



The Marrying of Chani Kaufman

By Eve Harris

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Perhaps the most surprising and intriguing novel on the Man Booker Prize longlist, *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* is a debut originally published by a small independent Scottish press that is already garnering significant attention worldwide.

London, 2008. Chani Kaufman is a nineteen-year-old woman, betrothed to Baruch Levy, a young man whom she has seen only four times before their wedding day. The novel begins with Chani standing “like a pillar of salt,” wearing a wedding dress that has been passed between members of her family and has the yellowed underarms and rows of alteration stitches to prove it. All of the cups of cold coffee and small talk with men referred to Chani’s parents have led up to this moment. But the happiness Chani and Baruch feel is more than counterbalanced by their anxiety: about the realities of married life; about whether they will be able to have fewer children than Chani’s mother, who has eight daughters; and, most frighteningly, about the unknown, unspeakable secrets of the wedding night. As the book moves back to tell the story of Chani and Baruch’s unusual courtship, it throws into focus a very different couple: Rabbi Chaim Zilberman and his wife, Rebbetzin Rivka Zilberman. As Chani and Baruch prepare for a shared lifetime, Chaim and Rivka struggle to keep their marriage alive—and all four, together with the rest of the community, face difficult decisions about the place of faith and family life in the contemporary world.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Harris takes readers into the insular ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in London. It is 2008, and 19-year-old Chani Kaufman is about to marry Baruch, a young man whom she has seen only four times. As she stands uncomfortably in the wedding dress used by her mother and her older sisters, she is nervous about what the future holds, especially since her knowledge of the physical aspects of marriage is lacking. Using flashbacks to tell the story of this arranged courtship, Harris contrasts the story of Chani and Baruch with that of Rabbi Chaim Zilberman and his wife, Rebecca, who met at a university in Israel and became observant as adults. While Chani and Baruch begin life together as a couple, Chaim and Rebecca are struggling to maintain a viable marriage. The book introduces readers to a little-known way of life and asks us to consider the role of faith and family in today's world. Anyone interested in relationships will enjoy this fascinating take on the subject; in fact, Jane Austen fans will find much that is familiar in the well-developed characters and the social conventions they must navigate. --Barbara Bibel

Review

Longlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize

An Amazon Best Book of the Month (Literature/Fiction)

A B&N Discover Great New Writers Selection

"Like a surgeon cutting into human flesh for the first time, Eve Harris audaciously dissects a community defined by inscrutable social mores; her profound reverence for her characters in no way hinders her intrepid plunge into the murky viscera of this complex world. Readers will be mesmerized by Harris's unforgettable voice; this powerful debut novel is a startling and effervescent contribution to a canon much in need of enrichment."—**Deborah Feldman, author of *Unorthodox* and *Exodus***

"A restrictive, claustrophobic world emerges from the pages of this astonishingly impressive first novel. Yet, there is tenderness and compassion too which irradiates the struggles of the various characters as they negotiate their way through the demands of religion, duty and personal desire. Terrific."—**Elizabeth Buchan, bestselling author of *Consider the Lily***

"Eve Harris's remarkable debut novel offers access to [a] hermetic realm. . . . Harris—born to Israeli-Polish parents in London—focuses on the separate plights of two women and captivates us with her compassionate character studies and gripping set pieces. . . . Harris renders her characters multifaceted by fleshing out faults and finely orchestrating emotions. . . . Harris also keeps us rapt by altering her tone and imbuing scenes with rich humor. . . . *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* shines a light on a topic and a people rarely seen in fiction."—**Minneapolis Star Tribune**

"Eve Harris spent years teaching at an Orthodox girls' school, and is clearly intimately familiar with the social nuances of that culture. . . . she gives readers a fresh perspective on an obscure community, depicting its humanity in both its beauty and its flaws. With its keen tongue-in-cheek observational humor and classic love story format, *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* reads like an Orthodox *Pride and Prejudice* with fearless, witty Chani taking the lead as a spunky, Jewish Elizabeth Bennett. This stunning debut, which was deservedly nominated for the Man Booker Prize in England, is a rewardingly delightful read."—**Bust**

"Simultaneously relatable and unfamiliar. . . . [Chani] is a deep and wonderful character with whom the reader can't help but connect. She lives in a world that might be unfamiliar to most, but with the help of a writer of great ability like Eve Harris, *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* is the type of novel that ventures into an unfamiliar place with the ease of a seasoned traveler."—**Flavorwire (book of the week)**

"Harris writes of this closed world with knowledge and understanding, and highly observant, slightly acidic humour. Deservedly longlisted for the Man Booker."—**The Times (UK)**

"Engages from the very first page, slipping the reader deep into the orthodox Jewish community, beyond the rituals and prayers, the constraints and the hair-covering wigs, into the secrets and emotions beneath, illuminating the story of Chani's journey from schoolgirl to bride and revealing the lives of others around her besides. This novel is beautifully done and highly recommended."—**Daily Mail**

"One of those books you cannot put down . . . Some of the women (the story is mostly told from a female perspective), could have been created by Jane Austen or Mrs Gaskell. . . . Eve Harris looks but does not judge. . . . an optimistic, compassionate story."—**Sunday Express**

"Compassionate and witty . . . *The Marrying Of Chani Kaufman* is about more than an innocent girl in a rigorously controlled community hoping for a soul mate while being paraded before husband material (Jane Austen has done that already). At the heart of the book is the theme of identity and the glue that fastens us to communities, be they religious, racial or social. . . . [It has] the emotional and thematic complexity needed to raise the story to a Booker contender."—**Independent**

"The serious subject at its core – the semi-arranged marriage of two young Haredi Jews – is belied by the warmth of the writing. There are demons here, but they do not terrify. . . . Humour abounds, but so do pathos and anger. . . . Harris's eye for suburban social mores is wickedly acute, as is her evident relish in describing both the sensual life and its absence. . . . Has the potential to be that rare thing – a crowd-pleaser about Orthodox Judaism."—**Guardian**

"The book introduces readers to a little-known way of life and asks us to consider the role of faith and family in today's world. Anyone interested in relationships will enjoy this fascinating take on the subject; in fact, Jane Austen fans will find much that is familiar in the well-developed characters and the social conventions they must navigate."—**Booklist**

"Intelligent, revealing characters who command conviction and connection; the tug between the old ways and modern life; and the universal themes of desire, guilt, manipulation and submission will resonate with readers from all backgrounds. Harris' debut is as deeply melodic and exciting as her depiction of Shabbat in Jerusalem, and will linger after the last page."—**Publishers Weekly**

"Not just love and tradition, but rules and expectations shape the relationships of two couples from an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, in a British novelist's engaging debut. . . . A readable, compassionate portrait of roles, especially women's, in a Haredi community."—**Kirkus Reviews**

"Harris evokes the community's insular nature, she also suggests the sense of comfort and belonging that it confers, offering a sympathetic window on a way of life little glimpsed in contemporary fiction."—**Financial Times**

"Confidently done, a romantic comedy at ease with its own lightness. Its setting, northwest London's ultra-orthodox Jewish community, is small and devoutly separate, and reading about such enclosure is pleasantly

consuming. . . . Harris is humorous and clement throughout with her characters."—*Sunday Times*

"Depict[s] the claustrophobic anxieties of a young heroine locked within a powerful family hinterland. . . . Readers seeking genuine Jewish characters have no need to search for the latent beneath the manifest here. . . . [The Marrying of Chani Kaufman] has received the British literary establishment's seal of approval. It deserves it."—*Jewish Chronicle*

"Judaism may be the setting but Eve touches on universal themes. It's about being true to ourselves when even our closest friends seem at odds with our chosen lifestyle. It's about forging a set of values when everything around us, locally and globally, seems to encourage the antithesis. It's about being human. It's about being alive and I adored it."—*The Bookbag*

"[The Marrying of Chani Kafuman] is set in the ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods of Hendon and Golders Green . . . The chapters shift from Chani's point of view to that of her equally anxious betrothed, Baruch, as well as his best friend who is secretly dating a shiksa, and his mother Rivka, the rabbi's wife who is supposed to prepare Chani for marriage but is herself grappling with the religious way of life."—*Haaretz*

"Harris is tender and sympathetic as she reveals the intricacies of acceptable behaviour and anathema in this group of Orthodox families. This lively and thought provoking novel makes a significant contribution to the contemporary literary scene."—*The Bay*

"A lovely, very funny and touching account of a marriage in orthodox Jewry."—*Spectator*

"A wonderful novel, which grips you from the first sentence and holds you until the last. Like Zadie Smith's *NW*, this book is set in contemporary North London, but it has much more in common with the work of Jane Austen. The main preoccupation of the novel is marriage."—*WeLoveThisBook.com*

About the Author

Eve Harris was born to Israeli-Polish parents in West London. She taught for twelve years at schools in London, as well as in Tel Aviv. *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* was inspired by her final year of teaching at an all girls' ultra-Orthodox Jewish school in North West London.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Willie Burroughs:

This The Marrying of Chani Kaufman book is not really ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is information inside this book incredible fresh, you will get facts which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. This The Marrying of Chani Kaufman without we know teach the one who reading it become critical in considering and analyzing. Don't end up being worry The Marrying of Chani Kaufman can bring when you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it with your lovely laptop even cell phone. This The Marrying of Chani Kaufman having great arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not experience uninterested in reading.

April Wages:

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Kathi Adamo:

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