



Honor and Polygamy: A Novel

Omar Farhad

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The in-depth descriptions of the Afghan setting and culture add exceptional intrigue to this thrilling mystery.

Omar Farhad's *Honor and Polygamy* spins an action-filled tale of tragic romance developing in the culture clash of war-torn Afghanistan.

Nicholas Blake is an American UN aide. When another UN employee backs out of an Afghanistan assignment, Nick is forced to leave his wife, Lisa, and two children, even though he's been home only a few weeks. In Kandahar, he meets a friend, and the pair journeys into the city, where Nick is captured by the terrorist Molawee Abdul Satar. Held prisoner for months in Uruzgan, Nick finally escapes. Relying on the Pashtun honor code of Nanawatai, which means a person can seek refuge until a problem is solved, Nick finds sanctuary at a compound belonging to a man named Gulbaz. Later, now identified as Naikee, son of Ibrahim, Nick learns he can preserve his and Gulbaz's safety by marrying Gulbaz's daughter Shaista. Little does he know he will fall in love with the beautiful young Afghan woman and return for her after his rescue.

Farhad's plot is cinematic—a Westerner immersed so extensively in Afghan culture that he finds himself in love with an Afghan woman. That gives the story conflict, internally and externally. However, characters are one dimensional, serving only as a framework around which to weave the plot. Nick's character is realistic, but the book leaves short the motivation that would have a man, however long his captivity, abandon family and all that's familiar. Gulbaz, Nick's savior, is drawn sympathetically and will appeal to Western readers. Nick's return to rescue Shaista is dramatic and well described.

Farhad knows his setting, especially the rugged conditions under which prisoners are held in Afghanistan, and his descriptions of Gulbaz's compound, acreage, and farming intrigue. The isolation of female Afghans, especially Shaista, who has never left her father's compound, brings an edge to the story. The writing is clear and straightforward, but it relies on telling rather than showing, with the narrative driven by simple declarative sentences and long passages of exposition. The action scenes are well done, especially the confusing battle and flight after Nick is captured.

While the plot would be better served with a deeper exploration of character and theme, *Honor and Polygamy* is a short, easily read novel with a unique premise.

GARY PRESLEY (November 24, 2014)

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