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Kaoru Mori

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Smith majoittuu matkallaan rikkaan persialaismiehen taloon ja tutustuu paikalliseen ympäristöön, kulttuuriin ja tapoihin. Tarinan keskipisteessä on kuitenkin isännän suloinen nuori puoliso Anis, joka ei yleensä astu ulos talostaan ja jota Smith ei koskaan saa edes tavata. Anis on elänyt hyvin ylellistä ja suojaattua elämää, mutta viimein hän uskaltautuu palbelijansa kanssa naisten kylpylään, paikkaan jossa ulkomaailmassa tarkkaan verhotut ja varjellut naiset saavat olla yhdessä vapaasti. Tämä pieni retki mullistaa Aniksen elämän, sillä hän löytää itselleen ystävän, jonka kanssa hän haluaa solmia sisarliiton.

???? 7 Details

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Amy says

This volume left me speechless. I guess this is what sisterhood really means in a polygamy marriage. Anis is a very generous and noble, borderline with naive character because she is willing to share her husband with a friend that she made in a bath house. A very weird kind of friendship that many modern women wouldn't understand. The art style is gorgeous as always.

7jane says

I haven't been commenting on this series yet, but now I will. A series of stories where a man called Mr Smith travels from east of Aral Sea towards Ankara, and seems to be an anthropologist of some sort (or something), during the latter half of 19th Century. The people of various kinds have yet to experience the devastation of wars, the Soviets, etc. and have strong, sometimes a bit harsh, traditions.

Here Mr Smith and his guide arrive to a Persian city (Tehran?) and are welcomed by a wealthy tradesman. His wife, Anis, is not permitted to meet them, and all women must wear purdahs (burqa) in public. But luckily she can still go to the women's bath house, which is suggested to her as she finds herself bored during Mr Smith's stay. And there she meets a woman, Sharine, willing to do Khwahar Khwandagi (become avowed sisters) with her, which might've still existed back then, in real life. Basically really close female friendship (Heterosexual Life Partners level) with an almost-marriage level ceremony making it official, traveling together on trips, one can inherit the other after death, and sometimes they might even be buried together. Then a tragedy strikes, which changes things in Anis and Sharine's life...

This is a really good series, with interesting bits about the culture(s), women's position in each society (only in this book do they wear purdahs) and conflicts. The drawings are really beautiful and detailed; in this book there's also some female nudity due to the baths scenes :) Very worth following. If possible, get hardback(s).

Anu says

Miten kauniisti voi piirtää joutilasta hiljaisuutta, herkkiä yksinäisyyden häivähdyksiä ja sattumalta syttivää suurta ystävyyttää...

Paolo says

Holy shit, this book is gorgeous! A little light on plot, but you'll probably never notice that because you're too goddamn busy picking your jaw up from the floor due to the very sensual nature of the illustrations Mori decided to bless her readers with. Not surprising, really, as the volume is about baths, avowed sisters and the deep friendship between two women. It's handled with a light touch and with enough grace that it doesn't end up feeling like fan service; in fact the male gaze is completely removed here as the arc deals primarily with women! Mori herself says in the afterword that she changes her style relatively drastically in order to

differentiate this light novel from the war and battle-heavy volume that was volume six.

That said, don't read it on the bus.

Kendall H says

I still love Kaori Mori, but this has been my least favorite of her books so far. She mentions in the afterward that her usual style of heavy-in-the-details drawing was absent in this volume, and I missed it. I also didn't connect with any of the characters. I don't understand what Anis saw in Sherine - aside from her body, and the story didn't seem to go in "that" direction. Neither had real depth of character, and I didn't really feel the love between Anis and her husband either. I don't know, just fell a bit flat for me.

Marie Viala says

I had been waiting for almost two years for this book, so when I saw it at the bookshop today I had to grab it. As usual with this series, the art is absolutely beautiful. We got introduced to new characters that seem very interesting, but I'd have one little reproach : reading the author note before the actual book, I was expecting queer women, which would have been amazing, and even though these characters' arc is not over I'm not sure it'll go that way so it's a bit sad (can still be read that way though), so let's say it'd be a 4,5/5

Maggie Gordon says

Another gorgeous volume in the Bride series by Mori featuring a new character and a focus on a type of marriage between two female friends. The art, though more simplistic than previous volumes, is gorgeous. My only complaint is the two ladies we're following aren't very well developed. Their story was a nice aside, but the other brides in this series are much more vivacious and interesting!

Heidi Burkhart says

I have enjoyed each book in this fantastic series, but found this volume, which takes place in the Central Turkic area, to be the most unusual. The story describes a developing relationship between two young women which is cemented by a union called khwahar khwandah. It is like a marriage in many ways. I am sure that you will want to learn more about this very interesting union so will do some searching after the book is finished to learn more about this custom.

David Schaafsma says

I had sort of forgotten I had been reading this series, so needed to go back to my reviews of the first six books. 2 1/2 years since I had read a volume! This is gorgeously drawn historical manga set in the 19th century, along the Silk Road, where brides like the one who is focused on here are typically married by 12-

13. We get personal stories situated in historical context, of course, and a close look at cultural artifacts and traditions. Strong girl (and other girls, and sometimes women) focus from Mori, who also provides afterwards to explain her process, talk to readers. Maori loves to draw period costumes, and maybe women in particular.

The focus in this volume is on Anis, young and bored and isolated wife of a wealthy tradesman, who is being visited by a westerner, Mr. Smith, but she is not allowed to see him, per customs. Her connections with men are very restricted. This is the first volume in which women in this region wear the burqa. But Anis discovers a way to connect with women, at the public baths. I should also say Anis is the only wife of her husband, though he could have as many as four wives.

She also learns of a practice with which I was unfamiliar, Khwahar Khwandagi, where two women can become “avowed sisters,” bff formally constituted for life. There’s an almost-marriage-like ceremony they go through, and sometimes they might even be buried together. There are financial commitments that are possible, too.

So Anis finds a woman very quickly she connects with, Sharine. Recall now, these are cis-gendered women, married. Then a tragedy strikes, which creates a change in Anis and Sharine’s life, and necessitates a decision that Anis initiates, very interesting.

The art and history are stunning. In this one you have the burqa and also, in the baths, you have a lot of female nudity. As I said, Mori just loves drawing women, clothed or not! I would very much call this feminist work. The series would seem to be primarily about the emergence of something like a strong female identity amidst a culturally enforced oppression of females. Pretty cool.

Miss says

i am continually amazed at kaoru mori's ability to draw extended scenes of naked women without setting off my NO, BITE ME GROSS MALE-ORIENTED FANSERVICE reflexes. i guess it's hard to be bitter when it's in the context of super cute stories about female homosociality and friendship?

4 stars

Lizzie Darcy says

Amo esta historia. La amo. Me encanta cómo la autora se mete por cada rincón de Asia Central y dibuja las costumbres con ese talento para el detalle. En este caso el volumen se centra en una región musulmana donde las mujeres no pueden mostrarse libremente ante los hombres, y la historia en particular de Anis, la esposa joven de un acaudalado señor. Anis muere de ganas por tener una amiga para dejar de lado su vida solitaria, y apela así a la costumbre de "amigas por voto". Debe encontrar una amiga con la que jurarse eterna amistad. El volumen describe su vida, la sociedad que la rodea y sus tradiciones, y su encuentro con quien será su amiga elegida. Acá no hay espacio para "lo ideal", es muy directa ilustrando dichas costumbres que no coinciden con nuestra mentalidad occidental, y eso es algo que adoro =)

Christina says

On his journey from present-day Mongolia to India, the British wannabe anthropologist Mr. Smith stays for a period of time with a wealthy trader and his beautiful, young wife named Anis. As a Muslim woman, Anis is required to remain hidden from Mr. Smith and other male, non-family visitors to the home. Therefore, she often passes her days in complete solitude save for the few moments she spends with her son, Hassan, and the woman hired to care for him, Mahfu, and the Persian cat that often spurs her affections.

Anis tries to remind herself that she has no reason to be unhappy. She lives in a beautiful home, her husband has no plans to take another wife, and she has given birth to a son. Yet her loneliness is still omnipresent, particularly after Mahfu explains to Anis about the sacred tradition of “avowed sisterhood” where two married women become lifelong secret keepers and never become jealous of each other. Determined to make a female friend if not an avowed sister, Anis convinces her husband to allow her to visit the public baths with Mahfu accompanying her and eventually meets a woman by the name of Sherine.

I mentioned the first six volumes of Mori’s series in my list of ten favorite reads from 2015, and this volume will likely make my list for 2016. Her choice to focus on Anis’ interest in Sherine’s body — the shape of her eyes, the size of her breasts, the comparison to Anis’ cat — as the basis for Anis’ interest in getting to know Sherine is a departure from the typical focus of Mori’s series, but I think this emphasis on sexuality and the differences between female bodies is an interesting and accurate approach to how women view one another at first glance.

Whether women have been conditioned to “compare” because of society or not, Anis develops a “girl crush” (as my friends and I call them) based on the appearance of Sherine’s body. Yet Mori’s drawing of this interest is never drawn with the heaving, over-the-top focus that more male-oriented comics suffer from. Breasts and bodies are presented in all different sizes and shapes — much like one would see in the changing room of a gym (apropos given the setting of the story) — and the near-constant nudity is beautifully rendered without feeling like fanservice to keep male readers interest.

While there is some nudity during scenes with Anis and her husband, her breasts are nearly always covered in those moments and the focus is either on her back or her mouth as she converses with him. The emphasis of the story is on female friendships and how women view the female body rather than that the male perception so often seen in comics. (Interestingly, scenes where Mr. Smith and Anis’ husband visit the men’s public bath are typically devoid of nudity.)

As Sherine and Anis’s attention moves away from physical appearances, the two women are able to find common connections based on more substantial interests and develop a bond that allows them to lean on each other after a tragedy. This shift in focus would have been added by an additional chapter where the women are allowed to get to know one another. Even the other women in the story express shock at how quickly Anis and Sherine’s relationship advances! But the story is still beautiful in its simplicity and in the way it is visually rendered in each panel.

At the end of the book, Mori discusses how she chose to use a lighter touch in her drawings this time, and this stylistic choice is best seen in her full-page drawings of Anis spending time in the courtyard of her home. (I included pictures of two such panels above.) The panels feel very airy and include beautiful depictions of the scenery yet still manage to convey the darkness of Anis’ loneliness. This is one of those rare comics where I

read first for the story and then go back to look at every panel in greater detail because every single panel is beautiful. Seven volumes into this series, Mori still manages to amaze me with her talent.

Elizabeth A says

In this installment of this wonderful manga series we cut back to Mr. Smith and his travels. He is now in a region of Central Asia where the women wear burkas, and he is surprised to learn that he cannot meet/see the wife of his gracious host. Other than Mr. Smith and his guide, we are introduced to a totally different set of characters.

Anis is the only wife of a wealthy man who clearly loves her. She has a baby son. She is so lucky and happy, right? Well, while that is true, she is also really lonely as her closest friend is a reluctant Persian cat. One day she visits a public bath and discovers an entirely different world than she is used to, and her life will never be the same.

I continue to love this series, and with each new installment we explore lives of women along the Silk Road, and their agency or lack of it. Most of the girls are married off really young - think tweens/early teens, and their lives are governed by the strictures of the culture they are raised in. I really love that we see that different regions have different norms, and that is just the way it is.

Anis should be blissful all the time. Her home is luxurious with beautiful gardens, she has maids, and a husband who refuses to marry additional wives, though he clearly can afford to, but somehow something is missing. This feminist tale showcases the lives of women as they flourish in a world prescribed by men. This region has a tradition of Khwahar Khwandagi, where two women become avowed sisters. It's essentially a marriage between two women; a life companion who is often buried with, and inherits from the other. Mind you, these are not queer women, but rather a way to create a different way of being in the world. I have only heard about this kind of relationship in Chinese stories, though not are formalized maybe, and I for one love the idea of having an avowed sister. Why do we not do this today?

The art continues to be lovely, though very different in this volume as there is lots of nudity - we do spend lots of time in a bath house after all. I cannot wait to get my hands on the next book in this series.

Zaz says

The story was interesting on the cultural side, the avowed sisters was a nice custom in a part of the country where the women were hidden. I also liked the cat and the scenes with Anis and her husband were warm and cute. Otherwise, the focus on the public baths (with many nudes) and friendship wasn't really entertaining, it lacked the usual action, emotions, beautiful clothes and the characters I'm invested in.

Jennifer says

This volume might come as a surprise to anyone who's been reading the series, which has been so far "family friendly" with brief glimpses of nudity. Much of this volume takes place in the women's public bath, and the women's bare bodies are drawn with loving detail. There's a lush yet innocent eroticism to the story of a

sheltered young bride who desperately yearns for a female friend and falls head over heels for a beautiful stranger at the baths. At a political level, some may well take issue with the way the story elides issues with the seclusion of women and romanticizes polygamy (fair complaints), but as a sweet, romantic tale it's lovely and satisfying.
