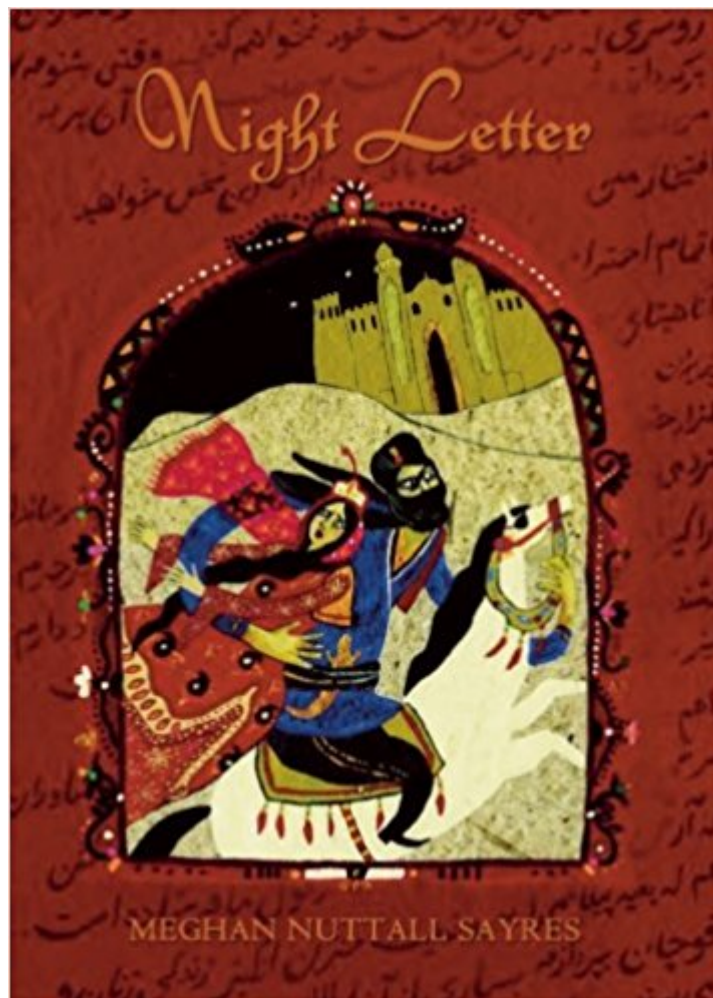


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# Night Letter



## Synopsis

"This fast-paced adventure is filled with tension, excitement, and a realistic sense of history. The main characters are well drawn, and both Anahita's independent spirit and her determination will resonate with readers. The novel is imbued with details featuring the rich and exotic rituals, dress, poetry, and customs of early-20th-century Persian and Uzbek cultures and quotes from poets such as Rumi and Omar Khayyam. Numerous Farsi words are all explained in context and/or in the glossary to add authenticity to the tale. The novel includes a discussion guide and notes about slavery, past and present, coupled with websites indicating ways in which readers can help victims of human trafficking. Anahita's epic love story captures the mystique of long-ago Persia while providing a framework for exploring issues of social justice still relevant in our own times."--Nancy Menaldi-Scanlan, School Library Journal

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

## Customer Reviews

Gr 7 Up-This sequel to Anahita's Woven Riddle (Abrams, 2006) finds the nomadic weaver traveling across the desert with her grandmother on the eve of her wedding to Arash, a Persian Qajar prince. When they are kidnapped for ransom, Anahita's intellect, inner strength, and faith in Allah are fully engaged. Eventually finding herself in the emir's harem, where she is being groomed for her sığeh (a temporary marriage, designed to give the ruler an heir), she manages to send a shabnameh-a night letter-to the shah, requesting that he rescue her, as well as the women and girls unjustly

enslaved there. Arash and others faithful to Anahita risk life and limb so that she might ultimately regain her freedom. This fast-paced adventure is filled with tension, excitement, and a realistic sense of history. The text rings true to the extensive research documented in the lengthy author's note. The main characters are well drawn, and both Anahita's independent spirit and her determination will resonate with readers. The novel is imbued with details featuring the rich and exotic rituals, dress, poetry, and customs of early-20th-century Persian and Uzbek cultures and quotes from poets such as Rumi and Omar Khayyam. Numerous Farsi words-all explained in context and/or in the glossary-add authenticity to the tale. The novel includes a discussion guide and notes about slavery, past and present, coupled with websites indicating ways in which readers can help victims of human trafficking. Anahita's epic love story captures the mystique of long-ago Persia while providing a framework for exploring issues of social justice still relevant in our own times.-Nancy Menaldi-Scanlan, formerly at LaSalle Academy, Providence, RI

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"Intrigues, a kidnapping, and a rescue attempt kept me turning the pages of this novel. Long after finishing the book, I kept thinking about the inner wisdom Anahita receives that helps shape her destiny";the story resonates like a Sufi poem."--";Marilyn Carpenter, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Eastern Washington University, and founder of The Children's Book Compass

"";Meghan Nuttall Sayres has once again shown her gift of story telling. Night Letter is a new epic love story that captures the mystique of Persia and the will of a woman to survive an unpredictable adventure."--";Shahrokh Ahkami, editor, Persian Heritage Journal

"A visual and literary feast."--Fahimeh Amiri, Amiri Fine Arts, illustrator of The Prince Who Ran Away: The Story of Gautama Buddha

"The history of modern Iran is unknown to most Americans, yet the call for justice based on true events dramatized in Night Letter is greatly relevant to the world today."--";Bob Greene, Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association, and retired owner of the indie bookstore Book People of Moscow, Idaho

"";Night Letter is an engrossing adventure of love and danger amidst the social turmoil of 19th century Persia." -- --";Constance Vidor, recipient of the U.S. Board on Books for Young People Bridge to Understanding Award, and Director of Library Services, Friends Seminary, New York City

The plot of this modern (early 20th Century) fairy tale set in Iran is a Middle Eastern twist on the familiar handsome-prince-and-his-beloved-facing-insurmountable-odds story. What makes

Nuttall-Sayres books different (this is a sequel to her "Anahita's Woven Riddle") is the seemingly effortless way the author draws us into the rich complexity of the life of the heroine, a young nomad girl who is an intelligent, devoted weaver as well as an unorthodox female of her clan, in that she is determined that she will marry on her own terms while respecting the customs and needs of her tribe. In this chapter of her life, she is kidnapped on her way to join her future husband who is, yes, a handsome prince of the old Qajar Dynasty of Iran. While she sometimes doubts her own ability to get herself out of some pretty impossible (and quite threatening) situations, she keeps her head and persists in trying all opportunities to escape her mysterious captors, in spite of horrible thoughts that her prince might not want her after her abduction, even if her virtue remains intact. Along with a fast-moving plot, the story is adorned with old Persian poetry, lovely illustrations, and creative use of traditional designs and interesting fonts. Within her characters' narration the author creates complex thought patterns built upon their native culture, which she has clearly spent a lot of time studying. She supplies the reader with several appendices to add to the reading experience, including a discussion guide. While suitable for young adults, Nuttall-Sayres is never condescending; bad things do happen to people, and there is plenty of that in this adventurous tale. While I loved *Anahita's Woven Riddle*, I found this sequel to excel its predecessor in several ways, including the detailed description of the ancient city of Bukhara, which becomes as much a character in the book as other "passive" participants, like the desert with its mysteries and the 13th Century poet and mystic. I recommend this book to all lovers of adventure stories in particular and historical novels in general. Popular literature in English from this part of the planet is most welcome and serves to support the similarities of all people while illuminating many of the fascinating differences. In this respect the books are most educational as well as good reads.

This is a tale of a soon-to-be bride who is kidnapped by two men. In the Persian culture of the time, this means that her chances for marriage are now ruined along with her reputation. As she works to maintain her dignity and look for escape, she also tries to get to know one of her kidnappers, who seems a cut above the type of men known to do this kind of work. Her family and friends are also looking for her, and she works to leave clues behind as she and the kidnappers travel. There are some lovely poetry quotes included and a look at this older Persian culture which is rather illuminating. The cover art is lovely as well. I felt that the character(s) were never fully drawn. I read on because the history was interesting, but I never felt a connection with the main character or any other. If you are interested in learning a bit about the culture of Persia I would recommend this title. QUOTES (from an ARC; may be different in final copy): To dwell in the past or the future is to

live in a state of destruction. Even though a woman's honor would be maintained when she was kidnapped for ransom, few would receive offers for marriage because of the stigma attached to women who have kept unsavory company or who have spent time alone with unrelated males. Surely, Arash's royal family would refuse me. Stop weaving and watch how the pattern improves. Maybe the shaikh had meant that other forces are at work. Perhaps synchronicity is not mere coincidence - it's more a complicity of multiple wills coming together for reasons we do not understand. A force in the universe that responds, guides, and unifies. It seems that we exist for the sake of everything else. Writing: 4 out of 5 stars Plot: 3 out of 5 stars Characters: 2.5 out of 5 stars Reading Immersion: 3 out of 5 stars

Beautifully illustrated and thick with historical detail of a time and place you don't normally find represented in YA fiction, *The Night Letter* should be an absolute slam dunk. How wrong can you go, after all, with a tale of a kidnapped bride whose love must rescue her from the harem of an evil Emir? And yet despite the fascinating insight into Islam and the delight of having bits of Rumi quoted at the reader (take a moment to reflect on how tragically rare that is), Sayres' work remains sadly flat due to the lack of characterization. The prose is workmanlike, and - despite being scattered with the occasional gem culled from Persian idiom - nowhere near as magical as one might wish. I picked this up not realizing it was the second of a series, and I think it speaks volumes that I've no intention of seeking out the first, or following the next to see where the tale goes. Educational, but not moving.

*Night Letter* features the heroine of Sayre's book *Anahita's Woven Riddle*, but can stand alone. It takes the reader into the world of 19th century Persia (Iran), where modern traditions are beginning to filter through ancient traditions. The story opens with Anahita's kidnapping and continues at an adventurous pace to a thoroughly enjoyable conclusion. The writing is highly evocative, full of color and poetry. There's an ethos of fairy tale combined with a strong sense of historical authenticity and a strong, smart heroine who plays a central role in her own fate. A great read for historical fiction fans or anyone with an interest in Middle Eastern cultures.

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