

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

Colorized covers are for web display only. Most covers are printed in black and white.

The Persian Quarter

A photograph of a woman in a black hijab and a man with a white blindfold standing in front of a patterned wall. The woman is holding a sign that says "NOVEMBER 1979".

"Born out of Cahill's time teaching English to Iranian women in 1976, *The Persian Quarter* is an audacious piece of theatre that pulls out all the stops to give us the fullest possible tapestry of its subject ... Miss this essential play at your own peril."

—The Salt Lake Tribune

Drama by Kathleen Cahill

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

Colorized covers are for web display only. Most covers are printed in black and white.

The Persian Quarter

Drama. By Kathleen Cahill. *Cast: 2m., 2w.* The 13th-century Persian poet, Rumi, invites us to ride with him on a Persian carpet of history. He introduces us to two American diplomats, Ann and Mike, stationed in Iran in 1979, just as the mullahs under Ayatollah Khomeini are coming to power and the Iranian Revolution is gaining strength. They are oblivious to the terror that awaits them when they are taken hostage by student revolutionaries and begin a trial of endurance that lasts 444 days. In the last days of Ann's captivity, she becomes involved in a grand debate with one of her captors—Shirin, a beautiful student and zealous supporter of the revolution. In taut dialogue between the American captive and her Iranian captor, they battle over each other's "truths." Woven throughout, Rumi uses poetry as the vehicle to take us back and forth through time, political history and the richness of Persian culture. We go forward to the year 2009 to New York's Columbia University, where a fashionable Iranian, Azadeh, introduces herself to an American photojournalist, Emily, neither of them aware that their mothers met 30 years ago in a prison in Teheran. Azadeh is Shirin's daughter, in exile in America after her blog of the 2009 Green Movement put her life in danger. Emily has come to Columbia to photograph visiting Iranian President Ahmadinejad, who was once the student revolutionary who escorted her mother, Ann, out of prison. We learn what became of their parents and how the optimism and zeal of the Iranian Revolution were replaced with oppression, bitterness and cynicism. *Flexible set. Approximate running time: 2 hours. Code: PK7.*

Cover photo: Salt Lake Acting Company, Salt Lake City, featuring (l-r) Nell Gwynn and Deena Marie Manzanares.
Photo: Thom Gourley, Flatbread Images.

ISBN-10 1-58342-834-8
ISBN-13 978-1-58342-834-4



Dramatic Publishing

311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
ph: (800) 448-7469

Cover design by Jeanette Alig-Sergel.



Printed on recycled paper

www.dramaticpublishing.com

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

THE PERSIAN QUARTER

By
KATHLEEN CAHILL



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXIII by
KATHLEEN CAHILL

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE PERSIAN QUARTER)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:
Bret Adams Agency, 448 W. 44th St.,
New York NY 10036 • Phone: (212) 765-5630

ISBN: 978-1-58342-834-4

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play must give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author must also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and must appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“*The Persian Quarter* received its world premiere production at the Salt Lake Acting Company in Salt Lake City, Utah, Executive Producers
Keven Myhre and Cynthia Fleming.

The Persian Quarter received its world premiere at Salt Lake Acting Company (Keven Myhre and Cynthia Fleming, executive producers) in Salt Lake City, opening February 2, 2011. It was directed by Alexandra Harbold; set design was by Keven Myhre; lighting design was by Jesse Portillo; sound design was by Cynthia L. Kehr Rees; costume design was by Brenda Van der Wiel; the production manager was Jennie Sant. The cast was as follows:

ANN, EMILY Nell Gwynn
SHIRIN, AZADEH Deena Marie Manzanares
RUMI, IRANIAN POOL ATTENDANT . Shane Mozaffari
MIKE, KERMIT Josh Thoemke

THE PERSIAN QUARTER

CHARACTERS

Cast of four actors: two men, two women.

Played by the same actor:

JELALUDDIN RUMI. A 13th-century Persian poet.

IRANIAN POOL ATTENDANT

A PERSIAN MAN

Played by the same actor:

MIKE. An American, early 30s.

An adventurer. Smoker, very masculine,
built like a bulldog.

KERMIT ROOSEVELT . . In his 30s, a man of the 1950s.

Played by the same actor:

ANN GILLIES An American, 30. Unsentimental,
athletic, smart. A teacher who says she
works for the State Department.

EMILY GILLIES Her daughter, 26.
A photographer in New York.
Hip, ambitious, conflicted.

Played by the same actor:

SHIRIN Iranian, about 30. A student revolutionary.
Sophisticated, naive, driven.

AZADEH Her daughter, about 30.
A political refugee. Brave, demanding.

The play is both a story told on a Persian carpet and a piece of political history, set in 1979, 1981 and 2009, in the United States and Iran.

NOTE: A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

THE PERSIAN QUARTER

(PERSIAN MUSIC plays.

JELALUDDIN RUMI, the 13th-century mystic poet enters. He has long white hair. He wears rolled, draped trousers and a top with large flowing sleeves. He unrolls a Persian carpet. He looks at us. He sits down on the carpet.)

RUMI. This is a story told on a Persian carpet...an invisible carpet in which we are both the weavers and the threads.

(Pause. He pulls a digital camera from his pocket and points it at the audience. He presses the button. An enormous FLASH OF LIGHT blocks him out. We see:

ANN and MIKE at the swimming pool of the apartment compound where they both live. They wear terrycloth bathrobes over their bathing suits. It is 1979.

MIKE wears wire-rimmed glasses. ANN is attractive, vital. She isn't girlish. And probably, has never been.

They are sitting poolside, at some distance from each other, reading. ANN has a book; MIKE has a newspaper.

MIKE stands and takes off his robe. He's wearing bathing trunks. He sits down and reads his newspaper.

ANN stands and takes off her robe. She wears an extremely modest one-piece bathing suit. She sits down and picks up her book. MIKE looks up at her.)

MIKE. Hi.

ANN (*without looking up from her book*). Don't say hi.

MIKE. Hi.

(ANN looks around, as if they might be observed. She stands up and puts her robe back on. She sits down and picks up her book.)

ANN (*under*). You're impossible.

MIKE. I haven't seen you for a week.

ANN. Five days.

MIKE. Feels like a week. (*They look at each other. She returns to her book.*) Good book?

ANN. *The Billion Dollar Sure Thing*. It's about a plot to control all the oil in the world.

MIKE (*pause*). I want to touch you.

ANN (*loud whisper*). Shhhhsh.

MIKE. —I don't care. (*He stands up, looks around, walks over to her, and still without looking at her, he kisses her, she kisses him back. He goes back to his chaise, sits down, leans back in his chair and picks up his*

book. They continue to talk without looking at each other.) A nun. How were you ever a nun?

ANN. Who told you that?

MIKE. I read it.

ANN. Where?

MIKE. Ahh—your journal.

ANN (*looks up*). My journal?

MIKE. When I was in your bedroom.

ANN. You went snooping into my things? (*MIKE grins.*)
Did you?

MIKE. Is it true?

ANN (*suddenly fierce*). Did you or didn't you?

MIKE. Wow. Remind me never to cross you. (*Pause.*)

What's in your journal? (*He's teasing her. ANN gets up and punches him in the arm.*) Ow! (*He grabs her arm.*)

Now that I know you keep a "journal"—what did you say about me?

ANN. You think I'd tell you? How did you know about/
my past?

MIKE. /I didn't know. I heard.

ANN. Heard?

MIKE. Heard. Yeah.

ANN. You shouldn't say things like that.

MIKE. Like what?

ANN. Like that you read my journal...like that you *heard*.

MIKE. Do you think the State Department might be reading your journal?

ANN. I'm not going to tell you what I think. You work for the State Department.

MIKE. So do you.

ANN. No I don't.

MIKE. You work for the company.

ANN. I work for the Iran American Society.

MIKE (*doesn't believe her*). Okay.

ANN. I give English classes and discuss literature.

MIKE (*doesn't believe her*). Okay.

ANN. You're impossible.

MIKE. So you said.

ANN. I heard you were impossible.

MIKE. I heard you were a nun.

ANN. Will you please let go of my arm? (*He does. She goes back to her chaise and picks up her book. A beat She looks at him. He looks at her. Pause.*) Never mind.

MIKE. What?

ANN. Forget it.

MIKE. Fine.

(Pause.)

ANN. I heard you stayed up all night smoking opium with the mullahs. (*MIKE laughs.*) Is it true?

MIKE. I don't like opium. It makes me sick.

ANN. You've tried it?

MIKE. Sure.

ANN. Opium. (*Pause.*) I wish I could try it.

MIKE. You want to try it?

ANN. Does it make you sick?

MIKE. A little. At first.

ANN. And then?

MIKE. Then it's ahh...like having all your nerves removed. In a good way.

(Pause.)

ANN. Did you really smoke opium with the mullahs?

MIKE. Yeah.

ANN (*pause*). I'd like to try it. (*Pause.*) For the experience.

MIKE. You would?

ANN. Yes.

MIKE. You want to try opium or you want to meet the mullahs? Is this a trap by any chance?

ANN. A trap?

MIKE. There are people in the department who would love to see me take a tumble.

ANN. What does that have to do with me?

MIKE. Just checking, Ann.

ANN. You could get me in trouble just for saying I *wanted* to smoke opium. The director of the Iran American Society is an opium addict. That's what the story would become in the Washington world of inflatable truth.

MIKE. Opium and the Ex-Nun. (*Pause.*) So were you?

ANN. Why is it so interesting? It's not even relevant.

MIKE. It's interesting to me.

ANN. Why?

MIKE (*pause*). It turns me on. (*ANN laughs.*) I have a thing about nuns.

ANN. I'm not a nun anymore. I'm not even Catholic anymore. I'm not even religious.

MIKE. No belief in anything?

ANN. Sorry to disappoint you.

MIKE. You don't believe in anything?

ANN. Are you still Catholic?

MIKE. I never said I was Catholic. (*Pause.*) You heard I was Catholic?

ANN. No.

(Pause.)

MIKE. So how did you— Oh. Because of my thing about nuns? Yeah, a sexual attraction to nuns is a sign of deep religious faith.

ANN. You're weird. I heard you were weird. Because of your family background.

MIKE. You know about my family background?

ANN. Only what I heard...

MIKE. From who?

ANN. I don't know. I don't remember. Around.

MIKE. Around, like the wind?

ANN. This compound runs on gossip.

MIKE. They gossip about me?

ANN. You, me, everybody. Don't tell me you don't know that. Where did you get your information about me?

ANN/MIKE. Around.

ANN. Do you wish you stayed in your apartment in North Teheran?

MIKE. How'd you know I had an apartment in North Teheran? Stupid question.

ANN/MIKE. I heard/You heard.

ANN. From you. You lived on top of a grocery store.

MIKE. Yeah, on top of a grocery store, with a fancy cooler in the front window.

ANN. Full of sheep heads.

MIKE/ANN. Who told you?/You did.

ANN. But not the whole story. Tell me the whole story.

MIKE. Why?

ANN. It's interesting. You're here and you're having experiences.

MIKE. Aren't you having experiences?

ANN (*flirting*). You're my only experience. I'm really interested. Tell me. I love hearing your stories, Mike. I do. Come on. Come on.

(They look at each other. He is very drawn to her.)

MIKE. Okay, so I lived on top of this grocery store called Saadi Super Ghousht, with the sheep heads in the window that I had to pass twice a day, coming and going. But it was a brand new building. White brick, two stories, very modern. Very Western. Saadi Super Ghousht. Ghousht means meat.

ANN. Saadi is the great Persian poet.

MIKE. Yeah, so I lived on top of a butcher shop named after a poet. I'd like to see a chain of burger joints in the U.S. named after Walt Whitman.

ANN. I'd like to walk into a bar and say "Got any Robert Frost on tap?"

MIKE (*laughs*). Why not?

ANN. Because Americans aren't poetic. We're prosaic grim realists.

MIKE. Am I grim or prosaic? What does prosaic mean?

ANN. We honor soldiers, politicians and the occasional astronaut. Men. Always men.

MIKE. Do you want to be an occasional astronaut?

ANN. So what happened to your apartment on top of Saadi Super Meat?

MIKE. ...Well, I was sitting in my living room one evening, drinking Persian wine from Shiraz, writing a report...and I heard this big crash coming from the bathroom. I got up, and walked down the hall, what was left of the hall. Half the floor had caved in. And I'm peer-

ing through the hole in the floor where I can see the cooler with the sheep heads, right there, below my feet. It turns out the building wasn't made of brick, it was made of dung. And straw. With a brick façade. It just looked like a modern building, but it wasn't. It was really just like a peasant's hut in the village.

ANN. Interesting. Ancient Persian construction techniques. Western façade. Huge metaphor.

MIKE. A metaphor? It was a catastrophe.

ANN. Not to me. I'm an English teacher.

MIKE. Are you?

ANN. Yes. What did the landlord say?

MIKE. He said he was sorry that my bathroom floor caved in when it was such a nice bathroom. He moved me into another apartment in the building. A bigger apartment. With a better view.

ANN. But you didn't like it there anymore.

MIKE. No I liked it. Except that I noticed when I came home and saw those heads in their cold case...I started to feel too close to them. I started to identify. (*ANN laughs.*) I started to imagine my head in the cooler. I don't know why but I got freaked out. So I moved here to the American compound. (*Looks at her.*) Which may have been a mistake.

ANN. I'm glad you did. (*Pause.*) I'm glad you didn't want to be a sheep head.

MIKE. I wrote all this to the Foggy Bottoms in Washington. I hope they believed me.

ANN. Why wouldn't they?

MIKE. Because I'm suspect.

ANN. Suspect?

MIKE. Why wasn't I living in the compound to begin with? What was I doing living in an apartment on my own? They don't like the reports I write either. My reports don't fit into their world view.

ANN. What is their world view?

MIKE. That they rule the world.

ANN. They're just trying to do their job.

MIKE. Yeah, I know. They think their job is to rule the world. And I think that's bullshit. For the record.

ANN. What record?

MIKE. Are you sure you're not trying to get me into trouble?

ANN. You're so suspicious.

MIKE. It's how I stay out of trouble.

ANN. I think they love you in Washington. You're related to the Roosevelts. To Kermit Roosevelt. A great patriot.

MIKE. Distantly related.

ANN. I think he was a brave man.

MIKE. That's your opinion.

ANN. Yes, that's my opinion. *(Pause.)* But not yours?

MIKE *(pause)*. You're such a true believer.

ANN. What do you mean?

MIKE. You're a believer—all the cells in your body believe in a nun like way. So why do I find you so hard to believe?

ANN. I'm beginning to think you don't like me.

MIKE. No, I like you. That's the problem.

ANN. Why are you so suspicious of me?

MIKE. I don't know...

(A pause. They look at each other. He's going to kiss her but she looks around and pulls away.)

ANN. Mike.

MIKE. Yeah, okay. We're not in the bedroom.

ANN. And we're in this country.

MIKE. There must be something you like about being here.

ANN. You.

MIKE. Besides me.

ANN. I like...I like Rumi.

MIKE. Who?

ANN. The Persian poet. He's very mystical and profound.

MIKE. Never met him.

ANN. He died in the thirteenth century.

MIKE. That explains it.

ANN. And I like Googosh. You know who she is, don't you?

MIKE. She used to be blasting from every car radio in the city...*Ahmani...your eyes are my wine... Your eyes are my wine...* You like poets? I can be poetic.

(The look at each other.)

ANN. You're so different from your reputation.

MIKE. What is my reputation?

ANN. You're a hothead.

MIKE. A hothead? What does that mean?

ANN. And an oddball elitist.

MIKE. Where do they get elitist? Me?

ANN. You're a Roosevelt.

MIKE. I'm a Catholic boy from a Pennsylvania farm.

ANN *(pause)*. They say you've "gone native."

MIKE. Native? Because I speak the language of the country I've been sent to and I actually like the people who

live here. What do they expect? I was in the Peace Corps. I learned Farsi in the Peace Corps.

ANN. So you know my name means shit in Farsi.

MIKE (*laughs*). Maybe you should think about using another name.

ANN. My older brother used to call me little shit. I can't get away from it.

MIKE. What do your students call you?

ANN. They call me Khonom Gill-as. Lady Cherries.

MIKE. Lady Cherries. Don't take offense, but that sounds like a stripper. A stripper nun. (*He gets a pack of cigarettes out of the pocket of his bathrobe.*) It's enough to give me a heart attack. (*Offers her a cigarette.*)

ANN (*shakes her head*). I don't smoke. So I guess I can't stay up all night smoking with the mullahs and get the lowdown. Also I'm not a man.

MIKE. That's one of the reasons I like you.

ANN. I can't go anywhere in this city.

MIKE. Where do you want to go? I'll take you.

ANN. I really want to get out of here. Can you take me out of here?

MIKE. But you just got here. How long has it been? A couple months?

ANN. It twists me up, being in a culture where a man's sense of his virility is dependent on the misery of his women.

MIKE. It's not misery. They believe in female modesty.

ANN. That's exactly what I was told by the church. That God wants me to be modest. I'd ask the nuns, but is that all he wants of me? Yes, they said, that was all he wanted. I thought it was so undignified.