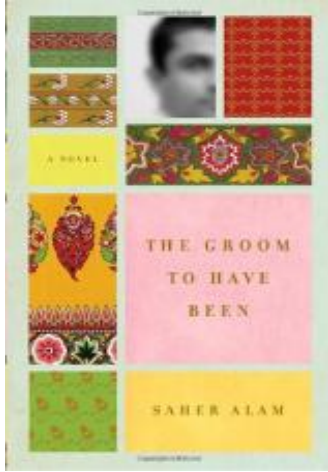


The Groom to Have Been

by Saher Alam



About the Book

A love story inspired by **The Age of Innocence**, about a young man and woman thwarted by tradition and the fears of a world suddenly defined by tragedy

Just as Nasr, a young man with a vibrant professional and social life in New York, begins to prepare for the arranged marriage he hopes will appease his Indian Muslim family and assure him a union as happy as his parents', he starts to suspect that his true love has been within his reach his entire life. Nasr has known Jameela since they were children, and for nearly that long she has flouted the traditions her community holds dear. But now the rebellion that always made her seem dangerous suddenly makes him wonder if she might be his perfect match. Feeling increasingly trapped as his wedding date approaches, Nasr contemplates a drastic escape, but in the wake of 9/11, new fears and old prejudices threaten to stand between him and the promise of happiness. Current in its political themes and classic in its treatment of doomed love, **The Groom to Have Been** is a graceful and emotionally charged debut.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the alternative life that Nasr imagines for himself affect his relationship with Farah? In your experience, has the ability to imagine a path not taken haunted your life?
2. What do you think of Nasr's mother's generation's desire to push their children into arranged marriages?
3. In a love marriage, the desire to commit to someone for life comes after falling in love. In an arranged marriage, the opposite is true: with the commitment of marriage comes love. Given this difference, would a love marriage between Nasr and Jameela have been more successful than the arranged marriage he has with Farah? Can Nasr ever hope to develop feelings for Farah that are as strong as the feelings he has for Jameela?

4. In Chapter 13, while talking to Jameela, why does Nasr recall the awkwardness of his exchange with Lillian on the plane home from London? How do the emotions lingering from that encounter affect his conversation with Jameela? He has been angry with Jameela for weeks, so why doesn't he finally confront her?
5. If first-generation Americans often feel that they straddle two cultures, for many of the main characters in this novel, September 11 exacerbates their sense of being culturally marooned. They resist both of the communities that make claims on their allegiance: the Americans they live among and, despite themselves have come to resemble, and the terrorists, who share their religious beliefs and customs and who, to a certain extent, claim to have acted in their name. At the end of Book One, why does Nasr conflate the memory of his sister Saira's wedding with his behavior at Heathrow airport when he ignores the Arab passenger's imploring calls for help? How are the emotions that these two events stir up similar?
6. Along the same lines, why do Nasr's feelings about the people he meets at the masjid (Malik, Rashida, etc.) shift so dramatically after Javaid and Jameela leave New York? And what does this mean for him and his future with Farah?
7. What does Javaid tell Jameela that makes her finally decide to elope with him? Why is this piece of information particularly effective in persuading her?
8. **The Groom to Have Been** is preceded by two epigraphs—one from Edith Wharton's novel *The Age of Innocence* and the other from the Qur'an. Why do you think these epigraphs were chosen?
9. Late in the novel, Nasr thinks the following of his and Farah's relationship: "Implicit in their sort of marriage was that Farah would love him without needing to know him thoroughly." What does Nasr mean by this? Discuss this notion of marriage. Can anyone in a marriage know the other person thoroughly?
10. Is Nasr an admirable figure? Do you find his way of being in a world changed by the attacks on September 11 reasonable and practical, or cowardly and insufficient?
11. Do you think the novel has a happy ending?

Author Bio

Saher Alam was born in Lucknow, India, in 1973, and moved to the United States when she was five. She is a graduate of Princeton University and the Creative Writing program at Boston University. She was a fiction fellow at Emory University, and her stories have appeared in *Best of the Fiction Workshops* and the journal *Literary Imagination*. She lives in St. Louis, Missouri.

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Publication Date: July 1, 2008

Paperback: 399 pages

Publisher: Spiegel & Grau

ISBN-10: 0385524609

ISBN-13: 9780385524605