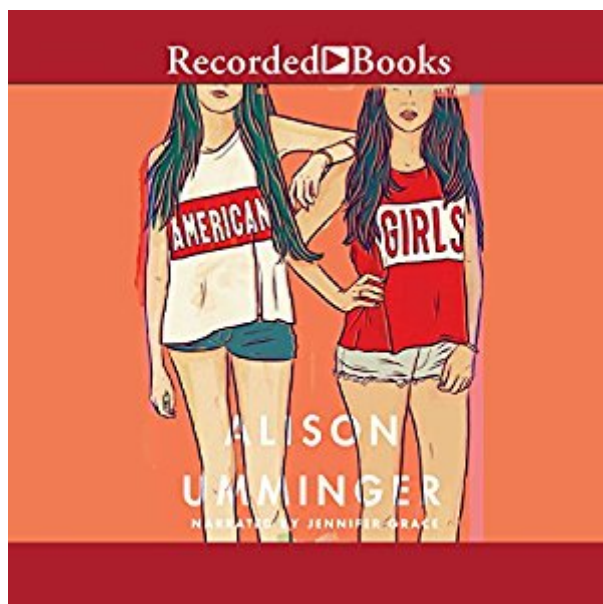


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# American Girls



## Synopsis

She was looking for a place to land. Anna is a 15-year-old girl slouching toward adulthood, and she's had it with her life at home. So Anna "borrows" her stepmom's credit card and runs away to Los Angeles, where her half sister takes her in. But LA isn't quite the glamorous escape Anna had imagined. As Anna spends her days on TV and movie sets, she engrosses herself in a project researching the murderous Manson girls - and although the violence in her own life isn't the kind that leaves physical scars, she begins to notice the parallels between herself and the lost girls of LA and of America, past and present. In Anna's singular voice, we glimpse not only a picture of life on the B-list in LA but also a clear-eyed reflection on being young, vulnerable, lost, and female in America - in short, on the B-list of life. Alison Umminger writes about girls, sex, violence, and which people society deems worthy of caring about and which ones it doesn't in a way not often seen in YA fiction.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 9 hours and 11 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: June 7, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01FYBYOB0

Best Sellers Rank: #2 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Alternative Family #10 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Performing Arts > Film #410 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Girls & Women

## Customer Reviews

I can already tell this is going to be a hard review to write. That's always the case though with books that blow me away so completely; I can never seem to find the words. Granted, rendering me speechless is a tough feat in and of itself and one that is reserved solely for the books with everything going for them. Even better is when I can give the distinction to a rare five star read (my first of this year), such as Alison Umminger's AMERICAN GIRLS. It's hard for me to pin down what exactly I found so intoxicating about protagonist Anna's journey, but it's safe to say I

was hooked. Having read it in a mere two days, it seemed like my every waking moment was dedicated only to the consumption of this fascinating story. This may give the impression that Umminger's debut is so packed with action and suspense that I was hanging on the content of every page. While the latter is true, *AMERICAN GIRLS* is a rare breed of contemporary YA that is quiet in all manners of its presentation. From characters to atmosphere to the underlying message, this story relies heavily on readers to draw their own conclusions. Perhaps the aspect of *AMERICAN GIRLS* most benefited by this unique distance from conventional storytelling was the Manson Girls subplot. It would have been easy for the oft-sensationalized story of Charles Manson to quickly go off the rails, descending into a portrayal of madness and hysteria. Instead, Umminger paints a portrait of "regular" girls at the wrong place (California) in the wrong time (60s) that perfectly mirrors Anna's own look at modern violence and the American dream. At its core, though, *AMERICAN GIRLS* is not in any way, shape, or form about the Manson family. It's merely a jumping off point for Anna's story to be set in motion.

*American Girls* is a well-written book that I really enjoyed, but my enjoyment derived more from the characters and anecdotes than the actual plot - which is somewhat thin. The story is told in first person narrative by Anna, a 15-year-old misfit with low self esteem who does hurtful things to other people at times. It's clear she's no angel, but she's treated by her family like she's really bad and they seem to always expect the worst from her. She takes off for Los Angeles, where she begins living with her sister Delia, a beautiful, aspiring actress. This book focuses on Anna's experiences in LA, and how she evolves during that time in her life. It's really a coming of age story more than anything else. In LA, Anna needs money and she gets a paid gig by a movie director to research the "Manson girls"- the Manson family who committed the gruesome Tate-LaBianca murders in LA in 1969. I was intrigued as to how Anna's research would tie into her own life as the Manson crimes were huge news while I was growing up, and when I was just about Anna's age I recall being horrified, yet mesmerized, reading "Helter Skelter" by Bugliosi. Ultimately, however, the connection between Anna and the "Manson girls" is somewhat weak in my opinion, and probably too subtle for young readers. Anna also gets some TV work, has some LA experiences and forms interesting bonds with characters like Dex, Delia and Jeremy that have an impact on her. I liked reading about Anna's experiences because she's an interesting protagonist. While not always likable, she's edgy, insecure, sarcastic, funny and honest. I wanted to know how her LA experiences would affect her choices, and the negative path she was on back home.

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