

Death of the Persian Prince

by Katie Glover

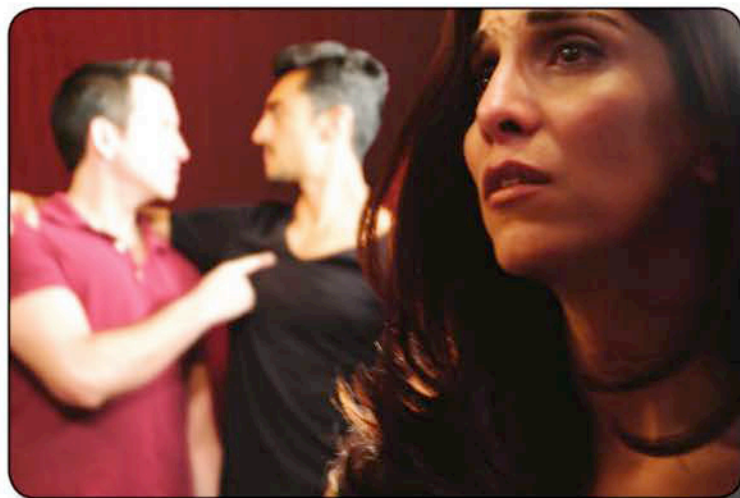
Gender Reassignment Surgery is legal in Iran and in many cases, paid for by the state. However, homosexuality is forbidden and in some cases for male repeat offenders, punishable by death. A growing trend is for gay men to have sex changes in order to avoid the potential for execution. It's not official government policy to force gay men or women to undergo gender reassignment but the pressure can be intense. In the 1980's the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa allowing gender reassignment surgery - apparently after being moved by a meeting with a woman who said she was trapped in a man's body.

A psychologist at a state-run clinic in Iran says some gay people now end up being pushed towards surgery. Doctors are told to tell gay men and women that they are "sick" and need treatment, she says. They usually refer them to clerics who tell them to strengthen their faith by saying their daily prayers properly.

Supporters of the government's policy argue that transgender Iranians are given help to lead fulfilling lives and have more freedom than in many other countries. But the concern is that gender reassignment surgery is being offered to people who are not transgender, but homosexual, and may lack the information to know the difference.

'Death of the Persian Prince' is a new play that dramatizes the real-life story of thousands of gay Iranians who have changed genders to avoid prison or execution. Written and directed by award-winning director, writer, and actor, Dewey Moss, it's a haunting tale about the power of the human spirit. It premiered at The Davenport Theater in New York in July to great acclaim as part of the 16th Annual Midtown International Theater Festival and continues its run at the DMAC-Duo Theater between September 17th and 19th and from the 24th to the 26th (details at <http://deathofthepersianprince.brownpapertickets.com>).





The plot is basically as follows... Samantha is an Iranian woman living in New York. James is a veteran of the Iraq war. Late one night, in the middle of a heated argument, James leaves and Samantha finds herself alone. Suddenly, there's a knock at the door. Someone from Samantha's homeland has arrived unexpectedly. Fuelled by a barrage of threats that unearth shattering confessions of unimaginable terror, the story of James, Samantha and the stranger takes an unexpected turn, leading to a stunning ending that proves nothing is as it seems. Sounds interesting!

Dewey Moss says "For me, inspiration always seems to happen with a tiny seed of information that peaks my interest, then grows with research. On *Death of the Persian Prince*, it actually hit while watching an episode of *Real Time with Bill Maher*, during which he was interviewing a Middle-Eastern guest and discussing the lack of gay rights in Iran. True to his form, Maher said something along the lines of instead of allowing people to be gay, they "chop their <dicks> off!" At first I thought

his comment must refer to some sort of barbaric torture that gay men are subjected to in Iran, given my surface-level understanding of anti-gay policies in various countries. So I began to research out of curiosity more than anything. What I found, however, was something so unbelievable and, in my opinion, hypocritical that I felt I had to write about it. The fact that something so extreme as Sexual Reassignment surgery was actually legal in Iran became fascinating, and wasn't exactly a new notion.

Since the 1980's, the government has recognized that there was little religious reason for not allowing the "corrective" surgery. However, it was when I began to understand the recent trend of gay men who do not identify as transgender having the surgery in order to avoid legal persecution or execution that *Death of the Persian Prince* really began to take shape. I poured over research from the BBC reports and other news organizations and found organizations such as the Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR) in Canada who



helped me begin to understand the real story of the individuals choosing to take this action instead of taking the risk of living as gay men."

"Because I set the play in New York City, it was more accessible to western audiences, clearly showing the scope and impact that foreign anti-gay policies can have on individuals even when they no longer live under the rules of that society."

"We had a truly international cast, which was very exciting. Because two of the characters are Iranian, we knew that casting could be difficult. Luckily we were able to cast Pooya Mohseni as Samantha, a talented Iranian-American actress who truly grew up in Iran and truly understands the persecutions of the LGBT community. Gopal Divan, cast as Cas, was born in Hong Kong and studied acting in the UK. He is a wonderful actor who also brings a clear understanding of the different circumstances facing the LGBT

community in various countries. George Faya, played Samantha's American boyfriend James. He brought a depth of emotion as he tackled the role of an ex-marine who served in Iraq, who had then become caught up in another type of international turmoil. These three actors are immensely talented were excited to be part of the project. We were lucky to have them premiere the show."

The initial performances were sold out and the cast played to very enthusiastic audiences. Dewey hopes the next run in September will be just as successful if not more so. He says, "This will give us a chance to continue to develop the play a bit and to reach a wider audience. I'd still like to reach a larger Trans community and their supporters for our next run. I'll even create a discount code for Frock readers" (see below).

'*Death of the Persian Prince*', starring Pooya Mohseni, Gopal Divan, and George Faya is on at the DMAC-Duo Theater, 62 East 4th Street, New York, NY 10003 - September 17-19 and 24-26 at 8:00pm. Tickets are normally \$20 but there's a special discount for Frock Readers: Save \$5 using Code FrockPrince at the checkout at:

<http://deathofthepersianprince.brownpapertickets.com>