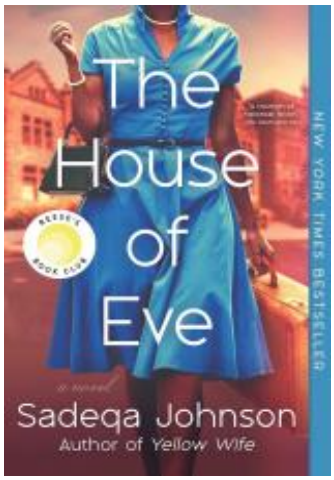
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The House of Eve

by Sadeqa Johnson



About the Book

From the award-winning author of YELLOW WIFE comes a daring, beautiful and redemptive novel that explores what it means to be a woman and a mother, and how much one is willing to sacrifice to achieve her greatest goal.

1950s Philadelphia: Fifteen-year-old Ruby Pearsall is on track to becoming the first in her family to attend college, in spite of having a mother more interested in keeping a man than raising a daughter. But a taboo love affair threatens to pull her back down into the poverty and desperation that has been passed on to her like a birthright.

Eleanor Quarles arrives in Washington, DC, with ambition and secrets. When she meets the handsome William Pride at Howard University, they fall madly in love. But William hails from one of DC?s elite wealthy Black families, and his par-ents don?t let just anyone into their fold. Eleanor hopes that a baby will make her finally feel at home in William?s family and grant her the life she?s been searching for. But having a baby --- and fitting in --- is easier said than done.

With their stories colliding in the most unexpected of ways, Ruby and Eleanor will both make decisions that shape the trajectory of their lives.

Discussion Guide

1. Consider the epigraph from Toni Morrison. How does this set the tone for the opening section? Who do you think are the monsters in this story, if any?

2. The novel takes place before the Civil Rights movement in the mid-1950s and 1960s. Discuss how racism affects both women and their families, such as when Ruby goes stocking shopping with Aunt Marie or how she?s treated at the House of Magdalene. Would these instances be surprising today? Why or why not?

3. One of the biggest shocks for Eleanor is the colorism amongst Black people in Washington, DC. This is highlighted in particular when Eleanor meets William?s family and describes it as being ?a room filled with white-faced Negroes.? How does colorism play out in the novel for both Ruby and Eleanor?

4. Both Ruby and Eleanor have mentors in their stories --- Ruby with Mrs. Thomas and Eleanor with Mrs. Porter. How do these women support their mentees, and how would the story have played out if they weren?t a part of Ruby and Eleanor?s lives?

5. Both Ruby and Eleanor fall in love with men who are off limits and essentially forbidden. Shimmy is Jewish, and William is upper class. How do these conflicts affect their relationships and shape each woman?s decisions throughout the novel?

6. William and Shimmy may seem like opposites, but how are they similar? What prejudices do both of them face?

7. The second epigraph of the book (?Sometimes there are no words to help one?s courage. Sometimes you just have to jump.?) comes from Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, an American poet, psychoanalyst and post-trauma specialist. Why do you think Sadeqa chose this quote, from this author, in the novel? How does trauma affect the characters?

8. The role of a mother is a strong theme in the book. How do the actions of Rose, Eleanor?s mother-in-law, and Mrs. Shapiro, Shimmy?s mother, affect Eleanor and Ruby and what happens to them? Would you consider them cruel and abusive or justified and reasonable in their actions?

9. Both William and Shimmy propose to Eleanor and Ruby upon hearing of their pregnancies, but each woman reacts differently. Ruby says to Shimmy, ?Your mother will crush our love. The world will stomp out our fire.? Could Eleanor have said the same thing to William? Why or why not?

10. Consider the other young women and the nuns at the House of Magdalene. How does religion both inside and outside of the House use Christianity to bring shame to what happened to them? How does this stigma of shame and unwed mothers affect the women, and does it still exist today?

11. Despite the hardships that each character undergoes, there remains a sense of second chances and hope. How do Ruby and Eleanor find hope, even in their darkest moments? What keeps them going?

12. How are women?s reproductive rights portrayed in the novel? How is this struggle and lack of access reflected in today?s society, and could this story have taken place in modern day?

13. In the end, Ruby notes that Mother Margaret was right: ?The only way forward was to forget.? Do you think this could be said not only of Ruby, but of this forgotten history of unwed homes for mothers? What are the harms in forgetting?

14. Discuss the last chapter of the novel, which is the only time in the story the two women meet in person. How did it make you feel? If the book continued, would you want the women to connect over what happened or remain simple acquaintances?

Author Bio

Sadeqa Johnson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of five novels. Her most recent novel, THE HOUSE OF EVE, was an instant *New York Times* bestseller, a Reese?s Book Club selection, an NAACP Image Award nominee, and a Goodreads Choice award finalist. Her previous novel, YELLOW WIFE, was the Library of Virginia?s Literary People?s Choice Award winner, a Goodreads Choice Award finalist, a Hurston/Wright Foundation Legacy finalist, and a BCALA Literary Award honoree. Originally from Philadelphia, Sadeqa currently lives near Richmond, Virginia.

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