

Roya and Arash Shirazi

In "Roya and Arash Shirazi," set in Tehran in 1973, ten-year-old Roya faces the indignity of bedwetting, a source of shame and ridicule for her. Despite her attempts to hide her embarrassment, such as limiting her water intake and avoiding meals, the smell clings to her, eliciting taunts from her older brother, Arash. Their relationship, marked by teasing and conflict, reflects a broader familial tension, as their parents seem to overlook Roya's struggles. Kamran, their father, goes about his day without much engagement, while Parvin, their mother, displays her frustration subtly as she handles laundry.

Roya's school experience is tainted by her insecurities; she worries that her peers can smell her odor. During a lesson on beautiful words, Roya feels the weight of their laughter when she awkwardly volunteers "bini," the Persian word for nose. The episode exacerbates her feelings of alienation. Meanwhile, dining with her family offers little comfort; her mother shares cooking tips and aspirations for Roya's future, but she feels disconnected, yearning for something beyond her domestic reality.

The narrative reveals the family's financial strain, hinted at through whispered conversations about Kamran's job uncertainties and potential relocation for work. This backdrop adds to Roya's feelings of hopelessness for her future, which she imagines without the confines of her current life.

The chapter culminates in a deeply unsettling moment when Roya wakes to find Arash urinating on her, a visceral manifestation of her shame and the reality of her familial relationships. This climactic action underscores the complex dynamics at play—of love, embarrassment, and the struggle for dignity within a challenging family and societal context. Ultimately, Roya's story weaves together themes of childhood vulnerability, familial relationships, and the harsh realities of their environment .