

# Roya Shams

In August 1987, in Tehran, the narrator reflects on her dissatisfaction with life, feeling distanced from her existence. She finds a brief reprieve in small moments of solitude, such as sipping tea alone or doodling, amidst the mundane responsibilities of cooking and cleaning. The arrival of Leila, the wife of her husband's friend Gilgamesh, disrupts her anticipated chance for solitude. Leila and Gilgamesh, who works for the Tehran police and has a brash demeanor, are newlyweds, and their bond mostly highlights the narrator's exhaustion with her marriage to Ali, who is perceived as overbearing despite their relatively balanced relationship.

The narrator wrestles with feelings of impending motherhood, having realized she is pregnant with Cyrus but hesitant to confirm it with a test. The weight of announcing her pregnancy to Ali looms over her, making her desire for autonomy all the more critical. When Gilgamesh drops Leila off for a weekend stay, the narrator feels a sense of loss regarding her independence.

Leila's personality quickly emerges as she sheds any initial shyness. During their dinner, the narrator attempts to bond over shared frustrations about their husbands, but Leila's focus remains on her husband's peculiar habits instead, causing discomfort for the narrator. Leila's humorous anecdotes about Gilgamesh are intended to create camaraderie, but they often serve to magnify the narrator's frustrations.

Their interactions become challenging as Leila's uninvited energy complicates the narrator's small respite. After dinner, Leila curiously invites the narrator to the lake, disregarding the late hour. Reluctantly drawn into Leila's spontaneity, the narrator grapples with her annoyance for being pulled away from her cherished solitude.

As they prepare to leave, the narrator demonstrates her perennial urge to maintain control and order, while Leila embraces a carefree spirit that frustrates the narrator further. This dynamic sets the stage for a deeper exploration of identity, motherhood, and the complexities of female relationships against the backdrop of societal expectations in Iran.