



## Duty Free

*Moni Mohsin*

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## **Duty Free** Moni Mohsin

Jane Austen's Emma, transported to the outrageous social melee of 21st-century Lahore.

Our plucky heroine's cousin, Jonkers, has been dumped by his low-class, slutty secretary, and our heroine has been charged with finding him a suitable wife -- a rich, fair, beautiful, old-family type. Quickly. But, between you, me and the four walls, who wants to marry poor, plain, hapless Jonkers?

As our heroine social-climbs her way through weddings-sheddings, GTs (get togethers, of course) and ladies' lunches trying to find a suitable girl from the right bagground, she discovers to her dismay that her cousin has his own ideas about his perfect mate. And secretly, she may even agree.

Full of wit and wickedness and as clever as its heroine is clueless, **Duty Free** is a delightful romp through Pakistani high society -- though, even as it makes you cry with laughter, it makes you wince at the gulf between our heroine's glitteringly shallow life and the country that is falling apart, day by day, around her Louboutin-clad feet. Moni Mohsin, already a huge bestseller in India, has been hailed as a modern-day Jane Austen, and compared to Nancy Mitford and Helen Fielding. **Duty Free** is social satire at its biting best.

## Duty Free Details

Date : Published September 6th 2011 by Broadway Books (first published 2011)

ISBN : 9780307889249

Author : Moni Mohsin

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Adult, Humor

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## From Reader Review Duty Free for online ebook

### Peg says

A review of 'Tender Hooks' by Moni Mohsin: If you can get used to the grammatical and spelling 'mistakes', you'll enjoy this novel about a wealthy Pakistani self-centered socialite who has agreed to be a quick matchmaker for her male cousin since his mother believes that he is unable to make a suitable match on his own. The misuse of the English language used by the nameless narrator is hilarious at times, but also repetitive and irritating at times. The narrator's marriage has troubles of its own mostly due to her social-climbing which requires her to be very socially-active. Her husband seems to be the only family member who is grounded. He is wealthy enough to be able to support his quirky, but lovable wife's glamorous lifestyle. All this is going on amid the Pakistani war with its bombings, terrorists, etc. I found the satire aspects easy to identify and this novel to be fast-paced. It gives the reader a chance to look into a different culture with its customs and concerns which is always educational to me. This novel was provided to me by Read It Forward and was free of charge.

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### Sana Shahid says

Hilarious!

after a long time, I have read a comic satire and I literally thoroughly enjoyed it.

The narrator is too much funny. Although she depicts the part of our society which does not concern what is happening around them and just cares about their own well being but the way writer has shown her qualities of head and heart and the way it progressed is appreciable.

The best thing about the book is that it does not leave a lingering feeling in a readers mind. The story focuses on "match-making" for Jonkers'(narrator's divorced cousin), her friends financial matters and her own complicated marriage and thanks to God that writer has so skilfully penned down the end of each in a satisfying way. Jonkers gets married to a person he loved, Mullo 's matters get resolved, and she also realizes that her husband is best for her as he always stands for her.

However, the darker side which Moni Mohsin has depicted through her sugar-coated-satire is prevalent. The Pakistani reader recognizes it, agrees to it, embarrasses on it and simultaneously laughs on it. It's a kind of dessert that you would like to eat slowly slowly, but unable to restrain yourself to devour it as it is so delicious.

On the whole, it is recommended read, very entertaining, unputdownable and lol type book!

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### Selva Subramanian says

I wouldn't go so far as saying it is an amazing satire on high-society life in Pak or that it offers a brilliant social commentary. But it endeavors to do one thing and does it amazingly well - that is to make you laugh.

A laugh-riot and I loved it. In doing so, the author has twisted and turned phrases and developed her own brand of English. Your liking/not-liking it would depend on whether you take to the language or not. Actual rating: 4.5 stars.

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### **Petra CigareX says**

This has nothing at all in common with any Jane Austen book any way you look at it. It was a piece of flimflam ~~trash~~ light fiction to read on the beach if that is your sort of thing. It wasn't mine.

Two stars because on a scale of dreadfulness it was only somewhat boring, pretentious rubbish where because it was set in Pakistan the foreignness of it was probably meant to add to it from a cultural perspective. It did, but not in a good way, too many stereotypical people and situations. It wasn't one star unreadable nor was it good enough for a three star 'meh, ok'. It was one of those read it and forgot it books.

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### **Subata says**

I'm generally a quiet person who sticks to serious, philosophical stuff. And I REALLY don't like chick-lits, except for when I'm ravenous for a book and there's nothing good to read.

But this book. Oh God.

I found myself laughing (embarrassingly loudly, and in public, mind you) throughout the course of this book. Being a grammar Nazi, I was REALLY (pleasantly) surprised when I didn't find the misspellings annoying at all. Probably because I've encountered women like Butterfly in real life as well. Actually, I think I've encountered someone like every single character in this book in real life. Well, except maybe for the DVD wallah. But that was probably what gave the plot its suspense.

Oh, and my favorite part of the book (as a writer)? The fact that the chapter titles were headlines that corresponded to what happened in each chapter. That, in my opinion, was (unprecedented) genius.

I loved how all the subplots converged towards the end and added dimension to Butterfly's opinions of marriage. This besides the obvious praises, you know, the ones with Butterfly's surprisingly sharp and witty perception of the world, presented in her humdrum desi manner. It was a well-rounded, close-to-reality portrayal of the Lahori upper-class society, and I'll definitely read it again.

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### **Melissa Acuna says**

Brilliant satire. Set in Lahore, Pakistan this novel is laugh out loud funny, brilliant social commentary and provides a sobering look at life in a place where suicide bombers and fundamental extremists affect every day. The narrator speaks a language all her own, with mangled analogies, malapropisms and misspellings, all to brilliant effect. Highly recommended. I can't wait to read more from this author.

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### **Puja says**

"Duty Free" (originally released as "Tender Hooks") is a follow-up to Moni Mohsin's "The Diary of a Social Butterfly". Honestly, I had not read "The Diary of a Social Butterfly" & I picked up its sequel on a whim!!

And after reading the first page, I was bewildered, because the author had written it in a style, that was full of malaprops. Now if you look up for the meaning of "malaprop" in a dictionary, it says - The unintentional misuse of a word by confusion with one that sounds similar. But once you start this book, you will realise that Mohsin has "intentionally" filled the narration with misspellings and used a language that is a cross between English & Urdu. But that, my dear friend, is the most enjoyable part of this novel, undoubtedly. At the beginning, it is a bit difficult to understand, but as you start getting the hang of it, you will clearly fall for it hook, line & sinker...

So meet Butterfly, our unnamed heroine, who is the quintessential privileged class with an absolute preoccupation for designer labels in Lahore, Pakistan. This novel is in the form of diary entries (something which reminds you of Bridget Jones but let me assure you that the similarity ends here) narrating the peppered happenings of her life – from her bore “Oxen” (read: Oxford educated) husband to the overblown kitty parties & wedding season to the fierce competition in her social life. She receives the charge (more like she is emotionally manipulated) from her Aunt Pussy : to quickly find a suitable (read : rich, fair, beautiful, old-family type) match for her hapless cousin Jonkers (who is not exactly marriage material - plain, shy & already divorced) which is ironic since Butterfly’s own marriage is on the rocks. However, taking all this in her stride, Butterfly shinnies her way through the dangerous territories i.e. the Pakistani wedding circuit in search of the right girl from the right “bagground”. What ensues is a series of humorous upshots as she encounters a Smith educated lesbian, fundamentalist parents & drug smuggling families as a potential brides & in-laws. To top it all, our protagonist has to look out for backstabbing frenemies, errant maidservants & beardo weirdos (suicide bombers) who are out to spoil her matrimonial mission.

Read complete review at:  
[poojareviewer.blogspot.in/2012/09/ten...](http://poojareviewer.blogspot.in/2012/09/ten...)

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### **Laura says**

Not an exact Jane Austen retelling as the blurb suggests. Apart from both being "clueless" matchmakers, the heroine bears a stronger resemblance to a meaner-version of Lorelei Lee from Gentlemen Prefer Blondes than to Emma. She creates endless funny malapropisms. *I made a beehive towards her; the garden was all land-escaped; every single illegible girl was going to be there;* etc. Be warned, she starts out unbearably irritating & self-centered, but later reveals more heart.

I listened to the (BBC Book at Bedtime) dramatic reading by Meera Syal:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01lk6wh>

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### **Antonomasia says**

Back when chicklit began in the 90s, with Bridget Jones, it was humour, and it laughed at the characters as well as with them. *Tender Hooks*, aka *Duty Free*, is firmly in that tradition. I wouldn't bother with Anglo-American chicklit, but this is set in Lahore, Pakistan, and it looked like it might give a different angle on culture and genre. There's really quite a lot of material in the novel about politics, and the UK publisher is Random House literary fiction imprint Chatto & Windus: over here, it looks like the book's aimed at readers who approach it the way I did: a beach read with a current-affairs angle.

It's very loosely based on *Emma* - a little more so on *Clueless* - but there are enough differences that that's fairly irrelevant. Malika is a wealthy, married airhead snob in her late thirties. She's been tasked with finding a new bride for her recently divorced accountant cousin, Jonkers, by his mother, the equally shallow Aunty Pussy - and the cousin has very different ideas about his type of woman, compared with his social-climbing, soap-watching relatives.

Two of these four stars come from the cultural interest in the book - though with the caveat that I don't have the knowledge to see just where accuracy stops and comic exaggeration begins. Every page has a tickertape of news at the top, from features and human interest - often related to the book's themes - like "Caterers make hay in pre-Muharram wedding rush" (Malika's matchmaking attempts are part of that rush), "woman divorces man for not dining out daily", and "Lahoris use over 1 million flowers daily" - to serious headlines: "security threat causes plunge in foreign investments", "17600 families flee as troops backed by warplanes storm south Waziristan in hunt for Al Qaeda", "terrorists strike 3 law enforcement facilities in Lahore, kill at least 18". And there's a tension between increased westernization and increased conservatism: e.g. "custom of arranged marriages eroded by new media age" v. "college imposes ban on jeans after receiving threats from extremists".

It's mostly bad news about Pakistan, the wars and terrorism, restriction and extreme poverty, that people hear about in the west, unless they go looking for more, or have connections via family or close friends. *Tender Hooks* shows another side to the country rarely heard of in our mainstream media, one that still coexists closely with the news headlines, and the book is not afraid to use humour. (Recent debates about stereotyping in African literature appear to argue that it's something like this which could balance the picture there - showing there's more to life than conflict and poverty.)

A minor cliche of war reporting and some charity appeals is that many women still care about fashion and beauty and that these items can boost morale (one I remember first hearing explained during the former-Yugoslav conflict in the 90s - also an explanation of the accepted Second World War favourites of lipstick and nylons or fake seams painted on legs). It's tempting to see Moni Mohsin's characters in that light. But they feel very confident in their way of life: Malika feels like she's being rudely interrupted. At the beginning perhaps Malika and her family perhaps don't have a much greater sense of living in a conflict area than I did in the 80s and 90s, when there were sometimes IRA bombs in Britain - there is some background risk and a lot of worrying, but through the book the tension escalates: *I feel frightened myself going to the bazaar in case some mad weirdo arrives and shoots me for buying western food like chips or wearing western clothes like pop-socks.* (Maybe pop socks underwent some ironic hipster revival when I wasn't looking - but oh how differently both these items would be regarded by her western equivalent!)

There is, though, one incident in which the troubles impinge directly on Malika's world, by more than hearsay and news. (view spoiler)

Finishing this review nearly two months after writing the first half, what has stuck with me most is the sense of the characters' social world: where blingy high fashion is very much the thing for some, and Malika's idea of herself as average in her views in contrast with other types of people of her own class she commonly encounters

I found this fascinating, whilst also assuming these are as cartoonish as stereotypes in a glossy magazine quiz.

The 'NGO-types' who often work for, yes, NGOs, in education and the like: the equivalent of *Guardian* readers working in the voluntary sector (when we hear "NGOs", we think of people who work abroad...) - some of these people are still glam, but it's not their priority, they are less snobbish than the narrator, and they have a lot of conversations about politics that Malika doesn't quite follow. (Malika's takes on politics go something like this: *So when people say Americans are behind all this killing-shilling, I say I tau use Estee*

*Louder products for my facial. And Estee Louder, as everyone knows, is American. So why would Americans put axe in own foot by causing all the killing in Pakistan so no-one could leave their houses any more to get Estee Louder facials, haan? ...In any case, who is against facials? Is it Americans? No... Is it Talibans? Yes. Yes. Yes.)*

Returnees from the west: some of them are basically the 'NGO types' - people like Malika's husband who dutifully went abroad to get degrees (University of Hull is probably chosen for contrasting ideas of prestige in the UK, and as a British degree among his family.) The "bore NGO-types" are often more secular and progressive, in a reasonable way - but then there are the returnees who are so westernised they can't fit in, like one twentysomething girl who's lesbian and behaves like a sulky teenager from an Anglo sitcom.

'Fundos' - Malika's peers aren't entirely secular, but in their eyes, people certainly can be too religious, like the family of one of her cousin's prospective brides, who wears full veil and has a life that revolves around Islam - and her father *slaughters sheep on his front drive with his own hands and the servants are unshaven and I'm sorry but they have no class*. (That's reason here to go a bit Hyacinth Bucket - but not to call the RSPCA.)

Another type she implies are best avoided are flashy families involved in shady 'import export' businesses, basically drug dealers, seemingly more often found in upper middle class circles than they might be here. But then it seems as if almost every wealthy character has a bit of corruption somewhere in their family - someone who got rich off backhanders and nepotism: all shades of grey and mostly in the recent past. So can they really talk?

The language is playful and great fun. I could hear the character's accent in my head the whole way through, thanks to spot-on sentence structures and spelling choices: one of the most frequent and characteristic is 'bagground' [background]. Some of her alternative words for things have very satisfying sounds: 'bombs are bursting', for instance. Could I confidently translate *haan* or *tau*? Not really, but as they pepper the narrative they become as familiar as English regional interjections. And then occasionally the slang is easy to work out from experience of reading old colonial authors: a *DVD-wallah*, or a female *waxing-waali*. There are so many genius malapropisms along with great imagery: I opened the book at random just now and the first thing I saw was *Aunty's head was snivelling around like an owl's*. (And the character generally complains a lot and is nosy!)

Sometimes the narrator 'unconsciously' turns the tables on a western reader: *not even ordinary shrubs like motia or chambeli*, but strange erotic ones from western countries. (The malapropism reminds of the erotic-exotification of the east via texts like the *Kamasutra* and *The Perfumed Garden*.)

For an ostensibly throwaway book, it's enormously impressive linguistically. Sometimes I'd think the author was laying it on a bit thick with the spelling errors, but there's an apt meaning in almost every one. I can't believe a fashionista would mis-spell Jimmy Choo, yet 'Jimmy Choose' also kind of says something about a brand and its consumers...

This is a book that can be enjoyed as a throwaway beach read type of thing, but - whilst I've no idea how it might read to people who know Pakistan well - there's an awful lot more to it both in content and language if you want to pick up on that: it's simultaneously satisfying in both trivial and clever ways. It has that 'personal growth' sort of ending that would satisfy the readers at whom I usually roll my eyes at when they fail to understand the point of some dark novel - yet it doesn't seem cheesy as the character doesn't lose herself. I rarely read 'random' books, but this one was well worth it: I figured there would be a bit more to it than just typical chicklit, but not how much more.

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## **keatspring says**

Ah float like a Butterfly, sting like a bee, Duty Free is Moni Mohsin's much appreciated sequel to Diary of a Social Butterfly. Snappy, 'prada-wala' globe-trotting Butterfly can't seem to find an "illegible" bride for her 'bore' cousin. This biting social satire is stocked with malapropisms, near death misses with 'beardo-weirdos' and vicious maids. Oh and Infernally displaced Persons, erotic plants and craa-acks!

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## **Dianne says**

uty Free-Moni Mohsin

If the idea of a book styled along the line of "Gone With The Wind" or the movie "Clueless" "but set in modern day Pakistan intrigues you, then this may be the book for you. We have a social-climbing 'heroine', shallow as the day is long but with a "heart of gold", uninterested in the horrors abounding in her country but quite willing in her own selfish way to help her family. Especially when her family can create the havoc, she thinks her Aunt Pussy can create. Aunt Pussy has begged our heroine (no name was used in the book for our female protagonist and the book is written in diary form) to help her find her son a suitable mate, emphasis on the word "suitable"! Moreover, it must be done with all haste!

Therefore, that is exactly what our heroine sets out to do, in her own lazy, half-hearted, totally clueless way.

I'm sure the author is using malapropisms to make a point that I just didn't 'get'; but the usage became quite annoying after about a quarter of the way through the book. In addition, I would have loved to have some kind of translation of the words that Ms Mohsin used repeatedly. I was never quite sure if I was reading what amounted to a grunt or an actual word and I was being left clueless. It was a frustrating read for me.

The social-satire aspect is easy to pinpoint and yet I didn't take it for being witty or clever, just sad. I know the customs and places for women in a society such as this are so different than what I've come to expect, yet I can't help being sad when a woman who has the potential and the support of her husband and child to become so much more...doesn't.

This book evoked many feelings from me and I am not so sure that they are the ones that the author wanted me to feel.

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## **Lorna says**

This is my review I posted at Read It Forward:

I received my copy of Duty Free by Moni Mohsin from Read It Forward. I wish I could say I loved it, but I did not. It is a nice, fluffy read and an interesting look at Pakistani culture. The main character is likeable and yet unlikeable, but then – aren't we all at times? She has family loyalty – she tries to help her aunt find a suitable match for her cousin, but Auntie doesn't make it easy. And our heroine (are we ever given her name?) has to face her own prejudices as well. What I did not like about the book was the overreliance on malapropisms and "misspellings". At first, since it was an ARC, I thought it was just unedited, but eventually realized it was supposed to be that way. For me, it really detracted from the flow of the book. I could hear the

character's voice clearly enough without all of that. Just between you and me and the four walls, the book would have been much more enjoyable with a little less of it. I am grateful for the opportunity to read it, though. I work in a library and will pass it along to one of my coworkers.

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### **Redfox5 says**

This is my first Pakistani chick lit and it oddly really reminded me of 'The Wag's Diary'.

This is because the main character, Butterfly, is a stuck up, fashion loving spa hopping lady. She thinks the most important things in life are status and money. However, despite this, she still ends up being somewhat loveable and it's hard not to like her.

She does dismiss things like bombs and the Taliban, mainly upset not because of the lives that have been lost, but because she can no longer go to hotels, etc., well that's until she gets herself caught in a scary situation.

The plot in the book is basically to find her cousin Jonkers a suitable bride from a good background. She has been enlisted by her Aunt Pussy (I couldn't help but grin every time I read her name \*immature\*) to do this. Auntie Pussy is a pretty formidable character. I wouldn't want to come against her.

I should also mention the way the book is written. It's purposely written in bad English and misspelled. It's easy to get on with but personally I'm not a fan of when books mess with spelling/grammar in books. Not sure why as I'm pretty crap at both of them! It just annoys me!

Ultimately this book is about Butterfly realizing what really matters in life and most fans of chick lit will be pretty happy with it. And although it's not hilarious, it did raise a smile from time to time.

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### **Paras Abbasi says**

Having not read Social Butterfly, Duty Free was *totally* absolutely hilarious read. As you know *na*, I *totally* very much like South Asian fiction that touches the social demographics of the strata we are living in, and so, this one was a treat to read (quick, funny and yet relatable). *But* if course it had nothing to do with literature shiterature or intellectual type things in it (of course I knew it when I'd picked it up), since I needed something light after my previous recent reads. So it has pumped me up for another couple of heavy reads *starting from tomorrow only*.

So between you, me and the four walls, Duty Free gets full points in wit, hilarity and satire in describing Pakistani elite and the happenings of their part of the world.

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### **Valerie Gleaton says**

I got this book from Read It Forward — a great score! I'm normally pretty wary of Jane Austen knockoffs, but this loose retelling of the Emma story is enough of a departure from the original that I wasn't constantly comparing the two. And it's still similar enough that you get a thrill recognizing parallel plot points and characters.

The story is a cultural satire set in modern-day Lahore, Pakistan. The unnamed narrator is charged by her aunt with finding her cousin Jonkers a wife. The narrator and her family (excluding her "bore" husband and son) are obsessed with wealth and class standing and are determined that the potential bride come from a good "bagground." As she goes about her search, we follow her from lavish weddings to kitty parties to a brutal encounter with a street thief at the market. Because the book is written as a series of diary entries (I think?), we also get a peek into the narrator's inner life, from her musing on how to deal with your servants to political upheaval and terrorism.

I enjoyed Mohsin's writing. Although some readers may find the narrator's flawed English, with its malapropisms and political incorrectness, distracting, it made me laugh. And exploring a place and culture that I know little about — Lahore, Pakistan — make me feel as if I'd learned something by the end of the book, as well.

One criticism of the book that many readers have voiced is that the narrator is a tad unlikeable. And it's true: For much of the book she's materialistic, pig-headed and seems to only be out for herself. But bits of character shine through (though overbearing, she's clearly devoted to her son), and by the end of the book you can sense at least a small shift in her priorities. There's nothing worse than a character who doesn't grow and change, and that's a mistake Mohsin avoided here.

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