

Shirin

Somebody
Call 911!



Unconstitutional Pizza

I like when my teacher teaches us useful things. She doesn't do this very often.

One time our teacher taught us something useful. She warned us to be careful not to make any mistakes while we were doing it. We prepared the cards she wanted at home the day before. We were supposed to write our most important telephone numbers on this card. I



thought about what the most important phone numbers to know might be. I had them immediately.

A pizza place and a
candy shop. Done. 😊

This card was going to be very useful for me. Now I wouldn't need to beg my parents to buy me pizza anymore. With this card I could do it all by myself.





After our teacher called the roll she told us to take out our cards. My card was yellow and I drew pictures of a detective on it, because my favorite stories are detective stories.

I like daydreaming before I fall sleep. In those moments I imagine myself as a detective in a long overcoat in search of bad people.



What is our teacher talking about?
Whatever.

I am a very good detective. The only thing is that I don't have a detective dog. I do have a detective cat, though. Tiger is the wildest cat on our street.



You can't think less of him because he is a cat. Tiger scares away not only mice, but dogs too. He walks around the street with his long, messy fur and big thick tail like he's not afraid of anyone.

This is the number for the police, the ambulance and the fire station. Write it carefully.



Tiger is my best friend. He looks like a panther. I take him all of our best food. When my parents learn that I do this, they will be very happy.

They always say,
"Be good to animals."

How could I possibly be better to Tiger? In my dreams Tiger sits on my shoulder. I have a magnifying glass. I am standing up tall and my

hair is blowing in the wind.



“Shirin, are you in there?”

What is that? Is someone calling my name?

“I’m sorry teacher. What did you say?”

“Is your card ready?”

I showed her my card right away.

“Tell me, what are we going to write on that card today?”

“The most important telephone number.”

“What is the important telephone number?”

“Those are the ones that our parents know but we don’t.” Our teacher thought for a minute and tried to understand what I meant. “Yes! They have this number memorized, but you should write it somewhere for yourself, just in case you ever need them.”



Right!
Then we
call them
whenever we
want.

Our teacher frowned,

“Shirin! We should call them not when we want!”

Gosh! What the heck was that supposed to mean?

“Teacher, why would I call them if I didn’t want to call them? First I want to call them, then I call them.”

“Come on! Don’t do that. I wonder whether I should even give you this number. I’m afraid that you will call them whenever you want.”

“Why should I call them more than I want to? Do I need to call them every day to ask them how their mother is doing?”

Come on Shirin!

“Will I call them only once a year, like my parents do? I’ll call them every afternoon. Then they will come every night.”



Our
teacher took a deep
breath.

“Shirin, if you call them when you don’t need to, you show a disregard for other people’s rights.”

When did ordering pizza become unconstitutional?

“I can call them. I have rights, too.”

“That’s enough, Shirin! I want to talk with your parents. They need to talk to you about this.”

“We don’t need to bring my parents into this.”

“And why not?”

“Because they are very picky about food. They might try to keep you from teaching this lesson. They wouldn’t be very happy if they knew that you were giving these numbers to us.”

“But why? This is a very important number. I’m giving them to you so that you can call it when you need to.”

“Okay. I will call it whenever my stomach needs it.”

“Where?”

“The pizza shop!”



The whole class began to laugh except for the teacher. According to her, I was living in a dream-world and I wasn't listening to the lesson. We wrote down the number that our teacher had written down on the board.

"In case of emergency, call 911"

She told us that we can only call 9-1-1 if it's an emergency. If we call this number whenever we want, we may be punished because we will keep them from doing their jobs. But if we call it at the right time, we can save lives. I will always carry this card in my pocket and I will be the first one to call them whenever the situation calls for it.



You better
watch out
emergencies! I'm
coming for you!

Our Neighbor Helen

It was Saturday. I had a long breakfast with my parents. I like these Saturday breakfasts very much. *Long, relaxed, filling...*

After breakfast, my father went to get the car washed. Then our neighbor Helen came to see us. While my mother was drinking coffee with Helen, she was talking about the concert they were going to that night.



“Mom, what concert are we going to?”

My mother looked at me with her angelic smile, the way she did when she wanted me to just accept whatever she was going to say.

“You aren’t coming, dear! This concert isn’t appropriate for you.”

Not appropriate for me? How could a concert be not appropriate for me?

“Why not? Isn’t it a music concert?”

“It is not a kind of music that you would like.

“I like all kinds of music.”

“It’s a classical music concert, honey. It isn’t appropriate for your age.”

“Hmm... If it’s classical music, I won’t come. But you shouldn’t go either.”

I don’t only think of myself. I always think of others, too. My mother patted my head and went on talking to Helen. It seemed that my mom wanted me to stay at Helen’s house, but Helen wouldn’t be at home, either.

“Okay! No problem! Shirin can come to the henna night with us. She will have lots of fun!”

What is a henna night?

“Are you sure? She has ways of getting into trouble.”

“Sure, I’m sure! Let’s ask Shirin. Shirin, do you want to go to a classical music concert or a henna night?”



What is a henna night?

It is a night where you will have lots of fun.

I agreed to go. Then Helen left and my mom went to do housework. I was left alone. What should I do? I decided to watch television. I turned on the TV and sat down in front of it. There are so many channels! I like the kids' channels the best. There were advertisements, a program about how people build bridges, a football game being announced by a guy speaking Spanish. Some people were singing songs, others were arguing.

Suddenly, a woman appeared. I was struck by the image.



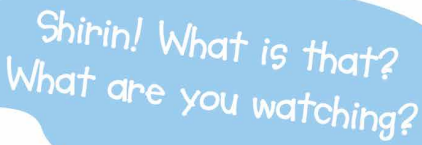
She was crying so much! She wore a mask so that the audience couldn't see her face. She was talking about how much she hated her arranged marriage.

I wish I was there;
I would stand in front
of her and protect her.
I would tell everyone to
leave her alone.

As soon as I had that thought, the question of why that woman didn't just protect herself came into my mind, but then my mom came in so I couldn't find an answer.

Boo-hoo
boo-hoo





Shirin! What is that?
What are you watching?



Whoops! I wasn't allowed to watch that kind of program. How could I forget?

“Mom! I was going to watch cartoons but then that woman –”

“You aren’t allowed to watch shows like that. Change the channel, and if I see it again you won’t be allowed to watch any television for a week.”

My parents are right to forbid such programs. I saw a masked woman who was crying because she had been forced into marriage! I had only seen it for a moment, but it broke my heart. I thought about it even while I was watching cartoons. What a terrible show!

Henna Night

When we got in the car with Helen and her husband, I looked beautiful according to my own tastes. I say, “according to my own tastes,” because my mom thought my clothes were ridiculous. She wanted to make me wear a pink-ribboned dress. She said that people always wear clothes like that when they are going to a henna night.

This was because in my culture, a henna night happens before a wedding, and so it makes up half of the wedding.

And of course, people have to wear ribbons and frilly things at weddings.

