

# OUT & ABOUT

CULTURE, LEISURE, AND OTHER PURSUITS

GREAT READS

## Return of the QUEEN

THE AUTHOR OF A HOTLY ANTICIPATED BOOK ON THE SHAH OF IRAN TALKS EXCLUSIVELY WITH T&C ABOUT A REVEALING MEETING WITH THE DEPOSED MONARCH'S WIDOW.

By Andrew Scott Cooper

Her Imperial Majesty Farah Pahlavi, Empress of Iran, is sitting in her living room in Potomac, Maryland. Behind her is a portrait of a young woman wearing a crown of rubies and emeralds, and a guestbook with notes by Jimmy Carter and King Hussein. She's telling a story about how she died recently—for the third time.

"They said I had a heart attack in L.A.," the 77-year-old Pahlavi says. "Apparently my body was sent to Egypt to be mummified."

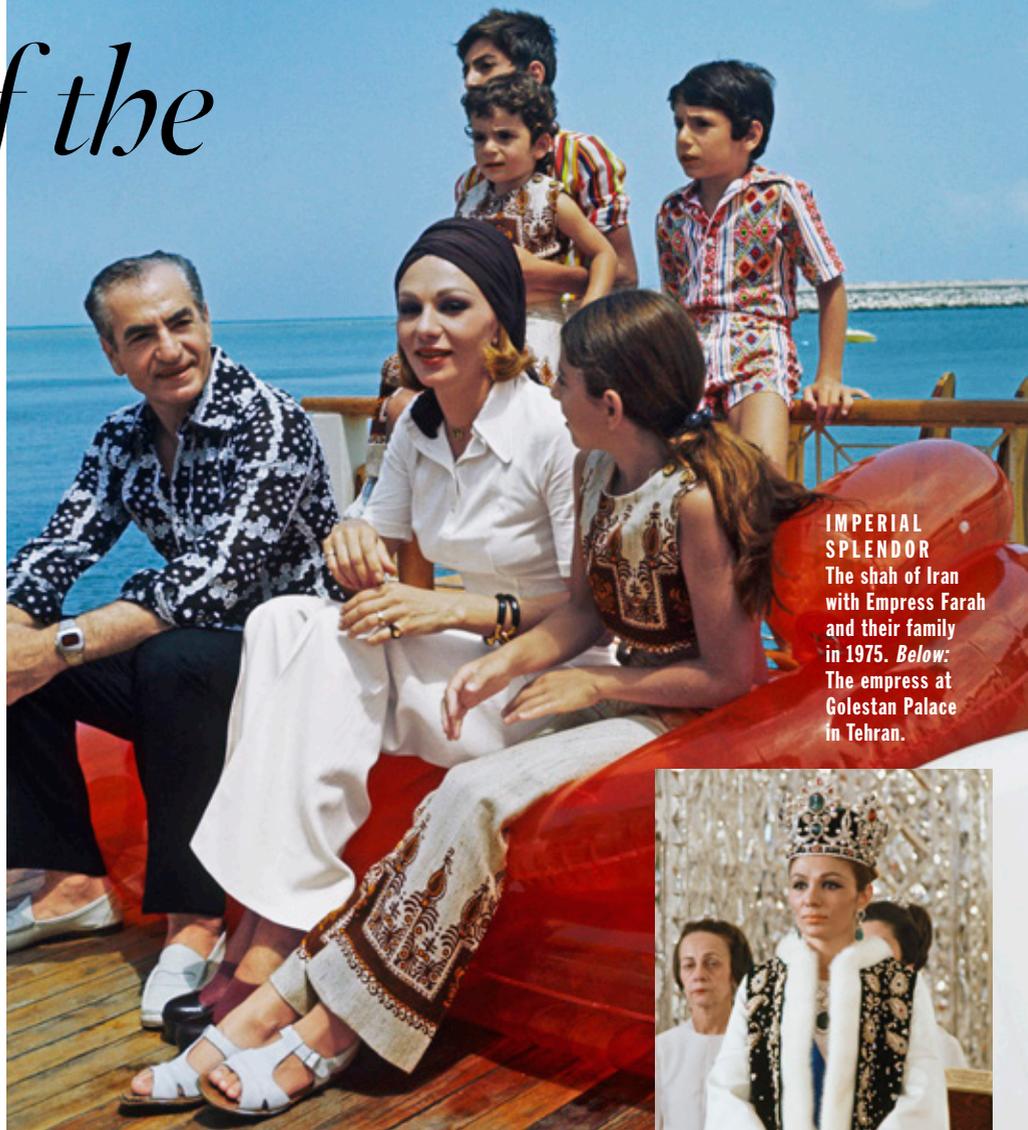
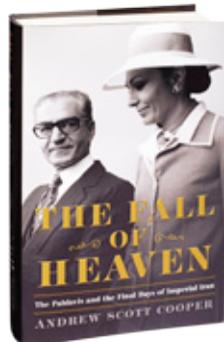
"They" refers to the ayatollahs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who in 1977 overthrew the government led by Pahlavi's husband, the shah of Iran. Pahlavi believes that the ayatollahs circulate rumors of her death to lure into the open—and punish—Iranians who might be tempted to mourn her passing. She hasn't set foot in Iran for 37 years, but to many in the country she embodies an idealized version

of the nation that existed before the Islamic Republic, a country that guaranteed women's rights, welcomed the world, and enforced separation of church and state. For the legions of young Iranians who have turned against the regime, especially since its bloody 2009 crackdown on democracy activists, Pahlavi is an icon.

Her e-mail is flooded with messages from supporters. "Dear Lady," one begins, "each

time I look at photos of you, I wonder what our future could have been." Another, from a revolutionary dying of cancer, begs forgiveness.

Nostalgia is at work, for sure, but something else is going on. Over the past decade scholars, including me, have revisited the reign of the shah. In my new book, *The Fall of Heaven*, I trace the rise and decline of Iran's glamorous Pahlavi dynasty and offer a look inside the imperial palace



IMPERIAL SPLENDOR The shah of Iran with Empress Farah and their family in 1975. Below: The empress at Golestan Palace in Tehran.



through the eyes of Empress Farah, Iranian revolutionaries, and Carter administration officials. The shah himself, who died in exile, did not survive long enough to get a second look, but his family appreciates the attention. "During the revolution they tried to smash a statue of me that stood by a lake," Farah Pahlavi chuckles. "But it was too big, so they gave up and pushed me in. I'm still there, and one day, I'd like to think, I'll resurface." «

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: HUGUES VASSAL/AGF-IMAGES; JAMES L. STANFIELD/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN SWEENEY/STUDIO D