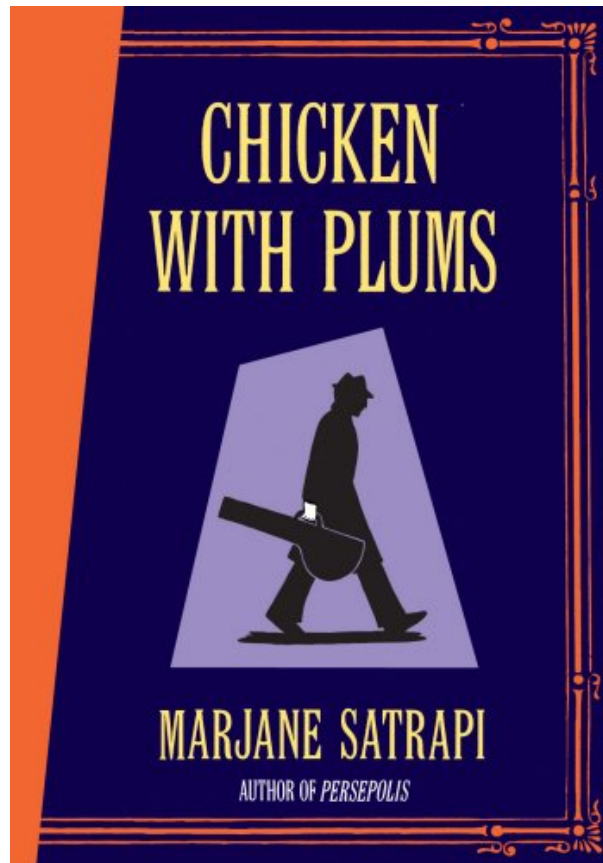
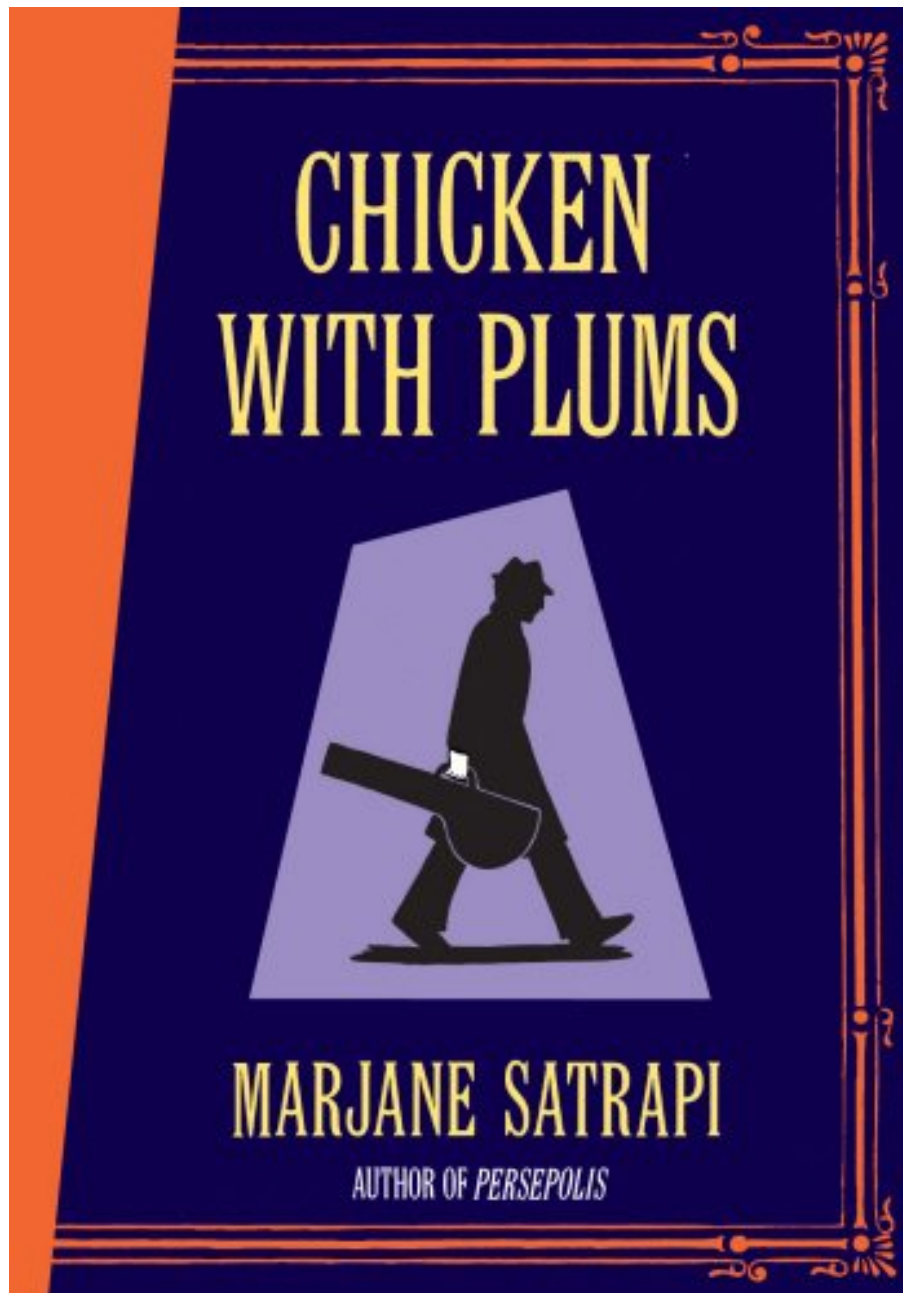


CHICKEN WITH PLUMS BY MARJANE SATRAPI



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In November 1955, Nasser Ali Khan, one of Iran's most celebrated tar players, is in search of a new instrument. His beloved tar has been broken. But no matter what tar he tries, none of them sound right. Brokenhearted, Nasser Ali Khan decides that life is no longer worth living. He takes to his bed, renouncing the world and all of its pleasures. This is the story of the eight days he spends preparing to surrender his soul. As the days pass and Nasser Ali Khan grows weaker, those who love him - his wife, his children, his siblings - gather round, incredulous, to try to comfort him. Every visitor stirs up a memory, and in the course of this week, Nasser Ali Khan revisits his entire life, a life defined by three relationships in particular. He remembers his late mother, who sacrificed everything for his revolutionary brother, but who also, in the last week of her life, found solace only in smoking and listening to him play his tar; his angry wife, who can't forgive him his melancholy and irresponsibility; and Irane, his first love, whose father forbade her to marry a poor musician and inflicted the wound that fuelled his music. The pieces of Nasser Ali Khan's story slowly fall into place, and as they do, we begin to understand him. By the time the eighth day dawns, having witnessed Nasser Ali Khan communing with Sufi mystics, Sophia Loren, the spirit of his late mother, his own demons and, bravely, with Azrael, the angel of death - we feel privileged to have known him. Brilliantly weaving together the past, present and future to explore the successes and joys, failures and disappointments of Nasser Ali Khan's life and through his story, the meaning of any of our lives - Marjane Satrapi has also once again presented us with a complex and deeply human portrait of the men and women of her country, and of pre-revolution Iran itself. She delivers this tremendous story about life and death, and the fear and courage both require, with her trademark humour and insight. "Chicken With Plums" is Marjane Satrapi's finest achievement to date.

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Most helpful customer reviews

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Seeing the Elephant

By Sally

Drawn in bold black and white, Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel illustrates the moving and disturbing life and last days of her uncle, Nasser Ali Kahn. He was a famous Iranian musician, loved for his virtuosity, and the sensitivity with which he played his beloved tar.

It's a tale of how a man's happiness was gradually eroded by his culture, loss, suppressed feelings, and unrealizable expectations.

The story starts with an older man in black walking down a city street. He encounters a slender woman with her grandchild. He hesitates. Asks if her name is Irane. She doesn't recognize him. Wonders how he knows her name. He, Nasser, apologizes and walks on to a friend's business where he hopes to buy a replacement for his recently broken tar.

We later learn that the broken tar had special meaning for Nasser. When he was a young man, the parents of the woman he'd fallen in love with forbade her to marry him because he was only a musician. Losing her plunged him into deep depression. He had difficulty playing. Nasser's tar master tried to console him by telling him, "To the common man, whether you're a musician or a clown, it's one and the same. The love you feel for this woman will translate into your music. She will be in every note you play." He then gave Nasser his own tar and instructed him to go on playing.

From then on, Nasser's joy was his music. His playing thrilled his audiences

Since childhood he'd been unable to meet the conventional expectations of others. His mother's, his brother's, his teachers', the parents of the woman he loved, his wife, his children.

His mother urged him to marry a woman he didn't love so that he would forget his loss. Although the woman he married did love him, she resented his music. His children, influenced by their mother's attitude, became estranged from him. This drove him further and further into his music.

After he failed to find another tar equal to his broken one, feeling that without that tar and his music there was nothing else he wanted, Nasser came to the conclusion, "To live, it's not enough to be alive." He decided to die.

This where the novel really begins. Through Satrapi's masterful construction, we are able to piece together what we need to understand who Nasser was, and why he would make this tragic choice.

Satrapi reveals Nasser's life and character by skillfully rearranging temporal events - picking up an incident, then dropping it, and then weaving it in later on in the story with new threads. She loops the past into the present, the future into the past. Sometimes, from frame to frame, she switches back and forth between the past and the present, showing how a character's unhappy memories and lingering hurt become emotional IEDs on the path to true understanding.

There are many lenses through which to "see" another person, many ways in which to know them. At Nasser's mother's funeral, a mystic tells him the story of five men in the dark trying to describe a whole elephant from the part each has touched. "We give meaning to life based upon our point of view," he tells Nasser. In *Chicken With Plums*, through characters and events, Satrapi gives us the whole elephant.

As the novel progresses, Satrapi's drawings become more expressive and surreal, adding more decorative touches. Her work resembles animation, almost cartoonish, but her story has the depth of a great novel. She has the timing of a film maker, knowing just what to show when, and how to keep the mystery and tension to the end.

Chicken With Plums has touched me deeply. It's a heart breaking story of love on many levels, fulfilled and unfulfilled. I believe Nasser died of a broken heart. Without Irane and without his music, he could not find a way to be in this world.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Chicken with Plums was Excellent!!!!

By Hayden Moyle

I love Marjane Satrapi's books. Fun to read, sometimes a bit unusual with childish pictures, a serious and rather dark storyline. A perfect mix with historical and cultural Iranian references and sometimes a bit raunchy. A quick read but one that doesn't get old. I would recommend this to everyone I know along with every other book by Satrapi. Have already loaned it to several friends and I have others waiting to loan it. Buy it!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

This is no *Persepolis* but still good

By Campos

The book is too brief, my guess is that this is just what Satrapi was able to find out from her uncle's story...

If you read if you read "*Chicken with Plums*" before *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* & *Persepolis 2:*

The Story of a Return you might end up disappointed, those two graphic novels are more much complete works, if you read them first you'll end up wanting more from the author and will see this book with a different eye.

BTW, now I'm off yo get Embroideries which I should have read before this one :)

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