

Veiled Destiny

Shirin Humzani

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Veiled Destiny is a captivating tale that takes the reader to another land and explores entirely new ways of thinking about how decisions of life and love are made.

Secrets, lies, and the unspoken manipulation of her future by others leave Ehma, a stunning young Pakistani woman, wondering whom to trust. Fearing she'll be forever bound to a terrible man, Ehma questions whether true love can prevail, and if she'll even survive her troubles to find out. In *Veiled Destiny*, author Shirin Humzani offers a Romeo and Juliet story with a Muslim twist.

In the mountainous tribal regions of Pakistan where she lives, Ehma senses something unsettling, something her traditional parents aren't telling her. She suspects her father plans to marry her off to a man she fears. But more may be behind it all, and some family secrets are held tightly under lock and key—even from those they impact the most. When a man with an unknown agenda kidnaps her, threatening her and her family's honor, Ehma's helplessness only increases. Unknown to her, a more intense love works in her favor. But with all the secrets and lies, can she see her true love for what it is? And with powerful forces working against it, does that real love even stand a chance? With the honor of so many at stake, someone could end up dead.

Because the story begins with a sole focus on characters' inner, unspoken fears, it takes a while to get moving and requires patience. Perhaps because some Middle Eastern cultural attitudes and practices may not be well understood in the West, the underlying meanings of certain statements, actions, concerns, and even glances between characters can get lost in translation. The dialogue sometimes feels awkward, and phrasing, metaphors, and even humor take time to become familiar. Sometimes, it's difficult to determine if cultural difference or weak writing is the problem, as in this example: "Just for his lust, he fell from the heavens into the filth of indignity."

Such forms of expression underpin the mystery at the start of the tale, but it takes a little while to grow accustomed to the dialogue. Eventually, though, it becomes part of the local color and what emerges is a strong, intriguing plot filled with danger, mystery, and suspense. Characters, too, are well written and interesting, with believable shades of personality, strengths, and weaknesses.

The cultural differences also become apparent with some events in the story that many Westerners would consider either misogynistic or outright abusive (women prevented from disagreeing with their husbands, marital rape, domestic violence). Such things make understanding certain characters' choices difficult, especially when they feel the actions were justified, even necessary; however, these events also highlight a certain restlessness in Pakistan among the younger generation for things to be different.

Overall, after a challenging start, *Veiled Destiny* becomes a captivating tale that takes the reader to another land and explores entirely new ways of thinking about how decisions of life and love are made. In the midst of an unconventional love story, the reader has the opportunity to experience another culture. And it's a chance to be reminded that the human heart remains, in many ways, the same no matter its location.

DIANE GARDNER (January 2, 2014)

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