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Moon At Nine



Synopsis

Based on interviews with a young woman forced to flee Iran because of her sexual orientation, *Moon at Nine* is a tense and riveting novel that shines a light on an issue of social injustice that continues to this day. Fifteen-year-old Farrin has grown up with secrets: ten years after the overthrow of the Shah, her aristocratic mother is still working against Iran's conservative revolutionary government. But when Farrin befriends Sadira, the intriguing and outgoing new student at her school for gifted girls, her own new secret is even more dangerous. Because the girls discover their relationship is more than just a friendship—and in Iran, being gay is punishable by death.

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Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up—The daughter of wealthy Iranian parents, 15-year-old Farrin earns top scores at a prestigious school in 1988 Tehran. Her parents remain loyal to the ousted Shah, so Farrin knows the importance of keeping a low profile. One day, Farrin meets a new classmate, Sadira, who plays forbidden music on a prohibited instrument in a closet at school. Farrin and Sadira become fast friends who enjoy subversive literature and music despite the tough restrictions imposed by the Iranian government. Before long, Farrin and Sadira's friendship morphs into a romantic relationship, for which both girls could face death. Set during the reign of Ayatollah Khomeini, this title is based on real women who fell in love in a country where homosexuality is still against the law. Sparse and eloquently written, this short historical novel is both beautiful and heartbreaking. The subject matter and writing style will appeal most to older teens and adults who likely have a better understanding of

the political history of Iran. Sadira and Farrin's relationship is believable, as is the girls' undying determination to stay together at all costs. While sexuality is important to the plot, the book is relatively tame, containing no profanity and nothing beyond hand-holding and a few kisses. A four-page Author's Note provides necessary historical background and insight into worldwide persecution of homosexuals today. Give this to fans of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Riverhead, 2007) or Latifa's *My Forbidden Face* (Miramax, 2002). --Leigh Collazo, Ed Willkie Middle School, Fort Worth, TX --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Fifteen-year-old Iranian Farrin lives with secrets. It is 1988, and Farrin's wealthy parents are conspiring to install the Shah's son to the throne. That is their secret; hers is even more dangerous. She is in love with Sadira, the new girl in school, who returns her feelings even though homosexuality is regarded as a crime punishable by death in Iran. When the Revolutionary Guard discovers them together, the girls are taken to prison and threatened with execution. How can they possibly survive? Though based on a true story, Ellis's version of it sometimes feels a bit melodramatic. Still, it is inarguably powerful, and readers will identify with the two star-crossed girls who are victims of what seems to be an inhumane government. In an appended author's note, Ellis chillingly reports that more than 4,000 lesbian and gay Iranians have been executed since 1979. A book study guide is included and will help encourage much needed discussion. Grades 7-10. --Michael Cart --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

'Ancient demons roam an ancient land. They dwell in the valleys and lurk in the mountains. The demons play their games and inflict their pain [...] and the humans blame themselves... The demons just laugh. And thus the eons pass. Until one of the humans finally wakes up, opens her eyes, and decides to fight back.' Moon at Nine is a story based on true events. 15-year-old Farrin comes from a wealthy family in Iran. This is both a blessing and a curse, as it keeps Farrin in comfort and gives her the occasional privilege -- but also cements her into a less-than-popular standing in her school. Farrin has always been somewhat invisible; this is, in part, because her family has chosen a political standing that is illegal in 1980's Iran -- they wish to bring the Shah back into power. Farrin has always been told to keep quiet, lay low, and not call attention to herself or the family. Farrin's entire world changes the day she meets the new girl in school, Sadira. "Looking for something?" "Farrin opened her eyes. Farrin felt something like a jolt of electricity through her body as the most intense green eyes looked right into hers." Sadira and Farrin become friends instantly. Their relationship evolves from friendship into love.

When the two girls are caught kissing, the consequences are severe. They are not to see or speak to each other, and their families are pressured to marry the girls off as soon as possible to sway their "deviant" behavior. The girls insist they are simply in love and want nothing more than to be together; they wish to harm no one. Their families shun them none-the-less. In a country where homosexuality is illegal and punishable by death, Farrin and Sadira have a truly arduous fight ahead of them.

- - Moon at Nine is a powerful story of love and human rights. I enjoyed it, although it left me very much teary-eyed (more than once). *SPOILERS AHEAD*

The love shared between Farrin and Sadira inspired me and made me feel full of hope. These two girls couldn't have been in a more inconvenient place for a lesbian or gay during this time period. Even their young age could not save them from a death sentence. Upon being caught together in a physical embrace a second time, both girls are arrested by the Revolutionary Guard and taken to prison. They are interrogated, beaten, and sentenced to hang. All through their horrible experience, both girls hold onto their love as if it were a lifeline. They both sacrifice and they both suffer. From the very beginning until the very end, they never deny that they love one another. They stand up against the cruelty and the oppression together and apart. They fight back even when there is no hope left in sight. How easy would it be to claim ignorance and just go back to their previous lives? Do they? No, not even for a moment. This is inspiration. This... this is why those of us with sexual orientations that stray from the so-called norm (heterosexuality), in the 21st century, can live easier lives and do so more openly. We still have a long way to go, but we wouldn't even be where we are now if it weren't for people like Farrin and Sadira; people who stand up and fight, take the blows, and pave the way for the rest of us.

Deborah Ellis has created a detailed picture of what Iranian life and culture was like during this era. It is stark and ugly at times, but also quite peaceful and beautiful at others. I was impressed with the thoroughness with which the history was explained. I also appreciate that it wasn't info-dumpy or monotonous. There was just the right amount of history and politics mixed in with the love story and the message behind it. Ellis also made sure to stay away from the stereotypes of Iranian people and their culture/religion. This must have been tough. I do believe the relationship between Farrin and Sadira could've been elaborated on just a bit more. Their love was palpable, don't get me wrong on that. It was the lead-up to that point that I was a bit disappointed with. If this weren't based on a true story I'd shout insta-love, but I know better in this case.

All in all, Moon at Nine was a truly beautiful, yet sorrowful, story. There are sweet parts that are filled with innocence and love, but there are also those inevitable parts that show you just how close-minded some of humanity could be back then and can still be today. Farrin is a wonderful protagonist and it was a pleasure to read from her point of view. Sadira was

mysterious and strong; a gorgeous person who did not deserve what life handed to her. The two together are pure inspiration.

“You won’t be lonely ever again,” Farrin said. “It’s a pact...”

“Look at the moon,” Sadira said. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a moon so bright...” it felt like she and Sadira were all alone in Tehran.

“It’s shining down on the two of us,” Sadira said. She looked at her watch.

“It’s almost nine o’clock. Let’s make another pact. Let’s look at the moon every night at nine, and that way, if we are not physically together, we will be together in spirit.”

“The nine o’clock moon...” Every night, she promised. I loved this book and I recommend it to anyone fighting the fight for LGBT rights, women’s rights, or human rights in general. Love is love and there is hope. We can do this!

Farrin can’t let anyone come close, because her family has so many secrets. Her parents have asked her to keep away from her classmates for that reason. She goes to a school for gifted girls, but she’s lonely. Her mother is still supporting the Shah while that’s forbidden. The same goes for many of her activities and the food, drinks and other goods they have in their home. If someone ever finds out Farrin’s family has to go to jail and they could even be executed. Farrin tries to do as she’s been told, but something changes when she meets Sadira. Sadira is bold, smart and not afraid to let people know what she thinks. Sadira becomes Farrin’s best friend. They spend most of their time together, but that isn’t enough. The two girls soon find out that they love each other. They don’t want to hide their true feelings even though they’re taking a great risk doing that. They can be sentenced to death because of it.

Moon at Nine is an impressive story about two girls whose love is so strong that they want everyone around them to know. If it feels so right it must be good, but not everyone thinks the same way. Sadira and Farrin are in big trouble. I wanted them to be all right, but Moon at Nine is no fairytale, it’s based on a true story. It’s a beautiful tale though and I shed a lot of tears. Deborah Ellis has told this story in such a moving and delicate way, I think that’s brilliant. I highly recommend this book to both teenagers and adults.

This novel was a real eye opener for me. I know that homosexuality is illegal in other countries. I remember the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the Ayatollah Khomeini. I don’t remember much about the war between Iraq and Iran but this novel enlightened me. At its heart, this is a story of two young, very naive girls who fall in love and never think of the consequences of what being open about their love will be. Unfortunately, they live in a country and at a time when not only is it illegal to

be in love with a person of the same sex, but it is an act punishable by death. There are many stories in this novel. There is the story of Farrin and her parents, she is already at odds with her mother. Her mother who thinks the Shah's son will come back into power and secretly has parties to support him. Her mother who thinks she is too good for most of the people on her husband's side of the family. Who thinks her daughter is too good to go to school with the girls she does. And yet believes that the education of women will be the salvation of Iran. Then there is the story of Farrin and Sadira, despite all odds, falling in love and for a short time, being happy. They come from completely different backgrounds, but believe in the same things, enjoy being imaginative and creative. Their love is completely innocent. It happens over time and is sweet, but with tragic consequences when they declare their love publicly when they are caught together. As I wrote before, Iran was and according to the notes in the back of the book, still is a country where being a homosexual is punishable by death. And then there is the political story. The one going on in Iran with the war defending themselves against Saddam Hussein. I find it so ironic, well I am sure most people do, that Saddam Hussein was then backed by our government. But that's another story. So Iran is going through a change with the Ayatollah Khomeini ruling the country, a crack down on religious laws and western ideas. The Revolutionary Guard goes around scaring people, arresting them, stirring up crowds. And mothers send their boys, young children to war. Over one million Iranians died. And then there is an internal interrogation of Iranian citizens as fingers are pointed at those who might be in secret support of the deposed Shah. I found this novel to be more than I expected. The stories intertwined to make an interesting story, though perhaps a little simplistic in the telling. I enjoyed the story, as much as you can when the story's subject is about the subjugation of people and the threat and death and hanging of people. I was horrified by the callousness of the guards at the prisons as they walked the people to their deaths on the gallows. The fact that they jailed 15 year old girls. That they dragged girls out of their schools and homes. That women would turn on each other at the mere suggestion of weariness of losing more of her children to the war being a comment against the government. If you are interested in learning about other cultures this is a definite read. The LGBT part of the story, though brief is heartbreaking. There are resources in the back of the E-ARC which I hope made it to the novel where you can learn about other countries that persecute the LGBT community. It is still punishable by death in 7 countries, 7 too many. There are also groups in Iran that help LGBT people. If they can be found. I commend all that Deborah Ellis has done to bring this social injustice to light. I'm not sure if you've heard of her stories, "THE BREADWINNER" which is a series. I recommend it. It's a story set in Afghanistan fighting the Taliban. There is a giveaway going on at my post [HERE](#) along with a blog tour. There is a chance to

win this novel as well as a charitable donation to be made in your name. Please check it out.I received a copy of this novel for review from the publisher, Pajama Press. I was not compensated for my review. This did not influence my review. All opinions expressed are my own.

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