Funny in Farsi

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FIROOZEH DUMAS

Firoozeh Dumas was born in Iran but grew up mostly in California. She attended Berkeley and graduated with honors, and shortly afterwards married her husband, François Dumas. In 2001, she submitted a collection of stories about her early life, and much to her surprise, Random House published the stories under the title *Funny in Farsi* in 2003. Since 2003, Dumas has written another memoir of her childhood, *Laughing Without an Accent* (2008), and a middle school-level work of fiction, *It' Ain't so Awful, Falafel* (2016).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The main historical event discussed in *Funny in Farsi* is the Iranian Revolution of 1979. After many years of civil unrest in Iran, Shia clerics organized a revolution against the country's American-backed leader, the Shah. In the wake of the Revolution, Iranian society became increasingly religious and authoritarian, and many Iranians—including some of Firoozeh's relatives—fled the country. Firoozeh also discusses the Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-1981), during which armed Iranian students from the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line took hostages from the American Embassy in Tehran. The students demanded that the U.S. send the Shah—who'd sought asylum in the United States—back to Iran to stand trial for his tyranny and corruption, threatening to kill American citizens unless the U.S. government complied. The hostages were released shortly after the death of the Shah, and just hours before the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) is another book about the challenges of parenting for immigrants in America. Like *Funny in Farsi*, Tan's novel incorporates many autobiographical elements and mixes comedy and pathos. Another serio-comic novel about the immigrant experience, Karolina Waclawiak's *How to Get Into the Twin Palms* (2012), addresses many of the same themes as Dumas's memoir.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America
- **When Written:** 1998-2000
- **Where Written:** California and Tehran
- **When Published:** Fall 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** Whittier and Newport, California, and Abadan and Ahwaz, Iran
- **Antagonist:** While *Funny in Farsi* doesn't have any single strong antagonistic character, it could be argued that bigotry and intolerance are the antagonists of the memoir
- **Point of View:** First person (Firoozeh's point of view)

EXTRA CREDIT

Hear her voice! In addition to her writing, Firoozeh Dumas is a regular commentator on National Public Radio.

A gracious loser. *Funny in Farsi* was nominated for many awards, including the James Thurber Prize for American Humor and a 2005 Audie Award (for the audio recording of her memoir). Although Dumas didn't win either award, she lost to some heavy hitters: the Emmy Award-winning comedian Jon Stewart and the Nobel Prize-winning musician Bob Dylan, respectively.

PLOT SUMMARY

When she's seven years old, Firoozeh, along with her father, Kazem, her mother, Nazireh, and her older brother, Farshid, move from Abadan, Iran to Whittier, California. Kazem is an intelligent engineer working for a large Iranian petroleum company, and he needs to be in the United States for his work. Over the next two years, Firoozeh slowly adjusts to her American surroundings.

One of the first things Firoozeh decides about American society is that it's kind and generous. On her first day of school, Firoozeh can barely understand what's going on, since she speaks virtually no English. She and her mother get lost when they try to walk home, but a friendly American family lets them use the phone to call Kazem. Afterwards, Firoozeh quickly learns to speak English well, and very soon she can speak without any trace of an accent.

Although Kazem has lived in the United States years ago, when he studied in California and Texas as a Fulbright scholar, he's largely ignorant of American culture, and his English isn't great. He immerses himself in American culture, studying documents of any kind and watching hours of junky television. Nazireh is less interested in making friends with other Americans or improving her English, and even today, she doesn't speak good English. Firoozeh perfects her own English learning how to translate for her mother. Kazem takes his family to various "all-

American" places, such as Disneyland and Las Vegas, and he's extremely enthusiastic about American pop culture—to the point where Firoozeh gradually comes to find Disneyland boring.

Firoozeh does well in school, but her classmates sometimes regard her as odd because she's from a faraway country. Students asks her if there are camels in her country, and even parents assume that she speaks the same language as everyone else who lives in the Middle East. After two years, Kazem moves his family back to Iran, but shortly afterwards, his company sends him back to California, this time to Newport. During the early years of their second period in the U.S., Kazem takes him family on trips to Vegas, Hawaii, and Yosemite National Park, and Firoozeh goes to a summer camp, during which she refuses to bathe and spends all her time making key chains.

Many of Kazem's relatives, with whom he's extremely close, come to visit him and stay with him in California. Kazem loves his siblings, as well as his nephews and nieces, and whenever any one of them gets good news, the good news makes them all equally happy. As Firoozeh grows older, she learns more about her father. Unlike many other people in Iran, he doesn't obey the Muslim ban on eating ham, and in general he's not very religious at all. As a young man, Kazem did well on the prestigious Fulbright exam and earned a scholarship to Texas A&M. During his time in the U.S., Kazem met Albert Einstein and decided that he would raise his own family in the U.S., where his children would have lots of opportunities for success.

Firoozeh grows up with great respect for her family and Iranian culture. She's very close with her uncles, aunts, and cousins, who provide her with lots of love and encouragement. However, she doesn't admire everything about Iranian culture. Her mother, Nazireh, only has a sixth-grade education, and she had children with Kazem when she was only seventeen years old. Firoozeh admires other women in her family, such as her Aunt Parvine, partly because she became a successful doctor in Switzerland instead of doing what Iranian society expected her to do.

In the late 1970s, the Iranian Revolution breaks out, and Iran goes from being an important Middle Eastern country in America's eyes to a symbol of danger. Revolutionaries take American hostages in Tehran and threaten to kill them. In the meantime, Iran reforms its oil economy, meaning that Kazem no longer has a job in the U.S. He tries to find other opportunities, but no American or Saudi companies want to hire an Iranian. Shortly after the hostage crisis ends, he gets a new job that pays much less money.

Firoozeh works hard as a teenager to pay her way through college. She excels at writing essays for scholarship money, and also wins a two-month stay in Paris to study French. Her visit to Paris is a little disappointing, however, since she doesn't make any French friends, and finds the classes dull.

Firoozeh attends the University of California at Berkeley, and graduates with honors. There she also meets a French Catholic student named François Dumas, who later becomes her husband. In Iranian culture, marrying a non-Iranian is often frowned upon, but Kazem and Nazireh welcome François into their family. Unbeknownst to them, François's parents are appalled that he's marrying an Iranian woman, and many of his family members don't attend the wedding. François and Firoozeh are married, first by a Catholic priest and then in the traditional Persian fashion. They move into a San Francisco apartment, and later have children. While she's married to François, Firoozeh thinks more deeply about beauty standards and about the sexism of Iranian culture. She admires women who show confidence in their bodies and achieve success professionally. During a trip to the Bahamas, Firoozeh and François judge a beauty pageant and choose a conventionally unattractive but highly intelligent and articulate young woman as the winner.

Throughout her marriage to François, Firoozeh remains extremely close with the rest of her family. She admires her father for his extraordinary generosity to his friends, both in America and back in Iran. Kazem often tells her, "I'm a rich man in America … I just don't have a lot of money."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Firoozeh Dumas – The protagonist and narrator of *Funny in Farsi*, Firoozeh is born in Iran, but spends most of her childhood living in California. She's a bright, funny child, and much of her book consists of stories about her childhood—especially her interactions with her father, Kazem. As a child raised in two very different cultures—Iran and the United States—Firoozeh has a lot of insight into both, as well as the feeling of being a constant outsider. Some of the funniest and most insightful scenes in *Funny in Farsi* are about the differences and surprisingly similarities between Iran and the U.S., and about what it can be like to navigate one's way between both countries. Firoozeh grows up in America and ends up studying at Berkeley, from which she graduates with honors—something she would never have been allowed to do in Iran. However, Firoozeh continues to feel a deep affection for Iranian culture and tradition.

Kazem – Kazem is Firoozeh's beloved father. An intelligent, hardworking man, Kazem grows up in Iran but studies in the United States on a Fulbright scholarship, and later begins working for an Iranian oil company. In spite of his vast intelligence and talent, Kazem is often a comical, bumbling figure in the book, and most of the comedy arises from his infatuation with parts of American culture that other people might find tacky or disposable. Firoozeh clearly loves her

father, and the portrait of Kazem she offers in *Funny in Farsi* is very affectionate—sometimes making fun of Kazem's cluelessness about American society, but also emphasizing his extraordinary intelligence, warmth, and generosity. Kazem is a true "family man"—he's extremely close with his siblings, nephews, and nieces, and when something good happens to anyone in his family, he celebrates as if it's happened to him personally.

Nazireh – Nazireh is Firoozeh's mother, and although Firoozeh clearly loves her deeply, she's not as important a character in the book as Kazem, Firoozeh's father. Nazireh was raised in a fairly traditional Iranian family, meaning that she grew up believing that her purpose in life was to get married and have children. She marries Kazem at the age of seventeen, and later moves to America with him. Nazireh is an inspiring, but also somewhat tragic character—at various points, Firoozeh expresses sadness that Nazireh didn't get a chance to realize her dreams due to the structures of Iranian society. However, Nazireh becomes a heroine to Firoozeh after she supports Firoozeh's marriage to François Dumas, showing her commitment to a more progressive understanding of marriage than what she was raised on.

François Dumas – Firoozeh's classmate at Berkeley, fiancé, and later husband, François Dumas comes from a wealthy, worldly Catholic family that is nonetheless appalled when he marries an Iranian woman. François, like Firoozeh, is an adventurous, open-minded person, and over the course of the book he tries many new foods and travels to many new places alongside Firoozeh. In part because he was raised in a wealthier household than Firoozeh, he exoticizes and fetishizes the rugged, "authentic" outdoors, where Firoozeh almost always prefers air conditioning and bug spray.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Farshid – The older brother of Firoozeh.

Farid – The eldest brother of Firoozeh.

Mrs. Sandberg – Firoozeh's second grade teacher.

Uncle Nematollah – On of Kazem's siblings, who comes to live with Kazem's family in California for a brief period, and gains a lot of weight from eating too many American foods.

Laura – One of Firoozeh's classmates.

Mary – A girl who attends summer camp with Firoozeh.

Willy – A boy who attends summer camp with Firoozeh, and Mary's sister.

Farbod – One of Firoozeh's cousins.

Aunt Parvine – Firoozeh's aunt, a doctor, who is one of the few Iranian women of her generation with a successful career (according to the book).

The Shah – The leader of Iran from 1941 to 1979, often considered a pivotal figure in Iranian history (since he modernized the country), but also considered a corrupt or tyrannical leader.

Javad – Kazem's father.

Aunt Sedigeh – Kazem's sister, a bright woman who, due to the dictums of Iranian culture, doesn't go on to become a doctor or a lawyer like her brothers.

Uncle Muhammad – Kazem's brother, who forges a successful career in Iran as a doctor, flees to America after the Iranian Revolution, and is forced to re-enroll in medical school there.

Bob Hope – Famous American comedian and TV special host.

President Jimmy Carter – The 39th president of the United States.

Noëlle – A French concierge who keeps Firoozeh company during her two-month stay in Paris.

Father Christopher – A Catholic priest who officiates Firoozeh's marriage to François Dumas.

Uncle Ali – Firoozeh's uncle, who hosts her wedding ceremony.

Linda – Uncle Ali's American wife.

Golda Rubenstein – An elderly woman who lives in Firoozeh and François's apartment building.

Chantal – A contestant and "fan favorite" in the Miss Bahamas beauty pageant.

Albert Einstein – World-famous physicist who became an American citizen and worked at Princeton University.

Uncle Abdullah – Firoozeh's uncle, who's married to Aunt Sedigeh.

Mehdi – One of Uncle Abdullah and Aunt Sedigeh's children.

Soheila – One of the guests at Firoozeh and François's wedding.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

IMMIGRATION AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

In her memoir *Funny in Farsi*, Firoozeh Dumas writes about her family's journey from Iran to the United States in the early 1970s, and her childhood growing up in California. Firoozeh's father, Kazem, studies in the U.S. on a Fulbright scholarship, and later immigrates to the U.S. with his family to work for an Iranian petroleum company. Although

Kazem briefly moves his family back to Iran, Firoozeh spends the majority of her childhood in America, and grows up surrounded by a mixture of Iranian and American cultural values. At its heart, *Funny and Farsi* is a memoir about immigration and cultural assimilation in the United States—in other words, the way that immigrants adapt to the culture of their adopted country, embracing some aspects of the culture and ignoring or rejecting others.

Throughout the book, Firoozeh shows how different Iranian immigrants in her family adapt to their new lives in the United States with varying degrees of enthusiasm, curiosity, and hostility. Certain of the characters, such as Kazem, embrace American culture enthusiastically. Many of the funniest scenes in the book revolve around Kazem's fascination with aspects of American culture that many Americans would consider excessively tacky or banal, such as fast food, Disneyland, or all-you-can-eat buffets. Humor aside, these scenes convey an interesting point: being completely comfortable in a given culture doesn't just entail *knowing* about the culture, or being enthusiastic about it, as Kazem clearly is. It also entails being able to distinguish between "high" and low" aspects of a culture, and having opinions about these aspects. In a way, what marks Kazem as a first-generation American immigrant, more than anything else, is the fact that he's so enthusiastic about things like all-you-can-eat buffets—nobody who grew up with these things would be so interested in them. Other characters, such as Firoozeh herself, take a more balanced view of American culture, and of Iranian culture. Firoozeh spends the majority of her childhood in America, to the point where she speaks English with an American accent. While she loves many aspects of American culture, such as American television, she's much more blasé about others—for example, her father loves going to Disneyland far more than she does. Firoozeh's behavior, one could argue, is typical of the second-generation immigrant: she's more comfortable in American society than her parents, and but also less excited about American culture, since she's grown up with it.

In general, *Funny in Farsi* portrays cultural assimilation as a delicate process that requires multiple generations of immigrants, as well as a general willingness to embrace the new and the unfamiliar in one's adopted country. (Interestingly, Firoozeh doesn't write about any Iranian immigrants who adamantly refuse to assimilate with American culture, or voice strong objections to American culture—perhaps because that wasn't her family's experience, and perhaps because, if it had been, American publishers would have been less likely to publish her book.)

But just because the characters in *Funny in Farsi* immigrate from Iran to the United States doesn't mean that they abandon their Iranian roots altogether. On the contrary, Firoozeh and her family adopt different aspects of Iranian and American culture into their lives, and the memoir ultimately suggests that this process of cultural "mixing" is the essence of an American immigrant's life. Firoozeh continues to celebrate Iranian holidays and eat Iranian foods, even as she becomes increasingly at home in American society and embraces American values. The result—which gives the book its poignancy, as well as its comedy—is that Firoozeh is an insider and an outsider, both in America and in Iran. She's familiar with both countries' cultures, and yet neither country's people regard her as a true insider. The memoir concludes shortly after Firoozeh marries a Western, Christian man named François Dumas, and their marriage represents the process of cultural assimilation—an ongoing "compromise" that mixes Western and Iranian values together.

PREJUDICE

Funny in Farsi is full of amusing observations about American culture. But it's equally about how Firoozeh and her Iranian family are perceived by non-Iranian Americans, in particular those of white, European heritage. Many of the Americans who Firoozeh meets and befriends during her childhood in California are gracious and accepting of many different cultures. Tragically, however, others treat Firoozeh and her family with varying degrees of prejudice, sometimes rooted in ignorance of Iranian culture and sometimes (especially after the Iranian Revolution of 1979) in active hatred for Iranians.

Firoozeh experiences many different kinds of mild and serious prejudice as an Iranian-American in the United States. Especially when she's a young child, she experiences mild, somewhat innocent ignorance about her culture and her heritage. Her classmates ask her questions about the camels and sand in Iran. At other times, parents, who ought to know better, treat Firoozeh in a mildly prejudiced manner as well—for example, assuming that she can speak the same language as anyone else who's from the Middle East.

After the Iranian Revolution, however, Firoozeh's family endures more serious forms of bigotry. Especially after the Iran Hostage Crisis, when student revolutionaries held American citizens in the American embassy in Tehran hostage, Kazem faces systematic discrimination because he's Iranian: he can't find a job, even though he's a great engineer and has absolutely no ideological interest in the Iranian Revolution. Later in her life, when she's at Berkeley, Firoozeh experiences other forms of prejudice that are harder to categorize: some of her classmates, who would be horrified to be accused of bigotry, treat her as "exotic" because of her Iranian heritage. This kind of behavior is sometimes called "soft bigotry," since it involves treating people from other cultures condescendingly, even if it doesn't involve any overtly negative or hateful behavior.

Although she describes many different forms of prejudice that her family faces in the United States, Firoozeh takes great care to emphasize that America itself is a tolerant, generous

country—suggesting that any instances of bigotry are aberrations from the usual state of American society. (This is certainly a disputable claim, but it's the view the book as a whole takes.) She stresses that America was always a highly tolerant country before the Iranian Revolution. Furthermore, when describing the prejudice that Kazem faces when applying for work—probably the nastiest and most pervasive kind of prejudice described in the memoir—she doesn't discuss any specific instances of bigotry, and stresses that Kazem himself never loses his faith in America. In this way, one could argue, Firoozeh preserves her idea of America's "innocence." She believes that there's certainly bigotry in America, but asserts that American culture and values themselves are free of this bigotry.

WOMEN AND FEMINISM

One of the most important aspects of *Funny in Farsi*'s portrait of Iranian culture is its treatment of women and femininity. Throughout the memoir, furthermore, Firoozeh evokes feminist themes more broadly. Although Firoozeh doesn't mention any close friendships with American women (this aspect of her formative years is more important to the second memoir she wrote), the clash between American and Iranian notions of what women should want and accomplish in life is fundamental to her book.

As Firoozeh portrays it, Iranian culture places highly specific demands on women: that they should marry a man early on in life, bear children, and spend their remaining years cooking and supporting their children in any way they can. Firoozeh portrays Iranian notions of femininity primarily through the character of Nazireh, her mother. Nazireh was a bright child, but because of the unwritten laws of Iranian society at the time, she was pressured into getting married and having children at the age of seventeen. Nazireh abandons her formal education and her dreams of having a professional career, suggesting that Iranian women are expected to prioritize marriage and bearing children before everything else in their lives. (Firoozeh's Aunt Parvine, one of the few Iranian women of Nazireh's generation who has a successful career—at least in the book—is the exception that proves the rule, since she becomes a doctor in Switzerland.) Furthermore, Firoozeh suggests that Iranian women are pressured into worrying about their bodies and their beauty primarily for the pleasure of their male partners. An astounding number of Iranian women get "**nose** jobs," Firoozeh explains, mostly because they want to look beautiful and get married.

It could be argued that, given that some Iranian women go on to have successful careers, Iranian culture's view of women isn't as suffocating and repressive as Firoozeh often suggests. However, Firoozeh is unambiguously critical of the Iranian view of women, which she describes as stifling and condescending; her entire adult life, as a college graduate and later as a professional writer, contradicts the Iranian view. However, she takes a gentle, affectionate tone when critiquing Iranian feminine ideals. Instead of viciously attacking the sexism of Iranian society, Firoozeh often suggests that certain Iranians are simply old-fashioned and afraid of change. Furthermore, there's never a scene in which Firoozeh quarrels with another Iranian person about her decisions to go to college, get married relatively late in life, and become a working professional.

Ultimately, *Funny in Farsi* critiques Iranian notions of femininity but also suggests that Iranians can shift their traditions and learn to support a more equitable view of women: thus, Nazireh becomes a "pioneer" of progressive values by supporting Firoozeh's decision to go to college and marry a non-Iranian later in life, even though she would have been criticized had she done the same thing as a young woman. In the place of Iranian gender norms, Firoozeh advocates what she sees as more tolerant American notions of feminism, which encourage women to educate themselves, pursue careers, and marry when and if they want to marry. While one could certainly argue that American society is guilty of many of the same forms of sexism that Firoozeh recognizes in Iranian society, Firoozeh herself doesn't explore such an argument: instead, she celebrates America as a place of feminism and equality, in direct contrast to Iran.

FAMILY

Family is another important theme in *Funny in Farsi*. According to Firoozeh, Iranian culture places much more emphasis on the family than the bulk of American culture does. In Iran, families tend to stick closer together, often staying in the same small communities for many years, and sometimes having three or even four generations live together under one roof. Family is especially important for Iranian immigrants settling in the United States: family members provide Firoozeh with the morale, encouragement, and economic support she needs to prosper in her new country. Family also provides the Iranian immigrants in the memoir with an important, ongoing connection to their country of origin.

Firoozeh discusses many of the ways that Iranian families, and particularly Iranian immigrant families, can be an important support system. Materially speaking, the family provides a "safety net" of money and shelter. Over the course of the memoir, Firoozeh describes how various cousins, nephews, and uncles come to stay with Kazem and his wife and children, even though his house isn't particularly big. Kazem clearly considers providing his relatives with shelter to be one of his duties as a member of the family. Elsewhere in the book, Firoozeh discusses how family members provide her, and her relatives, with more abstract forms of support, such as encouragement and inspiration. Her parents encourage her to work hard and educate herself, and their encouragement is an important part of her acceptance to U.C. Berkeley, and her success there.

Family members also act as important role models for Firoozeh—for example, her Aunt Parvine inspires her to overcome traditional roles and pursue an education and a career for herself. Furthermore, because of the way she's raised to think of her family, Firoozeh gets genuine pleasure when her relatives—even her distant relatives—achieve successes in life, and she treats her relatives with great warmth and affection, and expects the same warmth and affection in return. All in all, Firoozeh depicts the family as a source of warmth, comfort, love, and support—qualities that one would associate with family in any culture, but which may be especially overt in Iranian society, or particularly strong among Iranian immigrants.

At times, however, Firoozeh portrays her family as a stifling force in her life. The constant pressure of her family—i.e., the fact that she's obligated to so many different people, and implicitly ranked and measured against the achievements of so many siblings, cousins, nephews, and nieces—sometimes causes her to become frustrated. For example, Firoozeh's father Kazem spends years trying to teach Firoozeh to swim; when she can't right away, he complains to his relatives, and contrasts Firoozeh's inability to swim with the success of her cousins and siblings, who've all learned how. Firoozeh only learns how to swim later on, when her father and relatives *aren't* yelling at her—suggesting that her family members' constant pressure and badgering sometimes acts as a barrier to her development and individuality. For the most part, however, Firoozeh conveys her frustration in an affectionate, humorous way, giving the impression that family, even if it can be a little annoying at times, is for the most part a great source of joy and success in her life.

AMERICAN VALUES

Funny in Farsi is a portrait of Iranian immigrant culture, but also a portrait of American values, as seen by Firoozeh over the course of her life in the United States.

For the most part, Firoozeh offers a glowing depiction of American values. She highlights the importance of education in America, and the fact that people of many different backgrounds are encouraged to attend college. Similarly, Firoozeh celebrates the feminist values of American society, which she believes encourage women to pursue their passions, educate themselves, and find work: Firoozeh values this aspect of American society so highly that she says she's thankful for it at her family's **Thanksgiving** feast. Also at the family Thanksgiving feast, Kazem offers another important component of American values: America's inclusive, accepting nature. For Kazem the best symbol of America's accepting nature is the institution of voting, which allows adults of any kind to vote for their politicians. Elsewhere in the memoir, Firoozeh writes about other iterations of American inclusiveness and acceptance—for example, the time when she can't find her way home from school, and a friendly American family lets her into their house and helps her find her way back.

One could easily argue (and plenty of people have) that the virtues of American society Firoozeh discusses have a "dark side"—after all, American society is hardly free from racism, sexism, or xenophobia. However, Firoozeh doesn't offer any such criticism of American values. To the extent that Firoozeh *does* criticize American values, she faults America for its crassness, its material excesses, and its overall lack of dignity or seriousness. At several points in her memoir, Firoozeh describes her horror at seeing Americans eating food; similarly, she notes the outrageous excessiveness of American grocery stores, and the amount of food that Americans waste every year. In these and other passages, Firoozeh suggests that American society—and American values, too—encourage an undignified, almost childish amount of greed and wastefulness that would be considered outrageous in almost any other country. However, even when criticizing American excessiveness and tackiness, Firoozeh always softens her criticism. Her own beloved father is guilty of these same faults, suggesting that they're more like minor flaws than serious problems, and also suggesting that greed isn't even a uniquely American value. Similarly, when describing the bigotry that her family endures, Firoozeh stresses that the America she knows and loves is tolerant, suggesting that any instances of bigotry are deviations from American values, rather than expressions of those values. In all, Firoozeh paints an extremely warm and loving portrait of American values—one which many (but certainly not all) immigrants would agree with.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THANKSGIVING

Firoozeh's family celebrates Thanksgiving every year. At the Thanksgiving feast, her family members bring traditional Persian foods, but also cook a Turkey (the traditional American thing to eat at Thanksgiving). Furthermore, the family gives thanks for living in America, a country that (generally) supports gender equality and gives citizens the opportunity to vote and prosper financially. In all, the Thanksgiving feast symbolizes the way that Firoozeh and her family embrace American culture and tradition without ignoring their strong Iranian roots.

NOSES

Firoozeh explains that, as a child growing up in

America, native-born Americans tease her for her nose, which is somewhat larger than the average white American's nose. She also explains that in Iran, women are judged on the size and shape of their noses, and often have expensive surgery to reshape their noses. In all, noses could be said to symbolize the xenophobia and sexism that Firoozeh experiences while growing up—as an Iranian and an American and, in particular, as an Iranian-American woman.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Randmom House edition of *Funny in Farsi* published in 2004.

Chapter 1 Quotes

To him, America was a place where anyone, no matter how humble his background, could become an important person. It was a kind and orderly nation full of clean bathrooms, a land where traffic laws were obeyed and where whales jumped through hoops. It was the Promised Land. For me, it was where I could buy more outfits for Barbie.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Kazem

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3-4

Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of *Funny in Farsi*, Firoozeh captures two sides of America: one lofty and idealistic, the other material and consumerist. Kazem, an Iranian engineer, brings his family to California in the early 1970s to work for an Iranian oil company. He's spent time in the U.S. before, and thinks of it as a "Land of Opportunity." However, his daughter, Firoozeh—the author of the memoir—thinks of it as the place where she can buy more toys.

America is a land of opportunity, but it's also a consumerist paradise. As Firoozeh shows over the course of the memoir, America is a country of abundance and excess, to the point where, at times, American culture can be materialistic and tacky. In short, both Firoozeh and Kazem are correct in this passage: America is a place where people can achieve success, but it's also a place that places a lot of value, perhaps too much value, on materialism and material goods.

The problem was that my mother, like most women of her generation, had been only briefly educated. In her era, a girl's sole purpose in life was to find a husband. Having an education ranked far below more desirable attributes such as the ability to serve tea or prepare baklava.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Nazireh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Nazireh, Firoozeh's beloved mother, is a typical Iranian woman of her generation. She was raised to believe that women's purpose in life is to get married (and, it's implied, have children). Therefore, she completes her education in the sixth grade, and gets married and has children before she's eighteen years old—something that many would find shocking or even shameful. Strangely, Nazireh comes from a relatively *progressive* Iranian family—her father wants her to have a career as a midwife instead of simply getting married—but even Nazireh ends up getting married at a young age.

Throughout the memoir, Firoozeh honors her Iranian heritage, but she also criticizes it. Firoozeh dislikes Iranian culture's expectations that women must marry and bear children, and suggests that in the United States, women have more freedom and are given more opportunities for personal fulfillment. Though this is the point of view the book takes, one could argue that Firoozeh too broadly idealizes American society (which also places unfair, sexist pressures on women) and denigrates Iranian society (which, as Firoozeh shows, *does* produce successful, professional women).

Chapter 3 Quotes

He and his siblings survived through teamwork, and now, even though they are well into their seventies and have many kids and grandkids, they remain the central players in one another's lives. They have supported one another through deaths and illnesses and rejoiced in one another's good fortune.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Kazem

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

One of the central themes of the memoir is the importance of family, and in this passage, Firoozeh makes it plain that family has been an important part of her life for as long as she can remember. Firoozeh's father Kazem grew up extremely close to his siblings, and to this day, he talks to them all the time. When his siblings are feeling angry, Kazem is angry; when they're happy, he's genuinely happy. Kazem takes good care of his nephews and nieces, and thinks of them as his own children. Firoozeh adopts her father's attitude toward the family: she keeps up with her uncles and aunts, as well as her innumerable cousins. Family is an important part of life for almost everyone, and for immigrant families, it's particularly vital. One's family acts as a source of love, comfort, and financial support in a new country, and over the course of *Funny in Farsi*, Firoozeh shows how her family provides all these forms of support for her.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Because we were new to this country we were impressed not just by the big attractions but also by the little things—smiling employees, clean bathrooms, and clear signage. Our ability to be impressed by the large selection of key chains at the souvenir shops guaranteed that every place we saw delighted us.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

When Firoozeh is still a small child, she and her family move to Whittier, California for Kazem's work. During this time—which, Kazem knows, will end after two years—Kazem makes a point of exposing his family to as much of the "real America" as possible. However, Kazem interprets this a little differently than other Americans would. He takes delight in almost every unique aspect of America, no matter how trivial it seems. Things like a keychain selection in a gift shop delight him, because he's not used to such things. Firoozeh, at least while she's a child, finds these things delightful, too, since they're equally new to her. But while Kazem continues to find tacky American cultural artifacts (such as fast food and key chains) interesting over the years, Firoozeh quickly grows out of her interest in key chains. America becomes her home, and this means that she's no longer as impressed with something as simple as a clean bathroom.

❝ I had no idea where the screamer was from, but I knew he wasn't Iranian. A gerbil would never mistake a hamster for a gerbil, and I would never mistake a non-Iranian for an Iranian. Despite the belief of most Westerners that all Middle Easterners look alike, we can pick each other out of a crowd as easily as my Japanese friends pick out their own from a crowd of Asians.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

During a trip to Disneyland, Firoozeh becomes separated from the rest of her family, and ends up in the Disneyland lost-and-found area. There, she encounters a child, about her age, who doesn't speak any English. He begins crying loudly, and some of the mothers in the area ask Firoozeh if she can speak to the child. The mothers, Firoozeh realizes, assume that Firoozeh can speak the child's language because they're both Middle Eastern—rather naively, they think that all Middle Easterners look the same and speak the same tongue.

The passage is a good example of the kind of "soft bigotry," stemming from ignorance rather than actual hostility, that Firoozeh often encounters as a child. The mothers mean well, but they're so ignorant of Middle Eastern society that they say foolish and potentially offensive things. But also notice that Firoozeh doesn't judge the mothers harshly at all—she seems to understand why white Americans, who have little to no experience with the Middle East, might very naturally assume that one Middle Easterner is from the same country as another.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ When my parents and I get together today, we often talk about our first year in America. Even though thirty years have passed, our memories have not faded. We remember the kindness more than ever, knowing that our relatives who immigrated to this country after the Iranian Revolution did not encounter the same America. They saw Americans who had bumper stickers on their cars that read "Iranians: Go Home" or "We Play Cowboys and Iranians." The Americans they met rarely invited them to their houses. These Americans felt that they knew all about Iran and its people, and they had no questions, just opinions. My relatives did not think Americans were very kind.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Nazireh , Kazem

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter Six, Firoozeh describes some of the changes in Americans' attitude toward Middle Easterners following the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s. During this period, Shia clerics orchestrated a revolution overthrowing the government of the U.S.-backed Shah, and instituted a newly authoritarian, fundamentalist society instead. As a result, the U.S. became much more hostile to Iran, and American citizens began to treat Iranian-Americans with much more hostility in turn. This was a tragic development for many reasons: as a child, Firoozeh was used to Americans treating her with respect and understanding, but as she got older, she noticed that American society was becoming colder and less inviting to Iranian-Americans, and foreigners in general.

Although Firoozeh is very positive about many aspects of American society, especially its emphasis on equality, women's rights, and social advancement, she criticizes American people's tendency to discriminate against Middle Easterners. It's noteworthy that Firoozeh's book was published in 2003, at the height of the War on Terror, the period during which President George W. Bush declared Iran part of the "Axis of Evil," and hostility toward Iranians skyrocketed in the United States. While Firoozeh appears to love her country and respect it for its hospitality to immigrants, she also suggests that it can be cruel and unwelcoming to minorities.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Have you noticed how all the recent serial killers have been Americans? I won't hold it against you.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

As an adolescent and a teenager, Firoozeh endures a lot of teasing and bullying from American peers who associate Firoozeh, as an Iranian American, with the Iran Hostage Crisis. During this crisis, Iranian revolutionaries took over the American Embassy in Tehran and held American citizens hostage, demanding that the U.S. government negotiate with them for the return of the Shah (who'd gone to America for medical treatment) to Iran, where he was supposed to stand trial for his corruption. During the crisis, hostility toward Iranians increased, and Firoozeh was often scapegoated for other Iranians' acts. In the book, Firoozeh's response is to turn her bullies' arguments on their head, pointing out that it would be illogical to blame all Americans for serial killers' actions, just because of their common nationality. By the same token, Iranian-Americans shouldn't be blamed for the actions of a few Iranian revolutionaries. The passage is also a good example of how Firoozeh uses humor and wit to lighten the mood of her book. Even when she's dealing with serious topics, such as racism and prejudice, she entertains her readers.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Everywhere I went, I saw the same carved coconuts, the same seashell frames, and the same hats, all made in the Philippines. I tried to hang loose, but Waikiki felt more like 7-Eleven-by-the-Sea.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Firoozeh and her family travel to Hawaii on vacation. There, Firoozeh is disappointed to find that the beautiful tropical island they visit has become overtaken with tourists and big businesses, which destroy the island's natural beauty and replace it with tacky hotels and stores.

The passage is a good example of the critique of American society which Firoozeh implicitly offers in her memoir. Even though she's glad to be living in America, Firoozeh often notes that America can be big, ugly, and excessive. There are few better symbols for the problems with American society than the recent history of Hawaii: the delicate, fragile beauty of the islands has been crushed under the weight of tourism and consumerism. However, this is only a "critique" in the lightest sense of the word: Firoozeh's complaints about American consumerism amount to gentle ribbing, rather than an actual attack.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ After three months of rejections, I added "Julie" to my résumé. Call it coincidence, but the job offers started coming in. Perhaps it's the same kind of coincidence that keeps African Americans from getting cabs in New York.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Firoozeh discusses the confusion that Americans often feel when trying to pronounce her name. Firoozeh's name, which means "turquoise" in Persian, is an immediate sign that her family is non-Western. This has yielded some interesting results over the years: for example, when Firoozeh was applying for jobs after college, she found that she couldn't get any decent interviews. Then, when she changed her first name to "Julie," she suddenly got a lot more interviews. While Firoozeh is basically calling out racism here, as usual she does so in a lighthearted and non-confrontational way, and then doesn't pursue the issue much further. Firoozeh is proud of her Persian name, and uses it today—but over the years, she's sometimes gone by "Julie" for pragmatic reasons like the one described here.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ When I was eight years old, we went to Switzerland to visit my aunt Parvine, my mother's sister. Aunt Parvine has always been considered something of a deity in our family because she managed, despite being an Iranian woman of her generation, to become a doctor and to set up a successful practice in Geneva. The woman overcame so many hurdles to reach her dream that she deserves to have her likeness carved in marble.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Aunt Parvine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Firoozeh has many good female role models in her family. Her Aunt Parvine has forged a successful career as a doctor in Switzerland. Parvine's career is (as Firoozeh presents it) anomalous among women of her generation; most Iranian women of her age are encouraged to get married and settle down with children at a young age. So perhaps it's appropriate that Aunt Parvine settled in Switzerland instead of remaining in Iran: if she'd remained in Iran, she might have given into the pressure. (Although one could also argue that Aunt Parvine's success proves that Iranian society isn't quite as repressive and sexist as Firoozeh implies.) In any event, Aunt Parvine's perseverance and ambition have a major influence on Firoozeh as she gets older: she takes after her aunt and goes to college and goes on to have her own career as a writer.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ During our Thanksgiving meal, my father gives thanks for living in a free country where he can vote. I always share gratitude for being able to pursue my hopes and dreams, despite being female. My relatives and I are proud to be Iranian, but we also give tremendous thanks for our lives in America, a nation where freedom reigns.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Kazem

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Firoozeh devotes some time to describing her family's annual Thanksgiving feast. Thanksgiving is one of the quintessential American holidays, so the fact that her family celebrates Thanksgiving at all is a sign of their love and respect for America. Sure enough, when Kazem and his children sit down to eat, they begin by expressing their gratitude for being able to live in the United States: Kazem says he's grateful the U.S. allows its citizens to vote, and Firoozeh says she's grateful that American women can go to

college and pursue careers. However, it's also important to note that Kazem and his family serve Persian dishes at Thanksgiving, in addition to the usual turkey. In this sense, the Thanksgiving feast could be a symbol of the way Firoozeh and other Iranian-Americans adjust to their new life in the U.S.—by embracing American values and social structures (such as ideas of gender equality, education, and democracy) but never forgetting their Iranian culture.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ It's not what we eat or don't eat that makes us good people; it's how we treat one another. As you grow older, you'll find that people of every religion think they're the best, but that's not true. There are good and bad people in every religion. Just because someone is Muslim, Jewish, or Christian doesn't mean a thing.

Related Characters: Kazem (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Firoozeh asks her father about the tenets of Islam, the most practiced religion in Iran, and one that requires its adherents to refrain from eating pork. Although Kazem considers himself a Muslim, he eats pork all the time—it's one of his favorite foods, in fact. When Firoozeh asks him about this contradiction, Kazem explains that Islam is about treating people well, not obeying specific rules. He also says that the ban on eating pork originated at a time when pork couldn't be eaten safely—so perhaps it's obsolete, anyway.

The passage is one of the only times in the entire book that Firoozeh—who seems to be a Muslim—talks about her religion. Firoozeh suggests that it's possible to be a Muslim without rigorously adhering to every tenet of the religion. Rather, the purpose of religion is to encourage people to behave virtuously—Allah doesn't really care about what people eat.

The passage is praiseworthy for offering a sensitive, endearing portrait of a Muslim American at a time (the War on Terror) when virtually all portraits of Muslim Americans in the media were negative in some way. However, the passage could also be faulted for "neutering" Islam—presenting it as a loose collection of vague, fluffy statements about doing good, to the point where it's hard to recognize it as Islam at all.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ I know about your famous carpets and your beautiful cats.

Related Characters: Albert Einstein (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kazem—a young student studying in the U.S. at the time—meets one of his heroes, the physicist Albert Einstein. At the time, Einstein is an old man, and he's working in Princeton, New Jersey. Einstein asks Kazem to tell him about the Fulbright program, on which Kazem is studying in the U.S., and Kazem nervously talks for far too long about the program. Einstein then says that he knows a little about Iran—cats and carpets.

The remark could be considered somewhat belittling, since it reduces the entire country of Iran to a few exotic artifacts, but it also seems to come from a place of kindness and respect. Einstein isn't claiming to know much about Iran; only the beautiful things he's heard about it. In any event, Kazem is amazed that he was able to meet such a brilliant and famous man at all, as he keeps telling the story even decades later.

❝ He also had a new dream, in which the treasure was no longer buried. He dreamed that someday, he would return to America with his own children. And they, the children of an engineer from Abadan, would have access to the same educational opportunities as anybody else, even the sons of senators and the rich.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Kazem

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the chapter, Kazem returns to Iran to pursue his career with Iranian oil companies. However, his time in the U.S. has proved valuable: he's come to believe that in America, anything is possible with hard work and intelligence. He sees America as a land of opportunity, where anybody of any background can prosper.

It's interesting to consider that Kazem is behaving exactly the way the Fulbright program wants him to behave. The Fulbright scholarship was founded shortly after the end of

World War Two, at least partly in order to draw the most talented people from around the world to the United States and expose them to American ideals. Generations of great thinkers have immigrated to the United States because of the Fulbright, and to this day it's an important part of America's "soft power"—i.e., its ability to control other countries by showing off its cultural and societal qualities.

Chapter 16 Quotes

Times being what they were, Sedigeh was not allowed to pursue her education past sixth grade and was married shortly thereafter. All her brothers became engineers and doctors. My father found this a huge injustice. He always told me that if his sister had been able to pursue her education, she would have become the best doctor of them all, for not only was she smart, she was resourceful as well.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Kazem , Aunt Sedigeh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Firoozeh describes the life of her Aunt Sedigeh, an intelligent, resourceful woman who nonetheless never had a professional career because of her gender. Kazem, Sedigeh's brother, often says that Sedigeh was more than intelligent enough to become a successful doctor. He finds it outrageous that Sedigeh never got to pursue her career, and it's further implied that he encourages Firoozeh, his daughter, to pursue her own education in order to ensure that she achieves the professional success that was denied his sister.

The passage shows that Kazem, despite his Iranian roots, doesn't embrace every aspect of Iranian culture. Where many Iranians believe that women should forego their education and career in order to marry and settle down, Kazem believes that women, no less than men, should pursue professional success if they want to. That Firoozeh becomes so successful as an adult is, in no small way, the result of the encouragement Sedigeh and Kazem give her.

Without my relatives, I am but a thread; together, we form a colorful and elaborate Persian carpet.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Here Firoozeh discusses her love for her family. Family is an important part of her life, and has been for as long as she can remember. Her family members provide her with inspiration for her own life—for example, her father and aunt encourage her to work hard, study, and achieve greatness, rather than simply settling down with a husband. Firoozeh also discusses how her family members have provided one another with emotional support, money, and shelter in their times of need. She sums up her relationship with her family by comparing it to the relationship between a single thread and a carpet. A thread by itself isn't particularly interesting, but when it's added to a large, colorful carpet (notably a Persian carpet, which Iran is famous for), it becomes much more beautiful. By the same token, Firoozeh wouldn't have led such a happy, successful life without her "close-knit" family to help her along the way, and to this day she's still close with her parents, siblings, nephews, and nieces.

Chapter 19 Quotes

Nobody asked our opinion of whether the hostages should be taken, and yet every single Iranian in America was paying the price. One kid throws a spitball and the whole class gets detention. For my father to be treated like a second-class citizen truly stung. If there were ever a poster child for immigration, it would be Kazem.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Kazem

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

In this tragic chapter, Firoozeh discusses the discrimination that Kazem faced after the Iran Hostage Crisis. During this crisis, revolutionaries took American citizens hostage and demanded that the U.S. government cooperate with their demands. The crisis went on for more than a year, making it one of the longest hostage situations in American history. During this period, Iranian-Americans experienced persistent harassment, prejudice, and discrimination. Kazem was mysteriously fired from his job—quite possibly because his coworkers didn't want to work alongside an Iranian—and he was unable to get a new job. While nobody

deserves this kind of discrimination, the situation was particularly sad in Kazem's case, since Kazem was always a "poster child" for American immigration. The idea that Kazem was in any way comparable with the people who orchestrated the hostage crisis was absurd to anyone who knew him at all well. Nevertheless, it's interesting to note that Firoozeh emphasizes Kazem's ongoing love for his adopted country: he never loses his faith in America's institutions, such as democracy, the police, and the media. In this way, his discrimination becomes even more poignant—even as the evidence that America is a just and equitable society evaporates, Kazem continues to believe in the country's "best self."

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ As college approached, I stumbled upon a talent better than selling popcorn or polishing silver. I started writing scholarship essays. I wrote essay after essay about my life and my dreams and my goals.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

As a teenager, Firoozeh realizes that she needs to start making money if she's going to pay for college. She takes a variety of menial jobs housesitting and babysitting, but eventually discovers that she has a better way of getting money: writing scholarship essays. As an Iranian-American, Firoozeh has lots of great stories to tell about her experiences in her adopted country. As time goes on, Firoozeh becomes a stronger, funnier, and more confident writer, and various scholarship organizations give her money. This is interesting to learn, since it's the first time in the book that Firoozeh has mentioned writing. It would seem that Firoozeh began to develop her literary voice as a teenager, applying for scholarships.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ Apparently, some people thought that my Parisian accent was too authentic for a foreigner. Perhaps taking their cue from Detective Clouseau, a couple of the judges decided to do a little investigative work.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Firoozeh wins a prestigious competition that involves making a speech in French. When she wins the competition, delivering an excellent speech in perfect French, some people become suspicious. They question whether Firoozeh is really a non-native speaker, as the contest rules stipulate. While Firoozeh never says so explicitly, it's quite likely that Firoozeh is the victim of racism here. The predominately American, European-descended contestants don't like being beating by a young Iranian-American woman, and react by petulantly challenging her victory. However, Firoozeh doesn't treat her opponents harshly in the passage—instead, she laughs off the incident, comparing them to Inspector Clouseau (the "Pink Panther," a bumbling French detective from a popular series of films). This is typical of Firoozeh's writing style—even when she's writing about something very serious, she keeps the mood light.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ Once my mother realized that I wanted to marry François, she said, "He will be like a third son to me," and wiped the tears off her face. At that very moment, my mother threw aside everything she and her generation knew about marriage and entered a new world where daughters select their own husbands. She became a pioneer.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas, Nazireh (speaker), François Dumas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 22, Firoozeh has decided that she's going to marry François Dumas, a French classmate of hers at Berkeley. When she introduces François to her parents, she's somewhat afraid that they'll refuse to support the marriage, because François isn't Iranian, and he's a Catholic. However, to Firoozeh's delight and relief, her parents are very happy about the marriage. In Firoozeh's eyes, Nazireh then becomes a "pioneer" for feminist values by supporting her daughter's decision to marry François, rather than trying to cling to the traditions Nazireh herself was raised

with.

Nazireh is one of the most moving characters in the memoir. She's clearly a wonderful, loving woman, but she's not as much of a presence in the memoir and Kazem, and Firoozeh often seems much closer with her father than with her mother. However, even though Nazireh herself was raised in a traditionally conservative Iranian culture, she abandons these traditions for the greater good of her daughter's happiness.

❝ I could only hope that my wedding would work a bit of magic for this uninvited guest. I like to think that she eventually found a husband, a tall Iranian doctor maybe, or perhaps a short Mexican businessman with a big heart, or a medium-built Irish Catholic book vendor whose family thinks she's the best thing that ever happened to their son.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of the chapter, Firoozeh describes her wedding, during which the two families come together (although very few people from François's side show up) and celebrate the happy occasion with a mixture of Catholic and Iranian traditions. At the end of the night, Firoozeh throws her bridal bouquet (a traditional Western marital practice—legend has it that whoever catches the bouquet will be the next to get married). The woman who catches the bouquet, a woman named Soheila, isn't related to either family in any way—Firoozeh's relatives invited her because she had done a family member a favor. However, it's significant that Firoozeh concludes the chapter by suggesting that it doesn't matter what the ethnicity of Soheila's husband is. Firoozeh's marriage to François is a major event in her family's history, because François isn't Iranian, and Firoozeh hopes that other women will marry for love, as she has done, even if their culture encourages them to only marry people of the same ethnicity.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ I remembered how much I admired Jane Fonda's nose when I was in fourth grade in Tehran, and how much I hated my own. Thinking of all that wasted energy, I wanted to scream and tell my fellow countrymen and countrywomen that a nose by any other name is just a nose.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 165-166

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the memoir, Firoozeh has criticized Iranian notions of femininity and womanhood. She finds it outrageous that Iranian society frowns on women who pursue careers and educate themselves and celebrates women who get married and have children before they're eighteen. Another aspect of Iranian standards of womanhood is the emphasis on physical beauty. Iranian women are trained from an early age to worry about their appearances, especially their noses, so that they'll be able to marry handsome, successful men and lead "successful" lives. Indeed, many Iranian women get nose jobs so that their noses can be as attractive as possible. Firoozeh turns down the chance to get a nose job, and she later realizes that this emphasis on superficial feminine beauty is tragic—it would be better if women celebrated the beauty they're born with and, better yet, pursued success in many different avenues, rather than simply getting married right away just because they're told to.

It's interesting that Firoozeh directs most of her criticism at Iranian culture, when it could be reasonably argued that American society also places unrealistic beauty standards on its women, and encourages them to pursue happiness by conforming to the desires of men, to the detriment of their careers or educations. Indeed, Firoozeh's own example of unrealistic beauty standards concerns a white American movie star, Jane Fonda, no doubt appearing in an American movie—as clearly the beauty standard she is told to idealize centers around white women with small, straight noses. But for the most part, Firoozeh doesn't really criticize America for its sexism; rather, she celebrates the country for encouraging women to learn and achieve greatness.

It's also worth noting that Firoozeh, as usual, remains relatively lighthearted even while discussing serious issues, ending the passage with a pun based on the Shakespeare quote from *Romeo and Juliet*: "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Chapter 25 Quotes

The girl we had selected was undoubtedly the underdog. She was quite overweight, she was the least physically attractive, and she had the smallest cheering section. She was, however, the most articulate.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), François Dumas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Firoozeh and her husband, François, are traveling in the Bahamas. The owner of the hotel where they're staying, who's from the same part of Iran as Kazem, asks François and Firoozeh to judge a beauty pageant. Firoozeh is highly reluctant to do so, since she regards beauty pageants as offensive for the way they enforce conventional beauty standards onto women. However, during the course of the pageant, Firoozeh finds a way to subvert these beauty standards. Instead of voting for the most conventionally beautiful woman, she and her husband vote for the most articulate woman, even though she's overweight and not conventionally attractive. In this way, Firoozeh feels like she takes one small step toward fighting societal sexism, rewarding women for their intelligence and articulacy, rather than their attractiveness.

Chapter 26 Quotes

My husband has since taken the situation into his own hands, hiding all our screwdrivers and hammers before my parents visit.

Related Characters: Firoozeh Dumas (speaker), Nazireh , Kazem , François Dumas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

As Kazem gets older, he continues to behave in a funny, somewhat eccentric manner. He thinks that he's talented enough to repair anything, and so whenever anything in his house breaks, he tries to fix it himself rather than waste money on a repairman. But of course, Kazem isn't as good with his hands as he thinks, and most of the things in his house are broken. He also tries to repair things in other people's homes. That's why, whenever Kazem comes to visit François and Firoozeh in their new apartment, Firoozeh and François make sure to hide the tools.

A lot of the comedy in *Funny in Farsi* comes from the reversal of roles. Even when Firoozeh is a child, she often treats her father as if *he's* the child and she's the responsible adult. Here, Firoozeh and François once again treat Kazem as if he's an immature kid, who's too young to be trusted with tools.

I'm a rich man in America, too. I just don't have a lot of money.

Related Characters: Kazem (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

The memoir ends with Firoozeh paying tribute to her father. As much as Firoozeh pokes fun at Kazem for his clumsiness and cluelessness about American society, she clearly loves him dearly. In particular, she respects him for his generosity, his ambition, and his undying faith in the best parts of America.

In Iran at the time, the currency is so weak that Kazem's U.S. dollars are much more valuable, and he's seen as especially wealthy—though he isn't wealthy in America itself. Yet more than once, Kazem tells Firoozeh that he's a rich man in America too, in the sense that he's surrounded by friends and family, and derives a lot of joy from them. Kazem isn't a millionaire, but he's lived a happy, successful life, thanks to his hard work and his sincere love for his siblings, his wife, his nephews and nieces, and his children.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: LEFFINGWELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Firoozeh, the narrator of the memoir, recalls moving from Abadan, Iran, to Whittier, California at the age of seven with her parents and her fourteen-year-old brother, Farshid. At the time, her eldest brother, Farid, is going to high school in Philadelphia and living with Firoozeh's uncle and aunt.

It's important to notice that Firoozeh moves to America when she's old enough to remember Iran fairly well. Like many immigrants, she still identifies with both the country she came from (Iran), and the country where she's spent most of her life (the U.S.).

The family moves to California because Firoozeh's father, Kazem, is an engineer for the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). Kazem studied in Texas and California in graduate school. He thinks of America as "a place where anyone, no matter how humble his background, could become an important person." At the time, Firoozeh thinks of America as just a place to "buy more outfits for Barbie."

Kazem is an enthusiastic proponent of American values and the "American Dream" (which he more or less defines in this passage). Firoozeh, on the other hand, thinks of America in strictly material terms, as a place of abundance. In a way, they're both right: Funny in Farsi *portrays America as a haven of freedom, but also a land of products and excess.*

Firoozeh is a second grader at the time, and she starts attend the local elementary school in Whittier. Her parents arrange for her to meet with her teacher, Mrs. Sandberg, shortly before school begins. While Kazem speaks fluent English, neither his wife nor Firoozeh does. On her first day of school, Firoozeh feels embarrassed as her mother walks her to her classroom—other kids stare at them. Firoozeh's mother sits with Firoozeh in class, and Mrs. Sandberg writes Firoozeh's name on the board, and then the word, "Iran." She asks Firoozeh's mother something, and Firoozeh suggests that Mrs. Sandberg probably wants Firoozeh's mother to find Iran on the map.

Almost as soon as she's in America, Firoozeh begins to feel the Iranian and American sides of her identity tugging her in different directions: she loves her mother but she also wants to fit in with her peers, with the result that she begins to grow annoyed with her mother for embarrassing her. The scene also emphasizes the differing views of women's education advanced in Iran and the U.S.: American women are expected to go to school long after most Iranian women are expected to be married.

Firoozeh's mother, Nazireh, like most Iranian woman of the era, hasn't had much education—she was raised to believe that her purpose in life was to marry and take care of her family. Her father was a fairly progressive man who encouraged her to have a career and become a midwife. However, her teacher died, and shortly afterwards, she married Kazem. Kazem was handsome and intelligent (he'd been a Fulbright scholar) and he liked Nazireh, partly because of her fair skin and straight hair. By seventeen, Nazireh had given birth to her first child.

Even in a relatively progressive household, Nazireh ends up married with a child at the age of seventeen. This would suggest that, in Iranian culture as Firoozeh presents it, women are often expected to marry and bear children at the expense of getting an education.

Back in the classroom, Nazireh comes to the front of the room. She tries to find Iran on the map, but can't. Mrs. Sandberg smiles and directs Nazireh back to her seat. Then she shows the class where Iran is located on the map. The children stare at Nazireh and Firoozeh, and Firoozeh senses that they think she and her mother are stupid.

Firoozeh's earliest reactions with her peers in school are uncomfortable, because they seem to think of her as an alien, "Other" person, rather than a true peer.

On the walk home from school, Firoozeh and Nazireh get lost—the street signs are useless to them. Luckily, a young girl invites them into her home, Nazireh calls Kazem, and Kazem convinces the owner of the house to guide his wife and daughter home. Firoozeh decides two things about America: "the bathrooms were clean and the people were very, very kind."

The chapter concludes with an anecdote that shows the generosity and openness of (some) American people: instead of regarding Nazireh and Firoozeh as dangerous outsiders, the family kindly helps them find their ways home. It seems likely that this interaction affects Firoozeh strongly, contributing to her early idealization of Americans as especially kind and welcoming (when later on she finds that this certainly isn't always the case).

CHAPTER 2: HOT DOGS AND WILD GEESE

Firoozeh and Nazireh had been nervous about moving to America, but they were both counting on Kazem to guide them. However, when they arrive, it becomes clear to them that Kazem isn't much more knowledgeable about America than they are, and sometimes other people can't understand him. Kazem's time in America has mostly been spent studying science in libraries—he has little to no idea of American society. Kazem likes to pretend that he knows everything about America, but he also knows that he needs to learn more. He reads extensively—in particular, he reads every document fully before signing it.

Kazem is an impressive character, but also the memoir's main source of comedy. Firoozeh clearly loves her father deeply, and has a lot of respect for his hard work—but she's also observant enough to recognize when he's behaving oddly. One reason why Firoozeh is such a compelling narrator is that she uses humor to connect with readers. In a way, Firoozeh is an ambassador between her family and her readers (many of whom might not be familiar with Iranian culture): she gently ridicules her father when he does things that identify him as a first-generation immigrant, but she encourages readers to admire him, too.

Nazireh, on the other hand, learns English mostly by watching television. After a few months of watching *The Price is Right*, she becomes an expert on American goods. Nazireh then relies on Firoozeh to interpret English for her. While many compliment Firoozeh on her skills as a translator, Nazireh usually says, "Americans are easily impressed." Firoozeh still has problems learning American English slang. She and her mother once spent hours looking for "elbow grease" at a store after talking to their repairman. Thirty years later, Nazireh and Kazem's English is better, but still not perfect. However, there are now more Iranian-American immigrants around them, meaning that Nazireh can communicate with strangers without help.

It's notable that Nazireh learns English through the language of consumerism and materialism—learning the names of goods and prizes on The Price is Right. *Iranian cultural expectations about women may also explain why Nazireh isn't always willing to go outside and practice her English with strangers—but it's also possible that her experiences with other Americans have not been as positive as Firoozeh's, and so Nazireh is more wary about her new environment. The story about "elbow grease" is a good example of Firoozeh using a small humorous anecdote to encapsulate the wider experience of being an immigrant.*

CHAPTER 3: IN THE GUTTER

Kazem grew up in Ahwaz, Iran. His father died young, and Kazem had to work with his siblings to support the family. To this day, Kazem is very close with his siblings and nephews and nieces—some of the happiest moments in his own life are days when his siblings had some good fortune.

The memoir doesn't proceed chronologically, and instead jumps back and forth between Firoozeh's experiences and those of other characters, particularly her father. This passage establishes the importance of family in Kazem's life.

Kazem had a tough childhood, and he aspired to become rich one day. As an engineer, Kazem knew he'd never become rich. But, strangely, he never gave up on fantasies of "champagne and caviar," and so he signs up for the American game show, *Bowling for Dollars*. *Bowling for Dollars* is a popular program at the time, and the game is very simple: if a contestant bowls two strikes in a row, they win the jackpot. Kazem tries out, and he's invited to the taping of the show.

Kazem's ambitions of wealth and success are amusing, since they take such extravagant forms, but they also reflect his love for the American Dream. This is what makes Kazem such a loveable character: it's easy to laugh at him, but his persistence and ambition make him admirable and perhaps even heroic.

On the day of the taping, Kazem drives to the studio, very excited. He comes home miserable; he only hit seven pins, meaning that he only won seven dollars. When the program airs, the family watches Kazem bowl on TV: he seems really nervous. Shortly afterwards, he gives up bowling.

Funny in Farsi *is a funny book, and much of the comedy stems from Kazem's misunderstandings and false sense of confidence, which often doesn't stand up well to reality.*

CHAPTER 4: SAVE ME, MICKEY

Firoozeh's family is scheduled to stay in America for two years, so they make a point of visiting as much of California as possible. They visit every theme park and taste every American fast food. The family's favorite attraction is Disneyland. Kazem particularly loves the "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride.

As is the cliché with many first-generation immigrants, Kazem is more "American" than Americans who've been living in the country for their entire lives. What many other Americans take for granted, he finds exciting.

One weekend, Kazem organizes a visit to Disneyland with his family, as well as the families of six of his Iranian colleagues. By this time, Firoozeh has already been to Disney before. Bored, she wanders off and gets lost. Following the instructions Kazem has given her many times, she then finds a police officer and tells him she's lost, and the officer brings her to the Lost and Found. There, a few American women ask Firoozeh for her name, and they seem confused when she says she's from Iran. When a much younger boy, who clearly speaks no English, is admitted to the Lost and Found room as well, the women ask Firoozeh, "Is that boy from your country?" The boy clearly isn't Iranian—even though Americans might think all Middle Easterners look alike.

Firoozeh, unlike her father, finds Disneyland boring, even though as a child, she should be the one enjoying it, not Kazem! Firoozeh encounters some "soft bigotry" in this scene: the ignorant American women assume that Firoozeh is from the same country as another Middle Eastern boy—as if the Middle East is just one big country, without any cultural or ethnic differences.

The women in the Lost and Found try to get Firoozeh to talk to the boy, saying, "Will you do it for Mickey?" Grudgingly, Firoozeh tries—and, naturally, gets no answer from the boy. A short while later, Kazem shows up and hugs Firoozeh—there are so many people in his group that he didn't notice Firoozeh's absence for an hour. Kazem is so "weak-kneed" from worrying that he has to cut the trip short and drive home. The next weekend, while Firoozeh is in another theme part gift shop, Kazem buys her all the toys she wants, instead of making her choose one. Firoozeh "basked in my new status as favorite child."

One of the main sources of comedy in the book is the way that Firoozeh acts like more of an adult than the adults. Here, for example, she wearily humors the two women, even though adults are usually the ones who are "humoring" children. The chapter ends by emphasizing Kazem's enormous love for Firoozeh: even though he loses sight of her, he's so worried about her safety that he can't concentrate on his beloved Disneyland even after he finds her again.

CHAPTER 5: SWOOSH-SWOOSH

Firoozeh says that in her culture, "marriage … has nothing to do with romance"—parents usually arrange marriages. While many Americans find this surprising, the success rate of Iranian marriages is probably about the same as that of American marriages.

In many countries, arranged marriages are still the norm. Some studies have found that, in the case of arranged marriages, the partners' happiness tends to go up over time, where in "Western marriages," the partners' happiness has a higher probability of going down.

Firoozeh's Uncle Nematollah has been married and divorced twice. After divorce number two, he comes to visit Firoozeh's family in Whittier. This is challenging, since Firoozeh's house isn't that big. Nevertheless, Kazem loves hosting other people, especially his family. Kazem and his brother Nematollah love eating and cooking food. Back in Iran, Firoozeh loved cooking special, fresh Iranian foods, but in America, much of the food is canned or frozen. Kazem and Nematollah sample various American foods. They dislike most readymade foods, but enjoy KFC and Baskin Robbins. Pretty soon, Nematollah's clothes don't fit him anymore.

Firoozeh's family is big but close-knit: whenever somebody needs a place to stay, Kazem willingly opens his doors, even though his house in Whittier isn't big at all. Also, notice that Firoozeh gently makes fun of American culture by contrasting the cheap, mass-produced American food with delicious, lovingly cooked Iranian cuisine. Even Kazem, who seems to enjoy most American pop culture, can't force himself to enjoy canned goods.

To lose weight, Nematollah buys diet pills and a scale. Frustrated when he doesn't get results, he buys a girdle and a shiny exercise outfit designed to help him sweat away weight. He jogs around the neighborhood, looking like an astronaut. Nematollah also buys a nylon cord and begins using it to do exercises. He begins to lose weight, and a month later, it's time for him to go back to Iran. As he packs his suitcases, everyone wishes he could stay longer.

During the 1970s, when the scene is set, there were lots of bizarre diet and exercise fads, few of which seemed to work particularly well—and Nematollah tries many of these fads. The chapter ends on a nostalgic note, suggesting that, even if Firoozeh sometimes finds her family members weird or even irritating, she loves them deeply.

CHAPTER 6: WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Firoozeh's family came from Iran to America shortly before the Iranian Revolution. Before the mid-seventies, many Americans hadn't even heard of Iran. Iran, Firoozeh admits, is a small country. But children in California have strange ideas about Iran: they ask Firoozeh about the camels and sand in her country. Kazem likes to lecture strangers on the history of petroleum in Iran. Once, an American told him that he knew about Iran from watching *Lawrence of Arabia*.

The Iranian Revolution, during which Shia clerics orchestrated a newly theocratic government, prompted new hostilities between America and Iran. Previously, Firoozeh suggests, many Americans perceived Iran in a condescending or ignorant, but not actively hostile way.

In school, a boy annoys Firoozeh with questions about the camels in Iran. One day, Firoozeh gives in and tells the boy what he clearly wants to hear: Iranians have camels, which they keep in a garage. Sometimes, the students ask Firoozeh to teach them dirty words in Persian. Eventually, Firoozeh teaches the students how to say, "I'm an idiot" in Persian—and so they run around the playground, shouting, "I'm an idiot" at the top of their lungs.

Once again, Firoozeh plays the part of a mature adult, wearily giving in to the children's questions. However, she gets her revenge by tricking the other children into yelling about their own ignorance—in a way, proving herself to herself.

After two years in California, it's time for Firoozeh's family to return to Iran. At first, Firoozeh assumes Nazireh will be happy to return to her own country, where she can understand the language. But then she realizes that her mother is going to miss the Americans in her life. Even if she can't understand their language, she misses their kindness and generosity.

It's interesting that every single member of Firoozeh's immediate family loves America (in many books about immigrants, there's at least one character who's strongly critical of the U.S.).

Firoozeh often thinks back to her early days in America. Later generations of Iranians, including some of Firoozeh's own relatives, experience a different kind of America in which people have bumper stickers saying, "Iranians: Go Home." Americans don't strike them as being kind at all.

Firoozeh suggests that, following the Iranian Revolution, Americans become increasingly bigoted and hostile to Iranians. It's worth keeping in mind that the book was published at the height of the "War on Terror," when bigotry against Middle Easterners in America surged in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Firoozeh seems to be reminding readers of what she sees as America's friendly, inviting nature—from which its more recent xenophobia is (in her view) a tragic deviation.

CHAPTER 7: BERNICE

In the town of Abadan, Firoozeh and her mother look almost as foreign as they looked in America. They have fair skin, especially compared with most of the people in Abadan. In Whittier, with its large Mexican population, Firoozeh and her family didn't look so foreign. In 1976, Kazem's job brings the family back to California. They settle in Newport Beach, a place "where everyone is blond and sails."

Firoozeh is perceived as being just as much of a stranger in her hometown as she is in her adopted country. This underscores the point that Firoozeh, like so many immigrants, is "neither here nor there"—she inhabits a liminal, or in-between space, and is something of an outsider regardless of where she lives. Note also how it's suggested that white Americans confuse Iranians and Mexicans—groups from entirely different continents—based only on skin color.

In Newport, Firoozeh's family stands out from everyone else. A school nurse asks her, "Oh my God! Are you Alaskan?" Firoozeh is now in the seventh grade and at the request of Laura, a classmate who needs extra credit, she gives a speech about Iran to her class. As she begins her speech, however, the teacher says to Laura, "You said she's from Peru!"

Americans—both adults and children—continue to behave cluelessly (and perhaps even offensively) toward Firoozeh during her time in California, betraying their ignorance of Iran and other cultures in general.

Around the same time, Iranian revolutionaries take hostages in the American embassy in Tehran. Everyone asks Firoozeh what she thinks of the hostage situation, and Firoozeh notices that people seem to be vaguely afraid of her now. Sometimes Firoozeh says, "Have you noticed how all the recent serial killers have been Americans? I won't hold it against you."

The Iranian hostage crisis was a milestone in U.S. foreign policy: Iranian revolutionaries took American citizens hostage in Tehran. In America this led to a lot of bigotry directed at Middle Easterners in general, and Iranians in particular. Firoozeh's ironic point is that all Iranians (especially Iranian immigrants who, after all, left their country for a reason) shouldn't be judged based on the actions of those involved in the hostage crisis.

Later on, when Firoozeh is studying at Berkeley, she meets her husband, a Frenchman named François Dumas. Being French in America, Firoozeh realizes, is very different from being Iranian-American. Americans immediately assume French people are sophisticated. Firoozeh sometimes imagined as a child that in another life she'd be a Swede—but if God made her a Swede "trapped in the body of a Middle Eastern woman, I'll just pretend I'm French."

Americans have different stereotypes about different cultures, and not all of these stereotypes are negative. In Firoozeh's lifetime, many of the stereotypes about Middle Easterners have been negative, whereas stereotypes about French people are more positive, hence her joke about pretending to be French.

CHAPTER 8: A DOZEN KEY CHAINS

Everyone in Firoozeh's family has a "reputation," which sticks with each family member for their entire life. For example, one of Firoozeh's cousins defecated on the curtains as a little kid, and decades later, his mother still teases him about the incident. Firoozeh's older brother, Farshid, has a better reputation: in kindergarten in Abadan, he was popular and charismatic. Forty years later, Farshid's parents and cousins still ask his opinion about everything—they treat him like an oracle.

One of the key characteristics of Firoozeh's family is that it never forgets: Firoozeh's parents and other relatives remember little details from her early life. While this sounds pretty irritating (almost everyone knows what it's like to have a parent embarrass you in front of your friends by talking about what you did when you were five), Firoozeh portrays her family's behavior as a loveable flaw.

In 1976, when Firoozeh is eleven years old, she tells her parents that she wants to go to camp. Naturally, Farshid is consulted on the matter, and he finds an expensive camp eight hours away from Newport. Kazem takes Firoozeh to buy a sleeping bag and other things, even though he's very thrifty. Kazem buys a sleeping bag that's so enormous Firoozeh can barely carry it.

Kazem loves his daughter deeply, but he can also be very stingy. Notice that, just as Firoozeh's family members remember trivial details about each other, Firoozeh herself remembers this funny little episode from her relationship with her father.

Months later, Kazem takes Firoozeh to the bus stop. Firoozeh is nervous about going to camp, but Kazem calms her by telling her about going to America years before. On the bus, everyone stares at Firoozeh's sleeping bag. Someone tells her, "your **nose** points downward, so I figured that's because you're always looking at the ground," and everyone laughs.

Throughout her early years (and into adulthood), Firoozeh experiences teasing and prejudice because of her Iranian origins. Her nose especially becomes a point of focus.

Firoozeh and the other children arrive at the camp. Firoozeh immediately dislikes the girls in her room, except for Mary, who's so homesick that she cries all the time. Mary is at camp with her brother Willy, with whom she's so close that she can barely stand to be separated from him. Everyone in camp teases Willy and Mary, and secretly Firoozeh is relieved, since it means that nobody teases her. She also decides not to bathe, since doing so involves getting naked in front of others, which she's never done before. Instead of participating in the activities, such as archery, cooking, or horseback riding, she sits alone making key chains every day.

It's interesting that Firoozeh doesn't make friends with anyone else in the camp (besides Mary)—and in fact, throughout the memoir, Firoozeh doesn't really talk about the friends she had as a child. Instead, Firoozeh gives the impression that she still feels like an outsider even after spending many years in California—which would explain why, at her summer camp, she spends all her time alone.

The campers are supposed to put on a play: *Fiddler on the Roof*. Firoozeh plays the grandmother's ghost, which requires her to be covered in talcum powder. When the counselors apply talcum powder to Firoozeh's body, they discover that her body is so greasy that the powder "clumps" on her body, and as a result, she looks like she's been "dunked in a vat of bread dough." After the play, she wants to take a shower, but can't—she can't stand the thought of getting naked.

As in many other parts of the book, Firoozeh describes an episode from her life that's tinged with sadness—going to an American summer camp and making no friends—and makes it funny. Laugher allows Firoozeh to make light of her childish embarrassment, and embrace her early memories of America instead of regretting them.

On the last day of camp, Firoozeh arrives at the bus station and finds Kazem and Farid waiting for her. Farid immediately yells, 'You stink!" On the long ride home, Firoozeh, too embarrassed to tell her father that she hated the camp, invents elaborate stories about her "great adventures." Firoozeh still doesn't know whether Kazem believed any of these stories.

Firoozeh lies and claims she had a great time at camp, perhaps because she doesn't want to disappoint her father, who just wanted to do something nice for her (and may have wanted to help his daughter fit in with her new American peers).

CHAPTER 9: YOU CAN CALL ME AL

Kazem loves taking his family to Las Vegas. Before every visit, Nazireh holds the Koran above the doorframe, so that everyone in the family can walk underneath it—a ritual that will bring them good luck on their long drive. Kazem always stays at the Stardust Hotel, since he has a friend who hooks him up with a room for five dollars. Kazem usually plays blackjack, and almost always loses. But he keeps coming back for more. Kazem also enjoys the $3.99 all-you-can-eat buffet, which, he claims, justifies the hundreds of dollars he loses at gambling.

Naturally, Kazem's love for American mass culture extends to Las Vegas, a popular tourist destination that's sometimes seen as being excessively tacky. Notice also that this is one of the only passages in the book in which Firoozeh mentions the Koran (the holy book of Islam), or, by extension, Islam itself. When talking about Iranian culture, Firoozeh emphasizes food, gender norms, and her family, but not, for the most part, her religion.

Firoozeh hates Las Vegas because she's old enough to remember the vacations her family used to take in Iran—they'd drive from Tehran to the Caspian Sea. In California, Firoozeh rarely even goes to the beach. However, on one occasion Kazem books a trip to Hawaii for his family. Firoozeh remembers Hawaii as "7-Eleven-by-the-Sea." But the next year, Kazem books another Hawaiian vacation. This time, Firoozeh loves the tropical foliage and beautiful rainbows of the island. However, her parents find the trip boring because "there are no stores."

While Firoozeh often praises America, she also criticizes the country for its tackiness and consumerism, and the way it destroys natural beauty to make way for hotels and other ugly modern structures (as is the case with Hawaii).

The year after their second Hawaii vacation, the family drives to Yosemite National Park. At first, everyone is awed by the sight of the Yosemite Valley. But later, Uncle Nematollah, who's staying with the family, notices a sign warning of bears. He and Nazireh then decide that they need to leave immediately. After the trip, Kazem decides that his favorite vacation spot, aside from Vegas, is the couch. Privately, Firoozeh decides that when she grows up she'll travel the world in search of rainbows and bears.

It's interesting to consider the differences between Kazem and Firoozeh's ideas of a good trip. Kazem doesn't become a resident of the U.S. until he's an adult, and perhaps as a result he's excited by seemingly minor details of American society, such as fast food or TV. Firoozeh, on the other hand, grows up with American culture all around her, which perhaps explains why she's more eager to travel and see nature than Kazem is.

CHAPTER 10: OF MOSQUITOES AND MEN

Firoozeh's husband, François, loves traveling. His grandfather was Greek, and died in Baghdad, and his grandmother was Belgian. François grew up in the Congo. However, he finds Firoozeh "exotic" because of her name and nationality. For their honeymoon, François wants to take Firoozeh to India. However, Firoozeh isn't interested in traveling there—it seems dangerous due to the lack of vaccinations or good plumbing. François grew up in a luxurious household, so he thinks that "bugs and humidity" are exotic, whereas Firoozeh and her family "worshipped the guys who invented climate control and bug spray."

One of the major differences between François and Firoozeh is that François (who clearly comes from a wealthy family) tends to exoticize the rugged outdoors. Put another way, he idealizes the opposite of what he experienced as a child. Firoozeh, on the other hand, grows up in more frugal conditions, meaning that she places more value on comfort than François (who takes comfort for granted).

After living in Whittier for two years, Firoozeh recalls, her family moves back to Iran. Firoozeh lives with Nazireh in Ahwaz, while Kazem lives in Tehran. Firoozeh doesn't enjoy her new life in Ahwaz—everything seems dirty in comparison with California. After Firoozeh has been living in Iran for a few months, a swarm of frogs comes into the town. Firoozeh doesn't see frogs up-close again until she's on her honeymoon—in Paris—and the frogs are served on a plate with a side of asparagus.

Firoozeh doesn't spend much time discussing her brief period in Iran between her time spent in California: the focus of her book is her experience in the United States. Furthermore, Firoozeh seems not to have very much nostalgia for her time in Iran, which she seems to associate with frogs and other unpleasant pests.

CHAPTER 11: THE "F WORD"

Firoozeh has a cousin named Farbod. Although his name means "Greatness" in Persian, his American peers call him "Farthead." Like Farbod, Firoozeh never realized that her name would be such an obstacle to assimilating in America. Firoozeh's name literally means "turquoise," but growing up, Firoozeh becomes accustomed to Americans being unable to pronounce it. Firoozeh's last name is difficult for Americans to pronounce, too—although, at her father's request, she won't use it in this book. Later on, however, when Firoozeh was studying at Berkeley, her name attracted people "like flies to baklava." Firoozeh found these people "refreshingly nonjudgmental."

Although Firoozeh becomes increasingly comfortable in her adopted country, her name acts as a barrier, causing other people to perceive her as being "different," even though she speaks the same language and grew up in the same culture. Conversely, Firoozeh's name strikes some of her Berkeley classmates because they find it interesting. (One could also argue that this is another form of "soft bigotry," since her classmates exoticize her name and may treat her somewhat condescendingly—however, Firoozeh doesn't entertain this possibility.)

When Firoozeh and her family return to California to live in Newport, Firoozeh announces that she wants to use an American name from now on. She settles on Julie, and her brothers choose "Fred" and "Sean" for themselves. From then on, Firoozeh is "Julie" in school. Because she is fair-skinned and speaks English with an American accent by now, many people assumed she'd been born and raised in the U.S. Unfortunately, this means that Firoozeh grows up hearing Americans express their real feelings about "those damn I-raynians." After graduating Berkeley with honors, Firoozeh finds it almost impossible to get an interview. When she writes the name "Julie" on her resume, however, she finally gets job offers.

Firoozeh's desire to fit in with her classmates leads her to adopt a more stereotypically American name, "Julie." The persisting prejudices in the United States against Iranians then lead Firoozeh to use her American name even as an adult. Nevertheless, she does this out of pragmatism, rather than embarrassment—she's clearly proud of her Iranian roots, and in fact her memoir is a celebration of these roots.

After getting married, Firoozeh goes by the name Julie Dumas, but everyone in her family calls her Firoozeh. Sometimes, she says, she feels as if her life is a big knot. Eventually, she decides to go back to using her Iranian name. This creates new problems, however—once, someone pronounces her name as "Fritzy Dumbass." Nevertheless, Firoozeh finds that Americans are now somewhat more willing to learn new names than they were when she was a child.

In this chapter, Firoozeh has been uncharacteristically negative about Americans' treatment of foreigners. However, she ends the chapter on an optimistic note, emphasizing Americans' growing tolerance and curiosity about other cultures.

CHAPTER 12: WATERLOO

Kazem was the first person in his family to study in America. And yet his proudest achievement is to be the family swim instructor. Years ago, Kazem decided that all of his children would learn to swim, even though this wasn't normal in Iran. To this day, Kazem loves telling stories about teaching his children, nephews, and nieces to swim.

Kazem treats swim lessons very seriously, but his seriousness is both funny and endearing. Learning to swim could be considered a symbol of adjusting to American society—so it makes sense that Kazem, a lover of America, takes the lessons so seriously.

Firoozeh recalls that she was her father's one great failure as a swim instructor. Kazem used a logical, methodical approach to teaching swimming. While this approach worked well for many of Kazem's nephews and nieces, it didn't work for Firoozeh, who isn't particularly scientifically minded. After many summers' worth of lessons, Firoozeh concluded that she'd never learn how to swim. Kazem was irritated, and muttered, "She's built like a rock."

No matter how much time Kazem spends trying to teach Firoozeh, she doesn't learn. Considering the rest of the chapter, it's possible that the more time Kazem spends teaching her, the less likely she is to learn, since she doesn't do well with her family's constant pressuring.

When Firoozeh is eight years old, the family travels to Switzerland to visit Firoozeh's Aunt Parvine. Parvine is a successful doctor—a rarity for Iranian women of that generation. In Switzerland, Parvine tells Kazem that she'll to teach Firoozeh to swim. She takes Firoozeh to the deep end of the pool and pushes her in. Instead of swimming, Firoozeh sinks to the bottom of the pool. Parvine jumps into the water and pulls Firoozeh to the surface. She concludes, "Firoozeh is a rock."

Aunt Parvine is an important role model for Firoozeh—she's an Iranian woman who goes on to have a successful career, even though Iranian women of her generation are generally expected to get married and have children. The fact that Parvine pursues her medical career in Switzerland could suggest that Iran isn't conducive to women having careers (although it could also suggest that Iranian culture isn't as opposed to women becoming professionals and traveling the world as Firoozeh repeatedly implies).

The next summer, Firoozeh and her family go on vacation to the Caspian Sea. On her first day at the beach, Firoozeh begins to swim, "Simple as that." She later tells Kazem that she's begun to swim. Kazem replies, "You are an odd child," and Firoozeh says, "No, there was nobody yelling at me in the sea." Firoozeh still remembers the "first gentle wave" on the day that she learned to swim.

Firoozeh learns to swim, she claims, because she isn't under any pressure from her family to do so—instead of overthinking things, she swims, "simple as that." The episode could symbolize Firoozeh's gradual coming of age, and the way she eventually becomes her own person instead of simply doing what her family tells her or expects her to do.

CHAPTER 13: AMERICA, LAND OF THE FREE

Firoozeh and her family celebrate **Thanksgiving** during their time in America. Nazireh makes curry, and the extended family brings other traditional Persian dishes. The Thanksgiving feast also includes a stuffed turkey, which everyone claims to find flavorless (however, the turkey always gets eaten). Before the meal, Kazem always says he's thankful for living in a country where he can vote, and Firoozeh gives thanks for being able to pursue her dreams "despite being female."

The family celebrates Thanksgiving, one of the quintessential American holidays, but they also bring Persian foods to the feast. This could symbolize the way that Firoozeh's family embraces American culture and traditions, and the democratic, pluralistic structure of American society, without turning their backs on their Iranian roots.

Firoozeh's family loves living in the "Land of the Free." But for Kazem, "free" has another meaning. One day, he tells Firoozeh that he and Uncle Nematollah are going out to lunch at Price Club, the bulk chain of stores. There he and Nematollah eat dozens of free samples. Kazem and Nazireh are "hunter gatherers"—they hoard free food, free soap from hotels, and free peanuts on airplanes.

Kazem and his brother don't seem to have a lot of perspective on what is and isn't considered acceptable behavior in American culture—in this humorous example, they see free samples in Price Club and decide that they can eat almost as much free food as they wish.

Firoozeh notes that Kazem doesn't know his exact birthdate—the date was recorded in a Koran when he was a baby, but somebody lost the Koran. He decides to celebrate his birthday on March 18, Nazireh's birthday, so that he'll only have to remember one date when filling out forms. He and Nazireh receive lots of free meals on their birthday, but find that they have to explain to waiters at what point they realized they had the same birthday. As a result, Kazem prefers to eat at Denny's by himself on his birthday.

Kazem is a comically practical man—he chooses to make his own birthday the same as his wife's, just for the convenience. The circumstances that led to Kazem forgetting his birthday are difficult to explain to other Americans—many of whom own a birth certificate. Thus, Kazem avoids explaining the complicated truth (and risk being denied free food as well).

Since retiring, Kazem has become obsessed with time-shares. He and Nazireh still live in Newport Beach. They're not that wealthy, but they live in a wealthy neighborhood, so they're targets for time-share marketers. Kazem has been known to buy time-shares in return for a free t-shirt or steak. Nazireh refuses to participate in time-share activities, but Kazem still tries to convince her to attend the free seminars.

Kazem continues to hoard free goods, no matter how useless they are. As with so many other parts of the book, Kazem's recklessness with money might seem tragic, but Firoozeh presents it in a light, humorous manner.

CHAPTER 14: THE HAM AMENDMENT

Kazem's favorite food is ham—and this was a problem during his time in Abadan. While Firoozeh was growing up, Iran was still a monarchy led by the Shah. Kazem and Nazireh loved the Shah and believed that he'd modernize the country, making use of engineers like Kazem.

Kazem isn't especially religious, although (as Firoozeh notes elsewhere) he does consider himself a Muslim. During Kazem's childhood, Iran under the Shah was a religious country, but historians generally agree that it was more secularized than it became after the Iranian Revolution.

Iran's relationship with oil has been a "mixed blessing." A century ago, the British Empire discovered oil in Iran, a potentially lucrative source of fuel. The British Petroleum Company negotiated an agreement that would give the company drilling and selling rights. But in the 1950s, Iran nationalized its oil reserves, forcing BP out of the country. Though it went through economic troubles during the 1960s, Iran was "finally reaping most of the profits from its own oil" by 1970.

The British Empire used its military might to pressure Iran into giving up the majority of its wealth to British Petroleum. Since the end of World War Two, however, Iran—along with many other Middle Eastern countries—has managed to gain control of the majority of its own oil reserves. This further escalated tensions between Iran and Western countries, since gaining access to Middle Eastern resources has long been a cornerstone of Western foreign policy.

During his time as a graduate student in America, Kazem's love for ham grew quickly. Later, when he and his family were living in California, Kazem loved the fact that ham was widely available. However, Nazireh hated ham, and as a result, Kazem had to buy ham in secret. It wasn't until much later that Firoozeh learned about the restrictions on eating pork in Islam. Horrified, she rushed home and told Kazem what she'd learned. Kazem explained that ham was forbidden in Islam because, when the religion was founded, people didn't know how to cook it properly. He continues, "it's not what we eat or don't eat that makes us good people; it's how we treat one another."

Kazem's love for ham symbolizes the divide between his own lifestyle and Iranian Muslim culture—but he still considers himself a Muslim. To practice Islam, he claims, one need only treat other people morally—furthermore, he insists that the restriction on eating ham is obsolete. It's important to remember that Firoozeh's memoir was published at the height of the War on Terror, so her description of her father may be pointedly directed at Americans who might stereotype all Muslims as dangerous fundamentalists. One could commend Firoozeh for offering an affectionate, warm portrayal of a Muslim American, but one could also criticize her for presenting Islam in a "neutered" form—a collection of vague statements about love and getting along.

CHAPTER 15: TREASURE ISLAND

Kazem grew up in the town of Ahwaz. His father, Javad, was a wheat farmer. Growing up, Kazem loved sneaking into outdoor movies—by climbing a high wall, he could see the movie for free. One night, Kazem and his brother Muhammad climbed onto a wall to watch a film. A police officer shouted at them, and they jumped down and ran away. Kazem fell on a pile of bricks, leaving a permanent scar on his shin.

Clearly, Kazem remembers his childhood in Iran fondly, but for the most part Firoozeh's memoir isn't about life in Iran; rather, it's about Kazem and Firoozeh's experiences in the U.S.

When Kazem was twenty-three years old, he applied for a Fulbright scholarship. His friends told him that Fulbrights were for wealthy Americans, not Iranians, but he finished the Fulbright exam ranked first in Iran. Kazem later accepted a grant to study engineering at Texas A&M. However, the acceptance letter arrived so late that by the time Kazem found out he'd be moving to the United States, the orientation program had already begun. Kazem frantically went to Tehran to obtain a passport; he ended up staying for weeks, trying to get the right paperwork. He eventually flew to Texas, thirty-five days late for orientation.

The Fulbright scholarship program was originally developed after World War Two to foster peace and cooperation between America and other countries (and, furthermore, to encourage the smartest people from around the world to live in America)—so the claim that Fulbright grants are for "wealthy Americans" isn't entirely true.

Kazem spent the year studying hard. His roommate was an antisocial student who was expelled from the program for drinking. Kazem began to feel lonely. He learned that he could transfer to another school, but didn't want to ask for the transfer explicitly. Instead, he wrote a letter to the Fulbright office, explaining his loneliness. Instead of transferring Kazem to another school, the office arranged for him to meet with an American hostess. The hostess took him to art museums and other places, and he eventually decided that he enjoyed sitting in his room after all.

Kazem doesn't develop a rich understanding of American society because he prioritizes studying—and even when the hostess tries to show him American culture, he's uncomfortable. Again, this could be considered pretty depressing (and perhaps it was for Kazem at the time), but Firoozeh softens the episode with humor.

One of Kazem's professors invited him to join him in visiting an "old acquaintance" in Princeton, New Jersey for Easter break. The acquaintance turned out to be Albert Einstein. Einstein asked Kazem to tell him about his Fulbright grant, and Kazem, lonely and excited to meet such an impressive man, proceeded to lecture Einstein for far too long on the history of the Fulbright. Einstein smiled and said, "I know about your famous carpets and your beautiful cats."

In many ways, Einstein's story isn't so different from Kazem's: like Kazem, Einstein immigrated to America and eventually became an American citizen. While Einstein is clearly a hero to Kazem, Einstein seems to be guilty of the same innocent cluelessness about Iran that Firoozeh depicts throughout the book, hence his remark.

Kazem finished his studies in Texas a confident, educated man. In Iran was grateful to be back with his beloved family, but he'd developed ambitions to return to America and give his own children the same opportunities he'd had.

Kazem's time in America leaves a huge impression on him: he's lonely, but he also recognizes that America (as he knows it) rewards hard work. This, one could certainly argue, is one of the purposes of the Fulbright program: to attract bright people from other countries and encourage them to lend their services to America.

CHAPTER 16: IT'S ALL RELATIVES

The Persian language has far more complex vocabulary for describing relatives than the English language does. For example, there are eight different Persian words describing various kinds of cousins—whereas in English, there's just one word, "cousin."

Firoozeh suggests that Persian has more intricate language for family members because in Iran, family relationships are a more important, overt part of one's day-to-day life than they are in America.

One day, while Firoozeh is strolling through Berkeley, she smells a flower and experiences a vivid flashback to playing in her aunt's garden as a child. At the age of six, Firoozeh loved to spend time with her Uncle Abdullah. Abdullah was an educated man, and Firoozeh admired his passion for language. Abdullah now lives in California with his wife, Firoozeh's Aunt Sedigeh. He works as a translator, and has four children. Kazem is very close with Abdullah's children, and after the Iranian Revolution, when he couldn't find a job, he stayed with Mehdi, one of his (Kazem's) nephews. More recently, one of Mehdi's own children stayed with Kazem.

Firoozeh is very close with many of her family members, and the same could be said for Kazem. This closeness manifests itself in many ways—notably, family members take care of each other and provide material, financial support (for example, Kazem stays with Mehdi, and later returns the favor for Mehdi's child).

Aunt Sedigeh, Kazem's sister, was a bright child, but because of the norms of Iranian society at the time, she didn't continue her education after the sixth grade, and married when she was a young teenager. Her brothers became engineers and doctors. Kazem found this outrageous, and often tells Firoozeh that, had Sedigeh been allowed to study, she would have become the best doctor of anyone in the family.

Despite Firoozeh's largely affectionate portrait of Iranian culture, she faults it for limiting opportunities for women. Firoozeh, as well as her father, seems to find it absurd that Iranian women are expected to bear children before anything else.

Firoozeh's paternal uncle, Muhammad, became a successful doctor in Ahwaz. However, following the Iranian Revolution, he fled to America. Muhammad then had to get a new medical degree, and by the time he started interning at the hospital he was almost sixty. For Firoozeh, Muhammad is a symbol of the family's perseverance. To this day, Firoozeh is very close with her cousins, uncles, and nephews. She goes to everyone's graduation, and celebrates her family's achievements as joyfully as if they're her own. Kazem and his siblings have bought burial plots in the same cemetery, since they want to be together even after they die. "Without my relatives," Firoozeh concludes, "I am but a thread; together, we form a colorful and elaborate Persian carpet."

Another aspect of Firoozeh's close relationship with her family is that she becomes genuinely happy when good things happen to her family members—for example, she takes genuine pride and inspiration in Uncle Muhammad's success as a doctor in the U.S. Firoozeh's comparison between her family and a Persian carpet is apt: individual "threads" in the carpet aren't very beautiful or interesting, but when they're combined with other threads, they become something much more. In the same way, Firoozeh's family has enriched her life.

CHAPTER 17: ME AND BOB HOPE

Growing up, Firoozeh read *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss. It occurred to her that the Grinch didn't like celebrating Christmas because he was a Muslim. As a small child in Iran, Firoozeh's society was almost entirely Muslim, although Christians and Jews lived there, too. Most of the population was secular Muslim, meaning that people thought of Islam as "donating a part of their income to the poor and not eating ham." Women didn't cover themselves in a *chador*, and many of them dressed in a Western style.

Firoozeh's memoir was published in an era when Muslims were often depicted as violent religious extremists in American media (as is still sometimes the case today, unfortunately). Partly in response to these portrayals, Firoozeh stresses the moderate, secularized nature of Muslim society in Iran before the Iranian Revolution.

In the U.S., Firoozeh loves going to school. However, she feels left out when the other students participate in Christmas activities. The biggest holiday in Iran, at least while Firoozeh was a child, is Nowruz. This secular holiday, the New Year's Day, is celebrated nationwide, and the entire country spends weeks preparing for it. In America, Firoozeh and her family still celebrate Nowruz, but it's no longer so exciting. Firoozeh commiserates with her Jewish friends about being left out of Christmas. On Christmas, Firoozeh and her family watch the Bob Hope TV specials, and Firoozeh translates Bob Hope's jokes for Nazireh.

During her time in the United States, Firoozeh and her family develop many new traditions: instead of placing so much emphasis on traditional Iranian holidays, they begin to celebrate more common American holidays, such as Christmas (and Thanksgiving, as we learned in an earlier chapter).

Later on, Firoozeh marries François, a Catholic, and becomes "a card-carrying member of the Christmas Club." She loves celebrating Christmas: decorating the tree with her children and baking Christmas cookies. But sometimes, she finds Christmas exhausting—far more exhausting that Nowruz—and yearns for the simple days when Christmas just meant watching Bob Hope on TV.

It's interesting that Firoozeh isn't nostalgic for her childhood celebrating Nowruz in Iran, but rather her adolescence, when neither Nowruz nor Christmas was the defining part of her identity. Put another way, Firoozeh seems to be nostalgic for the "in-between" period of her life, when she felt like she belonged to both America and Iran.

CHAPTER 18: I RAN AND I RAN AND I RAN

The year is 1977, and the Shah has just arrived in the United States to meet with President Jimmy Carter. Because there were so few Iranians in the U.S. at the time, many of them—including Kazem and his family—are invited to go to the White House to welcome the Shah. Kazem decides to bring his family, minus his two sons, who are concerned about the anti-Shah demonstrators at the White House.

Many working-class Iranians in America went to the White House in 1977 to greet the Shah. At the time, the Shah was a widely despised leader, since he was seen as being corrupt and overly loyal to the U.S. As a result, many people demonstrated outside the White House during his visit.

Firoozeh and her family stay in a hotel with many other Iranian-Americans. At the White House, Firoozeh is delighted to see thousands of tiny Iranian flags planted in the lawn. She asks her parents to help her gather thirty flags to give to her classmates. But soon, Firoozeh and her parents notice the hundreds of masked demonstrators gathered outside the White House, condemning the Shah. Some of the demonstrators become violent after the Shah arrives, and many Iranian guests are injured—however, Kazem and his family "ran and ran and ran." They approach a police officer and beg him to take them back to their hotel safely, but the officer says, "That's not my job." In the end, they buy the first bus tickets they can find. The bus takes them on a tour of D.C. monuments.

Firoozeh contrasts the innocence of her desire to "pick" flags for her classmates with the danger and hostility of the anti-Shah demonstrators. Like many passages in the book that could be interpreted as sad or even frightening, this passage uses humor to lighten the tone. One interesting comedic technique that Firoozeh uses here is bathos, *the technique of suddenly switching the mood. Here, the sudden transition from a chase scene to a banal tour bus is strange, surprising, and amusing.*

Later, when Kazem and his family return to their hotel, they see other Iranian guests with their arms in slings. Demonstrators have sent threatening notes to the hotel, claiming, "We are going to blow you up." Kazem realizes he's dropped the tiny flags, and apologizes to Firoozeh. Firoozeh says, "That's okay. We can always go back."

Even after she sees the damage the demonstrators have caused, Firoozeh, who's still too young to understand why they're demonstrating, innocently claims that she and her family can just go back to the White House lawn. She seems not to understand the danger they faced (or how rare it is to be invited to the White House). Although Firoozeh doesn't discuss it, demonstrators continued to protest the Shah for many months, decrying what they saw as a corrupt alliance between American economic interests and the Shah's political decisions.

CHAPTER 19: I-RAYNIANS NEED NOT APPLY

Kazem begins working for the NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company) at the age of seventeen. He continues with the company for many years, but after the Iranian Revolution, his world "turned upside down." No more refineries are built in Iran, and so Kazem is soon out of a job in California. The company offers him work in Iran, but Kazem refuses. He finds an engineering job with an American company, but shortly after "a group of Americans in Tehran were taken hostage in the American embassy," he's laid off.

In this chapter, Kazem faces a steep uptick in prejudice: suddenly (and, in all probability, illegally), he's fired from his job. It's strongly implied that he's fired because of hostility to Iranians, and Middle Easterners in general, in the tense atmosphere surrounding the Hostage Crisis. During this period, Iranian revolutionaries took American hostages and demanded, among other things, that the U.S. government return the Shah (who'd come to the U.S. for medical treatment) to Iran to stand trial.

For 444 nights, Firoozeh and her family watch TV, waiting for new developments in the Iran Hostage Crisis. In the meantime, Kazem's pension is cut off, and he finds himself unemployed at fifty-eight. Nobody in American wants to hire an Iranian. He is forced to sell the family house for a tenth of its value. Iranian-Americans are among the most educated, hardest-working immigrants in the country. Kazem loves America, and is thankful that he has the right to vote. And yet he is treated like a second-class citizen.

The Hostage Crisis provokes a lot of hostility toward Iranian-Americans, and as a result, Kazem—a talented engineer who bears zero hostility toward the U.S.—is prevented from finding work. As Kazem's ordeal shows, immigrants are often treated as scapegoats for their country's faults—even though, almost by definition, the people who choose to leave their country often aren't representative of their country's politics at all.

Kazem continues to look for work. Eventually, he finds work with a Saudi petroleum company. This is far from ideal, but he has no choice—he's already lost his money. He accepts an executive position, but is later denied the job—he's told that the Saudi government won't allow Iranians to enter the country. Next, Kazem tries to work for a Nigerian oil company. He's given a huge salary—it almost seems too good to be true. After a few weeks, Kazem learns that the company is a scam, run by a con man who's already been deported from the U.S. After 444 days, the hostages are freed. Shortly afterwards, Kazem finds a job as a senior engineer with an American company. His salary is lower than what it was before the Revolution, but he's happy to be working. He never complained during his job ordeal—instead, he remained "an Iranian who loved his native country but who also believed in American ideals."

This poignant passage captures Kazem's struggle to find work. Firoozeh emphasizes that Kazem retains his love for America and American ideals throughout his period of systematic discrimination. By ending the chapter in this way, Firoozeh creates a sad but cautiously optimistic mood, suggesting that, while America has its share of discrimination and prejudice, the nation itself is tolerant and idealistic, and gives immigrants opportunities for advancement. Of course, one could also disagree with Kazem's opinion and argue that a fundamental "American value" has always been racism and discrimination.

CHAPTER 20: GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUNDS

At the time when the Iranian Revolution begins, Firoozeh is an adolescent. She's old enough to understand that her family is going through money troubles, and she's worried that she won't be able to pay for college, so she decides to find babysitting jobs. After several low-paying stints, Firoozeh interviews to babysit for a wealthy French family. The family offers her five dollars an hour, and she's thrilled.

Firoozeh needs to work hard to pay her way through college, since her father has lost a lot of money after being fired from his job. (At the time, it would seem, five dollars an hour was a great wage for a teenager.)

Firoozeh begins babysitting for the French family, but quickly discovers why they pay her so well—their eight-year-old child refuses to eat or sleep. After one night of trying to get the child to eat, Firoozeh decides that the babysitting gig is more trouble than it's worth. Later, she takes housesitting jobs, which just require her to water plants. Once, she enters her clients family's house and hears music playing—sure that there's a burglar inside, she runs out and doesn't water the houseplants for the rest of the family's vacation. Later, she learns that she heard a clock radio, not a burglar.

Firoozeh tries to earn money as a housesitter and a babysitter, but she runs into various problems. While these problems undoubtedly caused her a lot of frustration at the time, in retrospect she depicts them humorously.

Later on, Firoozeh takes another housesitting job, taking care of a family's cats. She follows directions perfectly, but notices that the cats won't stop meowing. When the family returns, the mother is furious: Firoozeh was supposed to leave the patio door open, and as a result the cats haven't gotten any exercise for a week. Her next gig involves scrubbing the silverware in a wealthy family's house. She finishes her duties very quickly, and as a result she's only paid eight dollars.

Firoozeh continues to run into trouble while housesitting for other families. Sometimes, her problems stem from her inability to do what's expected of her (even though the family seems not to have told her about opening the patio door), and sometimes they stem from her doing her job too well, and too quickly.

Firoozeh works at a movie theater, selling food. She found the job disgusting—especially the sight of people eating hot dogs and ordering Tab, a popular diet soda of the era. Kazem is sorry that Firoozeh has to work so hard, and feels bad that he can't give her more college money. Around this time, Firoozeh begins writing more. She writes many scholarships essays about "my life and my dreams and my goals." She concludes, "And the funds just flowed in."

This is one of the few passages in which Firoozeh makes fun of American crassness, perfectly represented by the disgusting foods many Americans eat. However, Firoozeh also becomes a good writer as a result of her need for scholarship money—therefore, the silver lining of her family's financial hardships was that they helped her develop her entertaining, humorous voice.

CHAPTER 21: JOYEUSE NOËLLE

Toward the end of high school, Firoozeh goes to UC Irvine to compete in an impromptu speaking event, the prize for which is a two-month stay at the Alliance Française in Paris. She's given an hour to prepare a speech, in French, on "Responsibility Toward Technology." By this point, Firoozeh has become nearly fluent in French. In order to compete in the event, she has to sign a form saying that her parents aren't native French speakers. Firoozeh truthfully signs the form—her parents know almost no French, and the language she usually hears in her house is Persian. The other language spoken in her house, Shustari, is a version of Old Persian, which is still commonly spoken by farmers in certain parts of Iran.

Firoozeh's success in the French speaking competition might suggest that she's become a more confident, articulate person in the process of writing scholarship essays about herself (which Firoozeh mentioned at the end of the previous chapter). Firoozeh is also adept at learning other languages, since she was almost forced to learn English after coming to America as a child.

Firoozeh ends up winning the competition—which certain people in the audience find suspicious. They think that her accent is too authentic and begin investigating. Within a few weeks, Firoozeh's parents begin receiving mysterious calls in French. Shortly afterwards, Firoozeh prepares to enjoy her prize for winning the competition: a two-month trip to Paris. When she lands in Paris, however, she's detained by two officers, who find it suspicious that an Iranian should be going to Paris alone for so long. Eventually, the officers allow Firoozeh to go free.

The hostility Firoozeh receives after winning the French competition, it's loosely implied, is tied to the racist suspicion that an Iranian can't possibly be the best French-speaker—she's so adept at the language that the other contestants suspect foul play. Firoozeh continues to encounter other forms of racism in Paris, showing that hostility towards Middle Easterners is not limited to America or the time of the Iran Hostage Crisis.

Firoozeh stays with a host couple, both of whom work for a left-wing French paper. The couple is cold and inhospitable, and on the first night they inform her that they'll be traveling to the country all summer—clearly, they're just hosting Firoozeh to make extra money. Firoozeh is disappointed not to have hosts for her time in Paris, but goes to talk to the concierge in her apartment. The concierge is a pleasant woman named Noëlle, who seems very excited that Firoozeh is from California. The next day, she takes Firoozeh to the Champs-Élysées (a famous Parisian avenue) to enjoy the Bastille Day festivities. The parade is so crowded that Firoozeh can't see anything. By the time the parade is over, it's one am, and Firoozeh is extremely tired. She and Noëlle walk all the way home, which she finds exhausting.

Firoozeh's trip to France gets off to a disappointing start: evidently, she's been counting on having someone friendly to show her around. Although Noëlle is kinder than Firoozeh's cold, inhospitable host family, she's not particularly sensitive to Firoozeh's needs, hence her suggestion that the two of them walk all the way home at night. Firoozeh's visit to Paris, like the Bastille Day parade itself, is a disappointment.

Firoozeh begins school a few days later, and the classes are disappointing. The teachers seem apathetic, and Firoozeh doesn't make friends among the other students, most of whom are considerably older than she. The "silver lining" of Firoozeh's time in Paris is that she becomes fully fluent in French. After Firoozeh returns to California, she receives a letter from Noëlle explaining that she's moved to New Caledonia to meet more men. Firoozeh's time in Paris wasn't the romantic coming-of-age film she'd hoped it would be—instead, it was dull and black-and-white.

Firoozeh doesn't particularly enjoy her time in France, but she relishes the opportunity to improve her language abilities. Firoozeh loves to travel, but she realizes that her expectations for what a trip will be like don't always measure up to reality.

CHAPTER 22: THE WEDDING

Firoozeh's marriage to François begins with a lie: she tells her family that François's family is happy about the engagement. Firoozeh has to say this, because otherwise her family wouldn't have agreed to the marriage, since, in Iranian culture, two people can't get married unless both families support the union. Previously, François's family had been opposed to François having a Jewish girlfriend, and when he began dating an Iranian, they were furious.

Firoozeh skips ahead from her time as a teenager to her engagement to François, omitting her time at Berkeley (which she may discuss in another memoir). Notice that François's family is far more opposed to the union than Firoozeh's family, who support Firoozeh in every way—further reinforcing the point that racism and bigotry aren't uncommon in the Western world.

Firoozeh's family loves François: they meet him for the first time after Firoozeh's junior year of college. By this time, Firoozeh and François have known each other for six months, and they've known they were getting married for five and a half months. Kazem and Nazireh take François to the finest Persian restaurant in Los Angeles. François charms Nazireh by asking her about the food. However, he eats a huge amount, which baffles Kazem and Nazireh. Later, he explains that he ate so much because he thought that Iranians "loved to feed people."

François, comically, is eager to please Firoozeh's family, since he knows how important it is to impress his future parents-in-law. Notice that Firoozeh briefly mentions but does not elaborate on the fact that she decides to marry François after knowing him for only half a month—suggesting that, in spite of Firoozeh's skepticism for the Iranian custom that women get married quickly, she still gets married quickly herself.

Kazem and Nazireh love François, not just because he's a good person but because Firoozeh clearly loves him, too. Nazireh had hoped that her daughter would marry an Iranian doctor, but when she meets François, she abandons her cultural conservatism, and wholeheartedly supports the marriage, even though it hasn't been arranged like most Iranian marriages. Firoozeh is still grateful to her mother for being so supportive.

There's surprisingly little generational conflict—a fixture of immigrant narratives—in this memoir. Instead, Nazireh adapts to her new culture and welcomes a non-Iranian into the family with open arms, suggesting that Iranian notions of marriage and femininity must be updated as time goes on.

Shortly after the wedding plans are made official, it becomes clear that some members of François's family won't be attending, including his grandmother and one of his sisters. However, both of his parents come. Other members of François's decline to come, not because they're offended by François marrying an Iranian woman but because they've been feuding with other family members. Firoozeh's side of the family, on the other hand, is excited about the wedding, and even some of her distant relatives come. In all, 181 people from Firoozeh's side of the family show up.

Francois's family is intolerant of many people who are different from them, and that's partly why many of his family members boycott the wedding. However, Firoozeh's family, which is close-knit and supportive, is excited for the wedding, and wants to celebrate Firoozeh's good fortune by her side.

Firoozeh and François are married twice, with a Persian ceremony and a Catholic ceremony. Finding a priest who will officiate a mixed marriage is tricky, but Firoozeh finds a man named Father Christopher. Father Christopher is a warm, funny man, and he agreed to officiate the Catholic ceremony. The Persian wedding, on the other hand, is much simpler to organize: Firoozeh's Uncle Ali hosts the ceremony, and his wife Linda, an America woman, cooks all the food. Ali was the first person in Firoozeh's family to marry a non-Iranian.

The couple's unorthodox wedding symbolizes the union of two different cultures: Western culture, symbolized by Catholicism, and Iranian culture, symbolized by the Persian ceremony. Firoozeh doesn't really discuss the religious elements of either ceremony—it's not clear, for example, how seriously either Firoozeh or François take their religions, and whether they're only participating in these religious ceremonies to appease their families.

The Persian ceremony proceeds, with Uncle Abdullah reading from the Koran. He asks Firoozeh if she consents to marry François, and, as is traditional, Firoozeh hesitates before answering "yes." After the ceremony, everyone hugs and kisses. Kissing, Firoozeh notes, is an important part of Persian culture. Everybody kisses everyone else on the cheek—a tradition than some foreigners find a little odd.

The importance of kissing in Iranian culture, it could be argued, is a sign that Iranian culture places a lot of value on overt expressions of love and affection. This reflects the overall loving, close-knit structure of Firoozeh's own family.

The wedding reception is held in an Indian-Chinese restaurant near the airport. This is one of the few places that stays open from ten pm to two am. An hour before the reception begins, however, the owner of the restaurant demands an extra four hundred dollars from Kazem or else he won't open the door. Kazem, left with few options, agrees to pay. (Kazem doesn't tell Firoozeh the truth until weeks after her wedding.) The Iranian caterer has promised to roast a whole lamb for the reception, but—bizarrely—ends up serving a lamb carcass with the meat carved off.

Firoozeh and François encounter some obstacles in the hours leading up the reception (some of which they don't learn about until weeks afterwards), but, as with other part of the memoir, Firoozeh describes the obstacles in a characteristically funny, light-hearted tone that glosses over the actual stress and aggravation the characters no doubt felt at the time.

Later in the night, the guests dance, and toward the end of the reception, Firoozeh throws the bouquet—a traditional Western wedding ritual that's unfamiliar to many of the Iranian guests. Nevertheless, a guest named Soheila, who isn't related to the rest of the family in any way, and who's been having trouble finding a husband, catches the bouquet. Firoozeh doesn't know if her bouquet helped Soheila find a husband, but she hopes it did, regardless of his ethnicity.

The wedding incorporates traditional aspects of both Western and Persian weddings, symbolizing the intermixing of these cultures in Firoozeh and François's own lives. Firoozeh concludes by emphasizing that people of any ethnicity should be allowed to marry—an idea that many people (including, apparently, some in François's family) would disagree with.

CHAPTER 23: I FEEL THE EARTH MOVE UNDER MY FEET

Firoozeh and François move into an apartment in San Francisco. Shortly afterwards, there's a big earthquake, and all the pictures François has hung on the wall fall to the ground and break. Firoozeh and François are unharmed, but Firoozeh wants to call her parents. Firoozeh's parents are "highly evolved worriers"—when she was growing up, her parents would warn her about absurd possibilities, such as being bitten by deadly spiders. To Firoozeh's dismay, the phone isn't working.

In this interesting passage, Firoozeh ridicules her parents for worrying about her so excessively, but also wants to call them in order to reassure them that she's okay. In other words, Firoozeh knows that her parents are irrational to worry so much, and yet also humors their irrational behavior.

Firoozeh goes downstairs to try another phone. There, she encounters an elderly woman who seems to be having a heart attack. Firoozeh calms the woman, and then asks if she can use the woman's phone. The phone seems to be working, and the woman seems to be okay, so Firoozeh calls her parents. She explains to Kazem that she's just survived a big earthquake, but Kazem cheerfully says, "No problem."

Amusingly, Kazem worries about hypothetical, extremely unlikely problems (such as being bitten by deadly spiders) and yet finds the prospect of an actual, real-life problem—an earthquake—to be "no problem."

Since getting married, Firoozeh has hoped that François's side of the family will begin to be happy for them. After the earthquake, she calls François's mother. When she explains what happened, though, François's mother just asks if any of her china broke.

François's mother, like Firoozeh's father, seems unfazed by the earthquake—but unlike Kazem, she comes across as cold and unfeeling, more concerned about material things than her own daughter-in-law.

A few days later, the elderly woman who Firoozeh comforted shows up at Firoozeh and François's apartment. She introduces herself as Golda Rubenstein and tells Firoozeh that she saved her life. A month later, she shows up again, this time bringing chocolate cake. Every month after that, she shows up to deliver cake, always weeping.

While it's not directly explained, it would seem that Firoozeh was able to calm down Golda and prevent her from having a heart attack on the day of the earthquake. In return for her good deed, Firoozeh gets chocolate cake every month thereafter—showing that "what goes around comes around."

François and Firoozeh decide that they have no use for the china dishes (which haven't broken, as it turns out). François proposes giving the dishes to a hospital auction to raise money for children. The dishes turn out to be very valuable, and for years to come François and Firoozeh are honored guests at the hospital's galas and fundraisers. In a way, Firoozeh's mother-in-law's gift ends up bringing great joy to Firoozeh's life.

By giving the expensive china dishes to the hospital, Firoozeh and François kill two birds with one stone—they get rid of an unpleasant reminder of François's mother's rudeness, and they also get to go to various galas and fundraisers for the hospital (and do a good deed in the process).

CHAPTER 24: A NOSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

During her time at Berkeley, Firoozeh becomes obsessed with the big, ugly **nose** of a school librarian, whom Firoozeh nicknames the Toucan. What fascinates her most, however, is the Toucan's effortless confidence—she walks around as if she's a beauty queen. In Iran, women are judged based on their noses, and "nose jobs" are a huge industry. Firoozeh's fraternal family members' noses are large but "reasonable," while her maternal family members' noses are hooked. By the time Firoozeh was a teenager, it was clear that her nose wasn't *too* hooked—meaning that she'd be able to marry a decent husband.

Throughout her life, Firoozeh has dealt with Americans commenting on her "odd" appearance. But in Iran as well, she now explains, women are trained from an early age to question their own beauty and work frantically to become as beautiful as possible, even reshaping their own bodies with expensive surgery. One could even argue that the fact that Firoozeh's nickname for the librarian at Berkeley shows that she, too, has been trained to judge other women by their appearance.

At the age of eighteen, Kazem takes Firoozeh to a plastic surgeon to fix her **nose**. During her initial conference with the plastic surgeon, however, Firoozeh decides that she doesn't like the idea of getting a nose job. Kazem is relieved, since he wasn't looking forward to the idea of spending so much money. Firoozeh goes on to graduate college, marry, and have children, without having a nose job.

Firoozeh clearly takes fierce pride in the fact that she chose not to have a nose job at the age of eighteen—instead, she chose to focus on her education and her career, and ended up having both a happy marriage and *a successful career.*

One day, François and Firoozeh take a drive and stay in a hotel. Late at night, Firoozeh is watching television when she sees the Toucan—absolutely naked. She's become a nudist, and lives in a North Californian nudist colony. She tells a reporter about the importance of nudity, and about how she's come to accept her body—which Firoozeh interprets to mean her **nose**. Watching the interview, Firoozeh becomes deeply sad. She thinks about all the Iranian women she's known, almost all of whom consented to have their noses reshaped just so that they could marry the right man.

Firoozeh emphasizes the sexism of Iranian society, in which women are encouraged to worry excessively about their physical beauty, simply so that they can get married and have children. It's interesting that Firoozeh classifies this as Iranian *sexism—one could argue that American women are also pressured to appear beautiful in order to satisfy men. But Firoozeh seems to suggest that, even if America isn't perfect, women there have more opportunities for career success, and are more likely to be encouraged to take pride in their bodies.*

CHAPTER 25: JUDGES PAID OFF

Firoozeh's brother Farshid travels a lot, and because he's saved so many airline miles, he often treats his family to free trips. After François and Firoozeh have been married for a year, Farshid offers them a free flight to the Bahamas, and they accept. When they arrive in Nassau (the capital of the Bahamas), however, they realize that they should have booked hotels and tours already—it's spring break, and everything is booked through the week. Even after they find a room, the noise from the spring breakers keep them up all night.

François and Firoozeh's trip to the Bahamas gets off to a bad start—and in fact, one of the recurring themes in this memoir is the way that Firoozeh's ideas of what constitutes a good vacation (Hawaii, Paris, etc.) are shown to be very different from the realities of visiting these places.

François and Firoozeh spend all day trying to find a way to leave Nassau and travel to another island as soon as possible. Eventually, they learn about boats to the other islands. Firoozeh guesses that some of these are drug boats shipping cocaine, but François convinces her to wake up early the next morning and go to a mail boat bound for another island. The boat turns out to be an ordinary vessel, and it takes François and Firoozeh on a beautiful trip to the island of Spanish Wells.

François and Firoozeh decide to go to a quiet island, rather than continuing to spend their time around noisy spring breakers.

François and Firoozeh notice that they seem to be the only tourists in Spanish Wells. A cab driver takes them to a hotel that seems to be completely vacant. They dine in the hotel's restaurant, which is delicious but very expensive. After a few days, Firoozeh meets the owner and learns that he's from Abadan, Iran. He worked at the same company as Kazem, and knows Firoozeh's old neighborhood. The owner asks François and Firoozeh if they could do him a favor: serve as judges in the year's Miss Bahamas beauty pageant. They agree, though Firoozeh is reluctant to do so—she's spent too many years learning to overcome the "rigorous standards" of female beauty.

Even when she's traveling with François to a faraway place, Firoozeh keeps getting reminders of her family—here, for example, she learns that the hotel owner is from Kazem's neighborhood. Firoozeh's involvement in a beauty pageant creates a problem: as Firoozeh has explained in the previous chapter, she's opposed to the notion that women should worry about their beauty in order to please men.

The next day, the pageant begins. The two other judges, in addition to François and Firoozeh, are a beautiful former pageant winner and a wealthy, drunk Canadian who owns a big house in the Bahamas. The contestants are all dressed in costumes representing their industries—one of them wears a lobster costume representing the lobster fishery. The emcee for the competition asks the contestants clichéd questions such as, "If you could solve one problem, what would it be?", and the contestants participate in the talent and swimsuit portions of the competition.

The beauty pageant proceeds ordinarily, with the different contestants showing off their beauty (the swimsuit competition) and talent, while facing superficial tests of their intelligence and quick thinking (the question portion of the show, which consists of boring, clichéd questions).

The judges retire to discuss a winner. The Canadian is too drunk to remember the pageant, and the former pageant winner emphasizes the need for an articulate winner. François and Firoozeh are drawn to an "underdog" candidate—she's overweight, not particularly physically attractive, and doesn't seem to have many fans. In the end, the judges agree that this woman will be the winner.

François and Firoozeh convince their fellow judges to vote for a winner who's not particularly beautiful at all, but who is articulate and intelligent—upholding the former beauty pageant winner's requirement (the Canadian, it's implied, is too drunk to protest).

When the judges announce their decision, the crowd screams with fury—by far the most popular candidate, a conventionally beautiful woman named Chantal, has lost. François and Firoozeh manage to get out of the auditorium before the crowd kills them. That night, as François and Firoozeh fall asleep, they can hear the crowd chanting, "Judges paid off!"

François and Firoozeh make the crowd angry, but Firoozeh seems satisfied with her decision: she's fought conventional beauty standards, just a little, and proven that women can be successful for reasons other than their bodies (or, as she discussed in the previous chapter, their noses).

CHAPTER 26: IF I WERE A RICH MAN

During his time in Abadan, Kazem and his family live in a nice house, and the NIOC takes care of most of their financial needs. When Kazem and his family move to California, however, their financial status changes—they have to pay for their own food, entertainment, and plumbing. As a result, Kazem learns to do things himself—the only problem is that he's not very good at any of the tasks he teaches himself. As a result, Firoozeh grows up learning to expect that nothing in her house works properly.

The book concludes with an affectionate portrait of Kazem. At first, Firoozeh emphasizes Kazem's minor flaws—for example, his tendency to think that he can fix anything, and that he doesn't need to hire a professional repairman. From an early age Firoozeh and Kazem's roles are reversed—she's like a mature grown-up, while Kazem is like an overeager child who thinks he can do everything.

Once, Kazem goes to visit his son Farshid, who's living in a high-rise apartment at the time. While Farshid is at work, Kazem does his son a "favor"—he buys white paint from the store and paints over all the "cracks" in the walls in Farshid's apartment. The problem is that Kazem uses a different color of white, and the walls of Farshid's apartment now look as if they've been covered in strange blotches. On another occasion, Kazem decides that François and Firoozeh need a medicine cabinet in their bathroom, and builds it himself. Kazem installs a medicine cabinet that hangs crookedly from the wall. Now, whenever Kazem visits, François hides the screwdrivers.

Firoozeh continues to poke fun at her father, repeating stories of how he ruined other people's things in the process of trying to repair them. François, much like Firoozeh, learns to humor Kazem but also treat him like a child in certain aspects of life.

When Kazem goes back to Iran, he's a millionaire—the country's currency has become so weak since the Iranian Revolution that Kazem can live like a king whenever he returns from America. He's also extremely generous with his money—he donates his monthly pension from NIOC to the poor, and pays for many people's surgeries and operations. Kazem's arrival is always a major event in Abadan, and he's one of the most popular people in town. Kazem likes to tell Firoozeh, "I'm a rich man in America, too. I just don't have a lot of money."

In spite of Firoozeh's ribbing of her father, it's obvious that she loves him deeply. Kazem is an extraordinarily generous and hardworking man, who's forged a successful life in America without sacrificing one iota of love for his family. Kazem may not have become a millionaire in America, but he's "rich" in the sense that he's surrounded by people who love him—his family and his friends—and has a daughter who loves and respects him.

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