

Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood Study Guide

**Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood by
Fatema Mernissi**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 through 6.....	4
Chapters 7 through 13.....	8
Chapters 14 through 17.....	12
Chapters 18 through 22.....	15
Characters.....	18
Objects/Places.....	21
Themes.....	23
Style.....	25
Quotes.....	27
Topics for Discussion.....	29



Plot Summary

Fatima is born in a harem and her childhood is filled with the love and laughter of that lifestyle but is shaped by her mother's desire that her children have more freedoms than life in a harem allows. Fatima is born just an hour after her cousin, Samir, and her mother immediately defies tradition by insisting that there be a joyous celebration over the births of both children, not just the boy child. This is typical of Fatima's mother and she teaches Fatima that she must stand up for herself if she wants things in life.

Fatima, her younger siblings, her mother and father make up one wing of the household along with some relatives, usually divorced or widowed. Another wing of the house consists of Fatima's paternal uncle, his wife and children, including Samir. The matriarch of the family is Fatima's maternal grandmother who is very traditional, takes the words of the men as law and hates Fatima's mother for her forward and rebellious thinking. Fatima's mother has support from several of the women in the harem, including Fatima's cousin Chama who is openly rebellious. A divorced aunt who lives in the harem, Aunt Habiba, also believes in Fatima's mother's arguments but because of her precarious situation in the household, is unable to publicly support them.

Fatima's maternal grandmother is Yasmina who lives in a rural harem with her husband and his group of wives. Yasmina, though personally living in the confines of a harem, also bucks tradition on many minor points. She tells Fatima about the role of harems in society and predicts that Fatima's life will be better than that of Yasmina or Fatima's mother. Yasmina says that Fatima will be educated and the first step toward that occurs when nationalists create schools that accept young women and encourage girls to attend. Fatima's mother immediately petitions her husband to allow Fatima to transfer to that school and the family council permits all the girls to go. There, Fatima has her first taste of freedom, walking the distance between her gate and the school and feeling the power of being allowed to open doors to enter and leave rooms, which are freedoms forbidden by life in the harem.

Meanwhile, Fatima ages and matures. She studies the stories and lives of those around her, taking advice such as that offered by a servant named Mina who tells Fatima that she must always draw on her own strength. From her cousin Chama, Fatima learns about magic, incantations meant to create love or to keep love alive in a relationship. From her mother, she learns to desire freedom for herself and to imagine a life that is filled with happiness.



Chapters 1 through 6

Chapters 1 through 6 Summary

As the story opens, the author, Fatima Mernissi, explains that she was born in the Moroccan city of Fez in 1940. Fatima says that there are many frontiers in her life, of which some are tangible and others intangible. The first of these to play an important role in her life is the doorway separating her family's living quarters from the courtyard shared by the extended family. Fatima's mother tends to sleep later than Fatima and she says that her very first experience with a frontier is in learning that she is not allowed to go out into the courtyard until her mother was awake. Fatima is pleased with this frontier because the rules regarding it are "crystal clear." She learns to sit quietly for the time until her mother wakes, usually about two hours, by viewing everything around her as if it were completely unfamiliar to her. This includes the courtyard just outside her door where almost everything is squared and symmetrical. There is a fountain, marble tiles and an arched colonnade in her immediate view outside the door of her home. There are many right angles in what she sees and she says that even the patch of sky visible from the courtyard is "square shaped," hemmed in by the edges of the courtyard.

Directly across the courtyard is the home of Fatima's Uncle and his family. This Uncle is the older brother of Fatima's father and Fatima notes that, although he is wealthier, the salon he and his immediate family have is outwardly no different from the one shared by Fatima's immediate family. This is not the norm and only occurs here because Fatima's mother insists on it.

The quarters of Fatima's father's mother, Lalla Mani, are in another part of the extended house. Fatima says that Lalla Mani "liked being surrounded by heavy silence" and that she often threatened the children if they were too loud by her standards. The men's quarters were in yet another part of the house. There is a radio and though the men are supposed to have sole control, there are loudspeakers outside so that the entire family can listen when the radio is on. Once, Fatima and her young cousin, Samir, are asked by their fathers what they had done that day and they answer that they'd been listening to the radio. This indicates to the men that the women had an "illegal key" to access the room with the radio and the men question the women but can't find who has the key or how it came into existence. Fatima says that "after two days of inquiry, it turned out that the radio key must have fallen from the sky." Fatima says that her mother chastised Fatima and Samir and the two children struggle to find the balance, between telling the truth as they have been taught and telling the answers that will not get anyone into trouble.

Fatima and Samir are close. They are born on the same day, Samir an hour earlier than Fatima. Fatima's mother insists that she attend the "festival chants" that occur when families are extremely happy - such as when a baby boy is born. Samir is soon a rebellious child but Fatima tends to run to her mother. Her mother teaches her that she cannot allow Samir to rebel alone, and that Fatima has to stand up for herself because



crying over an insult only invites more insults. Only Fatima's maternal grandmother, Yasmine, advises Fatima's mother to stop comparing Fatima and Samir. Yasmine's suggestion is to encourage Fatima to become more protective of the younger children of the family, saying that is another way to forge a strong personality.

In Chapter two, Fatima is learning about the importance of considering words before saying them. She learns the power of words from the story, "A Thousand and One Nights," in which a young woman named Scheherazade has to tell her captor a story each night, and that her life depends on keeping her captor so engrossed in the story that he can't bring himself to kill her. Fatima and Samir, armed with this story and the chastising they received over the radio incident, begin spending hours considering their words and hoping that the grownups in the family will notice this contemplation.

Life in the harem is basically split into two segments. The life in the courtyard and on the lower level of the house is more stringent and there is less room for spontaneity and individuality. Upstairs, this is less the case. Those who live upstairs are those with less importance in the family structure, such as women who are divorced or widowed and have nowhere else to go. Fatima says that there are various relatives taking advantage of the rooms upstairs at any given time and that those living there vary regularly. One who lives upstairs is Aunt Habiba, a divorced woman who says she will never return to her husband though he kept all their possessions, leaving her at the mercy of her relatives. Fatima and Sabir often go upstairs where Aunt Habiba tells stories. Sometimes the children are ushered out of Aunt Habiba's quarters and sent home before they are ready. Sometimes they are allowed to spend the night. Fatima says that her aunt's ability to take her listeners on great adventures makes Fatima long to become "an expert storyteller" as well.

In Chapter three, there is a doorman named Ahmed who determines who can leave the house and go out into the street. In the streets, the French soldiers are common sights and the natives fear the French soldiers but also believe the French fear the Moroccan people. Fatima notes that the soldiers look young but that they are also powerful. Guns are banned for private citizens. Fatima and her family sometimes go to the country to visit her maternal grandmother, Yasmine. In the country there are no gates to separate the harem household from the rest of the world. Fatima says the lack of that frontier worries her, especially for the first few days of the visit. Her Grandfather Tazi has nine wives and Lalla Thor is the "first wife." As such, she has more power than the others, including Yasmine. Yasmine gets back at her by naming a fat white duck after Lalla Thor.

In Chapter four, Lalla Thor learns about the duck's name and insists that Grandfather Tazi do something about it. Grandfather is from a region called Rif and has the typical appearance of people from that area. Grandfather intervenes regarding the duck and Yasmine says she cannot kill the duck because it would be bad luck for the human Lalla Thor. She does promise that she'll never call the duck by its name when anyone is around to hear.



Yasmina talks about what life in a harem means to the women involved. She says that "sometimes to be stuck in a harem simply meant that a woman had lost her freedom of movement. Other times, she said that a harem meant misfortune because a woman had to share her husband with many others." It is Yasmina's take on the life in the harem that forms some of Fatima's ideas and impressions. Some of Fatima's grandfather's wives are foreigners but others were "stolen" from their Moroccan families during the disruptive time in the early 1900s.

In chapter five, Fatima says that the grownups are separated with their stands on the benefits of a harem. Fatima says that some of the adults said the harems were vital because without the stringent supervision of the men, the women would never get any work done. Fatima's paternal grandmother is among those. But Fatima's mother is willing to stand up to her and to argue the point. Fatima's mother says that women in France don't live in harems, and that they are allowed to go where they want - including the market - without supervision. She says that the French do get their work done on time and that they are apparently adept enough at it that they are also able to make war on the Moroccans. Another aspect of the situation is that "respectable men provide for their womenfolk" so that the women had no need to go out into the dangerous situations of the world. These people realize that the poor women who are not part of harems are forced to go out into public to make money.

There is a story of how harems came into being. The story goes that men were told to rush around and to catch all the women they could find with the man who caught the most women to be the wealthiest of the men. While the Arab men were rushing around catching the women, the Christians made new rules but didn't tell the Arabs. One of Fatima's cousins, a seventeen-year-old named Chama, would tell this story and then say that the Arab men have only recently woken to the fact that the rules have been changed and that the men have no need to gather women into harems.

In chapter six, Fatima tells about the harem on the farm where her maternal grandparents live. She said there is a bamboo fence that marks the "frontier" or boundary between the part of the house used by the men and that used by the women. The garden on the men's side is neat and orderly but the women's garden is noisy, filled with plants, fruits and vegetables, and teeming with wildlife. Yasmina lives in a building separate from the main building, a situation she had insisted on in order to be as far from Lalla Thor as possible. Another of the concubines, Tamou, lives with Yasmina. Fatima says that Tamou, a Rif like Grandfather, arrived one day on a horse. Grandfather provided aid to her people and she returned to live with him after that. Tamou is something of a free spirit, loves to ride horses and urges the women into contests with the loser doing anything the winner asks. When Yasmina loses, the winner asks for a special food. Another of the wives is Yaya who is black and homesick. Tamou and Yasmina grew a banana tree to help make Yaya feel more at home.



Chapters 1 through 6 Analysis

As Fatima begins her story, she tells about the location of her birthplace. According to her description, the city of Fez is "one thousand kilometers south of Madrid, one of the dangerous capitals of the Christians." Fatima says that her father's version of how life is supposed to be is that Allah had separated Christians from Muslims and put a sea between them, but that the Christians continually tried to "trespass" into the lives of the Muslims. Interestingly, she says that there was also a separation of men and women. While her father says that this separation is right and that it creates a system of harmony and respect, Fatima says that the women she knows are constantly thinking of ways to "trespass" onto the property held by the men. This seems to be both figurative and literal. The women want to be allowed more freedom of movement in a physical sense but also want more rights. This tangible and intangible is typical of Fatima's way of viewing things, including life in the harem.

Fatima's extended family varies from time to time to include relatives who need a place to stay for one reason or another. For an extended period of time, this includes Aunt Habiba who is divorced. Though she is often sad and cries at little provocation, she is determined that she won't ever return to her husband. The sister of Fatima's aunt often stays with Fatima's Uncle and Aunt though she is married. These women are, in the words of Fatima's father, "troubled." Fatima says that whenever someone mentions that harem life should not be allowed, her father asks what these women will do without the harem as an option. It's interesting to see Fatima's take on the life inside a harem because there is a general belief that the life in the harem revolves around numerous wives and sexual conduct. This doesn't seem to be the case in Fatima's household. Even in the case of her maternal grandfather who has eight wives, the emphasis is on the family unit. The reader should be aware that Grandmother Yasmine does say that she hates having to wait her turn for a night with her husband, so there's little doubt that this does play a role in harem life.

There are many footnotes included in the book and in chapter four Fatima explains about the various kinds of harems. She describes "domestic harems" as "dull" with a focus on the extended family rather than an "erotic dimension." In these domestic harems, the men of a family join their resources and live in a paternal household. In these harems, the women are "asked" to stay inside the walls of the harem. By contrast, the imperial harems were popular in Muslim dynasties and wealth played an important role in the size of the harem and the number of women.



Chapters 7 through 13

Chapters 7 through 13 Summary

In Chapter seven, the entire household packs up once each year and goes to Oued Fez, property owned by Fatima's uncle, for a picnic. The trip, the food and the preparations are time-consuming and elaborate and everyone has to pitch in to help. The "important" adults ride in the cars and the children, accompanied by the less important adults such as the divorced aunts, ride in a truck rented for the occasion. Fatima says that her mother, upon their arrival home, would be depressed for days. Fatima's mother says that, having had the freedom of the country, returning to the confines of the harem is more upsetting.

Anyone in the harem who wants to go outside must pass by Ahmed, the door keeper. However, by climbing onto the terrace and jumping to a neighboring terrace, the women could get to the street without passing by Ahmed. While the door to the terrace is sometimes locked, it's often possible for the women to make this escape. Fatima says that a lesson learned early on is that of learning how to land without being hurt. She says that it's common knowledge that the women who appear with skinned knees had made that escape. Fatima's mother says that having the ability to land correctly is as vital as the ability to climb and the nerve to take the chance. She tells Fatima that it's important to think about the landing before making the jump.

There is an important difference between life in the harem in the city and the life in the harem on Yasmina's farm. There, there are no walls to keep the women inside. Yasmina says that the word harem is similar to the word for "forbidden," and that people understand this to be necessary with regard to a man's harem. For example, a man who happens to encounter one of the women from Grandfather Tazi's harem will avert his eyes out of respect. Yasmina says there are strict codes of conduct regarding the harem. However, she says that most of the rules are in favor of the men. She predicts that those rules will eventually change but doesn't think it will happen immediately. During one of their talks, Fatima asks Yasmina, "Will I be a happy woman?" Yasmina answers that Fatima will be "a modern, educated lady,"

In Chapter eight, Yasmina and the other women of the harem come up with the idea that they will take all the dishes to the river to wash them. The women have a man drive the truck to the river where they set up an elaborate formation to get the pot, pans and dishes cleaned. When one of the women lose their grip and a dish floats away, it is the job of Mabrouka, the harem's "swimming star" who was kidnapped from Agadir, to retrieve any that are lost. Yasmina works near the bank and when the dishes are cleaned, Yasmina hands them to Krishna, the man who drives the truck for the operation. Naturally, Lalla Thor objects, probably just because she sees the other women of the harem having fun. But Yasmina prevails and Grandfather allows the activity. Fatima notes that because there are so many people living in the harem and mealtimes require



a great amount of food, there are many dishes to be washed. Another of Krishna's duties is to take the women on regular visits to the public baths at Sidi Slimane.

In Chapter nine, Fatima's mother hates communal life, especially the routine of set meal times with the entire household. Fatima's mother wants Fatima's father to agree to move the family out of the harem. But Fatima's father is torn between the desire to please Fatima's mother and his feeling of responsibility toward the extended family and tradition. Fatima's father allows his wife to have a stash of food for herself and to indulge in a luxurious breakfast she cooks for herself well after the time when the rest of the household has eaten. This means that she sometimes cannot eat at lunch time and skipping the meal is considered rude.

Sometimes, in the interest of making his wife happy, Fatima's father spends a night on the terrace with the family. On these occasions, Fatima's father acts silly in response to his wife's teasing and the family has an entire evening alone, usually with Samir as their only guest. Fatima says that her mother is so preoccupied with her husband and her happiness on these occasions that she forgets to provide covers for the children as they sleep and they wake with sniffles. For days after these events, Fatima's mother is ultimately happy.

In Chapter ten, Fatima says that many of the young men of the men's salon wear western dress though the older men tend to wear traditional garb. Fatima's mother insisted that Fatima be dressed in western clothing as well. Fatima says that she is always in frilly dresses and that she is in trouble if she gets the clothes dirty. Fatima says that the traditions and the new ways exist together in the household and most evenings find the men listening to radio broadcasts and discussing newspaper accounts of various local and world news events.

In Chapter eleven, the world is bracing for war. Samir and Fatima are taught passages from the Koran though Fatima says that she wants to know what the passages mean and their lessons do not include that information. Instead, they are to write a passage and memorize it, then recite it during their Wednesday lessons. Fatima has trouble keeping track of what's part of the Koran and what's news and at one point her father is called in to straighten out a situation that her teacher calls "blasphemy." At one point, Fatima and Samir are trying to figure out the ongoing battles that include the Christians and the Jews. She says that a cousin says it has to do with hair color and that the Christians are fighting everyone who has dark hair. Fatima and Samir are so worried that Samir dyes his hair with henna to give it a reddish cast and Fatima wears a scarf in public until her mother puts a stop to it.

In Chapter twelve, the women sometimes listen to the radio during the day and Fatima's cousin, Chama, "fiddles" with the dials until she finds music. Sometimes she manages to find the songs by Asmahan, a young woman who had been an accomplished singer. She is Fatima's idol because Asmahan wears western clothing and clings to western way of life, ignoring the Arab traditions. She gets married early and divorced by a husband who is angry when Asmahan asks him to go dancing with her. She dies early and Fatima and her cousins sometimes enact scenes of her life. She is self-indulgent,



buys things for herself and travels at a whim, all the things the women of the harem wish they could have for themselves.

In Chapter thirteen, entertainment is important in the harem and when the chores for the day are finished, everyone rushes to find out if Aunt Habiba is telling stories on a particular day or if Chama is acting out a play. Sometimes the men go to the movies but the women are seldom allowed to go. On those rare occasions when they were allowed, the women and children were accompanied by male cousins and Ahmed. The group would reserve four rows but would sit in the center two, leaving an row unoccupied both in front and behind them to ensure that no strange men got too close.

Fatima talks about her cousin Samir's temper tantrums. She says that her mother's advice was that she not allow Samir to throw these tantrums alone but that Fatima must also learn to rebel. However, if Fatima did throw a fit in front of her mother, her mother would put a stop to it by saying that Fatima cannot rebel against her mother. She also says that Fatima must weigh situations and decide when she can successfully rebel.

Chapters 7 through 13 Analysis

There is an interesting statement by Fatima about the time during which the family is preparing to go on the picnic at Oued Fez. She says that, while these preparations are ongoing, she and Samir are pretty much on their own, even if they can't find their "espadrilles," because the adults are too busy to help the children with anything. This makes the reader understand that the daily aspects of life in the harem are very much the same as the daily lives of people everywhere. Children in the harem don't always put their shoes where they belong and adults don't always have the answer for a lost item.

Fatima's grandmother, Yasmina, makes a series of predictions for Fatima's future. These seem to have to do with the things Yasmina desires for herself, including that Fatima will "devour books." She also predicts that Fatima will learn languages and "have a passport." Finally, Yasmina predicts that Fatima will "speak like a religious authority." These all seem to be aspects of Yasmina's life in which she feels to be lacking. Finally, Yasmina says that Fatima, "at the very least," would be better off than Fatima's mother. This seems to be an indication that Yasmina feels Fatima's mother is better off than the people of Yasmina's generation.

Fatima's mother charges Fatima with the duty of being "one hundred percent happy." Her mother wants this for Fatima but also says that it's a way Fatima can attain "revenge" for her mother's life of unhappiness. Fatima says this is a heavy duty and that she worries about the possibility of failing at it. Fatima also notes how much energy and effort her mother puts into a single evening of happiness with her husband and says she can't imagine the amount of energy it would take to accomplish being happy all the time.

Fatima and Samir are initially skeptical of their cousin's explanation of who Hitler is choosing to attack. Only when an adult verifies that the entire war has to do with hair

color does Fatima and Samir accept this rather simplistic explanation. When Fatima is at the public baths, she tries to cover her head with a scarf but her mother intervenes, saying that Fatima will not be allowed to cover her hair. Fatima's mother says that she has spent her entire life rebelling against the idea of a veil and that Fatima must not willingly cover her head, ever. When Fatima says that she fears Hitler, her mother says that Fatima should willingly meet that threat with her head uncovered. This seems somewhat extreme but in actuality, this is Fatima's mother's way of rebelling against the confines of the harem life that she hates.



Chapters 14 through 17

Chapters 14 through 17 Summary

In Chapter fourteen, the women of the harem often gather to entertain themselves and each other with plays. Chama is the star of these performances, creating elaborate settings in the bedrooms and on the terrace. Sometimes another of Fatima's cousins, a young man named Zin, plays the hero. Other male cousins also participate but Zin is arguably the favorite. While the singer and actress Asmahan is often at the heart of the plays, there are others who are loved as well, including several feminine activists. A character from the "One Thousand and One Nights" is another important character in the plays. Her name is Princess Budur and she is traveling with a large group, including her husband, when he disappears. To save herself from being raped or sold into slavery by the remainder of the traveling party, she dons her husband's clothes and pretends to be him. She is not only successful, she is put in charge of a kingdom. The women love her story because, though it is improbable, she dared to dream past what a woman could typically expect, and she succeeded at it.

In Chapter fifteen, Aunt Habiba tells the women of the harem that there is no disgrace in having undiscovered and untested talents, but that it's a normal situation because the women of the harem live in a closed environment and are dependent on men. Aunt Habiba is often called on to create less-serious entertainment and one of the favorites is the story of Princess Budur who is posing as a man in an effort to reach the next city on the caravan's route. She succeeds in doing that but upon her arrival, is sought by the king as a husband for the king's daughter, Princess Hayat. Habiba, posing as Princess Budur, pretends to be earnestly praying the first night after the wedding and continues this ruse for several nights. Fatima says that the audience is always split on the best course of action for Princess Budur. Some believe she should tell the king the truth in the hope that he falls in love with her but others believe she should tell Princess Hayat the truth in the hope that the Princess Hayat will help Princess Budur. Fatima says that this ideal of women's solidarity is important to the women of the harem though it is seldom accomplished. The women who believe in the tradition of the harem believe that any decisions offered by the men should be adhered to as if it were law. However, other women, including Fatima's mother, disagree. Fatima's mother says that the women who side with the men do more damage to women's rights than the men.

In Chapter sixteen, the house where Fatima lives has a high terrace that is actually above the ceiling of the top of the house. This terrace is above Aunt Habiba's room and is forbidden by the household because it is so high, has no protective walls around the exterior and is therefore dangerous. Fatima says that a single wrong step could result in a fall that would be disastrous. There is also no direct access to this forbidden terrace and the only way to get to the terrace is by an elaborate method of climbing using poles and boxes. Fatima says that two women in the house - Aunt Habiba and her cousin Chama are the only two women who use the terrace. Both are plagued by occasional



onsets of depression and use the terrace as country women would use a mountain top, as a place of serenity.

Fatima says that breakfast is her favorite time of day and that it usually consists of a simple meal that includes olives. However, the members of the household often provide delicacies that they like as part of this meal. The rule about meal times is that all food is to be shared. That means that anyone who chooses to eat something must provide enough for everyone in the household to have enough of that food to satisfy them. She says that those people who provide treats such as donuts are a favorite but that she loves better those who bring exotic fruits.

Olives are an important part of life for the harem household and Fatima says that the huge olive jars are so big that the children can play hide-and-seek behind them or even in them. The olive jars are also an important part of the ability to climb onto the highest terrace. Sticks used to hang out the heaviest blankets are put in the olive jars as one of the steps toward reaching the highest terrace. Fatima, Samir and their cousin Malika get the opportunity to climb up to the terrace and manage it because they've seen Aunt Habiba do it. One day the three children go to the terrace and Fatima is so frightened by the view that the ears rush in her ears and she fears that she's dying. In keeping with her religion, she tells her cousins to be sure that Fatima's mother pays the debt she owes to the vendor who sells treats near the public baths the women frequent.

While on the terrace, the children consider questions related to life in the harem. One of those is whether a man must have multiple wives. Malika's father does but neither Samir's father nor Fatima's father do. Another question is whether there can be multiple masters of the house. While Samir's father is older and therefore has more power, their household does have both men as recognized masters. Malika's father is the sole master of their harem. The children decide that either is possible but multiples means there's a better atmosphere and more fun because what one master vetoes another might approve of. Another question is whether there must be slaves in the household.

In chapter seventeen, the children discuss the slave question. While slavery is illegal, one of the women in Fatima's house is Mina, a woman who was kidnapped and sold into slavery years earlier. Though formally free, she has little memory of her own country and family, and nowhere to go, so she lives with and works for Fatima's family. She is loved by Fatima's family, especially the children, so much so that the adults sometimes call on Mina to help induce the children to behave. Fatima says that Mina seldom shows any emotion at all except when a child is mistreated, then she becomes angry. She seldom goes out except to an annual festival and prefers to spend her free time on a terrace so that she can face Mecca. Mina was taken from her home by men of her nationality and sold to Arab slavers. She tells the story of coming to a place she believes she recognizes and trying to escape only to be caught and punished. Her captors lowered her into a well and she was forced to hold onto a bucket or be dropped in the well and drowned. Fatima has nightmares after hearing that story for the first time but desperately wants to hear the story again and again. Mina's message is that even as a child, she had to look up toward her captors rather than down to see what was coming toward her, and to call on all her strength to hold onto the rope. Fatima takes



that advice to heart and her version of testing herself on these points is to slide her body into one of the olive jars. The danger is that she might get stuck and have to call for help but she continues to try it so often that her parents worry about her. Fatima never reveals her reasons for taking on the dangerous stunt.

Chapters 14 through 17 Analysis

The story of Princess Budur is described in some detail. Fatima points out that the story does not appear in the table of contents as Princess Budur but under the name of her husband. Fatima also points out that the story appears on the nine hundred, sixty-second night, meaning it's near the end of the book. Fatima goes on to explain that the woman telling the tales, Scheherazade, probably feared telling that particular story because of the message - that there is little difference between the sexes and a mere changing of clothing would allow a woman to perform all the duties of a man.

The fact that the women of Fatima's harem are willing to put aside their own entertainment to please Mina's desire for information about her home country is indicative of the attitudes of the women toward each other. Even though some, like Fatima's mother, hate the harem way of life, they do what they can to make life better for the others in the harem. This courtesy was also seen in the case of Fatima's grandmother, Yasmina, who set aside her jealousy to help arrange for a banana tree for one of the concubines in her harem. This community spirit is bound to be an important part of life for those in the harem though Fatima makes it clear that there are occasions of anger and spite, which is natural when there are so many people in a small area for long periods of time.

In one of the footnotes, the author writes that harems ceased to exist in the 1950s.



Chapters 18 through 22

Chapters 18 through 22 Summary

In Chapter eighteen, Fatima says that her activity of hiding in the olive jars was only one of many "illegal activities" that occurred on the terrace. She says that the adults sometimes chewed gum, put on red fingernail polish, and even occasionally smoked a cigarette filched from the pockets of one of Fatima's cousins. The women also sometimes burned "charmed candles" meant to increase their sexual allure or bobbed their hair to resemble that of a favorite French actress. There was also talk of nationalist activities, especially women's rights. Fatima says that the situation means that the children have a great deal of knowledge that will get the adults in trouble with the masters of the house. The result is that the women who are participating in these activities are extremely nice to the children, are as indulgent as is possible, and provide treats such as almonds and donuts. However, the men know that the children possess this information and depend on them to tell. Fatima feels some guilt at letting her father down on this point.

Fatima and her cousins have lengthy discussions about the reason Americans arrived in the country at all. They can come up with no real satisfactory answer and Fatima even suggests that perhaps the Americans were just out for a picnic and thought the country uninhabited when they landed. This suggestion makes Samir angry and he says that she's being silly. The result of the presence of Americans is that there are consumer items available that were never before available, such as scarves, handbags, lipstick, gum and cigarettes. Fatima's father and the other men of his generation oppose the goods but Fatima's mother says that he has no objection other than the fact that it's something the women choose. Her father says that the goods represent corruption of the accepted code of conduct but her mother says the fact that there's nothing wrong with gum and that the men's objection is that women choose to chew without consulting the men.

In chapter nineteen, the young men are not supposed to be on the terraces of the Mernissi household but often spend their evenings there with their female cousins. The young men are able to watch the Bennis house next door. The Bennis family has several boys and girls of marriageable age and this is the reason the boys were not supposed to be on the terraces, but it is the reason that they were anxious to be there. One day Fatima comes home from school with the information about her monthly menstrual cycle, the expectation that she would soon develop breasts, and the knowledge that the boys' voices would change. Her mother is initially upset and says she would have waited before giving Fatima that information, but accepts it because it's "part of her education." In fact, Fatima's teacher has provided the details as part of a biology lesson.

Fatima's cousin Malika is on the verge of developing breasts and Fatima notes that she is just holding onto the hope that it will also happen to her. She often gets brief access



to Chama's books about magic, charms and astral signs as it relates to love, and copies down as much as she can in the brief moments of access to the books. Sometimes Chama forgets that Fatima is so young and reads to her, information that Fatima greedily takes in. The other women of the harem often hold incantations and burn candles in an effort to make themselves more irresistible to their husbands or their future husbands. The children are often called on to help in these situations and Fatima says that it sometimes seems as if the stars are shining more brightly, just to support those efforts.

The nationalists continue to petition for women's rights and there comes a time when schools are opened to the girls of the nation. Fatima's mother immediately asks Fatima's father to transfer Fatima from the Koran school she attends to a general studies school. Father doesn't immediately agree but does call a family council. During this council, all those with knowledge about the topic attend but it's also important that someone from Fatima's mother's family attend to ensure that her best interests are protected. Her father, living so far in the country, is unable, but sends his son, Fatima's Uncle Tazi, in his place. At the end of the meeting, it's decided that Fatima and all her female cousins will attend Moulay Brahim Kettani, a school located a short distance from the front gate. Fatima is soon good at her studies and revels in the relative freedoms of school. Meanwhile, life goes on uninterrupted for Fatima's mother. She asks to be allowed to go to a community school where literacy is taught but the family council denies the request. She consoles herself by saying that her daughters will have a better life and will be part of changing the world.

In Chapter twenty, the women are in the courtyard one day when Fatima suddenly feels an incredible sense of stillness and peace. She initially believes that someone is using magic to try to send her an image and looks around carefully in an effort to discover the sender. When she tells Chama about it, Chama responds that it is a sign of maturity.

Fatima describes a typical day in the courtyard when the women are working on their various embroidery projects. Her mother and Chama are working on an elaborate, vivid bird with outstretched wings embroidered on the back of a red silk garment meant for Chama. They will then make a matching garment for Fatima's mother. Fatima says that women sometimes dress alike in an show of solidarity. The women in the harem are divided with Fatima's mother and Chama desiring to make elaborate embroidery pieces that defy tradition while her grandmother and some of the others remain traditional. Because the women can't go out to shop for themselves, there is a cousin of Fatima's grandmother who shops for them and their ability to get what they want depends on being able to describe well to this man and to get his approval. Aunt Habiba believes in the rebellion posed by Fatima's mother and Chama but because of her tenuous position in the household is unable to publicly side with them. They understand this and sometimes share secret smiles with her to show their understanding.

In Chapter twenty-one, Fatima turns nine and realizes that Samir doesn't care about the things that are becoming important to her, such as taking care of her skin. It's during this small emotional struggle between the cousins that Fatima learns that she has power over Samir because he depends so heavily on her presence. Fatima describes, in great



detail, about the various masks and beauty treatments used by the women of the harem.

In Chapter twenty-two, the rituals of the harem are important and Fatima develops a fake fainting spell in order to get out of some situations. Samir tries it once but is caught smiling and is chastised for it. There comes a day in the women's houses when one of the women complains that Samir is showing the attention of a man for a woman. Samir is soon banished from the women's quarters and sent to the men's quarters. He confides in Fatima that it is not nearly so much fun there but lords it over her that he's been granted access to a sanctum that's closed to Fatima. Fatima is quiet afterwards and it's Mina who asks about her somber mood. When she tells Mina about it, Mina says that Fatima is growing up and that her life will never be the same.

Chapters 18 through 22 Analysis

Fatima talks about her own appearance and the fact that her mother says Fatima has too much hair and that it is unruly. Fatima is torn between the desire to learn about the grown up aspects of life and clinging to the desire to remain a playmate to Samir. She enjoys the times when she goes to the baths with her mother, washes her hair in a concoction of tobacco leaves, oil, and henna, and learns about the various beauty treatments that the women use. She also wants to learn about love and sex and seeks information from her cousin Malika, although Malika wants payment in the form of cookies for the information and instruction that she is willing to provide.

Fatima talks about the doors at school and is amazed that she is allowed go to the bathroom when she wants, which is a privilege that was not granted at the Koran school she had attended previously. There is no monotony in the school day as the children change classes and subjects routinely. They are given two breaks each day with time to go outside and play. Finally, she and the rest of the household have the ability to walk in the streets to and from home. They pet the donkeys, buy treats from the chick-pea vendor and generally take over for that brief period. But what really amazes Fatima is that the children are allowed to take as long as they want in the bathroom and if they are late returning to the class, they simply knock at the door and enter. She says that children are not allowed to either open or close a door in her home.



Characters

Fatima Mernissi

This is the author. She is a girl growing up in a harem in Morocco as the story opens. Fatima is a precocious child and she is very close to her mother. It is from her mother and grandmother that she comes to realize some important facts of life, specifically as it pertains to women living in Moroccan harems. Fatima puts a great deal of thought into every aspect of life. For example, when her mother says that her goal for Fatima is that Fatima should be happy "one hundred percent of the time," Fatima immediately begins to think about how a person would go about accomplishing this. She puts the same level of thought into understanding all aspects of life and especially wants to understand and explore the ideas of a frontier, or boundary, between the harem and the outside world. Fatima knows firsthand about the way to escape the harem by climbing onto the terrace and going through a neighboring house and says that this method of escaping the confines of the house is symbolically important to the women of the harem because it's one of the few instances in which they take control of some part of their lives. Fatima takes in all that her mother tells her but isn't personally ready to commit to either a life within the harem or a life outside the protected family unit. If the story is truly a memoir of Fatima's childhood, as some people believe, it seems that she eventually comes to accept the need to live outside the harem and does live up to her mother's dreams of making a life for herself and of having the freedom to do as she wants with that life.

Fatima's Mother

A serious woman who chafes under the restrictions of life in the harem, she dreams of a better life with more freedoms for both Fatima and Fatima's sister. Fatima's mother defies several aspects of the harem life, including the need for communal meals. She rises later than everyone else and cooks herself a lavish meal for breakfast despite the fact that everyone else would have eaten hours earlier. When lunch time rolls around, she is often too full to eat. When the entire household packs up for the occasional picnic in the country, Fatima's mother is anxious to go and works as hard as anyone to make it all come to pass. However, she is morose afterwards and hates the confines of the harem. She often clashes with her mother-in-law who says that the younger women, including Fatima's mother, have too much freedom already. Fatima's mother responds that the French women have the freedom to do what they want, including walking to the market place by themselves and that the French still manage to get all their work done. In fact, they get so much done that they are able to make war on the Moroccans. Periodically, she arranges a nighttime picnic on the terrace of the family home with her immediate family and those events make her exceedingly happy. She pleads with Fatima's father to move their immediate family out on their own and he offers compromises, such as allowing her to stock a pantry so that she can eat what she wants, when she wants, but doesn't agree to move.



Fatima's Father

The younger of the two brothers living in the extended household of their parents, he is very traditional in his thinking. Though his wife pleads with him to move out, he continues to refuse, saying that it would be the end of the traditional family situation for his family. He is kind and loving with his family and offers his wife compromises in an effort to try to make her life better.

Cousin Samir

A young boy who is the son of Fatima's uncle, Samir and Fatima are very close as children and spend a great deal of time together. Samir is eventually expelled from the women's side of the house when several of the adult women note that he's grown past being a child. He admits to Fatima that the men's side of the house is not as much fun as the women's but feels the superiority that comes with having been accepted into that sanctum that is unavailable to the women.

Uncle

Fatima's uncle, he is the brother of Fatima's father. Uncle is the older son and so holds a place of superiority over Fatima's family. He is very traditional and seems somewhat strict in his dealings with others.

Lalla Mani

As Fatima's father's mother, she is very traditional and does not get along well with Fatima's mother. She demands that the grandchildren show her respect by kissing her hand daily and very seldom interacts with anyone other than those times.

Grandmother Yasmina

As Fatima's mother's mother, she lives in a rural area and is greatly relaxed, compared to the other women in Fatima's life. She tells Fatima about the negative sides of life in a harem, including that there are multiple wives which means that a woman has to wait several nights for the opportunity to cuddle with her husband. Yasmina is one of eight wives.

Aunt Habiba

A divorced woman who lives in the house with Fatima's family, she is an excellent storyteller and often entertains Fatima and the other children in the harem by telling stories. Though she holds a low place in the hierarchy of the household, she insists that



she would not return to her husband under any conditions. However, Fatima notes that she is prone to tears and often cries with little provocation.

Grandfather Tazi

This is Fatima's maternal grandfather, he lives in a rural area and works to keep the peace between Fatima's grandmother, Yasmina, and the seven other women he keeps as wives. His family originates in the Rif region and Fatima notes that he looks like the people of that area.

Ahmed

The door keeper of the house where Fatima's family lives. Ahmed seems to be a reasonable person and it seems that he would allow members of the family to leave, if they wanted. His wife works sometimes outside the home and they have several children.



Objects/Places

Morocco

This is the country where Fatima and her family lives.

Fez

This is the Moroccan city where Fatima and her family live.

The Frontier

A symbolic division between life in the harem and life outside the harem, Fatima says that in some cases the frontier is tangible, such as in the example of the gate at her house. In other cases, this frontier is intangible and Fatima says she likes that less because the rules are less defined.

A Thousand and One Nights

This is an Arabian story in which a woman has to entertain her captor with a new segment of a story each night in order to keep from being killed. Fatima loves this story.

The Rif Region

This is where Grandfather Tazi is from.

The Courtyard

This is where most of the action of daily life occurs at the house where Fatima lives.

The Terrace

This is a communal area used by Fatima's family and sometimes used by Fatima's mother as a place for a nighttime picnic.

Oued Fez

This is a place ten miles from the city where Fatima's family lives. The property belongs to her uncle and the family sometimes goes there to picnic.



Agadir

This is where Mabrouka is from.

Sidi Slimane

This is where Krisha takes the members of Yasmina's harem to the public baths.



Themes

The Desire for Freedom

Fatima knows nothing but the life in the harem, having been born into the situation and raised there. Her mother also knows no other life but chafes under the restrictions just the same, as does Fatima's grandmother, Yasmina. Fatima's house is in the city of Fez and there is a door keeper who ensures that the women of the harem do not leave. When Fatima's cousin, Chama, tries to go out to the movies with the boys of the family, she is confined by force with the door keeper sometimes chasing her down and physically taking her back to the harem. Still, the women of the harem find small ways to rebel against this confinement and to create small escapes for themselves. One of these methods is through acting and the women often entertain each other by putting on plays, usually with female activists and heroines at the heart of the stories. Another method of attaining this freedom is by jumping from the terrace of their house onto the terrace of a neighboring house where the women could reach the street without being stopped by a door keeper. Fatima doesn't say how often this happens but says that whenever a woman appears in the courtyard with skinned knees, the other women know that she's had a mishap while making her escape in this fashion. Fatima's mother finds small ways of making her own escape. Fatima notes that her mother and her cousin Chama create elaborate embroidered clothing with designs that often include birds with wings spread wide, as if in flight. This is contrary to accepted designs and is counted as an act of rebellion by Fatima's paternal grandmother. When confronted, Fatima's mother says that she has little in her life that is truly a freedom and that she refuses to give in on this point. Through it all, Fatima's mother and grandmother, Yasmina, encourage Fatima to seek freedom of her own.

Coming of Age

Fatima ages both physically and emotionally over the course of the book. One of the most evident signs of this emotional aging is her anxiety to consider harems and the role of harems in the lives of her people, but she is also anxious to learn from others. One example of this desire to learn is seen in Fatima's reaction to the story of Mina's kidnapping. Mina had been taken from her home as a child and told the members of Fatima's household about running away from her captors and the punishment that followed. From this story, Fatima learns a lesson about facing opposition and she is so eager to test her ability to withstand frightening situations that she often hides in a huge olive jar, risking the possibility of getting stuck, so that she can practice facing fear. Over time, Fatima naturally begins to pay more attention to the lives of the adults around her. She takes careful note of the beauty treatments indulged in by the women of the harem and she begins taking part in these rituals herself. Fatima eventually comes to realize that her cousin Samir, who happens to be a boy, is more dependent on Fatima's companionship than Fatima is dependent on his. When she and Samir formally recognize these differences, Fatima feels sad, intuitively sensing the childhood that is



slipping away from her. She confides this sadness to Mina who tells Fatima that her life will never be the same.

Life in a Harem

The author makes the point that there are two types of harems, the domestic harem such as the one her family has and the imperial harem which consisted of a master with a group of wives. Fatima says that most people associate the word "harem" with eroticism but that there was actually little of that in her own family's harem. In Fatima's case, the harem consisted of her paternal grandmother, her father and his older brother, and her mother and her uncle's wife. Each of the men has only a single wife though each has several children. The remainder of the harem is made of extended family and servants. The extended family members are usually divorced or widowed aunts who have nowhere else to go. When life in the harem is discussed and anyone suggests that there might come a time when harems cease to exist, Fatima's father asks the question, what would the poor women relatives do? Fatima says that the domestic harems are focused more on the use of a single home for the men of a family with the men pooling their resources to provide for that extended family. The fact that it is a harem means that the women are enclosed. This forced separation is enforced in the case of Fatima's harem by the employment of a door keeper who doesn't allow anyone in but also doesn't allow women out unless he's had express orders to do so. In the case of Fatima's maternal grandparents, the harem is without walls. However, Fatima's grandmother, Yasmina, says that the separation still exists. As an example, she says that a man outside the harem who happens upon a woman of the harem will avert his eyes as a sign of recognizing that by merely looking upon the woman he is trespassing onto another man's harem. Fatima says that the rules of the harem are seldom in a woman's favor and that, while men might believe that keeping trespassers at bay is good, the women dream often of trespassing.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in the first-person point of view from the perspective of the author. The reader should be aware that some people call this a work of non-fiction and that the stories presented truly are memories of Fatima Mernissi's childhood living within a harem in Morocco. Others take the stand that the stories are made up. Biographical information about Fatima indicates that she was born in Morocco in the 1940s and that she grew up there. There are many footnotes included in the book and one refers to "the harem which inspired the tales of this book," which seems to indicate that the stories are only based on Fatima's life but are not a true depiction of it. In either case, the stories seem historically correct and Fatima's first-hand knowledge of the subject matter makes the stories believable. Fatima is taught from early childhood that her goal in life should be happiness and independence with the two vying for importance in her mother's instructions. Due to this, Fatima might have over-emphasized the lack of these things in the lives of the women living within the harems of Morocco. Fatima seems to have shared a close bond with her mother which could have altered her perspective of the roles of women. The reader should also keep in mind that Fatima emphasizes her actions as a child playing quietly in the doorway until her mother wakes up and her thought processes. If the reader believes the stories are based on Fatima's actual childhood, these may be over-emphasized as the author looks back to a time that is, at least in her memory, somewhat idyllic.

Setting

The story is set in Morocco in the 1940s. The physical setting is described in great detail, specifically as it relates to the houses where Fatima and the various members of her family live and to the surrounding area. Fatima describes in great detail several of the settings, including the rural area where her grandmother lives. At her grandparents' home, there is a main house and several separate buildings, one of which is the home of Fatima's grandmother. The setting of Fatima's house is also described in great detail, including the various sections of the extended house where the different segments of the household live. The details include descriptions of the terrace, courtyard and the method by which the women could sometimes escape the confines of the house. The time setting is borne out by the fact that automobiles are fairly common and the members of the household sometimes depend on them for transportation, especially when the entire household goes to the country for a picnic or leaves the city to visit relatives. A truck is also used to transport the women of Fatima's grandmother's household to the river to wash dishes. There are also movies and radios available, which are both technologies of the time period. Another aspect that points to this time period is the talk of war and the fact that the Americans had dropped the bomb on the Japanese. This apparently refers to the atom bomb, further supporting the 1940s time period.



Language and Meaning

The overall tone is one of depression and oppression though there is an overriding tone of hope and a belief in a better future. The hope that there is to be a better life for the next generation is touted often by the older generations, including Fatima's mother and grandmother. The language is generally straightforward and easy to follow. The language is western in tone and this seems at odds with the subject but is likely an effort by the author to make the stories more easily understood. The book is a series of stories that Fatima calls "tales." These stories seem somewhat disjointed at times but flow reasonably well and are generally in chronological order. There are several aspects of imagery used repeatedly throughout the book. One of those is Fatima's description of frontiers. These "frontiers" are both real and intangible. Fatima talks about the frontiers in the form of the gates at the front of the house where the harem lives. These frontiers are tangible and Fatima hates them but prefers them to the intangible frontiers such as the separation between particular aspects of society.

Structure

The story is divided into twenty-two chapters. Each chapter is named and those names are indicative of the subject of that chapter. Chapter titles are My Harem Frontier; Scheherazade, the King and the Words; The French Harem, Yasmina's First Co-Wife; Chama and the Caliph; Tamous' Horse; The Harem Within; Aquatic Dishwashing; Moonlit Nights of Laughter; The Men's Salon; World War II: View from the Courtyard; Asmahan, the Singing Princess; The Harem Goes to the Movies; Egyptian Feminists Visit the Terrace; Princess Budur's Fate; the Forbidden Terrace; Mina, the Rootless; American Cigarettes; Mustaches and Breasts; The Silent Dream of Wings and Flights; Skin Politics: Eggs, Dates, and Other Beauty Secrets; and Henna, Clay, and Men's Stares. The chapters range in length with most being ten to twelve pages in length. Chapter seventeen, "Mina, the Rootless," is only eight pages and several chapters are fourteen pages in length. The opening page of each chapter is preceded by a page that contains a picture. Each of these pages is devoid of writing. The picture is photo-quality and depicts various aspects of life for those in the country. There are pictures of individuals and of the city. Chapter eleven begins with a picture of the city, presumably from the terrace of Fatima's house. Chapter six begins with a picture of several women standing at an area that could be the gate to a courtyard. The fact that these are photos rather than drawings lends an additional air of credibility to the story and it is easy to imagine that the people depicted are the various characters of the book.



Quotes

"To make babies, the bride and groom had to dress up nicely, put flowers in their hair and lie down together on a very big bed. The next thing you knew, many mornings later, there was a little baby crawling between them" (Chapter 4, pg. 33.)

"Sometimes, she said that to be stuck in a harem simply meant that a woman had lost her freedom of movement. Other times, she said that a harem meant misfortune because a woman had to share her husband with many others" (Chapter 4, pg. 34.)

"'The French do not imprison their wives behind walls, my dear mother-in-law,' she would say. 'They let them run wild in the local souk (market), and everyone had fun, and still the work gets done'" (Chapter 5, pg. 42.)

"Then she would tell me that whatever else I did with my life, I had to take her revenge. 'I want my daughters' lives to be exciting,' she would say, 'very exciting and filled with one hundred percent happiness, nothing more, nothing less'" (Chapter 9, pg. 80.)

'I want my daughters to stand up with their heads erect, and walk to Allah's planet with their eyes on the stars.' With that, she snatched off the scarf, and left me totally defenseless, facing an invisible army that was running after people with dark hair" (Chapter 11, pg. 100.)

"You had to develop a talent, Aunt Habiba said, so that you could give something, share, and shine. And you developed a talent by working very hard at becoming good at something" (Chapter 14, pg. 127.)

"A fierce hatred of co-wives was just about the only thing that my mother and Lalla Radia, Samir's mother, had in common" (Chapter 16, pg. 150.)

"Once freed, however, many female slaves like Mina were too weak to fight, too shy to seduce, too breathless to protest, and too poor to return to their native lands. Or else, they were too unsure of what they would find once they were back there" (Chapter 17, pg. 165.)

"Chama danced also, and so did the Bennis girls, thus managing to sculpt fleeting moments when adolescent love and happiness floated around, and turned the sunset into a red and romantic haze" (Chapter 18, pg. 176.)

"In fact, the two letters, o and k stood for longer words, but the Americans had a habit of shortening their sentences so they could get back to chewing gum" (Chapter 18, pg. 184.)

"The idea of flying around to find something which would make you happy when you were discontented with what you had, entranced Chama, and she made Aunt Habiba repeat the beginning of the story over and over again, never seeming to have enough of



it, until the rest of the audience started resenting her interruptions" (Chapter 20, Page 208.)

"The frontier indicates the line of power because wherever there is a frontier, there are two kinds of creatures walking on Allah's earth, the powerful on one side, and the powerless on the other. I asked Mina how would I know on which side I stood, and her answer was quick, short and very clear: 'If you can't get out, you are on the powerless side'" (Chapter 22, pg. 242.)



Topics for Discussion

Describe Fatima's life in the harem. How does the life of Fatima's mother in her harem differ from that of Fatima's maternal grandmother's life? Why do those differences exist?

Fatima talks about "frontiers." What are these frontiers and are they always tangible? What are some of the frontiers in modern life? Are those frontiers always tangible? Describe the symbolism of a frontier in Fatima's life.

Describe Fatima's parents. Describe her maternal grandparents. Describe her paternal grandmother. How are these characters similar? Different? How does each impact Fatima's life?

Who is Samir? Who is Chama? Who is Aunt Habiba? Who is Mina? What is the role each of these play in Fatima's life? Why are each important to her life? How do each aid in Fatima's coming of age?

What happens that allows Fatima to attend regular school rather than the Koran school she had attended when she was very young? How does this change come about within her family? What is the impact on Fatima and her family?

Describe the two types of harems. What is the significance of each? What is the story told to explain how harems came to exist? What type of harem is Fatima's family? What does her father say about the importance of the harem?

How do the women of the harems entertain themselves? What are some of the stories told in the harem? What is the importance of these stories? What are Fatima's favorites? Why?

Is this a true story? Support your answer.