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English 101

September 9, 2011

Summary and Analysis

The beginning chapter of Mustafa Bayoumi's book *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?* reflects on a story about a young Syrian girl named Rasha. The chapter is mostly a recounting of her experiences with being detained for not having US citizenship. However, there is the question of whether or not she is incarcerated for being an Arab. Bayoumi poses this question by detailing Rasha's stay at the jail where she and her family are questioned at length as par their residence in the United States. In the jail, they are treated like inmates, their calls are restricted and their only friends are those who are incarcerated with them. When they are allowed to receive mail Rasha gets letters from her friend Gaby which alleviates her fears of being forgotten. The family is separated for a few months and during questioning tempers and feelings fly as they are severely interrogated. In the end, they are released and Rasha is happily reunited with her friends. But the family has to undergo a new slew of problems. Rasha has to catch up on all her classes and the family sold their house because, "they were behind on payments and Rasha's mother was convinced that the place was cursed anyway" (35). But there are also the problems of distance between the family members, Rasha's sisters need for a therapist, and having to deal with all the talk of September 11. One day Rasha and her friends go to a restaurant and she sees the official who had questioned her and her family for so long. She attempts to make him understand how much anxiety he put her and her family through and through this she

gets some kind of closure from the experience her family does not really discuss.

The last few paragraphs of the chapter on Rasha, exhibit a seemingly out of place meeting with the official who had questioned Rasha and her family for the last few months while they were in jail. The scene is out of place because the story is finished and its main problem resolved. So the scene with the official is supposed to be a piece of falling action, which it is not. Aside from their meeting being out of place, Bayoumi also takes care to mention that they are in Chili's in New York. This is immensely important because it is Chili's, a chain of restaurants, meaning that there are many of them. And then it is New York, which is huge and populous. Thus the chances of this happening are extremely slim. Rasha comments, "All the restaurants in New York City and he's at this one" (43). Making this meeting seem almost like destiny, Bayoumi outlines and describes the official as just a dad out to dinner with his family. The way he writes this makes the official seem very human and that is Bayoumi's intention. By telling this and by describing it the way he did he is attempting to make this villain in the story into just a regular guy. He is trying to say that what happened to Rasha is not the doing of a secretive government office, something we have no tie to; but instead the doing of a regular, everyday worker. These last pages bring this message home to the everyday person.