



Pomegranate Soup: A Novel

Marsha Mehran

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Beneath the holy mountain Croagh Patrick, in damp and lovely County Mayo, sits the small, sheltered village of Ballinacroagh. To the exotic Aminpour sisters, Ireland looks like a much-needed safe haven. It has been seven years since Marjan Aminpour fled Iran with her younger sisters, Bahar and Layla, and she hopes that in Ballinacroagh, a land of “crazed sheep and dizzying roads,” they might finally find a home.

From the kitchen of an old pastry shop on Main Mall, the sisters set about creating a Persian oasis. Soon sensuous wafts of cardamom, cinnamon, and saffron float through the streets—an exotic aroma that announces the opening of the Babylon Café, and a shock to a town that generally subsists on boiled cabbage and Guinness served at the local tavern. And it is an affront to the senses of Ballinacroagh’s uncrowned king, Thomas McGuire. After trying to buy the old pastry shop for years and failing, Thomas is enraged to find it occupied—and by foreigners, no less.

But the mysterious, spicy fragrances work their magic on the townsfolk, and soon, business is booming. Marjan is thrilled with the demand for her red lentil soup, abgusht stew, and rosewater baklava—and with the transformation in her sisters. Young Layla finds first love, and even tense, haunted Bahar seems to be less nervous.

And in the stand-up-comedian-turned-priest Father Fergal Mahoney, the gentle, lonely widow Estelle Delmonico, and the headstrong hairdresser Fiona Athey, the sisters find a merry band of supporters against the close-minded opposition of less welcoming villagers stuck in their ways. But the idyll is soon broken when the past rushes back to threaten the Amnipoors once more, and the lives they left behind in revolution-era Iran bleed into the present.

Infused with the textures and scents, trials and triumphs of two distinct cultures, **Pomegranate Soup** is an infectious novel of magical realism. This richly detailed story, highlighted with delicious recipes, is a delectable journey into the heart of Persian cooking and Irish living.

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