

Interview with Homa Pourasgari, author of *Lemon Curd*

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to interview Homa Pourasgari, who is here to talk about her novel, “Lemon Curd.”

Homa Pourasgari resides in Los Angeles, California. She received a degree in Business from Loyola Marymount University, after which she left to live in Paris for one year and attended the University of Sorbonne, focusing on literature. Multilingual, she has been traveling since the age of five and has experienced many different cultures. Homa has worked in various industries such as marketing, retail, banking, accounting and fitness but has always returned to her true love—writing. She is currently working on a new book. “Lemon Curd” is her first novel.

Tyler: Welcome, Homa. I’m glad you could join me today. To begin, I’m intrigued by the very unusual title of your book. Can you tell us why you chose it and what you intend for it to represent?

Homa: There are several reasons why I chose “Lemon Curd” for the title of my book. Firstly, I was looking for a title that’s different, that would stand out and have an international appeal. Lemon Curd is a European delight that started in England. No one I know of has ever written a book titled “Lemon Curd,” not even the British who are in love with their afternoon tea, scones and Lemon Curd. Secondly, like chocolate, Lemon Curd is the language of romance. And thirdly, Lemon Curd has a tart and sweet flavor which is symbolic of Anna Lisa’s and Neil’s relationship—it is tart at first and sweetens as the story progresses.

Tyler: Will you tell us a little about the female main character, Anna Lisa Gibson? What do you think readers will find appealing about her?

Homa: I think readers will be able to relate to her. Many of us at some point have faced similar situations—being stuck in a relationship which is going nowhere, getting manipulated by unsavory characters, struggling to find love in between our crazy busy schedules, juggling too many tasks at the same time, keeping our eyes on that promotion at work and making sure we don’t lose it to the next person.

Tyler: Anna Lisa has a boyfriend when the novel opens, but she seems dissatisfied in her relationship with him? Why?

Homa: Her boyfriend, Paul, is always looking for someone better to come along and he’s never satisfied. He wants to be loved but isn’t willing to reciprocate. He wants a better position at work

but isn't willing to work for it. And Anna Lisa is looking for someone who is honest, dependable and loves her back. Paul makes her feel insecure and unstable.

Tyler: And what about Neil Scott Whitaker, who starts out as a co-worker but wants more. Can you tell us a little about who he is when he meets Anna Lisa?

Homa: Neil is a Brit who was transferred from the London office to temporarily work with Anna Lisa. A nice guy but a bit arrogant, he is really competitive just like Anna Lisa and has a fiancée who is a snob. Neil got engaged because he felt that it was time for him to settle down and who better to do it with than the stunning Sarah Weston who comes from a high society family.

Tyler: Why does Anna dislike Neil from the beginning?

Homa: In the beginning she was upset with him for behaving ungentlemanly when he took her last jar of Lemon curd. And later, she was afraid that he was going to steal her client and her upcoming promotion. Anna Lisa works really hard at her job in the hopes of someday becoming a partner at Howard Brown. She is also quite aware that women live in the men's world. Men still get paid more than women for the same positions and they are more likely to become partners in large corporations. Not willing to handover her hard work to a newcomer, Anna Lisa fights back without realizing that her insecurities are more of a threat to her livelihood than her coworker, Neil.

Tyler: The novel takes place in both Los Angeles and London. Why did you choose these two cities, and what made you decide to have this type of international connection to the book?

Homa: I like to write about people from all cultures and truly believe that if we walk a mile in someone else's shoes, we wouldn't have so many wars. I feel that as a writer, I have an obligation to explore the world around me and to show that we are all the same regardless of nationality, sex, religion and race.

I chose Los Angeles and London because these two cities are quite different. In LA we are casual and don't always follow rules and etiquette whereas Londoners are more proper and stiff. These two settings were the perfect way to create friction between Neil and Anna Lisa.

Tyler: In some of your promotional materials for "Lemon Curd," you talk about how it reflects women in the workplace and the difficulty of balancing home and work life. Did you set out to write a book about a working woman? Do you think women today need more characters in books and films they can relate to in this way?

Homa: I wanted to write a book about our time period and not necessarily just about women. We have evolved from the time when one income would feed a family of four. Many work because they have to and others do it because they enjoy their jobs. It's always difficult to balance home and work life and work is often the thief of our precious time. But we must always make room for family and friends. Without them, life becomes meaningless and stale.

And yes, I do think we need more books and movies with characters that we can all relate to. An inspirational film or a novel can make us feel that we're not alone and that other people are going through the same struggles. This in turn would give us hope and help us overcome issues we face in our lives.

Tyler: You also mention in your promotional materials about how the book depicts the workaholic and multi-tasking aspects of our society. Will you tell us more about what you mean by our society being full of workaholics, and how that is depicted in “Lemon Curd”?

Homa: We are often defined by what we do rather than by who we are. One of the first questions we ask people we meet is what do you do for a living? We equate success with money, power and position. And so we work long hours to catch up with our friends, neighbors or coworkers. I suppose this is human nature. The more we have, the more we want and in the process we end up being workaholics. This is especially true in United States where we are taught at a young age to set goals, to have a plan and to ask ourselves where will be in ten, fifteen or twenty years? In Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, people are more easy-going with their shorter workdays, longer vacations and the many days off in between.

We have become a society of multi-taskers. We are eating and talking on our cell phone while listening to our friend who is seated in the passenger seat while driving to pick up our child from a basketball practice. But are we enjoying any of these tasks? Will we even remember what we did an hour from now? True enjoyment is taking pleasure in the small things life offers such as giving our full attention to a friend who needs us or sitting down at the dinner table and sharing a meal with our family or noticing the lovely maple trees that we pass while driving.

In “Lemon Curd,” both Anna Lisa and Neil work long hours and move from one task to another and at the end of the day, they are both exhausted and sometimes even irritated. Neil doesn’t have much time for his fiancée or his sister when they come in town for a visit and Anna Lisa is too busy with work and has no time to take care of herself. For both of these characters work always comes above everything else until they realize that there is more to life than a series of tasks.

Tyler: Homa, without giving away the story, what would you say is the lesson that Anna Lisa most has to learn in life, or that she does learn by the novel’s conclusion?

Homa: After a series of bad relationships, Anna Lisa needs to learn to trust and take a chance again. Throughout the story, she is cautious and tries hard to conceal her vulnerabilities, but by the end, she lets her guard down and isn’t afraid to show her feelings.

Tyler: In terms of changing, is Anna Lisa the only dynamic character in the novel or do Paul or Neil or any of the other characters also undergo changes, for the better or worse?

Homa: Paul doesn’t change much. His character stays the same throughout the story. As for Neil, he learns that there is a big difference between marrying the right person and marrying for love. At the beginning of the story, he is sort of stiff and uptight, but toward the end he learns to relax and let loose.

Tyler: Homa, I understand you are a member of the Association of Iranian American Writers. Will you tell us what it is like to be an Iranian author in America, and can I ask why in “Lemon Curd” you didn’t choose to write about your Iranian background, especially when so many Middle Eastern authors today are getting attention for their novels?

Homa: I think when you are an Iranian writer in America, everyone expects you to write about Iran, but most Iranian writers are already doing that. As for me, I rarely do what is expected because it is not interesting. Although I do have a few Iranian characters in my book, I usually like to write about what I don't know and not what I know. I spend a great deal of time doing research. I break all the writing rules and come up with a story that surprises readers. I am a rebel who doesn't like to follow and prefers to lead. My whole life, I have followed a different path than others and will continue to do so as long as it suits my personality. Maybe someday when no one is looking over my shoulder, expecting me to write about Iran I will do it, but for now, I will stay away from the status quo and challenge my art instead. After all, art is all about creativity and we cannot create something that already exists.

Tyler: Even though you don't write about Iran, do you think your background makes you view America or even England in a different light than you would otherwise, and if so, how is that reflected in your writing?

Homa: Hmm...that's a tough question to answer. It is difficult for me to step back and analyze my own writing objectively, but I will try to give it a shot. Because my Iranian background pushes me to be more conservative and my American background pushes me to be more liberal, I view America and England from both a traditional and a progressive point of view. As an Iranian and American citizen, I am more aware of the differences in cultures and so my descriptions, settings, characters, and dialogue exchanges are not similar to what one would find in an average romance book.

Tyler: Homa, I know you have a second novel coming out later this year. Will you tell us what that book will be about?

Homa: My second novel, "The Dawn of Saudi," which is coming out June 22, is a romantic mystery about the oppression of women and the human rights abuse in Saudi Arabia under the pretext of religion. I wrote about this topic because each time I fill up my gas tank, I can't but think about my money going into the pockets of the very people who want to shut me up and treat me like a piece of furniture.

Tyler: I never would have thought about it that way, Homa. That's an interesting insight. I assume then that you're an advocate not only for women's freedom but also the U.S.'s freedom from a dependency on international oil?

Homa: Yes, we should move toward renewable energy and not be dependent on foreign oil or at least we should have affordable options to choose from. Frankly, I do not want to buy from an organization that supports the oppression of women and the human rights abuse. Currently, because of our 100% dependence on oil, our government is willing to look the other way when countries abuse their citizens and residents. Many horrifying things are going on in countries with which we do business and the media is not willing to give it much coverage because their hands are tied. Take Saudi Arabia for example. How often do you see anything about it on primetime news except for when King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud has a brief visit to some country and even then the coverage is minimal.

If TV stations and major newspapers ever decided truly to dig in and talk about what really goes on in the kingdom, do you know what would happen? All the lobbyist of oil companies would pressure our government to put a gag on the media and the media would have to oblige. An example of this was in 1980 when David Fanning tried to release his docudrama titled “Death of a Princess” regarding the granddaughter of Prince Muhammad bin Abdul Aziz who was executed by her family in an act of honor killing. After the Saudis threatened to divest in England, the English government banned the movie. In the U.S, oil companies objected to the release of the movie as well. So, no TV station ever picked it up except for PBS. Unfortunately, this is the kind of influence that can kill our freedom of expression. And I can tell you many more stories but you will have to wait till my book comes out.

Tyler: Thank you, Homa, for the opportunity to interview you today. Before we go, will you tell us about your website and what additional information can be found there about “Lemon Curd”?

Homa: Thanks, Tyler, for this enjoyable interview. The book’s website is www.lemoncurdbook.com. Readers can find a sample chapter, an excerpt, reviews, interviews, bookstores where they can purchase my book and links to my other websites.

Tyler: Thank you, Homa. I wish you much luck with “Lemon Curd” and hope you’ll come back to tell us more about “The Dawn of Saudi” when it is released.

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