

Chicken With Plums (2011)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V -1; L -;3 S/N -3. Running time: 1 hour 33 min.

*The heart knows its own bitterness,
and no stranger shares its joy.
Proverbs 14:10*

Marjane Satrapi, whose Nasser Ali practicing on his autobiographical animated film violin.

Persepolis was nominated for a 2008 Oscar, is the co-director with Vincent Paronnaud of this live action film that includes some animation and lots of magical whimsy.

Azrael, the Angel of Death (Edward Baer) is the narrator, beginning his story in Tehran in 1958, when the shah ruled a secular Iran not yet overtaken by Islamic fundamentalists.

The main character Nasser Ali (Mathieu Amalric) is a retired violinist who has lost the will to live. He takes to his room determine to die, and while waiting for the Angel of Death to take him, he reflects back on his life. His resolve to die began when his wife had smashed his violin during a quarrel, but when he and his son visit a strange (he shares opium with them) violin dealer, not even the man's assurance that the one he offers was a Stradivarius once owned by Mozart is enough to restore the will to live. Pushed by his cigarette-addicted mother (Isabella Rossellini), he had gone on to become a world-class musician and had married a woman he did not love. We then learn that he harbors a broken heart because the woman he had loved while still a student, a girl named Iran (Golshifteh Farahani), because her father would not consider her marrying someone who was penniless. Now he is heartbroken

again because when he spotted her in the street, she had claimed not to recognize him—though we see a moment later, when she has turned a corner, she does indeed remember him.

The story is thus told with a note of humor and irony. The only hint of religion is the presence of the Angel of Death, and the only political note, which the Iranian audience (but apparently not the censors) must have noticed, is in the name of the lover, the same name as the country. The young and radiantly beautiful young woman is now old and gray, and in denial, much like the radical Islamist nation has become. Those interested in a larger picture of Iranians than provided by the news headlines will enjoy this whimsical tale of a sad man.