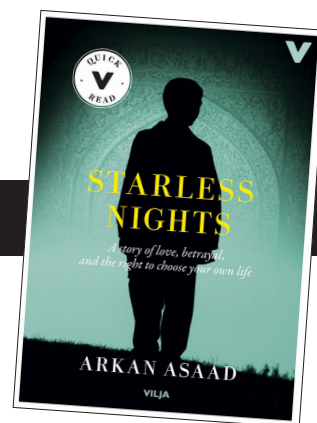


ARKAN ASAAD, translated by Saskia Vogel

Starless Nights



ABOUT THE BOOK

This is a story about Amâr, a young Kurdish man, living in Sweden. One day, his father takes him to his family in Iraq and Amâr realizes that he will have to marry his cousin Amina. Everything is so different from Sweden, where young people are free to marry someone they love. *Starless Nights* is based on Arkan Asaad's own life.

Discuss

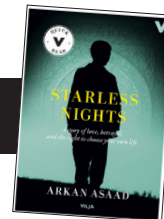
This book is a description of a culture clash (*kulturkrock*). What things are different between the two cultures?

Did Amâr do the right things? Were there things he could have done differently?

Talk about Amina's situation. What is it like?

What had happened if the Swedish Migration Authority had acted differently?

Read the chapter *Concluding Words* together and talk about it.



EXERCISES WITH KEY

There are no chapters in this book, but here it is divided into parts with questions and word exercises on each part. The narrator's (*berättarens*) name is Amàr.

The trip to Iraq (pp. 3–7)

Questions

1. What was the relationship between Amàr and his father like?
Amàr's father had never been proud of him and Amàr had always had a love-hate relationship with him. He had always been the rebellious son.
2. There was a big difference between Amàr and his father about jobs and family. What was the difference?
Amàr's father wanted his son to be just like him. Work hard and support his family. Amàr said that Sweden is a modern country. There is no war and you don't have to support your family.
3. At the end of this part, we know that something is going to happen. How do we know that?
Amàr says that the trip would change many things. Not only his own life, but the lives of everyone around him.

Words

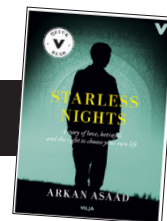
Find these words in the text.

1. syskon siblings
2. upprorisk rebellious
3. tjatade på mig nagged me
4. förväntade sig att jag expected me to
5. släktingar relatives
6. hade övergett, svikit had deserted
7. hade lämnat, övergett had abandoned

Arriving in Iraq (pp. 8–15)

Questions

4. What happened when Amàr went out into the kitchen to wash the dishes?
His aunt said that he could not do that. Women do that kind of work, not men.
5. A whole new world had opened up for Amàr. In what way?
Lots of unfamiliar people came into his life. He had forty cousins.



Words

Pair the English words with the Swedish words. Write the correct figures on the lines.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1. border | 9 | diska |
| 2. rumpled | 6 | gränd |
| 3. amount | 1 | gräns |
| 4. immediate | 10 | jämlikhet |
| 5. was supposed to be | 3 | mängd |
| 6. alley | 4 | närmaste |
| 7. approximately | 2 | skrynklig |
| 8. beamed | 8 | strålande |
| 9. wash the dishes | 7 | ungefär |
| 10. equality | 5 | var tänkt att bli |

Marriage (pp. 16–29)

6. What was unusual about Amina?
She was twenty years old and not married.
7. In this part, there are examples of different attitudes to love and marriage. What are the different attitudes?
Amàr wants to marry a woman that he loves. His aunt says that love comes with time and that you learn to love each other.
8. Amàr overheard Reza, his father, his grandmother, his aunts and Amina whispering about something. When he entered the room, they stopped whispering. What do you think they were whispering about?
Student's own answer.
9. What was Amàr's father talking about all the time?
He was talking about marriage. He wanted Amàr to get married.
10. Everything changed. Why?
Amàr said that he never wanted to get married, especially not to a Kurd.
11. What did the two aunts say that shocked Amàr?
They said that they wanted him to marry his cousin Amina.
12. Why did Amàr think that it was sick to marry Amina.
She was his cousin and like a sister to him.



Words

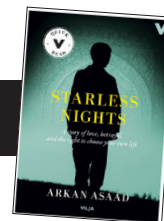
Pair the English words with the Swedish words.

- | | | |
|--------------------|----|---------------------|
| 1. suggested | 14 | ansvar |
| 2. extended | 8 | brorson (systemson) |
| 3. surviving | 1 | föreslog |
| 4. unfamiliar | 2 | förlängd |
| 5. hardly | 10 | höll med |
| 6. despite | 15 | ilska |
| 7. unusual | 5 | knappt |
| 8. nephew | 16 | kryddad |
| 9. thoughtful | 4 | okänd |
| 10. agreed with | 9 | omtänksam |
| 11. gathered | 7 | ovanligt |
| 12. snuck | 11 | samlades |
| 13. be ashamed | 13 | skämmas |
| 14. responsibility | 12 | smög |
| 15. rage | 6 | trots |
| 16. seasoned | 3 | överleva |

Father's heart attack (pp 30–43)

Questions

13. What does Samir ask Amàr to do?
He asks him to take care of his sister Amina.
14. Why did Amàr's father hit him?
He hit him because he said that he never wanted to marry and that he hated his father and the sick family.
15. Amàr heard his aunts screaming and crying. What had happened?
Amàr's father had had a heart attack.



16. What does Amina think of the marriage?
She would have been proud if Amàr had wanted to marry her. She only wants what Amàr's father wants. His wish is her command.
17. How does this part end?
Amàr says that he will marry Amina and everybody is happy.

Words

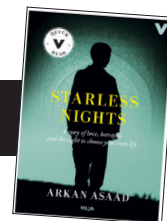
Fill in the blanks. The words are all in the text in this part.

1. I heard everyone **gather** in the **living** room to talk to him.
2. I've had such good **luck** with everything – finding a **job** and a place to **live**.
3. I know you will be **happiest** with Amina, because she is your **cousin**.
4. The day after the **argument** with Father, I heard my aunts screaming and **crying**.
5. All day trips were **cancelled**.
6. I had **hurt** my father and my family by being **disrespectful** toward Father in front of others.
7. If you had **wanted** to marry Amina, this **would** never have happened.
8. I know of nothing on this earth that **would** make him **happier** than to see us married.
9. I had to tell them I'd changed my **mind** and needed time to think about it.
10. I wanted to tell him that I had made a big **mistake** and that I didn't want to get **married**.

The wedding (pp 44–53)

Questions

18. What was the difference between Sweden and Iraq, thought Amàr?
In Sweden you marry the woman of your dreams. In Iraq, you married your cousin.
19. Here, we get an explanation of the title *Starless Nights*. What is the explanation?
Amàr was looking at the stars until they disappeared. His hope disappeared with them.
20. Amàr's father explained what had happened. What did he say?
Amàr has to take responsibility for Amina, and her life lies in his hands. He is her master and she is part of his life.
21. Here is a reference to the title, *Starless Nights*. What was the sky like on the night of the wedding?
It was pitch-black. There were no stars.



Words

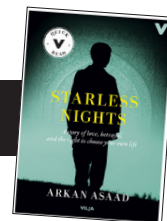
Pair the Swedish words with the English words.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|----|---------------------|
| 1. din blivande man | 3 | a single |
| 2. jag brydde mig inte | 10 | a pile |
| 3. en enda | 9 | carried out |
| 4. tjusig | 11 | devastated |
| 5. hellre | 4 | fancy |
| 6. flämtade | 2 | I didn't care |
| 7. andfådd | 7 | out of breath |
| 8. skakade hand med mig | 6 | panted |
| 9. genomförde | 5 | rather |
| 10. en hög | 8 | shook my hand |
| 11. förstörd | 12 | smothered |
| 12. kvävde, dämpade | 1 | your future husband |

Going back to Sweden (pp 54–60)

Questions

22. What did Amàr's father want Amàr to do?
He wanted him to stay at a hotel with Amina and make her pregnant.
23. What two things does Amàr have to do for Amina?
He has to send half his salary to her and he has to apply for her residence permit so that she can come to Sweden.
24. Why could Amàr not tell his friends what had happened?
He was too ashamed.
25. What did Amàr do for a whole year? Why?
He was working and saving money. He was supposed to pick up Amina and take her to the Swedish Embassy in Syria.



Words

Find these words in the text.

1. gravid **pregnant**
2. tutade **honked**
3. trösta **comfort**
4. lön **salary**
5. ansöka om **apply for**
6. framför dig **ahead of you**
7. hantera **handle**
8. att hyra **to rent**
9. studenthem **dorm**
10. fyllde 21 **turned 21**

The Swedish Embassy (pp 61–64)

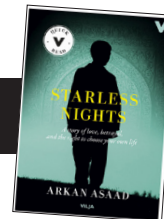
Questions

26. What did Amàr and Amina do at the Swedish Embassy?
They filled in a form.
27. Why did Amàr feel happy?
He would have almost two years of freedom in Sweden.
28. What would Amina do?
She would live with three other Kurdish women. They were also waiting for their husbands.

Verbs in the past

In each of these sentences, a verb in the past tense (*förfluten tid*) is missing. Find the verbs in the text and fill in the blanks.

1. We **took** a taxi to the Syrian border.
2. I **understood** that she was valuable.
3. The worst was when we **came** to the hotel in Damascus the first day.
4. That night, I **slept** on the floor.
5. I **felt** so happy.
6. I **told** Amina the news.
7. Father **knew** someone in Syria who helped Amina find a place to live.



Shilan (pp 65–69)

Questions

29. Where did Amàr's money go when he got back to Sweden?
It went to parties and alcohol.
30. How did Amàr meet Shilan?
He got a friend request from her.
31. Why did Amàr like Shilan so much?
They had so much in common and she made him laugh.
32. When Amàr and Shilan had been together for ten months, problems started coming up. What problems?
Amina's brother Samir called Amàr and asked how long Amina would have to wait for him. His father also asked him why he did not go and visit Amina.
33. Amàr lied to Shilan. What did he say?
He said that he was going to a wedding in Turkey, but he went to Syria to see Amina.

Shilan

Find words and expressions that describe Shilan. Both her looks and what she is like as a person.

pleasant, different from other girls, beautiful, golden skin, coal-black hair, her eyes were stunning, the most beautiful thing about her was her smile

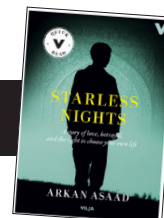
Back to Syria (pp 70–75)

Questions

34. Why is Amina ashamed?
She is ashamed because she is still a virgin.
35. There is a phone call from Amina's father. He threatens (*hotar*) Amàr. What does he say?
He says that if Amàr does not get Amina to Sweden, God only knows what he will do to him.
36. Why was Amina scared?
She thought Amàr was never coming back.

Words

Pick at least six words that you want to learn.



The Swedish Migration Authority (76–88)

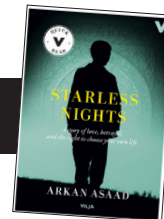
Questions

37. What happened when the caseworker asked Amàr if he loved Amina?
Amàr started crying and he told the caseworker everything.
38. Amàr wanted the Migration Authority to promise something. What?
He wanted them to promise not to tell Amina and his father about this.
39. Do the Migration Authority keep their promise?
No, they have to say that the marriage was arranged and that Amàr's family forced him to marry Amina. They will also say that he loves another woman.
40. What did Amàr want them to write?
He wanted them to write that Amira has been denied because they are related.
41. How does Shilan react when Amàr tells her the truth?
She is glad that he told her the truth. She says that she will stand by his side and support him.
42. How did this part end?
Shilan and Amàr went to Shilan's parents' summer house in Turkey.

Words

Find these words in the text. They all have to do with the Swedish Migration Authority.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Migrationsverket | the Swedish Migration Authority |
| 2. receptionsdisk | reception desk |
| 3. besöksstol | visitor's seat |
| 4. uppehållstillstånd | residence permit |
| 5. handläggare | caseworker |
| 6. högste chef | highest-ranking supervisor |
| 7. avslå | deny |
| 8. ansökan | application |
| 9. beslut | decision |
| 10. hade inkommit med,
hade skickat in | had submitted |
| 11. avslag | rejection |



Father's reaction (pp 89–94)

Summary

43. Write a summary of this part, based on these keywords: the phone rang, take back everything, kill Amàr and Shilan, heart attack, Amína, Father is sick, train to Stockholm
Student's own answer.

Adjectives

Find these adjectives in the text.

1. lugn **calm**
2. stjärnklar **starry**
3. rädd **scared**
4. allvarlig **serious**
5. tyst **quiet**
6. hård **hard**
7. sjuk **sick**
8. svag **weak**

Samir (95–101)

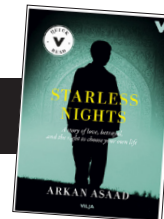
Questions

44. Something terrible happened. What?
Amàr's cousin Samir died in a car accident.
45. What did Amàr have to do?
He had to go to England and take Samir's casket to his parents in Syria.
46. Why must Amina not see that Amàr was sad?
She did not know that her brother, Samir, was dead.

Words

Find these sentences in the text.

1. Varför var det alltid de goda människorna som måste dö?
Why was it always the good people who had to die?
2. Jag fick uppdraget att åka till England.
I was put in charge of going to England
3. Sedan skulle jag åka och besöka Amina och bo där ett tag.
Then I would go visit Amina and stay there for a while.



4. Gör det rätta.
Do the right thing.
5. Vi pratade nästan inte alls innan jag la mig ner för att sova.
We hardly talked at all before I laid down to sleep.

With Amina in Damaskus (pp 102–106)

Questions

47. Because her husband seldom visited her, Amina had never got to see much outside her home. Why is that so, do you think?
Student's own answer. Example: Women cannot go out without their husband (or another relative).
48. What did Amina say when Amàr asked her if she was not afraid if she could not come to Sweden?
She said that they would appeal and try again and that she had waited for three years and could wait a little longer.
49. What are these people's feelings towards Amàr? Amina, Shilan and Father.
Amina is sad, Shilan is angry and Father is impatient.
50. How did this part end?
The Migration Authority denied Amina a residence permit for Sweden.

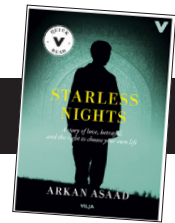
Words

Pick at least six words that you would like to learn. Translate them into Swedish.

Alone again (pp 107–115)

Questions

51. Amàr was desperate. What did he do?
He decided to kill himself. He drove his car really fast.
52. Amàr's father was ashamed that his son tried to take his own life. What did he say?
He said that Amàr had to pay 150,000 kronor to Amira's parents.
53. What did Amina's parents demand?
They demanded that Amàr never set foot in Kurdistan again.



Words

IV = dropp

Find these words in the text.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. gips | cast |
| 2. bultande | pounding |
| 3. sms | text message |
| 4. röstmeddelande | voicemail |
| 5. trassel | tangle |
| 6. kröp | crept |
| 7. skuld | debt |
| 8. vanhedrat, skämt ut | disgraced |