

Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail Study Guide

Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail by Malika Oufkir

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Contents

Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 through 3.....	4
Chapters 4 through 6.....	8
Chapter 7.....	12
Chapter 8 through Postscript.....	14
Characters.....	16
Objects/Places.....	19
Themes.....	21
Style.....	23
Quotes.....	25
Topics for Discussion.....	27



Plot Summary

Malika Oufkir was five when she was taken to the palace for the first time to meet the king. She was immediately intrigued by the young princess but the two girls got into a fight. The king asked to adopt Malika and her parents, Fatima and Muhammad, agreed. Malika was heartbroken and homesick though she lived the life of a pampered princess. She was treated as the king's child and saw her parents only occasionally, but continued to long for home. After the death of the king, his son, Hassan II, took over the throne and Malika's life went on much as before. When she was given the opportunity to speak out to him, she took it and was sent home to live with her parents. She was rebellious and often slipped away at night, dancing in clubs and partying with friends. The political situation became tenuous and Malika was at Casablanca with friends when her father called with what could have been termed a suicide call. His body indicated that he had been shot several times with a fatal blow to the neck. He had apparently been involved in a political situation involving the king and Malika was angry. When the king sent food to the family home, she refused to eat it.

Soon after her father's death, the entire family was told to pack what they would need for a two-week stay and was picked up. Malika had feared that the stay would be longer than two weeks and had encouraged the family to take as much as they could carry. They were taken to a series of prisons, each worse than the last. For many years Malika sought to make their lives as normal as possible for the younger children, including a brother who is only a toddler at the time of their imprisonment. She helped create plays, oversaw daily schooling and even taught them table manners. When the family arrived at Bir-Jdid, where they remained until Malika and three siblings escaped, they were segregated which created as much a hardship as the poor diet and lack of medical care.

Malika and three of her sibling escaped by digging a tunnel out of their cell and the exit was not discovered until hours after they left. They found that their former friends were afraid of the repercussions of helping them but eventually contacted French attorneys who brought their plight to light. With the media attention focused on the fact that the government had held children in prison for fifteen years because their father had been involved in a coup, the situation changed but they were not released. They were taken to a villa, provided plenty of food, but remained prisoners for another five years. It seemed that the king suddenly decided that it was time to set them free and did so. Malika and the others then had to discover how to live on their own again with the past twenty years of imprisonment behind them. They each have trouble adjusting but eventually find their way.



Chapters 1 through 3

Chapters 1 through 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter one opened with Malika Oufkir watching as her mother arrived at a party. Malika said that her bond with her mother, Fatima, was probably stronger because of their shared hardships. Fatima's mother had died in childbirth when Fatima was four and Malika had been taken to the palace, adopted by the king, when she was four. Fatima was a wealthy heiress to a vast estate. She was beautiful and her father had become adept at warding off men interested in her. Malika's father was Muhammad Oufkir. He was born in 1920 and served in the French Army. Fatima and Muhammad married in 1952 and were wildly in love. Malika was the first child born ten months after the wedding. She was followed by another daughter, Myriam who was called Mimi, and then a son named Raouf. Muhammad quickly rose in the ranks of the French Army and two more children were born, Mouna-Inan who later changed her name to Maria, and Soukiana. Muhammad became chief aid-de-camp to the King and his two wives were fond of Fatima, insisting that she visit daily.

The king's son, Moulay Hassan, was called "Smiyet Sidi" or "the almost master" and was a frequent visitor at Malika's home as was King Muhammad V. At age five, Malika was taken for the first time to the palace where she saw a little girl, a princess known as Lalla Mina, who is the favorite daughter of the king. The two girls played together for a few minutes before the princess bit Malika. Unable to get her mother's attention, Malika bit the princess who ran crying to her mother. When the king asked what happened, Malika said that the princess had insulted her father, and that she had insulted the princess's father in return. The king immediately told Fatima that he wanted to adopt Malika as a daughter so that she could be sister and playmate to Lalla Mina.

In Chapter two, the princess and Malika lived at the Villa Yasmina. It is located near Malika's home of Rabat, about ten minutes drive from the main palace "on the road to Zaers." Lalla Mina and her governess lived on the first floor of the villa and for awhile Malika used the nearby guest room. Then two more little girls were brought to live in the villa and Malika and the two girls moved to a small house in the garden. Each day, the king arrived around six thirty in the morning to wake the girls. He was constantly visiting during the day and was affectionate to Lalla Mina and Malika. In 1961, at age fifty-two, Muhammad died during a routine surgery. Five days later, his son Lalla Mina's half-brother was crowned king Hassan II. Malika noted that it would have been the right time to insist that Malika return to her family but that her mother must have known that Lalla Mina was heartbroken over her father's death and didn't want to further disrupt the princess's life.

Hassan had promised his father he would treat Lalla Mina as he would his own daughter and the lives of Lalla Mina and Malika go on much as before. Several other students joined them at the villa for their schooling. Malika noted that the king's many concubines "lavished affection" on her and that her childhood was the stuff of dreams,



but she continued to be homesick. When she visited her family, she was aware that she was no longer really part of their lives.

After Muhammad's death, Hassan was expected to marry and some looked at Malika with dislike, fearing that she might vie for that position. Malika watched the intrigue as it became apparent that one of two women would hold the coveted position as wife while the others would remain members of the harem. Malika said that she believed this to be normal and acceptable at the time but later tried to convince the women of the harem that they were being mistreated and should find lives of their own. Hassan made changes, including opening the palace to more visitors and giving the women more freedom, but many of those raised in the cloistered atmosphere of the palace didn't want to mix with those from "outside." Throughout these years, Malika's relationship with Hassan was cemented despite her homesickness and she considered him to be like her father.

Once, Malika knew that she would be whipped for her poor grades and she submitted meekly but Hassan, who had decided to administer the whipping himself, soon discovered that she had heavy padding on to protect herself from the blows. She pleaded with him to skip the punishment and he laughed at her with the rest of the court but later caught her unaware and whipped her severely. When a schoolmaster intervened on her behalf, the man was whipped in Malika's stead. Twice during her adolescent years, Malika contemplated suicide because of her homesickness - once rubbing dirt in a wound in the hope that an infection would occur.

It was while Malika was living in the palace that her mother, Fatima, grew tired of her father's infidelities and left him. The king insisted that Muhammad remarry while Fatima lived with a soldier who was given dangerous assignments in an effort to encourage an end to his affair with Fatima. Eventually, Muhammad divorced the other woman and he and Fatima remarried. She was pregnant with a son named Abdellatif who Malika said "is the spitting image of our father," though there seemed to have been some question about his parentage. After Muhammad and Fatima remarried, their romance remained a subject of interest among the concubines at court. When Malika overheard one of the women making a negative comment about Fatima, she became angry and Hassan overheard her outburst. When he told her to calm down, she told him that she wanted to go home. He replied that her people were "known for their ingratitude," and it was only much later that Malika realized that in wanting to go home, she'd wounded his pride. That night she was taken home but continued to go to the palace for classes for the remainder of the school year.

In chapter three, Malika returned home to find her parents and siblings all away from home that night. After only a short time, she began living in a studio apartment separate from the main villa. Malika described their home as full of love and laughter but noted that there were "flatterers and hangers-on" who sought to be near Muhammad, who was by then very important to Hassan. Myriam, at fourteen, suffered epileptic seizures. Raouf, as the oldest male heir, was "pampered" by the women of the household and "universally adored." Maria was seven years old and Soukaina was six at this time and Soukaina loved to cuddle with their father. Malika had a group of friends her age and the



group sometimes included Fatima's younger brothers, Azzedine and Wahid, aged twenty and seventeen. Malika said that she often slipped out at night to dance with friends and her father often knew about it, but Malika evaded serious punishment.

Malika turned eighteen and her parents planned an elaborate ball with many "high society" guests. She dreaded the party, hated the fittings for the party dress, washed the elaborate hairdo out as soon as the hairdresser was finished but found she had a good time after all. She admitted that she "deserved a good slap" for her spoiled actions.

The political unrest continued and Muhammad pled for - and was granted - acquittal for the "rebel trainee officers" involved in a conspiracy against the king. Malika began to realize that she was no longer a supporter of the monarchy. Malika was angry then when she learned that her father had a hand in evicting families of military leaders from their homes. Some of these were Malika's friends and she "demanded an explanation" for the harsh action. He swore his innocence and provided help for a young woman.

Malika's parents were informed that she should leave school for her own safety and she convinced her parents to send her to Paris where she attended for awhile but a rumor of an attempt on her life prompted them to bring her home. Muhammad was involved in two accidents and Malika said that she felt the king was trying to have Muhammad killed. Malika and Muhammad spent a weekend together in Kabila and Malika said that it was "wild," with her father insisting on loud music and spending time on the beach. Malika had been involved in a car accident in Paris and had scars on her nose. Despite the fact that she knew the sun could cause permanent scarring, she stayed on the beach with him often. She returned home and Malika told Muhammad that she planned to join her mother in Casablanca where she planned to spend some time studying for an upcoming test. He told her he loved her as she left.

On August 16, 1972, Malika was in Casablanca with friends. Her mother had gone to visit friends of her own. Muhammad called, told Malika that he loved her and demanded that she not leave the house until an escort arrived. She had already heard of a new political uprising on television and knew that her father was doomed. Early the following morning, Malika's grandfather called with news of her father's death but following his final orders, she refused to leave Casablanca until an escort arrived for her. They are stopped at a roadblock on the way back to Rabat and Malika saw police officers crying upon learning her identity. She wanted to believe that her father wasn't dead, but knew it was true. She saw the body and discovered that he'd been shot four times prior to the fatal shot in the neck. The king sent food but Malika refused to eat, knowing that her actions had "political overtones." Fatima sent Muhammad's bloodstained uniform to a friend, hoping it would be used as proof he was murdered but it was never revealed. On August 20, the entire family was placed under house arrest then one of Fatima's brothers was injured in a car wreck while waiting for help that "curiously took a long time coming." The king made public comments that Fatima was behind Muhammad's actions and then the family was told to prepare for two weeks away from their home. Sensing that it might be more, Malika ordered everyone to pack heavily. They were allowed to take two people with them and Achoura Chenna, Fatima's first cousin who had lived with them for many years, volunteered as did Halima Aboudi, younger sister of



Abdellatif's governess who was fond of Abdellatif. Malika said that they all suffered at the thought of "exile," but that she was the only member of the family who realized that it wasn't meant to be a temporary measure.

Fatima really had no option available when the king said he wanted to adopt Malika. It's unclear exactly why he wanted her but it seems that her strong will was at least partly the reason. The king probably knew that the entire court bowed to the young princess and saw in Malika a playmate who might be more willing to stand up to Mina, providing her with some badly needed grounding. It's left to the reader to decide.

Malika was not excited at the prospect of leaving her family. She was homesick and heartsick from the beginning. There was an interesting passage in which Malika said that she has always wondered whether her mother cried upon Malika's departure, and that Malika had never dared ask. It seems that Malika, who was so bonded to her mother, couldn't stand the idea that her mother believed the separation would be a good thing for Malika.

Malika first introduced the idea of her continued conflict when she talked about her move to the palace. She said that she had been determined to have King Muhammad V's affection while she was living in the palace and she strove to find ways to gain that. She did the same when King Hassan II took over his father's throne. Despite Malika's feelings of homesickness, she wanted the approval and affection of these two men. This became a major problem later for Malika when Hassan ordered her family imprisoned.

Malika's return home is not what she'd expected. She'd longed for the opportunity to go back to her family but what she was really wishing for was a return to her life as a child. When she got to their house, her parents and siblings were all away. The staff knew her position in the king's household and were not comfortable with her. She was disappointed at the beginning because she didn't recover her lost childhood and it was a long time before she became happy with her life. She constantly slipped out of the house and was rebellious and it seemed that she was seeking something she simply was not able to have, which was the idyllic childhood with her parents.

Malika knew that there were a group of generals who were executed after the attempted coup. What she didn't know was that the children of these generals were thrown out of their homes and many were left penniless and at the mercy of relatives and friends. Malika heard that Muhammad had given the order to evict these families and she was furious, demanding an explanation from him. But he said that he's innocent of her accusation and even helped at least one young woman escape the country. What is interesting here is that Malika was later angry that her friends and family members do not stand by her but at this point Malika's family does not offer refuge to the families that are in trouble. Muhammad has Malika help them secretly.



Chapters 4 through 6

Chapters 4 through 6 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter four, the family traveled but time passed before they learned they were near Assa. Malika said that she was upset over the situation because they had suddenly changed from being wealthy to being poor, but that she had no idea of the hardships yet to come. Thanks to Malika's forethought, the family had a record player and would listen to either records or the radio in the evenings. The generator was unreliable and the records were often "playing at the wrong speed." In the winter, they were cold and depended on a gas lamp to provide what little heat they could have. The nights were longest and it was often difficult to sleep. Fatima sometimes filled hours with stories. The family members were allowed outside and sometimes the children went to a nearby market. The youngsters returned many days with hot bread or cakes, dates, and other gifts from the people of the village. But one morning they were wakened and told that they would have to leave immediately, apparently because some people discovered the identity of the Oufkir family.

They traveled for eighteen hours and were then locked up inside a house without being allowed out at all, though they could hear people going about their lives just outside the walls. Malika sometimes wove stories from her geography book, creating lives they would live after their release. They believed that the "world would not tolerate such an injustice for long." Malika noted that she was still a "spoiled brat" and that the entire family still believed that people would intervene. One day in May they were taken back to Assa where they settled into a house. There were power plays among their captors which resulted in harsher living conditions for Malika and her family.

In Chapter five, the family is moved to Tamattaght and Malika noted that each of their prisons is "more remote than the last." This prison was a huge fort in a desert setting and Malika said it was obvious that it had been a splendid place at one time. They come to believe the fort is haunted but found some areas to be more so than others. They settled into a routine with daily lessons for all the younger children and Malika taking control of much of the teaching as well as setting up lesson plans. Each month, Malika and the others put hours into practicing a play, sometimes of Malika's creation. Her mother was the sole member of the audience and sometimes, for comic effect, Raouf played the part of the woman while Malika took the role of the man. Their exaggerated acting kept their mother rolling with laughter. They occasionally received packages from those on the outside, specifically their grandfather who was given permission by the Prince to send books and magazines in regular shipments but the shipments were stopped when the King learned about it. There were some letters but Malika said those who described their everyday lives only served to remind her family of what they were missing. They became acquainted with a man from Malika's grandmother's village and the man, who Malika referred to as "Rasputin," managed to smuggle in great quantities of provisions by hoisting them over a wall. When he was caught, the captors punished the family by lowering their rations but because of the surplus he had provided, they



were able to survive. Raouf and Malika decided to escape and were preparing when their captors announced that the family would be moved. They were hopeful that their situation would be better in response to a recent petition to the king.

In Chapter six, the family arrived at Bir-Jdid, about forty-five kilometers from Casablanca. They were taken to an "L-shaped" house and told that they would be separated at night but were allowed to share meals and spend time together during the day. Fatima pled with the man in charge but he said he'd been given orders and refused to give in to her pleas. On Raouf's twentieth birthday, they were separated during the day as well. Malika and her two sisters were in one room, Raouf in another, Fatima and Abdellatif in another and Achoura Chenna and Halima Aboudi in another. The guards' attitudes changed as well and they were no longer allowed to show any kindnesses. They created a method of communication via a radio amplifier and though this means, the members of the family were able to talk to each other. Malika said that she and her sisters initially tried to develop a "routine," and that she prompted games using whatever they could find. But as time passed, they gave up on that, having lost interest in life in general. The one thing Malika didn't lose was pride in herself and she forced her sisters to clean themselves, eat with proper table manners, and be polite to each other.

There was never enough food and Malika came to believe that Achoura and Halima, who did most of the cooking for the entire family, were stealing. Malika took charge, doling out to them portions for each meal and being careful to keep enough for the remainder of the week until their next rations. The quality of food is poor with much of it more rotten than should have been fit for consumption, but they continued to eat it. The girls especially were anxious to learn about life and to satisfy this craving, Malika began to tell a story using their makeshift communication system. She created an elaborate cast of characters, set in nineteenth century Russia, and had them interact in an array of situations. Malika devoted a great deal of time to developing the story, titled "The Black Flakes," and the family became engrossed in the story.

There were several health issues to be faced and Malika said it was a miracle they survived them all. Mimi was epileptic and suffered from lack of medicine. Malika said they depended on humor to survive and each family member got a nickname. For their father, they chose "Moby Dick," referring to a particular day when he'd been dressed ridiculously at a water skiing adventure. The humor was sometimes dark and they often laughed, saying that if "Moby Dick" had drowned that day, he'd have earned an elaborate funeral and they would have avoided prison. They had a radio though it was kept secret from the guards and batteries were sometimes difficult to come by. With that, they remained abreast of current events. Malika turned thirty-three in prison and said she despaired of ever being released so that she could meet someone and have a family of her own. Abdellatif, who did not remember any life other than of being in prison, adapted more than the others and helped solve many problems. Malika said Abdellatif learned that they could get more time from batteries if they put it them in the sunshine for awhile.



One night the family's despair grew so great that they made a suicide pact. Fatima slit her wrists and Abdellatif reported on her condition as her heart slowed. Raouf tried as well. Malika slit Soukaina's wrists with a lid from a sardine can but cannot cut deeply enough. She loses a great deal of blood but none of the three dies though it seemed for a time that Raouf might. Malika cited this as the night their lives changed from a passive state and they began to make plans to escape. The natural plan was to dig a tunnel and they chose a spot in the girls' rooms. They removed some stones from the floor and begin to dig at night, replacing the stones each day atop a makeshift cover and filling in "mortar." The guards never looked at the stones and never caught on. Malika tunneled down and out then waited to dig upwards until they decided on a plan and a time to escape.

On April 19, 1987, Fatima overheard guards talking about a plan to increase security. With that information, Malika and the others decided that they would have to make their escape immediately. It was already decided that Malika, Raouf, Abdellatif and Maria would go, leaving Fatima, Soukaina and Mimi behind, as well as Halima and Achoura. Malika went to dig out the last remaining inches of dirt, pulled on some vegetative roots and found herself able to stick her head up into daylight. That night, the four made their way into the tunnel but Malika became wedged. She struggled to get free and emerged with the others. They expected to be immediately captured but weren't and made their way away from the building, apparently unnoticed.

Malika noted that she dreamed of Hassan II during the early days in prison but never dreamed about her father. This was another example of Malika being torn between her affection for her father and her affection for the king who had acted like a father to her for many years. Malika looked back on her life during the early years in prison and recognized herself as "spoiled." While she may very well have been, it should be noted that her family was forced to live in primitive conditions that were so horrible that anyone would have hated it. It seems that Malika may have been hard on herself and that any normal person would have hated being made to live in those conditions, especially having moved from a comfortable lifestyle.

Malika talked several times of the laughter and it seemed that this was her way of protecting herself against holding onto the bad memories. While she did describe the bad times and made it clear that the good times were of their own making such as putting on the shows for her mother, she made it a point to tell about them as well. This may make some readers less sympathetic for their plight but it does seem to offer the perspective that her family was resourceful and determined to survive, not only physically but mentally as well. Malika said that she felt sorry for her mother who was still beautiful but locked away, for her sisters who had been denied the joys of being teenage girls, for Raouf who had been denied a father figure, and for Abdellatif who had no memories of any life other than in prison. What's interesting is that she didn't say that she felt sorry for herself.

Abdellatif turned eight in Ber-Jdid and one day before the family was completely separated, he fell. They discovered that he had gotten some medicine and taken it all in



an attempt to commit suicide. From that day, Malika and the others made certain that he never heard them despair and they worked to make his life as happy as possible.

Malika looked forward to nighttimes at Bir-Jdid because she wasn't required to keep up appearances. She said that during those hours she often railed against God, saying that she didn't believe he could be real because he allowed such bad things to happen but then changing her tone to say that she did believe but wanted a sign that He was real. She also spent a great deal of time thinking during those hours. She said that she sometimes wondered if they were alive because the king did not have the political support to kill them all or because he felt some love for Malika who had grown up in the palace.

Malika did not explain how her brothers were able to make their way to her room where the tunnel was when they had been kept separate for so long. It seems that if escaping from their individual rooms was so easy, they would have done it occasionally during their imprisonment, just in order to be together. This is never explained but Malika later said that another writer had said that the family had help digging the tunnel and then escaping. Malika was angered by that allegation but it seems possible that there was help and that Malika denied it in order to protect someone. It's left to the reader to decide.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter seven, the four heard the barking of dogs and soon found themselves facing off a pack of the animals. Despite the noise, the guards didn't discover that the prisoners had escaped. They walked for a long time but found themselves walking in circles until Malika told Abdellatif to take the lead. He walked for awhile then announced that he had found something unusual. It was a paved road but Abdellatif had been locked away for so much of his lifetime that he didn't know what asphalt was. They used a story about their car breaking down and Malika suffering a recent miscarriage in order to gain transportation to a nearby village where they hired a taxi using money that had been sent to them by their grandfather during their earlier days of incarceration. They reached Casablanca and began to look for old friends but were fearful of being betrayed or captured. Malika found a man willing to help them based on mutual acquaintances until he discovered her identity. Their next stop was the French Embassy and Malika, leaving the others behind for fear authorities were searching for the group of four, approached the security guard with a request to be admitted but is informed that the Embassy is closed for the Easter holiday. They stopped next at the American Embassy and Malika felt she could slip in and be safely on American soil but feared what would happen to her siblings if they were separated and passed up the opportunity. Malika found another acquaintance, a childhood friend, who screamed at Malika for involving her. They eventually managed to borrow money though they found no one willing to help them hide. The four split up with Malika and Abdellatif planning to walk by the family's home. Malika discovered the house had been razed but pretended to be disoriented so that Abdellatif wouldn't know. They eventually made their way to the home of Michele Barere and her husband, Luc. Malika explained their appearance by saying that the king hadn't wanted to create interest in their release and so had kept news of the situation to a minimum. They had baths and Malika discovered that her legs were badly scraped from her trip through the tunnel and she had to work hard to keep the blood from soiling the bathroom rug. When Luc discovered that they had actually escaped, he demanded that they leave. Luc's son, Phillippe, stood up to his father, saying that the entire family should have done something to help Malika and her family. The family gives Malika money and the four head to Tangier.

On the train to Tangier, Malika became friendly with a man and when they got off the train, she walked with him so that police looking for the group of four overlooked them. They called an old family friend who gave a cryptic answer to questions and later said there had been officials on hand, listening in. They went to the Hotel Ahlan but were unable to secure rooms because they didn't have passports. They decided to call the Radio France Internationale but knew the only way to get the number was through the hotel switchboard. They created a situation in which an older woman who was a hotel resident helped them get the number. Malika learned from a hotel employee that police were looking for a group of four escaped criminals. Maria made the call to the radio and talked to Alain de Chalvron, telling him her identity and asking for help making their case



for freedom. The political climate played a role in the next events but the four were promised help and an attorney. They met with a lawyer who pledged to help them but were then captured in the lobby of the hotel.

They were taken to the police station in Tangier where an official called the king with news of their capture. The officials seemed to be lagging about taking any action against the four. Then Malika heard a radio broadcast and the officials seemed resigned to the fact that the story of their imprisonment was no longer secret. They were then moved to Casablanca where they were reunited with Fatima and the others. Then, Malika learned what happened when their escape was discovered. Fatima said the guards had been unable to comprehend what happened and Soukaina eventually showed them the escape route. Fatima was blindfolded and questioned but knew the voices of her captors from the years prior to her imprisonment and called each by name. Malika is then told that the family will be moved to a house in Marrakesh.

There's a confusing section in which Malika and the others were given drugged coffee. They slept for awhile and woke to find themselves giggly but apparently unharmed. It's unclear what the purpose of the drugged coffee was or what the effects were.

After the escape of Malika and the others, several generals put in appearances in the prison where they had been held. Their purpose was to question Fatima but they discovered the living conditions and were angry. They had known the family was being held but claim not to have known the horrible conditions because the camp as a whole had been provided ample provisions. It was only Malika and her family that had been starved and deprived.

Malika noted that she saw news on television about the king and that she grew teary when she saw him. She said that for at least awhile, she forgot that he was her captor and remembered her childhood. Malika made the point that her siblings couldn't understand her torn loyalties. What's more interesting here is that Malika was likely unable to completely reconcile the loving father-figure from her childhood with the man who had kept them in prison without a care for their well being. It seems that because the king was never at the prison, she could separate him from the man who had treated her so well as a child.



Chapter 8 through Postscript

Chapter 8 through Postscript Summary and Analysis

In Chapter eight, Malika and her family were taken to a palatial home in Marrakesh. They were given permission to order anything they wanted to eat, to furnish their home and to make their lives more pleasant but remained captives. The health of the various family members was unstable and Mimi had to be hospitalized for a month. Malika, in an effort to recover lost body muscle, exercised daily. They were given free access to television but had lost out on two decades of cinematography and some movies were simply incomprehensible. Malika said that if they caused problems, the television shows were censored. The French attorneys who had agreed to represent them failed to renew contact, a fact that Malika said was worrisome. They then met another official, Maitre Kiejman, who said they would be allowed to leave for Canada but in return had to promise that they would never tell anything of their ordeal. Each imagined how life would be in Canada and Malika tried to ignore her doubts that they would really be granted their freedom. They were packed and ready to depart on the appointed day but received a note from the king that they would have to wait a little longer. Soukaina asked Maitre Kaijman if her suicide would ensure the release of the rest of the family but he encouraged her not to take that step.

While Malika and the others could not leave the house, they were allowed visitors and their extended family regularly appeared on weekends. Though their living conditions were much better, they remained imprisoned and began to look at the possibility of another escape attempt. One day in 1991, several government officials who had been overseeing the family arrived and talked at length about various topics before dropping the news that they had been released.

In Chapter nine, the family was released though they were denied passports. They were advised against speaking to journalists who camped outside the homes of family members and they obeyed though Malika said they should have used the opportunity to tell their stories. While they were allowed to come and go at will, Malika discovered that she was uncomfortable in crowds and that police were constantly looking at her, though she couldn't tell whether they were there to ensure her safety or her behavior. Few of their old friends were willing to renew relationships for fear of reprisals. Lalla Mina asked to meet with Malika and she agreed. Mina made it apparent that she'd known Malika and her family were imprisoned and that she'd known at least some details of their treatment, such as the killing of the birds they'd kept as pets. They visited only a few times. Malika found a job though it was dangerous for anyone to hire her. She met a man named Eric at the wedding of a mutual friend, fell in love and married him, eventually moving to France. In the postscript, the reader learned that Maria and Achoura eventually escaped Morocco with Maria's adopted son, Michael. Malika, Soukaina and Raouf went together to Paris.



Malika said that during their first months in Marrakesh, the entire family focused on food. This was likely because they had been so completely deprived for so long but it was also a way for them to prove to themselves that they were alive and had at least some minor control over their lives. They were initially amazed that they had the option to order anything they wanted to eat and tested that to discover that the boundaries were apparently endless. They had a cook and soon taught him to make all sorts of dishes they craved. They spent a great deal planning and executing meals.

Malika was obviously happy to see Mina and it seemed that the two girls might renew their friendship on their own though the king would probably have interfered if they had become too close. What's interesting is that Malika, after her first visit, became afraid that she might have said something she shouldn't. She seemed worried that Mina was really nothing more than a spy for the king or that something Malika said to Mina might somehow cause problems for her family. With that standing between them, any chance of renewing a friendship was bound to fail.



Characters

Malika Oufkir

Daughter of Fatima and Muhamma and Fatima Oufkir, she was taken to live in the palace of King Hassan II as a young girl. Malika, who shared an incredibly close bond with her mother, was homesick and hated being away from home despite the opulent lifestyle. She remained in the palace for many years and was somewhat wild prior to the family's arrest. She often slipped out at night, managing to have an active nightlife while usually maintaining reasonable grades in her studies. She enjoyed dressing up in the fashions of the day, including miniskirts and shorts. It was Malika who talked to her father just prior to his death. Malika was a strong person and became the foundation of her family during their incarceration. She organized plays, provided daily school lessons, and even insisted on good table manners in order to provide some semblance of family life for the other members of the family during much of their time in prison. While Malika did these things for her own self-preservation, she was more concerned with the preservation of her family. She was fully focused on her family and their survival was more important to her than her own. Malika did survive as does her family and she even lived to find the love that she dreamed about during her years in prison.

Fatima

Malika's mother, Fatima was a strong-willed person and lacked the tact necessary in some political situations. Malika noted that Fatima was direct and said what she thought, even when doing so was not in her best interests. Fatima was frantic when her family was incarcerated but held onto her dignity and restraint until she was about to be separated from her children. This seemed to be her greatest fear. When the four children managed to escape from Bir-Jdid, Fatima played her role though she must have been terrified. She refused to show fear when she was blindfolded and questioned and was able to identify each of her questioners by name just from the sound of his voice, recalling the voices from their associations in years past. Fatima retained control of the situation after Malika and the others escaped, encouraging the guards to take specific actions. During the years they were incarcerated, she turned over much of the role of mothering to Malika but it seemed as much because Malika desired this role as because Fatima is incapable of retaining control of the family. An example of Fatima's role in the family was seen when Malika and the others practiced for days at a time to create two-hour plays with Fatima as the sole audience member. Her personality was such that she probably enjoyed the play but she also probably went out of her way to show her enjoyment in order to buoy the spirits of the others.



Raouf

Malika's younger brother, he was the only adult male among the family imprisoned for the two decades, a fact that made it more difficult for him in some ways. Raouf was segregated from the others when they were moved to Bir-Jdid though the others were housed together in small groups.

Abdellatif

Malika's younger brother, he was only a toddler when the family was imprisoned. Much of what the family did in later years was done for Abdellatif's benefit. When Malika and Raouf decided to escape, they agreed to take Abdellatif along. Having grown up in prison, the time out was a shock to him and Malika worried that he would go into shock at the sensory overload.

Muhammad Oufkir

Malika's father, he was important in the king's court until there came a time when he was involved in an attempted coup. He telephoned Malika, apparently with a suicide call, but was shot multiple times. His death and his family's reaction to his death resulted in the imprisonment of Malika, her siblings and her mother, for twenty years. Muhammad was a strong personality and his bond with Malika was strong so that she was the only person who dared correct his lack of table manners.

Myriam

The daughter born after Malika, she was an epileptic and suffered most while in prison from lack of the medicine needed to keep her epilepsy under control. She was called Mimi by members of the family and spent much of her time in bed during her final years in prison due to the lack of medical care.

Princess Lalla Mina

The daughter of King Hassan II, she was the same age as Malika and the girls were raised as sisters from an early age. After her release from prison, Malika discovered that Mina knew details of her life in prison and feared that she might say or do something that would endanger her family.

Maria

Named Mouna-Inan at birth, she was Malika's younger sister and changed her name while in prison. She was among the four who escaped from Bir-Jdid and helped secure the notice of international media in order to bring attention to their imprisonment.



Soukaina

Malika's younger sister, she remained behind with her mother and Mimi when Malika escaped and it was she who showed the guards the escape tunnel. Soukaina considered committing suicide after the family was moved to Marrakesh in an effort to obtain their release.

Rasputin

The name given to a man who was from the village of Malika's grandmother. He made contact with the family while they were held in the desert fortress and frequently smuggled large quantities of food and provisions over the wall. When he was caught, the family was punished with less rations of food but were able to survive because of the stores Rasputin had helped them put aside.



Objects/Places

Villa Yasmina

This is where Malika and the princess lived as children.

Rabat

This is where the palace was located where Malika lives as a child.

Bir-Jdid

This is where the family was held for many years in a prison and it was from here that Malika escapes with three of her siblings.

Kabila

This is where Malika and Muhammad spend a weekend together just before Muhammad's death.

Casablanca

This is where Malika was when she learned of her father's death.

Assa

This is where Malika and her family were when villagers discovered they were being held prisoner, forcing authorities to move them.

Tamattaght

This is the desert fortress where the family was held for a period of time.

Bir-Jdid

This is where the family was held when four of them escaped, it is about forty-five kilometers from Casablanca.

Tangier

This is where Malika and her siblings were when they were captured.

Marrakesh

This is where Malika and her family are held for the final five years of their imprisonment.



Themes

A Desire for Freedom

Malika's desire for freedom began at an early age. When she was sent to live at the home of King Hassan II to be a playmate and sister to the king's daughter, Malika's life was in turmoil. She knew that she should be grateful for the opportunities provided, but she wanted only the freedom to live her life. When she returned home as a teenager, she sought the freedoms typical of any teenager. She slipped out of the house at night and spent evenings in nightclubs, dancing and spending time with other young people out for fun. Later, Malika went away to school, living under an assumed name in the hope that she could live an unobtrusive life, but that dream came crashing down when a plot to kidnap her was discovered. She admitted that she'd always rebelled and when she and her family were imprisoned, she adapted better than might have been expected. She spent some fifteen years in prison with her family living in deplorable conditions and would probably have looked for escape much sooner than she did except for the fear that she would bring punishment down on her family. When she finally made her escape, she hoped to be free but remained skeptical. That skepticism was founded and it was five more years before she and her family were fully freed from the tyranny of the king. Through it all, she remained dedicated to the desire to be free, as did her family, though it seemed that near the end of the final five years they each began to lose hope and might eventually have given up.

The Importance of Family

The importance of family was evident from the beginning of the story and it was this ability to bond that held the individuals together during the difficult times over the twenty years they were imprisoned. Malika described a period of many years during which she and her mother were not allowed to see each other. During that period, they caught glimpses of each other in reflected water and were sometimes able to see each other through a doorway, if they were both positioned correctly and the guards opened both doors at the same time. They held out for that hope and worked to be in position, in case the opportunity came. They also created a "system" of communication whereby they could communicate with each other and it was this communication that kept them sane through many lonely nights. Malika said that whenever a wire in the system gave way, Raouf would whistle, signaling that he was disconnected, until she was able to reconnect his line so that he could hear. Malika related stories of nights when her sisters would curl up in bed with her, desperate for her comforting touch. For the many years that the four girls were separated from their mother, Malika took on many of the roles of mother and the bond between the girls grew though the bond between Malika and her mother never wavered.



Torn Loyalties

The book was divided into two sections. The first was titled "Alee de Princesses" and included the first three chapters. Chapter one, titled "My Beloved Mother," included Malika's memories of her mother and her description of their bond. Chapter two was titled "The King's Palace, 1958-1969" and chronicled Malika's years living in the palace. Chapter three was "The Oufkir House, 1969-1972" and detailed the three years of Malika's life after she was allowed to return home to live with her parents prior to her father's death. The second part of the book was titled "Twenty Years in Prison." The seven chapters of this section were presented in order of their imprisonment. Chapter four was "A Year in the Desert, 25 December 1972-8 November 1973" and detailed the lives of the family as they were taken into custody. Chapter five was "The Walls of Tamattaght, 8 November 1973-256 February 1977" and told of the move to a new prison. Chapter six was titled "Bir-Jdid Prison, 26 February 1977-19 April 1987." This was the cruelest time and the most primitive conditions of their imprisonment. Chapter seven, "Escaped Prisoners, 19 April-24 April 1987" gives detailed accounts of the five days Malika and her three siblings spent on the run from authorities. Chapter eight, "Marrakesh, 1 July 1987-19 February 1991" was about the final five years of imprisonment for Malika and her family. Chapter nine, "A Strange Kind of Freedom," offered information about the family's attempts to adapt to freedom and their lives afterward. The chapters were further divided into smaller sections. For example, chapter seven began with "Wandering," but included sections titled "Casablanca," "Rabat" and "The Arrest," among others, each describing events that occurred or places the group went. Chapters vary greatly in length from as few as eleven pages to more than fifty. The book included a section of photos, including Malika as a child with the princess and as a teen in a mini-skirt, mug shots of Malika and other family members after their escape, and several other photos of the family.



Style

Perspective

The story was presented in first person from Malika Oufkir's perspective. This was an extremely limited point of view but was augmented by the fact that Malika presented her information years after the events. This gave her the advantage of a better perspective and of more information than she might have had at the time of the events begin presented. For example, she talked about a party that she dreaded and said that she behaved very badly, throwing a tantrum and angrily washing out the elaborate hairdo she had been provided. At the time, her perspective on that situation was probably much different but by the time she wrote this book, she admitted that she was spoiled and should have been reprimanded for her childish, selfish actions. The fact that the perspective was first person doesn't mean that the reader was limited to what Malika saw first-hand. For example, Malika and three of her siblings escaped from their prison in Bir-Jdid and she later learned that her mother and sister stood up to the guards and the officials who questioned them. Those actions were presented but not at the time they actually occurred. The reader learned about those acts later as Malika related them.

Tone

The book was written in first person and the tone remained one of hope though the family continued to face an apparently-unending prison sentence. The book was fairly easy to understand and a reader with a reasonable vocabulary should have little trouble with comprehension. There were a few foreign terms thrown in but these are fully explained. For example, Malika said that there is a "Queen Mother, or Oum Sidi, mother of the master," who was the king's wife who had given birth to a son. These explanations were sprinkled throughout the early portions of the text, mainly to offer up explanations about life at the king's court. It seems likely that this was an effort to ensure that the reader gained at least a few facts of court and, more importantly, that Malika understood the inner workings of life at court. The political climate was not explained in great detail but it was evident that there was political upheaval threatening long before Malika's father's death. Malika mentioned a friend's father and said that this man had the good sense to separate his son's friends and his political dealings, indicating that Malika would otherwise have been banned from that home. These political dealings were not vital to the understanding of the story and most readers will accept the scant details given. The story was written in past tense with one notable exception: The first chapter opened in present tense as Malika described seeing her mother at a party. This was obviously intended to emphasize the bond between Malika and Fatima and it was successful.



Structure

The book was divided into two sections. The first was titled "Alee de Princesses" and included the first three chapters. Chapter one, titled "My Beloved Mother," included Malika's memories of her mother and her description of their bond. Chapter two was titled "The King's Palace, 1958-1969" and chronicled Malika's years living in the palace. Chapter three was "The Oufkir House, 1969-1972" and detailed the three years of Malika's life after she was allowed to return home to live with her parents prior to her father's death. The second part of the book was titled "Twenty Years in Prison." The seven chapters of this section were presented in order of their imprisonment. Chapter four was "A Year in the Desert, 25 December 1972-8 November 1973" and detailed the lives of the family as they were taken into custody. Chapter five was "The Walls of Tamattaght, 8 November 1973-256 February 1977" and told of the move to a new prison. Chapter six was titled "Bir-Jdid Prison, 26 February 1977-19 April 1987." This was the cruelest time and the most primitive conditions of their imprisonment. Chapter seven, "Escaped Prisoners, 19 April-24 April 1987" gives detailed accounts of the five days Malika and her three siblings spent on the run from authorities. Chapter eight, "Marrakesh, 1 July 1987-19 February 1991" was about the final five years of imprisonment for Malika and her family. Chapter nine, "A Strange Kind of Freedom," offered information about the family's attempts to adapt to freedom and their lives afterward. The chapters were further divided into smaller sections. For example, chapter seven began with "Wandering," but included sections titled "Casablanca," "Rabat" and "The Arrest," among others, each describing events that occurred or places the group went. Chapters vary greatly in length from as few as eleven pages to more than fifty. The book included a section of photos, including Malika as a child with the princess and as a teen in a mini-skirt, mug shots of Malika and other family members after their escape, and several other photos of the family.



Quotes

"Doubtless I owe the privileged, almost filial relationship I had with Muhammad V, and later with Hassan II, to my ambition and strong will. During all those years spent at the Palace, I strove to win their affection, to become part of their lives and to make myself indispensable" (Chapter 1, pg. 20.)

"I pricked the end of my thumb with a sharpened bamboo stick to make the blood spurt out, then I mixed sand in the cut to cause an infection and waited, my eyes closed and my heart racing. Death was slow in coming, so I got up after a few minutes" (Chapter 2, pg. 57.)

"With each day that went by, I became increasingly convinced that I would lose my father in tragic circumstances. I couldn't explain the premonition: I just knew it" (Chapter 3, pg. 83.)

"If I still respected Hassan II as my adoptive father, I hated him for the despot he had become the day he had begun to persecute us. I hated him for his hatred, I hated him for my ruined life, for my mother's misery and the mutilated childhood of my brothers and sisters" (Chapter 4, pg. 114.)

"I suffered for my sisters who were becoming women without having been children, for Raouf, deprived of a father figure, and for Abdellatif, deprived of everything, and I felt remorse for Achoura and Halima, imprisoned alongside us out of loyalty" (Chapter 5, pg. 130.)

"They were determined to break us - Mother, because she was the wife of the hated General, me because they were aware of my influence over the rest of the family, and Raouf because he was his father's son and it was natural that he would want to avenge him. In their minds, he had to be stopped at all costs" (Chapter 6, pg. 143.)

"We could all have died twenty times over, but every time we emerged again unscathed from the numerous illnesses we contracted in prison. We were protected by a mysterious god whose main design was to keep us alive, although he didn't spare us the most horrific ordeals" (Chapter 6, pg. 159.)

"He had known nothing but prison all his life, and, of all of us, he had adapted to it most readily. Things that seemed aberrant to us had been normal daily routine since his earliest childhood" (Chapter 6, pg. 174.)

"The country was in a state of alert, with the police looking for us in public places, but the government was in a quandary. They had to be careful that public opinion, outraged at the fate we had suffered for fifteen years, didn't turn against the public's rulers" (Chapter 6, pg. 224.)



"To escape, all we needed was fifteen years in prison, fifteen years in inhuman suffering, fifteen years of starvation, cold fear and deprivation. And as for intelligence, you gave us all those years to nurture and develop it" (Chapter 7, pg. 251.)

"From time to time the thought that they might want to do away with us crossed my mind, but I made myself banish it, just as I dismissed the idea that all this was impossible, too good to be true, and that we would never be free" (Chapter 8, pg. 263.)

"The police kept us company day and night. We weren't sure whether the guards who never left our sides were there to protect us or keep us under surveillance" (Chapter 9, pg. 279.)

Topics for Discussion

Describe Malika. What was her life like prior to going to live at the palace? What was her life like at the palace? What was it like after returning to the home of her parents? She longed for something during most of her life prior to being put in prison. What was that? What impact did that have in her life?

How did Malika and her family come to be imprisoned? What was revealed of the political climate that prompted their imprisonment? What was the role of Malika and her siblings in the political upheaval of the time? What was the role of her mother? Why were they punished? Support your answers.

Describe the lives of Malika and her family during their lives in prison. Who suffered most during the prison terms? Why do you believe that? What were the roles of Malika and her mother during their time in prison? How are those roles similar? How are they different?

Who was Achoura Chenna and Halima Aboudi? How were their fates different from those of Malika and the other members of her family? How were their fates similar? Do you believe the women might have made different choices if they had known the family would be imprisoned for twenty years? Support your answers.

Describe Raouf, Abdellatif, Maria, Myriam, and Soukiana. Compare each with Malika. What was the role Malika played in the lives of each?

List at least three coping mechanisms used by the various family members to survive their time in prison. Describe how each came into existence, how each was employed by the various family members and how long it remained a useful coping technique.

Describe the escape and what the four did during their time out of custody. What were the biggest shocks to each? How did they cope with those? What were their smartest moves? What were their biggest mistakes?