

Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia Study Guide

Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia by Jean Sasson

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Plot Summary

PRINCESS: A TRUE STORY OF LIFE BEHIND THE VEIL IN SAUDI ARABIA by Jean P. Sasson is a true story based on information given to the writer by a Saudi Arabian princess. Sultana was born the tenth daughter of a prince of Saudi Arabia and grew up in a world of luxury. That luxury was belied, however, by the oppression of women that took place all around her as Sultana grew up. Sultana would suffer some of this oppression herself when she was forced into marriage to a man she barely knew before she was seventeen and when that husband would later tell her he intended to take a second wife because she could no longer give him children. Princess is a non-fiction story of the outrage that is forced upon women throughout Saudi Arabia even today, a story that leaves the reader praying for change before it is too late for the next generation of girls growing up in Saudi Arabia.

Sultana grew up being tortured by her older brother, Ali. Sultana's first memory stems from an incident in which her mother hit her for copying Ali. Other early memories stem from battles she and Ali fought in their attempts to both end up on top. Ali was a spoiled child who often did cruel things to people and animals alike and was never disciplined because he was the only son of their father's first marriage and therefore Father's heir.

When Sultana was entering her teenage years, her sister Sara was forced into marriage. Only three years older than Sultana, Sara dreamed of studying art. However, these dreams died the day she was forced to marry a man more than twice her age and who already had several other wives. Sara was crushed emotionally by this marriage, made worse by the fact that she would not be allowed to see her mother and sisters the first few months of marriage. Before the time limit set by their father was over, Sultana and Mother got word that Sara was in the hospital. When they arrived they learned that Sara had attempted suicide. Sara's husband was a sexual sadist who tortured Sara, leaving her desperate to leave the marriage any way she could. Her mother put her own well being at risk by insisting that Father arrange a divorce for Sara.

In the months after Sara returned to her father's home, Nura, an older sister, arranged for Sara and Sultana to go on a furniture buying trip with her. Ali managed to convince Nura to take him and friend along as well. Enraged by Ali honing in on her trip, Sultana flushed Ali's headdress down the toilet, causing him to break his toe as he attempted to stop her. Later, Sultana took Ali's hidden collection of pornography to the local mosque in order to get him in trouble with the mutawas, the religious people and protect herself from getting in trouble. The ruse worked, but Ali suffered more than Sultana had expected, causing her to regret her actions.

During the trip to Cairo and Italy, Sultana walked in on her brother and his friend raping a small child. This was condoned because the mother of the child sold her to Ali for this very purpose. At the same time, Sultana began to menstruate, bringing her to the age at which all Saudi women must begin wearing a veil and abaaya whenever they are in the presence of a man not of their immediate family. Sultana was excited about this coming of age act but disliked the veil's restrictions.



After returning from their trip, Sultana and her siblings learn that their mother was dying of cancer. Sultana was heartbroken, but grieving for the dead is not accepted in their culture, so she focused on the happy times in her mother's life. Shortly after her death, Sultana's father decided to remarry. Sultana was determined to dislike her new stepmother but discovered she was a scared young woman just like herself. Sultana included her new stepmother in a woman's group she had organized with two friends. However, this proved to be a mistake when the other two members of the group were caught spending time with foreign men. Sultana's father divorced his new wife.

Sultana's father arranged for Sultana to be married. Sultana wanted to meet the man before the wedding and her father surprisingly agreed. Sultana discovered that her father had made a good match and Kareem was a good man. Sultana's marriage was happy until she suffered a bout with breast cancer and became unable to have any more children. Kareem decided to marry a second wife for the purpose of having more children. Sultana could not accept this, so she ran away with their three children. Eventually Kareem agreed to sign a paper promising to never marry another woman as long as Sultana lived.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, refugees flooded Saudi Arabia. As a result there was a great deal of chaos. Several women took advantage of this chaos and drove through the city streets, something that is forbidden. Sultana saw this as a sign of change but soon learned that these women were ostracized, including one who was rumored to have been killed. Little had changed and it appeared that little would ever change.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

Sultana was the daughter of a prince of Saudi Arabia. Sultana's father was the son of Abdul Aziz, the first king of Saudi Arabia and the brother of the current king. Sultana grew up in the palace belonging to her father and lived in by her ten siblings and her mother, the prince's first of four wives. Sultana, who was not allowed by Saudi culture to write a book of her own, told her story to the author of this book who presented it to readers in the first person point of view as though Sultana wrote it.

In the section "Childhood," Sultana refused to give an apple the cook had given her to her brother. As they fought, Omar, their father's driver, separated them and reported the fight to their father. As a consequence of Sultana's refusal to give in to her brother, Ali was given the privilege of choosing what Sultana would eat at every meal for several weeks. Sultana often went to bed hungry as a result. A short time later, Sultana recalled overhearing a meeting between her father and his brothers. Sultana's father was the son of Abdul Aziz, a man who won back control of his country from the Rasheed clan and became the first king of Saudi Arabia. Now Abdul Aziz's son Sa'ud was king, but he was a bad king who was spending all his money and lacked in leadership skills. The brothers knew something needed to be done about Sa'ud but were reluctant to force him to resign. The brothers decided they would first attempt to reason with Sa'ud, but when this did not work, they had no choice but to force a resignation. Faisal, another brother, replaced Sa'ud on the throne.

In "Family," King Faisal's wife was a woman who believed women should be educated. With her encouragement, Sultana's mother managed to convince Sultana's father to allow their younger daughters to be educated, including Sultana. Sultana would always be grateful for this as she was an excellent student who would eventually get a college degree. Sara, Sultana's closest sister, was the smartest of all, however, with a special interest in art. At the same time, Sultana's father was a very wealthy man who spoiled his only son with his first wife with great riches. Sultana and her sisters were often overlooked, leaving Sultana with feelings of resentment for her brother. Sultana once broke a Rolex watch Ali left laying around and was pleased when Ali suffered a punishment as a result. Ali was often a cruel child, who would torture small animals and mistreat the servants. No one would do anything, however, because Sultana's father did not see the harm in Ali's cruel habits. Therefore, Ali was rarely punished for the many cruel things he would do, even when he would hurt and abuse Sultana.

In these chapters, Sultana is introduced. Sultana is the youngest daughter in a family of eleven children. Sultana's mother is the first wife of a prince of the Saudi royal family. Sultana's father has three other wives and many other children, but the children of his first wife have some priority because they are the first and the oldest. Unfortunately, all but one of them are girls. Girls are not desired in Saudi families because they are not an asset to the father. Only sons can work and inherit the father's estates. A girl's only



worth to a father is a good marriage, but they must wait until the girl is twelve or thirteen; therefore, most fathers do not take much notice of their daughters in childhood. Sultana is different than other Saudi girls in that she is educated and she has a spirit that has not been broken by the cruel treatment of her brother and the indifference of her father.

These chapters also introduce Ali. Ali is a cruel little boy who often tortures people and animals alike simply because he can. Ali has little discipline from either his father or his mother. Ali is allowed to do as he pleases, and he takes advantage of this situation. Ali and Sultana are archenemies, often getting into fights in which Sultana often comes out on the wrong end. This relationship is a metaphor to the way women are treated in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, Sultana's father is introduced. Sultana's father is an absentee father in Sultana's life, ignoring her except when she is in trouble, which might explain some of the scraps Sultana gets into with Ali. Her father lives his life according to the traditions of his culture, something his own people would not blame him for but which the child Sultana is cannot understand. Sultana wants her father to love her and will spend much of the book attempting to get his attention.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary and Analysis

In "My Sister Sara," Sara learns at the age of sixteen that she is to be married to a man more than twice her age. Sara had dreams of studying art and perhaps going to work in a museum. With the news of this impending marriage, Sara's dreams died. Not only this, but Sara would only be one among many wives to her new husband. The marriage was beneficial to Father, however, because the groom was a member of a leading merchant family; therefore, the wedding was to go through no matter what Sara had to say about it. Sara cried all through the wedding preparations, despite the sedative their father ordered the doctor to administer to her. Sultana attended the wedding, which began in tents in the backyard with dozens of women from different levels of society. Sara was escorted inside the tent after a meal was served and brought together with her new husband before a holy man. The marriage had already been made between Father and the groom; this was only a symbolic ceremony. Sultana caught sight of Sara's face after the ceremony and knew how frightened Sara was and felt sad that Sultana could do nothing about it.

In "Divorce," Sultana and Mother were told they could not visit Sara for six months after her wedding in order to give her a chance to settle in to the new situation. However, after only four months, Father told Mother that Sara had been admitted to the hospital and that she and Sultana would go to be with her. Mother and Sultana had to wait for Omar to bring them the letter from Father that would allow them to fly. Once it arrived, Mother and Sultana boarded their family's private jet. Sultana spent some time in the cockpit with the American pilots, an event that helped her to see that not all men were cruel. When they reached the hospital, Sultana's mother and Sultana learned that Sara had attempted suicide because her husband was a sexual sadist who had tortured her. The husband's mother came to the hospital and complained that Sara was shaming her family. Mother stood up to her in a rare show of compassion for her daughter. When Sultana's father arrived, her mother insisted that he allow Sara to leave the marriage. Father threatened to divorce mother and leave her destitute if she did not stop pushing the issue; however, Father eventually convinced Sara's husband to divorce her. The divorce was a simple matter of Sara's husband saying three times that he divorced her in front of two male witnesses. When she recovered, Sara returned to her father's house, a changed woman.

In these chapters, the reader is introduced to the marriage arrangements that Sultana feels is part of the outrage of her male-oriented culture. Sara is forced at the age of sixteen to marry a man in his sixties, more than twice her age and a man who has two wives already. Sara is frightened and enraged by this marriage because she had hoped to go to school to study art; however, Sara has no choice. Sara must marry this man because her father said so. There is no law that protects Sara and no avenue for her to turn to except to run away. Running away, however, is not an option because no one will protect a woman. Sara's marriage proves to be a cruel one, leaving Sara beaten and



damaged, so emotionally warped that she attempts suicide. Mother, in a rare show of strength touching on the theme of strong women, defends her daughter and forces Father to pursue a divorce to protect Sara from further harm.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary and Analysis

In Ali, Nura, Sultana's older sister, decided to take Sara and Sultana on a furniture buying trip with her in order to cheer up Sara. When Ali wrangled an invitation to go on the trip as well, Sultana became enraged. Sultana took Ali's new headdress and flushed it down the toilet, causing Ali to break his toe in his attempt to stop her. Afterward, Sultana became afraid of what her father would do to her when he learned what happened. In order to distract their father, Sultana took a stash of pornography Ali hid in his room and took it to the mosque. The pornography included a group of slides that had Ali's name written all over them. Within hours the mutawas, the religious men, came to Sultana's house and told Father what they had found. Father was so outraged that he almost allowed the mutawas to arrest Ali for possessing materials that were forbidden in their religion. Instead, Father forced Ali to attend mosque five times a day for a year, something he was loath to do. Father also had to make a large donation to the mosque.

In "The Trip," Nura and her husband, Ahmed, took Sultana, Sara, Ali, and Ali's friend Hadi to Cairo to begin buying furnishings for their new palace. Sultana loved Cairo; therefore, it seemed fitting to her that she became a woman there. Sultana chose not to begin wearing a veil and abaaya at that time, however, preferring to wait until they returned to Saudi Arabia. One afternoon Sultana and Sara returned early from a shopping trip and found Ali and Hadi raping a young girl who could not have been more than eight. Sultana was outraged and told Nura, but was told there was nothing they could do. The child's mother sold her to Ali to be used way, and that there were hundreds of children used in that way in many cities throughout the world due to the extreme poverty in some countries. From there, the group went on a tour of several Italian cities, buying furniture and seeing the sights. It would be the last time Sultana would see the world without the barrier of a veil.

In these chapters, Sultana's discord with Ali comes to a head when she finally gets revenge on him by leaving his forbidden pornography in the mosque. Sultana is excited to finally get the better of her brother until she realizes the full impact of what she has done. Ali could have been arrested and maybe even put to death. What Sultana did was deeply cruel, exposing her naivety and her desire to hurt the brother who has always been very cruel to her. Sultana shows some of her character when she regrets her actions despite her deep hatred of her only brother. Later, on a trip to Cairo, Sultana gets her first period, making her a woman in the eyes of her culture. Now Sultana will have to begin wearing a veil and abaayo and will be eligible to get married. Sultana is no longer a child. At the same time, Sultana is introduced again to the cruelty of the men in her culture when she catches her brother and his friend raping a little girl and no one will do anything about it. It appears that these actions do not even upset the adults in Sultana's world, showing the reader exactly what Saudi's think of women and of foreign women, setting up a later chapter when Sultana tells a story of the mistreatment of foreign servants.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-8 Summary and Analysis

In "Journey's End," Sultana returns from her trip to learn her mother is dying. Sultana and her sisters remain by their mother's side until the end comes. After her death, Mother is buried in an unmarked grave in the middle of the desert as is the tradition in their country. Sultana made an attempt to be happy at the burial because in their culture, to grieve over the death of loved one is to show disrespect to God. In "Girlfriends," Sultana's father decided to marry again to bring the number of his wives back to four. Father married Randa, a woman Sultana set out to dislike because she was a replacement for her mother but discovered she could not dislike her. Randa was young, only a few years older than Sultana, and frightened. Sultana befriended Randa and allowed her to join a group Sultana had created with two other friends that was supposed to help promote the independence of women. However, the two friends who founded the group with Sultana, Nadia and Wafa, were participating in acts that placed all their lives in danger. Nadia and Wafa would approach foreign men and ask them if they wanted to meet in their apartments. When Nadia and Wafa would find a man to meet them, they would engage in sexual acts including everything except penetration. One day Nadia and Wafa were caught. The girls were arrested, but the mutawas could not punish them because they were still virgins. Nadia and Wafa were returned to their fathers. Wafa's father immediately arranged for Wafa to be married. Nadia's father, however, felt the damage to the family's reputation was so bad that the only punishment could be death. Nadia's father had her drowned in the family's pool as the family watched. When Sultana's father learned of Sultana and Randa's participation in the group with Nadia and Wafa, he divorced Randa and began searching for a husband for Sultana.

In "Foreign Women," Sultana became depressed after the death of Nadia and the absence of Randa. Sultana began spending long hours in her bedroom where her maid, Marci, would spend hours caring for her. Over that time, Marci began talking to Sultana about her personal life. Eventually Marci began to tell Sultana the story of how she came to Saudi Arabia and what happened to her friend Madeline. Madeline had heard that a girl could make good money as a maid in Saudi Arabia, so she signed up with a company who arranged employment. A few months later, Marci followed suit, hoping to find Madeline once she arrived. When Marci arrived, she had trouble getting in touch with Madeline. Eventually Marci learned where Madeline was but could not talk to her because the employers did not allow the employees to talk on the phone. When the family was out of town, Marci enlisted the help of another Filipino employee in Sultana's household to help her. Together they went to the home where Marci was employed and convinced the male employee to allow them inside. Madeline told Marci how the father of the household would rape her every night and would allow his sons to do the same. The wife of the household told Madeline that it was part of her job description to provide sexual release for the men. Madeline wanted to leave, but she had a two-year contract and was unable to even leave the house. Marci tried to help, but no one in the



government, the law enforcement, or the Manila government was willing to help. Madeline finished out her contract and returned to Manila, unhappy and convinced Marci had abandoned her.

In these chapters, Sultana's mother dies and leaves Sultana to her own devices. Sultana immediately creates a woman's group to help promote freedom for women in their own small way. However, Sultana's friends go about this in the wrong way and eventually are caught compromising themselves with foreign men. The punishment for this is death, but they escape this fate when they are able to prove they are still virgins. However, they are still left to the mercy of their fathers. In most cultures, the father is a compassionate man who would do anything to protect his child. However, in the Saudi culture the father does not consider his daughter an asset to his public persona. Therefore, when a daughter shames the family in any way and especially in the way these two girls did, the father has every right to do whatever he feels is necessary to right the wrong. In Nadia's case, the father felt only death could wash away the shame she brought on the family. This is the first time Sultana is faced with the absolute control men have over the women in their lives in her culture and the outrageous things they can do, leaving her both afraid of facing the same fate and determined to change things in her culture for women.

After Nadia's death, Sultana is more open to other stories of outrage against women. Marci, her maid, provides one such story. In Marci's story, a young Filipino woman is brought to Saudi Arabia to act as a maid but is turned into a prostitute by the male inhabitants of the house. Not only this, but the female members of the house are not outraged by this action. In fact, these women feel it is the maid's duty to pleasure these men any way the men want. Again the disregard for the female is seen in this culture, a disregard that is not solely a male vision, but rests with the females as well. Sultana is outraged but recognizes the danger in doing anything; she therefore remains silent about these terrible actions.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary and Analysis

In "Huda," Huda was an old servant in Sultana's household who claimed to have psychic abilities. In an attempt to cheer up Sara, Sultana and Sara have Huda read their fortunes. Huda claims Sara would marry again some day and have six children. Huda also claimed that Sultana would make a good marriage that would be happy for the first few years, then hit a difficult period. That same night, Sultana learns that her father found a husband for her. Sultana was to marry Kareem, a cousin. Sultana was upset and called Kareem's sister to tell her that she had become disfigured. Immediately Kareem's aunts came to the house demanding to see Sultana. Father was so amused by the whole thing that he agreed when Sultana asked if she could meet Kareem before they married. In Kareem, Sultana met her future husband and was surprised to find she liked him. Afterward, Kareem called Sultana and asked if she had been circumcised. Since Sultana did not know what was circumcision was, she asked Nura. Nura explained that in their culture girls often had parts of their genitals removed when they reached maturity. Nura had been circumcised, causing sex and childbirth to be extremely difficult. Nura saw a Western doctor who managed to convince Father and Mother to end the practice in order to protect the health of their remaining daughters.

In "The Wedding," Sultana and Kareem continued to speak on the phone often in the weeks before the wedding, although they never saw each other again. On the morning of the wedding, Sultana was happy because she knew her marriage would be a happy one. Sultana wore a bright red dress that left her older family members scandalized, but in which she looked beautiful. The wedding ceremony was simple and exciting, a happy wedding because the young couple was so pleased with their match. For their honeymoon, Sultana and Kareem went to Cairo and then toured the United States. In the first few days, Kareem refused to force Sultana into a sexual relationship and allowed her to decide when the time was right. Sultana was so happy in her new marriage that she welcomed Kareem into her bedroom after only a few nights.

In these chapters, Sultana manages to convince her father to allow her to meet the young man she is to marry. Normally couples do not meet until the day of the wedding, but Father is so amused by Sultana's attempts to sabotage the match that he allows them to meet. Sultana falls head over heels in love with Kareem, accepting him as her husband and creating a wedding that is actually happy as opposed to the usual wedding that is more like a first date for most couples. Sultana once again shows her stubborn, strong personality in these chapters, touching on a theme of the novel. Sultana fights the match until she is able to handle it her way and then decides to be married in red despite the fact that a more subtle color would be appropriate. Sultana is a strong woman and never fails to show that.

Also of note in these chapters is Nura's story of circumcision. Circumcision is a cruel tradition that makes it impossible for a woman to have any enjoyment from sex, in



theory keeping her from seeking sexual pleasure from men who are not her husband. This practice is archaic and cruel, leaving a woman forced to endure horrible pain during sex and childbirth, assuming she survives the procedure in the first place. Sultana is very lucky a doctor convinced her mother to stop the process before she was old enough to suffer it. The fact that Mother was the one who insisted on the ritual is somewhat surprising, but when the reader takes into account the fact that circumcision is supposed to increase the chances of a good marriage, the only thing a girl could aspire to, it is understandable.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary and Analysis

In "Married Life," Sultana and Kareem move into the home of Kareem's father and his mother until their own palace could be built. Kareem's mother did not like Sultana and felt she was the wrong woman for Kareem. Kareem's mother wanted her son to divorce Sultana. One afternoon, Sultana and her mother-in-law got into a shoving match and were still fighting when Kareem came in. Kareem had had a bad day and hit Sultana, leaving her cheek bruised. Sultana threatened to divorce Kareem, but he was so wrapped up in some legal trouble his brother had gotten into that he did not argue. Sultana's mother-in-law, however, did not want the scandal of Sultana initiating the divorce, so she made amends with Sultana. Later, when the king chose not to punish Kareem's mother, Sultana's mother-in-law came to believe Sultana had gotten her father to use his influence with the king to save him. Peace was made between Sultana and her mother-in-law, but Kareem continued to be distant. About the same time, Sultana learned she was pregnant and decided an abortion was the only course of action open to her. When Kareem learned about the planned abortion, he confessed his undying love to Sultana and begged her to return to him.

In "Birth," Sultana and Kareem plan to have their baby out of the country where the health care is better but were delayed so long that they were no longer able to travel. Instead, Kareem had a suite built at the local hospital specifically for Sultana's use. In the meantime, Sara came to stay with Sultana. One night, Sultana and Sara were sitting in the garden when one of Kareem's other brothers, Asad, came in with several friends. Sara was shamed that she was seen without her veil, but Asad's reaction was so comical that Sultana was afraid he would pass out. The following day Asad announced his intention to marry Sara. Sultana interrupted an argument between Asad and his mother over Sara and went into labor. Sultana gave birth to a healthy baby boy that same day. In "Dark Secrets," Sultana was told a story by one of the nurses about another girl staying in the maternity ward. This girl had been raped by several of her brothers who had become drunk and high while the girl's parents were out of town. The girl told the authorities her story, but the boys insisted that the girl had initiated the sexual encounter. The girl became pregnant as a result. The father waited until the baby was born and then insisted that the girl be stoned to death. The nurse was outraged and became further outraged when she learned Sultana could do nothing to stop it.

In these chapters, Sultana began her new life as a bride. Sultana is forced to live in the same home as her mother-in-law until her own palace could be built. This relationship was difficult because the mother-in-law did not approve of her daughter-in-law; however, this discord was repaired when a family crisis bigger than their petty differences came into their lives. At the same time, Kareem hit Sultana and left her with no choice but to ask for a divorce. Sultana has too much pride to allow a man to hit her, once again illustrating the theme of strong women. When Sultana learns she is pregnant, she is convinced Kareem will divorce her and leave her a single mother. Because this is a



nearly impossible situation for a single woman in Saudi Arabia, Sultana decides to have an abortion. This act of desperation convinces Kareem that he loves his wife and bends to her will, something that is rare in Saudi men, showing the reader that Kareem would rather have the woman he loves than to live strict to the codes of Saudi Arabian culture.

After Sultana has her baby, she hears the story of a young woman who will be stoned to death for her assumed participation in a sexual act that left her impure and pregnant. While Sultana is outraged at this story, she insists there is nothing she can do. The English nurse who tells her the story cannot understand why Sultana insists she cannot help. After all, Sultana is the daughter of a prince, the niece of a king. Even the reader finds themselves wondering why Sultana did nothing. However, the culture of her country makes a woman's voice worse than silent. A woman cannot do anything. Sultana does not even try to save the poor girl.



Chapters 15-17

Chapters 15-17 Summary and Analysis

In 1975, Sultana is vacationing in Juddah with Sara, who was expecting her first child, when news of the king's death reached them. A member of the royal family killed him in revenge for the death of his brother during a protest ten years before. Grief enveloped the entire country at the loss of this great man. A few days later Sara gave birth to a girl. The death of the king prompted Asad to sign a paper ensuring his daughter's freedom to choose a husband without family intervention. At the same time, Ali returned from studying in America where he was enjoying what he called the looseness of American women. Ali told his father he wanted to marry, however, because he wanted a virtuous Saudi woman in his life. In revenge for all the bad blood between them over the years, Sultana told Ali he could never know for sure if his wife were pure, even if she said so and if she bled on their wedding night. This left Ali with a lack of confidence in himself as a man.

In "The Woman's Room," Sultana learns about the fate of an old friend. This girl was the daughter of a man who believed his daughter should be allowed the freedom to live her life her own way. When this daughter got accepted to a school in London, he was thrilled and immediately arranged for her to go. In London, the young woman fell in love with an American man and began to live with him. In the meantime, the young woman's father was killed and her care was left to an uncle who did not have the same views as her father. The uncle forced the girl to return home and arranged for her to marry an older man. The girl was outraged and in an attempt to end the marriage, told her new husband that she was not pure. The husband quickly divorced her. The uncle was outraged and decided to punish the young girl. The uncle put the girl in a padded room at the top of his house and allowed her no human contact. The girl was fed every day but denied conversation, music, books, and television. The only company the girl had was herself, which quickly drove her insane.

In these chapters, the king of Saudi Arabia is killed by one of his own relatives. This attack leaves the country in turmoil because the king was a kind man who ruled the country with a fair hand. The death of the king brings on change in the men around Sultana. Sultana's brother-in-law signs a contract ensuring his daughter will have the freedom to marry whomever she wishes. At the same time, Ali proves he has not changed at all when he decides he wants to get married even though he is sharing his bed with any willing woman while attending school in America. This makes Sultana so angry that she tells him he will never know for sure that his virginal wife was truly a virgin. Sultana has a mean streak and this proves it.

Again the oppression against women, a theme of the novel, in Saudi culture is shown in the story Sultana tells about her friend who is placed in a woman's room. The girl's only sin was to enjoy the freedom her father gave her and to fall in love. The Saudi culture does not allow for this behavior unless the guardian agrees, however, so the girl's new



guardian takes action against her. The guardian first has the girl married, but when this does not work out, he has her locked in a room with only herself for company. This treatment is cruel and would never be allowed in a country where women are appreciated. It is action like this that prompted Sultana to tell her story and to hope for change one day.



Chapters 18-20

Chapters 18-20 Summary and Analysis

In "Second Wife," five more years passed. Sultana gave birth to two daughters, then suffered a bout with breast cancer. The illness left Sultana in danger should she ever become pregnant again, so she underwent sterilization surgery. Shortly afterward, despite his assurances of love, Kareem told Sultana that he intended to take a second wife for the purpose of having more children. Sultana became enraged and told Kareem she would never allow that to happen. In "Escape," Sultana took her passport and a letter allowing her to travel that she forged and flew to Dubai where the children were attending a camp. From there, Sultana took a commercial flight to London. During that flight, Sultana met a woman who was from Lebanon. While living in Saudi Arabia the woman's daughter had been kidnapped and used as a kidney donor. The woman was outraged and on her way to London to get medical care for her child. Sultana felt sorry for her but was too wrapped up in her troubles to offer much consolation. Once in London, Sultana and the children traveled to Zurich where she withdrew money from her son's bank account. Then they returned to Paris where Sultana rented a house. A few months later, Sultana called Kareem and agreed to meet him. Sultana told Kareem she would only return to him if he promised to sign a contract agreeing to never marry another woman while Sultana was alive. Kareem agreed and Sultana eventually returned with the children.

In "Great White Hope," Saddam Hussien invaded Kuwait in late 1990. In the aftermath of the invasion, many Kuwaiti refugees escaped to Saudi Arabia. Among these refugees came American soldiers to keep Saddam from invading Saudi Arabia as well. In the chaos of these events, women began driving in Riyadh. When Sultana heard this, she became very excited, convinced it meant a change in attitudes. However, Sultana soon learned that these women were abused; their families harassed, and one woman was rumored to have been killed. Sultana was saddened by these events. In the "Epilogue," Sultana was saddened that thirty years had passed in her lifetime, yet nothing had changed for women in her culture.

In these chapters, Sultana once more shows her spirit, illustrating the theme of strong women, when she runs away after learning her husband intends to take another wife. This action is very dangerous for Sultana because she has stolen the children of a Saudi man. This is grounds for death in her culture. Sultana is not afraid, however, because she knows her husband loves her and would not put her to death. The reader must wonder, however, if Sultana would have acted in such a rash fashion if she had not been as confident in her husband's love. While on the run, Sultana hears one last story about a small child who was kidnapped and used as a kidney donor in Saudi Arabia. Again the disregard for females, young or old, is illustrated here, filling the reader with a sense of outrage that these people do not at least value the children.



When Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait, Kuwaiti women begin driving in Saudi Arabia, encouraging Saudi women to do the same. Sultana sees this as a sign of change; however, it is later proved that nothing has changed. These women are harassed, injured, and one is even rumored to have been killed, putting an end to these rebellions. Sultana is disappointed that the oppression of women, a theme of the novel, continues and nothing has changed. Sultana is frightened because she has two daughters of her own, perhaps supplying the reader with a motive for telling her story despite the danger this book poses for her.



Characters

Sultana

Sultana is the daughter of a prince of the royal family of Saudi Arabia. Sultana's uncle was the king of Saudi Arabia, giving her family a special place in Saudi Arabian society. Sultana grew up in four palaces, one in each of the cities where her father liked to conduct business and to relax. Sultana was one of ten daughters born to her father and his first wife. Sultana's father also had three other wives and many brothers and sisters, but she spent the majority of her childhood among the siblings she shared with her biological mother and father. Sultana's father was a man who believed deeply in the culture and traditions of Saudi Arabia. As a consequence, Sultana was treated as an afterthought by her father, who put all his energies into his son rather than wasting time on his daughters.

Sultana was a difficult child who would often cause fights with her only brother, Ali. Ali was spoiled and would often take things from Sultana simply because he knew he could. Sultana would fight back, sometimes successfully but other times success was fleeting. Sultana grew up in the lap of luxury, traveling on private jets and shopping in foreign countries. Sultana knew her life was privileged, but that did not keep her from learning of the outrage often perpetrated against women by the men in her country. Sultana had two friends who were caught in compromising positions with foreign men resulting in the death of one. Sultana also learned the story of a Filipino servant who was repeatedly raped by her employer. These stories made Sultana want to do something to change the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia.

When Sultana was sixteen, she was informed that she would be getting married. Sultana insisted on meeting her fiancé before the wedding, something that was highly unusual but was arranged for Sultana. Sultana was lucky in that she was able to get to know her fiancé and discovered she loved him. Sultana's marriage would be a happy one until she was forced to undergo sterilization after a bout with cancer. Sultana's husband decided to marry another woman to provide him with more children. Sultana could not stand the humiliation of this act, so she took her children and hid in a foreign country until her husband agreed to never take another wife.

Ali

Ali was Sultana's older brother. Ali, as the only surviving son of the first wife of Sultana's father, was very spoiled. Ali was allowed to do anything he wanted as long as it fit within the restraints of the family's religious beliefs. Ali would steal food and toys from his sister, torture small animals, and abuse the servants. On the occasions when Ali would come up against Sultana, he would find her a worthy opponent. Once, outraged that Ali had wrangled his way onto a trip to Egypt and Italy with Sultana and her older sister, Sultana flushed his headdress down the toilet and then took his stash of pornography to



the local mosque. This latter action caused Ali to be punished for one of the only times in his life and overshadowed everything else Sultana had done that day.

Ali was a dark personality who learned from his father that women did not deserve respect. Ali was cruel, treating women with a dark disregard to their feelings. Sultana once caught Ali raping a small child, but no one would do anything about it because the child's mother had accepted money to allow Ali and his friend to use the child as they pleased. As an adult, Ali continued to be cruel, using American women while in the United States attending school while planning to marry a traditional Saudi Arabian woman upon his return.

Omar

Omar was a driver for Sultana's father. Omar was also a cruel man who did not respect women. Omar would often be on Ali's side in fights between Ali and Sultana. Omar was a go between, often acting as the disciplinarian when Sultana's father was out of the house. Sultana disliked Omar, believing he acted as a spy for her father and was the cause of some of her trouble with her father. Omar was only one of three drivers employed at Sultana's home. There were two other drivers who would run errands and transport the women on their errands. Omar's main function was to transport Sultana's father and brother where they needed to go.

Father

Sultana's father, a prince in the royal family of Saudi Arabia, was a son of Abdul Aziz, the first king of Saudi Arabia. Father was an emotionally absent father who rarely showed any interest at all in his female children. Father was kind to Ali, his only son with his first wife, because Ali would one day be his heir. This kindness led Ali to become a spoiled child who thought he could get away with whatever he wanted to do, causing a great deal of difficulty for Sultana as a child. Father was deeply devoted to the traditions of his culture and as such would not allow his daughters to be educated until his first wife argued for education so long and hard that he finally relented when it came to his youngest daughters. Father felt girls did not need to be educated because their only purpose was to marry and have children, marriages that Father himself would arrange for his own benefit, often pairing his daughters to older men.

Father arranged the marriage between Sara and her first husband, creating a rift between him and his first wife. Sara's mother did not want her daughter to marry someone she did not love but accepted it because this was the way things were. When the marriage proved to be abusive, Sara and Sultana's mother put her own well being at risk by insisting that Father encourage a divorce. Father threatened to divorce his first wife but eventually persuaded the husband to divorce Sara when he saw how unhappy everyone truly was. Later, as his children were becoming adults and after his first wife had died, Father began to soften toward Sultana. Eventually, Sultana and her father were able to create a stable relationship.



Sara

Sara was Sultana's sister, older by three years. Sara and Sultana shared a room and therefore were closer to each other than with their other sisters. When Sara became a woman, their father immediately arranged a marriage for her. Sara was unhappy because she had dreams of studying art and perhaps working in a museum. With marriage, these dreams died. Sara's husband was an older man who already had several wives. After four months of marriage, Sara's mother was notified that Sara was in the hospital. When she arrived, Sara's mother learned that Sara had attempted suicide.

Sultana and their mother learned that Sara attempted to kill herself because her husband was a sexual sadist who did terrible things to Sara. Sara was frightened and did not want to return to her husband's home. When their father learned about the situation, he made Sara's husband promise not to practice his sadistic urges on Sara any longer. Not satisfied with this, Sara's mother stood up to her husband and forced him to ask Sara's husband to offer Sara a divorce. Eventually the husband did this, allowing Sara to return to her father's home. Sara was so broken from her marriage that she rarely smiled or laughed anymore. Eventually, however, Sara remarried a man she loved and had several children.

Mother

Sultana's mother was her father's first wife and therefore the matriarch of the family. Mother was an orphan whose parents had died when she was only a small child. At twelve, Mother was forced into marriage with the prince. Their marriage was not a happy one, but Mother was content in her life as she believed given her country's culture she had made a good marriage and provided her husband with lots of children. Unfortunately, most of these children were girls. Boys were preferable to girls in their culture. Father had three other wives, over whom Mother was expected to lead, helping these other women with problems in their households that should not be brought to the attention of Father.

Mother loved her daughters and treated them fairly, going so far as to beg her husband to allow the girls to be educated even though this was not the culture of their country. At the same time, however, Mother insisted that her daughters be circumcised because it was the tradition of women in their country. It was only the interference of a Western doctor and Father's opinion that ended this practice before Sultana was old enough to go through it. Mother would fight for her daughters, but only when the fight seemed worth the risk. When Sultana was still a teenager her mother became ill and died. Mother was buried in the middle of the desert in an unmarked grave, as was the tradition of their culture.



Nura and Ahmed

Nura was one of Sultana's older sisters. Nura was one of the daughters who suffered circumcision. This ritual left Nura unable to have sex without suffering terrible pain and bleeding. When Nura became pregnant, the pain of her circumcision was even worse, leaving a Western doctor who was caring for her to become so enraged that he spoke to Nura's parents about ending this ritual. Sultana knew nothing of this tradition until Nura told her that women suffered through this indignity because it made them cleaner and somehow more virtuous for their men.

Ahmed was Nura's husband. Nura and Ahmed built a new palace and decided to take Sara and Sultana to Egypt and Italy with them to buy furnishings. It was on this trip that Sultana walked in on her brother Ali and his friend raping a young girl. It was also on this trip that Sultana became a woman and would have to begin wearing a veil and abaaya.

Randa

After the death of his first wife, Sultana's father decided he needed to marry another woman to bring his number of wives back up to four. Randa was a young woman, barely older than Sultana and many years younger than most of Father's other daughters. Randa was a beautiful woman whom Sultana's father liked very much, causing him to spend a great deal of time with her. At the same time, Sultana discovered that she, too, liked Randa even though her presence in their home felt like a betrayal to her mother. Sultana befriended Randa and included her in a group Sultana had created with two girlfriends. This group was suppose to raise awareness about the inequality of women in Saudi Arabia and help in some small way to encourage change. When Sultana's father learned that two members of this group were approaching and seducing foreign men, he divorced Randa and arranged for Sultana to be married immediately.

Nadia and Wafa

Nadia and Wafa were the two friends with whom Randa and Sultana created their women's group. Nadia and Wafa liked to proposition foreign men and go to their apartments in order to participate in every sexual act except penetration. When Nadia and Wafa were caught doing this by the mutawas, they were arrested. It was against the law for unmarried women to be alone with men, let alone engage in sexual acts with someone who was not their husband. However, when it was discovered that both Nadia and Wafa were still virgins, they were released to their families. Wafa's parents immediately arranged for Wafa to be married. Unfortunately, Nadia's father felt that the shame caused by Nadia's actions was too great to justify allowing her to continue to live. Nadia was drowned in the family pool while the family watched.

Kareem

Kareem was Sultana's husband. Kareem was a kind man who was happy to discover that Sultana was a spirited woman rather than a meek one his mother would have liked him to marry. Kareem called Sultana on many occasions before their wedding, getting to know her in a way that most men are not allowed before getting married. After the wedding, Kareem waited until Sultana was ready before initiating the sexual side of their marriage. Kareem was a lawyer who practiced in Riyadh, an unusual thing based on the fact that his family was already rich and most Saudi Arabians did not have careers if they already had money. Kareem was intelligent, kind, and gentle. However, Kareem believed in many of his country's cultural mores and would hit Sultana when she "deserved" it and discussed taking on a new wife when Sultana was no longer able to provide him with children. Sultana took her children and ran away, forcing Kareem to agree to never marry another woman while Sultana lived. This was highly unusual and proved that Kareem was a kind man who did love his wife.



Objects/Places

Abaaya

An abaaya is a full body covering that is often made out of black fabric that is used to cover a Saudi woman while she is in a place where she might be seen by men who are not of their immediate family. Saudi women are required to begin wearing an abaaya when they begin menstruating.

Veil

Saudi women are required to wear a veil made of dark material of various thicknesses. This veil is to protect a woman's face from being seen by a man not of her immediate family. All Saudi women must wear a veil after they begin menstruating.

Swimming Pool

Many affluent Saudis have swimming pools in their backyards. One friend of Sultana, Nadia, was murdered in the family swimming pool after her father became aware that she was meeting with foreign men for sexual encounters.

Ghutra and Igaal

A ghutra is a headdress that Saudi men wear. The igaal is a cord that rests on the ghutra. In a fit of anger, Sultana flushed her brother, Ali's ghutra and igaal down the toilet.

Pornography

Pornography is strictly forbidden for Saudi men to possess. Angry with Ali, Sultana took her brother's stash of pornography and left it in the neighborhood mosque to be found by the mutawas, the religious men. As a result, Ali suffered a terrible punishment.

Mosque

A mosque is a religious temple for use by devotees of the Muslim faith. There are many mosques in Saudi Arabia because it is believed that there should be a mosque within walking distance of every Saudi adult male. Women are not allowed to step foot inside a mosque.



Red Paint

One of Sultana's maids had her legs spray painted with red paint after going to a market in a short skirt. The mutawas do not believe women, even foreign women, should show any skin in public and perhaps entice men to have sexual feelings or perform sexual acts.

Hospital Suite

When it became clear Sultana would have to give birth in a hospital in Riyadh, Kareem had a suite built for Sultana to labor in and stay with the baby after the birth. While in this hospital, Sultana learned a sad story about a young woman who had been raped, but whose rapist lied and put her in a position where her father felt his only option was to have her put to death.

Palaces

As part of the royal family, each of the wives of Sultana's father have a palace of their own where they raise their children. These palaces are divided into sections, one section where the men have rooms and a section where the women have separate rooms and gardens so that they will not be seen by male visitors without their veil and abaaya. At the time of marriage, most new couples build their own palace where the women will raise their children.

Riyadh

Riyadh is a major city in Saudi Arabia, the center of government and business, and where Sultana lives first with her father and later with her husband.

Jeddah

Jeddah is a city near the sea where Sultana's father had palaces for his wives, and they would often spend the hottest months of the year there.

Cairo

Sultana goes on a trip with her sister to Cairo. It is here that Sultana becomes a woman, but she does not tell her father for several weeks to postpone the purchase of her first veil and abaaya.



Themes

Oppression of Women

In the Saudi culture, women are second class women who are ruled by their fathers and then their husbands. Saudi women are often forced to suffer a circumcision as young girls and are married immediately after they begin menstruating, some as young as twelve. Saudi women must cover all skin when in the presence of men who are not of their immediate family. A Saudi woman cannot work or drive and are therefore strictly reliant upon men. A Saudi man can divorce his wife for any reason by simply saying three times that he divorces her. When a Saudi woman is divorced, she must return to her father's home. If the father does not want the woman returned to his home, the woman is left homeless without any means of support. A Saudi father and husband has complete control over a woman's life, even given the power to have a woman imprisoned in his home or killed if she should commit a crime that brings shame on the family.

While the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia is a part of their traditions and based in religion, there are many women who believe these traditions should be changed. Some Saudi women have defied tradition and learned to drive or gone to foreign countries where they take lovers and walk out in the open without a veil or abaya. These women are often severely punished for their actions; some stoned to death or drowned in family swimming pools, while others are lucky enough to have fathers or husbands who understand their actions and choose not to punish them. Sultana was one of these lucky women. When Sultana learned her husband intended to take a second wife in order to have more children, Sultana took her children and lived abroad for several months until her husband promised to sign a contract saying he would never marry a second wife. Sultana's actions were dangerous, leaving her vulnerable to be put to death by her husband, but she was one of the few whose husband was understanding.

The oppression of women is a theme of this novel because it is the main purpose of the book. Sultana has chosen to tell the readers her story through the author because she wants the traditions of Saudi Arabia toward women to change. Sultana took a terrible chance by speaking to the author of this book, and if she was ever identified, the shame to her husband would have been so great that he might not have been able to avoid punishing her. However, Sultana took the chance because she believed that the only way things would change for women in Saudi Arabia was if women like herself stood up for what was right.

Strong Women

Sultana grew up in a world where women bent to the wills of the men around them. Sultana's own mother rarely stood up to her husband or her son even when their actions were putting one of her daughters in danger. When Sara was forced to marry, Sultana's



mother was unable to do anything to stop the marriage, even when she learned that Sara's husband was a sexual sadist who injured her daughter. The culture in which Sultana grew up in did not support strong women. However, Sultana was a stubborn child who grew up to be a stubborn woman, often fighting the battles she believed she could win even when they placed her in danger of being punished by her father or her husband.

On the surface, it appeared that Sultana's mother was weak because she did not stand up to her husband or her son. It also might have appeared that Sara, a damaged young woman who suffered a terrible marriage and faced a life dependent on her father for her care, was weak. However, these women were as strong as Sultana; they simply showed their strength in different ways. It would take a very strong woman to survive the abuse heaped on these women by the men in their lives. Sultana's mother and sister simply learned which battles were worth fighting and which were a lost cause before the fight even began. Sultana learned from these women and in her own way became a strong woman who would fight every battle, no matter how useless it might appear on the outside.

Tradition versus Modern Morals

Part of Sultana's argument in this book is that the strict traditions of the Muslim faith have not changed even though the world around them has. Sultana believes that the traditions of her country were based in realistic and moral bases. There was once a time when a woman did require the strength of a man to protect her from the sexual and physical advantage most men had over them. However, in the modern world women and men are on a more equal level. Men can no longer rape a woman and claim the sight of her skin drove him over the edge. The modern world has laws against these actions.

Women in the modern world now work and make as much money as most men and participate in professions that were once male dominated. Women can live on their own, raise children on their own, and do almost everything a man can do. In Saudi Arabia, however, women can do none of these things. The laws of Saudi Arabia are still male dominated, leaving women largely unprotected. Sultana believes it is time for these things to change. The modern world may be a dangerous place, but Sultana believes women are capable of taking care of themselves to a certain extent. Sultana saw no harm in allowing women to get driver's licenses, to be allowed to travel without a permission letter from their fathers or husbands, and to be allowed to show some skin in public without risking rape or death. The world has changed, but Saudi Arabia has not, and Sultana believed that was unrealistic, making tradition versus modern morals a theme of the book.

Style

Perspective

The author of this book writes the book in the first person point of view, giving the reader a first person narrative of life as a woman in Saudi Arabia. The author, however, is not Sultana, the narrator of the book. Sultana is a Saudi woman who is not allowed to write a book on her own. Instead, Sultana has told her story to a writer and asked her to tell the story as honestly as possible. To do this, the author chose to adopt the first person point of view and tell the story through Sultana's voice as it was told to her.

The perspective of this book is unique because it is not the author's story but one told to her. This situation gives the reader the impression that the author is the person who lived the events in the book and suffered all the oppression women of Saudi Arabia suffer daily. This perspective is only partially correct. The author is a woman who has lived in Saudi Arabia for many years, but she is not a Saudi and therefore is not restricted by the traditions of the Muslim faith. The author has met many Saudi women, however, and one of them has given her a detailed story of life in Saudi Arabia. This perspective leaves the reader with a mix of fear, pity, and contempt for the Sultana whose story is being told. Sultana is a rich woman, spoiled by her economic status and an indulgent mother, who has seen the worst her country's traditions can do to women and the best. It is this perspective that dominates the book and therefore this perspective is highly personal and deeply subjective.

Tone

The tone of this book changes frequently, running the spectrum of emotions from optimism for change to deep grief for the injustices done toward women in Saudi Arabia. The book is meant to be a wake-up call for the modern world, to let people know what has been happening behind closed doors in this largely Muslim country. However, the woman whose story is related in this book is a woman of privilege who has many comforts that free women in the United States might envy. Sultana wants the reader to understand the atrocities that are perpetrated on women in her country everyday, but at the same time she lives a life where spending eighty thousand dollars on one object is a daily occurrence. While the reader walks away outraged for the young servant who was repeatedly raped by her employer and the young woman stoned to death after her rapist lied about the circumstances of her rape, the reader cannot help thinking Sultana has a good life that is far removed from these incidences.

Sultana is a spoiled young woman which comes through in the tone of the book. Sultana told stories about atrocities perpetrated against young women with a tone that comes across laced with pity and maybe even a little contempt that the young woman could place herself in such a position in the first place. When a wrong is about to be committed against Sultana, she immediately withdraws millions of dollars from her



child's bank account and hides out in a foreign country. The reader cannot help wondering what would happen to another woman in the same situation who does not have the means Sultana has, leaving the reader feeling as though Sultana's tone of outrage as she relates this story is a little false. The tone of this book often has a false feel to it, as the book is told through Sultana's eyes and therefore has a sense of aloofness, of distance, that Sultana surely felt when listening to these stories of outrage.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty chapters. The book also includes an introduction written in the voice of Sultana, an epilogue, and an afterward that is written in the voice of the author. The author has also included in the book many facts on Saudi Arabia, including an appendix that lists many of the laws of Saudi Arabia as they relate to women. The author also includes a glossary and chronology of the history of Saudi Arabia.

The book is told in a linear fashion, beginning in Sultana's childhood and continuing through her marriage and birth of her three young children. Sultana begins with the sibling rivalry that often ruled her relationship with her brother, Ali. Sultana takes the reader through the marriage of her sister Sara that ended in divorce, her own coming of age, and her engagement that including meeting her husband-to-be before the wedding, an event that was highly unusual at the time. Sultana also relates the happy first years of her marriage, the birth of her son, and her husband's decision to marry a second wife after Sultana was forced to undergo sterilization after a bout with breast cancer. Sultana ran away when her husband informed her of this decision, forcing him to sign an agreement promising he would never take another wife. The book ends shortly after the beginning of the Persian Gulf War, during which many women in Saudi Arabia took advantage of the confusion of the emergency evacuation of many Kuwaiti people and drove through the streets of Riyadh.



Quotes

"To teach me that men were my masters, my father decreed that Ali would have the exclusive right to fill my plate at mealtimes. The triumphant Ali gave me the tiniest portions and the worst cuts of meat. Each night, I went to sleep hungry, for Ali placed a guard at my door and ordered him to forbid me to receive food from my mother or my sisters." *Childhood*, pg. 26

"When Ali found baby kittens, he would lock them away from their mother and howl with glee as the mother cat tried in vain to reach them. No one in the household dared to chastise Ali, for our father saw no harm in Ali's cruel ways." *Family*, pg. 41

"In my grieving mind, I found no consolation in the knowledge that the groom would never know happiness in such a bitterly unjust union. There could not be punishment enough for him." *My Sister Sara*, pg. 51

"But Sara's husband relented and uttered the words 'I divorce you' three times in the presence of two male witnesses. The divorce was final in a matter of moments." *Divorce*, pg. 58

"My misdeed had accomplished my target, however. No mention was ever made of Ali's broken toe, or the toilet clogged with Ali's headdress. One sin had so outweighed the other that they ended up canceling each other out." *Ali*, pg. 70

"I found the grinding poverty unsettling, yet it was not discouraging, for I saw in it a profound force of life. Poverty can turn a person into a flaming torch for change and revolution, without which mankind would come to a standstill." *The Trip*, pg. 76

"Hadi was raping a young girl, no more than eight years old, and Ali was holding her. Blood was everywhere. Our brother and Hadi were laughing." *The Trip*, pg. 78

"In Islam, to show grief at a loved one's passing indicates a displeasure with the will of God." *Journey's End*, pg. 85

"We young women of Arabia recognized that the men of our land would never pursue social change for our sex, that we would have to force change. As long as Saudi women accepted their authority, men would rule." *Girlfriends*, pg. 91

"It was the most dramatic hour in my young history, yet I knew that my friends' schemes for fun, as bad or sad as they were, should not have caused Nadia's death, or Wafa's premature marriage. Such cruel actions were the worst of all commentaries on the wisdom of the men who consume and destroy the lives and dreams of their women with emotionless indifference." *Girlfriends*, pg. 102



"Ownership of my body and soul would soon pass from my father to a stranger I would call my husband, for Father had informed me I would be wed three months after my sixteenth birthday. I felt the chains of tradition wrap tightly around me; I had only six short months of freedom left to savor." *Foreign Women*, pg. 120

"My dress was made of the brightest red lace I could find. I was a bold bride, and I took great delight in scandalizing my family, who had begged me to wear a soft peach or pale pink instead. As was my way, I refused to relent. I knew I was right." *The Wedding*, pg. 143

"If there could be one word that would describe the Saudi women of my mother's generation, it would be waiting. They spent their lives waiting. Females of that era were banned from education and job opportunities, so there was little to do but wait to be married, wait to give birth, wait for grandchildren, and wait to grow old." *Married Life*, pg. 151

"The rumor of the death of the young woman held fast in our land, and to this day, her fate has not been denied or confirmed; it hangs over us women, a veiled threat of the ultimate sacrifice awaiting those with courage." *The Great White Hope*, pg. 243



Topics for Discussion

Who is Sultana? Why does she not share her real name? Why does Sultana tell her story to the book's author rather than write the story herself? How does this choice reflect the themes of the book? How does this choice reflect the tone of the book? Is this book's tone dark, or is it lighter, optimistic? Why?

What is the significance of the history of Sultana's family? To whom is Sultana related? How does this affect Sultana's home life? How does this affect Sultana's relationship to other women in Saudi Arabia? How does this impact Sultana's experiences with the oppression of women that is so common in Saudi Arabia? Is Sultana an appropriate narrator for the story she is attempting to tell in this book? Why or why not?

Who is Sultana's father? Why does Sultana's father keep himself distant from his daughters? Does Sultana's father not love his daughters? Why is Sultana's father always nicer to his son, Ali? How does this attitude affect Ali's attitude toward women? How does this attitude affect Ali's future relationships with women? What does Sultana do about this?

Why does Sara marry her first husband? Could Sara have done anything differently in that situation? Why did Sara attempt suicide? What was the result of this suicide? Why did Sara's husband divorce her? What did this divorce mean to Sara's future? What were the chances Sara would ever marry again? Did Sara marry again? How was her second marriage different from the first?

Discuss Nadia and Wafa. What did Nadia and Wafa do with foreign men that caused them to be arrested? What was their crime? Why were they released to their fathers? Why did Nadia's father decide to murder her? How did Nadia's actions warrant this reaction? What happened to Wafa? Why were their punishments so different?

Discuss the young rape victim. Who raped this girl? Why? Did the girl have any part in the rape? Why was she accused of being a willing participant? Why did the girl's father not believe her story? Why was the girl stoned to death? What do you believe happened to her baby girl? Why?

Discuss Madeline. Why did Madeline chose to come to Saudi Arabia to work as a maid? What was Madeline hoping to gain from this job? What happened when Madeline arrived in Saudi Arabia? What did Madeline's employer do to her? What could Madeline have done differently about her circumstances? What do these actions say about Saudi Arabian laws?