love in friendship, and how far one girl will go to save her friend. Guerra is a wonderful writer; her way of writing pulled me in and kept me flipping the pages with this intriguing storyline.

Stella is simply sitting in English class, and in walks the new girl, Ruby, with her mid-drift, high heels and her loud, obnoxious attitude. Stella can't keep her eyes off this wild girl. She's everything Stella's not. But this is what draws these two girls together. Soon Stella is in so deep to Ruby's wild ways that she will either have to abandon Ruby or commit to doing what it takes to help save her.

Stella gains from this friendship, too, though. It's not just one sided. Stella is a stable, good girl, but not too great at voicing her opinion or standing up to others. It's easier for Stella to keep her mouth shut. But even this good girl can learn from Ruby—the wild girl. I loved this scene where Ruby stands up for herself against the whole school in the lunch room. Sometimes a girl has to do what a girl has to do in order to shut the bullies up. And believe me, Ruby is a girl after my own heart in this scene.

Torn is beautiful story that made me cheer for Stella and Ruby. It makes you realize that no matter what you don't have, and no matter what this ugly world throws at you to take you down, it's clear that two is better than one when dealing with it. And when you have that one friend who believes in you and knows that your worth fighting for, you will have a friend who will be standing by your side forever. I recommend Torn as a wonderful read.

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### **Kayla says**

Torn was an excellent realistic teen read. We've all been there before, people trying to bring us to the "dark side". Everyone loves to gossip and start rumors on one another, even if most is not even real people still have it in the back of their mind. And that is what happened to Stella.

Stella Chavez is your average student, good grades, sort of a jock in high school, and gets along with majority of the school. But truth is her dad was a major drug user and ended up leaving his family behind. Now Stella is picking up the pieces and helps her mother, whom works double shifts as a waitress, take care of her younger siblings Marcus and Jackie.



Then comes Ruby who is new and you can tell first hand that she takes nothing from no one. She loves speaking her mind, dating much older guys, and smoking. Ruby has hidden secrets that you will find out that will blow your mind. Before too long, Stella and Ruby start hanging out. People at school start questioning why she is spending so much time with Ruby that she is a "whore" and been with half the college campus. Stella ends up meeting Mike from Ruby, who's age difference is just two years, but to everyone in high school that's just nuts. But how far will Ruby go and what age limit does she stop at? Ruby and Stella have their differences and Stella's social life is taking a downfall due to rumors. Stella's life is at stake, college applications need to be filled out, soccer is not much of a priority anymore, and girl's at school are planning something terrible at the end of graduation. Will she lose a friend, by going behind her back to help Ruby?

I highly recommend this book, it is a wonderful book that most people have experience or will experience in their life. This book kind of reminded me of the "Mean Girl" scene. Teenagers can be vicious and in Torn you definitely see this. This is a great fast paced read that I could not put down. I liked the way the author wrote, very easy to follow and makes you want to keep turning the pages.

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### **Andrea thebusybibliophile says**

Stella was a good girl until she met Ruby. Soon, she finds herself doing new and exciting things. Then Stella starts doing things that aren't exciting, they're dangerous. I was really torn (haha, see what I did there?) about how to rate this one. On the one hand, it had an interesting plot and plenty of action, but on the other it had a moderate religious undertone and unlikable characters.

Stella was sort of on the bland side. She was nice to everyone, had a solid group of friends, wasn't too popular or unpopular, played sports and took care of her younger siblings while mom worked hard to support the family. She was just your average teenage girl. I didn't really care about her right away, though I eventually did. Ruby was kind of a cliché: absentee parents led her to drugs, she stayed up all night, didn't care what anyone thought of her... She was a tough chick in the fast lane. All of the male characters were one-dimensional to me and I never really cared about any of them, though I did outright dislike one (which was the point).

At the heart of the novel was the friendship between Stella and Ruby. When Ruby started to get out of control and do things that made Stella uncomfortable, should Stella have dumped her new friend, or stuck around for the long haul? I waffled over each choice myself. You can't just dump your friends when they start doing things you disagree with. But you also can't stand around and let them do things that may harm themselves. How much do you owe them and how much do you owe yourself? It was a tough choice and I couldn't decide which way Ruby should go.

The dialogue didn't jump out at me or impress me in any way. It was just standard teen stuff. There was zero sexy hotness though there was sex. It wasn't described during the acts but after and it was... kinky. There was a much older man and it involved blood. There were drugs and alcohol in spades. Another thing I need to mention is the religion. It's not discussed in the blurb, but it ought to be known that religion plays a moderate part in Torn.

The cover is just bland. Between the pale colors, the pretty but average looking girl and the plain font for the title, the cover is unremarkable.

The sum up: An okay look at how far we go for our friends. It lacked the emotional punch I would have liked.

As reviewed on [www.thebusybibliophile.com](http://www.thebusybibliophile.com).

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## **Laura says**

Standing up for yourself and the ones around you should be easy. Right? Ha! No, not in high school. A place filled with pressure, meanness, divisions, rumors, and risks. A world where standing up for yourself or speaking your mind can put everything at risk.

Torn by Stephanie Guerra is a hard edged story filled with friendship, loneliness, family, and the power of loyalty presented in a clear cut, realistic tone and language. This is the story of Stella Chavez, a well liked senior on the soccer team with good grades who never gets in trouble, until the day Ruby Caroline hit town and turned her world upside down with one click of her high heeled toe. Ruby Caroline instantly attracts attention, glares, and rumors in her new school with her beauty and outspoken ways. Ruby and Stella spark up a friendship that becomes the talk of the school. As the fun adventures escalate into darker dangers filled with men, drugs, and sex, Stella must face some hard decisions between old friends and new; responsibility at home versus finding her own path; and providing a helping hand or betraying a trust.

Ms. Guerra paints a pretty realistic and common picture of high school life with sports, boys, parties, cliques, friends and rumors. Ruby and Stella's friendship causes a rift and tension with Stella's "old" friends—Christine and Beth. Unfortunately, I felt no connection with Beth, Christine or any of the girls at school with Stella. Readers were not shown any real emotional connection or interactions with Christine or Beth before Ruby arrived. So when the trouble started at school between Stella and her friends, I guess you could say I didn't feel all that torn about it.

At home, Stella is half of a team. Since Stella's Dad left, Stella has been helping her Mom raise her siblings and run the house. In our world, single parent homes are common and the norm, so children have to adopt duties and responsibility at home at such a young age. This emotional conflict in Stella's life will ring true and hit home for many readers. How can Stella leave her Mom and go off to college? The suffocating power and guilt of such a decision jumped off the pages. The guilt of wanting to leave and the desire to go versus her loyalty to her family tore through Stella and my heart!

For me though, the real magic and strength of this story was the friendship and bond between Stella and Ruby. Readers will definitely get to see what these girls are made out of through their sadness, pain, and struggles. Stella and Ruby's strength to stand up for themselves and each other will inspire you. Two characters that will keep you guessing until the end! One minute I am in awe of their courage and the very next minute in fear for their safety! Ruby's relationship with an older man kept me on edge the whole time. I do not want to spoil or reveal too much about Ruby and Stella's past or secrets, but just know their stories touched my heart with fear, pain, and hope.

There is a lot going on in these pages. At times, it felt like too much. Some subjects felt thrown in rather than addressed. But the topics are pivotal and powerful ones that readers will recognize and identify with in their own lives—the power of a rumor, bullying, religion, sex, drugs, gangs, self image, and so much more. Stella and Ruby will look and sound familiar to readers with struggles so common in teenagers' lives today. Stella and Ruby might just show readers how the strength of friendship and loyalty can help us get through it all.

With friends and trust, anything is possible.

Torn is a strong book with powerful messages for young readers.

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### **kb says**

I'm a little disappointed how despite of its interesting plot of good girl-bad girl best friendship coupled with older-guy romance on the side and racial issues, this still fell short. The writing wasn't bad but sometimes the voices just made me want to close the book altogether. There were also too many underlying stories that went unsolved—and that ending? What was that?

*Note: I received a copy via Net Galley.*

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### **Rose says**

Stephanie Guerra's "Torn" is a young adult novel that I have to commend for taking on a lot of tough issues in the life of a multicultural teen falling into the wrong crowds and learning what it means to rise above the adversity and become more settled into herself. It's also a book I think will have a lot of people talking about the issues within it, for good reason, because quite many of these issues are relevant problems that a teen faces - including peer pressure, bullying, drug-use, relationship development and relationship abuse, racism (particularly in the case of multicultural and minority teens), among other dimensions. But my concern with "Torn" is that while some of these issues are beautifully shown with ample opportunities for the protagonist to step up to the plate and stand her ground, I'm not sure if it was handled evenly on all of those spectrums. Perhaps, in retrospect, they could've been delved into a little more for proper closure.

Still, I think "Torn" standing on its own did stir quite a bit in me to consider the larger story at hand. In retrospect, I liked reading it, though I consider it with some caveats.

Stella is a young woman who isn't likely to stumble into trouble, and she seems secure in her social circles and life - being a part of a knit clique of girls and wanting to go to college in the future, though having fears about being able to get into a good school and affording it considering her family circumstances. All this changes when Ruby comes barging in as the new girl at Stella's high school (and she makes quite the entrance!)

It becomes evident that Ruby's part of the larger thread that starts unraveling Stella's supposedly secure world - making Stella question her group of friends, her capacity to build a loving personal relationship, and wanting to shape her own future. But the further that things get along, Stella realizes that Ruby has her fair share of issues as well, and some of them are quite shockingly asserted. Stella realizes that she has to step it up in order to help Ruby, as well as herself, find stable ground in the mix of their relationships and attitudes.

Stella is probably the most developed member of the collective cast of characters - the rest feel more like they fill the backdrop upon the canvas of events that take place in the novel, and I wish that the backing character development was strong than what it was. I wish that more time could've been placed into the ethics and resolution of some of the issues tackled here, but I think the audience that "Torn" is aimed for will

see the moral dilemmas and be able to take the messages in this novel for what they are, and hopefully be able to think about them in terms of where Stella stumbles and where she holds her own and grows from the experience.

Overall, I would say this is certainly a novel worth the read from the perspective of a multicultural teen's coming of age. There are quite a bit of shock factors to consider, but in the end, it's worth seeing them in context and being able to take consideration of them even beyond the dimensions this novel covers. I just wish it had been a little more even in its presentation, and that the ending had had a bit more conclusive resolution.

Overall score: 3/5

Note: I received this as an ARC from NetGalley, from the publisher Marshall Cavendish.

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## **Taneika says**

### **More of my reviews can be found at [Flipping Through the Pages!](#)**

This book had me completely hooked from the very first page.

Stella is your average teenage girl. She is friendly with everybody, gets good grades, is on the Soccer team and has a pretty balanced social life... Stella's life is pretty good apart from having a father who left her mum and the kids when they were younger. Then Ruby shows up. Ruby is beautiful, edgy, cool and rebellious and ends up befriending Stella, causing Stella's life to be turned upside down.

This reminded me vaguely of the movie 'Thirteen'. Torn isn't a nice, comfortable story but it completely sucks you in. I don't know how she's done it, but Stephanie Guerra has written a teenage rebellion novel in such a realistic way.

As an MC, I loved Stella. She was fun, she had flaws, she was caring and in a way, she reminds me of my best friend. I really connected with Stella because she's a scarily accurate representation of a lot of teenagers. Stella wasn't considered perfect, things didn't always go her way and the problems she went through in her last year of high school with Ruby were pretty spot-on (if you occasionally rebelled and whatnot). She was feisty, protective, passionate but she had her issues too. I really admired her strength. She stood up for what she believed in and knew when to call it quits with certain uh, issues...

Ruby on the other hand is probably Stella's opposite. She is confronting, rebellious and has this awesome "Don't give a shit" attitude that just added so much spark and fire to her personality! The girls at school hate her because she didn't try to impress anybody. Ruby is a take it or leave it sort of character and I really appreciated this. The thing I loved the most is that while you'd expect yourself to hate Ruby for making such stupid decisions and being so direct, you just can't! In addition to Stella, Ruby is such a complex character and I don't know how she did it, but Stephanie Guerra manages to make you love Ruby although you know you should hate her.

This is probably one of my favourite contemporary novels so far (mind you, I'm very new to the genre). This is due to the fact that whilst I couldn't relate to Ruby (I could somewhat relate to Stella), I knew girls like that-and I knew them very well. Ruby was troubled, had her own way of dealing with things and Stella learnt what it means to be a true friend. The friendship between the girls was incredibly well portrayed. Some

moments they had together reminded me of myself and my best friends. However, if you're looking for romance, this isn't going to do it for you! There are relationships, but there isn't romance (I appreciated this as well!). There isn't any, "I can't live without him" or "I was falling apart without him by my side" bull. The decisions made by some of the characters were stupid, but I could believe the situations they got themselves into because I've seen it firsthand.

There is swearing, drugs and law-breaking in this novel and whilst I didn't care (I thought it was well-done and a realistic, "THIS IS LIFE. IT HAPPENS" message), some others might. Due to the tone of the novel, I completely understood the swearing, it made me feel like I was in freaking high school again myself! I even understood the drugs and the law-breaking content because again, I've seen it happen and I think it's an unrealistic expectation that you won't get any of that in a novel as raw, gripping and edgy as this. I'm not saying that all teenagers are like those in Torn, but as one representation, I thought it was accurate and well-done.

Torn was gripping and edgy with a heart warming ending that hopefully gives hope to anybody who's been bullied. It teaches us that yes, karma can be a bitch and that not all things in life should be easy.

*I received this from Netgalley and this has not affected my review*

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## **usagi ?? says**

3.5/5 stars.

A solid YA debut to be sure, but even though this book goes into the “tough stuff” (as the sub-genre of contemporary YA lit has been now dubbed), it goes surprisingly into the darker areas of sexual behavior/lifestyles and yet it lacks a lot of heart. While this is a cautionary tale (you probably don't want to end up as another Dolores Haze), I just felt it lacked a lot in terms of actual emotional connection where it needed to be the most. “Torn” is an engrossing read, but in the end, fails to deliver where it's needed most.

Perhaps it was the passive tone taken by Stella as she narrates us through her misadventures through her last year of high school with newcomer Ruby, but I just wasn't feeling any kind of emotional connection. And ideally, I should have – I too am a single-parented child, though I don't have any siblings, and my mother still works very hard (ridiculously so) to provide for the family. I also am fatherless, though that is by choice. I should have connected with Stella emotionally and identified with her at least on those very basic similar levels, but I think because Guerra only really went into details about how Stella felt about her father (and only significantly at the end of the book), I lacked that connection. While she had some flares of rage at the fact that she's had to become a second mother to her younger siblings while her mother works her tail off to make sure they're provided for, it wasn't nearly enough as it should have been, realistically. I know that I've felt some similar feelings in terms of single parenting and loneliness, and they were oceans compared to the mere puddles that Guerra tapped. This is one area where I feel that Guerra had HUGE untapped potential, but perhaps in order to advance the main arc with Stella and Ruby, she might have scrapped it. I'm not sure what happened there, but it definitely needed another draft in terms of the character building department in order to make Stella a believable teen with those feelings.

Stella narrates with incredible passivity, even when angry. That's what amazed me the most – the most explosive parts of the book still felt incredibly watered down, and I think maybe a POV switch might have remedied this (between her and Ruby).

The world was believable, otherwise. It was just Stella's reactions and how she lived her life that made it a little too easy for me to read.

As for the characters, aside from Stella, it's a balance between typical high school mean girls (Stella's kind-of-ex-friends and the stereotypical artsy/rebellious/etc new girl with absent parent syndrome who doesn't want to fit in in terms of Ruby. While Ruby was eventually punched up enough to be larger than life (and ended up as my favorite character when all was said and done), it took well into half of the book for that to happen. Hell, it took the first third of the book for me to really start getting interested at all. That shouldn't happen. Authors: remember that your hook should ideally be in your first sentence. Failing that, your first paragraph or chapter. But I was well into a third of this book before the hook finally sank in.

What was a delightful surprise was the path Guerra took with Ruby in terms of her relationship with Kenneth – in terms of a sexually based lifestyle. Blood sport and knifeplay are very quietly talked about in our culture as a whole, but I found it interesting that while so much of the rest of the novel was bland, Guerra chose to talk about blood sport/knifeplay and make it more horrifying over the fact that Ruby was, even consensually, being taken advantage of by Kenneth, an adult. Then again, movies with sex get R ratings while people can be beheaded and it can get an PG-13 rating. That says loads about where we are with American culture right now. While taking advantage of people in relationships is not cool, had Ruby been an adult and still consenting, the knifeplay bit wouldn't have really bothered me. But because she wasn't, it did, and I think that's what Guerra was really trying to do to make the whole relationship with Kenneth really hit home. And it worked. Yet at the same time, that too was a really deep ocean she could have tapped but didn't – or at least, not as much as she could have. She could have taken it really over the top in terms of Ruby, Kenneth and their sexual peccadilloes, but chose not to, and I'm still baffled as to what stayed her hand, once again losing a potentially very high emotional connection with the audience.

So all in all, this is a very difficult book to parse out. While most of it was so very bland and so much of it was stuff we've had covered before, there was some serious brave new world territory struck by Guerra in terms of sex and teens. And I have to commend her for that. So, 3.5/5 stars. Had it not been so glazed over all the time, it might have gotten a higher score.

Final verdict? I think there are enough "stranger danger" and "tough stuff" books out there, but just for the teens dealing with sex bit, it's worth the read. "Torn" is out April 3rd, 2012 through Marshall Cavendish in North America, so be sure to check it out then.

(posted to goodreads, shelfari, and birthofanewwitch.wordpress.com)

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