

# Chapter Twenty-eight

The chapter explores the concept of grace through the perspective of Roya Shams, a woman who narrowly escaped death when her plane was mistakenly shot down by the USS *Vincennes*. Roya reflects on grace as an unearned gift, contrasting it with justice, which is transactional. She recounts how she traded passports with her lover, Leila, to help her flee Iran, only for Leila to perish in the crash instead. Roya grapples with the guilt of surviving while Leila died, framing her second chance at life as an inexplicable act of grace.

Roya's survival hinges on a series of fortunate events: a border guard accepting a bribe, a passport photo's poor quality, and her ability to blend into New York City. These moments underscore her theme of grace as arbitrary and unmerited. She wanders the city, stealing necessities and mourning Leila, whose absence haunts her physically and emotionally. Roya's grief is palpable as she describes the hollow space Leila left behind, a void she carries with her in every action and thought.

The chapter delves into Roya's struggle with guilt and identity. She questions why she was spared and wrestles with the moral weight of her survival, even as she acknowledges grace's inherent lack of conditions. Her theft of a Persian-English dictionary becomes a symbolic anchor, a small comfort in her disoriented existence. Roya's reflections on the imprecise language used to describe the plane crash—"Gulf Tragedy" instead of "murder"—highlight her disillusionment with justice and the randomness of her fate.

Ultimately, Roya's narrative is a meditation on the paradox of grace: it is both a gift and a burden. She lives with the knowledge that her survival came at the cost of another's life, yet grace demands no repayment. The chapter closes with Roya's unresolved guilt and her haunting question: "God will never forgive me. Why should I?" Her story lingers on the tension between gratitude and grief, leaving the reader to

ponder the weight of unearned second chances.