

Family Matters Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Family Matters takes place in present day India. The family of Nariman Vakeel, including his daughter and her husband, Roxana and Yezad Chenoy, their two sons, Murad and Jehangir, and Vakeel's stepchildren, Jal and Coomy Contractor, lives in Bombay. At the opening of the novel, Nariman is living with his stepchildren in a large flat in a building known as Chateau Felicity. It is where Nariman lived with his wife, Yasmin, and where they raised their family until Yasmin's untimely death some years before the start of the story.

As the story begins, Coomy is preparing to have a party for Nariman's 79th birthday. Roxana and her family are coming over. Coomy is worried by Nariman's practice of going alone for a walk in the evening. He is beginning to show early signs of Parkinson's disease and she is afraid he will hurt himself. Indeed, he does come home banged up a little from a fall in a ditch, but she is not able to get him to say he will no longer go for walks.

The day after the party Nariman has another fall during his evening walk. This time he breaks an ankle. Jal and Coomy get him to the Parsi General Hospital where Dr. Tarapore sets the ankle and has a plaster cast put on. Jal brings him back to the Chateau Felicity flat couple of days later; Coomy is out at the fire temple. She has acquired a commode that sits in Nariman's bedroom, but it is very difficult for him to use, since he cannot move around by himself. They switch to a bedpan and urinal, but that does not work much better. Coomy is terribly put-upon having to deal with her stepfather's excretions. She complains loud and long. She finally convinces Jal that they must take Nariman over to Roxana's and let her look after him. Nariman agrees to the move only if they have gotten Roxana's approval; actually, they have not even told Roxana about the accident, and Coomy has no real intention of seeking her approval. She and Jal load Nariman into an ambulance and take him over to Roxana's tiny flat.

Roxana does, of course, take her father in, even though she and her husband, Yezad and their two sons, Murad and Jehangir, live in a very crowded 2-room flat. The expectation is that he will need to be there only three weeks, so even Yezad does not complain. The boys are delighted to have their grandfather there. Jehangir, especially, pitches right in and feeds him.

Money quickly becomes a major problem. Yezad, who is an honored employee at the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium, tries various things to help fatten the family budget envelopes. He even tries playing the local numbers game, but manages to lose just about everything they have when the numbers game is shut down. His boss at the Emporium has expressed an interest in running for office, which would give Yezad more responsibility and more money, but then changes his mind (his wife disapproves). Yezad work up a plan aimed at getting the boss back on his track, but his plan works out very badly and the owner winds up getting killed in the course of it. The owner's widow closes down the store and Yezad is out of a job.



Coomy, fearful that her stepfather will be returned to her care, knocks down the plaster ceilings in her flat to make it unlivable. In a terrible accident that occurs when a handyman neighbor and Coomy are working on the ceiling of Nariman's bedroom. A heavy beam slides off its supports and kills both Coomy and the handyman.

Following Coomy's death, Jal persuades Roxana to move her entire family into the flat in Chateau Felicity with him. He even goes to the extent of finding a buyer for their 2-room flat. At the end of the main part of the novel Roxana, Yezad, and the boys take Nariman back to Chateau Felicity.

There is an Epilogue that takes place five years later. Nariman is still an invalid; after his ankle heals his Parkinson's disease keeps him confined to his bed, virtually unable to communicate.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Nariman Vakeel lives with his stepdaughter Coomy and stepson Jal in a comfortable flat in Chateau Felicity in Bombay. It is the evening of his seventy-ninth birthday. He is a retired professor and is showing early signs of Parkinson's disease. He has just awakened from his afternoon nap and is preparing to take his evening walk. Coomy crabs at him not to go, and Jal begs him. They are afraid something terrible will happen to him if he goes out alone. Nariman thinks that Coomy would have made a good headmistress enacting rules for hapless schoolgirls. In spite of their crabbing and pleading, he continues to prepare for his walk. He has locked himself in the bathroom while having a shave. This infuriates Coomy. She has laid down a rule that he is never to lock himself into any room. Nariman deals with Coomy's ranting with quiet sarcasm.

Nariman takes himself out for his walk, but comes home with a limp and abrasions on his elbow and forearm. He fell while crossing the lane. Coomy is full of "I told you so's." The following day, Roxana, Nariman's daughter and half-sister to Jal and Coomy, is coming with her husband Yezad Chenoy and their two sons, Murad and Jehangir, for dinner to help celebrate Nariman's birthday. While getting ready for his birthday dinner, Nariman recalls the time when his family arranged for him to marry Yasmin Contractor, a widow with two young children, Jal and Coomy. Nariman was deeply in love with Lucy, a Goan. His Parsi family forced him to break up that relationship and encouraged him to marry Yasmin. While Yasmin accepted the marriage primarily for security and to give her two children a stepfather to replace their deceased father, after a couple of years she and Nariman became the parents of a lovely little girl, Roxana. Coomy and Jal were teenagers when Roxana was born, so they did not suffer from the rivalry felt by siblings who were closer in years. They took very good care of Roxana. This evening Coomy is helping Nariman do the buttons on his shirt as the doorbell rings signaling the arrival of Roxana and her family. Coomy grumbles that the Chenoy's always come on time.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the main characters of the book and describes the day-to-day relationships between the members of Nariman Vakeel's family. Jal and Coomy are Nariman's two stepchildren, with whom he shares the flat the family has owned for many years in Chateau Felicity. Coomy is shown to be something of a fussy budget. She dominates her brother Jal and bosses her stepfather around. Her concern that he might be injured on one of his evening walks is validated when he comes home with cuts and abrasions from a fall. This also foreshadows his more serious injury on another of his walks. In Nariman's flashback, readers begin to see how the need to remain pure Parsi colors much of the family's ways of being. Nariman's family forced him to break up with Lucy, whom he loved deeply, and to marry Yasmin Contractor, a widow with two children. We understand that while the breakup with Lucy was painful, Nariman has



been a dutiful husband to Yasmin and a conscientious father to her children. It is made clear that his love for Roxana, the daughter he and Yasmin had together, is greater than his love for the two stepchildren, and yet he has been a good parent to them.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Roxana arrives with her husband Yezad and two sons, Murad, thirteen, and Jehangir, nine, for Nariman's birthday dinner. The boys are instructed to sit like statues, but it doesn't last. Murad gets up and begins to explore the room. He tries to open a pair of curtains, but he succeeds only in pulling the curtain rod down. With a flash of anger, Yezad commands him to sit down again on the sofa. They are regaining their composure when Nariman enters the room. He sits in his chair, collapsing a bit as the early signs of Parkinson's disease make the last foot or so of sitting down more like falling. The boys rush to embrace him and go through their special greeting of feeling his chin and his bald head and asking him to show them his teeth. Nariman seems a little unhappy in the large but gloomy flat they live in. A row of family portraits in the long hall adds to the somber tone. They wish him a happy birthday and say that he must reach the century mark.

Coomy returns to the living room and immediately spots the drapes and curtain rod lying in a heap on the floor. Roxana succeeds in preempting her anger by saying that Murad pulled them down and is going to be severely punished. Coomy is forced to be magnanimous and says that Jal will fix it later. She says she hopes no shameless mavaalis try to peer into their house. Jehangir points out to her that they are on the third floor, but Coomy says the mavaalis are not necessarily only at street level. She says they could be miles away in a skyscraper with a strong telescope. She and Roxana get into a slight argument about money, with Coomy complaining about the expense of taking care of Nariman and paying for all his medicine. To get the conversation away from the fight it is becoming, Yezad asks about the constant hammering they hear. Jal explains it is their crazy neighbor, Edul Munshi. Edul fancies himself as a world-class handyman but usually succeeds in destroying everything he tries to repair.

The conversation proceeds idly through one subject after another. There is talk of how corrupt the country is getting. Nariman asks the boys how their classes are this year. Roxana says that Jehangir's teacher has honored him by appointing him a homework monitor. Coomy performs a little ritual with incense. Roxana is especially appreciative of it. She is more devoted than her husband Yezad. After her mother's sudden death, her training was taken over by Coomy and Jal and other members of her mother's family. Nariman refused her nothing. Yezad is clumsy, almost mocking, in his perfunctory performance of the little ceremony. Finally, with one little bickering argument after another, they get to the dinner table. Nariman wants Coomy to bring out the good china, but she doesn't want to. She is afraid it will get chipped or broken, but she finally gives in when Nariman insists. After Roxana, Yezad and the boys have left, Coomy says she always feels exhausted after they have been here, as though a whirlwind had passed through. Nariman says it feels to him more like a fresh breeze has stirred the stale air.



As the Chenoy's are waiting at the bus stop, Jehangir asks about Lucy, who made Coomy Aunty say such hateful things to her father. Roxana attempts to avoid a direct answer, but Yezad says she might as well tell them. They are bound to learn about it sooner or later. Roxana explains that Lucy was a girl their grandfather had been in love with but that his family made him give her up because she was not Parsi. They arranged for Nariman to marry Jal and Coomy's mother, who was a widow. That marriage produced Roxana. A pair of drunks accosts them. The drunks make lewd remarks about Roxana. Yezad moves so that he is between Roxana and the drunks, who continue harassing her. Finally, their bus comes along, and fortunately, the two drunks do not get on. As they ride home, the author describes something of Yezad's background, how he attempted to emigrate to Canada. Roxana recalls that Yezad's sisters did not accept her when she and Yezad got engaged. Jehangir says that someday he will write a big fat book about the Chenoy and Vakeel families. His mother says he should only write nice things about them. His father corrects that to say, "As long as he tells the truth."

Chapter 2 Analysis

The chapter is full of foreshadowing of later events. Character traits continue to come out. Coomy always seems to have something crabby to say about everybody. Yezad jokes with Nariman, but his history of having once applied for admittance to Canada conveys the feeling that he is somewhat dissatisfied with his life. He is a trusted employee at the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium, but he is not given the title and responsibility of being the manager. Especially interesting is Yezad's somewhat scoffing attitude toward religious practices. This attitude is in for a major change later in the story. The boys are appealing, especially Jehangir. His expression of a desire to write a book about the Chenoy and Vakeel families is interesting. Could this book be the one he is talking about?



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Coomy's worst fears are realized. Two laborers lug Nariman home from his evening walk. He has fallen into a trench and injured his ankle. Jal, at the behest of Coomy, goes across the street and knocks on Dr. Fitter's house. Her first inclination is to have the two men lug Nariman over to Dr. Fitter's house, but Jal prevails on her to let him go. Dr. Fitter has retired and given up his practice, but he has occasionally helped out in emergencies. Fitter is annoyed at being disturbed. He scolds Jal, and indirectly, Coomy for letting Nariman go for a walk alone. He tells Jal to take Nariman to the hospital immediately. The two laborers help get Nariman into the back seat of a taxi. Coomy gets into the front seat, while Jal and the two laborers follow in another taxi. At the hospital, Dr. Tarapore, Nariman's regular doctor, takes x-rays and decides that the leg needs to be in a cast from thigh to toes. Mr. Rangarajan, Dr. Tarapore's assistant, applies the plaster of paris. As he is doing that, he and Nariman fall into a conversation about how difficult things are in Bombay. Included in Rangarajan's mutterings are references to the Shiv Sena and their name police. The Shiv Sena are basically radical conservatives who think any business that includes "Bombay" in its name should be made to change it to "Mumbai." Ranjaragan pauses in his tasks and asks Nariman if he knows of anyone who might be able to help him find a job in another country.

Later that evening, Dr. Tarapore stops by. Nariman presses him for a prognosis. Years before, Tarapone was a student in Nariman Vakeel's English class. It was a compulsory class for medical students to help them with their English, so Nariman is well known in the Bombay medical community. Dr. Tarapone reminisces about those years-ago events when Nariman pulls him back to the present by pressing him for his prognosis. The doctor finally says they should expect the cast to be on for four weeks, at which point the doctor will take another look. While Nariman is still in the hospital, one of the two ward boys (orderlies) who helps with his care asks Nariman if he could write a letter of recommendation so the boy can apply for a better job. For the two days that Nariman is in the hospital, Jal and Coomy are with him constantly. Nariman asks Coomy if Roxana and Yezad have been informed of his accident. Coomy says that they did not want to worry them, so they did not tell them.

In anticipation of Nariman's coming home from the hospital, Coomy has bought some sick room equipment including a commode to place beside Nariman's bed. It is a struggle for Coomy and Jal to lift Nariman onto the commode. In a flashback, Nariman remembers Lucy, his former love. Lucy comes and hangs around his building at night, and Nariman goes out and talks with her. Yasmin keeps asking him to stop and to tell Lucy not to come around anymore. She even takes Nariman's clothes away from him. One night, he goes out in a towel to see Lucy. He tells her that this will have to stop. While he is forcefully telling her how she must stay away, Lucy says, "I love your outfit." It makes Nariman smile. Lucy eventually agrees that she will come no more, and Nariman gets his clothes back.



Back in his sickroom, Nariman has a terrible time trying to use the commode. He has to ask Jal and Coomy to help him repeatedly. He finally succeeds in having a bowel movement and the smell of it just about does Coomy in. They turn his ceiling fan to high, which blows papers all over the room. After having to get up repeatedly in the night, Coomy says she is exhausted and can no longer help out. Before they leave him for the night, Nariman has to ask them to turn the fan to low.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Coomy is right to be worried about Nariman's walks. His broken ankle is just the kind of thing she thought might happen. The fact that during his short stay in the hospital two professionals ask his assistance in finding other work says a lot about conditions in Bombay. The reason that Coomy opts for a commode rather than a bedpan stems from her disgust at the idea of looking after her stepfather's bodily functions. She can't stand the odor or his bowel movements and feels that a commode will keep her slightly farther away from the degrading chore of dealing with them. In another flashback, readers learn a little more about Nariman's experience with Lucy, the girl his family will not let him marry. She becomes a little crazy and hangs around the Chateau Felicity. There is also a strong hint that Yasmin is jealous about Lucy and Nariman.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Coomy is awakened by her cleaning woman, Phoola Phoola, ringing the doorbell. Jal doesn't answer it, so Coomy has to. She asks Phoola Phoola to do her room first, because she has a headache and plans to go back to bed. Phoola Phoola gets to Nariman's room and cries out. Nariman has had a bowel accident in his bed. The cleaning woman says she cannot work in such a place and leaves. She says she will be back tomorrow for her money. Jal and Coomy finally get Nariman and his bed cleaned up. They trade in the commode for a bedpan and urinal. During the day, Nariman asks Coomy to do him one favor. He hasn't had his teeth cleaned in five days and wonders if she would do it. Coomy snatches the glass with Nariman's teeth in it, takes it to the bathroom, pours out the water, drops in a few flakes of laundry detergent and fills the glass up again. She is pleased with herself to have managed the task without having to touch his disgusting teeth. Nariman is grateful to get them back, but then he tastes the detergent and makes a bitter face. Still, he does not complain.

Nariman asks Coomy if Roxana has been told about his accident. Coomy responds by saying she hasn't had a minute. Later that evening, Jal and Coomy talk about what to do. Coomy says she hates Nariman. Jal is startled by the strength of her word. He says she doesn't hate Nariman. She hates the work. On their way past Nariman's door, they hear him crying. They notice it again over the next few days and plan to call Dr. Tarapore. The doctor says Nariman is progressing well but needs more nursing care to prevent bedsores, and they need to raise his spirits. He thinks Nariman is in danger of depression. Coomy decides that Nariman always seems happier when Roxana's family is there, so she decides they have to move Nariman to Roxana's small apartment. They ask him whether he approves. There is a long silence while Nariman thinks the proposition over. He finally says that if it is okay with Roxana, it is okay with him. They must ask Roxana first. Coomy says she has not told Roxana about the accident because if she did, Roxana would insist on taking care of him. She says that she and Jal wanted to spare Roxana that trouble. Finally, they pack up Nariman's things and trundle him off to Roxana's small apartment. Nariman notes that it is difficult for them to disguise their eagerness to be rid of him.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Coomy likes to pretend that she is thinking of others, but her actions don't bear this out. She is determined to get rid of Nariman and the disgusting job of looking after his bodily functions. Even after she persuades Jal to come round to her view of what should be done with their stepfather, there is a delay of a few days in acting on her decision. Nariman is onto her duplicity, which is why he agrees to be moved to Roxana's small flat only if she has approved the idea. Of course, Coomy has no intention of asking Roxana about this.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Roxana, Yezad and their two sons, Murad and Jehangir, live in a crowded two-room flat in a decaying building. The building is filled with noises, such as the explosion of Roxana's pressure cooker and the violin exercises of Daisy Ichhaporia, a first floor neighbor who plays first violin in the Bombay Symphony Orchestra. Yezad works at the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium. The boys attend an English-style school.

Jal and Coomy arrive at the building. Jal has some doubts as to whether they are doing the right thing. He wonders what the family relationships will be like after Nariman recovers and returns to Chateau Felicity. Jal and Coomy come upstairs and tell Roxana about Nariman's accident and about how he needs to live with Roxana. Roxana shows them around her tiny apartment. She says that she and her family will visit Nariman every evening. Coomy insists that that would not be good. Nariman would be happy while they were there but depressed when they left. They are trying to avoid depression. After more discussion, Coomy pretends to be convinced that there is no room for Nariman in Roxana's flat. She tells Jal to tell the ambulance to turn around and go back. Roxana is horrified. She had not realized that they left Nariman in an ambulance outside. She rushes down to him and is appalled at her father's condition. He whispers that the idea to bring him to her flat was not his. He says that they promised to talk to Roxana and Yezad before bringing him. Roxana says she understands and strokes his chin. She has him brought upstairs and put into the settee that is Jehangir's bed at night. Back home, Jal and Coomy work to get rid of the smells left behind by Nariman. They wonder if they have done the right thing. Coomy persuades Jal that they have.

Chapter 5 Analysis

As Coomy and Jal bring Nariman over to Roxana's two-room flat, readers enter into the locale of most of the rest of the story. There is a kitchen and a balcony. Roxana and Yezad occupy one of the other two rooms, and the boys, Murad and Jehangir, occupy the second. When Nariman is put in Jehangir's bed, it forces a rearrangement. Jehangir moves to Murad's bed, and Murad is set up on the balcony. Now that Coomy has gotten rid of Nariman, the only remaining task is to get rid of the smells he left behind. Jal shows his concern and wonders whether it was right of them to dump Nariman onto the Chenoy family, but Coomy persuades him that they really had no choice.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Nariman settles in at Roxana's. Roxana cleans up. She uses what water can be spared to give him a sponge bath. Jehangir feeds him from a bowl that Nariman is not able to handle himself. Roxana observes the tender way Jehangir looks after his grandfather. She has to swallow hard to keep from crying. After the meal is finished - with two aeroplane maneuvers for the last two spoonfuls - Nariman asks what's next. He says he will be pleased to help Jehangir with his homework. Jehangir says homework is not on his agenda, but Nariman persuades him. Jehangir reads to Nariman from an Enid Blyton book he is reading. They start in Chapter Four, which is the point Jehangir had reached. Jehangir gives him a running explanation of the characters and the situation. Roxana touches Jehangir on the shoulder and puts a finger to her lips. She has noticed that Grandpa has fallen asleep.

Yezad arrives home from work. He is surprised to find Nariman lying on the settee. Roxana explains to him what is going on and says it is only for three weeks until his leg heals. Yezad accepts the idea, but he says that after three weeks he will send Nariman back to Jal and Coomy. The family has a discussion about who will sleep where. Yezad goes to their neighbor Villie Cardmaster and borrows an old tablecloth to enclose the balcony. Both of the boys are intrigued by the idea of sleeping on the balcony in the makeshift tent. Yezad makes a deal with them. Each of the boys will have ten days on the balcony. Nariman has a flashback to a time when Lucy hires on as a maid with another family in Chateau Felicity. Roxana thinks she hears Nariman call her name, but when she checks on him he is asleep. She thinks he must have been dreaming.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The Chenoy family is still working out how to handle the addition of a new person, who happens to be bedridden, into their small space. The plastic tablecloth, borrowed from Villie Cardmaster, enables them to close in part of the balcony. The boys are intrigued by the idea of sleeping there because it will be like sleeping in a tent. Yezad adjudicates between them as usual, saying that they will take turns for ten days. He still believes that the stay is going to be relatively short and that they can handle it for three weeks without too much trouble. As Nariman begins to drop more and more out of the present world, readers see that he continues to be haunted by memories of Lucy, the love of his life.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Yezad takes the train to work, arriving about 9:30. He lets the peon, Husain, into the store. Husain is the victim of some earlier riots. He was psychologically damaged and is not able to work full time. There are days when he can only cower in the back room, sitting on his haunches, holding his knees. Today is one of those days. Mr. Kapur, the storeowner, has taken him in. He does odd jobs around the store, running errands and cleaning up. Yezad visits with his friend Vilas Rane. Vilas works as a clerk in a nearby bookstore and also writes letters for those who cannot write, a function that brings him close to people. A customer comes in to give an order to Yezad. He makes a hard-to-miss suggestion that Yezad pad the bill so they can each get a kickback, but Yezad doesn't fall for it.

Mr. Kapur arrives at the shop. Yezad tells him that Husain is unable to work. Kapur sits with Husain to comfort him. Yezad is impressed by Mr. Kapur's caring nature. When he first started at the shop fifteen years ago, Mr. Kapur insisted that Yezad call him by his first name, Vikram. Yezad was reluctant to give up the formality he thought their situation called for, but they settled on using first names after hours. After the store closed, they were Vikram and Yezad. Kapur is a student of Bombay, having arrived there from the Punjab in his mother's arms. He is also a passionate collector of photographs of the city and has bought two old photographs that day, which he shows to Yezad. After the store closes for the day, Kapur invites Yezad to stay and have a beer with him. He talks about how he loves Bombay and tells Yezad that he is considering running for the municipal council in the next election. It would mean more responsibility for Yezad and more money.

Meanwhile at the apartment, Nariman talks to Murad and Jehangir and tells them old myths and stories from his youth. Yezad comes home and is annoyed at the congestion of their cramped quarters.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 introduces another locale that is important to the story, the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium. Readers also meet three new characters. Mr. Kapur is the owner of the store. Husain is a peon who does odd jobs around the store, and Vilas Rane works at a bookstore six doors down from Bombay Sporting Goods. He has a sideline as a scribe, writing and reading letters for illiterates. He is a friend with whom Yezad often shares breaks.

Mr. Kapur's news that he is thinking of running for the municipal council is exciting for Yezad to hear. It would mean that he would assume more responsibility for running the store and could expect his wages to increase as well.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Usually Nariman holds his bowel movement until after Yezad has left for work and after the boys have left for school, but Dr. Tarapore is to visit today. Nariman has a nervous stomach. The family hopes that Dr. Tarapore will pronounce Nariman well enough to go home. Because of his nervous stomach, Nariman can't hold his bowel movement. Yezad complains about the smell.

Coomy is worried about the impending return. She and Jal go over to Roxana's. They run into Yezad on the stairs. There is much joking and pretending they have missed Nariman. Finally, Roxana reports that Dr. Tarapore told Nariman to wait another week, but he did remove some of the plaster cast. She shows it to them, piled under the bed, and she shows them the remaining cast, which ends below Nariman's knee and leaves his toes out. Roxana says Nariman is to go to the hospital in a week for an x-ray. Nariman wants to go home now, but Coomy whines that that will mean more ambulance rides. She is afraid that the men will mishandle Nariman and injure him. Unexpectedly, Yezad agrees with her and says that Nariman should stay with them for the additional week. Back home, Coomy argues to convince Jal that she has a wonderful idea that she got by seeing the plaster under Nariman's bed. She makes Jal agree that they will knock the ceilings down in their apartment. They borrow hammers from Edul Munshi, their mad fixer-upper neighbor in Chateau Felicity. The night before they are to go to Parsi General Hospital to pick up Nariman, they destroy the ceilings in their flat, all except the ceiling in their mother's room. They even soak the ceiling with water to add authenticity.

Roxana and Nariman are at Parsi General where Dr. Tarapore has taken an x-ray. He says that the ankle is healing amazingly well. He gives Nariman some exercises to strengthen the leg that he is to do either standing or in bed. Coomy and Jal arrive with the bad news about the ceilings at their flat. They take Nariman back to Pleasant Villa. Yezad is not surprised to find that Nariman is still with them. The first tentative walk - to Roxana's dinner table - goes quite well. There is some pain, but that is to be expected. However, in a few days the pain becomes intense. Dr. Tarapore is consulted. The x-ray showed that the original break was healing well, but osteoporosis has led to another break in the area. Nariman is back to full-time bed care.

Roxana and Yezad are growing concerned about their finances. Nariman tells them to go to Coomy and Jal and ask them to turn over his savings account.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Coomy has no intention of ever letting Nariman return to what had been his home for many years. Her idea of banging down the ceilings in their apartment shows the lengths

to which she is prepared to go. Nariman is becoming increasingly bedridden, as his ankle breaks again from osteoporosis. Readers begin to understand that he is never going to be able to move about and take care of himself. The financial strain on Roxana's family is beginning to hurt.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

At Coomy's, Yezad and Roxana walk carefully across the plaster debris. Jal brushes the dust off a chair, but Coomy indicates she would rather stand. She grumbles that the coals for Loban are ready, and she is about to start to pray. Yezad apologizes for breaking into the line to God ahead of her. Roxana brings up the subject of Nariman's medicines. She says that the money that Coomy gave them is not enough, which leads her to ask about the rest of Nariman's pension. Coomy blows up, suggesting that they are accusing her of stealing from their father. Yezad chimes in to say that the work of taking care of Nariman is exhausting Roxana. They argue about that. Yezad says they only took care of Nariman because they were living in his house and would inherit it. Coomy says that fifteen years ago when Nariman bought the flat that Yezad and Roxana live in for them, he changed the name on the Chateau Felicity flat to Coomy and Jal. She says that they will repair the ceiling when they have the money to do it and that Nariman will return when they want him to. Yezad says that they are kicking him out. Coomy accuses him of twisting her words. Jal says to tell Nariman that they will fix the ceiling as soon as possible so that Nariman can come back.

After Roxana and Yezad leave, Jal blows up at Coomy for ruining the family relations. Coomy counters by waiting until he has stopped his rant and then crying. At home, Yezad asks Nariman pointedly about his finances and about whether he signed the flat over to Coomy and Jal. Nariman sheepishly admits he may have. He remembers signing something. Yezad is furious. Over supper they argue about who will get one of the few slices of bread. After supper, Yezad puts on his shoes and goes out - behavior that is very unusual for him. He sneaks over to Villie Cardmaster's apartment and asks her about how the Matka is going. Matka is an Indian version of the numbers game that Villie plays when she has a significant dream about a number. She describes a dream she has about getting a fitting for a bra. Yezad gives her ten rupees to bet for him on number thirty-six.

After the lights are turned off for the night, Jehangir is unable to sleep. Nariman hears him tossing and turning. He says Jehangir should hold his hand, which he does. They both fall asleep.

The next morning, Jezad leaves for work. After the apartment door is closed, he doubles back and knocks on Villie's door. She lets him in and puts 810 rupees into his hand. Yezad plans to add one hundred rupees to the budget envelopes each week. If Roxana challenges him on it, he will say that Mr. Kapur has paid him some extra commissions.

On the way to the Merwan Irani's restaurant for afternoon tea, Vilas tells Yezad that two friends of his from his drama club are going to stop by. As they make their way to their table, they are joined by Gautam and Bhaskar. Yezad mentions that this will be his treat because of his luck with the Matka. Vilas and his two friends urge him to put the money



away and not play anymore. Bhaskar says that he and Gautam are journalists and that Gautam had recently done an in-depth story about Matka. He tells about how the Shiv Sena beat him up and blackened his face with shoe polish because his story had maligned Shiv Sena. He says that Matka profits go to support Shiv Sena. The journalist/actors urge Vilas to write something for their drama group. Vilas tells a horror story that he learned through his work as a scribe. The story is about two young people who are tortured and hanged because of the antiquated caste system. The actors say that their interest centers more around urban themes. They take it as their mission to awaken the poor to their plight. Yezad and Vilas have to leave to get back to work. On their way back they talk about honesty and what a curse it can be. Vilas tells Yezad he is bound by his Parsi heritage to remain honest.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The argument about who will take care of Nariman intensifies. Coomy's disclosure that Nariman signed the apartment over to her and Jal some fifteen years ago comes as a shock to Yezad and Roxana. After Yezad and Roxana leave, Jal finally expresses his anger and impatience with his sister. He clearly feels badly about their dishonesty toward Roxana and Yezad. In Nariman's admission about signing the apartment over to Jal and Coomy, readers see that he is indeed becoming a bit senile. Yezad's visit to Villie Cardmaster to ask her to place a bet for him on the Matka shows how desperate the financial situation has become. The fact that he wins and turns ten rupees into 810 is both good and bad. It certainly provides some immediate relief to the tight budget, but in the long run it is apt to have serious consequences. There is a touching scene between Nariman and Jehangir. When Jehangir can't get to sleep, he is comforted by having his grandfather's hand to hold. The scene in the restaurant between Yezad and his friend Vilas and Vilas' two friends from his drama group is significant. The stories of the threat that the Shiv Sena represents and the introduction of the two amateur actors will prove important later in the story.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

On the way to school, Jehangir tries to persuade Murad to sell their books to help raise money for the family. Murad will not agree on the grounds that it would not produce nearly enough money. After they part, a friend of Jehangir talks to him about a cricket match coming up later that day. It will be between Catholics and non-Catholics. The school, St. Xavier's, doesn't really condone such distinctions, so his friend has to whisper the names of who will be playing on which team. In an assembly at the beginning of the school year, Father D'Silva told how, many years ago when cricket first became popular in India, there used to be an annual tournament. Teams of Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Europeans and a fifth team called The Rest, played for the championship of Bombay. This organization of teams caused great sadness to Mahatma Gandhi. He said that in work and in play everyone should be as one family. Under his guidance, the tournament was abolished, and the school has tried to live up to the Mahatma's precepts.

In class, Miss Alvarez, Jehangir's teacher, talks to the students about good citizenship. The students are more interested in Miss Alvarez herself than in her views on good citizenship. She is very pretty, and the boys like to watch her as she mounts the platform by her desk, sits in her chair and crosses her legs. Miss Alvarez likes to think of the job of homework monitor as a small example of what good citizenship means. Jehangir vows to be the best homework monitor ever, but he has gone too far in accepting bribes and cannot stop it now. In fact, his clientele keeps growing as the word gets around that he takes bribes. On his way home on the bus, he spots Murad walking and wonders why. After getting home, he goes to see Villie Cardmaster and asks if there is any work he can do for her for which she could pay him. Villie says his mother would be very mad if she found out that Villie was making a servant out of Jehangir.

Kapur shows Yezad three photographs of the streets around where Yezad lived as a child. It has a big effect on Yezad. Kapur also says that he has definitely made up his mind to run for office. This is also a big thing for Yezad. It means more responsibility and a raise in salary. Getting home that evening, Yezad blows up at Murad for presuming to wind the clock. This is a responsibility that Yezad inherited from his father and reserves for himself. Nariman starts to talk in his sleep about Lucy.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Jehangir's predicament about trying to be a good homework monitor at the same time that he is accepting bribes from two or three of the poor students intensifies. He wants to be history's best homework monitor to make an impression on Miss Alvarez, and at the same time, he wants to make a contribution to the family budget. In an earlier chapter readers learn of Mr. Kapur's collection of photographs of Bombay. In this



chapter, we learn of three other photographs that Mr. Kapur shows to Yezad. These figure prominently in the story in a later chapter. By winding the clock, Murad shows the first signs of his approaching adolescence and his struggle for independence from the family, particularly from his father. Nariman has increasingly frequent dreams about his sweetheart Lucy, who his family forced him to give up because she was not a Parsi.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Jehangir feels guilty about accepting money for being a homework monitor. He wonders if his appearance has changed. There is a loud explosion in the kitchen. The pressure cooker has blown up. Daisy Ichamora appears to help Roxana get it turned off. They stay in the kitchen to clean up the mess. Jehangir gets out the budget envelopes and puts his twenty rupees in "Bread & Butter." He remembers when the budget envelopes were new, and he used to sit with his mother while she counted out Yezad's salary check. She used to let Jehangir put the crisp new bills into the envelopes. If the bills were old and wrinkled, she was more cautious, making sure he washed his hands after helping her. After they get the pressure cooker under control, Roxana takes Daisy in to meet Nariman. He is very complimentary of her playing. He says she should never go anywhere without her violin and that he would love it if she would do her practicing there in his room. Daisy is flattered. She goes downstairs and comes back with her violin. She plays a couple of things, both of which Nariman identifies. He asks her to promise to play for him when the day comes that he lies dying. They shake on it. Roxana frowns at the idea, and Jehangir is very distressed. It is as though by agreeing to his grandfather's request, she will hasten the moment.

Jehangir continues to take bribes as a homework monitor. The word is beginning to spread as one poor student after another slips Jehangir twenty rupees. His client list grows from Ashok to include Vijay and Rajish. Jehangir tries to resist, but the newer clients threaten him with exposure if they don't get the same deal as Ashok. Roxana surprises Jehangir as he is trying to sneak his money into the budget envelopes. He says he wanted to look at his father's writing on the Canadian letter.

Yezad arrives home with good news. The elevator is working. At dinner, Jehangir asks if he can change his name to John. Nariman says to Roxana, "Your son wants to be a Christian." Jehangir says that Nariman is wrong. He just wants to change his name slightly. Nariman says that Hindus have Hindu names. Jehangir is Parsi, so he has a Persian name. Roxana talks about Jehangir wanting to look at the Canadian envelope. Yezad tells about applying to emigrate to Canada. In the process, he came to an interview with a slovenly immigration officer, Mazobashi, of Japanese ancestry. Mazobashi was very insulting. Yezad and Roxana were dismissed, but Yezad took the opportunity to tell Mazobashi off. After the story, Nariman says he is glad they did not emigrate. He says the loss of home leaves a hole that can never be filled. Yezad goes to put all the papers back in their place. Then, he wonders why he is saving them. He realizes it is because he secretly feels he may apply again someday. He tears the papers up. Roxana joins him. They embrace. It is a commitment.



Chapter 11 Analysis

The introduction of Daisy Ichamora to Nariman is a significant occurrence. He admires her music so much and is so complimentary of her playing that they become fast friends. Her promise to play for him when he lies dying foreshadows a very touching scene in the Epilogue. Jehangir's request to be allowed to change his name to John gives Nariman an opportunity to give a lesson about how important it is for Jehangir to know that he is Parsi. The story about Yezad applying to emigrate to Canada gives Nariman another chance to stress the importance of family and home. Later that evening, when Yezad tears the application papers up, it is his way of acknowledging the truth of the things Nariman has been telling them.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Roxana goes to the budget envelopes to get money to pay the man who has delivered a fresh tank of cooking gas. She notes that his bill is higher than it used to be. She thinks that they probably should go back to cooking with kerosene, but she figures that the old Primus stove might well be clogged up. She has to cook dinner tonight, so she goes ahead and looks through the budget envelopes. She discovers twenty rupees in the Bread & Butter envelope, but she knows they have been out of butter for days. Looking for the envelope marked Gas Cylinder, she feels extra weight in the Electricity envelope. It should be empty because the bill was paid on the third of the month, and yet there are forty-five rupees in it. She pays the gas man and then goes back to the envelopes. She looks through every one of them. She counts a total of one hundred and eighty rupees extra. When Yezad gets home, she tells him about it. He says that maybe Mr. Kapur paid him some extra commissions. Nevertheless Yezad is puzzled. He has added one hundred and twenty rupees, but Roxana counted an extra one hundred and eighty rupees. How to account for the extra sixty rupees? He can't figure it out. Over the next few days, Yezad keeps hoping that Villie will have another strong number dream. He decides that if Mr. Kapur puts him in charge and gives him a pay increase, he will never play the Matka again.

A few weeks later, Villie stops him on his way in one evening to say that she has had another very strong dream involving the number eighteen. Yezad goes home and locks himself in the back room. He takes over 700 rupees from the budget envelopes and gives it to Villie. He is a nervous wreck as he waits for word from Villie. She reports that the opening number is a one. That means that if he pulls out now Yezad will collect over 7,000 rupees. He decides to let it roll. After a day of torture, he learns that the police have shut the Matka down. He has lost everything. Yezad tells Roxana what has happened to all the money. She forgives him because she has seen what torment he has been going through. Nariman has a dream of a time when Lucy and he are first in love. They are in a park after having gone to an afternoon movie. Nariman suggests that she come to his flat. His parents are out, and they can be alone. Lucy agrees to come. They put the chain on the door so as not to be surprised. They are in Nariman's bedroom beginning to make love when there is a loud banging at the door. It is his parents returning early from their evening out because his mother feels ill. There is a huge uproar that ends with his father calling Lucy a whore.

At the store, Mr. Kapur, who has decided to celebrate all religious holidays, has ordered some very fancy Christmas decorations. Yezad decides it's time to ask him about an advance and about his getting more responsibility. Kapur gives him an advance without any questions, but he is somewhat evasive about the increased responsibility.



Chapter 12 Analysis

In this chapter, there is a puzzle over the extra sixty rupees Roxana reports finding in the budget envelopes. As readers, we know that Yezad is not the only family member who has been sneaking extra rupees into the envelopes. Jehangir has been slipping his homework-monitor bribes in, too. Will he be exposed?

Despite the discussion with Vilas and his actor/journalist friends, Yezad is again drawn into playing the Makta. It is ironic that he could have taken his winnings after the first number was announced and realized a 1,000% profit, but he lets it ride and loses it all when the police shut the game down. Even though the family is in hard financial straits, his wife forgives him. She values his happiness above their financial position, and she is willing to be kind.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Miss Alvarez gives Jehangir a note to take home to his parents. Jehangir is afraid to give it to them, but Yezad arrives home in a good mood. Jehangir gives his parents the envelope. Yezad opens the note. Miss Alvarez is asking for one of the parents to meet with her. Yezad agrees that he will go, since Roxana has to stay home to take care of Nariman. At the classroom, Yezad is all but lost in memories of his own school days. He realizes Miss Alvarez is talking about the homework monitor assignment. She comes right out and says that three boys who didn't do their homework gave money to the monitor to get good marks. Yezad finally realizes that she is talking about Jehangir. Miss Alvarez says she may give up teaching. She doesn't know what to do when her best pupil gives way to temptation.

Yezad tells Miss Alvarez that she must never give up. He tells her that Jehangir says what a wonderful teacher she is. He promises that nothing like this will ever happen again. Jehangir begins to cry and whispers an apology. Miss Alvarez says she thinks she will keep on teaching. Back home, Jehangir waits for the punishment he feels sure will come, but his parents realize he was only taking the money to help the family. Roxana and Yezad argue about how it came to happen. Yezad blames it on Coomy and Jal setting a bad example with their trickery and betrayal. Roxana dismisses that argument. She says Jehangir did it only to help the family. Jehangir realizes that his only punishment is going to be listening to his mother and father bicker about it. Roxana finally leaves to go to the market. While she is out, Nariman calls for the urinal. Yezad has promised himself that he will take no part in the care of Nariman, and he ignores him now. Even when Jehangir says that Grandpa wants to do soo-soo, Yezad does not permit him to help. He says to wait until Roxana comes home. He hopes the day will never come when he and Roxana place such a heavy load on their sons.

The next morning, Jehangir refuses to get up and get ready for school. He says his stomach hurts. He takes out his Lake Como jigsaw puzzle and pleads with his mother not to make him go to school. He dreams of walking along the shore of Lake Como, but he can make no progress with the puzzle. Yezad comes in from his shower and persuades Jehangir that since his name means "conqueror of the world" he should not let a little stomach ache keep him from school. They talk about the meaning of the names of other family members. Finally the boys go off to school. Yezad sits there dreaming and feeling sad that his boys are growing up so fast. As he dreams, he whistles "Sunrise, Sunset" from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

At the store, Mr. Kapur is excited because the special ball that is part of his Christmas window has arrived. Yezad is hoping to get a chance to talk to Mr. Kapur about when his increased responsibilities might begin. Kapur says he is not going to run for office after all. Yezad is so stunned that he drops the red light bulb, and it shatters. Mr. Kapur doesn't give any convincing explanation of his decision not to run for the municipal



council. The only thing that comes through is that his wife is against it. Yezad can't get Mr. Kapur to focus on what he is asking him. Kapur is too full of himself about the Christmas window.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Problems continue to mount for the family. The meeting that Miss Alvarez has requested is to let the parents know that Jehangir has been accepting bribes from the duller students in his role as homework monitor. Roxana and Yezad reach the decision not to administer a punishment. They know that Jehangir only took the money to help the family budget. The forgiveness is not unlike that given to Yezad by Roxana when he confesses that he has lost 700 rupees in the Makta. Mr. Kapur's news that he has decided not to run for city council is a tremendous blow to Yezad. Kapur's reason for dropping the idea is because Mrs. Kapur is against it. This foreshadows future events.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Roxana goes to Chateau Felicity to visit Coomy and Jal. Waiting for the elevator, she runs into Edul Munshi, the inveterate handyman that everyone dreads. Roxana makes the suggestion that Edul might like to help fix up the ceilings in Coomy and Jal's apartment. Edul is delighted. In fact, he wants to go up there with Roxana right away and start working on an estimate for the materials, but Roxana persuades him to let her talk to Coomy first. She does so. Jal, who is delighted to see her, agrees right away, and Coomy agrees after a while, realizing that Edul has the reputation of taking forever to finish any job. If they give him the okay to fix the ceilings it will take so long that she will never have to worry about Nariman coming home.

Mr. Kapur is still wrapped up in his Christmas display and does nothing to give Yezad any encouragement about more money or more responsibility. Kapur says his wife has reminded him that service to the family comes before service to the community. She has also pointed out that running for public office might expose him to inspection of his unreported suitcase money. On his way home from the store, Yezad notices Mr. Kapur's influence over other merchants. Many stores are featuring Christmas windows. He thinks that maybe what is needed is a Shiv Sena agitation to sweep down the street and smash the crazy Christmas displays.

Yezad stops at the Book Mart to chat with Vilas. Vilas says he looks troubled and asks what is bothering him. Yezad tells him about Mr. Kapur's change of heart and how it seems that his promotion has vanished. As they are talking, someone comes to use Vilas' service as a scribe. Yezad wanders on. He finds himself outside the fire temple. He goes part way in, but then he backs away. He goes a little distance on and then comes back again. He goes into the temple compound and watches a man praying. Then, he turns away again and proceeds to make his way home. When he gets there, he finds that Roxana is out. The boys cannot tell him where Roxana has gone, only that she is out. Nariman begins to ask once again for his urinal, but Yezad ignores him.

Jehangir asks Yezad why he is ignoring Nariman. Yezad tells him only that he made a promise to himself when Nariman first came to them that he would never touch the bedpan or the urinal. He takes himself out to the balcony and wonders what is becoming of him. He thinks that it would have been better if he had sat in the fire temple rather than coming back to this wretched flat. Jehangir finally can stand Nariman's pleas no longer. He takes the bottle, helps Nariman to a sitting position as he had seen his mother do, and guides him into the entrance. Nothing happens. Jehangir makes the hissing sounds he has heard Roxana make. The urine begins to flow. Yezad comes in and asks Jehangir what he thinks he is doing. Jehangir mutters that grandpa needed to go very badly.



Chapter 14 Analysis

The suggestion to have Edul work on repair of the ceilings in Coomy and Jal's flat is an important forward step in the plot, as readers shall see in a coming chapter. The passing thought that Yezad has about the Shiv Sena smashing up the Christmas decorations is the first inkling of the scheme that Yezad develops in succeeding chapters. Another important first step is Yezad's feeling drawn to the fire temple. He backs away this time, but it is at least a beginning. It is also a significant change when Jehangir helps his grandfather use the urinal. Yezad still refuses to have anything to do with that level of care giving for Nariman.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Edul is working away at the ceiling as Jal keeps an eye on him. Jal draws 500 rupees out of his bank account and goes to visit Roxana. He commiserates with their cramped situation and says if he had his way they would all live in the big flat in Chateau Felicity. Roxana and Yezad are grateful for the money and worry what will happen to Jal when Coomy finds out. Jal tells Roxana and Yezad how miserable he is living in that seven-room flat with Coomy knowing how cramped they are here. He pulls out the envelope with 500 rupees but is uncertain who to give it to. Both Roxana and Yezad say that perhaps he should keep it because Coomy is sure to get furious when she learns what he has done. Jal, however, insists that they take it. Nariman has another vivid dream about Lucy. He dreams of a time when Lucy, who works for another family in Nariman's building, has climbed up on the roof of their building. She is singing and threatening to jump. Nariman finally persuades Yasmin, his wife, to let him go to the roof and save Lucy. She finally says okay. Nariman talks Lucy into coming down from the ledge she is on. He escorts her back to the flat of the family she works for. At the door, she blows him a kiss as though they were out on a date. A few days later, Nariman stops by to ask how she is. He wants to see if they have gotten some professional help for Lucy. He gets into an argument with her employer.

Yezad stops by the Book Mart on his way to work. Vilas has a client just departing. He tells Yezad a little bit about the man's plight. The man has learned that his fourteen-year-old sister is being sold to a sixty-year-old man. The man says he wants her as a wife, but it seems clear that he is looking for a slave. Yezad interrupts Vilas' tale. He has developed a plan for motivating Mr. Kapur to run for office, and he describes it to Vilas. Yezad wants Vilas to go to the local Shiv Sena office and complain about all the Santa Claus displays in the stores. Vilas will ask them to start a riot to destroy the displays. Vilas says that Yezad's idea won't work. Shiv Sena riots are ordered from their headquarters, and even if it were possible to get them to start a riot, there is no telling how it might get out of hand. Instead, Vilas suggests they use his two actor friends to impersonate Shiv Sena men and pay a visit to Mr. Kapur. They agree to meet that evening to discuss the plan in more detail.

Two days later, Mr. Kapur leaves the store for a while to have his blood pressure checked. When he comes back, Yezad, following the plan he and Vilas have cooked up, tells Kapur that two men from Shiv Sena came by and were threatening him. He says they insisted that all businesses with Bombay in their name, like Kapur's Bombay Sporting Goods, must change the Bombay to Mumbai within thirty days. When Yezad protested, the men said they could keep the name Bombay if they gave them a payment of 30,000 rupees and 5,000 every month. While Kapur is cursing the men and figuring out what to do, Yezad suggests that he could change his mind and run in the election. Once he wins, he will be able to tackle the problem from the inside. Mr. Kapur says that



there will be little that the municipal council could do to root out the Shiv Sena. He decides he will do nothing and wait until they come again to pay him a visit.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The beginning of the plan to have Vilas' two friends impersonate Shiv Sena thugs is hatched. The first step of the plan, described in this chapter, is for Yezad to tell Mr. Kapur about a supposed visit from two Shiv Sena men. Mr. Kapur doesn't automatically change his mind and decide again to run for the municipal council, which is what Yezad was hoping for. Mr. Kapur decides to wait and see what happens if he ignores the demand Yezad has told him about.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Yezad meets with Vilas and his two actor friends. They work out the details of the scam they are going to pull on Mr. Kapur. The actors will try to inspire Mr. Kapur to respond to their threat by running for municipal council. Later that week, Yezad is daydreaming at his desk. The actors were supposed to put on their drama today, but Yezad has decided to wait and let Mr. Kapur come to him. Mr. Kapur comes and gives him an envelope. He says it has 35,000 rupees for the two Shiv Sena the next time they come. This is not what Yezad wants. He wants Kapur to run for office, not knuckle under to extortion. Yezad tries to give him back the envelope, but Mr. Kapur insists that he keep it in his desk. Yezad complains to Vilas. Vilas tries to encourage him by saying that the actors followed the script exactly. He says it is up to Yezad to keep the pressure on and encourage Mr. Kapur to run. Yezad is thoroughly discouraged. On his way home, he goes by way of the fire temple. He goes in and stays for prayers. He remembers prayers he hasn't said since he was a boy. Yezad has a great feeling of peace while in the temple. That night, Roxanna says she can smell sandalwood on him. He tells her about stopping at the temple and the repose it gave him. She is happy to hear it.

Kapur is determined to become more like the common people. He sells his car and commutes by taxi. His first choice was to use the trains, but he could not squeeze his way on board. The other passenger did not reach out to pull him on board, the way he has seen them do for others. Mr. Kapur has decided it is because he looks too much like a rich man. He determines that he will no longer wear such expensive suits. He will buy his clothes in a department store and stop paying so much for haircuts.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The imaginary visit of two Shiv Sena men trying to bully Yezad into signing a form to change the store's name from Bombay Sporting Goods to Mumbai Sporting Goods is the first step in Yezad's plot. Yezad's goal is to convince Mr. Kapur to get into politics so that he, Yezad, can get his promotion. With Vilas and his two actor friends, Yezad works out the details of how they will approach Mr. Kapur. One might expect that Yezad would have noticed that Mr. Kapur is not at all inclined to go back to his idea of running for a seat on the municipal council. After the fake Shiv Sena men visit the store, Mr. Kapur gives Yezad 35,000 rupees to hold and give to the men when they return. Yezad again heads past the fire temple on his way home, but this time he enters and stays for prayers. This is a further step along the path that leads to a major change in Yezad's character. In contrast to his frustrations at work and at home, the temple gives him peace.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Edul continues to work away at the ceiling in Coomy and Jal's flat. Jal has to conspire to keep Edul's wife from becoming jealous of his working in a flat with a single woman. He gives up his evening walk in an effort to see that Edul and Coomy are not alone. Standing at the window, Jal can hear Edul's wife, Manizeh, accuse him of pandering. She also calls the Vakeel/Contractor home the house of unhappiness. Edul is able to placate her and convince her that he is not carrying on with Coomy, so they agree that he should continue the project. In Nariman's room, he discovers that the beam is rotten. He says that it must be replaced with a steel girder.

Jal goes to Pleasant Villa to visit Roxana and his stepfather Nariman. He finds Daisy playing to Nariman. Jal is really tongue-tied with Daisy, so he just listens while she plays for Nariman. Trying to act like he knows what he is talking about, he asks what piece she was playing. Daisy says it is Beethoven's Violin Concerto. Jal asks what number, and she says there was only one. He asks what movement it was. Jal asks Roxana where Yezad is, and Roxana says he is probably at the fire temple. When Jal expresses surprise, she says that he goes quite often and that he says it gives him repose. Jal describes how the work in their flat is coming. He tells about Edul's plan for a steel girder. Yezad and Roxana sit quietly in the evening. Yezad seems to recognize that none of his schemes for getting money have worked and that perhaps the only answer is attendance at the fire temple, where he can forget his problems. Later, Yezad sits with Nariman and thinks about the agony the man is going through with the Parkinson's, not to mention his broken leg.

Kapur is excited when his Santa costume arrives. He puts it on and plays around with Yezad and Husain. He is expecting to have crowds of children come in to get candy and talk to Santa Claus. Yezad and Kapur talk about Bombay. Yezad tries to drop some suggestions designed to move Mr. Kapur toward becoming political, but he doesn't have any noticeable effect. On his way home, he goes to the service at the fire temple. After the service, he goes back to the store, takes the envelope with the Shiv Sena cash in it, puts it into his briefcase and heads home.

The following afternoon, Christmas Eve, Mr. Kapur is all decked out in his Santa costume waiting for some children to show up. The problem is that the children don't show up. Husain is out on the sidewalk trying to shoo children into the store, but they seem to react with fear. Finally one child allows himself to be half-dragged into the store where Santa is presiding and giving away candies. A trickle of kids does appear, enough to make Mr. Kapur think the day is not a total failure.



Chapter 17 Analysis

Work progresses on the ceilings in Jal and Coomy's flat. Edul's discovery of the rotten beam in Nariman's bedroom and his plan for installing a steel girder foreshadow the climactic accident of the next chapter. Things at the store go along two different paths. Yezad is trying his best to make Mr. Kapur think of going ahead with his political ideas, while Mr. Kapur is totally occupied with his elaborate Christmas celebration. Yezad is ever more drawn to attending services at the temple, even to the point where he feels, as he ponders how nothing seems to be going right, that maybe the only thing he can count on now is the temple.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Yezad wakes up in the night with chest pains. He gets a ginger ale out of the refrigerator, but it does not help. He knows that what is bothering him is the envelope with Mr. Kapur's money in it. Murad comes into the kitchen. He is surprised to find Yezad sitting there in the dark. Murad explains that he has come to get the present he wants to stuff in Jehangir's stocking. Yezad asks what the present is. Murad says it is three books by Enid Blyton. Yezad asks where he got the money. Murad says he got it by walking home from school for the past several months and saving his bus fare. He goes into the room where Jehangir and Grandfather are sleeping, except that Jehangir is not sleeping. He is awake enough to know what Murad is doing. He thinks of jumping up and surprising him, but then realizes that that would spoil Murad's surprise. He shuts his eyes tight. Murad stuffs the present into Jehangir's stocking and tiptoes away.

Yezad continues to sit in the dark kitchen wishing that Roxana was with him to see what wonderful sons they have. He goes back to bed. Roxana asks how he is feeling. He says he feels much better. Nariman again dreams of Lucy and how she climbs up on the roof and threatens to jump. As before, he goes up to the roof to talk her down. His wife, Yasmin, follows. Yasmin tries to pull Lucy from the ledge. They sway dangerously. Nariman rushes forward to help. He grabs each one by an arm, but they slip from his grasp and fall to their deaths. Nariman wakes up screaming from the dream.

On Christmas, Yezad goes to the store. His plan is to return the money. Mr. Kapur arrives and gives Yezad the three photographs of Hughes Road, the neighborhood where Yezad grew up that Mr. Kapur showed to Yezad a few weeks ago. Yezad is stunned that Mr. Kapur should give him such a valuable gift. He does not know how to thank him. Mr. Kapur says he wants Yezad to have them, and then he goes to put on the Santa costume. Two men from Shiv Sena show up and point out to Mr. Kapur that his sign should say Mumbai instead of Bombay. These are not the two who were there previously. Yezad is horrified. Kapur curses the two men and pushes them out of the store. Mr. Kapur proceeds to get ready for the expected flood of children.

Edul Munshi comes to Coomy and Jal's apartment to continue the repair project. Two workmen arrive that Edul has arranged for. He needs to put up a girder to replace the rotted beam. The workmen help him get the beam into Nariman's room and hoisted up to its supports. He dismisses the workmen. He plans to jack the beam up the final few inches himself. After the beam is in place, Edul finds that it is 1/2 of an inch out of alignment. He struggles to get it straight. Coomy comes in to watch him, suggesting that he should get the workmen back to help. Edul, however, insists that he doesn't need them. While he is struggling with the beam, Coomy says, "Careful! The post is moving." Those are her last words. The beam comes crashing down, breaking her skull and crushing Edul.



Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter is full of death. Readers not only witness the tragic death of Coomy and Edul Munshi, but we also hear about the death some years before of Nariman's wife, Yasmin, and his true love, Lucy. We see the dangerous course being followed by Vikram Kapur when he pushes the two Shiv Sena men out of his store. That action is likely to have serious consequences later in the story.

On a gentler note, there is the touching story of the two Chenoy sons, Murad and Jehangir, treating each other with love. It makes Yezad very proud to witness how they care for each other's feelings. The nagging Coomy, the demanding Shiv Sena, Yezad's search for money and Yasmin, who marries for security instead of love, are all negative forces, bringing destruction. The love of two brothers and the refuge of the temple stand in contrast, as the things of true value that bring peace.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Jezead and Roxana are commiserating with Jal over Coomy's untimely death. They report that Nariman said it is sad that she died full of anger. After they get back to their home, Yezad tries to call Mr. Kapur to say that he will not be in tomorrow because of the funeral. There is no answer at the Kapur residence. He tries again later with the same result. Jehangir asks if he and Murad can go to the funeral. When Yezad gets to the store the day after the funeral, there is a note stuck to the door saying the shop will be closed until further notice because of a death in the family. This is disorienting to Yezad. He can't figure out how Kapur knows of Coomy's death. He tries to let himself into the store, but there is an extra padlock on the door. Husain arrives overcome with grief. Yezad suggests that Husain go home. They will talk to Mr. Kapur tomorrow. Husain says, "No. We will never talk to him again." Yezad says, "Tell me what happened." Husain says that two men came into the store and killed Mr. Kapur. In a daze, Yezad makes his way to Kapur's house to pay his respects to his widow. He has difficulty getting close enough to her to convey his condolences, but he eventually does. She thanks him, but she is otherwise quite cold to him.

After an absence of a couple of days, Jal comes to Yezad and Roxana's apartment bringing food. He and Coomy had a regular standing order from the grocery, and he has not yet had it reduced from two persons to one. He speaks of the comfort he has gotten from the fire temple. Yezad agrees with him. Jal says he is planning to thank Inspector Masalavala and Doctor Fitter for their help with Coomy. Yezad asks him to convey their thanks as well.

The next evening Jal rings the doorbell at Inspector Masalavala's house. When the door is opened, Jal can see that Dr. Fitter is with the Inspector. They invite Jal to sit down and have some scotch with them. He refuses the scotch but does sit with them. The inspector is bewailing the shrinking size of the Parsi community. He thinks that they are well on their way to becoming extinct. He outlines a strange plan where young couples who cannot find a place of their own stay with their parents but have a private room where they can procreate. The doctor says that it is the nature of more educated people to have fewer children. The Inspector has an answer for that too. He wants the Panchayat to establish a rule that says there shall be no higher education for Parsis unless they sign a contract to have at least as many children, up to a limit of seven, as there are people over the age of fifty in their family. They continue this discussion. The Inspector is trying to be serious, but Dr. Fitter and Jal are concealing smiles about his plans.

Yezad is hanging around the apartment with nothing much to do. He has discontinued the newspaper to save money and has nothing to while away the time. Roxana is nervous because they have heard nothing from Mrs. Kapur. In the kitchen he finds the special drinking cup with a spout that they use for Nariman. He takes it and sits by Nariman's bed. His first attempt to have Nariman drink some tea is awkward, but he



finds a more proper angle. Nariman drains the whole cup with gratitude. He puts his hands over Yezad's as a way of saying thank you. Yezad takes the cup back to the kitchen where Roxana is surprised and pleased that he has helped Nariman with it. He next finds Roxana's nail clippers and trims Nariman's fingernails and toenails. He even gives the old man a shave. The remarkable thing about all this is that it is the first time Yezad has done anything to help take care of Nariman, and he finds it rewarding. Jal arrives with another food package and admires the way Nariman looks. A man comes to deliver a note from Mrs. Kapur. The note asks that he come to meet her the next day. The messenger has been told to wait for an answer but agrees that Yezad does not need to write it out.

Chapter 19 Analysis

The family comes together after Coomy's death. Yezad tries to let Mr. Kapur know that he will not be in because of a death in the family. He is confused when he goes to the store and finds it locked. When he learns from Husain what has happened, he realizes how tragically wrong his plan was. The visit of Jal to Inspector Masalava and Dr. Fitter gives us a view of the Parsi situation. Yezad's change to looking after Nariman's needs is an important transition. Yezad is discovering the two important elements to life: religion and family. Caring for Nariman and visiting the temple are the only two things that give him solace. Mrs. Kapur's rather cold acknowledgement of Yezad at Mr. Kapur's funeral foreshadows the treatment she gives him in the next chapter.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

When Yezad arrives at the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium for his meeting with Mrs. Kapur, the servant who delivered her letter is inside and points Yezad to the back door. Mrs. Kapur is in Kapur's office. Without preliminaries, she tells him that the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium will not be reopening. She tells him that besides the wages she owes him, she is giving him one month's extra salary. She asks if he remembers the suitcase that used to be in the office. She goes on to ask if he knows how much was in the suitcase. Yezad says he doubts that even Mr. Kapur knew the exact figure. She says, "No. He didn't but I did." She says that there is a problem. When she counted the suitcase last night, it contained 35,000 rupees less than it should. Yezad says that the money was taken out to pay the Shiv Sena, but that two different fellows came on Christmas Day. She asks what happened to the money. Yezad says that it is still in his desk. Together they go to his desk. Mrs. Kapur peers into the drawers to make sure that Yezad does not have anything that does not belong to him. He fishes out the envelope and gives it to her. She says that he should take his personal items from his desk. He need not come again. When he is finished, she asks him if there is anything small that he would like to keep as a gift. Yezad tells her that Mr. Kapur gave him three photographs of Hughes Road but that he has not taken them home. She says that that is impossible. The photographs are very valuable and are from Mr. Kapur's collection. He could not possibly have given them to Yezad. He declines any other gift, so Mrs. Kapur says, "Okay, bye-bye then." He leaves the shop. Passing the bookstore, he hears Vilas calling him but ignores him.

Yezad returns home, gets out his rsumy, updates it and goes to have copies made. In the next three days, he contacts all the sporting goods stores in Bombay and leaves his rsumy, but they all seem reluctant to have anything to do with someone who has been so closely connected with a murder. On the fourth day, he goes to the fire temple and prays for several hours. He returns home about one o'clock. Roxana takes advantage of his being home to ask if it is all right if she goes over to Jal's to help him sort out some clothes he is giving to charity. Before she leaves, she makes sure Nariman has made use of the urinal.

While Roxana is out, the boys arrive home from school. Yezad sets them doing their homework. After a while, Nariman begins making noises that they finally figure out mean that he needs to use the bedpan. Together, Yezad and the two boys manage to get Nariman onto the bedpan. Roxana arrives home and immediately notices the odor. She is immensely pleased to find that Yezad has taken care of the situation. She gives him a small incense burner that Jal has sent over that used to belong to Coomy. The boys think it is a little odd that their father seems to be turning so fatalistic, saying such things as, "God will see that someone offers him a job sooner or later." He suggests that since tomorrow is a holiday for them that they go with him to the fire temple to pray.



Yezad reminds the boys that they are to come to the temple with him the next morning. Although Murad is reluctant, they enjoy the experience.

Jal comes to visit loaded with food. Yezad suspects that Roxana has told Jal that he is no longer employed by the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium. They recall with sadness how Coomy has refused to give Nariman final forgiveness. Now it is too late for her. Jal comes for another visit a couple of weeks later. He proposes that they sell the flat in Pleasant Villa and move in with him in Chateau Felicity. He has gotten an estimate of what they could sell the flat for, and it surprises both Yezad and Roxana, since it is some ten times what Nariman paid for it. Yezad is skeptical, saying it would take months to find a buyer, but Jal says he already has one. He also has a detailed estimate for repair work needed to Chateau Felicity flat.

After Jal leaves, and after dinner, Nariman is agitated, but no one can figure out what is bothering him since the Parkinson's has so effected his speech. Finally, Yezad says he will light the afargan and offer some prayers. By the time he has finished the first prayer, Nariman seems quieter. They take pleasure in the effect of the incense. They carry it around the flat while Roxana sensually fans the smoke around her head. They continue and work their way back into Nariman's room. He seems agitated again and does not react calmly to the smoke from the incense. Finally, Roxana sends Jehangir to go and get Daisy. She comes and begins to play Schubert's Serenade. Nariman fails to calm down. Yezad competes with the violin by continuing to say prayers. They repeatedly raise their volume, but without effect. Jehangir finally asks Daisy if she knows "One Day When We Were Young." He says that is Grandpa's favorite. Daisy asks him to hum it, and she recognizes it as The Great Waltz. Nariman finally calms down and falls asleep. Yezad makes a gesture to indicate that the prayers calmed him. Later that night when they are in bed, Roxana asks Yezad if he thinks Jal's idea will work. Yezad says it will work if God wills it. This comforts Roxana.

The following Sunday, Jal and his buyer, a diamond merchant from Surat who wants to buy the flat for his son, come to meet Yezad. The merchant suggests that they have to be very careful about how they handle the payments, because the tax collectors are familiar with all of the usual tax-avoidance schemes. They agree that the money will be delivered in small suitcases and that it will be stashed away in a number of safe deposit boxes in a variety of names of family members. Yezad is content with the deal, and they begin work on the repairs to the flat. Yezad is relaxed because he credits God with making everything work out for them. He spends his day going from the fire temple to the work site, getting in the way of the workmen and then returning to the fire temple for another service. The work on the flat is finished at last, and Roxana and Yezad take the boys over to see their new rooms and pick out paint colors. Murad has no trouble. He picks a light green. Jehangir, though, is not able to make a decision for himself. He tells Roxana to decide. She picks a yellow and asks him if he likes it. "It's beautiful," he says without emotion. Jal has arranged for the owner's names to be listed on a brass plate on the front door:

Mr. & Mrs. Yezad Chenoy



Mr. Jal Contractor

Mr. Nariman Vakeel

On moving day, an ambulance and a special nurse arrive to take Nariman. A lorry arrives to pick up all their belongings. Yezad finds Roxana and Murad standing in the empty front room. He says he will take a final look around and asks Jehangir to come with him. Jehangir is sad about leaving. Yezad tells him that without ending the old, they cannot begin the new. Jehangir says he likes the old. Yezad gives him some good fatherly advice, while at the same time he doesn't fully believe it himself. He wants his sons to grow into men, but he hates the thought of losing the little boys he could carry on his shoulders. Villie Cardmaster and other neighbors are waiting on the landings to say goodbye. They can hear violin music. They leave by taxi. Murad asks if he can ride up front and asks the taxi driver if he can drop the flag. Roxana and Jehangir both take backward glances as they leave. She sees good omens, such as a bird sitting on a ground floor window. Jehangir sees a moth floating lazily out of the front entrance. He watches as the moth flies directly toward the bird's open beak.

Chapter 20 Analysis

This is the final chapter in the current timeframe (there is an Epilogue set five years later), so there are many threads to tie up. First, Mrs. Kappur meets with Yezad and gives him a quick kick out the door. When Yezad asks her about the photographs of Hughes Road that Mr. Kapur has given him, Mrs. Kapur says that cannot be possible. She says they are too valuable for Mr. Kapur to have done that. After being pushed out of the store, Yezad is becoming more and more religious. He is fatalistic when his job search produces no results. Now that Coomy is unfortunately dead, Jal is much more open to reestablishing good family relationships with Roxana, Yezad and the boys. Jal's recommendation that they sell their flat - in fact his producing a willing buyer - means that there is less pressure on Yezad to find a job. Readers do not know for sure why Nariman is so agitated by the talk of moving to Felicity Towers, but his favorite song, played by Daisy Ichamora, calms him down enough so that he falls asleep. This part of the story ends with the Chenoy family and Nariman leaving to go to their new home with Jal. Nariman goes by ambulance. The rest of the family follows in a taxi. Roxana sees a good omen as they leave, but Jehangir sees a dreadful one.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Murad and Yezad have almost daily arguments about everything from Murad's haircuts to his friends. Yezad also jumps on Jal when Jal gets too close to an area that Yezad says is his prayer space. The space is a cabinet with prayer books and other holy items. Since moving from Pleasant Villa, Yezad has read nothing but religious books. Yezad has not worked since the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium shut down. It later reopens as a sporting goods store, but they do not hire Yezad. For a while after they move, Roxana keeps budget envelopes like before and hands out cash to Yezad. The money from the sale of the Pleasant Villa flat is just about enough to cover their expenses. After Nariman dies, things become a little easier, and Roxana becomes more relaxed about money. Yezad spends time at the League of Orthodox Parsis and the Association for Zarathustrian Education, which meet once a week.

Nariman seems lonely having his own room. For a while after they move, the family members try to spend time with him, but it gradually becomes less and less. They have a nurse from the hospital who looks after him, but Roxana criticizes her for taking shortcuts. After she scolds Nariman by giving him tea that is too hot, she is fired. When Nariman seems to be in his final coma, Jehangir is sent to find Daisy. He hunts all over and finally finds her at a rehearsal of the symphony orchestra. Daisy comes with him, but she insists on going by way of her flat where she changes into a long black skirt. She also wears a string of pearls. When they get back to Chateau Felicity, Yezad thinks, because of the way she is dressed, that Jehangir has pulled her away from an important performance. Daisy says that this is the important performance. She plays the Schubert Serenade and ends with Nariman's favorite song, "One Day When We Were Young." Dr. Tarapore arrives, takes Nariman's blood pressure and assures the family that he is resting comfortably. Early the next morning, Yezad wakes Jehangir with the news that Grandpa has died. About three months after Nariman's death, the day approaches for Daisy's concert. Roxana and Yezad say they cannot go because of the mourning period. Murad does not want to go. Jal and Jehangir are the only two who want to go. They go backstage, and Daisy is delighted to see them.

Yezad catches Murad kissing a girl. Yezad tells him that the relationship with the girl is impossible since she is not a Parsi. Murad says that Yezad is like Hitler. Murad's eighteenth birthday is approaching, and Roxana is planning a dinner party for eight. There will be space for three of Murad's friends. Yezad says that the Maharashtrian girl should not be one of them. That brings on another huge argument.

Roxana sends Jehangir to deliver boxes of Mithai to Inspector Masalava and Dr. Fitter in thanks for their kindness towards Nariman. Inspector Masalava is out, but his wife takes the Mithai. Dr. Fitter is in. He recognizes Jehangir immediately and insists that he come in. His wife is also very cordial. Dr. Fitter talks to Jehangir about the deaths of Lucy and Yasmin. Mrs. Fitter gives him a mound of sugar, the traditional way of saying



thank you for the Mithai. On his return home, Jehangir lies on his bed and thinks about the things he has heard over the years of the deaths of the two women. He finds his old jigsaw puzzle of Lake Como and the Enid Blyton books. He takes them all and adds them to a stack of things being set aside for Daisy's charity drive.

Yezad finally decides what to do with the pictures Jal has uncovered of the Vakeel ancestors. He does not want to keep them, so in keeping with Zarathustrian tradition he wants to wrap them up and put them into the sea. Jehangir goes with him on this mission, thinking how much he misses the man his father used to be before he became so religious.

Yezad has set strict rules about what Roxana must do when she is having her period. He also says that she must keep track of the servant's cycle and that neither of them may come into the parlor during their period. Murad says that Daddy has passed the menstruation laws.

Yezad says he will throw Murad out of the house if he does not live by his rules. Roxana is terribly upset with this. She observes to Jehangir that grown-ups acquire too much pride. She is convinced that Nariman was trying to warn her not to move to Chateau Felicity.

Yezad finally agrees that Murad's friend Anjali can come to Murad's birthday dinner, but they must rearrange the furniture to make a barrier to the prayer cabinet. Murad calls it the Cordon Sanitaire. Jal is excited. He suggests asking Daisy to the birthday dinner, and she accepts at once. Roxana is using the good china. She reminds Jehangir of what Grandpa used to say, that they "should take pleasure in the beautiful things to defeat the sadness and sorrow of life."

Epilogue Analysis

In the Epilogue there is a change in the point of view from omniscient narrator to first-person narration by Jehangir. The observations in the Epilogue are all Jehangir's. Readers hear of battles between Murad - now approaching his eighteenth birthday - and his father and of Yezad's ever-increasing religiosity. Yezad is also joining organizations that are open to him because of his Parsi heritage. In the main part of the book, Yezad's religion is a comfort to him, but in this Epilogue there is a reversal. His religion becomes domineering and theocratic. He forces his son into the position his grandfather once was in, that of denying love because of religion. The message seems to ultimately reject the strictness of religion in favor of valuing love and family.

The family is losing touch with Nariman now that he is in his own room rather than in the middle of one of the two rooms of the Chenoy's flat. The more money the family has, the less familial love they seem to share. The scene in which Nariman is serenaded by Daisy as he lies dying is especially touching. Jehangir, now around fourteen, is beginning to show signs of separating from the family. Murad is strongly in that phase. Jehangir, after being told by Dr. Fitter about the deaths of Lucy and Yasmin, begins to

view the family more objectively. He gathers some of his childhood treasures and adds them to a pile of things being given to charity.



Characters

Nariman Vakeel

Nariman is a retired professor of English and the father of Roxana Chenoy. He is Jal and Coomy Contractor's stepfather. Nariman is a Parsi, a fact that plays an important role in the story. As the story begins, Nariman is living with his two stepchildren, Jal and Coomy Contractor, in a seven-room flat in a good building named Chateau Felicity. After he falls and breaks his leg, he is taken to stay at the two-room flat of his daughter Roxana Chenoy in a much less elegant building known as Pleasant Villa. As a younger man, Nariman was very much in love with a pretty Goan woman named Lucy. His family forced him to break up with Lucy because she was not a Parsi. They talked him into marrying Yasmin Contractor, a widow with two children, Jal and Coomy. Nariman was a good father to his stepchildren, although in Coomy's mind, he could never replace her real father. Nariman and Yasmin had a daughter, Roxana, who has a special place in Nariman's affections.

Jal Contractor

Jal is the Nariman's stepson. His own father died when Jal was a youngster. At the time of the story, Jal is in his late forties. He is a bachelor. In fact, he is shy with women and lives with his sister, Coomy. Jal has a sweet nature and is pushed around somewhat by his sister. Jal does not work. He usually spends his days at the share bazaar (stock exchange), especially in the early part of the story.

Coomy Contractor

Coomy is Nariman's stepdaughter. She is full of anger, directed largely at Nariman. She blames him for the death of her mother. She also seems a bit jealous of her half-sister, Roxana, although the author makes a point of saying that because of the age difference between Jal and Coomy and their half-sister, Roxana, they did not go through the sibling rivalry phase. When Roxana was an infant, Coomy used to love taking care of her. At the time of the story, Coomy is concerned only with her own comfort. She complains of being overburdened when she has to take care of her injured stepfather. All of her decisions are made without considering the effect on others. For example, when Nariman breaks his ankle and must have bed rest, Coomy buys a commode because she thinks it would be easier to take care of, whereas a bedpan and urinal would have been much easier on the patient. After a day of hoisting Nariman from his bed to the commode, Jal persuades her to abandon the commode and switch to a bedpan and urinal. She agrees only after Jal says he will be responsible for emptying the bedpan. When she decides to take Nariman over to stay with Roxana in her tiny apartment, she does not consider the impact on Roxana's family, only her own comfort.



She progresses from this casual lack of consideration to active plotting to avoid ever having to take her stepfather back into what had been his home.

Roxana Chenoy

Roxana is Nariman's only child. She was born when her stepbrother and stepsister were in their teens, so there was not the typical sibling rivalry between them. In fact, they loved taking care of her when she was small. She is married to Yezad Chenoy and is the mother of two sons, Murad and Jehangir. Roxana is a very loving person. She devotes all her energy to taking care of her family. She looks after the budget for the family, putting cash into the budget envelopes when Yezad is paid. When Nariman breaks his ankle, Coomy and Jal dump him onto Roxana. She receives him without thinking twice about it. He is put in Jehangir and Murad's room, which also doubles as the family sitting room. Murad is set up out on the balcony, which is an exciting adventure.

Yezad Chenoy

Yezad, Roxana's husband, is the manager of the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium. He does not quite run the store - Vikram Kapur, the owner, does that - but he is a trusted employee. His principle manager-like function is to open the door in the morning. Yezad is particularly well thought of for his honesty. In an early scene in the novel, his honesty is demonstrated. An important customer is giving Yezad an order and urges him to add a little extra to it that the two of them can divide. Yezad declines.

Murad Chenoy

Murad, the elder son of Yezad and Roxana, is about thirteen at the time of the story. He is beginning to show his independence from the family. For example, without telling his parents, he has taken to walking home from school. The reason is that he wants to save the bus fare in order to buy a Christmas present for Jehangir. In the Epilogue, which takes place five years later, he is in a running battle with his father for his independence.

Jehangir Chenoy

Jehangir, the younger son of Yezad and Roxana, is about nine at the time of the story. He is more central to the story than his older brother. In fact, the Epilogue is told through his eyes. Jehangir has been appointed to the position of homework monitor by his teacher, Miss Alvarez. That role exposes him to the temptation of bribery when three of the poorer students pay him twenty rupees each to sign off on their homework. He is later found out, but his family forgives him because he was taking the money only to add it to the family budget envelopes.



Vikram Kapur

Vikram Kapur is the proprietor of Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium. While he is proud of his Punjabi heritage, he has a great affection for Bombay where he was brought as an infant. His collection of photographs of Bombay from forty or fifty years ago is one of his principle hobbies. Kapur wants to be identified as an ordinary citizen of Bombay although his European style clothes and expensive haircut mark him as far wealthier than the average citizen. Early in the story, readers learn that he has told Yezad he is planning to run for the Municipal Council. This means that Yezad would be officially the manager at an increased salary. Even though Kapur gives up on that idea at the first sign of an objection from his wife, he still longs to be accepted as an ordinary citizen. At one point, he stops driving himself to work in his Mercedes and starts trying to take the train. He has noticed how the crowds of passengers overflowing from the carriages of the train will reach out and hoist up someone running along the platform, trying to board. Kapur wants that to happen to him, but the helping hands never materialize. He ends up taking a taxi to work. Kapur's refusal to give in to the powerful Shiv Sena, which demands that the Bombay in Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium be changed to Mumbai, makes him the unfortunate victim of Yezad's plan.

Vilas Rane

Vilas is a friend of Yezad who works in a bookstore in the same neighborhood as Bombay Sporting Goods. They often have lunch together. Vilas also works as a scribe, writing letters for those who cannot write and reading them letters that they receive. It is a role in which he takes great pleasure because of the insight it gives him into the plight of the poor and uneducated. He also takes great pleasure at the gratitude of his clients. Vilas is a confidante of Yezad. When Yezad tells him about his plan to get Mr. Kapur to focus on running for the municipal council, Vilas introduces him to two actor friends of his. Together they plan the drama that indirectly leads to Mr. Kapur's death.

Daisy Ichimora

Daisy is a violinist with the Bombay Symphony Orchestra. She lives in Pleasant Villa where the Chenoy family lives. When Nariman with his broken ankle comes to stay with his daughter Roxana, he meets Daisy, and they become good friends. Nariman is very knowledgeable about music. He invites Daisy to come practice in the Chenoy's flat. He and Daisy make a pact that she will play for him as he lies dying.

Villie Cardmaster

Villie is another Pleasant Villa neighbor. She is devoted to betting on the Marka, an Indian version of the numbers game. She claims that the numbers come to her in dreams. When he is desperate for money, Yezad gives her some money to bet for him. He wins, but then the next time Villie has a powerful dream, Yezad goes overboard. He



cleans out the family budget envelopes and tells Villie to put it all on the number she dreamed of. This bet doesn't turn out so well. They appear to be on their way to winning a huge sum, but the police raid the Marka and shut it down. Yezad loses everything.

Edul Munshi

Munshi is a neighbor in Chateau Felicity. He is an inveterate handyman/fixer-upper whose wife has gotten so tired of his botching every job that she no longer permits him to do anything in their flat. The neighbors consider him a joke. Since his wife will not let him do anything in their flat, he is always looking for projects elsewhere in the building. Roxana runs into him in the elevator at a time when Coomy is doing nothing to repair the ceilings in her flat. Roxana suggests that perhaps Edul could help. This leads to the accident that kills both Edul and Coomy.



Objects/Places

Chateau Felicity

Chateau Felicity is the building where Nariman lives with Jal and Coomy at the beginning of the story. Chateau Felicity is in a good section of the city. The flat is a comfortable seven rooms. It is fitting for a person of Nariman's position, professor at the university. Somewhere along the way, Nariman has signed the flat over to Jal and Coomy, a fact that makes Coomy feel entitled to push Nariman out onto Roxana when he becomes a burden.

Pleasant Villa

Pleasant Villa is the more modest building where Roxana and Yezad Chenoy live in a two-room flat. The part of town is not as good as where Chateau Felicity is located, and the building is quite run-down. The elevator is out of order, so the Chenoy's have to climb two flights of stairs to reach their third-floor flat. About mid-way through the story the elevator is fixed, making life a little easier. When Nariman is dumped in Roxana's lap, the family has to struggle to figure out where he is going to sleep. They finally settle on putting him in Murad's bed. A settee with another bed, Jehangir's, is tucked in underneath it. Murad sleeps out on the balcony protected by a big plastic sheet borrowed from their next-door neighbor, Villie Cardmaster.

Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium

Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium is the store where Yezad works. Vikram Kapur owns the store. Kapur believes that shopkeepers should recognize the holidays of all religions. He has arranged for elaborate Christmas decorations including a mechanized tableau of Santa Claus wielding a cricket bat. He also dresses up as Santa Claus himself and invites children in to receive candy. The fact that the name of his business includes the word "Bombay" leads to a visit from the Shiv Sena thugs who are on a mission to have everyone replace the word "Bombay" with Mumbai.

St. Xavier's School

St. Xavier's School is the English-type boys' school that Murad and Jehangir attend. It is run by Jesuit priests. The school draws students from all classes of society and provides a standard college preparatory curriculum. Jehangir has been appointed to be a homework monitor, which means that he checks to make sure the other students have done their homework.



The Fire Temple

The temple in the story is one that Yezad passes on his way home from work. It is of the Zoroastrian religion that Yezad was brought up in. During a period of stress at work, he stops at the temple on his way home. At first, he just peeks in, but after a couple of such visits, he enters all the way and begins to recall prayers and things from his childhood training. Over time he becomes extremely devout.

Budget Envelopes

Roxana and her family use budget envelopes to control the way they spend their money. The whole family is involved with them. Jehangir sneaks the sixty rupees he got as bribes in his homework monitor job into them, and Yezad adds to them from his winnings at Matka. He also takes everything out of them to make another Matka bet when Villie Cardmaster has one of her number dreams.

Incense Burners, Afargaan and Thurible

Incense burners, afargaan and thurible, are important objects for the religious observances practiced by the family. Coomy performs religious rites at the start of the book, and later Yezad does as well.

Bedpan and Urinal

The bedpan and urinal are pieces of equipment that Nariman needs after his accident. They play a big part in the story because Coomy's disgust in dealing with these humiliating objects leads Coomy to the decision to dump Nariman on Roxana and her family. Once Nariman has been taken over to Roxana's flat, the equipment is again important. Yezad at first refuses to have any part in dealing with the equipment and its use. An important milestone in his change of personality occurs when he finally responds to Nariman's need to use them. Yezad tries to keep Murad and Jehangir from having anything to do with the bedpan and urinal, but Jehangir is much too caring of his grandfather to let such rules bother him.

Public Transportation

Public transportation is the way the Chenoy family gets around. Mostly they use busses and trains, occasionally using a taxi. The commuting train into the city is a key part of Mr. Kapur's wish to be embraced by the ordinary citizens of Bombay. He is particularly impressed by the way passengers on a train reach out to help someone running down the platform to get on board the train.



Photographs

Mr. Kapur is an avid collector of photographs of Bombay. On two occasions he shows Yezad photographs he has acquired for his collection. One of the photographs is of the area where his store is located. The other is a set of three photographs of the Hughes Road area where Yezad grew up. He gives the Hughes Road photographs to Yezad as a Christmas present. Yezad leaves them in the store during all the excitement of the Shiv Sena visits, but then Mrs. Kapur refuses to believe that her husband ever gave such a present to Yezad.



Themes

Family

The author's first concern is family. Through the example of the family of Nariman Vakil and its extensions he seeks to show that family members do both good and bad things to each other. The leading example of a family member who does bad things is Coomy Contractor, Nariman's stepdaughter. We get a preview of her feelings toward other members of her family in the very first chapter of the novel when Roxana, Yezad and their children arrive at Nariman's Birthday party at the precise time set by Coomy, she grumbles that the Chenoy's always show up on time. After Nariman's accident every one of Coomy's actions demonstrates her real dislike of the other family members. While she can't blame Nariman for the death of her biological father, she nevertheless appears to have always felt somewhat of an outsider in the Vakeel family, and does hold Nariman responsible for her mother's death.

On the other hand, the author wants the reader to see what it is like to be part of a loving family. Most of the examples of family members caring for each other come from the Chenoy family. Both Yezad and Roxana look at what their two sons do and are really touched. Much of this centers on Jehangir, the younger brother, who jumps right in and starts taking care of his grandfather. Murad, however, is seen to secretly save his bus fare by walking home from school for a couple of months before Christmas just to save up enough money to buy a present for his brother. Even Jal, who is somewhat shy, demonstrates his family feeling by, after Coomy's death, bringing food to Roxana and her family. He carries his beyond that simple act by conceiving of the idea that the whole Chenoy family should move into the 7-room flat he shared with Coomy. He follows through on the idea by finding a buyer and bring him over to talk to Yezad.

Nariman, through his seniority, occupies a special position in the family. The author seems to hold the view that a family needs a leader and despite his physical condition, Nariman holds that position. He is the only person in the family who sees everyone objectively, recognizing their weaknesses but loving them all the same. It is sad that he is so obviously upset at the idea of moving back into the flat in Chateau Felicity, particularly since his Parkinson's has advanced to the point where he cannot make himself understood. The reader suspects that his agitation is caused by his feeling that Chateau Felicity is an unhappy place for his family, while the Chenoy's small flat in Pleasant Villa is a place of love.

Religion

The Vakeel/Contractor/Chenoy family are Parsi, an Indian ethnic group small in number, but large in influence. Traditionally, Parsis are known for their language skills and for their honesty. These two traits made them particularly valuable to the British, and they achieved great prominence during the years of British rule. The original Parsi



immigrants to India came from Persia to escape religious persecution. They brought the Zoroastrian religion with them.

The thought that Mistry seeks to convey about religion and religious practice is that while a little bit of it is good, it is possible to go too far. In the beginning of the story, Coomy is the only character who could be thought of as religious. Yezad makes jokes at her expense for her constant trips to the fire temple.

As his plot to influence Mr. Kaput to run for the Municipal Council reaches a point of maximum frustration, Yezad is drawn to stop in at the Fire Temple that he passes each day on his way home. At first he is very timid and feels like an outsider, but as he stops in again and again he begins to remember the religious training he received as a child, and he begins to partake in more and more of the ceremony. This helps him to calm down, a change that is noted by Roxana. He explains to her that he has been stopping by the Fire Temple. Roxana is happy that Yezad is doing that and urges him to continue. When he has lost his job, and after an initial half-hearted job hunting effort, he begins spending ever-increasing amounts of time at the Temple.

After the Chenoy family has moved (with Nariman) back into the flat in Chateau Felicity, the author begins to make Yezad's growing religiosity appear really ridiculous. He marks off a portion of the living room, which contains a bookcase holding some texts that he values, to be a special sacred area. When Murad brings a non-Parsi girl to his eighteenth birthday part, Yezad forbids her to enter that area. He also puts special restrictions on Roxana when she is having her period, and tries to insist that she keep track of the periods of a servant girl. Roxana just ignores this nonsense. Murad makes fun of his father's obsession the way Yezad used to do with Coomy. Jehangir is probably the most effected. He cannot understand the changed behavior of his father, and wishes he were the way he used to be. Jehangir does go with him, however, when Yezad undertakes to get rid of some no-longer-wanted pictures of ancestors in a Zoroastrian-approved manner.

Emigration

The idea of emigration is not one that would appear to be a major theme of the novel, and yet the author brings the topic up on a number of occasions, so it is reasonable to assume that he has something to say about it. The first occasion is when Mr. Rangarajan, Dr Tarapore's assistant who is applying the plaster cast to Nariman's broken ankle asks him if he has any friend or colleague who would write a letter for him. Mr. Rangarajan had left India earlier and was working in a hospital in Kuwait when the war in that country forced him to return to his home. His reasons for wanting to leave are not fully explained, but the reader is given the impression that he is troubled by some of the conditions in India - he specifically mentions the threat of Shiv Sena - and that he enjoyed greater stature in his job in Kuwait.

Yezad's reasons for deciding to apply to Canada to emigrate to that country are not fully explained either, but the dressing down he delivered to the Canadian immigration official



who interviewed him became a family story - one which his kids beg him to repeat. It is after one retelling of the story that Yezad begins to ask himself why he has so carefully preserved the application papers. The answer comes to him immediately; it is because he has always thought that he might one day apply again. When he realizes that, he begins to tear the papers into a thousand pieces. Roxana joins him and they engage in a real orgy of paper tearing.

Nariman's view of emigration is that it is a terrible mistake. He feels that you never recover from the loss of your home.



Style

Point of View

Family Matters is written from the point of view of an omniscient narrator. The author knows every character's thoughts, but more attention is paid to what they do and what they say. What is in the mind of a character is shared with the reader when the knowledge will help the reader understand the character's motivation. For example, following Nariman's accident, the reader sees Coomy becoming increasingly disgusted by the task of helping Nariman with his bowel movements and his urination. We see her convincing herself - and subsequently her brother Jal - that Nariman's interests will best be served by dumping him on Roxana. At the last minute, before the deed is done, we see Jal wondering if they are doing the right thing.

In the Epilogue, which takes place five years after the main part of the novel, the point of view shifts to the first person narrative style. The person telling the story in the Epilogue is Jehangir. This recalls episodes in the novel that indicate that Jehangir may be the author of the book.

Setting

The setting is in Bombay around the turn of the 21st Century. It was around this time that the Shiv Sena, the radical nationalist movement, was scoring its early successes. Shiv Sena had a small number of seats in the legislature but added physical abuse and threats of physical abuse against the public to get their way. They staged violent protests against a movie because of its lesbian theme, forcing the film to be withdrawn. Another of their continuing efforts was to force the official name of the city, Bombay, to be changed to Mumbai. To accomplish this, they brought pressure on merchants who used the name Bombay in their business name, like Bombay Sporting Goods, for example, to change the name to Mumbai. Mistry, although he had himself emigrated to Canada over twenty years previously, used this Nationalist political activity to locate his story where he did and at the time he did.

Language and Meaning

Mistry is more interested in having a reader come to know and understand the characters in his novel than he is in telling the reader about Bombay, so he does not spend time describing the geography. The story is told largely in conversation, because by hearing a character's own words the reader comes to understand the character better. For example, it is more effective to have Vilas Rane tell Yezad in his own words how he feels about his work as a scribe than it would be to have the author describe it for you.



In most cases when the author uses an Indian word for an object, the reader understands what is meant without needing to have the word translated. The text of the novel is largely conversation. Various Indian words and phrases are included. Where it is necessary, the author lets us know the meaning.

Structure

The book contains twenty chapters and an Epilogue. Many of the chapters are broken into sections that resemble chapter breaks, but without a chapter number. A lot of background information is given in the form of Nariman's dreams. They are presented in an italic font, separating dreams from the rest of the text.

The chapters and sections are broken into scenes, sometimes with a double blank line, other times with a double blank line plus a graphic.

The difference between the styles is that the break plus the graphic indicates a break in time, in locale and in the characters present. The simple double line break indicates simply a break in time.

Breaking the story into sections and scenes adds a cinematic quality to the work, and gives the reader feeling that the story is moving along. Relating Nariman's dreams in Italic type serves to separate them from the main line of the story. The dreams serve the same purpose that flashbacks do in a film. They tell a piece of the story that is out of the main time line.



Quotes

Page references for the quotations refer to the following edition:

Mistry, Rohinton. *Family Matters*, New York, Vintage International, A Division of Random House, Inc. 2002.

"During her girlhood, relatives would scrutinize her and remark sadly that a father's love was sunshine and fresh water without which a daughter could not bloom; a stepfather, they said, was quite useless in this regard." Pg 4

"Taking his hand in hers, which was shriveled from burns in a kitchen accident during her youth she whispered, 'No happiness is more lasting than the happiness that you get from fulfilling your parents' wishes.'" Pg 12

"The aging wardboy asked him how he was feeling, did he need anything, were the pillows comfortable. Then he smiled - and Nariman felt as though they had just concluded a long and heartfelt exchange of ideas." Pg 51

"I have the feeling we are about to do a horrible thing." Pg 87

"She felt she was witnessing something almost sacred and her eyes refused to relinquish the precious moment, for she knew instinctively that it would become a memory to cherish, to recall in difficult times when she needed strength." Pg 98

"Everyone underestimates their own life. Funny thing is, in the end, all our stories - your life, my life, old Husain's life, they're the same. In fact, no matter where you go in the world, there is only one important story: of youth, and loss, and yearning for redemption. So we tell the same story, over and over. Just the details are different." Pg 197

"I think emigration is an enormous mistake. The biggest anyone can make in their life. The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills." Pg 220

"Careful! The post is moving." Pg 341

"Yezad removed the paper and found a folder in which there were three cellophane sleeves. They held the three photographs of Hughes Road.

He looked at Mr. Kapur. 'But. . . these are - '

'I hope you still like them.'

Yezad swallowed, running his finger along the edges. 'Thank you, Vikram. It's too much, it's. . . '"

'But I want you to have them.'" Pg. 331



"Now is there anything in the shop you would like to have for a souvenir? Something small, to keep in Vikrams' memory?"

'Actually, Mr. Kapur gave me a Christmas gift. I forgot to take it that day, in all the Shiv Sena commotion. Three photos of Hughes Road - he must have put them back in his desk for me.'

'Oh, I know where they are, Mr. Chenoy. But those are very valuable.'"

Pg. 369



Topics for Discussion

Should the word "matters" in the title be read as a noun, as a verb or possibly both?

Are Nariman's "dreams" to be understood as dreams, as the author's method of providing background for the action in the novel or as something else?

To what can we attribute the change in Yezad from a non-observant person who scoffs at Coomy's religiosity to the fanatically religious person we find in the Epilogue?

There are at least three important female characters in the novel: Roxana, Coomy and Mrs. Kapur. What do they tell us about Indian society? What about the roles of other women in the story? What do the men tell us about Indian society?

Yezad changes considerably during the course of the novel. Discuss the nature of the change and to what it can be attributed.

As Roxana and Jehangir are about to leave their flat at Pleasant Villa, both observe things that can be considered omens. Describe these omens and explain why they are so different.

Several instances in the novel suggest that Jehangir represents the author, Mistry. Do you agree? If so, cite three examples and discuss.

Vilas Rane's role as a scribe sets him aside from the other characters in the novel. Explain, and describe what point the author is making here.

An undercurrent of the novel is the idea of people emigrating. What significance do you attach to this?

No reason is given for the fact that Murad and Jehangir attend an English-type school. What do you think is the reason? Explain what bearing it has on the novel as a whole.