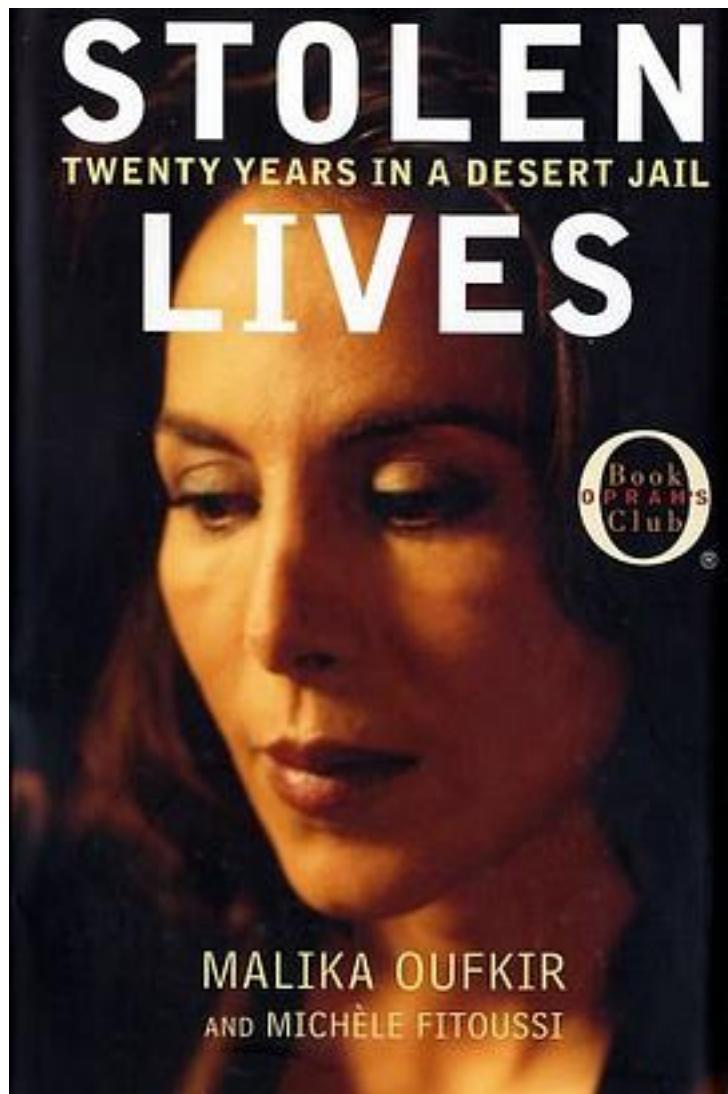


Stolen Lives



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The book Stolen Lives takes place in Morocco and follows the lives of the Oufkir family from affluence and power through imprisonment, abandonment and final escape, following the father's failed attempt at a coup d' état to overthrow the regime of King Hasan II. The story is told by Malika Oufkir, the eldest daughter of the Oufkirs and one-time adoptive daughter of King Hassan II. Malika's story begins when as a young girl she meets King Muhammad V, who is struck by her strong spirit and "adopts" her from her parents as a playmate for his young daughter, the princess Lalla Mina. We get a fascinating look at what life was (possibly still is) like for a young Moroccan royal, as Malika is groomed as a princess and lives among concubines, princes and kings, with little knowledge of, or contact with, her own family or the outside world. After the death of King Muhammad V, his son Hassan II becomes king, and essentially father, to both her and the princess his sister. Her accounts of life within the palace are intriguing and at times shocking considering they take place within the last century. She is publicly spanked for bad grades and as a shy pre-pubescent girl, made to swim naked in front of the King. After all, the King was the only male allowed in the harem and modesty meant shame. There are also a multitude of happy memories, with both King Muhammad V and King Hassan II taking a great deal of interest in her upbringing and her status as "adoptive daughter" affording her a rare intimacy with the royal family. This close relationship she shares with the family of King Hassan II makes the events which transpire even more shocking and unfathomable. After all, she is considered a daughter, sister and friend. There is humor as she writes about her small rebellions against the king, about the rituals and rivalries of the harem concubines, and about the strict German palace governess. Throughout her childhood, and especially when she hits adolescence, Malika experiences extreme loneliness as she lives apart from her family, only occasionally being able to see them and even then feeling as if she doesn't belong. Her father is a frequent visitor at the palace due to his influential position, and an advisor to the king. However, it is her mother that she misses especially and their rare visits are bittersweet. Finally at sixteen years old, she makes it clear that she is no longer happy at the palace and wishes to be back with her family. The King concedes and a relatively normal and peaceful period of this family's life follows, as Malika reconnects with her family and discovers what life is like outside the palace walls. After a period of continuing her studies at the palace, she is able to live like a normal teenager – she goes to a typical school, sneaks out at night, goes dancing – in short, she experiences what any girl her age would. Her dream is to be a movie director and her affluent family has many friends in social and political circles. She moves to Paris and for a short time her life is one of privilege and freedom. The story takes a dramatic turn, however, when in 1972, her father, now a general in the king's army, attempts a coup. The attempt is unsuccessful and her father is executed. The family is grief stricken of course, but that sorrow is to be only the beginning of an ordeal that stretches over twenty years and threatens to claim the sanity and lives of Malika and her family. The family is placed under house arrest for a time while they and their friends and family are interrogated and harassed. On December 24, 1972 the family of General Oufkir, his wife and six children, are sent into exile at a penal colony in the south of Morocco. The youngest is only three years old. And this is where the story becomes truly incredible. Over a span of twenty years the family is put in increasingly more deplorable conditions – they are denied food, water, clothing, even contact with each other. Throughout their incarceration they show a great deal of bravery and ingenuity in finding ways to stay connected to each other and the world outside, and in the end it is the combination of their talents and courage, as well as their tight family bond, that enables them to survive and escape. The escape is carried out by three of the children, dressed in outdated clothing and makeshift shoes, who contact foreign journalists in order to broadcast their story and force the King to acknowledge their incarceration and eventually free the rest of the family. The depth of this story is difficult to capture in a short review, but the lingering feeling after reading this tale is

one of admiration for this family of survivors. The damage done by half a lifetime of incarceration is tragic, but the story itself is one of overcoming great obstacles – of family, courage, determination, and the strength of the human spirit to survive against all odds.

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