Persepolis

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARJANE SATRAPI

Born in Rasht, Iran, Marjane grew up going to French language schools in Tehran. Her family was highly educated and modern in its outlook, which put it in a difficult position when the Revolution that overthrew the American-backed Shah of Iran ultimately resulted in the establishment of a repressively conservative Islamic Republic. As a teenager, Marjane was sent by her family to a French school Vienna in 1984. Returning to Iran after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Marjane attended a masters program in the School of Fine Arts in Tehran Islamic Azad University until 1994. During this time she got married but the marriage was short-lived and the couple divorced within three years; after graduating, Marjane worked for a short time as an illustrator for an economics magazine. Marjane then returned to Europe and attended school in Strasbourg to study Decorative Arts. In 2000 she published the four volumes of *Persepolis* in French, which was then published in English in two volumes in 2003 and 2004.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The many events that Marjane illustrates in *Persepolis* follow a linear path from the 1979 Iranian Revolution, to the political and social upheaval immediately following it with the rise of the Islamic Republic after a nationwide referendum, to the subsequent Iraq-Iran War, which still rages at the end of the graphic novel. The 1979 Revolution, which was marked by mass protests and political disobedience, led to the fleeing and overthrowing of the autocratic the American-backed Shah, who had been the king of Iran after inheriting the title from his father. The Shah was particularly known for his attempts at modernizing the country, for his land reform policies, and his reliance on a brutal secret police to realize his aims. In 1980, Iraq attacked Iran, which led to the eight-year long Iran-Iraq war, which left hundreds of thousands of civilians and soldiers dead.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Persepolis is part of a burgeoning field of new serious comic books, often called graphic novels. While comic books were in the past not taken seriously, or seen as possessing much literary merit, this changed most prominently with the publication and following acclaim of Art Spiegleman's *Maus*, which was serialized in magazines for eleven years until a final and complete edition came out in 1991 and won a Special Pulitzer Prize in 1992. *Maus*, which deals as its subject with the Holocaust, was a harbinger for a critical reconsideration of the merits and possibilities of comic books.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood
- **When Written:** 1999
- **Where Written:** France
- **When Published:** 2003 (in English)
- **Genre:** Graphic Novel; Memoir
- **Setting:** Mostly Tehran
- **Climax:** The bombing of the Baba-Levy home
- **Antagonist:** The regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- **Point of View:** First person (Marjane)

EXTRA CREDIT

Polyglot. Marjane speaks six languages: Farsi, French, German, English, Swedish, and Italian

The Big Screen. *Persepolis* was turned into an animated film and released in 2007. It won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

PLOT SUMMARY

Persepolis opens right after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which results in the downfall of the American-backed dictator known as the Shah of Iran and leads to the rise of the religious hardliners who establish the oppressive Islamic Republic. Marjane Satrapi describes how she used to attend a French co-educational and non-religious school, but how this is outlawed because the Islamic Republic distrusts and rallies against all Western influences. Further, the regime forces all women and girls to wear **veils**. Marjane's parents, however, are modern and secular in outlook; though they supported the Revolution again the Shah, who was a despotic ruler, they are alarmed and dismayed at the fundamentalist turn of the new Islamic Republic. Forced to grow up quickly, Marjane begins to learn about the history of Iran and the many invaders and rulers it has had over its centuries' long history. Her own grandfather was a Persian Prince who was often imprisoned and tortured under the rules of the Shah. She also begins to understand that different social classes exist, and that this is one root of much tension and suffering in the country.

After the Revolution comes to an end and the Shah is ousted, many political prisoners find themselves released from prison, including Siamak and Mohsen, both Revolutionaries who have

been in prison for years. They speak of the tortures they experienced and the deaths they witnessed. Thinking of these two men as heroes, Marjane remains disappointed that her own father is not a hero, and that no one in her family is one, either. However, she is enthralled when she meets her uncle Anoosh, who fled Iran to the USSR so that he would not be arrested for his activities against the Shah. However, when he came back to Iran, his disguise was not good enough to keep him out of jail, and there he experienced much degradation. Marjane considers him a hero, and he hands her a **bread swan** he made while in prison. Unfortunately, soon afterwards, with the new radicalization of the country under the hardline government, the former political prisoners that were released become targets again, and Mohsen gets assassinated, though Siamak manages to sneak out of the country. Anoosh gets arrested, and Marjane is allowed to see him just once before his execution. This is the point at which Marjane rejects God.

Many of Marjane's family and friends leave the country, but the Satrapis decide to stay in Iran for economic reasons. Soon after, Marjane's mother gets harassed by men for not wearing her veil, and Marjane and her family go out on their last demonstration against the veil, which turns extremely violent. Soon after that, the Iraq-Iran War breaks out. This is a moment of great nationalism for Marjane, as she desperately wants Iran to defeat its enemy, but as the war goes on she begins to realize the cost of war, heroism, and of so-called martyrdom – something the government regime valorizes – when her friend Paradisse's father, a fighter pilot, dies while bombing Baghdad. The new war brings many refugees from southern Iran up north to Tehran and many young boys are enlisted into the army. They are given **plastic keys painted gold** as a symbol of the easy entry one enjoys into paradise after dying for the nation. Marjane and her family see this as a despicable lie, particularly because it is only told to poor people.

During the War, the country's policing of its people becomes more stringent, and the Satrapis' forbidden wine supply—as people still hold parties as an attempt at normalcy—nearly gets found out. When Marjane's parents sneak in Western items for Marjane—like posters and sneakers—after their trip to Turkey, two members of the women's branch of the Guardians of the Revolution nearly arrest Marjane. The Iraqis now use ballistic missiles against Tehran, which are very destructive, and one day the Satrapis' Jewish neighbors' home gets destroyed, though at first Marjane thought that her own house was hit. Nevertheless, Marjane is traumatized when she sees the severed arm of her dead friend Neda beneath the rubble of her house. Marjane, always rebellious, becomes even more so. She becomes bold, bold enough to slap her principal at school, and she is promptly expelled. Even in her new school she speaks her opinions, and Marjane's family thinks it best (and safest) that Marjane continue her education in a country that will afford her more freedom. Tearfully, Marjane leaves her family and makes her way to a new life in Vienna, Austria.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Marjane Satrapi – Marjane is a strong-willed, sometimes confused protagonist who we follow from childhood to burgeoning adulthood over the course of *Persepolis*. The confusion stems from her valiant attempts at trying to understand the embattled and restrictive world that she lives in—post-Revolution Iran—as well as her attempts at trying to maintain her dignity, independence, and individuality among often senseless torture, suffering, and death. The main threats to her sense of self and growth are the new regime's restrictive measures, most notably the imposition that all women must wear the **veil**, which disallows in public the kind of modern outlook and expression that Marjane would prefer. As a child, she must contend with being thrust into the consequences of the adult world without being fully able or allowed—even by her mother and father, who try to protect her—to understand the shadowy mechanisms that dictate the oftentimes sorrowful fates of her friends and members of her family. She reacts to the forces around her by variously denying, lashing out against, emulating, supporting, or resigning herself to them.

Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father) – Though many characters in *Persepolis* appear and then disappear, Marjane's parents are constants in the graphic novel, the two people who most affect Marjane, and whose cues and beliefs Marjane follows or alternately disregards over the course of her growing up. Educated, politically active, and modern, and accepting of Western culture, Marjane's parents represent for her an ideal mode of living. During the Revolution her parents demonstrate against the Shah and take other risks to achieve the kind of government they think is best for the people. They are dismayed, however, when the regime that takes the Shah's place is even more repressive, and though at first they demonstrate against the Islamic Republic, too, and even let Marjane come along—though they always worry about what information to share with her and from what she should remain protected—they realize the danger is too great. They continue living secular, modern lives—but only while indoors. Still, they wish to give Marjane the kind of education and life that will most benefit her, and by the end of the graphic novel they decide that what is best for Marjane is if she leaves them for the foreseeable future and completes her education in Vienna, Austria, away from the repressive Iranian regime.

God – As a child, Marjane finds much comfort in God, who becomes a friend as well as a source of support. However, as the world around Marjane becomes uglier and uglier, and as she comes to understand that much of this ugliness is a result of the hardline religious leaders who now run the Islamic

Republic, she begins to move herself away emotionally from God, and she finally banishes him from her life after she sees Anoosh in jail and knows he will soon be executed.

Anoosh – Marjane's Uncle who fled to the USSR after Fereydoon is caught and executed for opposing the Shah. He returns to Iran to see his family but, though disguised, gets imprisoned. He becomes a role model for Marjane, who considers him a hero. However, after the revolutionaries take full power they again arrest Anoosh (just because he was anti-Shah does not mean his views accord with the new regime's). He gets sent to prison again and executed, but not before Marjane gets to speak to him one more time in jail and he gives her a second **bread swan**.

Taher – Marjane's Uncle, he dies from his fourth heart attack after being frightened by an exploded grenade. Before he dies, knowing of his ill-health, Marjane's family tries to get him a fake passport through Khosro, but Khosro flees from the regime and a real, government-issued passport arrives only on the same day as Taher's burial

Niloufar – A young communist, Khosro hides this woman until she is caught and executed. Marjane's parents use her as an example to explain to Marjane of the dangers that young women face when arrested. Niloufar was forcibly married off to a prison guard and raped before execution because it is illegal to kill a virgin woman by the strict religious guidelines of Iranian law. To add brutal insult to terrible injury, Niloufar's family was then sent a dowry for the wedding after the execution.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Marjane's Grandmother –An early confidant of Marjane's. At the end of the novel she gives Marjane important advice about how to live and survive in a world with people who wish to cause other people suffering.

Marjane's Great-grandfather – Was emperor of Persia before the Father of the Shah overthrew him.

Marjane's Grandfather – He was a Persian Prince, and though at first Marjane gets excited by this fact, the truth of the matter is that he was often imprisoned and tortured for his communist beliefs.

Ramin's Father – Ramin's father is a member of the secret police under the Shah. Marjane and her friends at first blame Ramin for his crimes.

Ramin – Ramin's father is part of the secret police and Marjane and her friends decide to punish him for his father's crimes, though later Marjane tells him that she forgives him.

Siamak Jari – For a long time he is a political prisoner of the Shah's regime. He is released but later targeted for assassination. His assassins do not find him and kill his sister instead. He flees across the border hidden among a flock of sheep with his family.

Mohsen Shakiba – He is for a long time a political prisoner of the Shah's before being released after the ousting of the Shah. He is then murdered in his bathtub by the Revolutionaries.

Laly – The daughter of Siamak.

Ahmadi – Friend of Marjane's Father, Siamak, and Mohsen, who is tortured and executed.

Fereydoon – Cousin of Anoosh and the man who declared Azerbaijan as independent from Iran. He gets executed by the Shah's regime.

Paradisse – Marjane's friend whose father dies while a fighter pilot bombing Baghdad. Paradisse writes to Marjane, "I wish he were alive and in jail rather than dead and a hero."

Mali – Marjane's Mother's childhood friend who stays with Satrapi family after their house in destroyed in southern Iran during the start of the Iraq-Iran War.

Mali's Husband – Mali's husband, who also lives with the Satrapi's for a while after his own house gets destroyed. Marjane's Father considers him very materialistic.

Mali's Two Boys – Mali's children. These young boys are materialistic and not very aware of their family's losses and deprivations incurred during the Iraq-Iran War.

Mrs. Nasrine – The Satrapi's family maid, whose son receives a **plastic key painted gold** in school, which is a tactic used by the regime to tempt boys to become martyr's during the Iran-Iraq war. She loses her faith due to the way the regime uses religion to manipulate its people.

Mrs. Nasrine's Son – A schoolboy who receives a **plastic key painted gold** and is very unaware of how the government and the school are manipulating him into wanting to become a martyr during the Iran-Iraq war.

Shahab – Marjane's cousin who, while on leave from the army, describes the way young men turned into soldiers are convinced by the army that martyrdom will bring glory in the afterlife.

Khosro – A man who spent time with Anoosh in prison and agrees to make a fake passport for Marjane's uncle Taher but must flee the country before he can do so.

Neda – Marjane's friend and the daughter in the Baba-Levy household. After the Baba-Levy home is destroyed in fighting, Marjane discovers Neda's bracelet—and the arm attached to it—in the rubble.

Baba-Levy Family – The Jewish family next door to the Satrapi's who gets killed by ballistic missiles. They refuse to leave Tehran because their family has lived in the city for 3000 years.

Marjane's Baby Cousin – Marjane and her family take the time to celebrate his birth with the rest of her family even though sirens ring throughout the city day and night.

Marjane's Baby Cousin's Mother – She hands her baby to Marjane and flees without him as a siren interrupts the party commemorating his birth.

Mehri – Marjane's childhood maid and friend.

Hossein – A neighbor who sends Mehri letters.

Two women in the supermarket – Marjane and Mali's family overhear these two women denigrating refugees from southern Iran.

Hospital Director – The hospital director once was Taher's family's window washer. He has, since the Revolution, become very devout and reached a high position in society.

Two Members – These are two members of the women's branch of the Guardians of the Revolution who accost Marjane about the western clothes she is wearing and her improperly veiled hair.

Young policeman – He accosts the Satrapi family one day on their way home and threatens to search their house for illegal goods, but he quickly vanishes after Marjane's Father offers him a bribe.

Peyman – Marjane's friend who holds a party in his house.

Tinoosh – A neighbor who is arrested after someone informed the police about his holdings of forbidden Western party objects.

Kaveh – Marjane's friend who left to live in America.

Golnaz – Marjane's childhood friend.

Mashid – Marjane's childhood friend.

Narin – Marjane's childhood friend.

Minna – Marjane's childhood friend.

THEMES

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

RELIGION, REPRESSION, AND MODERNITY

Persepolis explores the intersection of religion and modernity, as well as the impact of religious repression on the religious feeling and practices of those who must endure it. At the beginning of the story, when Iran is ruled by the Westernized, American-backed dictator Shah, Marjane defines herself as "deeply religious" even as she and her family think of themselves as also being "very modern and avant-garde." In fact, her religion at the start seems like a type of freedom. Religion, Islam and Zoroastrianism, and its many stories and traditions allow Marjane an escape not only into fancy and imagined glory—she sees herself as the last prophet—but also into ideas of social equality, aid for the weak, and the end of suffering. In pre-1979 Iran, Marjane does not see religion and modernity as incompatible: in her self-written holy book she adds a commandment that "everybody should have a car." Indeed, God, who comes into the book as his own character, provides Marjane with much comfort, companionship, and meaning.

But the Revolution, which many Iranians supported because they wanted freedom from the decadent, violently oppressive, and foreign-backed Shah, ended up bringing to power a regime of conservative religious hard-liners who saw modern Western-style culture as incompatible with Islam. This new government—the Islamic Republic of Iran—soon passed laws that rigorously regulated all behavior on strict religious grounds and outlawed consumption of or interaction with essentially anything seen as Western, such as American music or clothing. Much of the graphic novel depicts how the Satrapi family, devoted as it is to Western ideas and practices, must hide these affinities behind closed doors (smuggling in, making, or buying Western luxuries like wine and posters of rock bands), while outwardly professing their devotion to the religious values defined by the rulers of the nation so as not to suffer terrible consequences that could range from beatings to torture to execution.

Further, *Persepolis* shows how, while Iran ostensibly became more religious under the Islamic Republic, the government's attempts to force their religious practices onto the populace actually causes Marjane and others to lose their personal religions. After the execution of Anoosh at the hands of the Revolutionaries, Marjane yells at God to leave her, and he disappears as a character from the graphic novel. Under the new regime, she can no longer explore and think about religion on her own terms, and instead religion gets co-opted for nationalistic and political reasons. For instance, Mrs. Nasrine, the family maid, shows Marjane and Marjane's Mother the **plastic key painted gold** given to her son by his teachers. The key, given to the poorer boys of Iran, represents their guaranteed entry to heaven if they are to die as soldiers in the Iraq-Iran War. Religion, here, becomes a tool used by the government to not only justify but make schoolboys want to go to a war that is almost certain death for them. Seeing such a usurpation of religion, Mrs. Nasrine expresses that though she has been "faithful to the religion" all her life, she's not sure she can "believe in anything anymore." Further, *Persepolis* depicts the hypocrisy of many of the representatives of the Islamic Republic, who declare their religious allegiance to the laws but also take bribes or overstate their devotion for the chance at extra money or promotion. The state-sanctioned religion makes *shows* of religion valuable as a means of career advancement, but does not inspire true religious values in many of even its

most powerful adherents. Ultimately, the graphic novel portrays the repressive religion imposed by the Islamic Republic as actually standing at odds with the heartfelt religious feeling and belief experienced by an individual.

NATIONALISM, HEROISM, AND MARTYRDOM

When the Revolution comes, Marjane, like her family, rejoices. After decades under the despotic American-backed Shah, she and her family believe that this moment will ensure that the Iranian people will finally be free to decide for themselves who will lead their country and how. Put another way, Marjane is an Iranian patriot and a nationalist, in the sense that she believes profoundly in the value and need for an independent Iran ruled by Iranians. Marjane's love for her country and belief that it should be free is so great that she feels the urge to fight for it, and glorifies those who do fight for it—particularly those people who die in the name of the cause: martyrs. Marjane, just a child at this time, thinks of heroism in romantic terms, and sees martyrdom especially as extremely positive and desirable. In fact, Marjane hopes her own family members will be heroes and she is disappointed that her father is not a hero. She is ecstatic when it turns out that Anoosh, her uncle, has had to flee to the USSR to protect himself from the Shah's government against which he was fighting.

Yet as Marjane starts to come to grips with the actual consequences of martyrdom and heroism—Anoosh, for example, gets executed by the new regime because of his former political activities—her positive feelings about heroism and martyrdom begin to fade. Even more importantly, as the Revolution results in a new regime even more oppressive than the Shah's, and an Iran ruled by Iranians turns out to be no better and in many ways worse than an Iran ruled by foreign powers, Marjane is forced to grapple with the very notion of nationalism. What country or which people should be the object of her nationalism? Though before and just after the Revolution she complains that her father is "no patriot" because of his pessimism, as she grows up and sees the actions and impact of the Islamic Republic she begins to recognize her own country's stubborn foreign policy and ideologically-driven warmongering for what they are. She realizes that the boys sent off to war as martyrs are being brainwashed and used, their lives wasted, in service to nationalism. She sees that just as nationalism can overthrow a dictator, so it can also be used to prop up a dictator. And yet, at the same time, when she hears the Iranian National Anthem, Marjane is "overwhelmed" with emotion. Facing this conundrum in her feelings about her country, Marjane begins to understand that she can both love her country and hate it at the same time. She begins to understand that a country is not one monolithic culture, one monolithic religion (her neighbors are Jewish, for example), nor one monolithic people: she sees how the people in Tehran make fun of southern Iranians, how the country is very much divided, and how there are many competing narratives about Iran's past, present, and especially future. Much of the book's aim, as Marjane explains in her preface, is to give readers at least one narrative about Iran: her own.

VIOLENCE, FORGIVENESS, AND JUSTICE

The historical body count by the end of *Persepolis* is enormous: from the start of the Revolution to the end of the Iraq-Iran War over a million people die—on the battlefield, in the streets, and in prison cells—killed by the Shah and by the Islamic Republic that replaces the Shah. By the end of the book, Marjane expresses her sorrow that "we could have avoided it all", indicating a belief that much of the damage done to the Iranian people was a result of the Iranian regime's own actions: its warmongering with Iraq, its radicalization of young soldiers, its religious fanaticism, its valorization of martyrdom. Official, legally sanctioned punishment for infractions as small as an improperly worn **veil** or the possession of forbidden party fare could be shockingly severe, including torture and death, and the people who carry out these punishments are usually agents of the regime. As such, Marjane claims, "it was really our own who attacked us."

Marjane must therefore contend with the reality of the complicity of the people around her. In the early days after the end of the Revolution, Marjane and her friends find out that Ramin's father was part of the secret police under the Shah that killed many people. They decide to get revenge by holding nails between their fingers and attacking Ramin. However, Marjane's mother teaches her that one cannot blame and punish the child of the perpetrator, who has nothing to do with the crimes committed. She claims that one must forgive, and Marjane takes this to heart. Later, however, after seeing the deaths perpetrated by the new Islamic Republic, she contradicts herself somewhat, saying that "bad people are dangerous, but forgiving them is, too." This comment suggests the realization of an impossible situation, the realization that despite what the storybooks might say, forgiveness is not a cure-all, that forgiving bad people won't magically turn them good. At one point, Marjane's mother claims, "Don't worry, there is justice on earth." But the book seems to constantly question the veracity of this claim. In *Persepolis* little justice is to be found.

CHILDREN, WAR, AND GROWING UP

The memoir follows its protagonist, Marjane, from childhood to young adulthood, and as such it traces the effects of war and politics on her psyche and development. By her own admission, Marjane thinks that the moment she comes of age occurs when she smokes a cigarette she stole from her uncle. However, by this point Marjane has encountered so much sorrow, death, and disaster, with enough grace, dignity, and sympathy, that her tiny act of rebellion

against her mother's prohibition of cigarettes comes across as hopelessly childish—as more of a defense mechanism against the repression enacted by the state than an act of maturity. What might have, during peaceful times, been seen as a rite of passage into adulthood becomes muddied by the heightened stakes of the war, and Marjane must grapple with growing up quickly even as she still retains many of her immature instincts. War both stunts and quickens her growth, and brings out both the weepy and sensitive child and the strong and willful adult in her.

Persepolis shows children to be extremely malleable ideologically and behaviorally during war precisely because children do not yet have the capacity to understand the complexity of the situations around them. For example, we see how many boys easily become radicalized and come to believe in the heavenly benefits of martyrdom because they are naturally trusting of authority. In fact, the graphic novel opens with Marjane professing the fact that she and her friends did not understand the meaning of the **veil** newly imposed by the Islamic Republic; they only knew it as a change from the time before, when they did not need to cover their hair. This alerts us to the fact that for a child born into this new rule, the rule will seem perfectly normal, just as not wearing a veil felt normal for Marjane before the Revolution. Children, thus, take their cues about what is normal in the world from the adults around them, and Marjane and her friends throughout *Persepolis* emulate in reality or imagination the roles of soldiers, torturers, demonstrators, prophets, heroes, and political leaders. Rather than thinking rationally or sophisticatedly about all the different players in this societal moment of crisis, Marjane at first follows or reveres anyone with power and popular appeal.

However, the graphic novel literally illustrates her growth into young adulthood as she becomes continually confronted with the contradictions and confusions of life. Marjane's growing up is complicated by the fact that the Iranian government understands that the children of today are the adults of tomorrow, and so wants to influence children to become adults who will support the Islamic Republic. Marjane's school thus becomes a microcosm of the wider world in which the government's ideology gets thrust onto the populace. Not only must the girls wear veils, whereas once they did not, but after the Revolution they must also tear out the photo of the Shah—a man whom they were once told to adore. This confusion leads Marjane to understand that she cannot simply follow the opinions of others—she must make up her own mind about the political realities and questions surrounding her. She must grow up.

THE PERSONAL VS. THE POLITICAL

Persepolis is a story about Marjane Satrapi, her family, her friends, and the people she knows—and also about the nation of Iran. These two stories cannot be unspooled from each other—one cannot be told without the other, and no individual in the story can exist or be understood outside of the context of the historical change happening in Iran around him or her, no matter how much he or she might try. From the start, Marjane's story is about how the individual engages with the political—as her parents demonstrate against the Shah during the Revolution—and how the political encroaches on the personal—as after the Revolution Marjane must suddenly wear the **veil** at school. Indeed, what Marjane at one point pinpoints as the source of the Revolution—class differences—she recognizes in her own family home: the family maid, Mehri, does not eat dinner at the table with them.

The question, then, becomes one of degrees: if one cannot escape the political in one's life, how much should one participate in the political sphere, and does one actually have a choice in the matter? For the Satrapis, the question manifests itself in questions over how much risk they want to take to protect their rights—do they want to demonstrate and possibly be beaten, for example? The Satrapis' solution is to try to recede as much as they can, to appear like good citizens of the Islamic Republic even as they privately hold parties, make wine, and buy imported goods. Yet even these choices are political acts, as they are forbidden and might lead to arrest.

Though Marjane cannot outwardly rebel much beyond improperly covering her veil, she finds small ways to resist the oppressive rules imposed on her by the Islamic Republic. The personal and the political, then, become inexorably intertwined in Iran. To assert one's individuality in clothing or spoken opinion becomes a political act. Furthermore, Marjane expresses that government policies really affect people's behaviors: "It wasn't only the government that changed. Ordinary people changed too." Under such a repressive regime, what once felt like an enormous separation between the public sphere and the private one considerably narrows. By the end of the graphic novel, Marjane's mother is both covering the windows to protect against flying glass—a consequence of the ongoing warfare, indiscriminate in its destructiveness—and from the eyes of prying neighbors, who might inform the authorities about the family's Western ways, which would be an individually targeted and motivated act.

GENDER

Persepolis opens at the moment in Iranian history when it becomes obligatory for women to wear the **veil** and schools become segregated by gender. The Revolution brings many changes to Tehran, but the changes imposed on women and men in how they dress and look—women must cover their heads, men must cover their arms and not wear a necktie—might be the most immediately relevant and personally frustrating. Over the course of the graphic novel, Marjane begins to understand that to be a

woman in her new society is to be subjugated to a lesser role than the one she expected to have in her younger years. As a child, she imagines herself a to be the last prophet, explicitly despite the fact that all the other prophets were men. However, as the graphic novel progresses, she realizes that though she "wanted to be an educated, liberate woman" this "dream went up in smoke" with the Revolution. Though she had once wanted to be like the celebrated scientist Marie Curie, she thinks that "at the age that Marie Curie first went to France to study [chemistry], I'll probably have ten children."

Marjane comes to understand that her destiny as a woman is dependent on the state's allowance or disallowance of women's freedom. Early in the days after the imposition of the veil, Marjane's mother gets assaulted for not wearing a veil, and at a demonstration against the veil Marjane sees women getting beaten up and even a woman getting stabbed. Though her mother thinks earlier that she "should start learning to defend her rights as a woman right now," Marjane understands this to be impractical and dangerous, so she resigns herself instead to committing small acts of disobedience, like improperly wearing her veil. However, she continues to speak out against the contradictions and unfairness she notices around her, which gets her expelled from school. Soon after her parents reveal to her the extent to which the state believes it has a right to control women's bodies—it is against the law to kill a virgin woman, so before executions of virgin women a prison guard will rape the condemned prisoner. The situation appears both completely hopeless and dangerous to an outspoken girl like Marjane, and so her parents decide to send her out of the country, to Vienna, where she will have the freedom to be and grow as pleases and befits her as an independent woman, an independent person.

SYMBOLS

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

VEIL

The **veil** is an extremely vital piece of clothing to Marjane's identity, not because she feels pious and wants to wear it and thus asserts it as part of herself, but instead because she *doesn't* want to wear it and must anyway. *Persepolis* opens with Marjane describing how she first has to start wearing the veil at school. This moment for her most markedly divides her pre-Revolutionary life and her post-revolutionary life, when the rise of the Islamic Republic creates an enormous schism in society between those who are traditionally religious and those who are not and prefer to dress with Western influences. Marjane, though she still considers herself Muslim, belongs to the latter category. But the Islamic Regime dictates the moral code of society, and Marjane must contend with a world that disallows her regular mode of expression. The veil for Marjane and for many women in Iran becomes the key symbol of repression, particularly against women.

BREAD SWAN

Marjane receives her two **bread swans** from Anoosh, her uncle who spends much of his life hiding in Moscow from the regime of the Shah or imprisoned by it, and who, shortly after his release from prison after the success of the Revolution, gets arrested and executed. Anoosh is a man who spent so much of his life hiding or imprisoned, and yet the bread swan represents his ability to maintain his humanity in dreadful situations. Having few materials to work with, he creates a sculpture of a swan from the bread he receives in jail. Despite its modesty, its splendor comes from the fact that Anoosh has been able to find whatever good remains in his situation and create a work of art. He has not become embittered or angry, but instead focused his energies on his sculpture. The bread swan indicates the redeeming quality of art, and suggests that Marjane's book functions in a similar sense of redemption after all the trauma and suffering she experiences.

PLASTIC KEY PAINTED GOLD

The **plastic key painted gold** is a beautiful object from the outside. Mrs. Nasrine's son is given the key by his teachers at school, to represent the "beautiful" idea that if he were to die for Iran in the war against Iraq he would be a martyr and immediately enter heaven. Mrs. Nasrine, however, sees the key, which being plastic is actually nothing more than a trinket, as propaganda and brainwashing—she believes that the regime wishes to sacrifice her son for the cause of a political war rather than putting any real value on his life. The key, then, is a way for the regime to further the war and people's enthusiasm for it, but it also comes to represent in the book how the regime's promises emphasize beauty and reward but are often self-serving and hollow. It turns out, also, that only the lower class boys, who are shipped off to the front, get these keys from their schools. The rich boys do not get fed such stories of paradise. Thus, the key also demonstrates the great class divide entrenched in Tehran's society.

CIGARETTE

When Marjane reaches her teenage years, she smokes a **cigarette** in order to rebel against her mother's strict rule. Marjane skips school in order to buy an illegal hamburger, and when she returns her mother yells at her and indicates that to skip school is to throw away her future.

Later that day, Marjane smokes a cigarette as a symbolic gesture against her mother's "dictatorship" and feels that she has reached adulthood. This insubordinate gesture, which is actually quite childish, becomes a way to deal with the heavy stresses of the war. On the one hand, Marjane wants to be a normal teenager; on the other hand, every move she makes might have enormous consequences for her future—taking the wrong step might ensure that, in fact, she has no future. Consequently, the gesture is broader even than Marjane intends, and is directed against all the repressions in her life: from her parents, who rightly pressure her to behave responsibly, but also from the regime, which makes life difficult and restrictive enough that she has to sneak around in order to lead what she considers a normal life. That Marjane uses the language of the regime—"dictatorship"—to describe her relationship with her mother indicates just how intertwined her personal life has become with the larger political issues of her day.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the L'Association edition of *Persepolis* published in 2000.

The Veil Quotes

We found ourselves veiled and separated from our friends.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

After the westernized Shah of Iran is overthrown by the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iranian women and girls are suddenly forced to wear a veil in public. The Revolution also led to the abolition of bilingual schools, such as the French-Iranian school that Marjane attends as a child, due to the government's belief that they are a symbol of "decadence." Thus, Marjane is forced to switch into a single-language, single-gendered school.

In this quote, Marjane refers to the veil as a method of separation not just from the public and a woman's body, but also between different groups of people and culture. Though she enjoyed a co-educational, secular and bilingual education prior to the Revolution, after Islamic Law was put into place, her world became much smaller as she was forced into a dogmatically-religious, single-gender and monolingual education. The reference to the veil here serves to represent not only the opression of woman, but also a curtain of sorts between Iran and the rest of the modern world after the Revolution of 1979. Iran, like Marjane, was veiled and separated from its "friends" (other modernized nations) after the Revolution.

I really didn't know what to think about the veil. Deep down I was very religious but as a family we were very modern and avant-garde.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Though Marjane's family is religious, her home life is not as devout as her school life becomes after the Revolution. This leads to tensions within herself as she grows up and hears one thing at home and another in school. Though she feels strongly about the religion she learns at school, it conflicts with her parents' views, two people whom she loves and respects above anything.In this quote, Marjane notes that she is unsure how to feel about the imposition of the veil in 1980. She has previously been religious in her heart, but feels oppressed when she is suddenly forced to wear the external trappings of religion--showing how counterintuitive any real state-sponsored or nationalistic religion is (since true religious faith is always a personal choice, not a government rule).

This quote is representative of Marjane's larger feelings about Iran as she grows up. While she knows logically that the sociopolitical situation in Iran is grim, she cannot help but feel deep love and allegiance to her homeland. Even when her parents help her escape the repressive regime by sending her to Vienna, she cannot bear to shed her "true" self in order to assimilate to Viennese culture, and she ultimately returns to Tehran. Marjane will grapple with her innate love but logical problems with Iran for years to come.

I wanted to be justice, love, and the wrath of God all in one.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Marjane notes that she was "born with religion," and feels deeply religious from a young age. As a child, prior to the Revolution, Marjane believed that she would be the next Prophet of Islam. In this quote, she notes that she wants to be both loved and feared in this role, and seeks to become a Prophet in order to fix the various injustices she notices in the world.

As a young girl, Marjane seeks to reconcile what she sees as problems with what she has learned so far from her parents and at school. Thus, she seeks to use the religion she deeply identifies with to fix these problems. This is representative of the strong will and rebellion that Marjane expresses as she grows up: she wants to embody love but also wants to be greatly respected, a model of power that is difficult for her to imagine outside of religion, particularly between the monarchy and the dictatorship that she experiences in Iran growing up. Marjane's wish to be a Prophet shows her need to establish a personal identity through deep soul-searching and a personal--not public or state-imposed--philosophy from a very young age. Even when she is reprimanded at school for speaking her childhood dreams aloud, she is steadfast in her wish and belief that she can bring about change.

The Bicycle Quotes

"The Revolution is like a bicycle. When the wheels don't turn, it falls."

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Marjane and her friends like to play pretend as "revolutionaries," dressing up as figures such as Guevara and Trotsky. Though they don't quite know what this revolution will bring--nor does anyone--they are excited at the idea of a rebellious change to the status quo. In this quote, Marjane likens the Revolution to a bicycle--if no one is pedaling its wheels, such as the Revolutionaries they hope to embody, it falls.

Even though Marjane identified as very religious from a young age, the idea of a revolution that could change the way her world works is enough to push the idea of Prophet-hood from her mind. While the metaphor of the bicycle is clever, the fact that Marjane and her friends make a game of the bloody disputes across the country shows that they do not fully understand the consequences of the political conflict. It is likely that Marjane heard this phrase from her parents, in the media, or from friends at school. Marjane is therefore at a phase in her life where she absorbs her surroundings like a sponge, but still has difficulties processing her own nuanced points of view on various issues such as politics, war, and religion.

The Water Cell Quotes

As for me, I love the King, he was chosen by God.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

After a long day of protesting against oppressive government policies, Marjane's parents come home exhausted. When she demands that they play a game of Monopoly with her (a board game that takes a notoriously long time to complete), they tell her they are too tired. Angry, she lashes out against her parents' demonstrations, here claiming that she loves the King, as "he was chosen by God."

In this quote, Marjane parrots what she learned in school. She is too young to understand that her education is controlled by the government. To her, it is inconceivable that she would be taught something in school that is not true. Her belief that the King (Shah) of Iran was chosen by God is indicative of her fierce loyalty, even at a very young age. Iran comes first in her heart, even as she grows up and learns of its problems from her parents. Marjane comes to be proud of her parents' active roles in the resistance to repression, and learns to be skeptical of even the things she learns in school--but at the same time she never loses her loyalty to Iran itself, despite its different corrupt governments.

Persepolis Quotes

"You know, my child, since the dawn of time, dynasties have succeeded each other but the kings always kept their promises. The Shah kept none."

Related Characters: Marjane's Grandmother (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

After learning that her grandfather was in line for the throne of Iran, Marjane asks her grandmother to tell her more about his life and time in jail. Marjane's grandmother tells her about the problems Iran faced prior to the Revolution, but does not directly address the life and times of Marjane's grandfather. In this quote, Marjane's grandmother explains to Marjane that the tyrannical rule of the Shah was a deviation from the Shahs that came before him, thus leading to the current Revolution.

As a young child, Marjane takes everything she hears at face value, and is still learning to understand the complexities and nuances of people's points of view and positions. Though Marjane has learned much about the Revolution through hearsay at school and from eavesdropping on her parents, Marjane's grandmother tries to break down politics into concepts she, as a young girl, can understand, such as the making and breaking of promises. Marjane's grandmother, like her uncle Anoosh, helps to shape Marjane's understanding of her world and her country by explaining things in terms she can comprehend at her age and experience. Thus, a young girl can understand why the revolutionaries, such as her parents, are angry at a Shah who has broken promises unlike (supposedly) any ruler that has come before him.

"All the country's money went into ridiculous celebrations of the 2500 years of dynasty and other frivolities...all of this to impress heads of state; the population couldn't have cared less."

Related Characters: Marjane's Grandmother (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Marjane's grandmother continues to explain the sociopolitical situation that led to the Revolution. Here, she tells Marjane that the Shah was "ten times worse" than his father had been, and spent all of the government's money on frivolous celebrations of the State. Meanwhile, Iranian citizens were starving and living in desperate poverty. Many revolutionaries were sparked by the injustice they felt from a government that served itself rather than its constituents.

At this moment in history, Iran was receiving a lot of attention from nations around the world due to its abundant oil reserves. Marjane's grandmother suggests that these lavish displays of wealth were ploys to earn respect and interest from other heads of state throughout the globe, to assert Iran's wealth and power. This came at the expense of most Iranians, and ultimately led to uprising and the Revolution.

By hearing the events that led to the Revolution, Marjane slowly begins to grasp how important it is to her parents that they demonstrate against the rules they find to be repressive and detrimental to their fellow Iranians. Rather than continuing to feel angry at her parents' exhaustion and long hours away from home, Marjane feels proud that she has such politically active and brave parents.

The Letter Quotes

The reason for my shame and for the revolution is the same: the difference between social classes

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Eager to learn more about her country's history and the reasons for the Revolution, Marjane devours a number of books, both historical and fictional, that describe the inequality in Iran. She particularly likes books byAli Ashraf Darvishian, "a kind of local Charles Dickens," whose stories depict those who live in deep poverty in Iran. (Charles Dickens wrote many stories about social and economic equality in 19th century England.)

In this quote, Marjane expresses a kind of relief and also guilt at finally understanding why she feels shame when she rides in her father's Cadillac: though she has problems and difficulties in her own life, her economic and social standing

means that many of her struggles will never come close to the gravity of pain felt by many of her countrymen. Though her family is not currently involved in the government, she comes from royal lineage and enjoys the creature comforts that come from socioeconomic security, such as a nice home, car, education, and a live-in maid. Here, Marjane realizes that the same things that make her life comfortable, that make her feel shame when she drives past impoverished Iranians with her father, are also what have directly inspired her country to revolt.

❝ "You must understand that their love was impossible…because in this country you must stay within your own social class."

Related Characters: Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father) (speaker), Mehri, Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Thinking about social and economic inequality in Iran reminds Marjane of the case of her family's maid Mehri, and her crush on the boy living in the neighborhood. Mehri was sent to live with Marjane's family at age eight because her family could not take care of her. Though she is technically their live-in help, she was raised alongside Marjane as if they were sisters, and they often slept in the same bed. Marjane helped Mehri, who could not read or write, compose letters to the neighborhood boy. When Marjane's father discovers the letters, he immediately recognizes his daughter's handwriting. He tells the boy that Mehri is not his daughter, but a maid, which ceases the relationship. In this quote, he explains to Marjane that Mehri and the boy could never have married because of their separate social classes.

Marjane thinks of this anecdote involving Mehri because Mehri is the only person she has known who comes closest to the characters in Darvishian's stories. Marjane is shocked to learn that social class is something someone is born with, and that social mobility rarely exists in Iran. The memory of Mehri's lost romance is particularly salient for Marjane, since she loved Mehri like a sister and often slept in the same bed as her. Marjane grapples with the concept that someone can be forced to remain in a position that they were born with and did not actively choose. This quote from Marjane's father also reveals a hypocrisy within his sociopolitical views: though he is eager to demonstrate against repressive governmental policies, he is complacent regarding the social strata that already exists.

The Party Quotes

❝ "As long as there is oil in the middle east we will never have peace."

Related Characters: Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Marjane's father continues to explain the situation in the Middle East to Marjane. Though the Shah attempts to belatedly appease protesters, it is too little and too late, and he eventually steps down from the throne. As he can no longer remain in Iran, the Shah seeks asylum from various global leaders. He is denied asylum from Jimmy Carter, President of the United States, and eventually finds a new home in Egypt.

In this quote, Marjane's father laments that much of the turmoil in the Middle East arises from the rich resources of oil that exist there. World powers fight over the control and collusion of governments in the region to retain access to this crucial natural resource. In explaining the crisis in Iran to Marjane, Marjane's father explains how various world leaders served to exacerbate internal crises due to their desperate need for oil. Marjane's father, though a passionate revolutionary who frequently demonstrates and protests against the oppression of the Shah, here expresses a dismal outlook on the political situation of Iran's region. He is cautiously optimistic about the good that a Revolution will do in Iran (as he does not yet know that the fall of the Shah will bring about a similarly oppressive regime) but is less certain about the prospect of peace in the surrounding countries of the Middle East.

The Heroes Quotes

❝ My father was not a hero, my mother wanted to kill people…so I went out to play in the street.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker), Siamak Jari, Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

When the Revolution succeeds, political prisoners are released, including many family friends of the Satrapis. Siamak Jahri and Mohsen Shakiba, two such victims of the regime, visit Marjane and her family upon leaving the prisons. Ignoring Marjane's young age, they regale the family with gruesome stories of torture and execution. Horribly disturbed by the descriptions, Marjane's mother cries out that all torturers should be massacred, and Marjane learns from her friends at school that people who survive such trials are considered heroes.

In this quote, Marjane continues to grapple with her romanticization of the war. Though she previously considered her parents to be exceedingly brave and noble as avid protesters of the Shah's regime, she is shaken by what she hears from the released prisoners and her friends at school whose fathers have been executed or released. She struggles with the idea that her father is not as "heroic" as she previously thought, since he has not survived torture in the prisons, and that her mother, who advocated for an end to such practices, wanted to murder the very people carrying out assassinations and inhumane practices. By illustrating this anecdote, Marjane expresses her slow understanding of the nuances of war, in which good and bad are not always black and white, but rather a vast no-man's land of gray areas. However, as a relatively sheltered child, she still has the opportunity and gift of being able to set aside such complicated ideas and play in the streets with her friends. Though the war looms large in the background of her childhood, she is nonetheless privileged to still be able to enjoy a childhood during wartime.

Moscow Quotes

"Our family memory must not be lost. Even if it's not easy for you, even if you don't understand it all."

Related Characters: Anoosh (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

After the Revolution succeeds, Marjane's uncle Anoosh, whom she has never met, is released from prison after nine years. He tells her about the trials he endured as a revolutionary, which involved thirty years of exile to the USSR followed by prison in Iran. In this quote, Anoosh warns Marjane of the importance of keeping their family history alive, even though she is young and does not quite understand the pain it has brought.

Marjane immediately becomes attached to Anoosh upon meeting him for the first time. He is the only member of the family who speaks to her frankly as an equal, rather than only allowing her to hear things of a gruesome or difficult nature by accident like her parents do. As the youngest member of the family, it's suggested that it is Marjane's burden to carry on its triumphs and struggles. Rather than just being a bystander of the members of her family and their roles in the Revolution, she is now an active member. Anoosh gives her a sense of importance and singularity she has not yet felt, and this is why his story impacts her more than any other tale of war she has experienced thus far.

The Trip Quotes

I wanted to be an educated, liberated woman...and so another dream went up in smoke.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

After the success of the Revolution, the fundamentalist regime that takes over the Iranian government decides to close the universities for the time being, since that kind of education was thought to be too "decadent," leading students away from the "true path of Islam." As an educated woman, Marjane is crushed--she had dreams of studying chemistry at university, like her hero Marie Curie.

In this quote, Marjane notes that her dream of becoming a famous chemist like Marie Curie has gone "up in smoke," just like her dream of moving to America prior to the fundamentalist student take-over of the American Embassy in Iran. Though the Revolution has succeeded, Marjane's family and other supporters of the Revolution are slowly realizing that this was not the outcome they had intended. Though the Shah was corrupt and oppressive, he had at least supported a modern Iran; the new regime serves to impose a fundamentalist version of Islamic law onto Iranians, which rendered women as second-class citizens to

men. Without the chance to continue her education, Marjane realizes that the prospect of becoming a housewife with many children is far more likely than is a career as an educated scientist.

> It wasn't only the government that changed. Ordinary people changed too.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

With the new Revolutionary government, fundamentalist Islam becomes the law in Iran. It is mandatory for women to wear the veil in public, and men must dress conservatively as well (no Western neckties, or bare arms). Many people adopt the fundamentalist point of view in order do adhere to the laws of the new regime. Though Marjane's family is not very religious at home, Marjane's mother urges her to pretend that she is in public.

In this quote, Marjane notes that the new rules of the Revolutionary regime not only changed the politics of Iran, but also served to seep into the public consciousness such that ordinary people changed along with the laws. In school, Marjane's fellow students compete over who prays the most; in public, resistance was expressed only in subtle ways. Marjane and her parents learn that the Revolution they hoped for was far from the one that actually happened. Remaining unique and individual is now an act of resistance in and of itself.

The F-14s Quotes

> "The real Islamic invasion has come from our own government."

Related Characters: Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father) (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

When Iraq bombs Tehran, Marjane and her Father learn of the attack over the car radio. Together, they scream expletives against the Iraqis. Marjane asks her father if he will fight in the impending war against Iraq, but her father says he won't, and doesn't even cite the Iraqis as the obvious enemies. In this quote, her points out to Marjane that though the Iraqis have technically carried out the attack, the new regime is like an invasion of Iran in its own right, and may have aggravated the bombing.

Marjane becomes angry when her father says he will not fight on behalf of Iran, since her lessons at school have caused her to become increasingly nationalistic. However, she comes to learn through this event that her parents can both love and criticize their country. It is actually due to their love for Iran that they point out its flaws, and continue to demonstrate and protest to try to make it better. Therefore, even when his homeland is directly attacked by another nation, Marjane's father does not abandon his belief that Iran is not entirely blameless in this war. This anecdote teaches Marjane about the nuances and complexities of maintaining beliefs and a point of view, but also about revising opinions based on changing politics.

> War always takes you by surprise.

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi (speaker), Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

When Marjane and her father return home, they rush to tell Marjane's mother about the bombing. Having been in the shower, she had no clue it had occurred prior to being told by her daughter and husband. In this quote, Marjane reasons that war is never truly expected--it always takes people, and a nation, by surprise.

Though Marjane grew up in a state of political turmoil, this is the first time she has experienced being in the midst of a war. Previously, she heard about bloodshed and disputes via secondhand accounts at school and from her parents. Now, she finds her city of origin as the point of attack. Though she knew that her country's position in world and Middle Eastern politics was far from friendly and stable, an Iraqi bombing of Tehran was the last thing she expected to hear over the car radio while driving with her father. This event teaches her to expect the unexpected.

"I wish he were alive and in jail rather than dead and a hero."

Related Characters: Paradisse (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Iran uses F-14 fighter jets to bomb Baghdad in retaliation for the Iraqi bombing of Tehran. Marjane and her father rejoice over Iran's expression of its power in the face of an enemy, but sober up when they hear that half of the fighter jets, and thus their pilots, will not return. When she returns to school, Marjane is saddened to see that one of her classmates lost her father, a pilot, in the bombing. Marjane attempts to console her friend by telling her her father is a national hero. In this quote, Paradisse (the friend) replies that she wishes her father were still alive and in prison, rather than dead and a hero.

Ever since she learned of the glory that former political prisoners received once they are released, Marjane feels marginally ashamed that her father, though a brave protester, is not technically a "hero."However, like Paradisse, she of course would rather have him alive and non-heroic than dead and hailed as a martyr. As a part of growing up, Marjane realizes that there are complex nuances to the war: to be hailed a hero or martyr is an honor, but one that comes at a grave price. Marjane continues to learn that the war, like life, is not split into good and evil, or black and white, but a system of gray areas between the extremes.

The Jewels Quotes

"To have the Iraqis attack, and to lose in an instant everything you had built over a lifetime, that's one thing...but to be spat upon by your own kind, it is intolerable!"

Related Characters: Mali (speaker), Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

When Southern Iran is bombed by the Iraqis, one of Marjane's mother's friends loses her home. She and her family come to stay with the Satrapis until they can get back onto their feet. One day in the grocery store, she overhears some local women complaining that there is less food on the shelves since the Southern Iranians have sought refuge in Tehran, and that southern women are "whores." In this quote, Mali expresses her shame and rage at overhearing these remarks.

Even though Iran has united in its efforts against the Iraqis, this quote illustrates how the country is still very much split internally. The war has affected everyone, but it has done so in differing degrees based on location and socioeconomic class. While the only hardship the women in the grocery store have come across is less variety of foods due to the influx of refugees, Mali and her family lost their home, and could have died if they were at home at the time of the bombing. The war has increased Marjane's sense of nationalism, but this event showed her how there can still be serious distrust and malice even between native Iranians.

The Key Quotes

"Our country has always known war and martyrs, so, like my father said: 'When a big wave comes, lower your head and let it pass!'"

Related Characters: Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father) (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

As the war rages on, the newspaper prints the names and photographs of "today's martyrs," or the most recent victims of the war. Marjane tries to talk to her mother about what she sees in the press, but her mother avoids the topic. In this quote, she explains to Marjane that Iran has seen so much death and bloodshed in its history that her own father taught her to remain stoic through even its worst moments.

Marjane is surprised that her mother, a staunch revolutionary and avid protester, is so passive about the current war. This is likely due to the fact that even though the Revolution she fought so hard for succeeded, the new regime is even more oppressive than the one it overthrew. Her disappointment at the state of her country is therefore understandable, though depressing to Marjane, who has always looked up to her mother's courageous words and actions. Her parents have always made her feel safe and protected from the horrors of the Revolution and the war in the past, and though her mother intends these words to comfort her, they have the potential to do the opposite.

Whereas previously her parents advocated action, now her mother encourages passivity. From this conversation, Marjane realizes that her parents are capable of complexities and contradictions, and that she must develop her own approach to the world separate from theirs.

The Cigarette Quotes

"Now is the time for learning. You have your whole life to have fun!...In this country you have to know everything better than anyone else if you're going to survive!!"

Related Characters: Marjane's Parents (Mother and Father) (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Marjane befriends some older students at school, who convince her to skip class to go buy hamburgers at a Western-influenced restaurant called "Kansas." Though Marjane does not think it is a big deal to skip the class, which is on religion, Marjane's mother finds out and becomes furious. In this quote, Marjane's mother reprimands her for forgoing her education in pursuit of fun. She is concerned that if Marjane does not become as educated as possible, she will never succeed, or worse, "survive" in the political turmoil of Iran.

Now that the Revolution served to allow the Islamic Republic to take over Iran, there are fewer chances than ever for women to engage in social mobility and intellectual pursuits. Marjane's mother wants her daughter, who is smart and spirited, to have every chance she can to make a good life for herself. She is particularly angry that Marjane didn't mind skipping religion class, since safety within the new regime is only ensured if one expresses devotion to fundamentalist Islamic education and ideals. As Marjane grows up and begins to express a stubborn and rebellious personality, her mother is both proud and scared for her daughter: she has the potential to do great things, but only if she abides by the rules and receives an education. No doubt Marjane's mother sees in her daughter the rebellious nature of many members of her family, in particular Anoosh, whose bravery and spirit led him to his death. Thus, her scolding of Marjane is inspired by much more than anger about her daughter skipping school.

"To die a martyr is to inject blood into the veins of society."

Related Characters: Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

As the war between Iran and Iraq rages on, Iranians become increasingly confused as to the trajectory of the fighting. The government controls the news, so it is difficult to know what is true and what the government says to save face. In order to boost morale and encourage citizens to fight, the government releases propaganda that glorifies those who die in war. This quote is one such slogan, suggesting that each person that dies in the war serves to energize society at large.

Marjane's parents teach her to be skeptical of Iranian news sources, since many Iranians believe that it is propaganda to make the public believe the war is progressing more than it actually is. Though Iraq offers a peace settlement and Saudi Arabia offers to aid in reconstruction, Iran rejects both offers due to a refusal to compromise ideological beliefs. This suggests that the regime is using the war to unite Iranians against Iraqis, distracting Iranians from uniting against the Islamic Republic. Slogans such as these, as well as rhetoric that tells young boys that they will be received into a glorious afterlife if they die in on the front lines, serve to convince Iranians to continue fighting for a war that seems to have no point and no end. Marjane, who grapples between her wish for the war to end and her intrinsic love for her homeland, is fascinated by the idea that death is supposed to invigorate the Iranian people.

The Dowry Quotes

"If [people] hurt you, tell yourself that it's because they're stupid. That will help keep you from reacting to their cruelty. Because there is nothing worse than bitterness and vengeance...Always keep your dignity and be true to yourself."

Related Characters: Marjane's Grandmother (speaker), Marjane Satrapi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

After Marjane is expelled from one school and is reprimanded for speaking out against political prisoners in a second, her parents decide that is in her best interest to

leave Iran. They decide to send her to live with one of Marjane's mother's friends in Vienna, where she will attend a Francophone school. On the night before she is scheduled to leave Tehran, her grandmother comes to spend one last night with her. In this quote, she gives Marjane the advice to never react cruelly to anyone, even if they are cruel to her.

The advice that Marjane's grandmother gives her extends not just to interpersonal relationships, but to world relations as well. Violence and cruelty begets more violence and cruelty, and the aim of war is to cause so much damage to an enemy that they are weakened to the point of being unable to cause more damage. Though Marjane is stubborn and spirited, she is also kind and unique, and Marjane's grandmother hopes that she will be able to continue to be herself, albeit herself with dignity, in Vienna, since she was not able to fully express herself within the strict regime of Iran.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

THE VEIL

The opening chapter of *Persepolis* describes the implementation of the **veil** policy in Iran. After the populist 1979 Islamic Revolution, during which the westernized monarch, called the Shah, is overthrown in favor of an Islamic Republic, the new government becomes increasingly religious and oppressive and makes it obligatory for women and girls to wear a veil that covers most of their faces. The girls at Marjane's school, including her friends, Golnaz, Mahshid, Narine, Minna, do not like the veil, particularly because they do not understand why they must wear it. At the same time at school they play games as if they are revolutionaries: "Execution in the name of freedom!" In the first drawing that opens the book, a group of girls sit in a row with their veils and look unhappy; Marjane sits with them, but she is partially cut by the frame.

Before 1979, these girls are all part of a French co-education and non-religious school, which is shut down following the Revolution particularly because bilingual schools are seen as markers of capitalism and decadence. Afterwards, "we found ourselves veiled and separated from our friends," Marjane describes. On the streets there are demonstrations for and against the **veil**, of which Marjane's mother is a part. A German journalist photographs her mother and the photo is placed in many European magazines. Though Marjane is proud of her mother for demonstrating for her beliefs, her mother fears for her life, as she might be recognized on the street as being the woman in the photograph and be in danger; she dyes her hair and wears glasses for a long time in order to protect herself.

Persepolis *opens with the implementation of a government policy, that of the wearing of the veil, which on the political level captures the repressiveness of the Islamic Republic and for Marjane in particular encapsulates throughout her childhood a symbolic shrouding of her desires for freedom and self-expression. Only a child, she is thrust into a whirlwind of change that she cannot possible understand, and yet her and her schoolmates attempt to make sense of it: though they react negatively against the veil, they support a grim revolutionary slogan that they must have heard first from adults. Marjane's positioning half in and half out of in the frame foreshadows how she will, at the end of the book, leave Iran, but also never "escape" the pull of Iran as her homeland.*

Marjane slowly begins to explain the differences in both Iran at large and her personal world pre- and post-1979 Revolution. Co-education and foreign influence becomes disallowed by 1980 as the new regime begins to crack down against what they consider to be non-Islamic elements of society. From the start of the memoir, Marjane expresses how her family contends with the difficulty of having to navigate a fraught landscape where one wants to fight for one's rights, but one also has to be careful if one also wants to live with whatever freedoms the government does allow. Execution or imprisonment are very real threats, though as a child Marjane sees them as glamorous badges of courage rather than awful.

Marjane speaks to her conflicting feelings about the **veil**. Though her family is modern, she "was born with religion" and feels deeply religious herself. From a young age she imaginatively perceives herself as "the last prophet"; even though all the other prophets in history are men, she does not let that dissuade her from her conviction of greatness. She writes her own "holy book" with rules that derive from religious sources like the first prophet of Iran, Zarathustra, and also her own experiences; for example, one rule she devises has it that everyone should have a car. Every night she speaks with God, who appears as a character in the book, and confides with her grandmother about her feelings, though her grandmother is the only person she opens up to. Marjane codifies it that no old person will suffer, and when her grandmother asks her how this will be done, she replies: "it will simply be forbidden."

Marjane's ambivalences are reflections of the kind of soul-searching that many in Iran must be also experiencing: how to understand one's own beliefs and behaviors when the government imposes on one so-called correct behavior. Though her family sees being religious while not wearing a veil as being compatible, the government believes the opposite. Marjane's idea of herself as a prophet suggests the ways in which she is, at such a young age, already steeped in the history of her ancient country—as well as its new, developing history. By mixing up history, religion, and modernity, and reinventing all three towards her aims, she mirrors the regime in a way. Even the language of "it will simply be forbidden" directly mirrors the mentality and language of the regime. And yet her rules involve female empowerment and the elimination of suffering, which of course are the opposite of what the new government will impose.

When Marjane eventually does confide to people in school about her fantasies of prophet-hood, they make fun of her. The teacher gets wind of all this and calls her parents in to the classroom to talk to them about her fantasies. At home her parents question her, though they defended her before her teacher, and she lies to them and says that she wishes to be a doctor. Regardless, she keeps her hopes alive in secret, telling God that she will continue being a prophet but that no one will know: "I wanted to be justice, love and the wrath of God all in one."

Marjane's private thoughts enter the public sphere, and quickly she gets into trouble, as will constantly be the case in the book. The regime purports to decree the laws of Islam, but the talk of executions, the demonstrations, and the possible threat to Marjane's mother's life, show how religion becomes a force for oppression and danger. However, Marjane illustrates and wishes to implement a different version of religiosity, one that treats people with fairness and love, and which accepts women as equal to men.

THE BICYCLE

This chapter opens with Marjane confessing that her faith "was not unshakable." She momentarily puts aside her belief that she is a prophet and begins to engage closely with the question of revolution, a topic that is on everyone's minds now that the ruling Shah has been overthrown. Marjane mock-demonstrates in the family garden with her friends, mimicking the many adults around her who do the same in the street. Waxing philosophical, Marjane describes to her friends that "the revolution is like a bicycle, when the wheels don't turn, it falls." She suggests that often in the history of Iran the wheels haven't been turning.

At this moment in Iran's history, the despotic Shah has been overthrown but what the new government of Iran will be like is not yet clear. It is therefore a time of excitement, and the children pick up on this excitement, turning the demonstrations into a game. The way that children will pick up on and follow what adults are doing is regularly portrayed in the novel. Marjane's interest in Iranian history is evident here.

Marjane turns to the history of Iran as explained to her by her father. Her father describes the history of Iran as "2500 years of tyranny and submission." The abuse of power, he explains, has often been both from inside and outside. The outside invasions include the "Arab invasion from the West, the Mongolian invasion from the East, and finally modern imperialism," when European powers sought to control Iran. However, he notes that the tyranny and submission has often been inflicted also by "our own emperors." As part of her education, Marjane's parents buy her books to "enlighten" her. She reads about Palestine, Fidel Castro, Vietnam, Karl Marx, Descartes, and the many revolutionaries of Iran who died young deaths. She later gives the cold shoulder to God because she no longer wants to discuss her prophet-hood anymore. Instead, awkwardly, they talk about the weather.

Marjane's parents do not allow her education to be one-sided or simply Iran-centric; rather than concentrating merely on the invasions and abuses that Iran suffered over the centuries, Marjane learns about other lands who have undergone dramatic times of change, and the individuals who influenced these histories. The particular people she learns about suggests that her parents have "leftist," perhaps socialist, political leanings. The fact that Iran still exists despite its many iterations and periods is a source of pride for Marjane and her family; they love Iran, despite its many problems. As the revolution against the Shah is successful and Marjane learns about history, she becomes less interested in religion, as her changing conversation with God indicates.

One night Marjane overhears her parents speaking about the burning of the Rex Cinema, a famous and popular movie theater in Teheran, during the revolution against the Shah. The doors had been locked from the outside before it was put on fire; four hundred people died as the police stood guard and beat away people trying to save the victims. This constitutes a terrible and purposeful massacre. The Shah claimed a group of religious fanatics had committed the crime, but, Marjane claims, "the people knew that it was the Shah's fault!" Marjane imagines all the ghosts of the dead people fleeing the Rex Cinema.

There still exists a separation between children and adults: Marjane is not automatically invited to difficult and serious discussions. Still, as usual, her parents cannot hide the truth from Marjane, and politics once again enters her private living room and also her imagination. This is a direct example of the internal abuses of power that her father previously spoke about. This history establishes the Shah's awfulness and in doing so the justness of the revolution against him.

Standing before a mirror in her room, Marjane puts on a Che Guevara costume and then a Fidel Castro costume, but God, who she has ignored momentarily to listen further to her parents, has left the room by the time she turns around to ask his opinion of her costume. Afterwards, she tells her parents she wants to come with them to demonstrate in the streets against the killing of 400 people at the Rex Cinema, but her parents tell her it is too dangerous. That night God does not come back when she calls for him and Marjane weeps bitterly.

By trying to literally wear the costumes of important revolutionary figures, Marjane demonstrates her attempt at trying to understand and mimic the confusing principles of a revolution that she is too young to really grasp the meanings of. She follows both the examples of the historical figures she has read about, as well as the example of her parents. She wants to play adult, but her weeping and costume-wearing suggest she is not one. The disappearance of God, however, indicates her continuing evolution away from religious feeling and perhaps her slow process of maturation, one which is full of pain and uncertainty.

THE WATER CELL

Before the overthrow of the Shah, Marjane's parents demonstrate in the streets every day and are exhausted, too exhausted to play Monopoly with Marjane. They come back home aching and demoralized. Because she is upset with her parents, she tries to defy them by expressing, "As for me, I love the King [the Shah], he was chosen by God." However, Marjane's father explains that "God did not choose the King," though her textbooks tell her the opposite. He then begins to tell the young girl about the history of Iran and how the King became the King in the first place.

Marjane's childishness continues to be emphasized in contrast to her desire to have a viewpoint on political events. Still, her parents retain their role as guides to the revolution, and Marjane has to learn that not everything that she learns in school, the place where one might think one might learn the truth, is correct.

Her father explains to Marjane that fifty years earlier the Father of the Shah, Reza Shah, organized a coup to establish a Republic. Though the idea of a Republican government was popular among these earlier revolutionaries, there were many different interpretations among them. Moreover, there were many proponents of and examples of Republicanism, from Gandhi in India—who hoped to overthrow Western influence—to Ataturk in Turkey—who emphasized the secular, Western aspect of Turkish society. Reza Shah was not educated or a natural leader, but "an illiterate low-ranking officer" who was taken advantage of by the British, who wanted to stave off the Russian Bolsheviks and to tap into Iran's vast oil fields. The British promised Reza Shah the role of emperor, convincing him that "a vast country like [Iran] needs a holy symbol"—and he agreed, despite his original Republican ideals, which would have meant a less autocratic government. Reza Shah became king, and his son, the current Shah, inherited the role from him. Marjane's father, having explained the rise of the Shah on political grounds, concludes by saying that "God has nothing whatsoever to do with this story," despite Marjane's initial thoughts to the contrary.

Marjane so far has been very interested in religion, myth, and history, but as her idea of her perfect religion earlier shows, she mixed all the different elements up into one, in which some kind of ideal religion motivates historical events. However, this continuation of Marjane's introduction to the history of Iran demonstrates how over time religion, myth, and history become separate entities for Marjane. She begins to understand cause and effect, and how both influences inside and outside the country created modern Iran. Marjane's father shows the Shah and his father to be on a human, historical scale, disproving the claims of her textbooks. It also shows just how messy history can be, and how those in power use propaganda to try to justify their own power.

At this point Marjane's father reveals that the emperor that the Father of the Shah overthrew was in fact Marjane's maternal great-grandfather. Marjane rejoices at this new information, including the realization that her grandfather was, as the son of the Emperor, a prince. She immediately romanticizes her connection to royalty, but her father explains that in fact the Father of the Shah took everything her grandfather owned. However, because he was educated, the Father of the Shah named him Prime Minister. After his appointment, because he interacted with other intellectuals, he became a communist and also a critic of the regime. For this reason he was later often sent to prison and tortured; he was often placed for hours in a cell filled with water. Marjane's mother, the daughter of this grandfather, sadly describes how, as a girl, she always dreaded the knock on the door that often meant her father once again would be arrested. She visited him in prison, but his health deteriorated dramatically because of the terrible conditions. She cries to Marjane and her father: "All his life he was in pain."

In this scene, the politics that initially seemed purely historical and "bigger" then Marjane suddenly becomes extremely personal. Marjane at first welcomes the news—as she had once thought of herself as a prophet, she thinks happily about the great individuals that are connected to her. Nevertheless, Marjane's mother's interruption of her husband's history lesson demonstrates the actual costs that politics and dissent had on Marjane's grandfather's life. While previously the political arena remained rather abstract to Marjane despite her parent's demonstrations and her wearing of the veil, now Marjane must deal with the fact that her family members have been directly, and negatively, affected by the turmoil that Iran has experienced over the last few decades. And she must also start to confront her romantic view of history with the actual human cost of participating in that history.

Very affected emotionally, Marjane no longer wants to play Monopoly; instead she wants to take a bath. "That night I stayed a very long time in the bath. I wanted to know what it felt like to be in a cell filled with water." God asks her what she is doing, as if he doesn't understand. When she comes out, her hands are wrinkled, "like grandpa's."

Marjane, confronted with difficult truths, edges slightly closer to adulthood, as she refuses to play a childish game which itself symbolizes a casual reenactment of adult capitalistic business deals. Though Marjane has previously mimicked adults, she has always mimicked their demonstrations of bravado and strength. Here Marjane's mimicry in the bathtub becomes one of sympathy, an attempt to try to understand what it feels like to be someone physically harmed because of his or her political beliefs.

PERSEPOLIS

Marjane's grandmother comes over to the house, and Marjane asks her about the times Marjane's grandfather was in jail. Her grandmother speaks of how poor she was back then. At times she pretended to cook food she did not have just to keep up appearances for the neighbors who could see her through the window. She then says that the Shah was even "ten times worse" than the Father of the Shah. He was extremely wasteful and bombastic and kept none of his promises, unlike the other historical kings of Iran. At his coronation the Shah visited the grave of Cyrus the Great, who once "ruled over the ancient world." Then Marjane's grandmother describes how, during his rule, "all the country's money went into ridiculous celebrations of the 2500 years of dynasty and other frivolities" but none of this benefited the people, who couldn't care less. She claims that the Shah did this only "to impress heads of state." Marjane's grandmother then expresses her happiness "that there is finally a revolution." She does not directly speak of Marjane's grandfather throughout the conversation, even though Marjane had originally asked about her grandfather at the start.

Marjane looks towards all of her family members to describe and explain the confusing facets of the rise of the Shah and the subsequent revolution – both how it happened, and also how her family is connected to it. Instead of answering Marjane's question about her grandfather, Marjane's grandmother avoids talking about his torture by talking about other difficult but less traumatizing subjects. She describes the way the Shah wasted enormous amounts of money on propaganda when the people of Iran were suffering from poverty and hunger. She highlights the great distance between the Shah and the common people, though this also more generally indicates the ways that rulers often try to control rather than serve those whom they rule.

Each day, Marjane's father goes to take photographs of the continuing demonstrations during the revolution, despite this activity being strictly prohibited. The family waits anxiously for his return, as his activities can get him into a lot of trouble. When, one day, he is late getting home – much to everyone's terror – he finally returns and then describes how he had gone to the hospital where a group of people were "carrying the body of a young man killed by the army." Marjane's father describes how the people "honored [the young man] like a martyr." When another dead body, this time of an old man, was carried out of the hospital, the people crowded around and also called the old man a "hero," just as they had called the first man. Yet, when Marjane's father questions the old man's widow about his death, it turns out he died of cancer—he was not a martyr at all. Still, at the crowd's insistence, the old widow actually joins in their demonstration honoring the dead old man and defiling the Shah. Together they shout: "the king is a killer!" The whole family laughs, except for Marjane, who does not understand how this story of "cadaver, cancer, death, [and] murderer" can lead to laughter. Finally she laughs, though still not understanding, and she decides to read as much as she can so that she will understand.

Marjane's father, an avid detractor of the current regime, here tells an ironic story about the way that fact and fiction get confused in the turmoil and passion of the revolution. Though the old man, unlike the young man, did not lose his life in the fight against the regime, he still gets celebrated as an equal martyr. People are so wound up in their ideals and their struggles that they project these ideas and struggles onto any situation they see. In this sense they are a bit blinded by their own fervor, and this is the reason that Marjane's family laughs: everything, including natural deaths, gets tied up with the revolution, even if during regular times people would consider it a part of normal life. Marjane cannot understand the irony because she cannot see the nuances, the grey areas, or even the funny absurd parts about what is going on around her. She is still too young and still sees everything as right or wrong, good or bad. In a way, Marjane is similar to the revolutionaries – both have a rather simple, childish view of the world.

THE LETTER

Marjane likes to read books by the Kurdish writer Ali Ashraf Darvishian, "a kind of local Charles Dickens," and with her mother attends his clandestine book signings, which are secret because his books are not supported by the Shah's regime. In his stories, she reads of impoverished children, and "finally understood why I felt ashamed to sit in my father's Cadillac." She expresses that "the reason for my shame and for the revolution is the same: the difference between social classes."

Darvishian's books are frowned up by the Shah because he does not want people thinking about any issues within the country. The more Marjane reads, the more she begins to understand about parts of the world that she has no direct access to, particularly the plights of other people. The stories of poor children help Marjane to see how she is different from other people economically, something she has felt before but never quite realized. By feeling sympathetic to other people and understanding their problems, she begins to realize why individual people might participate in revolution. At the same time, Marjane's thoughts here will come to have an ironic sense to them as the book continues: poor people will continue to get the short end of the stick even after the successful revolution against the Shah.

Pondering further her place in Iranian society, Marjane remembers her maid Mehri. Mehri became the Satrapi's maid after Mehri's parents gave Mehri to the Satrapi family, understanding that their daughter would be better fed in the Satrapi household than in their own, crowded and poor as it was with fifteen children. Mehri and Marjane are very close, and when a neighbor boy named Hossein sends Mehri a love letter, the illiterate Mehri asks Marjane to read her the letter and write a response based on Mehri's dictation. Eventually the whole family finds out about the budding epistolary love affair, and Marjane's father speaks to Hossein, revealing to him that Mehri is not his daughter but in fact his maid, a revelation which abruptly ends the relationship. Marjane's father explains to Marjane that she "must understand that their love was impossible…because in this country you must stay within your own social class." Marjane bemoans that one's birth determines one's social class, though she is happy at least that she and Mehri can still share the same bed.

Mehri comes to Marjane's mind because she is the closest person Marjane knows who resembles the people in the books she reads. Understanding the cause for Mehri's presence in her home, and feeling sympathetic, allows Marjane to connect with the illiterate Mehri and aid her in her romantic pursuits. However, this episode becomes for Marjane a lesson in the gap between the social classes, and how this gap is hard or even impossible to close. In Iranian society, everyone remains firmly footed in the class one is born into. Though Marjane can sympathize with Mehri, and though she can even spend a lot of time with her, she cannot change the way that society functions or what is expected. Marjane's family both want to overthrow the Shah and continue to have a kind of complacency about class structure, and Marjane herself shows a selfish complacency in focusing on what she gets from Mehri as opposed to the ways that Mehri is oppressed by Iranian society because of her class.

Understanding the differences in social classes as the source of the revolution, Marjane decides the next day to go out with Mehri and demonstrate in the streets—without her parents' knowledge. When they come home late at night, Marjane's mother slaps both of them, angry particularly because they had gone out on one of the most notoriously dreadful days up to then, called "Black Friday," when many people died. There are many rumors about who ordered or devised the killings, including rumors that Israel initiated the massacre, but Marjane knows that, as in other instances of death and massacre, "It was really our own who had attacked us."

Despite social divides, Marjane attempts to be in solidarity with Mehri by demonstrating with her—this act also indicates one step further towards adulthood, as she tries to mimic her parents but without their even being involved. Marjane demonstrates further maturity in her being able to spot misinformation and come to more likely conclusions about the source of the violence. At the same time, Marjane's decision to go protest without telling her parents is incredibly immature and reckless, and again demonstrates just how little she understands of the actual dangers. She wants to be like her parents, but she is still a child, and her judgment about safety is not as refined as her parents'.

THE PARTY

More and more massacres occur in Iran, though it also becomes clear that the Shah's reign will soon end. He's fighting as hard as he can to keep his power. Despite his efforts to find a Prime Minister, a nod towards democracy, the people continue to demonstrate, burning him in effigy and tearing down statues of him. Finally, he leaves the country, to the joyous celebration of the nation. The revolution has succeeded.

The revolution is a wheel that turns and turns, and though the Shah attempts to backtrack and make reforms, the people's anger is so great as to make his nods at democracy moot: the wheel, already at a high velocity, just keep turning. This is a moment of joy and excitement, as those fighting the Shah now see the chance for true *freedom.*

Though the American President Jimmy Carter will not give asylum to the Shah, Anwar Al-Sadat, the President of Egypt, allows him to reside there. Marjane's father claims that "as long as there is oil in the middle east we will never have peace." Though Marjane wonders whether Sadat decides to help the Shah because the Shah's first wife was Egyptian, her father retorts, "Surely not! Politics and sentiment don't mix."

As the Shah leaves the country, his fate becomes decided by whatever government will allow him entrance: the once mighty and powerful has now fallen. Marjane still does not quite get the picture: she has yet to learn that politics defy emotions. Though the revolution was very much propelled by emotion, governments, according to Marjane's father, act purely through strategy: a harsh world indeed. And yet this, too, is ironic, as Marjane's father doesn't understand the politics that will soon make the government that arises from the revolution run counter to his goals for the revolution.

After the schools close for some time, they reopen, but with one major difference: now the schoolteachers, who once praised Shah, ask the students to tear out his photos from the textbooks, and deny the idea that his rule was based on divine right.

In the way that textbooks and teaching are suddenly revised, Marjane sees front and center examples of hypocrisy and contradiction. She also sees how normal citizens will model their behavior on the desires of whoever is in power as a way to protect themselves and rise in society.

Though "the battle," or the revolution, appears over in the eyes of many adults, the children still talk about it incessantly. A friend of Marjane's explains that Ramin's father – the father of a boy named Ramin whom they knew – was part of the Shah's secret police that killed a million people. Two more friends decide to put nails between their fingers and attack Ramin in retaliation. However, when they are about to find Ramin, Marjane's mother comes by and stops them. She asks Marjane, "What would you say if I nailed your ears to the wall?" She explains that though Ramin's father might have committed a crime, that was not Ramin's fault.

Here Marjane and her friends attempt again to emulate the adults by applying the physical violence they have seen used against the Shah. The children are, of course, terribly wrong to try to commit this violence against someone only peripherally related to the crime. Marjane's mother, ever the moral compass for her daughter, tries to make her daughter put herself in others' shoes rather than reacting so excessively and impulsively. At the same time, the moral wrong the children were about to commit is an implicit criticism of many others who almost certainly did, in revolutionary passion, kill or harm those only peripherally connected to the Shah.

Marjane tells Ramin that she forgives him, though Ramin claims that his father "is not a murderer" because "he killed communists and communists are evil." Continuing to follow Marjane's mother's example, Marjane stands before the mirror and repeatedly says that she must forgive: "I had the feeling of being someone really, really good."

Though Marjane tries to take on her mother's mantra of temperance and forgiveness, Ramin surprises her by defending his father, who Marjane considers indefensible. Forgiveness, it turns out, cannot in itself reform someone, though it does allow Marjane to feel morally righteous.

THE HEROES

A few days after the revolution succeeds, 3000 political prisoners of the revolution are liberated, among them Siamak Jari, the husband of Marjane's best friend, and a long time political prisoner and friend of the family named Mohsen Shakiba. Marjane recalls how, before the release of the political prisoners, Laly, Siamak's daughter, had visited Marjane's family home. Marjane had told her that though her family was telling her that her father is on a long trip, really this means he is dead. Laly had run home crying, and Marjane was sent to her room. "Nobody will accept the truth," she thinks.

The end of the revolution brings a semblance of normalcy: those who were arrested have now been returned. However, Marjane remembers how she was sure that Siamak Jari was dead, and how she had tried to tell the truth to his daughter, who believed he was simply on a trip. Though Marjane demonstrates her alertness in not believing what is obviously false (though she was also wrong herself), she is not able to muster the maturity to allow another girl to believe a white lie.

When Laly's father, Siamak, and Mohsen return from prison, Marjane concedes, "after the revolution I realized that you could be mistaken." A tearful and happy reunion commences after which Siamak and Mohsen offhandedly describe the various tortures they experienced, including how their fingernails had been pulled out. So engrossed and horrified are Marjane's parents that they "forget to spare me this experience." When Marjane's father asks for news of another friend, named Ahmadi, Siamak explains that he was assassinated, adding that he was burned with an iron as torture. Marjane is horrified that an ordinary household appliance could be used for torture. Afterwards, Laly proclaims her father a hero, and Marjane's mother expounds that "all torturers should be massacred." Deeply affected by the day's events, Marjane thinks about the fact that her father "was not a hero" and that her mother "wanted to kill people...so I went out to play in the street."

Further initiated into the macabre horrors of the revolution, Marjane is both fascinated and terrified by what she hears. This time, she wishes that her parents would protect her. Looking at the iron, she is struck by the ordinariness of the objects of torture; what she saw as an innocent object has now been turned into an object of inhumanity, something that was previously beyond her imagination or comprehension. Confusingly, Marjane's mother seems to take back her mantra of forgiveness when she wishes for the killing of torturers. Moreover, Marjane feels jealousy towards Laly and her father, indicating how she still, childishly, romanticizes the war. Unable to compute the seeming contradictions within her family, she flees into the activity of childhood.

Marjane starts playing a game with her friends where they make up various forms of torturer. "Back at home that evening, I had the diabolical feeling of power...But it didn't last. I was overwhelmed." Back home, Marjane runs and cries on Marjane's mother's lap, and her mother reassures her daughter by promising that the torturers "will pay for what they have done." When Marjane brings up that she had thought her mother told her that one should forgive others, her mother explains: "Bad people are dangerous, but forgiving them is, too. Don't worry, there is justice on earth." At night, Marjane lies in her bed and feels safe in the arms God.

Playing games becomes a defense mechanism for dealing with difficult information; by taking on adult torture in her childish games, Marjane diminishes the reality of the horror while allowing herself a sense of power. Still, playing is not enough to allay her trauma, and she runs to her mother and confronts her about the contradiction between forgiveness and punishing bad people. Marjane's faith in God allows her to believe that there will be justice sometime.

MOSCOW

Marjane remains upset that her father "was not a hero," and she makes up stories of his heroism though none of them are true. She feels lucky when she hears about her uncle Anoosh, who returns to Iran after thirty years of exile. At Marjane's house, he tells her a story about his background. When he was just eighteen, his uncle Fereydoon, along with his friends, proclaimed the independence of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan and appointed himself Minister of Justice; Anoosh became his secretary. Fereydoon was later arrested and executed by the Shah. In order to avoid the same fate, Anoosh walked in terrible winter conditions all the way to his parents' house. Nevertheless, in order to protect himself, he soon afterwards decided to flee to the USSR. Marjane thinks that not even Laly's dad, Siamak, has been to the USSR. Marjane is immediately drawn in by Anoosh, thinking that now she has "a hero in my family."

Marjane remains upset that she does not, like Laly, have a hero in her family. She continues to childishly glamorize heroism and martyrdom, and her wishes come true when she meets Anoosh, who has a story that Marjane thinks that not even Laly's father can beat. All of Marjane's romanticism suggests how she does not truly understand the human costs that the stories she hears entails, despite already seeing how her family has suffered for political reasons over different periods of their lives. She thinks of heroism as wonderful, but she does not yet realize the losses Anoosh and Laly's father have had to endure.

While hiding in Moscow, Anoosh received a doctorate in Marxism-Leninism. He got married and had two children, but the marriage was rocky and he got divorced soon after: "What my wife made me suffer was much worse than" the torture he experienced under the Iranian regime. After his divorce he felt extremely nostalgic towards Iran. Dearly missing "my country, my parents, my brothers," and dreaming about them often, Anoosh returned to Iran under a false passport and a disguise. Nevertheless, Anoosh was still recognized at the border and sent to jail for nine years because of his previous illegal activities. Anoosh takes a moment to warn Marjane: "Our family memory must not be lost. Even if it's not easy for you, even if you don't understand it all." Before bed, Anoosh gives Marjane a **bread swan**—a small figurine he made out of bread while in prison. Later, Marjane tells her friends, "There are lots of heroes in my family. My grandpa was in prison, my uncle Anoosh too…my great-uncle Fereydoon…"

Anoosh represents for Marjane a glamorized vision of heroism, but his story is more complicated than she at first realizes. Marjane learns that the emotional torture he experienced under his wife he considers worse than the physical torture he experienced under the regime. In fact, Marjane learns how Anoosh still loves his country even after his country won't accept him. Anoosh is also one of the first people to treat Marjane as if she is an adult: he purposefully tells his story to her; she does not merely overhear it. He also makes it okay that she cannot understand everything, and grants her a deal of responsibility: she, as one of the young members of the family, is in charge of continuing the family's legacy. The bread swan represents the way that Anoosh was able to keep sane and keep his humanity while in prison. When Marjane announces that there are many heroes in her family, it comes across as slightly more nuanced than her previous ideas of heroism: she begins to grasp the personal and familial sacrifices heroism entails.

THE SHEEP

During Anoosh's stay with Marjane's family, political discussions occur frequently. Anoosh and Marjane's father wonder about the contradiction of the revolution. They are amazed that while the "the revolution is a leftist revolution…the new republic wants to be called Islamic." This is in direct opposition to the expectations of Marjane's family, who supported the leftist revolution without expectations of it being Islamic as well. Indeed, they Believe that a free and republican government is incompatible with theocracy—that church and state in a republic must be separate, yet the revolutionaries buck this understanding and seem to want to combine both. In order to explain the strangeness of this phenomenon, Anoosh clarifies that "in a country where half the population is illiterate you cannot unite the people around Marx. The only thing that can really unit them is nationalism or a religious ethic." Marjane is heavily affected by the discussion, though she does not quite understand it, and cries when she realizes the changes in the country remain beyond the reach of her comprehension.

Just as there are many contradictions in Marjane's daily life and the history of her country, so, too, are there many contradictions in the way that the revolution plays out. The revolution is shifting from the perceived original ideals of freedom and republicanism to include Islamic fundamentalism. Whereas the family once thought these as opposites, Anoosh points out that most people in the country are not like Marjane's family: they are illiterate and uneducated and therefore do not know or cannot grasp political theory. Instead, they respond emotionally to nationalist or religion. Once again Marjane bemoans that as a child she can't entirely understand this discussion. Note, though, that Anoosh is saying that most Iranians wouldn't understand this discussion! The book continually draws parallels between Marjane's childish romanticization of the revolution and the nationalistic romanticization of the revolution by the all the Iranians, which ultimately allowed the Islamic fundamentalist regime to take power.i

Later, one of Marjane's friends tells her that his family will soon move to the United States because his parents believe it is "better to leave" than to "live under an Islamic regime." Much of Marjane's family also leaves the country, and though Marjane's mother suggests perhaps her family should leave, too, Marjane's father points out the family's limited economic opportunities in the US, where Marjane's parents would be relegated to menial jobs. He is confident everyone who left will soon return.

The revolution has not ended up the way that Marjane's family hoped or believed it would, with new leaders perhaps even more problematic for them than the Shah was. But there is a sense here that they can't bring themselves to leave because they love Iran, both because it is their country and because this is where they have built a life. Yet Marjane's father's optimism seems perhaps as romantic as Marjane's own childish notions.

Marjane's father receives a phone call, after which he sobs in front of his family. It turns out that his friend Mohsen, who was just released from prison after a long time as a political prisoner, has been murdered: an assassin drowned Mohsen in his own bathtub. Later, Assassins target Siamak, too, though the assassins end up executing his sister in his stead when she opens the door for them, because Siamak wasn't at home at the time. Marjane finds out some time after the murders that Siamak, Laly, and her mother have escaped over the border by hiding themselves among a flock of grazing sheep. Those who once supported the revolution are now being targeted as enemies of the new Islamic Republic because their opinions about how the new government should function differ from the policies of the new ruling class.

The previous joy that Marjane's family experienced when the political prisoners were released after the abdication of the Shah has now been overturned by their murders. Though the prisoners had also been revolutionaries, many of them oppose the Islamic component of the new government and are thus re-targeted for their differing opinions. This mirrors the way, in the revolution previous to this one, those who were once favored, such as Marjane's grandfather, found themselves targeted by the new state. The leaders of the country have changed profoundly from the western-supported Shah to the western-hating Islamic regime, and yet their tactics are exactly the same.

Soon after, though Marjane's parents try to protect Marjane from the fact that Anoosh has been arrested. Nevertheless, Marjane sees through their attempts at giving her a white lie about his whereabouts—they say he has gone to visit his wife in Moscow—and she guesses the truth about his arrest. Later her father tearfully admits the truth to her and tells her that Anoosh, stuck in jail, asked his jailor to see Marjane, since he is allowed one visitor. Marjane visits him in his cell. Emotionally, Anoosh tells Marjane, "you are the little girl I always wanted to have" and gives her another **bread swan**, which he calls "the uncle of the first one." The next day, the newspapers announce the execution of Anoosh as a "Russian Spy." When God visits Marjane at night, she yells at him to "Shut up!" and to "get out of my life!" God disappears as a character from the book. Marjane feels disorientated and helpless, but at the same time her parents scream for her to run to the basement because they are being bombed. "It was the beginning of the war" between the new Islamic Republic and those who oppose it.

Older than Laly, Marjane does not fall for the white lie that her uncle is on a trip, but rather realizes that her uncle's life must be in danger. Though Marjane's parents attempt to protect her, the situation hits the family too directly to keep up the charade as Anoosh is clearly someone slated for execution. Yet the Anoosh Marjane finds in jail is a man who does not appear afraid; instead, the bread swan represents his continued humanity and hope in the face of adversity. For Anoosh, Marjane represents the kind of girl that he always wanted: someone innocent, brave, and loving. It is notable that after Anoosh's execution, she does not proclaim him as a hero or martyr, instead her faith in God is broken just as the revolution that was supposed to liberate the people now plunges them into another long war.

THE TRIP

Marjane's father is very alarmed by what he reads in the morning newspaper. Fundamentalist students have occupied the U.S. Embassy and taken the Americans working there as hostages. The implication for Marjane's family is that no one from Iran will be able to flee to America anymore as so many have before. The members of Marjane's family are not spared from this prohibition, though Marjane had once dreamed of going to the U.S. and seeing her friend Kaveh, who left Iran the year before. Now she realizes that her dream is dead.

With the war's onset more and more repressions pop up, including the prohibition of Iranian citizens from visiting the US. Those who didn't leave previously to America can no longer do so. Marjane must confront the fact that the decisions that her family made previously now have consequences on what liberties she can and cannot take in her life. The new regime literally means that her life goals might no longer be possible.

Not long after, the government announces it will shut down all universities because of the "decadent" learning they enable that, according to the fundamentalists, leads students "astray from the true path of Islam." Marjane realizes that she will not be able to study chemistry or be like her hero Madame Curie, an early pioneer of chemistry and one of the most celebrated women in the sciences. She states: "I wanted to be an educated, liberated woman…and so another dream went up in smoke." She cries, "at the age that Marie Curie first went to France to study, I'll probably have ten children."

That the Islamic regime would want to stop someone like Marjane from becoming a scientist for the simple fact that she is a woman starkly outlines both the destructiveness of its fundamentalist ideals and, at the same time, their ridiculousness. This is the logic that forces women to wear the "veil," a logic that reduces women to simply being wives who bear children and represses any other dreams or abilities they might have.

One night, after Marjane's mother's car breaks down in the street, she gets assaulted by two bearded fundamentalist men. They scream: "Women like [Marjane's mother] should be pushed up against a wall and fucked and then thrown in the garbage." Marjane's mother explains that by "women like me," the men meant women who do not wear a **veil**. Marjane's mother comes home markedly shaken. The family watches TV, where a fundamentalist representative explains on the news that women now must wear veils so that men are not distracted or excited by women in the street. He claims that the rationale for this new law is that it is more civilized to wear a veil than to let a woman's hair show.

This episode marks the beginning of the veil policy that Marjane describes at the start of the book. It also marks one of the first instances in which the public and the private begin to merge, since random people on the street attempt to police people's otherwise private clothing choices. The logic behind the new law exposes the fundamentalists view of women: that they have to be aware of the way men might react to them in public and therefore have to wear the veil so that they do not pose a threat to men. In other words: that the egregiously terrible behavior of men toward women is seen as the women's fault.

Marjane explains how, quickly, one's clothing becomes an "ideological sign." Whereas fundamentalist women wear full covering from head to toe, with just the face showing behind the **veil**, the "modern woman" shows her "opposition to the regime by letting a few strands of hair show." Marjane does allow that men also face restrictions: the necktie, a symbol of the West, is forbidden, as are uncovered arms. Men also silently protest by shaving their bears or by not tucking in their shirts. Marjane expresses that government policies really affect people's behaviors: "It wasn't only the government that changed. Ordinary people changed too." Marjane's mother makes sure that Marjane, while in public, claims to be devout and pray during her spare time, even if this is not actually true at home. At school the children compete as to who prays the most.

Clothing, particularly the veil, becomes a way ordinary people can express their displeasure or devotion to the ruling regime. Though certain lines cannot be crossed, women and men are able to subtly show their liberalism. However, everyone does follow the most basic rules, and for many people the changes are not merely cosmetic; many people do in fact change their beliefs and ideologies to match the Islamic Republic because this is the only way for them to protect themselves or even rise in society. Though Marjane's family does not change their beliefs, they do have to, for their safety, pretend to be devout while in public, especially considering the assault that Marjane's mother already experienced.

Marjane's mother allows her daughter to attend a demonstration against fundamentalism, reversing her previous stance because she thinks Marjane "should start learning to defend her rights as a woman right now!" However, the demonstrators get attacked and Marjane sees violence for the first time "with my own eyes." She witnesses a woman getting stabbed and many others getting beat up. Running away, Marjane's father shouts, "every man for himself!" The family goes on vacation in Italy and Spain for three weeks, fearing this will be their last chance to do so. On TV in Spain they see an illustration of Iran being covered in black; they fear the worst.

Impassioned by the new restrictions, and feeling the time dire, Marjane's mother allows Marjane to join her in a demonstration, and even alludes to Marjane being a woman—and not just a girl—for the first time. What ends up happening, however, is that Marjane gets initiated in the difficulties and traumas of demonstrating against an unflinching regime. Marjane's parents have underestimated the might and viciousness of the regime. What they see while in Spain shows them how the rest of the world sees Iran, their beloved country, transforming into something nefarious.

On their return, Marjane's grandmother explains to them that Iraq and Iran are now at war because Iranian fundamentalists tried to sway Iraqi Shiites against Iraq's leader, Saddam, a minority Sunni leader. (The Sunni and Shia branches of Islam form the largest two branches of Islam. Iran is a majority Shia country; though Iraq has a larger Sunni population than does Iran, the Sunni population still forms a minority—though under Saddam the minority Sunni population had more power in government, leading to resentment.) Marjane understands the war as the "second [Arab] invasion in 1400 years" and desires to fight the enemy.

The family's return from vacation has them understanding the new threat against their nation, one which has its source both in political strategy and religious resentment and difference. Marjane, versed in the history of her country, understands that this sort of war has been fought before, and she feels a flourish of nationalistic pride.

THE F-14S

Iraqi fighter jets, called migs and supplied by the USSR, bomb the Iranian capital of Tehran. Upon hearing the news on the radio while at his office, Marjane's father yells, "No! The bastards!" Following her father's lead, Marjane screams even louder, "Those assholes!" On the drive home, Marjane asks her father if he will fight in the war. "We have to teach those Iraqis a lesson," she says. Marjane's father only responds with confusion and wonders why he should fight. Marjane explains, "the Iraqis have always been our enemies" but her father only brushes this off, joking, "and worse, they drive like maniacs." He places the blame not on the Iraqis but on their own government. When they come home, Marjane's mother has been in the shower, oblivious to the bombing. "War always takes you by surprise," Marjane explicates.

Marjane becomes increasingly nationalistic. Still young and driven by love of her country (despite who leads it), she sees the enemy as pure evil, though her father sees them as people, too, making fun of their driving. Her father employs the same kind of ironic laughter, a defense mechanism in the face of much stress, that he did when he saw the two corpses being led out of the hospital, but once again Marjane cannot fully comprehend this reaction. Marjane's father also pins the blame for the war on what he perceives is the source, the Islamic Republic. He recognizes that the nationalistic pride that Marjane (and even he himself) feels in the war against Iraq is exactly what the regime wants them to feel, because by uniting all of Iran against Iraq the regime protects itself from the Iranian's who disagree with it. Still, normal life must continue somehow, as exemplified by the fact that Marjane's mother did not even know the bombings had happened.

Marjane proclaims that Iran must bomb the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, though her father remarks that without the generals and fighter pilots, who were jailed after an earlier failed coup d'état, the country cannot do anything. Marjane complains that her father is a "defeatist" and "no patriot." Still, when the family hears the Iranian National Anthem, which has been outlawed for a year, they are "overwhelmed" with emotion. When they hear on the radio that 140 Iranian bombers, F-14s, bombed Baghdad today, Marjane and her father celebrate, and she concludes, "he loved his country as much as I did."

In line with his opinion that it is really Iran itself that caused the war with Iraq, he also blames the country's inability to fight back on the new government. It turns out, however, that just as the political prisoners were released when it was convenient, so, too, were the generals and fighter pilots. Just as Marjane was upset her father was no hero, she is also upset about his supposed lack of nationalistic fervor. Still, it turns out that he can be both supportive and critical of his country. That Marjane can understand this seeming contradiction is a mark of her continued growing up.

Still, the news is bad at the end of the military mission, as half of the pilots did not return alive to Iran. Marjane worries the father of her friend, Paradisse, died, since he was one of the pilots freed from jail in order to attack Baghdad. At school Marjane intuits by Paradisse's face that her father died. When the teacher asks the students to write a report about the war, Paradisse writes about how she will protect her mother and her little brother after her father's death. Marjane tries to console her during recess, telling her that her father is a hero, but Paradisse dismisses Marjane outright, saying, "I wish he were alive and in jail rather than dead and a hero."

As has been her tendency throughout the book so far, Marjane romanticizes most of her strong feelings, and so she sees the death of her friends father in combat in romantic, heroic terms rather than in human terms. She doesn't get that, to his daughter, the man's death is still death, no matter how he died. With the death of her friends father, Marjane must start to confront these human costs.

THE JEWELS

Not much food is left in the supermarkets, and when Marjane and her mother look for food there they see women fighting with each other over boxes of food. Even Marjane's mother and father fight. At home, when Marjane's mother does not answer quickly enough about whether the jerry cans she has are for storage or gasoline, her father starts screaming and yelling about the sacrifices he must make to keep the family safe and peaceful. Marjane, in the middle of the two, at first trying to defend her mother, then begins to cry.

Everyone's fuses have been shortened by the stresses of the war. Normal life has been disrupted, and so people cannot behave as they normally would. A child still, Marjane cannot easily handle the familial rifts that the stresses of the war create, and when she feels that she has to choose a side, just as she feels she must in the larger war around her, she weeps instead.

When the family goes to the gas station to fill a jerry can, the gas attendant tells them he will not fill the cans for them, as everyone needs to ration the gas. The press says nothing about what has happened, but the gas attendant tells them that Iraq bombed a refinery in Abadan, leading to the shortage. Marjane's mother thinks of Mali, her childhood friend, who lives in Abadan. Back at home the family tries to call Mali, but they get no response. Some days later, Mali and her family, her husband and two boys, ring the doorbell at Marjan's house. They, like many other people from border towns like Abadan, had to flee northward. Marjane takes it upon herself to care for the two boys who have come to stay in their house, offering them hot chocolate. When they ask for toys, she tells them she doesn't have any because "I'm all grown up."

The bombings in the south of Iran lead many people to flee north, and it is now up to the people in the north to help out the refugees. It remains a moment of national crisis, and thus people expect everyone to chip in, from rationing gas to housing refugees. Marjane uses the opportunity to assert herself. She wants to help out, but more than that, she wants to prove that she is in fact grown up, responsible, caring, and capable. Of course, anyone who has to say that they are all grown up is revealing, in fact, that they are still a kid.

That night, Mali's husband moans over the loss of his house, which cost a lot of money to build. Marjane's father does not like Mali's husband because he is materialistic. In the morning, one week after they've come to live with the Satrapi's, the two families go to the supermarket. The two boys point at objects they want, as they are still used to their previous lifestyle. The family overhears two women speaking about the southern refugees and how it is so hard to find food now that they have come. Prejudicially, they claim that "southern women are all whores." Embarrassed and ashamed, the family leaves the supermarket. In the car on the way home, Mali says soberly, "To have the Iraqis attack, and to lose in an instant everything you had built over a lifetime, that's one thing...but to be spat upon by your own kind, it is intolerable!"

Marjane's father's negative feelings about Mali's husband shows how different people can have very different values, even though they are all Iranian. Yet Marjane's family continues to offer support and comfort to Mali and her family – the war can bring people together. Yet at the supermarket the prejudiced remarks of the two women indicate how the war is also ripping the Iranian's apart. People's own suffering can make them blind and uncaring to the suffering of others.

THE KEY

In the morning newspapers, Marjane sees the pictures and names of "today's martyrs." Marjane is a bit surprised at her mother's seeming indifference at the pictures; when Marjane mentions the photos, her mother changes the subject by asks Marjane to help her style her hair. Marjane's mother explains that though affected by the war dead, "our country has always known war and martyrs, so, like my father said: 'When a big wave comes, lower your head and let it pass!'" Marjane, too, tries to "think only of life," however, at school twice a day Marjane and her classmates must line up to mourn the dead and beat their breasts, a ritual with religious roots usually performed by men, who sometimes would hit themselves vigorously, even sometimes with chains. She describes the beatings as a "macho thing."

Wartime has completely inundated every aspect of society, from the newspapers to Marjane's school-time experiences. Marjane's mother's response, that she would rather lower her head and just survive, suggests her sense of helplessness—both in the sense that all of this has happened before, and in the sense that after having demonstrated to overthrow the Shah she sees that the results of action were not what she wanted. So she disengages. However, Marjane herself does not have this luxury because at school she is forced to mourn the martyrs physically. The description of the grieving as "macho" connects both the war and the nationalist and religious fervor it inspires to men (and note also that these men are forcing the girls in the school to mourn in this way).

Marjane and her classmates begin making fun of the beating ritual, exaggerating their suffering and pain during these sessions, or poking fun at the winter fleece hoods they have to knit for the soldiers. The teacher zealously chastises the girls for their impudence. She also punishes them with a week's suspension, since not one of them would tattle on a girl who shouted "poopoo" at the teacher's objections to their disobedience. As Marjane describes herself and the other girls, "we were completely united." Marjane points at the fact that the girls had once attended secular schools, where such religious rituals were nonexistent, as the reason for their rebelliousness.

There is one definite advantage of being a child: the consequences for disobedience in the public sphere, the school, are not as serious as arrest or execution. That the girls of the school make fun of the rituals and tasks they are made to perform highlights how ridiculous this religious zealousness is, how it is an exaggeration of what anyone actually feels. And yet what these girls see as ridiculous, the adults of their school are actually making them do! Again, the religious and nationalist devotion on display in the novel is painted as childish; more childish than the children forced to do them.

Back at home, Mrs. Nasrine, the family's maid, tearfully explains that at school (a different school from the one Marjane attends) the teachers gave Mrs. Nasrine's son a "**plastic key painted gold**." The key is supposed to represent the idea "that if they went to war and were lucky enough to die, this key would get them into heaven." Essentially, this means that the teachers are teaching the boys that dying for the state, or martyrdom, would give them entrance to heaven. Mrs. Nasrine has five kids and tearfully expresses her devastation that the government "want[s] to trade this key for my oldest son." Moreover, she feels terrible, for though she has been "faithful to the religion" all her life, she's not sure she can "believe in anything anymore." The teachers also tell the boys that in heaven there will be "plenty of food, women and houses made of gold and diamonds," which excites the boys. After all, the boys are only fourteen.

The experiences that Marjane has in her all-girls school and the experience that Mrs. Nasrine's son has in his all-boys school are markedly different. While Marjane and the rest of the girls are supposed to support the war through prayer and practical but faraway support, the teachers attempt to persuade Mrs. Nasrine's son about the greatness of martyrdom and therefore to join the war effort and willingly die for his country. (In fact, the Iran-Iraq war was characterized in part by Iran's tactic of just throwing their young soldiers into the front lines where they would die by the hundreds of thousands). Mrs. Nasrine sees how the regime is using religious promises to manipulate the boys toward their own deaths, and so the Islamic fundamentalists drive Mrs. Nasrine away from her long held religious beliefs.

When Mrs. Nasrine's son comes over after school, Marjane's mother tries to convince him that the stories about paradise that the teachers tell him are just made-up. She also tries to tell him about the bright future he could have if he goes to college and gets married. Nonetheless, he does not really listen. He does not take these warnings seriously and playfully says that he will marry Marjane one day.

As Mrs. Nasrine described, her son is not mature enough to understand the real consequences of the war—just as Marjane herself was once too young. As a child who has known times of strife for most of his adult life, he cannot really imagine the type of life trajectory that Marjane's mother tries to explain to him.

Marjane's cousin Shahab shows up in the house—he is on leave from the army—and he tells how in the army he sees groups of young boys from the poorer regions who have been convinced "that the afterlife is even better than Disneyland." He expresses how the army leaders "hypnotize them and just toss them into battle." It also turns out that the **keys** that Mrs. Nasrine described are only given to poorer boys. Marjane's male friend, Peyman, for example does not receive one at school. Marjane turns to the future in her narration for a moment, and reveals that though Mrs. Nasrine's son does not die at the front, "thousands of young kids, promised a better life, exploded on the minefields with their keys around their necks." Meanwhile, Marjane has her first party ever at Peyman's house; she says, "punk rock was in…I was looking sharp."

The type of teachings that the upper class people and the lower classes go through in school are not commensurate to each other. The poor get exploited and are given the keys that persuade them that dying for Iran will bring them everlasting afterlife glory, whereas the older boys are not given such lessons. Earlier in the novel, Marjane recognized that the revolution against the Shah was based on class difference. But now that realization has become ironic: a new regime is in place, and the poor are being even more ruthlessly exploited. At the same time, Marjane continues to complacently enjoy her own class privileges as she breaks the rules of the anti-West government without consequences.

THE WINE

Tehran now becomes the direct target of Iraqi bombings. Everyone turns their basements into shelters. While the sirens ring in the city, Marjane's family hides in the shelter built in the basement of their building. After the bombings end, they call their friends and relatives to make sure everyone is safe. The continuation of the war also means the tightening of the regime's rule. Someone anonymous informs the police about Tinoosh's family's infractions—Tinoosh is one of Marjane's neighbors—and Tinoosh is arrested and lashed after the cops find forbidden party items such as cards and cassettes in his house. Marjane's mother subsequently tapes up the windows of their home, both to protect against flying glass from the windows should explosions go off nearby, and also to protect the family from neighbors' prying eyes. Marjane's family does not want to undergo the same punishment that befell Tinoosh's family.

As the war comes closer to Marjane's friends and family, everyone draws closer together, checking on each other's safety. And yet at the same time the regime uses the war to further put in place their own rules, and in so doing set the population against each other. Informing on someone becomes a way to "move up" in society, and so people do it and justify it as serving their country. No longer can Marjane and her family trust their neighbors as they might have during peaceful times. The tape over the windows of their house indicates their ever increasing isolation within Iran.

The riotous parties that people in society held before the war continue with the same fervor, or even more fervor. People justify these parties by saying that they remain the only way to psychologically bear the traumas and stresses of the war. At one party that Marjane attends, thrown to celebrate the birth of Marjane's baby cousin, the lights go out just a moment the siren goes off and announces the dropping of a bomb over the city. The baby cousin's mother wails and hands Marjane the baby before running to protect herself. Marjane is shocked at this selfish and spontaneous behavior.

People attempt to preserve a semblance of the same life that they led before the start of the war. The parties, though dangerous politically, continue as a way to allay stress and also as a way to feel normal. And yet that normality is tenuous, at best. The way that the terror of the war frays and damages relationships is here symbolized by the mother who abandons her baby in order to saver herself.

On the way back home from the party, a young policeman, a boy who looks about sixteen years old, stops Marjane's father as the family drives home. Because Marjane's father wears a tie, the policeman assumes he is westernized and therefore has been out drinking. The policeman follows the family back to their house so that he can inspect the house for the forbidden alcohol. Marjane's family *does* have a secret alcohol-making operation in their house, but Marjane's father manages to stall the policeman as Marjane and her grandma get rid of all the evidence. Marjane's father soon comes inside irate but without the policeman, who has been successfully bribed, after which he disappeared without a trace. "Their faith has nothing to do with ideology!" Marjane's father complains, disgusted with the people who police the populace into complying with the rules of the regime. "A few bills were all he needed to forget the whole thing." Still, everyone is relieved.

The incident with the police man is an interesting one. First, it demonstrates the way that the government is increasingly cracking down on personal expression, and using whatever tools it can (however circumstantial) to try to root out anyone who is at odds with its fundamentalist Islamic ideology. Yet what infuriates Marjane's father in the end is not the intrusion on his private freedom (though that upsets him too), but rather the sheer hypocrisy of the policeman who gives up his investigation for a bribe. The point here is that despite its supposedly pure ideology, the regime and its followers are corrupt hypocrites. That many of those who carry out the regime's ends do so not out of piety, but because it is a way to make money.

THE CIGARETTE

One day, two years after the war began, Marjane follows some of her older friends to a store called Kansas, where the shopkeepers sell burgers. Though expressly forbidden, money can still buy Western trappings for those who have it. When Marjane comes home, Marjane's mother yells at her because she skipped her school lessons in order to buy hamburgers. She lectures her: "Now is the time for learning. You have your whole life to have fun...In this country you have to know everything better than anyone else if you're going to survive!!" Marjane's mother continues her lecture and promises to punish Marjane. In return, Marjane compares her mother's nagging to a kind of dictatorship, and her promise of punishment akin to government torture of dissidents.

Marjane is becoming a typical rebellious teenager. Even within repressed Tehran avenues exist for the well-off to enjoy some of the delicacies that would have once been far more common before the rise of the Islamic Republic. Marjane's mother tries to make her daughter understand how important it is for her to make the right decisions now in order for Marjane to have a decent future. However, Marjane dismisses the warnings, just as Mrs. Nasrine's son had done. By showing Marjane using the language of dissent against the Islamic Republic to describe her mother's attempt to control her (or protect her, as her mother would put it), the book again builds a comparison between revolutionaries and children.

The Iranian people constantly hear differing accounts about the progress of the war. Fort this reason, no one believes much of the reporting. Despite this skepticism, however, the report that Iraq offers Iran a peace settlement is true. Additionally, Saudi Arabia offers a sum of money to aid reconstruction, but Iran refuses the deal because it refuses to compromise its ideological ideals even for peace. Public warmongering increases. People write slogans that support the war on the streets. Marjane notices one slogan that particularly intrigues her: "To die a martyr is to inject blood into the veins of society."

The government uses propaganda to try to control the message of the war, and thereby continue to control its own population. That the regime rejects peace suggests that the regime needs the war to continue as a way to maintain power. And this tactic works, as the majority of Iranians continue to support Iran and the ideology that drives it to war. The slogan is a good example of the way that the regime uses the war to control its people, to make them see themselves as both connected to Iranian society (and thus the regime that governs it) and to willingly throw themselves into the war effort.

Marjane explains that it eventually became clear to the people "that the survival of the regime depended on the war"—if the war did not continue, the Islamic Republic would fall apart, so the regime must continue it at all costs. She tells the reader sadly: "When I think we could have avoided it all...it just makes me sick. A million people would still be alive." She explains further how the regime arrested and executed "the enemy within"—anyone who posed a threat to or rebelled against the regime in any way. At around the same time as she had this realization, Marjane smokes her first **cigarette** as "my act of rebellion against my mother's dictatorship." Though she does not like the taste, she feels that she has reached adulthood: "Now I was a grown-up."

Marjane has matured to the point where she can see past her nationalism and understand that Iran's war with Iraq helps people feel like their lives have a purpose and it also distracts them from rebelling much against the regime that represses them. Still, Iran gets rid of anyone who does dare rebel against it's rule, and Marjane mourns the death of so many people who died for the sake of a government that put its own survival before the survival of its people. The cigarette represents a small way that Marjane finds to rebel against what she feels like is a war at home against her mother's rules, though of course this is also a small rebellion against the state of her life in general. Though, again, she mistakes the romanticism of rebelling for being an actual grown up.

THE PASSPORT

Marjane's Uncle Taher visits Marjane's family and tell them of his son, who he has sent to Holland for safety. However, the borders of Iran have now been closed to Taher, so he can't leave the country, and he wonders whether he will ever be able to see his son again. He has already had two heart attacks because of the stress of the war. He also denounces what he sees as the regime's gratuitous slaughtering of young men in the streets—men like his son. One day shortly after his visit to Marjane's home, he has a fourth heart attack after hearing a grenade explosion near his home.

This section further explores the human cost of the war—families have been separated, and because the war threatens to drag on for a long time, many wonder, legitimately, whether they will ever be reunited with their loved ones. Taher's situation also raises the prospect that in order to protect one's children might also mean a parent having to sacrifice their own happiness and wellbeing.

Taher needs open heart surgery in England, but the only way for him to receive a permit to leave the country is if the hospital director agrees. However, the hospital director, who is actually Taher's former window washer, refuses to help him. He says it is up to the will of God. The former window washer has become very religious ever since the Revolution, which has undoubtedly helped him get appointed to his current job. Instead of helping Taher, a doctor shows Taher's wife and Marjane's family the swamped hospital premises, in order to explain why supplies are so short. In the hospital there are many men with chemical weapon wounds who await transport to Germany for treatment—though the doctor claims that it is also Germany that sells the chemical weapons in the first place. He says the wounded men are really Germany's guinea pigs.

The episode in the hospital demonstrates how the new regime has allowed those opportunists who once were in a lower class to rise up to the higher class if they also abide by the religious rules of the regime. Most likely the hospital director invokes the will of God to show Taher how the tables have been turned—a power play rather than true religious devotion. Additionally, the idea that many men with chemical weapons await transport for medical aid in the country which supplies those weapons in the first place, demonstrates how all *governments can act hypocritically and immorally.*

Marjane and her father go to meet a man named Khosro, who spent time in prison with Anoosh. Khosro manufactures fake passports for people seeking to leave the country. He also hides in his basement a young lady named Niloufar, a communist who the police have been trying to find. Khosro agrees to make Taher a passport, but says it will take a week. Before he manages to make it, though, Niloufar is spotted through the window of Khosro's home, arrested, and executed. Khosro flees across the Turkish border by night in order to seek asylum in Sweden with his brother. Because he is unable to receive a fake passport in time to make it to London, Taher dies less than three weeks after the start of his hospitalization. His burial occurs the same day as the arrival of his government-issued passport.

Chance has a huge role in the fates of people during wartime. Though Taher would have been able to fly out to London with a fake passport and thus his life would have been saved, Khosro has to flee the country and cannot help him. The irony is that at the end Taher does receive a real government-issued passport, but only on the same day as his death.

KIM WILDE

The government finally reopens the country's borders, and Marjane's parents quickly receive their passports. They take a vacation, just the two of them, to Turkey. Marjane's parents ask Marjane if she wants them to bring her back any gifts, and Marjane asks them to smuggle back for her a few forbidden Western items. In Istanbul, they buy her a denim jacket, Nike shoes, and two posters, one of Kim Wilde, and one of Iron Maiden. In order not to get caught at customs, Marjane's parents hide the posters in the inside lining of Marjane's father's coat. They pass through customs without much of a hitch, and back at home Marjane excitedly puts up the posters in her room as well as wears her new clothes—along with her headscarf, of course.

Marjane is old enough that her parents can now go on vacation without her, and they use the opportunity to give Marjane the chance to own a few items that other teenagers in the rest of the world might have. They are even willing to risk getting caught smuggling, though they are now ingenious smugglers after facing such a long period of repression and difficulty. Marjane happily wears her new clothes and puts up her new posters, which make her feel more normal.

Though Marjane is only thirteen, Marjane's parents let her go out alone, unlike most Iranian parents. One day she goes to buy illegal cassettes of Western Music, but on the way home afterwards she gets stopped by two members of the women's branch of the Guardians of the Revolution, which was founded in 1982 to arrest women who do not conform to the **veil** wearing law. Marjane wears her veil improperly. The two members question her about her clothes, her pin of Michael Jackson, and her veil. Though Marjane lies and tries to feign ignorance, the women want to take her to "the committee," where she might be detained for hours or days, or even whipped, without her parents finding out.

That her parents allow her to go out speaks, perhaps, to their sense of her maturity or their more liberal views. That other parents don't let their children out may suggest just how dangerous it is to even go out in Iran at this time. And Marjane's interaction with the two Guardians shows that it is dangerous: failure to conform to the social expectations of dress and behavior can lead to the government physically harming you. The stakes for Marjane, a natural rebel, in Iran are very high.

Though the two members insist on taking Marjane into their car, she comes up with a fake sob story about her difficult family situation and weeps about it in front of the two women. The two women let her go. Marjane decides not to tell her parents about the episode because she knows that if she does they will never allow her out on her own again. She listens to American music to calm herself down.

Marjane shows quite a bit of ingenuity in working her way out of the situation. Her thought process about not telling her parents shows how she is still negotiating the normal process of growing up as a teenager. However, this wasn't a simple teenage hijinx—Marjane was in real danger, and so the typical events and mistakes of growing up are fraught with dire consequences. Faced with the danger posed to her by the anti-Western government drives her to Western music for comfort. This illustrates how repressive regimes can drive at least some of their people away from the ideology that the regime is trying to promote.

THE SHABBAT

Iraq gains new ballistic missiles called "Scuds"—very powerful and expensive missiles that can reach from Iraqi land all the way to Tehran. When the sirens go on, it takes just three minutes before the missiles make landing, which does not give people much time to hide. Marjane's father says it is useless to try to hide in the shelter in the basement. The damage done by the missiles is so great that the basement wouldn't actually offer any protection to the family. They would just be crushed. "For the first time, I realized just how much danger we were in," Marjane narrates.

The danger to Marjane's family only increases as the war gets more and more heated and Iraq gets more powerful weapons. Marjane's father's admission that there remains little one can do to protect oneself from the new missiles deals a blow to Marjane's confidence and feeling of safety: she is not protected by her family's wealth or her education. She is at the total mercy of the war.

Many people leave the city because of the ballistic missiles, but Marjane's family stays, because her parents believe that her education at her school remains her only link to a good future. Without it, even after the war with Iraq ends, they think that Marjane's options might be very limited. One day, as Marjane goes shopping with a friend and is about to pay for new jeans and earrings, they hear a bomb explode. It turns out to have exploded in the neighborhood of Tavanir, the neighborhood in which Marjane's home stands.

Marjane's family continues to try to preserve the prospects of her daughter's life, even if in the short term it endangers her life. They want Marjane to continue as close to a Western education as possible, preparing her to thrive for a time when the war is over and perhaps a different government runs Iran. However, as the missile in her neighborhood shows, there is no escaping the war, and no guarantee that they will live to see the future they hope for.

Marjane runs home as quickly as she can, but when she gets to her street it seems as if the bomb has hit her home and home, she can barely walk. She hopes desperately that her parents are still alive. However, it turns out that Marjane's home remains unharmed; instead, the home of their Jewish neighbors, the Baba-Levys, lies destroyed. When they are reunited, Marjane's mother tries to distract her daughter from the rubble of their neighbor's home, but Marjane witnesses a bracelet lying in the ruins—a bracelet she knows is attached to the arm of her friend Neda. Marjane screams, angry and mournful about the loss of her friend, who was only in the house because it was the Sabbath, the holy day for the Jews and a day of rest. She says, despite her screaming: "No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger."

This represents one of the few moments when it seems that Marjane might lose members of her nuclear family to the conflict that has ravaged Iran for the past few years. Chance, however, has left Marjane's family alive and taken the life of a different family. That Marjane's friend died during a religious war because she was piously observing her religious faith is a fundamental irony. For Marjane, the death of her friend makes the war something personal and inescapable – her overwhelming grief and anger scours away any last remaining vestiges of her romanticism about the war.

THE DOWRY

It is now 1984 and Marjane is fourteen. She remains as rebellious as ever. She talks back to her teachers at school when they chastise her about what she wears or says: "I had learned that you should always shout louder than your aggressor," she explains. One day, after the principal criticizes Marjane for wearing jewelry and tries to take it away from her, Marjane hits the principal and is summarily expelled, though she does try to apologize. At the new school to which she is sent, Marjane speaks out against the regime's practice of keeping political prisoners, despite the teacher telling the class that the Islamic Republic does not keep political prisoners. The teacher calls her parents, and while they are both proud of her personal strength, they are also angry and fearful about her incautious behavior.

A proper teenager, Marjane has a lot of trouble conforming to the expectations of her, particularly because she has gone through so much and suffered so much during the Islamic Republic's rise. Her anger at the principal is really anger at the regime, for the principal is a representative of its ideology. Marjane's parents are still as liberal as ever, but they also understand the many dangers involved in standing up for oneself nowadays, despite the fact that they, too, once demonstrated in the streets.

Marjane's parents explain the regime's horrible treatment of arrested women. They explain that when a girl who is a virgin and also unmarried gets arrested, a Guardian of the Revolution forcibly marries and rapes her before the execution. The rationale is that it is against the law to kill a virgin, so they solve the issue by making sure the girl is no longer a virgin. This horrifying situation is exactly what Niloufar underwent before her execution. After she was executed, her family received a measly dowry from the government in the mail. The dowry, which is a sum of money given to a bride's family by the groom's family after a wedding, proved to the family that Niloufar had been married off before her execution. In total, the family received the equivalent of $5 for their daughter's life. Marjane is shocked and alarmed.

In order for Marjane to fully understand the danger she puts herself in by behaving against the rules in school, her parents very directly tell her the ugly truth about the way the regime treats women. Marjane's parents have moved far away from their earlier attempts at protecting Marjane from the truth; as they express to her horrifying aspects of the regime, they treat her almost like an equal adult, one who has the mental capacities to understand the enormity of which they speak. The regime's tactic of raping women so as to satisfy the tenets of Islam before executing them also reveals the horrible emptiness of the regime's ideology. Early in the novel Marjane had wanted to be a prophet and to forbid suffering. While naïve, such a desire represented an understanding of religion that put people first. The Islamic regime's understanding of religion is one that imposes suffering as a matter of course.

Luckily, the principal chooses not to write up a report about Marjane's bed behavior in school. However, despite this reprieve, Marjane's parents tell her that they think it best if Marjane leaves Iran for a time. They decide that they will send her to a French school in Vienna, Austria. Marjane's parents assure her that they will join her in a few months time, and though at first Marjane is happy she will have full independence, she suspects her parents are lying to her about following her to Vienna. "Don't ever forget who you are," Marjane's father says, as Marjane thinks about the independence she will experience in Austria.

The decision to send Marjane to Austria is not an easy one, but it demonstrates a trust Marjane's parents have for their daughter. They think she is old enough to handle herself far away from them. It also demonstrates the desperation of their situation. For all they know they, like Taher, might never see their daughter again. When Marjane's father tells Marjane not to forget her origins while in Austria, he harkens back to the idea that you can love your country and criticize it deeply at the same time, a hard lesson. He is saying that she may not agree with the Islamic regime, but that she will always be Iranian.

The next day, Marjane begins her preparations to go to Austria. She fills a jar with Iranian dirt, gives away her favorite objects to her friends for safekeeping, and embraces her family, realizing "how much they loved me" and "how important they were to me." At night, her grandmother comes to spend the night with her. She gives her some advice: "If [people] hurt you, tell yourself that it's because they're stupid. That will help keep you from reacting to their cruelty. Because there is nothing worse than bitterness and vengeance…Always keep your dignity and be true to yourself."

Marjane must prepare for the complete unknown; though dangerous, Tehran has also been a place of love, happiness, family, and friends. By taking the dirt with her and giving away her objects to friends she ensures a physical connection both to her land and to the people who are close to her but will be very far physically from her. Her grandmother's advice seems to underscore the reason why much of the violence has continued so unabated—people want to commit revenge against one another—and it also suggests a way to survive in a cruel world. Though Marjane has learned this to a great degree already, the reminder is important for her, especially as she must embark into a more substantial—and lonely—adulthood.

The next day, at the airport, Marjane's parents reiterate to Marjane that she should not forget who she is or where she comes from, and Marjane vows that she will not. She remains worried that her parents will not manage to visit her in Vienna—that her family will never be together again. Tearfully, Marjane enters the airport. She turns around one last time and sees her father carrying her mother, who looks like she fainted, back to the car. "It would have been better to just go," Marjane says, "rather than take one last look."

Marjane is not at all unrealistic about her future: she understands that she might never be able to be with her parents in the same way again. Her last look back towards her family represents the difficulty of trying to keep a grasp on the past and one's home while being forced to leave both. Marjane understands that the consequences of her leaving will not only reverberate in her own life, but also in the lives of the people she loves. She must leave Iran and her family to have a future, but she can never – nor does she want to – escape her connection to Iran or her family, even if her separation from her family and homeland fills her with grief.

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