

Outcasts United Study Guide

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Summary

Luma al-Muflehs was born into a life of privilege in Amman, Jordan, which put her into a very small minority in that country. The vast majority of the people were poor and oppressed. The youth of Jordan had no hope for a bright future. Luma was fortunate; she was sent to an elite school that King Hussein's children attended. Her family decided to send her to the U.S. to attend college. Her parents, especially her father Hassan had high hopes for her to return as an education young woman who would return to Jordan's high society, becoming a wife and mother as was expected.

Although Luma had a shy and retiring personality like her father, there was an independent streak within her that innately told her that women weren't less important than men. Her time in America confirmed that sentiment; she reveled in the freedom and opportunities that America gave her.

When she was a schoolgirl, Luma loved to play soccer with the young men in her neighborhood. Her grandmother didn't approve – soccer wasn't for little girls. Although she and her beloved grandmother didn't agree about sports, they shared the same compassion for the poor. Her grandmother would never turn away a beggar who came to her door without giving him food or money. Luma inherited that feeling of helping the underprivileged, and it would prove to play a big role in her life.

After graduating from her American college, Luma made a big decision. She could not picture herself back in Jordan wearing a burka and unable to drive a car. She had four years of freedom and wasn't about to give it up. The news did not sit well with her parents, especially Hassan. He had done so much for her and now she was shaming him. He warned her that he would cut off funds and contact with the family if she insisted on staying in America. Freedom was more important to Luma than anything else; she stayed in America.

Luma was cut off from her family and from support money. She had no work permit and was literally an undocumented immigrant. She had to take menial jobs to get her by. She settled in a small town in Georgia named Clarkson. She observed the sons of refugee families playing games of pick-up soccer in the streets. It came to her that she could organize teams and coach these kids. It would give them a team to play for and a purpose in their young troubled lives. She got help from the YMCA and formed three teams of differing age groups but they all had the same name --- the Fugees... for refugees. She learned during the ups and downs of coaching three teams of refugees that she needed them as much as they needed her.



Part One: Changes, Chapters 1 - 4

Summary

Hassan and Sawsan al-Mufleh called their first child Luma which means “dark lips.” The al-Muflehs were a wealthy couple who lived in Amman, Jordan. Luma was shy like her father, Hassan. Hassan had hopes that his eldest child would marry and live near the family home. However, Luma had an independent streak. She was also protective of the weak and defenseless. Luma was sent to the American Community School in Amman where American expatriates and the elite of Jordan sent their children including the children of King Hussein and Queen Noor.

While away at school, Luma was also away from the reality of the poor and suffering of her country. Luma’s grandmother Munawar was always kind to the poor. She always helped beggars who knocked at her door. At ACS Luma played basketball, volleyball, soccer and baseball. Her athleticism and eagerness to learn and cooperate was noticed by her coach, an African American woman named Rhonda Brown who expected a lot from her students.

Luma began to recognize that her life at ACS and the freedom she enjoyed there was vastly different than how most of the people in Jordan lived. She understood that she was expected to live a traditional life of a Jordanian because of her family’s high profile. After graduating from college in the United States, Luma decided to stay. She could not return to Jordan and give up the freedom she had become accustomed to in the US. Her family cut her off from their money and from any communication with them.

Luma was an illegal immigrant without a work permit and had to find a job that didn’t require an immigration check. She took a job washing dishes and cleaning toilets at a diner. Ultimately, Luma moved to Atlanta even though her friends feared she’d be a target in the Deep South and were worried about her safety.

In 1997, Beatrice Ziaty and her husband were struggling to raise their three sons and keep them safe in the war-torn Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. The city had been destroyed by rebel armies. It was a common occurrence for bullets to strike innocent citizens. Beatrice’s husband had been a paymaster for the former government. Men with guns would often appear at their door, demanding money because he had the government’s money.

Beatrice fled with two of her sons. Beatrice, Jeremiah and Mandela made it past the checkpoints and out of town walking toward the Ivory Coast. They scrounged around for food and hitchhiked to the border. After ten days they came to an overcrowded refugee camp across the border. Beatrice and her sons built a mud hut for shelter. They hoped for the end of the war so they could return home.



Beatrice applied for financial aid with the UN. She had stiff competition for the relatively small amount of money. There were more than 20,000 refugees in their camp. The people were hungry and the conditions were filthy. Her focus was on taking care of her sons and keeping them from being recruited by the army. Beatrice and her sons had lived in the camp five years when she learned that they had been accepted for resettlement in Clarkston, Georgia. They were granted \$3,106 in loans from the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement and were assigned to a case worker.

The family was placed in a dingy apartment in Clarkston. Beatrice took a job as a maid at the Ritz-Carlton. The boys were told to stay inside until she got home. On her first day, she got off the bus and was mugged. The robber took all the cash she had.

Non-profit agencies began to eye Clarkston, Georgia, for the many refugees who needed a place to live. Atlanta had a growing economy and needed workers. There was public transportation that could take the workers from Clarkston to Atlanta. The housing in Clarkston was affordable and within walking distance of services and shopping.

In 2001, Lee Swaney the owner of a heating and air-conditioning company was elected mayor. Tensions increased when 700 Somali Bantu were settled in Georgia, many of them in Clarkston. These refugees came from a completely different culture and needed more help in their transition than most others. Councilman Feltz understood that the change would be traumatic for these people. They needed help but she didn't know who would be able to help them. The Bantu refugees were afraid of everyone especially the police who in their country were violent and corrupt.

The placement of the Bantu pointed out the flaws in the federal government's resettling program. The feds didn't provide enough money or agencies for the refugees.

Luma's goal was to become a soccer coach. She was hired by the Decatur-DeKalb YMCA as the soccer coach for girls age 14 and under. During her first year as coach, her team lost every game. In time, her discipline paid off and the team began to win. In her third year as coach, the team was undefeated and won the tournament.

Luma opened a café in storefront property in downtown Decatur called Ashton's. She worked hard but the café was not drawing enough patrons. Trying to run her café and coach her team proved to be quite a challenge. She noticed a group of boys playing soccer in a parking lot one day. She envisioned organizing a team for these poor boys to play on. She spoke with a board member at the YMCA and to her surprise the Y offered to fund a program for them.

Analysis

This section begins with a background of Luma al-Mufleh. She was born and raised in Jordan and was from a wealthy family. Despite her privileged and isolated life, she always felt for the millions of poor people in her country. She followed her beloved grandmother's example by always thinking to the poor and being charitable with them.



Luma also had an independent streak. Although she was shy like her father, there was a sensibility about her about the welfare of others. She probably got that from her close association with her grandmother. They were very much alike. Where they parted was on the subject of sports. Her grandmother thought it wasn't proper for her to play soccer with the boys outside. But Luma loved playing soccer and was a natural athlete.

The family decided that Luma should get an American education. She was accepted at a college in upper state New York. Her independent streak was stoked by the independence she enjoyed in the United States. As she neared the end of her senior year, she knew she could not give her freedom up. She decided to stay. Her decision did not sit well with her family, especially her father who had expected her to live the traditional life of a Jordan wife and mother. Staying in the U.S. was an affront to the family and especially to her father who had done everything for her. He promised to cut off all communications with the family and all financial help should she carry out her decision.

Luma stayed and although she missed her family and aspects of her homeland, she knew she made the right decision. She had no work permit and was basically an illegal immigrant. She had to get menial jobs that didn't require a work permit or a background check. Eventually, Luma "graduated" from dishwasher to soccer coach for a girls' team at the Y. But her feelings for the poor and vanquished returned to her when she observed the poor refugee boys of her hometown playing pick-up soccer in the streets. Refugee organizations had sent scores of refugees to Clarkston. The young boys were poor, had no outlet for their energy and felt like outsiders. It was the perfect storm for Luma. She loved soccer and her heart went out to the poor boys. She decided to organize a free soccer program for the refugee boys.

Vocabulary

expatriates, intramural, sharia law, demographic, assemblage, humus



Part One: Changes, Chapters 5 - 7

Summary

Eight-year-old Jeremiah Ziaty was excited when he heard about the soccer program. He loved the sport. He had been cooped up in his apartment for months. Tryouts were held at the Clarkston Community Center. Like Jeremiah, many of the refugee boys were tired of being cooped up in their small apartments and turnout was great. Refugee parents were eager to get their kids involved because they knew they needed to run and play like other children. Jeremiah made the team. Luma assured Beatrice and all the other parents that she would watch over the children and keep them safe.

Luma had her own struggles. Her café was losing money. She didn't want to disappoint those who had invested in her venture and show her parents that she could succeed on her own. However, she began to wonder how she could keep it going. Jeremiah told Luma that they each month when the food stamps ran out, they literally had no food. Luma knew that it was time to close Ashton's. Luma stopped coaching the girls' team. Her main focus remained the Fugees. The boys and their families had become part of her.

Even though it was mid-season and Luma had a full roster, she agreed to let Bien come to the next practice. But Luma wouldn't shut the door on new kids like Bien and his big brother Josue would could bring new talent to the team. At practice, Luma made Bien and Grace speak to each other in English. She didn't let the boys of the same ethnicity pair up for practice drills. Luma refrained from speaking Arabic herself.

The two best players were Jeremiah's older brother Darlington and an Iraqi Kurd named Peshawa Hamad. The two boys competed to win Luma's favor. She tried to get them to work together because they had a big influence on the other boys. The team faced real challenges. They didn't have the best equipment and there was no league of fans. In fact, there often was open hostility from opposing teams of American kids. It brought the kids closer together. They wanted to prove to Luma that they could be the team she imagined. Jeremiah learned that Luma didn't eat pork because of her Muslim religion. He told his mother that since Coach Luma didn't eat bacon he wouldn't either.

Emanuel Ransom was a member of the community center's board. He felt that the Fugees should help with the clean up and maintenance of the center since they used it so often. After a fight broke out, the Y decided to end their relationship with the Fugees. They were no longer welcome at the center. Luma found an unused field a few miles outside of Clarkson. The Y loaned her a bus to take the kids back and forth. It was a short term solution. She had to find a permanent place for her team.

The Y found a field behind the Indian Creek Elementary School that Luma could use. The field was in deplorable shape with broken glass and potholes and not an ideal place for a youth soccer program. Everyone and anyone wandered in and out of the area;



there would be no more private practices. There were no lights, no goals and no bathrooms. On the plus side, the field was in walking distance for the boys and Luma would be able to run her tutoring program in one of the school's classrooms. Luma vowed to make the best of the field but she was angry at the Mayor and community center board who banned her use of the Y's superior facility.

In 2005 Luma met a woman from Nebraska named Tracy Ediger. She had moved to Georgia to work on the refugee program. Tracy worked at Jubilee Partners, a Christian organization near Comer, Georgia, to work with refugees. When Luma met Tracy she mentioned that she was looking for a soccer program coordinator. Tracy came to a few practices and was on the fence for a while about whether to take on the additional task. In the summer of 2006, Tracy agreed to join the Fugees for a year as Team Manager. There would be no salary but she had no debts. She would look for a part-time job to cover her expenses. She joined the team just before tryouts were being held.

Analysis

A soccer team was just what the boys needed. They were all cooped up in small apartments. Most were not allowed out while their parents were working which was most of the time. The parents appreciated Luma's interest in their children. Luma promised each parent that she would watch over the boys. She recognized the struggles that these young boys had been in. The horrors of war and the fear of fleeing with an unknown destiny had to be etched in their minds forever. Luma had problems of her own. She was estranged from the family and nation she loved. But she'd given it up for the freedom of America but second thoughts had to have crept in during some lonely moments.

Luma was also having her share of troubles. The café she opened in town was not doing well. It was a lot of work and she felt like she was getting nowhere. She wasn't getting a lot of customers and was worried about disappointing the people who had invested in her venture. She was doing double duty – trying to run a successful café and organizing three teams of refugee boys.

Luma's first love was soccer. Although she could have quit her coaching the refugees, which earned her no money, but she loved being involved with the sport and wasn't about to let her boys down. She had saved them from the streets and the gangs that would gladly recruit them. Luma didn't give up even when the Y ended their relationship with the Fugees. She found another home field for them although it wasn't really suitable for soccer. But she had no choice. She knew her boys had found nothing but struggles so far in life – here was yet another. She knew that they would weather the storm; she had to, too.

Vocabulary

scrimmages, mugged, clapboard, trauma, underlying, radicals



Part Two: A New Season, Chapters 8 - 12

Summary

There was a buzz around town about the tryouts. The Fugees soccer program was the town's only free program. The Fugees had uniforms and traveled around the state. The parents of the players liked the program because their kids had fun and exercise and they trusted Luma to keep their kids safe. There were three different Fugee teams for boys: the Under Thirteens; the Under Fifteens; and the Under Seventeens. Luma's challenge was to get boys to play as one unit and discard ethnicities.

Luma was strict about making practices and being on time. She knew that the boys had suffered devastating experiences in the war torn countries they came from but felt the discipline would help them struggle through their personal problems. The boys would set an example for others in their same circumstances to follow. Some kids had adjusted to their new lives, some were struggling. Luma required that the boys participate in after-practice tutoring classes to bolster their learning.

Fornatee had other problems. His father was in a serious accident and was still recovering and wouldn't be able to return to work for an unspecified time. Fornatee was worried about the family running out of food and rent money. Fornatee wanted to stay on the team because Luma was like a second mother to him. He was conflicted; however, because Prince and Mandela were his good friends. Fornatee wanted to patch up things between Luma and Prince.

The team's first preseason practice was a miserably hot day at the end of August. It was so dry that the players were coated in dust from the arid field. But the practices and tutoring classes went on with the three teams on different schedules. Punishment for screwing up was running laps in the hot sun. During practice she didn't let the boys get away with breaking any of the rules. She had to be consistent and not let up on her demands.

Since the Indian Creek field wasn't suitable for league competitions, Luma arranged to use Ebster Field in Decatur as their home field. She used a YMCA bus to take the kids back and forth. The first game for the Under Fifteens was against the Gwinnett Phoenix from Lilburn, Georgia. The team was comprised of mostly middle and upper middle-class white kids. The team, parents and fans arrived in Decatur and filled up one side of the field. As usual, nobody was attending the game in support of the Fugees.

Luma was waiting at the field for the YMCA bus to show up. It was late. The Phoenix had already taken the field to warm up. She talked to the bus driver on her cell phone. Some kids didn't show up. He waited as long as he could but was on his way. Only nine players exited the bus. The team was two players short with no substitutes. Mandela asked Warren to drive him back to get Fornatee and some of the others to play. Just in the nick of time, they returned with Fornatee and two additional players.



Luma was still upset even though she now had a full complement of players. She had worked so hard and had such high hopes for her team. Luma just sat down in the bleachers as if she was giving up on the boys. Kanue, an older veteran player, took charge. The teams took their positions on the field and the game was underway. At half-time it was 3 to 1. Fornatee was upset that Luma had given up on them. The boys vowed to score in the second half. They didn't need Luma – she just talked; they played. When the ref blew the final whistle the score was 7 -2 in favor of the Phoenix. Luma felt the boys weren't giving their all and canceled the season for the Under Fifteens and forfeited the rest of their games.

The cancellation of the Under Fifteens' season hit Kanue Biah especially hard. He was from Nimba in eastern Liberia. When the family fled from the wars, he was just two years old. He was separated from his parents and wound up with his uncle Barlea who worked hard to keep him and his nephew afloat. Kanue had to help out at home which matured him. The sense of responsibility that he assumed made him seem older.

Kanue was devastated when his team was eliminated. He asked Luma not to cancel their season. He and the other boys would recruit new players who had a better attitude. She agreed to let Kanue and the other boys try to round up enough players. She would see how the tryouts would go and then decide about the team.

Luma had two other teams that were still active. The Thirteens had not done well in their first two games. They seemed to try harder at practice after their losses. The Thirteens, led by Jeremiah won their third game by a whopping 5 to 1. Luma was proud of them but she didn't want them to relax. She told them they had a good game but it wasn't their best. They had to keep working harder.

Analysis

The Fugees teams brought a lot of attention from the townsfolk. The parents of the players were very pleased with the problems. Luma had no intention of making things easy for the boys. A hard-won victory was more satisfying than having it handed to you. She had learned that herself.

There was so much diversity among the players. Luma's challenge, besides improving the skills of the boys, was to get them to act as one unit. Their team would not be successful if one boy from the Congo only passed to another boy from the Congo or if a boy from Kosovo only helped defend a player running toward the goal if he was from his homeland. Language was a problem but Luma had dealt with it herself. She only allowed English to be spoken; she adhered to that rule herself.

The Indian Creek field wasn't suitable for league play. The Fugees would have been laughed out of their division had they used it as home field. She made a temporary arrangement to use a field in nearby Decatur. Luma still had to look for a permanent solution; without a home field the team would not survive.



Luma could take a loss more than she could take a win with her boys playing sloppy ball. She was so upset with the Under Fifteens that she cancelled their season and forfeited the rest of the games. The boys were upset and swore to her that he would recruit new boys with better attitudes.

Vocabulary

mandatory, scourge, asylum, seethe, inconsequential

Part Two: A New Season, Chapter 13 - 18

Summary

Tryouts for the Under Fifteens were being held on the Indian Creek field. Kanue and Mandela had come through. There were lots of new faces. Luma knew that if the team survived it would need most of her focus. But she had two other teams to coach; they needed her to. The new boys were impressive. Luma began imaging what positions they'd play. Luma warned the boys that practices would be grueling. The new boys would probably have to work the hardest. Kanue was relieved and grateful. His team was not dead – it still had life. He promised Luma he and Mandela would do everything to see that the boys followed the rules and treated her with respect.

The Under Fifteens was a diverse group. There were boys from Liberia, Kosovo, Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Bosnia, Ethiopia and Afghanistan. Luma would have to work hard to make the boys think of themselves as one unit. Luma was concerned about Mandela. Although he helped to gather new talent for the team, he had grown moody and quiet. Fornatee decided to ask Luma if he could rejoin the team. The hair issue was something that irritated him. He never considered himself off the team. Despite his problems with Luma's rules, he thought she was a great person in addition to being a great coach.

The Under Seventeens were not only older than the other boys they were more talented. Peshawa and Shamsoun Dikori, a graceful and able Sudanese player, were leaders of the team. The Seventeens were going to scrimmage with the Fifteens. Luma was certain that the Seventeens would win but it would be a good challenge for the younger boys who were beginning to show a new energy and enthusiasm. When the score was 1 to 1 Peshawa got after his teammates. He wasn't going to be humiliated and being beaten by the fifteen-year-olds. The Seventeens won the scrimmage by 3 to 2 but the Fifteens put up a good fight.

Luma wanted to move the Fugee's home field to Armistead Field in Milam Park. It was a grassy field in much better repair than Indian Creek. Luma decided to try to secure the field for her boys. She made a direct appeal to Mayor Swaney but since it put him in a politically hot spot, he deferred to the Clarkston City Council.

Luma was nervous about her Fifteens. She was afraid they'd be blown out in their first game. At game time, Luma was relieved that all the boys showed up on time. Kanue had become the unofficial team leader. The opposing team, the Lightning, was from Fayetteville, Georgia, and its members were mainly middle-class white boys. As usual the stands were filled for the opposition while there were only a few Fugee fans in the stands.

The Fugees began the game in a tentative manner. They were nervous and turned the ball over because of their inept passing. The Lightning tore down the field and scored



the first goal. Kanue talked it up with the boys, urging them to keep up their spirits. Mandela took off down the right side of the field and blasted a shot at the goal tying the game. At half-time, the Fugees led 2 – 1. She warned Mandela that the defenders would be doubling up on him. She told them to keep up their aggressive play and set the tone for the season.

Mandela was targeted in the second half just as Luma predicted. He kept his temper in check and made some moves that his opponents didn't expect. Things got tense near the end of the game when the Fugees were leading 4-2. The Lightning was desperate to score. Kanue was poked in the eye and collapsed to the ground in pain. The Lightning came within one goal of the Fugees but missed on a penalty kick. The Fugees won! Luma was grateful – her ragtag team of kids she hardly knew had beaten an elite team. She smiled for the first time in weeks. Luma and the boys celebrated the unexpected victory together.

Toto, a friend of some of the boys, had been shot in the face. Luma was alarmed by the news. She knew Tito was a friend of some of her boys. She feared that gang members might show up at practice to avenge the shooter's arrest. She told her boys to have nothing to do with Tito and his friend Osman who was involved in the incident. She worried about keeping the boys safe as she had always promised their parents that she would. She was more than ever determined to convince the city council to let her use Milam Park. After making her case at a council meeting, Luma got permission to use Armistead field at Milam Park.

Luma held discussion groups with each of her teams about gangs and the problems that young boys can get into by joining a gang. She announced that they would be practicing across town at Milam Park from that point on. They would have privacy and be playing on a flat grass field. They would be the first soccer players to use the field and she counted on them to set a good example. She expected them to be responsible and respectful. The boys were thrilled with the field the first time practice was held there. It was an appealing setting and the thick grass was luxurious. They boys delighted in seeing a gaggle of geese fly over and a small herd of deer in the nearby woods. They felt they were finally in the America they had heard about.

Analysis

The Under Fifteens were taking most of Luma's attention. But she had two other teams that she had to coach. She was impressed with the efforts made by Kanue and Mandela in recruiting new talent. Perhaps there was hope that the Under Fifteens would survive. Kanue certainly hoped so; it was the most important thing in his life. It gave him goals and purpose, and it distracted him from other realities and terrible memories.

Luma had known all along that she had to be strict with the boys and couldn't favor any of her players. Although it was tempting to give Prince a pass on his long hair because he was one of the best players but she just couldn't go down that road. If she excused him, there would be someone else who wanted special treatment. She had to be



consistent. Consistency was something that the boys needed in their play and in their lives.

Luma was horrified when Tito, a friend of Mandela's, was shot in the face by a gang member. She envisioned her boys being recruited by the town gangs. Keeping out of that world had been her main goal from day one. Tito's assault hit close to home. She believed that her Fifteens were the most vulnerable because several of them were very troubled and could easily be lured over to the dark side. She had to keep the team together. She had made promises to the parents. She couldn't let the parents or the boys down.

Vocabulary

lectern, barrage, outhustling, midfielder, indigenous, sequence, turf, carotid



Part Three: Full Circle, Chapters 19 - 23

Summary

The boys all had their soccer heroes – idols they wanted to play like – David Beckham, Ronaldo and other international stars. Qendrim Bushi's hero was his grandfather who was a professional goalie in Kosovo and later became a high-profile referee.

The Under Thirteens including Qendrim were beginning to show strong team characteristics. Their first game was a tie and had two wins to their credit. They were hard-working at their practices and called out that the Fugees were the kings. When they noticed Luma watching them, they called out that Luma was their queen.

Mafoday, the boy from Gambia, was shocked when the Under Thirteens walked on the home field of the Blue Springs Liberty Fire in Loganville, Georgia, to see that they were all white. Luma tried to get him not to focus on their race. The Liberty Fire was a high scoring team. Blue Springs scored first. The Fugees were in a fog, many of them roused from sleep when the bus arrived to take them to the game. Qendrim was taken out at the knees by the goalie. He was taken to the sidelines in pain.

Luma reminded the boys to be aggressive and not let the Liberty Fire push them around. Although Qendrim was still hurting, he wanted to go back into the game. He was channeling the toughness of his grandfather. When the score was 2 -1 in favor of Blue Springs, Luma decided to use her secret weapon; she switched Bien to offense. Bien surprised the opponents when he fired a shot into the goal and tied the game. The opposition defense began double-teaming Bien. But again Bien eluded the defenders and scored. The Fugees were ahead 3 – 2 and the game was nearly over.

Luma was proud of the boys. They had played as a team and had stayed focused despite injuries and penalties and forgot that the team was “all white.”

A day after the Under Thirteens' victory, it was the Under Fifteens' turn for an away game. Their opponents were the Roswell Soccer Club team called Santos. The players were from an upper class suburb of Atlanta. The Fugees were still finding their identity while the Roswell players were contenders for the division championship. Mandela was still moody and the boys had all been impacted by Tito's shooting. Mandela was shouting at his teammates when he felt they messed up. The score was quickly 3 – 0 with Roswell on top. Mandela blamed Ervin the goalie who just shrugged it off.

Luma coached the boys at half time on the mistakes they'd been making. She pulled Mandela from the game and gave his position to another boy. The Fugees played better in the second half even though the talented Mandela had been benched. The boys put up a valiant effort but the final score was 6 – 1. Luma told the boys that the Roswell players were in better physical shape. The boys were aggressive enough and made too many unforced errors.



Brothers Idwar and Robin Dikori were new players and were among the youngest and smallest on the team. They weren't intimidating but they were faster than everyone. Luma felt they would be part of her strategy to defeat the Valiants. Luma asked Natnael for his advice on how to deal with Mandela who didn't show up for all practices and screamed and cursed his teammates. She loved his brother and his mother and would have a hard time cutting him. Even though Mandela was one of his friends, he knew how hard Luma had worked and he had lived a life of struggle and hard choices. He said he would let the boy go. She followed his advice and cut Mandela from the team. It hurt her that she had given up on him.

Beatrice was worried about Mandela after he was cut from the team. She was afraid he'd get in trouble roaming around the streets of the town. Mandela had nothing to do and decided he needed to talk to Luma. Luma spent a lot of hours thinking about Mandela and was sad that she had to let him go. However, she was focused on her three teams which were all doing well. It seems the new home field had lifted their spirits and inspired them to work harder. The Under Thirteens would be competing with the Athens United Gold Valiants, the toughest team in their division. The players were getting better and Luma was getting better at positioning them.

Analysis

Being on the team gave the transplanted boys a boost in self-esteem. They were part of a unit that worked together – each boy was an important part of the team. The refugee boys had been through such horror and uncertainty that the team had come to represent a sliver of hope for a better future. It was the America they dreamed of. Although they lived in cramped, dingy apartments which were sparsely furnished, they had excitement and purpose in their lives. They were important.

Each of the boys were improving in their skills and with each win or near win, they learned something about themselves and their abilities as did Luma. She was proud of the boys and each of her teams began to perform as a unit putting aside friendships and ethnicities. They also were able to overcome the intimidation they first felt when facing an all white elite team. They looked past race and ethnicity, didn't succumb to minor injuries and didn't get angry when the ref penalized them. They were maturing as soccer players and as young men.

Luma was very conflicted over Mandela. She had grown close to Beatrice, his mother, and knew how much she depended on Luma and the team to keep Mandela out of trouble. But Mandela's behavior and attitude had turned very negative and Luma had to follow her own rules. She had no choice but to cut him from the team. But Luma always kept the door ajar just in case he'd come around and want to mend his ways and return.

Vocabulary

dollop, billowing, kanga, inhabited, commercial, roster, offside



Part Three: Full Circle, Chapter 24 - 28

Summary

It was game day for the Under Thirteens. They piled into the team bus to head for Athens and the Gold Valiants. On the way down, Luma was stopped by the Georgia State Police. She was driving her Volkswagen bug following the team bus. She thought she was being stopped for her broken brake light. The police officer told Luma that her license had been suspended. He ordered her out of the car. He was arresting her because her license had expired. Tracy came later and bailed her out but Luma missed the game.

Tracy did her best to fill in as coach on the sidelines. The Valiants scored in the first three minutes of the game. Anderson noticed that the boys seemed lost. He knew that the team had good players. At half-time it was 5 - 0. Anderson switched his defenders with his offense for the second half. The Fugees used the break arguing about who would play what. They didn't give up a goal in the second half but didn't score either. The final score was 5 – 0.

On Halloween, Luma decided to bring the kids to a nice neighborhood where the traffic was cut-off for the trick-or-treaters and where there would be piles of candy waiting for the boys behind every door. The boys were stunned to see the hordes of kids dressed in costumes of every description. They had a great time and couldn't believe all the candy they were given. They drove off looking back at the nice homes with Halloween lights and decorations. Back in his neighborhood that night, Grace woke in the middle of the night to the sound of gunfire beneath his window.

Natnael asked Joseph why he never told him that his father was dead. Joseph explained that he didn't tell anyone. He didn't want a lot of questions. Joseph said he didn't cry because he never knew his father. Natnael took the field with the Under Fifteens to warm up for their final game. Although their goal had been to make the state tournament, they hadn't done well that season. Luma encouraged them to do their best because it would show her that they had what it took for the next season. The opposing team was the Cobb WMCA Strikers.

During the first half of the game, the boys were not focused. The Strikers were ahead 2 – 0 at the half. Luma was upset that they hadn't really tried. If they kept it up she warned that they wouldn't play the next season. The boys decided to give it their all in the second half. But the Fugees only scored one goal and lost 3 to 1. Kanue and Natnael had worked hard to keep the team together. They would find a way to having a winning team in the next season.

Luma made sure she never played favorites but she was much closer to her Under Thirteens than she was with the other two teams. The younger boys were easier to



coach, gave their all and played as a unit. Their final game of the season was against the high-scoring Georgia Futbol Club.

Grace led the team in a prayer before the game. There were both Christians and Muslims so Grace led the Christian prayer and Eldin led the Muslim one. The boys were playing well and were ahead 1 to 0 at the half. The Fugees continued their good play and won the game 2 to 1 and finished third in their division. Luma entered them in a tournament called the Tornado Cup.

Luma set up an intense week of schedule for the Under Thirteens in preparation for the Tornado Cup competition. The Under Fifteens were going to play the Under Thirteens in a practice scrimmage and didn't want to be embarrassed. The Fifteens won the game 3 to 1 but the Under Thirteens had played well. Luma thanked the Fifteens for challenging the younger boys; it would help them in the tournament.

The first team the Fugees faced at the tournament was the Liberty Fire who they had beaten earlier in the season. Luma told the team she wanted to have a hard time picking out who the MVP was. At the half it was 1 to 0 in favor of the Fire. But with a smart passing and generally good play in the second half, the Fugees won 3 to 1. In their second game the opposing team was the Strikers from Robins, Georgia. The Fugees played their hearts out but lost 2 to 1. The next day the boys had an early game. Luma arranged for the boys to sleep at the YMCA that night.

The next game was against the Concorde Fire. If the Fugees won, they would go on to the finals. She cautioned the boys to keep their cool even if they thought the ref made a bad call. This time there were Fugees fans in the stands. The Fugees led 1 to 0 at the half. But the Fire scored ultimately triumphed which disqualified the Fugees for the finals.

Luma decided to enter the Under Thirteens and Under Fifteens in a big tournament in Savannah in January. The boys would have to raise \$1,000 for travel expenses. She helped them organize fundraisers and they were able to come up with the money.

Luma got notice that she couldn't use Armistead Field as home field. Luma was stunned. She probed the City Council who informed her that it was Mayor Swaney who wanted them thrown out of the park. His reasons weren't clear and he denied that he was behind the change. Luma searched for a new home for the Fugees. The boys had to practice for the tournament. She was sure that someday, somehow the boys would have their own field again.

Analysis

Luma had taken the forgotten boys from war-torn countries who had nothing but bad memories and no hope and elevated their self-image to give them purpose. Although Luma enjoyed soccer and sports and there was a selfish motive to pursuing a career in coaching, her main goal in organizing a soccer team for these boys to play on was to keep them out of trouble and give them something to look forward to.



All along Luma had seen the skills of the boys improve and their character strengthen. She never let up on the rules that she established for the boys because they needed to be disciplined to be successful and they needed consistency in their lives. She had her ups and downs with the boys and she learned a lot about herself and her abilities as a coach.

Two of her teams made it to tournament level. Luma encouraged them to play as a team and not be intimidated by the other elite teams they would meet. She told them that she wanted to have a hard time deciding who the MVPs on their teams was.

In the end, the boys lost their home field for the second time. But Luma was not deterred. She would find them another home field. Estranged from her own family, Luma realized that she needed them as much as they needed her.

Vocabulary

fusillade, countryside, verify, immigration, staggering, cul-de-sac



Important People

Luma al-Mufleh

Luma al-Mufleh was born and raised in Amman, Jordan. It was a developing nation with the vast majority of its citizens suffering in abject poverty. Luma inherited her concern for the poor and needy from her beloved grandmother, Munawar, who would never turn away a beggar without giving him food or money. Luma's favorite sport was soccer which was something her grandmother didn't view as a proper pastime for a little girl.

Luma and her parents decided that she should attend college in the United States. She enrolled at Hobart and William Smith College in the Finger Lakes region of New York. She played soccer during her first semester but injured her knee ending her college play. Classmates remember Luma as outgoing and involved in sports and social events.

On a trip back home during her junior year, Luma realized that she could never return to Jordan to live full time. It would be impossible to give up the independence she became accustomed to in the United States. There were only limited opportunities for women in Jordan. Women's activities were repressed by the sharia law, a civil code based on Islamic laws. Women were subservient to their husbands and honor killings were considered minor crimes. When she left Jordan to begin her senior year, she didn't tell her family that she was saying goodbye to them and to her life in Jordan.

Upon her graduation in 1997, she telephoned her parents to tell them that she was staying in America. Hassan was hurt and angry. He had done everything for her and now she was shaming him. He warned her that he would cut her off from the family funds should she remain in the US. She would be dead to them.

Luma ultimately settled in the small town of Clarkston, Georgia. She had to take menial jobs because she didn't have a work permit. She observed the poor boys of refugee families that played soccer in the streets. It was the perfect storm for Luma. The charity she learned from her grandmother tugged at her heart and her love of soccer together led to her forming three soccer teams of refugee boys that she would coach. Both coach and players struggled through problems and adjustment issues, but in the end, she gave the boys on her three Fugees teams identity and purpose. For Luma, she was gratified that she was able to help these lost boys and, on a personal level, she enjoyed being once again involved in her favorite sport.

Beatrice Ziaty

In 1997, Beatrice Ziaty was living in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, with her husband and four sons, Jeremiah, Mandela, Darlington and Erich. It was a dangerous time. The war had been raging for years and the city was destroyed. Stray bullets often hit and killed innocents. Beatrice's husband was a paymaster and the thuggish soldiers would often stop by the house to harass him and demand the money he kept to make payroll.



The family was in dire straits. There was no food or medicine. She only had prayer when one of her children fell ill. The thugs began to beat her husband in their desperation to steal his money. She grabbed Jeremiah and Mandela and ran out the door. The boys heard their father screaming for his life. After days on foot, Beatrice made it the Ivory Coast where they settled temporarily in a refugee camp, hoping to get passage to a safe place. Beatrice constructed a mud hut for them to live in. They were in the camp five long years when finally they got the news that they were heading for the U.S.

After arriving, Beatrice concentrated on a job. The family was given a little transition money but when that was gone they had nothing. She got a job as a maid in downtown Atlanta. It took her an hour each way on the bus. She was gone long hours from home which greatly worried her. She was afraid of what might happen to her boys. She ordered Jeremiah, the youngest, to not go outside when she wasn't there.

The Fugees soccer team was a godsend. Coach Luma promised Beatrice that she would watch out after Jeremiah – even pick him up and bring him home – if she'd let him play. He was a good player and he needed to have fun with the other boys. Beatrice and Luma became close friends. Beatrice came to trust and depend on Luma to help her keep her kids safe.

Bienvenue Ntwari

Twelve-year-old Bienvenue Ntwari arrived in America with his mother and two brothers from a refugee camp in Mozambique. The family felt they had been sent to another planet. The family was from Burundi which was one of the poorest nations on earth. It was a war-torn country that had grown too dangerous for Bienvenue and his family to stay. Over 300,000 people had been killed during the civil war with untold others who had fled to other regions. Bienvenue and his family made it to Mozambique. Ultimately, Bien and his family were resettled in Clarkston, Georgia.

Shortly after arriving in Clarkston, Bien made friends with a boy from the Congo named Grace. He couldn't believe that he found a boy right in his complex who spoke Swahili. He learned a lot about his new country from Grace. Grace told him about the Fugees, the soccer team he was on. Bien loved soccer. Grace promised to ask Luma if Bien could come to the next practice. Bien was bored at home and couldn't wait for tryouts. He was sure he would make the team. Tryouts went well for him and he was thrilled to be part of the Under Thirteens.

Prince

Luma wanted to keep her boys safe from the lure of gangs. It was tempting for these poor boys to see their star rising in a notorious gang. She wanted to create a sense of family and belonging to steer them in the right direction. Tryouts were held in August. Luma divided the boys into two groups to watch them play. If anything, the field was worse when she first saw it; it was riddled with ruts from summer thunderstorms.



After the first play, she called the boys in. She told Prince that if his hair wasn't cut by first practice he was off the team. She reminded the boys that tutoring was mandatory. She reminded the boys of the rules and that anyone not following them would be out. They had to sign an oath that they would follow rules and display good behavior on and off the team.

The hair rule caused a huge debate among the older boys. Prince decided to keep his hair and was off the team. Mandela and Fornatee were upset because Prince was their best player. Luma established the hair rule because she didn't want to cause further hostility from opponents who already ridiculed the boys. She had to be strict with Prince because if she let him skirt the rules, others would follow.

Kanue

The team had meant a lot to Kanue. He was the type of kid who always wanted to beat his personal best. He became the team's goalkeeper which he accepted although he would have rather been on the offense. During his entire first season he gave up only three goals. Once he was given a chance to play offense, he made a good impression on Luma.

Kanue was devoted to the team and was never late for practice or games. He gave his all in every game. Luma had to make sure that he didn't do too much. The other guys relied on him so much that they would get lax. She benched Kanue once so the others would learn not to rely on him. When Luma cancelled the Under Fifteens because of their inability to follow rules, Kanue pleaded with her to let him recruit better players with better attitudes. She gave him the chance and he came through with better players thus saving his team.

Mandela

Mandela was never as keen on soccer as his younger brother, Jeremiah was. Mandela was tall and wanted to play basketball. But Beatrice encouraged him to play soccer because she knew that Luma would watch over him. He eventually joined the team and turned out to be a fast runner and powerful kicker. Despite his natural ability at the game, Mandela never seemed comfortable. Mandela had his dark moods but Luma felt she could help him. Mandela made friends on the Fugees and at school but mainly with other Liberian boys. Beatrice did not approve of some of his friends and was worried.

Beatrice would often ask Luma for help in dealing with Mandela. When Mandela acted up at practice, Luma would ask for Beatrice's help. Beatrice would remind them how good they had it now compared to their lives in Monrovia and the Ivory Coast. She reminded them of what she went through to get them to the U.S. and that she worked 10-hour days to keep them there. She wanted her boys to remember where they came from.



Qendrim

Qendrim was inspired by his grandfather who was a soccer star in their native Kosovo. His grandfather also authored a soccer rule book that was written in Albanian. Qendrim brought a copy of the book with him when the family fled to the U.S. Soccer was in Qendrim's blood. Qendrim's family had suffered when ethnic violence erupted in his home town of Kacanik in southern Kosovo. His town was among the many towns that had become a battle field in the 1990s.

The violence drove the family from the country. Xhalal Bushi, Qendrim's father, got his wife and children out of the war-torn country and into Macedonia before the fighting began. Xhalal returned to their hometown to protect the family home and business – he and his brother owned several grocery stores. Unfortunately, Xhalal had returned to find his house bombed, completely destroyed. He and his brother walked for two days over the mountains to Macedonia to reunite with their families. The family was overjoyed when they learned that they had been granted asylum by the United States.

Qendrim was six when he arrived in the U.S. When he was 12 he met Luma and joined the refugee soccer team. He became best friends with the Bosnian goalie Eldin who lived in his complex. He also became friendly with Grace from the Congo and Shahir from Afghanistan. He enjoyed having an international group of friends. To Qendrim he felt they were all his brothers.

Jeremiah Ziaty

Jeremiah Ziaty fled from the civil war in Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia with his mother and two brothers. The family was from the Krahn tribe and lived in the area of Monrovia that was under Krahn control. But things quickly fell apart and it was too dangerous to even go outside. The boys fled with their mother, Beatrice, to a refugee camp on the Ivory Coast. After living in a mud hut there for five years, they got word that they would be resettled in Clarkston Georgia.

Jeremiah tried out for the refugee team for Under Thirteens. When he arrived at the tryouts for the Under Thirteens, he was surprised to see that the coach was a woman – that just didn't happen in his country. The other boys gave Jeremiah the nickname of "One Shoe" because after tryouts he took his kicking shoe off, wiped it clean and placed it in his backpack to keep it from harm. Jeremiah made the team.

TitoTito

The gunshots that rang out behind Indian Creek Elementary sounded like fireworks at first. Tito, a Liberian boy who had cheered on the team at its big victory, had been shot in the face. There had been a dispute about territory and gangs. Tito had identified himself as a member of a gang called the Africans. The gang didn't really exist; he was just putting the gang members on. Tito and his friends were apparently walking on the



wrong turf when he was shot. The shooter was identified as a 16-year-old who was promptly arrested by the DeKalb County police. The bullet had ripped through Tito's chin and jaw. A few inches lower and it would have hit his spinal cord or carotid arteries.

Lee Swaney

When Luma wanted to secure a new home field for her boys, Mayor Swaney suggested she go before the City Council for a decision. Swaney could have made the decision but it was politically risky for him to do so. But after Luma gave her impassioned presentation to the Council, Mayor Swaney spoke up for Luma and suggested that it was a good way to get the teenagers off the streets. The council agreed to allow the Fugees to use Armistead Field in a nice park just outside of town as their home field.

Nikola Vukovic

Several Bosnian refugees who had been placed in Clarkston had the surprise of their lives. One day they came face to face with a Serbian soldier named Nikola Vukovic who had tortured and beaten them during the civil war in their native country. The Bosnians sued him and won a judgment against him of \$140 million. Vukovic fled the U.S. to avoid the settlement.

Somali Bantu

There was escalating tension in the city of Clarkston, Georgia, over the resettlement of refugees there. It came to a head when there were plans to relocate 700 Somali Bantu in the state, many of whom would wind up in Clarkston. These Somalis represented a particular challenge for placement agencies. They had been persecuted for more than 300 years in their native land. Many had fled the country and become nomads without a land. The Somali Bantus were impoverished, psychologically damaged and isolated from the modern world. Among all the refugees that were resettled in Clarkston, the officials knew that the Somalis would need the most hope, compassion and understanding.

Peshawa

Peshawa Hamad was an Iraqi Kurd who was one of the most talented athletes on the Under Seventeens Fugees team. He was a role model for other players. When Peshawa spoke to Luma in Arabic she would respond in English. She insisted that the boys speak English to help them assimilate in their new society.

Tracy Ediger

Tracy Ediger had moved from Nebraska to Georgia to work with the refugees through a Christian organization. Luma met Tracy and asked her to become the team coordinator to help her with the management of the team. Tracy accepted the position and proved to be a huge help to Luma. On one occasion, Luma was stopped by the Georgia State Police and arrested for having an expired license. Tracy bailed her out so she wouldn't have to spend a night in jail.



Objects/Places

Jordan

Luma al-Mufleh was born and raised in Amman, Jordan. The family was wealthy and made their fortune as the owners of a large rebar manufacturing company. At the time there were two million people in Amman. Luma's family was part of the tiny percentage of Jordanians who were wealthy. The vast majority of the people of Amman were impoverished and living in squalor.

American Community School

Luma attended school at the elite American Community School (ACS). King Hussein and Queen Noor of Jordan sent their children to the school. Luma learned to speak English without an accent at the school. She became friends with children of different cultures including the U.S. and Europe. The children of many diplomats also attended the school.

New York College

Luma and her family decided that she should attend college in the United States. Luma was accepted at Hobart and William Smith College in the Finger Lakes region of New York state. Luma played soccer there but her athletic career was cut short when she injured her knee during her first season. Luma loved her school, loved America and most of all loved the freedom she became accustomed to in the U.S. After graduation, she announced to her parents that she was staying in the United States. Her father was hurt and irate. He cut her off from family funds and contact with her family.

The Fugees

There were three teams called the Fugees: Under Thirteen, Under Fifteen and Under Seventeen. They were not named after the hip-hop group, the Fugees. The name stemmed from the official status of each of the boys – refugee. Luma set up the free soccer program for the refugee boys whose families had settled in Clarkston, Georgia. Luma was the coach for all three teams. The boys were literally from everywhere: Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Liberia and Kosovo just to name a few. The boys spoke only broken English but Luma insisted they speak only English in an effort to accelerate their assimilation into American society. Luma wanted her team to win games but more than that she wanted to give the boys who had fled with their families from civil wars identity and purpose.



Liberia

Beatrice Ziaty and her family fled Liberia during the civil war. Her sons became players on Luma's refugee teams in Clarkston, Georgia.

Liberia was founded in 1821 by Americans who were creating a colony for freed slaves. Americo-Liberian rule ended in April 12, 1980 when army sergeant Samuel Doe who was a member of the Krahn tribe stormed the presidential compound and killed William Tolbert the nation's president. Doe proclaimed himself to be Liberia's new president. Charles Taylor led a fight against the new regime. He had been educated in America where he was jailed for embezzlement. He escaped by sawing the bars off a window in his cell.

Taylor and his army which included young boys attacked Monrovia. The city was in disarray with no water or medicine for the sick. Soldiers terrorized citizens and looted the stores and shops. Refugees from Liberia fled to the Ivory Coast. Over 150,000 Liberians died during the wars. Beatrice and her husband were members of the Krahn tribe. Her husband was brutally beaten by the gunmen who demanded money from him.

But Monrovia was destroyed and Charles Taylor ultimately came to power in 1997. He won the election was held but he and his men intimidated the people into voting for him. He exploited his people and country during his brutal reign until he fell out of favor with the U.S. He fled to Nigeria in exile and was indicted for war crimes by the United Nations. He was caught in an SUV with large amounts of cash and heroin.

Clarkston

Clarkston is a suburb of Atlanta with a population of about 7,200 and was originally settled by farmers and railroad workers after the Civil War. Clarkston was an ordinary small southern town. Things changed in Clarkston when Atlanta's airport expanded to become the southeast's first international airport. This expansion created new jobs and the need for new housing. Initially the new apartment complexes built during this economic explosion were leased by white residents of the town. With crime on the rise, these residents moved onto more remote suburbs. Many of the apartment buildings became government housing projects. The housing development came into disrepair and, like the area surrounding it, plunged into a cycle of urban decay. These apartments were used for the resettlement of refugees from war-torn countries in Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Refugee Settlement Agencies

The agencies that placed refugees in Clarkston, Georgia, included the International Rescue Committee which was founded by Albert Einstein in 1933 to help bring Jewish refugees from Europe to America and the Lutheran Family Services among others. These organizations helped the refugees find jobs and access to social services. Case

workers were assigned to each family to help them make the monumental transition from their third world nations to the U.S.

Burundi

Generose Ntwari and her two sons Alex and Bienvenue or “Bien” to his friends were from Burundi. It was one of the poorest countries on earth. It is the size of Connecticut and has an astounding population of 8.5 million. The Tutsi minority ruled over the Hutu majority for decades in Burundi. In 1993, the country held its first democratic elections and Hutu leader, Melchior Ndadaye, came to power. He was assassinated a short four months later by Tutsi forces. The incident sparked a civil war which lasted until 2003. In the mean time, families like the Ntwaris were in mortal danger as the war destroyed the country. The family made it to Mozambique where they applied for refugee status. It wasn't until 2005 that they were told they'd be resettling in the Atlanta, Georgia, area.

Sudan

The Dikori brothers, Shamsoun, Idwar and Robin, hailed from the Nuba Mountain region of Central Sudan. The country was the size of South Carolina and had a population of one million people. The Nub region was situated between Africa to the south and Arab to the north. Each of these continents had an impact on Nuba's culture. Within just the Nuba region, there were 50 ethnic groups that included Christians, Muslims and Africans who adhered to tribal religions. The Islamist regime that took control in 1989 wanted to open access to the Nuba valley. It was decided to drive the tribes out of the region. Some citizens were killed by bombing or terrorized and tortured by ground troops. The UN estimated that the Nuba valley lost 200,000 people during the war.

Indian Creek Playing Field

When the YMCA decided to break ties with the Fugees teams, Luma had to scramble around to find a home field where the boys could practice and play. She was told they could use the field behind the Indian Creek school. Luma was depressed when she saw the condition of the field. It had huge ruts, was sprinkled with broken glass and it was so dusty that the first time the boys practiced there, they were coated with dust that made them look like they were in the flour bin.

Armistead Park

Luma quickly determined that the field behind Indian Creek Elementary would not do as a home field for the Fugees. Luma appealed to the Mayor and the City Council to have permission to use Armistead Park in Millam Park. After considering the request, the Council gave the Fugees permission to use Armistead as their temporary home field.

Themes

Freedom

Freedom is a strong theme that emerges from the story of Luma al-Mufleh and her Fugees soccer teams. Luma was born and raised in Amman, Jordan. Unlike the vast majority of the people in her city and nation, Luma was fortunate to be born to a wealthy family. Because of her family's wealth, the family had the freedom of educating their daughter at the American Community School which King Hussein's children also attended. Having such an education, gives one an early start in life and the freedom of choice to advance to an elite institute of higher learning.

The freedom that money gave the family allowed the al-Mufleh's to make the decision to send Luma to the U.S. for her college education. Luma spent her four years at a college in upstate New York. It was Luma's experience in the United States that woke her up to what freedom really was. Before she began her last year of school, she was home in Jordan for a visit. She knew that she would not be back on a permanent basis.

Luma had enjoyed the free society that America offered to its citizens. When she thought of returning to Jordan and living under sharia law that ruled that men were superior to women, she shuddered. Under these laws women do not have the same rights as men. Luma knew that she would be expected to live the traditional life of a wife and mother and be subservient to her husband; Luma knew she could not live that life.

When Luma told her parents she would be staying in America after graduation, she was disowned and cut off from contact with her family and from the family wealth. There are exchanges and compromises that everyone makes in life. Luma literally gave up her family and its wealth in exchange for the opportunity to live a free life in America.

Assimilation

Many of the boys came from places that had been destroyed by war and had never attended school. Luma recognized that school in the U.S. was difficult for them because they hadn't had a basic education and could not read or do simple math. The schools were overcrowded, had limited resources, and did not devote the necessary time to these children who were lost in their classes. She hoped to set up a free after-school tutoring program with volunteer teachers. She would require the boys who wanted to play soccer to participate in the program. The team became known as the Fugees, short for refugees - not the popular hip-hop group by the same name.

During its first year, the team played in the recreational league, an informal division that the team had to play in before it could compete in the select division. Luma had to rely on donations to keep the team afloat. Luma had to teach the boys the official rules and standard practices of the game. She noticed that the boys seemed to pair up with kids of their own ethnicities in practice and in play. Luma knew to be successful she had to



get these kids to play as one unit. Luma was getting to know the boys' parents most of whom were single mothers. They all struggled with language and cultural differences; she helped them however she could.

Luma decided that she would require the boys to speak only English. Many of them only knew a few words of broken English. But Luma knew for them to assimilate to their new culture and to be a successful team, they had to communicate. She wanted them to speak to each other during their practice and play. English would be the common language so the boys from many diverse areas could communicate and work as one team. Luma herself had to resist the temptation to speak her native Arabic with some of the boys who spoke the same language. She was being assimilated into the American culture herself and had to follow her own rules.

Xenophobia

The first refugees arrived in Clarkston from Southeast Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They settled into the community without a hitch. Later refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo trickled into the area as well as oppressed minorities from Russia. Newcomers from many African nations that were at war – including Liberia, the Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia and others – also were sent to Clarkston. Between 1996 and 2001, nearly 20,000 refugees were resettled in Georgia many of whom were placed in Clarkston. Just over a few years, Clarkston had drastically changed.

Female Islam transplants wore full burkas or jalabib. Many former diners were turned into Vietnamese and other ethnic restaurants. Clarkston's first Mosque was opened and drew worshipers by the hundreds. The high school had students from fifty different nations. With the influx of the refugees, more and more white residents began to move out. Demographics changed. While Mosque attendance was on the increase, membership at the local Baptist Church was dwindling. The white residents didn't hold protests or complain that they were losing their town. Instead they stayed in their houses and stayed away from the refugees. A sense of community was dying in the small town. These new foreign residents weren't like them.

There was resentment brewing in Clarkston, although it was repressed for years. The long-time white residents directed their anger at the agencies that were resettling the refugees in their town. To Clarkston Police Chief Charlie Nelson, the refugees were a constant problem. The refugees spoke broken English, couldn't drive well and were given an inordinate number of traffic tickets which they resented. According to Salahadin Wazir, the imam at the Clarkston mosque, the refugees felt discriminated against and that the police pulled them over without provocation just to issue them costly traffic tickets. The refugees decided to stand up to the police. In one incident, a Somali cabdriver who'd been given a ticket organized other cabbies and surrounded the officer who feared they were going to riot.



While the refugees and those who supported them were thrilled with the opportunity available to them in Clarkston, other residents of the town didn't like seeing all the newcomers gathering together at the center – they were taking that over, too!

Mayor Swaney organized a town hall meeting that would allow the public to ask questions of agency officials. On May 31, 2003, more than 100 Clarkston residents gathered at an auditorium at Georgia Perimeter College for the meeting. The first question was how the citizens of Clarkston could keep more refugees from coming there. It set the tone for the meeting which deteriorated from there. People against more refugees had words with those who supported them. There was hurt on both sides of the issue.

Trust

The transition to the new culture was more difficult for the parents of refugee children than it was for the kids. They worried about the welfare of their children. They were in America and it was much safer there than it had been in their home nations. But everything was new. The parents, many of which were single mothers, had to work long hours and be away from home. These parents worried about their children being hurt and lured into criminal gangs that were common in the small town. After the experiences that these women had been through, it was hard to trust anyone – even the Americans who saved them from certain death.

The family had left the oppression of one country for what looked to be the oppression of another. The refugee families were poor and intimidated by their new surroundings and struggled with the transition from living in a third world country to coming to the U.S. and having a chance at the American dream. But there was doubt among the refugees that that dream was meant for them.

Beatrice Ziaty was upset. Her youngest child, Jeremiah, was too small to be out in this strange new alien world alone. She couldn't trust that he'd be okay; trust was something that she dropped from her lexicon long ago. She ordered him to stay home while she was gone. Jeremiah had made the Fugees Under Thirteens team and wanted to go to practice. But Beatrice had lived in fear and oppression all her life and didn't really know how not to, how to acquire a new mindset and trust people.

Jeremiah pleaded with his mother. He would introduce her to his coach. Luma gladly met with Beatrice and promised to watch out for Jeremiah's safety as if he were her own son. She would pick him up and bring him home so that he'd never be alone. Luma wanted soccer to be a way for the boys to escape the trauma of the past. But they would reveal things from time to time that let her know that their experiences were always part of them. Each time she heard one of these tales, she would shudder and be all the more determined to give these boys hope.

Beatrice realized that she had to trust Luma. She had to work to make ends meet. But she realized that Jeremiah had to be a little boy who could run and play and feel free.



He had been through a horrific trauma that most would never know – he witnessed his father being killed. Bien was willing to trust Luma; Beatrice had no choice but to trust her, too.

Tenacity

Tenacity is a recurring theme throughout the story of *Outcasts Unite* which tells the story of Luma al-Mufleh a young Jordanian woman who decided to give up her family and its wealth in exchange for the opportunity to live free in America. Luma had a strong independent streak even when living under the stringent sharia law of her native land. She wasn't like the ordinary girls in Jordan; she played soccer with the boys in the street and felt deeply for the impoverished.

After graduating from college in America, Luma made the decision to stay in America which resulted in her father disowning her and cutting her off from family funds. Luma had opted for a pathway that was wrought with many difficulties and uncertainty. Despite the challenges, she hung on. She could have returned to her family and had an easy life. But she wanted to live where she could be herself. She had no work permit and was an illegal immigrant. Despite her intelligence and education, she therefore was forced take menial jobs like dishwasher or cook that didn't require background checks.

Luma was determined to not only make it on her own but to make a difference in society. Her love for soccer and her big heart propelled her to organize a free soccer program for the impoverished refugee boys who had been resettled in her community. She had to deal with traumatized boys who could barely speak English and who had been through the harrowing experience of fleeing for their lives from war-torn countries. There were many times that she could have quit the teams but she was their coach and she wouldn't let them down. She literally had to fight city hall when the teams were stripped of their home fields. She pleaded her case that these boys needed to have their soccer teams; it would keep them off the street and away from the lure of gangs. The soccer teams were the only bright lights in the lives of boys who had little to aspire to. She ultimately convinced the city council to allow the team to use a field in a local park as their home field.

Luma never took the easy way out. She was strong in character and her tenacious nature compelled her to hang onto her dreams, goals and principles despite the many challenges she faced.

Styles

Structure

Outcasts United is separated into three main parts. In Part One: Changes, the reader learns the story of Luma who grew up in a wealthy family in Amman Jordan, a nation in which the vast majority of citizens live in abject poverty. She went to the best schools and had a college education in the United States. The freedom she enjoyed during her four years in a U.S. college compelled her to stay where she could be herself. She told her family that she would not return to Jordan; she was staying in America where she could live free. Her father disowned her and cut her off from family contact and its fortune.

In Part Two: A New Season, the story of Luma's struggle being an undocumented immigrant in the U.S. and being forced to take menial jobs just to make it. Luma's love of soccer, the beautiful sport, and her big heart compelled her to organize a free soccer program for the refugee boys who had been resettled in her town after fleeing for their lives in war-torn countries.

Part Three: Full Circle tells the ups and down that Luma faced in trying to rein in the anger, fear and painful memories of her boys. She helped the boys with their English, schooling and assimilation to their new culture. It would have been easier for her to quit and return to a life of luxury in Jordan but she would never let her boys down and their mothers who depended on Luma to watch over their sons.

Perspective

Warren St. John attended one of the Fugees games in Clarkston, Georgia. He knew nothing about the program when he came to the town pursuing a story as a reporter. He had wanted to write a story about the small town in Georgia becoming one of the most diverse communities in America due to Georgia's robust refugee resettlement program. After watching one of the Fugees games, St. John wanted to learn more. He had just witnessed a remarkable turn of events. A dozen impoverished boys from various war-torn countries had formed a team that played the beautiful game.

The boys were talented, athletic and followed all the rules. St. John wanted to learn how this all came about. And importantly who their coach was. He noticed the coach, a female who appeared to be quiet and reserved only offering bits of advice and wisdom here and there. St. John noticed a sense of trust and closeness that could be likened to a family between coach and players.

As St. John dug deeper using his reporting skills, he learned that the team didn't even have a home field. He also learned that the shining beacon of hope in the lives of these transplanted boys was their soccer team. They had fled with their families from unimaginable horrors and dangers in their native lands winding up in untenable



circumstances in impoverished refugee camps. After years of living in abject poverty, the families were notified that they were being sent to America – a chance to pursue the American dream in a small town named Clarkston, Georgia.

St. John tells the story from his own experiences and reporting. He also tells Luma's story who was also a transplant but under very different circumstances from her boys.

Tone

Author Warren St. John is a reporter by trade and, therefore, tells the story of Luma and her Fugees soccer teams based on the facts that he uncovered during his time in Clarkston, Georgia, the small town where a large number of refugees who fled from poverty, starvation and war and were ultimately resettled in Georgia.

When St. John visited Clarkston he was pursuing a story about the large number of refugees that had been placed in the small Georgia town. He did not initially realize that there would be another story to tell, one that would be more interesting than a mundane account based on stats and government reports. When he first saw one of the Fugees team play, he was amazed at the skill and professionalism of these young boys who had led harrowing lives of fear and uncertainty in their native homes. He was even more amazed that the coach of the three teams was a woman from Jordan. What an international story he had uncovered! He writes without demagoguery but, reading between the lines, it is apparent that St. John was impressed by this unexpected small miracle.

St. John has been a writer for the New York Observer, the New Yorker, Wired and Slate and was a New York Times reporter. The adult title of this work, *Outcasts United: An American Town, A Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference*, was recommended reading for college freshmen across the country.



Quotes

Luma lived at a comfortable distance from Amman's problems, which included poverty and the tensions brought on by the arrival of Palestinian and, later, Iraqi refugees."

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 6)

Importance: While attending ACS, Luma was isolated from the real Jordan where people lived in poverty and in over-crowded conditions.

The citizens of many communities might have organized, or protested, or somehow pushed back, but Clarkston wasn't a protesting kind of place. The town's quiet, conservative southern character didn't go for rallies and bullhorns. Rather than making noise, during the first decade of resettlement the older residents of Clarkston simply retreated into their homes."

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 10)

Importance: The influx of refugees into Clarkston changed the demographics of the small town. The people of the city didn't hold protests but they stayed away from the new arrivals.

During those early practices, Luma made a point not to ask her players about their pasts. The soccer field, she felt, should be a place where they could leave all that behind. But as the kids became more comfortable with her, they would reveal details about their experiences that showed Luma how the trauma they'd experienced was still affecting them."

-- Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 26)

Importance: Luma wanted to give the boys a place where they could leave their struggles behind them. But she saw that the trauma they experienced was part of them no matter where they were.

She said we're all foreigners, and this is a team where everybody unites. And she told us she was going to kick us off the team if we didn't."

-- Yousph Woldeyesus (chapter 6 paragraph 43)

Importance: Yousph Woldeyesus was a player on the Fugees and was originally from Ethiopia. This quote captures Luma's determination that the boys play as a unit and not defer to others of their same ethnicity. It was the core spirit of the team – outcasts united.

We had the same feeling that with refugee families we felt at home in a way that we didn't feel in the rest of our lives."

-- Tracy Ediger (chapter 7 paragraph 13)

Importance: Tracy Ediger became the coordinator for the Fugees soccer program. She



and Luma shared a special connection with the refugees which is demonstrated by her statement above.

While their parents were at work, the kids were at school, learning the rules of the new culture, and sometimes using this new knowledge against their parents.”

-- Narrator (chapter 9 paragraph 56)

Importance: It was more likely that refugee children learned more about their new nation at school. Their parents had to keep their nose to the grindstone and earn money. There was very little time for them to learn about their new home and its culture. The children, therefore, became wiser to their new world than their parents were.

A huge group of parents, siblings, and friends accompanied the Gwinnett Phoenix team to Decatur and set up camp on a sideline with folding chairs, blankets, coolers, and picnic lunches. The Fugees sideline, as usual, was empty.”

-- Narrator (chapter 10 paragraph 3)

Importance: The parents of the Fugees rarely attended games because they were working or because they were intimidated and felt out of place as foreigners. The boys and Luma not only had to work at improving playing skills they had to be their own cheering section.

While in a refugee camp in Mozambique, Generose had lost a daughter to a domestic accident. The girl had accidentally knocked over a pot of boiling potatoes and was badly scalded, and Generose, too poor to afford a ride to a hospital, was left to wrap her daughter’s burns with leaves. For a time it seemed the girl might be fine, but eventually her wounds became worse, and she died, just nine years old.”

-- Narrator (chapter 12 paragraph 8)

Importance: This incident captures the inhuman and impoverished conditions that families had to contend with at resettlement camps after fleeing their native lands.

I wasn’t going to come to tryouts because I tried out. I love playing soccer. I love playing with my friends, but my friends aren’t here. It’s like you break up with your family. And this is why: don’t nobody want to cut their hair. I want to play on the team, but I want to play on the team with my friends.”

-- Fornatee (chapter 14 paragraph 5)

Importance: In an effort to create a disciplined structure, Luma required the boys to cut their hair as short as possible. Having long hair in the oppressively hot Georgia August made the heat more unbearable. She also wanted the boys to be alike – they were a team. But some of the boys refused to cut their hair and she cut them from the team. She even cut one of the best players but she had to enforce her own rules consistently.

If you keep getting beat up on the same road, take a different road.”

-- Luma (chapter 18 paragraph 27)



Importance: Luma was worried about her boys and the dangers from the many gangs in town. Rather than fight she advised the boys to not provoke the gang members by walking on their turf. A better solution was to take a different route.

For a while I expected you to be like Jeremiah. Actually, you're a better athlete – but you don't have the discipline or the respect to play. You don't respect me, and you don't respect your team.”

-- Luma (chapter 21 paragraph 24)

Importance: Luma had to tell one of her best players, Mandela, that he was not measuring up as far as attitude and cooperation. He was a great athlete and player but she knew he would bring the team down with his dark moods and anger issues. It was difficult for Luma but she had to do the right thing.

... you are a bunch of idiots. You do not know how to play soccer. You know how to play street ball. So everything everyone has said about this team – that you don't deserve to play, that you don't know how to play as a team, because you don't have the discipline or the respect to play – it's true. Because you don't know how to play. If you want to play on the streets, let me know. Because this is a waste of my time.”

-- Luma (chapter 26 paragraph 31)

Importance: This quote is an example of the reverse psychology that Luma resorted to in an effort to get her boys to take the game seriously, follow the standard rules of soccer, respect their fellow players and coach and give it their all.



Topics for Discussion

1

Why was Luma's life in Jordan an isolated one? What did she think of the poor in her country and who inspired her?

2

Why did Luma want to stay in America after she graduated? What reaction did her parents have and what were the repercussions?

3

Describe the escape of Beatrice Ziaty and her three sons from war-torn Liberia? Where did they flee to and what happened to her husband?

4

Why could Luma only get jobs involving menial labor like dishwasher or cook? What business venture did she enter into, and what level of success did she achieve?

5

Why did the YMCA decide to end their relationship with the Fugees teams? Describe the new home field behind the Indian Creek Elementary School that Luma was allowed to use for her team.

6

What signs of bias were demonstrated by the residents of Clarkston with the influx of refugee families? What is xenophobia and does it apply to this story?

7

What compelled Luma to cancel the Under Fifteens for the season and forfeit all their remaining games? How did Kanue intercede and with what results?



8

What were the circumstances of Tito being shot by a town gang member? How did the incident impact Luma and how did she broach the subject with the boys?

9

Why did Luma cut Mandela from the team? Why was it difficult for her and how did it impact Beatrice?

10

Why did Luma want the boys to celebrate Halloween? What arrangements did she make and what reaction did the boys have to the holiday?