**Literary Exploration**

Suggested Time: 70 to 80 minutes

Suggested word count range: 400 to 900 words

Read the following nonfiction excerpt to help you complete your literary exploration.

*At age 16, the narrator of this excerpt was arrested on false charges by Iranian Security Forces and placed in prison. Years after leaving Iran with her husband and son, she has established a comfortable life in Canada, but memories of her past continue to return to her.*

**from PRISONER OF TEHRAN[[1]](#footnote-1)**

There is an ancient Persian proverb that says, “The sky is the same colour wherever you go.” But the Canadian sky was different from the one I remembered from Iran; it was a deeper shade of blue and seemed endless, as if challenging the horizon.

We arrived at Pearson Airport in Toronto on August 28, 1991, a beautiful, sunny day. My brother was waiting for us. My husband, our two-and-a-half-year-old son, and I were to stay at his house until we could find an apartment. Although I had not seen my brother in twelve years- I was fourteen when he left for Canada- I immediately spotted him. His hair had greyed and thinned a little, but he was six foot seven and his head bobbed over the enthusiastic chaos of the waiting crowd.

As we drove away from Pearson, I looked out the window, and the vastness of the landscape astonished me. The past was gone, and it was in everyone’s best interest that I put it behind me. We had to build a new life in this strange country that had offered us refuge when we had nowhere to go. I had to concentrate all my energy on survival. I had to do this for my husband and son.

And we did build a new life. My husband found a good job, we had another son, and I learned how to drive. In July 2000, nine years after our arrival in Canada, we finally bought a four-bedroom house in the suburbs of Toronto and became proud, middle-class Canadians, tending our backyard, driving the boys to swimming, soccer, and piano lessons, and having friends over for barbecues.

This was when I lost the ability to sleep.

It began with snapshots of memories that flashed in my mind as soon as I went to bed. I tried to push them away, but they rushed at me, invading my daytime hours as well as the night. The past was gaining on me, and I couldn’t keep it at bay; I had to face it or it would completely destroy my sanity. If I couldn’t forget, perhaps the solution was to remember. I began writing about my days in Evin- Tehran’s notorious political prison- about the torture, pain, death and all the suffering I had never been able to talk about. My memories became words, and broke free from their induced hibernation. I believed that once I put them on paper, I would feel better – but I didn’t. I needed more. I couldn’t keep my manuscript buried in a bedroom drawer. I was a witness and had to tell my story.

My first reader was my husband. He, too, didn’t know the details of my time in prison. Once I gave him my manuscript, he put it under his side of our bed, where it remained untouched for three days. I was anguished. When would he read it? Would he understand? Would he forgive me for keeping such secrets?

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier?” he asked when he finally read it.

We had been married for seventeen years.

“I tried, but couldn’t … will you forgive me?” I said.

“There’s nothing to forgive. Will you forgive me?”

“For what?”

“For not asking.”

Marina Nemat

In this excerpt, the narrator reflects on the significance of acknowledging her past in order to fully embrace her present life.

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| **What is your opinion of the idea that our identity is shaped by difficult experiences?** |

1. Capital of Iran [↑](#footnote-ref-1)