

Personal Essay



It was one of the beautiful summer days in Iran, one of the pretty hot days that are common in this region. The city had already waked up, but I did not have the slightest intention of getting out of bed. What for? To meet with the judging stares again? To hear how awkward I was? To face vivid, open hostility? I was so tired of that. Still, I did not have a choice. I promised my mother I would sweep the backyard, the place where I would see our “nearest and dearest” neighbors. Do not get me wrong, I like people, and I am always looking forward to helping them. Nevertheless, what I cannot stand is prying into my personal life.

If you ever go to Iran, be ready for continuous prying. At first, you can mistake it for curiosity. All people would seem so friendly to you. They will listen to you with close attention. You bet it flatters one’s vanity. However, in a week, you will understand what I mean. Living here is like living in an aquarium. The neighbors treat you as a quaint fish and observe you all the time waiting for some kind of trick. What type of fish was I supposed to be? Most probably, people saw me as a clownfish. I was a Christian, and it bothered them a lot. I was unlike others, I was a black swan among them. To tell the truth, I wanted to be another fish. I wanted to be a plaice. I dreamt of hiding myself in sand and algae so that nobody would see me. Oh, I would give everything I had to become a plaice and skip sweeping that damn backyard. Nevertheless, I had to do it. So, I humbly put my shoes on and floated outside the room.

Two heads appeared over the fence immediately. “Good morning, Jasmine!

Good morning, Mrs. Parisa!" They saw my forced smile and responded, "Are you sweeping a backyard today?" These stupid questions made me really angry every day. In the meantime, this question was nothing compared to what was to come. I knew that the next question would be about my girlfriend. "So are you seeing someone right now?" Mrs. Parisa asked. "No I am not," I responded. "If I do, you will be the first person to hear about it." "At least she will teach you how to sweep properly," said Mrs. Parisa, and she and her daughter burst into laughter. At such moments, I usually thought that a girlfriend would be a real savior to me. At least, she would save me from stupid questions. However, I did not hope to have a girlfriend soon. It seemed that everybody knew I was a Christian, and that was a serious hindrance to the happy relationships. Muslim girls did not spend time with guys like me for the simple reason that their religion and their parents did not approve it. All that changed on a day when I decided to move to the United States.

This idea came into my head spontaneously when I was daydreaming. I remember that day perfectly. The sky was rather cloudy, but it was warm outside. I lay on the green soft grass far away from the city. I was listening to the music in my headphones. Actually, it was an American band singing about wonderful life. I can compare it to some kind of flash, some kind of lightning. I realized I wanted to try to live that wonderful life in a country where people seemed to be happy. At least, they were happier than I was, weren't they? I had to find out it. I started contemplating the idea enthusiastically. Thus, I was open to a new life in a new, successful, and happy world.

I tore into the house like lightning and announced my decision to the parents. "I am going to fly to the USA to live there," I said. "Are you crazy?" my father replied, "This country will eat you like a crocodile." I did not expect to get another response from my father because he was a

conservative person, and he despised the West. I turned to my mother begging her for support with my eyes. "Well, you are an adult now," she said in a calm voice, "It is your decision and we will support it in any case." I felt like I was in heaven. I hugged my parents and started planning my departure. I had so many things to do...

My first step was to learn about living in the United States. I had to gather all the necessary documents and choose the place of living. My next step was to pack my lucky green bag. "Mom, where is my lucky green bag?" I asked a week after that memorable day. "I washed it and it is hanging in the backyard. It is probably dry by now," the mother answered. I went to the backyard to get the bag when I suddenly heard, "Going somewhere?" It was Jasmine, a daughter of my neighbors. "Yes, Jasmine, I am going to the USA," I said proudly. "So far... Why would you need to go there?" she asked. "Well, you wanted me to find a girlfriend, so I am going to meet her there," I said smiling. "Aren't local girls good enough for you?" she inquired making eyes at me. "Hmm, they say American girls rock!" I joked again. "Ok, then good luck with your rock," stated Jasmine and left me. It was the first time she did not put stupid questions to me. Or maybe it was just an illusion. Anyway, nothing could spoil my mood that day, so I came inside the house to pack my bag.

The entire neighborhood saw me off. I felt like I was a clownfish in an aquarium again, but I knew it was the last time I had that feeling. I had been waving to them for almost half an hour before I got into a taxi. My mother cried, and my father told me to be brave and never surrender. I was not going to surrender at all. Sitting in a plane, I was eager to enter the new period of my life. I wanted to turn over the page of my previous life. When I arrived, the girl at the reception desk looked at me smiling and said, "Welcome to the United States of America, sir." I do not know why, but I felt like America is genuinely glad to meet me. Enjoying that feeling, I blended

into the crowd. For the first time in my life, no one followed me with the stupid questions. There was no one ready to pry into my personal life, not a single person. It was so unexpected and so sudden that I did not get it at first. Then, I felt that a huge wave of joy covered me. At last, I could be myself, changing living in the aquarium into living in a real world.