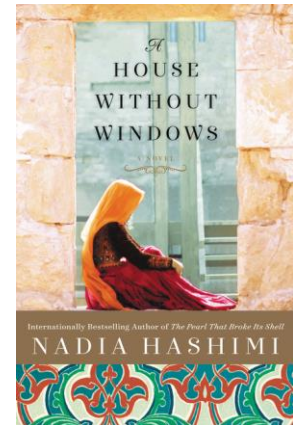


A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS

William Morrow

By Nadia Hashimi

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Introduction

A vivid, spellbinding story of murder, survival, sisterhood, and a mother's love that illuminates the plight of women in a traditional culture from the author of the bestseller *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.

For most of her life Zeba has lived quietly in an Afghan village, a loyal wife and loving mother. But on one horrific day, her family's world is shattered when her husband, Kamal, is found brutally murdered with a hatchet in the courtyard of their home. Covered in Kamal's blood and catatonic with shock, Zeba refuses to explain what happened. Barely escaping a vengeful mob, she is sent to Kabul's Chil Mahtab, a women's prison.

As Zeba awaits trial, she befriends other women whose own misfortunes have led them to these bleak cells: Nafisa, imprisoned to protect her from an honor killing; Latifa, a runaway who stays in the jail because it is a safe haven; and Mezghan, pregnant and unmarried, jailed for zina, or "love crimes." The women whisper among themselves: Is Zeba really a cold-blooded killer? Has she truly inherited her mother's powers of jadu—witchcraft—which can bend fate to her will? Can she save herself? Or them?

Into this closed world comes Yusuf, Zeba's Afghan-born, American-raised lawyer, whose desire to help his homeland has brought him back. With the fate of this seemingly ordinary housewife in his hands, Yusuf discovers that, like Afghanistan itself, his client may not be at all what he imagines.

A moving and often surprising look at the lives of modern Afghan women, *A House Without Windows* is astonishing, unforgettable, and triumphant

Questions for Discussion

1. At the very start of the novel, who do you think killed Kamal? What was the motive for his murder?
2. "Dignity is not in what work you do. It's in how you do that work." Yusuf's father tells his family when he takes a job doing manual labor in Pakistan after the family is forced to flee Afghanistan. What other characters in this book live up to that belief? Are there any who do not bring dignity to their work?

3. When we meet Latifa in prison, we learn that “Latifa had no interest in leaving Chil Mahtab, a place where she was treated better than she’d ever been treated in her life.” What about Chil Mahtab makes it seem preferable to the outside world to some of the prisoners we meet?
 4. When Zeba remembers her life with Kamal, she she says to her mother “I should have turned to you. Maybe things would have worked out differently, then. I thought what you did, all those things you did for so many years, thought it was so dark and evil but I know now what evil really is.” What might Gulnaz have been able to do for Zeba? What help, besides jadu, could her mother have given her?
 5. Why do the villagers go to Hakimi with made-up stories about Zeba and Kamal? Why does Timur tell the story about Kamal burning a page of the Qur’an? Why do they choose to report those stories instead of the truth?
 6. Gulnaz thinks that “Tamina’s house was a safe place for her grandchildren. Tamina would let nothing happen to the children.” Why is Tamina a good protector for her brother’s children?
 7. What do you make of Zeba’s reunion with her father? When Zeba contemplates his abandonment of her family and his starting a new one she reflects that “...it made sense to her, too, because she was not completely unlike this man. She too had turned her back on Gulnaz.” Do you believe that? How are father and daughter alike or different in their actions?
 8. When Zeba returns to Chil Mahtab and inmates begin to tell her the good fortune that they’ve suddenly been blessed with, “Zeba was stunned. She remembered the day these prisoners had laid their problems at her feet. She’d had no answers for them....She wasn’t responsible for any of this—was she?” What do you think?
 9. Zeba ultimately goes free because of Qazi Najeeb’s somewhat creative approach to sentencing her, which relies on his acceptance of both truth and lies. In the end, is justice served?
 10. What do you think happens to the characters in this book in the years after this story ends? What will become of Zeba and her family, and her village?
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