

When "Mo" Shirazi returns to Los Angeles to visit his traditional Iranian parents, he finds they have no intention of recognizing his newfound independence.

Hero Pizza

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HERO PIZZA



FRED BESHID

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Fred Beshid

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For Maman and Baba

Chapter 5

There was no missing the restaurant on Ventura Boulevard. The typical modern-era storefront was converted into a Persian palace by attaching plywood cutouts of columns and pointy arches to the exterior. The gold and white painted attachments looked like they were salvaged from a high school production of *Arabian Nights*. The restaurant was named after the snow-capped dormant volcano that towers above the city of Tehran, *Damavand*. My mom grew up at the foot of that mountain in fear it would erupt and take her away in a flood of molten lava.

My mom is a real estate agent with a largely Iranian clientele who fear being swindled out of their life savings. Her ethical reputation is comforting to those who don't know how the system works in the U.S. Although women in traditional Persian culture are not valued as breadwinners my dad was fine with her working as long as she had dinner ready every night at 7 p.m. I helped her with household duties as much as I could. She never explained why she wanted to work. I assumed it was so she could buy all the things my dad wouldn't. Designer bags, expensive perfumes, a luxury car, and a Persian palace in Beverly Hills.

My mom dreamed of living in a *Persian palace*. This type of architecture is characterized by an abundance of moldings, porticoes, cornices, balustrades, columns, rotundas, capitals and friezes. The columns are a must. They are the opposite of modest. Her version has a pool even though she can't swim. Her obsession started a long time ago when one of her friends added columns to the front of her tract house. Apparently, this is very prestigious in some circles. The richer you are the more columns you add to the front of your house. This same friend also built a kitchen in the garage because they didn't want to use the inside kitchen. They wanted it to remain spotlessly clean. They seemed to believe appearances were everything.

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My parents didn't believe in daycare or babysitters. My mom waited until I was in junior high school to start her real estate career. I started my working career at the same time. My first position was pizza box folder. I folded pizza boxes for hours at a time while my mind atrophied. They were the generic kind with the cartoon pizza on the top. Cartoon pizzas over and over. Cartoon pizza... cartoon pizza... cartoon pizza... One day I reached my cartoon pizza limit and decided I couldn't take it anymore. I complained to management; unfortunately, I was promoted.

My new position came with a fancy new title, Vice-President of Marketing for Hero Pizza. My job responsibility consisted of canvassing the neighborhood after school and attaching Hero Pizza ads to the doorknobs of unsuspecting homeowners. In the pizza business they're called *door-hangers*. I didn't mind the work but I found being chased by angry dogs rather unpleasant. One day while being chased by a poodle I fell and received some dog-induced puncture wounds on my left hand. When my mom found out she bought me a can of dog repellent, the kind postal workers and meter-readers carry. It changed my life. That can of dog repellent reduced the amount of terror in my life by as much as 78%. The other 22% I attributed to the Iranian-hating bully at school who referred to me as *The Terrorist*. When he was feeling creative he placed a colorful expletive between *the* and *terrorist*. Unfortunately, my mom made me promise not to use the dog repellent on people.

I parked in front of the restaurant and hesitated at the wheel. I tried to remember all my Farsi. She insisted on speaking to me only in Farsi so I wouldn't forget my culture. Or should I say her culture. She feared I would lose what little Persian-ness I had. The problem with Farsi is everything is vague, subtle and suggestive. This is great for poetry but for daily communication it takes some getting used to. For example, if you want to complain about being cheated by a merchant at the bazaar you say, *Daree saram kolah mizaree*. This translates to *you are putting a hat on my head*. It's a great language for expressing emotions. It's a very colorful language for expressing anger. In order to wish someone dead you might say, *Khak bar saret*. This translates to something like *dirt on your head*. One of my personal favorites is

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zahremar. One can shout this out if one is being lied to. It translates to *snake venom*. Some words are just plain confusing like *sheer*. Depending on the context it can mean *faucet*, *lion* or *milk*.

I took a deep breath and went inside, repeating my mystical mantra as I walked. *This too shall pass*. Inside the familiar smell of Persian cuisine made me feel at home. I asked the hostess for my mother, Shahrazad. She was named for the clever heroine of *Hazar-o-yek Shab*, or *A Thousand and One Nights* as it's called in English. I followed the hostess to my mom's table. She was alone scribbling notes on a legal pad. When she saw me she jumped up and hugged me. "*Mach bedeh*," she said while squeezing my face. *Kiss me*. We exchanged kisses on both cheeks. When she pulled away her perfume didn't go with her. I wondered how long it would haunt me. I can't remember the name of her perfume though I should. She asked for it every year for her birthday. I could never bring myself to go to a perfume counter at a department store. I told her I couldn't hold my breath long enough to complete the transaction. My mom was convinced I was exaggerating but I kept trying to convince her. I was reluctant to condone her perfume abuse. I didn't want to be an enabler.

She gave me the once-over. Her happy face soured. She couldn't hide her feelings if she tried. She wore her emotions on her face at all times. She pointed at my jeans with disgust and said, "*Een ashghal chee-eh mipooshy?*" *What's this garbage you're wearing?* In her world being overdressed was a virtue.

"What do you mean? I'm a grown man and this is how I dress. I even changed my shirt to make you happy and you still complain." She looked around embarrassed and motioned for me to sit down. A few other patrons glanced over at us and went back to their meals. She wanted to hide my jeans under the table. She explained to me in a serious tone that my future depended on my ability to impress others. "I think it's silly to judge others by their clothes," I said. She insisted that others judge others by what they wear and I had no control over that.

I had forgotten about her obsession with appearances. It seemed most of my family worked overtime to create an illusion of success

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and happiness. They acted as though saving face and hiding difficulties were primary goals. I remembered my mom telling me when I was young, "Slap your face to keep it pink." It was an old Persian proverb that suggested one must be willing to suffer to maintain a happy appearance. Personal and family reputation was the top priority.

"How do you expect to find a good Persian wife with clothes like that?" she asked.

"Maybe I want a wife that wears jeans and a T-shirt." She cast her eyes toward the sky as if pleading for heavenly intervention.

"*Khehjahlat bekesh!*" I don't know how to translate this. It means something like *shame on you* or *you should be ashamed of yourself*. "When you dress like that people will think you are *badbakht*." *Poor, low class*. I did my best to explain that this was a perfectly acceptable way to dress in America but it fell on deaf ears. She started to gather up her things because she wanted to move to a corner table where I would be less visible. I told her to relax and she sat down.

"Maman, *man Amreekahyee hastam*," I said. *Mom, I am American*. "It's perfectly okay for me to dress like this."

"*Een harfah nagoo*," she said. *Don't say these things*. "*Khodeto loos nakon*." *Don't make yourself spoiled*.

"But it's true," I said. I started laughing at the absurdity of it all. She seemed mad at me for not taking the matter more seriously.

"*Amreekahyee nasho*," she warned. *Don't become American*. This was her way of saying I had become *too* American and I had lost touch with my cultural heritage. I wanted to laugh again but my mom was way too serious. I wished I had an American flag to wave.

Fortunately, the owner came up with menus and asked if everything was okay. She was a friend of my mother's. She looked at me and smiled. "*Pesareh shomah hast?*" she asked my mom. *Is this your son?*

"*Baleh*," my mom replied. *Yes*. She faked a smile. I'm sure she was thinking about my jeans.

I stood to be polite. My mom made a face as soon my jeans were exposed again. I clasped my hands in front of me. I never know if I'm

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supposed to shake hands with an Iranian woman that I'm meeting for the first time. If she was Muslim she might have been offended by my desire to shake her hand. I never know what's appropriate. Sometimes I'll meet my mom's friends for the first time, and they'll hug and kiss me. Since I have no idea what sort of greeting Iranian women expect from me I resolved to stay still until they make the first move. That's probably rude too. I never know what to do.

"*Khaylee bahnamakeh*," my mom's friend said to her. *He's very cute*. I smiled and questioned the wisdom of referring to a grown man as *cute*. *Bahnamak* means *with salt*. For some reason you use this term to describe something that is cute. *With salt*. Like I said, Persian is an interesting language.

Mom began to apologize for my jeans and assured her that I meant no offense. I slowly recoiled back into my seat. She rattled off some excuses in Farsi about my appearance. She said I had just arrived from New York and came straight from the airport, having no time to change into a proper outfit. My mom was concerned her friend would report the incident to her friends and family. In an endless chain of gossip this news would make its way all the way back to Iran. Her friend assured her that everything was fine and that she should be thankful for such a *bahnamak* son. My mom looked at me and I flashed her a fake smile. They exchanged small talk. I stared at the table. The gold utensils reminded me of my own at home. When I moved into my apartment in Brooklyn I casually mentioned to my mom that I needed silverware. My mom sent me a fancy gold-plated service for ten. I never figured out the use for some of the utensils in the set. It was a mystery that could be solved only by going to charm school. They clashed with my mismatched thrift store dishes. My friends made fun of my "royal" silverware.

After her friend left I told my mom to relax. "Maman, I didn't fly three thousand miles to have my life criticized. You can do that over the phone any time. This is a special occasion," I said. My mother called me every Sunday evening. This was our Sunday night ritual ever since I moved to New York. When I told her I was moving to New York she threatened to never speak to me again. I knew she was bluffing. I was her only son. She couldn't disown me. The topic

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of conversation was usually how I was disappointing my entire tribe by not being married yet.

She sat back in her chair and her face relaxed. I was glad I'd finally gotten through to her. "*Chehtoree?*" she asked. *How are you? "Khaylee delam barat tang shodeh, azeezam."* I miss you very much, my dear. It literally means *my heart is tight for you*. I told her I missed her too. We stared at each other for a few seconds and then I picked up my menu.

I was excited to have Persian food. My dad told me many times the Persians invented cuisine, the art of eating for pleasure, thousands of years ago. Since Persia was located between Europe and the Far East, Persian cuisine influenced the eating habits of many countries around the world. When I was growing up my mom always made Persian food. It was as if she thought her traditional dishes would keep me Persian.

I saw many of my childhood favorites on the menu. I liked *khoreh*, stews served over rice. *Ghormeh Sabzi* is a stew made from fresh herbs, kidney beans and small chunks of meat. Many consider this to be the national dish. *Fesenjan* is stewed walnuts, pomegranate and chicken. *Gheimh Bademjan* is stewed eggplant, peas and chunks of meat.

Rice, *polo*, is an art form in Persian cuisine. There are many ways to serve rice. *Sabzi Polo* is rice cooked with fresh dill, fenugreek and coriander. *Reshteh Polo* is rice with noodles. *Adas Polo* combines rice with lentils, raisins, cinnamon and saffron. *Baghali Polo* is rice with fava beans.

Other foods I remembered from childhood were *Mast-o-khiar*, a side dish made from cucumber, yogurt and mint; *Aash*, a thick soup with noodles; *Doogh*, a yogurt drink with mint and salt; and *Kuku*, an omelet-like dish with spinach, parsley, dill, coriander, chives, and walnuts. Baba claimed *kuku* was the inspiration for quiche.

Desserts, *shireeni*, included *Sholeh Zard*, saffron rice pudding; *Bastani*, rosewater and pistachio ice cream; and *Zoolbia*, something like a funnel cake soaked in syrup.

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My mom asked what I wanted. “*Kuku and Sabzi Polo*,” I said. She gave me a funny look. “What?” I asked.

“*Yeh khoodeh goosht bokhor*,” she said. *Eat a little bit of meat.*

“*Maman, man sabzi khoram. Man goosht nemikhoram*,” I said. *Mom, I’m a vegetarian. I don’t eat meat.*

“*Halet khoob neest. Yeh khoodeh goosht bokhor*,” she said. *Your health is not good. Eat a little bit of meat.*

“I feel fine. Why do you say I’m sick?” I asked.

“*Zard shodee*,” she said. *You look yellow.*

“Do you know what a vegetarian is?”

“Okay, okay. *Pas yeh khoodeh mahi bokhor*,” she said. *Then eat a little bit of fish.*

“*Maman, mahi goosht hast*,” I said. *Mom, fish is meat.*

I was tired of the conversation and reached for the basket of *lavash*, thin Persian bread. I examined the slices for mold because the previous time I had eaten in that restaurant the bread was moldy. My mom shot me a look. “*Chi shodeh?*” she asked. *What happened?*

“I’m checking to see if the bread is moldy, *kapak zadeh*.” She told me to stop because it was rude. “Well, isn’t serving moldy bread rude?”

“*Hichi nagoo*,” she said. *Don’t say anything.* I could tell by her tone that her friend was approaching our table. Her friend looked at me and smiled.

“Do you speak Persian?” she asked me.

“*Man yeh kami Farsi baladam*.” *I know a little Farsi.* My lack of Farsi proficiency was a travesty, an insult to the 3,000 years of culture my ancestors created.

“We don’t speak Farsi. We speak Persian,” she said in a serious tone. I looked at my mother. She forced a smile. I can never get a straight answer about this. It’s politically charged. Do I speak Farsi or Persian? Some people say one thing. Some say the other. It doesn’t seem like a difficult decision to make. Can’t we just vote on it?

The trouble started when some Arabs invaded Persia in the eighth century. Persia was known as *Pars* at that time. Since the Arabic language has no *P* sound they replaced the *P* with an *F* sound. *Pars* became *Fars*. The language *Parsi* became *Farsi*. The Arab

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occupation inspired the poet Ferdowsi to write the *Shahnameh* to preserve Persian culture and language.

I ordered in English to avoid any more Persian lessons. In addition, I ordered my dad's favorite, fish and rice, to take back to him. My mom ordered and then stared out the window for a minute. She was quiet. That could mean only one thing, she was thinking. Which meant she was plotting against me. That worried me. I wondered what she was up to. I figured it had something to do with marrying me off to one of her friends' daughters. She looked at me and smiled. "Do you want to go on a trip with me?" she asked.

"I would like to but I can't right now. I'm really busy with art shows and my design business."

"Well, it would be nice if you would go with me to visit our family."

"Take Baba. He needs a vacation," I shot back.

"Are you kidding? He can't leave his pizza for five minutes."

"I know. I've noticed," I said. She was quiet again. More plotting on her part which lead to more worrying on my part. She reached into her purse and retrieved a small picture of a young woman. She placed it on the table and slid it toward me with her freshly manicured fingertip. I asked who it was.

"What do you think?" she asked with angelic innocence.

"Of what?"

"Do you like her?" she asked.

"I don't even know her," I said.

"Do you think she's pretty?"

"I guess." I shrugged. "Who is she?" I asked.

"Afsar. When can you go meet her?" she asked, suppressing a devious smile.

"Oh, I get it," I said. My mom covered her mouth to stifle her laughter. "I know what you're up to. I told you I'm against this *khastegari* stuff." *Khastegari* is the fine art of arranging marriages. In tribal cultures inter-marriage is a way to increase or maintain family power. Marriages are sometimes arranged as early as childhood. Sometimes even first cousins marry. According to Persian tradition only one's parents are qualified to choose potential spouses. My dad

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did not seem to have any interest in this so my mom took it upon herself to find me a wife.

I preferred the simple American dating rituals. Dinner and a movie. Simple, only two people involved. On the other hand, the Persian way could potentially involve dozens of people. Everyone in the extended family might have a say in the matter. That is, everyone except those that are actually getting married.

“I can find my own wife,” I proclaimed. “Thanks anyway.”

“But you are not doing it and you do not know any nice Persian girls from good families. I have to do it for you,” she said, trying to be serious again.

“I’m busy right now,” I said. “*Delam nemikhad.*” *I’m not interested. Literally, my heart doesn’t want it.* She looked irritated and asked for an explanation. “*Namidanam.*” *I don’t know.*

The image of a Persian wedding popped into my mind. I shuddered. Proper manners would obligate my parents to invite everyone they know. Even people they don’t know very well. The invitees would be obligated to go. Not going would be considered an insult. Between my parent’s friends and family there would be a thousand people just on my side. I shuddered again. Although one tradition sounded appealing, a woman poet would write love poems on the bride’s thighs in henna for her husband to read on their wedding night. That sounded like fun.

“You have to call Afsar,” she demanded.

“*Mano azyat nakon,*” I said. *Stop bugging me.*

“*Beetarbiyat!* Don’t be rude. How will you know what a wonderful girl Afsar is if you don’t meet her?”

“*Mano azyat nakon.* I’m good. I can’t believe you people sit around and think about stuff like this. Plotting behind my back.”

“I have to. It is my job to find you a good wife,” she said. My mom, like my dad, believed in the philosophy of parental superiority. “You cannot expect to choose your own wife. These American girls are not good for marrying,” she said. By good wife she meant a *virgin*. I tried to explain to her the world was different now. She disagreed and insisted no self-respecting Persian girl would have pre-marital sex. She believed there were only two types of unmarried

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women: virgins and *jendeh*, sluts. I told her some women got hymen reconstruction surgery to restore their virginity. She didn't believe me. She closed her eyes and slowly shook her head.

I wasn't interested in having this conversation with my mother but I couldn't figure out a way to end it. "I'm more than capable of choosing my own wife. That is not your job and I never hired you to be my matchmaker. It's a free country. Isn't that why you came here?"

"It's too late. I already told Afsar you want to meet her so now you have to call her."

"Why did you do that?" I held my face in my hands. "Why can't you ask me first?"

"Why can't you just meet her?" she asked.

"I told you I don't feel like it. Just tell her it was a misunderstanding. *Eshtebaah shodeh*." She said I was being selfish and there were other people involved besides me. "I know. That's why I don't like it."

"Please, be a good son. She is an architect. You will like her. Here is her phone number. Please call her," she pleaded. A Latino man served our food while she was writing something down on her note pad. She tore off the page and placed it in front of me. I told her I had no intention of calling that woman. It was a matter of principle for me. I felt I had the right to find my own wife. If I married at all. I started eating. A welcome distraction from the ongoing marriage feud. I looked at the slip of paper in front of me and noticed that the phone number began with a foreign access code, 011.

"What the heck is this?" I asked, trying not to choke on my rice. "What country does she live in?"

"*Alman*. Germany. Didn't I tell you?" She stared at me innocently. At this point I was more curious than I was aggravated and I decided to get to the bottom of the matter.

"Okay, start from the beginning. Who is Afsar?"

"She is the daughter of Sholeh," she said.

"Wait. You mean Sholeh, your cousin?" She nodded. "So let me get this straight." I rubbed my head. "You want me to go to a foreign

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country and marry a relative? And if I don't then I'm rude?" I started laughing.

"*Zahremar!*" *Snake venom!* She tried to slap me as I pulled away still laughing. "In Iran cousins marry each other all the time," she insisted. "It is not a big deal."

"Okay. Well, why didn't you say so? Since you put it that way it sounds great. I guess I'm getting married to my second cousin in Germany. I feel happy." My sarcasm prompted her to try to slap me again. By this time I was laughing so hard I couldn't pull away fast enough. She made contact with the side of my head which made me laugh even harder.

"*Bitarbiat!* You have no manners. *Dahanet beband. Chegadreh shaytoon shodi.*" *Close your mouth. What a devil you've become.*

"I have no manners? You just hit me in a restaurant. That doesn't seem very polite," I said. The other patrons glanced at us and went back to their meals. My mom started eating her food as if nothing had happened and was quiet for a few minutes. I enjoyed my food in silence.

"You are just like your father," she said. She meant this as an insult. It meant I was bullheaded. "Why don't you have any respect for tradition?"

"Because tradition has no respect for me. I've told you that a million times. Besides, my tradition is American. I was born here. Americans frown upon marrying relatives."

"Why? Your uncle Ali and your aunt Suri are cousins," she said.

"They are? I wish you hadn't told me that."

"Does this mean you are not going to call Afsar?" she asked.

"No. I'm not calling her. Stop bugging me."

"But what do I tell her mother?" she asked.

"Tell her I'm a starving artist and I can't afford to call Germany."

"I don't know what I did to deserve such an ungrateful son," she said. I told her to ask me ahead of time in the future. "When do you plan to get married?"

"There is no plan. If I meet the right person I'll think about it," I said. She shook her head. She warned me if I waited too long I would

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become *torshideh*. It means *pickled* or *soured*. It's used in the same way as spinster. "Men don't get *torshideh*. Only women do," I said. She shook her head.

"No, men do too," she said. I laughed and shook my head. "And people will think you do not like girls. Especially because you are an artist."

"Maman, you know I don't care what people think. Let them think whatever they want. I know you think appearances are the most important thing. But I think the truth is more important. *Velam kon.*" *Leave me alone.* I was tired of this conversation but I knew from past experience that she wasn't going to let it go. It was an obsession. Resistance was futile. I was up against the inertia of a thousand years of tradition.

She asked me why I didn't date Persian girls. "*Vosam nemireseh.* I can't afford it. Besides they only date doctors."

"No, they are not like that," she insisted. I disagreed and reminded her of the time I went out with a Persian girl I met in college. When her father found out he called me and demanded to see my financial statement. When I told him I was a student, he told me to stay away from his daughter until I was a *khanehdar*, a homeowner. Dating a Persian girl was subject to paternal permission which was subject to an interview and financial portfolio review. During this process I would be expected to explain why I didn't own a house. Whereas, if I did own a house I would have to explain why it wasn't bigger. I was under pressure. After all, I was competing with doctors, dentists, lawyers and the independently wealthy. The game was over as soon as I said I was an artist. If you're not a doctor or an engineer they're convinced you can't make a living.

"And remember that other one, Mina's daughter. Her father interrogated me for half an hour as a part of our date," I said. "I have enough problems." She said marriage for love doesn't work and pointed to the high American divorce rate. She said falling in love was only appropriate after the wedding ceremony. I was puzzled by this bias against romantic love. All the great Persian love stories I ever read were tragedies: Layla and Majnun, Shirin and Farhad, Vamegh and Azra, Vis and Ramin, etc. It was as if the stories were

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propaganda designed to prevent young lovers from acting on their romantic impulses.

The Latino busboy cleared our plates. "*Gracias. Por favor, un vaso de agua,*" I said. *Thank you. May I have a glass of water?* He smiled and nodded. My mom made a face. She didn't like my speaking Spanish. She thought it diluted my Persian-ness. I wasn't concerned about that. I spoke Spanish well thanks to Chucho and Señor Garcia, my high school Spanish teacher. Since I spoke Spanish I could easily convince people I was Mexican. For me having a flexible identity was a survival mechanism.

Pretending to be Mexican actually saved my life a few times. One time I delivered a pizza to a scary guy with a questionable tattoo on his neck and a gun in his waistband. Before I could say anything he asked, "What's your name, boy?" He looked at me suspiciously as he leaned against the door frame with folded arms. I pointed to my name badge and said my name was Mo. "Is that short for Mohammed? Are you one of them Iranians?"

"No, sir. Not me. I'm Mexican. Mo is short for Moses," I said with a smile. He said Moses wasn't Mexican. "My parents are Bible thumpers. All of us kids are named after prophets. I have a brother named Jesus. Your pizza comes out to \$12.45, please." He stared at me suspiciously.

"What's your last name?" he asked. I said Garcia. It was the first name I thought of. His eyes narrowed. "Say something in Mexican," he commanded.

"*Buenos dias, mi amigo,*" I said. He asked what that meant. "Good day, my friend," I replied.

"How do you say 'I want pizza'?" he asked.

"*Yo quiero pizza.*"

"Pizza is the same word in Mexican?" he asked. He looked puzzled.

"*Si.* Yes."

"All right, thanks," he said. He handed me the cash including a generous tip. "I just want to make sure that none of my hard-earned cash goes to terrorists."

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“God bless America. *Viva los Estado Unidos!*” I said walking away.

My mom looked at her watch and said, “*Deeram shod.*” *I’m late.* She started shoving her papers into her briefcase. She stopped and looked at me. The sadness in her eyes made my chest tighten. “When are you moving back home? *Delam barat tang misheh.*” *I will miss you.*

“*Nemidonam. Zendegi daram,*” I said. *I don’t know. I have a life.* I did my best not to feel guilty. This was one of those times that I wish I had siblings. Then the family guilt could be distributed over a larger group of people instead of just focused on me.

“Why can’t you make a life here?”

“Because you and Baba won’t let me be myself.”

“*Mageh kee hasti?*” *Who do you think you are?*

“I don’t know. I’m trying to figure that out. Why is everyone against that?”

“I know who you are. *Pesareh man haste.* You are my son. That’s who you are. I’m your mother. It is my job to explain to you who you are.” She stood up and picked up her briefcase. I stood up with the intention of declaring my independence but she looked too sad. I couldn’t do it. I kissed her on both cheeks and told her I’d take care of the check.

“*Maman,* I’ll see you later at dinner. Good luck with your client,” I said. She smiled and left. I picked up my dad’s take-out order and paid the tab. As I was getting in the car my cell phone rang. It was my dad so I didn’t answer. When I checked the message it said, “*Komak! Komak!*” *Help! Help!*

When "Mo" Shirazi returns to Los Angeles to visit his traditional Iranian parents, he finds they have no intention of recognizing his newfound independence.

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