

The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree

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The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree is a fantastical tale set in post-revolutionary Iran that concentrates on a family's tragedies, loves, and losses. It's a work of magical realism with plenty to unpack.

Bahar's family begins to dismantle when her mother, Roza, climbs to the highest branches of a greengage tree, stricken silent after her son, Sohrab, is snatched from the family home, accused of harboring antiestablishment literature. Bahar is Roza's daughter; though she was murdered in an act of arson, she visits with her family in the same ways that living people do.

For three days and three nights, Roza ignores her family's vigils and pleas for her to return home. By the third night, Roza's hair has turned completely grey; she knows, without knowing, the fate of her beloved son. Sohrab's is a tragic outcome among countless others; he does not return to the family in the way that Bahar has.

The family of five slowly dwindles in number. Roza never rebounds, though her family works toward some semblance of ordinary life. Bahar's older sister, Beeta, cannot forget how the Revolution altered her life and dreams. She spends her days at home with her father, who is soon the only one left in residence with her. Beeta tires herself out trying to reprise the roles of each of her departed family members. Meanwhile, Bahar paints her afterlife in bleak terms; her days are filled by stalking the living, comforting the newly departed, and walking with others among the wandering dead.

The family's struggles intertwine with magical happenings in the lives of others, and the spirit world populates as much of the novel as do the living. Nods to poetry and literature make the parables of *The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree* engaging, tantalizing, and memorable.

TANISHA RULE (January / February 2020)

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