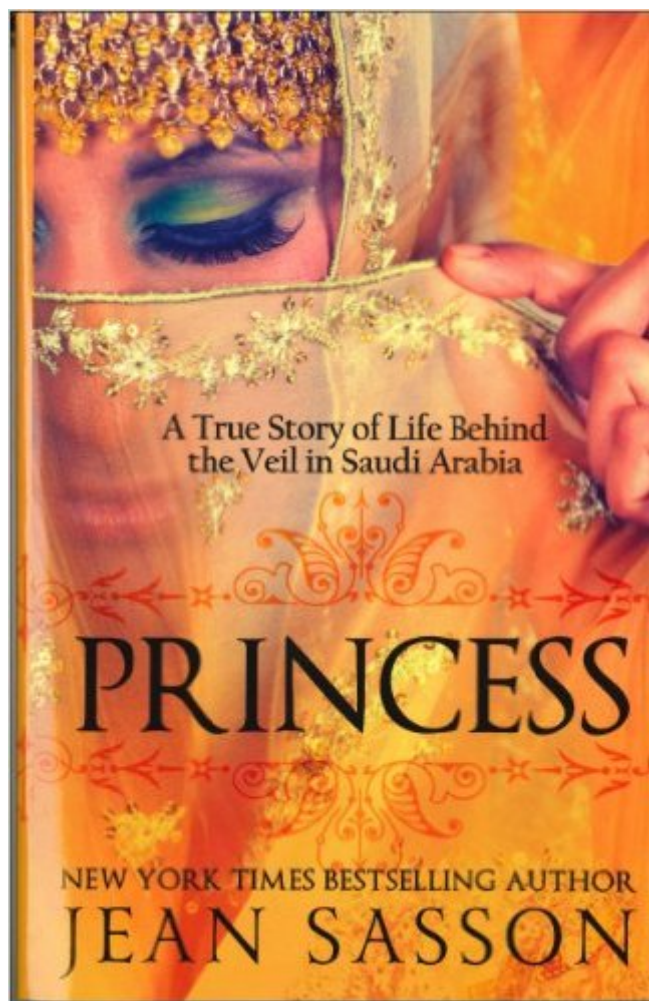


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Princess: A True Story Of Life Behind The Veil In Saudi Arab



Synopsis

Sultana is a Saudi Arabian princess, a woman born to fabulous, uncountable wealth. She has four mansions on three continents, her own private jet, glittering jewels, designer dresses galore. But in reality she lives in a gilded cage. She has no freedom, no control over her own life, no value but as a bearer of sons. Hidden behind her black floor-length veil, she is a prisoner, jailed by her father, her husband, her sons, and her country. Sultana is a member of the Saudi royal family, closely related to the king. For the sake of her daughters, she has decided to take the risk of speaking out about the life of women in her country, regardless of their rank. She must hide her identity for fear that the religious leaders in her country would call for her death to punish her honesty. Only a woman in her position could possibly hope to escape from being revealed and punished, despite her cloak and anonymity. Sultana tells of her own life, from her turbulent childhood to her arranged marriage--a happy one until her husband decided to displace her by taking a second wife--and of the lives of her sisters, her friends and her servants. Although they share affection, confidences and an easy camaraderie within the confines of the women's quarters, they also share a history of appalling oppressions, everyday occurrences that in any other culture would be seen as shocking human rights violations; thirteen-year-old girls forced to marry men five times their age, young women killed by drowning, stoning, or isolation in the women's room, a padded, windowless cell where women are confined with neither light nor conversation until death claims them. By speaking out, Sultana risks bringing the wrath of the Saudi establishment upon her head and the heads of her children. But by telling her story to Jean Sasson, Sultana has allowed us to see beyond the veils of this secret society, to the heart of a nation where sex, money, and power reign supreme.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Windsor-Brooke Books, LLC; 1 edition (January 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0967673747

ISBN-13: 978-0967673745

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (1,037 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #11,527 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) [#1 in Books > History > Middle East > Saudi Arabia](#) [#9 in Books > Law > Constitutional Law > Human Rights](#) [#11 in Books >](#)

Customer Reviews

In the course of the true life stories found in the book *Princess*, by Jean P. Sasson, the reader becomes enveloped in the terrible and heart-wrenching lifestyles of middle-eastern women. Through the course of the narrative, though horrifying stories are related in a truly eye-opening manner, the reader discovers a true slice of Princess Sultana's imaginative and vivacious personality, and weeps as it slowly becomes lost in the process of womanhood in Saudi Arabia. "The history of our women is buried behind the black veil of secrecy. Neither our births or deaths are made official in any public record. The common emotion expressed at the birth of a female is either sorrow or shame." These few sentences, which bring about the whole theme of the non-entity of women, lead us to much more shocking crimes against women which, in that society, are not considered to be crimes whatsoever. The stories of Nadia, who was drowned in the family pool by her father as a way of "protecting her honor", her sister Sara, who attempted suicide after being sold as a wife to a sick and sexually brutal elderly man, and a brave Filipino maid named Madeline, who was raped nightly by all the male members of the family she served under, illustrate how Jean Sasson was able to intertwine other supporting character's stories with the life of Princess Sultana effectively and believably. Some stories, which show how these incredibly courageous women, can survive in this kind of life, bring the reader to cry and cheer simultaneously. Others, which, sadly, lack the happy ending we could hope for, are gut-wrenching due to the fact that they are horribly true. Behind the black veil of the Muslim women lie incredibly diverse personalities, characters, and spirits, which come alive to us through the voice of Sultana.

I am an unbiased reader, yet one with first-hand knowledge of social customs of Saudi Arabia. I lived for over 8 years in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and worked as a nurse in the King Faisal Spec Hosp and Research Ctr. Anyone with the slightest understanding of the Kingdom and the manner of life for women in that country is fully aware that the stories told in *Princess* is the sad reality of life for women in that country. The only people who have a hard time believing Jean Sasson are people who have never lived in Saudi or possibly jealous people who simply want to attack a good book. As a nurse, I personally cared for Saudi women at the hospital who had endured horrible acts of cruelty from their Saudi husbands. I can say with certainty that many of the stories told by Jean Sasson are duplicated many times over in the daily lives of women in that country. I took care of a 13year old girl, who was suicidal because she was being forced to marry a very old man in his late 60's. She

considered herself bright, and she was, and wanted to be educated and have some choice later in life who she was to marry, but this was her parents decision. They would either give drug therapy or electrical shock in some cases to make the women more compliant! I was the nurse in charge when a Saudi princess was locked away in a private room in the hospital. She had been abducted from the West by her own government and was forced to return to the Kingdom. The look on that poor woman's face when she discovered she had been drugged by her own American doctor and brought back into the country on a private jet, I will never forget!

This an easy to read absolutely riveting account of the lives of upper class Saudi women, written by a member of the royal family. By way of background, the "Princess" of the title is a direct descendant of the founder of the current Saudi monarchy, and has told her story at great personal risk, according to the author. Even taking into account that there are several hundred princes and princesses who claim to be direct descendants, I found it hard to understand how this book, which is actually the first of three, could have been published without its source being discovered, given the unbelievably tight constraints the society places on the behavior of women. Be that as it may, the lives of these women are lived in gilded cages, which is fine if you can totally suppress your personality and intelligence and observe the rules. The ones who can't suffer consequences that I find hard to believe exist in the modern world. On the surface, life seems pleasant enough--the royal family lives in luxury that is unimaginable even by American standards--once a young couple is married, the building of several palaces seems a matter of course. When the Princess goes on her honeymoon, her new husband buys all the seats in first class so they can have privacy. Yet life is circumscribed severely--education is often withheld from women; husbands are chosen for a girl at a very young age in order to cement family or business alliances, with no regard for suitability in terms of age or personality. Abuse of women in marriage is common. From childhood, the wishes of men are accomodated in all things--a son can take the possessions of his sister without question. Porsches and Rolexes for male teenagers are common.

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