

Rooftops of Tehran Study Guide

Rooftops of Tehran by Mahbod Seraji

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Plot Summary

Rooftops of Tehran, a first novel written by Mahbod Seraji, chronicling the culture of Persia and the struggle of the human existence begins with the protagonist, Pasha Shahed lying on the rooftop with his best friend, Ahmed. Pasha and Ahmed are 17 years old and just beginning their last year of high school in the summer of 1973. Pasha reflects on how he and Ahmed first met. When Pasha moved into the neighborhood, he was bullied on the first day of school. Ahmed jumped to his defense even though it meant both of them were going to get beat up. Ever since then, they've been best friends. Ahmed is telling Pasha about the crush he has on a girl, Faheemeh. Pasha has his own crush on his neighbor, Zari. Unfortunately, Zari is engaged to Pasha's friend Ramin, whom everyone calls Doctor.

Ahmed tries to go after Faheemeh, but he finds out that she's engaged to someone else. Pasha encourages him to confess his feelings for her anyway, believing the idea of arranged marriages to be outdated. He does so and Faheemeh returns his affections. After hearing this, the other family involved in the arranged marriage call it off. Faheemeh isn't allowed to see Ahmed after that. Ahmed and Faheemeh work together to see each other, using Zari's home as a mutual meeting place. They bring Pasha along with them, and over the summer the four become close friends.

Pasha thinks back to how he met Ramin. Both men enjoyed reading and were familiar with literature that the Iranian government had banned for political reasons. The two became close friends, although Pasha never told Ramin how he felt about Zari. Ramin ends up leaving before the summer, with Pasha promising to watch over Zari while he is gone. At the end of the summer, Ramin returns, but he is being chased by the secret police, the SAVAK. Pasha watches as Ramin hides in Zari's house. One of the agents happens to follow his gaze and they storm the house and violently arrest Ramin.

Pasha feels incredibly guilty over that. Not only does he feel responsible for Ramin getting captured, but also the feelings that he has for Zari. Everyone in the neighborhood is angry with the government, believing the Shah to be a fascist dictator. Pasha plants a red rose bush in the neighborhood because it symbolizes peace. He does so in the memory of Ramin. Pasha and the neighborhood eventually find out that Ramin has been executed when the SAVAK show up demanding Zari's family pay the price for the bullet.

Everyone is devastated. The government doesn't allow for them to mourn for Ramin's death. Pasha continues to encounter instances of people in power being corrupt rulers. His father shares stories of his days in the military, and talks about some of his friends that had been arrested. Pasha even gets the chance to meet some of them and hear about the horrors they had to endure.

Every so often, the story flashes forward to the following year where Pasha is being treated in a mental ward. He doesn't remember how he got there, he just knows that he's injured. Back in the summer, Pasha and Zari are starting to grow closer. He reads



to her every single night and the two eventually end up kissing. They finally admit their feelings for one another, and Zari tells Pasha that he shouldn't feel guilty for what happened to Ramin.

Zari and the others go to see the Shah, much to the surprise of Pasha. At the parade, Zari runs out and lights herself on fire, claiming she's the mourning candle that Ramin was never allowed to have. Pasha and Ahmed run out to try and put her out. Guards end up attacking both of them. Ahmed is arrested and Pasha is brought to the hospital where he is being treated.

Pasha is devastated by the news of Zari's passing. Ahmed is released from prison though and Pasha gets to leave the hospital. Ahmed tells them that the SAVAK know they weren't involved with Zari's actions and they are innocent. Ahmed and Faheemeh have gotten engaged while Pasha was healing. He is grateful for this, but still sad about losing Zari. While he was gone, Zari's cousin came over to help take care of her family. Her face is always hidden in a burqa, and she seems to be fascinated with Pasha.

Pasha decides that he is going to go to college in the United States just like his family always wanted. He wants to tell the world the story of his neighborhood, to make them realize that Ramin and Zari were heroes fighting against an unjust government. Before he leaves, he realizes that Zari's cousin has been watching him, and that it is in fact Zari underneath the burqa. He gets to spend one last night with her. She reveals that she still loves him, but she had to hide as part of a deal her family made with the government. She wants him to go to the United States, but tells him she'll be waiting for him to return so they can be together as husband and wife.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1

Rooftops of Tehran opens in the summer of 1973 with 17-year-old Pasha Shahed watching the stars on the rooftop with his best friend, Ahmed. Pasha thinks back to his past detailing a few important events. He talks about how his father raised him to understand advanced vocabulary and has been preparing him for a life as an engineer. Pasha isn't interested in becoming an engineer though and wants to do something more meaningful with his life. Pasha also talks about how his mother is obsessed with natural remedies, and despite having no formal training believes she can whip up a cure for anything. She's constantly making him take strange concoctions, for both physical and social issues.

Pasha also reflects on how he and Ahmed first met. Pasha was new to the school and being bullied. Ahmed immediately jumped to his defense, even though it just resulted in both of them being beat up. They had been friends ever since. Both started to learn how to box from Pasha's father, but they were also taught that they shouldn't use their skills to pick fights with people and it should just be for defense. Pasha also briefly touched upon another student, Iraj, who is considered the smartest kid in their class. Neither of the boys like him though because he always seems to stare at Ahmed's sister.

Chapter 2

Pasha talks about how Ahmed is in love with a girl named Faheemeh. He thinks that Faheemeh returns his feelings because she seems to go out of her way to communicate with him. This makes Pasha think about the girl that he is infatuated with, Zari. She lives next door, but is engaged to be married to Pasha's friend, Ramin Sobhi. Ramin is attending the University of Tehran so everyone refers to him as Doctor. Pasha feels guilty about having feelings for someone engaged to his friend, but he is unable to help himself and frequently thinks of her.

Ahmed reveals that he faked an accident to get close to Faheemeh's protective brothers, which in turn allows him to be near Faheemeh. He ropes Pasha into joining them at a soccer match where Pasha can pretend to accidentally injure Ahmed so he looks tougher for Faheemeh. The next night Ahmed is devastated because he finds out that Faheemeh is going to be married off to someone else, a practice that Pasha's parents disagree with. Pasha feels bad as it reminds him of his own situation with Zari, whom is promised to Pasha's older friend and mentor, Doctor. He encourages Ahmed to tell Faheemeh his feelings. Ahmed does so, but gets beat up by her protective brothers.

The end of the chapter cuts to the winter of the next year. Pasha is in the hospital with several major injuries. He has no memory of what happened to him, suspecting that he



might have fallen off of the roof. He spends several days drifting in and out of consciousness due to the severity of his injuries.

Analysis

Chapter 1

The first chapters are critical for setting up the relationships that Pasha has with most of the characters. The reader gets a glimpse into his past and understand why he's so close with Ahmed, and also the close relationship that Pasha shares with his family. The reader also gets a firsthand experience with many of their personal biases and perspectives that will come back later in the novel. The initial descriptions also do a good job of setting the age of the main characters. Although Pasha only specifically mentions it once, through his first person account readers can see that he and Ahmed are still very much young teenagers and haven't yet stepped into adulthood, something that will happen as the story unfolds.

The symbolism of stargazing in this first chapter gives the reader the impression of the innocence of youth. Their dreams and their connections to family are evident in the conversations that the two have together. The stars also represent freedom and hope for the future, which both at this point in time in the novel are wide open. The reader learns that Ahmed wants something more down to earth and local, while Pasha wants to become a filmmaker, against his father's wishes. His father wants him to become an engineer. It is through their dialogue with each other that the reader learns something about Pasha's family and about Pasha's character. The story of how he stood up for Ahmed in the schoolyard, even though he knew that he, too, would be beat up, sets the stage for later actions by Pasha. It shows that he has little stomach for injustice, something that he is surrounded by on a daily basis (though at this point he is too young to know it).

Chapter 2

A lot of Iranian customs are explored as well, and readers get to see some of the differences between schooling in America or Europe compared to Iran. This is important because unless you specifically grew up in that area, a lot of the customs would be unknown. Even for those that are knowledgeable on the customs now, things were quite different in 1973 when the story takes place, and Pasha even notes some of these differences. This chapter also introduced Zari and Pasha's conflicted feelings for her. She is promised to be married to someone that Pasha greatly admires, someone called Doctor. Doctor's real name is Ramin Sobhi.

Interestingly enough, through this exchange between Pasha and his parents, the reader learns that Pasha's parents are fairly progressive for 1973 in that they, too, abhor the ancient practice of arranged marriages. When they learn that Faheemeh is to be married off to someone else, they feel badly for Ahmed and tell Pasha that it isn't right. A



sense of injustice presents itself in this moment and the reader begins to see a pattern with Pasha that will lead him to many hardships in his life.

Discussion Question 1

What is the author's purpose in including how Pasha and Ahmed first met?

Discussion Question 2

What does Pasha's father teach the boys about boxing and when to use it?

Discussion Question 3

What is the symbolism of the stars in this opening chapter?

Vocabulary

eccentric, vignettes, unabashedly, inaugurated, poachers, remedy, ailment, gallantry, introvert, concoction



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3

Pasha recounts how he first met Ramin (Doctor). The two bonded over their love of shared literature, especially banned books about communism. Ramin shares his belief that the Shah is a corrupt ruler who is just a puppet to the west, a belief that Pasha's father seems to share. Readers also learn that he got his nickname Doctor after trying to take care of his father when he lost his arm due to unsafe work conditions. His father was later fired, which is what opened Ramin's eyes to the government corruption. Later in the summer, a group of rebels are being tried for wanting to overthrow the Shah. Their leader, Golesorkhi publicly argues against the Shah, much to the surprise of everyone watching. The trial is pulled from the air, and Pasha's father laments that Golesorkhi is going to be tortured.

Pasha goes up to the roof where he sees Ramin painting red roses, the symbol of Golesorkhi, a rebel who has been arrested, on the walls. The next day, Ramin tells him that he will be taking a trip out to a small village near the Caspian Sea to help educate the people there. When he returns, he's going to marry Zari. Pasha is hurt by this, but promises his friend that he won't tell anyone about seeing Ramin painting the red roses on the wall.

Chapter 4

Pasha finally ends up confessing his feelings for Zari to Ahmed, something that his best friend had already been well aware of. The next day, Ahmed tells Pasha that Zari's younger brother has to build a doghouse as part of a school project. He volunteers them to go over and help so Pasha has an excuse to be close to Zari. Pasha is so nervous he can barely look at her or even speak to her, but Ahmed assures him that Zari couldn't take her eyes off of him.

The chapter skips ahead to winter again where Pasha is still recovering. He has a dream of himself, Zari, Ahmed, and Faheemeh all running together in a field. He wakes up and finds a woman taking care of him who he nicknames Appleface. She brings him water and tells him that nothing is broken. When he asks about the burns on his hands and arms, she seems surprised he doesn't know how he got them. Pasha ends up crying but he isn't sure why, but Appleface is there to comfort him.

Analysis

Chapter 3



Through learning about his relationship with the Doctor readers also get an idea of what the government situation is like, which will play a huge role in the book later. The reader sees that many of the Iranian people are unhappy with their treatment and are trying to resist in small, nonviolent ways such as with the Doctor simply looking to educate the people to take care of themselves. The government sees this as a threat because it takes away the power and reliance from them.

The symbol of the red rose is first introduced here as one of the rebels that Doctor idolizes, Golesorkhi, is publicly arrested and placed on trial. When the trial is pulled from the air, Pasha and his father fear the worst. They know that he will be tortured and treated as a criminal against the state...and anyone thought to be associated with him. Pasha is worried about his friend Doctor. Later, when he goes to the rooftop he finds Doctor painting a wall full of red roses, showing his solidarity with Golesorkhi. Pasha both admires and is fearful for his friend.

The rose, often a symbol of love, is used here as a symbol of rebellion, as a reminder of how thorny a rose bush is, how multilayered the petals and how sweet its perfume. All of these symbolically represent the desire for freedom from tyranny, and a return to peace.

Chapter 4

This chapter also give readers a look at the majority of the settings that the reader will see throughout the book. Most of Rooftops of Tehran takes place right in Pasha's neighborhood or the school. Readers also experience the first and one of the shortest time skips forward. This foreshadows the darker events that are about to unfold throughout the rest of the book.

The fact that Pasha wakes up disoriented in this chapter, with burns all over his hands and face, hint at some terrible tragedy occurring, though at this point the reader doesn't yet know what. Given the information that has been presented thus far, the reader can surmise that it has something to do with the rebellion and most likely, Doctor.

Discussion Question 1

How does Chapter 3 illustrate how unjust conditions shape a person's political views?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it dangerous to paint red roses, or plant them in Tehran?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbol of the red rose, and why the author chose it as a sign of rebellion and hope.

Vocabulary

demeanor, dialectical, materialism, intimidated, idealistic, irrigation, debilitating, serene, distraught, disingenuous, tranquility, bashful, inconsolably



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5

Ahmed brings Faheemeh and Pasha over to Zari's. They carefully sneak over so the neighbors won't see them hanging out together and start talking. Pasha is extremely nervous around Zari, but the rest of the group is quite comfortable which gives him a chance to learn a little more about Zari. Ahmed keeps trying to bring up impressive facts about Pasha, such as his intelligence, that he wants to be a filmmaker, and the fact that he's a boxer. Zari brings Pasha inside, wanting to give Ahmed and Faheemeh a chance to be alone. Since he declared his love for her, her arranged marriage seems to be off, but she is forbidden from seeing Ahmed.

While in the kitchen together, Zari comments about how good of a couple Ahmed and Faheemeh are, admiring the fact that they fell in love with each other and weren't just an arranged couple. She asks Pasha if he has a special lady in his life. He blurts out that he does and goes on to describe Zari, but doesn't mention her by name. Zari seems amused by his answer and says she wants to find out who he's interested in. She has her younger brother take a picture of the group, intending to make copies so they can all remember the summer where they became best friends.

Later that night, Pasha worries that he doesn't know enough about Zari to say that he's in love with her. He asks Ahmed how much he knows about Faheemeh, which ends up not being a lot. The two briefly panic over their feelings, wondering if they are really genuine or not. They eventually let the subject drop and just end up going to sleep.

Chapter 6

The group continues to hang out in secret each day. Every afternoon, it becomes harder and harder for them to depart. Zari continues to pull Pasha aside every so often so Ahmed and Faheemeh can have time to themselves. She says she enjoys watching the way that they evolve as a couple. One day, she shows Pasha her sketchbook, talking about how much she enjoys drawing different locations. She also talks about her cousin, Soraya, who she calls the Masked Angel because she wears a burqa. She talks about how beautiful her cousin is and how she wished she would do films.

A few days pass and Zari and Pasha are starting to get closer, though he's still respectful of Ramin and constantly reminds himself that he can only ever be friends with Zari. The boys end up giving roses to the girls. Ahmed's is red to represent love, while Pasha gives Zari a white one, representing a strong friendship. He notices that after he gave her the rose, Zari started to dress up more. He compliments her on the way that she wears her hair, and a surprised Zari says she'll start wearing it that way whenever he's around. Ahmed hears this and tells Pasha that his plan is working.



Analysis

Chapter 5

Out of all the chapters, this section might be the most important because it captures just how strong the friendships between all of the main characters are. The author does an excellent job of shifting between letting readers see specific scenes of the group bonding and general summaries so readers don't have to actually read about each individual day.

The friendship between Pasha and Zari is particularly important because their relationship is ultimately what serves to motivate Pasha throughout the book. In these chapters, he only hints at his feelings for Zari, but by the end readers are given the impression that Zari knows she is the woman that he is talking about. While Pasha doesn't realize it, readers as an audience get to see that Zari clearly seems to return these feelings.

Additionally, the reader sees that since Ahmed has declared publicly his feelings for Farheemeh, the arranged marriage has been called off. However, they are forbidden to be seen together. This facilitates the clandestine meetings between all four of them. Later, on a rooftop discussion, Ahmed and Pasha lament over the fact that they might not know if they are in love with someone or not...having never been in love before. The author is clearly indicating that teenagers are the same, regardless of the political nature of their country.

Chapter 6

Outside of setting up the relationships with the main characters. In this chapter, the reader sees Zari and Pasha growing closer. She shows Pasha her sketchbook and the reader sees that she is a sensitive, deep thinking, creative individual with the same longing for justice that Pasha has. She speaks about her cousin, Soraya, whom she calls the Masked Angel, because she wears a burqa all of the time. This mention of beauty undercover is a key symbol of the times in which the book is set. The area of the country is quite beautiful but is hidden behind closed doors and in whispers because of the people in power.

Likewise, dreams and ambitions are kept hidden undercover as well. Zari shows her sketchbook to Pasha, knowing that she will never be allowed to follow up on her dreams of doing it for a living. Likewise, Pasha shares that he'd like to be a filmmaker, but that his father is demanding that he study engineering. Both teens feel trapped and helpless to affect their own futures.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Pasha still a little uncomfortable around Zari?



Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the name, the Masked Angel?

Discussion Question 3

Why are Pasha and Zari pursuing studies in things they don't really enjoy?

Vocabulary

timid, threshold, habitually, inquisitive, seared, Zionism, immensely, revitalizing, broach, intuition, caricature, radiant



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7

The group gets together and throws a birthday party for Zari's little brother, using it as an excuse to all hang out without being judged by the rest of the neighborhood. Pasha and Zari continue to get closer as she asks for more details about his mysterious crush. He shares his theory about wanting to get to know someone before declaring himself in love. As he does this, he realizes that he knows so much about Zari. The two share a moment alone together and almost end up kissing. They're interrupted by Zari's brother coming in and asking for a shirt that Ramin got, reminding both Zari and Pasha about the fact that she's betrothed to the Doctor.

Later that night, Zari draws a picture of Pasha and a mystery woman based on the descriptions that she has. She says that she'll draw the face when she finally knows who it is.

Readers cut back to Pasha in the hospital where he keeps having dreams that keep him awake. He still doesn't know why he's in the hospital, and readers learn that he's been having trouble remembering who his parents are when they come to visit.

Chapter 8

Faheemeh is away for the end of summer, so the two boys don't feel comfortable going to see Zari. Zari herself is occupied with Soraya coming to visit. One day, Pasha overhears the two talking and it sounds like Zari had been talking about having doubts about her arranged marriage, though Pasha isn't positive that's what they're discussing. Towards the last days of summer, the Doctor returns, with the secret police, the SAVAK, on his tail. He manages to make it to Zari's where he tries to hide out.

Unfortunately for him, the SAVAK catch Pasha peeking over the wall into Zari's, where they figure out the Doctor is hiding. They catch him and begin to beat him in the street, but stop once a crowd begins to gather. They throw him into the car and drive off with him. Everyone has come out at this point to try and help comfort Zari and her family, as well as the Doctor's family who caught the end of the brutal display.

Analysis

Chapter 7

Once again the idea of innocence lost is introduced into this chapter. The advent of a party for a little 7-year-old boy is cause for celebration and happiness. It is all of that and more, until Zari's brother interrupts Pasha, just before he's about to kiss Zari. In asking



for Ramin's shirt (Doctor's shirt) he reminds Zari of her betrothal to Doctor. Pasha is stricken with feelings of guilt and anger at the situation. Once again, something beautiful must be kept hidden and secret.

The drawing that Zari has begun is also significant in that it represents the truth between both Pasha and Zari. Until now he's not revealed who it is that he is in love with. Zari has been trying, all of this time, to get him to tell her who it is, but until he is sure of her feelings for him, he's not sure he wants to tell her. However, he's given her enough information that she's able to make a sketch that depicts a beautiful woman without a face, and Pasha reaching out for her. She tells him that she will fill in the face, when he tells her who it is.

Chapter 8

This is a pivotal point in the book as the Doctor returns from being away in the countryside. While he is away, Pasha overhears Zari telling her cousin about her doubts about the arranged marriage. She says that she has feelings for someone else. This encourages Pasha, but before he can do anything about it, the SAVAK (secret police) have broken into Zari's home and dragged out Doctor, who'd been hiding there. They pull him into the street and begin beating him. Then he is taken away.

Watching his mentor treated in this manner, and watching Zari's reaction, Pasha is conflicted. He is both terrified, angered, and disgusted with himself to have ever harbored feelings for Zari, given her reaction to Doctor's arrest. He also feels guilty because he thinks it was his spying on Zari that tipped off the SAVAK as to where the Doctor was hiding. This is, of course, not true, but it is not something that Pasha will accept.

The concept/theme of community is demonstrated in this chapter. Doctor is dragged into the street where the SAVAK begin to beat him senseless. It is only when all of the families living in the alley begin to emerge from their homes that the SAVAK realize that they need to take their prisoner somewhere more remote to continue the torture. This type of solidarity will be a source of strength for Pasha and Zari as the story unfolds.

Discussion Question 1

Why can't Pasha and Zari date?

Discussion Question 2

Why would the SAVAK want to stop the Doctor in a public manner?

Discussion Question 3

How is the theme of Community introduced in this chapter?

Vocabulary

anthropologists, correlation, intoxicated, mantra, mesmerized, chador, commodify, laborious, ironic, vile, wretched, loathed, subversive, sanctuary



Chapters 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9

Everyone in the neighborhood is still torn up about the Doctor being taken away. Pasha tells Ahmed that he feels responsible, and how he wants nothing more than to get revenge on the agent that saw him looking over the wall. Ahmed reassures Pasha that it isn't his fault and nobody has once mentioned him as being responsible. He goes on to say that it was the Doctor's fault for drawing attention to himself in the first place while he was gone.

Pasha is still upset and tries to get back into reading. He starts studying up on the subject of anarchy, trying to teach Ahmed about it. Ahmed doesn't understand, but recognizes that something needs to be done about how depressed everyone is. He organizes a bunch of the boys together and manages to put on a comedy act that gets them cheered up. He says he did it in the name of anarchy, but Pasha isn't quite sure he sees the connection.

Chapter 10

School begins and Iraj talks to Pasha and Ahmed about how he believes the American government is spying on them all. This makes Pasha think about the only democratically elected leader, Mosadegh, who was overthrown by the Americans. Iraj believes that Mosadegh was only imprisoned and not killed because they knew his death would spark a revolution. Throughout the day, Pasha encounters all of his teachers and starts to explore their quirks.

Pasha remembers a time where his geometry teacher gave him a 0 on a test because he didn't like the way that Pasha came up with the answer, accusing him of cheating. This angered Pasha who tried to argue with the principal. The principal said his teacher didn't need proof, so Pasha just had to accept the grade. To Pasha, this is just another sign of people in power abusing their position.

Analysis

Chapter 9

One of the things that Pasha and Doctor shared was a love of literature, in particular, revolutionary material. They enjoyed reading Russian literature about revolts and overthrowing bad governments. He begins reading these works, again, to honor his friend. It is interesting to note that Pasha's father had, at one time, also kept banned literature that he read. However, when he married and had children, the risk was no longer worth it.



Pasha's attempt to teach Ahmed about anarchy falls on deaf ears, as Ahmed is about the 'here and now' instead of the later and potential life. This is also indicative of the mindset of the people during this time, taking each moment's pleasures as they happened because they couldn't be certain that there would ever be another.

Chapter 10

This chapter introduces the involvement of the U.S. government in Iranian politics. Iraj, a friend of Pasha's, states that the U.S. really runs the government, since they are the ones that helped the Shah come into power. This angers Pasha and he immediately determines that he hates all things U.S. Where he initially had dreamed of going to the U.S. to learn to be a filmmaker, or an engineer, now he vows to never step foot in such a terrible place.

In a direct parallel Pasha talks about an unjust ruler on a smaller scale as he describes his geometry teacher. In this instance, his intolerance for abusive people in power is made clear to the reader. His acceptance, but slow burn about the situation lay the ground work for future incidents. This entire event foreshadows an escalation that will take place later on in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

To combat his feelings of guilt about Doctor, what are some of the things that Pasha does?

Discussion Question 2

What is Pasha's impression of the U.S.?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the foreshadowing that happens in Chapter 10. What might happen later on in the book as a result?

Vocabulary

recourse, anarchy, precursor, stoutly, disciplined, sophisticated, blustering, temperamental



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11

Pasha is still feeling sad about the Doctor being imprisoned, not to mention he hasn't gotten the chance to see Zari since Doctor's imprisonment. He's also frustrated with school and the fact that he's being forced to go to America. Ahmed takes him and Iraj to see a movie, hoping that will improve his spirits. At the movie Ahmed's grandma is there and starts to panic when she sees the character in the movie getting into a fight. She keeps calling out for her deceased husband to come and save her. Pasha and the others are able to get her out of the theater where she calms down. Pasha admires the fact that she still feels so strongly about her deceased husband, even if she is so delusional about him.

That night, old friends of Pasha's father visit, the Mehrbaan's. At first Pasha is confused why they haven't spoken in 18 years, but it's soon revealed that Mr. Mehrbaan was arrested by the secret police on his wedding night. His wife waited all that time for him to come back, a fact which impresses Pasha. He hears about all the tortures that Mr. Mehrbaan had to go through and hopes that the Doctor isn't going through such treatment. Pasha's father offers him his first drink of vodka and tells him that now he is a man.

Chapter 12

A few days later, Mrs. Mehrbaan calls up Pasha's family in a panic. She tells them that the SAVAK returned and searched the house. They didn't say what they were searching for, but apparently they found something. They dragged Mr. Mehrbaan back into prison. Pasha asks his father why he didn't mention Mr. Mehrbaan if they were that close. He tells him that sometimes it's easier to try and forget about the important people that you might never see again.

He then goes on to say how Pasha and Ahmed remind him of the friendship that he and Mr. Mehrbaan used to have. He recounts the story about how they met in the army. There was a time where his father had been out of bed, but before he could be caught and punished Mr. Mehrbaan created a diversion and risked getting caught himself to make sure that Pasha's father was able to sneak away and get back into his room.

Analysis

Chapter 11

The story of Mr. Mehrbaan tells readers a lot about the state of the world, and also helps to reinforce some ideas that become important at the end of the book. It shows that the



government has always been an issue in Iran, and that many of the adults have tried to oppose it. Despite their efforts, nothing manages to change and readers see that many of them have given up. This is reflected several other times throughout the novel and is one of the reasons why much of the activism seems to fall on the shoulders of characters like the Doctor and Zari. The adults have just grown up feeling like they can't actually make a difference, and as adults they need to worry about protecting their families instead of trying to change the government, something which frequently results in imprisonment or death.

Also notable is the fact that there are two examples of enduring faith and love exemplified in this chapter. First, there is the belief by Pasha's grandmother that her husband, who has been gone for decades, is coming back. She is often depicted as confused or delusional, but despite it all, she defends the fact that her husband is still alive. And, in her mind, he is. Likewise, the reader sees that Mrs. Mehrbaan, too, remained faithful to her husband when he was arrested 18 years prior on his wedding night, and taken away. Again, the beautiful is destroyed and interrupted.

The symbol of vodka is introduced, here, in that it is used to symbolize a movement away from innocence, as is depicted in Mr. Mehrbaan's description of how he was wrongfully imprisoned and how he was treated. Throughout the novel, whenever innocence is lost, vodka is not far behind.

Chapter 12

Readers are given a look at how strict the government is not only during the imprisonment, but afterwards as well. Through Mr. Mehrbaan readers get a very detailed look at how the prisoners are abused. And it is just as evident how unjust the system is when he is re-arrested a few days later. It is interesting to note Pasha's father's response to the arrest and it is clear that the older generation have given up the fight. However, in a very telling statement, he says that Ahmed and Pasha's friendship reminds him of how he and Mr. Mehrbaan had been when they were boys and in the army together.

When Pasha's mother gives Mrs. Mehrbaan a special tea to combat depression, she tells her that it tastes bitter. Pasha's mother says that the more bitter the taste, the stronger its healing power. In this statement, the author would seem to be restating that old axiom...what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. This is not only for Mrs. Mehrbaan's sake, but is also a blanket statement about the Iranian people in general.

Discussion Question 1

List the two examples of enduring love that are exemplified in Chapter 11.

Discussion Question 2

What indicates that Pasha's father has given up his struggle against the government?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Pasha's father say that Pasha and Ahmed remind him of he and Mr. Mehrbaan?

Vocabulary

predicament, subdued, eroding, irrelevant, unbeknownst, brandishing, exempted, exasperated



Chapters 13-14

Summary

Chapter 13

Pasha finally gets the chance to talk with Zari again after several weeks of not speaking with her. He can tell that she's still clearly distressed about the fact that the Doctor is still in prison. Pasha reveals that he was the reason that he got arrested in the first place. Zari dismisses the claims, pointing out they had surveillance on the neighborhood for weeks. She wants him to promise to never feel guilty about it again. Pasha promises, but doubts he'll be able to do it. She asks if he ever gave the picture to the girl he liked, but Pasha says he hasn't.

A few days later, the SAVAK show up at Zari's, claiming that they want her family to pay for a bullet they used to execute the Doctor. This is how they learn of his death. There is a time jump in the narrative, and in the winter of the next year, Pasha has a dream that he is speaking to the Doctor, saying that he's responsible for his death. They discuss love and Pasha's dream version of the Doctor says that he was in love with someone else, which confuses Pasha.

Chapter 14

Zari asks Pasha and the others to attend the funeral with her. When Iraj hears about that he tries to get Pasha and Ahmed not to go, warning them that it could be a trap by the SAVAK. That makes Pasha realize that the SAVAK agent that brought in the Doctor will likely be there. He tells Ahmed that he doesn't want to give the agent the satisfaction of seeing him cry, so he and Ahmed promise one another they won't shed any tears at the funeral. At the funeral, Ahmed almost attacks the SAVAK, but Faheemeh and Pasha keep him from doing anything. Pasha realizes how grateful he is to have Faheemeh in his life, recognizing how much she clearly cares for not only Ahmed, but also Zari and himself. Iraj ends up showing up at the funeral to show support, despite the fact he initially protested them going.

Later that night, Ahmed and Iraj spend time with Pasha. With his parents out, Pasha decides to take some of his father's vodka which he shares with his friends. They get drunk, and vow that they aren't ever going to let the government do anything to crush their spirits.

Analysis

Chapter 13

This chapter shows Pasha confessing his feelings of guilt over Doctor's death and Zari telling him that they are groundless. Zari has given her sketch to Pasha so that he can



give the picture to the girl that he loves....which of course she's hoping he will give it to her. However, he doesn't make the connection and tells her that he hasn't given it to his dream woman yet because how can he think of love under such terrible conditions.

It is interesting that Pasha should mention a dream a year in the future at this juncture in the story. It tells him that Doctor was in love with someone else other than Zari. It is evident that Doctor was in love with revolution and that this is the something that he was in love with...returning Iran to a peaceful and prosperous nation.

The reader also learns, along with Zari's family, that Doctor has been executed. This news floors everyone who thought that at the very least he would remain in prison for a while, or be tortured, then released. The fact that he has been tortured and executed ripples throughout the alley and everyone is upset. Additionally, they are told that they cannot formally acknowledge or mourn his passing.

Chapter 14

The closeness of the main characters is shown once again as they try and support Zari at the funeral. Pasha and Ahmed vow not to cry because they don't want the SAVAK agents watching them to have the satisfaction of seeing the damage they've inflicted. This chapter also features Iraj, one of Pasha's other friends. At first he begs them not to go to the funeral, for fear that they too will be arrested. When Ahmed and Pasha declare that they will go anyway, Iraj takes a bus in order to catch up to them and stand by them at the graveside.

Later, all three of the boys drink vodka on the rooftop. Vodka is an important symbol in this book and it represents maturity and harsh reality. In a very telling statement, Pasha says that Iraj doing what he did, risking everything to come to the funeral, was proof of the indestructible nature of the human spirit. He says that no one can destroy it. Iraj responds that he'd do it again and that he learned that friendship is worth making sacrifices for...and Doctor proved that life is a small price to pay for one's beliefs. It is in these few short lines between drunken friends, that the author puts for some of the deepest truths in the novel. These are things, the author states, worth dying for.

Discussion Question 1

How does Doctor's death impact each character differently?

Discussion Question 2

What does Iraj learn as a result of attending Doctor's funeral?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism of Vodka.

Vocabulary

diametrically, phenomena, chide, sanctity, tentatively, pacifist, ideologist, immensity, integral, eerie, procession, inebriated



Chapters 15-16

Summary

Chapter 15

The SAVAK give strict instructions that nobody is allowed to mourn for the Doctor, or even acknowledge his death. They discourage everyone from going to see his grave, a simple marker that only bears his name. Pasha decides to do something to honor the Doctor anyway. He remembers the red roses that the Doctor painted before he left. He goes to the spot where the Doctor was taken and plants a red rose bush in the evening. That following morning, the rest of the neighborhood wakes up surprised to see it there, but they understand what it means and all talk about wanting to take care of it and preserve it in his memory.

On the 3rd, 7th, and 40th day after a person's death, there are gatherings to remember the deceased. It is while he is preparing for one of these gatherings that Pasha finds an old book that Doctor had loaned him: *The Gadfly*. This book is about a young revolutionary who was killed for his beliefs. He wonders if Doctor saw himself in this character. He misses his friend all the more.

Chapter 16

Pasha, Ahmed, and Faheemeh continue to hang out with each other, but Zari hasn't joined the group, as she is too busy taking care of the Doctor's mother. Mrs. Mehrbaan has been spending time with Pasha's family as she's struggling to deal with the fact that her husband is imprisoned, once again. One night she nearly has a heart attack when the family discusses the Doctor, as it makes her think what her poor husband must be enduring.

In October, Ahmed points out that most of the signs in the neighborhood are named after family members of the Shah. He also points out how strange it is that the distance of the alleyways is listed on the signs. He implies that the more respected the family member is, the larger the neighborhood named after them is. In his own little act of defiance, he decides to actually measure the distance, proving that what the government says and what the actual distance is are two different numbers.

Analysis

Chapter 15

It is interesting to note that in the opening passages of this chapter that the government has literally wiped Doctor from the face of the planet. There is no death certificate, and all documents pertaining to his birth were destroyed. No one is allowed to visit the



grave, and only Doctor's name is on the headstone. The reader learns that in Iran the death of a loved one has a year long process of mourning. .

Pasha takes his first steps towards rebelling by planting the rose bush to honor the memory of the Doctor, and the whole neighborhood supports him by taking care of it throughout the book. This demonstrates the theme of rebellion. While the Doctor being imprisoned had set many of the characters on the path of rebellion, his death is ultimately what drives them to later act, and will frequently be referenced as motivation later on.

Chapter 16

Most of these chapters is about exploring the many ways in which the government has unjustly acted, and also all of the ways that trying to resist has failed. Even when the people were ready to rise up in the past, the government was able to subtly exert their control by simply hiding what they did from public eyes. Everyone knew that it was still going on, but it was harder to resist because it wasn't something that they could physically see. This secrecy also created fear amongst the people. You never knew who could be an agent of the SAVAK, and all it took was an accusation and you could be whisked away to prison. The government regained control while making it look like they were initially giving into the needs of the people.

When he walks with Ahmed, Pasha notices, really notices, the place where he lives, its sights, smells, sounds. He says that he notices, for the first time, the unusual loudness of life, and compares his life before Doctor's arrest to a colorful motion picture projected onto a movie screen. Now, he shares, now his life is like an old black and white photograph that had yellowed and creased. This image of film is particularly poignant as he longs to be a filmmaker. It also demonstrates the theme of coming of age, of maturity. He 'sees' where he lives for the first time and how naive he used to be in regards to life that surrounded him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the community opt to care for the rosebush instead of pulling it up or hiding it?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of Pasha's life as a motion picture.

Discussion Question 3

What has Pasha learned about himself as a result of Doctor's death?

Vocabulary

pertaining, incarceration, condolences, regime, fabricated, fundamentalism, insurmountable, prosperous



Chapters 17-18

Summary

Chapter 17

Pasha's mother is worried about the way that Ahmed and Pasha are talking, especially about the SAVAK. Pasha's father tells them a story about a time when he was still in the military. He had been accused of accepting a bribe by someone loyal to the government. The loyalist was surprised that Pasha's father didn't try and beg for forgiveness or do anything else the accused usually do. He asked if he was innocent and Pasha's father decided to prove his point. The two switched roles and went to face the one who made the accusation. The man claimed that he would recognize the one who accepted the bribe, yet he didn't acknowledge the fact that Pasha's father had switched roles with the loyalist. The accuser goes on to mention that his father was the one who had offered the bribe and was already arrested. As such, he and his wife would have to take his house while he was in prison. The loyalist realizes that the man lied just to get a better home, not even caring that two innocent people ended up in jail.

Pasha realizes that his father was giving him a subtle warning about being too vocal about resisting the government, because it doesn't matter if you actually do something wrong. All it can take is an accusation to be brought down. Meanwhile, in the winter of the following year Pasha realizes that he is in a mental ward of the hospital. He complains about having pains and Appleface isn't there to treat him. She shows up and he feels comforted. He's surprised to find that she's a doctor and not a nurse. She gives him her number to call if he's ever having problems again. Pasha talks about how his family brings a red rose every day, and he feels like it should mean something but he doesn't know what. He later overhears the nurse talking about how if Pasha remembers whatever he has forgotten it will be devastating.

Chapter 18

Pasha's father takes Ahmed and Pasha on a trip to one of the smaller nearby villages. He takes them to meet one of his old friends, Mr. Kasravi. They travel through the town square and discuss the history. Mr. Kasravi is impressed with how much that Pasha knows. They discuss the way that prisoners used to be treated. Instead of being imprisoned, they would just be publicly tortured and executed. Mr. Kasravi laments that it was a dark period and is grateful that things have improved. Pasha doesn't verbally disagree, but he's angry that Mr. Kasravi thinks things are better just because they don't happen in the public square.

They return to Mr. Kasravi's home to have dinner, where Pasha's father apologizes for the lesson that Mr. Kasravi gave. They are joined by Mr. Mohtasham, a holy man who has taken a vow of silence in exchange for clairvoyant powers. He writes down predictions of their futures, fating Pasha to marry Mr. Kasravi's youngest daughter in 20



years. Pasha is horrified at the prospect of marrying someone so much younger than him, and was already doubtful that Mr. Mohtasham had any sort of gift at all.

Analysis

Chapter 17

Pasha and Ahmed also learn a valuable lesson about resistance, namely that you can't just try and use brute force to solve all of your problems. In his story, Pasha's father almost resorts to violence, but at the end readers realize that if he had, he would not have only taken an innocent life, but another innocent man would still be in prison while the guilty party remained free and got what he wanted by trying to frame Pasha's father in the first place.

Instead, Pasha's father's passive form of resistance got the SAVAK agent to realize the error of his way, as well as making it so the extortionist got caught. This also gives readers a rare insight into the mind of the SAVAK agents. Readers see that they are practically brainwashed into absolute devotion to their government and are trained not to even see the accused as people, just guilty parties. They blindly follow any orders they're given, and if someone is guilty they'll go after them without a second thought. This lesson is what ultimately stays Pasha's hand when he snaps against his teacher, keeping him from getting thrown in jail himself.

Chapter 18

In this chapter it becomes clear to Ahmed and Pasha why they've made this trip with Pasha's father. It was to hear Mr. Kasravi talk about the times before the Shah came to power, as if they were worse times. The point his father made was that rebellion must take into account whom it will affect, and what effect it will have on making change permanent. He also laments the loss of Persian culture and its potential to have been a leading power in the world. Now, as it is, he remarks sadly, it is a country just trying to survive.

What should also be mentioned is the little girl, four years old, who is Mr. Kasravi's daughter. The soothsayer that comes to the house and makes predictions about their futures has indicated that Pasha will marry her in twenty years. This appalls Pasha, but more telling is the fact that the little girl keeps saying that she is tired but that she cannot sleep. What this symbolizes is a young generation who are desperate for release from the strictures of past generations, wanting to be free, but unable to be free at the same time.

Discussion Question 1

What was Pasha's father's point in taking them on this trip?



Discussion Question 2

Why did Pasha's father tell the boys the story of when he was in the army and falsely accused?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism of the little girl who could not sleep.

Vocabulary

peculiar, loquacious, affluent, unwavering, perpetuate, heady, demeanor, ravenous, clairvoyance, reverently, ludicrous



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Chapter 19

It has been four weeks since Pasha has last seen Zari. He still feels responsible for the Doctor getting killed. In one of his classes they are assigned to write about a subject of their choosing, so Pasha decides to write about the injustices faced by criminals. He writes about how the rich are able to pay off the government for their crimes, so the poor are really the only criminals in the system. His teacher, Mr. Rostami is furious, but also sympathetic. He says he'll have to report Pasha and that he should have known better than to write something like that. He doesn't deny the truth of the paper though, but he says if anyone finds out he didn't report it he could lose his job and be unable to support his family.

Mr. Rostami ends up destroying the paper. He still reports Pasha, but he greatly downplays the severity of what Pasha wrote, making it sound more like Pasha wasn't really aware of what he was writing about. Pasha talks with his father that night about how he doesn't believe God cares about them. His father leaves and Zari reveals she's been behind the wall the whole week. She asks Pasha to read for her, and he does so for the rest of the week.

One night Zari isn't there, leading to Pasha feeling stressed in school the following day. His calculus teacher punishes him for not doing his work and ends up insulting the Doctor in the process. Pasha snaps and nearly beats up his teacher before leaving the room. The principal initially expels Pasha, but Ahmed has a private discussion with him and is somehow able to reduce it to just a three day suspension. Ahmed then angrily asks Pasha what he was thinking by ruining his future like that. Pasha snaps back that he's fed up with the system, that their inaction is the reason the government is allowed to be so corrupt and he just doesn't care anymore.

Chapter 20

Pasha becomes a legend at school, and everyone is proud of him for standing up to his teacher. Pasha gets to talk to Zari again, even spending the day shopping with her. She makes him promise that he won't let her get in the way of his school work again. He starts focusing on school, showing her his homework every night. The two begin to spend their evenings together cuddling. Zari's mother catches them, but she doesn't seem to object. Pasha ends up kissing Zari, which causes her to run inside. He spends the following nights waiting on the roof for her, even though it is getting colder. Ahmed shows up to support him, telling Pasha that he and Faheemeh believe Zari returns his feelings.



Ahmed gets Zari to come out and speak with Pasha. He confesses his love for her and Zari returns his feelings. She makes him promise that she won't get in the way of his life though and he'll still go to the United States and become a famous filmmaker. Pasha insists that he wants to take her with him, but she keeps hinting that there might be some reason she won't be able to go with him.

Analysis

Chapter 19

The first few lines in this chapter set the tone. It is October and the weather is bleak. Pasha particularly notes that the rosebush has lost all of its leaves and is bare. He says the nights have fallen into a deeper silence. This foreshadows some very traumatic events that occur in rapid succession. Pasha is still wracked with guilt about Doctor's death and his feelings toward Zari. His paper is written about Crime and Punishment in Iran. He states that punishment is most often designed for those who don't have the wealthy to cover it up. He says that wealth and power make those who are evil exempt from the ramifications of their actions. In this statement he is directly implicating his own country, but also the U.S. as being instrumental in assisting in the proliferation of violence in his country.

Later that evening, when he learns that Zari has been on the rooftop listening to him and Ahmed on most nights, Pasha is overcome with his feelings for her. She asks him to read to her, so he does. He reads part of a poem that speaks of hope and an end to struggle and strife. This is particularly poignant given what happens to Zari in a couple more chapters.

Chapter 20

Pasha also learns just how effective his form of resistance ended up being. Everyone in school ends up supporting him, showing that not only are they unhappy with the treatment, but they are willing to resist as well, they just need someone to guide them. Again, it is interesting to note that it is mostly the younger characters that want to resist as the older ones have too many bad experiences from their youth, and now they have families they want to take care of. This is clearly shown in the way that Pasha's teacher acts when he writes his paper. He clearly wants to support Pasha, but keeps lamenting that he has to report him because he can't risk something happening to his family.

It is notable that Ahmed, who is usually fun loving and nonsensical, is the one that is able to barter with the administration and have Pasha's expulsion revoked. This shows that Ahmed has learned to work from within the system, telling those in power what they want to hear, offering them a way out instead of confronting them with their powerlessness. This is a lesson that Pasha has not learned, yet.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the impossible situation that Pasha's paper places Mr. Rastami in.

Discussion Question 2

What is the symbolism of the rosebush with bare leaves at this point in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

What does Pasha learn about rebellion in both chapters?

Vocabulary

dissent, dispirited, rescind, pseudo, narcissistic, prolong, jubilant, serenity



Chapters 21-22

Summary

Chapter 21

It is the fortieth day since the Doctor's death, and also the same day that the Shah is celebrating his birthday. Zari wants to go to see him when his motorcade drives by. Pasha and the others go with her. Pasha suspects she is up to something, but doesn't know what. When the Shah passes by, Zari runs into the street and lights herself on fire, saying that she's become a candle for the Doctor. She throws a red rose at the Shah. Pasha and the crowd run out to try and put her out. Ahmed gets attacked by a guard and Pasha jumps to his defense. Both of them are knocked out by the guards. Ahmed is arrested and taken away.

Chapter 22

The story line cuts back to Pasha in the hospital, now fully aware of how he got hurt and why he is there. He's devastated about Zari and asks what happens to her. Appleface, whom he learns is actually Dr. Sana, tells him that Zari died and Ahmed was imprisoned. For the next few days Pasha is a wreck. Dr. Sana's husband comes to visit and talks about how much his wife talks about Pasha. He invites him to join them on a vacation, but Pasha declines. In his grief, he starts to curse God, hoping that if he does so enough he will bring his wrath down on Pasha and he can finally be with Zari again.

Analysis

Chapter 21

Pasha and Zari finally cement their relationship in this section. Again, readers are given an opportunity to see just how close they've become, which is important because it lets readers really experience the grief that Pasha goes through when he loses her. Through Zari, readers are also given another view of how people want to resist the government, and exactly what extremes they are willing to go through if they are pushed too far. Her eventual rebellion also makes a little more sense because readers get to understand why she chose a nonviolent path instead of trying to do something like take the Shah's life.

Zari's resistance marks the first time in the book that a character has so publicly protested the tyrannical rule of the government. Readers have seen some small examples like Pasha's paper and planting the rosebush, but ultimately all of that was done in secrecy, so no party could be held accountable. Zari changes all of that by directly facing the Shah and shouting about the injustices. Many people in the crowd are shown to share her thoughts, but they only do so in quiet whispers, afraid of getting caught.



Chapter 22

Readers finally get the explanation of the time jumps to 1974, and from here on out that serves as the setting for the book. This is also around the time that readers really get to explore why Pasha has become an atheist. Readers are also given another example of formerly rebellious characters choosing to give up their ways in adulthood through Pasha's doctor, Apple Face. Instead of trying to fight, her family simply opts to move away from the injustices and encourages Pasha to do the same.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Zari call herself the 'candle' for Doctor?

Discussion Question 2

What is Pasha's response when he realizes, in Chapter 22, why he is in the hospital?

Discussion Question 3

What do both chapters suggest about oppressive regimes and the people suffering them?

Vocabulary

imminent, fabrication, enthused, jostle, intuition, haze, exudes



Chapters 23-24

Summary

Chapter 23

Pasha decides that just like the Doctor, he doesn't believe in God anymore because he doesn't know how a God can be so cruel. He's told that Ahmed is out of prison, but doesn't believe his family. He starts to panic, fearing that Ahmed is dead; otherwise he would have come to visit. Ahmed does finally show up, but just for a few minutes. He says that they're all in the clear and the SAVAK knows they were just friends with the Doctor, but not actually affiliated with him. He says that the rose bush he planted is still being taken care of and people keep coming to see it. He also says that soon they'll be hanging out again just like before. Dr. Sana tells Pasha that she will be moving to avoid religious persecution. She'll be going to Sydney at the end of the week, and promises to write Pasha and send him a ticket so he can visit her.

Chapter 24

Pasha is released from the hospital and sent home. Everyone in the neighborhood eagerly greets him. At first he's worried that Ahmed isn't there, but it turns out that he and Iraj were waiting for him at the house, pelting him with snowballs when he arrives. The group plays in the snow for a while before retreating inside where Ahmed tells him what's going on at school. The principal had stepped down and was replaced with the strict religious teacher. There's also a new math teacher, Mr. Sheidaee that believes everything can be explained with mathematics. It's rumored he won't last long because his views are seen as blasphemous.

Once they are alone, Ahmed and Pasha discuss the changes that happened in the last five months. Ahmed goes over the torture he received in prison, how they gave him a roommate who pretended to be tortured as well, but was actually a SAVAK agent. Ahmed also tells Pasha that Zari's family have been avoiding everyone and took the death of Zari incredibly hard. Her cousin, Soraya, came back down to help take care of Zari's family.

Analysis

Chapter 23

This section of the book is ultimately about loss. Readers get to see what everyone has given up to try and fight the government, and what they aren't willing to lose which is ultimately why they have stopped fighting. This presents an interesting message about resistance. Readers have learned that a violent uprising isn't always the way, but at the same time readers have been shown that a passive resistance doesn't always get results, either.



The loss for Pasha is across all parts of his life. He's lost his true love, Zari, and the resistance has been squashed by the soldiers. While his bush still lives, in stubborn solidarity with the community, Pasha can take little comfort from it. He has lost, more importantly, his faith in human kind. This chapter is Pasha's 'dark night of the soul'.

Chapter 24

The theme of community is expressed in this chapter, as everyone in the alley turns out to welcome Pasha home. He is almost overwhelmed by their emotional response to him. Iraj and Ahmed wait for him at the house and ambush him with snowballs, as if they were, once again, twelve years old. However, after everyone leaves, and it is just Ahmed and Pasha again, they go to the rooftops to talk. Though it is very cold they brave the elements to talk candidly about Ahmed's time in the prison. He tells of torture and betrayal, but eventually he is acquitted of any crimes. Zari's family has taken Zari's death badly and have sequestered themselves away from the community. The cousin, Soraya, the one that Zari had always called The Masked Angel, has come to stay with them to help take care of them. This introduction of Soraya is an important detail that will be 'unmasked' in a later chapter.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Pasha decide that he's an atheist?

Discussion Question 2

What does Ahmed tell Pasha about his time in jail?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of community in these chapters.

Vocabulary

affluent, infuriated, scoundrel, consecrated, excruciating, charlatan, hypocrite



Chapters 25-26

Summary

Chapter 25

Pasha starts to visit some of the other families in the neighborhood. He is angry that so many of them are praising God for his recovery and Ahemd's return, but he wants to be polite and doesn't disagree with them in their homes. Pasha learns that Ahmed and Faheemeh are engaged, which he is overjoyed to hear. Pasha finally gets the chance to see Zari's family along with Ahmed. Both sides shed tears over Zari. Zari's mother thanks Pasha for always taking care of Zari. Her father tells Pasha that they plan on moving sometime soon, on suggestion of the SAVAK. Pasha tries to tell them not to move, and adds that the neighborhood will never forget her or the Doctor.

Chapter 26

Pasha's family shows up to celebrate his release. At first, Pasha is unhappy with the thought of having so many people over, but once his family shows up he finds himself enjoying their company. Much to their surprise. Mr. Mehrbaan is one of the guests that shows up, having been released that same day. This makes everyone celebrate further. Pasha's father tells Ahmed that he considers him a son, and the family celebrates his upcoming marriage with Faheemeh. The whole time, Soraya is watching from her home, but every time Pasha goes to look at her she retreats into the shadows.

Analysis

Chapter 25

This is the first time that readers really get to experience all of Pasha's family and see exactly how supportive the community is willing to be, which reinforces the theme of community. Everyone gets together to support not only Pasha, but also Ahmed and the other families that have been effected. Even though Zari's family denies support, people are still making an effort to reach out to them. Readers get to see forms of passive resistance through Ahmed reading the Koran. This is especially important because, as Pasha notes, it goes to show that even someone who has been tortured in prison can still have the spirit to fight back. Ahmed knows that he just has to be more careful about how he fights back, which is why he doesn't try to resist later on in the novel when the principal forces him to get a haircut.

Chapter 26

Although it isn't explicitly spelled out, as an audience readers get the chance to see things clearly aren't right with Soraya and are opened up to the idea that it may in fact be Zari in disguise. This gives readers a chance to see how much pain both of the



characters are in, even though readers are seeing it mostly through Pasha's eyes. This further reinforces why so many of the adult characters have become more passive in their resistance, because they either don't want to go through the pain that Pasha has, or they themselves have experienced it already.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Pasha be angry that the community would be praising God for his return?

Discussion Question 2

What clues does the author give that suggests that the Masked Angel may be Zari?

Discussion Question 3

What does Pasha say that Ahmed's imprisonment taught him about the human spirit?

Vocabulary

candor, disposition, triviality, inconceivable, emancipating, demeanor, refuge



Chapters 27-28

Summary

Chapter 27

Pasha continues to long for Zari and finds himself spending time in the spot where they used to sit. He falls asleep and has a dream that he's speaking with Zari and she's taking care of him, chiding him for sitting out in the cold. He wakes up and finds himself wrapped up in a blanket that doesn't belong to his family. He guesses that it was Soraya who wrapped him up in it. He keeps trying to get peeks at her, curious to know more about the person who now lives in the room of his former lover. He continues to spend more time outside where he used to be with Zari. He also finds that he's lost the sketch of the faceless angel that Zari had made for him. Finally, he decides to try and peek into Soraya's window, but he isn't able to get more than a glimpse of her.

Chapter 28

Pasha ends up talking to Ahmed's grandma. She claims that her deceased husband is coming to take her away for New Years. She tells yet another story about the two of them met, this one being completely different than the last time. Pasha listens to her, able to relate to her desire to see her husband again because he wants nothing more than to see Zari again. Ahmed brings her inside and sits with Pasha. He tells him that his grandpa was married to her for 50 years.

Analysis

Chapter 27

This chapter chronicles the loss of something beautiful and precious in the wake of war and revolution. He feels Zari's loss as if he's lost a limb, and he talks about having a hole in his heart. He is not allowed to go back to school, and his father has told him that they will be sending him to the U.S. to go to school since they are afraid that the SAVAK will change their minds and come looking for him. Getting him out of the country is their best option. However, facing the fact that he is leaving his home, community, and rooftop where everywhere he looks he still feels Zari, is difficult for him. This chapter chronicles several dreams and daydreams that he has about her.

Most notable in this chapter is the fact that the sketch that Zari made for him, of the faceless angel, has gone missing. This signals, at least to Pasha, that she is really gone. However, no one confesses to having taken it, or even knowing anything about it. The fact that it is gone is just another loss to Pasha.

Chapter 28



In a discussion with Ahmed's grandmother on the rooftop, Pasha listens to her speak about her long gone husband. He's asked her to go away with him this time she says. Pasha indulges her and she shares that when she was 17 she had an incurable disease. She says that being 17 is miserable business because that's the age that you realize that you have a heart and feelings get in the way of thinking. Throughout this conversation Grandma continues to walk precariously close to the edge of the rooftop, in an act of foreshadowing Pasha says that so many people die each year by falling off of the rooftops. At this point, she tells Pasha that love cured her, thus demonstrating the healing effects of love. She tells him that love is the most incurable disease that there is.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Pasha's grieving for Zari.

Discussion Question 2

Why is Pasha upset that the sketch is gone?

Discussion Question 3

What does Pasha's grandma tell him about love?

Vocabulary

detainee, hallucinate, melancholy, accentuates, fragrance, tremendous, bewildered, cognizant



Chapters 29-30

Summary

Chapter 29

Pasha has started to notice that someone is lingering outside of his window, sitting in the same spot that Zari used to sit. At first he thinks it's just his mind playing tricks on him, but he gradually starts to realize that it might, in fact, be Soraya peering into his room. He thinks he sees her at the spot where he and Zari used to sit together. One night he believes he hears her crying, but again he can't actually tell if it was her or not.

Chapter 30

Ahmed is having trouble with the new principal at school, their former religion teacher. He keeps trying to control everything the students do. Ahmed embarrasses him and the next day the principal forces him to shave his head. From there, he follows Ahmed to all of his classes, making the teachers ask him questions that he cannot answer just so they have an excuse to mark him down. None of the teachers approve of this, but they don't have a choice in the matter. Ahmed decides to get his revenge by memorizing verses of the Koran in Arabic, having done much of this when he was formerly in prison. He knows that their principal is unfamiliar with the language. Whenever the principal tries to harass Ahmed, he reads a verse from the Koran in Arabic and tries to get the principal to comment about it. This immediately embarrasses the principal who clearly has no idea what he's saying. He makes up excuses to get away from Ahmed and starts to leave him alone during his classes.

Analysis

Chapter 29

This short chapter offers the reader, as well as Pasha, some hope. He isn't sure whether he is dreaming, or if what he sees is real. That he is at first wakened by a woman crying loudly indicates that his is not the only heart broken at this time. When he goes to look out of his window and sees the Masked Angel sitting in Zari's old spot, he allows his heart to, for a moment, pretend that it is Zari again. Because of this he can't sleep the rest of the night. In many instances the theme of love has been chronicled. In this chapter it shows that it can transcend the grave, distance, or culture.

Chapter 30

Resistance continues, but it is Ahmed leading the way. In an attempt to make an example of him, the Principal at the school has decided to harass Ahmed until he acts out and he can have him arrested again. However, Ahmed proves that he has matured and thinks before he acts now. His act of memorizing long passages from the Koran



serve to protect him from the Principal as well as eventually winning his freedom from that persecution all together. In essence, then, the author is saying that religion plays a part in keeping the hopes of a people alive, and in many respects is the one thing that can protect them when other things cannot.

Discussion Question 1

What gives Pasha hope and despair when he views the Masked Angel on the rooftop?

Discussion Question 2

What has Ahmed learned to do to resist abusive authority?

Discussion Question 3

What statement is the author making about religion in Chapter 30?

Vocabulary

fascist, rosary, dejected, zealot, paralysis



Chapters 31-32

Summary

Chapter 31

Ahmed's grandmother ends up walking off the roof, thinking to get to her husband, and then falling to her death. The neighborhood is devastated and quickly arranges for a funeral. Pasha tells Ahmed that he could understand why his grandma did that, as he thinks that he has been seeing Zari outside of his window. At the funeral, Pasha takes the opportunity to go over and visit Doctor's grave. He thanks him for all the things he did as his friend, and promises that one day he'll save up enough money so he can get Doctor a proper headstone, not the cheap slab of stone that the SAVAK used. He cleans up the grave and finds that his friends and the rest of the neighborhood have gathered to pay their respects, offering up red roses. Pasha promises that one day he'll tell the story of their neighborhood, so everyone knows how brave Doctor and Zari were.

Chapter 32

Pasha decides that he needs to get away from his home, and that he will go to the United States. He finally gets the courage to tell his father he wants to be a filmmaker and not an engineer. His father jokes that he can always do a dual major, but seems fine with the decision. He uses his contacts with his friends to arrange everything for Pasha. Pasha is initially uncomfortable with faking a high school degree, but his father points out that he should have gotten one normally and it was just unfair circumstances that kept him from finishing out the year.

Before he leaves, he wants to go to Zari's parents and tell them everything. He struggles at first, but he manages to tell them how much he loved their daughter. They tell him that she loved him too, and that he will always be welcome in their home. Pasha panics when he realizes that they are moving and will be gone by the time he returns from college, but they promise they will find a way to get in touch with him.

Analysis

Chapter 31

Readers finally get to see the buildup of all the characters resisting the government. The neighborhood gathers at the grave of Doctor to pay respects, even though they have officially been told that such an act is illegal. They know that SAVAK agents are going to see them, but they just don't care. Pasha realizes that the agents can't do anything just because of how many people are involved. If they arrested a whole neighborhood, it would spark rebellion amongst the rest of the neighborhoods and turn into a full scale resistance. He sees just how much power the people have when they are willing to work



together, and when they are aware of exactly what is going on. This just gives him more reason to go to America so he can become a filmmaker and tell their stories.

The fact that all of the community bring red roses to Doctor's grave en masse is significant in that it symbolizes the community's support of the idea of Doctor's resistance and movement.

Chapter 32

This chapter sees Pasha reaching full maturity. He's determined to tell his community's story, to make Zari and Doctor live forever in his films. He also realizes a sense of loss, once again, as he learns that Zari felt the same way about him as he did for her. He feels her loss even more at this point. He also learns that the SAVAK have told his family that they need to leave the area for their own safety, showing that the government that he'll be leaving will continue to be up to their same antics.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of placing red roses on Doctor's grave?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Pasha finally decide to stand up to his father?

Discussion Question 3

How did it make Pasha feel to learn how Zari felt about him?

Vocabulary

pandemonium, continuity, resilient, stoic, preposterous



Chapters 33-34

Summary

Chapter 33

Pasha falls asleep on the roof, waking up when he thinks that he hears Zari's brother speaking with Zari. He runs over to her house, but finds that nobody is there. That gets him thinking about the way that Soraya has been acting. She was reading a book of poetry that Zari was supposed to have memorized. Zari always said that she never moved with a purpose, but every time he saw her it seemed like she was dashing into the shadows. He begins to wonder if it was possible that Zari's family made some sort of deal with the SAVAK and it is actually Zari underneath the burqa. He tries to get a good look at her, but is interrupted by Iraj. Still, he convinces himself that it is Zari and decides he can't move if his love is still alive. He wants to confirm his theory, but he recognizes that he needs to be careful not to blow her cover and bring the wrath of the SAVAK down on her family.

Chapter 34

Pasha tries to tell his family that he believes Zari is still alive, but they don't believe him. They give him a Valium and tell him to go to sleep. He passes out but wakes up later that evening. Determined to find the truth, he sneaks out of his room and goes out to look for Soraya. He finds her, overhears her reciting by memory their poem, and goes to confront her, asking if she's Zari. At first, she denies it and tries to convince Pasha she just wanted to know what it was like to be so in love. Pasha breaks through this defense though and she finally admits that she is Zari. The two embrace and discuss their love for each other and the events that they went through. Zari reveals that her family was able to strike a deal with the government where they would be banished and Zari would have to pretend to be Soraya. She didn't want to tell Pasha because she was afraid he would stay behind and the SAVAK would find out.

Pasha tells her that there's no way he can leave to the United States, but Zari insists that he has to go. She says that he needs to follow his dreams so one day he can return and make Iran a better place. She says that she will always love him, and will wait for him to return so the two of them can be properly married. Pasha is torn, but reassured at the fact that Zari wants to still be with him. He wants to go to the United States to become successful so he can return and be with her as proper husband and wife.

Analysis

Chapter 33

These chapters do an excellent job showing just how much Zari cares for Pasha. She isn't hiding from him because she wants to, but because she feels she needs to. She



wants Pasha to go to America to become a filmmaker and tell their story because she knows how important it is. Not only that, but she knows that exposing herself to him will bring the SAVAK back to the neighborhood. She might not be actively rebelling against the government, but she's still found her own way to fight back.

This chapter features the poem that they learned together as much younger, more innocent, people. It served as a bridge between them then, and it allows them to reconnect in the present.

Chapter 34

Pasha and Zari are finally reunited by the end of the book, even though Zari initially tries to resist. Readers understand why she was pushed into resisting in the first place, but also get to hear why she has gone into hiding. For Pasha, this acts as his final lesson about resisting the government, and it also cements just how strong his friendships have become, not only with Zari but the community as a whole. He knows that if he leaves for America the community will continue to take care of his rose bush, and he knows that when he comes back Zari will still be waiting for him, along with Ahmed and the others.

As much as *Rooftops of Tehran* has been about resisting the government, it has also been about the strength and love that goes into personal friendships as well as communities. By now, Pasha has seen that everyone around him is willing to rally together to support him. He didn't stand alone when he was at the Doctor's grave, or when he planted the rose bush. Even with his plans to go to America the community has supported him with getting all of the necessary documents. Zari herself was willing to endure the pain of not speaking with him for years because she believed it was the push that he needed to go to America and create a film which would bring into light all of the injustices they face, something that was critical if they ever wanted to free themselves from the tyrannical government. Not only have the characters stepped into adulthood and begun to challenge an oppressive government, but they've formed lasting bonds that can't be broken, not by the SAVAK and certainly not by distance.

Discussion Question 1

What does Pasha begin to suspect about Zari's death and her family's involvement?

Discussion Question 2

What has the author stated in this last chapter about resistance and revolution?

Discussion Question 3

How does the community show their support of Pasha going to America?

Vocabulary

expeditious, exaltation, accusations, dissidents, incognito, superficial, apprehension, magnanimity, somber, austere, ambiguity, masquerading



Characters

Pasha

Pasha is 17 and is wondering about his future. The book, initially, depicts him as full of hope, optimistic about his potential in the world. He is a deep thinker as evidenced when he tells Ahmed that he believes that all people are the same deep down, regardless of where they live. He understands, even at his age, that it is often the people in power who don't act in accordance with the will of the people. He does not blame the people in a country, only their leaders. He likes to sleep on the rooftop in the summer. First, it is cooler up there, but secondly, he likes to look at the stars. The reader gets a sense that Pasha is a very sensitive, intelligent, deep thinking individual, one who would be the furthest ideal of a good soldier.

Pasha is a very passionate person, both in his deep feelings for Zari, the neighbor girl, and for the resistance that is ongoing in his country. He tries to find ways to support the rebellion without getting caught, or directly implicating his family or friends. He has learned this from his friend, Doctor. He feels guilty about his feelings for Zari because Zari has been given in an arranged marriage to Doctor. While Doctor and Zari care for one another, it is clear that they do not love one another. Zari later tells Pasha that he should not feel guilty about his feelings for her. His inability to tell Zari how he feels about her causes him a great deal of heartache and confusion. Finally, when he is able to tell Zari's family it is too late.

Later on in the story, Pasha finds himself in a mental ward in a hospital. He is attended to by a doctor that he calls 'apple face'. She tells him that he has been badly burned. Pasha has no recollection of how he got there, or what happened to him. He also seems to have some sort of mental breakdown, or trauma because he doesn't recognize his parents at first when they come to see him, nor does he realize why they are giving him red roses when they visit.

The red roses are, of course, a symbol of solidarity and love, as well as a secret logo for the resistance. His friend Doctor, who was taken by the SAVAK and executed, once painted red roses on a wall. To honor his spirit, Pasha had planted a rose bush secretly in his village. This shows that Pasha is a courageous person whose sense of justice motivates him to great accomplishments and tasks.

Ahmed

Ahmed is Pasha's best friend. When the story opens he and Pasha are hanging out on the rooftops in Tehran. Ahmed is the first person that Pasha tells about his secret crush on Zari, the girl that lives next door. Of the two boys Ahmed is more of the risk taker, often instigating many of the adventures they get in to. This proclivity to leap before thinking propels much of the action in the novel.



Ahmed is also shown to have a sense of humor, always attempting to alleviate the suffering that he observes around him. He is the one that suggests throwing a party for Zari's brother so that Pasha can visit Zari openly. He also joins Pasha many nights on the rooftop to discuss all manner of issues. It is also Ahmed who staunchly declares that he will go with Pasha to the funeral when everyone has been warned to stay away.

Ahmed also has a temper, as evidenced by his actions at the cemetery. He is angry because in an adjacent plot others are allowed to fully and properly mourn their loved one, while they are relegated to staying still, quiet, and reserved at Doctor's service. They end up paying a wandering cleric to say a prayer for Doctor. This enrages Ahmed to the point that he starts to go toward a man who is standing on the street corner observing them. Thinking that they are SAVAK come to spy on them, he is so worked up that he almost follows through on his threat. It is only Faheemeh's interjection that makes him stop.

At every step of the way Ahmed proves himself to be a loyal and good friend to Pasha, retaining a great deal of his earlier innocence and optimism, even when Pasha can no longer do so.

Zari

A girl a few years older than Pasha, she does not know that Pasha is interested in her at first. She is poised, smart, and is also shy. Like Pasha she has an idealized version, romanticized ideals, about love. Though she has an arranged marriage to Ramin (Doctor), she has no feelings for him as they've been promised since birth.

Zari is depicted as being highly intelligent and a gifted artist. She sketches a picture of an angel with no face and Pasha reaching out for her. She gives the picture to Pasha telling him to give the picture to the girl that he is in love with. She does this to see if he will give the picture to her, so that she will know his true feelings. However, he feels terribly guilty about having feelings for her because Doctor is a close friend of his.

When Doctor is executed Zari is the only one left to make the funeral arrangements, such as were allowed. She asks Pasha and Ahmed to go with her. They do as well as Iraj and Faheemeh. Later, despondent over the regime that killed Doctor she sets herself on fire in a public demonstration. For most of the novel, Pasha believes her to be dead. However, later on in the novel, he comes to realize that she's been hiding as the Masked Angel, her cousin, for many months in order to avoid detection. In the end, Zari encourages Pasha to continue on with his plans to go to the U.S., to tell their story, then return to her.

Faheemeh

This is a young girl, about Zari's age. They are best friends. Ahmed and she have been seeing each other, and it is she that relays Pasha's feeling to Zari, initially. She becomes one of Pasha's closest friends, along with Ahmed, and is loyal and caring. She can



sometimes be very naïve, however, such as when they all sneak away to meet in secret. Later, as the reader sees her mature, it is clear that she is as rebellious as the rest in that she challenges the arranged marriage that her parents have for her. She says that she has feelings for Ahmed and they are shocked. Later, she and Ahmed do get married. She accompanies Zari to Doctor's funeral, though it was a dangerous act for anyone to do so.

Doctor

Doctor has been promised Zari in marriage since birth, and he aims to make good on the deal. He is much older than the others, but is so highly respected that everyone thinks that Zari is lucky. He is not unkind and is a kind of mentor to Zari.

The reader can see evidence of the mutual respect that Pasha and he have for one another in their discussions over various works of literature, and politics. The Doctor is very involved in the turbulent politics of the times, and is who Pasha sees placing up the red rose posters. While he is a learned individual, he is also naïve in that he asks Pasha to watch after Zari while he goes away for the summer, supposedly to help farmers learn better farming methods.

He does not like the government, and it is clear that he is involved in the underpinnings of a rebel group, comprised mainly of college students, who wish to overthrow the current regime. He is later arrested by the SAVAK. It is the Doctor's arrest, and the consequences that follow, that throw everyone into situations they could never have envisioned.

Mr. Shahed (Pasha's Father)

Mr. Shahed is a large part of Pasha's life. He understands Pasha and tries to guide his son's revolutionary instincts and inclinations. He tells his son many stories of when he was younger and also read banned books, and took part in inciting rebellion. He takes both Ahmed and Pasha to the mountains to visit a friend of his, so that they can understand what they will risk if they continue outwardly rebelling against the authorities.

Mrs. Shahed (Pasha's Mother)

Pasha's mother sees Pasha as a shy boy. She has a hard time realizing that her son is growing up and following in his father's footsteps. In a world where women are not valued, she has found a way to make herself stand out in the village with her herbal remedies. She is constantly taking care of everyone around them.



Keivan

Keivan is Zari's little brother. At first, Zari and Pasha use his birthday as an excuse to throw a party so that they can spend time together. Ahmed and Keivan play together on the floor which gives Zari and Pasha time together.

Iraj

Iraj is another boy that lives in their alleyway. He is about the same age as Pasha and Ahmed. He is that friend that tags along, never really instigating anything, but more going along with whatever is suggested. Iraj doesn't always think things through, either. There are several times when his actions cause both Ahmed and Pasha to have to rescue him. However, in his attempt to remain true to his friends he goes through a great deal of effort to go to Doctor's funeral and stand with him at the grave.

The SAVAK

The SAVAK are not unlike the Nazi secret police. They have complete authority to arrest those that seem to be engaging in subversive activities. Most who go into their jails are tortured or killed.

The Masked Angel

Originally, the Masked Angel is Soraya, Zari's cousin. She says that she is very beautiful, even if she hides that beauty behind a burqa. Later, it will be Zari who is pretending to be her cousin, and finally she appears to Pasha who immediately recognizes her.

Apple face/Dr. Sana

Apple face is the name that Pasha gives to the person who attends him in the hospital. At first he thinks that she is a nurse, but later understands that she is a doctor. She had heard what Pasha did for Zari and was so impressed that she wanted to take care of him herself. She gives him advice before he leaves, and tells him to leave the country, that it is no longer a place for dreamers.

Ahmed's grandfather

Ahmed's grandfather is a character that never actually appears in the story. He is frequently mentioned by Ahmed's grandmother though, who still believes that he is alive. Ahmed's grandmother shows a never-ending love towards her husband, even though he's gone, just like Pasha refuses to let go of his feelings for Zari.



Symbols and Symbolism

Red Roses

Throughout the entirety of the book, red roses are used as a symbol of passive resistance. Red roses represent peace. Whenever a character is unjustly murdered, red roses are used to signify that the person was peaceful and wasn't harming anyone. When the government bans anyone from mourning Ramin's death Pasha plants a red rosebush in his memory. The whole neighborhood takes care of the rosebush over the course of the book. Eventually, at the end of the book, everyone places a red rose at Ramin's grave as a sign of defiance towards the government and so they can properly mourn their friend and neighbor.

The Faceless Angel

The Faceless Angel is a drawing that Zari makes for Pasha at the height of their friendship. The Faceless Angel embodies all of the traits that Pasha tells Zari is in the woman that he desires. She draws Pasha trying to reach out to this woman, though she doesn't have a face because Pasha hasn't yet told Zari her identity. At the time, it was implied that Zari had already figured out Pasha was in love with her. The drawing with Pasha represents her desire for Pasha to open up and reach out for her to confess his feelings.

Illegal Literature

There are plenty of instances where characters are reading books that are banned by the government. This is how the Doctor and Pasha ultimately meet, and it's what almost causes Pasha's father to get arrested. Every time illegal literature is brought up, it represents a character choosing to defy the government and acknowledge that the Shah is treating them unfairly. When Pasha's father gives up his illegal literature, it represents that his rebellious days are at an end, as he now has a family that he has to take care of.

Vodka

There are a couple of times that the main characters drink vodka. The very first time Pasha is given vodka it's because his father wants him to be a man with him. After that, the characters are always drinking vodka when they're considered to be growing up. Pasha and the others next have vodka when they're mourning the Doctor. This is when all of the characters truly grow up and come to accept the corrupt government they live in. Pasha and the others share another drink when they are celebrating Ahmed being freed from prison and Pasha getting released from the hospital. Again, this marks a step into adulthood for them, as it's also around the time that Ahmed gets engaged and



Pasha decides to go to college. Lastly, Pasha drinks when the subject of his potential arranged marriage comes up, again marking another milestone into adulthood.

The Stars

Every evening when Pasha is on the roof, he points out the largest stars and names them after his friends. Pasha frequently uses the stars as a way to symbolize those characters relationships. When Ahmed and Faheemeh first become a couple he starts to name the stars next to each other after the both of them. When he believes that Zari is dead he also does this for her and the Doctor. Ahmed and Zari also both do this for Pasha himself, both placing his star near Zari's. When Pasha is getting ready to leave for college, he promises that he will continue to look up and name the stars so that he will always be connected with his friends and loved ones.

The Doctor's Grave

Pasha talks about how in Iran whenever someone dies they always get very lavish gravestones. Pictures of the deceased are frequently put alongside the stone, as well as poems and other items with significant meaning to them. Mourning also lasts for much longer, with specific days after the death being times where friends and family go to mourn the fallen. The government refuses to let anyone mourn for the Doctor though, and he's only given a poor stone marker that has his name on it. Near the end of the book, Pasha and the rest of the neighborhood gather to mourn for the Doctor, decorating and cleaning his gravestone and openly mourning him. This represents their resistance to the oppressive government and shows that they aren't willing to have their emotions be controlled.

Pasha's Father's Tree

Early in the book, Pasha talks about a tree that his father plants in front of their home. He frequently looks at the tree, only to see that it isn't really growing. By the time that he's ready to leave for the United States though, the tree is showing signs of blooming. This represents a few things: for Pasha, it represents that he's grown up enough to finally begin living his life as an adult. For the neighborhood it represents a different kind of growth. It shows that despite how hard the government has been pushing down on them and how many people they have lost, they will continue to thrive and grown. This is even supported when Pasha's mother comments about how many couples have gotten together and how they are going to start having children.

Pasha's Report on Fascism

In his grief over what the SAVAK have done to the neighborhood, Pasha writes a paper about unjust governments. Writing such a paper is considered a crime, one that Pasha's teacher has to report, even though he doesn't want to. Because everyone in class



knows that Pasha wrote it he can't take the chance of not reporting it, for one of the students might tell the SAVAK and then he could be imprisoned and his family would suffer. Pasha's teacher sends all of the students out of the room and tells Pasha how dumb he was for writing the paper. While he does report Pasha, he chooses to destroy the paper so when he does report the paper he can downplay the severity. While he does ultimately have to give in, this shows how willing the people of Iran are to go to protect one another and challenge the government without having to resort to violence.

The Doctor's Candle

When Zari lights herself on fire she runs in front of the Shah's motorcade and claims that she is doing it for the Doctor. The Shah had forbidden anyone in the neighborhood from mourning the Doctor, including the very common act of lighting candles. In direct defiance of that, Zari chooses the most open way she can think of to mourn the Doctor, turning herself into a literal candle. This shows the extremes that people are willing to go through in order to resist the Shah and his regime, and it was also Zari's way of making the world acknowledge the existence of the Doctor, something that the SAVAK normally don't allow with their prisoners.

Poetry

Poetry is used often between Zari and Pasha when they are together. Zari's favorite poet is one that Pasha has also studied with Doctor. The author uses poetry as a conduit which allows Zari and Pasha to speak and be together under the guise of studying. Additionally, the particular verse that is offered is one that has multiple meanings, such as freedom, love, sacrifice, and transcendence...which both characters long for. That Zari has committed the very long poem to memory is the one identifying characteristic that identifies her to Pasha at the end of the novel as only his Zari could have known that poem. When Pasha hears 'the masked angel' reciting the poem, he knows it is his Zari.



Settings

The Rooftops (1973-1974)

As the title implies, many of the scenes in the book take place on the rooftops of Tehran, specifically Pasha's as well as Zari's. This is where the characters constantly go to meet up. Pasha recounts much of his history, such as his friendship with Ahmed and his feelings for Zari on the rooftops. It is also where he and Zari first become a couple, and where they share their last moments before he leaves. The rooftops is also where the SAVAK spot Pasha looking into Zari's house, which leads to the capture of the Doctor.

Ten Meters of Shahnaz

This is the alleyway where Pasha and the other characters live, and also where the majority of the scenes take place. The most noticeable locations would be Pasha and Zari's home. This is where all of the characters initially become friends, and also the set piece for most of the action in the book, such as the Doctor's eventual capture as well as Ahmed's mother passing away.

The School

Pasha only attends the school a few times in the book, but it is referenced quite a bit in passing. The school is usually a place where Pasha will compare the injustices of those in power. Several times throughout the book it is also a place where characters try and rebel against authority. Pasha gets in a fight with one of his teachers and reads his paper condemning the government. Ahmed challenges the teachers as well as the principle who rules the school like a dictatorship.

The Graveyard

Pasha and the others only attend the graveyard a few times. The first is when the Doctor dies and they go to bury him. It is the first time readers get a good look at how abusive and controlling the government is when they deny the neighborhood the right to grieve for the Doctor. It also marks a turning point in their resistance, when at the end of the book everyone gathers at his grave anyway, despite the laws saying otherwise.

Psychiatric Ward (Winter 1974)

Many times throughout the series when Pasha is telling his story in 1973, readers jump forward to the psychiatric ward a year later. The Psych ward is where Pasha recovers and has to ultimately come to terms with what Zari did to herself.



The Prison (Various Years)

The Prison is a unique setting because readers never actually get to see it. Still, it is an important setting because it represents the heart of corruption. Readers are constantly hearing about characters being wrongfully imprisoned and tortured, including friends of Pasha's father as well as Ahmed and the Doctor. Just the threat of the prison is enough to cause characters fear. That's why Pasha's father stops resisting the government, and why Zari's family wants to hide the fact that Zari is alive.



Themes and Motifs

Tyranny

Palpable enough to be considered a setting or a character on its own is the theme of tyranny. The regime that is in power has declared a martial law that is so oppressive that the people struggle to go about their daily lives. This way of life has been consistent, the reader learns, for many generations, as evidenced by Pasha's father's experiences when he was in the military and was framed for a crime he didn't commit.

Tyranny is demonstrated in the way that Doctor is arrested, tortured, then executed while in jail and that there is a restriction on how many people can mourn him. Many are afraid of paying their respects, initially, because they don't want to be implicated or suspected of subversion. This type of living in a paranoid situation finally, after so many generations, breeds rebellion, and Pasha, Ahmed, Zari, and Fahreed, all example this type of spirit.

Next, there is a type of tyranny closer to home that is introduced as well. There is the tyranny in the classroom. Even the regular classroom teachers must bow to the religious overseers in the school. When Pasha puts the teacher in his place by using religion against him, he has struck a blow for them all, and even the classroom teacher cheers (once the religious teacher has left). This shows that oppression and tyranny, an abuse of power, doesn't have to come from a dictator for it to be just as oppressive and destructive.

Lastly, there is the tyranny that attempts to destroy love and beauty. This is exemplified by the true love of Zari for Pasha and her offering of herself as a martyr. Later, when it is revealed that she was badly burned, her beauty marred for life, this demonstrates how horribly destructive dictatorships can be to the innocent people and the beauty of the country. All of the precious and beautiful aspects of the country are marred by the iron grip of an abusive regime.

Coming of Age

Throughout the novel the reader gets to witness Ahmed and Pasha as they grow from young teens into young men, striking out into the world. At the beginning of the book, their innocence is exemplified by the simple act of lying on the rooftops and gazing at the stars, not a care in the world. The troubles that their parents have to face, the rules that, if broken, could lead to one's death, haven't touched them yet. They are lost in the carefree world of girls, friends, and school.

When Pasha begins to meet with Zari, and Ahmed meets with Farheemah, the reader sees the boys beginning to become men. They have chaste feelings towards the girls, as they admire and respect them. Pasha and Ahmed are both drawn to girls that are promised to others. Ahmed finally draws up the courage to challenge this tradition,



confronting Farheemah's parents. Pasha is sure that he cannot do this in Zari's case because she is promised to Doctor and appears to truly like him. Worse yet, Pasha likes Doctor, too, and considers him a great friend. This crisis of conscience brings about a maturing moment when his indication leads the police to arrest Doctor and take him away.

Other indications happen throughout the novel, such as Pasha's father giving him Vodka to drink. Considered a drink of adults, he offers Pasha a drink after the trouble at school erupts. He also tells Pasha that he should feel free when his father is speaking with the other men to join into the talks. He tells him that he should have asked about Doctor if he had wanted to.

When Doctor dies the remnants of childhood are gone for Pasha. He sees the brutality, not only in Doctor's treatment but in the way he is treated by certain teachers at school. When Zari sets herself on fire to make her point, Pasha determines that he will make a difference and get the word out to the world about what is going on in their country. This marks his transition into adulthood. When he decides to plant the rosebush it symbolizes his determination to fight the system from within as well as without.

Rebellion

When a regime as horrific as the one Pasha lives under continues for any length of time, rebellion is the product. Pasha and his family chronicle the often subtle ways in which the people get around many of the strict edicts they are forced to live under. For example, when the teacher reads Pasha's essay and notes the references to civil disobedience he is terrified for Pasha. He has been placed into a dilemma of epic proportions. If he turns the paper in, Pasha will most likely be arrested or punished severely. Instead, the teacher burns the paper, which is against the rules. Then, he turns Pasha in, but says that while the paper (which was mysteriously lost) didn't directly say anything subversive, he recommended that the council speak with Pasha's father about disciplining his son.

Another form of rebellion happens when Pasha honors his friend Doctor by planting the red rose bush. Earlier, Doctor had painted rosebushes on a wall near the rooftop. Now, Pasha takes rebels against the regime who has said that they cannot mourn or honor Doctor's death. By planting the rosebush, not only Pasha, but the community, have an opportunity to rebel and honor Doctor without fear of detection.

By setting herself on fire, Zari offers up the greatest form of rebellion: self sacrifice. When someone is willing to be a martyr for a cause that they believe to be just, it has the effect that it spurs and encourages more to rebel. Zari's 'death' does this. She says that no one was allowed to light a candle for Doctor and that she will be his living candle. Setting herself on fire before a large gathering got the attention that she had hoped for.



Love

The theme of love is explored in many ways within this novel. In all of its aspects it is shown to be uplifting, encouraging, motivating, and a consolation to the downtrodden. This is especially evident in the planting of the rosebush. This is not only a show of solidarity by the community, an outpouring of love for Doctor and what he fought for, but it is also a comfort for the family. It is also a way for Pasha to indirectly honor his friend.

Secondly, there is the obvious love between Zari and Pasha, though it is unrealized until the end of the book. There's a tragic love that is battered and beaten almost into non-existence by the oppressive authorities in power. Their love evolves through the novel, from a very chaste, idolization by Pasha. Then, he is guilt ridden when Doctor is captured and he realizes that his feelings for Zari were inappropriate. Then, of course, there is a maturing kind of love that goes beyond the physical and extends to the nature and character of the other person. His respect and admiration for her, sharing his dreams with her, and her with him, indicate a true and selfless love has developed between them. However, when she gives her life for the cause of rebellion, he is devastated and the reader sees how the thought of her sustains him, even when he is lost and incoherent in the hospital.

Love is also shown by the actions of the friends. Iraj, Ahmed and Faheemeh are staunch friends to Zari and Pasha. They go to great lengths to stand by their sides, such as when Iraj joins them at Doctor's funeral, having to travel many miles by bus and then on foot. Ahmed joined Pasha when they tried to put Zari out when she set herself on fire, allowing himself to be arrested in Pasha's stead. It is their love that gives Pasha the motivation to go to the U.S. where he will be free to tell their story to the world, a monument to their love for him, and his love for them.

Lastly, there is the enduring kind of love as evidenced by Mrs. Mehrbaan in waiting for her husband for 18 years while he was in prison. She hoped that one day he would be released and they would be together again. The fact that Mr. Mehrbaan was taken on his wedding night makes the crime and abuse even worse, Pasha states, because they were not able to be together. Later, the reader sees a similar type of devotion with Ahmed's grandmother (whom Pasha also calls grandma). She is sure that her husband, who disappeared more than several decades before, is coming back for her. She is so sure of it, that one night she walks off the top of the roof hoping to join him.

Family

The idea of family and community as extended family is a strong theme that runs throughout the book. There is a decided disconnect between the people who lead ordinary lives and those in power, and this is, in essence much of the problem with the violence that occurs. The author states at one point that the SAVAK don't view people as human beings when they arrest them, but simply as the guilty who must be punished, regardless of proof or innocence.



Pasha's family is shown to be fairly progressive for the time period in which this is set. The reader learns that Pasha's father was once not too different from Pasha, full of ideas, hopes, and the desire to make things right in his country. However, as Pasha's father says later on in the book, having a wife and a child tends to make a man rethink his revolutionary ways. Pasha's mother and father don't believe in the arranged marriages that have been traditional in the country for centuries. This indicates that they are supportive of their son and will embrace new ideas if it doesn't threaten the family. They support Pasha and his father, in particular, recognizes some of himself in both Pasha and Ahmed. This is why he takes them into the mountains on a trip so that they can meet his old friend and learn something of how things were before the Shah came into power.

The community, itself, is an extended family, supporting all of the other families in the alley. They take care of each other's children, many seek out home remedies from Pasha's mother, and they share connecting rooftops. It is clear that all of the families have lived in this area and known one another for many years. Their children have all grown up around one another and they form a type of solidarity when Doctor is taken away. They are also supportive and sympathetic to Ahmed's grandmother, and Doctor's family, as well as Zari's family when she lights herself on fire.



Styles

Point of View

Rooftops of Tehran is written in a first person perspective from the view of 17-year-old Pasha. At the start of the book the perspective shifts between the summer and autumn of 1973 and the winter of 1974 where Pasha is in the psychiatric ward trying to remember what happened to him after the autumn of the previous year.

Despite the different jumps in time, Pasha always describes everything that he sees in the present tense. Whenever readers get to the viewpoint of another character, such as Ahmed or Pasha's father, it is always in the form of a spoken story to Pasha. The reader also sees the point of view through various drawings (such as Zari's faceless angel drawing) as well as works of banned literature that are discussed.

Language and Meaning

Because the story is told from the point of view of a teenager, a lot of the language is more juvenile in nature. The younger characters like Pasha and Ahmed are frequently shown swearing at one another, something that the adult characters very rarely do. This is in stark contrast to the older characters who tend to speak in a more refined and mature style. In fact, whenever an older character does make a point of swearing Pasha usually points out how rare it is and how they must truly be agitated to use such language.

Because of the setting, many Iranian words are used throughout the series. Fortunately, when Pasha sees them we're always given a general idea of what the item in question is and he will frequently compare the item or term to something that is said or used in America or Europe, meaning the audience doesn't have to be particularly familiar with Iranian customs to understand what's going on throughout the book. Since the book also takes place in the past there are a few historic references that are made, again all of which are explained by Pasha.

Overall, the book has a very autobiographical feel to it, like readers are being told a story by Pasha himself. What's interesting is despite the very personal nature of the story, many of the main characters are never given names. Pasha never refers to his parents by name, and even Pasha himself is almost never directly referred to by name. Many characters are only given formal titles, such as Mr. and Mrs. Some characters are also only really referred to by nickname, such as with Ramin who, for the majority of the book, is called Doctor.



Structure

Rooftops of Tehran has an interesting structure. The book starts off like a normal narrative, in the summer of 1973. A couple of chapters in, however, readers, suddenly jump to the winter of 1974 with Pasha in the hospital. After that, the story returns to 1973 and only takes a few small jumps to 1974. After Zari lights herself on fire, the story permanently skips ahead to 1974, and from there on out the story is told directly from that time frame. Beyond saying the year and occasionally mentioning the change of seasons, time is usually only vaguely referenced. Pasha will comment that days or weeks have passed, but never go into specifics. Every so often the book jumps back in time when someone is telling Pasha a story, although the story is still technically being told in the present, it's just the speaker that uses the past tense.

This relaxed style of storytelling helps make a personal connection to the reader and really gives the impression that Pasha is just telling them a story. This is particularly fitting as several times throughout the book characters are encouraging Pasha to follow his dreams and become a filmmaker. Pasha himself even promises a few characters that he is going to go to America just so he can tell the story of their neighborhood. This gives the impression that the book is Pasha attempting to pitch the story and get the word out about everything that happened in his neighborhood.

The personal storytelling nature is also fitting because Pasha points out several times that the Iranian people value their communities. Readers see countless examples where the neighborhood bands together and acts as one giant family. A character even comments how inconceivable it is that in America children leave their home at the age of 18.



Quotes

Our house is the tallest in the neighborhood, which makes our roof an ideal spot for stargazing. In fact, naming stars for our friends and the people we love is one of our favorite pastimes.

-- Pasha (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 1)

Importance: This quote is significant because it speaks to the strength of family and friendships in Pasha's world. It is also a symbol of connection, as it will figure prominently throughout the entire book.

I can hardly listen to Ahmed's stories about Faheemeh anymore because I'm always thinking about Zari.

-- Pasha (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 35)

Importance: This quote underscores one of the main conflicts for Pasha in that he's in love with someone that he feels is out of his reach and does not return his affections.

So now she gives me a tablespoon of syrup that's supposed to help me cry when I need to." "Do you?" Keivan asks hesitantly. "Only when I'm taking her syrup." I twitch my face as if I'm drinking my mother's horse urine potion.

-- Pasha (Chapter 7 paragraph Page 65)

Importance: This demonstrates how Pasha's mother is always trying out some new remedy on her family. This is a large part of her characterization.

Dad puts his arm around my shoulder and pulls me toward him. "You aren't a child anymore. You can engage in adults' discussions. You should've asked him about Doctor.

-- Mr. Shahed (Dad) (Chapter 12 paragraph Page 112)

Importance: This is significant because it is Pasha's father recognizing that his son is growing up and is capable of holding conversations with adults. He tells Pasha that he should have asked about his friend and that in the future he should do so.

This is a massive world, I think, and in each centimeter of it, a different drama unfolds every second of every day. But we live on as if the next moment in our lives will be no different than the last. How foolish we all are.

-- Pasha (Chapter 14 paragraph Page 130)

Importance: This quote happens after Pasha and the others learn of the Doctor's death in prison. He and Ahmed have been asked to join Zari in claiming the body and attending the limited funeral that will be granted them. He sits on the rooftop of his home, looking up at the stars when he says the above quote.



In this country being innocent doesn't protect you from suffering the fate of a criminal. That's because we have a lot of nokars in this country. Servitude and blind devotion is what a nokar subscribes to." .

-- Mr. Shahed (Dad) (Chapter 17 paragraph Page 155)

Importance: This quote shows the way that the ordinary citizen in Tehran had to behave and think. Here, Pasha's father is telling him that he needs to never act suspicious or be caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I hate the CIA. They're responsible for Doctor's death, and the deaths of all the other young people executed by the Shah. You know why, Dad? If you teach me how to kill, and I kill someone, you are as responsible as I am for my crime.

-- Pasha (Chapter 19 paragraph Page 185)

Importance: This quote happens shortly after Pasha's paper has been taken by the teacher and he's been formally disciplined for his concepts about civil disobedience. He blames the CIA for the deaths of so many of his friends.

I'm lighting a candle for Doctor. Today is the fortieth day of his death," she cries. "I love you.

-- Zari (Chapter 21 paragraph Page 213)

Importance: This is a climax point in the book. Zari has determined to make a demonstration out of her death. She says this quote right before she lights herself on fire.

I'm now an atheist, just like Doctor. I no longer blame God for anything— after all, how can you blame a being that doesn't exist?

-- Pasha (Chapter 23 paragraph Page 221)

Importance: This quote is significant because it shows how far Pasha has fallen and what his current mindset is. He's despondent and bitter.

My husband went away once," Grandma says. "For thirty years, or was it forty years? I never thought I'd see him again , but he came back." Then she turns to Ahmed and asks, "He did come back, didn't he?

-- Grandmother (Chapter 25 paragraph Page 243)

Importance: This quote illustrates Pasha's grandmother's stubborn faith in the fact that her decades gone husband is still alive and will return. This same stubborn resolution is present in Ahmed.

She must have really loved you," I whisper, looking at Doctor's grave. "She gave her life to be with you. I'd give my life to be with her, but you two are together now, the way you should have been here in this world.

-- Pasha (Chapter 31 paragraph Page 300)



Importance: At his grandmother's burial Pasha takes a moment to go over to Doctor's grave. This is what he says at the graveside. At this point in the novel he does not know that Zari is alive.

Thank you, God, for bringing my Zari back to me! Forgive me for doubting your wisdom and magnanimity. Forgive me for living a godless life. Let me be your servant, and I promise to make up for my stupid ways.

-- Pasha (Chapter 34 paragraph Page 326)

Importance: Here the reader sees that Pasha has come full circle. He is no longer bitter, but a young man full of hope and love.