



Bliss: A Novel

By O. Z. Livaneli

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Bliss: A Novel By O. Z. Livaneli

Fifteen-year-old Meryem lives in a rural village in Eastern Anatolia, Turkey. Her simple, conventional way of life changes dramatically after her uncle, a sheikh in a dervish order, rapes her and condemns her to death for shaming the family. Asked to carry out the "honor killing" is his son Cemal, a commando in the Turkish army. So begins a long, mystifying voyage for Meryem as her shell-shocked cousin ushers her to the shining metropolis of Istanbul where another troubled soul, the Harvard-educated professor Irfan, embarks on his own journey of transformation—one that catapults him into the heart of Meryem and Cemal's conflict. The crossed-paths and interwoven destinies of these three characters makes for an affecting, by turns brutal and life-affirming portrayal of traditional and modern-day Turkey that no reader will soon forget.

"Livaneli is an essential force in Turkey's musical, cultural, and political scene."
--Orhan Pamuk, Nobel Prize Winner and author of *Snow*

"Bliss is eye-opening and deeply moving."
--*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

"Compelling [for] American readers ...hard to put down."
--*The Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"With lush scenes of Turkish life and nuanced depictions of the [characters'] inner lives. . .a convergence of lost, likable souls."
--*Entertainment Weekly*

O. Z. Livaneli, one of Turkey's most prominent authors, is also an accomplished composer, and previously served as an elected member of the Turkish Parliament.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The paths of three characters converge to illustrate, perhaps too patly, the conflicts of contemporary Turkey. Raped by her uncle, the sheikh, 15-year-old villager Meryem has shamed her family. To save the family name, Cemal, the sheikh's son, a soldier home from his tour fighting Kurds in the Gabar Mountains, is ordered by his father to take Meryem to Istanbul and to murder her. When Cemal and Meryem reach Istanbul, they are shocked by the cosmopolitan city, full of women wearing low-cut blouses and children who disobey their parents. Cemal falters at the moment of decision and, instead of murdering Meryem, travels with her to the seaside, where they encounter Irfan, a successful Istanbul professor who, plagued by insomnia and anxiety, has fled his cushy life to set sail in the Aegean Sea. Irfan offers them jobs on his boat and forges a tenuous mentorship with Meryem, but Cemal, whose psychological torment is richly captured early in the book, is soon reduced to a glowering presence. Livaneli, a former exile who was elected to Turkey's Parliament in 2002, takes great pains to reveal his country's complex culture, but the result often reads like a cautionary fable. Readers should prepare themselves for heavy-handed allegory. (*Oct.*)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Left in the barn to hang herself as a consequence of her uncle raping her, 15-year-old Meryem defies local tradition and refuses to do it. Her cousin Cemal, recently a soldier in the army, who grew up with her in a tiny village in eastern Turkey, is sent to take her to Istanbul and is told to kill her on the way. On the train, Meryem's eyes are opened to city women who wear modern-day dress and speak and eat in front of men. Cemal cannot kill her, and after a short stay with his brother in Istanbul, he goes to a war buddy who gives them a place of temporary refuge, a fish farm on a cove in western Turkey. Here they meet a professor who has run away from his privileged life in Istanbul and is living on a large sailboat. He invites the two cousins to join him as his crew and companions. The dynamics created by this union give these three characters a new direction in which to take their lives. Teens will be drawn to the plight of a girl who has been raped and is then treated as the perpetrator of the crime. Livaneli shows village life and modern city life as two separate realities that coexist in Turkey today. Students interested in human rights and global studies will also appreciate this novel.—*Ellen Bell, Amador Valley High School, Pleasanton, CA*

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From [Booklist](#)

At 15, Meryem is raped by her uncle, the ruling sheik in her remote Turkish village. Locked up in the barn in disgrace, she does not do her duty and hang herself, so her cousin Cemal, a young war veteran returned from fighting the Kurdish "terrorists," must take Meryem to Istanbul and murder her. On their journey, they meet up with a distinguished city professor who has fled his wife and work. Told from the alternating viewpoints of these three travelers, who change each other, this novel by an eminent Turkish writer and member of Parliament tells a gripping contemporary story that gets behind stereotypes of exotic Islam to reveal the diversity in individual people and the secrets and lies, cruelty and love, in family, friendship, and public life. In a climactic moment, Meryem tears off her headscarf and experiences emancipation; yet, at the same time, radical students at the university are fighting police for the right to wear the veil. This will make a terrific book-club selection when it reaches paperback. *Hazel Rochman*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Joseph Kidwell:

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Michael Berube:

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