



## **Breaking Down Her Walls**

*Erin Zak*

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Leaving is what Julia Finch does best.

When a meeting with her birth parents goes horribly wrong, Julia escapes on a hastily planned road trip and winds up breaking down in a Colorado town so small the cows outnumber the people. Completely out of her element, she takes a temporary job as a ranch hand at Bennett Ranch. She only has to survive long enough to get her car fixed, and then she's out of there for good.

Her bad luck continues when she meets the ranch owner, Elena Bennett. Elena is unhappy, abrasive, and annoyingly breathtaking. But the longer Julia stays, the more the ranch starts to feel like home, and her feelings for Elena become impossible to ignore. She's spent years building her defenses high and running from her past. Could a love worth staying for be the key to breaking down her walls?

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## **Breaking Down Her Walls Details**

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Author : Erin Zak

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## From Reader Review Breaking Down Her Walls for online ebook

### Heath says

I really enjoyed this. I was a little hesitant going in because everything about this book is foreign to me. I've lived outside of a large city my entire life and therefore the ranching world is something that I have no knowledge in. Zak's writing was so descriptive that I had no problem picturing what was going on on the ranch.

I love an ice queen so I had no issue liking Elena, although I do wish she had kept some more of the iciness as the book went on. Her son was a welcome addition. I typically prefer an older child in a romance book than toddler age. The secondary characters had well developed personalities and were enjoyable.

I appreciate that the appearance of the ex didn't cause huge issues. The two mains talked to each other and were mostly on the same page.

I definitely recommend this.

(A copy of the book was generously given to me by BSB through NetGalley)

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### MJS says

ARC received via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

This is the second book by Zak that I've read. I had mixed feelings about the first, but enjoyed this one.

This features Elena, who is a ranch owner and mother, and Julia, who is running from life in general. There's also an age gap, but nothing is made of this at all, which I found refreshing.

Julia's car breaks down in a rural Colorado town and as luck would have it, Elena needs help on her ranch. Of course Elena doesn't even know she's hired Julia, so they don't get off to the best of starts, but Julia soon takes to life on the ranch, and all the people who live and work there. She is especially fond of Elena's son Cole (one of the best characters) and also develops a love for horses. The two grow closer and it's fun watching them interact.

Then Elena's ex shows up and this is where the story starts to drag a bit, there's a lot of 'I want to be with you, please don't run' vs 'she's not good for you, please don't take her back' and there could have been WAY less of that. There's also the usual contrived nonsense towards the 80% mark, but it doesn't drag on for too long.

I liked both MCs, and their relationship develops naturally (and over time), which I also enjoyed. The backdrop of the ranch was also fun. I'm giving it 4 stars because it did drag towards the end, but I enjoyed the story enough to overlook that.

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### **Danni Mladenovic says**

I really, really loved this book! It was fun, it has amazing, sparkling chemistry between two main characters, Elena and Julia; it deals with abandonment issues through tastefully placed moments, with the skill and craft of making it real, but not burdening, and it's in all the right places in the book. The scenes were amazing and only contributed to the already enormous chemistry and flirtation! I have to say that the interaction between these two and some coincidences remind me of my favorite fan-fic pairing, but it's a bonus here! I started reading it around 9 PM last night and I dropped my kindle on a nightstand table after I had finished it, at 2 AM.

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### **Arien says**

3.5 stars.

Overall I liked this read. The characters were nice, the plot wasn't too standard, the animals are always lovely and done well in this book. The supporting cast also works for the most part except the whole ex situation.

The last 20% or so kinda ruins what could have been a 5 star read for me. The drama was too forced and completely unnecessary. The definition of communication issues. It's one of the tropes I dislike most. Yet the first two-thirds were enjoyable.

Great start, unfortunate ending that's still HEA but with a bad aftertaste.

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### **Rosi says**

This is a great story that deals with pretty intense feelings.

Julia is a damaged young woman. She has been so mistreated by life that now she is miserable and broken. To top it off, she has been recently rejected because her bad fate and subsequent wrong decisions. And as if that were not enough, her battered car stops working in a little town near the Colorado Mountains, leaving her without means to keep running away. Her first impression of the town inhabitants is not very encouraging and neither is the feedback that she receives from them. But after some odd interactions with the townsmen and in charge of the car repair she starts labouring in a cattle farm owned by Elena, without having had previous experience in that. But when she starts relating with horses, it seems like she has some innate power to do it so.

On the other hand, Elena is also damaged somehow, after losing her partner, her parents and having to rise a teen son and taking care of the ranch. She lives and breathes for her son and her ranch.

Elena and Julia are so different but they connect in spite the reluctance that both have for open themselves and share their burden. But along the story there are many poignant moments when they go breaking down the walls that protect their hearts. So wonderful some of them.

The author wonders in the acknowledgements if we readers will find the Colorado environment as an important part of the story, it has been for me, really. I think that she has made a pretty good job on that, too.

And the moments between Julia and her horse have been amazing.

In short, I think this book has been fantastic to read, touching, sad, with moments that tear your heart, but very, very recommendable reading.

*An ARC was given to me from Bold Strokes Books through Netgalley for my honest review*

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### **Gaby LezReviewBooks says**

Julia Finch is a city girl used to constantly run away from her conflicted past and never settle anywhere. After dealing with her biological parents' rejection she leaves Chicago towards the west. Her car breaks down somewhere in rural Colorado. Alone and without money, she gets a job as a ranch hand but when she meets the enigmatic and gorgeous ranch owner Elena Bennett, all bets are off. Will their attraction be enough to stop Julia from running?

This is an entertaining romance set in rural Colorado where the author grew up. Her descriptions of nature and the landscape are very picturesque along with her accounts of what ranch life is all about.

'Breaking down her walls' is written in third person in present tense from the exclusive point of view of Julia. Some readers might not be comfortable with the choice of present tense despite it isn't as uncommon as one would think. Normally present tense provides a more intimate and immediate relationship with the character, it intensifies the emotions and the connection with the character's consciousness. I personally haven't issues with the present tense narrative but I think that Ms. Zak doesn't use the intimacy with her character in its full potential. There were moments when the author tells us how Julia feels instead of showing it and the closeness is temporarily lost. But other moments, like Julia's connection with her horse are really well done. Hands down, Leia is the best horse character I've read in lesfic.

It took me approximately half the book to feel the chemistry between the mains possibly because Elena's character was harder to grasp. Maybe that was the author's intention as it shows how Julia sees her. However, once the connection is established, the chemistry is strong and the intimate scenes are very realistic and hot. Unlike many lesfic books, the conflict around 80% mark doesn't feel contrived or forced and the resolution makes sense within the plot.

Overall, an entertaining romance for nature and horse lovers. 3.5 stars.

ARC provided by Netgalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

See all my reviews at [www.lezreviewbooks.com](http://www.lezreviewbooks.com)

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### **Farah says**

This book had a promising storyline and beginning but sadly Ms.Zak went overboard too many times. Where was her alpha readers? I loved the Colorado backdrop, I loved every single moment when Julia stepped into the cattle ranch before Ms.Zak decided to rush the relationship progression and added a shitload of

unnecessary / messy / lame dramas.

Ms.Zak did extremely well with the scenes involving Julia and the horses, I was really blown away.

Breaking Down Her Walls is the last book by Ms.Zak for me.

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### **Colleen Corgel says**

If I could describe this book in one word it would be this: annnngggssstt. I don't really go for overwrought romances, but this was just right for me. I think it was because we were only in one of the main characters' head space. She is a great lead and it was fun to see her crush on Elena, the other lead, for most of the book.

I thought the romance was well done up to the very last bit of drama. The author was teasing a big blowup for most of the book, but when it happened, it still kind of made my eyes roll. It was an acknowledgment that Julia still had to work through some of her feelings of abandonment. I thought it would have been nice to end a little before that, because we know those types of things take time. But other than that, I thought it was fun reading about the ranch, the supporting cast, and seeing Julia and Elena dance around each other.

If angst is your thing, this a great book for you. I enjoyed it for the most part, and I think my issues with it are more nitpicky than anything, and I did enjoy Cole. Cole is good people.

*I received this ARC from BSB via NetGalley in exchange for my honest review.*

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### **Rach (Les Rêveur) says**

Erin Zak really wow'd me with this wonderful story.

Julia is a runner. She takes off again after her first meeting with her birth parents goes terribly wrong. When her car breaks down in the middle of nowhere in the state of Colorado, she panics until a local cowboy offers to pay for her car repairs in trade for her helping as a ranch hand over herding session. Julia gets stuck into her new job but she can't stop thinking about the ranch owner and boss, Elena. Elena is the definitive ice queen character but there is something about Julia that she just can't help but be drawn to. The more time they spend together the more Elena's walls come down and then Elena's ex, Penn shows up and Julia starts to worry that this is just another moment of let down in her life. But will she run or stick around and see what life could be with Elena by her side?

This is a love story, 100% ! Breaking Down Her Wallshad me completely spun. One minute I'm thinking that it's such a sweet romance, the next I found it sexy as hell then by the end, I had it as an all-encompassing love story that I just adored.

Erin Zak has written Breaking Down Her Walls in third person, present tense and normally I am not a massive fan of that style but Erin Zak wrote it with such finesse, I was immersed in the story from the first chapter.

I really enjoyed the level of angst in the story and found that it created the perfect balance throughout. The

sex scenes were fantastic... I mean wow! The build up in the entire book was like foreplay and then when it happened... boom, my brain explodes!!! Very well done.

Just a side note that I love Colorado and this book took me back there to all of the wonderful memories I have from my time there. Secondly how amazing is this cover? Red Chucks? SOLD!

I really can't wait to see what comes next from Erin Zak because I will be waiting very impatiently.

5 Stars

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### Corrie says

I was a fan of **Erin Zak** back when she was still writing Swan Queen fanfic and posting her updates on Tumblr. That's how we met and hung out in a time that all our gay little hearts were furiously hoping that the showrunners would take Regina and Emma's obvious love for each other to the next level. As we know they ultimately chickened out, but we will always have fan fic that celebrates their love and a whole slew of new and exciting talent that originated from that fandom.

It took me until a few weeks ago to figure out that fanfic writer **EtotheSwan** was in fact Erin Zak (duh!) and so I had to start reading **Breaking Down Her Walls** in a screaming hurry! I read it as a work in progress when it was a Swan Queen fic but I never saw the finished product and kinda forgot about it.

It was as good as I remembered. I had no problem switching to the format (be it first or third person present time) and I loved the ranch setting. It is very much Zak's love letter to her birth state Colorado as she lovingly gives us a taste of the mountains in all their finery. If you love horses this is a must read. If you are a romance fan you don't want to miss this either. The romance is slow burn as both women have some emotional hurdles to climb but oh man, when they do get busy it will melt your socks. That is one seriously sexy *snu snu* scene.

Too bad for that obligatory angst at the 80% mark to happen. I know it's the go-to romance format of the moment, but personally I'm not a fan. It does nothing for me to be honest.

But other than that... I'm thrilled to bits Erin got snatched up by **Bold Strokes**. Not that I'm surprised because she was already a natural and can only grow further as an author. Looking forward to more!

f/f explicit

Themes: city girl, mountain ranch, horses, trust issues.

4 stars

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\* A free copy was provided by Netgalley and Bold Strokes Books Inc. for an honest review.

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### Bethany says

While this was a enjoyable read for the most part, I don't share some of the same feelings as other reviewers.

To me, Zak created a good novel, but it just wasn't GREAT. I had trouble with the tense that the novel was written in also - first person present tense is tough, and it took me a few chapters to feel the flow of the writing style.

MC Julie is a runner, running from her past and trying to find her place in the world, but her back story didn't really show through until halfway through the novel. It made it a bit hard for me to care about Julie or why she was running. Her car breaks down mid-run, and she's forced to work on a ranch to pay off debts to get her car repaired. MC Elena is the "hard-ass" ranch boss who's been beat down by losses in life and that's made her a bit icy. She's not really an ice queen though, just temperamental.

What really bothered me most about this read is the whole ex-girlfriend showing back up theme. Not to spoil it for anyone, but the obligatory angst that was created at the 80% mark because of the ex was a complete waste of reading time and brain cells for me, and almost ruined my whole read. I knocked a whole star off of my review just because of how Zak handled the whole ex situation.

The premise of the novel was pretty good, but unfortunately, it's been done time and time again, and Zak didn't put enough differences into this novel to make it stand out to me. In all fairness to Zak though, I was sick, sick, sick while reading this, and it may have affected my enjoyment level.

All in all, 3 stars.

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\*\*Many thanks to the publisher for providing me with an ARC copy in exchange for my honest review.\*\*

### **Lex Kent says**

4.25 Stars. This was a really enjoyable romance. An ice queen character on a horse, yes please. In all seriousness this was such a pleasant surprise. Zak's debut book Falling into Her, was not for me at all. I disliked it so much that I was not going to read Breaking Down Her Walls. However, after reading some of the good reviews on here, I just had to take the chance. I'm so glad I did because this was a huge step-up from her debut book and I really enjoyed it.

First off I do have to mention the writing style. It is odd and gives you this weird mix between first and third person. There have been some conflicting answers about how the book is written. Some have been saying this is first person present tense, others say it's third person present tense. My guess is its third person present tense. The writing is "she this" and "she that", not "I" as first person is. Anyway, it does take a little while to get use to. Eventually you do and you don't even notice but it is a little jarring in the beginning.

Lesbian and bisexual women on a horse ranch, plus an age-gap romance with an ice queen character... This totally worked for me. I loved the setting of the ranch in Colorado and the slow-burn relationship that just got hotter and hotter. The two mains had chemistry and the sex scenes were nice and steamy. The difference in this relationship compared to Zak's first book is just like night and day. She improved so much that I'm really impressed.

Was the book all smooth sailing? No. Unfortunately, Zak fell into the trap of needing to manufacture some angst so she brought in an ex-girlfriend. There was enough going on in the main character's pasts that she didn't need to go here. I actually think I would have given this book 5 stars if the ex was not in it. On the good side, the forced angst does not last long. It could have been way worse than it was. And in the end it

didn't stop me from really enjoying this story.

This book was a good reminder to me to give authors more than once chance. I almost always do and the one time I didn't, I almost missed out on a book I really enjoyed. I hope Zak keeps improving; I'm very excited about what she'll put out next.

*An ARC was given to me by BSB for a honest review.*

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### **Luce says**

3.6 Stars rounded up to 4 Stars for this pleasant romance. An easy, fast read.

I held onto this book until I got to Colorado. I'm visiting family for the holidays and they live in a small resort town with a home that is surrounded by trees and mountains. This book however, mostly takes place in the sweltering summer months... So I guess it help me feel warm when it was freezing outside.

Twenty-six year old, Julia Finch is on the road, with no particular destination, just away from her former life. Unfortunately her car breaks down in a small Colorado town. She doesn't have enough money to fix it so she agrees to work as a ranch hand in exchange for repairs. At the Bennett Ranch she meets the 40-something, beautiful and abrasive owner, Elena Bennett.

I enjoyed following Julia as she tries to learn to muck out the stables, care for the horses and later to ride. She makes close friends at the ranch, especially with Cole, Elena's teenage son. She begins to really enjoy being and working at the Ranch.

Julia is instantly attracted to Elena and at the same time dislikes her as Elena is naturally abrasive, especially since Julia who obviously has no experience, horse or ranch skills and was not impressed with the City Girl. We learn that Elena has lived through a lot of losses, can Julia help her heal? And likewise can Elena help Julia heal from whatever she is running from? There are bumps in the road as Elena's past returns to complicate things.

A couple of quibbles. This book is that it is written from Julia's point of view and occasionally it is not clear who is talking, Julia or the other person. I had to pause and decipher it. I hate when that happens. But it wasn't enough to make me stop reading. Second, we see quickly by her actions that Elena is probably attracted to Julia. Which seems out of character from how she is described. But it isn't until later that Elena feels it was out of character for her too. The problem of third-person stories?

Nevertheless, I enjoyed this book and it sounds like I liked it more than some other reviewers. I'll definitely check out Zak's next book.

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### **Tiff says**

Julia Finch is running away from life. The destination is 100% unknown. How can you run away totally from your past and self-hatred? She tries like hell too, that is until her beat-up old clunker of a car finally gives up

on her journey in a teeny tiny Colorado town. With little money, she has to make a deal to work off her automobile repair debt by lending a hand at a large cattle ranch.

Julia spends her days shoveling manure and bonding with the ranch's horses. Her immediate connection to these beautiful working animals endures her to the ranch's owner, Elena Bennett.

Elena Bennett spends her time working her ranch and being perpetually pissed off. Her heart has been broken too many times and she cannot shake off her anger. Her wife was killed in an automobile accident breaking her heart the first time, the second women she trusted with it decided to up and leave her with little warning. Now she's just angry and a bit broken. When she first meets Julia she is hard bitter and has very little patience for the new ranch hand.

I like the premise of the story. Two characters overcoming past tragedies to find their way to love, trust and respect. For the most part, I enjoyed this book. I will be honest I thought the ex-girlfriend showing back up after her disappearing act was a bit contrived and made to story slow way down and become a bit too contrived. I mean if your ex-lover dumps you with no word, disappears out of town and now you have a new lady you are just pining for you're going to hang out with said ex when she shows back up. Hell no! Penn showing back up was a monumental waste of reading space. It would have been infinitely better spent on dialogue between the two mains.

Overall a good book that I am happy that I spent some time with.

3 out of 5 stars

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### **Joc says**

In an emotional turmoil, Julia Finch is driving away from the devastation of being rejected by her biological parents for a second time. Unfortunately, between a detour and her car breaking down, she finds herself in a half-horse town with no means to get herself out. An opportunity to work on a ranch presents itself and it might be the only way to solve her problems. The ranch comes with its own problems though, like the angry and abrasive Elena Bennet who owns the place.

I enjoyed reading this for most of the book. In many ways it reads like fan fiction with an ice-queen who requires diligence and perfection from the hands working for her and a new, fish-out-of-water, much younger farm hand who is cheerful but also doesn't want to fail. The young city slicker surprises the inflexible ice-queen by her unexpected competence. It's a trope I enjoy reading.

The story is told from the third person point of view but only from Julia's side but because Julia is very closed about her past we don't get much information about what drives her until well into the novel. I would have liked to have seen flashes of her past much earlier in the novel instead of all the information being dumped in one go and I would have liked Elena's point of view. These things didn't bother me that much and I really enjoyed the horses and aspects of ranch life.

What broke it for me though, was the last 20% or so. I'm not putting in any spoilers suffice to say that my reaction was partly personal, and won't bother most people but left me intensely irritated, and partly because I could not suspend my disbelief for a separate incident. So, what started out as a three to four star read ended as a two star read.

*Book received from Netgalley and Bold Strokes Books for an honest review.*

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