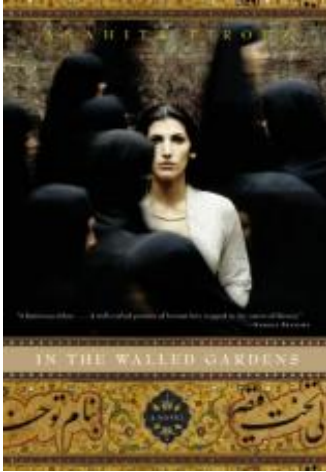


# In the Walled Gardens

by Anahita Firouz

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## About the Book

Sweeping us into scenes rich with drama, conjuring a world on the brink of destruction-Iran before the revolution-this haunting and passionate novel tells the story of a doomed love affair.

Mahastee grew up in the privileged inner circles of Teheran's aristocracy. Reza, whose father once worked for Mahastee's family, has become a revolutionary leading clandestine meetings in the city's shadowy underworld. When they meet again for the first time in twenty years, their volatile love takes on new and threatening implications as the political situation in Teheran becomes increasingly explosive.

Anahita Firouz belongs to the last generation in Iran who witnessed an entire way of life fall apart. **In the Walled Gardens** is her evocation of that complex and glittering world-a compelling portrait of a now vanished era, and an unforgettable, revolutionary love story.

## Discussion Guide

1. Whose view of life do you consider more realistic and pragmatic, Houshang's or Mahastee's? Why does Houshang seem to dislike Mahastee's family? What defines their marriage?
2. Identify some of the portentous "hairline cracks" in the novel that become large fissures as the plot unfolds. How does the opening chapter foreshadow events to come?
3. Reza Nirvani and his friend Jalal are both revolutionaries, and yet they are quite dissimilar. In what ways are they different? Why is Reza not a "typical" revolutionary? Where do his loyalties lie?

4. Attempt to describe the shape of the narrative. Do you find that the novel's structure resembles a vortex?
5. The meeting between the French journalist and Mr. Bashirian reflects the great divide between East and West. Can you point out different ways in which their misunderstandings are shaped and defined?
6. What sort of father is Mr. Bashirian? Considering his dedication, why do you think his son, Peyman, behaves the way he does during the prison visit?
7. Compare Mahastee's and Reza's mothers. How is each strong in her own way? Are the other mothers in the novel significantly different?
8. How is the relationship of Nasrollah Mirza and Hajji Ali-mardan pivotal to the story? What do you think is the real reason they ultimately part ways?
9. Consider the various households ? each with its distinctive meals, rituals, etc. ? that are portrayed in the novel. Describe the differences among the aristocratic Mosharraf family, the nouveau riche Mazahers, and middle-class families such as the Nirvanis. Contrast these families with peasant immigrants such as Jalal's parents, and the rural life portrayed in chapter 19.
10. Mahastee says: "I had wanted to choose my fate, whereas Mother believed one could not escape it" (page 140). And Reza says: "A man's will ? the very essence of his life ? makes him conscious of being free" (page 326). Discuss the issue of freedom of choice versus destiny with respect to each of the novel's principal characters. Do you see a shift as events unfold?
11. Describe Hajji-Ali's relationship with his son Reza. How does this relationship shape Reza's character and destiny? Although the two men's fates seem quite dissimilar as the novel opens, are they so far apart by the end? How does Reza change as a revolutionary in the course of the story?
12. Why doesn't Mahastee leave her husband once she has discovered and come to grips with how she feels about everything? What do you think would have happened had she chosen to live with Reza?
13. It's impossible to separate love from politics in the novel's two narrative strands. In the end, how is the political rendered extremely personal and emotional? Why does Mahastee say at the end: "And without exception we are all betrayers" (page 324)? Whom and what do the novel's various characters betray?

## Author Bio

Anahita Firouz was born and grew up in Tehran, Iran. She now lives in Pittsburgh with her husband and two children. This is her first novel.

## Critical Praise

"Her admirable and smooth prose is pointed, elegant, aphoristic, and wise."

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