



## **House of Orphans**

*Helen Dunmore*

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Set in Finland in the year 1901: Eeva, the young orphaned daughter of a revolutionary, is sent from the orphanage to work as housekeeper for Thomas, a widowed country doctor. Her challenging, independent, enigmatic presence disturbs Thomas as much as it fascinates him. Their relationship will shatter all the certainties of his life. Meanwhile, Eeva is drawn back to Helsinki, to the comrades of her childhood, and in particular to Lauri, the son of her father's friend. It is a world full of danger. For this is Finland in political ferment - the power of the Russian Empire over its subject peoples is growing more oppressive, but resistance to the Tsar's rule is growing too, both in Finland and in Russia. Some call such resistance terrorism; others call it a fight for freedom. Just as Helen Dunmore's "The Siege" is a novel about how huge public events bear down on private lives, so "House of Orphans", while a spellbinding story of love and loneliness is also about the tension between reform and revolution, and a country emerging into Independence.

## House of Orphans Details

Date : Published January 1st 2006 by Viking Books

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Author : Helen Dunmore

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Cultural, Russia, European Literature, British Literature

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## From Reader Review House of Orphans for online ebook

### **Jayne Charles says**

The first part of this book hums along at the steady, reassuring pace of a knitting Grandma with enough interest to keep the plot bubbling. About halfway, things change and though the reader suspects this earlier phase will have some bearing on the ultimate destiny of the plot, I did find my interest starting to wane from then on.

Intelligently written, like all her books, this taught me a great deal about Finnish history but left me with the nagging sensation of not having fully understood what the author was trying to convey. For example there is a theme of multiple lives lived by a single person, which is returned to again and again so it's clearly important but I didn't really 'get' it. One for higher beings than me, I think!

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### **Mary says**

Strangely kept slipping away from me even tho' tight, accomplished writing. Vivid evocation of place [Finland] & period. Found country descriptive material more plausible than city. Eluded me in some way, didn't get under my skin. And she is a favourite writer of mine...

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### **Sooz says**

i really enjoyed both The Siege (during the 900 days that Leningrad was held hostage by the German army during w.w.2) and The Betrayal (set during the terror of Stalin's reign). unfortunately this one didn't hold up as well. i didn't check the date of publication, but House of Orphans definitely feels like an earlier work. the story was entertaining enough but it just didn't have the edge that the other two did.

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### **Janet says**

The book tells the story of Eeva (pronounced Ava) an orphan, who leaves the orphanage to go to work for the local doctor, Thomas. Thomas falls in love with Eeva, but she is in love with her childhood sweetheart Lauri. She leaves to go to Helsinki to be with Lauri and make a life for herself there, but when Lauri is arrested by the Okhrana, the Tsarist secret police, and questioned about being a spy, Eeva has to call for the doctor to come to their aid.

The book started off really well. The first chapters about the Orphans and about the doctor were interesting and really drew me in, and the premise was great. However the book changed when Eeva went to Helsinki, and became very political and rather dull. It went on for too long. Towards the end, Eeva sends for Thomas, and he declares his love for her, but she rejects him and he returns to his village - this bit of the book felt very rushed.

The ending was poor. The author recaps what has happened to the male characters, but we are left guessing

whether Eeva and Lauri find happiness. It was almost as though she ran out of steam!

It was beautifully written in places, but it just didn't engage me. It took me several weeks to read it, because it was a chore rather than a pleasure and if it wasn't for it being a Bookworms book, I doubt I'd have finished it!

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### **SarahC says**

This book by a highly recognized author was a disappointment. The concept and the setting of the story were fascinating but the story faltered between what could have been a strong historical narrative and a touching personal story. The title also missed the mark. It may have been intended to be ideological but I don't think we are given enough to make that connection.

The book is fairly brief -- just over 300 pages. So much of that writing is oddly descriptive of the vivid details of illness, sex, and childbirth. Was this to establish the proper setting? In good solid fiction, I don't find that level of detail necessary to be captured by a story. After a bit of that much description, I just want to say, "Uh, thanks, I'm familiar. Even in the modern world, we have some of that." Most of this writing didn't strongly relate to the main line of the story anyway?

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### **LindyLouMac says**

<http://www.bookcrossing.com/journal/5...>

Although this book is titled 'House of Orphans', we actually meet very few orphans, in fact only Eeva, female protagonist of the story, and Anna Lusa, who runs the orphanage. The orphanage is just used to set the scene for the story of Eeva because it is to the orphanage that she is sent when her father, a revolutionary and her only family dies.

When she is older the orphanage places her in service with a widowed doctor who finds himself falling in love with her. So he is somewhat relieved when she decides to return to live in her home town of Helsinki, to be near her childhood sweetheart Lauri. Now a grown man himself he has also become involved in the fight for freedom against the Russians.

An opportunity for me to learn about somewhere I knew nothing about historically it is an absorbing account of life in Finland in the early 1900s. I preferred the earlier part of the book which is centred on Eeva's childhood growing up in the Finnish countryside and must admit to finding myself less interested in the account of the political turmoil once the story transferred to Helsinki.

A compassionate story of love and loneliness set against an interesting background.

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### **Amelia says**

3.5 Stars

I'm still trying to find a book to match up to the outstanding *The Siege*. Although decent and on a similar vein, *House of Orphans* is not that book. It touches upon the damage parents do to children; coming of age in a time of social unrest; the blurred lines between freedom fighting and terrorism and whether terrorism can ever be justified; the many paths to becoming a terrorist; how our station in life affects our opinions... all of which could be very poignant to read in the modern day, given the seemingly ever-present terrorist threat, except that a bit like in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, none of these topics are ever explored in sufficient detail. We skip huge chunks of time, so all the important plot events that so shape our understanding happen entirely off screen, which is rather frustrating. I like an open ended book - that makes you think - but not quite so open ended that you have no idea what happened or who characters really are.

If anyone has any clarifications on Sasha, hit me up!

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### **????? ???? says**

This book was not what I expected it to be, it wasn't just a story about a Finnish orphan girl who ends up working at a doctor's house. No this story has more depth to it. It involves politics, history, tragedy and romance and so much more. Although I didn't get some of the character's behavior especially when Sasha was talking to Eeva at his room drunk I don't understand why was he so desperate, what making him lose his mind? Wish the writer gave some insight about his life, also I wanted to know what happened when Laurie met with Eeva at the end!!! I'm trying not let the ending of this novel ruin it for me because I enjoyed reading it.

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### **Rachel Brand says**

I will admit it; I have a rather unhealthy obsession with Finland. So when I spotted this book I was immediately interested.

I don't remember a lot about this book, despite having read it little over a year ago. I remember that it was a fairly decent book, and quite interesting if you like light historical reads. But some parts of this book were light (where the main character is working for the doctor in his big house) whereas others are quite heavy (all of the political stuff in Helsinki). The ending seemed extremely rushed and it didn't really conclude anything. All of a sudden, the doctor went to visit the main character in Helsinki, and it seemed to me that the author thought "Oh! I forgot all about his character! Let's shove him in somewhere and make it look like it was part of the plot." One character was banished back to the Finnish countryside, another ended up wandering around in some woods for no explained reason (was he drunk? Insane?) and another was in jail, or just about to be released.

I don't know whether I would recommend this book or not. I remember enjoying it at the time, but it's not the kind of book which you can close and think "Well, that was time well spent" or "I feel satisfied because of that ending." I closed it and then reopened it to check that I hadn't skipped any pages; I was sure that Dunmore wouldn't end a book on a scene with a minor character rambling through the woods, possibly insane!

On second thoughts, I'm ducking the rating to three stars rather than four.

On another note, Helen Dunmore wrote a kids book called 'Adamina's Blanket' which was a favourite of mine as a child!

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### **Grace Harwood says**

This must be the last Helen Dunmore novel for adults which I hadn't read and to be honest it was a bit of a disappointment. That's not to say that it's not an enjoyable read - it is, but it's not as good as *The Siege* or *A Spell of Winter* (which is my all time favourite of her's). The story follows Evie, an orphan in The House of Orphans, after her political agitator father dies. It is set in Finland during the early part of the twentieth century and covers the time when Russia was annexing Finland to the Soviet Union, and attempting to get rid of everything Finnish. It's an interesting tale about what it must be like to lose your national identity because some other country has told you to (although for this, Theresa Hak Cha's *Dictee* is a great book to read and perhaps more raw in the telling because she uses poetry to do so). In the end, the problem I had with this was it was a bit samey - i.e. it was exactly the same as every other Dunmore book out there and didn't really do anything new. I'd just read it all before (in one scene, I really thought I'd actually read the scene before and I wonder if Dunmore had used the same thing in another of her books).

In short, not one of my favourites - but Helen Dunmore is always worth reading so it's still worth a look.

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### **Karen says**

It's OK for a book I borrowed, but I'm glad I didn't buy it. I found it easy to read, if a little over descriptive at times. I preferred the city setting in the second half and found the politics and history of Finland more interesting than an aging doctors obsession with pubescent young women. I agree with other reviewers that the title of the book is misleading or an odd choice for the story.

I would have enjoyed more storyline about what happened to Lauri, and how Sasha was involved. I was interested in the link between Eeva's childhood witnessing secret political meetings and how that helped her piece together the events surrounding Lauri.

What I did like about this novel was Eeva's strength of character and how she stands up to people in an assertive manner, that is people who are older than her, or who appear more confident. She can stand up for herself and I think this is why I liked her more independent lifestyle in the city.

It's also a novel about possession of one person by another. I found it interesting how Magda 'gives back' Lauri to Eeva, the exploration of Sasha's possessive relationship with Lauri, the doctor and Eeva...

Having read reviews I might try *The Seige* by the same author, but after reading this I won't be rushing out to read more by Helen Dunmore. I found it mediocre.

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### **Swiss Reader says**

Okay book but not an overwhelming read. Interesting topic but falls short of others she has written. Wanted

more from all the characters and better interweaving of the political history into the story instead of just on the edge.

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### **Adele Cosgrove-Bray says**

As always, I enjoyed Helen Dunmore's wonderfully poetic turns of phrase. That she's a poet as well as a novelist is apparent throughout her work.

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### **Lane Ashfeldt says**

A lot of the reviews of *House of Orphans* complain about the sudden switch in style as the book moves from the countryside to the city. I guess maybe what Helen Dunmore was attempting here was to show how the move from rural to urban living also signalled a change in storytelling style: from whatever went before (lyrical realism?) to modernism, and I imagine she was trying to reflect that in the way she wrote this. Hence the long detailed chunks of narration that deal with Eevi and the Doctor in the countryside, and the more jumpy, at times discordant, style of narration once we are in the city.

I slightly agree that not enough happens here, towards the end, that the novel somehow feels unfinished. But this could be intentional. To me this book is as much about what forced people in countries across Europe to make new beginnings out of their various feudal pasts, as it is about a particular time and place (Finland in the very early 1900s). And yet I like this book, and feel it is better to try something original and only partly succeed than to always stick with the programme and make a watertight literary product.

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### **Juanita says**

Review: **House of Orphans** by Helen Dunmore. 3.5 Stars 05/15/2018

I felt it was beautifully written and Dunmore's intents to show two sides to the story.

I will admit I wasn't sure what I was reading at first but it gradually came together for me. Eeva's life was sad and I don't believe she ever found happiness.

I preferred the childhood of Eeva and the time she spent in the country with Doctor Thomas. Eeva had no family left in the city of Helsinki and the authorities grab her as soon as her revolutionist father died and placed her in an orphanage at a young age

Not much later she was chosen to live and work for the doctor who lived in the country. That seemed to be a safer place for her than the abuse she received at the orphanage until the doctor started having feelings for her. He was an elderly man and she was still a child. While she lived there he never did anything to harm the Eeva but his love was being noticed by a friend of his. The doctor did all he could to get Eeva to stay and work for him but she wanted to go back to her childhood sweetheart who is now a grown man and he was involved in the fight for freedom against the Russians.

When Eeva left the country to go back to the city life to be with Lauri where she felt she would find happiness. That changed the story in a different direction becoming very political and disturbing. Towards the end of the book Eeva sends for Tomas the doctor and at this time he declares his love for her but she

rejected him and he returned to his village. Helen Dunmore goes on describing what happened to the other male characters but I felt it was rushed and not really explained fully how it ended for the characters.

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