

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Marjan Kamali, born in Turkey to Iranian parents, spent her childhood in Kenya, Germany, Turkey, Iran, and the United States. She studied English Literature at UC Berkeley and received her MBA from Columbia University and her MFA from New York University. She is the author of two novels: *The Stationery Shop* (Gallery/Simon&Schuster) and *Together Tea* (Ecco/HarperCollins).

The Stationery Shop, a Boston Globe best-seller, was a Real Simple magazine Top Editor's Pick, an Indie Next Pick, one of Newsweek's 30 Best Summer Books, and an excerpt was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. It is being translated into several languages.

Marjan's debut novel, *Together Tea*, was a Massachusetts Book Award Finalist, an NPR WBUR Good Read, and a Target Emerging Author Selection and has been translated into several languages and adapted for the stage.

Marjan's work has also been broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and published in two anthologies.

Marjan teaches writing at GrubStreet and lives with her husband and two children in the Boston area.

- [Author's website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The first two chapters show us very different stages in Roya's life. Discuss the similarities and differences between her life as a married woman in New England and her life as a teenager living in Tehran.
2. On page 3, Roya observes, "For hadn't she married a man who was reasonable and, my goodness, unbelievably understanding? Hadn't she, in the end, not married that boy, the one she met so many decades ago in a small stationery shop in Tehran, but lassoed her life instead to this Massachusetts-born pillar of stability?" How are Bahman and Walter different? How are they similar? What do you think Roya was looking for in each of them? How do her expectations for a relationship change throughout the story?

3. On page 56, after discovering Bahman's mother believes he should marry Shahla, Roya tries to contain her anger: "This was the societal web of niceties and formalities and expected good female behavior that often suffocated her. But she had no choice but to bear it, to try to navigate within it. That much she knew." Discuss the importance of "saving face" for Iranian women in the 1950s. Do those expectations differ from what was expected of American women? What about women today? Research the cultural expectations of young women in Iran and discuss as a group. How are they similar or different to the expectations you or the women in your life have experienced?
4. Roya and Zari have very different personalities and ways of looking at life, and the two sisters often argue and clash. But there is a bond between them that is unbreakable. Have you experienced that simultaneous closeness and clashing with siblings in your life? What do you think it is about the sibling relationship in general and Roya and Zari's sisterhood in particular that lends itself to such contradictions?"
5. Throughout the course of her courtship in 1953, Roya experiences passion and longing in new, surprising ways. For example, on page 84, when she watches Jahangir and Bahman dance, she is filled with desire. Compare Roya's desire as a young woman to Badri's. Do their social classes influence their actions? What would be the repercussions if Roya acted as Badri did in her youth?
6. Marjan Kamali employs foreshadowing as a plot device in THE STATIONERY SHOP. Discuss how it adds to the story and moves the narrative along. How would the novel read without foreshadowing?
7. In the 1950s, women in Tehran weren't allowed the freedoms, though still limited, that women in America were. How does Roya's family challenge those social expectations? How does that inform Roya's life as grown woman?
8. In chapter 14, the readers learn about the history between Mr. Fakhri and Bahman's mother. After reading this, why do you think Badri treated Roya so terribly?
9. On page 172, Roya struggles with cultural differences in flirting: "Sometimes there didn't seem to be any rules. It had been far easier in Iran where tradition and tarof who your grandfather was often dictated how to behave." How do flirting and dating in both Tehran and America challenge Roya and her expectations for relationships? Discuss the differences in how Roya and Zari approach dating. Why do you think Zari feels more comfortable in America than Roya does? Do you think Roya would have had an easier time dating in America if she had never met Bahman?
10. In chapter 18, Bahman reveals the struggles of living with a mentally ill mother in Tehran. Discuss mental illness and its stigma as a group. How was mental illness viewed throughout time, and how does the treatment of the mentally ill vary across cultures? How is the way that Bahman and his father care for his mother countercultural?
11. At the beginning of chapter 19, Roya and Walter go on a double date with Zari and her boyfriend, Jack. Jack offends Roya with the way he speaks about Iran and its food and culture. Do you think Roya is right in feeling offended? Would you have been offended? Discuss cultural ignorance and bias as a group.

12. The characters in *THE STATIONERY SHOP* experience several devastating losses, from love to identity to miscarriage. How do they recover, and how do those losses forever change them? Can your group relate to these sorrows? What losses in your lives have forever changed you?

- <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-stationery-shop/guide>

BOOK REVIEWS

Publisher's Weekly

In this tender story of lifelong love, Kamali (*Together Tea*) moves from 2013 New England to violence in 1953 Tehran as citizens, a new Prime Minister, and the Shah of Iran clash. In 2013, Roya is 77 years old, nearing the end of her life with her American husband, when she discovers her fiancé from when she was growing up in Tehran is living in a retirement home nearby. She begins to relive her first meeting with young Bahman 60 years earlier in a small Tehran stationery shop. As is true with Roya's father, Bahman is an avid supporter of the new Prime Minister Mossadegh, but Bahman takes it further with dangerous activism. The love that blossoms between the two 17-year-olds is intense and true, but Bahman's mother is determined to direct her son's interests away from Roya. It's only with the help of Mr. Fakhri, who allows the young lovers privacy in his stationery shop, that the romance continues until a final misunderstanding; the couple is separated by expectations that they enter arranged marriages, as well as the violence that erupts in the streets when Mossadegh is overthrown. The loss of love and changing worlds is vividly captured by Kamali; time and circumstances kept these lovers apart, but nothing diminishes their connection. Readers will be swept away. (June) --Staff (Reviewed 08/05/2019) (*Publishers Weekly*, vol 266, issue 31, p).

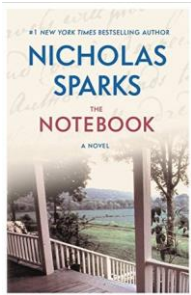
Library Journal

Roya Kayhani meets Bahman Aslan in a stationery shop in Tehran in 1953; both are 17. The owner, Mr. Fakhri, dispenses foreign-language books as well as antimonarchist polemics along with the poetry of Rumi. Sharing the poetry and letters passed between them by Mr. Fakhri inside the books, the couple fall in love and become engaged. Iran is moving toward democracy and modernization in 1953, but a coup by the forces of the Shah shuts down those hopes. Now, 60 years later, Roya is married to Walter Archer and lives outside Boston; Bahman is in a nursing home not far away. What happened to their love and the future of their country? Slowly moving through the budding love story, readers unearth secrets about those close to the pair and how, as Iranian belief dictates, one's destiny is already inscribed on one's forehead at birth. VERDICT The unfurling stories in Kamali's sophomore novel (after *Together Tea*) will stun readers as the aromas of Persian cooking wafting throughout convince us that love can last a lifetime. For those who enjoy getting caught up in romance while discovering unfamiliar history of another country. [See Prepub Alert, 12/3/18.] --Bette-Lee Fox (Reviewed 04/01/2019) (*Library Journal*, vol 144, issue 3, p80).

Kirkus Reviews

Sixty years after her first love failed to meet her in a market square, Roya Khanom Archer finally has the chance to see him. But will he break her heart again? Back in 1953, she was a 17-year-old schoolgirl, raised in a progressive home in Tehran, where her father encouraged Roya and her sister, Zari, to take advantage of the recent reforms that allowed women to go to university. While he hoped she might become a chemist, Roya loved escaping into novels, which sent her to Mr. Fakhri's stationery and book store every Tuesday afternoon. There she first sees Bahman Aslan, a breathless young man already well-known as a political activist. Kamali (Together Tea, 2013) sets Roya and Bahman's love against the tumultuous days of Mohammad Mossadegh's rise and fall as prime minister of Iran, infusing their affair with political passion and an increasingly frantic sense of the shortness of time. Tuesday after Tuesday, the couple falls more deeply in love, and Bahman soon proposes marriage to Roya. While Roya's family welcomes Bahman—although Zari warns Roya that his heart cannot be trusted—Bahman's emotionally volatile mother refuses to accept the engagement, because she has already chosen Shahla, the daughter of a man closely allied with the shah, for her son. Roya determines to weather her future mother-in-law's storms, but when Bahman and his family disappear, she can only turn to Mr. Fakhri for help. Although he cannot tell Roya where Bahman has gone, Mr. Fakhri offers to exchange secret letters between the lovers. The plan works, and the two even plan to elope, but Bahman does not show up in Sepah Square. Sixty years later, Bahman's confession will finally expose the secrets that cast shadows over the lovers so long ago. A sweeping romantic tale of thwarted love. (Kirkus Reviews, April 15, 2019).

READALIKES



***The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks**

An elderly man reads a story from a notebook to a woman who does not know him; the story is of young lovers kept apart by disapproving parents.



***Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid**

Presents the story of two young lovers whose furtive affair is shaped by local unrest on the eve of a civil war that erupts in a cataclysmic bombing attack, forcing them to abandon their previous home and lives



***Speaking of Summer* by Kalisha Buckhanon**

A woman's desperate search for her missing twin is complicated by their mother's recent death, police indifference, her relationship with her twin's boyfriend and a growing obsession that tests the limits of her sanity.