Another Brooklyn

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JACQUELINE WOODSON

Woodson was born in Ohio in 1963, the third of four children. When she was a child, her family moved to South Carolina and later to Brooklyn, New York, where Woodson spent her adolescence—she now owns the building in Bushwick, Brooklyn in which she grew up. Woodson has written over 30 books, mostly for children, ranging from picture books to novels. She has also received numerous awards for her work, including the National Book Award. Woodson and her partner live in Brooklyn with their two children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the 1970s, Brooklyn—and especially neighborhoods to the east of Prospect Park—underwent a significant population change. For many years, Brooklyn was largely populated by white Irish and Italian immigrants, but this began to change in the 1960s and, even more notably, in the 1970s, as censuses began to show an increase in African American residents. One especially illustrative figure is that the Flatbush neighborhood was 89 percent white in 1970 and then only 30 percent white by the end of the decade, with African Americans making up as much as 50 percent of the population. Although Woodson doesn't spend much time in *Another Brooklyn* dwelling on this shift in Brooklyn's population, the change serves as a backdrop for the novel, as August watches the last of her white neighbors packing up their cars and driving away to live elsewhere. Of course, it's also worth mentioning that the general area that Woodson focuses on is now undergoing yet another change in its population as many neighborhoods in New York City are experiencing gentrification.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Because *Another Brooklyn* examines what it means to grow up without a mother, it is similar to Jacqueline Woodson's only other novel for adults, *Red At The Bone*. This novel focuses on a young mother's desire to pursue more in life than motherhood, thereby giving readers an alternative look at the complexities of raising children. Furthermore, Woodson's autobiographical novel-in-verse, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, treads similar ground as *Another Brooklyn*, focusing on the author's childhood and adolescence in South Carolina and, later, Brooklyn. From a different perspective, *Another Brooklyn* shares certain similarities with Colm Tóibín's novel *Brooklyn*, which is also a coming-of-age tale based in Brooklyn. Although *Brooklyn* focuses on the city's Irish community, this actually connects with Woodson's depiction in *Another Brooklyn* of the few white families in August's neighborhood—all of whom eventually move away—since these families are predominantly Irish. In addition, *Another Brooklyn*'s examination of the ways in which racism often perpetuates itself within black communities draws certain comparisons to W. E. B. Du Bois's collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which the author considers the notion of "double-consciousness," pointing out that many black people see themselves through the eyes of people who are hypercritical of them. In terms of Woodson's portrait of the Nation of Islam, *Another Brooklyn* could also be compared to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in which Malcolm X recounts his involvement with the group. Similarly, James Baldwin's book-length essay, *The Fire Next Time*, also gives an account of the Nation of Islam during the 1960s. In terms of more modern comparisons, *Another Brooklyn* has certain aspects in common with Brit Bennett's novel, *The Mothers*, which also looks at the effects of motherly abandonment (by way of suicide) on a young black woman's life.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Another Brooklyn
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Brooklyn
- **Climax:** Shortly after Angela disappears, Gigi commits suicide when none of her friends come to see her in a musical.
- **Antagonist:** Discrimination; violence against women; trauma
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Close Contender. In 2016, *Another Brooklyn* was nominated for the National Book Award. If it had won, it would have been Woodson's second time receiving the award.

True to Life. Like August, Woodson moved to Brooklyn from the South as a young girl. Moreover, one of the book's other central characters, Gigi, comes to Brooklyn by way of South Carolina, which is where Woodson herself moved from with her family.

PLOT SUMMARY

August reflects on her early childhood: she thinks about how

she and her brother grew up in Brooklyn without a mother, though she felt for a long time that this didn't mean her mother was actually dead. In those days, August's father and brother focused on their devotion to the Nation of Islam while August invested herself in her friendships with Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi. While August's brother had religion to cope with the absence of their mother, she had her friend group, which helped her navigate the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Now, though, she and her brother have just said goodbye to their father, who died of liver cancer. Sitting in a diner, they ask each other how they're doing. August's brother is still religious and playfully tries to convince August to settle down with a good Islamic man, but August easily sidesteps this lighthearted suggestion by assuring him that she's doing well. When August says that she already misses their father, her brother simply replies, "All praise to Allah for calling him home."

August no longer fears death—in the 20 years since she last lived in Brooklyn, she has become an anthropologist who travels the world and studies how other cultures respond to death. However, simply being in Brooklyn unsettles her. On the subway back to her father's apartment after seeing her brother, she looks up and realizes she's sitting across from Sylvia. Shocked, August studies Sylvia's beauty, noting how well she has aged. August has a flashback of what Sylvia used to look like, envisioning her in a school uniform with her stomach just beginning to bulge. Just then, Sylvia looks up and recognizes her. Excitedly, she asks when August got back to Brooklyn, but August stands and jumps out of the closing subway doors even though she hasn't reached her stop. August has lost touch with all her Brooklyn friends. The last time she heard Angela's voice, for instance, was when Angela called her during college and spoke about the tragedy that befell Gigi. Since then, though, August has had no contact with any of the girls.

Jumping back in time, August narrates her childhood. She's eight when her mother first starts hearing voices. Clyde, her mother's brother, has just died in the Vietnam War, but August's mother refuses to believe this so she speaks to Clyde quite often. Unsettled, August's father takes August and her brother away from SweetGrove, which is what the family calls their home in Tennessee. Heading north, he brings them to Brooklyn. As they settle in, August and her brother talk about their mother's absence, and August insists that their mother is on her way and that she will surely be there "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow." During this time, their father tells them to stay inside when he's at work, so they spend their days gazing out the window at the streets, wishing they could join the children outside. It's while looking out this window that August first sees Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi; she becomes familiar with them from a distance, wanting nothing more than to become part of their tight-knit group.

One day, August's brother leans so hard against the window that the glass shatters, slicing his arm. Thankfully, his father sweeps into the room and rushes him to the hospital. From this point on, their father lets August and her brother leave the house. Around this time, August encounters Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi at school, and Sylvia asks August why she always stares at them. Sylvia clarifies that she's not trying to be mean—she's genuinely curious what August sees in them. "Everything," August replies. "I see everything." Sylvia puts her hand to August's cheek and asks if she is the girl with no mother, but August lies, insisting that she's not that girl. Holding August's hand, Sylvia declares, "You belong to us now."

Not unlike August, Sylvia is a new arrival in Brooklyn—her family moved from the Caribbean island of Martinique the year before. Sylvia's parents are sophisticated; Sylvia's father, for instance, quotes philosophers to her in French. Gigi also recently came to Brooklyn because Gigi's mother wanted to have her 21st birthday in New York—when she tells August this, she urges her not to do the math, adding that "it just adds up to teen pregnancy." Such a thing, August and the rest of her friends think, will never happen to them. Angela is the only person in the group who doesn't talk about her background. Sometimes, though, she descends into a dark mood, clenching her fists and avoiding her friends' questions when they ask what's wrong.

August recalls the night her father took her and her brother away from SweetGrove. Leading up to that night, her parents argued extensively, and her mother even threatened to take a butcher knife to bed and sleep with it beneath her pillow. August's mother also accused her father of cheating, claiming that Clyde told her that August's father was with another woman. By then, August notes, Clyde had been dead for years.

In Brooklyn, August and her family get by while living in poverty, though they make do with what they have. Each night, August assures her brother that their mother will soon join them. August and her friends all have different relationships with their mothers. Gigi's mother, for instance, is young and determined to make Gigi a star, insisting that she's beautiful and talented enough to become famous. August, Sylvia, and Angela all agree, frequently telling Gigi how pretty she is and talking about how everyone will someday know her name. "What keeps keeping us here?" Gigi asks one day, and though the girls don't know why she's talking this way, they soon learn that there's a drug-addicted veteran who sleeps beneath the stairwell in her apartment building. Apparently, he recently pulled Gigi into the dark and raped her. The girls are only 12 and they don't know what to do about this, but Gigi says she can't tell her mother what happened because her mother would only blame her. Acting on their own, then, the girls collect razor blades and instruct Gigi to slash the man the next time he grabs her. However, the soldier is soon found dead beneath the stairs, having overdosed on heroin.

Angela, for her part, has a mysterious relationship with her own mother and she won't tell the others anything about her, except

that Angela's mother used to be a dancer. When the girls ask for more information, Angela closes up, so her friends simply remind her that they love her and tell her to keep dancing. Sylvia, on the other hand, has a completely different family dynamic; when the girls visit her house, they can tell that her parents are judging them. Sylvia's father asks about their home lives and if they understand "the Negro problem," adding that it's up to them to "rise above" racism and discrimination. To that end, he insists that Sylvia become a lawyer, and she accepts this even though it's clear she really wants to become a singer.

As the girls get older, men pay more attention to their bodies. They find that they have to be careful in certain situations so they warn each other about which older men to avoid. When they're together, though, they feel powerful and capable of telling off boys they're uninterested in. Around this time, August asks her father what's inside a jar he keeps in the apartment, and he replies by saying that she already knows what's inside. When she admits that she knows there are ashes inside but she doesn't know *whose* ashes, he says, "You know whose." Still, August tells herself that she doesn't know where her mother is and continues to wait for her return. Meanwhile, her brother takes a liking to math, enjoying the certainty it provides him. While talking about how much he likes math, he tells August that—like the certainty of square roots—it's clear that their mother isn't coming back. "It's absolute," he says, but August doesn't listen.

After entertaining a rotating cast of women at night, August's father meets Sister Loretta, who establishes a relationship with both August and her brother. She also cleans the house and teaches them to stop eating food that the "white devils" use to "poison" black people. Speaking this way, Sister Loretta convinces August's father and brother to join the Nation of Islam, though August herself remains unwilling to devote herself to religion. Still, she promises Sister Loretta that she won't engage in sexual activity before she's married, but this is a lie. By this point, she has a boyfriend named Jerome whom she kisses each night, letting him explore her body with his hands. Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi are the only people August can talk to about this, and she feels especially connected to Sylvia because Sylvia knows what it's like to defy her parents, since her family is so strict. One day, Sylvia's older sister hears her laughing loudly and smacks her across the face, telling her not to be a "dusty, dirty black American."

Although August and her friends are close, their lives begin to diverge. First, Gigi goes to a performing arts school, though she still spends time with the others. Shortly thereafter, Sylvia's father forbids her from seeing her friends and sends her to an elite private high school, forcing the four friends to meet secretly in the parks at night, where they smoke marijuana and attend summertime dances. Though their lives are beginning to go in different directions, they remain friends. As time passes, each of the girls gets a boyfriend, and they disappear with these boys into the dark corners of the park, where they become more and more physically intimate. In line with this, they hear about a girl their age who got pregnant and was sent to live with relatives in the South, so they temporarily slow down with their boyfriends.

That winter, a dead woman is found on the roof of the Marcy Houses, a nearby public housing development. Angela soon tells her friends that her mother has been missing for the past several days, and though they say that they're sure her mother is all right, they learn that her mother truly was the woman found atop the Marcy Houses. Shortly thereafter, they lose track of Angela because they've never been to her apartment and they don't know how to contact her, and they later hear that she was put into a foster home in Queens or Long Island. In the aftermath of this, August and Gigi stop seeing Sylvia because she becomes increasingly preoccupied by private school. One night during this period, August's brother—who has devoted himself to the Nation of Islam—wakes August up and says that she's wrong to think that their mother is coming back, adding that she "won't be coming back until the resurrection." After he says this, August can't help but remember her father saying that her mother "troubled the water," though she doesn't let herself think any further about this. Still, she has an image of her mother walking through SweetGrove and not stopping once she reached the property's waterline.

Soon, Jerome stops dating August because August doesn't want to have sex yet. Then, while walking through the park one night, August sees Jerome holding hands with Sylvia. In response, August cuts Sylvia out of her life. Not long after this, Sylvia gets pregnant with Jerome's child. Gigi tries to keep the group together but she can't convince August to forget about what happened. One night, though, Gigi invites August to come see her in a musical, saying that she's going to set aside seats for her and Sylvia. Gigi is even going to leave a seat open for Angela, hoping that perhaps she'll return. That evening, though, August can't bring herself to leave the house, instead sitting with her coat on and thinking about the **urn** containing her mother's ashes, knowing that her mother committed suicide by walking into the water at SweetGrove. She later learns that Sylvia never showed up to Gigi's performance either, and that Gigi's voice cracked while singing, causing everyone in the audience to laugh. That night, Gigi went to the cast's afterparty and jumped out a window, plunging to her death.

August leaves Brooklyn behind to attend a prestigious university in Rhode Island. One of the only African American students, she tells everyone to call her Auggie. Throughout her college career, she sleeps with boys she knows her brother and father would think of as "white devils." While watching TV one night with one of these lovers, August sees Angela onscreen and learns that her old friend has made it as a dancer. Over the next two decades, August spends her life traveling the world

and studying death, having multiple relationships and constantly thinking about her time in Brooklyn. When one lover asks August why she clenches her fists when she sleeps, she considers saying, "For a long time, my mother wasn't dead yet," but instead she says nothing at all.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

August – August is a young woman originally from Tennessee and the narrator of *Another Brooklyn*. When August is eight years old, her father takes her and her brother to live with him in Brooklyn because their mother has been unwell. Throughout the rest of August's childhood, then, she waits for her mother to join them in Brooklyn, convincing herself that this will one day happen. Slowly but surely, though, she finds it harder and harder to deny what she already knows, which is that her mother committed suicide by drowning herself. Unwilling to acknowledge this, August throws herself into her life in Brooklyn, finding happiness in the relationships she establishes with three girls from her neighborhood named Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi. As the three girls grow up together, they navigate the transition into womanhood, talking about their experiences with boys, their home lives, and how to avoid dangerous men. Meanwhile, August's father joins the Nation of Islam and starts dating another member of the movement named Sister Loretta. August likes Sister Loretta, but unlike her brother, keeps her distance from the Nation of Islam, finding it difficult to devote herself to prayer and the Islamic religion. Instead, she focuses on her friend group, though her friendships begin to splinter when Angela disappears into the foster care system in the aftermath of her mother's death. Worse, August discovers that Sylvia has been dating Jerome, whom August dated until Jerome left her because she didn't want to have sex. When Sylvia becomes pregnant with Jerome's child, August stops talking to her. Shortly thereafter, Gigi commits suicide when none of her friends come to support her in a musical. Instead of concentrating on this tragedy, August focuses on getting into a prestigious university, eventually attending a college in Rhode Island. In the coming decades, she becomes an anthropologist and travels the world studying the way other cultures conceive of death.

Sylvia – Sylvia is a young woman who moves with her family from Martinique to Brooklyn. An intelligent and kind person, Sylvia welcomes August into her friend group, which consists of her, Angela, and Gigi. Having seen August watching them from afar for quite some time, Sylvia asks what August sees in them, and when August says, "Everything," Sylvia informs her that she "belongs" to them now. From that point on, the four girls are inseparable. Sylvia's parents are quite strict since they want to raise her to be a proper and successful woman. When Sylvia brings her friends to the house, then, her father asks them pointed questions about their backgrounds and asks if they understand that they, as black women, will have to "rise above" the country's racism. In striving to make sure his daughter succeeds, Sylvia's father subjects August, Angela, and Gigi to classism, investing himself in the elitist division of educated, successful black people from less fortunate black people. For this reason, he forbids Sylvia from seeing her friends and sends her to an elite private boarding school, though she still manages to see August, Angela, and Gigi. Together, the girls go to the park, where they smoke marijuana and sneak off with their respective boyfriends. Things get complicated, though, when Sylvia starts dating Jerome, who recently dumped August because she wouldn't have sex with him. Because of this, August stops talking to Sylvia. What's more, Sylvia soon becomes pregnant with Jerome's child. Decades later, August still can't find it within herself to forgive Sylvia when she sees her on the subway, so she rushes away before responding to Sylvia's excited greetings.

Gigi – Gigi is one of August's friends in Brooklyn. Originally from South Carolina, Gigi is strikingly beautiful and wants to become a famous actor, a dream her mother encourages by insisting that she has what it takes. To that end, Gigi's mother—who is extremely young—eventually enrolls Gigi in a performing arts school, though Gigi manages to maintain contact with August, Sylvia, and Angela. One day when Gigi is just 12 years old, she asks her friends, "What keeps keeping us here?" At the time, her friends don't understand why she's asking this rather morbid question, but they soon learn that she was recently raped by a former soldier who is addicted to drugs and living under the stairs in her apartment building. To make matters even worse, Gigi doesn't feel like she can tell her mother what happened, knowing her mother will blame her. To help her, then, her friends acquire a number a razorblades and tell Gigi to use them on the man the next time he approaches, but this becomes unnecessary because the man dies of a drug overdose shortly thereafter. Later, Gigi is the one who tries to keep everyone together when the friend group begins to splinter, imploring August to forgive Sylvia for dating August's ex-boyfriend, Jerome, behind her back. Wanting to get everyone back together again, she asks them to attend a musical she's in, telling them that she'll reserve seats for them. However, none of them end up coming, and Gigi's voice cracks during an important moment, causing the entire audience to laugh. That night, she commits suicide by plunging to the streets from the Chelsea Hotel during the cast party.

Angela – Angela is one of August's friends in Brooklyn. Unlike Sylvia, Gigi, and August, Angela has never lived anywhere else and doesn't like to talk about her home life. Angela's mother used to be a dancer, which is the only thing Angela tells her friends about her life—though she immediately stops talking about this when they ask for more information. Like her mother, though, Angela is a talented dancer, often charming her

friends by jumping into graceful dance moves as they walk down the street. However, she sometimes freezes up and clenches her fists, falling into a mysteriously dark mood. This happens one day when she's in the middle of a dance move, and none of her friends know why she has suddenly stopped. The only other person around them is a stumbling, weak woman who is clearly addicted to drugs—though the girls don't realize it at the time, August later understands that Angela froze because that woman was her mother. As they all grow up together, Angela often talks about wanting to escape her life in Brooklyn, though she's committed to her dance career. When Angela's mother is found dead on the roof of a nearby public housing development, though, Angela disappears from her friends' lives. They later hear that she was placed in foster care in Queens or Long Island, though they're unable to track her down. When August is in college years later, she sees Angela dancing on TV and she realizes that Angela has achieved her lifelong dream of becoming a professional dancer and escaping her previous life.

August's Father – August's father is a man from Brooklyn who, when August and her brother are young children, lives with them and their mother (his wife) in Tennessee. A veteran who fought in the Vietnam War, August's father has two missing fingers, though he never tells his children how he lost them. When his wife's brother, Clyde, dies in the Vietnam War, though, he becomes increasingly unsettled with the environment in which his children are growing up, since August's mother starts talking to her deceased brother. Finally, August's father takes her and her brother to live in Brooklyn—though August refuses to acknowledge it, this is because her mother has committed suicide. In Brooklyn, August's father works at a department store and he does what he can to keep the family financially afloat. As his children grow up, he dates women and brings them back to the apartment at night. Soon enough, though, he starts seeing a woman named Sister Loretta who convinces him to join the Nation of Islam. August's father welcomes Sister Loretta into the family and teaches his children about the Islamic tradition. August's brother takes to the religion, but August herself doesn't derive the same sense of clarity from the practice that everyone else in her family does, so her father lets her do what she wants, refusing to force her into anything. He does, however, send August to a therapist from the Nation of Islam named Sister Sonja, who tries to help her process the fact that her mother is dead. This is the only form of support August's father can offer, since he's too preoccupied by his religious beliefs to help her with her personal problems. Two decades after August first leaves Brooklyn, she returns when her father is dying of liver cancer, staying in his apartment until he finally passes away.

August's Brother – August's brother is younger than her when their father takes them from Tennessee to Brooklyn. Because of this, he believes August when she insists that their mother will someday join them again. As August's brother gets older, he gravitates toward things that are clear and certain, like mathematics and, later, religion. When their father introduces the family to Sister Loretta, August's brother takes to her immediately. Moreover, he becomes heavily involved in the Nation of Islam, becoming a very devout Islamic man. This helps him recognize that his sister is wrong to say that their mother will return. Unlike August, he's capable of acknowledging that their mother is dead, something that is easier for him to accept because he believes that she will return during the resurrection. As an adult, August's brother teases August when they eat dinner in the aftermath of their father's death, playfully trying to get her to settle down with a Muslim man. All the same, he doesn't push her into doing anything she doesn't want and he simply remains content with his own lifestyle, looking forward to the day that his pregnant wife gives birth. When August asks him if he's afraid to become a father, he admits that he is but he also says that "with Allah all things are possible."

August's Mother – Although August and her brother's mother never actually appears in the book, she looms large throughout the pages of *Another Brooklyn*. This is because August constantly thinks back to when she used to live with her mother in Tennessee on the family's plot of land, which they call SweetGrove. A beautiful and loving woman, August's mother becomes mentally unstable after her brother, Clyde, dies in the Vietnam War. Refusing to believe this, she continues to see and talk to him, insisting that he's still alive. This causes problems in her marriage, especially when she claims Clyde told her that he caught her husband with another woman. In the last months of her life, she starts talking about bringing a butcher knife into bed when she sleeps. Soon enough, she commits suicide by drowning herself, though August refuses to accept this truth until many, many years later.

Sister Loretta – August's father has a romantic relationship with Sister Loretta while living in Brooklyn. After several years of bringing women home while his children sleep in the next room, August's father settles into a routine with Sister Loretta, who introduces him to the Nation of Islam, cleans the family's apartment, and teaches them which foods the Islamic religion deems acceptable to eat. She also prays with August and convinces her brother to join the Nation of Islam, eventually taking pride in the fact that she has helped take care of August's father and his motherless children. However, August never embraces the Nation of Islam, at least not in the way that her father and brother do. Furthermore, as time passes, August's father stops seeing Sister Loretta, though this doesn't mean he completely leaves the Nation of Islam.

Clyde – Clyde is August's uncle, her mother's brother. He lives near August's family and often visits them when they still live in Tennessee, but he's soon called to the Vietnam War, where he's killed. In the aftermath of this tragedy, August's mother refuses

to believe that he's really dead and she even begins to see and talk to him as if he's still alive. This leads to her undoing and eventual suicide.

Sister Sonja – Sister Sonja is a therapist whom August's father finds through the Nation of Islam. Starting when August is 15, she has periodic appointments with Sister Sonja because August's father doesn't know how to address her silent grief. During these sessions, Sister Sonja tries to get August to talk about her mother, ultimately attempting to help her come to terms with the fact that her mother committed suicide.

Sylvia's Father – Sylvia's father is an intellectual man from Martinique. He frequently quotes philosophers in French, wanting to ensure that his children remember the language they spoke before moving to Brooklyn. He has very high standards and intends for Sylvia to become a lawyer. When August, Angela, and Gigi visit his home, he doesn't hide his disdain for them, making it clear that he doesn't think they're worthy of being friends with his daughter. In keeping with this, he eventually forbids Sylvia from seeing them and sends her to an elite private boarding school. Despite his efforts to keep Sylvia away from boys and people he thinks will distract her from her studies, though, she soon becomes pregnant.

Gigi's Mother – Gigi's mother had Gigi as a young teenager. Just before turning 21, Gigi's mother decided to move to Brooklyn with her daughter so that she could celebrate her birthday in New York City. Obsessed with beauty, Gigi's mother urges Gigi to pursue a career as an actress, insisting that Gigi is pretty enough to be famous—though she gives Gigi the idea that she'll have to compensate for how dark her skin is. When 12-year-old Gigi is raped by a veteran living under the stairs in their apartment building, she doesn't tell her mother because she knows that her mother would blame the assault on her.

Angela's Mother – Angela's mother is largely absent from her daughter's life and she is a great source of shame and pain for Angela. A former dancer, Angela's mother is addicted to drugs and she is eventually found dead on the roof of a nearby public housing development. As a result, Angela is put into the foster care system in a different borough, after which she loses touch with her friends.

Sylvia's Sister – Sylvia's sister is, like her parents, a serious-minded young woman who has disdain for August, Angela, and Gigi. When she hears Sylvia laughing loudly with her friends one day, she bursts into the room and slaps her across the face, telling her not to act like "a dusty, dirty black American"—a phrase that indicates that she has internalized the very racism she and Sylvia's father want to overcome through hard work.

Sylvia's Mother – Like Sylvia's father, Sylvia's mother is a strict and judgmental person who subjects August, Angela, and Gigi to severe scrutiny when they come to Sylvia's house. Although Sylvia's mother doesn't say anything rude to them, the way she looks at them makes it clear that she disapproves of who they are and the way they present themselves, clearly feeling that they're not good enough to be friends with her daughter.

Jerome – Jerome is August's first boyfriend. Before August is even allowed to leave the family's apartment in Brooklyn, Jerome sees her through the window and winks at her. Years later, they start dating even though he's several years older. When August refuses to have sex with him, though, he dumps her and starts dating Sylvia—something that destroys Sylvia and August's friendship. Shortly thereafter, Sylvia becomes pregnant with Jerome's daughter.

Jennie – Jennie is a prostitute who lives beneath August and her family in Brooklyn. At a certain point, a social services worker brings Jennie's children to her, but (largely because she's addicted to drugs) she doesn't pay sufficient attention to them, so the social worker returns several years later and takes them away.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Charlsetta – Charlsetta is the captain of the cheerleading squad at August's high school. When Charlsetta is 16, she gets pregnant and is sent to live with relatives in the South, a fate that scares August and her friends and keeps August from having sex with Jerome.

TERMS

The Nation of Islam – The Nation of Islam is a political, cultural, and religious movement that was founded in the 1930s. The movement was especially popular in the African American community during the 1960s and '70s, since it used Islamic structures of belief to address racism in the United States. One of the movement's central tenets at the time was that there should be an all-black secessionist state within the United States. However, *Another Brooklyn* primarily focuses on the religious side of the movement, examining the devout beliefs that the Nation of Islam has surrounding the way women should dress and behave.

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.

LOSS, DENIAL, AND GRIEF

Jacqueline Woodson's novel *Another Brooklyn* studies how people cope with loss. The narrator, August, focuses on her lifelong attempt to come to

terms with her mother's death, which she refuses to acknowledge throughout her childhood and adolescence. Instead of accepting that her mother committed suicide, she convinces herself that she's still alive and will one day come to live with the family in Brooklyn. As August remains steadfast in this belief, though, she experiences other kinds of loss that are impossible to deny. For instance, she loses Sylvia, one of her closest friends, after discovering that Sylvia and Jerome—August's ex-boyfriend—have been seeing each other behind August's back. In response, August severs all ties with Sylvia, destabilizing one of the only consistent and emotionally-fulfilling things in her life: her friend group. Later, August's other friend Angela disappears in the aftermath of her own mother's death, and it isn't long after this that August's friend Gigi commits suicide. On top of all of this interpersonal loss, August continues to mourn the loss of her childhood home, since her father took her away from the family's beautiful ranch in Tennessee when she was only eight years old, bringing her and her brother to live in Brooklyn. At the end of the novel, though, August returns to Tennessee to find that her old home has been torn down, the land reclaimed by the government. It isn't until she faces the undeniable loss of her old home that she finally manages to admit that her mother is dead. In turn, Woodson implies that facing reality and accepting loss are integral to the mourning process and that it's often impossible to remain in denial forever.

August's unwillingness to accept her mother's death emerges early in the novel, when she recounts telling her brother that their mother will someday come to Brooklyn to live with them. As the book proceeds, it becomes increasingly clear not only that their mother is dead, but also that August knows this on some level. For instance, in a conversation about a **jar** that contains her mother's ashes, August innocently asks her father what's inside it. "*You know what's in the jar*," he replies, and when she says she knows there are ashes inside but doesn't know whose, he says, "*You know whose*." This conversation suggests that August is actively keeping herself from coming to terms with the fact that her mother is dead. When her father implies that August knows exactly whose ashes are in the jar, it becomes clear that he isn't keeping the truth from her. Rather, she's hiding the truth from *herself*, trying to protect herself from the harsh reality that her mother committed suicide. And despite August's vague knowledge of this, she insists to her brother that their mother is "coming soon," saying she'll arrive "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow"—a phrase which ignores the fact that their mother is dead while also implying that she won't actually arrive the next day, nor the next, nor the one after that. In this way, August manages to deny reality while also subtly acknowledging it.

While trying to sustain her denial of her mother's death, August commits herself to her relationships with Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi. For a time, her friendship with these girls enables her to continue avoiding the reality of her mother's death. However, there comes a point when loss permeates August's friend group, as she catches Sylvia kissing her ex-boyfriend Jerome and consequently cuts her out of her life. This also happens around the time that Angela's own mother dies and Angela disappears into the foster care system. To make matters worse, Gigi soon commits suicide after none of her friends come see her perform in a musical. Her suicide is clearly tied to the fact that she has lost the previously unwavering support of her friend group, thereby suggesting that loss (whether a loved one's death or the end of a friendship) can sometimes perpetuate itself in devastating ways. More importantly, though, Gigi's death emphasizes the extent to which August cannot escape grief, ultimately making it that much harder to avoid recognizing that her mother—like Gigi—committed suicide.

On a certain level, August has always known that her mother killed herself by wading into the water on what was once their family land in Tennessee. But it isn't until she visits the land with her father and brother and *sees* that very body of water that she's capable of actually admitting this to herself. In the same way that everything else in August's life has been pervaded by loss and mourning, SweetGrove—the family's property—has been reclaimed by the government by the time August returns as a teenager. In fact, even the house itself has been torn down, effectively erasing the landscape of August's childhood. But facing this embodiment of loss has an important effect on August, allowing her to finally recognize that her mother is never coming back. This stripping back of denial, Woodson intimates, is part of what it means to grow up. "When you're fifteen, you can't make promises of a return to the before place," August contemplates at one point. "Your aging eyes tell a different, truer story." It is with these "aging eyes" that she looks upon a place she used to call home and allows herself to embrace reality even though that reality is painful. In this way, then, Woodson suggests that although denial is a common response to loss, it becomes harder and harder for people to practice as they get older and see that self-imposed ignorance is an ineffective coping mechanism.

FRIENDSHIP, WOMANHOOD, AND SUPPORT

In *Another Brooklyn*, Jacqueline Woodson examines the importance of interpersonal connection, paying special attention to the way friendship helps August navigate the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Because August's mother is dead and her father is preoccupied by his religion, she sorely lacks parental guidance. For this reason, August turns to Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi: forming a close bond with them helps not only take her mind off her grief, but August also feel less alone as she confronts the often unnerving experience of coming of age as a young woman in 1970s Brooklyn. She and

her friends do their best to avoid the inappropriate sexual attention that older men give them as their bodies develop, relating to one another and sharing advice about how to steer clear of unwanted sexual encounters. And yet, there's unfortunately only so much they can do as young women to stay safe, especially since the environment in which they grow up tacitly condones their premature sexualization by failing to properly address the fact that young and old men alike pressure, objectify, and even abuse them. In this regard, *Another Brooklyn* is also a study of the *limits* of friendship, effectively demonstrating that—though strong bonds between young women are deeply important—even the closest relationships can't always make up for broader societal problems.

Woodson frames female friendship as deeply empowering and vital to August's development. Perhaps the most important impact that August's relationships with Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi have on her life is the uplifting effect their connection has on her overall outlook. Before becoming friends with them, August sits inside all day staring out the window and longing for a sense of connection. This is because her parents are largely uninvolved in her life: her mother is dead (or, according to August, living elsewhere) and her father is busy with work and his religion. Accordingly, joining Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi's friend group gives August a sense of belonging. More importantly, though, her friendship with these girls gives her confidence as she moves into adolescence: for instance, when boys call out to August and her friends, they aren't afraid to rebuff them without caring what they think. "The four of us together weren't something they understood," August notes. "They understood girls alone, folding their arms across their breasts, praying for invisibility." This suggests that August might feel insecure if she faced these boys on her own, craving an "invisibility" that would help her escape their attention. With her friends, though, she feels emboldened and powerful, confident enough to simply walk away from boys she's not interested in. In this way, female friendship emerges as a source of power and agency.

In addition to lending the girls a sense of empowerment, their communal friendship affords them something even more practical: a support network of sorts. The older they get and the more their bodies develop, the more often they find themselves the subjects of unwanted sexual attention. Because of this, they give each other advice about which men to avoid, sharing their experiences so they can steer clear of dangerous, undesirable situations. For example, they tell each other to take somebody with them when they go to a certain shoe repair shop, where the proprietor tries to look up young girls' dresses and offers them money to see their underwear. Similarly, Gigi warns her friends about joining their church choirs, telling them that her pastor often appears behind her while she's singing and presses his penis against her back. With this in mind, readers see the practical value of companionship, as August tangibly benefits from her group of friends and the network they've formed—a network that almost makes up for her lack of parental guidance or protection.

Unfortunately, though, August and her friends aren't always capable of protecting one another. This becomes painfully evident when a heroin addict living under Gigi's stairwell rapes her, and though the girls urge her to carry razorblades so she can slash him the next time he comes near, what's harrowingly obvious is that they live in an environment that does very little to keep women safe. To that end, Gigi admits that she can't even tell her mother about what happened because she knows her mother will say it was her fault. This, in turn, is symptomatic of the larger problem facing the girls, which isn't that they're *unable* to protect each other, but that they would ever have to try to protect each other the first place. They live in a world that looks away when older men subject them to uncomfortable experiences, a world in which 12-year-old girls are blamed for their own rapes. In the absence of support from adults or society at large, then, August and her friends turn to one another, but this is an imperfect solution because friendship can only do so much to address a cultural lack of respect for women and their safety. Consequently, *Another Brooklyn* is a novel that simultaneously celebrates the empowering qualities of female friendship while also lamenting that these bonds are often the only resources available to women facing objectification and violence.

RELIGION, TRADITION, AND DEATH

Jacqueline Woodson's novel *Another Brooklyn* looks at the beliefs and rituals people seek out to help them deal with death and uncertainty. The different ways that August and her younger brother conceptualize the loss of their mother is especially noteworthy, since their differing approaches highlight the emotional benefits of having strong systems of belief. To that end, August's brother gravitates toward religion, joining their father in the Nation of Islam movement and, in doing so, adopting elements of the Islamic faith. This helps him acclimate to the idea that his mother won't be returning and even allows him to later accept the death of his father. August, on the other hand, doesn't devote herself to a religion and consequently has a harder time coping with her mother's death. However, she later becomes interested in anthropology, studying the rituals and customs that other cultures have surrounding death. In this way, she devotes herself to learning about the various traditions people use to make sense of mortality. Rather than conforming to just one philosophy, then, she remains open to many traditions. In turn, August finds a way of conceptualizing death without actually ascribing to a religion herself. With this in mind, Woodson suggests that exposure to tradition and ritual can help even the most secular person accept death as a natural,

inevitable part of life.

Throughout *Another Brooklyn*, it's overwhelmingly clear that religious faith helps August's brother make sense of life. Following in the footsteps of his father, he joins the Nation of Islam, a popular African American movement in the 1960s and 1970s that incorporated Islamic teachings into its overall message about race relations. In the novel's opening scene, August and her brother are adults and have just said goodbye to their father, who has died after a long illness. As they talk about what it will be like to live without their father in the world, August admits that she already misses him. Her brother, for his part, simply says, "Allah is good. All praise to Allah for calling him home." This response emphasizes the extent to which his faith helps him respond to losing a loved one. Although he's undoubtedly sad, it's clear he isn't completely at a loss, and this is because he has something to cling to: the idea that Allah (God) is a beneficent, guiding presence who can help him come to terms with the harsh reality that everyone dies at some point. This outlook makes sense, considering that August's brother has always been somebody who appreciates strong underlying principles that explain the way things are. For instance, when he's a child, he takes a liking to math because of its unwavering nature. Nothing, he points out, can ever change algebra or geometry. Applying this same fatalistic approach to his mother's prolonged absence, he tries to get August to admit that she's not coming back. "It's absolute," he says, using a math metaphor that reveals his tendency to gravitate toward ideas that help him make sense of a world that might otherwise feel uncertain. This, it seems, is the same comforting sense of certainty that religion lends to him.

For August, though, committing to a religion isn't so easy. This is perhaps partly because she doesn't see herself reflected in the Nation of Islam's worldview. Although she respects Sister Loretta (the woman her father dates and who introduces the family to Islamic teachings) she has trouble living the life of a devoted Muslim woman. All the same, August tries to derive the same peace of mind from religion as her brother and father do. When she prays, though, she feels like her brain is "fuzzy with clouded memory"—an image that underscores just how far she is from gaining the kind of "clarity" she hopes religion can give her. As a result, she doesn't take to the Islamic faith like her brother does, instead investing herself in her friendships and clinging to her hope that her mother will return. And though August's friendships are certainly important, her unwillingness to acknowledge that her mother is dead implies that she needs something else, something that will help her cope with the difficult parts of life.

August eventually finds the "clarity" she's looking for by becoming an anthropologist who studies how different cultures respond to death. Throughout the novel, she dispenses information about how various people around the world mourn deceased loved ones. She notes that she has "seen death in Indonesia and Korea," along with countless other places; she explains the customs of each of these cultures, showing how familiar she has become with the ways in which people conceive of not only death itself, but the process of mourning. And though August doesn't adopt any of these beliefs for herself, she does gain insight and peace of mind from observing such traditions. By the time August is an adult and her father dies, then, she's familiar with "the deep relief and fear that [comes] with death." This phrase is noteworthy because of its seemingly contradictory nature. August says that death comes with both "relief" *and* "fear," two things most people wouldn't necessarily associate with each other. But because August has spent so much time observing the way people react to death, she's capable of building a nuanced perspective, one that acknowledges the complexities that come along with mortality. In other words, her study of other cultures and their funeral customs has allowed her to engage with tradition in a way that is similar to how she might benefit from religious rituals like praying, which otherwise feel unapproachable to her. Whether a person is religious or not, then, Woodson implies that tradition can help them cope with death.

RACISM AND CLASSISM

Although *Another Brooklyn* doesn't explicitly spotlight the direct impact of racism on August's life, the novel plays out against a backdrop of prejudice and tense race relations. At first glance, August's life seems somewhat unaffected by the racism and bigotry of the 1970s despite the fact that she's black—possibly because the novel primarily focuses on her relationships with other black people. However, many of the interactions she has in her predominantly African American community hint at the ways in which prejudice and racism have impacted so much of her daily life. For example, the significant presence of the Nation of Islam in her neighborhood is a testament to how eager many of her community members are to take a stand against racism, considering that the organization is a separatist movement. Furthermore, August encounters a different kind of prejudice when her friend Sylvia's elitist father demonstrates his classist beliefs by forbidding August, Angela, and Gigi from spending time with his daughter. He does this largely because they live in poverty and, in his mind, they exemplify the stereotypes about black people that he wants so desperately to avoid. Consequently, he paradoxically turns a racist eye on them in order to protect his own daughter from racism. As a result, readers see that, though the novel's focus isn't necessarily on the bigotry August faces, such matters are unfortunately impossible to avoid. With this in mind, Woodson implies that even when people of color don't seem to experience overt discrimination, their communities and relationships are still inevitably affected by racism and divisiveness.

The Nation of Islam plays a subtle though significant role in

August's predominantly black community. Founded in Detroit in 1930, this religious and political movement taught that white people are a race of devils that antagonize black people, who are the origins of all humankind. Moreover, the Nation of Islam advocated for a separation of white people and black people in the United States with the goal of establishing an all-black nation or territory—they claimed that white America owed African American people at least this much after oppressing them for so long. With this in mind, the fact that so many people in August's community belong to the Nation of Islam suggests that they align with the organization's ideas about separatism. This is especially noteworthy because Woodson doesn't call attention to any overt examples of white-on-black racism, instead focusing on August's everyday life in a predominantly black neighborhood. And yet, the mere knowledge that so many people around her align with a separatist movement highlights just how heavily racism weighs on her community, even if it's not immediately detectable in the pages of *Another Brooklyn*. Indeed, it's quite possible that August's fellow Brooklynites have gravitated toward the Nation of Islam not only out of a sense of religious calling, but also as a response to the bigotry and racism they've faced throughout their lives.

The pervasive presence of the Nation of Islam is not the only sign that August's community struggles under the weight of discrimination. August's social life also suffers because of the classism of Sylvia's father, an erudite black man who lives with his family (all of whom are also black) in an impressive home. When August and her two other friends first go to Sylvia's house, they feel extremely uncomfortable because they are painfully aware that Sylvia's parents are judging their old clothing and making negative assumptions about their home lives. In fact, Sylvia's father even interviews them, asking who their parents are and what they do for a living. Of course, this kind of classism might not seem racially-inflected, since people of all races unfairly judge their children's friends because they don't think they meet a certain standard. However, the classism set forth by Sylvia's parents—and especially her father—is obviously tied to their thoughts about how their daughter will fare in a racist world. While grilling them with questions, Sylvia's father asks August and the others if they understand "the Negro problem in America," a reference to *The Negro Problem*, a collection of essays by black writers like W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington that advocates for disenfranchised African Americans to take responsibility for their own empowerment. Sylvia's father also asks if they understand that it is "up to [them] to rise above," a question that highlights his concern that these particular young women might *not* be able to "rise above" racism and discrimination. And as if this doesn't make it clear enough that Sylvia's family is subjecting August, Angela, and Gigi to the same unjust scrutiny that racist white people turn on the black community, Sylvia's older sister later hears her laughing with her friends and slaps Sylvia across the face, saying, "Don't try to act like a dusty, dirty black American." In this moment, it becomes overwhelmingly evident that Sylvia's family has great disdain for other black people, internalizing racist stereotypes about African American people and weaponizing them against their own community members.

In turn, Woodson manages once more to reveal the many ways in which August is forced to face bigotry. More importantly, though, she portrays racism as something that is deeply engrained in August's community, rendering it tragically inescapable even in a novel that largely focuses on other matters—a representation of the staggering shadow that discrimination casts.

SYMBOLS

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

MUSIC

At various points throughout *Another Brooklyn*, August sees music—and specifically jazz—as an embodiment of the struggle to survive hardship and sorrow. At the beginning of the novel, she looks back on her life and wonders if she and her friends would have had an easier time coping with adversity if they'd known about jazz, which she believes would have helped them see that there was a "melody to [their] madness." In this way, music represents the ever-present underlying joy and beauty in life, even amid messy or upsetting circumstances. This is a liberating notion, as it suggests that there will always be a way to find meaning and substance in life, even when it seems there's nothing but tragedy in the world. In keeping with this, August starts listening to avant-garde jazz when she's a young adult, finding great solace in the pain she hears expressed in the music—pain that has been channeled into something hauntingly beautiful. "How had my own father, so deep inside his grief, not known there were men who had lived this, who knew how to tell his story?" she wonders while listening to jazz, making it clear that she sees music as evidence not only that other people have undergone the same kind of hardship as her and her loved ones, but also that it's possible to derive meaning and value from these experiences. In turn, music comes to represent resilience.

THE URN

The urn that contains the ashes of August's mother is symbolic of August's longstanding denial amid her grief. In a conversation with her father, August refers to the urn as a "jar," refusing to call it by its actual name, since this would mean admitting she already knows that her mother's

ashes are inside it. Furthermore, she also asks her father about the contents of the urn even though he claims she already knows that it contains ashes, suggesting that August is purposefully keeping herself from acknowledging that her mother is dead. As August gets older, though, she slowly starts referring to the urn by its proper name, no longer calling it a "jar." Interestingly enough, she makes this switch even before she fully allows herself to acknowledge her mother's death. In this way, the urn comes to represent denial's tendency to erode slowly over time. As August gradually becomes more and more comfortable talking about the urn and using the correct term when she refers to it, she gets that much closer to dropping the delusion that her mother is alive. Consequently, the urn signifies the human need to let go of denial incrementally rather than all at once.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Amistad edition of *Another Brooklyn* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Somehow, my brother and I grew up motherless yet halfway whole. My brother had the faith my father brought him to, and for a long time, I had Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, the four of us sharing the weight of growing up *Girl* in Brooklyn, as though it was a bag of stones we passed among ourselves saying, *Here. Help me carry this.*

Related Characters: August (speaker), Gigi, Angela, Sylvia, August's Father, August's Mother, August's Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears early in *Another Brooklyn*, alerting readers to the fact that August spends most of her formative years without a mother. The idea that she still manages to grow up "halfway whole" suggests that she still has people upon whom she can depend, but this doesn't necessarily mean that her father makes up for her mother's absence. In fact, August's assertion that her brother invests himself in "the faith [her] father brought him to" suggests that both men turn to religion for support, leaving August to deal with her feelings on her own. Luckily, though, she has her friends Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi to help her navigate her way into adulthood. The idea that these girls share the "weight of growing up *Girl* in Brooklyn" is integral to the novel's central premise, since *Another Brooklyn* is first and foremost a study of the empowering qualities of female friendship. The novel also investigates the difficulties that young women often face growing up, and though August doesn't articulate what, exactly, causes the "weight" that she and her friends feel, she makes it perfectly clear that one of the only ways she has managed to shoulder this "weight" is by uniting with her friends, thereby demonstrating the sustaining nature of companionship.

As a child, I had not known the word *anthropology* or that there was a thing called Ivy League. I had not known that you could spend your days on planes, moving through the world, studying death [...]. I had seen death in Indonesia and Korea. Death in Mauritania and Mongolia. I had watched the people of Madagascar exhume the muslin-wrapped bones of their ancestors, spray them with perfume and ask those who had already passed to the next place for their stories, prayers, blessings. I had been home a month watching my father die. Death didn't frighten me. Not now. Not anymore.

Related Characters: August (speaker), August's Brother, August's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, August reflects upon the experience of coming home to watch her father die. In doing so, she reveals that she has spent the majority of her adult life as an anthropologist who studies death and the various rituals and customs surrounding it: she has witnessed the ways that multiple different cultures respond to the passing of loved ones, observing people in Indonesia, Korea, Mauritania, and Mongolia, to name just a few locations. By highlighting her familiarity with death, August provides an explanation for why, exactly, she isn't afraid of death or even all that bothered by her father's passing. After all, she has turned the mere subject of death into an academic topic, thereby enabling her to approach it objectively and with an understanding of the wide-ranging nuances that accompany the mourning process. However, she also hints at the fact that she hasn't always been capable of facing death in this manner, saying that it doesn't "frighten" her "anymore"—a hint that she used to be unable to think so openly about the subject. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that August's interest in death has actually emerged from her

original unwillingness to accept it as part of the human experience, suggesting that it can often be cathartic and productive for people to face the things they fear most.

In eastern Indonesia, families keep their dead in special rooms in their homes. Their dead not truly dead until the family has saved enough money to pay for the funeral. Until then, the dead remain with them, dressed and cared for each morning, taken on trips with the family, hugged daily, loved deeply.

Related Characters: August (speaker), August's Mother, August's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout *Another Brooklyn*, August frequently provides descriptions of various death-related rituals that people practice around the world. Although these pieces of information might sometimes seem random, they effectively remind readers not only that the subject of death looms large for August, but also that she has become an expert on the many different traditions surrounding the mourning process. This is important to keep in mind, since August is vehemently opposed to embracing the inevitability of death for the majority of her childhood and adolescence. Therefore, it's revealing that she one day finds herself capable of examining it so closely, since this implies that her initial unwillingness to think about mortality is tied to a deep-seated obsession with the topic. This makes sense, considering that she spends her time as a child trying as hard as she can to ignore the fact that her mother committed suicide, meaning that she actually spends quite a bit of time thinking about death, since striving to *not* think about something inevitably amounts to thinking about it.

In this specific example, August takes interest in the fact that families in eastern Indonesia attend to their dead loved ones as if they are still alive (that is, until they can bury them). This resonates with August because it is similar to what she tried to do when she was younger by insisting that her mother hadn't died—by believing that her mother would someday return to the family, August maintained a sense of connection to her mother. In the same way that the people of eastern Indonesia continue their relationships with their deceased loved ones, then, August remained tied to her mother simply by refusing to acknowledge her death.

Chapter 2 Quotes

In the late morning, we saw the moving vans pull up. White people we didn't know pulled the trucks with their belongings, and in the evenings, we watched them take long looks at the buildings they were leaving then climb into station wagons and drive away. A pale woman with dark hair covered her face with her hands as she climbed into the passenger side, her shoulders trembling.

Related Characters: August (speaker), August's Father, August's Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, August describes what it's like to watch all of her white neighbors pack up their things and leave. This takes place during the 1970s, a time when Brooklyn underwent major changes in its racial and cultural make-up. Whereas many neighborhoods were populated by predominantly white European immigrants in the first half of the 20th century, this dynamic began to shift in the 1970s when more people of color started living in these areas. This, in turn, created a phenomenon known as "white flight," or a mass exodus of white residents.

What's most noteworthy about Woodson's approach in *Another Brooklyn* to this piece of history is that she doesn't pause to comment on the greater implications of white flight, instead simply letting readers experience it through young August's eyes. However, it's hard to overlook the racist implications of the fact that all of August's white neighbors suddenly move away when black people start living in their neighborhood. And though August herself doesn't explicitly call out this inherently racist behavior, her straightforward account of what it's like to watch "trembling" white people hurry away from her fellow neighbors is a powerful way of highlighting the problematic undertones of white flight.

Chapter 4 Quotes

The woman had staggered to the corner, grabbing for the stop sign and missing it before disappearing around the corner.

How were we to learn our way on this journey without my mother?

Related Characters: August (speaker), Angela's Mother, Gigi, Sylvia, August's Mother, Angela

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

This passage begins with a description of a strange interaction August and her other friends, Sylvia and Gigi, have with Angela. While playfully dancing for her friends on the sidewalk, Angela suddenly stops and tenses but won't say why. Turning, August sees a woman stumbling toward the corner of the sidewalk before turning the corner. Although neither August nor readers know it at the time, this woman is Angela's mother, who is addicted to drugs. Because *Another Brooklyn* is narrated retrospectively, though, the older version of August telling the story now knows that this woman is Angela's mother, which is why she follows this story with a line about navigating the world without the help of a mother, knowing that—like August herself—Angela effectively had to find her way into adulthood without motherly guidance or support. Interestingly enough, August begins the line universally, using the word "we" to ask how she and her friends are supposed to "learn [their] way on this journey." By the end of the sentence, though, August has shifted to her own experience, focusing on the absence of *her* mother. This change is noteworthy because it emphasizes the fact that August's mother's absence is constantly on August's mind. To that end, she finds herself thinking about her mother even when she's actually thinking about something else, thereby demonstrating just how difficult it is for her to focus on anything else.

Chapter 5 Quotes

The only curse you carry, her mother said, is the dark skin I passed on to you. You gotta find a way past that skin. You gotta find your way to the outside of it. Stay in the shade. Don't let it get no darker than it already is. Don't drink no coffee either.

Related Characters: Gigi's Mother (speaker), Gigi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Gigi's mother says this to Gigi after telling her that she's beautiful enough to become a famous movie star. Everything about Gigi, her mother says, is perfect—except for the color of her skin. In this moment, Gigi's mother reveals her belief that dark skin is an undesirable thing, upholding that Gigi's blackness will follow her through life like a "curse." By saying this, she perpetuates the idea that lighter skin is preferable than darker skin—a viewpoint that reflects colorism (prejudice against different shades of skin within the same racial group) and is no different than the beliefs that fuel outright racism. In turn, she ends up subjecting her daughter to the very same kind of prejudices that she worries will hold Gigi back in the first place, unintentionally embodying the challenges she's supposedly so afraid might interfere with her daughter's happiness and success. As a result, readers see the unfortunate ways in which people often buy into racist ideas that work against them and their loved ones even when they don't mean to perpetuate such thinking.

What keeps keeping us here? Gigi asked one day, the rain coming down hard, her shirt torn at the shoulder. We didn't know that for weeks and weeks, the lock had been broken on her building's front door. We didn't know about the soldier who kept behind the darkened basement stairwell, how he had waited for her in shadow. We were twelve.

I can't tell anybody but you guys, Gigi said. *My mom will say it was my fault.*

Related Characters: Gigi (speaker), Angela, Sylvia, August

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

When Gigi tells August, Sylvia, and Angela that a homeless, drug-addicted veteran raped her in the basement stairwell of her apartment building, the girls see for perhaps the first time how dangerous the world can be. This traumatic event causes Gigi to wonder what, exactly, is keeping her from escaping her current circumstances. Though this might seem like a logistical question about why she doesn't leave Brooklyn to live somewhere else, the question takes on even more significance when she commits suicide several years later. This suggests that Gigi's rape traumatized her so thoroughly that it has interfered with her ability to see the point in life. Worse, she suffers with such thoughts alone, or at least without any kind of adult guidance or support. This is because Gigi believes that her mom would say that her rape was Gigi's own fault, a sentiment that underlines the extent to which she is expected to fend for herself in a world that is treacherous for young women. Indeed, the fact that Gigi's mother would blame her for the soldier's violence

proves that Gigi and her friends live in a world that looks the other way when young women need help, thereby allowing violence against women to perpetuate itself.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ In 1968, the children of Biafra were starving. My brother was not yet born and I was too young to understand what it meant to be a child, to be Biafran, to starve. Biafra was a country that lived only inside my mother's admonitions—*Eat your peas, there are children starving in Biafra*—and in the empty-eyed, brown, big-bellied children moving across my parents' television screen. But long after Biafra melted back into Nigeria, the country from which it had fought so hard to secede, the faces and swollen bellies of those children haunted me. In a pile of old magazines my father kept on our kitchen table in Brooklyn, I found a copy of *Life* with two genderless children on the cover and the words STARVING CHILDREN OF BIAFRA WAR blared across the ragged white garment of the taller child.

Related Characters: August (speaker), August's Brother, August's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Woodson references the Nigerian Civil War several times throughout the novel, using it as a point of comparison between the straightforward, livable poverty August experiences and the harrowing destitution created by violent conflict. The war itself took place between 1967 and 1970 and it was fought between the Nigerian government and the Igbo people, who wanted to secede from the rest of the country and create their own state called Biafra. Although the details of this struggle don't necessarily make their way into *Another Brooklyn*, the conflict is important to the narrative because it helps August put her hardships in perspective. Indeed, she is surrounded by dangerous men, many of whom are addicted to drugs, but she also has enough food to eat—a fact that stands in stark contrast to the children of Biafra, many of whom are so starving that their stomachs have become distended.

What's more, Woodson turns to the Biafran War as something that factors into August's memories about her mother, who often urged her to finish her dinner by referencing the starving children of Biafra. To August, these references were abstract since she didn't understand the circumstances surrounding the conflict. Now that August is older and her mother is gone, though, she has a better understanding of the war and is able to recognize that her mother was worried about children who lived so far away. Considering that August believes her mother is still alive but living apart from her, then, it becomes obvious why her memories about her mother's concern about the Biafran War are relevant—after all, if her mother worried about unknown children living on another continent, surely she's capable of caring about August's wellbeing even when they no longer live together.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ When boys called our names, we said, *Don't even say my name. Don't even put it in your mouth*. When they said, *You ugly anyway*, we knew they were lying. When they hollered, *Conceited!* We said, *No—convinced!* We watched them dip-walk away, too young to know how to respond. The four of us together weren't something they understood. They understood girls alone, folding their arms across their breasts, praying for invisibility.

Related Characters: August (speaker), Gigi, Angela, Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

As August and her friends get older, boys begin to notice their bodies. They also begin to yell out at them, but August, Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi feel no pressure to respond to their advances. This is significant, considering that Gigi was recently raped by a man, which means the girls must certainly feel on edge about the interactions they have with men (even if those men are still quite young). And yet, moving through the world as a group makes them feel unafraid of ignoring and even insulting boys. In turn, Woodson intimates that female companionship is something that can give young women a sense of strength, power, and fearlessness. The problem, of course, is that they have to band together like this to feel safe in the first place. Although it's certainly a positive thing that friendship makes the girls feel more confident, it's upsetting to think that they struggle to feel this way when they're on their own, since this indicates that the society they live in makes it difficult for them to feel comfortable and safe in their own skin.

I watched my brother watch the world, his sharp, too-serious brow furrowing down in both angst and wonder. Everywhere we looked, we saw the people trying to dream themselves out. As though there was someplace other than this place. As though there was another Brooklyn.

Related Characters: August (speaker), August's Mother, August's Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, August meditates on the feeling of looking out her apartment window with her brother when they're both in their adolescence. When they were little, they used to gaze out of this very same window and wonder what it would be like to live in the world that existed on the other side of the glass. Now that they have experienced this world, though, they're capable of recognizing all the ways people yearn to be elsewhere. Looking out the window with this knowledge, August can feel her brother's "angst and wonder," sensing that he, too, has picked up on the fact that everyone is "trying to dream themselves out" of their own lives. This is made overwhelmingly evident by the fact that so many of August and her brother's neighbors are addicted to heroin, which they use as a way of escaping their own realities. What August begins to intuit, though, is that there *is* no other place to go. Although people can remove themselves from Brooklyn, this won't necessarily change how they feel about their lives. This is a valuable lesson, one that most likely resonates with August because she knows—on a certain level, at least—that her mother committed suicide, which is the most desperate way of trying to escape one's own existence.

What's in that jar, Daddy?

You know what's in that jar.

You said it was ashes. But whose?

You know whose.

Clyde's?

We buried Clyde.

Mine?

This is memory.

Related Characters: August's Father, August (speaker), August's Mother, Clyde

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between August and her father sometime after they move to Brooklyn. The context surrounding this exchange isn't exactly clear, since Woodson simply presents it at the end of a chapter without explaining what "jar" August is asking about. All the same, it's perfectly clear that the "jar" in question isn't actually a jar but an urn, since it's full of ashes. More importantly, August's father provides answers without ever actually answering her questions, thereby revealing that August is purposefully keeping herself from acknowledging things she already knows. Indeed, when she asks what's inside the "jar," her father replies, "You know what's in that jar," to which she admits to remembering that he has already told her it contains ashes. Going on like this, she asks *whose* ashes are in the "jar," but he once again insists that she already knows. In this way, August is effectively interrogating herself, which means that she is also purposefully prohibiting herself from accessing certain information. As a result, readers realize for perhaps the first time in the novel that August's mother isn't simply absent, but dead—after all, what else would August so adamantly keep herself from accepting?

Chapter 8 Quotes

My brother had discovered math, the wonder of numbers, the infinite doubtless possibility. He sat on his bed most days solving problems no eight-year-old should understand. *Squared*, he said, *is absolute. No one in the world can argue algebra or geometry. No one can say pi is wrong.*

Come with me, I begged.

But my brother looked up from his numbers and said, *She's gone, August. It's absolute.*

Related Characters: August's Brother, August (speaker), August's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

August's brother's interest in math predates his devotion to

religion and particularly to the Nation of Islam movement, highlighting his attraction to things that explain certain facts of life. When he gravitates toward the "infinite doubtless possibility" of math, what he's really taking pleasure in is the idea that, unlike so many other things in his life, he can know with complete certainty not only why something is the way it is, but also that it will *always* be that way. He then takes this mindset and applies it to the areas of uncertainty in his own life, coming to terms with the fact that his mother isn't coming back. Whereas August refuses to acknowledge reality, her brother finds a certain amount of comfort in eliminating his sense of uncertainty by simply accepting that their mother is gone. In this way, Woodson spotlights the ways in which believing in a certain worldview, philosophy, or practice can help people cope with otherwise ambiguous and unsettling situations.

❝ I prayed that my own brain, fuzzy with clouded memory, would settle into a clarity that helped me to understand the feeling I got when I pressed my lips against my new boyfriend, Jerome, his shaking hands searching my body.

Related Characters: August (speaker), Jerome, Sister Loretta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears as August tries to devote herself to prayer in the way that Sister Loretta, a devout member of the Nation of Islam, has taught her. As August kneels beside Sister Loretta, she tries to find "clarity" in the act of prayer. What's interesting, though, is that she doesn't search for clarity simply by praying about something else, but by directly addressing the fact that she lacks clarity in the first place. Instead of letting the act of prayer steer her toward a certain kind of peace of mind, she actively tries to address the fact that her mind feels "fuzzy with clouded memory." What's more, this feeling is specifically tied to the exploration of her sexuality, meaning that she's actually praying for a sense of understanding when it comes to the way she feels about her boyfriend, Jerome. In this way, her engagement with religion is predicated on her desire to find the guidance she lacks as a result of transitioning into adolescence without the support of a mother. Because Sister Loretta is the only person in August's life in a position to give her any kind of motherly support, it makes sense that August would turn to prayer in this manner, since religion is the only way she knows how to connect with Sister Loretta.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ The parents questioned us. Who were our people? What did they do? How were our grades? What were our ambitions? Did we understand, her father wanted to know, the Negro problem in America? Did we understand it was up to us to rise above? His girls, he believed, would become doctors and lawyers. *It's up to parents, he said, to push, push, push.*

Related Characters: August (speaker), Gigi, Angela, Sylvia, Sylvia's Mother, Sylvia's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

When August, Angela, and Gigi visit Sylvia's house, they encounter Sylvia's overbearing parents, who mercilessly question them about their personal lives. Their questions highlight their judgmental attitude toward anyone who doesn't come from what they might consider a good family, anyone whose parents don't have elite jobs, anyone whose grades aren't perfect, or anyone who doesn't have plans to pursue a competitive, widely-respected career. Even more revealing, though, are the questions Sylvia's father asks about the girls' thoughts concerning racism, since these questions indicate that his classist worldview is fueled by a desire to "rise above" bigotry. Indeed, he believes that it is his daughters' responsibility to overcome racism by becoming doctors or lawyers, clearly thinking that the only way for a person to stand up against discrimination is to make it impossible for racists to align them with bigoted stereotypes about black people. The problem with this approach, however, is that it causes Sylvia's father to adopt racist standards himself, effectively subjecting August, Angela, and Gigi to the same kind of unfair scrutiny to which he's so worried bigots will subject his family. Accordingly, Woodson warns readers about the dangerous overlap between elitism and racism, ultimately suggesting that it's unfortunately all too common for minorities to perpetuate bigotry while ostensibly trying to fight it.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ When you're fifteen, the world collapses in a moment, different from when you're eight and you learn that your mother walked into water—and kept on walking.

When you're fifteen, you can't make promises of a return to the before place. Your aging eyes tell a different, truer story.

Related Characters: August (speaker), August's Mother, Jerome, Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears when August sees Sylvia and Jerome holding hands in the park and she realizes that Sylvia has betrayed her by secretly dating August's ex-boyfriend. What's unique about this moment is that it contains two revelations: first, August learns about Sylvia's betrayal.

More importantly, though, August also finally admits that her mother committed suicide. The reason these two acknowledgements come at the same time is that August finds herself incapable of denying reality when she sees Sylvia and Jerome holding hands. Although August usually tries to protect herself from heartache by overlooking anything that might trouble her, there's nothing she can do in this moment to ignore the fact that Sylvia and Jerome are in a romantic relationship. As a result, her world "collapses" around her, and this makes it all but impossible for her to continue deluding herself about her mother, too. Whereas she used to be able to convince herself to live in the past of her childhood without acknowledging the present reality that her mother is dead, she now has no choice but to live in the present. She has, it seems, become too old to convince herself of false realities. In turn, Woodson implies that denial is an undependable coping mechanism, one that falters as people get older and are forced to admit certain irrefutable realities.

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.

CHAPTER 1

August reflects that for a large part of her life, her mother wasn't dead "yet." Thinking back, August realizes that she and her brother could have had it worse than they did—their father could have become a heroin addict and run off with another woman, leaving them in the care of New York City's child services. This, she knows, would not have been a happy life. She now wonders if knowing about **jazz** would have helped her cope with the difficulties of her childhood and adolescence, wanting to know if it would have been helpful to know that there was a "melody to [the] madness." She notes that she came together with her friends Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi like a jazz improvisation and that it seemed like their collective song had always been playing. And yet, they knew nothing about jazz at the time.

The beginning of Another Brooklyn *isn't particularly straightforward, since August's style of narration is often fragmented and deeply metaphorical. Because of this, it's hard to tell what, exactly, she's talking about when she says that for a long time her mother wasn't dead "yet." However, the word "yet" does tell readers that her mother dies at some point, imbuing the narrative with a sense of anticipation of the loss August will inevitably undergo. What's more, her thoughts about jazz are somewhat elusive at this point, except that she seems to see the genre as representative of her friendship with Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, using it to illustrate their intuitive and fluid bond. In turn, she signals to readers that her connection to these girls still looms large in her mind as an adult.*

When she turns 15, August is quiet and moody, so her father sends her to a therapist named Sister Sonja. He found her through fellow members of the Nation of Islam; Sister Sonja herself is a devout member. Looking at Sister Sonja's black hijab, August finds it hard to answer her questions—August isn't comforted by Sister Sonja's attempt to make August feel like her suffering is universal. Looking back, August notes that she and her brother grew up "motherless yet halfway whole." Whereas her brother invested himself in the Nation of Islam like their father, August turned to Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi. Together, the girls helped each other navigate the challenges of growing up as girls in Brooklyn.

August and her brother grew up "motherless," which seems to have had a significant impact on August's entire life. To that end, her father sends her to a therapist to help her work through her emotions, but this proves unhelpful because August is unwilling to open up to Sister Sonja. This is perhaps because she doesn't feel connected to the Nation of Islam, a cultural, political, and religious movement in which her father and brother have invested themselves. Because Sister Sonja is affiliated with this organization, it's hard for August to relate to her. Instead, August tries to distract herself with her close bond to Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, implying that friendship can be a vital source of support.

It has been 20 years since August last lived in Brooklyn. She has returned because her father was dying of liver cancer and he has now finally passed away. Sitting in a diner in New Jersey after burying his body, August and her brother talk about how they're coping with the loss. Her brother offers to let her stay with him and his pregnant wife, but August declines, saying that she has no problem staying in her father's apartment until she leaves the city once more. August asks her brother if he's scared to become a father, and he admits that he is a little afraid, though he adds, "But I know with Allah all things are possible."

The response August's brother gives to her question about being afraid underscores the extent to which religious faith often emboldens people. Although he is frightened, he has committed his life to serving Allah (God), and this means that he feels comfortable opening himself up to life. Simply put, his faith gives him courage, something to lean upon in moments of uncertainty. This is an important dynamic to keep in mind as the novel progresses, since Another Brooklyn *centers on August's relationship with uncertainty and loss—two things she has to figure out how to deal with from a secular standpoint, since she isn't religious like her brother.*

Although August declines her brother's invitation to sleep at his apartment in Queens, she privately dreads the prospect of returning to her father's empty apartment. At the same time, she knows that both "deep relief and fear" come along with death, and this makes her think of the ways other cultures deal with the passing of a loved one. In India, she notes, Hindu people spread the ashes of the deceased on the Ganges river, whereas the Caviteño population in Bali bury people in tree trunks. August has spent her adult life as an anthropologist studying the traditions that people from other cultures have surrounding death. Accordingly, she has seen quite a bit of death and therefore isn't afraid of it anymore. Watching her father die didn't frighten her, she upholds, but simply being back in Brooklyn seems unbearable.

Although August doesn't have religion to turn to like her brother does, her anthropological interest in the traditions surrounding death in other cultures seems to help her process the idea of loss and mortality. In turn, readers see that her academic studies have—in some ways—supplanted the role of religion in her life, giving her a balanced perspective of what it means to lose a loved one. However, the notion that she finds returning to Brooklyn so unsettling suggests that there are certain areas of her life that her studies haven't helped her process, though it's not yet clear what these are.

August's brother playfully tries to convince her to settle down and devote herself to the Nation of Islam, but she sidesteps his insinuations. Focusing again on their father's death, August begins to say that it's good he's no longer suffering but she's unable to finish the sentence. She wants to comfort her brother but she can't bring herself to say more. To fill the silence, then, her brother says, "Allah is good. All praise to Allah for calling him home."

Again, it's overwhelmingly clear that religion helps August's brother process his grief. That he's capable of accepting his father's death by turning to his faith suggests that religion is a very powerful tool for dealing with loss, though this doesn't help people like August who aren't religious and must grapple with the mourning process in different, less spiritual ways.

August takes the subway back to Brooklyn. At one point, she realizes with a start that Sylvia is sitting directly across from her. While Sylvia reads the newspaper, August studies her, noticing how gracefully she has aged. Soon enough, Sylvia looks up and gazes directly at her, and for a moment, August has a flashback to the last time she saw Sylvia, when Sylvia was wearing a private school uniform and her stomach was just beginning to bulge beneath her shirt. Then, as Sylvia excitedly greets her and asks when she returned to Brooklyn, August realizes that her friend's daughter must now be a grown woman. Unthinkingly, August stands and walks toward Sylvia, who is clearly happy to see her. Without saying anything, though, August dashes out the open subway door, getting off the train even though she knows she hasn't reached her stop yet.

It's not yet clear what happened between August and Sylvia. At this point, all readers know is that August has been away for 20 years, a period during which she apparently hasn't spoken to Sylvia. At the same time, readers also know that August once looked to Sylvia and her other friends for support, turning to them to process the loss of her mother instead of depending on the Nation of Islam. However, August and Sylvia have apparently grown apart over the years despite their supportive bond—an unfortunate reminder that even the closest friendships can end.

August loses herself in memory. She remembers Angela calling her when she was in college, saying, "I only just heard about Gigi. So awful. Were you there?" Next, August recalls sitting with Sister Sonja and she remembers telling her that she spent the majority of her childhood and adolescence waiting for her mother to come back. "She's coming," August recalls saying to herself. "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow." She then thinks about how people treat their dead loved ones in Indonesia, where they don't consider them fully gone until the family has saved enough money to hold a funeral. In the meantime, families dress their deceased loved ones and take them along if they go on trips, hugging them and making sure they still feel loved.

Again, August provides incomplete amounts of information about her friend group, this time insinuating that something tragic happened to Gigi, though she doesn't elaborate further. August also recalls what it was like to deal with her mother's absence, and though she doesn't clarify the details surrounding this dynamic, it becomes clear that she has a hard time letting go of the people she loves. This is made especially evident by the anecdote she provides about people dressing up and doting on their dead loved ones in Indonesia—a tradition that aligns with August's unwillingness to give up on the idea that her mother will someday return.

CHAPTER 2

August's mother starts hearing the voice of her dead brother, Clyde, when August is eight years old. The family still lives together at SweetGrove, which is what they call their property in Tennessee. Soon, though, their father brings August and her brother to live Brooklyn, leaving their mother behind. From their third-floor apartment, the two siblings look out the window, gazing down at the streets as other black people go about their lives. Although Tennessee becomes a distant memory, August continues to think about her mother, confident that she will soon join them. To comfort her younger brother, August assures him that their mother will be coming soon, saying that she'll be there "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow."

In this passage, August goes back in time to narrate the circumstances surrounding her mother's absence. She implies that her father takes her and her brother to Brooklyn because of their mother's mental instability, which is why August hopes as a child that her mother will someday become well enough to join them, though there's no indication that her father has told her this is a possibility. This is why she promises her brother that their mother will come "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," a phrase that—though comforting in some sense—acknowledges the fact that she might ever arrive. Still, August clings to the idea of her mother's return as she settles into life in Brooklyn, which is undoubtedly different than her experiences in rural Tennessee. It's worth noting that everyone in August's new neighborhood appears to be African American like her and her family—although Woodson doesn't emphasize the point very much, readers will perhaps notice the novel's subtle interest in Brooklyn's racial dynamics. The novel takes place in the 1970s, a time during which Brooklyn experienced shifts in the racial demographics of its population. That August lives in a predominantly black neighborhood reflects these shifts, and Woodson will continue to subtly explore this dynamic as the book progresses.

The first summer that August and her brother live in Brooklyn, their father doesn't let either of them leave the apartment on their own, so they press their faces against the window and watch as other children play in the streets. In particular, August notices Sylvia, Gigi, and Angela and she becomes envious of their close friendship, wanting badly to join their tight-knit group. This makes her think about how her mother always told her to be wary of cultivating close female friendships because other women can't be trusted. Despite this, August can't help but feel as she watches Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi that there is something meaningful about their bond. In keeping with this, the closeness August observes between these three girls makes her painfully aware of the lack of connection she has to her father and brother, who are themselves intimately connected to each other.

When August envies the closeness between Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, she laments the absence of meaningful interpersonal connection in her life. This is partially the result of her father's unwillingness to let her leave the apartment to forge new friendships, but it's also a byproduct of the unfortunate fact that she has been deprived of a strong mother-daughter bond. Whereas August's father and brother enjoy a close relationship, she finds herself on her own. Though August's mother has warned her about becoming close with other women, she can sense that this is an unwarranted worry, one that clearly wouldn't stop her from reaching out to the girls on the other side of the window if given the chance.

While watching Brooklyn from the window that summer, August notices a number of white families packing up moving vans and leaving the neighborhood for good. Meanwhile, August and her brother continue to pass the time while their father works at a department store. Sometimes, a young boy outside winks at August as she peers out at him, and she wishes more than anything that she could go outside. Still, August's father doesn't let her, afraid that the world outside the apartment is simply too dangerous for his children. Having grown up in Brooklyn himself, he is confident that they shouldn't be on the streets without him, insisting that the world isn't as safe as people think. "Look at Biafra," he says. "Look at Vietnam." Still, August can't help but think that Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi look safe when they walk by with linked arms.

In the 1970s, parts of Brooklyn underwent significant changes, experiencing "white flight" as longtime white residents moved out of their neighborhoods in response to an influx of people of color. There is a tacit element of racism inherent to this trend, as white people seemingly flee areas simply to get away from their new black neighbors. However, Woodson doesn't remark upon this aspect, instead focusing only on August's youthful observation that the only white families in the surrounding area all seem to be leaving. What's more, August's father's reference to Biafra is a nod to the Nigerian Civil War, a conflict between the Nigerian government and the Republic of Biafra, a group that wanted to secede from the rest of the country. The war was predicated on a number of cultural and religious tensions and lasted from 1967 to 1970, with many Biafrans starving to death. Given that the Republic of Biafra was standing up for various ethnic and religious purposes and wanted to form its own nation, it makes sense that it would loom large in the mind of somebody like August's father, who will eventually devote himself to the Nation of Islam, an organization that wants to secede from the rest of the United States based on ideas about race and religion.


While walking to church one morning, August, her father, and her brother are stopped by a man in a suit who tells them that he has been sent to them in the name of Allah. He says he has a message for August's father, whom he calls his "beautiful black brother." Looking at August, he notices that her clothing doesn't cover her legs and says she should be fully covered because she is a "black queen" whose body is a temple. At this, August feels incredibly exposed, thinking that her legs are too long and her dress too short.

The man August and her family encounter on the street is a member of the Nation of Islam. According to the movement's beliefs, women should cover their entire bodies to protect the purity granted to them by Allah (God). This interaction on the street not only hints at the commitment August's father will later have to the Nation of Islam, but also illustrates the ways in which the men in August's community feel free to comment freely upon her body and looks. More importantly, when the man looks at her legs, her view of herself suddenly shifts, suggesting that such scrutiny runs the risk of refiguring a young girl's self-image—and given that August now feels uncomfortable in her own body, it's clear that this shift in her self-image is not a positive one.

One evening, August's brother leans so hard against the window that the glass shatters, slicing open his forearm. Instantly, their father swoops into the room and picks up him up, and they rushes to the hospital where a nurse gives August wafers while she waits. Thinking back, August remembers that her mother insisted Clyde didn't really die in Vietnam, believing that the military was wrong when they told her he'd been killed in the war. When the nurse at the hospital tells August that her brother is going to be fine, she remembers her mother saying, "Clyde is fine." In the days after August and her brother return from the hospital, August no longer wants to look out the window, even when her brother yells to her that the girls are outside again. Instead of paying attention to this, she thinks about how badly she wants to see her mother.

At this point, readers learn that August's uncle died in the Vietnam War. This, it seems, is what unsettled her mother and led to her mental health issues. Indeed, August's mother blatantly denied reality by insisting that Clyde was still alive. In keeping with this, August imitates her mother's unwillingness to accept reality by wholeheartedly believing that her mother will return to the family. Rather than acknowledging that this is increasingly unlikely, August clings to the idea that her mother will soon arrive, thereby exhibiting the same illogical thinking that led to her mother's instability in the first place.

CHAPTER 3

August's father lets her and her brother out of the apartment after the incident with the broken window. At first, he tells them they're only allowed to go as far as the gate in front of their building, then to the corner, then to the bodega, and finally as far as they want. Walking through the streets, August searches for her mother, wondering what she looks like now and if she still cries Clyde's name in the night. August is 11 now and she continues to keep track of Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, watching them from afar at school and feeling like she has so much in common with them despite the fact that they haven't officially met yet.

August continues to yearn for companionship. In particular, she wants to establish close female relationships, possibly because this is the thing she lacks most in her life, since she's still waiting in vain for her mother to return. Waiting like this causes August to live in a state of constant uncertainty, wondering when her family will be whole again. In this state of mind, she thinks about what her mother must look like now and how she's doing now that they've been separated for three years.

Finally, Sylvia asks August one day why she always stares at her, Angela, and Gigi. Moreover, Sylvia asks what August sees in them, clarifying that she's not trying to be mean. In response, August says that she sees "everything" when she looks at them. This prompts Sylvia to ask if August is the girl without a mother, but August lies and says no. Disregarding August's answer, Sylvia reaches out and takes her hand, saying, "You belong to us now." Several years later, August asks Sylvia what *she* saw in *her* that day. Sylvia replies that August seemed lost and beautiful, and Angela adds that she also looked "hungry." When the girls first come together, then, they all recognize these qualities in each other, each girl feeling lost, beautiful, and hungry.

At first, Sylvia's questions seem confrontational, as if she's making fun of August for always staring at her, Angela, and Gigi. However, it slowly emerges that she's simply curious about August. More importantly, it becomes clear that Sylvia and the others are just as interested in August as August is interested in them, forming a group in which each girl sees herself reflected in the others. In this way, August gains the kind of female companionship and support she's been wanting so badly.

Sylvia's family moved to Brooklyn from Martinique one year before August arrived in the city. Sylvia's parents still speak French to her, but she claims to have forgotten the language, focusing primarily on developing her friendships with Angela and Gigi while Sylvia's father quotes philosophy to her in her first language. Gigi also moved to Brooklyn the year before August, but she came from South Carolina. Gigi's mother, Gigi explains, wanted to spend her 21st birthday in New York City. Gigi then urges August not to calculate how old her mother is, joking that the math will only add up to teen pregnancy. Such a thing, August and her friends believe, will never happen to them.

Sylvia, August, and Gigi share their backstories with one another. In doing so, they realize that they are all in similar positions, at least insofar as they are new to Brooklyn. In turn, August further solidifies her connection to these girls, finding that—though their specific backgrounds vary from one another—they are all capable of understanding what it's like to move to a new city as a young girl. Needless to say, then, August finds a support network she previously lacked.

Unlike the others, Angela remains quiet about her family and home life. She also sometimes acts emotionally removed, but when August and her friends ask what's wrong, Angela insists that she's fine and she tells them to leave her alone. Still, August notices how frequently Angela's hands clench when these dark moods overcome her. When this happens, the girls let Angela brood, and she tells them that she doesn't have a past life—the only thing that matters is her current life and her friendship with them.

Unlike the others, Angela is unwilling to talk about her family or her home life. This suggests that she faces hardships none of the other girls have experienced—if they had, it seems, she would be more likely to open up to them about her personal life. Tragically, then, Angela doesn't benefit from quite the same kind of communal support as the other girls do, though this doesn't discourage them from trying to comfort her in any way they can, which is a testament to the group's determination to uplift one another.

CHAPTER 4

August recalls the night her father took her and her brother from SweetGrove. For days leading up to this departure, their parents argued viciously and their mother vowed to start sleeping with a butcher knife under her pillow. She also claimed Clyde told her that August's father slept with another woman recently, despite the fact that Clyde had already been dead for almost two years. These days, August's father tries to entertain her and her brother by taking them to Coney Island on Saturdays and letting them go on the rides. During this period, August and her brother struggle to grasp the fact that they live in poverty, since they manage to get by rather well even though the family is short on money. Still, their apartment is small, and they're forced to share a room while their father sleeps on a fold-out couch in the living room.

Although August leads a relatively happy life in which she doesn't feel crushed by the weight of poverty, she still faces a number of challenges in Brooklyn. First and foremost, she's haunted by the memory of her mother and the turbulent period that led up to her parents' separation. As if this isn't already stressful enough, August's father's attempts to distract her from such thoughts by taking her to Coney Island ultimately fail, and she also slowly begins to see the limitations of the family's new life in Brooklyn, coming to terms with the fact that—though they don't live in abject poverty—they don't have very much.

One day, Angela is dancing on the sidewalk when she suddenly stops and clenches her fists. August and the other girls ask what's wrong, but she doesn't say anything, simply shutting down as a woman hobbles by them on the street. This woman is unsteady and clearly addicted to drugs, but the girls hardly pay any attention to her. Instead of focusing on the woman, August thinks about how Angela's hands remind her of her mother's when they suddenly curled into fists. As the woman turns the corner, August wonders how she (August) is supposed to navigate life without a mother.

Again, the girls are unable to support Angela because they don't know what kind of hardship she's dealing with. As they try to comfort her, August can't help but think about her own misfortunes, once again demonstrating how thoroughly her mother's absence permeates her everyday life.

A beautiful young woman named Jennie moves into the apartment below August and her family. Jennie is from the Dominican Republic, but August feels as if she could easily have hailed from Tennessee. For this very reason, Jennie reminds August's brother of their mother, so he whispers to August that their mother is "almost back now," though their father instructs them to stay away from Jennie. During this period, August washes her brother's hair and tells him to close his eyes and pretend that her hands belong to their mother.

In this passage, it's clear that August isn't the only one who has been significantly impacted by the absence of her mother. Indeed, her brother also yearns for their mother to return to the family. Because she's older than him, August tries to soothe him by giving him the kind of love and attention a mother might give. Unfortunately for her, though, there is nobody to do the same for her—nobody, that is, except her friends.

August is acutely aware that the Vietnam War continues to rage on, especially since so many former soldiers wander through her neighborhood. Many of them are living on the streets and addicted to heroin, and August becomes used to the site of needles scattered on the ground. The children around her become so accustomed to the presence of addicts that they take bets about whether or not a stumbling man will fall over. Meanwhile, August hears Jennie leading men to her apartment, telling them not to touch her until they give her money. When August's brother asks what these men are paying for, August says, "Just things."

Not only does August have to deal with the sorrow of growing up without a mother, but she has to do so in a rather fraught environment, one in which she's surrounded by desperate, vulnerable people like the drug-addicted veterans on the streets. Jennie's exchange about money implies that she is a prostitute, which explains why August's father was adamant that she and her brother stay away from Jennie. Though August tries to protect her brother from the harsh realities of their neighborhood, it's clear that nobody is working to shield her from all this turmoil.

August once again recalls her childhood in Tennessee, remembering what it was like to run through the lush land of SweetGrove. Although August's family owned such a large farm, neither her father nor Clyde knew how to tend to it, so the task fell to August's mother. Accordingly, August has memories of her mother working with her hands in the fields, turning the property into a flourishing oasis. However, a fire razed most of the fields the year August's brother was born, and then the government reclaimed the majority of the land the following year, saying that there were too many years of unpaid taxes. Still, the large and quirky house remained in the possession of August's family, and they made do with what they had—that is, until Clyde went to Vietnam and was killed in 1971, precipitating August's mother's breakdown.

Once more, August demonstrates how hard it is for her to move on from her life in Tennessee. Memories of her mother stay with August as she vividly remembers SweetGrove and the way it flourished under her mother's supervision. With all of this in mind, it is undoubtedly hard for August to move on and accept that her mother is no longer in her life.

CHAPTER 5

August's memories sit alongside her friends' memories about their own mothers. Ever since Gigi was a child, Gigi's mother has told her she is beautiful enough to be a famous actress. She praises the beautiful shape of Gigi's eyes, which Gigi inherited from her half-Chinese great-grandmother. Gigi is also African American, which her mother says is a "curse." Thinking this way, she instructs Gigi to "find a way past" the color of her skin, urging her to avoid the sun so her skin doesn't darken. Gigi repeats this to her friends, telling them what her mother has said. In response, they crowd around her and admire the beautiful colors woven throughout her hair, telling her that they can't wait for the day when everybody in the country will know her name.

When Gigi's mother speaks negatively about the darkness of her skin, she makes the implication that it's impossible for black people to become famous actors. By urging Gigi to avoid anything that will darken her skin tone, she subjects her daughter to colorism (racism within the same racial group), thereby perpetuating racist ideas that will only make it harder for Gigi to proceed through life with confidence. Thankfully, though, August and the other girls are there to support Gigi when her mother fails, assuring her that she'll certainly become famous despite her mother's internalized racism.


One day, Gigi asks August, Sylvia, and Angela, "*What keeps keeping us here?*" Her shirt is torn, and the girls don't know why she's asking this, but they soon learn that a veteran living under the stairwell in her building brought Gigi into this space and raped her. The girls are 12 at the time. Knowing that Gigi's mother will only blame her for what happened, Gigi says she can't tell her. Gigi's friends assure her that it wasn't her fault and they pool together their change and go to the bodega to buy razorblades, telling Gigi to hide them and use them on the soldier the next time he comes near. Feeling their support, Gigi asks them if the four of them will always be together, and they insist that they will. Shortly after this, the soldier is found dead under the stairwell with a heroin needle in his hand.

Gigi's rape is one of the first indications that August and her friends live in an environment that is incredibly and undeniably dangerous for young women. Worse, Gigi knows her mother would blame her if she told her what happened—a sign that the girls' surrounding community tacitly condones violence against women by turning a blind eye and absolving male rapists and abusers of their transgressions. And though Gigi no longer has to worry about her rapist when he dies of a heroin overdose, the fact remains that Gigi and the girls are still largely unprotected by society.

August focuses on Angela's skin color, which is so light that she can see her friend's veins winding through her body. Whenever Angela dances, August and the others sense sadness coursing through her. Meeting up with them after returning from dance school one day, Angela casually notes that her mother used to be a dancer. When the girls ask if Angela's mother still dances, though, Angela shuts down and indicates that she doesn't want to talk about this anymore. Still, she says that her mother "kind of" dances, then she asks her friends why everything has to be so complicated. Burying her face in Gigi's hair, Angela begins to weep, and the girls crowd around her, reminding her that they love her and urging her to keep dancing no matter what.

By this point, it is rather clear that whatever Angela is struggling with in her personal life has something to do with her mother. This is made especially evident by the fact that she breaks into tears after casually referencing that her mother used to be a dancer. Though Angela won't elaborate on why, exactly, this is such an upsetting topic, she still allows her friends to comfort her, thereby illustrating the power of companionship and interpersonal support.

August starts to wish she was Sylvia, admiring her beauty and confidence. In fact, everyone in the friend group covets Sylvia, who is not only beautiful but fiercely intelligent. In keeping with this, she reads the books assigned in school to her older sister, studies advanced math after school, and learns Latin. Meanwhile, Sylvia's father quotes French philosophers at home and urges her to study law. When August and the others ask Sylvia if she actually wants to be a lawyer, she says she doesn't even know. This causes August to reflect upon the fact that parents try to push their children into their own "failed futures." August's father insists that she's smart enough to become a teacher, Sylvia's father wants her to become a lawyer, Angela's mother instills in Angela a desire to become a professional dancer, and Gigi's mother urges Gigi to become a famous actress.

In many ways, it's a good thing for parents to urge their children do pursue ambitious goals, since this can be a way of guiding them into stable and rewarding lives. However, August has a negative view of this style of parenting, seeing it as a way of steering people like her and her friends into "failed futures," or futures that parents never accomplished for themselves. And though this might be the case, it's worth considering that this idea might have something to do with the fact that August doesn't know what her mother would want for her, since she's not in her life. Therefore, listening to what her friends parents want for their daughters (or listening to what her father wants for her) is simply yet another reminder of her mother's absence.

CHAPTER 6

August recalls how unsettling it was when her mother used to urge her to eat because there were children starving to death in Biafra. This was in 1968, before August's brother was born, and August didn't know what Biafra was nor why children were starving. But years later—"long after Biafra melted back into Nigeria, the country from which it had fought so hard to secede"—August finds magazines on the kitchen table in Brooklyn and sees a picture of two children standing under a headline that reads "STARVING CHILDREN OF BIAFRA WAR." Looking at their distended stomachs, August realizes that her mother was telling the truth when she spoke about the starving children of Biafra, though August still doesn't know what to make of this information. All she knows is that, though her family is poor, they still have food and are healthy, unlike the children in the picture.

August's relationship to the war between Biafra and the Nigerian government is remote, but it connects to her memories of her mother, who apparently followed the conflict closely. It's possible that August has such a vivid memory of her mother talking about Biafran children because she herself now feels totally abandoned by her mother—if her mother was capable of worrying so much about children on a different continent, August might wonder why she wouldn't worry enough about her own children to follow them to Brooklyn. Of course, this is a rather callous analysis of her mother's empathy for the starving children of Biafra, but it's hard to overlook the fact that—due to August's mother's mental instability—her mother hasn't shown August the same level of concern as she exhibited for the Biafran children, though there are obviously multiple factors at play that explain why this is the case. Nonetheless, though, August surely feels the painful lack of her mother's presence and concern, regardless of the reasons.

One day, a woman from child services comes to August's building and delivers two young children to Jennie, who joyously yells out that her "babies" have returned. Ecstatic, she asks August to watch the two children while she runs out to get food. August agrees, taking the children into her apartment and trying with her brother to get them to stop crying. Jennie doesn't return for many hours, and when she does, her eyes are red and she keeps scratching her arms. What's more, she doesn't come upstairs to fetch her children, so August and her brother bring them down to her. That night, they can hear the children crying.

Once again, readers see that addiction is all around August. Even though Jennie is apparently happy that her children have been returned to her by child services, she fails to come home, instead prioritizing her apparent drug addiction. This puts August in an uncomfortable position, as she suddenly finds herself caring for Jennie's children even though she herself is still quite young. What's more, Jennie's absence undoubtedly reminds August of her own lack of maternal support. In this sense, then, the environment in which August lives constantly reminds her of what she'd most like to forget: her mother's illness and absence.

CHAPTER 7

As August and her friends grow older, they listen to the radio and feel like the **songs** are talking about certain parts of their own lives. They also begin to envy one another's features, though they don't let this come between them. When the girls walk down the streets and boys call out to them, they proudly tell them not to even speak their names, linking arms with each other and walking away. August notes that when they are all together, boys don't understand them. Indeed, although boys might *think* they understand girls when they're on their own and "praying for invisibility," they don't know what to make of August, Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi as an ensemble.

That August's friend group makes her feel like she can easily dismiss the boys who call out after them is a testament to the empowering qualities of female companionship. Needless to say, it's unfortunate that August and her friends wish for "invisibility" because of the way boys treat them when they're on their own, but they thankfully have each other to make them feel powerful. In turn, their bond illustrates the value and inherent strength that comes along with friendship.

Older men also begin to notice the girls' bodies. In response, the girls warn each other about which men to avoid, saying—for instance—that they shouldn't go to a certain shoe repair shop on their own, since the owner will offer girls a quarter to see their underwear. Similarly, Gigi tells her friends not to sing in their church choirs, explaining that her pastor comes up behind her and presses his penis against her back while she's singing. To deal with this, she says, she closes her eyes and pretends she's elsewhere. Gigi adds that she learned this trick from her mother, since Gigi often looks into her eyes and realizes that she's absent. When Gigi's mother *is* paying attention, though, she tells Gigi to go to Hollywood, saying that she'll be safe there. August and her friends don't ask what, exactly, Gigi will be safe from.

This section of Another Brooklyn *touches on the unsettling fact that grown men sometimes sexually objectify young girls who have recently gone through puberty. When Gigi tells her friends not to sing in their church choirs, she highlights one of the reasons it's so tragic that men treat girls this way—after all, Gigi and her friends shouldn't have to avoid church choirs in order to remain safe. And though it's helpful that the girls develop a support network intended to warn each other about such situations, their tactic of avoiding certain places and people indicates that they are unfortunately expected to simply make compromises in their lives without expecting that their surrounding society will ever change or address the problems they're trying to avoid. With this in mind, it's especially heartbreaking when Gigi says that her mom thinks she'll be safe if she goes to Hollywood, since it's clear that even as a grown woman in California she will most likely face the same kind of misogyny and unwanted sexual attention, since these things are societal problems and therefore not confined to Brooklyn.*

Gigi isn't the only singer in the group. Sylvia also likes to sing, and when she does, the girls are struck by the beauty and emotion in her voice. They encourage her to be a singer, but she replies by saying that she has to study law first.

That Sylvia remains so disciplined is directly related to the extent to which her parents are involved in her life. With their high expectations, it's clear that they have pushed Sylvia to pursue a career in law over all else. In this way, her home life is drastically different from August's, since August's father is more or less uninvolved in her life and her mother is completely absent.

As August and her friends get older, their bodies continue to change, attracting even *more* attention from men. As they walk through the streets, they still feel powerful but they know deep inside that they would feel unsafe if they were on their own—many men lurk in dim hallways and wait in tucked-away areas on the street, hoping to reach out and grab them when they're alone. Because of this, the girls invest themselves even more intensely in their group dynamic. August even fantasizes about the day her mother will return, when she can introduce her to Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi and tell her mother that she was wrong to think that it's unwise to have female friends.

One of the reasons August is so sure that her mother was wrong about becoming close with other women is that August's friends make her feel tangibly safer. While walking in her neighborhood alone, August feels vulnerable and afraid. When she's with her friends, though, she feels empowered and capable of navigating a world full of danger—a world that is otherwise unsafe for young women on their own.

August and her brother still look out the window sometimes and they often see a young man who recently returned from the Vietnam War. Having lost both arms, the veteran has learned to hold a syringe in his teeth and inject heroin into his armpit. Seeing this, August and her brother promise each other that they'll never use heroin. During this time, August's brother tries to decide what he wants to do in life, and they both recognize that everyone around them is looking for a way to "dream themselves out" of their current circumstances, clearly believing that there's "someplace other than" this neighborhood—"another Brooklyn" that they will someday find.

The fact that so many people around August are living in destitution and are addicted to heroin is a sign that she's not the only one who doesn't have much support. Indeed, the man who injects heroin into his armpits clearly lacks the resources to beat his addiction and deal with the trauma of having been injured in a bloody war. This dynamic only emphasizes the sustaining qualities of August's friend group, helping her feel a little less like she has to find a way to "dream" herself out of her current circumstances and into "another Brooklyn."

Around this time, August has a fragmented conversation with her father about the contents of a **jar** that he keeps in the apartment. When she asks what's inside, he replies by saying that she already knows. She then recalls that he told her there are ashes inside the jar, but she doesn't know whose. "*You know whose*," he responds, but August is incapable of guessing.

This is the first moment in which it seems that August is keeping herself in a state of ignorance. When her father says that she knows whose ashes are inside this jar, readers will likely intuit that her mother isn't simply absent, but dead—something August apparently refuses to acknowledge. To that end, the mere fact that she uses the word "jar" to refer to what is clearly an urn highlights her desire to deny the reality that her mother has died, though Woodson has not yet clarified whether or not this is truly the case. All the same, it's clear that August isn't ready to face what's really in the urn.

CHAPTER 8

The final white people left in August's neighborhood move away. August and her friends never got to know these families, all of whom are Irish or Italian immigrants, but they watch them load their moving vans and depart. August thinks about how these families must be afraid of the boys playing in the streets, mistaking sticks for weapons and wooden tops for dangerous spikes. Even though some children sing, "*Ungawa, Black Power. Destroy! White boy!*" everyone knows these are just songs—everyone, that is, except the white people who permanently flee the neighborhood.

Woodson's attention to the phenomenon known as "white flight" underlines the tense racial dynamics constantly playing out in the background of August's life. There is an inherent sense of racism in the fact that white families are leaving because they suddenly find themselves surrounded by black people, as if this is reason enough to relocate. Trying to make sense of this, August wonders if her white neighbors are frightened because of the altogether harmless songs that some black children sing, and she undoubtedly has a hard time imagining that this small amount of animosity would be strong enough to drive white people away forever.

August's brother develops an interest in math and starts doing problems that are far beyond his age level. He explains to August what it means for something to be "absolute," adding how much he likes that nobody can argue against the truth in mathematics. Then, switching gears, he abruptly looks up from a worksheet and tells August that their mother is never going to return. "*She's gone, August*," he says. "*It's absolute*."

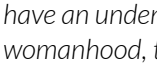
August's brother gravitates toward anything that gives him a sense of certainty. This clashes with August's unwillingness to acknowledge reality, which is why her brother goes out of his way to tell her that their mother is undeniably "gone"—something he finds himself capable of accepting once he learns the value of recognizing "absolute" truths. This mindset aligns with his later affinity for religion and its ability to help him accept things that might otherwise feel uncertain.

In the fall, the woman from child services returns and takes Jennie's children away once again. The woman has to carry the younger child in her arms, but the older sibling willingly trots down the stairs and exits the building, not even looking back when she reaches the street.

The willingness of Jennie's oldest child to leave Jennie behind stands in stark contrast to everything August feels about her relationship with her own mother. Whereas August would do anything to go back to her mother even though her mother was incapable of caring for her, Jennie's child is ready to move on with her life because she recognizes that her unstable, drug-addicted mother is only making things harder for her. In turn, witnessing this surely complicates August's desire to be reunited with her own mother.

As August continues to wait for her mother to come back to the family, she imagines that the women her father brings to the apartment late at night will act as surrogate mothers in the meantime. Lying bed, she hears her father dropping ice cubes into two glasses and she fantasizes about waking up to find a woman cooking the family breakfast and sitting the children down at the table to serve them pancakes. She even pictures sharing pig's feet and ham with whomever fills her mother's place—but the woman with whom her father eventually becomes serious doesn't eat pork. Her name is Sister Loretta, and she belongs to the Nation of Islam. Wearing a hijab and long clothes that cover her entire body, Sister Loretta tells August that she knows "how amazing and lovely" she is. What's more, she says that August's father is ready to "change his life."

When Sister Loretta says that she knows "how amazing and lovely" she is, she is referring to the fact that her faith requires her—as a woman—to cover her body so that men cannot look at anything but her face. According to Sister Loretta's system of belief, this is a way of respecting herself, suggesting that keeping her body from men is empowering. This idea is important to note, since August herself has been trying to navigate how, exactly, to cultivate a sense of power in the face of sexual objectification. As a result, Sister Loretta's beliefs have an undeniable impact on August's transition from girlhood to womanhood, though it remains to be seen whether or not she will fully adopt such ideas.



Sister Loretta teaches August and her family that they have been eating food made by "the white devil" to harm black people. One Sunday morning she comes to the apartment and cleans all of the family's pots and pans while August's father reads from the Qur'an. As Sister Loretta scrubs the dishes, August looks at her and wonders what her real mother's hands are doing at that moment. She also studies Sister Loretta's figure and senses that her body is curved and beautiful beneath her robes. This makes August think about the fact that she herself will one day "tell the world stories beneath the fabric of [her] clothes," too.

For the first time since August lived in Tennessee, there is a motherly presence in her life. However, Sister Loretta inevitably makes August wonder about the whereabouts of her real mother, once again highlighting the extent to which she struggles to move on from the past and the trauma of being separated from her mother. All the same, though, she watches Sister Loretta as a way of making sense of her journey into adulthood, realizing that she will someday be a grown woman and wondering what, exactly, that will be like. Mixed into this dynamic is the fact that Sister Loretta is deeply religious, meaning that she has a value system which helps her navigate the world in a way that might make it easier for August to deal with the uncertainty surrounding her mother's absence—if, that is, she chooses to adopt Sister Loretta's worldview.

Sister Loretta teaches August and her brother about the Nation of Islam. Becoming a daily presence in their household, she tells August and her brother not to use "jive talk" because it will keep them "uneducated and in the ghetto." When August and her brother say that Jesus is white, Sister Loretta shakes her head and corrects them. She also explains that "the white devil" tries to keep black people in oppression by forcing "slave food" upon them, reminding the children that they are nobody's slaves. August learns to pray with Sister Loretta, kneeling toward Mecca every afternoon. When Sister Loretta tells her that she'll become a beautiful woman if only she eats well and follows the teachings of the Nation of Islam, August promises to stay away from boys. As she says this, though, she knows she's lying.

The Nation of Islam believes that white people are devils sent to keep black people oppressed. Needless to say, this belief is directly linked to the history of persecution that black people have suffered at the hands of white people. In this regard, then, the Nation of Islam's outsized presence in August's neighborhood is an indication of just how much racism and discrimination her community faces, even if Woodson doesn't necessarily draw attention to specific instances of bigotry.

August continues to try to pray, finding that she doesn't derive any sense of clarity from the process. She wants prayer to help her make sense of the feeling she gets when she kisses her new boyfriend, Jerome, who lets his hands slide all over her body when they kiss, but she has no success in this regard.

At the same time that August is introduced to religion and the Nation of Islam, she starts having new experiences with boys. In particular, she hopes to gain clarity about her developing relationship with Jerome, though she finds that prayer does little to help her make sense of their physical encounters. This, of course, is because devout people like Sister Loretta tend to believe that a woman should wait until marriage to have a sexual relationship. Consequently, religion doesn't help August navigate her developing sexuality.

CHAPTER 9

Although August prays, August decides not to wear a hijab in public like Sister Loretta. She also eats pork when she's with her friends and she doesn't take her Muslim beliefs very seriously. This doesn't bother August's father, who insists that he and Sister Loretta should give August space to become her own person. Still, August becomes close with Sister Loretta and even starts calling her "Sister Mama Loretta," though she never forgets that Sister Loretta isn't her real mother. To that end, August continues to wait for her mother's return.

No matter what happens in her life, August maintains her belief that her mother will someday come back to the family. Nothing, it seems, can distract August from this, not even Sister Loretta's motherly presence or the new role religion plays in her life. In turn, readers see how narrowly focused August is on the memory of her mother and the pain of her absence.

August's relationship with Jerome started long before they actually knew each other—he was the boy who used to wink at her through the window. Then, when August is 12, he comes up to her and says that he recognizes her, then says, "*One day, you and me gonna do that thing.*" As a young teenager, August thinks this is simply how 16-year-old boys talk to girls, so she doesn't object and she kisses him back when he puts his lips to hers. The only people who could possibly understand what this is like, August knows, are Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi.

As August tries to make sense of her developing relationship with Jerome, she feels as if nobody in her family could possibly understand what she's going through. Rather, she turns to her friends for support, guidance, and camaraderie, once again proving the value of adolescent companionship, which ultimately helps her move through life without traditional forms of parental guidance.

Whenever August, Angela, and Gigi go to Sylvia's house, they feel uncomfortable because her parents are so proper and strict. Each Sunday afternoon, they hire a French woman to teach Sylvia and her sisters how to be proper and polite, telling them how to sit, which fork to use for salad, and which glass to use for wine. When August and the others come to see her, they stop in the entryway, too nervous to advance any further because of the pointed look Sylvia's mother gives them. Suddenly, they no longer feel "lost and beautiful." Instead, they feel "ragged and ugly" under Sylvia's mother's gaze.

When August and her friends feel suddenly self-conscious under the gaze of Sylvia's mother, Woodson shows readers how destructive such judgment can be to a person's self-image. Whereas August and the others previously felt beautiful, they now feel ugly, an obvious response to the elitist and classist attitude to which Sylvia's parents subject them. As a result, the harmful effects of this kind of attitude bring themselves to bear on the girls and the way they conceive of themselves.

While spending time at Sylvia's house one day, the girls start laughing but abruptly stop when Sylvia's older sister bounds into the room and slaps Sylvia across the face. As the girls look at her in shock, Sylvia explains that it's against the rules to laugh so loudly. Later, Sylvia's father interrogates August, Angela, and Gigi, asking them about their parents, their grades, and their goals in life. He also asks them if they understand the country's "Negro problem," saying that it will be up to them to "rise above" racism. In keeping with this, he says that his daughters will become lawyers and doctors. As he speaks this way, August feels unbearably self-conscious, sensing that he disapproves of her hole-filled socks and frayed bellbottoms. When the girls finally leave, Sylvia's mother gives them a look, one that says, "Dreams are not for people who look like you."

When Sylvia's father tells the girls they must find a way to "rise above" racism, he makes it clear through his disapproving tone that he doubts they'll be able to do this. He makes this viewpoint overwhelmingly obvious by asking them questions about their personal lives, doing very little to hide his belief that they aren't good enough for his daughter. Once again, then, this kind of disapproval alters the way August sees herself, making her self-conscious of her looks in a way that is directly linked to her family's financial standing, since she's embarrassed by the state of her worn-in clothes. What's more, Sylvia's father subjects her to a form of classism that is racially-inflected, suggesting not only that she and her friends aren't worthy of his or his daughter's time, but also that this renders them unfit to succeed in a racist world.

August wants to be Sylvia, whose parents still live together and whose life is glamorous. And yet, Sylvia's life is challenging in other ways. After slapping her for laughing, her sister says, *"Don't try to act like a dusty, dirty black American."* Feeling close to Sylvia, August tells her about her relationship with Jerome, hoping that this will endear her to her perfect friend. Thinking this way, she tells Sylvia when she and Jerome start doing more than just kissing, loving the idea that only Sylvia knows about the most intimate part of her life.

That Sylvia's sister tells her not to act like "a dusty, dirty black American" proves the extent to which Sylvia's family buys into racist stereotypes about black people. Indeed, everyone in the family except Sylvia wants to set themselves apart from other black people by acting rich and proper, thereby casting a negative light on anyone who is black and poor. In doing so, they subject other black people to the same kind of racism that they want so badly to overcome. And yet, despite this fraught dynamic, August still wishes she could have Sylvia's life—an indication of just how badly she wants to be part of an intact family again.

CHAPTER 10

Gigi starts attending a performing arts school in Manhattan. Around this time, Sylvia's father looks more closely at August and the others and forbids Sylvia from seeing them. When they come to her house, he informs them that Sylvia will be attending a new private school. He then tells them to go home and become better people. When he says this, they feel embarrassed of themselves. Worse, they see themselves in one another, so they part ways, not wanting to confront their own identities.

Once again, Sylvia's father's harsh judgment of August and her friends negatively impacts the way they think of themselves. Even more tragically, his classist and racially-inflect views interfere with their otherwise unassailable bond, since facing one another suddenly means recognizing the very things that Sylvia's father has deemed undesirable and bad.

Although Sylvia no longer goes to school with her friends, she manages to see them frequently, meeting them in the park and smoking marijuana that she brings with her. That winter, Gigi is cast in multiple lead roles at her performing arts school and Angela devotes herself to dancing. August, for her part, spends the winter going to mosque with her family and Sister Loretta, listening to other women ask about her mother. When August's father explains that August's mother is gone, August can't help but think about the conversation she had with him about the contents of the jar he keeps in the apartment, although she now refers to it as an **urn**. Still, she refuses to admit that she knows what's inside this urn. In bed at night, she speaks to her mother, promising her that someday her father will take them back to SweetGrove.

Despite Sylvia's father's best efforts to control her life, Sylvia not only continues to see August and the girls, but also rebels by smoking marijuana. This, in turn, suggests that her father's strict approach to parenting has backfired, causing Sylvia to act out in ways she might not have if he'd simply let her make her own decisions. Meanwhile, August continues to keep the truth about her mother from herself. Even though it's obvious that the urn is filled with her mother's ashes, August maintains her belief that they will one day be reunited, doing whatever she can to deny what she already seems to know on a certain level, which is that her mother is dead.

CHAPTER 11

August and her friends turn 13, and Angela—the last of the girls to get her period—tells them in secrecy that she has started menstruating. With these developments, men pay even more attention to the girls, constantly watching them and whispering lewd things in their ears. In the summer, they feel boys' hands grazing their behinds in crowded areas. All the same, they spend the majority of their time with one another, smoking joints instead of hanging out with the many boys who are interested in them. At one point, Sylvia threatens to run away, prompting her father to let her have the girls over for the night.

As they get older, the girls continue to support one another. This is crucial for somebody like August, who has virtually no other form of female support or guidance (except from Sister Loretta, whose strict beliefs would likely be unhelpful in a conversation about sexuality). Furthermore, it becomes more and more obvious that the girls' community does nothing to protect them from the inappropriate attention directed at them by men, leaving them to deal with unwanted advances on their own.

When the girls arrive at Sylvia's for the sleepover, Sylvia's father insists upon calling their parents to make sure they know where they are. After talking to August's father, Sylvia's father says that he's a good man because he's so devoted to his religion. Before he can call Angela's mother, though, Angela insists that he shouldn't bother because she already knows where she is. That night, the girls eat candy and watch TV while Angela teaches them to French kiss. They practice with each other for the next several hours, until their bodies feel like they're "exploding." They also whisper "I love you" to each other and find that they actually mean it. While kissing Jerome shortly after this experience, August evades his questions about where she learned to French kiss. All she cares about in this moment, she notes, is that he tells her he loves her.

In this section, Sylvia's father continues to judge his daughter's friends and their various backgrounds. And though his estimation of August apparently improves after speaking to her father, this doesn't change the fact that he still subjects the girls to a classist and unfair form of scrutiny. Nonetheless, this doesn't stop the girls from having a good time, as they turn to one another to learn new tricks about how to navigate their developing sexuality. In doing so, they experiment with new forms of intimacy, and though they don't seem to make too much of what they're doing with one another, it's clear that their experimentations satisfy a desire to explore a new, sexually-charged element of their bonds with one another.


Angela remains a mystery to her friends, refusing to let them in when sudden dark moods descend upon her. Her dancing is hauntingly beautiful, hinting at a world of emotional turbulence, though the girls never understand where these feelings come from. While watching fireworks on the Fourth of July, Angela tells August that she's going to "leave this place" someday. In response, August promises that they'll all go with her, but Angela refutes this, saying that she'll go on her own.

It's hard to say what, exactly, is going on with Angela, except that she is clearly going through something that she finds too difficult to talk about with her friends. This is significant, since the friend group seemingly talks about everything and the girls often support one another. However, Angela's inability to open up suggests that there are certain limits to friendship—limits that will become increasingly apparent as the girls grow up and experience more and more hardship.

CHAPTER 12

August starts looking for Jennie's children wherever she goes, curious about what has become of them. When she's not thinking about them, she spends her summer nights going to dances in the public parks, where DJs set up their equipment and play music late into the night. On one such night, August and Jerome kiss passionately behind the wall of a handball court. Working his way down August's body, Jerome performs oral sex on her for the first time, causing her entire body to "explode." Directly afterwards, August thinks about Sister Loretta, realizing that she has let Jerome into the "temple" of her body. Ignoring these thoughts, though, August pushes Jerome's head between her legs again.

It's worth mentioning that August uses the word "explode" to describe what it feels like to receive oral sex from Jerome, since she uses the same word when talking about the experience of kissing Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi. In this way, her relationships with these girls become not just vaguely related to her sex life, but a legitimate part of it. And though August almost feels guilty for doing something that so blatantly goes against the values that people like Sister Loretta and the rest of her family ascribe themselves to, she ultimately prioritizes her own experience and decides to simply enjoy sharing this intimate moment with Jerome.

August is no longer the only one with a boyfriend. In fact, all of the girls start dating boys, going with them to the park each night for the dances. Around this time, they hear that Charlsetta, the captain of the cheerleading squad at August's school, has been "sent away." Rumors circulate about Charlsetta's mother kicking her out of the house, but August and the girls still aren't quite sure what happened, so they ask Charlsetta's brother. He tells them that Charlsetta got pregnant and that their parents sent her to live with a relative in the South. Upon hearing this, the girls start taking it slower with their boyfriends, though they wonder about how many times Charlsetta had sex and, moreover, what it felt like. As the weeks pass, they wait for Charlsetta to return, but summer turns to autumn and still she doesn't come back.

When the girls hear about Charlsetta's pregnancy, they reexamine their relationships with their own boyfriends, perhaps realizing for the first time that this could happen to them, too—an idea that goes against the feeling they had years ago that what happened to Gigi's mom (who became pregnant as a young teenager) could never become their own reality. Now, it seems, they recognize that this is simply not true. In this way, hearing about Charlsetta's pregnancy is an important moment in the girls' transition into adulthood—a transition they are largely navigating without parental guidance.

As August becomes more and more independent, her father becomes increasingly withdrawn. Focused on his devotion to the Nation of Islam, he spends very little time with August. When they are together, he is engrossed in prayer or religious thought. Around this time, a woman is found dead on the roofs of the Marcy Houses, a nearby public housing development. Frightened, Angela tells her friends that she can't find her mother, but August assures her that everything is all right, insisting that the dead woman surely isn't Angela's mother. As August soothes Angela in this way, Sylvia and Gigi step back, unable to back her up when she maintains that Angela's mother is probably fine. And yet, the dead woman does turn out to be Angela's mother.

August finds herself capable of comforting Angela because she knows what it's like to lose a mother. More importantly, though, she knows how to remain fiercely optimistic even when a situation doesn't necessarily call for optimism, since she herself has been denying her mother's death for years at this point. With this in mind, she tries to convince Angela that her mother will be fine and, in doing so, perhaps tries to redouble her commitment to the idea that her own mother is fine, too.

Before everyone discovers that Angela's mother is dead, Angela stays for three nights at August's apartment. In this time, August tries to comfort her, but this becomes impossible when the truth of the situation emerges. Thinking about Angela's mother, August has a sudden memory of her own mother lying stiffly on a bed, a Bible held to her chest and her hands disconcertingly still as her father kisses her goodbye—an image August has suppressed for many years and once more forces herself to push away. Instead, August focuses on the realization that she once saw Angela's mother, whom she pieces together was the drug addict who walked by the girls on the day Angela abruptly stopped dancing in the street. "*She's not dead, Angela,*" August says. "*They have the wrong person.*" But Angela doesn't listen to her, instead withdrawing from her and the other girls.

In this moment, Angela's unwillingness to talk about her home life becomes a bit easier to understand, since it emerges that her mother was a drug addict. Rather than talking about this with her friends, though, Angela has chosen to keep it a secret, struggling silently with the difficulty of living with an unstable parent. More importantly, though, readers learn in this section that August knows and has always known that her mother is dead, but she has forced herself to deny this. In keeping with this, she distracts herself from this memory by trying to get Angela to—like her—deny reality, since this would perhaps make it easier for August herself to continue believing that her own mother is still alive.

August and her friends don't know where to look for Angela because they've never been to her apartment. When they go to the building that Angela once said she lived in, they learn that she never really lived there at all. They then try to call her, but her telephone has been disconnected. Meanwhile, August tells Sylvia and Gigi that the authorities must have gotten the wrong woman, upholding that Angela's mother isn't dead. "*Believe me,*" she says. "*I know.*"

Angela's sudden disappearance in the aftermath of her mother's death is the first rupture in the friend group, which has otherwise managed to remain so tight-knit over the years. Once again, then, Woodson intimates that there are certain limits to friendship, since particularly difficult circumstances can make it harder for people to stay in touch. On another note, August once again demonstrates her unwillingness to accept reality, ultimately projecting her insecurities about her own mother onto Angela's situation.

In recent years, August's brother has grown up considerably. Tall and conscientious, he is now a devoted member of the Nation of Islam who takes his religious faith very seriously. One night, he shakes August awake and tells her that she has been wrong to think for all these years that their mother will come back. "*She won't be coming back until the resurrection,*" he says.

Unlike August, her brother doesn't need to delude himself that their mother is still alive, since he has something else he can depend upon: religion. In the face of tragedy and uncertainty, he has turned to the Nation of Islam, finding solace in religious faith and the community it has given him. Finding herself unable to embrace the same things, though, August finds herself at a loss and, consequently, continues to deny that her mother is most likely dead.

After Clyde died, August's mother started vanishing for stretches of time. She also stopped doing any kind of cooking, so August and her brother often found themselves having to scavenge in the yard for berries until their father came home with ready-made meals from the grocery store. Thinking about this, August remembers the conversation she had with her father about the contents of the **urn** and then she remembers that SweetGrove brushed up against a body of water. "*Don't wade in the water, children,*" she thinks to herself. "*Your mama's done troubled the water.*" Thinking these words, August wonders if perhaps her mother forgot that the family's land ended in water—maybe, she thinks, her mother forgot and simply continued walking into the water.

August's thoughts about wading into water are taken from an old spiritual song called "Wade in the Water." What's most significant about this moment is that she seems to be on the verge of acknowledging that her mother is dead, since she insinuates that her mother walked into the water—or, to put it more straightforwardly, drowned. And yet, August doesn't fully admit this to herself, instead cryptically quoting "Wade in the Water" without letting herself completely acknowledge that her mother committed suicide.

CHAPTER 13

August and her friends still haven't seen Angela, but they tell each other she'll be back soon enough. Angela's dance instructor agrees, saying that something just *has* to come from a talent like Angela's. But as time passes, they receive very little information, knowing only that Angela was placed in a foster home in either Queens or Long Island. It is around this time, too, that August's father starts seeing other women again, sneaking them into the apartment at night and placing ice in their glasses as they drink whiskey. From her bedroom, August hears this and wonders where Sister Loretta has gone.

The level of uncertainty in August's life has increased considerably: not only does she have no idea how to locate Angela in the foster care system, but she also doesn't know why her father has suddenly stopped seeing Sister Loretta and strayed from his religion. Consequently, this period is full of questions, undoubtedly exacerbating August's unwillingness to face the likelihood that her mother will never return.

One day, Sylvia's boyfriend goes to her house to see her, but Sylvia's father stops him at the front door and puts a gun to his chest, saying that he'll kill him if the boy ever comes near Sylvia again. Despite his efforts to keep Sylvia sheltered away, though, what her father doesn't know is that Sylvia has already had sex—something she tells August and Gigi about in private, saying that it hurt at first but then became bearable, though it didn't feel good like everyone says it does. In August's own relationship, she continues to avoid having sex, though Jerome becomes more and more persistent. When she tells Sylvia about this, Sylvia ignores her hesitations, urging her to give in and sleep with Jerome because he's "*too fine to let slip away*." Still, August refuses to give in, so Jerome leaves her.

When Sylvia pressures August to have sex with Jerome even though she doesn't want to, she fails to support August for perhaps the first time in their friendship. Considering that the friend group has already begun to splinter because of Angela's disappearance, this is surely an unwelcome development for August, who otherwise depends upon her friends to give her the reassurance and guidance that she so sorely lacks at home.

August's brother manages to bring his father back to the Nation of Islam. Together, they pray and read the Qur'an while August applies herself to her studies, suddenly yearning to do whatever she can to escape Brooklyn by going to a college somewhere else. With this in mind, she focuses solely on schoolwork, saying almost nothing to her father when he speaks to her. Unsure of how to get through to her, then, August's father brings her to Sister Sonja, who asks about her mother, though August is hesitant to discuss such matters.

That August's father's first response to his daughter's sullenness is to bring her to a therapist underscores just how uninvolved in her life he really is. Of course, therapy is a very useful tool, but it's rather telling that August's father sends her to Sister Sonja before making much of an effort himself to discern what's going on with her. Indeed, he outsources the emotional guidance that comes along with parenting, allowing himself to retreat back into his devotion to the Nation of Islam instead of focusing on engaging with his daughter.

While walking through the park one day, August comes upon Sylvia and Jerome and sees that they're holding hands. She stares at them for a long time, feeling as if her entire world is falling down around her. Unlike the way August approached the loss of her mother, she realizes that she's too old to simply deny reality, finding it impossible to forgive Sylvia. This makes her think about the fact that she used to tell her brother that their mother would surely return—something that she herself believed for a long time.

When August sees that Sylvia has gone behind her back by dating her ex-boyfriend, she is struck by the profound realization that she (August) tends to hold reality at bay when it suits her. Now, though, August understands that she can't go through life this way, since it's impossible to ignore what is literally right in front of her. By that same token, then, she begins to grasp that she has to let go of her denial surrounding her mother's absence, finally admitting to herself that her mother will never return because she's dead.

CHAPTER 14

In a session with August, Sister Sonja asks her when she first realized that her mother died. Thinking this question over, August lets her eyes travel to the windows behind Sister Sonja and notices that they're blocked by metal bars. This causes her to wonder if anyone has ever run past Sister Sonja and jumped headlong out the window. Fixing her eyes back on Sister Sonja, she says, "*Why do you think my mother has died?*"

Because Another Brooklyn *jumps around quite a bit in time, it's hard to say whether this scene takes place before or after August finds Sylvia and Jerome in the park and realizes she has to stop denying that her mother is dead. Regardless, it's worth examining the defense mechanisms August uses to avoid answering Sister Sonja's question. To that end, her thoughts about people jumping out the window suggest that she would almost rather plunge out of the office than answer this question about her mother's death. Instead, though, she simply sticks to her habit of denying reality, turning the question back on Sister Sonja rather than actually addressing what she knows is the truth, which is that her mother committed suicide.*

August doesn't see Sylvia for three months. When she finally does see her, she learns that her friend is pregnant, noting the way Sylvia's stomach bulges slightly beneath her school uniform. But when Sylvia calls her name, August ignores her. She feels done with Brooklyn and is determined to leave, wanting to go to an Ivy League school where she'll be able to experience new things. She's tired, she says, of living in the neighborhood of Bushwick, where she and her friends are constantly called "ghetto girls." Around this time, she stops avoiding the **urn** in her apartment. In fact, she takes it from its place on the bookshelf and finally looks inside. Her mother, August can now admit, "walked into the water." With this in mind, August brings the urn into her bedroom and sleeps with one hand placed against its side.

By cutting Sylvia out of her life, August further estranges herself from the only thing that has supported her throughout her adolescence: her friend group. With Angela gone and Sylvia cast aside, only Gigi remains, meaning that August's central source of companionship and happiness has significantly diminished. Without this support system, then, August is even less capable of denying her mother's death, which is why she finally admits to herself that her mother committed suicide by drowning herself. In this sense, the dissolution of August's friend group actually helps her come to terms with reality, since she no longer has any way of distracting herself from what she knows is the truth.


Gigi is cast as a prominent role in a play produced by her school's drama club and she wants her friends to support her. Accordingly, she asks August if she'll come sit in the front row with Sylvia, imploring her to let go of her grudge. Pleading with August to let things go back to normal, Gigi says that she's going to save three seats—one for August, one for Sylvia, and even one for Angela, who she hopes will return. On the night of the performance, though, August puts on her coat but never makes it out of her house. Instead, she sits on her bed and thinks about **the urn** and about Sylvia's pregnancy. Letting her mind whirl, she misses the entire play.

Although the weakening of August's friend group enables her to face the reality of her mother's death, this doesn't mean she is emotionally better off without her friends. In fact, coming to terms with reality completely derails her. And because August has nobody to turn to for support, she finds herself unable to even leave the house, too overwhelmed to go to Gigi's play. In turn, readers see that although August used her friend group as a way to distract herself from the truth, she still needs them to help her process her grief.


August later learns that Gigi's voice cracked during an important song, causing the entire audience to laugh. Worse, August isn't the only person who didn't show up—Sylvia didn't come either, nor did Angela. When Gigi looked at the seats she had saved for her friends, then, she found them empty. That night, the cast had a party at the Chelsea Hotel, where Gigi jumped to her death from the 11th floor.

*Gigi's suicide might seem as if it comes out of nowhere, but it's worth recalling the traumatic encounter she had with the veteran who raped her under the stairs in her apartment building. In the aftermath of that incident, she asked her friends, "*What keeps keeping us here?*"—a rather morbid question that calls attention to her desire to escape her own life. Carrying around this trauma, it's clear that Gigi depends upon her friends to support her, which is why it's such a big deal when none of them attend Gigi's play and her voice cracks. This makes Gigi feel as if she doesn't have what it takes to become famous, thereby ruining her lifelong dream of escaping her life and moving to Hollywood.*

CHAPTER 15

August attends Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. During her first class, she introduces herself as "Auggie." When asked why she has enrolled in this course, she says, "I'm here because even when I was a kid, I wanted a deeper understanding of death and dying." Hearing this, a white student turns around and says with a smile that this is the same exact reason he signed up for the class. This young man, August notes, is the "white devil of a boy" who eventually becomes her first lover. Throughout college and her post-graduate years, August listens to **jazz** and sleeps with a number of white men, wishing that she, Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi had discovered avant-garde jazz when they were together, since she finds the music so moving and liberating.

In this section, the narrative jumps ahead in time, giving readers a glimpse of August's life after she moves away from Brooklyn. As August focuses on the details of her new life, it becomes clear that she hasn't let go of her past, since she thinks about Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi while listening to jazz. This, in turn, suggests that she misses the support they used to give one another, especially now that she's navigating adulthood on her own. Furthermore, one could argue that August is now mourning the loss not only of her mother, but of her beautiful friendship with these three girls.

Throughout her twenties, August listens to **jazz** and enjoys an active sex life. In her adulthood, she travels the world and has sex with people in many different places. In the Philippines she has sex with a man who kisses her feet. In Wisconsin she lives with a woman for months and becomes her lover, promising to stay with her forever but eventually leaving in the middle of the night. In Bali she has sex with a black man from Detroit who begs her to tell him that she loves him. In Korea she weeps because she thinks she's pregnant, then weeps when she finds out she isn't. Back in the United States, August's former lover from Wisconsin asks her why she sleeps with closed fists, and she almost says, "*For a long time, my* mother *wasn't dead yet.*"

Woodson presents a kaleidoscopic overview of August's adulthood, emphasizing the important roles that sex and intimacy play in her overall life. Now that August has fully come of age, she values the kind of connection that comes from sexual affection, though she avoids settling down with just one person. Woodson implies that August's unwillingness to fully relax into a relationship with somebody else is related to her fraught relationship with her mother (and with the idea of her mother's death). This is made evident by the fact that her lover notices that she sleeps with clenched fists, something August herself privately attributes to her longstanding inability to accept her mother's death. In turn, her clenched hands suggest that she's wary of relaxing into a close relationship, afraid that letting her guard down and becoming attached to another person might lead to more heartbreak and loss.

CHAPTER 16

August jumps back in time to when she's still 16, narrating a trip she takes with her father and brother back to SweetGrove. It is the first time they have returned since they moved to Brooklyn, and August is shocked to find the land significantly changed. Where their house once stood, there are now thick weeds that are taller than August herself. As she walks around, she can smell the nearby water and hear it lapping against the shore. Walking toward it, she passes bright signs that say "NO TRESPASSING. PRIVATE LAND. DO NOT CROSS."

Finally, August confronts the landscape that looms large in her memories of her mother and childhood. It's worth noting that the government has completely reclaimed this land, turning August into a trespasser on the very grounds to which she used to feel so intimately connected. Moreover, the house she grew up in has been destroyed, a representation of the fact that she literally cannot return to her past. In turn, August has to face the harsh reality that the world has continued to develop and change in the aftermath of her mother's death. In this sense, she has not only lost her mother, but also the landscape of her childhood.

August walks past the trespassing signs and makes her way to the water, where she looks out over the inky black surface. In retrospect, she remembers Sister Sonja's question about when August first realized her mother was dead, and though she's tempted to say that she *still* hasn't accepted this, she knows that the true answer is that she accepted the truth that day while staring at the water. Years later, at the diner after burying their father, August's brother asks her why she used to tell him that their mother would come back, and she tells him that she simply believed it was true.

August is finally able to be completely honest with herself only after returning to SweetGrove and seeing the water in which her mother drowned herself. This is because there's no way to deny that everything SweetGrove used to be no longer exists—the house is gone, the land has been reclaimed, and August's mother is nowhere to be found. In the same way that August can't pretend the house still stands, she can no longer delude herself that her mother is alive.

August sees Angela once again when she's in her first year at Brown. August is sitting in a dorm with a boy when she unexpectedly recognizes a woman on the TV before her. She and the boy are watching a movie about a dancer, and Angela has just appeared onscreen. As Angela dances, August recognizes the grace in her body and calls out her name, and though the boy she's with merely remarks that Angela is "hot," August ignores him, whispering, "*Angela* […] *You made it.*"

Angela's appearance on TV most likely plays an important role in August's path through life. Now that she's in college, she has to find a way to navigate the world on her own, without the help of her old friends. That Angela has succeeded despite the hardship she went through with her own mother's death ultimately shows August that it's possible not only to move on from painful experiences, but to succeed in the face of staggering loss. Needless to say, this is a crucial message for August to receive, since she herself is still fighting to process her mother's death (and, for that matter, Gigi's death).


Returning to her final experience at SweetGrove, August recalls her father telling her and her brother that it's time for them to leave. She's still watching the water but she doesn't mind the idea of departing, knowing that there's no longer anything for her in Tennessee. Looking up, she reflects upon the fact that no matter what, everything and every person in life fades to memory.

The final lines of Another Brooklyn *suggest that August has finally learned to accept that loss is an inherent part of life. Although she has tried hard to deny her mother's death, she now sees that it's futile to delude herself in this manner. Thinking this way, she embraces life's impermanence, recognizing once and for all that there is no way to avoid loss, which is integral to the human experience itself.*

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