

A House in the Sky Study Guide

A House in the Sky by Amanda Lindhout

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Summary

Amanda Lindhout was raised in a poor family, the middle daughter of three children. Her parents divorced when she was young and her father announced that he was gay, moving into a stable relationship with another man. Amanda's mother, meanwhile, moved from one bad relationship to another. Amanda and her older brother became closer when they moved into a new neighborhood with few friends. It was her brother who discovered that they could retrieve recyclables in the dumpsters in the neighborhood, earning the two a little spending money. With that money, Amanda purchased old copies of "National Geographic" and used those to escape her dreary existence.

When she turned eighteen, Amanda moved to the nearby city of Calgary with her boyfriend, Jamie. They were barely able to pay the rent at some points, but Amanda held to the dream that she wanted to travel. She found a job as a hostess and began bringing in large amounts of money in tips. With that, she and Jamie began making serious plans for travel. They chose South America for their first destination. At first, Amanda was cautious, refusing to eat the native fruits and doing everything she could to be safe. After a few days of traveling, she became more relaxed and was soon ignoring all the things that had scared her at first. Amanda's relationship with Jamie came to an end but she continued to travel. In Bangladesh, she had trouble finding a room because she was a woman traveling alone. There was a frightening situation in which a rickshaw driver headed in the wrong direction but Amanda escaped unharmed. Later, she was robbed at gunpoint in Kabul.

In 2006, Amanda met Nigel Brennan. She was captivated and introduced herself. She discovered that he was a photographer on assignment and the idea that Amanda might make money by selling photos and stories became a new driving force in her life. She felt it would be a way to have someone else pay for her travels. She and Nigel had a brief affair, ended when he called her later and tearfully announced that he was married.

Amanda began making plans to travel to Somalia but didn't have the funds to make the trip alone. She contacted Nigel, now divorced, and he agreed to meet her and share the cost of the trip. The two hired a man to help ensure their safety with information and bodyguards. They planned to visit a woman who had established a camp to help victims of the violence prevalent in the region but their car was stopped by soldiers on the way. Nigel, Amanda, their driver and the soldiers who were supposed to be protecting them were all taken hostage. This began the nightmare of captivity that would last more than a year.

Amanda initially took the lead with the soldiers who were holding them hostage, talking to them repeatedly and insisting they see her as a real person. The conditions weren't too bad at first and Amanda felt they would be released soon. The soldiers, however, believed that the families of Amanda and Nigel would each pay million-dollar ransoms. Amanda realized that raising even a fraction of that amount would put her family in serious financial debt and initially told them not to take any action. Later, when she was



brutalized and fearful that she would soon be killed, she begged her mother to pay the ransom. The months rocked on and Amanda sometimes lost hope though she always found a reason to continue living. There were months of negotiations until Amanda and Nigel were eventually released, their families having paid some six hundred thousand dollars to the kidnappers. They made their way out of the country and returned home where Amanda said she had to learn to deal with the physical and emotional fallout of the months of captivity. She also had to learn to forgive herself for taking an action that cost her family and friends so much worry and money.



Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

The prologue opens with Amanda giving a few details about her life during the months she spent in captivity with Nigel Brennan. They named the houses where they were kept and often moved under cover of darkness. They could see other people but their faces were always covered, meaning no one would recognize the two hostages even if they had bothered to look. She briefly introduces the soldiers who held them captive while a “desperate, wheedling, multinational transaction” takes place against the backdrop of a holy war.

In Chapter One, titled “My World,” Amanda notes that she trusted that the world was basically a good place. When she was nine years old, her parents had divorced and her father remained in the town of Red Deer in Alberta, Canada, with his gay partner, Perry. Her mother, Lori, had moved Amanda and her two brothers to Sylvan Lake. Lori's live-in boyfriend Russell was from an Indian reservation. He was abusive to Lori, and his extended family often stayed at the apartment for days at a time. Russell was much younger than Lori and was raised like a foster son by Lori's parents.

Amanda and Mark became close, especially after the move left them in a new school with few friends. Mark discovered that there were treasures to be had in the dumpsters around their Sylvan Lake apartment. Together, Mark and Amanda found recyclables and earned some spending money. With her share, Amanda often purchased National Geographic magazines from a neighborhood thrift store.

One night, Amanda's mother went out with Russell. When they returned, it was obvious that Russell was angry, and they fought violently when they returned home. Amanda asked her younger brother, Nathaniel, if he was afraid though she knew it was a ridiculous question. They were both afraid at these times but knew from experience that they were helpless to intervene. At times like this, Amanda lost herself in the stories and pictures of her National Geographic collection.

Chapter Two is titled “The Drink.” At nineteen, Amanda moved to Calgary, a more urban area. She and her boyfriend, Jamie, moved in together and could barely pay the rent for their modest apartment. Amanda began looking for a waitress job and met Rob Swiderski, the manager of a high-end club called The Drink. Amanda began working for Rob as a cocktail waitress. She made fifty dollars the first night. She was pleased but soon learned that much more had to be made. She saved as much as she could so that she could travel. The situation between her parents became more accepting after Amanda moved to Calgary and Amanda noted that the entire family – including her mother – spent Christmas together.

Chapter Three is titled, “Going Somewhere.” Amanda became more serious about her desire to travel. She and Jamie decided that they would go somewhere in South



America for their first trip. They read a great deal about the possible pitfalls that they might encounter and left for South America in January of 2002. Amanda writes about the preparations for the trip, saying that they read a great deal about the countries they would visit.

Chapter Four is titled "A Small Truth Affirmed." Amanda and Jamie began their travels and soon discovered that there were situations that their guidebook hadn't covered. Some places included in their book were no longer open and bus schedules had changed. Amanda tells readers it became too much of a chore to worry about everything but she was still often concerned about their safety.

Chapter Five is titled "A Haircut on a Lake." Jamie fell and broke his foot while climbing down Mount Roraima, effectively putting an end to further travel. They returned to Canada and broke up in 2003. Amanda became friends with Kelly Barker, a co-worker at the pub where Amanda worked. They decided to travel together and fly to Costa Rica. Kelly began a romance with a fellow traveler she met there. When he left, she asked Amanda to give her a dramatic haircut. Amanda complied and recalled the incident later when she was held in captivity in Somalia.

Analysis

Amanda outlines the details of her life in Chapter One, including the fact that her father was living a gay lifestyle with a man named Perry. Amanda says that Perry would sometimes take her and her brothers to a local swimming pool while her father cooked a meal. She later says that her friend envied Amanda's time with her father and that she "counted down the days" until it was time for her to visit him. Her father's lifestyle, though unusual in this time and place, provided a safe haven for Amanda and her siblings while her mother's life was always chaotic and sometimes violent. This came into play later.

When Amanda was about to cross the border into one of the many war-torn countries she visited, her mother pleaded with her to avoid the danger. Amanda's mother said Amanda should understand that her family would worry. This made Amanda angry. While she didn't voice her opinion to her mother, she wanted to say that her life had been perpetually in danger from her mother's violent relationships. This points to an important aspect of the story, as Amanda's lack of a stable home life may have pushed her to live more dangerously. An interesting comment is seen as Amanda visited her grandparents one final time before her trip. Her grandfather told her that they wouldn't be able to help if Amanda found herself in trouble while in South America. In a fiction book, that might have been considered a forewarning of what was to befall the characters. In this case, it was merely another instance of Amanda's family worrying about her despite her determination to travel.

Amanda doesn't give a lot of insight into Jamie but he seemed somewhat selfish and shallow. She notes that he didn't want her working as a cocktail waitress at first but then she began bringing in large tips and he stopped objecting. Most days, the pair would



spend the early part of the day together then go out for an “expensive lunch” together before Amanda headed to work.

The job as a cocktail waitress was difficult for Amanda. She seemed to constantly worry about her appearance and said she would eat very little, then binge and force herself to vomit. She also notes that her dreams were different from most young people. At nineteen, she had quite a lot of money in the bank and could have begun studying at the university. Instead, she only wanted to travel.

Amanda talks about the attitudes of her family prior to the first trip she and Jamie took together. Her grandmother gave her some Tupperware and anti-bacterial gel. At some point in the trip, Amanda became more comfortable with her travels and left both gifts behind.

Vocabulary

repository, resurrection, cachet, surreal, meandering, imperturbable, loiter, provocation, feasible, traversed, panacea



Chapters 6 - 9

Summary

Chapter Six is titled "Hello, Madame." Amanda worked off the idea that she could work for three or four months in Calgary nightclubs to pay for up to six months of travel. People would ask Amanda, "What do you do?" to learn about her career. Amanda would answer that she was a traveler, intent on seeing the world. Amanda and her mother traveled to Thailand in 2004 and spent a month wandering the country. Amanda refers to her mother as "a surprisingly mellow traveler" and said the two grew closer during that trip. In 2005, Amanda traveled to Dhaka, Bangladesh. She caught a ride from the airport with a businessman but set out on her own in the city to get a room. She discovered that managers of the hotels were unwilling to rent a room to a single woman traveling without a male escort. Exhausted and angry, she sat down in one of the lobbies, refusing to move until she was given a room.

Amanda spent some time in Bangladesh. She began to wear a scarf loosely over her hair like many of the women and enjoyed browsing the markets and watching the religious displays.

Chapter Seven is titled "The Rule of Proximity." Amanda continued her trip, crossing into India where she provided comfort, tea, and sponge baths for patients with an array of diseases, including AIDS. The clinic was one of Mother Teresa's charities. She continued to travel alone, keeping in touch with her parents by email and sometimes spending time with other young travelers. Amanda explains the "rule of proximity." She said whenever a traveler arrived at a specific destination, they began to look at other places nearby to also visit. It was enticing to continue traveling. Money was the only thing that held her traveling in check. When she was in India, the Pakistani border beckoned. Other travelers said Pakistan was a wonderful country and Amanda made plans to cross the border. Her mother was upset, pleading with Amanda to avoid the war-torn country but Amanda refused to be dissuaded and met up with Jonathan, a young man she had met previously. Though she and Jonathan know there were dangers, she noted that nothing dangerous happened to them and she saw no reason to think that would change. Once in Pakistan, she applied for permission to travel to Afghanistan.

Chapter Eight is titled "Don't F*** with Afghanistan." Amanda was aware of a woman being kidnapped in Kabul before her trip, but she was busy preparing for her trip to enter Afghanistan. She admitted that the story worried her and she decided to leave without crossing the border. However, she got only a short distance before deciding to return, knowing she would always regret it if she didn't get a firsthand look at Afghanistan while she was so near. She said the kidnapped victim had been unlucky and that she would be fine. Amanda entered Kabul, which she describes as "beautiful and wrecked." She was there six days before being robbed at gunpoint in the market.



The incident made her realize that she was homesick. With little money left, she made her way to Delhi and then home.

Chapter Nine is “The Start of a New Sentence.” Amanda met an Australian, Nigel Brennan, about eight months later in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She was immediately interested in him and learned that he was a photographer, headed out to Harar the following morning. However, he missed the bus by accident. They spent the following days together, exploring and getting to know each other. Nigel admitted that he had a girlfriend but said the relationship was failing. Amanda was somewhat uncomfortable letting their relationship advance, but allowed it to happen based on Nigel's assurances that he would be breaking up with his girlfriend. When they separated to go their separate ways, they kept in touch by phone and email. They met up again later and planned to see the salt mines of northwestern Ethiopia. Amanda suffered from dehydration however, and Nigel said later he was worried that she wouldn't live. When they reached the salt mines and Amanda tried to photograph the workers there, one of them threw a chunk of salt at her.

Analysis

It was in Bangladesh that Amanda first began to see the Islamic religion. She makes the statement that this was “a religion that required so much from its believers” and talks about the requirements for prayer and the devotion of those who followed that religion. She talks about the beauty of seeing rows of people bowing and whispering some parts of the prayers, supplicating themselves before God. Much later, Amanda would be forced to further study religion of the Middle Eastern people and even pretend to convert.

Amanda saw many great things and had good experiences. However, she also had problems. In Bangladesh, she was certain that someone was trying to break into her hotel room one night. She knew that she couldn't call for help because any problems would be blamed on her as a woman traveling alone and she would be kicked out of her hotel. Another time, she hired a rickshaw and the driver took her away from the city. Amanda hit him and he sheepishly returned her to her hotel. She was never certain what he had planned for her but the incident frightened her. The robbery in Afghanistan was also scary for Amanda, but none of these incidents stopped her from traveling. She never indicates whether she believed that nothing serious would happen to her or if she was merely determined to follow her dream, regardless of the risks.

Vocabulary

cacophony, officiously, supplication, mustachioed, dictum, rambunctious



Chapters 10 - 14

Summary

Chapter Ten is titled “A Camera and a Plan.” Amanda moved on to Cairo and Nigel returned to his home in London, promising that he was going to break up with his girlfriend there. One afternoon he called Amanda, crying with the admission that he was married. He said the marriage was a mistake but that lying about it to Amanda had also been a mistake. Amanda was numb for awhile but renewed her travel plans with even bigger goals and a professional camera. In 2007, as she planned to head for Asia for another trip, Nigel convinced her to stop over in Australia. She agreed and spent some time there, exploring and enjoying the country. When she left, she told him she planned to spend some time in Afghanistan and that he was welcome to join her, if he chose.

Chapter Eleven is titled “Press Pass.” Amanda got a room at the Mustafa Hotel in Kabul and began handing out business cards in search of freelance jobs as a photographer. A journalist named Jason Howe explained to Amanda that freelancing meant one “assumed your own risk” without the benefits of health insurance and the ability to make long-term plans. Amanda felt that was very much like her backpacking travels up to that point and began taking lots of photos. At one point, she managed to get into the camp of some Kuchi people and a photo taken there of a “grandmother type squatting outside one of the tents” became the first photograph that Amanda sold. She sold an article based on her experiences there and was encouraged to work harder at the freelancing. She spent some time at Masum Ghar, a Taliban stronghold, and learned that the work could be tedious and tiresome.

Chapter Twelve is titled “The Red Zone.” Amanda had been taking photos and trying to sell them for more than seven months with limited success. Out of money again, she returned home but fully expected to take up her journalism again as soon as she had enough money saved. Later that year, she was offered a job with a Baghdad television station and she accepted. Amanda said that her mother drove her to the airport, having “long since given up on voicing her worries to me.” In January of 2008, she arrived in Baghdad and took up work for Press TV. She was struck by the war-torn situation in the country and was afraid for her own safety from the beginning. Amanda felt that she would be doing important work but soon discovered she was part of the “propaganda” being spread throughout the country. Americans were depicted in the worst possible light and Amanda's unease with the situation increased when she was sent to dangerous parts of the city without a bodyguard. Amanda knew the job could be no more than a stepping stone to a more respectable journalism job. As she encountered other journalists, she realized that she was out of her depth. They spoke about people and places she did not know. After only a short time, she returned to freelancing, landing several assignments from a Paris television station.

Amanda returned from a short stay in Portugal with her friend Kelly to discover that her fellow journalists were angry. She had done an interview much earlier in her career,



lamenting the fact that most journalists spent their time in relative safety of compounds while others did the leg work, meaning the journalists didn't truly know what was going on in the country. The other journalists had discovered the broadcast on the Internet and Amanda was quickly ostracized. She says she had come to realize that was her own inexperience talking, which she believed to be true at the time of the interview. She gave up trying to make friends with the other journalists and instead focused on her work. Amanda talked to Nigel and he sounded “glum” about his new life. The conversation tapered off after a few minutes but Amanda had made up her mind to leave Baghdad.

Amanda cites the story of Dan Rather. As a young journalist, he had refused to listen to warnings of a dangerous hurricane, remaining in the direct path of the storm in order to report about it as it happened. He survived and earned himself a place in journalism history. Amanda began to look at Somalia like Dan Rather had looked at that hurricane.

Chapter Thirteen is titled “Doors Wide Open.” Amanda planned to spend four weeks in Africa. She hired a “fixer” named Ajoos Sanura who would be responsible for arranging her trip, including hiring security, arranging transportation, and providing information. She soon realized that she needed someone to travel with her, mainly to share the cost of the trip. She called Nigel and expected him to refuse, but he agreed to join her. Amanda said Somalia was a very dangerous place but she was immediately granted permission to enter the country. She did not really worry about the danger, having come to the conclusion that there was always “something hopeful and humane” in every country.

Chapter Fourteen is titled “Crossing.” Nigel arrived and they prepared to enter Somalia. Amanda writes that they enjoyed their first days together but she knew definitively that their relationship was over. Their travel day arrived and they boarded a plane together. A fellow passenger warned them to be careful, saying that their heads were worth a great deal of money in the war-torn country. It appeared they might not be able to disembark at their destination because fighting had erupted, but they landed safely. Nigel voiced the concern that they were in danger in Somalia and Amanda had a brief bout of conscience, fearing she had asked too much of Nigel.

They were met at the airport in Mogadishu by a man named Abdi who had been hired by Ajoos to work for Amanda. They arrived at the Shamo Hotel and Amanda notes that the quiet was eerie.

Analysis

Amanda struggled with her relationship with Nigel after learning that he was married when their affair began. She had felt uncomfortable with the idea that he had a girlfriend but was upset when she discovered that he had a wife. The idea of fate and destiny is introduced here to a minor degree. Amanda tried to reconcile the man she cared about with a man who had been living a relatively stable life in London with a wife and an apartment. She worried that she might have been the reason for his divorce and the



reason that his life had changed so dramatically. She also considered that it might have been that they were destined to be together and that his time in London was the part of his life that had been a mistake. The rocky beginnings, however, did not seem to be a solid basis for a relationship and Amanda realized that later.

In Chapter Eleven, Amanda talks about the fact that it was impossible to know the future. While she was in Kandahar, a roadside bomb killed three soldiers. She said these soldiers did not know that was going to happen and their families had no idea they were about to be notified of their loved ones' deaths. A CBC television correspondent named Mellissa Fung had no idea that she was going to be kidnapped in Afghanistan. Amanda talks about these people and their futures as a means of making the reader realize that Amanda was going about her life with no idea whether she would be kidnapped and brutalized for more than a year. Some readers might argue that Amanda was living a very dangerous existence and that she was basically asking for trouble, but Amanda believed at this point that she had faced the dangerous situations without being harmed and that she could continue to do so.

Amanda was interested in the religious attitudes and culture she saw in the Middle East. When she was working at Press TV in Baghdad, she noted that there were Islamic people on her crew but that they were not overly religious. She compared that to the casual Christians she had met in the past who paid attention mainly to the major Christian dates. She writes that the casual observers of Islam she met while in Baghdad were also afraid of the radical Muslims, just as those outside the religion were. These different attitudes about religion and culture are important to the story and become one of the most important themes in the book.

The Internet file of Amanda's interview was a blow to Amanda's ability to connect with other journalists. She was speaking in the interview from her limited experience at the time and had believed she was correct in saying few of the journalists assigned to cover stories in the dangerous zones were actually getting out and conducting their own interviews. Amanda was greatly embarrassed at her words but knew there was nothing she could say to correct it. The reader, looking at this passage, might wonder if Amanda later put herself in more danger than necessary, just to ensure that she was not like those journalists who spent their time in the safer areas, sending someone else to gather the actual interviews and firsthand information.

Vocabulary

teemed, tenets, wizened, cordon, waning, ubiquitous, dubious, mythic, nostalgia, wafting, pheromones, anarchic, dalliance, sonorous, mantra



Chapters 15 - 17

Summary

Chapter Fifteen is titled "My Hurricane." Ajoos oversaw the plans for Amanda and Nigel though he was spending his time with another team. Abdi remained with Amanda and Nigel. Ajoos was constantly on the phone, gathering information to decide where it was safe and where they might encounter fighting or other dangers. They spent the first couple of days nearby and Amanda wrote her weekly column for the "Red Deer Advocate," a newspaper in her hometown in Canada. She had trouble getting the file to send and missed the deadline. She wrote about the unsafe conditions that plagued the area and it ran a couple of days later with a headline that read, "Nowhere is a person safe in Somalia." Amanda notes that by the time that article was printed, she and Nigel had been kidnapped.

Chapter Sixteen is titled "Taken." Amanda and Nigel prepared on a Saturday morning to go to interview a woman who had set up an aid center and hospital for victims of the war. Amanda fussed at Nigel for his choice of clothing, saying it was much too bright, and he conceded only by leaving the purple scarf behind. They were followed by a pair of soldiers, hired to be their guards during their stay, and Amanda notes that they were always present but never seemed especially vigilant. At the edge of the city, the soldiers left the vehicle. Neither the African Union nor the Transitional Federal Government had jurisdiction or control outside the city of Mogadishu.

They set out and left the two soldiers at a specific point at the edge of the city, leaving Nigel and Amanda with Abdi and two Somali men who had been hired to help. Shortly after leaving their soldiers, the car slowed and Amanda assumed they were picking up the two new body guards, hired to take up that task for the remainder of the journey. Instead, they were surrounded by "bandits" wearing masks over the lower parts of their faces and carrying guns. Amanda and Nigel were ordered out of the car along with the three Somalis. The gunmen searched the car and rifled through Nigel's backpack. Amanda believed they were being robbed and that the ordeal would soon be over. But she, Nigel, and Abdi were ordered back into the car. Soldiers piled in as well and they began to drive.

After driving for a while, a man who identified himself as Ahmed ordered Amanda out of the car. He asked her about herself and she gave him the information. Another of the soldiers, identified as Ali, said they believed Amanda and Nigel were spies.

Chapter Seventeen is titled "Tuna Fish and Tea." They arrived in a gated compound. With the idea that she might truly be accused of being a spy, Amanda asked to use the bathroom. Inside, she erased all the photos from her camera. Ali ranted about the fact that other countries are meddling in the Islamic government of his country and said his life was completely focused on the jihad. Later, Ahmed announced that he was leaving and warned that the soldiers would kill them if Nigel and Amanda did not do as they



ordered. After Ahmed left, Ali demanded all the money Nigel and Amanda had and was furious when they could produce just more than two hundred dollars. Ali threatened to kill them repeatedly. He took Amanda into a room and strip searched her, saying he was looking for money. Amanda and Nigel were left alone outside for awhile and they saw Abdi and the two other men being marched across the compound. Amanda was relieved that they weren't killed and that they weren't in on the kidnapping.

Another man arrived, introduced himself as Adam, and said he was in command. He asked for names of family members and phone numbers. Adam said he didn't believe Amanda and Nigel are spies but had decided to ask for a ransom. They heard a report on the radio that included the words Canadian, Australian, and Shamo Hotel, and knew that the story of their kidnapping had been discovered.

Analysis

Chapter Fifteen ends with Amanda telling about the headline over her final column for the Red Deer newspaper. Amanda had written about the conditions and the fact that people were being killed and dying of starvation all over the region, and that nowhere was truly safe. She ends the chapter by saying that she and Nigel would be kidnapped before the article was even printed. If this had been a fiction book, the statement might have been a surprise piece of foreshadowing. Considering the book is non-fiction, Amanda uses the foreshadowing to bring the reader into the next phase of the story, which describes their captivity. She begins Chapter Sixteen by saying that she would later learn that someone had “sold us out.” She indicated that the kidnappers had somehow learned that foreigners were staying at the hotel and had deliberately set out to kidnap them. However, Amanda later learned that the kidnappers had initially expected two men, meaning Amanda and Nigel might have been taken by mistake and that the kidnappers actually had another journalism team in mind.

Amanda begins describing the kidnappers in Chapter Sixteen. Ahmed was young with prominent front teeth and spoke English in a relaxed way. It was Ahmed who first began questioning Amanda about her background. Ali also spoke English but his appearance indicated he was battle hardened.

Amanda writes about her efforts at taking control of the situation from the moment she realized they were being kidnapped. She spoke to the kidnappers, identifying herself by name and calling them by name whenever she was able. She said she sounded like a crazed schoolteacher, but didn't care if the ploy helped keep her alive. At one point, the young man named Ali asked why she wasn't afraid. She said it was because she had been promised by Ahmed that “nothing bad” would happen.

When Adam announced that he would be seeking a ransom, Amanda knew that she was in trouble. She knew most of her friends were poor, working in restaurants and barely getting by. Her own bank account was almost empty and her parents had no money to speak of. In addition, she knew that governments never wanted to pay out ransoms because the money went into the hands of terrorists. She later equated it to



feeding bears. She explains that if one fed a bear for a specific action, the bear would continue to do that act to get more food. And, because Amanda and Nigel were working on their own, there was no news organization that would be willing to step in and help them get released.

Vocabulary

sporadically, moldering, vigilant, extremists, obliquely, lolling, bizarre, clarity, confirmation



Chapters 18 - 22

Summary

Chapter Eighteen was titled "Ransom." Amanda writes that she understood that kidnapping was a serious business and that kidnapers saw foreigners as "comparatively rich." Amanda's family was notified of her situation by a radio journalist. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police became involved and tapped the phone lines. Amanda's family members were urged to ignore the media in the hope that the story would die out quickly, eliminating the possibility of causing more problems for Amanda. If contacted by the kidnapers, Amanda's parents were told to say they had no money and that their government wouldn't pay a ransom. Amanda and Nigel were told the ransom might be as much as two million dollars. They were stunned. Amanda and Nigel were told they would be killed in a matter of days unless the ransom was paid.

One of the soldiers was named Jamal and Amanda came to know a lot about him. He didn't have a great deal of English but managed to communicate. He was eighteen years old and asked a great many questions about Amanda and Nigel. He said he planned to get married with his share of the money once the ransom was paid.

Ali told Amanda that she was soon to die, and she said she might want to become a Muslim before she died. Ahmed arrived with the news that they were going to extend the deadline for paying the ransom and that they would be moved to "a nicer house." He also said he had been in contact with Nigel's sister, who was "panicked," and with Amanda's mother. He offered no more information.

Chapter Nineteen was titled "Electric House." Amanda said the house was no better except there was electricity and indoor plumbing, though the commode had to be flushed with a bucket of water. They were given some items, including two oversized tubes of toothpaste. Amanda took that as good news that they weren't to be killed immediately but also worried that it meant they were prepared to hold them hostage for a long time. Amanda was relieved to learn that Abdi and the other two Somalians were still alive, being kept in a nearby room.

Amanda was allowed to talk to her mother by telephone. Lori said the kidnapers had demanded one-point-five million dollars. She said the family was trying to raise some money but Amanda knew it would be impossible to raise the entire amount.

The soldier named Jamal often stopped by to chat with Amanda and Nigel, though he was more reserved around Amanda. Another soldier, Abdullah, often accompanied him. Amanda and Nigel learned that Jamal planned to marry and attend university in India.

Chapter Twenty was titled "Amina." Ali asked Amanda why she did not embrace the Muslim religion. Amanda asked for a copy of the Koran in English. Amanda wanted to pretend to embrace the Muslim religion, believing their captors will have to treat them



better. Nigel feared they would be killed if the captors found they were not serious. Nigel refused and Amanda knew they couldn't be divided on the subject, so she stopped talking about it. A few days later, Ali presented each of them with a copy of the Koran. Amanda was so desperate for something to read that she began to study right away. She soon found a verse that forbade men to have sexual relations with other women. The exception was a slave. Amanda realized that meant she was in danger. On the eleventh day, Amanda announced to Ali that she is prepared to make the conversion to Muslim. Nigel was angry but ultimately followed along. As new Muslims, Amanda became Amina and Nigel became Mohammed.

Chapter Twenty-One was titled "Paradise." The soldiers became more courteous after the conversion. Abdullah began to teach Amanda about the Koran while Jamal tutored Nigel. Amanda often had to ask Abdullah to repeat phrases and he wasn't patient but spent hours with her. Soon, Nigel was included in the prayers of the men outdoors but Amanda, as a woman, remained inside.

The man Amanda knew as Donald Trump arrived periodically. He always berated the soldiers for the poor treatment and accommodations, but did nothing about it. He said he would be willing to release Amanda immediately, but Amanda didn't believe him. Amanda had been in a sexual relationship shortly before her kidnapping and when her period was late, she asked Donald for a pregnancy test. The result was negative.

Chapter Twenty-Two was titled "Today's a Good Day." Days continued to pass and Nigel created a makeshift backgammon board. The game would have been considered taboo by the soldiers so they were careful to hide it whenever someone approached. As they neared their third month of captivity, they were moved several times. One day, Amanda and Nigel were forced to read from a script in front of a video camera while their captors stood by with their faces mostly covered. Amanda later learned that a short clip of the video played in Canada, and that it was without audio.

About six weeks passed after Amanda had spoken to her mother. Donald continued to say they were only interested in money. Nigel said his parents had some money from the sale of the family farm. Amanda knew that might ensure Nigel's release without her. Amanda continued to hope that the kidnappers would eventually just give up. Nigel and Amanda developed something of a routine. One day the soldiers rushed in, went through their belongings, and moved Nigel to another room, separating them.

Analysis

Amanda's conversation with her mother in Chapter Nineteen was brief. Lori was being coached by the government officials working with Amanda's family on the case and she asked Amanda if she had any ideas. Amanda wasn't sure what her mother was asking but the officials were hoping to learn whether the demands were negotiable and were hoping for any other information Amanda could find a way to share. This was only one of several times Amanda was confused about the messages being sent to her. At another point, she and Nigel had shared ridiculously exaggerated eyebrow movements.



Amanda said she wasn't at all certain what they were communicating, but were just glad they were communicating.

The relationship between Amanda, Nigel, and the kidnappers was fluid and changed depending on the current situation. Many of the young soldiers, including Jamal, seemed to have no personal animosity against Nigel and Amanda. They were doing what they were told and when there were no commanders present, they often spent time talking to their captives. Conversations often centered around cars and sports. Sometimes, Jamal laughed aloud at some comment from Nigel but he tried to stifle it. Jamal's opposite was a soldier named Abdullah. Abdullah, who carefully kept his face covered though the other soldiers had stopped that practice, wanted to become a suicide bomber. Jamal confided in Amanda once that he was Abdullah's friend and didn't want to see him die.

There was a man who was obviously funding the operation. He appeared occasionally with money, food, and supplies. Amanda and Nigel began referring to him as Donald Trump. They came up with nicknames for some of the others as well and Amanda talked about the fact that they were desperate to stay occupied.

Amanda said she made the profession to accept Allah as god only because she felt it was time to force some changes in the situation. She said that she wasn't angry but she also wasn't seeking to be obedient. She saw it just as a "chess move" aimed at reaching toward a conclusion in the kidnapping. She hoped they would see her as a sister in their faith, meaning they wouldn't be willing to kill her. But after the conversion, Amanda seemed confused. She described it as a feeling of finally reaching a distant shore.

The relationship between Nigel and Amanda deteriorated dramatically soon after the first month of captivity. Nigel became overly quiet. Amanda felt she needed to hold to hope in order to get by. When she told Nigel this, he erupted. He said he didn't feel the need to do anything just because it would make Amanda's life better at this point. The limited perspective means the reader doesn't know what Nigel is thinking. It could be that Nigel blamed Amanda for his captivity. It was obvious that Amanda felt betrayed by Nigel several times. When Nigel became included in the prayer time outside, Amanda was left alone inside. Amanda later heard Nigel laughing with the soldiers but he refused to tell her why they were laughing. One day, they were given some fried fish and Nigel joined in the joke that Amanda was fat. Amanda was bitterly hurt over Nigel siding with the soldiers against her. But she was willing to forgive him, probably because she needed his companionship so desperately. She says the one good thing that came from all the moving was that Nigel quietly took her hand and held onto it for several minutes during one of the drives.

Amanda obviously felt some guilt for putting herself and Nigel in the situation that led to their kidnapping. At one point, Amanda was on the phone with her mother and realized that her family would never be able to raise the ransom being demanded, but that they would try to raise as much as they could. Amanda realized that the one asset owned by her family was the home her father shared with Perry. She knew they would likely be looking at a way to borrow or sell the house in order to get money. She told her mother



that she wasn't certain what the family was doing to raise money, but to stop. In the epilogue, Amanda says she had to work hard in order to forgive herself for the money paid to the kidnappers on her behalf.

Vocabulary

beget, vacillating, aberration, accorded, proximity, loitered, effervescent, swathed, spiteful, roiling, purgatory, conjured, feigned, rhapsodized, culminated, fastidious



Chapters 23 - 26

Summary

Chapter Twenty-Three is titled "Blame the Girl." Amanda became obsessed with getting a note to Nigel. She wrote on a tiny scrap of paper and tossed it into his room as she was passing on the way to the bathroom. They began to communicate by knocking on the wall that separated their rooms. There was no way to knock out a message that way but Amanda was comforted knowing he was there. She came up with the idea of leaving messages for each other in the bathroom. She threw a note into Nigel's room, outlining the plan, and found on a later trip to the bathroom that he'd left her a message. Abdullah and Jamal stopped tutoring Amanda and Nigel. A soldier named Hassam took over.

An important change occurred soon after Nigel's move. Amanda had time for a quick shower each day but the shower curtain was very sheer. The captors had given her privacy until about this time. One day she caught Jamal and Abdullah snickering, obviously watching her as she showered. She became increasingly worried about her personal safety. One day Abdullah entered her room accompanied by a soldier named Mohammed. They held a gun against her neck and kicked her. When Jamal entered the room later, he asked why Amanda had told her mother not to pay the ransom. Amanda realized they were all frustrated with the length of time waiting and that they'd decided to blame Amanda.

Chapter Twenty-Four was titled, "Maya." Amanda could hear a mother talking with her young daughter in a neighboring courtyard. Amanda never heard the child's name but thought of her as "Maya." She cherished the normality of the mother and daughter. Abdullah periodically entered Amanda's room and noisily searched her possessions. She later realized he was seeing how much noise he could make before attracting the attention of the other soldiers. No one ever came to check and Amanda wasn't surprised when he raped her though she was devastated.

Chapter Twenty-five was titled "Catch-22." Amanda felt guilty for her situation. She was angry about the attack but she felt she had put herself available for the kidnappers. She thought about suicide but began to repeat the idea that she would be okay. The rapes continued in the following days. Amanda pleaded with Donald Trump to help end the rapes but he cited the section of the Koran allowing men to have sex with their slaves.

There were questions from Amanda's parents, such as the recent award her father received to ensure that she was still alive. One day Amanda was at the window when she heard Nigel's voice and they realized that they could again communicate with each other.

Chapter Twenty-six was titled "A Feast Is a Feast." Amanda and Nigel continued to talk. Amanda became obsessed with the idea of spending time near home in Canada. In November, Donald Trump arrived with a package sent from Canada. There was



medicine, pencils, a notebook, cookies, sanitary pads, underwear, a pair of prescription glasses, and books. Nigel also got a care package and Amanda later learned that their captors took some of the items before they were delivered. Amanda and Nigel continued to talk and Amanda described their “book club” reviews. Amanda and Nigel were thrilled with the items but Amanda knew it meant they weren't likely to be released before Christmas. On the first day of December, Amanda marked the one hundredth day of captivity.

Analysis

Separating Amanda and Nigel was pretty much inevitable. They were unmarried and allowing them to remain in the same room was against the teachings of the Koran. There was no explanation regarding the timing and why Nigel was moved on that particular day when they had been ignoring the situation up to that point. It changed things for Amanda and Nigel but Amanda noted that their captors were also changing. For example, Jamal had often stopped in to talk to Nigel and Amanda prior to that moment. They had learned about his fiance and would mention her name just to see his reaction. But Jamal no longer visited after Nigel was moved. The kidnapping had lasted months by this point, and it was obvious that no one had expected that to happen.

The moment of Amanda's rape was terrifying and it was another step in the changes that were taking place between Amanda and her captors. Amanda described the first attack as “ten impossibly long second.” She pleaded with Abdulla to stop but he didn't heed her pleas. Amanda hated the situation before the rape but lost a level of her determination after the rape. Later, there was a great deal of focus on the rapes as Amanda tried to reconcile the situation with the teachings of the Koran. She learned that the rape was technically acceptable. Another important aspect of this was seen when all the soldiers were gathered to participate in an attack and beating. All were forced to participate so that none of them would have the right to condemn any of the others. When Amanda later tried to escape, she yelled out that she was being raped by the soldiers. When she was beaten for that revelation, she claimed she misspoke in an effort to avoid retaliation.

At one point, Amanda felt certain she and Nigel would remain close for the rest of their lives. She imagined them sharing conversations “for years to come.” But soon after their release, Amanda realized that was not the case. The shared experience that might have been enough to hold them together forever would be the catalyst for breaking them apart.

Vocabulary

conscripted, frisson, cistern, trope, exasperation, antiquated, grotty, frivolous, placidly, consort, irked, mocked



Chapters 27 - 31

Summary

Chapter Twenty-Seven was titled "The Desert." Amanda was awakened in the middle of the night. That typically meant they were being moved to a new house, but this time she was told to get dressed and leave her possessions. She believed it meant she was about to be released. She was forced in the car with Abdullah and Ahmed, leaving Nigel behind. Donald Trump joined them and Amanda began to fear that she was being sold to another group. She saw bonfires and young men roaming the streets with guns. They took Amanda to a deserted area and she became convinced they were going to kill her. They asked how much money her parents had, and she assured them her family would get the money for the ransom, pleading for her life.

Chapter Twenty-Eight was titled "Call Home." The entire chapter was a police transcript of the call. Amanda is crying and pleading with her mother to pay the ransom. The man known as Adam said the kidnappers are running out of patience and that Amanda is going to be killed in a week unless the ransom is paid. Lori said the government has refused to pay and that the family is trying to raise money. Both Amanda and her mother cried and Lori urged Amanda to remain strong before the call was disconnected.

Chapter Twenty-Nine was "Christmas." Amanda is returned to her room. At the window later that morning, she told Nigel about the ordeal. Nigel later urged Amanda to give him any messages for her family, in case she was killed and he was able to go home. The week passed and then a few more days, and Amanda wasn't killed though the ransom didn't arrive.

As Christmas approached, Nigel and Amanda received a few more items, including a few pieces of candy. They agreed to save them until Christmas and to have gifts to exchange as well. They were each to write about a favorite memory, including as much detail as they would muster. Amanda made Nigel a doll of sorts, urging him to realize that he wasn't alone. Nigel made Amanda a bracelet from the pop-tops off the tuna cans they were routinely given for meals. Amanda cherished the fact that he'd spent so much time crafting the gift.

Chapter Thirty was titled "Escape." In January, Amanda and Nigel began to talk about escaping. Nigel believed he could remove bricks and bars from the bathroom window, making room for them to get through. Amanda was frightened of the captors' reaction if they are caught and she had seen the number of armed men in the area outside their compound. She also worried that their captors might kill Abdi and the other Somalian men who were still being held in the compound. In the middle of January, Amanda discovered that all three men were gone. Abdullah said that they had been killed and Amanda knew it meant she and Nigel had to get away.



Amanda and Nigel began to plan. Nigel worked at breaking up the concrete holding the bricks in place, carefully hiding the evidence of his work. They planned to cover as much of their skin as possible, to hide the fact that they were foreigners. Nigel would wrap himself in a blanket and pretend to be ill. Amanda, covered with a shawl, would pretend to be helping him. They planned to go to a nearby mosque, hoping someone there would help them.

Abdullah was on guard duty when Amanda and Nigel were escaping. Nigel could often get from his room to the bathroom without the guards seeing him. Amanda faked a stomach ache for permission to go to the bathroom. They met and managed to get through the window. They made it to the ground undetected but were immediately confronted by a half-starved child who ran away. Knowing he was going to find someone to tell, Amanda and Nigel took off running.

Chapter Thirty-one was titled, "My Sister." Amanda and Nigel discarded their plan of trying to hide their identities and ran in the direction they'd heard sounds indicating a mosque. They encountered a man who had seen Amanda in the window of the compound and Amanda pleaded with him for help. He took them to the mosque. Abdullah and Jamal burst in and began beating Nigel. Amanda ran outside briefly but returned to find Nigel seated among the men. Amanda didn't know what happened but knew that someone had stopped the Jamal and Abdullah from further action. A woman took Amanda's hand and asked if she was Muslim. Amanda said she was and the woman said that made them sisters. Ahmed and Donald Trump arrived and gunfire erupted. Abdullah grabbed Amanda and began pulling her away. The woman held to Amanda's arms, even when she was thrown to the ground and obviously hurt. Amanda's clothing was torn and pulled as she was dragged away. Another woman ignored Amanda's pleas for help. Amanda briefly feared Nigel was dead but she then saw him. She was relieved that they had survived but terrified that they would now be killed.

Analysis

Despite the shift in attitudes, Jamal was simply a happy young man with hopes for his future. At some point, he began to again visit with Amanda and Nigel, probably at least partly out of boredom. Amanda and Nigel were being fed poorly but they learned from Jamal that the soldiers were also living on insufficient diets. Amanda noted that everyone in the house wanted the ordeal to be over. When Amanda learned that Abdi and the other two Somalian captives were gone, she asked what happened. Abdullah told her they'd been killed but she later learned they'd just been released. Regardless of their fate, Amanda knew their disappearance meant the captors were becoming more desperate. She assumed that the money to feed and house the group was running out.

Amanda was worried during the days leading up to the escape attempt and her appetite lagged. The captors, despite being desperate themselves, would not have wanted either of their captives to die before the ransom was paid. Jamal entered Amanda's room the day that she and Nigel were finalizing their escape plans and presented her with fish and boiled eggs.



The scene in the mosque was chaotic and somewhat confusing in that it seemed Jamal, Abdullah, and the others who claimed to be devout Muslims had no problem creating violence in the holy place. The woman who help onto Amanda's arms was obviously hurt though not badly. Amanda wondered later if the woman might be killed for her role in trying to save Amanda from being taken. Amanda never knew the woman's name, nor did she learn her fate. When Amanda was returned home and began to work through her recovery, she thought about that woman and that became the catalyst for establishing the aid organization founded by Amanda. An interesting aspect of this scene was that another woman was outside the mosque and Amanda appealed to her for help. Amanda spoke English but the woman didn't intervene. Instead, she said "I don't speak English" in perfect English. While it might be easy for the reader to condemn that woman's actions, it is important to remember that the women were ruled by men and a woman who interfered was in great danger.

Vocabulary

approximated, dispensation, disembodied, excruciating, pragmatism, stark, boisterous, bolstered, emaciated, colossally



Chapters 32 - 36

Summary

Chapter Thirty-Two was titled “Tacky House.” Nigel and Amanda were put into a car and a couple of the men from the mosque joined him. A crowd had gathered and some waved as if saying, “goodbye.” They had a flat and changed cars, getting into the vehicle with Donald Trump. They arrive at a house that was obviously someone's home. They were questioned and beaten. They made it clear that they believed Amanda was to blame for the escape attempt. Nigel begged Amanda to take the blame. Nigel then said that he should not have listened to Amanda when she came up with the escape plan. Donald told Amanda he was leaving and that something bad would happen to her. They hobbled Amanda and she knew there would not be another chance to escape.

Chapter Thirty-Three was titled “Documents.” Amanda and Nigel were taken back to the house they'd escaped from. Amanda wonders if the captors had no where else to go or if they simply weren't afraid that someone in the neighborhood would intervene. The next day, Amanda was hopeful because she was not killed during the night. She was given food and then taken to another room where Amanda was sexually assaulted with all the soldiers in the room. She said it was to ensure they were all part of it and none of them felt they could judge the others. Amanda said she bled for weeks after the attack.

Chapter Thirty-Four was titled “New Rules.” The group moved and Amanda was put into a windowless room, which she later referred to as the Dark House. She was ill and running a fever. She could occasionally hear a woman cough somewhere in the house. Amanda was not allowed to speak or even sit up except when she prayed. She was given dirty water to drink and any infraction of the new rules meant she was beaten.

Chapter Thirty-Five was titled “A House in the Sky.” About a month passed and Amanda began to fall into a routine in an effort to survive the days. She had a razor because the men imposed the strict rule of shaving all body hair. She considered suicide but held onto hope that she wouldn't need to take that way out. Abdullah raped her repeatedly, sometimes multiple times in a day. Amanda remained still during the attacks but said her mind was seeking escape. She began to lose herself in happy memories of her past. By remembering that her body was being damaged but her mind was healthy, she endured.

Chapter Thirty-Six was titled, “Danger Is Coming.” Lori continued to work with officials. Amanda and Nigel had been held for seven months and had reduced the ransom demand to one million dollars for each. The Brennans had begun to question their government's ability to negotiate Nigel's release. Some of the family believe they should try to get Nigel out without Amanda. In March, the Brennans hired a private firm to get Nigel. Amanda's mother argued the kidnappers would immediately murder Amanda and the Brennans backed off the plan.



Meanwhile, there were many rumors circling about Amanda. One media source reported that she was pregnant. Another said she was living happily, teaching English to Somalian children. Another reported that Amanda had married one of her captors and had become a devout Muslim.

Amanda was allowed to leave her room one day for a brief shower though her leg chains weren't removed. When she passed Nigel's room, she saw him seated in mosquito netting and reading. Although he knew she was there, he didn't look up.

Analysis

Amanda pleaded with Donald Trump for help. She felt certain she was about to be killed and she begged for her life. Donald Trump was impatient and said there were other hostages, all released quickly, but that no one wanted to pay for Amanda and that running away had merely caused more trouble.

One of the most brutal aspects of the captivity for Amanda was the lack of human contact. She writes about the despair that threatened when she was separated from Nigel, even after he betrayed her by saying the escape attempt had been her idea. Amanda admits that while being held in the Dark House, she had mentally sent messages to Nigel and imagined that he was sending messages back.

One of the soldiers was a young man named Yusuf. Amanda spent her days in the Dark House mostly in solitude and darkness until the day Yusuf arrived. He had a papaya and offered Amanda part of it. She expected it to be a trick or that she would be punished for eating it, but she took it anyway. She thanked Yusuf for the fruit. Then Yusuf put his arm next to Amanda's. He pointed to her arm and said the word, "white," then to his own arm and said, "black." Then he said "no problem" and left the room. Amanda said he was apparently trying to tell her that he had no problem with the differences in their skin color. While Yusuf was as guilty as the others with regard to the treatment of Amanda and Nigel, he had shown this unexpected kindness. Amanda said it made her cry. This was an important scene in the book because it showed that the young men guarding Amanda and Nigel were largely victims of their circumstances. Yusuf and Jamal were not cruel teenagers who wanted to harm Amanda. They were caught up in the situation and likely felt they had little choice. Amanda talked about that in the epilogue, saying she felt many of the men fighting in Somalia were victims, too.

Vocabulary

impervious, quake, paternally, exertion, surreal, bellows, accrued, crotchety, clambering, languorous, stave, opaque, maw



Chapters 37 - 41

Summary

Chapter Thirty-Seven was titled “The Snap.” Amanda was asked by her captors where she went on vacation when she was nine. The answer was Disneyland. The question was posed by her mother to ensure that Amanda was still alive. She was hopeful, knowing there had been a phone call but lost that hope again when a week passed with no change.

Chapter Thirty-Eight was titled “Omar.” Amanda knew that the political situation was worsening and that there seemed to be the sounds of fighting everywhere. They were moved again and she called her new house “Positive House.” Amanda found a small envelope there and hid it to be sure she could look at it when her captors weren't looking. Any piece of paper was referred to as a document and her captors were constantly threatening to punish Amanda for having any document in her possession. Inside the envelope was a photo of a small boy and a slip of paper with the name “Omar.” Amanda clung to the photo for a time, relishing the normality of the little boy's photo. When she was moved to another room in the house, she left the photo behind.

Chapter Thirty-Nine was titled “Positive House.” Amanda writes about the political upheaval and the problems under the new president, Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed, who was trying to broker peace to an unwilling nation. Amanda's situation had deteriorated but she could sometimes hear Nigel talking with the soldiers, sometimes making jokes and laughing.

Amanda called one of the soldiers Romeo. She described him as “sophisticated” and he said that he had earned a degree in engineering. He wanted to study at a university in the United States but needed his share of the ransom money to pay his way. Amanda didn't consider him “friendly.”

Chapter Forty was titled, “Wife Lessons.” The group had moved again and Amanda figured out that they were near the Kenya border. They were near the Indian Ocean at Kismayo in an empty office building. Amanda called it the Beach House. Romeo had been accepted into an American university and he began spending time with Amanda, teaching her about the Koran again. Amanda accepted the tutoring, grateful that she was at least allowed to sit up during the sessions. One day he asked if Amanda thought Somalian men were handsome and if she was romantically interested in any of the soldiers. She said she wasn't. Romeo asked if she could be happy married to him. Amanda knew the situation was delicate and answered that she didn't feel she was in a position to begin any relationship. Amanda wasn't certain he was serious and felt it might just be a way for Romeo to pass the time.

Amanda's twenty-eighth birthday arrived. She heard the name “Michael Jackson” but didn't discover until later that the singer had died. Her diet was poor and starvation



became a real possibility. She could smell the food being consumed by the soldiers and one day came up with a plan. She told one of the soldiers she wanted to fast, as required by the Muslim faith. The soldier was pleased, knowing that Amanda's obedience to Allah won "points" for him on Judgment Day. The gamble was successful and Amanda was given a bag of samosas that evening, more nourishment than she was usually given.

Chapter Forty-one was titled "Everything is Changed." Amanda sometimes saw Nigel when she was going to the bathroom. She was shocked at how thin he had become. One day he made a motion with his hands saying, "I love you." By that time, they had been captive for almost a year. The soldiers were desperate for a resolution and convinced that the families had the money to pay the ransom but were choosing not to. The families had actually hired a kidnap-and-ransom specialist named John Chase, giving up on the government negotiations. They agreed to split the cost with Nigel's family paying up front and Amanda's family repaying their part later. With this new plan, Amanda's mother began answering Adam's calls again. They offered almost a half million dollars but Adam refused.

Amanda felt a shift in emotion one day. She was bound on her stomach with her ankles and wrists tied so that they were off the floor. If she relaxed, she was choked by her bindings. She was gagged and blindfolded. She continued to tell herself she was alright, but she found it difficult to believe. She wished for death to escape the pain. She was released and given a phone with Lori on the other end. She repeated the words "Mummy" and "please."

Analysis

When she was spending so much time in the dark with nothing to distract her, Amanda began to think about revenge. She imagined herself quietly tying each of her captors or shooting them. She imagined that she wouldn't kill Nigel or the woman she had occasionally heard in the house. It was also about this time that Amanda further looked at Abdullah as a victim rather than just an attacker. She said it was impossible for her to fully accept that idea but it did help her develop some unexpected compassion for the captors.

Amanda developed a cough while staying at the Positive House and she heard a woman who apparently cooked and cleaned who also had a cough. One day a soldier entered Amanda's room and gave her a package of pills that had apparently come from the other woman in the house. Amanda was greatly touched by any show of kindness and she could imagine this woman insisting that the pills be given to Amanda. It was a statement of Amanda's need for human contact that this small act was so important to her. Amanda noted that she saw the woman occasionally, but dared to meet the woman's eyes only once. In that moment, Amanda saw that the woman was afraid of the soldiers and that she would not be willing to put herself in danger by helping Amanda. Amanda was beaten for having looked at the woman and though she would never have tried it again, she was glad for that one brief second of human contact.



Amanda named the houses where she stayed during her captivity. The Electric House was the place where the electricity was available but erratic. The Escape House was where she and Nigel managed to get through the bathroom window and into the city before being recaptured. They spent some time in a place Amanda called the Positive House. It wasn't because there was anything positive happening there, but because she forced herself to find positive things on which to focus. She reminded herself that her body was being beaten but her organs were still working correctly. She was thankful for the food she was given to eat. She was thankful that her teeth were solid, that her mind remained strong, and that her skin was healed. She was hopeful that tomorrow would be a better day, with fewer stomach cramps. Amanda needed hope throughout the ordeal and when she had been housed with Nigel, she depended on him to help feed that hope. It seemed that once Nigel was separated, Amanda became stronger when it came to fueling her own hope, even when she knew that Nigel's situation was much better than her own.

Romeo began depending on Amanda to help him improve his English. He had her write difficult words that might impress people once he arrived in America to study. On another day, Amanda wrote the words to a lengthy speech given by Bin Laden in which he urged his comrades to follow through with the war that had begun. At one point, there was discussion about the soldiers who were against the Western ways but were willing to take advantage of Western offerings. For example, Romeo was planning to attend a university in the United States. The men said all things related to the United States was bad and Amanda and Nigel wondered how these two trains of thoughts could be reconciled. They were told that it was alright for the men to take advantage of Western offerings as long as they remained separate from the Western ideals.

Vocabulary

percolate, ravaging, veered, flay, dissipating, accrued, flux, luridly, bulbous, predominately, snippets, creed, assiduous, striation, mitigation, bellicose



Chapters 42 - Epilogue

Summary

Chapter Forty-Two was titled "The bird." Amanda told her mother that she was being tortured and Abdullah announced the treatment would continue daily until the ransom was paid. Amanda accepted that she would die and began to plan her suicide with the razor. Just when she felt that she could endure no more, she saw a bird on the floor of her room. It looked around, pecked at the floor, and then flew away. In that moment, Amanda became convinced the bird was a sign that she would survive the captivity to return home.

Chapter Forty-three was titled "A Notebook and a Promise." The group moved to a country house Amanda called the Bush House. Amanda had not been tied up again and once they were at the new house, she was given two new dresses. Amanda called them an "acknowledgment that I'd suffered." Abdullah gave her a small bottle of lotion, saying he'd paid for it himself. Amanda said she felt it was his way of apologizing but she never used it. Romeo continued tutoring Amanda, sometimes praising her and sometimes slapping her for mistakes. Another soldier named Hassam took up lessons when Romeo wasn't present. He sometimes gave Amanda an extra cup of tea or aspirin. He also sometimes let her have books for a few hours at a time. It was Hassam who gave her a pen, pencil, and a notebook with the UNICEF logo on the front. Amanda wanted to record her true feelings in the notebook but was afraid she would be punished for it. She and Nigel were sharing a Koran and Amanda came up with the idea of underlining words and creating a code in the notes section of the book. Nigel caught on and they began sending messages.

Amanda was given another chance to talk to her mother and she pleaded with her mother to get her out, even if it meant getting her out without Nigel. Amanda's mother remained committed to the fact that she and the Brennans were working together, and that both Amanda and Nigel must be released. At one point, Amanda was told she and Nigel might be sold to Al-Shabaab, a group that would then sell them back to their families. Ahmed forced Amanda to write out a statement in which she promised that she would continue her devotion to Islam and would pay him a half million dollars, aside from any ransom that was paid. Amanda dutifully wrote it, making it sound as official as she could.

The group moved to a small village just outside Mogadishu. Romeo told Amanda that Al-Shabaab would be willing to hold Amanda and Nigel for years, if that's what it took to get the full ransom. He told Amanda that he was sorry for her bad luck. It began to look as if the transfer would take place. Ironically, Hassam gave Amanda his email address, saying she might write to him. When it came time to remove the shackles from Amanda's legs, they discovered the key was lost. Abdullah had to saw the chains. Amanda and Nigel were put into a car with two men Amanda didn't know. Amanda was reminded of her promise and Nigel was handed his Koran. They traveled awhile before



a group of gunmen surrounded them and dragged them into another car. Amanda realized that one of the men smelled of cigarette smoke, meaning he did not belong to Al-Shabaab. Amanda was handed a phone and her mother told her that she was free.

Chapter Forty-four was titled “Beginning to Understand.” A ransom of six hundred thousand dollars was paid. John Chase, working with a member of the Somali Parliament, had executed the release. The plan was to go directly to the Mogadishu airport where a chartered plane was waiting but there was a problem and they had to wait to leave the country. Amanda writes she didn't truly believe she was free at that point. Once she was alone in a bedroom in the home of a government official, she got a look at herself in the mirror and was horrified at how malnourished and pale she looked. Later, Nigel and Amanda had chicken sandwiches and Cokes, and she says the situation seemed horribly strange.

They left Somalia the following days, more than fifteen months after their arrival, and were met in Nairobi by Canadian and Australian embassy representatives. They were taken to the Aga Khan University Hospital where Amanda's mother was waiting. Nigel's family arrived and they remained there for a week. Amanda writes that a week later, she and Nigel were just beginning to process what they'd endured and that it was over. It was only during those weeks that they learned about all that had been done in an effort to get them out of Somalia. They also learned for the first time that Abdi and the other two Somali men had been released, unharmed. Amanda met with Abdi in Nairobi who said the kidnapping had prompted him to leave Somalia. They referred to each other as “sister” and “brother.” Abdi cried when he learned that Amanda had been raped.

Late in 2009, Amanda and Nigel parted ways. Amanda soon learned that despite her predictions, they would not remain close. The families were at odds over the financial burdens they'd been forced to share and their separate lives pulled them in different directions.

The final section of the book was the Epilogue. Amanda describes coming to terms with her freedom and her choices that led to her capture. She had to learn to forgive herself for those choices and to deal with the lingering affects of her kidnapping. She came to feel a sense of compassion for the people of Somalia, including her kidnappers, who were caught up in political situations that were beyond their control. That, along with the woman who had tried to help her in the mosque during Amanda's failed escape attempt, prompted her to start a foundation for the victims of the war in Somalia.

Analysis

Amanda talks about her thoughts during the hours of torture. She'd been brutal to herself in an effort to stay thin and she now regretted that she'd hated her body. She berated herself for her “empty ambitions” and for feeling that nothing bad would happen to her. Despite the lack of hope and the feelings of having misused her life, she realized she was grateful for many of her experiences and that she'd had a good life overall. This series of epiphanies was a natural part of her grieving process over her situation and



some readers may wonder why she didn't go through with the suicide when the situation became so unbearable.

Amanda eventually began to write in the UNICEF notebook, although she kept the writing about herself and her feelings while avoiding any mention of abuse at the hands of her captors. She still feared she might be punished if she were caught. One of the entries in the journal was about a trip she had made to Afghanistan when she was first trying to break into journalism. She'd visited a prison where a woman was being held on drug charges. The woman had a small cell shared with five other woman, and they had a bathroom available to them. Amanda wrote that she had thought the woman's situation wasn't so terrible. When the woman told Amanda that she desperately wanted to go home, Amanda had replied that the woman had to pay for her crime. Now, being held captive, Amanda says the memory of the shame she had heaped onto the woman brought her pain. Amanda's time of self-reflection became an important part of the changes that occurred during her time in captivity.

Vocabulary

intensity, trundling, appeasing, despondent, torpor, chagrin, dowager, mitigate, aghast, visceral



Important People

Amanda Lindhout

Amanda was the daughter of a dysfunctional family. Her parents divorced when Amanda was young and her father entered into a stable gay relationship. While he was one of the few men living this lifestyle at the time, Amanda was actually more comfortable in the stable home he provided than she was in the chaos of her mother's home. While her upbringing might have sent Amanda searching for stability of her own, it had the opposite effect, prompting her dream to see other countries and to experience their culture firsthand.

Amanda was somewhat shy about traveling on her own initially, but soon overcame that as she sought to fulfill her dreams. She worked hard and saved as much money as possible to fund the dream of extensive travel. When she encountered journalists who were traveling at the expense of various news agencies, she thought that would be a perfect solution to her own money issues. She managed to land a job with a new television news organization but soon found they were manipulating her stories to their own end. She left that group in favor of freelancing though it meant she was truly on her own, again funding her travel from her own pocket, and producing news stories with the hope that someone would purchase them. She convinced her former lover and fellow journalist, Nigel Brennan, to join her in Somalia. There, she planned to interview a woman who was providing services for refugees.

Amanda was warned by several people not to make the trip because the situation for foreigners was especially dangerous at this time. Her unwillingness to heed the warnings was a statement of her determination, but she also later realized that she was selfishly determined to follow her dreams, regardless of the danger.

On the way to the interview, their car was stopped by a ragtag group of soldiers. Amanda, Nigel, and their three companions were taken hostage. Amanda soon learned that the soldiers expected their countries and their families to pay millions of dollars for their release. Amanda was initially certain that the soldiers would quickly discover that her parents weren't wealthy, meaning that she would be released, relatively unharmed. She was actually held in captivity more than a year. Upon her release, she had to face the fact that her actions cost her family a great deal of heartache and money. She said that she learned to forgive herself and she founded a charitable organization to help people being victimized in foreign countries.

Nigel Brennan

Nigel was a paid photographer when he met Amanda for the first time. The story, written entirely from Amanda's point of view, didn't give a great deal of insight into Nigel's thoughts, but there were actions and statements made by Nigel that help the reader



understand him. From the beginning of the trip, Nigel was afraid and it seemed obvious he wouldn't have attempted the journey on his own. When they were captured, Nigel was very afraid, and Amanda noted several times that he cried or fought back tears. When Amanda came up with the idea that they should pretend to convert to the Muslim religion, Nigel objected. Again, it was fear that motivated him and he worried about what their captors would do if the sham was discovered. When Nigel and Amanda were being held in what Amanda would later call "the Escape House," it was Nigel who came up with the idea to crawl through the bathroom window. He and Amanda worked on the details together, but he continued to insist that they carry through with the plan. Once they were caught, however, Nigel put the blame on Amanda. Despite the fact that Amanda was brutalized after that, Nigel called on Amanda to accept the sole responsibility.

Another important aspect of Nigel's character was seen in his relationships and his family. Nigel was married when he began a romantic courtship with Amanda but he lied, saying that he had a girlfriend waiting for him. Later, when he and Amanda reunite to make the trip to Somalia, Nigel is involved with yet another relationship and Amanda has to remind him of this fact when he expressed interest in resuming his relationship with Amanda. Nigel's family was apparently distressed at his divorce, but they had some money at their disposal and there was often the possibility that his family would pay a ransom, leaving Amanda behind.

Jamal

Jamal was a young soldier who was among those holding Amanda captive. Jamal was engaged to be married and was counting on his share of the ransom money to take him into the next stage of his life. Jamal was polite most of the time and even interested in talking with Amanda and Nigel in order to practice his English.

Abdullah

Abdullah was one of the soldiers holding Amanda and Nigel captive. Abdullah was a consummate soldier and his ultimate goal was to become a suicide bomber. He was cruel, more than most of the other soldiers. It was Abdullah who first who began raping Amanda on a regular basis, brutalizing her in the process.

Romeo

This was Amanda's nickname for one of the soldiers holding Amanda and Nigel captive. Romeo was accepted into a graduate school in New York City and freely talked about his plans with Amanda and Nigel. Romeo was counting on his share of the ransom money to pay his tuition and was furious when the money wasn't paid on time, as the masterminds of the kidnapping had promised. Romeo believed that Amanda should be willing to marry him and he went so far as to describe how they would live, with Amanda



always careful not to show herself to anyone outside their home because she was a foreigner.

Lori

Lori is Amanda's mother who was divorced with three young children to raise. She worked as a cashier at a grocery store and went through a series of bad relationships, often suffering abuse at the hands of the men in her life. When Amanda announced that she was going into a country her mother considered dangerous, Lori sent an email, begging Amanda to stay out of the more dangerous places. When Amanda was kidnapped, Lori worked at length with officials and friends to free Amanda.

The Unnamed Woman at the Mosque

When Amanda and Nigel briefly escaped their captors, they headed for a Mosque, hoping they might find protection there. Instead, they were taken captive again. While Amanda was being brutalized and taken back into captivity, a woman grabbed her and held on, trying to help Amanda. The woman was so determined that she held onto Amanda's arms even as Amanda was being dragged away and the woman was being hurt in the fight. Amanda said that she feared later that the woman might have been punished for trying to help and that she might even have been killed. The woman was the catalyst for Amanda's decision to create an organization aimed at helping victims of the war-torn country.

Amanda's Father

Amanda's father was a stable influence in her life even though he had divorced Amanda's mother and moved into a gay relationship. His home was less chaotic than that of Amanda's mother and his partner, Perry, sometimes took Amanda and her brothers swimming. Amanda's father was important to Amanda and she accepted his lifestyle and his partner. At one point, Amanda and Nigel were very afraid that they might die. Each gave the other messages to be relayed to their families, in case one of them made it out of the situation alive. One of Amanda's messages was to her father, urging him to visit Thailand with Perry, saying she knew that they would enjoy visiting the country.

Donald Trump

This was not the real name but a pseudonym given to one of the men who was apparently in charge of the money involved in the kidnapping of Amanda and Nigel. He always seemed disgusted by the conditions to which Amanda and Nigel were subjected, but he never forced any changes. When Amanda feared she might be pregnant, he was the one who brought her a pregnancy test. He offered some small kindnesses along the



way but at one point told Amanda that he was certain the other soldiers were going to do something bad to her.

Abdi

Abdi was a Somalian man hired by Amanda and Nigel to oversee their security while in the country. Abdi was in the car with Amanda and Nigel when the kidnapping occurred and Amanda was initially relieved when he was also taken captive, knowing that it meant he wasn't involved in the kidnapping plot. However, she later worried about him a great deal and spent months believing that he had been killed. When Amanda and Abdi met again after Amanda's release, they called each other "brother" and "sister," and Abdi cried when he learned that Amanda had been sexually assaulted while in captivity.



Objects/Places

National Geographic

This is the well-known magazine that featured articles and photos from exotic places. Reading this magazine was the catalyst for Amanda's desire to travel. She collected the magazines as a child and later set out to see the places that she had read about.

The Home of Amanda's Father

The home that Amanda's father shared with his gay partner, Perry, became a symbol of stability and calm to Amanda, especially when her mother's relationships were chaotic and often violent. When Amanda was taken hostage and the kidnappers demanded that her parents raise a huge sum for her release, Amanda knew that her father's home was one of the few assets that the family had. Without mentioning the house specifically, she told her mother to stop whatever they were doing to raise the ransom money. Later, when Amanda had been brutalized repeatedly and was certain the kidnappers were about to kill her, she pleaded with her mother to meet the kidnappers' demands.

The Koran

For an extended period of time, this was all that Amanda had to read. She studied it carefully, and used it to predict what her kidnappers might do to her. An important passage in the Koran dealt with the treatment of slaves. Men were forbidden to have a sexual relationship with women other than their wives, but the exception was a slave. This passage was touted to Amanda when she objected to being raped by one of the soldiers.

The Ransom Money

The ransom money was a bargaining chip from the beginning of the kidnapping. The soldiers insisted that the families of Amanda and Nigel pay for their release and most already had plans for what would become of that money. One of the soldiers, Jamal, planned to get married with his share. Another planned to attend graduate school in New York City. Overall, the money was to fund further military endeavors. While Amanda and Nigel were treated cruelly, they weren't killed and both knew that it was because the soldiers held out the hope that they would eventually be paid to release the pair.



The Drink

This was a fancy club where Amanda worked when she moved to Calgary. She learned that she could earn huge tips working there and came up with the idea to use the money to fund her travels. Prior to her job here, Amanda's dream of traveling the world seemed a distant possibility.

Global Enrichment Foundation

This is the organization founded by Amanda upon her release as a means of providing services in Kenya and Somalia. Amanda said that she wanted to create the organization as a means of reaching the victims of violence in that area. The idea was prompted by her realization that the young soldiers who held her captive for more than a year were victims of that violence and that their lives might have been much different if services had been available for them.

A Camera

The camera is the principal tool of a photographer. Amanda was captivated by the idea that she could be paid to travel, telling the world about the people and places that she saw. She bought a camera as a means to put herself on the path to becoming a journalist.

Dark Star Safari

This was a book by Paul Theroux that many of the young backpackers read, including Amanda and Nigel. Amanda cited the first line which read, "All news out of Africa is bad. It made me want to go there..." This seemed to be a driving force with Amanda as well as she set out for war-torn and devastated countries.

The Mosque near the Escape House

Amanda and Nigel began naming the various houses where they were held. One was called the Electric House because it had electrical problems. Another became known as the Escape House because Amanda and Nigel managed to get out of the house but were captured again when they sought refuge in a nearby Mosque. They had hoped they might find protection in the Mosque and the fact that they didn't was very difficult for Amanda to understand.

Red Deer and Sylvan Lake

Amanda and her family lived in Red Deer until her parents divorced. Amanda's mother moved with the children to Sylvan Lake while her father remained in Red Deer with his



gay partner. Amanda described these places in some detail, including the home that Amanda's father purchased with its well-tended flower gardens and the dumpsters around her mother's apartment building in Sylvan Lake. These towns were minor settings in the story and were important only because of Amanda's memories of her childhood.

Themes

Religious and Cultural Differences

There were a number of cultural and religious differences that affected Amanda during her travels. When she was in Bangladesh, she discovered that few people were willing to interact with her because she was a woman traveling alone. She had to create a bit of a scene in order to get past the stigma and find someone willing to rent her a room. One night she heard someone shuffling around outside that room and began to fear that someone was trying to break in. She was fearful and knew she had reason to be afraid, but she also knew that she couldn't create a scene. If she had accused a man of wrongdoing, she would likely have been blamed for causing the problem and she would have lost her room.

This theme came into play a great deal later, when Amanda was held captive. She was raped by the soldiers repeatedly and when she appealed to one of the kidnappers for help, he told her that the Koran allowed a man to do what he wanted with a person he owned. In this case, Amanda was completely at the mercy of the captors and there was nothing she could do about it. When she escaped and made her way to a nearby mosque, it was obvious the people there heard and comprehended her pleas for help. Despite that, they turned her back over to her captives and even joined in, helping take Amanda and Nigel back. Amanda also noted the devotion of those practicing the Islam faith. She said that the religion demanded a great deal from the followers. While she didn't talk about the lackadaisical attitudes of some other faiths, she seemed to be making that comparison.

Amanda's Desire to Travel

Amanda first began to dream of traveling to foreign countries when she was very small. She lived in an unstable home with her mother and two brothers; they often faced violent situations because of the men in Lori's life. As a means of escape, Amanda lost herself in National Geographic magazines. She read the articles and examined the photos, and dreamed of experiencing those things for herself. Amanda might have remained safely in her own country if she hadn't landed a job with huge tips that provided the means for the first trip.

Amanda and her then-boyfriend, Jamie, spent months in South America, and she became even more determined to travel more extensively. When Amanda ran out of money, she returned home and worked to save more, always with the idea of planning another trip. When she and Jamie split up, she found another friend willing to travel. When that friend wasn't available, Amanda traveled on her own even though it meant facing some difficulties as a woman traveling alone in ultra-conservative countries. At one point, hotels refused to rent her a room because she was a woman traveling alone.



Amanda became determined to have a room and refused to leave a hotel until the manager gave in and agreed to let her stay.

Amanda was never willing to stop traveling and she became caught up in counting the number of countries she had visited. She noted that when someone asked her about her life, she answered by saying that she was a traveler, out to see the world. It wasn't until she met Nigel that she came up with the idea of trying to make money from her travels. As she began to sell freelance articles, Amanda became more outgoing and put herself in some potentially embarrassing and dangerous situations, all in an effort to continue traveling. An important aspect of this theme was seen in Amanda's actions after her release. She founded an organization to help the victims of war-torn countries and continued to travel, including return trips to Somalia.

Amanda's Attitude Towards Danger

Amanda's attitude towards danger and dangerous situations became a major theme in this story. The reader saw a drastic change on this subject as Amanda began to travel. Amanda's first trip happened not long after a terrorist attack on the United States. She noted that dangers that had barely seemed possible were now occurring regularly and this obviously worried her though not enough to keep her from traveling.

Amanda also read a great deal about the dangers of eating raw fruit and drinking the water in the South American countries and she strictly avoided these situations at first. When Jamie saw a vendor selling fresh fruit, he suggested they go buy some. Amanda refused, opting to be safe because of the dangers she'd read about. However, Amanda soon became more comfortable with her travels. She lost her fear of traveling alone and took a job in the war-torn Baghdad as a news reporter. Even being robbed at gunpoint in Afghanistan didn't dissuade her from traveling.

When Amanda began crossing into the more dangerous countries, her mother begged her to stop but Amanda didn't allow her family's concern to keep her from her adventures. As she became serious about the freelancing, she became convinced that she needed to go to the most dangerous places in order to get the best stories. While she might have been somewhat uneasy about the situation in Somalia, she didn't hesitate to face the danger. She even wrote an article for her hometown paper about the dangerous situation in Somalia. She made it clear that no one was truly safe in the country and that article was published just a couple of days before Amanda was kidnapped.

Another important aspect of this theme is seen when Amanda talked to her mother about the ransom. Realizing that her father and Perry might be considering their house as a means of raising some money, she urged her mother to stop whatever steps they were taking. The dramatic change in Amanda's attitude towards danger put her in a desperate situation and the story concluded with Amanda having to face the consequences of that action, culminating in her efforts to forgive herself.



Amanda's Hope

Hope remained an important theme throughout the story, especially to Amanda. Amanda found ways to bolster her thoughts during her captivity and she became more creative as time passed. When they were initially captured, she and Nigel hoped that the gunmen were going to rob them and let them go. During the early days of captivity, Amanda hoped the kidnappers would realize her family had no money, and would let them go. As time passed, she began to hope that the kidnappers would merely tire of the situation and let them go.

When the situation became dire and Amanda knew her life was in danger, her hope waned for short periods, but she always returned to it. For example, when she was being raped and tortured, Amanda briefly considered suicide as a means of escaping the situation. She didn't go through with it and came to realize that her hope of returning home was greater than her fear or her pain.

An interesting aspect of this theme is seen when Nigel seemed to lose hope. Amanda was hurt by that attitude and it seemed to weigh on her because it dampened her own hope that they would survive to be released. The need for hope is an integral part of human nature and an important aspect of Amanda's life during captivity.

The Relationship between Amanda and Nigel

Amanda and Nigel met while traveling and their relationship took off immediately. However, there was a lie standing between them and Nigel, unable to withstand the lie, admitted to Amanda that he was married. After the divorce, Amanda and Nigel reconnect briefly but Amanda isn't certain that the relationship can recover. They talked a few times but Amanda felt the relationship wasn't really reaching its previous level.

Amanda called Nigel with an offer to travel to Somalia partly out of necessity – she needed someone to share expenses - but a part of her also wanted to needle him a bit. Amanda was working as a journalist while Nigel seemed to have given up on that dream. When Nigel accepted the invitation, he and Amanda spent some time out together, having meals and drinking prior to their trip into Somalia. Though Nigel seemed to be on the verge of kissing her at one point, Amanda knew the romantic relationship was at an end.

Once they were captured, their relationship changed dramatically. Nigel became Amanda's lifeline. She depended on his presence to help her remain hopeful and to make her feel relatively safe in a dangerous situation. Once Nigel was separated from Amanda, she struggled more than when they were sharing a room. After their failed escape attempt, it was obvious that everyone blamed Amanda and Nigel went along with that idea. Amanda was hurt by what she saw as Nigel's betrayal. Amanda expected that she and Nigel would remain fully committed to their friendship after their release but found that was not possible.



Styles

Structure

The book is divided into 44 chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue. The prologue includes a look at the life Amanda lived as a captive for more than a year. Amanda ends the prologue with the thought that she sometimes believed she would die in Somalia, never to be found. The epilogue included a few of the steps Amanda took once she returned home, including her path to self-forgiveness.

The first chapter opened with the memory of National Geographic magazines from Amanda's childhood, which had first sparked a desire to see the world. In Chapter Two, Amanda moved to the larger city of Calgary where she worked and began to realize her desire to travel was a dream within reach. She traveled first with a boyfriend and later with a friend before taking off on her own, returning home between trips to work and save more money.

By chapter seven, Amanda was traveling in dangerous countries and her mother expressed concern. Amanda and Nigel met in Chapter Nine and Amanda became intrigued with the idea of being a journalist, earning money during her travels. In Chapter Twelve, she became a television reporter in Baghdad but soon realized the station owners were changing the content of her reporting to meet their biased standards. Amanda traveled to Africa in Chapter Thirteen.

In Chapter Fourteen, Nigel joined Amanda for the trip to Somalia. In Chapter Sixteen, Nigel and Amanda were captured. The remaining chapters of the book were used to tell the story of their captivity and the efforts made to secure their release. The digital version included a brief biographical sketch of Amanda and her co-author, Sara Corbett.

The chapters were identified by number and title. In most cases, the title offered a clue to the reader about the contents of that chapter. For example, Chapter Sixteen was titled "Taken." This chapter detailed the kidnapping of Nigel and Amanda. Chapter Twenty was titled "Amina." This chapter detailed Amanda's decision to pretend a conversion to Muslim and her decision to take Amina as her new name. Chapter Thirty-Four was titled "New Rules" and covered the new circumstances of Amanda's captivity following the attempted escape.

Perspective

"A House is the Sky" was written in first person from the perspective of Amanda Lindhout. Amanda was one of five people captured while in Somalia and one of two held for months in captivity; The other was her former boyfriend, Nigel Brennan. While there were quotes and information about Nigel, it was all presented from Amanda's point of view. While there's no reason to believe that Amanda told anything but the truth, the reader has to keep in mind that the story is strictly from her perspective. For example,



Amanda presented the story of when she and Nigel tried to escape. Amanda said it was Nigel's idea to try to get away and that she might have backed out if he hadn't insisted they could be successful. When they were captured, Nigel put the blame entirely on Amanda and told her that she should accept that blame. The situation became desperate for Amanda at that point. Amanda also told of Nigel's emotional state early in the captivity period. She said that he cried and fought back tears often while she worked to engage their captors in an attempt to ensure they remained alive. It's left to the reader to decide whether Amanda's account might be slanted to put herself in a better light. The reader should also keep in mind that Amanda told the story months after their release. There were quotes and many details that Amanda presents as fact but that might actually have been changed somewhat. For example, Amanda might have forgotten exact quotes and sequences of events.

Tone

The overall tone of the story is one of hope through dangerous situations. It would be obvious to the reader from the beginning that Amanda survived because she co-authored the book. The first chapter of the book described Amanda's childhood which was important in fully understanding Amanda's motivations and attitudes. She wanted to travel the world from an early age as a means of escaping her chaotic life. The question of nature-versus-nurture will come into play for some readers. Amanda described the differences between her time with her mother and the time spent in her father's home. At her father's house, Amanda had a bedroom of her own and plenty of music and books aimed at teen girls. The men in her mother's life were often violent and there was no stability. It was while she was with her mother that Amanda began her virtual escape through National Geographic. Amanda's tone regarding these differences suggested that she might never have developed the desire to travel if her life had been more stable, but she didn't answer that question directly. There was another interesting tone seen when Amanda described her travels to her parents. She indicated that she ended the missives with sentences such as, "I'm having the best time ever," followed by a series of exclamation points. Her tone seemed somewhat rebellious, considering that her mother had tried to dissuade her from entering the more dangerous countries. The tone in the final chapters did not change, though Amanda was obviously fearful for her life. She described the hope that continued to motivate her though she briefly considered suicide as a means of escaping the situation.



Quotes

When the magazine asked ARE THE SWISS FORESTS IN PERIL?, I was pretty sure I needed to know.

-- Amanda (Chapter 1 paragraph 31)

Importance: This quote came from Amanda's early infatuation with National Geographic. It was this magazine that made her begin to dream of the possibility of traveling to other countries.

These people were looking at me – with my harmless ponytail and jeans and battered blue backpack, with my hoop earrings and eager-beaver smile – and seeing some sort of threat.

-- Amanda (Chapter 6 paragraph 43)

Importance: Amanda had tried to check into several hotels in Bangladesh but was repeatedly turned away because she was a woman traveling alone. She was initially just angry and so tired that she wanted to resolve the issue and get some rest. It wasn't until she'd been turned away several times that she realized that these people were serious on their distrust of her. For Amanda, this was a moment of cultural awareness, but it wasn't enough to dissuade her from continuing her travels.

My grandmother, I knew, would have labeled it a much-needed attack of common sense, but that, to my mind, was code for being afraid of new things.

-- Amanda (Chapter 8 paragraph 3)

Importance: Just before this sentence, Amanda was admitting that she'd been disturbed by the story of a woman who was kidnapped in Kabul. Up to now, Amanda had seemed to be unable to grasp the idea that something could happen to her but the story of the kidnapping raised at least some slight doubts about her determination to see the war-torn countries. She didn't heed the warning and was robbed in Afghanistan, but did escape unharmed.

The first lines went like this: 'All news out of Africa is bad.' It made me want to go there...

-- Amanda (Chapter 9 paragraph 4)

Importance: This was a quote from a travelogue by Paul Theroux called Dark Star Safari, which Amanda said had become a must-have for the backpackers who were traveling around the world. She had read it twice and this was the book Nigel was reading the first time she met him.

I understood that it was a hostile dangerous place and few reporters dared go there. The truth was, I was glad for the lack of competition.

-- Amanda (Chapter 12 paragraph 57)

Importance: Amanda had just left her job with the television station and was working as



a freelance journalist. She wanted desperately to break into the business and had just found a clip of herself, dismissing the efforts of other journalists, and was desperate for a break that would further her career.

Maybe it was the sight of our freshly washed SUV ripping around the Old City that caused people to ask questions, to wonder if we could make them rich.

-- Amanda (Chapter 16 paragraph 1)

Importance: Amanda gave this comment looking back on the day of the kidnapping. She said that someone tipped off the kidnappers that there were foreigners staying in the hotel and indicated that there was the general misconception that all foreigners had wealthy families that would pay a ransom.

It occurred to me that were our situations reversed, if Ali were captive and unmoored from everything he knew, he would manage to keep his appointments, to live by the order imposed by his faith. As my own days felt increasingly like a long wait for nothing, I realized there was probably strength in that.

-- Amanda (Chapter 20 paragraph 4)

Importance: Amanda was intrigued by the order and devotion of the Islam faith from the first time she witnessed the rows of men, dutifully stopping everything to pray at the appointed time. This conversation with one of her captor, Ali, prompted Amanda to ask for English versions of the Koran.

Why had I funneled my savings into plane tickets and not tuition? For fun, I pictured myself in a lecture hall, a dorm room, a cellar pub late on a Thursday night.

-- Amanda (Chapter 24 paragraph 16)

Importance: Amanda had talked about the money she was making in Calgary. She said she had “real money” in the bank and that it would fund a semester of college, but she'd chosen instead to use the money for traveling. She never really questioned that choice until she was being held captive and knew that her life was in serious danger.

I'd seen the outside world – our immediate surroundings – a landscape of big bonfires and young men wandering around with guns. If we were to run, it wasn't as if we were running toward any certain safety.

-- Amanda (Chapter 30 paragraph 7)

Importance: Amanda and Nigel had been separated but were able to communicate through an open window. It was Nigel who came up with the idea of escaping through a bathroom window, but Amanda - though she desperately wanted out - was initially afraid. She knew there wasn't any guarantee that they would reach safety but she was also concerned about what would happen to them if they were caught and was fearful that their captors might take out their anger on the three Somalian men who were also being held captive.



I think you should just take this one.
-- Nigel (Chapter 32 paragraph 4)

Importance: Nigel and Amanda had been captured after their escape attempt and the captors were furious, beating them both and threatening to kill them. Nigel pointed out that the soldiers believed it was Amanda's idea to try to escape and Nigel told Amanda that she should accept the blame. Amanda saw this as betrayal and was heartbroken over Nigel's obvious effort to escape their captor's wrath. Within a short time, Amanda realized that Nigel was afraid and she forgave him.

I did this in the dim light of the bathroom, testing the blade's sharpness against my skin, knowing that if I wanted to, I could probably slash my wrists with it. It was a thought, an idea waiting to be activated, but nothing more.
-- Amanda (Chapter 35 paragraph 5)

Importance: Amanda was given some basic toiletries, including a razor because she was forced to obey the dictates of her captors, shaving her body hair regularly. With the razor in hand, she considered that suicide would be a possibility but said she never came to the point that she was willing to go through with it.

Having invested twelve months of time and expense, and having conjured some idea that all Westerners swam in rivers of cash, my captors weren't interested in compromising on money. They were convinced that my mother was the gatekeeper to their fortune.
-- Amanda (Chapter 41 paragraph 9)

Importance: The man Lori knew as "Adam" had been speaking for the group, trying to get the ransom, and a great deal of the time he was talking directly to Lori. The kidnappers initially demanded millions for Amanda and Nigel. There was a great deal of maneuvering on the part of government and the two families, but the kidnapper remained convinced that Lori was simply refusing to pay the money.



Topics for Discussion

Amanda's Childhood

Describe Amanda's childhood. How did her childhood impact her need to travel?

Earning Money

Describe how Amanda earned money as a young woman on her own in Calgary. How does this affect her dream of traveling?

Destinations

Describe at least two of the countries Amanda visited and explain why she might have gone there.

Bangladesh

Describe Amanda's reception in Bangladesh as a woman traveling alone. What motivated this reception, and how did Amanda handle it?

Freelancing

How did Amanda come to discover freelance reporters and photographers? Why was she interested? What were some of the problems freelancers encountered that wasn't a problem for journalists on assignment from specific publications?

Nigel

Describe Nigel, his life, and the lie that he initially told Amanda about his wife. What does this tell (or suggest to) readers about Nigel?

Misconceptions

Describe some of the misconceptions the captors had about all foreigners. Why do you believe these misconceptions existed?



The Captors

Name and describe at least three of the soldiers who held Amanda and Nigel captive. Why do you think Amanda shares the information that she does about each captor in her book? Is it significant that she didn't find all of them evil?

Men and Women

Describe how men and women were treated differently during Amanda's travels, especially in Somalia. How were Nigel and Amanda treated differently?

Themes

What did you consider to be the most important theme of the book? Why? List at least three examples of this theme in the story.