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# The Alley of Love and Yellow Jasmines

by Shohreh Aghdashloo

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## About the Book

Shohreh Aghdashloo is an Oscar-nominated and Emmy Award-winning actress whose prolific work on stage and screen has been lauded for decades in both her native Iran and her adopted home in the United States. American audiences know her from roles as Ben Kingsley's character's wife in *House of Sand and Fog*, in HBO's acclaimed *House of Saddam*, and as a terrorist in season 4 of Fox's *24*. But the transition from a young girl first swept away by American movies in a Tehran theater to an acclaimed international performer has been a hard-fought and sometimes dangerous battle. In her stunning memoir, Shohreh Aghdashloo invites readers to retrace her journey from the vibrant Tehran of her youth through the menace of revolution to a place of promise and dreams.

Raised in an affluent Muslim family in and around Tehran, the stunningly beautiful Shohreh was encouraged as a child to play and enjoy life. Hollywood films were popular under the Shah's Western-leaning reign, and Shohreh relished her trips to the theater, emulating Elizabeth Taylor's makeup or Vivien Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara. She wished desperately to become an actress, though her parents would push her to take computer classes or prepare for medical school in Germany. When she fell in love with Aydin, a man thirteen years her senior, she made him promise when he proposed marriage that he would allow her to follow her dream of becoming an actress.

The first years of their lives together were magical. Shohreh was receiving fantastic reviews for her work on the stage and winning larger roles in Iranian films. Aydin was working for the Minister of Art and Culture, painting and exhibiting his art in Tehran. The two would travel around Europe and the Middle East in what seemed like an endless honeymoon. But in 1978, the Ayatollah began sowing seeds of revolution. As the Shah flees Iran, Shohreh realizes she, too, must escape her now strange and dangerous home, even if it means leaving behind the man she loves, who loves his country too much to go with her.

Shohreh was able to make it across the border to Turkey, then making her way through Europe to the UK, where she

would eventually settle down and attend university. It's in London that her passion for acting will be reignited, and it's here that her journey to the red carpet, to the Hollywood of her childhood dreams really begins. But once in Hollywood, she is frequently reminded of her position as an outsider and shares stories from behind the scenes, including what it was like to be snubbed by two of Tinseltown's biggest names on Oscar night.

## Discussion Guide

1. Were you familiar with Iran's political history prior to reading this book? What were you surprised to learn?
2. Shohreh speaks of having an interest in both politics and acting as a young girl. What interests from your own childhood have carried over into your adult life?
3. After rheumatic fever and eight months in the hospital, Shohreh decides she will live life fully; she realizes that life becomes meaningful in comparison only. (p. 29) Do you agree?
4. Had you known of SAVAK, Iran's secret police, or SAVAMA, the Islamic Republic's intelligence service, before reading this book? Can you imagine or do you know anyone who has lived in such a state of fear and government policing?
5. After Shohreh is accosted as a girl, her father tells her, "Success can only be achieved if you overcome fear." (p. 34) Do you agree? Have you overcome fear in your own life in order to achieve success?
6. Before the Shah is ousted, Shohreh speaks of the economic progress, the influx of money, and the "Americanization" of Iran as a good thing. What are the pros and cons of a society becoming more developed and modernized?
7. Shohreh was raised in the privileged upper class. Do you think she would have had a different story to tell had she grown up poor? Do you think she would have made it to Hollywood?
8. As political resistance to the Shah grows and riots begin to erupt in the streets, Shohreh realizes she is not safe in Iran. How would you have reacted to the political uncertainty and the rapid shift in culture that Iran underwent?
9. Shohreh's first husband, Aydin, tells her to go, leave Iran, and he will support her. What did you think of that? Is that love? What would you have done in the situation? Have you ever had to make a decision to leave a place you love?
10. Shohreh returns to Iran after a few months of the Ayatollah Khomeini's rule and finds her homeland changed. Have you ever returned to a place to find it drastically changed—for the better or the worse?
11. Are you politically active? Have you campaigned for political causes or change that you believe in?
12. Shohreh seems cavalier and nonchalant about her divorce from Aydin. Were you surprised by their split?

13. When Shohreh performs the Farsi-language play *Rainbow* in London, she realizes the emotional impact that it has on people. Do you think art can make a difference or bring change in politics?

14. What do you make of Shohreh's grandmother's bedtime fable about learning a craft? (p. 157) Does it resonate with you? Can you apply it to your own life?

15. Were you surprised when Houshang proposed to Shohreh? As they fly to Vegas to get married, he tells her, "This is America, Shohreh, anything is possible." (p. 166) Do you believe that? Do you believe in the American Dream? Do immigrants have a different perspective on what is possible as opposed to lifetime residents of the States?

16. When Shohreh is in the Amsterdam airport shooting a film, she meets a woman who is fleeing for her life from Iran. Her husband has been killed; she was smuggled into Pakistan; and she was carrying a forged passport. Shohreh makes the decision to lie to authorities and say she doesn't know the woman's history. Would you have done the same in this situation? Have you ever had to lie in order to do what you thought was right?

17. What do you think of Shohreh's baby names: Tara-Jane for *GONE WITH THE WIND* and *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*; or Rhett for Rhett Butler had it been a boy?

18. Have you seen any of Shohreh's films or television roles? What do you think of them and of her as an actor?

## Author Bio

Winner of the Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress for *House of Saddam*, Shohreh Aghdashloo, 59, is the first Iranian actress to be nominated for an Academy Award, for her role in *House of Sand and Fog*. She also won acclaim for her role on the fourth season of Fox's *24*. Aghdashloo was born in Tehran in 1952, where at age 20, she achieved national stardom for her work on stage and screen. During the 1978 Islamic revolution, Aghdashloo left Iran for England, and has since moved to Los Angeles, where she continues her successful acting career.

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