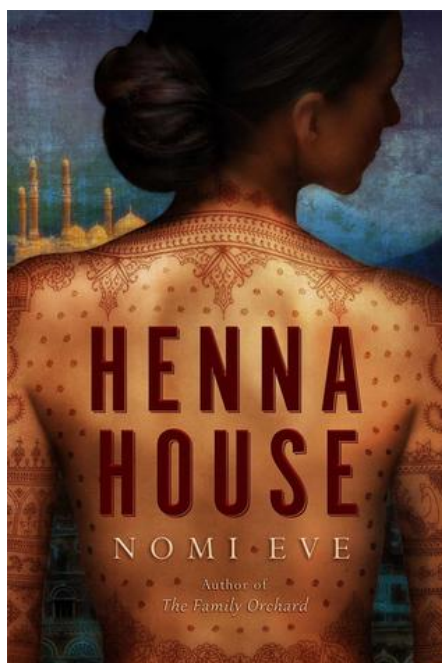




Henna House

Nomi Eve

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An evocative and stirring novel about a young woman living in the fascinating and rarely portrayed community of Yemenite Jews of the mid-twentieth century, from the acclaimed author of *The Family Orchard*.

In the tradition of Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, *Henna House* is the enthralling story of a woman, her family, their community, and the rituals that bind them.

Nomi Eve's vivid saga begins in Yemen in 1920, when Adela Damari's parents desperately seek a future husband for their young daughter. After passage of the Orphan's Decree, any unbetrothed Jewish child left orphaned will be instantly adopted by the local Muslim community. With her parents' health failing, and no spousal prospects in sight, Adela's situation looks dire until her uncle arrives from a faraway city, bringing with him a cousin and aunt who introduce Adela to the powerful rituals of henna tattooing. Suddenly, Adela's eyes are opened to the world, and she begins to understand what it means to love another and one's heritage. She is imperiled, however, when her parents die and a prolonged drought threatens their long-established way of life. She and her extended family flee to the city of Aden where Adela encounters old loves, discovers her true calling, and is ultimately betrayed by the people and customs she once held dear.

Henna House is an intimate family portrait and a panorama of history. From the traditions of the Yemenite Jews, to the far-ranging devastation of the Holocaust, to the birth of the State of Israel, Eve offers an unforgettable coming-of-age story and a textured chronicle of a fascinating period in the twentieth century.

Henna House is a rich, spirited, and sensuous tale of love, loss, betrayal, forgiveness, and the dyes that adorn the skin and pierce the heart.

Henna House Details

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Author : Nomi Eve

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From Reader Review Henna House for online ebook

Marla says

What a beautifully written story. This was a group of people I really knew nothing about and I've always been interested in henna. This is about Adela Damari starting in the 1920s in Yemen. It follows her life as she tries to avoid the Confiscator who takes Jewish children as part of the Orphan's Decree and they are instantly adopted by the local Muslim community. I enjoyed the relationship between Adela and her cousin Hani who introduces her to henna application and meanings. I enjoyed the harsh relationship she had with her mother. This is so worth the time. I would have read it faster but I had other things going on. This is one you will get lost in and will lose track of time because you will be absorbed into the characters lives. It will leave you thinking about the characters long after you put the book down.

I want to thank the publisher for my copy as I received this through my group as a read along with the publisher.

Kate Moretti says

Every once in a while, I read a book and think, I should just give up. I can't do this. I can't write LIKE THIS. Gorgeous, descriptive, lush prose. The kind that makes you want to crawl into the book and stay there. Gripping characters and plot. I loved everything about this novel and I learned a ton, considering what I knew about Jewish Yemenites was nil. Nomi Eve is a force. This book is an absolute gem.

Lyn says

Like a decadent, savory, chocolate truffle, this book was so rich with amazing description that I could not put it down. Chapter by chapter, I forced myself not to read it too fast. I reread the prologue after finishing the book because it made more sense to me. I always thought the ritual of henna was an Indian tradition and learned that the Jews of Yemen also used it in a very deep, detailed, and intriguing way. It was interesting to learn more about this culture and history through a well-told, satisfying, full-circle saga. The characters were as vivid as the description. I highly recommend this book. It is one of the most memorable I have read in a long time. Kudos, to Nomi Eve.

Ellen says

Sometime in the middle years of my twenties, my sister and my cousin hennaed my breasts on a lark, using a dime-store-quality kit we bought off a mysterious woman at a street fair. It was summer. The air was heavy. The moon was full. It all made sense at the time.

I had no idea how very close we came to correctly approximating the ritual of henna, which I did not understand to be such a robust and ritualized art form until I read Nomi Eve's Henna House.

Historical fiction thrills me in concept and reality; the idea that while being entertained I might also learn something vital; the possibility of acquiring – by osmosis! by accident! – facts and words and wisdom

missing from my vocabulary and worldview. In Henna House we get not just the epic saga of a young Yemenite Jew's coming of age but also a geography lesson and an environmental education as Adela Damari and her family trek mid-20th century through Arabia to the newly-formed Israel. Thanks to this book, I learned as much about this foreign land as I learned about her complex people as I followed them through the course of a life- and land-altering generation.

And in the sort of sensual language too often forsaken in this age of sound bites and 140-character Tweets, I learned about henna, "the red geometric flurry ... that seemed to tell stories at once simple and incomprehensible" and the rituals that make the hennaing process, exclusive to the domain of women, as intimate and dreamy and communal as it was when I naively limned it in my young adulthood.

Henna House abounds with stories of hennaed women: aunts and sisters and neighbors and cousins like Adela and "Hani [who] thrust her hand into mine, asking me one hundred questions all at once about the fairy tales I knew, the secrets I didn't, the stories I would maybe be so kind as to finish for her, for she had come to a point in the plot that needed a fresh perspective."

If it is stories about women and their mysterious ways that you crave ... if you believe that shared stories can bind and color us ... Henna House is not to be missed.

Update: Henna House is one of twenty-one books recently called out as Great Group Reads for 2015 by the Women's National Book Association.

Britany says

This was a disappointing miss for me. Went in expecting a dramatic story of a Yemenite Jewish girl learning Henna in order to set her free. What I got was a story with characters doing things that made me feel.... nothing.

Adela Damari has all the makings to be a powerful antagonist. She made a valiant effort, but ultimately didn't come off the page for me. This book starts out with her fearful of the Confiscator- a man who threatened to take Adela if her father died before she was married to another. This caused her to become promised to her cousin, Asaf at the tender age of 9. The story picked up from there, but the threads never fully connected. Too many story lines, going in different directions, with a final powerful surprise event towards the end-- which still didn't come across emotionally to me.

Maggie Anton says

You can read the synopsis on another page. For me this was a book to read twice: the first time to rush through the pages to quickly find out what will happen to the characters next, and the second time to slowly savor the descriptions of these marvelous and exotic people and locales. Nomi Eve captivated me to keep reading, promising the possibility of one more great scene on the next page ... in the next chapter ... until abruptly the story ends and I'm left hungry for more.

Sandie says

Nomi Eve's *HENNA HOUSE* an expansive historical novel that vividly depicts the exotic world of Yemeni Jews in the first decades of the 20th century. It is a riveting portrait rooted in real life. It tells not only of a lost culture but deals with the domestic lives of Jewish families (particularly the women) in that particular time and place as it addressed the Jewish tradition of tattooing with henna, family relationships, marriage, betrayal, karma, love, forgiveness as well as an arbitrary statute known as the Orphans Decree which authorized the state to confiscate orphaned Jewish children and raise them as Muslims.

The central character in the story is Adela Damari, the daughter of a sickly Jewish cobbler and his petulant wife. Due to her father's illness the family is terrified at the thought that Adela could be adopted by a Muslim family and forced to convert. With the arrival in their small village of her father's brother and his son it appears that an engagement to her cousin, Asaf, may offer the solution to five year old Adela's problem.

The book goes on to detail the various events of Adela's life over subsequent years and those family members, like Aunt Rahel and cousin Hani, who introduce her to the art and meaning of the henna drawings.

While the history of the Jews of the Saudi peninsula is informative and instructional, it is the interaction between the various characters that truly drives this story while utilizing henna as the conduit for the unifying themes of family, art and storytelling.

Nomi Eve's exhaustive research and her love of her subject matter is evident in this fascinating book and the plethora of material for discussion should make it a must read for every book club. Personally, I learned and I loved it.

Paul Pessolano says

"Henna House" by Nomi Eve, published by Scribner.

Category – Fiction/Literature Publication Date – August 12, 2014

This is a woman's book but I have to admit that I thoroughly enjoyed it from start to finish.

The story takes place in Yemen in the 1920's and tells the story of the Yemenite Jewish community living amongst Muslims. Adela Damari, a young Jewish girl, is getting close to womanhood, (determined by her getting her period), but has no prospects of a husband. At this early age if she has no prospects and her father, who is not healthy, dies she can be adopted by the Muslim community. This is done by the Confiscator.

She does become betrothed to her cousin Asaf, but Asaf leaves the community to travel with his father who is a merchant, although promising he will return for her.

In the meantime hennaing becomes a part of her life as she finds companionship in her relatives. This becomes very important in her life as her parents die and the Jewish community is forced to leave their home and move to the city of Aden.

While making a new life for herself Adela finds a young man from her prior life as a suitor but still feels strongly about Asaf. This becomes a serious problem when Asaf returns and she must decide between the

two.

The novel is a wonderful story of the Yemenite Jews and their search for a homeland, which they find in Israel where Adela finds a home, her true love, and a deeper understanding of love.

Kirstin says

www.justtoomanybooks.WordPress.com

In Yemen, Jews and Muslims live side by side- but not always peacefully. The Muslims have decreed that any orphaned Jewish child must be adopted by a Muslim family. Adela, the only child of a sickly cobbler and a mercurial mother, lives in fear of the Confiscator taking her. In hopes of preventing forced adoption, she is engaged to her cousin Asaf when she is just a child. While she plays at being married with Asaf, she also enjoys the companionship of her childhood friend Binyamin. Adela is still a child when Asaf leaves on a long journey....and other long-lost relatives arrive. Adela's aunt Rahel and cousin Hani introduce her to the world of henna, prized by Jews and Muslims alike. Henna is often used to decorate brides and is a ritual of beauty that women can share. For Adela and her relatives, though, it becomes something much more complicated- a secret code, a battle ground, a safe place, and a way to change their fate. Henna House is one of the best books I've read about female relationships in years. Every mother, aunt, sister and cousin is a vibrant character. The story doesn't shy away from the injustices that face women around the world, but it gives them strength and beauty. I also liked Adela's honest narration of her childhood. From time to time she recounts what she remembers, and then balances it with what an older female relative remembers. And isn't that an honest take on memory?! Henna House is about the lives of women, their loves and their relationships. When women are oppressed (because of their gender, religion, race, or marital status) they still find ways to influence and shape the story of their people. They communicate in any way possible- even in henna.

Lorie Slass says

This was a beautifully crafted story, with vivid characters. The author clearly did her homework in this wonderful piece of historical fiction. The women in this novel were amazingly resilient given what they had to go through. I so enjoyed the story but I also learned a lot about Yemenite Jews and their struggles.

Nicole says

There are a lot of tangents Henna House goes off on that I didn't care a lot about, and there are several that I wish the author had developed much more fully. I was nearly derailed completely by the sexual contact between children early in the book and that tainted the rest of my experience. I didn't find it necessary to the story and honestly it was disturbing.

Eve spends so much time developing Adela's childhood and early adolescence to the detriment of the later, far more interesting aspects of her story. Or gets too involved in telling tales accented with magical realism instead of showing the main story. The second part of the book dragged for me, yet I would have MUCH preferred to experience Adela's translation of Hani's journal as it happened rather as a small part of an

already short chapter. The end of the book is so rushed.

The language of Henna House is as exquisite as its heart-stopping cover, but I didn't feel like I got a solid payoff. Too many flowery words and not enough substance.

Sharon says

First of all, I would recommend that anyone reading this book should go for the hard copy version (not on a reader). The cover is the most beautiful book cover I have ever seen. As I was reading this book, and reading descriptions of the henna, I would keep going back to the book cover and looking at it. And the book itself was exquisite like the jacket - like slowly unwrapping a gift. The book was sometimes a little slow - but could be forgiven because the story was so interesting and informative and the author's descriptions so beautiful. I had never read a book about Yemenite Jews before - and did find it fascinating and of course - the descriptions of the henna rituals were amazing. All in all, this is a wonderful book that I would highly recommend.

Will White says

This is such a beautiful story that my words could never give it justice. It follows the life of a little girl growing up in Yemen as a Jew from the 1920's to 1980's. Her story of her enduring journey through the era and landscape is an eye opening experience that was educational and enlightening. It starts off a little slow but stay with it because it will be well worth it.

AH says

Henna House by Nomi Eve is a beautifully written story of a young woman growing up in Yemen during the 1920's and 1930's. Right away, I was transported back in time to a very primitive world, a world without any kind of modern day conveniences, a world where religion and superstitions played a central role in the lives of the people. The world is brought to life by the voice of the narrator. When we first meet Adela, she is a bright, young, precocious little girl, the youngest child in a very large family. Adela is part of a huge extended family clan - there's plenty of aunts, uncles, cousins all around her. We learn a lot about her world through the eyes of a five year old. One of Adela's biggest fears is being taken away by the Confiscator, a government official who collects Jewish orphans, converts them to Islam, and gives them to a Muslim family to raise. In order to circumvent the Confiscator, most Jewish children were betrothed at a very young age - Adela, at five years old was almost considered a spinster.

It is interesting to see the world through the innocent eyes of a child. While Adela is treated poorly by her mother, her father dotes on her and teaches her how to work with leather. As the story progresses, Adela's relatives move to her small village. Her Aunt Rahel is a henna artist, known all over for her talent. Her cousin Hani takes an immediate like to Adela and the two of them become close like sisters. Adela becomes fascinated with the art of henna.

In **Henna House**, henna is not simply a temporary tattoo. It is a way of life where milestones in life are lovingly detailed on a woman's skin. The art of Henna has meaning - each swirl and curl and design determined by the woman's experience. The application of henna is a beautiful process, a party with many

women sharing their stories and dreams. Adela longs to learn the art of henna, but her mother does not approve.

Circumstances cause Adela and her extended family to leave their small village and they head for the port city of Aden. Life in Aden is very different. The British army is present and there are modern conveniences. Adela makes it a point to go to the port every day to look for her betrothed Asaf. In the meantime, another young boy from her past is interested in her.

Adela's life is not easy. She takes pleasure in teaching young women how to read and she works at the refugee area. She suffers through a horrible betrayal and conditions in Yemen deteriorate. In between June 1949 and September 1950, Yemenite Jews were flown to Israel in Operation Magic Carpet. Adela's family was one of these families.

Henna House was a fantastic glimpse into the past and a wonderful reading experience. I highly recommend it.

Thank you to NetGalley and Scribner for a review copy of this book.

Review posted on Badass Book Reviews. Check it out!

Ruthie says

This is a beautifully written, meticulously researched book. At first I thought I was reading about a young girl in Biblical times Yemen. The Jews and the Muslims are living side by side with the Muslims ruling and controlling every minute detail of the lives of the Jews. The homes, clothing, living conditions, and cultural mores are biblical. It was quite shocking to realize that the story starts around the 1920's! Then I thought about how many people, especially girls and women are still living in similar conditions in much of the world, and it was not hard to believe that such an almost pre-historic existence could exist concurrently with the first trans-Atlantic flight of Charles Lindburgh, the Baseball career of Babe Ruth etc.

All that aside, this is a beautiful, rich story of a young girl growing up in a small primitive village where girls are betrothed as toddlers, married as soon as they bleed, and live rather bleak lives. Jewish children who are orphaned can legally be "snatched" by "The Confiscator", a Muslim, and then converted to Islam and adopted by Muslim families. Adela is the youngest child, the only girl, with a loving but ailing father, a cold, harsh mother, and older, brutish brothers. At the age of 5 things are looking dismal as parents cannot find her a husband -to -be. An exotic cousin comes into her life and things change dramatically. (No more plot details.....)

The story flows Adela as she grows up, learns about being a woman, finds love, friendship, sisterhood, heartbreak and discovers the world beyond her tiny village. The art of Henna plays a huge role and it is a fascinating one. As someone who has had minor hennas applied I found the descriptions of the role henna played in the Yemenite culture so interesting. Once again there is this commonality between the Jewish and Muslim faiths....(The author has created a website that offers more information about Henna etc).

Nomi Eve has created memorable characters, and shone light into a culture and people who were almost destroyed because of Hitler, WW2 and the creation of the State of Israel. As the Yemini Jews fled to Israel many chose to adopt modern lifestyles and their dress, foods and even hennas were pushed aside. Happily there is now a resurgence of appreciation for these cultural touchstones and Nomi Eve's novel will help to further encourage and celebrate them.

Mmars says

Before talking about what I didn't like about the book I'd like to talk about its importance and encourage people to read it. With Yemen currently in extreme crisis (2015) I encourage readers to pick up this book. There is a lot of information, clearly told, about Yemen from 1930s to post-WWII. All political and cultural upheaval is confusing to outsiders and without some background knowledge, it is even more difficult.

In the 1930s Yemen was divided between a Britain protectorate containing Aden and a Yemeni Muslim kingdom containing Sana'a. Aden was a busy port city and crucial to British forces during WWII. Sana'a was a rural community enmeshed in tradition.

This is the story of Adela, a young Jewish girl growing up in Sana'a. Like many of the Jews there, her father is a craftsman, a shoemaker whose livelihood depends on the more wealthy Muslim ruling class. She is seven and the "Confiscator" is waiting for her ailing father to die so he can claim Adela as his child and raise her as a Muslim. To prevent this she needs to be betrothed, but all of the boys her mother finds suffer tragedies and die, therefore giving Adela a reputation as being a curse.

Her mother arranges a betrothal to her cousin Asaf who arrives with his father from trade journeys and who is unaware Adela's curse. Against common practice, they become friends.

Adela becomes enmeshed in the custom of henna when her cousin Hani and her parents move from Aden to Sana'a to escape the dangers they suffered there.

The rest of the story lays itself out as history unveils itself and the remaining families must leave Sana'a for Aden and finally smuggled to Israel by plane shortly in the aftermath of WWII. The history the Yemeni Jews in the 20th century is largely unknown. I first learned of it in a Yemeni jeweler's shop in Israel.

So despite what follows, I still recommend the book. It reads well and has a compelling storyline. The characters are well delineated and the descriptions of the Yemeni culture and customs are marvelously described. It is a very readable book.

Unfortunately at times the important factual information impeded upon the flow of the book. And too often I questioned the authenticity of Adela's actions. I found the whole cave story largely implausible. Some characters seemed too good to be true and her mother unbelievably cold and unloving. Adela's encounters with Binyamin (a neighbor boy) felt contrived. So there are reasons this book was largely overlooked by reviewers and not purchased by libraries.

But Nomi Eve is a talented writer. It read quickly and I often found myself lost in Adela's world. An editor should have pointed out Fiction 101 pratfalls and insisted upon improvements

Kara says

Nomi Eve isn't playing when she composes fiction. *Henna House* is not a tale delivered by the author with a light hand to her readers. In another sense, this decidedly isn't literary play; I would not describe the form as experimental, exploratory, or organically tailored to the content in a responsive or flexible way.

Instead, the narrative here is as purposeful in tone and effect as any I can presently recall. Eve's narrator's voice has been well-honed, and more strikingly, the discourse in this text is never less than unabashedly powerful. Throughout the detailed work, the reader senses the heart of the matter being directly set forth; nothing is roundabout or oblique -- let alone trivial. In sum, this novel delivers exceptional drama without ever struggling with the bounds of good taste or the threat of melodrama.

The novel is as rich as it is heavy. The plot blends tragedy with the warmth of carefully drawn family relationships and other deep human bonds. There is joy and sorrow. There is history and culture (of Yemeni Jews in the 1920's, 30's and 40's) to fill a nonfictional account of the same, included seamlessly in the story and naturally presented fully to a mostly ignorant reader.

This narrator, the heroine, and her familiar coming of age story (in content yet strange in particular detail) will stick with this reader for a long time. If your reading of this book is anything like mine, you will be substantially enriched and deeply satisfied by this book. It's something really special, in my estimation.

This review is long overdue given the tremendous gift of this novel in and of itself, let alone in light of Nomi Eve's generous supply of my very own copy of the work (which implicitly raises a duty to review honestly when the book is months away from release). I am grateful to the author for this opportunity and the experience her art provided me. I encourage readers with any interest to read this book ASAP. Seriously.

Rhiannon Johnson says

This is in the running to be my favorite historical fiction read of 2014 and will definitely be on my favorite historical fiction reads of all time list. Described as similar to Diamante's *The Red Tent*, I found it to remind me much more of Hoffman's *The Dovekeepers*. Desert villages, a little girl who wants to read and not be married off to an old man, the microcosm of families, and Adela's knowledge of her expanding world were all a rich story unto themselves, but the final third of the book is an even larger story. Readers will follow Adela from a young girl hopeful to not be rounded up as an orphan to a woman far from her birthplace and loved ones. The henna artwork pulls so many of the individual stories together. I learned so much about a time and culture that I knew nothing about before reading this book.

I definitely recommend this book to any readers interested in expanding their knowledge of Yemenite Jews from a female perspective.

Read my full review here:

<http://ivoryowlreviews.blogspot.com/2...>

Laurie Anderson says

Beautifully written and deeply researched novel set in a Jewish community in Yemen from the early 1900s and to nearly the present-day. I was captivated by the details of a time and place that I knew nothing about. The pace was a bit slower than most books I read, but that worked for this tale. Really glad that I read it.

Lilisa says

Powerful and mesmerizing, *Henna House* is an absorbing story that spans the years from the 1920s to the 1970s in Qaraah and Aden in Yemen, to Hadera and Tel Aviv in Israel. Narrated by Adela Damari, a Yemeni

Jew, it's a sweeping family saga that captivates and beguiles, beckons and betrays. It is laden with culture and dreams of a people and the interpretation of traditional superstition of signs and omens. Even as a young girl, Adela dreams, defies, and loves; she's stubborn and she's loyal. And she's promised in marriage to her first cousin Asaf at the young age of eight. Integral to the story are Adela's Uncle Barhun, Aunt Rahel and Cousin Hani. Aunt Rahel is an oft-maligned, gifted henna stylist and mysterious healer with her herbs and potions. Hani, who becomes Adela's intimate friend and confidante, teaches Adela the intricate art of henna design replete with hidden messages, which will come back to haunt her as her pupil "bests" her in years to come. It's a book of culture and tradition, of religion and relationships, of many interesting and relatable characters, some flawed, but well drawn and with surprising depth. Despite a mere 299 well-crafted pages, the book feels longer, in a fulfilling sort of way. A highly recommended read.
