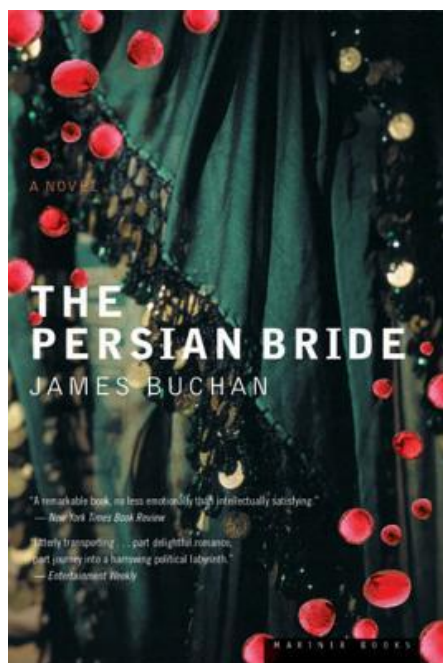




The Persian Bride

James Buchan

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At once a great love story, a riveting political thriller, and a profound analysis of modern Iran, THE PERSIAN BRIDE is unflinching in its vision of twentieth-century chaos. In 1974, the young Englishman John Pitt follows the hippie trail to Isfahan, where he encounters the enchanting Shirin Faramah. These two young people fall desperately in love and marry, despite their cultural differences and the political upheaval surrounding them. When they are tragically separated, John sets off in search of his wife on a nightmare journey that takes him from the corrupt court of the shah to the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Persian Bride Details

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From Reader Review The Persian Bride for online ebook

Howard Cincotta says

The Persian Bride is such a wildly romantic and compelling love story, set in the revolutionary Iran of the 1970s and '80s that I'm baffled it hasn't yet been made into a Hollywood film.

How can you resist a scene where an infatuated Englishman, John Pitt, teaching English at a girl's school in Isfahan, tells his friend (a Russian spy) that he has fallen in love:

"And may I enquire, within the boundaries of propriety and disinterested advice, the attributes of the Beloved?"

"She has black eyes and lovely feet and is very tall."

Mr. Ryazanov sighed. "All Isfahanian women are tall and dark-eyes and pretty-footed. This is why living here is such a torment to the spirit."

Although intensely romantic, the novel is also a suspense thriller, and offers some of the most riveting and graphic depictions of imprisonment, torture, and extreme psychological/religious states in modern fiction -- coupled with an unforgettable portrayal of the Iran-Iraq war in which thousands of lightly armed Iranian volunteers were sent to their deaths singing the praises of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Even though the title figure, Shirin Faramah -- she of the dark eyes and pretty feet -- disappears from the last third of the novel, she remains the book's most haunting figure. Buchan manages the neat trick of creating a figure who is everyone's fantasy of a Middle Eastern seductive beauty, yet reveals Shirin in all her magnificent complexity and contradictions -- ignorant of much of the world, yet passionately and deeply educated in the Persian literature that is her heritage. She is simply unforgettable, for the reader, and for her lover/husband, who must literally go through hell to find her (and their daughter) again.

The writing never falters, but the high spirits and energy of the opening chapters sag a little after Pitt survives both prison and the war front; it's as if -- mild spoiler alert -- the author is resisting the final moment when Pitt finds Shirin again.

Sarah says

This is the lamest book I have ever read. So disappointing...

Savanna says

I really try to stick with books for a good long time before I drop them. But I'm 50 pages in and I still have no idea what the plot is. Things just disjointedly happen, and there's very little explanation of why or how.

I also came across this quote: "I felt her gather up her hems and shift away a little. In that movement, in the

friction of the carpet and the cotton of her skirt and chador, I felt her awareness not merely of her clothes but of her skin, as if she'd woken that morning under the weight of a bust and hips." the context is he walks into a room and sits down next to her. asddfgfh like come on man

I feel bad abandoning it, but I really cannot see how much this can improve.

Stephen Gallup says

Delivered in flowing, dreamlike prose, this story speaks to me as few do. I see that some other reviewers find it confusing, and I do recall feeling a bit of a jolt when I first started reading. All that's required, however, is to get in sync with the mood being developed.

The dust jacket calls it an epic, a love story, a political thriller, and "a profound analysis of modern Iran," all of which is correct. But none of that accounts for the way I have embraced it. Any time I take it off the shelf and reread, for example, that magical overture in which the narrator dreams of lost nights when he is pacing the coral floors of their retreat, urging his fretful baby back to sleep until his wife rouses to nurse her -- I want to put all else aside and and read the whole thing yet again.

In part, no doubt, the attraction this holds for me is due to slight similarities with my own life story. The narrator traveled from the West to Iran, absorbed its culture, and married someone there. I did likewise in China. But luckily in my case nobody was betrayed. I was not imprisoned. I am not now on a lifelong quest to recover what was lost, at least in that regard. However, primarily it's a romantic story in an exotic setting, lyrically told, and I think it should have very broad appeal.

Aamna says

This book is written so well, shame the story line is hard to follow and dull

Mina Mohebbi says

I thought this book was very different from other books I read about 1970s-1980s Iran, particularly since this was written from the point of view of a foreigner. The way the character, a British man by the name of John Pitt, presents himself comes off as sort of a foreigner who is attempting to assimilate into an Iranian way of life. Upon meeting Shirin he is immediately captivated, and I will admit initially I thought that the love story would be the only thing that followed the character through the book. However, Buchan surprised me with usage of familiar Iranian words and events and actually placed Pitt within the changing political and social sphere of the time. In his search for Shirin he ends up in the Shah's court, which in many ways was intriguing for me because it was from the point of view of Pitt attempting revolts and referring to himself as a revolutionary, despite his different nationality. I think Buchan could have done a better job weaving in historical context though because if someone didn't really understand what was going on at the time it would be quite difficult to comprehend the situation. At times he has John explain what is going on, and as a reader that seems to me as though the author is just being lazy instead of weaving it in through things in the story like newspapers or conversations.

Jewel says

The Persian Bride is such an emotionally complex book that makes you think about love and life.

Callie says

One of the other reviews said this book was dense and confusing. Very true! I'm about 1/3 of the way into the book and have found it very confusing, difficult reading. A lot of the time I'll read the same passage 2 or 3 times and still not know what is happening. It's very hard to follow, it feels like I'm reading something that was translated by a computer into English, where I know all the words in front of me, but together they make gibberish. I'm not sure why I keep pushing on with it when I have so many other things to read, but I'll give it another 100 pages and see what happens.

Finished it, hated it. Confusing, hard to follow. I really hated it, and hate that I wasted so much time to finish it. Ugh. Don't read this book.

Fred Eisenhut says

I must admit along with other reviewers that this was a difficult reading experience. But I read it slowly, going over passages again and again. Wondering over Persian poetry and the ideas expressed in them. But I am glad I finished it. James Buchan is an amazing writer.

Jessica says

This was a strange and wonderful book that I enjoyed immensely. It is dense and confusing in many parts, so it also frustrated me. I would highly recommend it to people who have a high tolerance for dense reading, confusing storylines, and Persian history. It was really difficult to follow at times, but taking it slow and re-reading the most confusing parts helped me keep up with the story. It may be worth a second read now that my mind has a map of where the story is going, and also the language is so beautiful I would love to spend more time enjoying it. This isn't a speed read or a book you can skim, but it is worth the effort and time.

Kristen says

The conservative British magazine The Spectator described this novel as "A book of astonishing intellectual grandeur and integrity... Airy, graceful, and big with truth, it feels like a major statement of confidence, not just by an English novelist but by the English novel... There is really no word for it but 'masterpiece.'"

Exactly.

The story follows John Pitt, an 18-year-old drifter who is teaching in Isfahan, Iran, in 1974. He falls in love with Shirin, a 16-year-old girl, whose father happens to be an ambitious general in the Shah's air force. After they elope -- with the help of an opium-addicted Russian diplomat -- they spend a luminous year together in the Russian's walled villa on the sea. When they attempt to escape Iran, they are separated by vicious drug smugglers. The last half of the book follows John as he survives years and torture in revolutionary prisons, fights Iraq alongside boys and old men as an Iranian soldier, travels to Kashmir and Afghanistan, all searching for Shirin and his daughter.

That plot evidently makes it a "thriller" for some of the British press reviewers, but most Americans will agree that James Buchan's writing makes it something other. This book is rather a layered, graceful puzzle.

The first part of the book, John and Shirin's love story, is dreamlike. John at one point acknowledges that he's risking their lives by not getting them back to Europe. His judgment is that of an immature 18-year-old lovestruck dreamer -- which is what he is.

Here they are fleeing to the villa:

"In my arms, she fluttered with excitement and fear. Then she vanished. I stared miserably into the darkness. On the road, eighteen-wheelers roared and hooted. The moon rose to my right. My head jangled with the day. Her face and lips, the way she carried the can and tipped the water in the radiator, the trailing of her chador, lost their clarity, became mangled, rough and indecent. I smelled her scent, of salt and roses and some quintessential herness, on my chest and fingers. I felt drenched in femininity. Certain words -- 'pushidegi' covering, and by extension the mental attitudes in girls that are the effects or counterparts of veiling, such as ambiguity, inversion, concealment, intrigue or deceit; 'eish' meaning the delights of this worldly existence; 'kamrani,' the attainment of a young man's desire -- made maddening calligraphic shapes in my mind. I was depressed by missed opportunities: that we could have slept together one more time and still have reached here in the night. I thought: If we make it to the house, I am not going to stir from her bed for a year."

Perhaps a year later, here is Shirin:

"You do not think very much, John. I suppose it is not necessary for an Englishman to think, any more than it is necessary for an Englishman to pray. For that reason, your servant must think and pray not just for her poor self, but for the entire family. Our life in this garden cannot go on forever. We will be separated, or some other misfortune will befall us. Your servant is a mere woman. When you order me to kiss you, I obey, and the pleasure it gives me arises chiefly but not exclusively in my obedience. For I believe and hope that out of those kisses you might remember one kiss. Or you might remember this doorway, the rustle of my skirt and chador, the taste of fresh herbs and buttermilk from a cold steel cup, the warmth of my bust and neck in the morning, the scent of roses from the orchard, the damp of my lap. Each one is a thread that ties us -- or rather, though these threads must snap under the pressure of separation yet still there will be one intact -- and you will coil it up around your wrist and make your way back to your poor bride and wretched child."

It mustn't be imagined from this that Shirin is painted as anything but the stronger of the two. When they first arrive at the villa, she is the one who kills the snakes, bare-handed, that infest the place. Later, in a parallel, she staves off the double-crossing drug smugglers, protecting herself and her baby alone.

Here she warns John not to try to take their baby from her:

She spoke with the slowness of a nightmare. She said: "Mr Pitt, if you intend to take my Layly from me,, you shall first have to kill me. For otherwise I shall kill you."

"I have asked you before, ma'am, not to threaten me."

"It is not a threat, but the only solution to this difficulty."

Buchan gracefully shows us life's beauty and terror, but he weaves through magic, archetypal Iranian stories, poetry and politics as well.

Here, in Kashmir, he's talking with a student:

"Look, I've been there and you haven't. And to Iran as well. You must understand that the Iranian Revolution was not the beginning of something, but the end; not a revival of political Islam but its swansong. The effect of the Revolution has not been to revive religion in Iran but to make it hateful to all but the portion of the population that has a material interest in it, that gets its bread and water from the mosque. Without the war, the revolution would have lost its vigour long ago and its power to persuade. It survives only through control exercised on the minds of the living by the blood of young men and children who went singing to their deaths. Two hundred thousand boys died to prove that Islam could not be exported even to Iraq, home of one of history's most tyrannical despotisms."

I was surprised by my speechifying.

"Javed, you say that you want freedom, but it is not freedom you want but control. You and your friends want to close the hotels and the cinemas..."

"Yes. Life here is immoral. There are illicit liaisons..."

"Rubbish, Javed. Kashmiri girls are very chaste."

He trembled. I could see I had gone too far, for he hated his inexperience and I had made fun of it...

Buchan brings his hero's journey back to Isfahan, as heroes must return to their beginnings. Does he find his family? Buchan ends the book in exactly the right way to complete his character.

A verse from the end:

Luck and Joy and Grief and I

Set off together into the world of existence

Luck lay down and Joy ran off

But Grief and I go wandering on.

Berit says

Quite difficult to follow, it is written as if it wants to become some sort of literary equivalent of perhaps the tradition it is describing. Nevertheless a beautiful and sad story.

Larisa says

This book started out promising but the narrative became so harrowing and awful (though still well-written) that I really can't say I enjoyed the book nor would I recommend the experience to others.

elish says

This is a masterpiece, the author has a profound knowledge and love of Persian literature and history which inform every page of this astonishing work of literature.. I am in awe of his skills. At the same time, I don't think most people would actually enjoy the book. You'd have to have a passion for the subject yourself and a knowledge of geography and history of Iran and the lands around it. It's not for mass consumption. It's unlike anything else I have ever read, and I have read many other. books set in Iran...

Marianne Robin-Tani says

I wanted to like this book more because it was in such an interesting location, but it frustrated me because so much was in French, and I don't know French (and didn't have Google translate handy.) Also, far too much teenage angst from the main character. He was oblivious for most of the story. The bride was far more interesting and resourceful than he was.
