

# Zeitoun



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVE EGGERS

Dave Eggers grew up outside Chicago before attending the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. His father died in 1991 and his mother in 1992, both of cancer. Eggers subsequently took responsibility for his 8-year-old brother Toph, moving to Berkeley, California, where he supported himself doing freelance graphic design. After a number of years writing on a freelance basis, Eggers published the memoir [A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius](#) in 2000, which became a bestseller. Eggers has written a number of novels since then, which have been increasingly focused on social issues in the United States. He is also the founder of the independent publishing house McSweeney's, as well as the nonprofit tutoring and writing center 826 Valencia. He lives in California with his wife, Vendela Vida, and children.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Zeitoun* takes place during and immediately after Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast of America on August 29, 2005 as a Category 3 storm. The hurricane itself led to a great amount of damage in Louisiana and Mississippi, but what happened after the storm was even more catastrophic. The average elevation of New Orleans, Louisiana is about six feet below sea level, and the levees that had been built decades before to hold back storm surges were breached by Katrina. This led to massive amounts of flooding, and hundreds of thousands of people in Louisiana (as well as in neighboring states) had to flee their homes. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) received a great deal of criticism for its slow and (according to some) incompetent response to the disaster, which, because of the location of the levees, disproportionately impacted the city's poorest and minority residents. Dave Eggers also fits *Zeitoun* into a broader historical context of changes taking place in the country after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Anti-Muslim sentiment skyrocketed, and because of the Patriot Act, government officials had much more freedom to detain and question anyone suspected to be linked to terrorism—even if that suspicion had only to do with a person's religion or ethnicity. It is this confluence of factors, Eggers suggests, that led to the perfect storm of Zeitoun's predicament.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Dave Eggers is known for his self-reflexive, often experimental works. One of his books, *What is the What*, is the true story of

one of the "Lost Boys" from South Sudan—though it was marketed as a novel. *Zeitoun*, on the other hand, was sold as nonfiction, because of the greater ability to fact-check witness accounts. In general, *Zeitoun* fits into a broader trend of creative or narrative nonfiction, which has its roots in an earlier generation of journalists who tried to create a compelling, engaging narrative rather than dry reporting; these included Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. More recently, writers have used creative nonfiction to draw attention to underreported social issues and make people care about them by highlighting individual stories. One example is Katherine Boo's [Behind the Beautiful Forevers](#), which deals with the stories of residents of a slum in Mumbai, India.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Zeitoun*
- **When Written:** 2006-2009
- **Where Written:** New Orleans and San Francisco
- **When Published:** 2009
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Creative nonfiction
- **Setting:** New Orleans, Louisiana; Phoenix, Arizona; Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- **Climax:** Zeitoun and his wife Kathy are reunited at the Hunt prison after a month of Zeitoun's wrongful imprisonment.
- **Antagonist:** Many of Zeitoun's and Kathy's frustrations stem from the diffuse and complicated nature of their antagonists. The "system"—that is, the legal and judicial system as well as various levels of law enforcement, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency—has broken down as a result of Hurricane Katrina, so it is difficult to find one person to blame for Zeitoun's wrongful arrest and imprisonment.
- **Point of View:** Reported third-person narrative

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Bearing Witness.** Eggers met the Zeitouns through the McSweeney's oral history human rights imprint, "Voices of Witness." One of the interviewees for a Katrina book was Abdulrahman Zeitoun.

**Aftermath.** The book notes the emotional problems faced by Kathy and Zeitoun in the years after the storm, and their marriage fell apart by the beginning of 2012.



## PLOT SUMMARY

*Zeitoun* is set in New Orleans, Louisiana, and begins with the protagonist Abdulrahman Zeitoun (known by his last name) and his wife Kathy preparing to send their children Nademah, Aisha, and Safiya to school. Kathy's son from her first marriage, Zachary, is already there. The couple bickers, with Kathy growing frustrated by Zeitoun's stubbornness about everything, but they clearly have a loving relationship. Zeitoun heads out to work. He owns a painting and contracting business, and also manages several rental properties throughout the city. Kathy works from home, fielding phone calls and managing the documents for the business.

Zeitoun and Kathy are in constant contact throughout the day—Friday, August 26—as is often the case in dealing with business and other questions through their characteristic witty banter. Kathy then begins to hear news of an impending storm. Initially she's not concerned, because hurricanes are common in the New Orleans area, but as the day goes on the news grows increasingly worse. Zeitoun continues to brush it off, however, even after he gets a phone call from his brother, Ahmad, in Spain. Zeitoun had grown up in a coastal town called Jableh in Syria with many brothers and sisters. His father had been a ship captain, but after a near-death experience had decided to settle down. Still, both Ahmad and Zeitoun would end up being seamen themselves. Zeitoun would travel around for nearly a decade on ships before settling in Baton Rouge. There, he met a friend, Ahmaad, who introduced him to Kathy. Kathy had grown up in a Southern Baptist family in Baton Rouge, and was close friends with a girl named Yuko. Yuko later converted to Islam and married Ahmaad. After a failed first marriage, Kathy was drawn to the peace and contentment that seemed to emanate from Yuko. Especially after being disappointed by the preacher at her evangelical church, she began to learn more about Islam and eventually converted. After some hesitation, Kathy would go on to convert to Islam herself, and also to marry Zeitoun, a devout Muslim who was beginning to feel fiercely loyal to his adopted country.

By the end of the day, Kathy has heard on the news about a family lost at sea because of the storm, and the next morning she decides—given the governor's and mayor's recommendations—to take their children out of the city to wait out the storm. Zeitoun refuses to go with her, however. He can be obsessed with work, and especially in this case, he wants to make sure that all the construction sites and rental properties he's responsible for will be all right. Initially, it seems that he had the right idea, as Kathy is stuck for hours on the highway on the way to her sister's house in Baton Rouge. Over the course of the weekend, the storm passes—it's strong, but nothing unexpected. By Tuesday, August 30, however, the levees holding back the water are breached, and flooding engulfs the city: by the afternoon, Zeitoun's house is under eight to nine

feet of water. After moving whatever he can to the second floor, Zeitoun takes an old **canoe** that he had bought from a client—it reminded him of his days as a seaman—and begins to paddle around.

The narration now switches back and forth between Zeitoun and Kathy. Kathy is frustrated enough with her family, which has never fully accepted her conversion to Islam, to want to leave. She calls her friend Yuko, whose husband Ahmaad drives Kathy and her children all the way to Phoenix, Arizona. Kathy continues to beg Zeitoun to leave the city, but by this point, Zeitoun has found a sense of purpose. He manages to rescue several elderly couples as well as another woman trapped in their flooded homes. He carries food and water to others, and takes on responsibility for feeding a number of dogs trapped in homes. He partners with Todd Gambino, a resident of one of the rental properties on Claiborne Street, as well as an acquaintance, Nasser Dayood, another Syrian emigrant. He manages to call Kathy every day from Claiborne, where there is still a working telephone, and where the three men meet a fourth, Ronnie, whom they allow to spend time with them. Zeitoun hears news from Kathy about how the city is supposed to be violent and lawless, with murders, rapes, and rampaging gangs. In reality, Zeitoun mainly sees people wanting to be rescued, as well as military and police officers in full combat gear swarming the city.

On Tuesday, September 6, Zeitoun has just talked to his brother Ahmad and is about to call Kathy from the Claiborne Street house when a number of police and military officers burst into the home. They order the four men into their boat, refusing to hear Zeitoun's protests that he owns the house. The men are taken to a staging ground and then to the train and bus station—later nicknamed "**Camp Greyhound**"—which has become a makeshift prison after the storm. None of the men is permitted a phone call or given access to attorney, and Zeitoun isn't even told what charges are against him, as he is forced to submit to humiliating body searches. Through several hints he begins to fear that the authorities suspect them of some kind of terrorist activity—it doesn't help that Todd has Mapquest printouts and a memory chip in his pocket, and Nasser is carrying his life savings, \$10,000 in cash, with him (something that, nevertheless, immigrants often do). The men are kept in an uncomfortable outdoor cell for several days, where they witness periodic pepper sprayings by police, and where nearly every meal seems to include ham or pork, which Nasser and Zeitoun, as Muslims, cannot eat. Finally, they are transported to the Hunt Correctional Facility in St. Gabriel, a "real" prison where, nonetheless, none of the Katrina prisoners are given due process like the rest. Zeitoun is first placed with Nasser, but then is put in solitary confinement. For a month he tries and fails to establish contact with the outside world, to let Kathy know that he is alive, and to find some way of contesting his imprisonment.

Meanwhile, Kathy has become increasingly frantic every day. She also has to deal with the worries of Zeitoun's family in Syria, Spain, and elsewhere. Though Yuko tries to comfort her, Kathy begins to recognize that Zeitoun may have died. Finally, towards the end of September, she gets a phone call from a missionary, who says he saw Zeitoun at a prison and is calling, against the rules, to tell her he is okay. She also gets a call from Homeland Security, which says that the department no longer "has interest" in her husband. Kathy immediately calls a lawyer, Raleigh Ohlmeyer, but it is weeks before Zeitoun can actually be released. First Kathy has to fly back and gather witnesses to Zeitoun's good character for a court hearing. Then the hearing is cancelled, and she must return to her home in New Orleans to find documents confirming ownership of the house, in order to post bail for her husband.

Finally the two are reunited, and after staying with friends for a few days, they slowly move back into normal life. The couple begins to buy up properties around their neighborhood to renovate. By the fall of 2008, they have moved back into their original home, and are back to work—but much has changed since the storm. Kathy has become nervous and forgetful, exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Zeitoun, meanwhile, tries to think of his ordeal as a test from God, but he continues to grapple with his disappointment in his country, and his frustration that so many people refused to think of him as a fellow countryman and human. He throws himself into work in order to deal with his emotional difficulties. Still, both Kathy and Zeitoun are hopeful about continuing to recover and move on.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Abdulrahman Zeitoun** – The protagonist of the book, Zeitoun, as he is usually called, is originally from Jableh, a small coastal town in Syria. After spending years as a sailor traveling all around the world, Zeitoun moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he met his wife Kathy, and then to New Orleans. A devout Muslim, he has also embraced his adopted country as well as the city of New Orleans, which he has come to call home. Zeitoun is hard-working and committed, and is proud of having built a painting and contracting business from scratch. He can also be very stubborn and unwilling to listen to others, which is part of the reason he refuses to leave the city even as his wife begs him to. Zeitoun was deeply affected by the death of his brother Mohammed, who was an internationally acclaimed swimmer. The desire to live up to Mohammed's legacy—along with Zeitoun's faith and patriotism—serves as a major motivation for Zeitoun's series of rescues in New Orleans.

**Kathy Zeitoun** – Zeitoun's wife, Kathy was raised in a working-

class, Southern Baptist family. She was married and quickly divorced at a young age. Feeling unmoored and unhappy, she began to learn more about Islam through her friend Yuko, and eventually she converted, finding peace in the religion that she hadn't found in Christianity. Kathy is a loving wife and mother, as well as a crucial part of the Zeitouns' business. She is prone to worrying about her husband, and she never fails to speak her mind to him or to anyone else. It is Kathy's determination and refusal to back down that helps to free Zeitoun long before any of the other men he was arrested with.

**Mahmoud Zeitoun** – Zeitoun's father, a former sailor who narrowly escaped death on one of his ships, and subsequently vowed to not spend his life on the water, but rather to settle down with his family. Ironically, he must accept that a number of his sons find themselves drawn to the sea in various ways.

**Ahmad Zeitoun** – Zeitoun's older brother, and the first sibling to leave Jableh to become a sailor and then ship captain. He later hired Zeitoun and they traveled the world together. Ahmad now lives in Spain with his family. He loves photographs and is eager to keep in touch with his entire family, and he is in constant contact with Kathy as they try to determine what has happened to Zeitoun.

**Mohammed Zeitoun** – Zeitoun's oldest brother, a competitive swimmer who was the fastest in Syria and one of the top swimmers in the world. He traveled everywhere and was fêted by kings and presidents, before tragically dying in a car accident when Zeitoun was a child. Zeitoun idolizes Mohammed and in many ways looks up to him still.

**Yuko** – Kathy's best friend. The two of them grew up together and shared an apartment for a while after graduating from high school. Yuko converted to Islam and married a Muslim man, thus introducing Kathy to the faith. Yuko and her husband Ahmaad host Kathy and her children at their home in Phoenix, Arizona for weeks after Hurricane Katrina.

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**Patty** – Kathy's sister.

**Mary Ann** – Kathy's sister.

**Nademah** – Kathy and Zeitoun's oldest daughter, who is mature, intelligent, and spunky.

**Aisha** – Another daughter of Kathy and Zeitoun. Aisha is also the name of one of Zeitoun's sisters, who lives in Syria.

**Safiya** – Another daughter of Kathy and Zeitoun.

**Zachary** – Kathy's son from her first marriage.

**Kameko** – Yuko's mother and the adopted mother of Kathy.

**Ahmaad** – Yuko's husband.

**Miss Mary** – A friend of Yuko's who hosts Kathy and her family in Houston.

**Nasser Dayoob** – An acquaintance of Zeitoun, and another

Syrian immigrant who left the country in 1995. He is imprisoned with Zeitoun in New Orleans.

**Todd Gambino** – A tenant of Zeitoun who lives on Claiborne Street, and is arrested with Zeitoun.

**Ronnie** – A New Orleans resident who breaks into the Claiborne house to use the telephone after the storm. Zeitoun allows him to stay, and Ronnie ends up getting arrested along with him, Todd, and Nasser.

**Charlie Ray** – A carpenter who lives next to the house on Claiborne Street.

**Alvin Williams** – A pastor and neighbor of Zeitoun. Zeitoun helps him and his wife escape their flooded home.

**Charlie Saucier** – Zeitoun’s former boss, who admired his work ethic.

**Asma** – A friend of Kathy’s, who is Muslim but doesn’t wear the **hijab**.

**Rob Stanislaw** – A friend of Zeitoun and Kathy from New Orleans, who helps track down Zeitoun after Katrina.

**Walt Stanislaw** – Rob’s husband.

**Adnan** – Zeitoun’s cousin, who manages a number of Subway franchises in New Orleans.

**Frank Noland** – A client of Zeitoun in New Orleans.

**Jerry** – A fellow prisoner at **Camp Greyhound**, whom Todd suspects of being an undercover officer trying to make the four prisoners admit to terrorist activity.

**Missionary** – This man is in the prison when Zeitoun asks him, against the regulations, to call his wife Kathy. It is through the missionary that Kathy first learns that Zeitoun is alive and at the Hunt Correctional Facility.

**Raleigh Ohlmeyer** – A lawyer in New Orleans whom Kathy hires to help get Zeitoun out of prison.

**Donald Lima** – One of the officers who arrests Zeitoun.

**Ralph Gonzalez** – An out-of-state officer who helps in Zeitoun’s arrest.

and in his continued ties to his Syrian relatives in Jableh, where he grew up. These community ties are all portrayed as coexisting, rather than mutually exclusive, showing that identity can be complex and changeable rather than monolithic. Zeitoun clearly takes pride in the community he has developed as an immigrant to New Orleans, where he worked his way up from being a seaman to running his own construction company. The trust that his neighbors put in him is one reason he wants to stay in the city when Hurricane Katrina hits, and to take responsibility for his various properties. He also feels a certain responsibility for New Orleans, which has become his home. This then influences his decision to paddle around after the storm in his second-hand **canoe**, helping victims wherever he finds them.

The book also shows Zeitoun’s motivations as more complex than those of a do-gooder alone. Through flashbacks of his childhood in Syria and the early death of his brother (a nationally ranked and acclaimed swimmer), we see how family and community give Zeitoun a reason to want glory and validation for himself—even while he also genuinely believes in what he is doing. Both Zeitoun and his wife Kathy feel alternately hopeful about and betrayed by the community they have created for themselves. On the one hand, everything they have done seems not to matter once Zeitoun is thrown into prison without being charged for anything. On the other, Kathy is able to use the numerous contacts that they’ve developed through their years in New Orleans to get her husband out months earlier than his friends. By the end of the book, the couple’s belief in the ties of community and home are shaken—they are far more vulnerable and mistrustful than before the storm—but they continue to rebuild the physical and emotional bonds that they had developed in earlier years as they attempt to recreate this community. Still, Katrina has undeniably challenged the sense of home that they had worked hard to construct.



## CRIME, JUSTICE, AND INJUSTICE

With Zeitoun stranded in New Orleans and Kathy in Arizona with their children, two narratives on the fallout from Hurricane Katrina unfold. One, which Kathy hears largely from the media, is that Katrina has turned the city into a war zone, with stealing, shooting, and other illegal activity quickly becoming the norm. This sense of emergency creates a disconnect with her husband’s experience, at least initially: while he sees sporadic examples of looting, the days after the storm are much more defined by a vulnerable, desperate population seeking help or escape. Again and again, Zeitoun asks for help from among the police force, which has been highly militarized and is patrolling neighborhoods in military-style combat gear. He is almost always rebuffed, as it seems that they are there not to find people in need of assistance, but instead to “keep order” against



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND HOME

Abdulrahman Zeitoun, the protagonist of *Zeitoun*, has found community in a number of places: in his family, in New Orleans, in the Muslim community,



only the vaguest of threats.

In fact, the entire legal and justice system seems to break down after Katrina, as Zeitoun is taken from prison to prison, refused a phone call, and held without bail and without being charged for a crime. A makeshift jail—**Camp Greyhound**—is quickly built and filled with supplies for the guards and employees, while a few miles away, the Superdome, which is packed with New Orleans residents, has nowhere near the same level of resources.

According to Eggers, the authorities' post-Katrina emphasis on combating crime and lawlessness served not to uphold justice, but in fact to create injustice—a position that, the book argues, has much to do with the race and ethnicity of those who most needed help.



### FAITH, PERSEVERANCE, AND DIGNITY

The fact that Zeitoun owns a construction company takes on symbolic resonance in the book. As he attempts to help those stranded in New Orleans after Katrina, his efforts become another kind of rebuilding. Throughout the ordeal, he trusts that something good will come out of both his efforts and those of others—efforts that counter the corruption of the authorities. Zeitoun's Muslim faith is crucial to his perseverance, as he puts his trust in God even after being unfairly imprisoned. But his stubbornness is also an essential part of his personality, and we learn early on that Kathy finds this quality alternately endearing and infuriating. Stubbornness turns out to be a necessary personality trait, however, and one that equips Zeitoun with the grit needed to carry on when he faces various difficulties throughout the book.

Zeitoun also must persevere through a number of events that threaten to strip him of his inherent human dignity. He is subjected to invasive bodily scrutiny by the police, and must deal with prejudice and discrimination because of his Muslim faith. The very nature of Hurricane Katrina subjects others to indignities as well, and Zeitoun feels ashamed for an old woman who feels she has lost her dignity while desperately trying to stay afloat and alive outside her home. While nature threatens to remove human dignity, Zeitoun clings to the belief that people can restore this dignity by helping each other.



### HUMAN VS. NATURAL TRAGEDY

Hurricanes like Katrina are known as “natural disasters,” as the events themselves are outside of human control. Zeitoun is certainly aware of this, and he holds great respect for nature, understanding the powerful forces of water that both killed his older brother (who drowned many years earlier) and wrought such devastation on New Orleans. But the book also shows that there is always a human component to such tragedies as well.

In New Orleans, it is not just the massive storm that causes great damage—the poorly constructed levees that are meant to hold back flooding break, unleashing even more destruction on much of the city. In addition, the parts of the city most vulnerable to such flooding are the poorer, more minority-populated neighborhoods, meaning that these are the communities that suffer most. Meanwhile, those who lack resources to leave the city, given the mandatory evacuation, are overwhelmingly housed in the Superdome, which becomes a disastrous referendum on the inadequate response to the storm. Nature doesn't discriminate between rich and poor, white and black, but existing *human* structures are shown to create vast differences between who suffers more or less.



### ISLAM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Part of Dave Eggers's purported goal in writing *Zeitoun* was to introduce a “normal” Muslim family to American readers who, almost a decade after 9/11, might have a limited or even prejudiced view of the religion and of Muslim cultures. By portraying a Muslim family and tracing its beliefs and practices, *Zeitoun* seeks to counter these limitations and suggest that being Muslim is entirely compatible with being American—indeed, it is just one facet of American diversity. Eggers describes in detail how Kathy Zeitoun, the protagonist's wife, came to convert to Islam after having grown up in a Southern Baptist community. By showing how the small-mindedness of her Christian pastor contrasted to the openness that Kathy found in an imam she went to visit, Eggers inverts stereotypes about Islam and humanizes the religion. At the same time, we also learn how Kathy faced confusion and discrimination after converting to Islam—from her family lashing out at her for wearing a **hijab** (headscarf), to customers of her husband's construction company cancelling their orders after learning that the employees were Middle Eastern. Zeitoun, meanwhile, draws on his religious beliefs throughout the novel as a source of strength in difficult times. For him, Islam is also linked to his family's heritage, and is a regular part of his daily life. Anti-Muslim prejudice, however, is portrayed as a major reason for Zeitoun's arrest and detention without reason. Guards who witness him and his friend Naseer praying five times a day (in accordance with Islam) immediately distrust them.

To combat this kind of suspicion, Eggers tries to make some aspects of Islam more understandable to non-Muslim readers. Long quotations from the Qur'an introduce readers to its beauty, while some passages—especially one about a massive flood—show that there are many similarities between Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition. While Islamophobia never goes away in the novel—at the end, the Zeitoun couple continues to struggle to recover from their debacle—what remains is a certain confidence that knowing, understanding, and empathizing with those from other cultures and religions is the

only way to decrease suspicion and discrimination.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### ZEITOUN'S CANOE

A simple, unadorned piece of corrugated iron, the canoe that Zeitoun bought several years before Hurricane Katrina reminds him of where he came from. He was born in a small coastal town in Syria, but also was part of a family of seamen, sailors, and ship captains. This symbol of Zeitoun's past also becomes a symbol of his stubborn determination to help others in the days after Katrina, as he paddles around the flooded city of New Orleans assisting trapped residents and animals. The canoe stands in contrast to the military fanboats and motorboats prowling around the city, transporting officials that seem more concerned about maintaining "security" and "order" than about helping those left behind. Because the canoe is so quiet, Zeitoun is able to hear cries for help that these larger machines cannot.

At one point Zeitoun thinks back to the story of Noah's Ark, which is an important religious story for Muslims, as well as for Christians and Jews. In some ways Zeitoun's canoe is a kind of ark, protecting him and those that he helps, and saving them from a destruction so vast that it seems divine in origin. As a modern "Noah," Zeitoun takes on responsibility for rescuing and saving whomever he can, according to what he believes is God's will. Indeed, Zeitoun comes to think of his entire ordeal as a test from God.



### THE HIJAB

Born into a Southern Baptist family, and having converted to Islam as an adult, Kathy has a privileged insight into what it is like to be Muslim in America. She particularly is able to see the prejudices Muslims face—especially, she believes, after 9/11. For many Americans, the hijab that Kathy and other (though not all) Muslim women wear to cover their hair is a symbol of women's oppression and of scary "otherness." Kathy's mother, for instance, often asks her to "take that thing off" when she's away from her husband or at home—as if Zeitoun forced Kathy to wear it.

For Kathy, however, the hijab is a powerful reminder of the life choice she made to convert to Islam, and of the commitment of faith that she continues to make each day. By choosing to wear the hijab, Kathy believes she is choosing dignity and peace, something she admired in Muslim women she met before converting. She often touches or rearranges it at moments of confusion or uncertainty, drawing strength from this physical

reminder of her faith.



### CAMP GREYHOUND

Camp Greyhound is the massive temporary prison complex that housed Zeitoun and his three acquaintances, before they were transferred to a state prison. The complex is built in only a couple of days, immediately after the storm. Housed in the train and bus station, it is strikingly efficient—especially compared to the chaos of the rest of the city. In some ways, this efficiency reflects the skewed motives that, Eggers argues, characterized law-enforcement and legal response to the storm—emphasizing security, order, and militarized action rather than search and rescue. Camp Greyhound thus symbolizes both the extraordinarily well-coordinated militarized response to Hurricane Katrina, as well as a deeper malfunction: the breakdown of other systems, like the legal and judicial systems, which are meant to ensure people's basic human rights, even in times of crisis.




## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Zeitoun* published in 2010.

### Part 1: Friday August 26 Quotes

☝ The banter they'd developed, full of his exasperation and her one-liners, was entertaining to everyone who overheard it. It was unavoidable, too, given how often they talked. Neither of them could operate their home, their company, their lives or days without the other.

**Related Characters:** Kathy Zeitoun, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 16



#### Explanation and Analysis

As we are introduced to the Zeitouns, we come quickly to understand that their lives are inextricably bound both in the obvious ways - they are a married couple - but also in the details of their day-to-day lives. After all, they are not only husband and wife but also business partners, not to mention co-parents. Kathy's first impulse when anything seems like it may go wrong is to pick up the phone and call her husband: one of these moments is what prompts Eggers to try to explain their relationship. He does not claim that it is a perfect one - indeed, he suggests that they are mutually exasperating as much as they act lovingly towards each

other - but he does underline how much the relationship is one of mutual dependence and reliance.

☹️ His frustration with some Americans was like that of a disappointed parent. He was so content in this country, so impressed with and loving of its opportunities, but then why, sometimes, did Americans fall short of their best selves?

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 37

### Explanation and Analysis



The book has been describing some of the minor slights and instances of prejudice that Zeitoun and Kathy have suffered at work and in life in general, often due to his Syrian heritage or to their Muslim beliefs. Here, Eggers characterizes Zeitoun's relationship to his adopted country, the United States, as one of complex ambivalence. On the one hand, he is grateful to have been given the opportunity to build his own business, to create a life for himself, in a way that would have been difficult for him to do back home in Syria. But on the other hand, he finds the prejudices and small-mindedness of some Americans painful and confusing.

By describing Zeitoun's attitude as that of a "disappointed parent," Eggers emphasizes that it is not that Zeitoun finds there to be a sickness innate to America, something unresolvable. Instead he believes such beliefs and attitudes to be a stage similar to that of a teenager, who simply needs to grow up and learn to become his or her best self. Islamophobia, for Zeitoun, is not something that should necessarily characterize Americans, but rather something that they can overcome.

## Part 1: Saturday August 27 Quotes

☹️ She knew that in Islam she had found calm. The doubt sewn into the faith gave her room to think, to question. The answers the Qur'an provided gave her a way forward.

**Related Characters:** Kathy Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 67

### Explanation and Analysis



Kathy had begun to attend a mosque and learn about Islam during a tumultuous period in her life, when she was no longer felt at home in her religion or with her family, and wasn't sure where her life was headed. Here, it is suggested in particular that the Baptist faith with which Kathy grew up was too strict and dogmatic for her: it left little room for her to question, doubt, or grow. Kathy has found the opposite to be true in Islam. She now feels inspired both by the questioning implicit in the faith as well as the answers she does think the Qur'an lends to questions of struggling and perseverance.


This section of the book is part of a broader interest in explaining one person's experience with Islam to a readership that may not be familiar with the religion beyond what is shown on the news. By describing Kathy's conversion and relationship to her faith, Eggers attempts to make it more understandable and relatable to American readers unfamiliar with Islam, and who might otherwise be tempted towards prejudice.

## Part 2: Wednesday August 31 Quotes

☹️ But there was the canoe. He saw it, floating above the yard, tethered to the house. Amid the devastation of the city, standing on the roof of his drowned home, Zeitoun felt something like inspiration. He imagined floating, alone, through the streets of his city. In a way, this was a new world, uncharted. He could be an explorer. He could see things first.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 94-95

### Explanation and Analysis



When the storm quiets down and Zeitoun is left in a flooded city, he begins to feel restless and bored. Not long after that, however, he realizes that he is not condemned to remain trapped at home indefinitely. The canoe is his ticket out of what he hates the most - doing nothing. Zeitoun's adventurous spirit has already become clear: for one, he arrived to the United States on a steamer after traveling all around the world. Now he has another chance to uncover another new world, though in quite a different context.


However, Zeitoun's romantic vision of exploring uncharted paths and floating peacefully through the city is described

mainly as a contrast to what he will actually find. A devastating hurricane, of course, has just ripped through New Orleans. While Eggers doesn't portray Zeitoun as naive or uncaring, he points to Zeitoun's initial reactions both to underline his natural sense of adventure, and to suggest that few people thought that Hurricane Katrina would be devastating to the extent that it was.

☛ Had they been in a fan boat, the noise overwhelming, they would have heard nothing. They would have passed by, and the woman likely would not have survived another night. It was the very nature of this small, silent craft that allowed them to hear the quietest cries. The canoe was good, the silence was crucial.

**Related Characters:** Frank Noland, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 109

### Explanation and Analysis

Zeitoun and Frank have spent the day paddling around the neighborhood, helping a number of trapped residents in need. Zeitoun feels excited and purposeful - like there's a reason that he's remained behind in the city. Now, he realizes that the canoe is more than a means for him to keep from going mad while cooped up in his home. It can be used to help others as well, and, most importantly, it is ideally suited to such a task. The fan boats that have been sharing the same space as the small, unassuming-looking canoe seem important and necessary, part of an official fleet that has been dispatched to aid the recovery from the storm. But here Zeitoun recognizes that the fan boats' power is more symbolic than real, since it is too loud for its conductors to actually listen for people in need.

☛ Mohammed's accomplishments implied—proved, really—that the Zeitouns were extraordinary. It was incumbent, thereafter, on each and every child to live up to that legacy.

**Related Characters:** Mohammed Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 116

### Explanation and Analysis

In this flashback, one of many that make up the narrative of Zeitoun's time spent in New Orleans, the book uses examples and stories from Zeitoun's past to help explain some of his motivations in the present. Mohammed's life and tragic death are never far from Zeitoun's mind. Having long idolized his brother, Zeitoun never believed he could equal Mohammed's achievements: but now that Mohammed is no longer alive, he feels that he needs to sustain his brother's legacy by doing something extraordinary himself.

The book thus paints Zeitoun's motivations as complex, though realistic. He is not shown to be an entirely selfless hero: like anyone else, he wants validation from his family and community, and seeks out ways to prove that he can live up to his brother's legacy. Of course, this is not meant to take away from the admirable nature of Zeitoun's actions in New Orleans after the hurricane. It is rather to stress the complicated set of desires, dreams, and memories that work to characterize each person's motivations and to help us understand why people act the way that they do.

## Part 2: Tuesday September 6 Quotes

☛ But Zeitoun felt again that perhaps this was his calling, that God had waited to put him here and now to test him in this way. And so he hoped, as silly as it seemed, that his siblings might see him like this, on the water, a sailor again, being useful, serving God.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 167

### Explanation and Analysis

Zeitoun has just been interviewed by a local reporter and asked about what he's been doing while in the city. Now he admits that he hopes one of his siblings will see the news broadcast and be impressed by what they see. They will realize, he hopes, that Mohammed is not the only one in the family who has completed admirable feats. Zeitoun's naturally competitive nature is evident once again here. Some of his motivations for helping others are indeed related to the social networks in which he takes part, and by which he hopes to prove himself.

But Zeitoun also considers his task in New Orleans to be





one of proving himself not only for his neighbors and family, but also for God. Zeitoun considers divine tests, such as those to be found in the Qur'an or Old Testament, to be central to his faith, and he sees this experience as something sent by God for him to fulfill and thus prove himself worthy enough.

### Part 3: Saturday September 17 Quotes

☞ She had married a bullheaded man, a sometimes ridiculously stubborn man. He could be exasperating in his sense of destiny. [...] But then again, she thought, it gave their marriage a certain epic scope.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun, Kathy Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 199

#### Explanation and Analysis



Kathy is remembering one particularly exaggerated example of Zeitoun's stubbornness, when he had suggested at the beach that they stroll towards a far-away rock, even when the walk ends up taking hours and becomes far more strenuous than either of them had thought. For Kathy, this anecdote is emblematic of Zeitoun's character in general. When he decides what he wants to do, nothing and no one can get in his way. Kathy tends to grow anxious over her family's safety, and yet she realizes that if Zeitoun wants to stay in New Orleans, there is no way she can stop him.


In some ways, Kathy finds this aspect of Zeitoun's nature incredibly maddening. For her it threatens to wear at the close-knit family life she has worked so hard to develop, the stability that was foreign to her for so long. Yet at the same time, Kathy admires Zeitoun's "bullheaded" character, which ensures that life around him is never boring or banal. Her frustration mingles and coexists with her admiration for this man who she feels so inextricably tied to.

### Part 4: Tuesday September 6 Quotes

☞ When Zeitoun and the others entered the main room of the station, immediately fifty pairs of eyes, those of soldiers and police officers and military personnel, were upon them. There were no other civilians inside. It was as if the entire operation, this bus station-turned-military base, had been arranged for them.

**Related Characters:** Ronnie, Nasser Dayoob, Todd Gambino, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 


**Page Number:** 210-211

#### Explanation and Analysis

Zeitoun has been arrested with the three other men in the house, and his experience is beginning to take on a surreal quality. He has no idea why he's been arrested, where he'll be taken, or what will happen next. All he can tell is that what began as a natural tragedy, a devastating hurricane, has now morphed into something quite different. Rather than a rescue operation, the officials here seem to have quickly cobbled together a makeshift center based around crime and even war. At the same time, Zeitoun cannot see any evidence that such a vast structural operation stems from a real need at all. He believes he hasn't done anything wrong, and he doesn't see any other guilty parties: instead, these institutions seem to have cropped up almost of their own will. As the book shifts away from an inspiring section on Zeitoun's feats in helping others after the hurricane, it turns towards a more somber aspect of the days and weeks after Katrina, when social trauma and injustice proved even greater than natural disaster.

☞ Until this point, Zeitoun had not been charged with a crime. He had not been read his rights. He did not know why he was being held. Now he was in a small white room being asked by two soldiers, each of them in full camouflage and holding automatic rifles, to remove his clothes.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 216

#### Explanation and Analysis

After waiting for hours, Zeitoun is taken inside a room for processing, and we are about to learn in painful detail what indignities he is subject to, such as stripping bare in front of strangers and being treated roughly and with suspicion. Here, Eggers emphasizes the total disconnect between Zeitoun's position and the way in which he is being treated. First, he stresses that this processing is not following the typical legal procedures that are in place to ensure that

people are considered innocent until proven guilty, like being read their rights or knowing what crime they're being charged for.

This passage also is meant to reiterate the extreme militarization of the official response to Katrina. Rather than entering with doctors and rescue materials, those in charge send in policemen and soldiers that look like they are straight out of a war zone, complete with camouflage and massive weapons. Throughout this section, the book will attempt to show how disproportionate this response was to the reality on the ground. The institutions meant to combat crime and injustice, the book argues, actually exhibited the greatest example of injustice themselves.


which essentially created domestic refugees in need of rescue and of medical help, and the response, which emphasized the criminal and even warlike dangers after the storm.


“ The ban on phone calls was, then, purely punitive, just as the pepper-spraying of the child-man had been born of a combination of opportunity, cruelty, ambivalence, and sport. There was no utility in that, just as there was no utility in barring all prisoners from contacting the outside world.

## Part 4: Wednesday September 7 Quotes

“ Who did this work? Were there contractors and laborers working around the clock on a prison days after the hurricane? It was mind-boggling. It was all the more remarkable given that while the construction was taking place, on September 2, 3, and 4, thousands of residents were being plucked from rooftops, were being discovered alive and dead in attics.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 227


### Explanation and Analysis

As a businessman and a contractor, Zeitoun is adept at judging the amount of labor and time needed to accomplish certain tasks of construction. As he looks around Camp Greyhound, he marvels at this feat, recognizing just how much work it must have taken. In this passage, Zeitoun first wonders about the precise logistics of this process, failing to imagine how he, if in charge of it, would have been able to carry it out. Almost immediately, he compares this remarkable process with what he knows, from personal experience, to have been the real needs of people in New Orleans in the days after the hurricane.

Though he doesn't say it explicitly, the comparison suggests that valuable time, money, and energy were siphoned away from those who needed rescuing and put into the construction of this facility whose function Zeitoun still doesn't entirely grasp. Once again, the book aims to portray the disconnect between the reality of Hurricane Katrina,

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 236

### Explanation and Analysis



Zeitoun is feeling enormously guilty for having dismissed Kathy's concerns, especially now that he knows she must be so worried about him. He thinks his situation would all be much better if he could only have a chance to call her. In addition, according to American law, anyone arrested has the legal right to a phone call - a right that Zeitoun has not been granted since he's been here. After running through various possibilities for why this might be the case, Zeitoun settles on one: the guards have simply chosen the lack of the phone call as punishment for people they assume to be guilty of something, even if they haven't said what.

Zeitoun has been trying to find a rational way to account for the behavior of the officials at Camp Greyhound, but now he is beginning to realize that reason and utility are not going to serve him here. A structure ostensibly set up to hold criminals and keep people safe is doing the opposite: indeed, the forces meant to work for justice are exhibiting shockingly unjust behavior. Because there are no real reasons for the guards to keep these people prisoners, they invent various means of punishing them, as if they've entered a bizarre universe where the rules, laws, and values of society no longer apply.

## Part 4: Monday September 12 Quotes

☛☛ Kathy often worried about the National Guard and other soldiers returning to the United States after time in Iraq and Afghanistan. She warned him about passing groups of soldiers in airports, about walking near National Guard offices. "They're trained to kill people like you," she would say to Zeitoun, only half-joking. She had not wanted their family to become collateral damage in a war that had no discernible fronts, no real shape, and no rules.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun, Kathy Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 252

### Explanation and Analysis



Zeitoun and Nasser are once again left alone in their cell, giving Zeitoun another opportunity to wonder about what he is doing in Camp Greyhound and why people are interested in him. His thoughts turn to Kathy's worries in the past about the possibility that Zeitoun, because he was Muslim and Middle Eastern, might be a target or object of suspicion to authorities.

When Katrina takes place, the United States is entangled in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan: while they have pushed Saddam Hussein from power, for instance, neither the war in Iraq nor in Afghanistan is won, or even seems winnable by any standard definition of triumph in war. Instead, the wars have expanded to include a general attitude of fear and conflict with any part of the world that might seem to pose a threat to the United States. Kathy's point is that Muslim-Americans like Zeitoun may well seem to some to be part of such a threat, especially given the hazy borders of President George Bush's "war on terror." She argues as a result that Zeitoun has to be extra careful, more careful than white, non-Muslim Americans. While Zeitoun has brushed off her opinions before, now he begins to wonder whether or not Kathy's fears may well be able to explain his current situation.

## Part 4: Saturday September 17 Quotes

☛☛ He had long believed that the police acted in the best interests of the citizens they served. That the military was accountable, reasonable, and was kept in check by concentric circles of regulations, laws, common sense, common decency. But now those hopes could be put to rest.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 263

### Explanation and Analysis

Confined for 23 hours a day to his cell, with nothing to do but think, Zeitoun muses painfully on the subject of his imprisonment and what it implies for his view of American society and the American government. Earlier, Zeitoun's attitude towards prejudiced citizens was described as one of a "disappointed parent," who believed their intentions were good, their values real and true, if only covered by a veneer of weakness or fear. Now he is beginning to question such a basic assumption, given that he has witnessed cruelty that seems to play nonchalantly, even gleefully, with injustice. He can no longer expect that Americans are mostly good deep down, nor can he even expect that their uglier sides will be "kept in check" by community values and common sense, much less by laws and statutes. He is beginning to feel that there is a disease at the very heart of the institutions of his adopted country, from the police to the military, if such institutions have allowed a case like his to go on.

☛☛ He thought of bycatch. It was a fishing term. They'd used it when he was a boy, fishing for sardines by the light of the moon they'd made. When they pulled in the net, there were thousands of sardines, of course, but there were other creatures too, life they had not intended to catch and for which they had no use. Often they would not know until too late.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 263

### Explanation and Analysis

As Zeitoun attempts to determine what it means for him to be here, stuck in a jail cell despite having done nothing to warrant his arrest - and despite having failed to receive any notice of his charges - he returns to his past in order to search for an analogy that might allow him to better understand his situation. As a child, Zeitoun had often gone fishing with his brother, and even once thought that he might continue his family's trade and fish for a living. Now he recalls one of the more somber sides of catching sardines - the fact that many other living creatures would often be unintentionally caught up in the catch, but if not dumped

back into the sea would probably die as well.

Zeitoun sees his own situation as one of "bycatch." In response to the natural tragedy of Katrina, government institutions cranked into action with the broad intent of keeping people safe and helping them recover. But much of the response included far too sweeping regulations, ones that were meant to combat real crime and injustice but instead ended up sweeping innocent people into the fold, with little concern for what would happen to them.

☛ He had risked too much in the hopes that he might do something to match the deeds of his brother Mohammed. No, it had never been a conscious part of his motivation—he had done what he could in the drowned city because he was there, it needed to be done, and he could do it. But somewhere in his gut, was there not some hope that he, too, could bring pride to the family, as Mohammed had so many years ago? [...] And was this imprisonment God's way of curbing his pride, tempering his vainglorious dreams?

**Related Characters:** Mohammed Zeitoun, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 264

### Explanation and Analysis

Still trapped in his solitary cell, Zeitoun has the chance to return to his actions on the canoe after Katrina with a more honest, reflective eye. He recognizes that his motivations were not entirely selfless. Of course, he was motivated by a realization that there was a real need for people in the city to be rescued, and when he heard cries for help his first response was to go to their aid. But he also begins, now, to admit to himself that he wanted to live up to his brother's legacy, to do something that would be just as admirable in the eyes of his family and his community.

Now, Zeitoun continues to draw on his faith in order to understand and structure his response to his current situation. Having understood his time helping others as a kind of divine test, he now sees his unjust imprisonment as another kind of test, or even a kind of divine punishment. He wonders if his vain hopes for glory were destined to end in misery and indignity, if only so that God might show him the folly of such selfish dreams. At other moments, Zeitoun has been certain that the institutions involved are at fault for his imprisonment: now, he combines that view with another one that has more to do with his individual morality and

relationship to his faith.

## Part 4: Tuesday September 27 Quotes

☛ Kathy fell apart. She wailed and screamed. Somehow this, knowing that her husband was so close but that these layers of bureaucracy and incompetence were keeping her from him—it was too much. She cried out of frustration and rage. She felt like she was watching a baby drown, unable to do anything to save it.

**Related Characters:** Kathy Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 280

### Explanation and Analysis

Kathy has finally gotten incredibly close to knowing where her husband is and being able to contact him, or even track him down and see him. Now she knows that a court hearing will take place, but no one will give her the information about it, saying that it's "privileged information," even though she's Zeitoun's wife. Until now, Kathy has been anxious and upset, but has maintained her cool enough to do all that she can to find her husband. Now she breaks down. While Zeitoun is on the inside of the bureaucratic nightmare, she is attempting to break through it from the outside, and is coming up against just as many examples of incompetence and frustrating irrationality as Zeitoun has experienced. Kathy has fought to persevere through not knowing if her husband was alive or dead, but now this is almost worse, since she knows he is alive but cannot reach him - for no reason of her own.

## Part 4: Thursday September 29 Quotes

☛ They held each other for a long moment. She could feel his shoulder blades, his ribs. His neck seemed so thin and fragile, his arms skeletal. She pulled back, and his eyes were the same—green, long-lashed, touched with honey—but they were tired, defeated. She had never seen this in him. He had been broken.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun, Kathy Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 289

### Explanation and Analysis



Finally, Zeitoun is released and he and Kathy are reunited. But what was supposed to be an occasion for great joy and relief becomes instead, for Kathy, one of enormous disillusionment and sadness. As she embraces him, she sees the physical reminders of what he has been through. Not only is he thin and unhealthy-looking, but the very look in his eyes is different, defeated and exhausted. This both upsets and frightens Kathy. She has not been able to talk to Zeitoun and does not know in any detail what he has been through: she can only see the effects.

Like the natural tragedy of Katrina, the human-scale violence done to Zeitoun thus also creates material traces. However, these traces cannot speak to the full extent of what Zeitoun went through. Until now, Zeitoun and Kathy have shared almost every detail of their lives together, calling each other several times a day through their roles as husband and wife in addition to business partners. Now a gap has widened between Kathy and Zeitoun, one that she cannot see how she'll be able to bridge.

## Part 5: Fall 2008 Quotes

☞ The Zeitouns have lived in seven apartments and houses since the storm. Their Dublin Street office was leveled and is now a parking lot. The house on Dart is still unfinished. They are tired.

**Related Characters:** Kathy Zeitoun, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 295

### Explanation and Analysis



In the final section of the book, Eggers takes stock of the Zeitoun family's experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Zeitoun's hellish arrest and imprisonment may be over, but the aftershocks of that experience continue to affect the family. In part, these difficulties are shared by many other families in the years after Katrina. The Zeitouns lost their home and office, and now, years afterward, they still do not have a completed, ready place to call home.

In addition, of course, the difficulty of the Zeitouns in settling back into regular life is compounded by the isolation they feel in coming to terms with the prejudice and bureaucratic incompetence of the official response to Katrina. Their exhaustion stems not just from their material uncertainty, as they are forced to move around continually without settling down, but also from the emotional

aftermath of the weeks following the storm.

☞ Gonzalez talked about how the system is supposed to work: police officers investigate, make arrests, and then hand the process over to the judicial system. Under normal circumstances, if the men were innocent, he maintained, they would have been given a phone call and the opportunity to post bail. "They should have gotten a phone call," he said.

**Related Characters:** Ralph Gonzalez (speaker), Kathy Zeitoun, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 304

### Explanation and Analysis

Gonzalez, one of the officers that arrested Zeitoun, is interviewed for the book years after Katrina, and tries to explain the process that he followed in attempting to combat crime in the days and weeks after the storm. He seems to have an abstract understanding of the procedures that are in place to ensure that people are given due process and are considered innocent until proven guilty. However, he cannot seem to give a satisfactory answer to the question of what went wrong in the course of Zeitoun's arrest.


Finally, he seems to admit that according to what he has been told, Zeitoun was not treated properly by the authorities. Gonzalez may well be reluctant to admit personal wrongdoing, but it also seems that he is willing to acknowledge that his institution or others shared wrongdoing. It is not an entirely satisfying response, though it does help Kathy and Zeitoun gain validation from others that what they went through was wrong.

☞ On the one hand, knowing that these two police officers had not purposely hunted and arrested a man because he was Middle Eastern gave them some comfort. But knowing that Zeitoun's ordeal was caused instead by systemic ignorance and malfunction—and perhaps long-festering paranoia on the part of the National Guard and whatever other agencies were involved—was unsettling. It said, quite clearly, that this wasn't a case of a bad apple or two in the barrel. The barrel itself was rotten.

**Related Characters:** Donald Lima, Ralph Gonzalez, Kathy



Zeitoun, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 307



### Explanation and Analysis

After interviewing the police officers responsible for arresting Zeitoun, he and Kathy have a more accurate account of the reasons for his arrest—the event that triggered the rest of his harrowing experience at Camp Greyhound and in jail. Zeitoun had come to agree with Kathy that prejudice may well have played a part in his arrest. But it is almost worse for them to realize that this wasn't just a case of one racist or prejudiced officer or guard.

Instead, we learn in this passage, the problem was "systemic" - reaching far broader than the mistakes made by one or two individuals. This is unsettling because it means that, for things to change, a great deal more is needed than simply firing or disciplining one person, or even of getting a few people to understand the root of their prejudices. Instead, it is necessary to think about the ignorance, incompetence, and even paranoia at the heart of major government bureaucracies, which allowed Zeitoun to slip through the cracks.

●● To dial a number given to you by a man in a cage, to tell the voice on the other end, "I saw him." Is that complicated? Is that an act of great heroism in the United States of America? It should not be so.

**Related Characters:** Kathy Zeitoun, Missionary, Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 319

### Explanation and Analysis

As Kathy struggles herself with the aftermath of Zeitoun's arrest and imprisonment, she often returns to the fact of how easily things could have been different if someone had shown greater compassion or humanity. The one person she does feel grateful towards, and whom she'd like to thank, is

the missionary who took Kathy's phone number from Zeitoun and called her to tell her that he saw her husband, and that he was alive.

Now, Eggers takes a step back to question what counts and what should count as great heroism in such circumstances. He acknowledges that the missionary did Kathy and Zeitoun a great service. But he also underlines how small and insignificant an act it was, when compared to the structural injustice and unfairness of what Zeitoun went through. He thus suggests that our standards for heroism have been deflated by such injustice, which makes even the smallest show of humanity seem incredible.

●● As he drives through the city during the day and dreams of it at night, his mind vaults into glorious reveries—he envisions this city and this country not just as it was, but better, far better. It can be.

**Related Characters:** Abdulrahman Zeitoun

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 325

### Explanation and Analysis

Zeitoun is proud of having restored over a hundred homes with his company in the years after Katrina. This passage, following a number of more sobering details about the struggles of the Zeitouns in the time following Hurricane Katrina, seeks to end the book on a more optimistic note. Indeed, Zeitoun's attitude here is portrayed as more positive, thanks to the success he's been able to regain in his professional life. For him, his job is more than a way to pay the bills: it is symbolic of his desire to change his community for the better.

Rebuilding New Orleans is of course a matter of physical, material reconstruction, but it is also, according to Zeitoun, a chance for the community to reimagine what it would like to be and how it might change. There is a chance, he thinks, that people may become more inclusive, and that if he just perseveres long enough, he will see this changes happen. Zeitoun thus remains committed to his country and smaller communities even despite the unfairness of what he went through, refusing to entirely lose hope that transformation is possible.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PART 1: FRIDAY AUGUST 26

The narration begins with the protagonist Abdulrahman Zeitoun's recollections of nights spent fishing in his hometown of Jableh, on the coast of Syria. He remembers how the men would hold lanterns over the water to draw sardines to their rods. This only took place on moonless nights, as Abdulrahman's older brother Ahmad told him, so that the fishermen could control the amount of light with their own lanterns.

Once Abdulrahman was thirteen, and old enough to join them, he would enjoy paddling quietly with them, joking and whispering about women as they watched the fish rise beneath them, band motoring back to the shore before dawn. The fish broker in the market would pay them and sell the fish all over western Syria. Abdulrahman's father had died a year earlier and his mother was sickly, but he loved this work enough that he'd do it for free.

Thirty-four years later, in 2005, Abdulrahman wakes up in New Orleans, Louisiana, next to his wife Kathy. He lets the memories of Jableh recede. It's 6 a.m., and he knows the peace and quiet won't last long before the children awake.

Kathy and Zeitoun (as most people call Abdulrahman, since they have trouble pronouncing his first name) run a painting and contracting company, so every day customers and crews begin to call at 6:30 in the morning. Kathy knows that a tropical storm is supposed to be coming north, so this Friday will be especially busy as clients make preparations. An older woman calls first, asking if the crew can come board up her windows.

Kathy is the office manager, while her husband handles the building and painting: Kathy's native Louisiana accent puts people at ease. She and Zeitoun have been married for eleven years. Zeitoun had arrived in New Orleans in 1994, and Kathy is from Baton Rouge, so hurricanes—like this one, named Katrina—don't worry her too much.

*Although the book takes place largely in New Orleans, Eggers uses the protagonist's dreams and memories to toggle back and forth between the past and the present day, showing how Abdulrahman was shaped by his family and by the community where he grew up. The story Eggers is telling is a true one, but it is still relayed as a narrative, and so he uses lots of creative license in portraying the inner thoughts of his characters.*



*Abdulrahman had to assume responsibility for his family at a young age, but he considered this responsibility a gift rather than a burden. It allowed him both to grow closer to his brother and to other coworkers, and to grow more comfortable with life on the sea. All these scenes relating to the sea foreshadow the tragedy we know is coming: the floods of Hurricane Katrina.*



*Eggers shows that Abdulrahman's memories and early family life are just as essential a part of his self as his current life and family, and also just how far he has traveled over the course of his life.*



*Kathy and Zeitoun (as we will now call him) are immediately portrayed as partners, not only in marriage but in the business of painting and contracting as well. Part of this business is making and keeping relationships with other people, gaining their trust and being responsible for their well-being in times like these.*



*With this brief overview, we learn that Kathy and Zeitoun are both well-established in New Orleans, even if to many people Kathy seems more local because of her Southern accent and whiteness. Here we get the first hints of the prejudice that affects many aspects of Zeitoun's life, as it's suggested that some people are made uncomfortable by his accent.*



Kathy and Zeitoun's children, Nademah, Aisha, and Safiya, are currently obsessed with the movie *Pride and Prejudice*, and they spend breakfast reciting the words (Zachary, Kathy's son from her first marriage, is already at school). Zeitoun thinks they have more in common with Kathy in their playfulness and sense of drama.

Kathy worries about Zeitoun, who today, as usual, eats barely anything for his 12-hour shifts, and yet manages to maintain his weight. They squabble as Kathy tells him not to forget his phone, and she reminds him of the time he forgot newborn Nademah in the yard as he followed his wife into the house. Zeitoun is slightly resentful that Kathy always brings this up, but the event still epitomizes for him the difficulty he finds in balancing his obligations as partner and as protector.

Already at 7:30 a.m., Zeitoun feels behind for work, so he rushes out the door, stopping to kiss Aisha, who is begging him not to go. He isn't particularly doting, but he never objects to the girls touching and jumping on him: he is both firm and pliant. For Kathy, his long-lashed eyes tend to disguise when he's upset: though he is 13 years older than she is, those dreamful but discerning eyes had attracted her from the start.

Kathy adjusts her **hijab** (headscarf)—a nervous habit of hers—as she watches Zeitoun leave. His white van has “Zeitoun A. Painting Contractor” painted on it, along with images of a paint roller and rainbow. Zeitoun had never been aware of other possible meanings of a rainbow, so he had been surprised after initially designing it to immediately get many calls from gay couples. At the same time, some potential clients were no longer interested once they saw the logo. Kathy had wondered if they should change the logo so as not to create misunderstandings, but Zeitoun had already created signs and stationery. Besides, he said, anyone who had a problem with rainbows would probably also have a problem with a Muslim-run company.

Zeitoun drives to work, still thinking of Jableh. His mother is no longer alive, and his brother Mohammed died young, but his other siblings are spread out through Syria, Spain, and Saudi Arabia, all successful in their professions and happily married.

*We are starting to see Zeitoun as a more quiet, reserved counterpart to Kathy's more exuberant personality, one which is reflected in the theatrical antics of their daughters. Eggers emphasizes the fact that their family is life is chaotic but happy, as later we will see how tragedy affects this dynamic.*



*Kathy and Zeitoun are portrayed as a loving couple, though one that has its fair share of normal marital issues, from bickering to worrying to small resentments. Kathy is clearly not one to keep any concerns inside, while Zeitoun's worries do not seem to be as easily vocalized as his wife's.*



*Again, as a father Zeitoun is shown to be loving in a way different from what one might expect, due to his more reserved, retiring character. Although eyes are stereotypically thought to be the window into the soul, Kathy reflects on how the opposite is true for Zeitoun.*



*For the first time we learn that Kathy wears a hijab, the veil covering the head that is worn in particular by some (but not all) Muslim women. Indeed, both Zeitoun and Kathy are Muslim, a fact that contributes to the dark humor of Zeitoun's remark about keeping the rainbow (a sign of LGBTQ rights) as his logo: his suggestion is that prejudice, fear, and discrimination can take any number of forms, so the best response is not to hide from it but rather to stare it in the face.*



*Zeitoun continues to keep his family and his past in mind as he goes through his daily tasks, showing how important his parents and siblings continue to be for him, even if they are dead or thousands of miles away.*



In the kitchen, Kathy gasps as she realizes the kids will be late for school, and she quickly bundles them into the minivan and heads across the Mississippi River to the West Bank. Kathy enjoys being able to have flexible hours and choose clients and jobs, but the disadvantages to running a business are growing, and she and Zeitoun work and worry constantly. They own six properties with eighteen tenants, and feel responsible for all their tenants' well-being, as well as having to worry about maintaining their homes and paying and collecting from a huge variety of people.

Still, Kathy cherishes her family, and is thankful for being able to provide for her children, knowing that she'll be able to send them to college. Kathy had grown up with eight siblings, and Zeitoun with twelve—neither of them had much. Kathy marvels at the maturity and intelligence of Nademah, their eldest child, who is ten, and recalls how cleverly (but endearingly) she had attempted to get out of doing chores when she was younger.

In the car on the way to school, the radio is announcing that the storm heading into the Gulf of Mexico is a Category 1. Kathy hadn't paid much attention to Katrina, since people often get worried about hurricanes heading to the city, but the storms often dissipate before even hitting the coasts. Nademah asks if they should worry, but Kathy reassures her.

After dropping off the girls, Kathy turns the radio back on, and hears that there are 110-mile-per-hour winds and storm surges in the Gulf. She calls Zeitoun and asks if he thinks it's serious. "Really? I don't know," he replies. He prefaces many of his sentences with "really"—something that used to irritate her, but now she has to find endearing. They speak on the phone several times a day, their business talk interspersed with witty banter and exasperated needling.

Kathy had grown up in Baton Rouge in a Southern Baptist family, so ending up as a Muslim married to a Syrian American and managing a painting and contracting business still surprises her. She had met Zeitoun when she was a recent divorcée and convert to Islam, and was uninterested in getting remarried. Now, however, she finds Zeitoun a deeply honest, hardworking, and devoted man—though they still have regular, spirited arguments about anything at all. Kathy speaks her mind about everything. Sometimes the kids grow anxious about their "fussing," but it's all in good spirit.

*Though Kathy at times seems as happy-go-lucky as her three daughters, it is clear that she is not as carefree as she might seem. Out of love, she worries and stresses about Zeitoun in particular, as well as about the welfare of her and Zeitoun's tenants. Having put their trust in the couple, she believes, these tenants deserve a corresponding sense of trust and community.*



*Like Zeitoun, Kathy has seen her life change markedly in the years since she was a child. In many ways, her and Zeitoun's story is a classic "American dream" narrative, in which their perseverance, luck, and willingness to work hard have allowed them to become successful and to make a home for themselves in New Orleans. The fact that Zeitoun is a Middle Eastern immigrant makes their story even more inspiring, and makes it even more tragic later when he is the victim of so much discrimination.*



*Located on the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans is particularly susceptible to extreme weather patterns, including hurricanes—which can be difficult to accurately predict. Kathy is shown here to be rational and level-headed.*



*Little by little, Kathy begins to lose her calm response to the news and question whether the approaching storm is in fact something to worry about. Eggers describes a number of details about Kathy and Zeitoun's marriage, which is full of both love and the small irritations common to married life.*



*Kathy's trajectory shows how personal identity and community can have less to do with one's origins than with a common sensibility about how to see the world. If one created a bullet-point list describing Kathy and Zeitoun from the outside, according to where they come from, they couldn't be more different—but it's the values they share that matter more, even if their bickering seems at times to hide that commonality.*



Across town, Zeitoun begins his first job of the day in the Garden District, where he greets his employee Emil, a painter from Nicaragua. Inside is Marco from El Salvador. Zeitoun's employees are from all over the world, and his experience with them is usually positive, though his business has a high turnover rate, as many plan to spend only a few months in America before returning to their families. Some young workers are irresponsible, and Zeitoun tries to convince them to save money so as to live well and raise a family in the future, but the future seems not to be among their highest concerns.

Zeitoun gets a call from his brother Ahmad in Spain, who is worrying about the approaching storm. Ahmad had been a ship captain for 30 years, and had brought Zeitoun as a crewman to Greece, Lebanon, and South Africa. Zeitoun had then headed out on his own, traveling around the world until settling in New Orleans. Ahmad knows a good deal about storms, therefore, and Zeitoun listens, though doesn't entirely agree, when Ahmad says they should leave town.

Zeitoun's next job is in the same neighborhood—their company often benefits from word of mouth. It is a beautiful, stately home, and Zeitoun admires its exquisite details, part of what makes him enjoy working in New Orleans so much. He checks in on his Bulgarian carpenter, Georgi, who is installing new molding.

Back in the car, Zeitoun hears more about the storm Katrina. He heads to the Presbytere Museum in Jackson Square, and then Kathy calls from home with a new job, also mentioning the high winds and approaching storm, though Zeitoun dismisses it.

Zeitoun is naturally stubborn, having been raised by a legendary sailor who had survived a number of difficult trials. His father, Mahmoud, had been born on Arwad Island off Syria, and began crewing as a teenager between Syria and Lebanon. In World War II, his ship had been hit by a fleet of German planes, and he was among only a few survivors who hid underwater until the Germans were satisfied that all the crew members were shot or drowned. Another time, Mahmoud was returning from Greece when the ship's main mast cracked and the sail dropped into the water. While trying to fix it, it had broken entirely and Mahmoud had fallen into the ocean. He floated for two days before he washed ashore fifty miles north of Arwad Island.

*As an immigrant himself, Zeitoun is acutely sensitive to the concerns of others who have landed in New Orleans, far from their families, and whose loyalties often are to those communities even more than to their adopted home. Zeitoun is also able to adopt a more mature approach, having succeeded in establishing an entire life in New Orleans, and wanting his employees to embrace this new community like he did.*



*Ahmad's calls will be a regular part of the narrative—despite the physical distance, he is always eager to keep in touch with his far-flung family members. Ahmad is the closest in age to Abdulrahman, and so was always his most direct role model, especially in the years they spent traveling around the world on ships. We see more of Zeitoun's stubbornness here, even in the face of his brother's advice.*



*Again, the many nationalities of Zeitoun's workforce underline his embrace of the American "melting pot" ideal—here yoked to another part of American identity, that is, the specific architectural identity of each city.*



*In their constant contact throughout the day, Zeitoun and Kathy adopt a new topic to bicker about: the approaching storm and the reasons to worry or not.*



*Zeitoun's stubbornness is a trait that will come up again and again throughout the book, both in its positive and negative ramifications. Here we see a possible source of this character trait in Zeitoun's father Mahmoud, who managed to survive a ship bombing against all odds. This family story connects the Zeitoun family to broader world history—people often forget how large a role Syria and Lebanon played in both the First and Second World Wars.*





Mahmoud couldn't believe he survived. He quit sailing and moved his family to the mainland, to Jableh. He opened a hardware store, sent his children to the best schools, and taught the boys any trade other than sailing, which he didn't want them to pursue. Some of his children did grow up to work on the sea, but Zeitoun followed his father's trajectory in becoming first a sailor and then, to provide for his family, a stable builder.

Zeitoun calls Kathy back. She is online and is tracking the storm, which has already killed three people in southern Florida and knocked out power for 1.3 million households. Zeitoun looks to the sky and sees nothing unusual, but he goes to Home Depot for supplies like plywood and rope anyway. In the parking lot a man, noticing Zeitoun's van, introduces himself to Zeitoun as an electrician and gives him his card. Zeitoun admires his attitude.

When he began working in New Orleans eleven years earlier, Zeitoun was hired by Charlie Saucier, who had built his own company from scratch. He wanted to leave it to his teenage son, but the son was lazy and ungrateful. Zeitoun didn't have a car at the time, and instead biked to work. One day he had a flat tire, and had twenty minutes to make it four miles—he couldn't leave the bike, so he threw the bike over his shoulders and started jogging. Charlie ended up passing him in the car, laughed, and told him to throw the bike in the back. Charlie told Zeitoun that in thirty years, he had never had such a good worker—others made excuses not to show up, and Charlie admired that Zeitoun did the opposite. Two years after that, Zeitoun was working for himself and had twelve employees.

At noon Zeitoun heads to the Islamic Center downtown for the second of his five daily prayers, which the Qur'an asks Muslims to complete each day. Zeitoun worships at home but also wherever he happens to be during the day. On Fridays he stops at the mosque for a ritual gathering of Muslim men in the community called the *jumu'ah*. He begins with a ritual cleansing called *wudu*, and then begins his prayers, asking God to guide him.

Afterwards, Zeitoun calls Kathy, who says the storm looks like it's turning into a Category 3. Zeitoun still thinks it will die overland or in the Gulf. Kathy's friend Rob Stanislaw calls her, saying she'd be crazy not to leave. Rob's husband, Walt, is stubborn like Zeitoun—both couples have been close for years—but even Walt wants to leave. Kathy is about to log off when she sees a news item about a family of five who had been sailing in the Gulf and is now missing at sea.

*Mahmoud's own stubbornness did not survive his near-death experience unscathed—instead, he learned from this harrowing experience to change the way he lived. Still, moving his family to a coastal town shows that he could never totally free himself from being drawn to the water.*



*The impending news of the storm has come to seem more serious than it had been earlier in the day: now it seems to be edging towards a natural disaster, at least in some parts of the country. Zeitoun chooses not to worry about this and instead draws solace from the fact that he's well-known and respected in the community.*



*Charlie Saucier is another example of the classic "self-made man" that is such an ideal in American culture. Zeitoun clearly admires and appreciates this ideal, as he can remember this anecdote so many years later. Here, Zeitoun's stubbornness proves incredibly impressive to his boss—one of the positives of his stubbornness, of course, is Zeitoun's hardworking nature and unwillingness to give up even when it's more difficult to persevere. Such qualities help to explain Zeitoun's own entrepreneurial success.*



*Zeitoun manages to fit his Muslim faith into the day-to-day operations of his business, and here we get a glimpse into another kind of community in New Orleans: that of American and foreign-born Muslims who gather together to pray. One of Eggers' projects with the book is to make Islam more "relatable" to American readers who still might find it foreign or scary—mostly by portraying an "all-American," self-made family man as also a devout Muslim.*



*Category 3 means a much stronger storm than Category 1 (Category 5 is the strongest), and this shift means that many will now begin to take the approaching hurricane much more seriously. Kathy is shown to be a natural communicator, in near-constant contact with many friends and family members.*



Kathy gets deeply affected by stories like these, and she calls Zeitoun to tell him that their friends are leaving. Zeitoun usually trusts Walt, but after hesitating, he tries to change the subject. Kathy breathlessly tells him about the family of five, but Zeitoun tells her that they're not out at sea. He had spent a decade on ships—in 1988 he had finally come to the U.S. on an oil tanker, and began working in Baton Rouge for a contractor.

Zeitoun had met a Lebanese American named Ahmaad in Baton Rouge, who became a close friend. One day Zeitoun asked Ahmaad if he knew any single women who might be appropriate for him. Ahmaad had married a woman named Yuko, an American whose family was Japanese and who had converted to Islam. Yuko had a friend whom Ahmaad had already introduced to a friend of his, but he told Zeitoun he'd let him know if this didn't work out. Months later it hadn't, so Ahmaad told Zeitoun about Kathy, an American who had converted to Islam, but who had a two-year-old son from a previous marriage. Zeitoun didn't find that a problem, and admired the fact that Kathy would convert to Islam.

Ahmaad gave Zeitoun the address of the furniture store where Kathy worked, and Zeitoun pulled into its parking lot one day to wait and watch for her. He saw a young woman wearing jeans and **hijab**, striking and young, walk right towards his car smiling. He was electrified, but then grew nervous as she came closer to his car—he ducked under the dashboard, but it turned out that her car was simply parked next to his.

Zeitoun told Ahmaad that he needed to meet Kathy. They agreed to meet at Ahmaad and Yuko's house. Kathy immediately found Zeitoun attractive, though too conservative and too old for her. She also didn't feel ready to marry again two years after a disastrous first marriage. She told Yuko she didn't think it was a good fit, but over the next two years she saw Zeitoun occasionally, and he asked about her once in awhile. Meanwhile, as Zachary grew up, Kathy began to feel guilty that he didn't have a father, and her feelings against marrying again began to fade.

Back in New Orleans, Kathy calls Zeitoun in the early afternoon about a problem with a client. She begins to fret about him driving across the city with a coming storm, and they start to bicker about it. Finally Kathy gets the better of him and Zeitoun laughs, saying he'll call her later. Zeitoun heads over to the house, where a client has decided that she's unhappy with the tangerine color she had chosen for a bathroom.

*Kathy's natural compassion and empathy makes her susceptible to such stories, made even worse by the fact that she can imagine her own family in this unfortunate family's place. Still, Zeitoun refuses to have his heartstrings tugged by such a tale, preferring to remain stubborn and remind Kathy of his own sea experience.*



*Here we learn more about Zeitoun's process in settling into his new life in America—after years alone at sea, he wanted to have another person included in that new life. Even Zeitoun's small initial community in Baton Rouge is strikingly diverse, a group whose families come from Syria, Lebanon, and Japan. Zeitoun's faith is strong enough that it's important for him to marry another Muslim, but he is open-minded in considering that person's background.*



*Zeitoun is the opposite of Kathy's impulsiveness—in fact, he's so reserved, even timid, that he can't imagine meeting a potential love interest without getting a sense for what she's like first. Yet Kathy's obvious cheerfulness and openness immediately attracts him.*



*Although the previous scene might have suggested it, Kathy's and Zeitoun's relationship is the opposite of love at first sight—instead, their narrative shows how love can develop slowly, over time, based on more than an electric attraction between two people. Here, Kathy's strong love for her son and desire for a stable family contributes to her desire to marry Zeitoun as well.*



*Kathy's worry about her family clashes somewhat with Zeitoun's independent streak and his commitment to his work above all. Still, their bickering never escalates into a dire, serious struggle—instead, they're able to laugh off their differences.*



Zeitoun's work is never dull, what with people's changing tastes and the subjective nature of the tasks. Once, a Southern woman in her sixties had seemed fine when on the phone with Kathy, but then had complained about non-white people working on the house. Kathy had laughed and told her it wasn't possible, and the woman, though she continued to call to complain, finally resigned herself to watching the men. Other times, people would ask Kathy where Zeitoun was from, and with the response of Syria, would cancel their orders.

Usually Zeitoun laughs these events off, but once in awhile they bother him deeply. He loves the opportunities of America, but sometimes gets frustrated with Americans like a disappointed parent. He objects that whenever a Muslim—or an African-American—commits a crime, his or her faith (or race) is mentioned, whereas no one mentions the person's religion if it's a white Christian. Zeitoun often quotes a Qur'an passage emphasizing equality of men. Kathy admires his spirit, but doesn't like him getting so worked up in front of the kids at dinner.

Zeitoun especially can't stand anyone raising his or her voice to Kathy. One young woman had once asked Zeitoun for a quick turnaround, three days, for a painting job. Impressed with the job midway through, the woman had asked him to paint an office and bedroom too. But on the third day, Kathy called Zeitoun in tears, since the woman had called her yelling and cursing about the house not being ready for guests coming in. They had finished the initial job they said they'd do, but the client wanted the entire house done in five days—an impossible task. Kathy tried to reason with her, but the client continued to harangue her. Furious, Zeitoun drove to the client's home and told the crew they were to leave immediately. He told the husband that no one spoke that way to his wife.

Back at the room with the tangerine bathroom, Zeitoun calls Kathy back to run through prices, and notes the massive, antique tub in the bathroom. Kathy says it's big but beautiful and he jokes that it's like her. Kathy had been weight-obsessed when they'd met, binging and dieting dangerously. Zeitoun had insisted that she get beyond this, and now she jokes that she's gone too far. She is grateful for the abaya, a shoulder-to-floor Islamic dress that she wears.

*In some ways, the subjective nature of Zeitoun's work is an occasion for laughter and bemusement, but sometimes the ugly side of this subjectivity shows through: discrimination and prejudice against Zeitoun and his workers because they are non-white. Zeitoun's Middle Eastern heritage and Islamic faith also lead to suspicion among some people, especially after 9/11. This kind of Islamophobia will become more brutal and overt later in the story, but here Eggers reminds us that it was always present.*



*For Zeitoun, it's difficult to reconcile the successful, happy life that he believes America has given him, with the attitude some Americans take against his very identity. The different expectations and assumptions that Americans have, depending on the skin color, religion, or ethnicity of the person concerned, seems to Zeitoun to fly in the face of true "American" values.*



*In cases like these, which aren't as much about prejudice as about selfish and demanding attitudes, it's no longer Kathy but Zeitoun who assumes the stronger, more vocal personality, refusing to allow his wife to be bullied by a customer. This turns out to be an unpleasant but inevitable aspect of running one's own business—having to persevere despite the unexpected reactions and demands of the clients. Here, Zeitoun shows that for him, dignity and respect trump economic forces, such that he's willing to give up a job rather than submit to rudeness on the part of a client.*



*Here, it's not bickering but teasing, pleasant banter that characterizes Zeitoun's and Kathy's conversations, buttressed by the underlying love between them. Kathy's struggle with her body image shows another of the darker sides of American culture—the consumerist obsession with physical beauty and a certain body type, particularly for women.*



At Kathy's home, Melvin, a Guatemalan painter, knocks on the door to be paid before the weekend. They always pay swiftly (Zeitoun quotes the Prophet Muhammad, "Pay the laborer his wages before his sweat dries"), but Zeitoun prefers to pay on Sunday so that his employees don't disappear over the weekend. But Kathy is soft, however, and pays him just this once.

On television, everything is about the impending storm. Kathy hears more about the family of five, the father a construction supervisor, who had gone missing. She calls Zeitoun and begs him to leave. He says she can go, but he's staying. Zeitoun always has trouble leaving the business and relaxing. After threatening for years, Kathy finally packed up the kids and left for Florida one morning for a vacation without him. Zeitoun met them at home as they were piling into the car—Nademah had called to him to join, but he had been too stunned to move.

After that, Zeitoun understood that Kathy was serious. She continued to make plans, and once in awhile he would join, but only at the last minute. By 2002, though, Kathy wanted a real vacation. She slowly planned a ruse, saying that they would leave for their usual Florida trip the weekend after Christmas, which was always slow, so she knew Zeitoun would come along. As Zeitoun slept in the car, exhausted, Kathy simply kept driving all the way to Miami—17 hours. That way, there was no way for Zeitoun to sneak back to work. Now, Kathy smiles to herself as she remembers how well that plan worked.

Kathy decides to head to the grocery store to stock up on basic supplies. She adjusts her **hijab**, bracing herself for the minor incidents of prejudice that she has faced increasingly after 9/11. In 2004, at a local high school, a tenth grader of Iraqi descent had been repeatedly harassed by a teacher, who said the student would "bomb us" if she returned to Iraq, and who had pulled back the girl's hijab and said he hoped God would punish her. Though the student had filed a lawsuit, the school board decided simply to suspend the teacher for a few weeks and then return him to the classroom.

Since then, minor harassment of Muslims in the area has gone up. Teenage boys, for instance, would sneak up behind a woman, grab her **hijab** and run. This almost happened to Kathy when shopping one day with a friend, Asma, who was Muslim but didn't wear the hijab. Asma alerted Kathy in time, but the kid's group of friends cursed at Kathy as they fled. Kathy cursed right back at them, leaving them speechless.

*Kathy and Zeitoun balance a need to keep their business afloat with compassion for their employees, a sentiment that for them stems from the teachings of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, counseling generosity and fairness.*



*Here we see just how significantly Zeitoun's stubborn nature can impact the family. Kathy, however, is stubborn in her own way, refusing to meekly submit to her husband's wishes and instead making her own decisions for family affairs. Initially this determination surprises Zeitoun, but as we'll see, he comes to appreciate this quality in his wife.*



*Kathy and Zeitoun have settled into a way of managing Zeitoun's unwillingness to leave his job, but Kathy has also found ways to get around Zeitoun's obsession with work. She is shown to be just as determined as her husband, even if they may choose different priorities on which to persevere—this is another way that the couple, though quite different at first glance, aligns in terms of their values.*



*Kathy is in a position to be especially self-conscious of the discrimination she faces, since she can compare her treatment now to the way people treated her growing up, when she was Christian (although she is still white, of course, and so receives a different kind of discrimination from Zeitoun). The cases of prejudice that appear on the news, such as the anecdote she recalls now, are deeply personal for Kathy, who can imagine having to deal with similar issues because of her religion.*



*Indeed, the threat of harassment is more than just abstract for Kathy: world affairs and changes in the national attitude towards the Muslim world have affected her on a personal level, as there are now many who distrust Muslims and think they can't be "true" Americans.*



After 9/11, Kathy had seen very few Muslim women in public, and though that they were probably hiding. In late September she finally saw another woman in a **hijab** in a Walgreens, and ran up to her to greet her. The woman, a doctor studying at Tulane, greeted her just as warmly.

Today, at the grocery store, there are no such confrontations. Kathy soon leaves to pick up her daughters. The girls ask if they're planning to leave to go to one of their cousins' houses. All over the five o'clock news is footage of waves, uprooted trees, and flooded towns. Governor Blanco declares a state of emergency for Louisiana. Kathy feels rattled, and realizes it's too late to make dinner. She calls Zeitoun to ask him to pick up take-out.

At dinner, Zeitoun tells his daughters, who are picking at their food, to finish everything on their plates. He is still stunned by how disposable everything is in America, and how it feels like everything can be easily replaced. He tries to instill the value of work in his children, but worries that the waste and excess of the culture will rub off on them.

After dinner, Kathy and the girls watch *Pride and Prejudice* yet again as Zeitoun does chores. Kathy is growing more anxious, but after the movie she turns on the news to learn that the family of five has been found, and had survived the storm. Kathy puts Zachary to bed and then the girls, who take turns telling parts of a goodnight story. Zeitoun watches from the doorway, finding the scene beautiful.

## PART 1: SATURDAY AUGUST 27

The next morning, Zeitoun and Kathy turn on the TV to see Michael Brown, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), telling all citizens of New Orleans to evacuate and head inland. Katrina is set to become a Category 5 hurricane, a level that had never struck New Orleans before. Zeitoun tells Kathy that she should leave, and he'll stay to look after all their properties (they'd also be liable for damage if their equipment caused harm to clients' properties).

*The prejudice faced by Kathy after 9/11 has led to her embrace of a certain community, forged in solidarity not just because of a shared faith, but also against the threat of discrimination.*



*The suggestion of an impending storm that has trickled in on the news all day has now reached a high point, as the hurricane seems to be on a direct path for New Orleans. Although the authorities can track the storm and make predictions, they obviously can't control it, one reason why Kathy is rattled.*



*While Zeitoun has embraced his adopted country, there are still some cultural differences that remain difficult for him to overcome, especially given that his own children have never seen or experienced the kind of upbringing he had in Jableh.*



*That night, the everyday activities of the family seem to calm Kathy, a feeling bolstered by learning that her husband and children are now home safe. These small, even banal details of family life are shown to be enormously comforting for both her and Zeitoun. Things seem to be looking up, but the family's trials have only begun.*



*FEMA will play an important role in the book, as this federal agency takes on responsibility after the natural disaster. Here, the role of its director is still only cautionary in nature, even though it seems like a natural disaster is inevitable. Zeitoun finally changes his mind about his family leaving, though he won't think of doing it himself.*





By early afternoon, the mayor and governor call for a voluntary evacuation of the city. Mayor Nagin says that the Superdome (the huge enclosed arena in New Orleans) will be open as a “shelter of last resort.” Kathy remembers how ill-supplied and overcrowded the Superdome had been during hurricanes before, and she wonders if the authorities have learned from their mistakes. Kathy decides to go to her brother Andy’s ranch near Baton Rouge. Andy is in Hong Kong for work, but Kathy’s sisters Patty and Mary Ann are there with Patty’s four kids. It will be cramped, but Kathy looks forward to spending time with her sisters.

Kathy continues to try to convince Zeitoun to leave, but he’s never evacuated before and doesn’t see a reason to now. He knows he can always head to the second floor even if there’s flooding. They don’t live near the levees, so flash flooding won’t be an issue—it’s East New Orleans or the one-story houses of the Lower Ninth Ward that are in the worst danger. Plus, Zeitoun has to secure all the job sites, as he’s already told his workers and foremen to leave town.

After securing some work sites, Zeitoun returns to say goodbye to his family. Kathy has packed enough for two days, figuring they’ll return on Monday night. There’s still no mandatory evacuation, but on the radio she hears that those who stay behind should be prepared for heavy flooding. As she says goodbye to Zeitoun, her eyes tear up, but he tells her not to worry, and that she’ll see him on Monday. The family waves at Zeitoun, who waves back from the driveway.

As Zeitoun continues securing sites, he notices hundreds of people carrying coolers and blankets to the Superdome. He’s surprised, recalling how badly this system had worked in the past. Still, he feels somewhat cheerful having the city all to himself. Kathy has no such luck: at 6:30 she is stuck in traffic a few minutes outside the city—besides, she had taken a wrong turn and now is heading the wrong way, which will add hours to the trip. Zeitoun is home watching TV, and can’t help but gloat a little. Kathy stops at a Burger King drive-through for dinner. Without her knowledge, the kids start feeding their dog Mekay pieces of cheeseburger. Back in the car, Mekay starts farting for miles, making the trip even more unpleasant.

Kathy guesses that there are ten thousand cars on the road with her, and is overwhelmed wondering how all these people will find places to sleep. She thinks back to her husband, alone in a wooden house with an approaching storm. They talk again that evening, and Zeitoun tells her she should have stayed.

*As we’ve learned, hurricanes are hardly a rare occurrence for New Orleans, even though it seems that the city has failed to adequately prepare for the human costs of such a storm—especially in the case of its most vulnerable citizens, who won’t have anywhere else to go but the Superdome. Kathy’s large family here serves as a safety net, allowing her to have options as she plans to leave the city.*

*Thousands of people didn’t have such options or agency, however.*



*The fact that Michael Brown has called for evacuation ahead of the strongest storm the city’s ever seen doesn’t appear to faze Zeitoun. The sea has always been a part of his life, not a reason to be scared or run away. Zeitoun’s constant commitment to his work also impacts his decision not to leave.*



*Although Kathy is only planning to be away from her husband for a few nights, this goodbye seems more dramatic than it should, perhaps because of the dire nature of the warnings about the hurricane—or because Eggers is foreshadowing the struggles to come. Zeitoun is far less concerned than his wife, and is still mainly concerned with how to live up to his customers’ expectations.*



*Like Kathy, Zeitoun understands that the authorities in New Orleans are not quite prepared for an influx of needy people, and wonders why a better plan isn’t in place to reduce the human costs of a natural tragedy. Still, at this point it seems that all the warnings have been more about fear-mongering than about reality, as Zeitoun relaxes while the rest of his family undergoes a brutally long, unpleasant trip with thousands of others out of the city.*



*Kathy is witnessing first-hand the logistical nightmare of evacuating an entire city. Still, she doesn’t believe, as her husband does, that the correct alternative is simply to ignore the authorities’ warnings.*



Still, Kathy is looking forward to a few days in Baton Rouge, though she is a little wary of her family, who still struggles to understand her decision to convert to Islam and wear the **hijab**, even after fifteen years. Last time she had visited, her mother had told her to take “that thing” off her head and enjoy herself, as if the hijab was a disguise to be worn under duress because of her husband. Yet one time when Kathy was getting her driver’s license at the DMV, an employee had told Kathy contemptuously to take off her hijab for the picture, and Kathy’s mother yelled that it was her constitutional right, making a scene until the employee got permission from her superior and agreed.

Kathy had grown up in a chaotic home but a tidy, working-class family neighborhood. Kathy was picked on in school, and often ran away from home, usually to her friend Yuko’s house. The two were among the only non-African Americans in the neighborhood. Yuko’s mother Kameko’s husband had been killed by a drunk driver years before, so it was just Kameko and Yuko. They were warm and welcoming to Kathy, who came to call Kameko “Mom.”

After high school Kathy and Yuko worked together at Dunkin’ Donuts. Kathy rented her own apartment and felt a quiet order and independence for the first time in her life. A pair of Malaysian sisters would come in often, and Yuko was always asking them curiously about their scarves, and about Islam in general. Yuko was captivated and began to read the Qur’an. Kathy was disconcerted at first—they’d both been brought up Christian, and Kameko was especially devout, but Yuko asked Kathy to keep an open mind.

A few years later, Kathy was divorced and living alone with Zachary. She was working two jobs, one as a checkout clerk at a drugstore, and one at Webster Clothes. Working 50 hours a week, she could cover health insurance for her and her son, but life was still hard. Yuko, meanwhile, seemed peaceful and happy. Kathy began borrowing books about Islam, curious to know what Yuko saw in it. She realized how little she had understood about the religion. Much of the Qur’an is consistent with the Bible, and filled with the same people. Muslims, she learned, consider the Old Testament, Psalms, and New Testament holy books too.

Kathy was touched by passages in the Qur’an that reached out to other faiths. Kathy had also assumed that Muslims were a single, homogeneous group, but she learned that there were various interpretations, such as Sunni and Shiite, and variations in faith and commitment, just like for Christians.

*Kathy has a complex relationship to her family, which can be both loving and hurtful at turns. Islamophobia is an issue even for her own mother and siblings, though it’s somewhat understandable that her family would struggle to understand her desire to convert. Kathy’s mother’s prejudices coexist with the fierce love and desire to defend her daughter, showing that even someone who’s good at heart can hold prejudices that seem to conflict with their better qualities.*



*Although Kathy’s mother seems to love and defend her daughter, Kathy also found another kind of family growing up in her friend Yuko’s household. The fact that she and Yuko bond over being the only non-African Americans shows how much easier it is to form solidarity with those who look like you.*



*Having grown up in a chaotic household, Kathy came to appreciate an alternative, more stable kind of life. This desire for calm and peace will influence Kathy’s relationship to Islam, though initially it is Yuko who appears to be the most open-minded and willing to learn about a religion that was totally unknown to the two of them growing up.*



*The calm and contentment that Kathy had found after graduating high school seemed to have unraveled. Kathy never shirked hard work, and instead was determined to provide for herself and her son, but the void she continued to feel was more spiritual than material in nature. Kathy’s research into Islam helped reveal to her the points of unity rather than difference between Islam and her own Christian upbringing. This section also serves Eggers’ purpose of familiarizing Islam to some of his American readers.*



*As Kathy learned, Islam is both internally diverse and less distinct from Christianity and Judaism than people often think. Her research shows how much simply learning about another faith can combat prejudice.*



At the time, Kathy was attending a large evangelical church, but she was increasingly disconcerted by some things, like how the pastor had harangued the congregation for twenty minutes one Sunday for not donating enough during collection. Kathy knew that this was a working-class group that gave what it could. That night, she turned to the materials that Yuko had given her, recalling how Yuko was the most sensible and grounded person she knew, and wondering if Islam could be right for her—Kathy—too.

As Kathy was struggling that week, one of the preachers at church stopped by at Webster one day. He didn't recognize Kathy, but she told him she went to his church every Sunday. She confided that it must be a sign from God to see him there, since she had been struggling with Christianity and with the church, and had actually considered converting to Islam. The preacher didn't seem concerned about losing a member of his congregation, and told her it was just the devil trying to tempt her.

Kathy felt a renewed commitment to Christianity after this. She sat near the front at church on Sunday so her new friend would know he made a difference. He looked down at her specifically from the pulpit and, in the middle of the service, called her name and told her to come up to the pulpit. She was terrified, as the preacher commanded her to tell the congregation what she'd told him. She did so, wanting to trust him, but then the preacher cut her off, sneering that she actually wanted to convert to Islam. She was considering the "worship of Allah" he said with a snort, as Kathy, horrified, realized he didn't know that God and Allah were one and the same. When the preacher was done, Kathy sat down in a daze, and decided never to come back.

Talking to Yuko, Kathy realized that this preacher didn't understand how Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were all branches of one monotheistic faith, and she could not be part of something that dismissed Islam so contemptuously. She started reading the Qur'an, and was struck by how beautiful it was. The imam (Muslim worship leader) she went to visit spoke not about the horrors of hell but about how only God knew a person's fate, and that they should look to the Qur'an for answers. Kathy admired the dignity, purity, wholesomeness, and control that she saw in Muslim women.

Finally Kathy converted, pronouncing the *shahadah*, the pledge of faith, in front of Yuko and other women from the mosque. "I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is his messenger," she said, becoming a Muslim.

*Although Kathy had found some solace from Christianity, the way she describes her evangelical church shows a disconnect between her personal faith and the religious institution in which she found herself. It is this disconnect that seems to have motivated Kathy to seek out an alternative, especially given the points of overlap she's already found between Islam and Christianity.*



*For Kathy, personal kindness and generosity are qualities directly linked to religious faith, and in this case she was willing to remain committed to the faith in which she was raised if she were to be given some kind of a sign that her faith and her religious community could somehow be aligned. At first, it appeared that this visit was such a sign.*



*Kathy's description of the preacher's belittling, mocking tone shows just how painful she found her decision to leave the religious community in which she had been raised. Still, this incident allowed her to see that this church was no longer a welcoming community for her. In fact, any group that refused to embrace other beliefs and yearn for unity and understanding would, for her, fail to constitute a true community and a true expression of faith. This particular church's lack of understanding would lead to Kathy's fundamental break with Christianity.*



*Kathy's decision to convert to Islam ultimately rested on two related motivations: the desire to find the branch of monotheism that best fit with her own beliefs and motivations for how best to live—and the realization that she could find a model for living a dignified, peaceful life in the Muslim women that she saw around her.*



*The simplicity of Kathy's official conversion belies how difficult it was for her to make the decision to change her faith, though she embraces the beauty of this simplicity.*



Kathy found a sense of calm in Islam. She grew less aggressive towards her family, and learned to be more patient and forgiving. Her mother and siblings, however, felt as if she'd renounced her family and former life. A few of her relationships mended, but she wasn't in touch with a few other siblings at all. Still, she continued to hold out hope that she could have a thriving extended family for her children.

Back on the road, Kathy finally arrives in Baton Rouge at 11:30 at night. She calls Zeitoun once she puts the kids to bed, and he says there's no wind or rain yet.

## PART 1: SUNDAY AUGUST 28

Kathy wakes up before dawn and turns on the TV to see that Katrina is heading directly for New Orleans and expected to arrive that night. That day, clients call Kathy and Zeitoun to ask them to secure their windows and doors. Zeitoun and one of his carpenters drive around the city from job to job. That morning, Mayor Nagin orders the city's first-ever mandatory evacuation, but Zeitoun still doesn't plan to leave.

In Baton Rouge, there are high winds and black skies, and the power goes out by evening. Kathy tries to call Zeitoun but can't reach him, so she assumes the lines are down. At home in New Orleans, Zeitoun tries to assess what the damage might be—he assumes there might be leaks and a few broken windows, but he is optimistic, determined to protect his home. Still, the levees are meant to hold back 14 feet of water, and the storm surges in the Gulf are now 19 or 20 feet.

Zeitoun manages to call Kathy that evening to tell her that there are only strong winds so far. The storm arrives not long after, with rain in sheets and swirling winds. The leaks begin late that night, and a window breaks just after 3:00. The house creaks and strains under the assault. Before dawn, it occurs to Zeitoun that a flood isn't impossible, so he drags his secondhand **canoe** from the garage and ties it next to the house.

*Ironically, when Kathy finally finds the solace that she had been lacking in her life, it only leads to another kind of difficulty: the lack of understanding among her family. This continues to plague her attempts to create a warm extended family in addition to her nuclear family.*



*After reliving the life struggles and decisions that have led to this point, Kathy returns to reality by connecting to her husband—and we, as readers, have new knowledge and respect for their relationship.*



*From this point on, Kathy will depend on the national news coming out of New Orleans in order to learn what is going on—especially because she knows her husband has a tendency not to take warnings such as the Mayor's as seriously as she'd like.*



*As the storm makes its way onto land from the Gulf of Mexico, even Zeitoun begins to come to terms with the fact that there will probably be a good deal of damage. As the manager of a construction company, he's well aware of the capacity of the city's levees, so he can well grasp the potential issues.*



*Although Zeitoun continues to reassure Kathy, it seems that he is reassuring himself as well. He is now forced to confront the increasingly severe nature of the storm, but remains focused on keeping his house as safe and protected as possible. Tying the canoe to the house is an act of great foresight.*



Zeitoun had bought the **canoe**, an old aluminum model, from a client a few years before for 75 dollars. He had been intrigued by the 16-foot-long **canoe**, which seemed associated with escape and exploration. At home, Kathy had shaken her head at her husband, but knew that it wouldn't hurt to keep it in the garage as a connection to her husband's seafaring past. A few times Zeitoun had tried to teach his daughters to row on Bayou St. John, but they were not interested.

*For Zeitoun, the canoe is a small but powerful reminder of the many years he spent as a seaman, and even before that, of his childhood in a seaside town where boats and activities associated with boating were ubiquitous. It seems that this is a sentiment he hasn't been able to transmit to his own daughters—but one that will come to serve him very well soon enough.*



## PART 1: MONDAY AUGUST 29

Zeitoun wakes up late the next morning to strong winds and rain and a few more leaks. There are fallen trees and a foot of water outside—not much worse than other hurricanes he can remember.

*Despite the dire warnings and even the ominous beginning of the storm the night before, it appears that the scale of it has been overestimated.*



Meanwhile, Kathy goes to Wal-Mart with the kids to stock up on supplies. The place is nearly bought out, but she manages to snag a package of flashlights.

*This visit to Wal-Mart shows that others, even outside New Orleans, have taken heavy precautions—in fact, the worst part of the storm didn't pass over New Orleans at all, but over the Mississippi gulf coast.*



In New Orleans, the weather calms in the afternoon and Zeitoun leaves the house to find his **canoe** floating in the backyard. He paddles around an uprooted tree and through the silent street, seeing only a few neighbors who are wading through their yards and looking at the damage. He wonders if the flimsy aluminum canoe will withstand the shock of exposed power lines, and he turns around to return home.

*Zeitoun's first experience in the canoe is somewhat anti-climactic, as it appears there is less to do and fewer places to explore than he might initially have thought. The "natural" disaster has now passed for the city, but the "human" disaster still has yet to really begin.*



That evening the water recedes entirely and the streets are dry, so Zeitoun calls Kathy to tell her to return home. She's about to eat dinner with the kids, and knows there's still no power in New Orleans, so she decides to wait until the next day. Kathy is slightly upset that her sisters put pork (which Muslims don't eat) on the table, but she decides not to make an issue out of it this time.

*By Monday evening, it appears that the storm has blown over and that there was much less to worry about than the authorities had warned. Meanwhile, Kathy is struggling to reconcile her personal faith with her family's traditions and lack of understanding.*



In the evening Zeitoun's second cousin Adnan, who manages Subway franchises in New Orleans, calls to ask if Zeitoun is still in the city. Zeitoun confides that it's a little scary to be among the only ones left—something he never would tell Kathy. Adnan has gone to Baton Rouge with his pregnant wife, and he asks if Zeitoun knows of any mosques there. Adnan's parents had managed to sleep in one the night before, but it's now packed with people. Zeitoun tells Adnan to call Kathy, who will surely take them in. Zeitoun gets ready for bed, grateful to think of how little damage the house has suffered.

*The advantage of having family members a phone call away is that Zeitoun can easily confide in them. He hopes that he can be of reciprocal help to Adnan through Kathy and her family, which Zeitoun assumes will be happy to lend a hand at a stressful time, with so many people stranded far from home. Unfortunately, he doesn't account for their prejudices.*





## PART 1: TUESDAY AUGUST 30

The next morning Zeitoun notices that it is still strangely quiet. He daydreams about his family's home on Arwad Island, with its constant sun and warm white light, where he and his brothers would chase chickens and scare seagulls around the island's perimeter. He and his brother Ahmad would wave at the sailors docked at port.

Ahmad always knew he would be a sailor, though he kept this hidden from his father. Abdulrahman (Zeitoun) admired his older brother and followed him around everywhere, learning from him how to spear a fish and row a boat alone.

Arwad Island had been home to a thriving fishing industry for centuries. Sea powers from the Phoenicians and ancient Greeks to the Crusaders, Mongols, and, later, the British, had all taken their turn occupying the island. The brothers often played in the small castle fortresses now in ruins. More often, they would play and swim in the sea, talking of the heroes who had defended the island and of the armies that had stopped here.

Zeitoun recalls the constant ebb and flow of the Mediterranean, but that sound seems to jar with what he is hearing now: the noise of a streaming river.

## PART 2: TUESDAY AUGUST 30

Zeitoun opens his eyes, back in New Orleans, to hear a sound of running water. Looking out the window, he sees a wide sea of water rushing into the yard from the north. It's not murky rainwater, like the days before, but rather green, clear lake water. Zeitoun realizes that the levees must have given way or been overtopped, and the city will soon be underwater—eight feet or more.

Zeitoun quickly calls Kathy, but then has to get to work. He lifts as much furniture as he can to the second floor, along with all the games and books and electronics. Kathy wants to get out of her family's hair in Baton Rouge, with so many people sharing a small house, so she takes the kids into the car to drive around. She calls Zeitoun from the road to ask him to remember his jewelry box, which he brings upstairs. Then she calls back saying that she had been right not to want to cancel their flood insurance, which he did just a few weeks ago: he knows she's right, but asks if they can talk about it later.

*Once again, it is during his sleeping hours that Zeitoun allows himself to return to his past, plumbing the memories of his childhood in Syria, which here seem tinged with nostalgia for a simpler, more carefree time—when the sea was a beautiful, benevolent thing, instead of a source of disaster.*



*Despite Mahmoud's desire that his sons not follow his own dangerous career paths, they all seem to have been drawn to the sea in one way or another.*



*Eggers fleshes out a place in the world that many, especially American readers, might have no idea even existed. He shows how Arwad Island, though tiny, has long been at the crossroads of world history. Zeitoun and his brother were clearly fascinated by their own community's role in this history.*



*Zeitoun's past and his present suddenly and ominously coincide in this chapter-ending cliffhanger—as the real disaster begins.*



*Given the kind of water rushing into Zeitoun's yard, he's able to infer that this new flooding is different—indeed, potentially much more dangerous—than the earlier flooding, which disappeared quickly enough. This water is coming from nearby Lake Pontchartrain, whose waters are held back from the city by manmade levees.*



*Zeitoun realizes that now that the levees have broken, he doesn't have much time before his own home, and much of the rest of the city, will be fully underwater. This is partly why Zeitoun stayed in New Orleans in the first place, in order to reduce the amount of damage as much as possible and assume responsibility for his and his renters' homes. No longer is Zeitoun self-satisfied, though, about his stubbornness in wanting to stay.*



The water is flowing into Zeitoun's yard as he continues to drag everything he can upstairs. The water's translucent color is in some ways beautiful, though: it reminds him of a storm on Arwad Island when he was a child. Zeitoun reaches into the fish tank and drops the fish into the water, knowing this would be there best chance of surviving. The water rises up to six feet in the house, swallowing the phone and electrical box.

By that night, the neighborhood is under nine feet of water and Zeitoun can't do anything else. He calls Kathy, realizing that the house will have to be gutted when it's over. Zeitoun thinks of the houses near the levees, which must be in an even worse state. He decides to say goodbye to his wife to conserve what little battery he has left on his cell phone.

Meanwhile, Adnan calls Kathy to ask if she knows of a place to stay. She says she'll speak to Mary Ann and Patty immediately. The house is already crowded, but she's confident they won't make a pregnant woman sleep in the car. When she gets home, however, Mary Ann scolds Kathy for leaving, and Kathy, exhausted, wonders if she should drive to Phoenix to stay with Yuko. She asks if Adnan and his wife could stay for one night, and Mary Ann replies that they absolutely can't.

In New Orleans, Zeitoun is leafing with a flashlight through the boxes of pictures he's salvaged. He pauses over one that he hasn't seen in years: he and his siblings are playing with their brother Mohammed, 18 years older, in the bedroom shared by the younger boys in Jableh. Abdulrahman's five-year-old fingers are swallowed by Mohammed's large hand. Mohammed had been the most famous athlete in Syrian history, a long-distance ocean swimmer that was one of the best in world history.

Mohammed had often been away, racing in Greece and Italy and the U.S., and was featured in magazines and newspapers worldwide. His siblings swarmed around him whenever he was briefly home. When Zeitoun was six, Mohammed was tragically killed in a car accident in Egypt, just before a race. A monument still stands to him on the waterfront in Jableh.

Zeitoun has trouble sleeping—he's never had to withstand such heat without air conditioning. He crawls up to the roof and drags Nademah's mattress out to sleep there. He begins to hear the neighborhood dogs howling all throughout the streets.

*Although Zeitoun has been jolted into reality by the flooding, he still lingers on his early-morning memories of his childhood, when it was not dangerous or frightening but normal to be around water. Now, though, the flooding is ominous, already cutting off his communication to the outside world and his family.*



*In New Orleans, the houses closest to the levees were often occupied by the poorest residents, so Zeitoun realizes, even as he is sober about the damage to his own home, that things are much worse for many of the city's residents.*



*Adnan hasn't directly asked to stay with Kathy's family, but for Kathy, like Zeitoun, family always comes first, and she can't imagine a reason her brother-in-law can't stay. Mary Ann's unwillingness to accept the couple is difficult for Kathy, who can't seem to recover a true family feeling with her sisters.*



*The lack of electricity and company means that Zeitoun is able to spend some time revisiting his past in the form of photographs and the memories that these pictures revive. In particular, Zeitoun concentrates on his brother Mohammed, who continues to be an overwhelming presence in his life even in his physical absence. Mohammed is also yet another connection to the sea for Zeitoun.*



*The tragedy of his brother Mohammed's death hung over the rest of Zeitoun's childhood, leaving a gaping hole, especially because Mohammed was such a powerful and admirable figure to the world as well as to the family.*



*Crouched on the roof with howling dogs surrounding him, Zeitoun's fourth night alone in New Orleans is the bleakest yet, especially as his ability to contact his family is now limited.*



## PART 2: WEDNESDAY AUGUST 31

The next day is bright and sunny in New Orleans. Zeitoun sees only an underwater city for miles in every direction, and he thinks of Noah's Ark and the Biblical forty days of rain. Finally a helicopter pierces the absolute silence. Zeitoun eats some cereal he's salvaged from the kitchen, but then feels restless and trapped. Then he remembers the **canoe**, and he imagines exploring the new, uncharted world of the submerged city streets. As he takes the canoe and paddles down Dart Street, Zeitoun feels peaceful amidst the city's absolute stillness.

Zeitoun is overwhelmed as he passes unsalvageable bicycles and cars: he imagines there must be over 100,000 lost, and wonders what will happen when the water recedes. No one, even those who had left, had prepared for this. He thinks about the animals in the city's homes and zoos that have surely drowned.

Zeitoun is torn between his feeling of adventure, which makes him want to explore and witness the city, and his experience as a builder, which makes him decry how long rebuilding will have to take.

As Zeitoun turns south on Vincennes Place, he sees a client, Frank Noland, leaning out of his second-floor window. It still feels strange for Zeitoun to be able to paddle into someone's yard and appear under the window. Frank asks if Zeitoun knows of any place that might be open and selling cigarettes—Zeitoun is skeptical. Frank points to his beloved motorcycle, now submerged under six feet of water.

Frank asks Zeitoun to take him to check on his truck, and Zeitoun agrees to do so before going to one of his rental properties. A few blocks away, they catch sight of the truck, which is under five feet of water, and totally useless.

Soon they see an older doctor whom Zeitoun knows on the second-floor porch of a house. Zeitoun asks if he needs help, but the doctor says that he's doing fine. A few houses down they catch sight of another couple in their seventies leaning out of their window. They can't fit the couple in the **canoe**, so Zeitoun and Frank promise to send someone as soon as they get to Claiborne, a major thoroughfare where they assume there will be policemen.

*The story of Noah's Ark initially comes to Zeitoun's mind because of the disastrous flooding that surrounds him, a natural disaster that seems, like the Biblical story, to be without parallel. But the story of Noah's Ark is also one of one man's dignity and courage in saving the few people and animals he could. It is this aspect of the story that will prove important to Zeitoun—until he is interrupted by a new and uniquely human kind of tragedy.*



*Again, as in the Biblical story, it is this modern-day Noah who is the only person left (at least, that's the way it seems to Zeitoun) to witness all the destruction and to try to imagine a way forward.*



*Zeitoun's sense of adventure stems from his years on the seas, but he also has a sense of responsibility that makes him acutely aware of the extent of the destruction.*



*Frank Noland seems relatively cheerful and in good spirits despite the destruction—he seems to have accepted the loss of his beloved motorcycle, though his humorous remark about cigarettes suggests that he feels graver and more desperate under the surface.*



*Again, Frank's experience is emblematic here: an experience of sudden material loss, in response to which there's little to say.*



*Almost unwittingly Zeitoun, together with Frank, begins to assume responsibility for the well-being of others in his neighborhood—people who lack the ability to maneuver like Zeitoun in his canoe can. Having seen and spoken to these people, Zeitoun feels that it is natural to help them: they're part of his community.*



As they paddle away, they hear a weak female voice calling for help from a one-story house. Zeitoun jumps into the water and swims to the porch, where he has to kick down the door to enter. Above him a large, heavy woman in her seventies is balancing above him, hanging onto a bookshelf. She asks Zeitoun to help her. Zeitoun talks to her gently and pulls her out the front door, but they can't lift her into the **canoe**, and even if they could it would capsize. They tell her they'll quickly reach Claiborne and flag down a boat. The woman isn't thrilled to be left alone, but agrees.

On Claiborne they see a fan boat, a military model, heading straight for them. Zeitoun feels proud that he'll be able to give his promised help, but as soon as he and Frank start waving, the men aboard barely look their way, and the fan boat fails to stop, its wake nearly tipping the **canoe**. Over the next 20 minutes, ten more fan boats barrel by, all ignoring their cries for help. Zeitoun can't imagine what these boats are doing, if they're not helping city residents.

Then a small fishing boat with two young men approaches, and this one does stop. They throw a line to Zeitoun and tow the **canoe** to the woman's house with the motorboat. The woman directs them to the garage, where there's a ladder. Zeitoun swims over and brings it back to where the woman is clinging to the bookshelf. The woman has a bad leg and can't climb the ladder, however. She says she's eighty years old, and is even weaker from staying awake for 24 hours.

Instead, the four men use the ladder as a kind of gurney, with the two men from the motorboat heaving the woman up while Zeitoun pushes from below. Though it's awkward, they manage to maneuver her over to the boat. Zeitoun watches her recover, embarrassed to watch an old woman suffer like this, and to see her lose her dignity.

The woman gazes at her home, probably realizing that she'll never be able to return to it in her lifetime. After a moment she nods, and the men from the fishing boat turn on the motor.

*Another member of the neighborhood is in even worse straits, and though Zeitoun is eager to help her as well, his one-man canoe doesn't have the same capacities as a larger rescue boat. Now he's responsible for another human being in the community, a responsibility that Zeitoun treats seriously. What he had thought would be an adventure is turning out to be far more serious.*



*This military-style fanboat is exactly the kind of equipment needed to assist people like those Zeitoun came across in his neighborhood—and yet they seem to have no desire to help. This is the first of what will be many examples of a disconnect between human need and a militarized response, one that seems careless and even antagonistic to such needs.*



*Unlike the impersonal military fanboat speeding by, the small fishing boat is smaller and more approachable for Zeitoun. The men on the fishing boat, who remain nameless in the narrative, seem motivated by the same unassuming desire to lend a helping hand that characterizes Frank's and Zeitoun's actions.*



*For Zeitoun, dignity is an essential aspect of human nature, one that should be upheld at all costs. Though he is happy to provide assistance to this woman, he realizes that one disturbing element of this natural tragedy is its indifference to human dignity. This theme will become more important later, as Zeitoun himself faces great indignity.*



*We've seen examples of material loss in the hurricane with Frank, but this loss is tied to a person's life and home—and is repeated thousands of times over throughout the city and across the coast.*



Frank, Zeitoun, and the three others are heading to the older couple at the other house when another elderly couple waves at them from their second-story window. They help these two into the boat, and then retrieve the older couple from before. The young men from the motorboat had seen a temporary medical area set up nearby, and they agree to drop off the passengers there. They shake hands with Zeitoun and Frank, who realize that they never exchanged names.

In Baton Rouge, Kathy is growing increasingly anxious from the radio reports. She hears of violence, chaos, and thousands of deaths. She tries Zeitoun's home and cell phones again and again, as she hears that 10,000 National Guardsmen are being sent to the area, about a third of them to maintain order.

When Kathy returns home, her mother points to her **hijab** and tells her to take "that thing" off and relax, since her husband isn't there. Kathy resists snapping at her and instead starts to pack. She asks herself why Zeitoun had been so stubborn to stay.

In New Orleans, however, Zeitoun feels full of purpose and vigor, having already helped five elderly residents. He realizes that he's meant to stay behind in the city—he's needed. He and Frank stop by at one of Zeitoun's rental residences, on Claiborne. One of the tenants, Todd Gambino, is outside on the front porch. He can't believe that Zeitoun came to check up on him.

Todd invites Zeitoun and Frank inside, where he has brought all his possessions up to the second floor. There's a good deal of damage, but it's not irreparable, which comforts Zeitoun. The landline here is still working, so Zeitoun calls Kathy, who shouts *Alhamdulillah*, Arabic for "Praise be to God," and immediately orders him to leave the city. Zeitoun tells her instead about the people he's helped, and that he doesn't plan to leave. He would have nothing to do in Baton Rouge, but here he can make an impact. He also wants to see everything with his own eyes, since he cares so much about the city. Still, he promises to be careful, and that he'll call each day at noon.

*Without knowing their names, Zeitoun can still consider these men as symbolically powerful examples of the best parts of human nature exhibiting themselves after a natural crisis. At such times, some people put aside their own needs and even their desire to be recognized or celebrated and simply help another member of their community.*



*While Zeitoun is experiencing mainly positive interactions in the aftermath of Katrina, Kathy only knows what she hears of in New Orleans—which is the news media sensationalizing the tragedy, and emphasizing the worst parts of humanity, whenever they exhibit themselves.*



*The stubborn lack of understanding shown by Kathy's mother only exacerbates Kathy's frustration, as she feels an increasing lack of control.*



*Kathy's own struggles continue to contrast with Zeitoun's more affirming experiences, which help counter his earlier loneliness and give him a reason to stay in the city other than pure stubbornness. Eggers' retelling of Zeitoun's experiences also serves the larger purpose of undercutting the national media's narrative about Katrina, which was that in the hurricane's aftermath, the city became a site of lawlessness and savagery—and this narrative was most closely associated with the city's black residents.*



*Zeitoun feels responsible for Todd Gambino's house as one of his rental residences, and his relief is tied both to this sense of responsibility and to Zeitoun's newfound ability to contact his wife. Still, Kathy's worries fail to make Zeitoun consider leaving, now that he knows there's a reason to persevere in the city, and especially because he can't imagine abandoning the city that he's come to call his home. Zeitoun is essentially feeling an idealistic sense of camaraderie with his community at this point.*





On TV, Kathy watches reports of disorder and lawlessness. The news says that New Orleans is now a “third-world” state—sometimes referring to lack of basic health conditions, other times with a backdrop of black residents waving for help from rooftops. Unverified reports claim that there are roving gangs of armed men in the city. Kathy realizes that Zeitoun must not know about this violence, but it could easily reach his neighborhood soon.

Zeitoun and Frank paddle back to Zeitoun’s house, passing fan boats along the way. Zeitoun realizes that the noise from the fan boats is such that those on them could never hear faint cries for help from the houses. Zeitoun drops Frank off at his house and heads back, tying the **canoe** to the back porch. He cooks a small dinner on his grill, then cleans with bottled water and prays on the roof. He is certain that God has called him to stay in the city and be of use.

Zeitoun crawls back into the house to look again at the photo of his brother Mohammed. He also sees another picture, this one of Mohammed with the vice president of Lebanon, after winning a 26-mile race ending in Beirut. Though their father was proud, he had originally wanted his sons working on dry land. Mohammed had spent his early teenage years as a craftsman and ironsmith apprentice. But he crewed on local fishing boats in the evening, and always insisted on swimming to shore.

In 1958, Egypt and Syria merged to create the United Arab Republic. Citizens throughout the Middle East reacted with optimism, hoping that a broader alliance could be created between Arab states. One celebration was a 30-kilometer race between Jableh and Lattakia. Mohammed watched all the preparations and was part of the crew of one guide boat. Midway through the race, Mohammed jumped in to swim alongside the others, impressing one of the judges, who said he would be a champion one day. Mohammed started to train secretly, but his father found out and forbade him from swimming long distances, afraid for his life. Still, Mohammed continued to train, and won the next year’s race in Lattakia, becoming the best swimmer in Syria. When he found out about this, his father finally gave up trying to dissuade Mohammed.

*Zeitoun’s calmness on the phone seems to jar with what Kathy sees on the news, though she obviously can’t know how exaggerated and even false many of these news reports are—trusting the media, she can only continue to be concerned about her husband’s well-being in a city that seems to have gone mad. Here Eggers explicitly points out the rather blatant racism in the media’s coverage of Katrina. The victims of the flooding were overwhelmingly poor and/or black, and the news reports on the city didn’t focus on situations like Zeitoun’s, but rather on instances of looting or violence, which served to demonize the victims, rather than assist them.*



*Unlike the loud fan boats, Zeitoun’s canoe is actually ideal for listening and paying attention to cries for help. Slipping almost soundlessly through the city, the canoe symbolizes what Zeitoun has come to understand as his God-given duty to help others as much as possible, in a quiet, unassuming way. In this, we see another example of the wrong-footed nature of the government’s response to Katrina, which focused on persecuting crime rather than helping the helpless.*



*Once again, Zeitoun spends his evening reliving an earlier time in his life when water and the sea were similarly present, though in a far less menacing manner. Mohammed, like Zeitoun and Ahmad, wanted to follow his father’s wishes, but all three found themselves inevitably drawn to a life at sea in various ways.*



*Here Eggers fills in some of the historical that impacted Zeitoun and his family’s lives, even if indirectly. Syria is not known for its internationally ranked swimmers, so Mohammed’s success was even more remarkable. To Zeitoun, like any good thing that happened to him or his family, such a gift was really a gift from God. Although Mahmoud was understandably reluctant to send his sons out into the treacherous waters that nearly killed him, it also seems like Mahmoud loved his sons enough to allow them to pursue their dreams.*



Another photo shows Mohammed's first major victory in 1959, in Lebanon, when thousands cheered him. The next year he won a famous long-distance race between Capri and Naples, becoming one of the best swimmers in the world. He dedicated his victory to President Nasir, who celebrated him as an honorary lieutenant. As a child, Abdulrahman was in awe of his brother, who seemed to prove that the family was destined for great things. Now, Zeitoun reminds himself that rather than being bitter about his brother's early death, he should honor his memory by being strong and brave like Mohammed was.

*Zeitoun recalls these victories of Mohammed almost as if they were his own victories. He clearly takes a great deal of pride in Mohammed's success, even now, years after the triumphs and years after Mohammed's death. We also begin to see another possible motivation for Zeitoun's decision to remain in New Orleans: living up to his brother's memory, and perhaps even competing with that glory.*



## PART 2: THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 1

Early that morning, Kathy buckles her kids into the car to drive the 1500 miles to Phoenix. She knows it's a crazy decision, but also knows she can't stay in Baton Rouge, and she doesn't know when she'll be able to return to New Orleans. On the road she calls the Claiborne house, though it's earlier than her arranged call with Zeitoun. A gruff-sounding man enters and says that there's no one there by that name, and then the line goes dead. Kathy begins to worry that the man has killed Zeitoun and robbed the house.

*Kathy's mother's hurtful comment about her hijab is the last straw for her. Failing to connect with her family in Baton Rouge, she decides to try her luck with her second family: Yuko and her husband. Kathy's failed attempt to call Zeitoun only gives her another thing to worry about, even though he isn't supposed to call until later—the sensationalism on the news has made her paranoid.*



Listening to the radio, Kathy is even more scared by reports of lawlessness and a message from Governor Blanco that U.S. soldiers fresh from war will be arriving in New Orleans shortly, ready to "shoot and kill" any "hoodlums." As her children pipe up to ask about what's going on, Kathy shuts off the radio and tries to comfort them.

*Governor Blanco's address, like much of the government's response, seems less concerned with those needing help and rescue and more with punishing the apparent lawlessness in the city. Kathy is simultaneously drawn to this information overload and aware that it could be unhelpful, and even harmful.*



Frazzled, Kathy pulls into a rest stop and calls Yuko, who tells her to stay there. Yuko arranges for them all to spend the night at her friend's house in Houston. Yuko's husband Ahmaad will fly to Houston, meet them in the morning, and drive them to Phoenix. Yuko tells Kathy that they're sisters—Yuko's mother Kameko died last year, and now Kathy is all she has.

*Unlike Kathy's sister, Yuko proves to be flexible and gracious in wanting to help her adopted "sister," even sending her husband on a plane to pick up Kathy and her family. This is the kind of selflessness that both Kathy and Zeitoun embrace in the idea of family—a concept that doesn't have to mean one's blood relations.*



Zeitoun awakens to the sound of dogs howling. He immediately gets up and paddles down the street. He finds a plank with which he creates a bridge to climb up to the window of a house that seems to be the source of the barks. Inside, he finds two desperate dogs in a cage with no food or water. He lets them out, but there's nowhere for them to go. Zeitoun returns home and removes two steaks from the freezer along with water bottles from the roof, and carries them back to the dogs. He does the same for a house down the street, where two other dogs are trapped.

*Zeitoun's enterprising nature proves helpful in finding other, non-human victims of the hurricane. These dogs' owners probably assumed they'd be back within a few days, and now, with the city under mandatory evacuation, the animals are abandoned. Zeitoun feels just as compassionate to these animals as he feels towards his other neighbors trapped after the storm.*



Though Zeitoun notices the water is growing more contaminated, he still feels invigorated at what he's done to help the animals, and looks forward to calling Kathy to tell her. She lets out a sigh of relief when he reaches her, and asks him who the man was. Zeitoun can't imagine who this would be, and says it was probably a friend of Todd's. Kathy tells Zeitoun that he really needs to leave the city, given all the looting and killing she's heard about. But Zeitoun can't imagine what she's talking about. He confides that he feels like he's meant to stay—it's God's will.

Setting back out, Zeitoun runs into Charlie Ray, a carpenter who lives next to the Claiborne house and who apparently has also decided to stay—this comforts Zeitoun. Whenever he sees other people, he offers help and a bottle of water or canned food, which he's picked up along the way. He paddles up to the I-10 ramp on Claiborne, where dozens of people are waiting to be rescued. A helicopter has dropped off food and water, and the people give Zeitoun a case to give to others. Zeitoun decides not to go any closer to downtown, given what Kathy said.

Yuko, meanwhile, has arranged for Kathy and the kids to sleep at the home of a longtime friend, Miss Mary, in Houston. Miss Mary also was born into a Christian household and converted to Islam as an adult. Her home is now host to a dozen Muslim families from New Orleans. Mary hugs Kathy upon her arrival, and Kathy feels a sense of relief.

When Zeitoun returns home, he hears a helicopter approaching. He pokes his head outside to see it hovering over his house with two men signaling to him. Zeitoun tries to tell him that he's not interested in being rescued. Finally they understand and drop bottles of water right on the tent he's put on the roof, knocking it over. The helicopter flies away.

Zeitoun is restless and finds it difficult to sleep. He makes plans to check the office and the warehouse on Dublin Street the next day. He no longer hears dogs, only helicopters whizzing overhead.

*As we saw in the book's opening pages, Zeitoun is accustomed to sharing all the details of his day-to-day life with Kathy, and it seems that they're still getting used to only being able to speak to each other once a day. Once again, the apocalyptic news that Kathy is hearing on TV and the radio contrasts with what Zeitoun has seen, which is mostly people in need of rescue and assistance rather than "hoodlums."*



*Although Zeitoun has, as usual, put on a strong face for Kathy, it still seems that he can be lonely with so few others in the city, and any human contact is welcome. With his visit to Claiborne, Zeitoun confirms his intuition that most people left in the city are simply vulnerable victims in need of help, though he cannot know if the situation is really more dire downtown, as Kathy said was on the news.*



*In the aftermath of the storm, certain religious and cultural communities prove vital in assisting people who have nowhere to stay. The Muslim community is one of these, made up of individuals who are deeply generous in spirit. This fact, combined with the strength and kindness Zeitoun draws from his faith, contrast sharply with the negative idea of Islam many Americans hold.*



*Back in New Orleans, Zeitoun's first experience with a rescue helicopter already reveals some of the problems with the rescue effort, as the dropped bottles of water do more to harm than to help, symbolically knocking over Zeitoun's shelter.*



*Zeitoun's restlessness stems, perhaps, from his uncertainty as to his place and role on the ground in New Orleans, as the needs of people are shifting, and government's response seems harsh and ineffective.*



## PART 2: FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 2

This morning Zeitoun rises early to feed the dogs across the street, then heads out to check on the state of his office building. On the way, he sees a group of men at the Shell station, carrying full garbage bags from the office into a boat. Zeitoun realizes that these are the kind of people Kathy warned about: criminal opportunists. When one sees Zeitoun, he reveals the handle of a gun holstered in his belt, and Zeitoun quickly turns back toward the house on Claiborne. He tells Kathy on the phone that the slight rain falling meant he couldn't see the office that day.

Kathy tells Zeitoun that some friends have called. Knowing Zeitoun is still in the city, they've asked if he could check on their properties. Delilah Burmidian, the wife of a Tulane professor, was one of them: they owned a building that housed a resource center and dorm for visiting students from Arab nations.

Arriving at Tulane, Zeitoun realizes that he can walk on dry land. The property is mostly undamaged apart from a few downed branches on the ground. Then he sees Nasser Dayoob, another Syrian who had left the country in 1995 and arrived to the U.S. stowed away on a tanker. He had stayed at this residence during his legal proceedings to gain sanctuary.

Zeitoun asks if Nasser wants to come with him. Though Nasser knows he'll be safe on campus, he wants to see what has happened to the city and his home. Kathy has always thought Nasser to be a somewhat fragile man. Sometimes Nasser does housepainting for Zeitoun—they're not close friends, but Zeitoun now enjoys the company of someone who has a shared history with him. They both remark on the strangeness of being left behind in a city, with thousands of left-behind animals with them.

Nasser has heard reports about New Orleans residents stranded under highway overpasses, their evacuations unsuccessful, and so he wants to stay in the city for now. Zeitoun mentions that there's a working phone in the Claiborne house. As they arrive, Zeitoun runs into the Williamses, a couple in their seventies. Alvin, the husband, who is in a wheelchair, is a church pastor. His sister often used to eat at the Zeitouns', since she loved Kathy's cooking.

*Zeitoun's selfless work contrasts with those who have taken advantage of the disaster to benefit themselves. In Zeitoun and many others we have seen the best of human nature following a tragedy, while in these men we see the worst. It is telling, however, that in nearly a week Zeitoun has only seen one example of this kind of behavior—while it is "looting," not rescuing, that dominates the news. Zeitoun still recognizes the potential danger—and is perhaps even paranoid from the media via Kathy—even as he wants to keep Kathy from worrying.*



*The tasks that Zeitoun feels responsible for, like taking care of the dogs and his properties, begin to accumulate again. He's the kind of person that is happiest with something to do, so these responsibilities cheer him up.*



*Zeitoun's experience around Tulane shows just how differently Katrina affected different parts of the city, even though natural tragedies might seem indiscriminate. Zeitoun's acquaintance Nasser will figure prominently in the rest of the book.*



*Like Zeitoun, Nasser has a certain curiosity about New Orleans in the aftermath of the storm, a curiosity that trumps his desire for safety, despite Kathy's characterization of him as fragile. Even though Zeitoun is well assimilated into New Orleans, it is understandably helpful to be able to relate to someone else with a similar past.*



*In addition to being curious about the state of the city, Nasser has also heard about what increasingly seems to be a troubled rescue operation by the authorities. This doesn't bode well for Zeitoun's friend Alvin and his wife, who seem in great need of being rescued and evacuated from New Orleans.*



Zeitoun has never seen the couple look so tired. They've waited out the storm but now their food and water have run out. Zeitoun tells them he'll find help, and paddles up to the Memorial Medical Center, where he knows there are police and soldiers. As he approaches, two of them raise their guns and shout to not come any closer. He shouts over the wind that he's just looking for help. While one soldier lowers his gun, they both say they can't help him—he has to go to St. Charles. They ignore his protests, and Zeitoun is incredulous that they want him to paddle all the way there rather than simply have the soldier call a unit on his walkie-talkie. One soldier, who looks incredibly young, seems afraid and unsure, but finally turns and walks away.

Zeitoun paddles all the way to the intersection of Napoleon and St. Charles, where the water is shallower. There are tents, military vehicles, and police officers and soldiers. Zeitoun steps out of his **canoe** and asks one officer to help a handicapped man be evacuated. He gives the man the exact address, and asks him when he'll go: the man says he'll head over in about an hour. When Zeitoun returns, he reassures the pastor and his wife that help is on the way.

Meanwhile, Yuko's husband Ahmaad arrives in Houston to drive Kathy and her family to Phoenix. Though Ahmaad discourages Kathy from listening to the news, even the country stations announce that President Bush is visiting New Orleans—he mentions the loss of Trent Lott's summer home in Mississippi. National Guardsmen, heavily armed, have entered the Convention Center, but they find no resistance, just exhausted, hungry people. Kathy takes some comfort from thinking that the situation is under control.

Zeitoun and Nasser, paddling around, find an abandoned military jeep with boxes of meals, ready-to-eat (MREs) in it. They head past a family of five on an overpass and hand the MREs to them. Around 5 p.m. they head back to Claiborne. On the way they pass by the pastor's just to check, but Alvin and his wife are still on their porch with their bags ready. Zeitoun feels helpless and betrayed, and apologizes to the couple, saying he'll figure something out.

*Once again, Zeitoun assumes responsibility for other members of his community by promising to help them escape the city. However, the response he receives from the policemen and soldiers is wildly out of proportion to what he's asking of them. They treat Zeitoun like a criminal rather than a concerned citizen, and seem less concerned with helping others (like the church couple) than with protecting themselves from an unknown and, at least so it seems to Zeitoun, nonexistent threat of violence.*



*Finally, Zeitoun comes across a staging ground that seems largely devoted to helping those affected by the storm, although there is still a large police and military presence, in more significant numbers than actual members of the rescue operation. Still, the focus on crime seems to ebb long enough for Zeitoun to get his message across.*



*The news that seeps through on the radio also underlines the country's focus on New Orleans as a kind of "war zone" rather than a site of suffering for victims of a natural tragedy. This story, at least, seems to acknowledge the disconnect between the expectation of violence and the reality of desperation and hunger among those left behind. President Bush was especially criticized for his slow response to the disaster, and here Eggers emphasizes this by showing how Bush seemed more concerned for a Senator's summer home than the thousands of poor and minorities who were left homeless and hungry.*



*Nasser has partnered with Zeitoun in a kind of two-person rescue mission, doing what they can in their small canoe. Still, Zeitoun realizes that he has failed in his responsibility to Alvin and his wife: it may not be his fault that the man at the staging ground failed to get help to the couple, but Zeitoun still feels frustrated by this thoughtlessness.*





Outside the Claiborne house, Todd Gambino is sitting next to his motorboat with a dog he's found. Zeitoun feels like God has intervened again: Todd immediately agrees to take his motorboat to Alvin and his wife, dropping them off at the intersection. Grateful, Zeitoun spends time chatting with Todd on the porch, as they swap stories about their different rescues. Zeitoun has always thought of Todd as a playboy, and somewhat irresponsible and flaky, but now he's impressed by Todd's selflessness.

That night, Zeitoun realizes he's still angry about the pastor and his wife. He wonders what the man at the intersection could have possibly had to do that was more important than saving others. Unable to sleep, Zeitoun goes inside to sit on the floor of Nademah's room. He misses his family.

Zeitoun opens one of the photo albums he's saved, to a photo of himself his first year at sea aboard a ship captained by Ahmad. Ahmad had left home after their father's death. He first went to Turkey to study medicine, but then left college and enrolled in a training academy to become a naval officer. Two years later, he was on the sea.

Ahmad is the family member who takes the most pictures, and there are more of him in this album than of Zeitoun. There's one of Ahmad and his crew grilling something that looks like a dog, another of Ahmad in downtown New Orleans, another in Tokyo, another in India. Meanwhile Zeitoun was still at home, restless. His mother recognized Zeitoun's longing, so one day she called Ahmad to ask him to take his younger brother with him. Speechless and overjoyed, Zeitoun prepared to meet his brother in Greece.

Initially Ahmad treated Zeitoun more harshly than the others, probably to counter suspicions of favoritism, but Zeitoun didn't mind. Zeitoun was completely content, despite the grueling labor. He spent his twenties and early thirties at sea, on cargo and passenger ships going all over the world. Zeitoun loved exploring cities, but he wasn't the stereotypical sailor: he didn't gamble or drink alcohol. Instead, he would swim laps, always testing himself. He sailed for 10 years, until landing in Houston in 1988. He decided to explore inland, where his next life began.

*Here Zeitoun realizes that he himself can be susceptible to prejudices and snap judgments about other people, as his earlier assumption about Todd is now countered by that realization that Todd is acting with kindness and generosity. Zeitoun finds this attitude appealing and impressive, and it contrasts to the lack of "official" help for the couple.*



*Zeitoun, selfless himself, is again surprised and frustrated by the authorities' apparently misplaced priorities, as they focus on violence, lawlessness, and disorder rather than on helping those who need it.*



*As usual, Zeitoun seems to revisit his past at night, tonight focusing on his brother Ahmad, whom we've already heard from when he called Zeitoun from Spain. Ahmad followed his father's wishes while Mahmoud was alive, but after his death followed his dream of being on the sea.*



*Ahmad is the brother who is best at keeping in touch, and this quality of seeking constant connection to his family is reflected in his picture-taking mania. Ahmad's photos catalogue his years on the sea and help Zeitoun recall his own time spent working under his brother as a young man—an opportunity that his mother granted him out of love, even though it meant losing another son.*



*As Zeitoun recalls the years he spent on the sea with Ahmad, he doesn't remember the hard work and struggle to prove himself with any bitterness. As with his early job with Charlie Saucier, Zeitoun doesn't shy away from hard work, and in fact elevates it as a virtue above most others. He's disciplined and persevering, even while remaining adventurous at heart, which has led to this new adventure.*



## PART 2: SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 3

In the morning Zeitoun realizes that the little food left in the freezer will be rotten by the next day. Apart from some meat that he'll feed to the dogs, he decides to cook the rest, and to have a barbecue with Todd and Nasser that night.

Ahmaad, Kathy, and the kids arrive in Arizona midday on Saturday, where the kids immediately start playing with Yuko and Ahmaad's five children. Kathy tries to distract herself and not think of where her husband might be.

Zeitoun and Nasser decide to check Uptown to see if anyone needs help. The **canoe** goes faster with two men paddling, and they whiz by the submerged houses. Nasser spots a helicopter low over one roof. They paddle closer to see what's happening, and catch sight of a body face down in the water. A man in the helicopter is pointing a camera at the body. Then the helicopter rises and zips off.

Zeitoun is distraught as they paddle silently to Claiborne. He wonders if the man could have been helped in time. When he reaches Claiborne, the phone is ringing: it's Zeitoun's brother Ahmad, who says he wishes Zeitoun would leave the city. The kids are worried about him, Ahmad says, with the pictures of devastation on CNN every day. Zeitoun tries to reassure him, grateful for his constant concern. Ahmad had once called Zeitoun to arrange for the family to meet at the corner of Bourbon Street and St. Peter, where there happened to be a webcam that could stream video of the family to Ahmad via a website. They did so, standing awkwardly for awhile since they couldn't find the webcam, but Ahmad called back later, thrilled that he had been able to see them.

That night Zeitoun, Todd, and Nasser barbecue the meat that's left: their first social event since the storm. They talk about FEMA and the Superdome—there are reports that it's an absolute mess there. They wonder what the city will look like with the water gone, like a dredged lake. Then Zeitoun sees an orange light less than a mile away. He realizes that the fire is close to his office, where there are hundreds of gallons of flammable paint. The men pile into the motorboat and speed towards the fire, which has engulfed an entire block. Zeitoun's office is only twenty feet away, and the fire station several blocks away is empty and flooded. They can only watch.

*Without electricity in the sweltering Louisiana late summer, Zeitoun has few options for eating apart from the MREs being dropped all over the city by helicopters and rescue units.*



*Kathy's arrival in Arizona allows her to relax somewhat regarding the needs of her children (and tensions with her family), though it doesn't remove her concerns about Zeitoun.*



*The reporter Zeitoun and Nasser see taking a picture of a dead body seems like an especially symbolic act—another example of the media dehumanizing and sensationalizing the victims of the storm, rather than trying to help them.*



*In addition to assuming responsibility for his own neighbors—including the pets—Zeitoun has grown to feel responsible for anyone in the vicinity whom he feels could have been helped. As we have just seen in Zeitoun's recollections about his years at sea with Ahmad, it seems that the older of the brothers continues to feel protective. Ahmad's frequent calls—and even the ability to see the family in the webcam—help make Ahmad feel that he isn't as far away from Zeitoun and the rest of the family, and can maintain a close connection with them.*



*It's a motley group and a somewhat somber social event, what with the flooded venue and the somber topics of conversation, but for the first time Zeitoun isn't spending the night alone but rather with other members of his small community. Although he has maintained some kind of control over his days by paddling around in his canoe, the fire (as well as the dead body) are reminders that Zeitoun cannot be in control of or responsible for much else.*



The wind picks up and blows away from Zeitoun's office. He thanks God, as he watches somberly. There are no sirens or signs of authority, just a block of homes sinking into the water. Zeitoun recalls passages in the Qur'an about the flood and God's wrath, but he feels a kind of order in the night too.

Zeitoun recalls being on a tanker 20 years earlier in the Philippines, speaking about the existence of God with the Greek captain, an atheist. Zeitoun had watched the captain pilot the ship through the treacherous sandbars, high shelves, and around the island of the high seas. He told the captain that without a captain like him, a ship couldn't navigate, and he argued that any vessel needed a captain. The Greek captain appreciated the beauty of this metaphor, but he hadn't answered.

## PART 2: SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 4

In the morning Zeitoun picks up Nasser, drops him at the house on Claiborne, and continues alone. He chooses a new route towards the Jefferson Davis Parkway. It's quieter, and there are fewer people, though it smells dirtier than ever. At one corner, the land rises and, in a patch of dry grass, three horses are chewing away. Zeitoun is struck by the sight and watches them for a few minutes before traveling on.

Near the corner of Banks Street, a woman in a sparkly blue blouse calls down from a second-floor balcony, asking Zeitoun to give her a ride. Zeitoun agrees and then notices her short skirt, high heels, and made-up face: he finally realizes she must be a prostitute. He just asks her to take off her shoes so that she won't puncture the aluminum. She asks him to take him to Canal Street, where she's going to work, she says. He does so, she thanks him, and he paddles onward.

At the I-10 overpass where people had been awaiting rescue, no one is left, but there are a dozen small dogs there. As Zeitoun approaches, he sees that they have each been killed, shot in the head. He quickly returns to Claiborne, where he calls Kathy and tells her he just saw the most terrible thing. Zeitoun can't imagine why someone would do such a thing—it seems to imply that no one is concerned about being humane.

*Again, Zeitoun is reminded of the Biblical story of Noah's Ark and the flood: a story that is part of Islamic tradition as well as that of Christianity and Judaism—a complex story in which wrath, destruction, and renewal coexist.*



*Although Zeitoun has suffered in a number of ways throughout his life, what never changes is his unshakable belief in God and his commitment to his Muslim faith. This anecdote shows both Zeitoun's cleverness and his sense of awe and beauty at the natural world, one that for him only makes sense with God as its creator.*



*Although Zeitoun has appreciated company in the last few days, today he strikes out again on his own, committed as usual to doing whatever he can to help those in need. As he does so, he is struck by more signs of normalcy, like the horses, which seem almost surreal in the midst of such destruction.*



*Initially, Zeitoun considers this woman as just another person in need of help—even when he learns that she's a prostitute, he does his best not to judge her, and instead relates this anecdote as a humorous example of how the storm has forced people together, even those who otherwise might never have crossed paths.*



*Zeitoun's tenderness towards animals is emblematic of his compassionate nature, and means that he is particularly upset at violence done against the most vulnerable. This time, he feels the need to share this story with Kathy rather than conceal it from her. The violence against and neglect of animals after the storms is its own unique and poignant tragedy.*



Still, Zeitoun is eager to ask Kathy if the kids are in school yet. She says she'll try the next day. Kathy tries to convince Zeitoun to stay home that day and rest. He tries to, but he still can't stop thinking about the dogs, wondering why someone couldn't have just fed them rather than shooting them. He finds a passage, *al-Haqqah*, or "The Reality," in the Qur'an. It is a beautiful passage about the "Day of Disaster" that humans denied, and that asks how humans might recognize "the reality" that is God.

Zeitoun wonders if the dogs had been shot by robbers, not policeman, and wonders what he would do if they came to his house. He wishes he was not alone. He remains on his roof, telling himself that he's simply weak when it comes to animals—he had kept a number of pets as a child, even a stray donkey.

Once, Ahmad had roped Zeitoun into contributing to a pigeon-grooming operation, holding birds in a cage made from scrap wood and chicken wire that Ahmad planned to train to deliver messages. They cared for the pigeons together, and soon there were thirty living on the roof. Then Mahmoud, their father, discovered the hobby. He had been impatient and irritable since Mohammed's death, and he said that this hobby was pointless and a waste of time. He told the boys to free the birds, and since they refused, Mahmoud said he'd do it himself. But when he reached the roof to let them free, the birds flocked to his shoulders and arms. Mahmoud was charmed, and couldn't send them away. He died a few years later, technically of heart disease, but everyone believed it was heartache for Mohammed.

## PART 2: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 5

Zeitoun rises early to feed the dogs—Todd has given him a bag of dog food. At Claiborne, he finds Todd and Nasser eating breakfast on their porch. When Zeitoun calls Kathy, she tells him about two policemen who have recently killed themselves. Zeitoun has always gotten along well with the police in New Orleans, so this stuns him. Kathy tries to convince Zeitoun to leave, but he tells her he'll call her later.

Walt's husband Rob calls Kathy to check on the family, and is shocked to hear that Zeitoun has stayed behind in the city. Then he mentions that he had left their cat in the city, and wonders if Zeitoun could look for her. Kathy calls Zeitoun, who is happy to do it.

*Kathy, meanwhile, is struggling herself with distraction and worry, as well as the uncertainty of not knowing how long she'll be in Arizona and how much she should settle in with her children. The Qur'an passage underlines Zeitoun's ability to find guidance and solace in his religion, especially when facing what he can't understand.*



*For the first time, Zeitoun seems to question (even if only implicitly) if it was a good idea for him to stay in the city—a self-examination prompted by how shaken up he is from the seemingly senseless violence against animals.*



*Once again Zeitoun's nighttime thoughts turn back to earlier times and especially to the years of his childhood—here his relationship with his brother and father and the antics that he and Ahmad performed. As he would be the first to leave the family on a shipping boat, it seems that it was Ahmad who hatched the plan and Zeitoun who was only too eager to follow. Their project with the pigeons is portrayed as a means of countering their and Mahmoud's suffering after Mohammed's death by giving love and care to something else. This story also gives added weight to Zeitoun's grief about the storm's animal victims.*



*At first, the day begins normally: Zeitoun has settled into a kind of routine, and even has forged a new kind of community with Todd and Nasser. This sense of normalcy is interrupted, however, by Kathy's news, which once again seems ominous in contrast to Zeitoun's calm surroundings.*



*Although others are surprised at Zeitoun's stubbornness in staying behind, they seem to recognize his responsibility, commitment, and character, and so feel safe asking favors of him.*



Zeitoun, Nasser, and Todd stop by Nasser's house on the way to Rob and Walt's, but the water has reached the roof. Nasser is grim but unsurprised. At Walt and Rob's, the water is less than two feet high, but Zeitoun sees no sign of the cat. He knows the police would be suspicious if he tried to jump the fence.

*Again, different parts of the city have suffered from the storm to differing extents: natural disasters may not "target" specific areas, but in practice existing inequalities can contribute to different outcomes.*



That night Zeitoun and Nasser pray together on the roof of Zeitoun's house and barbecue. It's quiet, apart from the occasional sound of a helicopter. Zeitoun wonders if it's time to leave.

*Zeitoun and Nasser have developed a camaraderie that has to do with their identities as immigrants, as Muslims, and as New Orleans residents.*



## PART 2: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 6

The next morning, Nasser tells Zeitoun that he's ready to be evacuated. They paddle to the post-office parking lot, where an orange helicopter is lying in the distance. As they get closer, however, they realize that the helicopter had crashed, though there's no smoke, and no one around.

*Nasser seems to have assumed that there is a successful, ongoing rescue operation, yet here, it again appears that this is not the case—further disasters have plagued the already misguided efforts.*



They return to Claiborne, where Zeitoun decides not to tell Kathy about the helicopter. He asks her if she's put the kids in school yet, but Kathy says it hasn't been easy. Besides, she's been more concerned about convincing Zeitoun to leave. Mayor Nagin has just ordered a forced evacuation of everyone left, as officials are concerned about the risk of typhoid fever or cholera. Kathy reminds him that part of the city was built over landfills containing arsenic and lead, so these chemicals could be in the water. Zeitoun tells her he'll be careful, but not that he's thinking of leaving too—he is still mainly concerned about looking after his properties and the dogs.

*Again, Zeitoun has to pick and choose what he tells his wife, balancing a desire to share with her what he's experiencing, and a reluctance to make her worry even more. Now Kathy has a number of other things to worry about, which bear only indirect relation to the storm itself—Katrina has exposed a number of underlying issues related to the city of New Orleans itself, as it seems that the natural disaster reveals all the human corruption, injustice, and ineptness that was previously able to be ignored.*



After setting out alone, Zeitoun comes across a small military boat carrying a soldier and a man with a camera. They wave Zeitoun down and a reporter interviews Zeitoun about what he's doing still in the city. Afterward he hopes that one of his siblings might see him and admire his good works: the siblings have always been competitive, measuring themselves against each other and against Mohammed. Zeitoun feels that God has called him to do this, and he hopes his siblings can see him serving God.

*Even as authorities are struggling to enter the city in order to evacuate and assist people, other groups, like the media, are having less trouble navigating the city for their own more selfish purposes. Zeitoun's motivations are, as usual, complex. He's genuinely concerned about those left behind in the city, but there's also an element of seeking validation or glory in his actions, even if that validation is only from his family or God.*





At Claiborne, Zeitoun sees a blue-and-white motorboat tied to the porch. A man is inside when Zeitoun walks in, and the man apologizes. He says his name is Ronnie, and he'd passed by the house one day looking for a working telephone, which would allow him to call his brother, a helicopter pilot. Zeitoun can't think of a reason to make Ronnie leave, so he doesn't. He goes upstairs to find Nasser, who agrees that Ronnie seems nice enough.

*This man is most likely the source of the unknown voice that answered the phone on Claiborne when Kathy called—the man she assumed was a burglar. Others might have chased out this intruder, but Zeitoun and Nasser don't have that kind of suspicious or frightened reaction.*



The water in the bathroom still works, and Zeitoun feels like his shower is a miracle. He calls his brother in Spain again, and Ahmad again tries to convince him to leave, telling him about media reports warning of wild lawlessness. Zeitoun tells him he needs to get off the phone to call Kathy. When he hangs up, Nasser calls to him that more men are here, asking if they need water. Suddenly, a group of armed men break down the door and race inside.

*The small gift of a shower contrasts with Ahmad's claims about lawlessness and wild, marauding gangs, though the tone of the media makes it understandable that he would think that way. The sudden interruption of armed forces into Zeitoun's life of quiet care and responsibility marks a turning point in the book, as Zeitoun's human tragedy of injustice and prejudice really begins.*



### PART 3: WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 7

Kathy worries that Zeitoun hadn't called her the day before, but Yuko tells her not to worry. At 9 a.m., Ahmad calls from Spain, and tells her that he talked to Zeitoun the day before. He got off the phone quickly, Ahmad said, since there was someone at the door.

*Kathy has been waiting for the daily noontime call, and thanks to Ahmad's constant communication with the family, she's able to immediately realize that something might be wrong. As usual, the media's sensationalizing leads to more paranoia and worry for her.*



Terrified, Kathy calls the Claiborne house again and again. Yuko tries to reassure her that the phone must have finally died. Yuko takes the kids to the mall, since Kathy's pacing is making them anxious. Kathy calls Walt and then Adnan (Zeitoun's cousin), telling him she's ashamed they couldn't stay with her.

*Yuko shows herself to be a vital, compassionate friend to Kathy, allowing her to do everything she can to figure out what might have happened to her husband, while taking charge of the kids herself.*



Kathy tries to distract herself by finding Oprah Winfrey's show, but instead she finds herself watching a news report, with New Orleans police chief Eddie Compass saying that babies were being raped in the Superdome, and Mayor Nagin saying that people were trapped and fighting like animals. Kathy turns off the TV for good. In the afternoon the kids return. Yuko again tries to comfort her friend.

*Every time Kathy tries to distract herself, she realizes that the media focus on Katrina and New Orleans is all-consuming—every day the news reports seem to grow more sensational and appalling, which cannot help but stoke her fears about Zeitoun.*



### PART 3: THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 8

The next day Kathy feels in better spirits, assuming that Zeitoun might have simply forgotten to call, but she still calls Claiborne periodically. After noon, she grows frantic again, and tells Yuko she needs to go to New Orleans. Yuko talks her out of this idea.

*Though she begins in better spirits, Kathy's penchant for staying organized, on top of things, and in control is threatened by her ignorance about Zeitoun's whereabouts.*



Ahmad calls Kathy, and he's worried now, too. He says he'll try to contact the missing person agencies and Coast Guard in New Orleans. In broken English, Ahmad writes an email to a Katrina "Relief Updates" address, asking for news.

*Although Ahmad is even farther away than Kathy from New Orleans, he tries to assert his own kind of control over the situation through his own initiatives.*



Then Zeitoun's family begins to call from Syria, asking if Kathy has heard from her husband. Kathy feels increasingly burdened, and racks her brain for anyone she might know in the city who could help. She realizes she knows no one left in the city, and is struck by the fact that in 2005 there can be an entire city cut off from all communication.

*Although Zeitoun's close-knit family is obviously a gift, and it is striking how concerned they are for him, in this case their family bonds only serve to make Kathy even more anxious, feeling both responsible for and helpless about the situation.*



### PART 3: FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 9

Kathy has overheard her daughters talking to Yuko's kids about their dad being lost and their house submerged underwater, and she decides she has to lie to her children for the first time. She tells them that she heard from Zeitoun last night. Though they are initially skeptical, they believe her, or at least want to.

*Kathy has to balance her own attempts to figure out what's happened to Zeitoun with her responsibility as a parent to calm and reassure her children during such a stressful time, especially in a new place.*



The phone rings again and Aisha, another sister of Zeitoun's, calls to ask where he is. Kathy calmly tells her that he is fine. But she goes online and immediately sees that while the current death toll is around 118, Mayor Nagin thinks it may climb into the thousands. Checking her email, she sees that Ahmad has included her in a message to another aid agency. Kathy calls the Claiborne house again and again. When she puts the kids to bed, she says that they'll have new sheet sets in all the bedrooms when they redo the house.

*Now, in addition to her children, Kathy must keep in mind the feelings of Zeitoun's family and attempt to reassure them even while she continues to panic herself. Kathy bounces from one activity to the next, forcing herself to pull away from the worst news and yet drawn to anything that might give her a sense of where Zeitoun is. Eggers continues the suspense here, not giving us Zeitoun's perspective at all, but first showing how his sudden absence affected so many others.*



Walt calls and says that he'd spoken to a friend, a U.S. marshal, who had driven towards Zeitoun's house but couldn't reach it because of the water. He tells Kathy he'll call a friend with a helicopter.

*The broad support network that Kathy and Zeitoun have built around them in New Orleans is now proving fruitful: many want to help.*



All day Zeitoun's family calls from Lattakia, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, asking why Kathy hadn't heard him yet, and updating her on the news (which she can't bear to watch), which talks of looting, rapes, and murders. She realizes that the media must be putting a hysterical spin on the situation, but still feels helpless. Syria is so much safer, they tell her: she should move back there.

*Again, Zeitoun's large family, scattered all over the world, is both a source of comfort for him and now, ironically, a source of greater stress and anxiety for Kathy. Their comments on Syria are a telling reversal of the way many Americans think about the Middle East.*



Kathy goes into the bathroom and realizes that for the first time a stripe of white hair is rising from her forehead. Yuko forbids Kathy to answer the phone when there's a call from Syria. Yuko answers instead.

That day, Yuko and Ahmaad take Kathy and the kids to Veterans Memorial Coliseum, where the Red Cross has set up a shelter and had representatives from missing-persons agencies. Kathy brings information and a photo of Zeitoun. The Red Cross takes down all the information, telling Kathy that thousands of people have been located, and order is being restored every day. Kathy leaves somewhat cheered, thinking Zeitoun might be at a hospital, injured, and it won't be long before they find him. But now the kids are confused about where their dad really is. Kathy tries to shield them, but feels weak.

Kathy calls Claiborne again, and then the phone company to ask if the lines are down. They say that if it's ringing, it works, but there's no one to answer.

Aisha seems most affected, alternately worried, resigned, and irritable. That night Kathy brushes her hair to comfort her, and in response to Aisha's questions tells her that Zeitoun is not dead or drowned. Kathy realizes that Aisha's hair is coming out in clumps as she brushes it. Kathy can't imagine what could be worse than this.

### PART 3: SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 11

It's been six days since Kathy has spoken to Zeitoun, and she can't make sense of it. She can't imagine that he is still in the city and wouldn't have been able to call. But if he had left the city and been brought to the shelter, he would have called too. Kathy imagines that he might be dead, murdered perhaps, but she knows her husband well, and can't imagine any regular accident befalling him.

Kathy has to think of life insurance, and of how to support her children. She wonders if she can run the business alone, or if she would have to sell it. She thinks about where she should move the family. She asks herself how long she should wait before assuming the worst.

Kathy sees another email from Ahmad to the TV station that had interviewed Zeitoun, asking for information. Kathy finds a website with current photos of New Orleans from the air, and zooms into the neighborhood. The water looks filthy and oily.

*The stripe of white hair is a physical proof of Kathy's emotional state, only partially aided by Yuko's thoughtful advice.*



*For the first time, the authorities responsible for restoring order after Hurricane Katrina seem to have a handle on dealing with the thousands of people affected by the storm. By realizing the scope of the problem—how many other families are trying without success to contact loved ones—Kathy feels less desperate and alone, even if she cannot fully succeed in shielding her children from confusion.*



*Another idea on why Zeitoun might not be able to reach Kathy is tested, and fails.*



*Like Kathy's stripe of white hair, the thinning of Aisha's hair is a sobering physical reminder of the stress that has stemmed from Zeitoun's disappearance—in particular, from living in a constant state of not knowing.*



*Kathy goes through the possibilities for Zeitoun again and again: not one of them seems plausible, and yet there has to be some kind of an explanation for why he hasn't called. Kathy cannot fully accept that Zeitoun might have died—but even that tragedy might be better than this awful uncertainty.*



*Kathy's thoughts must turn to practical matters even in such a stressful time, since she has an entire family to support. All these decisions have to remain in limbo for now, however.*



*Ahmad continues to pursue his own theories for who might have information about Zeitoun, while Kathy turns to getting a glimpse of her former home devastated by the storm.*



Ahmaad and Yuko reassure Kathy that Zeitoun is stubborn and plucky—it's normal for him to be out of contact for awhile. Yuko keeps Kathy away from the news, but on the radio she hears President Bush's radio address, in which he compares the storm to 9/11 and the War on Terror, vowing that Americans will "overcome this ordeal."

*It's true that Zeitoun has failed to call in the past and has turned out fine, but to Kathy this seems different. The presidential address deals less with this kind of family tragedy than with the security challenges that Katrina prompts—another example of the government treating the people of New Orleans more like criminals, and less like victims.*



### PART 3: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 12

Finally, Kathy makes some calls to get her children into the closest public school. The girls are nervous to start in a new school, but Yuko and Ahmaad try to cheer them by buying special school supplies. Kathy can't bear to look in Aisha's scared eyes as she drops them off.

*With no new information, Kathy has to resign herself to a longer stay in Phoenix than she'd thought, which means restoring some kind of normalcy for now. She must show great courage and perseverance here, even as he husband must in his own, totally different situation.*



On the way home, Kathy hears that the death toll has spiked to 279. She asks herself if she has to prepare for a funeral—asks how she can explain this absence.

*Kathy cannot help but think that one of those anonymous 279 could be her husband.*



### PART 3: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 13

Today the death toll jumps to 423. Kathy calls Claiborne every hour, and then calls Todd Gambino's girlfriend, who is in Mississippi, and hasn't heard from Todd in a week. They wonder if the men could be together, and agree to keep in touch.

*Kathy perseveres in her attempts to find any information she can about Zeitoun, talking to any of her many contacts from the city.*



Ahmad keeps calling from Spain, and even looks into flights to New Orleans to look for his brother on the ground—he would be the only one in his family who could do so, since getting visas from Syria is hopeless.

*Ahmad might feel even more helpless than Kathy, given how far away he is, but his idea seems far-fetched and dangerous all the same.*



### PART 3: WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 14

The death toll is now at 648. Kathy continues to check in with the Red Cross. The girls are now at school, but they have grown more quiet and subdued, trying to prepare for a life without their father. Kathy frets about having to find a house in Arizona, and about the burden she's being on Yuko's family.

*The attitudes of the girls contrast to their carefree, happy-go-lucky nature at the beginning of the book. They have not been faced with positive evidence of their father's death, but still have to grapple with the possibility, while living in a strange environment and state of uncertainty at the same time.*



Kathy thinks back to the massive support network of Zeitoun's family in Syria. She had gone with him and the kids in 2003, and the visit shattered a number of stereotypes for her. She had pictured deserts and donkeys, not cosmopolitan cities and modern women along with brick and mud homes. The road to Jableh was beautiful, and she was surprised to see churches in addition to mosques. She realized that Syria was a deeply Mediterranean, culturally diverse country.

In Jableh they had stayed with Abdulrahman's brother, and had visited cousins all throughout town. Kathy had loved his family. Now she wonders if she could take the kids there—a radical idea, but one that begins to give her comfort. Meanwhile, Zeitoun's family grows increasingly despondent.

*Although Zeitoun's large family has been a source of anxiety for Kathy in the past few days, she now recalls what a gift this family is, and how much she learned from them and from visiting Syria in general. Like her introduction to Islam, this visit forced Kathy to confront cultural prejudices and recognize the beauty and diversity of another culture.*



*Although Kathy has created a vibrant social life with Zeitoun in New Orleans, it's difficult for her to imagine returning there without Zeitoun—his family in Syria is at least a secondary way of keeping him close.*



### PART 3: SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 17

Kathy can't help but check the TV and internet constantly, searching for her husband's name, or their company's name. On some sites she sees reports of hundreds of murders, but others claim that no babies have been raped, and no murders have taken place in the Superdome or Convention Center. The fear, confusion, and rumors are at a height.

There is a massive debate on where the violence and chaos of the city comes from—the residents or those sent to bring order. Kathy reads that private-security firms have sent soldiers-for-hire into the city from all over the world, including Israeli commandos. Since Zeitoun is an Arab, Kathy grows even more fearful. The private-security firm Blackwater has also entered the city in full battle costume.

Kathy calculates that hundreds of rifles and machine guns must be in the city, and wonders if one of the mercenaries might have shot Zeitoun and covered it up. But she convinces herself that the American troops on the ground must have things under control. Still, if these soldiers are coming straight from Afghanistan or Iraq, she assumes her husband could easily come under suspicion.

Kathy searches more websites, learning that 1,000 state police officers, SWAT teams, men from Border Control Tactical Units, and Coast Guard tactical units that are part of the War on Terror—all have swarmed the city, armed with M-16s, shotguns, and handguns. Kathy turns off the computer, but finds herself drawn back.

*Kathy's reconnaissance underlines the chaotic nature of the news coming out of New Orleans in the days and weeks after Katrina—contradictory information, and an obsession with security rather than concerns for the safety and assistance of the victims.*



*Given that Katrina took place in the years after 9/11, Eggers emphasizes how the authorities were ideally suited to mount a militarized response to the hurricane, one that seems to have more in common with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan than with the rescue needs of the populace. Blackwater would also become an infamous example of corruption and corporate greed in those wars.*



*Having dealt with suspicion herself because of her religion—and having witnessed prejudice against Zeitoun for being Middle Eastern—Kathy fears that these soldiers, meant to keep people safe, might assume Zeitoun is the enemy and act accordingly.*



*Kathy's research reveals a massive military mobilization in New Orleans, meant, according to the president, governor, and mayor, to keep order against a threat that still seems vague and undefined. Katrina was a horrible natural disaster, but only compounded by the human tragedy of this misguided response.*





Another email from Ahmad has attached a number of pictures from the family's visit to Málaga, Spain the year before. This reminds Kathy of the intense hike that Zeitoun had forced the family to take. As they were walking down the beach, Zeitoun noticed a small rock formation in the distance, and suggested they walk there. At first, the stroll was pleasant, but after an hour, it still didn't seem any closer. Zeitoun was carrying Safiya on his shoulders, clambering over ridges and rock outcroppings. Kathy begged him to turn around, but finally, after walking for four hours across 15 miles, they finally reached it: a small rock jutting out into the sea.

Kathy had to laugh, simultaneously furious and content to be married to such a stubborn man. She thinks of how his stubbornness gave a certain epic sense to their relationship, which now spans two continents, children, and a business. Now, whenever anything seems difficult and Kathy wants to give up, Zeitoun will tell Kathy, "Touch the rock!"

*As she attempts to distract herself from the constant media stream, Kathy (like Zeitoun alone on his roof in earlier days) finds herself drawn back to memories of their past together. This anecdote emphasizes Zeitoun's classic stubbornness, but also his perseverance, as he refuses to give up on anything he told himself he'd do—even if the goal no longer seems that important, or the steps needed to attain it too difficult to be worth it.*



*Although Kathy has often grown exasperated by her husband's stubborn nature, now that Zeitoun isn't around for her to tease and make fun of, she finds herself returning to his quirks and characteristics fondly.*



### PART 3: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 19

Kathy wakes up determined to go back to New Orleans and hunt down her husband. She is sure that thieves have come to their house and killed him, and she plans to hire a boat. But midday, Hurricane Rita is approaching New Orleans, and Mayor Nagin cancels the plans to reopen the city.

Nademah suggests that they all pray together in the living room. Just then, Kathy's cell phone rings, and a man asks if this is Mrs. Zeitoun. He says he saw her husband. Kathy has to sit down. The man is a missionary—he says Zeitoun is at Hunt, a prison in St. Gabriel. The man can't tell her anything else, and he hangs up.

*Even Kathy's new decision—one that seems able to equip her with more agency, and thus enable her to escape from her sense of desperation and helplessness—is thwarted by changes on the ground and more forces of nature.*



*Just when it seems that Kathy has nowhere left to turn, a stranger gives her the information that she's been waiting for—and yet this is still excruciatingly limited information. Finally, after seeing the psychological toll of Zeitoun's disappearance in this section, we will next get to see what happened from his perspective.*



### PART 4: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 6

Back in the house on Claiborne, two weeks earlier, Zeitoun is wondering when and how he might be able to leave. Now that people don't seem to need help, there's not much left to see, and he misses his family. As he's talking to his brother Ahmad in Spain, Nasser calls to him about some men on the porch.

*Now the narrative shifts back two weeks, in order to follow Zeitoun in the days when Kathy had no word from him. Ironically, his disappearance takes place just at the moment when his trials and responsibilities seem over.*



The armed men are wearing police and military uniforms, bulletproof vests and fatigues. There are at least 10 guns in the room. They ask Zeitoun who he is, and he tells them that he's the landlord. Zeitoun gives one of them his ID, but the man doesn't even look at it, and tells him to get in the boat.

Zeitoun is pushed towards the door, where Ronnie and Nasser have already been gathered onto a massive military fan boat. Two officers are pointing their rifles at them. At that moment, Todd returns on his motorboat and asks what's going on. He says he lives there, and his proof is in the house, but the officer tells him to get in the boat too.

Zeitoun assumes that this has something to do with the mandatory evacuation, and he just needs to call Kathy, who can call a lawyer. But he needs Yuko's number, which is on the hall table by the phone. He asks the soldier if he can sneak back in and grab it, but as he moves towards the house, the soldier grabs Zeitoun's shift and shoves him back onto the boat.

The boat heads towards the intersection of Napoleon and St. Charles, where a dozen other men in National Guard uniforms, bulletproof vests, and sunglasses are watching them. Two of them tackle Zeitoun to the ground once they're led off the boat: his face is pressed into the grass. He doesn't resist, but he is immediately handcuffed and his legs tied together, as the men bark orders and curse at him and the others.

The four men are herded into a large white van. Zeitoun asks one young soldier in the driver's seat what's going on. The soldier says he doesn't know—he's from Indiana.

They wait silently in the van for 30 minutes. Zeitoun asks one of the soldiers if he could take care of the dogs in the neighborhood. The soldier agrees. Zeitoun says he'll give him the addresses, but the soldier says he knows where they are, and walks away.

*The military response that Kathy has been following on the news is here manifested in person. The soldiers' large amounts of gear and protection is almost darkly comical, given that they're facing unarmed civilians.*



*The officers are not interested in any justification that the men might put forward—they seem like they have a previously assigned task, and will do whatever they need to fulfill it, even at the expense of basic human rights and dignity. The military fan boats return here, again as a frightening, antagonistic foil to Zeitoun's quiet canoe of rescue and exploration.*



*Zeitoun is convinced that the trouble is no more than a misunderstanding, and with his basic right of a telephone call (one supposed to be given to anyone imprisoned) he'll be able to sort out why he's being taken away and what he can do to be freed.*



*Again, the treatment of Zeitoun, Todd, Nasser, and Ronnie seems far out of proportion with the way they're acting. The National Guardsmen and other officers seem prepared for tough, hardened criminals—even soldiers at war—rather than unassuming citizens.*



*The mass influx of soldiers and officers seems to have led to confusion and lack of coordination—a total breakdown of the system of justice and the right to information.*



*At first, it seems that the soldier is genuinely interested in helping Zeitoun out, but it soon grows clear that the man is only mollifying Zeitoun, or maybe even making fun of him. His indifference will tragically lead to the probable deaths of many animals, however.*



Finally the van starts, and they drive to the New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal, seemingly confirming Zeitoun's assumption that they are being forcefully evacuated. As they pull to the side of the building, Zeitoun sees police cars and military vehicles, with National Guardsmen patrolling the grounds.

Zeitoun and the others are led inside to the main room, where it looks more like a military base than a train and bus station. There are no civilians. Instead, there are only dozens of men and women with guns, along with boxes of water and supplies. Everyone there seems to take more and more interest in the four men. Todd is brought to the Amtrak ticket counter and begins to be interrogated.

Todd, who is usually hotheaded, starts arguing at the Amtrak desk, and finally asks if they're going to get a phone call. The officer says no, even when Todd insists that they have to. Todd asks a passing soldier why they're here, and the soldier says that they're al Qaeda. Todd laughs, but Zeitoun is frightened. In some ways he's been waiting for this day since 9/11, when rumors about "sleeper cells" meant that everyone at any mosque could be under suspicion.

Zeitoun and Kathy have worried before about the eagerness of the Department of Homeland Security to interrogate anyone with a connection to the Middle East. Zeitoun's friends have had to send in documents and hire lawyers, but until now Zeitoun had never been profiled, apart from occasional suspicious looks or sneers upon hearing his accent.

Zeitoun decides to ignore this one soldier's words, but moments later another soldier mutters "Taliban" as he looks at Zeitoun. Now Zeitoun is certain that a horrible misunderstanding is taking place. He sits back while Todd rants, understanding that it will be a long time before this can be resolved.

*Zeitoun knows that there has been a mandatory evacuation, so this serves as his major assumption for why he and the others have been detained—it's also why he can't imagine that there'll be a harsh punishment for whatever his perceived crimes might be.*



*Although Zeitoun has assumed that they've been brought to the passenger terminal in order to leave the city, it appears that the terminal itself has been transformed. Like the rest of New Orleans, it has become a staging ground for what looks like a military operation. This is "Camp Greyhound," another example of the wrong-headed response by authorities to the disaster—which we already see here, as the soldiers have plenty of supplies, which the victims lack.*



*Todd is aware that it's their right to be able to place one phone call, but the regular rules of legal detention don't seem to apply in this dystopian environment. Todd can only imagine that the idea that the men are from al Qaeda is a joke, but for Zeitoun, who has paid attention to the growing Islamophobia since 9/11, this is an all too real possibility.*



*In the years after 9/11, the police tapped into much broader powers of surveillance and interrogation, usually antagonizing the Muslim community. The "Patriot Act" also basically allowed authorities to circumvent the usual rule of law whenever a threat of terrorism was even suspected.*



*While Todd (who has never had to face this kind of prejudice) continues to think that this is merely an easily resolvable misunderstanding, Zeitoun now realizes that he and his acquaintances have found themselves embroiled in a problem of much higher stakes.*



Zeitoun looks up at the mural occupying the upper half of the station's walls, depicting the history of Louisiana and of the U.S. more broadly. Zeitoun notices for the first time how much of this mural has to do with struggle and subjugation, from Ku Klux Klan hoods, to Confederate Soldiers, to Native Americans being herded off their land, next to wealthy aristocrats and businessmen.

Nasser is processed after Todd. The armed officials grow excited as they realize that there is cash in Nasser's duffel bag: \$10,000. Todd is carrying \$2,400. There are Mapquest printouts in his pockets, and though he says he delivers lost luggage, the officials aren't satisfied. They find a small memory chip from a digital camera in his pocket as well. Zeitoun sees this evidence mount up, and despairs that he won't be able to reach a lawyer or judge.

Finally it's Zeitoun's turn for processing. He is fingerprinted and his photograph is taken. The officials take his wallet, and while they ask him basic questions, he isn't told of the charges against him. Shortly after it's over, a soldier brings him into a small room and tells him to remove his clothes. Zeitoun hasn't been read his rights and doesn't know why he's being held, but now two soldiers in full camouflage with automatic rifles are surrounding him. Ashamed, Zeitoun submits to a full body check, which is unbelievably invasive. It's Todd's turn after him.

Zeitoun and Todd are brought to the back of the station, to where the buses depart. When the doors open, it's revealed that the parking lot has been transformed into a massive outdoor prison. A 16-foot-high cage extends a hundred yards into the lot under a freestanding roof like those at gas stations. Zeitoun and Todd are pushed inside the enclosure, where two other prisoners are already being held.

For Zeitoun, this has all been surreal, but Todd rants and swears. He notes that this isn't unprecedented, though, as during Mardi Gras, the police sometimes would put drunks and thieves into temporary tent-style jails. But this one is elaborate: a series of small, divided cages, like ones that hold dogs. To Zeitoun, it looks exactly like pictures he's seen of Guantánamo Bay.

*For Zeitoun, until now, New Orleans has largely been a land of opportunity, despite periodic instances of prejudice. Now, he understands that there is a much longer, darker history behind his beloved city. His present situation even seems like a logical continuation of this history.*



*Eggers portrays the officers as almost perverse in their apparent desire to find any evidence of wrongdoing and to be able to piece together these possessions into a narrative that would condemn the four men. Zeitoun knows what they're looking for, and exactly how these innocent possessions could be misinterpreted.*



*A basic legal right of a detainee, in addition to being given a phone call, is to be told of the charges that have led to one's detention. Not only is Zeitoun not given this basic right, but he is asked to submit to an embarrassing full body check—an indignity that seems to be meant for hardened criminals, rather than for someone who's never been charged of a crime and doesn't even know why he's there.*



*Zeitoun had realized that the authorities have transformed the station into a holding ground, but the scope of this transformation is only now clear. Ironically, rather than serving as a hub for free movement and transportation, the station is now a locus of confinement.*



*While Todd can't find a rational way of dealing with what's happening to them, Zeitoun attempts to fit their confinement into a broader framework. Despite his realism, this prison seems to be on an entirely different level to what he's familiar with. Guantánamo Bay is a prison for suspected terrorists, infamous for its violations of human rights and its lack of accountability.*



The space inside the cage is about 15 by 15 feet and is empty except for a portable toilet. Across from it is a two-story office building, now occupied by soldiers staring down at them with their M-16s. Behind them is the loud, unceasing sound of a full-power train engine. Zeitoun realizes that this Amtrak engine is generating all the electricity for the station and jail, and that this sound won't be going away.

Zeitoun is determined to get one phone call. He tries to get the attention of an officer by reaching for the chain-link fence in front of him, but the guard yells at him not to touch the fence: they can only stand or sit in the middle. There's a pain in Zeitoun's foot, and he sees that some kind of metal splinter has gotten wedged under his foot. He needs to get it out quickly, or it will get worse.

A little later, Nasser and Ronnie are pushed inside. Only Todd has been told why he's being held (possession of stolen goods) and none has been permitted a phone call. Nasser explains that he was concerned about the looting, and so decided to keep his life savings with him. The interrogators seemed not to know or care that many immigrants keep their money in cash. With the Syrian names and accents of Zeitoun and Nasser, the cash, and the Mapquest printouts, they realize that they're in deep trouble.

For the first hours, Zeitoun is committed to making a phone call. While landlines aren't working, there is a rumor that there's a satellite phone in the upstairs office. The prisoners beg for access whenever a guard passes, but have no luck. One guard tells them that they're Taliban—they don't get a phone call.

After four hours, the men are given a military-style, ready-to-eat meal of barbecued pork. Zeitoun tells the guard that he and Nasser cannot eat pork, but the guard shrugs and says not to eat it. They give their portions to Todd and Ronnie.

Zeitoun suggests to Nasser that they pray, though they're nervous about doing so in front of the guards. But Zeitoun thinks that this makes it even more important to pray, so they do so, as the guards watch them.

*The description of the men's confinement shows just how stark the makeshift prison is, from the tiny, spartan space, to the obvious constant surveillance from above, to the roar of the train engine that seems almost meant to torture the inmates and prevent them from sleeping.*



*Zeitoun still tries to trust that the regular rules of the legal system will be followed through, but it seems that this denial of rights has become its own law. The guard seems to take pleasure in decreeing harsh and arbitrary rules for the prisoners.*



*As the four men compare notes, it seems that the authorities have been systematic in both denying the prisoners basic rights and in refusing to present a reason for detainment (or, in the case of Todd, a compelling, evidence-based reason for detainment). The authorities seem to know what they're looking for and to be ready to perceive what they find in a single given way.*



*Again, it seems that there is a pervasive assumption among the guards that the men are affiliated with terrorists and thus don't deserve basic rights—even though this assumption is based on prejudice rather than fact.*



*Not only do the guards refuse to respect the Muslim dietary requirements of Nasser and Zeitoun, but this requirement seems to be only one more reason to suspect the two.*



*All throughout Zeitoun's imprisonment, one thing that will not leave him is his religious faith and conviction that he should do God's will. This contrasts with the negative and antagonistic views the guards seem to hold of Islam.*





There's little space to sleep, but Zeitoun wants to stay awake on the off chance that a supervisor or lawyer might pass by. The others struggle to sleep in the confined space and with the engine blaring. Every so often the guard shines his flashlight in, illuminating the exhausted, confused faces inside the cage.

*Zeitoun, stubborn as always, continues to believe that with just enough perseverance he'll be able to explain his case and eventually be freed. He still has faith in the American ideal of "innocent until proven guilty."*



## PART 4: WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 7

In the morning a new guard arrives, and seems similarly convinced of the men's guilt. But Zeitoun grows more optimistic as the day goes on, assuming that the city will stabilize and order will be restored. As soon as he can call Kathy, she'll find a lawyer and sort everything out.

*Like Kathy, Zeitoun clings to the hope that Katrina can't have entirely done away with the existing system of law and order, and that it will only be a matter of time before the regular pathways of justice reemerge.*



Breakfast includes ham slices, so Zeitoun and Nasser can't eat much again. Zeitoun begins to examine the new wire and portable toilets of the chainlink structure. It must have taken a great deal of manpower to move and construct this so recently after the storm. Within a day of the storm officials must have already been making plans for this makeshift prison. At the same time, he knew, thousands of residents were stranded in the city.

*Again, the guards appear uninterested in or even actively disapproving of Zeitoun's and Nasser's religious beliefs and practices. Zeitoun, of course, is also a successful contractor and builder, so he is well situated to understand just how many resources it must have taken to build the prison—rather than using these resource for rescue efforts.*



Around midday, buses arrive at the station, bringing about thirty prisoners from the Jefferson Parish and Kenner jails—they had been in prison before the storm. With their orange uniforms, the similarity to Guantánamo Bay is even more striking.

*Guantánamo Bay is terrifying to Zeitoun because many of its prisoners remain there for years without being charged for a crime, in a kind of legal limbo.*



Ham sandwiches are served again for lunch, so again Zeitoun and Nasser do not eat. The presence of dogs is a constant, often barking threateningly at some prisoner. One prisoner mentions Abu Ghraib and the infamous photos of torture, wondering if it'll happen to them. Nasser can't believe the guards really think they're terrorists, but Todd rolls his eyes. The four of them are alone in a cell while everyone else is crammed together—they're clearly thought to be important prisoners.

*The dire conditions of imprisonment are exacerbated for Zeitoun and Nasser given that they're growing weaker every day, without access to proper nourishment. The lack of legal structure and the guards' perverse enjoyment of harsh practice seems to recall a situation of prisoners of war more than anything else.*



In the afternoon, one guard gives a cigarette to a prisoner in the cage next to Zeitoun's, and then returns to the station and reappears with a television crew from Spain, who conducts an interview. When the reporter approaches Zeitoun with the microphone, the guard yells not to speak to that one. Todd marvels that the prisoner has been bribed, but Zeitoun has a glimmer of hope that the footage might reach his brother in Málaga. It's difficult for him to want his family to see him like this, though, being mistreated and gawked at in a cage—the greatest shame he's ever been subjected to.

Later that day a white middle-aged prisoner is brought into the cage with Zeitoun and the others. He looks clean and put together, unlike many of those who had stayed during the storm. He is friendly and gregarious. He introduces himself as Jerry, and tells them that he's in prison for siphoning gas from a neighbor's car when his was found, undamaged but out of gas. It was an honest misunderstanding, he says, but Zeitoun wonders why he's so cheerful, and why he's been put in their cage, rather than in one of the empty ones.

Jerry asks the four others how they've gotten here. Then he starts to ask more pointed questions to Zeitoun and Nasser, questions which don't flow from the conversation. He talks disparagingly about the U.S. and about George W. Bush, and about the competence of the U.S. military and the wisdom of U.S. foreign policy. Though Todd responds, Zeitoun and Nasser remain quiet: Zeitoun is suspicious about Jerry's intentions.

Suddenly, a young prisoner in his mid-twenties starts chanting, his knees drawn to his chest, "Be nice to your mom!" The others in his cage are annoyed, but the man is clearly disabled in some way. He seems to be in a kind of trance state. Then he starts pacing the cage, which the guards have forbidden. The guard yells at him to stop moving, but the man doesn't realize he's being addressed, and then touches the fence—making the guard enraged. The guard gets a colleague and they open the cage with something that looks like a fire extinguisher. They tie his feet with plastic handcuffs and then spray him head to toe with what Todd says is pepper spray, as the man screams like a child. Another guard dumps a bucket of water on the man and leaves him screaming and moaning on the pavement, before dragging him back to the cage.

*Access to the media is granted, but remains extremely limited, suggesting that freedom of the press is another right done away with at this makeshift prison—especially, it appears, when those suspected of terrorist-related activity are concerned. Still, Zeitoun knows just how committed his brother Ahmad will be to keeping in touch and trying to ascertain where Zeitoun could be, so this might bring them one step closer. He had hoped his siblings would see him in the proud position of helping others, but now he is almost afraid of them seeing him in such an undignified state.*



*Zeitoun was quick to realize what the "evidence" of his and the others' possessions would mean for the authorities. Here, too, he's able to get inside the heads of his accusers by beginning to suspect that they've placed a mole in the cell with the prisoners, hoping to gain the kind of information that could condemn them and serve as a real reason to be charged.*



*Jerry seems to be making questions and asking comments meant to provoke a similarly derisive, negative response about the American military and foreign policy. Knowing that anything they say could be used against them, especially as Middle Easterners, Nasser and Zeitoun are wary.*



*This anecdote is a shocking example of the breakdown of justice within the makeshift legal infrastructure at the bus station prison. The man involved is obviously mentally unwell, and should clearly be in a hospital setting or at home, rather than in a prison, much less one with as few resources to deal with mental illness as this one. The guards' response to the man's behavior seems not only thoughtless but sadistic, using much more violence than is needed and seeming unconcerned about the pain and harm being done to the man. People are essentially being treated like animals here—cages and all.*



Tonight there are more prisoners, more agitation, and soon the pepper spray comes out again. Zeitoun is reminded of seeing elephants in a Lebanese circus pass through Jableh as a boy: the trainers would prod or punish the animals with large steel hooks. These guards are used to maximum-security prisoners, and now they're using their harsh tactics on a totally different kind of animal: prisoners only guilty of curfew violations or trespassing.

Zeitoun feels enormously guilty: he knows Kathy was right, and he should have left when she told him to. He could endure anything if he could only call her. Zeitoun can't imagine why he's not allowed a phone call—it seems purely punitive, a combination of opportunity, cruelty, and ambivalence, just like the pepper-spraying of the disabled man.

Exhausted and angry, Zeitoun now begins to have wild, tenuous thoughts of escape. He wonders if something awful could happen to him here. He thinks of the disabled man throughout the night, knowing that he normally would have leapt to such a man's defense, but here he couldn't. He feels that such actions diminish the humanity of all of them.

*Here, Zeitoun's past gives him not consoling memories but a sobering comparison between the circus's treatment of animals and the guards' treatment of human beings. Zeitoun proposes one possible reason for this, which is that the guards are overreacting to a largely nonexistent threat.*



*After brushing off Kathy's concern for so long, Zeitoun knows that she must be frantic with worry. This feeling of guilt is collapsed into a feeling of anger and blame towards the guards whose treatment of the prisoners seems irrationally harsh.*



*Zeitoun is used to thinking rationally, planning ahead, and persevering through various challenges. This is the first time that his thinking starts to take wilder paths, showing just how desperate he feels at the prison. His thoughts on the indignity of the situation encapsulate the point Eggers seems to be making.*



## PART 4: THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 8

Zeitoun wakes to screams and curses, as guards are shooting the pepper spray through the fencing, so that it spreads to all the prisoners. The splinter in Zeitoun's foot is now infected and he can't put any weight on it. He only needs a sterile needle or even knife to remove whatever is lodged inside his foot, but no one has anything. That morning, a man in scrubs wearing a stethoscope emerges from the station; Zeitoun calls, "Doctor!" to him, but the man says he's not a doctor, and keeps walking.

With breakfast (again with bacon) there is also a bottle of Tabasco, which Zeitoun breaks into shards on the cement. With one of them he cuts the swollen area of his foot and pries out a metal sliver, immediately feeling relief.

That afternoon the guards switch from pepper-spraying to using a beanbag gun on prisoners. Meanwhile, Jerry keeps trying to engage Zeitoun and Nasser, asking them about Syria, their careers, their visits home. Zeitoun is increasingly unsettled. Later Todd would insist that Jerry was a spy meant to glean information. Zeitoun thinks he must have been very dedicated, to eat outside and sleep in the cage with the inmates. That night Zeitoun has a new pain in his side, which prevents him from sleeping yet again.

*In other cases, a new day has been the opportunity for Zeitoun to feel more optimistically about his situation, but this time, he awakens only to be faced with multiple reminders of his desperate situation. Like the military fan boats that seemed uninterested in actually rescuing victims, the doctor is similarly indifferent to Zeitoun's suffering.*



*Without access to a doctor, Zeitoun is forced to take medical matters into his own hands in a scene that is excruciating even to read about.*



*The guards seem to have switched tools merely for fun, to combat their own boredom. Jerry's questions seem to confirm the suspicions of Zeitoun regarding the reasons he and the others have been detained—Jerry is clearly trying to get them to say something that would actually justify their imprisonment.*



## PART 4: FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 9

Today, Zeitoun and the others are told that they'll be moving out of what they've called "**Camp Greyhound**." Zeitoun is handcuffed to another prisoner and told to board a simple old school bus. No one is told where they're going, and Jerry is gone.

They drive north out of the city and Zeitoun sees a mass of dry land for the first time since the storm. Forty miles on, Zeitoun sees a sign for St. Gabriel. For Zeitoun this is a good sign: in Islam, Gabriel is the archangel who revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad—the same angel who spoke to the Virgin Mary in the Bible and foretold the birth of Jesus.

The bus slows and Zeitoun sees a sign: the "Elayn Hunt Correctional Center," a maximum-security prison. Most of the men on the bus don't seem surprised. All the one-story red brick buildings are laid out in orderly grids, surrounded by barbed wire-topped fences.

Upon entering, Zeitoun is greeted by two polite women who ask him about his health, medications, and food restrictions. They seem professional and respectful, and Zeitoun hopes this means that he'll finally get his phone call. He removes his clothing in another room with a dozen other prisoners and is given an orange jumpsuit. They drive through the complex to the last block, a high-security section.

Zeitoun is placed in a cement block, six by eight feet, with Nasser. The two barely speak, realizing that their trouble has grown far more serious, especially now that the two Syrian Americans have been isolated. Zeitoun is convinced that his one phone call will free him: people all over New Orleans know him, as he's successful there. But the guards keep finding new ways to deny him, saying the phone's broken, maybe tomorrow, or that he's not "their" prisoner. He hasn't been processed traditionally and isn't assigned to Hunt long-term, so he's not bound by standard operating procedure—instead, as he's told, he's "FEMA's problem," since the organization is simply renting space to hold these men.

The pain in Zeitoun's side is worse, becoming a throbbing ache, but he continues to think mainly of Kathy, and by how much she must be suffering. In the middle of the night, he remembers the Qur'an passage called *al-Takwir* or "The Darkening," which speaks of the importance of trusting in God at the darkest moments on earth.

*"Camp Greyhound," which sounds benign enough, is an ironic name for a place that has become so grim. Even leaving it is the occasion for more confusion rather than resolution.*



*St. Gabriel is the name of a small town outside Baton Rouge, Louisiana—but for Zeitoun, who is always willing to see God's work in everything, it is a small comfort. This is yet another reminder of the similarities between Islam and other religions.*



*The memory of the religious Saint Gabriel consoles Zeitoun briefly, but he is soon forced to face his new reality: no longer a makeshift prison but a full, permanent establishment.*



*Zeitoun's experience with the authorities thus far has been one of indifference or outright hostility, and even a casual example of kindness feels far more positive. But it seems that Zeitoun's optimistic outlook is not to result in better treatment or any real change in his circumstances.*



*Once again, Zeitoun finds himself imprisoned without knowing if he'll be given a chance to defend himself or even to contact the outside world. The basic legal right of a phone call is again denied to him. It appears at this point that Zeitoun and Nasser are in legal limbo—they're housed in a prison complex belonging to one system but as the responsibility of another system, and with these two systems seemingly unable to communicate, two innocent men are caught between them.*



*In his darkest moments, Zeitoun's thoughts turn to Kathy, as he recognizes how much she must be suffering in his absence. Like her, he doesn't know what will happen to him, and instead chooses to put his faith in God.*



## PART 4: SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 10

The lights come on at 3 a.m., and Zeitoun and Nasser pray. Breakfast is sausage, which they can't eat, and nearly inedible eggs. They sit side by side, barely talking, and again the guard that passes by ignores Zeitoun's request for a phone call. When the guard returns, he makes a suggestive glance at Zeitoun and Nasser, implying that they are romantically involved. Zeitoun is enraged.

At midday, Zeitoun is brought to a small office to be photographed, and the photographer starts shouting at Zeitoun for looking at him the wrong way. Later that day, the guard from that morning passes by and asks what Zeitoun and Nasser are up to, saying he thought "that" was against their religion. Zeitoun starts cursing and threatens the guard, who is shocked at this perceived insubordination.

*Again, no one seems to care about Zeitoun's and Nasser's religious restrictions for their diet, meaning that they're growing weaker every day. In addition, the two are subjected to humiliating, hurtful treatment by the guards, who seem to take pleasure in this behavior.*



*Except for the two women checking Zeitoun into the prison, everyone he's come into contact with is openly hostile towards him, and it seems there's nothing he can do to combat such treatment. For the first time he isn't meek and polite, but here lashes out at the unfairness.*



## PART 4: SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 11

In the morning four African-American men are added to the cell. There's not room for all of them to sit, so they rotate every hour. They had been picked up in New Orleans after the storm, two of them in situations like Zeitoun's. One of them was a sanitation worker from Houston, whose company had been contracted to begin the cleanup after the storm. He was picked up and handcuffed while returning to his hotel one day, and seems the most bemused of all of them. It made no difference that he was in uniform and had his ID and keys to his truck—he was still charged with looting.

Zeitoun learns that many of the men had been brought to a makeshift court in the office at **Camp Greyhound** with a judge and at least one lawyer, were told their charges, and offered a deal: if they didn't contest the charges, they'd get a misdemeanor and would have to perform community service. Some who accepted this were immediately brought to the police station downtown to begin repairing the offices.

Zeitoun's pain in his side is growing worse and worse. He flags down the nurse who pushes a cart of medicine through the cellblock once a day, and she says he'll have to see the doctor. She gives him the form, which he fills out and hands back to her.

*As the men swap stories, it becomes clear that Zeitoun's case is not an isolated one, but rather an example of broader dysfunction and breakdown of legal justice in the days after the storm. It seems that racial prejudice is at play here as well, with authorities choosing to believe that one of the black men must be a looter even despite clear, obvious evidence to the contrary. The media's racially-biased portrayals of "looting" here have personal and devastating effects.*



*Unlike Zeitoun, many of these men actually did participate in some semblance of a court hearing, but it seems that even this kind of hearing was more of a sham, meaning that innocent men could be tricked into confessing guilt in order to avoid the possibility of serving jail time.*



*In addition to the broader problem of his imprisonment, Zeitoun now has to deal with a specific physical issue, one made far more complicated by his situation.*





That evening, the prisoners swap stories they've heard. The thousands from Orleans Parish Prison, including many imprisoned for misdemeanors like shoplifting and public intoxication, had been left on an overpass for three days, sitting in their own excrement and garbage, surrounded by guards with automatic rifles. They were then brought to the football stadium where they were held without any kind of shelter for days, murderers and rapists together with DUIs. There were no bathrooms, pillows, or dry clothing.

*The stories shared by some of these prisoners provide shocking examples of the breakdown in the social fabric of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. There was a failure in basic human rights for prisoners, as well as a failure to understand the implications of clearly last-minute decisions like housing the entire prison population in one undersupplied place.*



## PART 4: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 12

Today the other four men are removed from the cell and Zeitoun and Nasser are alone again, profoundly bored. Zeitoun tries to figure out why anyone had paid attention to them in the first place. In the past, Kathy has worried about soldiers returning to the U.S. after Iraq and Afghanistan, half-joking that they're trained to kill people like Zeitoun. She worries about a war that doesn't seem to have a real shape or rules.

*In addition to some of the more frightening aspects of Zeitoun's detainment, much of his time in prison is also just deathly boring. This boredom gives Zeitoun plenty of time to go over the possible motivations for his imprisonment, none of which makes him optimistic.*



In 1987, in the midst of a war between Iran and Iraq, Zeitoun had been working on a ship called the *Andromeda* bringing Kuwaiti oil to Japan. Sometimes one nation or the other tried to blockade or damage ships bringing oil to their enemy, and Zeitoun and his shipmates knew that it was a risky move to enter the Gulf of Oman. One morning Zeitoun was woken by an explosion below: the ship had been struck by Iranian torpedoes, as a warning and to hobble the ship. While they spent a month repairing the hull in Addan, Zeitoun decided that this might be the best time to settle down and build a family. A few months later, he departed the *Andromeda* in Houston.

*The long periods of time in which Zeitoun is left alone also give him the chance to return to his past. Zeitoun is no stranger to danger and risk, as this anecdote about the ship reveals. The recollection also underlines Zeitoun's ability to keep calm and rational even in a crisis. Most significantly, it's suggested that Zeitoun believed his days of endangerment were behind him once he left the *Andromeda* and settled down in America. Now, however, it seems this was not to be.*



## PART 4: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 13

Zeitoun can't imagine how long his case might stretch out, but it doesn't seem like any change is imminent. He's had no contact with anyone from outside, and the prison is so isolated that there appears not to be any oversight. He can only hope to give his name to every prisoner he might meet, to increase his chances of Kathy hearing about him should the prisoner be released. But he can't truly believe that others will be convinced he's innocent.

*At least at Camp Greyhound, Zeitoun had a sense that people were coming and going from the outside world, and there might be a chance for him to contact Kathy. Here, it appears that he's been forgotten, left to languish in a prison without any recourse to legal action or even the ability to contact his family.*



Zeitoun isn't given to conspiracy theories, but given the last few days, he starts to fear that he might be taken to a secret prison abroad, even Guantánamo Bay. He's heard about Muslim men being suspected by the U.S. government which, under the Patriot Act, is now allowed to seize them anywhere in the world and bring them anywhere without charging them with a crime. Some, he knows, would immediately suspect two Syrians paddling around in New Orleans after the storm. Zeitoun doesn't want to believe this about his adopted country, which he loves, but he can't rid his mind of these stories.

*The Patriot Act gave the U.S. government expanded authority to work against terrorism, but has been controversial for what many see as an infringement on people's civil rights. Zeitoun shows here how conflicted he feels about his adopted country: he appreciates the opportunities that living in the U.S. has given him, and yet he is frustrated by its continued attitude of intolerance and prejudice.*



#### PART 4: WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 14

Zeitoun can now barely breathe in certain positions. He waves down the nurse as she wheels her cart by to ask if she's given the doctor his form. She says she did and she'd hear back soon. Nasser tells Zeitoun that he looks bad, and is too thin. It strikes Zeitoun that the pain could simply be from sorrow rather than infection or injury—a manifestation of his anger and sense of helplessness.

*The problems stemming from bureaucracy and lack of communication have reached every level. Zeitoun's confinement is not only emotionally strenuous but now also physically dangerous, although the two are in many ways connected.*



#### PART 4: THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 15

Again, Zeitoun flags down the nurse, who doesn't remember Zeitoun's earlier request. She says the doctor probably didn't get the form, so Zeitoun fills it out again. He doesn't see her for the next few days.

*This is another example of the indifference shown to Zeitoun's well-being, even when it's not outright hostility.*



Zeitoun begins to feel faint from not eating enough, given that so many meals have pork, and he's often too distressed to eat anyway. That afternoon Zeitoun is handcuffed and taken into another, empty cell, where it is even grimmer to be without Nasser.

*Zeitoun's physical and emotional states have grown even more intertwined. This will only be exacerbated by solitary confinement, which is known to be agonizing.*



Zeitoun tries to remember what the life insurance policy he had taken out would amount to, and wishes he had taken out a larger one. He's sure that by now Kathy would have checked the value.

*As Zeitoun thinks back to his family, he understands that they must have no other choice than to begin imagining life without him—as indeed we know they are.*



Thinking this through, Zeitoun grows enraged at the police, the jailors, and even Ronnie, who was more of a stranger to him than the others. Even if he were to get out of prison immediately, his daughters, he realizes, will be scarred knowing that their father had been imprisoned, and subjected to shameful treatment.

*Zeitoun's guilt and shame now turn to anger, as he rails against the unfairness of his situation. This anger is coupled with helplessness, in that there's no way he can get out of his wrongful imprisonment on his own.*



## PART 4: FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 16

After lunch, the prisoners are allowed outside for the first time in a week. Zeitoun tries to jog, but he feels light-headed, and instead swaps stories with other prisoners. One man was moving furniture in his house just after the storm hit. The police broke in and beat him up when he said he was innocent. A few days later he came to the station to complain, and was arrested there.

Another prisoner told the story of Merlene Maten, which he had just seen on TV. Maten was in her seventies and a deaconess at a Baptist church. She and her husband had checked into a hotel downtown before the storm, since it was on higher ground. After three days, Maten went downstairs to get food from the car, and was walking back to the hotel when the police yelled and accosted her. A deli had just been looted, and she was charged with stealing \$63.50 worth of groceries. Her bail was set at \$50,000, 100 times the usual amount for bail. She was brought to **Greyhound** and then to Hunt's sister prison, and was only freed with the help of a private attorney, volunteer lawyers, and the AARP, who convinced a judge that a seventy-year-old staying at a hotel would not need to steal sausages—the deli didn't even sell the sausages she was carrying.

Late that afternoon, Zeitoun hears a group of guards enter the cellblock and pound down each door. He doesn't show any opposition, but the men, dressed like a SWAT team, still burst in, push him to the wall, and handcuff him. They bring him into the hallway for another full, naked-body search. Then they throw him back into the cell and move onto the next.

## PART 4: SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 17

Zeitoun has trouble sleeping but then spends his days exhausted. He still feels guilty for having remained in the city, and ridiculous for having a sense that God had put him there to do good deeds. As a result he's put his family in danger. For so long he's been a model citizen, but he put himself out on a limb with this role.

Zeitoun has always had faith that the machinery of government functioned in the United States, but now every piece of that machinery seems to be devouring anything in its path. It no longer seems like the police and military are acting on behalf of citizens, or are kept in check by regulations, laws, and decency.

*We see yet another anecdote of mind-boggling levels of institutional incompetence and unfairness, as the authorities seem to have lost the ability to judge between law-abiding and law-breaking citizens, and seem not to care about anyone who might get caught in the crossfire.*



*This is a particularly egregious example of the breakdown of law and justice after Hurricane Katrina. The other stories that Zeitoun has heard have been appalling, but this one is almost absurd. The combined factors of Maten's age, her obvious "upstanding" status, and the ridiculousness of the disconnect between the charges against her and the high bail, all show how desperate the situation is for many New Orleans residents. That Maten was only freed through a near-army of people defending her underlines how difficult it has become to get out from a legal bind such as Zeitoun's.*



*The guards entering the cells of Zeitoun and others seem prepared to deal with hardened criminals, and are expecting resistance and a fight—they don't seem to care that Zeitoun obviously doesn't fulfill that expectation.*



*Although Zeitoun understands that many of his difficulties have stemmed from prejudice and legal breakdown, he still, as usual, wants to claim responsibility for his own actions.*



*At the same time, Zeitoun struggles to reconcile his idealistic view of American government and social life with his first-hand experience of the way the system has worked for him.*



Zeitoun thinks of the term “bycatch,” a fishing term for the thousands of creatures that they’d pull in off the coast of Jableh along with the sardines. Sometimes they wouldn’t know until it was too late, and the creatures—one time a dolphin—were dead.

Zeitoun has been confined 23 hours a day to his cell, unable to work, read, build, or do anything else. He realizes that an unconscious part of his motivations had been to live up to his brother Mohammed—but now he thinks he risked too much. He wonders if his imprisonment is God’s way of tempering his pride. Zeitoun prays late at night for his family and for a messenger to tell his wife he’s alive.

*This memory serves as a metaphor for the way that the government is casting a wide net in trying to catch those they want, sacrificing many innocents along the way.*



*Solitary confinement is usually considered a harsh punishment, and is now even being banned in many prisons for being overly severe. Zeitoun acknowledges the more self-serving side of his motivations in wanting to help others, as he also wonders if there is a larger purpose or meaning to his confinement.*



## PART 4: SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 18

Part of Zeitoun has given up, and he feels disappointed in himself. He thinks he hears the nurse’s cart being wheeled down the hallway, but when he peers down, there’s a man he’s never seen before pushing a cart of black books. It’s a missionary, carrying Bibles. Zeitoun waves him down. Though the missionary asks if Zeitoun would like to hear about Jesus Christ, Zeitoun simply begs him to call his wife, telling him that he committed no crime. The missionary acts like he often hears such stories. Zeitoun says he knows he must be difficult to believe, but he asks if he can just write down Kathy’s cell phone number. The missionary says this is against the rules, but he tears out a page from the Bible to write down the number.

For the first time in days, Zeitoun feels hopeful, imagining Kathy’s reaction when she finds out that he’s alive. Zeitoun struggles to sleep that night, grateful that he’s found his messenger.

*Just when Zeitoun is struggling with himself over whether to give up hope or continue to be optimistic, a missionary—“mission” comes from the Latin for “send”—seems actually sent from God, not to convert Zeitoun but to aid him in the quest that has begun to seem so hopeless. Of course, there’s no way for Zeitoun to convince his missionary that he, unlike others who probably say the same thing, is innocent. He can only trust and have faith that the missionary will follow through on his agreement to call Kathy.*



*This time, Zeitoun’s struggle to sleep is not out of desperation but out of anticipation that something might change.*



## PART 4: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 19

That morning guards open Zeitoun’s cell, handcuff him, and lead him down the hall without telling him what will happen. He’s led outside and into a white van, which drives him to the main prison office. Outside the office he sees Nasser, Todd and Ronnie in the hallway. Zeitoun looks at them, bewildered, and is led past them into a small room.

Two men who say they’re from the Department of Homeland Security greet Zeitoun and ask him what he does for a living, and why he hadn’t left the city in the storm. Zeitoun answers truthfully, and is struck by the men’s politeness. At the end they apologize for what he’s been through and ask what they can do for him. He asks them to call Kathy, and they say they will.

*Much of Zeitoun’s movements in these weeks after his arrest are confusing, as no one tells him where he’s being sent, just as he’s never told why he’s there in the first place. It seems that it’s the same case for the other three men as well.*



*Like the women checking Zeitoun into the prison, and unlike most other authority figures, these men are suddenly cordial enough to make Zeitoun even more confused about why he’s been subjected to such arbitrary suffering.*



Kathy is still beside herself, having gotten the call from the missionary only a few hours before, when she receives another call from a man from the Department of Homeland Security. The man tells her that Zeitoun is at Hunt prison and that they have no more interest in him. Kathy asks what he was in there for. The man says that “looting” is on his arrest sheet, but those charges will be dropped.

Kathy praises God and embraces Yuko. They make plans to get the kids out of school early, and Kathy immediately decides to leave that day for the prison. She calls Hunt to try to reach Zeitoun, but the woman says she has no record of that name. She says that they have no records of anyone who came because of the hurricane—those people are “FEMA’s.”

Kathy almost collapses—she doesn’t have a number for the man from Homeland Security, and now she doesn’t know how to get back in touch. She decides she has to go in person and demand to see him or be told where he’s been taken. Yuko and Ahmaad are unsure: Kathy isn’t certain that Zeitoun is there, or if she’ll be allowed to visit, or where she would stay. Kathy begins to cry again, and Yuko and Ahmaad convince her to stay in Phoenix until she’s sure she can actually help her husband.

Kathy calls a lawyer, Raleigh Ohlmeyer, who had helped some of Zeitoun’s workers with legal issues before and who deals with cases from traffic tickets to criminal defense. There’s no answer, so she leaves a message. Kathy calls Ahmad in Spain and cries that Zeitoun is alive. Ahmaad is thrilled, but grows somber when Kathy says he’s in prison. He tells Kathy she needs to go get him out. Zeitoun’s sister in Jableh calls soon after, and tells Kathy the same thing.

Raleigh calls Kathy back and tells him about Zeitoun, whom Raleigh has just seen in his **canoe** on the local news. Raleigh tells her that he’s been working with prisoners from a makeshift office in Baton Rouge. The system has broken down, he says, and while he promises to get Zeitoun released, he can’t guarantee when.

*Having narrated Zeitoun’s experiences over the past few weeks, Eggers now returns to Kathy where we left her, at the first moment at which it seems like she has a hint for a way to find her husband (as well as some kind of proof that he’s alive and well). Zeitoun’s charge shows just how arbitrary and vague the crime of “looting” could be—and this applies to hundreds of others similarly arrested or demonized.*



*As with a number of other examples of post-Katrina bureaucracy, this anecdote shows the level of chaos in FEMA’s response to the hurricane, as well as the institutional lags that make any attempt to get through to a real human being so difficult.*



*Just as Kathy had seemed to have a plan and a way of finding her husband, her attempts are thwarted once again. Although Kathy hates feeling helpless and out of control, she has to accept that it would be just as difficult for her to track down Zeitoun even if she were to fly straight to New Orleans and search for him on the ground.*



*Kathy and Zeitoun’s broad web of contacts throughout New Orleans will hopefully be helpful as Kathy tries to find any way she can of tracking down her husband. Zeitoun’s family is more somber, knowing that his imprisonment prompts a number of new issues.*



*The local news is clearly lagging behind the latest updates, as it is only now—weeks after Zeitoun has been arrested—that the news of his rescue program has been aired. Raleigh explicitly acknowledges the breakdown of justice that Zeitoun has been experiencing first-hand.*





**PART 4: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 20**

In the morning Ahmad calls back and tells Kathy not to tell the other siblings that Zeitoun is in prison—it'll only make them worry more. But he asks which prison he's in, and Kathy explains what Raleigh had told her. Ahmad is fearful about what Abdulrahman's Syrian nationality could mean for his chances. He includes Kathy on an email to the San Gabriel police department, asking if Zeitoun is all right. Kathy tries to prevent herself from imagining the consequences if Zeitoun is tied to terrorism, even without merit.

*Ahmad knows that the rest of the family, being so far away, will only feel more helpless knowing that there's nothing they can do about Zeitoun's imprisonment. Ahmad himself, though, refuses to accept any lack of agency, and continues to make inquiries. Kathy's worries about terrorism assumptions have by now been validated by Zeitoun's own experience.*

**PART 4: THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 22**

Raleigh calls Kathy to tell her that he's been to Hunt, and they've confirmed that Zeitoun is there. When Kathy calls Ahmad, he says she has to go herself, since no one has actually seen Zeitoun. Ahmad says he'll fly to New Orleans himself, but Kathy tells him not to—he could be arrested too.

*Finally, Kathy knows exactly where Zeitoun is, though even this knowledge is accompanied by a renewed sense of helplessness, since she still has no way of actually seeing him.*

**PART 4: FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 23**

Finally Raleigh tells Kathy that it could be helpful for her to come to Baton Rouge to assist his attempts to get Zeitoun's case dismissed. She calls Adnan, Zeitoun's cousin, who is relieved to hear that Zeitoun is all right. He tells Kathy she can stay with him and his wife in an apartment they've rented for the month.

*Kathy relies once again on her broad web of family and other connections. She can do this because the couple had become so enmeshed in their larger community in the years before they had to rely on it.*

**PART 4: SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 25**

Kathy is fearful as the plane descends into New Orleans, flying low over the city so that, according to the pilot's voice over the intercom, passengers can see the damage. The airport is full of security officers, police, and National Guardsmen, though few civilians. Adnan picks her up and drives her to the apartment in Baton Rouge, where Kathy immediately falls asleep.

*The damage from Hurricane Katrina is unprecedented in its scale and scope, leading the pilot to point the passengers to their unique view from the sky. Life is far from normal even weeks after the storm, as is apparent from the airport devoid of civilians.*

**PART 4: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 26**

Zeitoun knows nothing about what Kathy and Raleigh are doing, and he can only hope that the missionary and Homeland Security followed through. After lunch he is brought to a small cinderblock room, a makeshift courthouse. A young man introduces himself to Zeitoun as the public defender. Zeitoun immediately begins to explain his case and asks to call his wife. The defender tells him that this is just a hearing to set bail, not to be judged.

*While his wife has been busy trying to get him freed, Zeitoun can only continue to trust and have faith in God as well as in the few people who have promised to call Kathy as he'd asked. This is the first time Zeitoun gets some kind of court hearing, although in this case it doesn't seem to be a positive development.*



The charges against Zeitoun, for possession of stolen property, are read aloud, and the prosecutor suggests setting bail at \$150,000. The public defender counters with \$35,000, and the judge sets the bail at \$75,000: then it's over. Zeitoun again asks for a phone call, asking why they should set bail when no one knows he's in prison. He gets no answer.

*The public defender is most likely overwhelmed with cases in the aftermath of Katrina, but for the individual case of Zeitoun, it seems especially irrational and absurd to have a bail hearing without anyone who could pay the bail knowing about it..*



## PART 4: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 27

Raleigh calls Kathy to tell her that there's finally a court date. He asks Kathy to gather as many character witnesses as she can to come to court and testify. Afterward, she realizes she's forgotten to ask where the courthouse is. Raleigh isn't answering, so she calls the district attorney's office, where the woman who answers says that there's no court right now. The woman transfers her to another man, who says that where court hearings are being held is privileged information. She protests that it's a public court, and she's the prisoner's wife, but to no avail. The third person she talks to says the same thing.

*Initially, Raleigh's call suggests that there is finally a path forward for Kathy to be able to see her husband and eventually free him—but then Kathy is faced directly with the kind of bureaucracy that Zeitoun has been struggling against since his incarceration. Though Kathy has had to deal with being out of control already, this combination of incompetence, indifference, and hostility is on another level.*



Kathy begins to cry again, furious at the levels of bureaucracy and incompetence. After calming down, she calls CNN and tells a producer her story—the producer says she will investigate.

*The one way Kathy can regain control over her situation is to publicize it, as per her general attitude in not being afraid to voice her opinion.*



Raleigh calls Kathy back and apologizes, saying that he's found out that the hearing will be held at Hunt the next day. Kathy calls friends and clients, and eventually seven people say they'll come.

*Finally the situation is resolved, and Kathy seems one step closer to seeing her husband again.*



Zeitoun is again handcuffed and taken out of his room to meet Raleigh. He smiles and says he wants out. Raleigh tells him that Zeitoun can either pay \$75,000, and be refunded if he won his case, or pay about \$10,000 total and lose that amount either way. Raleigh agrees with Zeitoun that the bail is about 100 times what it should be. It seems silly to Zeitoun to throw away \$10,000, so he asks Raleigh to try to reduce it, or to see if he can use his property as bail.

*For the first time Zeitoun is allowed to see a lawyer, and he is relieved to interact with someone from the outside world, especially his former life. The wildly inflated bail amounts complicate his imprisonment even more, though Zeitoun continues to act rationally and think his options through.*



Now that Zeitoun knows that Kathy and his family know he's alive, he doesn't think it's worth it to get free a few days early, especially when he can't work.

*As usual, Zeitoun always puts his work and responsibilities first (along with his family).*



## PART 4: WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 28

Kathy holds her breath as she drives into Hunt. The friends begin to trickle in: Rob and Walt, a woman whose house Zeitoun had renovated, and the principal at the girls' school, among others. They all look tired and somber, but hopeful that the judge will pay attention to them vouching for Zeitoun's character.

*Kathy is cheered by the fact that so many people would come to vouch for her husband's character. This seems to validate her fight against his wrongful imprisonment even more.*



Raleigh is confident that the witnesses, along with Zeitoun's lack of prior infractions, bode well for the case. They wait through the morning, and finally Raleigh goes to see what is happening: the hearing has been canceled with no explanation. Now Kathy has to go back into the city to find papers proving ownership of the office building, to be used as collateral against the bond for bail.

*The bureaucratic nightmares that have plagued anyone interacting with the legal system after Katrina continue here, in an exasperating waste of everyone's time. But Kathy refuses to give up, and instead moves on to her second plan, as she prepares to enter the city for the first time since the storm.*



Adnan drives Kathy into the city, where they are immediately struck by an overpowering, acrid, and rotten smell. The city looks like it's been abandoned for decades; there's debris everywhere. The streets are deserted until a police cruiser pulls up behind them. Kathy tells Adnan to let her talk, so as not to provoke any more questions from his Middle Eastern accent. She tells the officer that she's going back to her house to assess the damage, and when he asks what Adnan's doing, she quickly says they're contractors and hands the officer her card. He lets them go.

*As Adnan and Kathy pass through the post-apocalyptic landscape of New Orleans after Katrina, Kathy continues to be acutely aware of the possible difficulties stemming from prejudice and paranoia, especially given that she now knows the Department of Homeland Security was "interested" in her husband for unknown reasons, presumably having to do with terrorism.*



They continue on to Dublin, where Kathy is shocked that the fire had stopped only a few yards from their building. The lock is rusted and Kathy's key doesn't work. Adnan finds a ladder and climbs up to the second-floor window, then goes downstairs and kicks down the door. Inside, the building is ruined: the ceiling dotted with holes, a gray sludge covering the floor, the smell of mildew and sewage everywhere. Cockroaches are scurrying through the floors.

*Even Kathy and Zeitoun's familiar office building has to be broken into, showing how much the systems of the city have disintegrated as a result of the storm and the flooding. In only a few weeks, everything has changed—though Zeitoun did his best to keep his buildings safe from harm, it wasn't possible here.*



The file cabinets have moved, and the desk organizers are all over the floor, so Kathy makes a pile of the files that are unreadable, hoping that one might be enough proof of ownership. They search for an hour before finally finding the act of sale. Kathy cries, clutching it to her.

*Something as simple as finding a file becomes an epic enterprise, and another example of Kathy's need to persevere through all manner of obstacles in her path.*



They return to Raleigh's office in Baton Rouge, where Raleigh prepares the paperwork and faxes it to the bondsman, who confirms the payment. Raleigh calls Hunt to confirm, but it is 3 p.m., and the office has closed early, so Zeitoun has to spend one more night.

*After a number of other small bureaucratic steps, Zeitoun is excruciatingly close to freedom, although he doesn't know it—the authorities keep him in the dark, as usual.*



## PART 4: THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 29

In the morning, Kathy and Adnan drive to the prison before eight and gather in the waiting room. They wait until one p.m., when Kathy is told to wait for Zeitoun outside.

Zeitoun is in his cell praying when a guard calls to him. Zeitoun thinks that the guard can wait until his prayers have finished. When he's done, the guard tells him that he's getting out today. "What?" Zeitoun says, and the guard tells him to hurry up.

A white bus arrives at the gate, and as Kathy watches, her husband steps down onto the pavement. He's lost twenty pounds and his hair is almost all white. Kathy begins to cry, cursing those responsible. When Zeitoun sees Kathy he smiles and they try to embrace, but a guard yells at her to stay put until a few minutes later, when he is free. As they embrace, Kathy notices how thin and fragile he seems. His eyes are the same, though they look tired and defeated.

The three of them leave as quickly as possible, not trusting that the officers won't change their minds. Ten minutes later, Ahmad calls Kathy's phone and she tells him the good news, passing the phone to Zeitoun. Ahmad can only repeat, "Praise God."

*The last step before Zeitoun's freedom only underlines the senseless bureaucracy in his captivity.*



*Zeitoun has no way of knowing that freedom is awaiting him, and he's reached the point where he embraces any minor possibility to rebel against his helplessness.*



*The reunion between Kathy and Zeitoun is bittersweet, both joyful and frustrating, as Kathy sees physical evidence of how much Zeitoun has been mistreated and how much he has suffered during his imprisonment. Kathy has always loved Zeitoun's eyes, so it's particularly difficult to witness the defeat in them.*



*Ahmad has been the family member most directly involved in finding and freeing Zeitoun, but he too has little to say other than to express relief that Zeitoun is alive and safe.*



## PART 5: FALL 2008

As time goes on, Kathy feels that she is growing more forgetful, as if the wiring in her brain has frayed. She goes to the bank one day and, in the middle of writing a check, freezes, forgetting why she's there and what she's supposed to be doing. The teller says something, but she can't understand, though she tries to will herself to focus. Finally she returns to herself, and reassures the teller that she just spaced out for a minute. Kathy begins to forget facts, numbers, and dates, and has trouble concentrating.

In the fall of 2008, Zeitoun, Kathy, and their family move back into their old house on Dart, though it's been gutted and now expanded to give all the children their own rooms. The office on Dublin was totally lost, and now they plan to move their office into their home. They have lived in seven apartments since the storm. The Dublin office has been leveled and is now a parking lot, and the new house is still unfinished—they are tired.

*Three years after the storm, Eggers returns to the Zeitoun family to take stock of how they've recovered and of what has taken place since Zeitoun's wrongful imprisonment. The first example of what has changed is Kathy's personality. These changes are apparently physical aftershocks of the painful, stressful weeks when she was constantly on edge.*



*Much has changed for the Zeitoun family and business since Hurricane Katrina. Kathy has fulfilled her comforting promise to her children about the renovated bedrooms, though all this rebuilding and recovery has also been exhausting.*



Upon returning from Hunt, Kathy and Zeitoun had moved into the studio apartment of one of their rental units on New Orleans' West Bank, which had been undamaged. The first night, Zeitoun refused to talk about prison. He was ashamed, and wanted it erased. They said nothing for a long time, both of them feeling both thankful and bitter.

Though doctors could find no reason for the stabbing pain in Zeitoun's side, he had lost 22 pounds and much hair. Slowly he regained his strength and his pain went away, convincing Zeitoun that it had been caused by heartbreak more than anything.

Zeitoun and Kathy returned to their home on Dart not long after his release from prison. It smelled of sewage and dead animals, gaps in the roof had damaged the house even more, and everything they owned was filthy. They took the computer and some clothes away, along with the book of photos. Then Zeitoun knocked on the doors of the two houses where he had fed the dogs, but heard nothing. He stretched his plank onto the house on the right and climbed onto its roof. He found all the dogs lying together, dead, as if waiting for him.

After two weeks, Kathy and Zeitoun are ready to reunite with the kids in New Orleans. Zeitoun is nervous about seeing them in his physical state, but they are happily reunited in Phoenix, and drive back to New Orleans to the studio apartment.

One day Kathy receives a letter from FEMA, offering the Zeitouns a free two-bedroom trailer. In December 2005 an 18-wheeler pulls in to install it, but when Zeitoun returns from work, he sees that they haven't connected it to water or electricity, and it is installed on rickety cement blocks four feet from the ground, with no way to enter. No one left keys for the trailer either. Kathy calls FEMA, but no one does anything for a month. Then a pickup truck arrives to drop off a set of steps—but no key. Six weeks later, an inspector arrives with keys, but tells Kathy that the trailer is leaning and unsafe to use: someone will come fix it.

Zeitoun and Kathy begin to buy houses in their neighborhood, and soon began renovating some and renting others out. Meanwhile, the FEMA trailer has been parked for 8 months without ever being connected to water or electricity. The family doesn't need it, and it is blocking a view of the house—which they are now trying to sell. FEMA won't pick it up, though Kathy keeps calling and telling them that it's decreasing the value of their property.

*Returning to the period immediately following Zeitoun's release, Eggers has the reader relive the strangeness—a sense of relief together with shame and bitterness—of the couple's first night together again.*



*Zeitoun's slow return to health underlines the fact that his ordeal continued to have painful effects long after it was over and he was safe. Trauma, stress, and mental anguish can have long-lasting physical effects, as they do here.*



*Even though Zeitoun was released, the couple's problems were far from resolved, as they, like so many other residents of New Orleans, had to face the necessity of slowly recovering and rebuilding their entire lives, in addition to their homes. The death of the dogs is a tragic moment, and particularly excruciating to Zeitoun, who had assumed responsibility for them.*



*Zeitoun had already thought about how ashamed he was to look weak and fragile in front of his daughters, whom he was always so careful about protecting and inspiring.*



*This anecdote begins with a suggestion that FEMA is beginning to regain control over the situation in New Orleans. However, it soon becomes clear that just as Kathy could not break through the layers of bureaucracy in trying to find out where the court hearing would be located, the family now is faced with another example of bureaucratic mismanagement, though here in a more humorous example.*



*Zeitoun and Kathy are recovering from their ordeal through the entrepreneurial spirit that had characterized their way of living before Hurricane Katrina. Now, it's bureaucratic mismanagement and crossed wires that are getting in the way of their recovery, rather than assisting it.*





In June 2006, a FEMA inspector comes to collect the keys, but months go by without anyone returning to pick up the trailer. Finally, in April 2007, Kathy writes a letter about the saga to the newspaper the *Times-Picayune*. The morning it's published a FEMA official calls Kathy, and they take the trailer away that day.

Kathy also begins to have stomach problems, and grows clumsier, sometimes feeling as if she has vertigo. Doctors administer a variety of tests, which overall indicate post-traumatic stress syndrome.

While Kathy and Zeitoun are originally reluctant, their friends urged them to hold those responsible for their ordeal accountable by pursuing a civil suit against the city, state, prisons, police, and others. There are hundreds of other cases against all these groups, however, and even three years after the storm few have moved forward.

A few months after Zeitoun was released, the lawyer they hired had found his arrest report. Kathy clung to the names on it: Donald Lima and Ralph Gonzalez. Gonzalez was from out of state, meaning he couldn't make an arrest, so Kathy decides to name Lima in the lawsuit. But he had resigned after the storm, and no forwarding address could be found.

Gonzalez, meanwhile, is reached by phone in fall 2008. He had been a police officer for 21 years when Katrina hit, and his captain suggested they send a team to help out. Gonzalez and the others had heard reports of shootings and rapes, so they were tense, though they didn't witness such crimes. They did see a great deal of death and destruction, though, and grew increasingly on edge. On September 6, Gonzalez was ordered to participate in a house search involving at least four suspects thought to have been looting and dealing drugs. It could be very dangerous, he was told. Gonzalez was one of the first to enter, and he saw computer parts and stereo equipment on the dining room table, along with four men whose attitude signaled that they were "up to no good."

Gonzalez and the others handed the men over to the authorities at the staging ground, and their part was done. No one ever secured the house or collected evidence. Learning that an innocent man had spent a month in maximum-security prison, Gonzalez seems regretful, but he says that normally police officers only investigate and make arrests—then it's up to the judicial system to give the suspects a phone call and a way to post bail. He agrees it was wrong that they didn't get a phone call.

*Kathy, as usual, is not afraid to speak up for herself and draw attention to unfair treatment the best way she knows how. Bad press, indeed, seems to be the best way to make the authorities act quickly.*



*Like Zeitoun, Kathy does not immediately recover from her stressful ordeal: its aftereffects continue on in the form of psychological struggles.*



*Again it becomes clear that while Kathy and Zeitoun's ordeal was harrowing, it was far from isolated—it was just one example among hundreds of people being denied their civil rights.*



*Kathy seems to want to find some kind of resolution by talking to those directly responsible for Zeitoun's arrest, feeling that they might provide answers or at least clues to the reasons for Zeitoun's imprisonment.*



*As Kathy had heard herself, the media reports coming out of New Orleans after the storm were more exaggerated than based in reality. Nevertheless, these reports did have a real impact, making everyone left in the city wary and ready to immediately respond to any hint of violence or danger. Primed in such a way to see anything through the lens of violent crime, Gonzalez and the others seem to have jumped to conclusions when entering the house, even profiling the inhabitants based on how they looked.*



*Gonzalez attempts to excuse himself from at least part of the blame by referring to the chain of command that normally ensures that the legal system functions smoothly. In this framework, a series of checks and balances is supposed to ensure that it's difficult for innocent people to slip through the cracks and be denied their rights, as was clearly the case here.*



Finally the lawyer tracks down Lima, who quickly notes that he only made the arrest, and wasn't responsible for the men's long imprisonment. During Katrina, he stayed in the city to guard his house with his family, and during the day made rescues throughout the city with other policemen and National Guardsmen. The Guardsmen had plenty of gasoline but not much else, so Lima and the others would break into convenience stores and take cigarettes and tobacco in exchange for gas. Looting was essential to their mission, Lima said.

One day Lima saw four men carrying stolen goods from a Walgreens into a blue-and-white motorboat; two days later he saw the same boat tethered to a house on Claiborne, and gathered a group of officers at the staging ground. They thought the equipment on the dining room table was stolen goods, and Lima was sure that the four men—who seemed somehow amiss—were the ones he saw leaving Walgreens. Lima filled out paperwork for the arrest and drove the suspects to **Camp Greyhound**. Later he saw the maps, cash, and memory chips laid out on a table, and figured the men had been up to something.

According to Lima, there was no time to secure the house as a crime scene, though he was certain that the men in the house were guilty of something. He admitted that the system broke down in preventing the men from getting a phone call and attorney.

In some ways, the Zeitouns are comforted that Zeitoun was not hunted and arrested purposely because he was Middle Eastern. But it is unsettling to learn that his ordeal stemmed from the fact that ignorance, malfunction, and perhaps paranoia had triumphed, causing the system itself to crumble.

Kathy also soon receives a document from a friend that better helps her understand the mindset of soldiers and officers at the time. FEMA had historically operated on its own for natural disasters, but had become part of the Department of Homeland Security after 9/11. During Katrina, as for other disasters, FEMA assumed responsibility for all police, fire, and rescue operations, including the prison system.

*Lima, similarly, claims innocence for Zeitoun's ordeal by invoking the chain of command of the legal system in its normal operation. The fact that some police officers broke into and "looted" stores and homes is ironic—according to the media, it was violent looting and gang marauding by citizens that was supposed to justify the massive police presence in the first place.*



*Lima's justification for wanting to arrest Zeitoun and the others was on less shaky ground than Gonzalez's, but it still relied on unproven inference and profiling based on the men's appearance. Even at Camp Greyhound, the "evidence" amassed leads not to any specific charge but rather to a general assumption about the men's guilt, without any of the legal process that should lead to such a charge.*



*Lima's "certainty" again relied not on any conclusive proof but rather on snap judgments, which can particularly harm people already likely to face prejudice.*



*Kathy had hoped that more information would clarify or even console her and her husband, but these answers lead only to more sobering evidence of the breakdown of justice.*



*Eggers helps to fill in some of the history on a national level that would turn out to be personally relevant to Kathy and Zeitoun. FEMA's newfound connection to Homeland Security helps to explain the suspicion of terrorist activity that seemed to affect Zeitoun and the others.*



As Katrina was approaching, a document was faxed and emailed to law-enforcement agencies and National Guard units in the region, written by representatives of Homeland Security, the CIA, Marines, and corporate security firms. The committee had been asked to assess a “possible terrorist exploitation of a high category hurricane.” Though it admitted that this was unlikely, it went through the ways that terrorists might do so, from hostage situations to cyber attacks. To combat these threats, the committee recommended increased security procedures at evacuation center and patrols at key transportation points. It suggested that any act would most likely be a “splinter” terrorist cell or “lone actor” motivated by political or religious extremism.

Kathy isn't certain whether learning such things is helpful or not. She and her family are returning to normal, slowly, and getting back into the routine of work and the kids' school. But she continues to become disoriented at various points.

**Camp Greyhound** grew famous after the storm, and Amtrak clerks still show visitors where prisoners were fingerprinted, and where the height chart still remains. Zeitoun later learns that the prison was built so quickly by prisoners from Jackson from the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola. The country's largest prison, its prisoners have an average sentence of 89.9 years and have long been forced to do backbreaking labor. Burl Cain, Angola's warden, received a call from the sheriff of Orleans parish asking him to help build an impromptu prison once the Orleans Parish Prison was flooded. Cain sent prisoners, many convicted of murder and rape, to build cages for new prisoners, while they slept outside Camp Greyhound at night. It was completed in two days and would hold over 1,200 people. This was all completed while New Orleans residents were trapped in homes and highway overpasses. There were working toilets and cases of water and food for the workers and employees, while people in the Superdome and Convention Center had none.

One day in 2006, Zeitoun is visiting his cousin Adnan at his Subway franchise when he sees a tall African American woman enter in fatigues. Suddenly he realizes she was one of the National Guard soldiers who arrested him. He stares at her, but soon she is gone. He asks Adnan to ask the woman questions if she ever returns. Zeitoun is immediately brought back to reliving his arrest and the later weeks. He begins to try to avoid the Greyhound station, though it was too central, and becomes paranoid about committing any minor traffic violation.

*This document, discovered by Eggers while completing the research for this book, helps to clarify the mindset of many authorities as they were responding to Hurricane Katrina. Even though the document acknowledges how rare a terrorist manipulation of a natural disaster would be, its specific, detailed conclusions regarding how such an event could take place must have planted the idea in the minds of those responsible for maintaining law and order in New Orleans after the storm.*



*Again, more information is not necessarily comforting or helpful to Kathy. It's probably better than the alternative, but she still has to find other ways to recover and move on.*



*Kathy and Zeitoun obviously were unaware of the details of these places or phenomena in the chaotic days and weeks after Katrina. After the initial disaster, more and more information began to trickle out. This information helps to situate and contextualize Zeitoun's arrest and imprisonment within a broader history of New Orleans in September and October 2005. The example of the prison construction is remarkable in underlining just how much emphasis was given to prisons—in a kind of militarized rather than rescue-based response to Katrina. Clearly, efficiency was possible when the will and effort were there, but both were apparently lacking for many victims trapped in the city.*



*This is another example of how Zeitoun's ordeal continued to resonate in his life in the months and even years afterward. In this example, the reappearance of someone who contributed to Zeitoun's wrongful imprisonment provokes a traumatic reliving of the events, forcing him to modify his own paths throughout the city in order to prevent such memories from resurging.*



In the week after Zeitoun's release, after he had recovered somewhat, Kathy insisted that they return to **Camp Greyhound** to recover Zeitoun's wallet, which contained his ID. Nervous, Zeitoun drove to the Greyhound station with Kathy, warning her not to say anything, though she was trembling with rage. As they walked inside, a pair of soldiers directed them through a metal detector and patted Zeitoun down. They waited in the same pair of chairs in which Zeitoun had been questioned, putting him on edge.

As they waited, a reporter from the Netherlands started asking Zeitoun and Kathy why they were there. Kathy didn't hesitate to tell him about her husband's wrongful arrest, but then a female officer wearing full camouflage barked at the reporter to get away from them. She told a pair of National Guardsmen to arrest the reporter if they saw him again. Kathy marched up to the woman and started exclaiming about her right to freedom of speech, but the officer turned away and ordered the reporter's removal.

The assistant district attorney finally asked how he could help Kathy and Zeitoun. He said that the wallet was still being used as evidence, and they couldn't have it without permission of the district attorney, Eddie Jordan. The assistant didn't know when he'd be there. Kathy and Zeitoun walked into the lobby, and suddenly Kathy caught sight of Jordan out front, surrounded by reporters. Kathy walked right up to him and explained the situation, but Jordan said there was nothing he could do. Increasingly angry, Kathy reiterated what had happened to her husband as loudly as she could, in front of the reporters.

Though Zeitoun felt more cautious, Kathy marched them back inside and, nearly in tears, demanded that the assistant DA do something. Jordan left the office, and ten minutes later returned with the wallet, which contained Zeitoun's driver's license and permanent-resident card, but no cash, business cards, or credit cards: the assistant DA didn't know where they were. Still, Kathy thanked him, and felt like hugging him for this small piece of humanity.

Now Kathy rarely gets that focused and angry, and her rage is more diffuse. She's become more fearful with her children, and watches them sleep sometimes, which she never did before.

*After Zeitoun's release, it's Kathy who becomes more stubborn and determined in Zeitoun's place. Visiting the place where Zeitoun spent those harrowing days and nights is painful for him, but anger-inducing for Kathy, who now sees for the first time the kind of ordeal her husband had been subjected to while she remained ignorant.*



*Kathy, as usual, is unafraid to speak her mind, especially when it means drawing attention to unfair treatment and being able to expose wrongdoing, even if she is in a position of comparatively less power than others. Here, she is ultimately unable to triumph in her assertion of her rights, though she doesn't let this defeat come easily.*



*Once again, Kathy and Zeitoun come up against the excruciating, frustrating bureaucracy of the New Orleans legal system, especially in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It makes no sense why Zeitoun's wallet would still be needed as evidence when he'd been cleared of all "interest" by the Department of Homeland Security. As usual, those in power seem indifferent to the couple's plight.*



*For the first time, someone in a position of authority in this story does not only act politely and cordially, but actually follows through with that behavior by completing the small act of kindness for which Kathy is so grateful—even if, with the wallet mostly empty, this was a partial victory at best.*



*Kathy's very temperament and character has changed after the storm, as she continues to suffer from the aftershocks of the ordeal.*



Nademah, now 13, helps to take care of her sisters, while Zachary is 18 and works at one of Adnan's Subway restaurants, and Safiya and Aisha are still young and happy-go-lucky. Now there is also Ahmad, who was born in November 2006. Zeitoun's brother Ahmad, the namesake, still lives in Spain. Kathy works less these days, preferring to care for the baby. She no longer feels up to the task of handling all the paperwork on her own.

Kathy has been spending time trying to deal with her medical issues. Doctors have asked what the most traumatic part of Katrina was for her, and she was surprised to realize that it was when she knew Zeitoun was alive and at Hunt, but was not allowed to see him or know when she could. She said she felt broken to hear that she could simply be denied crucial information by a stranger.

Kathy thinks about how easily the situation could have been avoided if one person had shown some humanity. She wants to thank the missionary who risked something, but she also knows that he didn't risk that much, and that his act should not be considered one of great heroism.

Kathy worries that her husband works too hard now, even while fasting, as he's grown more religious. People ask why Zeitoun hasn't left the United States to escape the dark memories, and he does have bitter feelings when he passes the Greyhound station and Claiborne house.

Todd Gambino spent over 5 months at Hunt before all charges were dropped, and none of his confiscated \$2,400 was ever returned to him. Nasser spent 6 months at Hunt before the charges against him were dropped. He never recovered his \$10,000 life savings, and in 2008 he moved back to Syria. Ronnie spent 8 months at Hunt, and since his release the Zeitouns haven't heard from him.

Zeitoun sometimes recalls the beauty of the **canoe**, which allowed him to move and listen carefully. The canoe was gone when he finally returned to Claiborne, and the house had been robbed too, since the policemen had left the house unlocked. The other things were replaced, but Zeitoun keeps an eye out for the canoe still, wondering if his daughters will now like it more, and will be drawn to the water like generations of Zeitouns before them.

*Returning to the present day (2008), Eggers shares what has happened to the rest of the family. The children seem to have recovered relatively well, though this may be thanks to Kathy's commitment to keep them largely sheltered from the anxiety of her husband's disappearance at the time.*



*While it was traumatizing for Kathy to not know if her husband was alive or dead, this memory makes sense, given that Kathy is the kind of person to appreciate being calm, in control, and on top of the situation. The fact that another human being could deny her the truth is difficult to bear.*



*The missionary was certainly kind in calling Kathy against the rules, but Kathy's point is that the breakdown of justice in Katrina was so pervasive that even normal human kindness was outside of the norm, and could be lifesaving.*



*Zeitoun has always put his work first, but now it seems that he is working hard less because he loves it than because it's a way for him to distract himself from what he's gone through.*



*While Eggers has traced Zeitoun's story in particular, it is clear from the description of what Todd, Nasser, and Ronnie went through that experiences such as Zeitoun's were far from isolated. Indeed, for Nasser, his arrest was financially catastrophic, forcing him to return to Syria.*



*Although what happened following Zeitoun's arrest was certainly traumatic, not all of his memories from the time after the storm are so negative—he takes solace in remembering how calm, peaceful, and helpful he felt maneuvering throughout the city and assisting those in need.*





Some nights Zeitoun struggles to sleep, thinking of those who arrested and jailed him, who failed to see him as a neighbor and countryman. But he always awakens to the sounds of his young children, and he tries to tell them that everything happens for a reason—it's in God's hands.

The city's recovery has been slow, and it's taken a long time for the FEMA money to appear and insurance money to come through for his clients, but since Katrina, Zeitoun's company has restored 114 houses. He's proud of the projects he's working on now, including a junior high school, the Leidenheimer Bakery, and the St. Clement of Rome Parish Church.

Zeitoun is happy to be free in his city, the place where he was married, had children, and made a career. He was tested, he tells himself, but is now louder and more determined. He now must trust and have faith, so he builds and rebuilds—an act of faith, in coastal Louisiana. By building he proves he is part of this place. He imagines it not just as it was but as it can be, far better, in constant progress. He is committed to working as hard as he can, as he's done before.

*Zeitoun struggles to balance his natural optimism and faith in God with his continued knowledge that what happened to him was unfair, wrong, and senseless.*



*Just as Zeitoun and Kathy have taken years to recover from the weeks after the storm and to rebuild their lives, so the city itself is slow in rebuilding itself—a process whose physical manifestations are part of Zeitoun's livelihood.*



*The book ends on an optimistic note, in line with Zeitoun's own sentiments regarding what happened to him. Building, in this ending, becomes not just a physical act but a symbolic representation of constructing and maintaining one's own identity and beliefs, even in the face of struggles. Eggers ends almost with a plea to the average American reader, asking us to be worthy of American ideals, and not to give into the worst parts of our nature in times of crisis. Unfortunately, the story of the Zeitouns has gone downhill in the years since Katrina, as the couple is now separated, and Zeitoun himself has been arrested on charges of domestic violence—and even attempted murder. This adds a new level of darkness to the idea of Zeitoun's PTSD and its long-lasting affects, but also may call into question some of Eggers' more idealistic portrayals of his hero.*





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