

Reading Group Guide for Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*

1. Most love stories cast very young women as the "love interest," or else they feature older married women looking for an escape. The protagonist of *Crescent*, Sirine, is thirty-nine and unmarried. Do you think the author chose this age and situation deliberately? Why? Did it surprise you? What does it imply for the rest of the story?
2. Could you tell, from the way this love story unfolds, that the author is a woman?
3. What is the purpose of the tale that Sirine's uncle tells? Did you find it a distraction or did it help to inform the rest of the story? What do the tales of Abdelrahman Salahadin's several different slaveries and "drownings" mean or evoke?
4. Diana Abu-Jaber has been a restaurant reviewer for the *Portland Oregonian*. Do you think making her main character a chef was just an opportunity for the author to weave in her own love of food and cooking? Or is there something else going on here?
5. Both Han and Nathan have pasts in Iraq that remain shadowy for much of the novel. Does this make Han more attractive or more threatening? What about Nathan? Did you find yourself filling in the blanks of their past, and were your guesses right or wrong?

6. When Han finally tells the story of his childhood in Baghdad, the emotional gravity of the novel suddenly shifts. Why? What has changed? How does it affect your sense of involvement with the characters? How does exile affect Han's sense of identity?

7. The relationship between Sirine and Rana is complicated and highly charged. What do you think each of these women really thinks about the other? Why does each of them seem to see the other woman as some sort of challenge to her own identity? Do women actually use each other this way-as mirrors to reassure or to challenge their images of themselves? Is that good or bad?

8. Virginia Woolf once said that literature would change once two women in a novel could actually be together in a room, without any men, talking to each other. Crescent is full of such moments. What role do they play in the novel? How would you compare the relationships between the women, between the men, and between the women and men in this novel? Are they all convincing? Are they equally important? What about the relationships between members of different generations?

9. What was your reaction to Sirine's memories of her parents' death? How do you feel about her parents' desire to save the world, and its effect on Sirine? Combined with the story of the American woman in Baghdad, and the film crew in the desert

in Sirine's uncle's tale, do you think the author is sending us a message or messages about Americans abroad, or about how Americans are perceived in other countries? What is she saying and do you think it's true?

10. Do you have a different view of the Middle East after reading this novel? A different view of America?

11. What are the various ways in which the title is echoed through the book? What does it evoke for you, in the end?