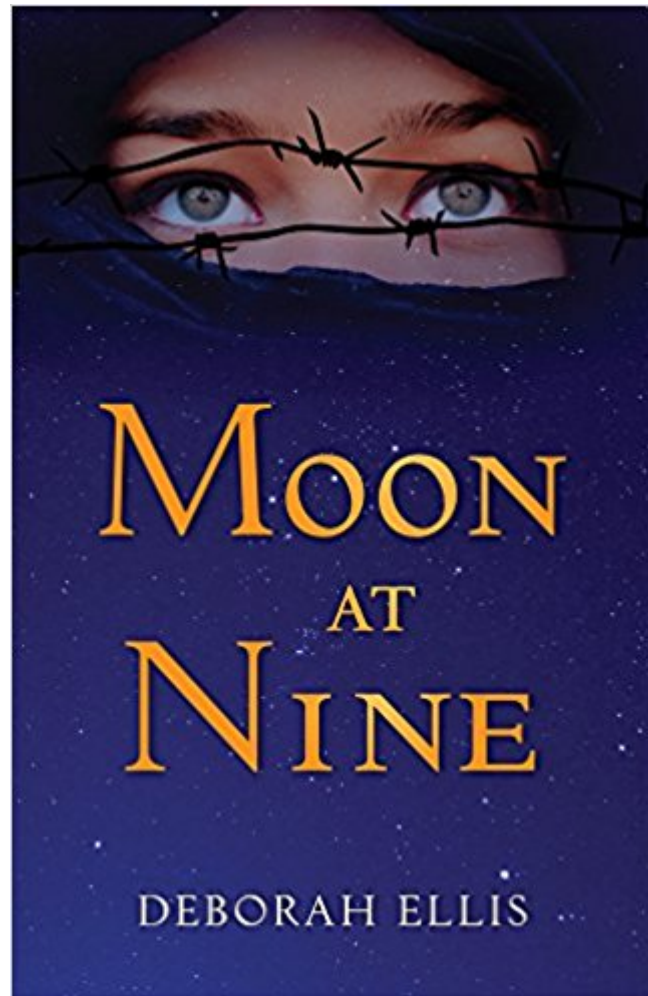


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Moon At Nine



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'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!'

Fifteen is a confusing age no matter where you live, but for Farrin, it's extremely so. She's attending a school for girls in post-revolutionary Iran during their nasty war with Iraq. Her wealthy parents seem to despise each other and hold silly gatherings with their friends where everyone drinks alcohol and talks about the return of the shah in defiance of the new government. She's trying to figure out what she believes in and how she feels about life when she meets and becomes friends with Sadira, a new girl in her class. Sadira lost all but her father in Iraqi bombing raids and has spent several years taking care of her grieving father. They moved to Tehran and now that he's better, she has started school. There's an instant bond between the girls because of their ability to talk freely when nobody else is around. Sadira motivates Farrin to become a better and more focused student. However, when they come in first and second academically, they incur the enmity of Pargol, a dour bully who is fanatical about her post as class monitor. She had become accustomed to finishing as the top student and now seems determined to get both of them in trouble. The girls give her opportunity as their friendship blossoms into a lot more. Farrin soon realizes that she's in love with Sadira. When she becomes brave enough to tell her friend how she feels, she's thrilled to hear that Sadira has similar feelings. Same sex attraction is right up there on the list of evil behaviors the revolutionary government thinks are inspired by decadent westerners. When the girls are caught kissing by Pargol, they're severely reprimanded and they're prohibited from having any contact with each other while in school. Love, however, is a very powerful force, even in an insanely despotic and ruthless environment. When they are caught a second time, both families treat them as pariahs and ramp up efforts to get them married as soon as possible. When Farrin decides that it's worth

risking everything to have an evening with Sadira while her parents are partying downstairs, she has her father's Afghan driver bring her friend to the house. Unfortunately, they fall asleep after planning to run away and the house is raided by revolutionary guards. What happens to them afterward is scary and eye-opening. The end of the book is a real gut-punch. This is an innocent story about young love in an impossible environment and brings home how barbaric other parts of the world still are. It's an excellent book for any school or public library and will appeal to teen readers who like recent historical fiction, different love stories or are curious about how teens are treated elsewhere. It's based on the experiences of a woman who lived during the Iranian revolution.

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