



# Sonora

*Hannah Lillith Assadi*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Sonora

*Hannah Lillith Assadi*

## **Sonora** Hannah Lillith Assadi

Ahlam, the daughter of a Palestinian refugee and his Israeli wife, grows up in the arid lands of desert suburbia outside of Phoenix. In a stark landscape where coyotes prowl and mysterious lights occasionally pass through the nighttime sky, Ahlam's imagination reigns. She battles chronic fever dreams and isolation. When she meets her tempestuous counterpart Laura, the two fall into infatuated partnership, experimenting with drugs and sex, and watching helplessly as a series of mysterious deaths claim high school classmates.

The girls flee their pasts for New York City, but as their emotional bond heightens, the intensity of their lives becomes unbearable. In search of love, ecstasy, oblivion, and belonging, Ahlam and Laura's drive to outrun the ghosts of home threatens to undo them altogether.

## **Sonora Details**

Date : Published March 28th 2017 by Soho Press

ISBN : 9781616957926

Author : Hannah Lillith Assadi

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Fiction, Lgbt, Contemporary, Magical Realism, Adult Fiction

 [Download Sonora ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Sonora ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Sonora Hannah Lillith Assadi**

---

## From Reader Review *Sonora* for online ebook

### Samantha says

*Sonora* is a bewitching debut novel, spilling over with beautiful writing and great sentiment. This novel is spellbinding, atmospheric, and mystical. From the start, Hannah Lillith Assadi pulled me into the world of *Sonora* and never let me go.

Ahlam narrates the story of her youth in this fabulous bildungsroman. Ahlam's father is a Palestinian refugee, and her mother is Israeli. They live in the desert in Arizona. Ever since she was a child, Ahlam has experienced visions, that are more than hallucinations, and which seem to be prophetic. As a child, Ahlam watched Laura from afar. At the start of high school, they become fast friends. They're soon embroiled in an obsessive relationship while they spiral into an increasingly self-destructive lifestyle. Their boundless dreams eventually lead them to New York City, where their behavior grows riskier and riskier.

Assadi's writing is stunning. The novel has a great sense of place; New York and Arizona are conjured up so vividly. *Sonora* captures the feeling of being young, and the scary, reckless, breathtaking rites of passage. Ahlam's narration perfectly expresses so much, from her obsessive, dependent relationship with Laura to her hard home life to her first love and infatuation with a boy. Besides being bitingly realistic at times, *Sonora* thrums with the mystical. There are possible UFOs, witches, and other supernatural elements. The story is rich with imagery and symbolism.

*Sonora* is mesmerizing and I loved everything about it. The narrative moves back and forth in time fluidly. This book hurt my heart but in a good way. I love books that inspire cathartic tears. I liked that both Ahlam and Laura were artists consumed by their art; both are musicians; Ahlam is also a dancer. *Sonora* eloquently explores a lot of topics, like being the child of immigrants, addiction, identity, and mental health. And despite its serious nature, it's always a pleasure to read, due to the lyrical language and overall grace with which it's told. This novel really resonated with me, and I believe it will resonate with a lot of people.

---

### Rachel says

It's not entirely accurate to call this a "Jewish novel," but it's my review and my prerogative! :P Surely there is a lot more Jewish content here than in something like "All Grown Up" anyway. Ashlam isn't exactly heavily identified, but she knows enough to incorporate Kol Nidre and the Shema and etc. Her father is a Palestinian refugee but her mother's people were Holocaust survivors. There's a sense of loss and displacement that permeates this entire book, and surely digs into a lot of my own associations with cultural Judaism. In her inscription to me (I got this signed last year at the Gaithersburg Book Festival!) Assadi wrote, "I hope [the book] brings you love despite wherever you are from." So here I am, relating to this novel as a Jewish woman with my own interfaith familial past.

This is maybe a little too nitpicky, but I'm a little iffy on Ashlam's mother being Israeli. Assadi mentioned doing this because it would amp up the tension (her own parents are a Palestinian refugee and an American Jew, and like Ashlam, Assadi grew up in the Arizona desert.) Yes, there was a lot of drama around Ashlam's father getting aggressive (towards furniture) and blaming her mother for his plight. But Ashlam's mother was a bit of a nonentity. She reminded me a bit of an abused woman, and she was, emotionally speaking. She stood in quiet corners a lot of the time, with little response to her husband's words or even when he smashes

her china and sole inheritance from her family. (One of the few specific details that we learn about her, though to be fair, the father doesn't get a lot of specifics, either.) In a way, I appreciate that the mother is the opposite of the brash, in your face Israeli stereotype, but it still felt like Assadi was cashing in on something she wasn't fully delivering.

Still, this is a very small part of the novel. Most of our emotional capital is spent on Ashlam, who can only relate indirectly to her parents' drama, and her friend, Laura. Laura is also the daughter of two worlds--a Native American mother who died awhile back, and a white father. The girls bond at school over being ostracized, and later said bonds intensify as a series of strange suicides rocks the area.

They end up moving to New York, chasing dreams, succumbing to drugs, etc. I'm giving away a lot of plot, I suppose, but the true beauty in this novel lies with the writing. At the Gaithersburg Book Fest, the moderator talked with Assadi a lot about her past as a poet. The writing is lyrical and dreamy, and brings you into the emotional state of the arid, empty dessert or the run down, teeming streets of Brooklyn. Laura and Ashlam's relationship is much different than anything I've experienced with a girlfriend--it almost fits into the drugged up world of "All Grown Up," but it's much more tragic. But it's beautiful, and unique, I think, too. I can see why it's caught some attention in the literary awards circuit. Kudos!

---

### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

I've meant to read this for so long and finally did thanks to the publisher, Soho Press, via Netgalley. Assadi was recently honored by the National Book Foundation as one of their "5 Under 35" authors of acclaim.

The settings (Sonora Desert and later New York City) are vivid and the two female friends growing into women are connected to the landscapes in a number of ways. Either one of them or the place might be cursed, because other teens start dying in their community. Ahlam, the daughter of an Israeli mother and Palestinian father, has dreams/visions that feel like clues.

There are elements that to me give away that this is a debut novel from a writer with an MFA program influence - extraordinary drug use for one - but it is stronger and more captivating than most novels in that vein. I liked the multiple timelines and storylines and the focus on the parents at times. The biggest strength is the sensory writing.

---

### **Jesse Glendon Tillers says**

This hypnotic novel is told to you like a secret, feverish and strange and achingly beautiful. The stunning mystery of what it means to be a living thing in this land is explored in dreamscapes, drugscapes, landscapes and cityscapes. There is a haunted bravery to its dark gaze, that is matched only by the wondrous music of its love. It feels like an author truly wondering, truly grieving, truly celebrating this life, in front of us, for us, with us.

---

### **Kathleen Gray says**

I found this coming of age novel irritating in ways I can't quite describe. There's a lot of language and

description but it didn't add up for me. Frankly I think there was a better story to be told than the "fever dream" this turned into. Thanks to Edelweiss for the ARC. I'm sure others will like this but it wasn't for me.

---

## Sentimental Surrealist says

Around this time every year, the book reviewers all nail on their goddamn horseshoes and dash off, in a mad race to submit their Best Books of the Year lists before December 31st rolls over to January 1st. Apparently in this model book reviewers are centaurs. Fuck it, we're live. It goes without saying that sometimes books get lost in this shuffle, and I'm here to tell you that *Sonora* is one of them. It is, any way I look at it, quite the creation, and it's a book that's been rattling around in my head since I read it. It's also a book I plan to steal from if I ever plan to write about haunted people trying to escape themselves, which I mean is just one of those themes it's tough to miss with.

Quick bit on the plot, if you're one of those weirdos who likes it when words on paper are used to tell a broader story. What's your deal? Ahlam, known through the book as Ariel, is the daughter of a Palestinian and an Israeli who lives on the Arizona side of the Sonora Desert. While she has a friend in Laura, she also has a certain isolation that she can't chase off. As her classmates mysteriously disappear, she plunges into a certain hedonism, which intensifies when her, Laura, and Dylan, one of the most selfish scumbags I've ever come across in a novel (seriously, get ready to hate Dylan) run off to New York City to live as bohemians. As in Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Fiction*, the three find that they can't shake that loneliness, even in their more glamorous surroundings. The novel is told from the future, looking back, while Ariel reckons with her father's disappearance from his nursing home. Her father, as we learn as the novel goes on, is really into the notion of finding some sort of spiritual fulfillment out in the desert. In a certain respect, this passes down to Ariel.

Now, I can't think of a better fusion of plot, character, and prose. Like a lot of great novels, the plot's arc is also the character's arc, but it goes one step further than that. The prose does so much to create Ariel and Laura's characters. It's at once sparse and heavy, in a sense that I can only describe as haunted, and the novel is thusly laden with strange, ominous imagery. Right in the first few pages, Ariel sees Laura crucifying herself, and yeah ok it's a little heavy-handed but it's a powerful image, you know? Reminds me of those terrific moments in Denis Johnson where the spirituality comes hard and strange, where characters cope with their strange and ecstatic visions. It's downright fearless prose, the sort of prose that's tough to forget about, and I'm excited to see what Assadi does next with it.

Because I mean, you're never really out of the spiral, and this is a novel that recognizes that. The past is never truly done; it's always close at hand, and we all have the choice between running from it and facing it, and sometimes in facing it, we find we'd rather run. It strikes me that this is Ariel's whole arc. She spends a better part of this novel running, and then she realizes she can't run anymore, and then, oh, then does the pain *come*. It's a novel that uses narrative distance skillfully. From her subjective present, Ariel stops a minute to catch her breath and stare down this thing that's chasing her, and she realizes it's huge and terrifying and isn't going away. The question at both Ariel and the novel's core: "*now* what?"

I guess if I'm going to complain, I'd say that the New York bits don't come off as strongly to me as the Arizona bits. I mean, there are some really moving passages in this section, especially as Ariel and Laura really decay and as Ariel finally decides the time to pull out of the spiral has come. Yet Assadi throws a *lot* against the wall here. Laura and Ariel's respective artistic talents, Laura's declining relationship with Dylan, Dylan's general awful scumminess, Ariel's decline into isolation, Dylan's starry-eyed insistence that they

will make it out here, parties with the bohemian set... it all feels important, but there's just too much of it to cycle through in a book of this length. A longer book could've done it, but 200 pages is a little scant for so much activity. Maybe... 250, 300? There's no exact science to this, of course. It's just that it does get a little bogged down.

Still, this is a very promising debut. In fact, it's one of the more promising debuts I've read this year. I have a feeling her next book is going to be quite good, quite good indeed. Assadi has given herself quite the foundation, and if she does a little of the honing many authors do between books one and two, two and three, three and four? Keep an eye on her. I know I will.

---

### **Anna says**

When two soul sisters find each other in the desert, they build a love under the cactus stars, feeling every prick of life and light. This is one of those friendships that burns so brightly, taking people out with its fire and flame until it completely burns out. There's love and hate and jealousy, sex and drugs and running away from it all, a never-ending party, unanswered questions, and a sense of watching oneself fall from the very idea you had of yourself. With breathtaking prose, Assadi folds us into these women's lives so much that we can taste their tumbling disaster and fall right along with them.

---

### **Anna says**

I'm unsure of my feelings about this book. It has this mysterious, blustery, gauzy atmosphere, which is gorgeous! But I finished it wishing something - some insight? - had crystallized. Like I never really saw through the billowing curtain. I wanted a strong, clear moment. Maybe there was one and I just didn't get it.

---

### **Colton says**

I'm a bit conflicted on this book. On the one hand, it's written quite well for a debut and has an interesting premise and setting. However, I don't feel the full potential was realized. The beginning starts off in the interesting setting of the Arizona desert with a Middle Eastern family, and there was so much room to explore the culture clash, but it was mostly surface-level reminiscing on how the main character Ahlam grew up with her friend Laura.

Almost half of the book takes place in New York, where the two girls go to become full-on drug addicts and party girls, and I found this much less interesting. I guess at this point in my life, I don't want to read about people who continually make the worst decisions possible and make no effort to repair their lives. I kept wondering why the main character was staying with this friend who was so clearly toxic, even if they did grow up together. Though her parents are difficult, they are clearly wanting the best for Ahlam, and she mostly gives them a middle finger to go snort coke and sleep with strangers in NYC with her friend.

For most of the novel, Laura is an awful and repulsive person, and Ahlam is a passive doormat who just seems to drift around in other characters' orbits. It was frustrating to read. I wanted this to be more memorable than it was. I guess I'm just not that into drug stories. Love that cover, though.

---

### **Jerrie (redwritinghood) says**

I have been waffling a bit on how to rate this one since I finished it earlier today. This is a beautifully written coming-of-age story about a girl's struggle with her best friend's drug abuse/addiction and general wildness. Unfortunately, the book seemed unfocused and there were some incongruous parts that drew away from the main narrative.

---

### **Tate says**

I found this book compelling enough to read it all the way through to the end, so I can't dismiss it off-hand. Obviously, there was something there that drew me in and held me. But, for me, the problem was that, ultimately, this book was about Ahlam making terrible life choices, the end. I didn't feel like anything was learned from any of it, either. Pretty words don't make up for the lack of a point, IMHO. I mean, maybe the theme was: don't fall for people who are screwed up? I don't know. I agree with the other reviewer that suggested what they wanted was more magical realism or more about growing up with a Palestinian dad and an Israeli mother, or, even better, more of both. Instead, we got hints of those things and a lot of drug use. This book summed up everything I dislike about "literary" books. It was poetic without much purpose and seemed to be about the fact that life sucks and then someone dies. Whatever. Not for me.

Yet... I read the whole thing, so I can't give it less than three stars.

---

### **Bree Hill says**

The writing in this was very poetic. I couldn't keep my highlighter down for very long. Girlhood and coming of age is crazy as is but throw in a very eerie landscape that you live amongst and a stunning best friend who also scares the crap out of you yet your loyalty lies with her and it increases the amount of crazy that girlhood already is. I couldn't put this book down once I got into it. I loved Ahlam. I really loved her relationship with her Dad and for a change having a main character whose parents are still together. I loved the eerie desert setting in the beginning and the gritty NYC setting in the end. I read the summary initially when I purchased the book but it was more than I expected. Definitely a new favorite

---

### **Rob Holden says**

Surreal, heady and intoxicating in the most sublime of ways, Hannah Asadi's SONORA is a coming-of-age tale of an entirely different form. A road novel without the road; a journey of discovery that exposes the powerful and paradoxical nature of home – that its inescapability can be both haunting and beautiful. A story of an enigmatic female friendship shot through with complexity, seduction, toxicity, and ultimately death. From the hypnagogic, ethereal aura of the Arizona desert to the overstimulation and anonymity of New York City, Asadi lays bare our misgivings about how well we think we know ourselves with mystical, lyrical prose. Strange in the most wonderful way, this novel will speak to you – on more levels than one.

---

## **jenni says**

there is something so damning, ghostly, and sublime about the sonoran desert, and assadi attempts to envelope this surreality of a landscape in tandem with the dreamlike self-destruction of adolescence in a short novel that truthfully speaks more to the strange divinity of this geography than it does to her identity as half-palestinian, half israeli, all arizonan composition. the love of oblivion between our main character ahlam and the unrestrained laura repeats itself in a violent unfolding of yearning, fever, and toxicity that brings the girls from the phoenix suburbs to new york city to back home again, calling into question the kind of stealthy agent that home can be when we try to run away from it. I was reading this during my own visit to phoenix, looking up from the book to the same spiky mountain ranges she made reference to, feeling the lavender and apricot colored sundowns in the same suffocating way. books are magnificent when they can so perfectly approximate the feeling of being somewhere through the achievements of narration, and the effect on readers is notable.

---

## **Laura says**

I just finished my ARC copy and will be swimming in the imagery and story for a good while. Assadi's debut was delivered like a pro. It wasn't just beautiful writing, it had a story and it felt like I was living alongside the narrator.

Memories of being a child in the desert and spending time with her deeply superstitious father. Memories of being in high school with her best friend, another outsider. Recent memories of NYC and the rabbit hole of life there, still with her best friend and what that love meant. Present day with her father in the hospital and dealing with the expectations of family.

Mysterious and moving. Possible book club choice.

---