



The Septembers of Shiraz

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In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, rare-gem dealer Isaac Amin is arrested, wrongly accused of being a spy. Terrified by his disappearance, his family must reconcile a new world of cruelty and chaos with the collapse of everything they have known.

As Isaac navigates the tedium and terrors of prison, forging tenuous trusts, his wife feverishly searches for him, suspecting, all the while, that their once-trusted housekeeper has turned on them and is now acting as an informer.

And as his daughter, in a childlike attempt to stop the wave of baseless arrests, engages in illicit activities, his son, sent to New York before the rise of the Ayatollahs, struggles to find happiness even as he realizes that his family may soon be forced to embark on a journey of incalculable danger.

A page-turning literary debut, *The Septembers of Shiraz* simmers with questions of identity, alienation, and love, not simply for a spouse or a child, but for all the intangible sights and smells of the place we call home.

The Septembers of Shiraz Details

Date : Published July 24th 2007 by Ecco (first published 2007)

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Author : Dalia Sofer

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From Reader Review The Septembers of Shiraz for online ebook

T says

I always feel somewhat iffy about novels set in Iran. I'm starting to realize that I -- an Iranian-American who tries to connect to her heritage in a variety of ways -- am not the target audience for these kind of books. These books seem to be written for a different target audience -- the American population at large, which still seems to think of Iran as a monolithic country where people only ever wear black, where the culture is rigid and forbidding. In actuality, the culture is rich and fascinating. There is more to Iran than meets the eye.

Had I been a member of this target audience, I might have enjoyed The Septembers of Shiraz more. As it is, I didn't learn anything new from the novel -- I already knew about Iranian Jews (for other novels written by Iranian Jews, check out Gina Nahai's books, namely Cry of the Peacock; for nonfiction, check out Esther's Children, edited by Houman Sarshar), for one thing. I already knew about the class differences -- the Iranian elite vs the poor -- that gave rise to some of the discontent at the root of the revolution, but I salute Dalia Sofer for writing it into her novel, because it's something that is often excluded from other such novels.

In any case, I feel like this book could have been so much more, had its characters and subplots been developed a little more.

Elyse Walters says

I saw this book on sale for \$1.99 a few minutes ago --(Kindle special) ---

I read it when it was first released years ago and still remember the story. Great story --for a great price!

Its about a Jewish/Iranian family -- in Iran during the 80's revolutionary period.

The head of the family-- Isaac owns a Jewelry store. He is making too much money under the leadership of the Shah-- is captured --sent to prison (accused of being an Israeli spy --but really its because he successful in business) --

His wife and 9 year old daughter struggle to survive with Isaac gone -- no money coming in -- and the awful stress of what's happening to Isaac. The prison scenes are horrific -and much too real.

The older son, is 18. He's in the United States --as a student -- Hasidim in Brooklyn --and a architecture student.

I remember this being a page turning story. A terrific \$1.99 special.

Carol says

Review to come.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Septembers of Shiraz, Dalia Sofer

The Septembers of Shiraz (2007) is a critically acclaimed debut novel by Iranian American author Dalia Sofer. It narrates the lives of a well-to-do Iranian family during and after the Iranian revolution which additionally overthrew the Shah and ushered in the Islamic republic. There is also a subplot involving a Hasidic family in New York.

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Dalia Sofer's 2007 novel, ???New York???: Ecco???, 2007??? = 1386, 340 Pages

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Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

This book is both less and more than I expected. From a pure entertainment standpoint, I was disappointed; not so much because of the pacing (which is on the slow side, although the book is a quick read overall), but because I was hoping for a book that read like historical fiction, while this one read more like a contemporary family story--with the twist that the father is a political prisoner. Nothing objectively wrong with that, and if you like modern-day stories about families you'll probably like it better than I did, but it isn't my thing. At any rate, I was rewarded by a book that turned out to be much more thought-provoking than I expected.

The Septembers of Shiraz is about a Jewish Iranian family: in 1981, following the revolution overthrowing the Shah, the father, Isaac, is arrested on a bogus suspicion of being an Israeli spy. His wife, Farnaz, and 9-year-old daughter, Shirin, are left to deal without him in Tehran, while the college-age son, Parviz, is in New York. It quickly becomes clear that the revolutionaries' problem with Isaac isn't really that he's Jewish, it's that he's very rich. Which makes for a much more nuanced story: hating someone because of their religion is just stupid, while hating someone for living extravagantly next to others who have nothing, for willingly turning a blind eye to a regime that tortures and kills dissenters as long as it's good for business.... well, that's much more complicated.

So what we get is a story about the effects of wealth and privilege, and what happens when people who are accustomed to that lose it. But what this means is that we get a story about some often insufferable characters bemoaning the loss of their extravagant lifestyle and having great difficulty understanding why that lifestyle upset other people. (It's worth noting that the book was published in 2007, when the reading public was perhaps more sympathetic to the woes of oppressed rich people than we are today.)

And so despite all their travails brought on by the new regime (the dramatization of which occupies most of the book), it's quite difficult to like these people, the mother and son in particular. Even at the end of his character arc--and no, I won't tell where in the book that is!--Isaac self-righteously wonders, "Why the constant indignation at a man who dares to live well?" Farnaz "feels a deep pain" for the loss of "shameless extravagance" (no pain for people who actually have to deal with poverty or anything like that, though) and is annoyed at the housekeeper speaking more familiarly to her than she would have dared pre-revolution. Parviz is nothing but a spoiled brat: in New York and without money (why he suddenly has none at all is never explained), he lies around watching TV and thinking about how he wasn't born to do things like clean up after himself and take a part-time job. (Unfortunately, whining and flirting with his landlord's daughter is all Parviz ever does; his chapters are exceedingly dull.) Even Shirin is keenly aware that her current playmate is not someone she'd have befriended before the revolution shut down the private schools.

And it's not just the sense that they're better than other people; the Amins are so used to privilege that they don't seem to fully understand the political climate that they're living in. Even after Isaac has been arrested and detained for months, even after Farnaz has been unable to stop his former employees from looting the business, the characters are shocked and outraged to discover that their beach house has been confiscated; I

was only astonished by their astonishment. But denial is a very human response.

Having difficult characters doesn't make a bad book, and Sofer's accomplishment is impressive in light of the fact that the novel is semi-autobiographical: she's a Jewish Iranian who fled to the U.S. at age 10. One might expect that she'd be wholeheartedly on the family's side, portraying them as innocent victims of an evil government, but while her sympathies are clearly with the family, the book is not that simple. While the focus is very closely on the Amins, a few characters who sympathize with the revolution do get to tell their stories; while the Amins try to portray their hiring employees and servants as an act of charity, one of Isaac's employees calls Farnaz out on this. (view spoiler)

Briefly, then: the plot is interesting, although a bit slow-paced and somewhat dragging in the middle (and Parviz's chapters are deadily boring throughout). The character development is decent, and the portrayal of the prison and its effects on the inmates is especially interesting. The setting is a bit sketchily drawn; I didn't get a strong sense of place or learn much about Iranian life or culture. The writing style is pretty good, especially given that this is a first novel. The dialogue is decent for the most part. The author does a good job of getting into the heads of all four members of the family; I found them all equally convincing, and given that both genders and a wide age range are represented, that's a feat in itself.

Ultimately, I didn't enjoy this book the way I'd hoped to, but its treatment of class issues was quite thought-provoking and had me thinking for days afterwards, and I don't want to penalize it too much for not being what I'd hoped. So, 3.5 stars.

Shovelmonkey1 says

Engrossing and brilliantly written for a debut outing. Combine this with interesting subject matter and a delicately evocative cover and you have a winner. It's rare that I'll read a book in one sitting. I am an eternal fidget. tidier and mover of small objects, however The Septembers of Shiraz managed the impressive feat of keeping me seated for four hours and that is to be applauded. Had it not been for this books inclusion on the National Geographic books and novels for the Middle East list, then I would have overlooked it entirely.

The Peacock Throne is empty and the Shah is gone. Iran is changing and slowly the populace are disappearing. The easiest way to disappear is beneath the newly prescribed outer garments, under heavy shrouds of modest fabric. The difficult way is over the border and into Turkey or Armenia under a cloak of darkness. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, Isaac Amin, rare gem dealer, is accused of being a spy and is arrested by the Revolutionary Guard. What follows is a year of uncertainty for the Amin family as friends and loved ones vanish, property is seized and the wealth and freedom that once characterised their cosmopolitan existence is slowly pared away. Old alliances are put to the test and the idea of personal and national identity comes under scrutiny. Finally it is life and not precious stones which becomes the most valued commodity of all.

By giving a voice to one small family, Sofer highlights the far reaching implications of a regime change which do not always register in the wider world.

Noel says

This is some sort of a fictionalized memoir, a novel based on the author's life, and the lives of her family. It takes place in Iran in 1981-1982, right after the deposition of the Shah of Iran. Isaac is a Jew, born and raised in Iran, he is a jeweler and gemologist, he has accumulated a certain degree of wealth, has a beautiful home and a summer house, has traveled abroad and has rubbed elbows with the old regime. He knew his days were numbered in the new Tehran, and one morning he meets his fate as members of the Revolutionary Guard come to his office to take him into custody and interrogate him. The easy going days of the Shah are gone, together with the liberties and freedoms of the Iranian citizens, and the terror filled, fundamentalist, righteous regime of the Ayatollah Homeini has started. Isaac is accused of being a Zionist spy, because of his many trips to Israel and is thrown in a cell with a very diverse population of anti-regime men. His son, Parvez, is studying in New York City, very much a loner, and more so after finding out the fate of his father. He goes through the motions in this huge city, but is barely existing, a bit of a whiny, needy character.

Back home, Isaac's wife and daughter try to cope with the uncertainty of not knowing where Isaac is, knowing that there are executions daily, and wondering which of their friends will betray them. Farnaz realizes that the cush life she once enjoyed will never come back, her young daughter, only 9 years old, quietly and secretly saves a few lives and grows up way too soon. Weeks turn into months, Isaac is interrogated and tortured, but survives. His captors and torturers have their stories, as do his housekeeper and her son who worked in Isaac's office. This is one of the strengths of the book. The author shows both sides of the coin, in as subjective a way as possible, given the fact that this is in part her own story.

The plight of the many refugees who have arrived on the shores of this country and so many others is a tale that needs to be told. So many times we get in a cab, hire a painter, or call to have our yards worked on - these are real people with real stories of persecution, greed, starting over, forgetting past lives -- and they deserve a listen.

Wooky says

i had high hopes after reading all the reviews, but was disappointed. it's a well-organized and thought-out novel in terms of structure and plot, but the characters didn't do it for me. i felt i was skimming along the surface of their feelings, and the writing also didn't particularly stand out. i'd still be interested to see what Sofer does with her second work though, primarily because her background as a Persian Jewish American interests me.

Pamela says

This is a really beautiful novel about a Jewish family in Iran; the father is imprisoned, accused of being a "Zionist spy" after the fall of the Shah, and his wife, teenaged son, and nine-year-old daughter must cope with his sudden absence and their fears about his fate. A couple of reviewers have used the word "delicate" to describe this novel. That seems apt to me, because of the gentleness and compassion offered to every single character (even, astonishingly, the sadistic and repulsive Revolutionary guards and interrogators). This story of the horrors of a totalitarian and terroristic society is extraordinarily suspenseful yet never crude; Sofer's style is understated, intelligent, and simply lovely.

But the highest achievement of this novel is that Sofer makes the reader actually feel what it would be like to be a father, mother, son, and daughter faced in the process of losing security, freedom, beauty, and comfort--

makes her feel the loneliness that comes with being forced to surrender country and past. The only other book I can remember that conveyed this as powerfully to me is Eva Hoffman's memoir *Lost in Translation*.

My only two quibbles are that, 1) a crucial choice the father makes toward the end is never examined morally; and 2) nor is the fact that while many of the wealthy manage to escape the Islamist regime, the family servant (whose portrait shades just slightly into sentimentality at the end) and those like her have no option but to remain.

BELIEVESINMIRACLES says

Fantastic story and book. I first came across this as I am a huge Adrien Brody fan and try to see every one of his films as my library gets them. The movie was excellent, so I decided to get the book as well. It is far far more detailed than the movie with loads of people that are not in the film.

I highly recommend this book and hope she comes out with another one soon.

A+++++++

Kerry says

I really enjoyed the different voices in this book. The story is interesting and really puts in perspective what it is like to live under and ever shifting government as a child, businessman, and a mother in Iran. What if your values don't conform with those of the ruling elite? How do you come to terms with that? Or even survive? What can a child do?

My one complaint is that the book didn't go on long enough. There were a few issues that I wanted to hear more about. I especially wanted to hear the son and daughter's thoughts a bit more. Certainly an interesting read.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

We read to go other places, to sample other lives. Reading, for me, at times lets me escape into lives I'd never want to lead, into places I'd never want to go.

The Septembers of Shiraz takes me deep into these lives I'd never lead, places I'd never go. Isaac Amin, along with his wife, his young daughter, and even his son in distant America, suffer the changes revolution in Iran creates. The persecuted become the persecutors. There is no safe place. Fear and anger breed more fear and anger. Hatred generates more hatred.

Amin's imprisonment spins and bends everything the family has believed and loved. Is it wrong to overlook the cruelties inflicted on the weak? How do you decide whether to remain in a familiar now dangerous place or dare to start a new life from scratch? Should one save a few strangers while risking one's family?

I couldn't stop reading this story. Would Amin live or die? Would the family stay or go? How had the pain inflicted on the jailers affect the way the jailers treated the jailed? Who were the good guys? How did the world become such a mess and how could it ever be made right?

This was a powerful book, beautifully told, that generated question after question in my mind long after I read the last page and closed the book.

Janelle says

I previewed this as a potential book for Gettysburg College's Syria & Iran: Beyond the Headlines series, to be held in 2014-15. There will be one book discussion each semester (in addition to lectures and film screenings). The series is a continuation of Conflict & Resistance in the Middle East, held during the 2011-12 academic year.

Septembers is the story of Isaac Amin (an Iranian-Jewish gemologist) and his family in the days after the Iranian revolution. Amin is targeted by the Revolutionary Guards because of his Western, "decadent" ways. He was well-connected during the Pahlavi reign and lived an upper-class lifestyle. He is taken to prison (without charge) in the opening pages of the book.

The story is told through flashbacks and a multi-voiced narrative. Issac shares the storyteller's voice with his wife, his son (a medical school student in the U.S.), and his daughter (a teenage student living at home). I thought the author characterized the stress of this time period beautifully. Issac suffers the most physically (experiencing torture in prison), but each member of the family bears the tension in his or her own way. The lives of the family's housekeeper and his son, one of Isaac's many employees at the gem shop, are also intertwined with the fate of the family. Isaac's son, miserable in his exile in the U.S., recalls the comment of a fellow passenger on the plane to New York, who said to him, "They've sent you off because of the war, yes? ... They did good. You're the wrong age for this country now. These mullahs will use the last one of you" (45). So many Iranians were "the wrong age" for their country.

I thought this book effectively showed the impact of the revolution on a typical upper-class family. It would have been nice to include more perspective from other groups (we do get that glimpse from the housekeeper), but it was compelling within its scope. I noticed that another goodreads reader included this title on a list called "Light but not (too) dumb." I both agree and disagree with this categorization. The book was "easy" to read - I went through it quickly and wanted to know what happened next. I was intrigued by the triangulation of perspectives. But "dumb"? I can't go there. It could have been more complicated, but it's not dumb. It may not enter the canon of literary fiction, but it is very discussable. I foresee this being selected in many book groups. We are seriously considering it for the *Beyond the Headlines* series mentioned above.

Doreen Petersen says

A delightfully moving read.

Gloria says

A can't-put-it-down-even-though-I'm-also-reading-Harry Potter book. Author's debut novel, and I can't believe how well she can write. It's about the Iranian revolution in the early 80s, and a Jewish family...father gets arrested by the Revolutionary Guard in the first paragraph. The story holds your interest from then on. Gives insights into Iranian cultural, class conflicts, women's plight, what it's like to wear the scarf all of the time [like little elves crunching paper in your ear]....
