



Apricots on the Nile: A Memoir with Recipes

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Cairo, 1937: French-born Colette Rossant is waiting out World War II among her father's Egyptian-Jewish relatives. From the moment she arrives at her grandparents' belle époque mansion by the Nile, the five-year-old Colette finds companionship and comfort among the other "outsiders" in her home away from home -- the cooks and servants in the kitchen. The chef, Ahmet, lets Colette taste the *ful*; she learns how to make *sambusaks* for her new friends; and she shops for *semits* and other treats in the Khan-al-Khalili market. Colette is beginning to understand how her family's culture is linked to the kitchen...and soon she will claim Egypt's food, landscape, and people as her own.

Apricots on the Nile is a loving testament to Colette's adopted homeland. With dozens of original recipes and family photographs, Colette's coming-of-age memoir is a splendid exploration of old Cairo in all its flavor, variety, and wide-eyed wonder.

Apricots on the Nile: A Memoir with Recipes Details

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From Reader Review Apricots on the Nile: A Memoir with Recipes for online ebook

Ellie Mackin says

Read this book with my partner as we both love food and it was absolutely fascinating. The author writes about her childhood in gypt and the food which reminds her of it in an enchating way that transports you straight into the Cairo suburbs of the 1940s. The recipes are accurate an plenty and there is a good deal of emotional content discussing the author's family relationships and her return to Egypt with her children which make this book, although less than 200 pages, absolutely jam-packed with interest.

Shovelmonkey1 says

This book made me nostalgic. But mostly it made me hungry.

Apricots on the Nile combines the childhood rememberings of Colette Rossant with a series of her best and most beloved recipes. About half way through reading this I got up and made hummus, ful medames and falafel because reading about it and not being able to eat it was making me crazy. I will admit now though that I didn't take this book into the kitchen with me and follow any of Colette's recipes. I prefer to use my own tried and tested methods of throwing together these tasty dishes.

I love Middle Eastern food and regard mine as being pretty good - there was the much celebrated hummus-off of 2008 at my friends house, of which I was declared the winner. I at least am happy to eat it all once its ready anyway! A good few years ago, when I was supposed to be in University studying, I bunked off in a fairly epic fashion to hitch hike around the Middle East. Thanks to this bit of wayward wandering I've eaten ful medames on the corniche in Alexandria and had falafel from as far west as Beirut and as far east as the Iraqi border. I've eaten pickled Turnip in Tripoli, avoided sheeps head in the Golan heights and munched on lokum while watching a missile attack from a mountain top in Israel.

The recipes provided by Rossant are probably better than my own but the familiarity of my own methodology provides me with a sort of muscle-memory comfort in my now static adult life (like someone who has adjusted from culinary nomadic pastoralism to a sedentary existence), one which is still capable of evoking the town or even kitchen in which I learned to cook my version of the food in question. It is clear that Rossant draws the same kind of comfort from her own cooking.

The recipes available here are tenderly wrapped in vignette memories of a scattershot childhood which jumped from Cairo to Paris, from Alexandria to Switzerland and then finally to America. The places she describes are of another time, but the flavours are for now so stop reading and start eating!

Diana says

A lovely book with some really good recipes. Cairo in the 1940s for a young girl torn between her Egyptian and French heritage.

Melissa Britto says

A nostalgic memoir of Rossant's childhood in Egypt and France, sprinkled with recipes that compliment the experiences of which she reminisces. The characters are described with warmth or the opposite (namely Rossant's mother) and her connection to place and people reflected through her descriptions of her food experiences.

While I enjoyed the book I felt that opportunities for reflection were often lost or forced, leaving any connection with Rossant's character limited. I also found the non-chronological nature a bit confusing in that it was inconsistent, almost like some inclusions were afterthoughts and deemed necessary despite not fitting contextually.

All in all it's an easy read and a charming memoir of a life that was both interesting and rich, not to mention a fine little collection of recipes.

Rose says

the way the author describes each of her experience is amazing and captivating.

Cathy (cathepsut) says

A cute little book with nice recipes of the typical Egyptian food you still get today and some others with a French twist. The book is more a collection of little anecdotes than a fully flung story. Fairly shallow and superficial, but still worth reading for the feel-good factor. If you like food, this is a good choice. You can see and smell those kitchens in vivid detail.

JanGlen says

This is an evocative account of Rossant's childhood years in Egypt. We get a real sense of the place, of her extended family and their household, and above all, of the food. The narrative is interspersed with recipes, but these do not take over or intrude on the story - they do make you hungry though!

Virginia says

I could not get into the authors writing. Almost instant dislike.

Karen Polak says

Atmospheric nostalgic magical pure innocence wonderfully evocative - I love this book that I picked purely by chance because I was intrigued by the title. I have always had a fascination with Egypt and Cairo, there is

a mystique that will never be fathomed because of cultural differences. I read this memoir many years ago and it has stayed with me in my soul. Colette transports the reader back to her childhood and the aromas and warmth and life around her, when staying with her grandmother.

I suppose it awakes my own memories of special times with my own beloved grandmother. It also makes me feel there is something inately good in people that is unwritten. This book is unique and I love it for that.

Sovotchka says

It's rather difficult to review a memoir.

If this was a "normal" novel, I would complain about the main character and some decisions or reactions I couldn't understand, but since it's not I'll switch to other things that I've noticed.

First off, I would have loved for this book to be structured following a timeline. As it isn't, and some experienced are revisited at later points in the book, I had a really hard time trying to figure out how old the author was during any given experience. Time spans were covered without mentioning it, so while I thought that the girl spend maybe a year at a convent, it turned out it had been actually four years, and I didn't notice that in the story telling at all.

I also missed descriptions of emotions. Despite the author saying what dishes she loved, or that she missed her grandmother, or whatnot, I was never able to build a real connection to her. Just to give an example, the young girl (by my count about 11 or 12 years old but that could be wrong) was given a dog as a present. Six days later she has to leave it to go to the convent, and she is only home on weekends, and - I would assume because it's never mentioned - not often in the same place as a dog. Some unspecified time later, her mother gives the dog away and she spends hours sulking and being angry. Since the dog never appeared after being mentioned as a present, I could not relate to this at all, in fact I wondered whether she'd ever seen the dog after she'd left for the convent.

Interestingly, the author also didn't describe food other than recounting what it was. I would have thought that the smells and tastes would leap right off the page, instead I had to go through my own memory to come up with an idea of what she was describing. If one has never eaten French and Middle Eastern food, that could be rather demotivating.

The recipes are generally interesting, although I - using standard sunflower oil and nothing special - would reduce almost every quantity of oil by 50%. (I'd go for the given quantities if I'd have better oil.)

To conclude this, I liked the idea of the book and will sure use the recipes, but I don't think I'll be reading it again just for the literary experience.

Elaine says

Gorgeous book. A beautiful memoir of a extraordinary upbringing, with recipes to make your mouth water!

Michael Armijo says

A very cute memoir of a book...

I found this book at a landmark bookstore on Picadilly Street in London, England. It was titled APRICOTS ON THE NILE, A Memoir With Recipes. I just realized via a search on Amazon that the title is different here in the USA. I like the English title better. This book is a 'must get' for anyone who cooks. There will be some recipes that sound "ugh", but many are mouth watering. Personally, I liked the Tomato Salad(s), Roast Chicken on a Bed of Leeks, Meatballs with Apricot Sauce, Angel Hair Pasta with Nuts, Vegetable Salad, Traditional Hummus, Christmas Four-Meat Pate, Lentil Soup, and Roast Leg of Lamb. The book is more than just recipes, though. You will be taken on a cultural trip through Cairo, Egypt and Paris, France through the eyes of a little girl & a woman who has not lost sight of her ancestral heritage. It's a quick and enjoyable read where you'll be thrust into memories of a wonderful childhood...try it, you'll like it. Smiles :)

Leslie says

Rossant's memoir is certainly mouthwatering, and it brings 1940's Cairo alive. However, it's a little on the light side - there are several family conflicts happening and it might have been better to explore them more fully. Still, Rossant's work is enjoyable and intriguing - looking forward to reading her first and third books.

Shirley says

Collette Rossant recounts in memoir and in recipes a snapshot of her early life. In 1937, aged five, she arrived in Cairo from Paris with her Egyptian/Jewish father and French mother. On the death of her father, her mother returned to France and Collette remained with her wealthy grandparents.

At age fifteen she was summoned to Paris to join her mother, never to see her grandparents again. Before going to Cairo, even as a very young child, she loved the Parisian kitchen, but her maternal grandmother thought it was no place for her to spend time: "*Une jeune fille de bonne famille ne fréquente pas la cuisine!*" (A young girl of good breeding does not go into the kitchen!)

In Cairo entering the kitchen was not a problem. Collette recounts tales of the happy and seemingly carefree lifestyle of her childhood: the welcoming kitchen, where she learned so much from Ahmet the cook and her grandmother, the sights and sounds of shopping in the bazaar and the sumptuous meals she remembers.

The final chapter of Apricots on the Nile tells how Collette, thirty years later and a journalist and food writer, retraces her steps. She rediscovers the Egypt of her past, trying to find again the places with their remembered sights, smells and tastes.

I loved this book with its honest account of Collette Rossant's unusual childhood before and around the time of World War II, the sadnesses as well as the happy times, giving a window onto a world now gone for ever. I loved too the unusual recipes, both Egyptian and French. One in particular, Grilled Chicken with Sumac & Roasted Banana, we thoroughly enjoyed and my variation the recipe is included on this site. There are many other delicious sounding recipes, including: Semit (soft sesame seed covered pastries) and Sambusaks (cheese filled pastries), Ta'miyya (like Felafel), Babaghanou (roasted aubergine puree, served as a dip), Stuffed Vine Leaves (filled with rice, lamb and cumin), Chickpea Purée and Traditional Hummus, Lentils and Beetroot with Swiss Chard, Fricasée of Fennel, Bean Soup and Apricot Pudding (a rich dessert of baked pureed dried apricots), plus from Collette's time at the convent school, Soeur Leila's Red Lentil Stew and Lentil Soup.

According to the Bloomsbury website, Collette Rossant has written two further 'memoirs with food', neither

of which I have read, but I will try to track them down as I hope they are equally as enjoyable.

Return to Paris

Madeleines in Manhattan

I have also found reference to a book on Collette Rossant's own website, supposedly the third in her series, called *A World in my Kitchen: The Adventures of a (Mostly) French Woman in New York*. It is not clear whether this is *Madeleines in Manhattan* under a different title, or a new book. Collette is also the author of several cookbooks, on a variety of subjects including Kosher Cooking, Japanese Cuisine and Slim Cuisine.

Kim says

This is such a beautiful account of childhood spent growing up in Egypt and the incredible food and food rituals that accompanied.
