

# THE WHISPERING GOLD



By John Williams

## **About the Author**

John Williams is an author of Persian descent whose work is deeply rooted in the ancient soul of Persia. From an early age, he has been drawn to the art, poetry, and philosophical traditions of the Iranian world—where beauty is inseparable from meaning, and love is considered a sacred force that shapes both destiny and time.

His fascination with ancient Persian history, particularly the Achaemenid and Sasanian eras, informs his storytelling with a sense of mythic depth and spiritual continuity. Influenced by classical Persian poets and epic traditions, his writing blends lyrical prose with symbolic imagery, exploring themes of love, memory, loss, and renewal.

Through his stories, John seeks to revive forgotten echoes of the past and reintroduce them to the present as living narratives—where ancient wisdom speaks softly to the modern heart. His work stands at the intersection of history and imagination, inviting readers into worlds where time bends, gold remembers, and love endures beyond empires.

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## **I. The Whispering Gold**

In the high days of the empire, when the Sasanian court at Ctesiphon was the centre of the world's gravity, the air itself seemed heavy with the smoke of sacred fires and the weight of unwritten laws. Stone remembered every footprint; the high arches of the *Iwan* echoed with whispers that travelled through centuries. In this place where stars were consulted before a cup of wine was

poured, lived a young scribe named Mehrdad.

He was the son of no great house, possessing no land and commanding no soldiers. His inheritance was patience, and his domain was the silent geography of parchment and ink. Mehrdad's hands were steady, his fingers stained perpetually with the dark blood of oak galls and lampblack. He sat day after day in the Scriptorium of the King of Kings, copying the decrees of the monarchy as one carries water in a cracked bowl—careful not to spill a drop, careful not to taste the power contained within.

Yet, among the treasures of the court—the silver seals that clattered on ebony tables, the heavy silk tapestries depicting the hunt, the sacred scrolls bound in leather—there was one substance that answered him differently: gold.

To others, gold was currency, or cold adornment. It was the hard edge of a coin or the heavy chain of office. But to Mehrdad, gold was alive. When he prepared the illumination for a manuscript, grinding the leaf into the finest powder to catch the candlelight, the metal softened beneath his touch. It seemed to warm against his skin, humming with a low, resonant frequency that he felt in the bones of his wrist. When ground into dust, it shimmered not with a simple metallic brightness, but with a quiet, sentient awareness, as though it

recognized his intention. It did not merely reflect the light; it seemed to hold it, breathing it back out in a rhythm that matched his own heart.

One morning, the sun struck the palace at a precise, piercing angle—an alignment of light and architecture known only to the royal astronomers. The Scriptorium was bathed in a haze of floating motes. Mehrdad was alone, bent over a pestle of agate, grinding gold powder for the border of a poem about the immortality of the soul. He was lost in the rhythm of the grinding, the *shh-shh-shh* of stone on stone, when the air in the room shifted. It was a subtle change, like the sudden silence of birds before a storm, or the scent of rain where there are no clouds.

"Do not press so hard," a voice said. It entered the chamber not as a disruption, but like a remembered dream returning to a waking mind. "Gold is ancient. It is older than the mountain that held it. It prefers respect, not force."

Mehrdad froze. His hand hovered over the agate bowl. He turned slowly, afraid that the voice was a trick of the solitude that often-plagued scribes.

There stood Azarmidokht.

She was the daughter of the Royal Astronomer; a

woman raised beneath open skies and the complex diagrams of fate. She wore a tunic of deep lapis blue, the colour of the twilight sky, embroidered with silver threads that traced the path of the wandering stars. But it was not her dress that held him; it was her eyes. They were dark and vast, reflecting constellations that had not yet been named by men. She stood in the doorway, and her presence rearranged the invisible geometry of the room. It was as if the dust motes, the smell of dry parchment, and the very light itself had been waiting for her arrival to complete their meaning.

Mehrdad felt a strange ache in his chest, a sensation of recognition so profound it was almost painful. He wiped his hands on a cloth, standing clumsily.

"Does gold truly feel?" he asked, his voice rough with disuse. He meant it half in jest, a courtly deflection, but half in terrified awe.

Azarmidokht did not laugh. She stepped closer, moving with the fluid grace of water seeking its level. She looked into the bowl where the gold dust lay in a heap of captured sunlight.

"Gold remembers," she said softly. "It was forged in the death of stars, Mehrdad. It has witnessed suns rise and empires crumble into sand. It has seen the beginning, and it waits for the end. When mixed with intention—

with the heat of a human hand and the focus of a human mind—it awakens."

She looked up, meeting his gaze. A smile touched her lips, small and private, and that smile dismantled the world as Mehrdad knew it.

"It knows if you are angry," she whispered. "It knows if you are lonely."

As if in agreement, the gold dust between Mehrdad's fingers glowed softly—no flame, no heat, only a memory of fire stirring from a billion-year sleep.

From that moment, the clocks of the palace ceased to matter. Time slowed when they spoke, stretching seconds into hours, and hurried frantically when they parted, days blurring into a gray haze until he could see her again.

## **II. Love Sung in the garden**

The court was a place of eyes and ears. Every shadow held a spy; every curtain concealed a listener. Love between a scribe of no standing and the daughter of the high astronomer was a dangerous, impossible equation. And so, they sought a world elsewhere.

Beyond the high palace walls, where the manicured order of the capital thinned and the wildness of the ancient land returned, there lay a forgotten garden. It appeared on no map and its name was recorded in no royal ledger. It was a remnant of an older dynasty, perhaps, or a whim of the earth itself. Cypress trees grew untamed there, their roots knotting like the hands of old men, and wild pomegranates burst open in the heat, bleeding ruby juice onto the dry grass. A spring flowed from a crack in a mossy rock, its waters tasting faintly of sweetness and sorrow.

It was Azarmidokht who found it first, guided by stars that leaned strangely toward the west, pulling her away from the city lights. It was Mehrdad who followed, drawn not by stars, but by the same magnetic force that pulls roots toward deep water.

They met there in secret, beneath the canopy of a massive plane tree whose branches bowed low to touch the earth.

Here, stripped of their titles and their duties, they were simply two souls standing unguarded. The silence of the garden was different from the silence of the library; it was alive with the hum of insects and the rustle of wind.

"My father says the stars dictate our lives," Azarmidokht said one evening, tracing the lines of Mehrdad's palm

with her cool fingertip. The sun was setting, painting the garden in shades of violet and bruised orange. "He says we are written before we are born."

Mehrdad closed his hand around hers, feeling the pulse in her wrist. "Ink can be scraped away," he said fiercely. "A scribe knows this. Even the King's decrees can be altered if the hand is steady enough. I do not believe we are written in stone, Azarmidokht. I believe we are written in water. We flow."

She looked at him, her eyes shining with unshed tears. "Water flows away, Mehrdad. It separates."

"And it returns to the sea," he countered, pulling her closer. "It always finds its way back."

He kissed her then, and the taste of her was like the gold dust he worked with—ancient, precious, and terrifyingly real. They spoke of the heavens and the dust beneath their feet, of kings who believed they ruled time, and of lovers who proved otherwise by stealing eternity in a single hour.

Mehrdad brought small gifts—not jewels, for he had none, but pages of poetry he had illuminated just for her, the borders swirling with birds and vines drawn in liquid gold. Azarmidokht brought him stories of the sky, naming the stars after the moments they had shared.

"That one," she pointed to a faint glimmer near the horizon. "That is the Star of the Pestle. And that," she pointed to a bright, steady light, "is the Star of the Hidden Garden."

Love grew between them—not rushed, not reckless, but steady as stone shaped by the persistent caress of a river. They built a cathedral of words and touches in that garden, a fortress that felt impregnable.

### **III. Dream of love**

But the world outside the garden was not asleep, and the ancient forces of the land were jealous of such stolen joy.

One night, the moon rose veiled in a shroud of dirty mist. The air in the garden thickened, turning heavy and sulphurous. The sweet spring fell silent, the water ceasing its flow as if breath were held.

Mehrdad felt the hair on his arms stand up. "Something is wrong," he whispered.

Azarmidokht gripped his arm. "The stars," she breathed, looking up. "They are... wrong. They are not where they should be."

Then the beasts appeared.

They were not wolves, nor lions, nor any creature of flesh and blood. They were creatures of the ancient dusk, the residue of nightmares from a time before men-built cities. They were shadows given bone, shifting forms that dissolved and reformed like smoke. Their eyes were hollow pits of green fire, and they moved in ritual circles, closing in on the couple beneath the plane tree.

They were the guardians of forgotten boundaries, and they had come to punish the trespass of a love that defied the order of the castes.

Recognizing the trespass, the beasts howled—a sound that was not a noise, but a vibration that cracked the earth.

"Run!" Mehrdad screamed.

He seized Azarmidokht's hand, his grip bruising in its intensity. They fled through the tangle of the garden, the thorns tearing at their clothes, the branches whipping their faces. The beasts were close behind, a cold wind snapping at their heels.

They reached the edge of the garden, where the land fell away into a gorge. Below, the great river roared, swollen with mountain rain, a torrent of black, churning

violence.

There was no bridge. Only the ancient limb of a dead tree stretched halfway across the chasm.

"We cannot cross," Azarmidokht cried, looking down at the crushing water.

"We must," Mehrdad gasped. The shadows were emerging from the tree line, their green eyes burning.

They climbed the trembling branch. It groaned under their weight. They reached the end, suspended over the abyss. The beasts were upon them.

"Together," Mehrdad said, looking into her eyes one last time. "We are written in water."

"Together," she sobbed.

They leapt.

They hit the freezing water with the force of a hammer strike. The river was a beast of a different kind—mindless, powerful, and cold. It seized them, spinning them in the dark current. Mehrdad fought to hold her hand, his fingers locked with hers. He kicked, he screamed her name into the roaring foam, but the river laughed.

A massive log, borne by the flood, slammed between them. The impact shattered their grip.

"Mehrdad!"

"Azarmidokht!"

Her fingertips brushed his one last time—a touch as light as gold dust—and then the current tore her away. He saw her blue tunic swirl once in the white foam, and then she was gone, swallowed by the dark throat of the river.

#### **IV. The Sleeping Gold**

Mehrdad awoke miles downstream, washed up on a bank of grey mud. He was bruised, broken, and alive.

He searched. He searched for days, then weeks, then months. He walked the riverbank until his feet bled. He called her name until his voice was a ruin. But the river gave back nothing. Azarmidokht was never found.

She was declared lost, then dead. Her father, the astronomer, gazed at the sky and found no answer. The court mourned briefly, then moved on, for the machinery of empire stops for no one. She became a

memory, then a rumour, then a whisper.

But Mehrdad did not move on. He returned to the palace, a ghost haunting the halls of the living. He resumed his work, but the ink looked like mud to him, and the parchment looked like dead skin.

Only the gold remained.

He took the gold dust he had been grinding on the day they met—the dust that had glowed when she smiled. He placed it in a small pouch of velvet; sewn from a scrap of the blue tunic she had worn in his memory.

He did not use this gold for any king's decree. Instead, late at night, by the light of a single dying candle, he whispered into the pouch. He poured his grief, his love, his memory of her scent, the sound of her laugh, the warmth of her hand—he poured it all into the shimmering dust.

"You are the witness," he told the gold. "You remember. Keep her for me."

He sealed the pouch with wax and hid it.

Years folded into decades. Mehrdad grew old. His hands shook, and he could no longer hold the pen. He died in his sleep, a man heir to nothing but a broken heart.

Decades folded into centuries. The Sasanian Empire fell. The fire temples grew cold. The stone arches of Ctesiphon crumbled under the assault of sand and time. New kings came, speaking new languages, worshipping new gods. The palace became a ruin, a skeleton of brick picked clean by the wind.

The pouch of gold lay buried in the rubble, deep beneath the earth near the dried-up bed of the river. It waited. Gold does not rust. Gold does not decay. Gold waits.

A thousand years passed.

Then, a traveller came—a wanderer seeking the past among the shards of pottery. He was digging near the old foundation of the Scriptorium, his spade striking something soft. He pulled the rotted velvet pouch from the dirt. It was fragile as ash.

He tugged at the string. The fabric, tired of holding its burden for a millennium, tore open.

The gold dust spilled out onto the ancient, sun-baked earth.

## V. Love and the heart

The moment the gold touched the earth, the universe hiccupped.

The gold did not scatter in the wind. Instead, it rose. It caught the light of the modern sun and refracted it, bending the rays into impossible angles. The dust began to spin, creating a vortex of shimmering light that grew brighter and brighter, until it was blinding.

Time inhaled.

The traveller gasped and shielded his eyes, but he was already fading, pushed to the margins of existence.

The wind reversed its direction. The dust of the ruins lifted and reassembled into bricks. The bricks flew together, mortar sealing them instantly. The great arch of the *Iwan* rose from the ground like a breaching whale. The silk tapestries wove themselves from the air. The fires in the hearths roared back to life.

Rivers flowed backward, the water leaping up waterfalls. Ash became wood, wood became trees. The sun raced backward across the sky, a streak of fire rewinding the days and the years.

The noise was deafening—the sound of history being unwritten.

And then, silence.

The Scriptorium was whole. The air smelled of fresh ink and sandalwood incense. The light struck the room at that precise, piercing angle known only to the royal astronomers.

Mehrdad stood at the table. He was young. His hands were steady. He held the agate pestle.

He blinked, a sense of vertigo washing over him, a memory of a drowning that hadn't happened yet, a grief that was centuries old and yet unborn. He looked down at the gold dust. It was warm. It was vibrating.

"Do not press so hard," a voice said.

Mehrdad spun around, his heart hammering against his ribs like a trapped bird.

She was there.

Azarmidokht stood in the doorway, wearing the tunic of deep lapis blue. The light caught the silver embroidery of the stars. She looked at him, and her eyes were wide, filled with a confusion that matched his own—a sense of *déjà vu* so powerful it brought tears to her eyes.

She remembered. Somewhere, deep in the blood, she remembered the river, the loss, the thousand years of

silence.

"Gold is ancient," she whispered, her voice trembling. "It prefers respect."

Mehrdad dropped the pestle. He did not ask if gold could feel. He knew. He crossed the room in two strides, disregarding the court, disregarding the laws, disregarding the distance that was supposed to lie between them.

He took her face in his hands. Her skin was warm. She was real. She was here.

"I found you," he choked out. "The river... it didn't take you."

Azarmidokht reached up, covering his hands with hers. tears spilling onto her cheeks. "The gold," she said, looking past him to the shimmering pile on the table. "You wrote me into the gold."

This time, when their eyes met, the gold dust in the bowl flared. It did not glow with a warning. It did not glow with memory. It flared with a blinding, triumphant brilliance—a promise kept.

The empire outside might fall. The stones might crumble again. But in this room, in this stolen moment that had defied the architecture of time itself, they were safe.

"Do not let go," she whispered.

"Never," Mehrdad promised.

And with no empire left strong enough to forbid them, and with time itself bowing in apology, love—at last—was free to remain.

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