

Fortress of the Golden Dragon

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In a fable-like telling greed evil magic and true love interweave in this visionary short fantasy tale by an Iranian-born poet and translator. Readers are transported to an idyllic village in “a land far away” learning initially about the tastiness of its pomegranates and figs as well as the character of its inhabitants: “The people of Kolallan were good-natured and fun loving. In spite of their meager income a month never passed during which they did not celebrate and enjoy themselves. Doors were never locked and they made strangers feel welcome to share their simple meals.” Into such paradise comes change as something small insinuates itself into the town attracting both evil and greed. The dark force from outside begins to grow at the heart of the town taking many forms in its inhabitants and attracting outside powers like a magnetic black hole.

The forces of light too are at work here with an old wizard a beautiful maiden a dog named “for a bright star in the sky” and a prince who is marked at birth for a special role. The commoner maiden and prince are smitten at their first meeting and the course of their true love cannot proceed without obstacles and hazards. The maiden receives gifts—light a magical ring and the dog—from the wizard who seems to appear only in the nick of time as wizards are wont to do.

Garemani earned a degree in German literature from The University of Tehran before moving to the U.S. in 1976. In this novel her maiden character unwittingly picks up an apparently innocent talking worm which initially seems to make life better for the girl in many ways. But the worm begins to transform and the changes wrought in the maiden's life among her family and in the town indicate that the dark forces are in a feeding frenzy in the once-simple town.

While most of the characters aren't deeply developed readers can see a palpable transformation of the prince who learns serious lessons after his tragic mistakes. A selfish father a wise uncle and a malevolent faux-priest round out a cast of characters in this battle for the soul of a town that was once a simple yet idyllic spot. Wars and betrayals vie with small rays of hope in this short novel resonating like a Persian miniature that met the Brothers Grimm. The painful lesson—that once paradise is lost it can never return—reflects the larger history of many troubled regions that at one time like Kolallan were sweet places.

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