

Finding Nouf Study Guide

Finding Nouf by Zoë Ferraris

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Contents

Finding Nouf Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapters 2-5.....	6
Chapter 6.....	8
Chapters 7-9.....	9
Chapters 10-11.....	11
Chapters 12-15.....	12
Chapters 16-17.....	14
Chapters 18-21.....	15
Chapter 22.....	17
Chapters 23-26.....	18
Chapters 27-29.....	20
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	25
Themes.....	27
Style.....	29
Quotes.....	31
Topics for Discussion.....	33



Plot Summary

Finding Nouf by Zoe Ferraris won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize winner in 2009 when the book was published. In Finding Nouf, Ferraris explores the tension between men and women in an Islamic nation. The two main characters, Nayir and Katya, an unmarried man and woman, come together in an improbable way to solve a murder mystery of the elite and infamous Shrawi family's daughter.

The novel begins with Nayir in the desert searching for the youngest sister of his dear friend Othman. She has been missing for ten days and is rumored to have run away. Nayir fears the worst - that the desert has killed her. This is confirmed when her body is found in a wadi or an empty lake desert lakebed miles away from Nayir's desert camp. Disappointed and aggrieved that he could not help his friend, he offers to pick up her body from the morgue before the funeral services.

At the morgue, Nayir, a very pious Muslim man, meets Katya, the examiner's assistant and coincidentally Othman's fiancée. Nayir asks to confirm that the body is in fact Nouf and when he sees her it seems as if she hasn't died from the desert heat. The examiner confirms this saying that she drowned and also has blunt-force trauma to the head. Surprisingly, the case is closed and the police are not investigating the possibility that Nouf was murdered.

At the funeral services, Nouf is buried with her back to Mecca and Nayir sees this. This means that Nouf at 16 and unmarried, was pregnant, a crime punishable by death in Islamic law. Later, Nayir receives a phone call from Othman who asks him to assist and lead an investigator into the desert to look for clues and footprints that may indicate what happened to Nouf. Nayir learns that the family does in fact suspect that perhaps she was murdered, or ran away to kill herself, but they paid the coroner's office to close the case to not draw attention to their family's disgrace by her being pregnant.

Othman has also asked Katya to process some samples that she took before the body was released to Nayir. Together, Nayir and Katya begin investigating Nouf's death together. Though highly inappropriate for an unmarried woman and man to spend time together alone, they both remain faithful to their loyalty to Othman, but many of the clues regarding Nouf's disappearance lead back to him.

Nayir and Katya discover that Nouf wanted to escape her family's compound on the island and their way of life. Nouf was engaged and on her honeymoon her husband was taking her to New York. Nouf had planned on running away once she was there. She had paid off an American man in Saudi Arabia to lend her his apartment and help her build a life. Othman, an adopted brother, and Nouf were in love despite the legality of incest. Nouf was pregnant with Othman's baby, but despite Othman not wanting her to run away without him, he did not kill her. Nouf's younger sister, Abir killed her because of her jealousy of Nouf's likability and her engagement to Qazi, whom Abir was in love with.



Othman and Katya break off their engagement because Katya realizes that although she and Othman are friends, he does not love her. Nayir realizes now that Othman and Katya are not engaged, that he has romantic feelings for her. However, Katya feels the same way about Nayir.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 begins with Nayir in the Saudi Arabian desert preparing for his evening prayer. Other men in the camp are laughing, drinking, and playing cards. Nayir is resentful of their disrespect and lack of piety for Muslim law and religious teaching.

Nayir has been asked by his wealthy friend, Othman to conduct a search for his missing sister. Already the men have been in the desert many days and have not found her. Nayir thinks of the missing girl, Nouf and allows him to imagine what she was like. He takes a photograph from his pocket—a photo of Nouf and her younger sister—and studies her face, an act considered immodest in Muslim tradition. While he is studying the photograph, a man approaches the camp and with him he brings the news that Nouf has been found dead.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The opening scenes of chapter 1 characterize Nayir well: he chastises the men for so overtly ignoring the call to prayer while committing crimes that are against the law—gambling and drinking. Nayir feels different than them and so he separates himself. While he is alone he takes a moment to study the face of Nouf from the photograph that his friend has given him. Studying the face of an unmarried woman is just as improper, if not more so, than drinking and gambling. Nayir does feel guilt, but absolves it with the fact that he is studying her face because he is helping lead a search to find her. These two scenes set up both the ongoing conflict that Nayir will have to deal with when confronted by the actions of others that he doesn't agree with, while simultaneously absolving his own guilt for actions considered inappropriate by Islamic tradition.



Chapters 2-5

Chapters 2-5 Summary

In Chapter 2, Nayir volunteers to pick up Nouf's body from the morgue. He does so because of the guilt he feels over having not saved her, and then not having found her. He does not want a servant to do it, but feels that it should be the duty of a friend.

At the morgue, Nayir insists on seeing Nouf's face to make sure that it is her. He is surprised to see that she suffered a head wound and that there were scratches and bruises on her arms. Furthermore, the examiner informs Nayir that she wasn't killed by the head trauma but by drowning. The examiner explains that the family has asked that the case be closed and no examination will continue.

In Chapter 3, Nayir delivers Nouf's body to the family estate. He is surprised by the lack of demonstrations of grieving. The men seem hostile and angry, not upset. During the burial, Nayir notices, despite the shroud wrapped around her body, that Nouf's back is facing Mecca. The only reason a woman's back would face Mecca during a burial is if she was pregnant.

In Chapter 4, Nayir pays his condolences to the men of the Shrawi family. In the men's sitting room, the brothers are sitting and passing the hookah. They thank Nayir for the duties he has completed for the family. Nayir is happy to be of assistance. He has known the Shrawi family for many years, taking the father and the boys into the desert for week-long camps. Though the Shrawi family has a lot of money, they run a welfare program for Saudis in need and though their home is large, it is sparse and elegant. The island estate was given to them by the royal family and the Shrawi's make a show of not being overtly fancy. Nayir notes that this is the only way that he, a lowly desert guide, could befriend them.

In Chapter 5, Nayir and Othman go for a walk. Othman seems distraught and Nayir does his best to offer his condolences. During their brief conversation, Othman sees a girl on a jet ski and startles. It is Nouf's little sister who bears a striking similarity to Nouf, Othman excuses himself and quickly walks down to the pier to meet her. Nayir decides to check on Nouf's beloved camel, which Othman said was quite traumatized.

When Nayir gets to the stables, the stable manager says that Nouf's camel is fine and leads Nayir to her. Nayir pets her and runs his hands along her fur looking for any indication of a struggle. Near one of her hooves he finds five straight lines that have been branded—the sign of the evil eye.

Chapters 2-5 Analysis

In Chapter 2, Nayir is surprised by both the fact that Nouf suffered head wounds—which implies foul play—and that her family has already closed the investigation. Nayir begins



to wonder if Nouf has done something improper and it is implied that he thinks that perhaps she wasn't a virgin. If this is the case, then this may have been an honor killing committed by the family. Sex before marriage is one of the greatest sins according to the Koran and is punishable by a public execution. Often, families take it upon themselves to save face with the public.

Katya the female examiner unnerves Nayir. Initially, because she is a woman who is working, and secondly because she is not donning the burqa, allowing her face to be revealed. She talks in a strong voice and addresses the men in the room directly.

In Chapter 3, Nayir's suspicions over Nouf's death increase. He notices that few of the family members are grieving—most seem angry and then Nayir sees that Nouf was buried with her back to Mecca indicating that she was pregnant. During the mother's lamentations she calls out, "Works are accomplished according to intentions. A man receives only what he intends." Nayir finds this an odd thing to call out during a daughter's burial, further convincing Nayir of the possibility of an honor killing. Nayir now assumes that, in fact, someone in the family had something to do with her death. Nayir does not assume Othman because he is who sent Nayir to the desert to look for her.

In Chapter 4, Nayir yearns to know more about what happened to Nouf—he also wants to know more about who she was as a person. In this he feels guilty because he knows that if Nouf had been alive yearning to know intimate details about Nouf's life would be improper and he could never consider marrying a girl like her because of his different social status. It is only in her death, that he might be able to know about her. This chapter reveals that Nayir knows very little about women and part of his interest in Nouf is because she was a woman and considered a dangerous one since she was pregnant before marriage. In many ways, she represents an entirely different, but fascinating world for Nayir.

In Chapter 5, Nayir is unnerved by Othman's reaction to the girl on the jet ski and to the inconsistency of what has been said about Nouf's camel. Nouf's camel was fine, except the branding and did not seem startled or traumatized at all. The inconsistencies in people's stories and their expressed emotions are mounting, as is Nayir's interest in what happened to Nouf.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Katya Hijazi wakes early in the morning to get to work to secretly run blood, dirt and skin samples. Katya is secretly working for the Shrawi family, specifically Othman, her fiancée, to find out what has happened to Nouf.

Since Katya is a woman, she is not allowed to driver or go anywhere by herself, so her father's friend, Ahmad, is her escort. He drives her around and escorts her on outings to protect her honor. When Katya arrives at work it is just after 6:00 in the morning. Shortly after, her supervisor, the boss's sister, comes in and demands that Katya work on specific files. Katya manages to sneak in her work on Nouf's case.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Katya is researching Nouf's case secretly not just to help Othman, because she also wants to know what has happened to her. Though Katya is 28 and Nouf only 16, Katya is intrigued by her fiancée's favorite's sister. The Shrawi family is considerably a higher status than Katya's family. Though Katya has carved out some freedoms for herself, like working and attending university, she is curious about why a girl from the family that she is about to marry into would run away to the desert. The implications of Nouf's case will inevitably affect Katya's future.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

In Chapter 7, Othman calls Nayir and asks him to accompany his private investigator into the desert. Nayir agrees but feels slighted that Othman has hired an additional investigator and does not feel that he can fully rely on him. In the desert, Nayir asks his friend Mutlaq, a Bedouin sand reader to read imprints around where the body was found.

What Mutlaq and Nayir discover is that Nouf most likely drowned in a big flood that filled the wadi she was found in. It rained about the same day that Nouf disappeared. They also learned that most likely she was carried down river by the force of the flood and was dropped upriver very close to a campsite that Nayir had taken the men in the family just a few months back. While Nayir and Mutlaq are examining the sand, the private investigator is in the car sleeping. As they are driving back, he passes out from heatstroke.

In Chapter 8, Nayir takes samples from Nouf's shoe to Samir, his uncle who raised him, who is a chemist. Samir discovers that the dirt on the shoe is not the same as the sand from the desert and that the dung on the shoe had traces of oleander in it—a deadly plant. Nayir takes this information to further his investigation. After Othman's private investigator passed out from heat stroke, Othman calls and asks Nayir would take over the investigation. Nayir gladly accepts the task.

In Chapter 9, Othman and Nayir go to a coat bazaar so that Othman can buy coats for Katya's trousseau, since all brides fantasize about going on honeymoons in exotic, cold locations. While they are shopping, Nayir tells Othman that Nouf was found just downriver from their last campsite. Othman seems surprised by this. Othman mentions that his desert jacket with the GPS and maps is missing and suggests that perhaps Nouf stole them. Nayir doubts his friend, but tries to conceal it. Nayir believes that if Nouf did take the coat then it would have been found with her body or in the desert.

Othman buys many jackets—some furs even—for Katya's trousseau. Nayir buys a trench coat that makes him feel important and dignified, though it was expensive and impractical in the desert heat. He feels guilt over his vanity and his distrust in his friend, he thinks that he sees a woman flash him, but before he thinks to get the police, she is gone.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

In chapter 7, new evidence suggests that whoever dumped Nouf in the desert did so near the Shrawi family's previous campsite. Nayir doesn't like the thought of it, but it is unusual that Nouf would be located downriver from this site. Nayir believes that she was dumped near the site, alive but unconscious from her head wound, and then unable to



swim out of the wadi during the flash flood. Mutlaq, the sand reader, confirms Nayir's beliefs with his evidence.

Suhail, the private investigator, passing out from heat stroke is an indication of just how hostile the desert can be. It also demonstrates that the Bedouin and Nayir are distinctly different than the private investigator who probably works in an air-conditioned office.

In Chapter 8, Nayir learns that the dirt sample does not match the desert, which implies that Nouf was dropped in the desert after her head injury. Nayir will use the oleander found in the dung to aid him in his investigation.

In Chapter 9, when Nayir and Othman go to the coat market, Nayir buys a trench coat. To own any coat in the heat of Saudi Arabia is impractical, but that is part of the allure. Nayir's coat becomes a talisman for his investigation and he feels official, and more important than a lowly desert guide. His vanity in buying the coat coincides with Nayir being flashed by a woman who had opened her robe. No one else sees the flashing and the reader is left to wonder if, in fact, it actually happened. Does Nayir feel so guilty about his vanity that he imagines something even more disgraceful?



Chapters 10-11

Chapters 10-11 Summary

In Chapter 10, Nayir drives to Nouf's escort, Muhammed's, house to question him about Nouf's whereabouts on the day of her disappearance. The day that Nouf disappeared she called Muhammad early in the morning and told him that he wasn't needed for the day. Through Muhammad, Nayir learns that Nouf was planning on running away to New York on her honeymoon and that an American, Eric Scarberry, was paid well to help her achieve her plan.

In Chapter 11, Nayir continues his investigation by visiting Nouf's fiancée, Qazi, at his father's shoe factory. Nayir's impression of Qazi is that he is just a boy. Nayir doesn't believe that Qazi would do it. He finds out that Qazi didn't know of Nouf's pregnancy until the day of the funeral—and denies that it was his.

Qazi and Nouf had spoken a few times during their engagement, but what drew Qazi to Nouf was her daring, her boldness. They were childhood friends and he remembers that she was just as capable as all of the boys. Despite this not being something desirable, according to Islamic Law, in a woman, Qazi still liked it.

Chapters 10-11 Analysis

In Chapter 10, it becomes clear that Nayir's prejudices may interfere with the investigation. Initially, he feels a reverence for Muhammad and believes that he is a good pious Muslim, but after hearing that he allowed Nouf to meet and speak with an American, he is disgusted. Nayir assumes that the American is also the father of the baby and that Nouf's plan was to run away and be with him.

Nayir considers all Americans infidels, and therefore the enemy. He cannot comprehend why Nouf would want to run there. He is disappointed that this is where the investigation has led because it goes against all of his beliefs.

After visiting and questioning Qazi in Chapter 11, Nayir doesn't believe that Qazi had anything to do with Nouf's death. In fact, Nayir believes that Qazi is a victim of Nouf's misdeeds. He pities him because of the disgrace of being engaged to someone who was an adulterer and for the fact that he found out about Nouf's pregnancy on the day of the funeral, just the same as Nayir



Chapters 12-15

Chapters 12-15 Summary

In Chapter 12, Katya returns from the lab exhausted. She was hoping that her father had made dinner, but instead he was making a smoothie. A few years back Katya's mother died and her father quit his job. Now, Katya goes to work and her father stays home. Later in the evening, Katya calls Othman to tell him what she discovered. They agree to meet later that week and Othman explains that Nayir is also working on the investigation. He gives Katya Nayir's number so that she can talk with him.

Katya's evidence reveals that the DNA from the scratches and underneath her fingernails matches the DNA to the baby. Katya wants to get samples to test. Katya will need Nayir to help her.

In Chapter 13, Katya arrives at the marina where Nayir docks his boat. He is taken aback by her presence and her boldness. He is well aware of their risks of being seen together, but nonetheless invites her into the boat. He explains what he has learned about the American from Muhammad, Nouf's escort. Katya insists on going with him to continue his search of American compounds.

In Chapter 14, Nayir follows in his jeep behind Katya's escort. They head to town where the American compounds are in search of Eric Scarberry. They come to a place called Club Jed where other tenants show Nayir and Katya which apartment was Eric's. They knock on the door and when no one answers, they enter. After searching the empty apartment they found old bill stubs and a dead bird and a used cookbook from the Ladies of Jeddah Society. It looks as if Eric Scarberry had moved a month before Nouf disappeared.

Chapter 15, The Shrawi family had been notified by an optometrist that Nouf's glasses were ready. Othman informs Nayir of this and Nayir and Katya go to pick them up as part of the investigation. The optometrist was not aware that Nouf had died. When he brings the glasses out, he suggests that one of them could still wear the glasses because they have no prescription.

As Nayir and Katya are leaving, a man stops and chastises Nayir for not having his woman cover her face. He calls both of them immodest, assuming that they were married.

Chapters 12-15 Analysis

In Chapter 12, Katya returns home to her father making a smoothie and though it is unusual for women to work in Saudi Arabia, Katya's father had consented because they needed the money and he knew she really wanted to do it. Despite her working long hours, he still doesn't want to cook or clean. Katya is resentful.



When Katya asks Othman for Nayir's number, she is surprised at how willing he gives it to her. She knows that it is improper for her to call or visit a man that it is not her husband and yet her fiancée doesn't mind. Though she is doing it for Othman and the investigation, she finds his lack of jealousy surprising.

Though both Nayir and Katya had unsavory initial impressions of each other with Katya thinking that Nayir was judgmental and Nayir thinking that Katya was too bold, too brazen for a woman, they now are working together and getting to know each other and their initial impressions have changed. Though nothing inappropriate has happened, they are beginning to enjoy each other's company.

Throughout these chapters, both Nayir and Katya take enormous risks in being seen in public since they are an unmarried couple. Initially, they were doing it purely for Othman, but now they also enjoy being together. When the man chastises Nayir for not forcing his woman to cover her face, Nayir is angry and embarrassed. He finds the man disrespectful of women. This is surprising since the action that the man did by chastising them and telling Katya to wear her burqa is not any different than what Nayir was thinking when he first met Katya.



Chapters 16-17

Chapters 16-17 Summary

In Chapter 16, without Katya, Nayir attends a bazaar to look for clues from the used cookbook found in Eric's abandoned apartment. As he locates the Ladies of Jeddah, he spots an origami stand with cranes and other figurines that match the crane that Nayir found in the backpack he found in the desert that is presumed to have been Nouf's. He asks the woman at the origami station what she knows about the crane.

Initially, she hesitates but then explains that she gave it to Eric when they were dating, that she was in love with him and wanted to have his babies. Nayir blushes at this statement and realizes that he is looking this woman right in the face. She is a western woman and is wearing jeans and a tank top. He expected this to bother him, but it does not. He talks to the woman and has no impure or improper thoughts. The woman tells Nayir where Eric is now living.

In Chapter 17, Nayir finds Eric's house in the downtown part of Jeddah that is mostly dominated by royal families. Eric lives with a man who works for an oil company which is how they can afford to live in such a nice place. Nayir questions Eric who explains that he was not having a relationship with Nouf, but simply helping her get out of the country and he was going to allow her to use his apartment once she was in New York. Eric allows Nayir to take a DNA sample without any concern of the results. Nayir deduces that because of Eric's reaction he is not the father of the baby.

Nayir visits Muhammad again to get a DNA sample. Though Muhammad seems anxious at Nayir's presence, more anxious than last time, he still allows Nayir to gather a DNA sample. Again, Nayir deduces, based on Muhammed's willingness to help, that he not the baby either. Nayir drives around town to think, gas is cheap and this is what he does to keep cool, but eventually he comes to a dead end and must turn around.

Chapters 16-17 Analysis

In Chapter 16, the woman at the origami stand alludes to the fact that Eric didn't love her back because he had a boyfriend. Like adultery, homosexuality is punishable by public execution. The thought that Eric might be gay disgusts Nayir, but so does Eric being an American infidel.

Chapter 17 ends with Nayir reaching a dead end after going through a roundabout. This is symbolic for the dead end that their investigation has come to and Nayir realizes this. Based on Eric's and Muhammed's reactions when Nayir asked them for DNA samples, he knows that neither one fathered the baby, that it must be someone from Nouf's family who hurt her out of anger for her pregnancy.



Chapters 18-21

Chapters 18-21 Summary

In Chapter 18, Katya visits the Shrawi residence while the men are away at work. She is received into the women's sitting room in a formal and stiff manner by her sisters-in-law. Though she is the same age as many of her sisters-in-law, she feels that they all seem older and haggard. She feels unwelcome in this room and herself cannot imagine a life where she sits around all day.

She offers her condolences for their loss and notices that at the mention of Nouf, the women harden. Two of the most devout and pious sisters and cousins, leave to another room and the younger sister, Abir leaves as well. Seeing that it is not going well, Katya bids goodbye and prepares to leave. On her way out, she sneaks into Nouf's old bedroom. In a desk drawer she finds a magazine article about the 77 words for love. She takes it. Abir comes in, surprised to see Katya and shows Katya Nouf's closet—a closet that is full of colorful clothing for her trousseau, but clothes that Nouf herself never chose or wore.

In Chapter 19, Katya runs the DNA samples of Eric and Muhammad against the baby's DNA and the DNA found underneath Nouf's fingernails. Neither man is a match. Othman takes Katya to a private beach and she explains to him that neither man is a match and that there must be someone else. Othman acts strange and tells her to stop working on the case, that it puts her in too much jeopardy at her job.

In Chapter 20, Nayir accompanies Katya to an old rundown zoo outside of town. She read that the zoo had been condemned for its poor treatment of animals and neglect. Katya knew that Nouf loved animals and unusual manure was found in her wounds, so they think that this might lead to something. At the zoo, it is deserted and none of the animals are alive. At an old Matterhorn replica, they see oleander growing, and inside the replica is a cave-like hideout with a blanket inside.

Behind the zoo on the access road, they find dirt that looks similar to dirt found on Nouf's other shoe, and then mangled and under a bush, they find the matching hot pink stiletto that they found in the desert. They both confirm that Nouf had been there, but cannot figure out what the tracks mean. There are the truck tracks, presumably from the truck that Nouf stole, but then there are motorcycle tracks.

In Chapter 21, Katya suggest that she and Nayir get something to eat. She leads him to a family restaurant that Nayir expects to be a pick-up bar, but in fact, is a restaurant where men and women can dine together with their children. Their intentions in going to the restaurant was to figure out what exactly to tell Othman and when. But, instead, they talked about what would make girl like Nouf want to run to America. Katya suggests it was the oppression of doing nothing, of her impending marriage, of pressure to soon



bear children after she married. Katya explains to Nayir that sometimes women want more than sitting in a sitting room with other women.

Nayir, at first unsure of the restaurant, marvels at how happy all of the families are. He sees a man dining with his children and his wife, whose face is uncovered. No one is staring at the woman with lust—everyone is just minding their own business eating with their families. Nayir imagines that someday he will bring his future family here.

Chapters 18-21 Analysis

In Chapter 18, Katya pays a visit to the Shrawi residence. She is sitting in the women's sitting room where most of the women in this family spend their time and she imagines how miserable they all are. One of her intentions to find out what happened to Nouf is self-interested. She is marrying into the same family—one that is possible of murder, but on a lesser note, one that may not tolerate her working or pursuing any type of outside goal. Sitting in this sitting room feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome, Katya is looking at her future.

When Katya tells Othman about the DNA not matching in chapter 19, he acts suspicious. He attempts at cloaking his response under the guise that he is concerned about her losing her job, but they plan to marry soon and since she is already 28, will inevitably have children soon, which means that she won't be working at her job for long anyway. Though Katya has suspected that Othman knew something or was somehow involved for a while, his adamancy at her no longer pursuing the investigation confirms that he knows something or is somehow involved.

In Chapter 20, Katya arrives at Nayir's boat with the news that neither DNA is a match. She tells Nayir Othman's reaction and Nayir too, suspects that Othman is somehow involved. Neither character is outright willing to suggest that Othman is involved because neither wants to betray their loyalty to him—as a best friend and as a fiancée. But there is an unspoken agreement that someone in the family is definitely involved.

At the zoo, Katya mentions that the cave in the Matterhorn smells like sex. This takes Nayir aback because it suggests that Katya has experience. Nayir has no experience with sex or women and finds Katya's knowledge both intriguing and dangerous.

By Chapter 21, Nayir's feelings for Katya have fully been realized. On page 213, "He dared a glance at her face and saw a child's excitement in her eyes. He imagined that a joy like that could last. She smiled, not at him exactly, but in response to his attention, and somehow he allowed the future to become his own." Not only does Nayir long for Katya—who is engaged to his best friend, but he longs for a life of openness and equality—one vastly different than the practices of Islamic Law.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Katya returns to the Shrawi residence to get DNA samples of the brothers. She sits briefly with the women and then complains about being tired. Othman's mother insists that she rest a bit in one of their guest rooms. As she is being led to the room, she stops off in the coat room and locks the door behind her. She picks up several hairs off of the men's robes and off of the floor.

When she is leaving the coatroom, Othman and a couple of his brother's come in. Othman does not recognize Katya. Katya feels disappointed that her own fiancée does not recognize her eyes. She watches him with his mother and sees that he is clearly a favorite. Katya knows that if Othman did do something, then his mother would never believe it.

Chapter 22 Analysis

When Katya visits the Shrawi family she observes them almost as if she pities them, yet, soon she'll be married into that family. With her increasing doom about becoming part of this family, it becomes even more important that Katya find out what happened to Nouf. When Othman does not recognize her, she feels defeated and deflected but she admires his tenderness and love for his mother. Katya fears that she will never have the same intimacy that he shares with his mother.



Chapters 23-26

Chapters 23-26 Summary

In Chapter 23, After the discovery of the zoo, Nayir visits Nouf's escort again to question him. He learns that Nouf used to secretly take the Jet Ski to a private beach and from there ride in a men's robe to the zoo. The zoo was her secret hideaway. From there she would send Muhammad on errands, like shopping, so that she could show her mother what she had been doing for the day.

On the day that Nouf disappeared, Muhammad showed up late and Nouf was already gone. Since he didn't want to get himself or her in trouble, he didn't say anything to the family because they thought that she was exchanging shows at the mall. Nayir notices that at the mention of Eric and at the suggestion of an additional man who impregnated Nouf, Muhammad angers. Initially, Nayir thinks that perhaps Muhammad did murder Nouf, but then he realizes that Muhammad is angry out of jealousy for the other men because he loved Nouf.

After his visit to Muhammad, Nayir walks along the shoreline searching for private beaches that belong to the Shrawi family. He thinks that the motorcycle Nouf rode to the zoo is probably kept on a private beach since she could dock her motorcycle there as well. After scaling a couple of walls and scoping out desolate beaches he finds a cabana on one beach. He busts the door open and finds the black motorcycle. Inside the cabana he also finds a map and a journal that presumably belonged to Nouf.

In Chapter 24, Nayir visits the Shrawi residence briefly. He sits in the main entrance hall waiting for Othman, but instead Abir serves him coffee. While she is serving him, she tells him about the big fight that she heard Othman and Nouf have before Nouf disappeared that day. Abir tells him that the jewels and gold from Nouf's safe are missing as well. Nayir leaves before Othman returns home. Before he confronts Othman he wants to talk to Katya.

In Chapter 25, Nayir reads Nouf's journal. He is surprised at the emotional complexity of Nouf's writing. She writes about a deep love that cannot be acted upon, a love that she must run and flee from. Her lover is her rescuer, but someone that she should not love. While Nayir is reading the journal he realizes two things: that Othman is Nouf's baby's father, and that Nayir loves Katya.

In Chapter 26, Nayir visits the Shrawi residence again to confront Othman. Nayir and Othman go for a walk into an underwater cavern that is an aquarium. Othman breaks down and explains that he loved Nouf, that he was the baby's father, but swears to Nayir that he didn't kill her. They did fight on the day that she disappeared because he told her that he didn't want her to run away to New York without him. He wanted to create a life with her, but she wanted to escape her life. Othman breaks down and Nayir



believes that Othman did not kill her. Othman explains that he hired Nayir to help him find out what happened to her because he wants to know who would hurt her.

Chapters 23-26 Analysis

In these four brief chapters, there is a lot of action. These are the final chapters building up to the climax and the resolution of the story.

Nayir is feeling increasing guilt about his feelings for Katya. He does some investigative work on his own trying to distance himself from her. Katya has been forbidden to do any more work on the case from Othman, so now Katya and Nayir have no legitimate reason to speak with each other. But, as Nayir is reading Nouf's journal he understands her feelings of love—because he realizes that he loves Katya.

Nayir is shocked by Nouf's voice in her journal. This is the closest that Nayir has been able to come to understanding a woman. He is saddled by the fact that she is dead and that she could not live the life that she wanted. This is demonstrative of just how much Nayir has changed since the beginning of the novel. It is known that Nouf has committed the greatest sin of adultery, yet Nayir feels sympathetic for her.



Chapters 27-29

Chapters 27-29 Summary

In Chapter 27, Nayir unmoors his boathouse from the dock and anchors at sea for a couple of days. He needs distance from what he has learned about Othman, what this means for his engagement to Katya and where he will go now with the investigation. One evening Katya calls and Nayir and her exchange information that they have discovered. She already knows about Othman and the samples that they took at the zoo match the dirt and plant samples found in Nouf's head wound and scratches. DNA on the blanket found matches Othman's and Nouf's.

In Chapter 28, Nayir goes investigate the camels and talk with the stable-keeper's daughter whom he noticed had a black eye. First, Nayir sneaks into Nouf's camel's stable to feel what he initially thought were the marks of the evil eye. He realizes now that they are the dashes of the Honda motorcycles symbol that must have been seared into the camel's leg when they were in close proximity in the bed of the truck.

Nayir hears someone approaching—it is the stable-keeper's daughter. He tells her all that he knows and asks her to please tell him who hit her. She won't tell him but she motions for him to follow her. Inside a room in the barn is a trapdoor on the floor, she motions to it. Nayir opens the door and finds a bag full of riyals and jewels. Nayir takes the bag and tucks it under his robe. He begins walking back toward the house and Nursa, Othman's blind mother, finds him. He tells her that he has come to visit Othman and she invites him in and tells him of the family's exciting news: that Abir is engaged to Qazi, Nouf's fiancée.

Abir finds Nayir in the entryway and brings coffee once again. As Abir is pouring the coffee, Nayir realizes that he had always assumed that a man had killed Nouf, but it could have been a woman. That would explain the additional white robe in the cabana and the similar foot size in the tracks at the zoo. Nayir knows that it is Abir—who would be the only other person to know the combination to Nouf's safe to steal her jewels and money to make it look like she ran away. She would also be able to take Nouf's camel without the camel fighting her. Nayir tells her he knows and then he tells the whole story of how Abir did it. She grows indignant, but denies nothing.

In Chapter 29, Katya notifies the examiner's office that Nouf's case she be reopened and shares the samples and other work that she has already completed. The office calls Qazi to tell him that his fiancée is under investigation. Katya and Othman call of their engagement and both Nayir and Katya try to live their lives beyond the investigation.

One afternoon Nayir takes Katya to an amusement park where they ride on the ferris wheel and eat ice cream. She accompanies him to the eye doctor for an examination and she invites him to a party to meet her father and his friends.



Chapters 27-29 Analysis

In Chapters 27 and 28, Nayir is troubled by what Othman has done to Katya. Othman has used Katya to cover up his love for his sister and also used her connections to further the investigation secretly. Also, Nayir realizes that Katya now knows why her age and status didn't matter so much to his family or her being educated and having a job, they just wanted to marry him off to someone. Nayir is angered by the life that Othman almost led Katya into. He is angry with Othman for hurting Katya.

In Chapter 28, Nayir burns the fake marriage license that he has been carrying around for many years. He carried it in case he was stopped by the police; he could say that he was married. Burning the marriage license is symbolic because he doesn't feel he needs it anymore. He is in love with Katya and they have begun the courting ritual.

In Chapter 29, he is gentle and tender with Katya as he helps her eat her ice cream on the ferris wheel. He wants her to feel that she is protected by him, but also able to enjoy the freedoms that she wishes. He is no longer bothered by her boldness, or her not wearing her veil. They have begun the courting rituals and after he meets her father, an engagement should ensue.



Characters

Nayir

Nayir is a tall Palestinian desert guide who is often mistaken for a Saudi Arabian Bedouin. He is in his late 20's and losing hope that he will ever be married. His parents are no longer living and he is an only child without any known cousins. He has very little access to the world of women. Though he is a devout Muslim and mentally chastises those that do not follow Islamic Law, his attitude toward women seems markedly different than the other devout Muslims in the book. He does expect that women follow Islamic law, but he believes that they do so for modesty and protection. His love seems more pure and real than the men in the book who are already married or who have access to women.

As he is investigating Nouf's death on behalf of his friend, Othman, he falls in love with his fiancée, Katya. Though he does nothing improper, besides think about her, he still feels disloyal. Despite Nayir's strict adherence to Islamic Law, he becomes used to the idea that Katya is not. Initially, he finds this brazen and off putting but eventually no longer judges her because of her behavior. He begins to see why she acts the way she does and even goes so far as to want the same things—like being able to dine in a restaurant with one's family. Nayir's character changes remarked Ely by the end of the novel—he has not cast off his faith—but he is understanding of why women want and need more freedom and more choices. His change is illustrated in this quote on page 296: "Something greater was crumbling inside him, the wall that held the strength of his beliefs, and it hurt to feel himself weakening, to feel this much sympathy for women like Nouf who felt trapped by their lives, by prescriptions of modesty and domesticity that might have suited the Prophet's wives but that didn't suit the women of this world, infected as it was by desires to go to school and travel and work and have ever greater options and appetites. He tried not feel that the world was collapsing, but it was collapsing, and there was nothing he could do, just watch with a painful, bitter sense of loss."

Katya Hijazi

Katya Hijazi is engaged to Othman Shrawi, Nayir's best friend. She is an assistant examiner at the coroner's office and is working secretly on Othman's sister's case. Katya respects Islamic tradition to not offend others, though she herself is not a pious person, she is spiritual. She believes that women should have the choice to be educated and the choice to work. She wants to work and be a wife and mother and doesn't see why those roles need be exclusive.

It is implied that the intense focus and time she is giving to investigating what happened to Nouf is not simply to appease her fiancée, but because she is marrying into his family. No women in Othman's family is as independent or bold as Katya is, except for



Nouf, who is now dead. If Katya marries into this family she will either become one of the sitting-room women or she will fight against not only society's expectations but those of her husband and his family as well.

Othman Shrawi

Othman Shrawi is an adopted son of the wealthy Shrawi family. His younger sister, Nouf, has run away from home and died in the desert or so he's been told. But the examiner's report shows that Nouf also suffered head wounds and that she drowned in a wadi in the desert, which suggests that she was already unconscious. Othman asks his fiancée, Katya, and his best friend Nayir, to conduct a secret investigation to figure out what happened to Nouf.

Increasingly throughout the book, Othman acts suspiciously and inconsistent with how Nayir and Katya would expect him to act. Eventually, Nayir learns that Othman was in love with Nouf and he was the father of her baby. He is acting bizarre not because he killed her, but because he mourns her death. He hired Nayir to search the desert and wanted Katya to run the samples because he wanted to know what happened to Nouf.

Abir

Abir is Nouf's younger sister who is jealous of Nouf's engagement to Qazi. She kills her sister to marry Qazi. Abir is a secondary character.

Ahmed

Ahmed is Katya's appointed escort. He trusts her and allows her the freedoms to do as she pleases, but he still watches over her.

Muhammad

Muhammad is Nouf's escort who was in love with her, but his love was unrequited. He allowed Nouf to do as she pleased because he wanted her to be happy. He feels guilty that she was murdered and feels that if he would have been a better escort then she would have never been hurt.

Abu (Katya's Father)

Abu is Katya's father. He dislikes Othman and the Shrawi family. He doesn't think his daughter will find happiness marrying into that family.



Eric Scarberry

Eric Scarberry is the American man who was being paid by Nouf to help her set up an escape once she landed in New York.

Qazi

Qazi is engaged to be married to Nouf.



Objects/Places

The Desert

The desert is where Nouf's body was found. The desert in Saudi Arabia is deathly and extremely dangerous for those who are not familiar with it. Nayir is a desert guide.

The Zoo

Nouf's hideout was an abandoned zoo outside of town. This is where Abir hit Nouf in the head and through her into the truck.

Shrawi Residence

The Shrawi residence is on an island and a rickety bridge is what connects their estate to the rest of the community.

The Camel

Nouf's camel was missing when Nouf was missing. Abir stole it to make it look like Nouf ran away to the desert.

Nouf's Journal

Nayir finds Nouf's journal and in it discovers that she was in love with someone. But it was a dangerous and forbidden love and rather than stay and be around it all the time and be tortured, she would rather run away.

Othman's Desert Jacket

Othman's desert jacket goes missing. In it is the map of the old campsite, near where Nouf's body was found, and a GPS device. His missing jacket appears suspicious to Nayir.

Nayir's Trench Coat

Nayir's trench coat is highly impractical in the Saudi Arabian heat, but he wanted a talisman that would bring him luck and fortune. He wears the jacket daily after he purchased it and it is a symbol of his involvement as a character.



Evil Eye

The evil eye is a symbol used in Arabic cultures to ward off evil. Only the superstitious believe in it.

Nouf's Glasses

Nouf's glasses are non-prescription. They are part of the disguise she is going to wear once she runs away to New York.

Women's Sitting Room

The women's sitting room in the Shrawi estate is where the women spend their days sitting and gossiping.

Private Beach

The Shrawi family owns private beaches that are cordoned off by high cement walls so that women can swim in modesty. Nouf hid her motorcycle in one of the family's abandoned beach cabanas.

Jet ski

Nouf and her sisters ride jet skis, one of their only sources of freedom. This is how Nouf often escaped her family's island.

Burqa

The burqa is what Muslim women wear to cover their hair and faces.

Mecca

Mecca is the Muslim holy city.



Themes

Treatment of Muslim Women

One of the primary themes in *Finding Nouf* is the life of Muslim women. In the nation of Islam, women and men are separated in most situations. Women are to wear burqas which cover their bodies, hair, and faces. Even the burqa itself inhibits the women. On numerous occasions, the novel mentions that women have a difficult time seeing from their peripheral vision when wearing the burqa. And the novel ends with a discussion between Nayir, Katya and the ophthalmologist who suggests that women wear glasses to help them see better and Nayir says that Katya already can see perfectly. This is symbolic because he means literally, but he also means figurate.

Like the burqa covers the eyes, many other customs prevent women from "seeing" or experiencing life. Katya describes the Shrawi women's days as long days sitting in a white room on couches that face each other. She could think of nothing less interesting or fulfilling and yet, she knows, this will be her future unless she fights against it.

Though Nouf's dies by her sister's hands—had her pregnancy been discovered when she were alive, she could have been killed by the police in a public beheading, or even by her own family in an honor killing. Women who fight the Muslim traditions face dire consequences. Katya walks a fine line of following and respecting traditions when appropriate, but not believing in them.

Romantic Love

Most Islamic marriages are arranged by each person's parents. The idea of falling in love and choosing who one marries is a very western notion—one that is abhorred by many Muslims. Nayir is not married because he has few cousins, is orphaned and therefore has little exposure to women and no one to set up a marriage for him. Katya has chosen Othman, a man whom she met a wedding, for her mate despite her father not approving of it.

Many of the examples of arranged marriage in the book are not necessarily happy ones. Katya remarks, a few times, how all of the women in the sitting room look miserable and bored, that there is no passion or interest in their lives.

Nouf, fought against this in her family, but fell in love with her adopted brother, which carried its own implications. In her journal, she writes about a deep and fulfilling love—a love that she knows that she cannot have. She was different and wanted to run for this life, but she never had the chance because she was killed.

There are also a few examples of unrequited love in the book of Muhammad loving Nouf and Abir loving Qazi. For Muhammad, he is married with a baby, and though it is not uncommon for a man to take on another wife, it could not be Nouf because of her



high social standing. For Abir, she says she loves Qazi, but in her discussion with Nayir it appears as if her love is fueled by her jealousy for her sister.

Rather than leave their fates into other's hands, Katya and Nayir begin courting each other. Both only children who have been orphaned (by at least one parent), and markedly different than the other Saudi's they know, with Nayir being Palestinian and Katya being 28. They are both employed and educated and they choose each other.

Righteousness/ Piousness

A secondary theme in Finding Nouf is men's rigidity regarding women due to their Muslim righteousness. Readers see this mainly with Nayir: he is devout. He follows Islamic law to the tee. He judges and criticizes others who do not believe and follow as he does. But as he begins to get to know Katya, he softens. He realizes that though he does believe and he is a pious man, he does not want to be like the hard and disrespectful men he sees on the street. Nayir realizes that his devoutness is different than that of other men. He doesn't look women in the face out of respect for their modesty, not because he feels superior to them.

Other examples of men in the book who act righteous or pious are not respectful to women, but still following the Muslim law. One of Othman's brother's chastises Abir for serving coffee and tea to Nayir grabbing her arm and calling her immodest. Nayir is stopped on the street by another man who tells him to make her cover up—referring to Katya. Nayir realizes that men act this way because of their distrust and disgust for women, not out of love and respect and a desire to protect.



Style

Point of View

Finding Nouf is told in the third person with alternating perspectives. Some chapters are in the perspective of Nayir and some chapters are in Katya's perspective. The effect of alternating perspectives of the two main characters is that readers are able to get a sense of what both characters are thinking but not saying.

This is especially important in this book because much goes unsaid between men and women, especially an unmarried man and woman. From the alternating perspectives dramatic irony is created—where the reader knows more than the character. Readers know Nayir and Katya's first impressions of each other and how their first impressions weren't really that accurate, but both characters didn't realize this until much later in the story.

Setting

Finding Nouf is set in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia during modern times. Jeddah is located along the coastline of Saudi Arabia about 70 kilometers from Mecca. Along Jeddah's coastline are private beaches cordoned off by tall cement walls so that men can take their women swimming in privacy.

Saudi Arabia is extremely hot with daytime temperatures being unbearable and deadly. In one scene, Katya's shoes actually melt into the asphalt. Also, Nayir believes that a camel was accidentally branded by the motorcycle simply from being in close proximity and the motorcycle's metal emblem getting hot in the desert sun.

The Shrawi estate is located on a small island that once belonged to the royal family. The estate is large but sparse since the family manages a welfare program for Saudi Arabians. Most of the wealth and accoutrements that come with being wealthy are given away and Nayir describes that house as being elegantly empty.

Language and Meaning

The novel is set in modern times and the language reflects this. Because the novel takes place in Saudi Arabia, a Muslim nation, Muslim phrases and terms are woven throughout the story. It is not difficult to understand the foreign words because of how they are used in context.

The novel is written for an adult crowd but is easily accessible for the high school reader.

Structure

Finding Nouf is divided into 29 brief chapters. Each chapter is written in third person in one character's —either Nayir or Katya's—perspective. Most chapters focus on one specific scene in a specific setting, but there are a few chapters that take place in two different settings, namely during Nayir's investigation.

Finding Nouf follows a traditional story arc with background information, rising action, climax, falling action and a resolution. Both main characters also go through their own character arc with demonstrable changes in the end.



Quotes

"Nayir confronted the less pleasant reasons he's come. Morbid curiosity. The need for a sense of closure. A desire to prove himself capable of something. It was the selfishness of this last reason that weighed on him the most" (Chapter 2, p. 11).

"Works are accomplished according to intentions. A man receives only what he intends" (Chapter 3, p. 26).

"A family buries a woman with her back to Mecca only when she carries a baby in her belly, a baby whose face, in death, must be turned in the direction of the Holy Mosque" (Chapter 3, p. 27).

"I've learned on thing here: when you enter the house of the blind, you put out your eyes" (Chapter 5, p. 45).

"The punishment for having sex out of wedlock—for even being caught with a single woman - was arrest, charges of prostitution and public indecency, a trial without a lawyer, and, if parties were found guilty, a public beheading" (Chapter 7, p. 83).

"He was wearing the coat. At first it had made him feel deeply self-conscious, but had worn it to the supermarket already and discovered a new feeling of authority" (Chapter 10, p. 95).

"Letting a woman work was a desperate thing to do" (Chapter 12, p. 119).

"He was worse than a eunuch; he wasn't missing a part, he was missing something else, a hidden seed that made him a man" (Chapter 20, p.199).

"He dared a glance at her face and saw a child's excitement in her eyes. He imagined that a joy like that could last. She smiled, not at him exactly, but in response to his attention, and somehow he allowed the future to become his own" (Chapter 21, p. 213).

"People acted decently only on the outside; inside, they were probably all just like him, longing for things they shouldn't" (Chapter 21, p. 216).

"If he seemed judgmental, it only stemmed from a belief in the virtues of tradition. It stung him too that when she glanced at his face, she seemed to withdraw" (Chapter 21, p. 217).

"After staring at the page for many minutes, he came to think that that's what Nouf had wanted—to know all the kinds of love, even if some of them were better left alone" (Chapter 25, p. 255).

"Something greater was crumbling inside him, the wall that held the strength of his beliefs, and it hurt to feel himself weakening, to feel this much sympathy for women like Nouf who felt trapped by their lives, by prescriptions of modesty and domesticity that



might have suited the Prophet's wives but that didn't suit the women of this world, infected as it was by desires to go to school and travel and work and have ever greater options and appetites. He tried to not feel that the world was collapsing, but it was collapsing, and there was nothing he could do, just watch with a painful, bitter sense of loss" (Chapter 28, p. 296).



Topics for Discussion

Why does Nayir go out of his way to help Othman find his sister? What happened later to his sister?

What are Nayir's first impressions of Katya? What influences his impressions?

How does Othman change throughout the book? How does his perception of Nouf and Katya change?

Does Nayir view women as he suggests other Muslim men view women? If not, how is he different?

Why is Katya so invested in Nouf's mystery?

How might Katya be seen as bold and brazen to pious Muslim men?

Why does Abir murder Nouf?

How does Nayir and Katya's relationship—and the activities they enjoyed—suggest that Saudi Arabia is becoming more modern? Does it?

Why might Nouf have been unhappy despite having such a large family and being very wealthy?