

I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced Study Guide

I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced by Nujood Ali

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Summary

I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced was written by Nujood Ali with Delphine Minoui. It is the true story of a ten-year-old Yemeni girl named Nujood. The story takes place in a rustic village called Khardji, Yemen. Khardji is so small and remote that it does not make it onto most maps of the country.

Nujood was a fun-loving, free-spirited ten-year-old, who loved school and drawing with her colored pencils. Like any ten-year-old, she loved playing with her siblings and the neighborhood children. Then, Nujood is forced by her father to marry a thirty-year-old man whom she does not meet until after the marriage contract is signed.

Nujood's mother had been forced into a marriage when she was sixteen and had given birth to sixteen children, some of whom died young or at birth. But the family had lots of mouths to feed and Ali, the father, supported his family with the livestock he raised. The family, who lived in a house without electricity, running water or a telephone, barely made ends meet.

When scandal hit his family, they were forced to leave the village and all their animals and possessions behind. They moved to the big city of Sana'a where their home life continued to deteriorate. After Ali lost his job sweeping streets, he began spending his days with other men in the neighborhood, chewing khat and gossiping about their neighbors. One of the men in the group, a thirty-year-old named Faez asked Ali to agree to a marriage between him and one of Ali's daughters. Two of his older daughters were already married and ten-year-old Nujood was next in line. Ali readily agreed to the marriage. It would be one less mouth to feed. Ali met with the men in his family and everyone gave their consent for the union. Her mother was sympathetic but didn't protest. In Yemen, the men decided everything. No one asked Nujood; her father just told her that she was getting married. Nujood was very naïve; she didn't even know how babies were made. She also didn't understand what marriage meant.

There were two marriage ceremonies – one for the women and one for the men – that were held after the marriage contract was signed by Ali and Faez's family. It was after the marriage ceremonies that she first met her husband. She was sobbing and depressed when she was forced to travel back to her old village and leave her family behind. Although Faez had promised not to touch Nujood until after she matured, he violated her that first night and terrorized her every night for a month.

Nujood was a spirited young girl and thought of nothing but escape. On a visit back to Sana'a, she ran away to the courthouse and told the judges that she wanted a divorce. When they saw the tiny, young girl the judges couldn't believe that she was a married woman. Nujood found support in the court system and from her lawyer who was an advocate of women's rights. Nujood went through a horrid ordeal but finally won her freedom and was able to return to being a child. She was hailed as a heroine and became an inspiration to other abused young girls in the Middle East.



Chapters 1 - 3

Summary

Chapter 1: In Court

April 2, 2008

People were bustling around in the courthouse yard. Some men were dressed in western style suits and ties; others were dressed in zannas, the traditional garb of northern Yemen. Women were shouting and weeping and seemed furious. Nujood's head was spinning. She could catch only a few angry words such as "childcare, justice, human rights." A large man in a turban in the courthouse was carrying documents in a plastic bag telling everyone that his land was stolen from him and he intended to get it back.

The chaotic atmosphere made Nujood think that it was probably like Al-Qa-Square where out-of-work laborers go to commiserate and vie for day jobs. Aba, her father, had often talked about it. After first prayers, it was every man for himself in snagging the first job announced. Nujood was only ten years old and wanted more than anything for someone to listen to her, but, she was so small that no one seemed to even notice her. She had thought the courthouse would be a calm place where justice was meted out.

Nujood vowed not to return to her parents' home until she got what she wanted. Her mother had sent her out to buy bread, but she went to the courthouse instead. After taking a minibus and then a cab, she wound up in the courtyard not knowing where to go or to whom to speak. After asking around, she was directed up a flight of stairs where she could find the "judge." She fought through the crowded hallways, feeling almost faint. But, she couldn't collapse. She had to see her mission through. There was Arabic writing on the walls, but Nujood couldn't read them. She had been forced to leave school in her second year.

Nujood was fearful that a group of policemen would spot her and arrest her for running away from home. She latched onto a woman's veil hoping to get her attention. She asked the woman to take her to a judge, any judge. She had never disobeyed her father or brothers before now. But, she felt she had a right to seek justice. The woman told her to follow her. She was led to a room where a judge sat behind a desk fielding questions from all directions. She felt some comfort seeing a photo of the president of her country, Ali Abdullah al-Saleh. Hearing the noon call-to-prayer, Nujood thought if there was a God he would come and save her. Nujood closed her eyes and thought of Khardji and that she did not want to go back there. The next thing she knew the judge was standing over her asking what he could do for her. She told him quite directly that she wanted a divorce.

Chapter 2: Khardji



Nujood was born and raised in the village of Khardji. Nujood's mother Shoya was just sixteen when she married Nujood's father, Ali Mohammad al-Ahdel. She had been offered no option. He added another wife four years later, and Shoya silently accepted his decision. Nujood felt resigned to marrying without realizing what she was getting into. Nujood didn't even know how babies were made. Shoya bore sixteen children. She had three miscarriages and one child who died at birth. Four of Nujood's siblings died before she was born. There were no doctors to treat illnesses or monitor a child's health. Like all her other babies, Shoya had Nujood at home without medical assistance. In Nujood's case, an older sister Jamila cut the cord for her mother. There were no official records of Nujood's birth. Shoya was uncertain about the year she was born in and whether she was born in June, July, or August.

In Arabic, Khardji means "outside" or at the ends of the earth. It was an apt description for the village that rarely showed up on any map of the area. The closest big city is Hajja, an important city in the northwestern part of Yemen. Nujood's brothers walked two hours to school. Nujood and her sisters didn't attend school often. Her parents were illiterate and saw no reason for girls to learn to read or write. A nearby river was the family's only source of water. It was so arid in that region of Yemen that everyone had to drink several liters of water each day to stay hydrated. They cooked in a wood stove called the tandoor. Dinner was served on a large cloth on the floor. The family ate with their hands from the serving dishes. There were no knives or forks or spoons.

While Shoya tended to the house and children, Nujood's father left each day at first light to take the animals out to graze. He always wore a dagger at his waist. One day when Shoya was in the city of Sana'a for a health problem, a violent disagreement broke out between her father and the other villagers. Nujood was only two or three but recalled that the argument was over Mona, one of her sisters. Mona was thirteen and was suddenly married. She had apparently brought dishonor to the village. Ali had to take his children and leave his animals and possessions behind and move to Sana'a.

The culture shock of the big city versus the tiny village was dramatic. They moved to the ground floor in an apartment in the slums. Ali was depressed. He had no idea how he would support his family. He found a job as a sweeper but barely made enough to pay the rent. Fares, the fourth oldest child, wanted nice clothes and shoes like the other boys. One day after an argument, Fares left and never returned. Ali was depressed and lost his job. Shoya suffered and sobbed through the night. Two years after he left, he called to let the family know he was okay and was working as a shepherd in Saudi Arabia.

Fares was Nujood's favorite brother. She dreamed of his return and wondered how he had traveled so far and exactly where Saudi Arabia was. In Sana'a, Nujood was allowed to attend school in an all-girls class of seventy crammed in together in a small space. She was fascinated by the stories of her best friend, Malak, who told her about the sea and beach. Nujood had never seen either. To the children, water was rain which was a scarce commodity. When it hailed in the summer, Nujood and the other children would collect the hailstones and then as they melted let them drizzle on their hot faces. She had learned to count in school and would count how many hailstones she could collect.



Mona moved with the family and was joined by her husband. The couple had two children, and her husband was eventually accepted into the family. One day Mona's husband and Nujood's big sister Jamila went missing. Had they run away to seek a better life? Only later would Nujood understand what had occurred.

Then, one evening in 2008 when Nujood got home from school, she was informed that she was to be married.

Chapter 3: The Judge

Judge Abdo thought he had misheard Nujood. She was so young and small. He asked her how she could already be married and seeking a divorce. She wanted a divorce because her husband beat her. The judge knew that the young girl was in a dilemma. She swallowed her pride and tradition and confessed to him that she was not a virgin. The judge vowed to help her and she was elated. She would soon be free. But, the judge phoned the chief judge, Mohammad Al-Ghazi, who joined them with the disturbing news that the process was a long and delicate one and that there was no guarantee that they'd be successful. They had never observed the marriage of a girl so young, but Yemen girls were often married before the legal age of fifteen. They were certain of something else: to their knowledge, no girl her age had ever been granted a divorce because no such girl had ever come to them seeking one.

It was nearly 2 p.m. on Wednesday, and the court was to close until Saturday. The judges both felt it was out of the question to send Nujood home. Judge Abdo was willing to take her home. However, since his family was out of town, he couldn't. It was against the law for a young girl to be alone with a man. Another judge, Abdel Wahed, volunteered to take Nujood in. His family was home and he would be breaking no traditions by having her in his home. On the ride to his home, Abdel told her how brave she was and that they would help her.

Nujood was introduced to Saba, Abdel's wife, who was very sympathetic to her plight. Their daughter, who was three years younger, took Nujood to her room to play. Their four sons were watching TV. There were two TVs in the house. Nujood could not imagine such luxury.

Analysis

The setting for Chapters 1-3 is a courthouse yard filled with people. Nujood has come to the courthouse to find a judge who will grant her a divorce. She is only 10 years old. At the courthouse, she finds Judge Abdo. He thinks that he has misunderstood the child's request for a divorce. He calls the chief judge Mohammad Al-Ghazi. The chief judge tells Nujood and Judge Abdo that obtaining a divorce will not be easy. The judges agree that Nujood cannot return home that evening. However, Judge Abdo's family is out of town. Since it is against the law for Nujood to be alone with a man, she goes home with another judge, Abdel Wahed. She meets his wife, who is sympathetic to Nujood's situation.

Vocabulary

Zanna, chaos, minarets, muezzins, rials, bewildered, inscriptions, contaminated, labyrinth, barrage, impetuous, microscopic, dehydration, protagonist, degenerated, rambunctious, revelry, capricious.



Chapters 4 - 5

Summary

Chapter 4: The Wedding

Early 2008

Nujood and Mona had always liked to window shop and gaze at the evening gowns in the store windows. Nujood was especially drawn to a white wedding dress which was in sharp contrast to the black-clad garb covering the married women in Yemen from head to toe. Mona assured Nujood that one day she would have a lovely wedding. Neither girl knew that it would come so soon and that it would be anything but lovely.

Initially, Nujood felt relief at news of her impending wedding. It would be an escape from her home life that had steadily deteriorated since Aba had been without steady employment. To survive, Nujood's mother had been selling off personal items. The day came when there was nothing left to sell. Mona and her brothers took to begging on the streets. Mona was arrested and sent to a detention center. Nujood eventually joined the others on the street.

When Nujood's father wasn't in the square seeking day labor, he would sit with neighbors and chew khat, a leafy green plant indigenous to the area. It was during one of these sessions that a thirty-year-old man suggested that their two families blend. His name was Faez Ali Thamer. He worked as a delivery man. Like Nujood and her family, Faez came from Khardji. He was looking for a wife. Aba's mind was made up immediately. He accepted Faez's offer. Nujood was next in line to marry.

Nujood heard Aba and Mona discussing her marriage. Mona argued that she was too young. Aba claimed it would protect her from being raped like Mona and Jamila had been. Faez had vowed not to touch Nujood until she was older. Nujood sensed that her mother was sad about the marriage; but, she also knew that Yemeni men gave all the orders. Aba also stressed that he would have one less mouth to feed.

Faez's family insisted that Nujood quit school a month before the ceremony. She had to say goodbye to Malak. It was the last time she was to see her. Nujood had to say goodbye to her two favorite teachers and leave behind her favorite studies – math, Koran study, and, in particular, drawing. On her wedding day, Nujood could hardly see through her tears as her cousins clapped their hands when they saw her arrive. The celebration for the women was held in Nujood's small apartment. The men celebrated at a neighbor's house. Only men were present during the signing of the marriage contract several days before the ceremony. Faez agreed not to touch Nujood for a year following her first period.

Nujood refused to dance at her celebration. She sensed that her entire life was changing and not for the good. She sat in the corner and greeted her guests politely but



without a smile. The next morning, Faez came by to claim his wife. Her mother hugged her tightly and pulled out a black niqab, the full-length garb that married women had to wear in public. Nujood was now a married woman and had to wear the black costume. When she entered the SUV that was filled with other women, it was the first time she saw her husband. He was short and unshaven and had greasy hands. She cried as she watched her mother from the SUV's window. She watched until her mother disappeared into the horizon. Although she thought only of escape, the farther the car drove north, the more she realized that she was trapped.

As they drove to Khardji, Nujood thought of all the things she would miss about Sana'a, particularly the old city called Bal al-Yemen where she loved to stroll with her sisters. There were so many sights and sounds and smells in the old city that it was like an exciting adventure to visit there. Some of the women in the old city dressed in colorful outfits. She recalled getting lost one time in the old city. Now she was lost again in a world of strangers and grown-ups where she didn't belong. The SUV got stuck in the sand as they turned off the paved road toward the village. When Nujood stretched her legs while the men were deciding what to do about the truck, Faez spoke to Nujood for the first time. He told her they would be on their way again in a neighbor's pick-up truck. It was a bumpy ride the rest of the way to the village.

Khardji had not changed since Nujood last saw it. It still seemed like the end of earth. Nujood's unfriendly mother-in-law awaited them on the threshold of the house they stopped at. She had wrinkled skin like a lizard and had missing and rotting teeth. No one seemed surprised by Nujood's tender age. It seemed it was not an exceptional occurrence among the village tribes. The adults talked about Nujood but not to her. Her mother-in-law vowed to teach her to work so she could pull her load.

Faez came into her room in the middle of the night. She begged him to leave her alone, but he told her he was the boss. He had decided that they would sleep in the same bed. She stood and ran out into the courtyard yelling for help. Faez caught up with her, brought her back to the bedroom, and pushed her down on the mat. He took off his tunic, pulled at her nightshirt, and ran his hands over her body, pressing his lips against hers. His smell was nauseating. Faez forced himself on her while she continued to scream for help. It hurt terribly; finally, she passed out.

Chapter 5: Shada

April 9, 2008

Shada, who was named Nujood's lawyer, promised to get her a divorce. Shada was a very important lawyer and one of the best female attorneys in all of Yemen. She was known to be a staunch defender of women's rights. She did not wear the traditional dress. She wore more make-up and looked like a movie star.

Judge Abdel and his wife were very good and welcoming to Nujood. She enjoyed a lovely weekend with them. At night, her sleep was fitful always fearing that the door would burst open and the monster would return. When she returned to court, Judge Al-



Ghazi told her that it would be difficult for her to file a complaint against her father and her husband. The marriage contract had been drawn up and signed by all the men in the families and was therefore valid. The best thing to do in the near term would be to arrest Aba and Faez.

The judge asked that Nujood accompany the arresting officers to make sure they found the right address. Nujood was naturally frightened. Her mother must have been worried about her. Her family probably thought she ran away like her brother and sister had. She had heard that her father was ill, even coughing up blood. Could he survive imprisonment? When she arrived at the family home with the police, the door was locked. To her relief, the police decided to return later without her to make the arrest.

Nujood couldn't continue to stay with Judge Abdel and his family. Judge Abdo asked Nujood the name of her favorite uncle. She responded that it was her mother's brother. He was married to two women and had seven children. He hadn't objected to Nujood's marriage, but he was kind and didn't beat his children. Her favorite uncle took Nujood in without any questions.

Nujood spent her long days at the courthouse hoping for some finality about her divorce request. Nujood had been discouraged by the lack of progress until Shada took her case over. She gave it new life and Nujood new hope. She told Nujood that she was like a daughter to her and she would never abandon her. She assured her that the hardest part of her journey was over. She had had the strength to run away and ask for help.

Analysis

Chapter 4 is a flashback of early in 2008. The chapter opens with Nujood window shopping with her friend Mona. They are looking in the window at wedding dresses. Nujood likes the beautiful white dress, which is quite different from the black clothing that married women in her culture are forced to wear. At this point, Nujood has no idea that she will be married very soon.

Nujood's father named Aba is not steadily employed. When a man named Faez comes from Khardji looking for a wife, her father strikes a deal and offers Nujood. Nujood and Faez are married. Though the man promises that he will not force himself upon her, he does on their wedding night. Nujood responds as a scared, hurt child. However, she resolves that she will get a divorce.

In Chapter 5, the story returns to the present in April, 2008. After telling the judges her story, Nujood is appointed a lady attorney named Shada. Shada is considered one of the best attorneys. She is a champion of women's rights. In the meantime, Nujood goes to live with her favorite uncle who is her mother's brother.

Vocabulary

Escapade, incarceration, tenacity, chignon, protocol, notary, improvise, upheaval, undulating, impassively, languishing, famished, prestige, discomfited.



Chapters 6 - 7

Summary

Chapter 6: Running Away

After the first night with her husband, Nujood's mother-in-law helped her clean up. Her sister-in-law congratulated her on becoming a woman at age ten. She avoided looking at her husband. After he ate breakfast, he was gone all day. Nujood prayed all day for the Almighty to save her. Nujood was not allowed to leave the house. School was out of the question as was playing with children her age. Nujood panicked each day when Faez returned. When Nujood tried to resist his advances, he started to beat her. His mother encouraged his abuse of her. In addition to the physical abuse, he taunted and ridiculed her in front of his family.

Nujood was tortured every night for twenty or thirty days. She had lost count. Her only thought was to escape and return to Sana'a. There was no electricity or transportation. There were no phones in Khardji. Her hometown had become her prison. One day, Faez agreed to take Nujood to Sana'a to visit her parents. He would stay with a relative for the visit and they would return together to Khardji. Silently, Nujood vowed to never return.

Back with her parents, her father told her she could not leave her husband. Her mother told her that such was the way of life. Aba warned her that if she divorced her husband his relatives would kill him for the disgrace his daughter would bring to the family. Nujood realized that if she were to leave her husband, she would be on her own. When they were alone, her mother would cry and tell Nujood she missed her. However, there was nothing she could do for her.

During her stay in Khardji, she appealed to every relative she knew, but no one could help. Finally, she talked with Dowla, her father's second wife. She was one of the few family members who voiced objection to Nujood's marriage. But, no one listened to her. After listening to Nujood's tale of woe, Dowla told her that she must go to the court for help. Dowla slipped her 200 rials – the money she had begged for on the streets that morning.

The next morning, Nujood's mother gave her 150 rials to buy bread. It was for that moment that Nujood had been waiting. Nujood started out for the bakery, but she took a detour and headed to the courthouse. She was afraid the entire time she spent heading for there – afraid of being recognized by a relative or neighbor. She waited at a bus stop and took the minivan to the downtown area. She got off at the end of the line and had to figure out where the courthouse was because she was afraid to ask anyone in fear of exposing herself. She decided to take a taxi and told the driver to take her to the courthouse. She was thankful that he didn't question her about being alone. When she



emerged from the taxi in front of the courthouse she was sure that her life was going to change.

Chapter 7: The Divorce

April 15, 2008

Shada had waged a media campaign that paid off. It got her the needed attention. The courtroom was packed. To Nujood, it was a miracle. Shada had contacted newspapers, TV networks, and feminist organizations to draw attention to Nujood's dilemma. Photographers were calling Nujood's name and telling her to smile for the camera. Nujood was nervous, but Shada assured her that it would all work out. Beyond the photographers and the crowd, Nujood was worried about the reason for the jammed courtroom – her divorce. What exactly would happen? Can the monster just say no and deny her a divorce?

Shada introduced Nujood to a reporter, Hamed Thabet of the Yemen Times, who was sympathetic to her story. He interviewed Nujood and took photos of Aba and Faez in their jail cells. The article he wrote gained a lot of attention throughout all of Yemen.

As Nujood entered the crowded courtroom, she spotted Aba and Faez being escorted in by police officers. Faez snarled ugly comments at Shada but it didn't faze her. Nujood could see that her father was angry and shamed at the same time. She wondered if her relationship with her father was over. Chief Justice Al-Ghazi and Judge Abdo were presiding over the hearing.

Judge Abdo proclaimed that Nujood had been forced into a marriage that she did not consent to and that she had been sexually and physically abused by her husband. Judge Abdo announced that Nujood was seeking a divorce. Faez claimed that Nujood had agreed to the marriage and denied that he had abused her in any way. Aba stated that he agreed to the marriage and had told Faez that Nujood was thirteen. He married her off to protect her, he claimed. He was afraid that she would be kidnapped like her older sisters were.

Faez requested that the hearing resume in a private room away from the crowd and cameras. There he admitted that he had consummated the marriage but that he had been very gentle with Nujood. Angered by his lies, Nujood shouted out that he was lying. Faez blamed Aba for lying about Nujood's age. He would agree to the divorce if Aba paid him back the equivalent of \$250 that he had paid for the bride. But, Aba had never received any money for the union.

In the end, the judge announced that the divorce was granted. Nujood was jubilant. Both Aba and Faez would be released without a fine or sentence. Upon leaving the courthouse, a Saudi benefactor slipped Nujood the equivalent of \$750. A woman in Iraq wanted to transfer some gold to her. Nujood was a divorcee and a heroine. Nujood's uncles were angry and shouted at Shada that she had sullied the reputation of the family.



Analysis

Chapter 6 is a flashback. It begins with Nujood's mother-in-law helping her on the morning after Nujood's wedding night. Faez continues to force himself on her every night. When she resists, he beats her. His mother encourages the way Faez treats Nujood. After a month or so of torture, Faez agrees to take Nujood to Sana to visit her parents. Nujood makes up her mind to never return to Khardji. Though her parents will not help her, her father's second wife named Dowla gives her 200 rials and tells her to go to the court for help. The next morning, Nujood's mother gives her 150 rials for bread. Nujood starts off to the bakery. Then, she has a change of heart and goes to the courthouse instead.

In Chapter 7, the story returns to the present with Nujood attending court for her divorce. Shada has taken Nujood's story to the media. On her day in court, the room is filled with supporters for her. In the end, Nujood's request for a divorce is granted. She is a divorcee and a heroine.

Vocabulary

Snivel, loathed, distraught, communal, paltry, pittance, corpulent, hubbub, astonished, media, preliminaries, tribunal, consummate, sullied.



Chapters 8 - 9

Summary

By happChapter 8: The Birthday

Nujood felt renewed and filled with hope. Shada gave her a pink sweatshirt and faded blue jeans. She no longer had to wear the black veil of a married woman. Nujood and Shada had an appointment at the Yemen Times with Hamed and several other journalists. Nujood was impressed with Nadia, the female editor of the newspapers. She was also impressed by the staff of women who appeared to be Americans or Germans and who were all working at computers. They spoke Arabic but with an accent that Nujood thought was English. She vowed that she would speak English one day. She was fascinated by the computers that the women worked at. Nujood was inspired and pictured herself as a journalist or lawyer one day. Nujood was praised and congratulated by the staff.

Entering the meeting room, Nujood was met with a round of applause from the thirty journalists and editors who awaited her. She was gifted with everything from a huge stuffed teddy bear to drawing pencils and pads. Nujood was asked to cut into the large chocolate cake that was presented in her honor. The group decided to sing happy birthday to her and name that day as her birthday since she had never known the actual date of her birth.

Chapter 9: Mona

June 2008

The divorce changed Nujood's life. She returned home from her uncle's house. She still held anger for her father, and he had his own reasons to resent her. However, they did not talk about it. She didn't cry any more. Her bad dreams were going away. Mona's story was still a mystery to her.

Nujood's story traveled around the world. A week didn't go by without a journalist or interested party knocking at her door. Mohammed, her older brother, resented all the attention she was getting. Nujood became very protective of her little sister Haifa. She vowed to speak out against an early marriage for her. She would report it to the police and call Shada and Hamed on the cell phones they had both given her if Haifa faced the same fate as she had.

Two women came to visit Nujood – a foreign journalist and Eman, a women's rights advocate. Eman and the journalist offered to take Nujood and Haifa to an amusement park. As they drove away, Mona ran after them. Mohammed had ordered that she go with them. The family had moved to a different area of the city and Mona wanted to drive through their old neighborhood in Al-Qa. They stopped in front of a mosque where a black-clad woman was begging and holding a small child. The child was Monira,



Mona's child who had been taken from her by her in-laws after her husband was sent to prison. Her mother-in-law brought Monira to beg with her because a child would soften the heart of passersby. Mona took Monira from her mother-in-law and carried her to the car.

Mona told Nujood, Eman, and the journalist why Mohammed, her husband, was in prison. He and her oldest sister Jamila had been having an affair and were caught red-handed, arrested, and imprisoned. Adultery was a crime punishable by death which was why he was asking Mona to cover-up for him. He sent a letter asking her to sign a paper that stated they were divorced before his arrest. But, so far, Mona had rejected the idea. Mona was not much older than Nujood when she was forced to marry Mohammed. Nujood felt terrible for her sister who was still forced to wear the black niqab of a married woman. Nujood pictured the tears that were surely running down her face as she told her sad tale.

Analysis

In Chapter 8 after her divorce is granted, Nujood and Shada visit the Yemen Times. While there, she meets Nadia, the female editor of the newspaper. She is very impressed with the staff of women who work at computers. Nujood can see herself being one of those journalists or, perhaps, an attorney like Shada one day.

In Chapter 9, Nujood returns home. Her bad dreams begin to go away. Her story gains worldwide attention.

Vocabulary

Ordeal, complicated, protégée, mosque, bewildered, minarets.



Chapters 10 - 11 and Epilogue

Summary

Chapter 10: The Return of Fares

August 2008

One evening when the family was eating, Haifa was pretending she was a waiter in a pizzeria. She and Nujood had recently been taken to one. Their dinner was interrupted when someone knocked on the door. Mohammed answered the door and was stunned to see Fares, his brother, standing there. Nujood felt faint – her beloved brother Fares had returned. Their mother rushed to the door, trembling and staggering. Fares was gaunt and taller. His skin was deeply tanned. Everyone greeted him with hugs and kisses.

They had heard from him for the first time in two years just the month before. Everyone was concerned about how he was doing and when he would come back. Fares called because he heard the family was having problems – all the way over in Saudi Arabia. On the phone, Aba had explained Nujood's situation to him. Their mother begged him to come home but he couldn't afford to leave his job. While she loved hearing from her son, she was in deep despair afterward because he couldn't come back.

But, when he finally did return, Omma wouldn't let go of him. He had worked hard for the four years he was gone but earned so little that he wasn't able to save anything. He had run off because he wanted to improve his life and earn more money. He never imagined how difficult it would be to realize his dreams. He told his family of his dangerous journey and how he had to cross the border at night because he had no identification.

Fares' first job was herding sheep for a farmer. He had been put in charge of a herd of six hundred sheep. He worked twelve hour days, earned very little and had nothing to look forward to during his time off. After that he had one disappointing experience after another he finally decided it was time to come home. He would be willing to do whatever it took to help earn money for the family. Nujood was happy Fares was home; but, she was sad that he seemed to be so defeated.

Chapter 11: When I Become a Lawyer...

September 16, 2008

Nujood was looking forward to returning to school. She was so excited that she couldn't sleep the night before. She missed Malak because she was registered at a different school and wouldn't see her. She no longer had nightmares about the monster bursting open the door at night. Now she dreamed about being surrounded by girlfriends at school. The international humanitarian association was paying for her and Haifa's tuition and for a taxi to take them to and from school.



As they neared the school, Nujood could hear the girls singing. She recognized the words from the year before. To Nujood's great surprise, Shada was standing at the front gate of the school to greet her. Nujood saw that all the girls were wearing green and white uniforms like she and Haifa were wearing. Shada introduced Nujood and Haifa to the principal.

The principal assured Nujood that the teachers listen to their students and that the girls were allowed to stay after class and tell the teachers about any personal problems they might be having. Nujood felt comfortable at the school and confident that she was in the right place. She wanted to learn to read and write. She vowed to one day be an attorney like Shada. Nujood wanted to be a defender of little girls like Shada was. Having been through an awful ordeal, she would be tenacious and strong in her defense of other little girls who were living in dangerous situations.

Nujood knew that it would still take time to understand everything she had been through. She had felt so abandoned and alone. She had to deal with shame and guilt and the feeling of being so different. But there were other girls like her. Shada introduced her to two young girls who had been in similar situations and who were seeking divorces. Nujood had inspired these girls to speak up and seek help.

Jamila was finally released from prison. And for the first time in a long time, Nujood's family was complete. Unfortunately, there was a schism between Jamila and Mona. Mona blamed Jamila for breaking up her family. Nujood dreamed of faraway places that she would visit someday. At school, she was the first to volunteer to recite the first sura of the Koran. Nujood recited it perfectly and was praised by the teacher. She looked forward to her homework that night and drawing with her colored pencils. She was finally a normal little girl again.

Epilogue

In November 10, 2008, Nujood was named one of the Women of the Year by Glamour magazine. She shared the honor with Nicole Kidman, Hillary Clinton, and Condoleeza Rice. Through her ordeal, Nujood had gained self-confidence and strength. Husnia al-Kadri, the director of women's affairs at the University of Sana'a, believed that Nujood's divorce knocked down a closed door. Her study revealed that over half of the girls in Yemen marry before the age of eighteen.

Nujood's story is one of hope and has been an inspiration to other girls throughout the Middle East. In February 2009, the Yemeni Parliament passed a new law raising the legal age of consent to seventeen for both boys and girls. Many factors play into Yemeni fathers marrying off their young daughters – poverty, old customs and lack of education. Shada and other activists continue their support of these young girls. But they place themselves in danger by doing so. Some factions of the society feel that women like Shada are bringing disgrace onto the country and Middle East. Fatwas, or death threats, have been issued by local sheikhs who accuse these women of promoting Western decadence.



Due to family problems, Nujood and Haifa were forced to withdraw from their school. However, they were both preparing to attend another private school. Royalties from her book support their education and help the family. Some of the money will be set aside for Nujood's college tuition. Nujood also hopes to use some of the money to build a proper house for her family.

Analysis

In Chapter 10, Nujood's beloved brother Fares returns from Saudi Arabia. However, he appears to be defeated. While away, he worked hard, but he was unable to save because his wages were so low. Nujood is saddened by her brother's disappointment.

In Chapter 11, Nujood returns to school.

The Epilogue relates that in November, 2008, Nujood was named one of the women of the year by Glamour magazine. She shared the honor with Hillary Clinton, Condoleeza Rice, and Nicole Kidman. Though Nujood is forced to leave school again due to family problems, the royalties from her book help her and her sister attend a private school. Some of the money will be used for her college education, too. Nujood's story is one of hope and inspiration.

Vocabulary

Rummaged, cistern, gaunt, adolescent, scrounging, impudent, exasperated, heralds, humanitarian, conspiratorially, compulsory, extravagant, decipher, tenacious, formulating, reverie, gravitas, barbaric, conjugal.



Important People

Nujood Ali

Nujood Ali was just ten-years-old when she learned that she would soon be getting married. Nujood was an active and happy child despite her family's poverty. She loved to run in the rain and collect hailstones and count them. She has just learned to count to one hundred. She also loved to draw pictures with her colored pencils. She had a best friend at school and had dreams about the future. She and her sisters would window shop in the Old City and imagine wearing beautiful gowns, even the lovely white wedding gown that was displayed in the front window.

But, marriage turned out to be a completely different thing for Nujood. She knew that her sisters and mother and other relatives married young; but, she never imagined that she would join the adult world of married people as a child, a ten-year-old child. Her "husband" promised her father that he wouldn't touch her until she matured. He broke that vow the very first night. She was subjected to a month of terror and nightly beatings and rapes.

Nujood had an independent streak and an inner strength that compelled her to run away and report her father and husband to the authorities. She sought a divorce from the judges at the Sana'a courthouse. After the judges got over their astonishment that the small girl before them was asking for a divorce, they sympathized with her and eventually saw to it that she was granted her freedom.

Ali

Ali, Nujood's father was instrumental in the marriage of his ten-year-old daughter Nujood to a thirty-year-old man. As the story opens, Ali lives in Khardji with his wife Shoya and his many children. Shoya had given birth to sixteen babies, but some had died at birth and some had died at young ages. Still, there were at least a dozen children whom Ali had to care for and feed. Khardji was a small, remote village that had no electricity or running water. Ali supported his family with the livestock he raised. When a scandal hit the family, the neighbors forced Ali and his family to leave the village. With limited options, the family moved to the big city of Sana'a and left all their possessions and animals behind.

Ali had a difficult time finding work in Sana'a. He finally secured a job as a street sweeper, but he didn't make enough to support his large family. Shoya had to sell off personal items just to scrape by. When Ali lost his job, things went from bad to worse. In desperation, Ali agreed to allow his ten-year-old daughter Nujood to marry a thirty-year-old man. It would be one less mouth to feed.

Nujood was miserable in her marriage. Eventually, she ran away and reported her father and "husband" to the authorities. They were both arrested. Nujood was granted a



divorce. Unfortunately, neither man was punished for the misery and pain that Nujood was made to suffer. Nujood lived with her parents after her divorce. She and her father didn't talk about her ordeal. Though both sides were angry and held resentment, Nujood's and her father's feelings were unexpressed.

Shoya

Shoya was Nujood's mother. She was forced into marriage at sixteen and bore sixteen children. She was sympathetic with Nujood's plight; but, she felt that she could not help her daughter because men decided everything in their culture.

Mona

Mona was one of Nujood's older sisters. She was raped by a neighbor when she was thirteen. She "disgraced" the family by becoming pregnant. As a result of the rape, she was quickly married off to cover the shame.

Faez

Faez was the thirty-year-old man who married ten-year-old Nujood. He had promised not to touch her until she matured. He broke that vow on the very first night. Nujood couldn't even say his name; so, she called him the monster.

Jamila

Jamila was the eldest child in Nujood's family. She spent time in prison because she had sex with her brother-in-law. Adultery was punishable by death. They were both doomed for execution until Mona lied and said that she was divorced when her sister and her husband had sex.

Shada

Shada was a famous lawyer in Yemen. She was a fearless advocate for women's rights. She acted as Nujood's attorney when the little girl sought a divorce.

Judge Abdo

Judge Abdo was the first judge with whom Nujood made contact. He was astonished that such a tiny young girl had come there to ask for a divorce.



Haifa

Haifa was one of Nujood's younger sisters. After her experience, Nujood was very protective of Haifa fearing that their father would try to marry her off at a young age like he had her.

Fares

Fares was Nujood's favorite brother. He had run away from home to have a better life. After four years of hard work and very little pay, he returned home dispirited and willing to beg in the streets with the other young people to help his family survive.



Objects/Places

Niqab

After Nujood got married, she had to wear a black full-length niqab like all the married women of Yemen did.

Khat

Ali, Nujood's father, sat with the neighbors and chewed khat leaves. Khat was a green plant that was plentiful in the Yemen region.

Sleeping Mat

Nujood had her own room at her in-laws and slept on a floor on a sleeping mat. The first night after her marriage, her "husband" insisted on sleeping with her on the sleeping mat. She was terrorized every night when he burst into her room.

Colored Pencils

Nujood loved to draw with colored pencils that she used at school. After she had to quit school to get married, she often dreamed of drawing with her colored pencils again.

The Koran

One of Nujood's favorite subjects at school was the study of the Koran. When she returned to school, she was the first to volunteer to recite a passage from the holy book.

Marriage Contract

Marriages of young girls in Yemen are considered valid if the men in the girls' families all agree to the marriage and sign a contract affirming their consent.

Tandoor

The tandoor was the traditional clay oven that Yemeni women used to cook meals for their families. Its source of fuel was wood.



Hailstones

As a little girl, Nujood loved to dash out in the rain and collect hailstones during summer storms. She had learned to count at school and enjoyed counting the hailstones that she collected.

The Red Teddy Bear

After she was granted her divorce, Nujood visited the Yemen Times where the journalists honored her and gave her a huge red teddy bear with a heart on the front that read, in English, "I love you."

Nujood's Birthday

There was no documentation of Nujood's birth. Shoya had so many children she couldn't remember when Nujood was born. The journalists at the Yemen Times sang happy birthday to her and told her that the day of her divorce would henceforth be her birthday as well.



Themes

Child Abuse

One of the strongest themes that emerges from *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced* by Nujood Ali is that of child abuse. Certainly to the West forcing a child to marry at age ten is an unforgivable and blatant form of child abuse. Although the age of consent for a girl to marry was older than ten, that law was often ignored and abused. If the father of a young girl consented to her marriage and all the uncles in the family agreed, then such a union was apparently legal and binding. But “legal and binding” doesn’t erase the fact that it is still child abuse – no matter the country or culture.

Nujood lived in terror of her “husband” bursting into her room each night and raping her repeatedly. The contention that the men in the family made the crime okay, didn’t do a thing to assuage the fear and horror that she lived through. Her account of the experience represents the cases of many others in her culture who live through the same kind of ordeal. It proves that the Yemeni culture and the others that ascribe to same kind of treatment of their young girls is wrong. Nujood was raised in that culture yet she resisted it and didn’t want any part of it. It was natural response, a human response that Nujood possessed which trumped what she was taught by her culture.

Abandonment

A child comes into the world innocent and defenseless. Nature protects these defenseless babies by giving them two parents – a mother and a father. They are both charged by Mother Nature to care for their children, protect them and see that no harm comes to them. Unfortunately, nature’s plan while a good one is often vacated. Children can be abandoned by a parent even if the parent is “there” physically.

In the case of Nujood, she was a happy and healthy girl who despite her family’s poverty had a positive outlook and dreams of a better life in the future. After Ali, Nujood’s father, lost his job he was desperate and defeated. He had no idea how he would feed his large family. When a man in the neighborhood approached him about marrying one of his daughters, Ali readily agreed. It would be one less mouth to feed. He didn’t stop to think that it was criminal to allow his daughter to be married to a thirty-year-old man. He was thinking only of himself. It was part of the Yemeni culture but at the moment he agreed to the arranged marriage, Ali ceased being Nujood’s father.

Shoya, Nujood’s mother, is presented as a more sympathetic character. Although she does not protest the marriage of her ten-year-old daughter, she silently disapproves. But she married when she was sixteen without any say and had sixteen babies some of whom she lost to illness. Shoya knew that speaking up would do no good. In that culture, the men make all the decisions and the women obey. She told Nujood that it was just the way life was. However, Shoya instinctively knew that it was wrong but she



failed to speak up for her child – her apathy and lack of courage was just another form of parental abandonment.

Courage

For a very small, slightly built ten-year-old girl to stand up against a thirty-year-old grown man, her father and the laws and mores of her country, there is no doubt that Nujood Ali had more than her share of courage. Even though she was raised in a culture that condoned the subservience and mistreatment of women, there was something within Nujood that would not allow her to endure abuse misery and marriage at such a tender age. She understood that the man who was called her husband was really a rapist, pedophile and child abuser. All she could think of was escaping. She intuitively knew that she was up against very steep odds. The balance of power and authority in Yemen and in other Middle Eastern countries is tipped unfairly in favor of the men of the community. But Nujood was willing to take whatever risk necessary to escape from her hell.

By making her way to the courthouse and telling the judges that she wanted a divorce, she was exposing the blatant and unforgivable abuse of a child. Luckily, the judges she contacted were sympathetic to her. They could have come down on her very harshly for disobeying her father and husband. The judges had to admire her grit in running away and wanting to have a future and a better life for herself.

After she was granted her divorce, she was hailed as a heroine by many and as an inspiration to other young girls who might find themselves in a similar situation. But the conservative extremists in her country felt that she had besmirched the reputation of their nation and culture. Although she got her divorce and returned to being a child, there are those who have revenge and hatred in their hearts for her. She will have to continue to be courageous in order to realize the future she dreams of.

Styles

Structure

I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced, by Nujood Ali with Delphine Minoui, is separated into eleven medium-sized chapters. Nujood’s story begins when she is in the courthouse seeking help. The story then flashbacks to the events leading up to her appeal to the judges in the courthouse. The ordeal of her marriage to a thirty-year-old man is chronicled as well as her escape to the courthouse. The last several chapters cover the granting of her divorce and the aftermath. The last chapter describes her aspiration to follow in the footsteps of her attorney and become a lawyer and advocate for abused girls.

The final chapter is followed by an epilogue written by co-author Minoui who explains how the poverty, lack of education, and traditions of Yemen and other Middle Eastern countries foster the kind of mistreatment and abuse that Nujood was forced to endure. She adds that while Nujood was a heroine and inspiration to many, she was thought of as a traitor to her country and people by extremists.

There is an “Acknowledgments” section in which credit is given to those who helped with the research for the book. There is also a “Notes” section which describes some of the cultural elements unique to Yemen. There is a “Reading Group Guide.” Finally, there is a section titled, “Girls Like Nujood Need Our Help” which is a plea for donations in support of the young girls of the Middle East.

Perspective

Tone



Quotes

Poor people are so hungry they've got stones where their hearts should be, and no time to feel pity for the fates of others.

-- Nujood (Chapter 1)

Importance: This quotation captures the culture in which Nujood lived.

When she was about sixteen, Shoya, my mother, married my father, Ali Mohammad al-Ahdel, without a word of protest. And when he decided four years later to enlarge the family by choosing a second wife, my mother obediently accepted his decision.

-- Nujood (Chapter 2)

Importance: This quote underscores the life that awaits a Yemeni woman; and, she dares not protest it.

In a few hours, I will be divorced. Divorced! Free again. Without a husband, without that dread of finding myself alone, at nightfall, in the same bedroom with HIM. Without that fear of suffering, over and over, that same torment.

-- Nujood (Chapter 3)

Importance: These are Nujood's thoughts when she was hopeful that a powerful judge would help her escape from her marriage by granting her a divorce.

My life was taking a new turn in this world of grown-ups, where dreams no longer had a place, faces became masks, and no one seemed to care about me.

-- Nujood (Chapter Four)

Importance: Reality hits Nujood after her wedding and on her trip back to Khardji where she would share a home with her husband whom she just met.

To guarantee a happy marriage, marry a nine-year-old girl.

-- Tribal lore (Chapter 4)

Importance: A tribal proverb that described the thinking behind Nujood's marriage.

In Khardji, life had become impossible. Tortured by shame and pain, I suffered in silence. All those horrible things he made me endure, day after day, night after night.

-- Nujood (Chapter 6)

Importance: This quote captures the essence of the life that no ten-year-old girl should have to endure.

I wanted to play outside, like all children my age, but he beat me and kept making me go back into the bedroom with him to do the nasty things he wanted. He always used bad words with me....



-- Nujood (Chapter 7)

Importance: This quote underscores that Nujood was a child subjected to sexual abuse that was considered “legal” because she was “married.”

My eyes are shining, as if they were discovering for the first time the slightest bits of beauty in being alive. I feel happy. This is the best day of my life.

-- Nujood (Chapter 8)

Importance: This quote captures how Nujood felt after the court granted her a divorce.

When I had to leave school last February, I knew how to count to a hundred. Now I want to learn to count to a million!

-- Nujood (Chapter 11)

Importance: This quote captures Nujood’s jubilation at being able to return to school and being a ten-year-old.

If only school could be compulsory for all children; that would keep boys like him from being forced to hawk chewing gum at red lights.

-- Nujood (Chapter 11)

Importance: This quote underscores the reality of life for children in Yemen.

Marriage was invented to make girls miserable. I will never get married again, not ever again!

-- Nujood (Chapter 11)

Importance: The results of forced marriages with abusive older men distort the girls' views of marriage and turn them against it.

Nujood’s rebellion, honorable in our eyes, is moreover considered by conservatives as an outrageous affront, punishable, according to extremists, by a murderous ‘honor crime’.

-- Delphine Minoui (Epilogue)

Importance: The co-author of the book points out that Nujood’s stand against marriage and quest for divorce was not a heroic act by many in her community. It was wrought with danger.



Topics for Discussion

Reaction of Judges

What was the initial reaction of the judges at the courthouse when Nujood said she wanted a divorce?

Nujood's Thoughts about Marriage

What did Nujood think when she was first told she would be getting married?

Nujood's Birthday

Why didn't Nujood know her birth date? How did she get a new day for her birthday?

Culture

How did the culture of Yemen foster the marriage of such a young girl? What other elements of the culture are restrictive for women?

Poverty

How did poverty impact Ali's decision to allow his young daughter to marry? What was the overall impact of poverty in the region?

Education

How could education change the mores of the Yemeni culture? How did Ali's lack of education contribute to his bad decision? How is education sorely lacking in Yemen for girls?

Fatwa

What is a fatwa? Why would a fatwa be issued against Shada and Nujood?

Punishment

Why weren't Ali and Faez punished for their abuse and mistreatment of Nujood? What type of punishment would they have faced in the United States?



Inspiration

How was Nujood an inspiration to other young girls in her country? What does it mean for someone to have the courage that she displayed to escape her ordeal?

Advocacy

Why is it important for people to speak out and become advocates for girls like Nujood? Who inspired Nujood to seek a good education and career?