Girl, Woman, Other

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BERNARDINE EVARISTO

Bernardine Evaristo was born in South East London to an English mother and Nigerian immigrant father. Her father was the first black councilor of the Labor Party in his borough. Evaristo studied theatre and drama at various schools, eventually earning a doctorate in creative writing. Evaristo was at the forefront of several groundbreaking firsts for Black women creative writers and artists in England. In 1980, she cofounded the Theatre of Black Women, and in the 1990s, she organized Britain's first Black writers conference. In 2019, she became the first mixed-race woman to win the Booker Prize. Evaristo has authored eleven books and seven plays over the course of her career. A common theme throughout Evaristo's works, both fiction and non-fiction, is the African diaspora and the social and political complexities that migration creates in a postcolonial world. *Girl, Woman, Other*, like Evaristo's other works, pushes the boundaries of narrative and stylistic conventions. Her work often moves across non-linear timelines and explores alternative realities. Her satirical novel *Blonde Roots*, for example, tells the story of a world where Africans enslaved Europeans.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Girl, Woman, Other spans generations through its long series of flashbacks, reaching as far back as the late 1800s, but the novel's present is a single night sometime between 2016 and 2019. The novel takes place during England's "Brexit" negotiations, a period when the country was embroiled in the debate over whether to remain a member of the EU or not. This debate sharply divided the country and inspired the resurgence of right-wing, nationalist rhetoric. Most notably, many saw leaving the EU as a way to tighten and control the country's borders to reduce and restrict immigration, and as a way to assert English national identity. The novel references the concurrent presidency of Donald Trump (2016-2020), who activated and emboldened far-right groups in the U.S. and encouraged a culture of open hostility toward immigrants, people of color, women, queer people, and many other marginalized groups. The novel is also set against the backdrop of climate disaster. The late 2010s saw increasingly devastating wildfires, hurricanes, heat waves, flooding, and more. England specifically saw record-breaking temperatures and deadly heat wave.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Evaristo's novel *Lara* is a work of fiction based on her family history as well as her experiences growing up mixed-race in England. *Girl, Woman, Other* likewise tells family stories across generations and contains fictionalized references to her personal experiences. Evaristo's novel is structurally and thematically similar to Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, a polyphonic novel that tells the story of a family across generations and explores slavery's impact on the African diaspora in the United States. *Girl, Woman, Other* explores similar themes as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, which examines the African diaspora, the cultural impacts of migration, the pressures and losses of assimilation, and what it means to be Black in the white, Western world.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Girl, Woman, Other
- **When Published:** 2019
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Postmodern Literature, LGBTQ+ Fiction, Postcolonial Literature
- **Setting:** London and various other towns and cities across England
- **Climax:** Penelope Halifax takes an AncestryDNA test, discovers that she's 13% African, and uncovers her birth mother's identity.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

In Demand After winning the Booker Prize for *Girl, Woman, Other*, Evaristo was highly sought after for interviews. She's been featured in two documentary series and on countless podcasts.

Controversial Choice Evaristo was awarded the Booker Prize for *Girl, Woman, Other* alongside Margaret Atwood for her novel *The Testaments*. The Booker judges explained that they couldn't decide between the two, and broke the rule established in 1992 that stated joint awards are not allowed.

PLOT SUMMARY

Girl, Woman, Other is the story of 12 Black British women who are interconnected in unexpected ways. The novel reads as a long series of run-on and fragmented sentences, employing a stream-of-consciousness style to blur together the women's stories across geographies and time. Their stories converge at

the after-party for Amma Bonsu's play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*. It's a groundbreaking night. After racism and discrimination kept Amma on the margins of the mainstream theater world for years, her play, centered around the stories of powerful African women, premieres with five-star acclaim at London's **National Theatre**, a revered cultural institution predicated on exclusion and reserved for the white middle and upper classes.

The novel begins with Amma's story. Amma still sees herself as the 20-something radical lesbian who, along with her best friend Dominique, made waves in the theater world with their Bush Woman Theatre Company, which gave voice to the women of color whom the mainstream theater world has historically silenced. Amma criticizes her once-radical friends who sold out in middle age, failing to consider how debuting her play at the National Theatre undercuts her formerly radical beliefs. Yazz, Amma's college-aged daughter and a member of the "woke" generation, criticizes her mother's generation for being out of touch. Yazz struggles to find love and community at her predominately white university while struggling to accept what feels like a bleak future in the face of rising white supremacy, far-right nationalism, and environmental collapse.

Dominique stays out of England, a place where she has never felt fully accepted. She moves to Los Angeles with her girlfriend, Nzinga, who quickly becomes abusive. After the women break up, Dominique remains in Los Angeles. However, she returns to England to surprise Amma at the premiere of Amma's new play.

Carole Williams, the daughter of a proud Nigerian immigrant mother, Bummi, grew up in a council flat and attended a struggling public school where teachers like Shirley King and Penelope Halifax burned out and became jaded. To Bummi's dismay, Carole assimilates into white, British culture, seeing it as the only path toward achieving financial stability and success as a Black woman in England. Shirley, Carole's teacher, spearheads Carole's assimilation. Shirley is also Amma's close friend from childhood— they were the only Black girls at their primary school. Shirley encourages Carole to separate herself from her childhood friends like LaTisha. (LaTisha is a Black kid growing up in public housing with no father in the picture, and these conditions make Shirley believe that LaTisha will eventually succumb to teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, or gang affiliation). After getting into Oxford, a place where she initially feels so out of place that she wants to leave, Carole marries Freddy, a white, English man and becomes Vice President of an important bank.

Bummi, meanwhile, has her own secrets. She's settled down with a boyfriend, Kofi, but still yearns for the woman with whom she had a secret affair following the death of her beloved husband.

LaTisha focuses on turning her life around after her father's abandonment upended her life when she was a teenager. She works hard as a grocery store manager to provide for her three children. Because Shirley convinces Carole to cast LaTisha out of her life, LaTisha and Carole never realize that they share a painful secret–they were both sexually assaulted by a local boy, Trey.

Shirley was always ordinary and conservative compared to Amma, but she becomes a public school teacher because she wants to make a difference in the lives of Black students like Carole. She's bright-eyed, progressive, and successful at the beginning of her career, and she loathes teachers, like Penelope Halifax for their racist, stereotypical views of their students. After years on the job, Shirley loses her passion and starts to complain about her students just like Penelope does.

Penelope, a white woman, considers herself a groundbreaking feminist because she has stood up to her male colleagues throughout the years. However, her second-wave feminism is not intersectional. Despite Penelope's progressive feminist views, she remains deeply racist, which shows up in the way she disrespects her multiracial students and Bummi, who becomes her housekeeper.

Shirley's mother, Winsome, wonders how her daughter, who is blessed with so much, can be so miserable all the time. Winsome falls in love with Shirley's husband Lennox in a way she'd never been in love with her own husband, Clovis, whom she settled for when she first arrived in London from Barbados. Winsome and Lennox carry out an affair that Shirley never discovers.

Morgan, a popular LGBTQ+ internet activist, finds themselves in the audience of Amma's play on assignment to write a review and, upon running into Yazz at the after party, realizes they met previously at one of Morgan's guest lectures. Morgan is multiracial. Their family endured years of racist abuse in the small English village where their family farm, **Greenfields**, stands. They struggle with severe internalized racism because of their past. When Morgan realizes that they are non-binary and changes their name and pronouns, it's their grandmother, Hattie, who supports them wholeheartedly while the rest of the family struggles to accept their identity.

Hattie is a powerful woman, still robust in her 90s, and her identity is firmly rooted in the farm. She married Slim, an African American man who was both proudly Black and politically involved. Their children, however, reject their Black identities because of the cruel racism they experience. Hattie is haunted by the unsolved mystery that haunted her own mother, Grace, throughout her life: the question of her father's identity, a man she knows only as "the Abyssinian." Grace has always been proud of her Ethiopian ancestry, even though she never got to know her father. Grace, a multiracial woman, grew up motherless in England in the early 1900s. She was working as a maid when a wealthy, landowning, white Englishman asked her to marry him, which is how she came to call Greenfields her

home.

Amma's play is the connecting force that directly and indirectly brings these 12 women together. The women wind up in the audience of Amma's play for different reasons, but they're all there to witness a momentous occasion: the premier of a play by and for Black women at London's most esteemed National Theatre, a bastion for the white and wealthy. While they all agree that it's a significant moment of change and progress, the women in the audience have complicated feelings about what this moment means and if it speaks to their own identities and experiences. It's this coming together that ultimately highlights both the power and limitations of stories as a bonding and representative force, becoming, too a meta-commentary on the novel itself, which is sweeping celebration of both the interconnectedness and individuality of the twelve women at the heart of this story.

Girl, Woman, Other ends on a shocking DNA discovery. Penelope, who long knew she was adopted, finds out that she's the baby that Hattie gave birth to at 14 and named Barbara—the baby whom she loved but had to give up to avoiding bringing shame to her family. This revelation challenges Penelope's racist beliefs and shows her how all identities and forms of oppression are intersectional. While this single moment doesn't magically rid her of her deeply embedded racist thinking, the immediate and overwhelming love she feels when she sees her mother's face for the first time makes her realize how wrong she was to hold and perpetuate her racist beliefs. Through both this homecoming and the after-party for Amma's play, the novel ends on a note of togetherness that celebrates community in all its imperfection and complexity.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Amma – Amma is Yazz's mother and Dominque's best friend. Amma grew up with her father, Kwabena, a Ghanian journalist who was forced to immigrate to the UK after campaigning for the independence movement, and her multiracial, English-born mother, Helen. As a young person with fierce and radical feminist politics, Amma relentlessly criticized both her mother and father for lacking feminist perspective, only later understanding how generational differences and their unresolved traumas impacted their social and political views. Amma is now on the other side of the generational divide. Her daughter, Yazz, subjects her to the same incessant criticism she once doled out to her own parents. Amma became an activist in high school. In her twenties, she adopted a radical political identity and, with Dominique, formed the Bush Woman Theatre Company, which sought to dismantle the white-supremacist mainstream theater world and elevate women of color. Amma's radical politics distances her from her oldest childhood friend, Shirley, who took the path of reform. Nonetheless, the two remain friends into adulthood, and this reflects one of the books overarching messages: that both the reformer and the radical have a role to play in social change. In the novel's present, Amma is middle aged and has settled down in a polyamorous relationship with two partners, Dolores and Jackie, who are both white. Amma finally finds success in the mainstream theater world with her play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, which opens at London's **National Theatre** to five-star acclaim. This success leaves Amma torn between her old identity as a radical and her emerging identity as someone who is reforming systems from within.

Yazz – Yazz is Amma and Roland's daughter. She relentlessly criticizes her parents for what they believe are their progressive beliefs, but that Yazz sees as out of touch. Yazz has inherited her family's revolutionary spirit and is deeply committed to social justice. However, just like her mother, she can be so focused on criticizing others that it blinds her to her own privileges and hypocrisies. Yazz falls into the trap of ranking her peers from most to least oppressed, failing to acknowledge how intersectionality complicates the simple narrative she tries to impose on the world around her. Yazz attends a university where the student body is predominately white and wealthy, which often leaves her feeling out of place. She and her friends Waris and Nenet initially connect because they are three among the few women of color at the college. They call themselves "The Unfuckables," asserting their right to exist and succeed within an institution of power and privilege. Even though her unconventional upbringing was sometimes challenging, Yazz is proud of it and defends her parents against anyone who suggests that the way she was raised may have been damaging to her.

Dominique – Dominique is Amma's best friend. Her parents, Cecilia and Wintley, are both Guyanese immigrants. Dominique leaves home at sixteen to move to London, where she can live openly as a lesbian and pursue a career in acting. Dominque founds the Bush Women Theatre Company with Amma after both grow tired of the demeaning typecasting and racism they experience within the mainstream theater community. Dominique works alongside Amma until she meets and falls in love with Nzinga, an American woman. Dominique follows Nzinga to the U.S. and soon becomes trapped in an abusive relationship with Nzinga, who isolates, controls, and physically attacks her. With the help of Gaia, the woman who owns the women's commune where Dominique and Nzinga live, Dominque escapes Nzinga and starts a new life in Los Angeles. She rebuilds a successful career in theater with a continued focus on elevating the voices of women of color. She becomes ensnared in the generational divide when her women's music festival draws criticism for not being trans-inclusive. She meets Laverne, whom she will eventually marry and adopt two

children with, while attending a support group for survivors of domestic violence.. Dominique rarely visits the UK because it no longer feels like home, but she returns to surprise Amma at the premiere of Amma's most recent play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*.

Carole Williams – Carole experiences poverty in her childhood; she and her Nigerian immigrant mother, Bummi, live in public housing. Growing up, Carole is a good student and is uninterested in boys or parties. Everything changes when Carole attends a party at her friend LaTisha's house and a college student named Trey sexually assaults her. Carole keeps her assault a secret for the rest of her life, and her unaddressed trauma often leaves her feeling disconnected from her body. Carole's mother, like many immigrant parents, has sacrificed everything to give Carole a shot at success in England. Carole feels the weight of this expectation and enlists Mrs. Shirley King, her teacher, to help her get back on track academically. Mrs. King encourages Carole to find success by assimilating into white English culture, and Carole's assimilation accelerates furiously upon her arrival at the University of Oxford, where she feels out of place among her wealthy (and mostly white) classmates. After college, Carole marries a white man, Freddy, whose parents disapprove of his marrying a Black woman. Carole eventually becomes vice president of a major bank, one of the few women of color in a white, male-dominated field. In this way, Carole belongs to the group of characters who challenge oppressive systems lawfully and from within those systems. Though Carole achieves the success her immigrant parents wanted for her, to Bummi's dismay, this success costs Carole her Nigerian culture. Carole's story highlights the struggle that second-generation immigrants can experience when they become caught between their parents' expectations that they succeed in a new country *and* adhere to cultural traditions.

Bummi Williams – Bummi is Carole's mother and Augustine's wife. Bummi was born in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, in a town destroyed by foreign oil companies. Her early life is marked by significant tragedy and hardship. Both her parents (Moses and Iyatunde) die when she is still young, and she lives in extreme poverty in Lagos until moving in with a harsh, distant cousin, Aunty Ekio, who makes her work as her house-servant. Bummi is studying math at university when she meets and falls deeply in love with Augustine Williams. They marry and, facing a lack of job opportunities in Nigeria, move to London. However, English society finds their Nigerian academic backgrounds invalid, and this forces them to take underpaid work in the service sector. Bummi is devastated when Augustine dies, leaving her to parent Carole alone. Augustine's death motivates Bummi to start her own cleaning company, and she has sex with the Bishop of her church, who then gives her a cash loan to start her business. Bummi builds a successful cleaning company staffed by first-generation immigrant women. Among them is Sister Omofe, a Nigerian woman with whom she falls in love and has a secret affair until shame compels her to end the relationship. Bummi, like many first-generation immigrant mothers, wants Carole to have more opportunities than she and Augustine had in their home country. When Carole wants to leave Oxford, it's Bummi who tells her that she can't let white people scare her away from the opportunities she deserves as a native-born, English citizen. However, Bummi later regrets how Carole's eventual success distances Carole from her Nigerian culture. Eventually, Bummi settles down with Kofi, a Ghanian man who provides her with a stable life and home and makes peace with Carole's choices.

LaTisha Jones – LaTisha is Carole's childhood best friend. Unbeknownst to LaTisha, Trey and some of his friends sexually assault Carole at a house party that LaTisha throws in year nine. In a tragic twist of fate, Tray later assaults LaTisha, too, and she becomes pregnant with her third child, Jordan. LaTisha has a happy and secure childhood, but this changes after her father, Glenmore Jones, abandons the family for another secret family. LaTisha loves her father deeply, and his sudden departure causes her to act out at school and at home. Carole, her teachers, and even her own mother all view LaTisha as a stereotypical "ghetto" girl destined for teen pregnancy, drug addiction, and poverty, and as a result, they leave her to fend for herself. LaTisha's story reveals how racists stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Without guidance or support, LaTisha gets pregnant at 18. At the novel's present, LaTisha is almost 30. She is a single mother to three children, all from different and entirely absent fathers, and she works as a manager at a grocery store. She's ready to turn her life around and is reinventing herself as the "New LaTisha." When her father suddenly reappears and begs his family to take him back, LaTisha disregards her own hurt for the sake of her youngest who, lacking a father figure, has begun to rebel just like LaTisha did when she was younger. In this way, LaTisha aspires to help her children break the cycle of oppression.

Shirley King – Shirley is Amma's oldest friend, and the daughter of Barbadian immigrants, Winsome and Clovis. Shirley has always been more conservative than Amma, and in her work as a teacher, she acts as a lawful reformer rather than a radical. Shirley arrives at the Peckham School for Boys and Girls determined to help empower lower-class children of immigrants like herself. Shirley is immediately successful, which causes a rift between Shirley and Penelope Halifax, one of Shirley's conservative, racist, and jaded coworkers. Shirley's success leaves her under immense pressure to continue being a great teacher as well as an advocate for Black people everywhere. As the years pass, however, Shirley falters under this pressure and becomes disenchanted by her difficult job, and she starts to view vulnerable, struggling students like LaTisha through the same racist stereotypes as the coworkers she once hated. Meanwhile, she privileges students like Carole

who behave and demonstrate potential. Eventually, Shirley becomes close friends and allies with her former nemesis, Penelope. Shirley's story demonstrates how the pressures to succeed in a white-supremacist society can create internalized racism in oppressed people of color. Shirley is married to Lennox, a kind, attractive, and supportive husband, and they have two daughters together, Rachel and Karen. Lennox is fun and warmhearted compared to Shirley who, as Winsome notes, is perpetually unsatisfied despite her comfortable life. Winsome, a first-generation immigrant, can't understand how Shirley, who has benefited so greatly from her parents' hard work and sacrifice, can be so unhappy.

Winsome Robinson – Winsome is Shirley's mother and Clovis's wife. As first-generation Barbadian immigrants, Winsome and Clovis have made immense sacrifices so that their English-born children could find success and opportunity in England. Winsome meets Clovis not long after arriving in England. The couple immediately bonds over their shared immigrant background. Winsome feels indifferently toward Clovis but marries him because he offers safety and stability; this is one of the many sacrifices that Winsome makes as an immigrant. Soon after marrying, Clovis convinces Winsome to move south to a fishing town. She agrees, but only because, as his wife, she feels obligated to accompany him. Though racism prevents Winsome from getting work as a fisherman, he insists that they settle in the countryside, which Winsome tolerates until she can no longer sit back and watch her children experience racism from their teachers and peers. In a moment of feminist conviction, Winsome tells Clovis she's taking the children back to London with or without him; Clovis follows the family to London. Decades later, Winsome falls in love and has an affair with Shirley's husband Lennox, whom she sees as a better version of Clovis—as a member of the younger, more progressive generation, Lennox treats Shirley as his equal, whereas Clovis expected Winsome to be an obedient wife. In their old age, Winsome and Clovis return to their native Barbados, and their quality of life immediately improves. Winsome, for instance, starts attending a women's book club, allowing her to explore intellectual pursuits that her hard life as a first-generation immigrant denied her. Their homecoming challenges reductive immigrant narratives that suggest life is always ultimately better in an immigrant's adopted country. Winsome struggled for much of her adult life to give Shirley the opportunities Shirley would need to succeed in England, so Shirley's perpetual unhappiness puzzles and wounds Winsome.

Penelope Halifax/Barbara – Penelope Halifax is Shirley's coworker at the Peckham School. Penelope is old and jaded, and she regards the students with open hostility. Her low expectations for them are grounded in her racist beliefs about her low-income, Black students—beliefs that were passed down to her from her horribly racist mother, Margaret. At the same time, Penelope is a diehard feminist and has made significant strides within a male-dominated workplace. Penelope is angry that new teachers like Shirley fail to recognize the feminist progress she's made at the school. Meanwhile, Penelope fails to see how her feminism suffers from its lack of intersectionality. After retiring, Penelope hires Bummi to clean her house, and she asserts her perceived racial superiority over Bummi by forbidding Bummi from speaking. Eventually, Bummi confides in her about the misfortunes of her life, revealing how white women often demand not only physical but emotional labor from women of color. Penelope was married twice, and both relationships ended due to the men's misogyny. Penelope is adopted. Her adoptive parents broke the news to her when she was 16, and the news devastated. Years later, per her daughter Sarah's advice, Penelope buys an AncestryDNA test. She's when her results show that she is 13 percent African, and she's even more surprised when her birth mother, Hattie, contacts her. Penelope travels to **Greenfields** to reunite with Hattie, and their loving reunion shows Penelope how wrong she was to harbor racist beliefs her whole life.

Megan/Morgan Malinga – Morgan is Julie and Chimongo's daughter and Hattie's great-grandchild. Morgan, who was born Megan, was always a tomboy but their mother forced femininity onto them. Morgan's fraught relationship with their mother illustrates how women can go against their best interest and become enforcers of the patriarchy's gendered expectations. Hattie, who Morgan calls GG, is the only one who accepts them for who they are. Morgan's struggles with their gender lead them to drop out of high school and experience drug addiction. Morgan later gets clean and moves out of their parent's house. No longer behold to their family's expectations, Morgan explores and invents their own identity for the first time. Morgan retreats into chat rooms where they eventually meet Bibi, the transgender woman who introduces them to the transgender community and eventually becomes their romantic partner. Morgan is shocked when Hattie decides to leave **Greenfields** to them and Bibi, suggesting that they turn it into a refuge for the trans community. With the farm, Morgan inherits land and power typically reserved for white men, creating a future in which marginalized communities have access to both the refuge and empowerment that land ownership provides. Morgan's Twitter account launches them into internet activist fame, which allows them to make their living as a writer. Morgan meets Yazz at a guest lecture at Yazz's university, encountering her again at the premiere for *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, which Morgan is reviewing for work. Morgan's unconventional path to success without a high school or college degree, suggests that assimilation into the mainstream isn't the only path to success.

Hattie "GG" Jackson – Hattie grew up on **Greenfields Farmhouse**, the only child of her mother, Grace, and father Joseph Rydendale. At 14, Hattie gets pregnant and gives birth

to a baby girl who she names Barbara. Hattie wants to keep Barbara, but her father forces Hattie to put Barbara up for adoption. He swears Hattie to secrecy, and Hattie never tells anyone about Barbara, not even her husband Slim. This part of her story reveals the power that men, and specifically fathers, have over women's bodies. Hattie's life and identity are deeply rooted in Greenfields, an inheritance she is proud of and wants to keep in the family. Although her father expected that she pass the farm down to her son Sonny, Hattie decides to give it to Morgan. Hattie's decision simultaneously disrupts the gendered and patriarchal transfer of land and, most importantly, ensures that the land stays in Black hands (Hattie's children, possible due to racism they experienced in childhood, have married into white families and distanced themselves from their Blackness). Like Slim, Hattie is proud of her racial and cultural identity, and she wants the farm, which she eventually discovers was founded by her slave runner ancestor Captain Linnaeus Rydendale, to stay in the hands of the people whose ancestors suffered for it.

Grace – Grace is Hattie's mother and Joseph Rydendale's wife. She grows up not knowing her father, Wolde's, identity, and this haunts her for her entire life. After Grace's mother dies of tuberculosis when she is still young, Grace is later shipped off to a home for girls where she's educated by people who teach her that she must tone down her Blackness if she wants to succeed in white society. Grace always remembers how her mother taught her to never be ashamed of her Ethiopian roots, though, so Grace holds tight to that cultural identity regardless. Racism prevents Grace from working at a local department store like she dreams, and instead she's offered a job as a maid. Her life changes one day when she meets Joseph Rydendale, a white man, who sings her praises but also objectifies and exoticizes her due to her Ethiopian roots. When she and Joseph marry, she moves onto his family farm, **Greenfields.** Joseph is determined to have a boy who will inherit the farm, but Grace bears two children who die shortly after birth. Impatient, Joseph doesn't allow her to recover before making her try again, and soon Harriet is born. She sinks into a deep, postpartum depression that leaves her completely uninterested in Harriet, though she later recovers and strives to raise Harriet to be a strong, independent woman.

Roland Quartey – Roland is Amma's co-parent and Yazz's father. Roland is a professor and author who has found mainstream success as a major television news personality. The son of African immigrants, Roland decides early on to assimilate and pursue mainstream success—to reform systems from within rather than from the outside as a radical like Amma. He hates when people who interview him on TV force him into the role of spokesman for Black people and cultural diversity. He never wanted to base his academic career on his identity as a gay, Black, man the way that society expects of Black people in academia, as Amma has done with her theater career. Becoming Yazz's father profoundly changes Roland, motivating him to be his best self and achieve success. He loves her deeply and wishes that she would recognize, rather than criticize, the remarkable opportunities his success has afforded her. Their relationship reveals how generational differences can sour parent-child relationships.

Sylvester – Sylvester is one of Amma's oldest friends. Sylvester is queer and used to go by the name Sylvie. He wore dresses and had long hair, proudly challenging gender norms alongside his partner, Curwen. He maintains the radical political views he held in his 20s and continues to run his socialist theater companies, putting on plays in community centers and demanding social change from outside society's institutions. He repeatedly calls Amma a sellout for premiering *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* at the **National Theatre**, and this creates tension between them. Sylvester sees the debate between radical and reformist approaches in black and white. He is unforgiving toward those who take a reformist approach, failing to see that both sides depend on each other to make social change. Sylvester's refuses to acknowledge his own hypocrisies, mainly how his middle-class upbringing, which has allowed him to pursue the arts, contradicts his radical beliefs.

Waris – Waris is one of Yazz's three best friends. The friends call themselves "The Unfuckables." Waris is the daughter of Somali immigrants who fled the country's civil war. She wears a hijab as a political statement in the face of racism. Waris is fierce and confident in her beliefs but insecure in her body. Yazz admires Waris because, in Yazz's view, she's suffered the most out of their friend group. However, Waris tells Yazz not to victimize her because Waris's mother, Xaanan, didn't raise her to be a victim. Waris's story reveals how even other women of color can view each other through problematic and demeaning lenses despite their best intentions.

Courtney – Courtney is one of Yazz's three best friends that make up her squad, "The Unfuckables." A white girl who experienced poverty growing up on her family's farm in a rural community, Courtney is woefully ignorant about race, and her comments often contain microaggressions and racists stereotypes. Yazz scrutinizes Courtney for this but takes her under her wing and sets out to educate her in all things social justice. Courtney later calls Yazz out for her habit of ranking their friend group in order from most to least oppressed, citing Roxane Gay's warning against playing the "privilege Olympics." Courtney's knowledge of Gay earns Courtney newfound respect with Yazz. Courtney's dad is racist and anti-immigrant, and Courtney, who professes that she's only interested in Black men, can't wait to upset him when she brings a Black man home one day. Courtney's character reveals the complexity inherent to identity, and how intersectionality complicates the simple narratives that society puts forth about race, class, and identity.

Nenet – Nenet is one of Yazz's three best friends that make up her squad, "The Unfuckables." Nenet is Egyptian and has a

boyfriend to whom she's arranged to be married. Much to Waris's frustration, Nenet identifies as Mediterranean, refusing to call herself Black or African. Her family in Egypt is wealthy and well connected, and in London, they live in a mansion, complete with domestic servants. Nenet is always decked out in designer clothes, and she later admits that she pays someone to do her schoolwork for her, which is why her grades are so high. In light of these revelations, Yazz starts to question their friendship,. Nenet's story reveals how class complicates racial and ethnic identity. Nenet's deeply internalized racism leaves her wanting to distance herself from her African identity.

Nzinga – Nzinga is Dominique's abusive girlfriend. Nzinga's abusive personality is a direct result of the devastating abuse and neglect she suffered as a child growing up in Texas. Nzinga is stopping over in London on her way home from a trip to Ghana when she meets Dominique, who immediately falls for her. Nzinga is steadfast in her Black, feminist beliefs, taking them to an extreme that even young, radical Amma can't believe. Amma immediately dislikes and distrusts Nzinga, seeing how Nzinga has complete control over Dominique. In turn, Nzinga sees Amma as a threat to her control over Dominique. Dominique follows Nzinga to the U.S., where they live and work on women's communes. Nzinga abused the girlfriend she had before Dominique and abuses the girlfriend she finds after Dominque escapes. Her cycle of abuse doesn't end until she dies following a major stroke.

Augustine Williams – Augustine is Carole's father and Bummi's husband. Augustine came from a progressive Nigerian family who readily accepted Bummi when Augustine brought her home, regardless of the fact that she was poor and without a family. Augustine has a doctorate from the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, but upon immigrating to London, his credentials prove useless. Far from being the land of opportunity he imagined, Augustine is forced to work as a taxi driver. He works long days and nights to provide for his wife and daughter, working under immense stress and fueled by a poor diet. One New Year's day, when Carole is still young, Augustine is driving drunk when he suffers a heart attack that kills him. His story highlights the extreme sacrifices that first-generation immigrant parents make for their second-generation children.

Lennox King – Lennox is Shirley's husband and Rachel and Karen's dad. He is a doting and supportive husband who treats his wife as his equal. When they have kids, he's an involved and caring father. Like Shirley, Lennox is the second-generation child of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. In his youth, he was determined to achieve upward mobility but understood that society viewed him, a Black man, as a threat. Growing up in the stop-and-frisk era traumatizes him, and he becomes a lawyer so that he can reform the system from within. One day, Lennox shows up on his mother-in-law, Winsome's, doorstep and initiates a passionate affair with her. Just as suddenly as it begins, Lennox ends the affair and never speaks of it again. Shirley never uncovers this secret.

Clovis – Clovis is Winsome's husband and Shirley's father. An immigrant from Barbados, Clovis meets and marries Winsome not long after her arrival in England. The marriage gives Winsome safety and comfort in the early and overwhelming days of her new life in the UK. Despite Winsome's protestations and the hostile racism they in the south of England, Clovis stubbornly insists that the family move to the countryside, where he finds work as a stevedore and spends his nights at the bar. When Winsome later gives Clovis an ultimatum, Clovis agrees to move back to London. Clovis never finds out about Winsome and Lennox's affair.

Kwabena – Kwabena is Amma's father and Helen's husband. Kwabena, a journalist from Ghana, was forced to flee his homeland after advocating for the country's independence. He met Helen after migrating to the UK. Kwabena maintains his fierce socialist convictions in the UK. His life centers around his activism and constantly inundates his wife and children with his political preaching, which helps Amma grow into her own activist identity that comes to define her life's work. He infuriates Amma because he isn't a feminist, though. While Dominique understands that Kwabena is a product of his time and tells Amma not to criticize him so harshly, it's not until after he dies that Amma admits she was too harsh and understands the depths of the trauma he experienced after being forced to flee from his birthplace.

Helen – Helen is Amma's mother and Kwabena's wife. Born in 1935, Helen is biracial and faced intense racism growing up in a small, Scottish city. She escapes to London where she meets and eventually marries Kwabena. Helen worked a full-time job while maintaining sole responsibility for the household chores and childcare. Amma thinks her mother is oppressed and unfulfilled and lacks the feminist insight to stand up for herself.

Freddy – Freddy is Carole's white husband from a privileged background. His parents harbor racist views and were shocked when he announced he was marrying a Black woman from a lower-class background. Despite his best intentions, Freddy brings his unconscious biases into his relationship with Carole. While this means their relationship isn't perfect, Freddy still makes Carole happy in many ways.

Iyatunde – Iyatunde is Bummi's mother and Moses's wife. When Moses dies, Iyatunde and Bummi are forced to live with Iyatunde's parents. When her father intends to marry Bummi off as soon as possible, Iyatunde escapes with Bummi to Lagos. In Lagos, Iyatunde begs for work. A sawmill eventually hires her, but she works long and backbreaking days. When Bummi is 15, Iyatunde is killed in a horrific saw accident, leaving her daughter orphaned. Iyatunde's story reveals both the cultural and physical sacrifices that parents make for their children.

Trey – Trey grew up in the same neighborhood as Carole and LaTisha. He is in college when he shows up at teenage LaTisha's

house party and sexually assaults Carole. Years later, he asks LaTisha out and sexually assaults her as well, leaving her pregnant with her third child, Jordan. At ten, Jordan is already a troublemaker, which LaTisha believes he inherited from Trey. Trey's story reveals the ways in which men perpetuate violence against women.

Glenmore Jones – Glenmore is LaTisha's father. He upends her world when he abandons his family to go live in the U.S. with one of Pauline's friends, with whom he has a secret second family. Glenmore was a loving and devoted father, but he always favored LaTisha, which the girls only later understand when Pauline reveals that Glenmore isn't Jayla's biological dad. When Glenmore returns years later and begs his family to take him back, Pauline readily accepts him. LaTisha lets him back in for the sake of her youngest child, Jordan, who at 10 is already acting out and needs a father figure in his life. Glenmore's story reveals the impact that men have on their families, and how their irresponsible actions can wreak havoc and destruction in the lives of those around them.

Pauline Jones – Pauline is LaTisha and Jayla's mother. Her husband, Glenmore, cheats on her with one of her friends and later abandons his and Pauline's children. Pauline is a social worker, but when LaTisha starts acting out after Glenmore leaves, she struggles to control LaTisha. When LaTisha gets pregnant at 18, Pauline is angry and ashamed. They fight constantly, and she kicks LaTisha and LaTisha's young son Jason out of the house. Pauline gives up on LaTisha the same way that the rest of society has, essentially viewing her daughter through the same destructive and stereotypical lens as white, racist English society. Eventually, she lets LaTisha move back in and helps LaTisha with childcare. When Glenmore shows up many years later, Pauline takes him back.

Jordan Jones – Jordan is LaTisha's 10-year-old son. The youngest child, Jordan takes after his father, Trey, and is already a troublemaker. When LaTisha's estranged father, Glenmore, shows back up in their lives, Jordan takes to him immediately, and, for his sake, LaTisha lets her father back into her life. Jordan's story is a lesson in generational trauma. Without a father figure, Jordan acts out just as LaTisha did when her father disappeared. Thus, LaTisha's decision to forgive Glenmore represents her desire to break that cycle of generational trauma that left her vulnerable.

Jayla Jones – Jayla is LaTisha's sister and Pauline's daughter. Sometime after their father, Glenmore, leaves, Pauline reveals that Jayla has a different dad, which explains why Glenmore always favored LaTisha. Against all advice, Jayla goes in search of her biological dad. She shows up at his mother's house, and the old woman is upset to discover that he has yet another child he didn't know about. Her biological father refuses to meet her, leaving Jayla crushed. As an adult, Jayla lives at home with her mother and LaTisha, and she helps take care of Jason, Jantelle, and Jordan. She suffers from an unknown mental illness but refuses to see a psychiatrist. Like LaTisha, Jayla's story shows how men's irresponsible decisions and abandonment can have devastating consequences.

Margaret – Margaret is Penelope's mother and Edwin's wife. When she was young her family migrated to the Union of South Africa to take advantage of a 1913 law that distributed 80 percent of South African land to white people. When the Black workers on her father's farm weren't working hard enough, he took the advice of his neighbors and flogged them. This worked for a while until one day, when his workers attacked him back. After that, the family moved back to England. Margaret's time in South Africa leaves her with deeply embedded and vile racist beliefs, which she then passes down to Penelope.

Giles – Giles is Penelope's first husband and Adam and Sarah's father. Penelope meets Giles in high school, shortly after she's crushed by the revelation that she's adopted; she leans on him for emotional support and becomes quickly attached. Giles's sexist beliefs—specifically his insistence that Penelope stay home and care for the children and domestic duties, denying her desire to make us of her teaching degree–eventually persuade Penelope to end their relationship.

Phillip – Phillip is Penelope's second husband. She meets him shortly after her breakup with Giles and falls in love quickly, largely due to their sexual chemistry. Phillip is a psychologist, which is what eventually begins to ruin the relationship. Penelope tires of his habit of constantly psychoanalyzing her, By the time Penelope discovers that Giles is having sex with a younger woman, she and Giles are already living separate lives in separate parts of the house.

Sarah – Sarah is Penelope's daughter who moves to Australia. This breaks Penelope's heart because, even though she often complained about her raucous grandkids, she realizes she'll miss them when they're gone. Like her brother, Adam, Sarah favors their father, Giles. This upsets Penelope, seeing as she was the one who raised them after the divorce. Sarah suggests that Penelope take the AncestryDNA test to find out more about her birth family and later helps her connect with her birth mother, Hattie.

Julie – Julie is Morgan's mother and Hattie's granddaughter. Julie's family was outraged when she brought a Malawian man, Chimongo, home, because by that point, the family could pass as white. Hattie is the only member of her family who immediately accepts Chimongo. Their relationship highlights the complexities of interracial love in white-supremacist society.

Chimongo – Chimongo is Morgan's father and Julie's husband. He doesn't turn away when Julie's white-passing family objects to her marrying a Black man, and he eventually wins them over. His story highlights how interracial relationships place undue burden on the person of color in the relationship. Chimongo is hard-working like Slim, and he likewise wants his children to be

proud of their race. He buys them picture books featuring Black characters so they can see themselves represented in stories. When Hattie finds out about this, she feels guilty and wonders if there were books like that back in the 1940s that could have helped her own children love themselves, highlighting how social progress is benefitting the younger generations. Throughout Morgan and Julie's fights over Morgan's gender identity, Chimongo takes a backseat and defers to his wife.

Bibi – Bibi is Morgan's long-term partner who introduced them to the transgender community after connecting in an online chat room. Bibi is a transgender woman whose Indian family has disowned her, highlighting how second-generation children of immigrants are often cut off by their families when the fail to meet their cultural expectations. Bibi works at a nursing home, and the old people there loved and accepted her through her transition. Bibi educates Morgan, who is initially very uninformed and ignorant about gender identity, and she helps Morgan come into their own trans identity.

Daisy – Daisy is Grace's mother and Hattie's great-grandmother. Daisy was 16 when she got pregnant by Wolde, an Ethiopian seaman who stopped over in her coastal, English town. He promises to return, and although he never does, Grace never lets his memory die. As Grace is growing up, Daisy tells her stories about her father, promising that they'll travel to Ethiopia one day to find him, and she reminds Grace to be proud of her Ethiopian identity. Daisy's determination to make sure her daughter grows up proud of her racial identity stands in stark contrast to the shame that Ada Mae and Sonny will feel generations later. When Daisy's father finds out she is pregnant, he orders her to give the baby up, but she refuses and instead moves out on her own. She and baby Grace live in a tenement with another single mother and her child, and she works long hours at a factory. Daisy dreams of a better life for herself and her daughter, but before she can make those dreams come true, she falls ill with tuberculosis and is forcibly removed to a sanitorium where she succumbs to the disease.

Slim Jackson – Slim is Hattie's husband and Ada Mae and Sonny's father. Slim is an African American man from Georgia. When Slim and Hattie marry, he's happy to leave the United States behind for good, finding that people respect him more in England. Slim comes from a family of sharecroppers, so he is excited that marrying Hattie means he'll finally be a landowner after his ancestors were denied their forty acres and a mule. When Slim is outraged after he and Hattie discover that Captain Linnaeus Rydendale, Hattie's ancestor who founded **Greenfields**, was a slave runner, Hattie calms him down by suggesting that his co-ownership is a form of reparations that he and his family deserve. When Ada Mae and Sonny come home crying after their white classmates bully them, Slim has little sympathy. Instead, he tells them horror stories from his youth living in a segregated America, where his brother was lynched. This highlights a generational divide between Slim and his children. The horrors that Slim witnessed in his childhood leave him politically aware and with a strong sense of Black pride that his children don't inherit. Instead, they are ashamed to be seen with him, revealing how white supremacy destroys family relationships and cultural pride and identity. Slim eventually dies of cancer, leaving Hattie heartbroken for the rest of her life.

Ada Mae – Ada Mae is Hattie and Slim's daughter. She is named after Slim's mother. Like her brother, Sonny, Ada Mae's childhood was fraught with hostile and racist bullying that she internalizes until she hates being Black. She and Sonny are embarrassed to be seen in public with Slim, so they start to distance themselves from him despite his fierce love for them. This tragedy reveals how white-supremacist society can destroy family relationships. When Ada is 16 and Sonny 17, they dramatically leave home for London, swearing never to return to their miserable lives at **Greenfields**. Ada Mae has worked in a factory for much of her life, and this has left her body in bad shape. She marries a white man, and with each passing generation, the family gets whiter until none of them identify as Black any longer, demonstrating how internalized racism can completely erase racial and cultural identity.

Sonny – Sonny is Hattie and Slim's son. He is named after Slim's brother, who was lynched back in the United States,. This namesake conflicts with Sonny's desire to distance himself from his racial identity. Sonny, like his sister Ada Mae, suffers racist bullying growing up in a small English village. Eventually, Sonny internalizes this racism and hates being Black. He and Ada Mae both distance themselves from their father, embarrassed to be seen with him in town, which reveals how white supremacy can destroy family relationships. When Sonny is 17 and Ada is 16, they leave home for London, swearing never to return to life at **Greenfields**. Sonny spends his like working as a miner. He marries a white woman, and the family becomes whiter with each passing generation, demonstrating how internalized racism can erase a person's racial and cultural identities.

Wolde – Wolde is Grace's father, though she never knew him. An Ethiopian seaman, Wolde met Grace's mother, Daisy, when he was stopped over in England. Before he departs, he promises Grace—who, unbeknownst to Grace and Wolde, is pregnant with their child–that he'll return for her but never does. Wolde's absence haunts Grace for her entire life, highlighting the impact that missing fathers have on their children.

Joseph Rydendale – Joseph Rydendale is Grace's husband and Hattie's father. Joseph is descended from Captain Linnaeus Rydendale, a slave runner who used his wealth to found **Greenfields**. Although Joseph falls in love with Grace at a time when society intensely scrutinized interracial relationships, he objectifies and exoticizes Grace's Ethiopian identity, revealing

the complexities and inequalities of interracial relationships. When he and Grace lose a series of children shortly after birth, he has little sympathy for her despite how clearly devastated she is. He forces her to try for another child without giving her time to physically and emotionally heal because he is so preoccupied with having a son who will inherit the family farm. Joseph's treatment of Grace reveals how men use women to achieve and perpetuate their own patriarchal goals.

Captain Linnaeus Rydendale –Captain Linnaeus Rydendale is the founder of **Greenfields** and one of Hattie's ancestors. He was a slave runner, a fact that Hattie's father evidently wanted to keep this a secret from her. Rydendale was married to a woman named Eudoré, whom he met while on business in Jamaica. Years later, Slim reveals his suspicion that Eudoré was Black.

Xaanan – Xaanan is Waris's mother. She's a Somali immigrant who fled to London at the outset of the Somali civil war. She splits her time between teaching martial arts and working at a refuge for Muslim women. She trained her children in martial arts, advising them to be warriors and not let anyone take pity on them for who they are.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Eudoré – Eudoré is Captain Linnaeus Rydendale's wife who was rumored to be Spanish. She's the daughter of merchant Rydendale conducted business with in Jamaica. When Slim sees a picture of Eudoré decades later, he tells Hattie that he's certain she was Black, and Hattie thinks he might be right.

Laverne – Laverne is Dominique's wife. A fellow survivor of domestic abuse, they met at a support group. They live in Los Angeles and parent their adopted twins.

Gaia – Gaia is the woman who owns the Spirit Moon women's commune where Dominque lives with Nzinga when they first move to the U.S. Gaia ultimately helps Dominique escape the commune and Nzinga's abuse.

Cecilia – Cecilia is Dominique's mother; she's a Guyanese immigrant.

Wintley – Wintley is Dominique's father; he's an Indo-Guyanese immigrant.

Dolores – Dolores is Amma's partner of seven years. They are in a polyamorous triad with Jackie. Dolores is white and a graphic designer.

Jackie – Jackie is Amma's partner of three years. They are in a polyamorous triad with Dolores. She is white and an occupational therapist.

Mabel, Olivine, Katrina, and Lakshmi – Mabel, Olivine, Katrina, and Lakshmi are Amma's close group of friends. Amma criticizes them for each having sold out in their own ways as they entered middle-age.

Georgie – Georgie is Amma's friend. Georgie struggles with substance abuse and dating. When he dies, likely by suicide, Amma feels guilty.

Curwen – Curwen is Sylvester's partner.

Kenny – Kenny is Roland's partner.

Moses – Moses is Bummi's father who died while illegally refining oil in the Niger Delta. His family disowns Bummi and her mother, Iyatunde, after his death.

Aunty Ekio – Aunty Ekio is Bummi's distant cousin who takes her in after Iyatunde dies. She is a wealthy, mean, and demanding woman who makes Bummi work hard as her house-servant in exchange for housing and education.

Bishop Aderami Obi – Bishop Aderami Obi is the bishop of Bummi's church who gives her a cash loan to start her cleaning business in exchange for sex.

Sister Omofe – Sister Omofe is one of the women who works for Bummi at her cleaning company. They become close friends and eventually share a passionate, secret love affair. Once Bummi ends things, Sister Omofe starts dating another woman from church, leaving Bummi jealous.

Kofi – Kofi is a Ghanian man who worked for Bummi's cleaning company and eventually becomes her long-term boyfriend.

Aunty Angie – Angie is LaTisha's aunt who moves in to help Pauline after Glenmore abandons the family.

Jason Jones – Jason is LaTisha's 12-year-old son.

Jantelle Jones – Jantelle is LaTisha's 11-year-old daughter.

Dwight – Dwight is the father of LaTisha's first child, Jason.

Mark – Mark is the father of LaTisha's second child, Jantelle.

Rachel – Rachel is Shirley and Lennox's daughter and Winsome's granddaughter who, to her delight, takes interest in her life story.

Madison – Madison is Rachel's daughter, Shirley's granddaughter, and Winsome's great-granddaughter.

Karen – Karen is Shirley and Lennox's daughter and Winsome's granddaughter.

Tony – Tony is Shirley's brother and Winsome and Clovis's son.

Errol – Errol is Shirley's brother and Winsome and Clovis's son.

Adam – Adam is Penelope's son who moves to Texas after graduating from college. He never visits his mother. His father, Giles, is his favorite parent, because Giles paid for all his university expenses.

Mark – Mark is Morgan's brother and Hattie's great-grandson.

Edwin – Edwin is Penelope's father and Margaret's wife. Edwin was a surveyor born in England; he lived his life according to a strict and predictable routine.

Jeremy Sanders – Jeremy is Penelope's partner later in life. Penelope ignores Jeremy's flaws, namely his sexism, to keep the

peace and enjoy their life together.

Great Aunt Myrtle Lennox's great aunt, who lives in Harlem. His parents send him to live with Aunt Myrtle while they get themselves establishes in the U.K. Aunt Myrtle stresses to Lennox that school and knowledge are the keys to building a better life, which is a lesson that he internalizes.

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.

DIASPORA, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

Girl, Woman, Other features 12 women's voices from the African diaspora. The women trace their ancestry back to different countries—Ghana, Nigeria, Barbados, Malawi, Ethiopia—and span the first, second, and successive generations of immigrants. The first generation of immigrants, directly tied to their homeland, bring their home cultures with them to the U.K. and fight to maintain them as they struggle to survive in a society that is openly hostile and discriminatory. For Amma's father Kwabena, that means maintaining his radical, political identity. For Bummi, it means dressing in traditional Nigerian clothes, eating Nigerian food, and expecting her daughter to marry a Nigerian man. For Winsome, it means finding solace in a man who shares similar roots. The first generation wants to pass their cultural identities down to their second-generation children born in England, but whiteness and the pressure to assimilate threaten those cultural identities.

The second generation straddles the middle ground between their parents' homelands and their native-born England. They are torn between their parents' expectations that they adhere to the cultural norms of a homeland that is effectively foreign to them, while at the same time being rejected by a white-supremacist English society that views them as foreigners because of their racial and ethnic identities. Amma rails against her father who, despite his progressivism, has internalized sexist ideologies. The feminist identity that Amma has cultivated in her native country, England, becomes a cultural divide between her and her father. Carole rejects her Nigerian roots because assimilation into the white middle-class is, for her, the only clear path to financial and material stability. Though Grace loses her Ethiopian identity with her father, her mother, a white woman, fights to keep that identity alive for her through stories and by instilling in Grace a deep sense of racial pride. Eventually, however, Grace's descendants will abandon their Black identities entirely, choosing to pass as white to escape the racism that traumatized them in childhood. Members of successive generations—like Yazz and Morgan—have the benefit of living in an England that is more diverse than ever, but they must also contend with the right-wing reactionaries who want to halt diversification. Through this chorus of stories, Evaristo's novel reveals that for members of the diaspora, each successive generation reconfigures and reshapes identity, resulting in losses and conflicts but also new possibilities.

LOVE, SEXUALITY, AND RACE

Love and sexuality run through the heart of the 12 narratives that make up *Girl, Woman, Other*, and each of the women's stories explores the myriad ways that love intersects with racial and ethnic identity. The pressure to fall in love with someone from one's own racial or ethnic group is present in many of the women's lives. Carole's mother, Bummi, is devastated when her daughter falls in love with a white, English man instead of a Nigerian. For Bummi, this decision threatens to further erode Carole's Nigerian identity, which Carole has already suppressed in order to assimilate—the only clear path Carole saw to achieve success in a discriminatory English society. Amma is a radical, activist lesbian who is proud of her "multicultural hoedom," but ends up with two white women life partners. Dominique always dated blondes in her 20s, which a girlfriend later suggests is a product of her internalized racism. Falling in love with someone white also means facing those lovers' racist families. Carole's husband, Freddy, is excited to see his parents' reaction when he brings home a Black woman, as if she's a token he's entitled to use to make a political statement to his family. When Julie, descended from an Ethiopian great-grandfather and African American grandfather, marries a man from Malawi, her family is angry with her for "ruining" the family line which becomes "whiter with every generation." This desire itself is one rooted in their internalized racism, born of the traumas of growing up amidst the racism of the English countryside. Almost all the women the book features have experienced colorism and have either been sexually objectified or ignored because of their race. In this way, the characters' stories highlight the relationship between love, sexuality, and racial and cultural identities, as well as how living in a racist, Western society complicates interracial love and desire.

HOME AND COMMUNITY

The women who make up the cast of *Girl, Woman, Other* are all, in their own ways, in search of home and community. Each of the characters struggles to carve out a place for themselves within an often hostile and exclusionary English society. The first-generation immigrants—like Bummi, Winsome, and Amma's father Kwabena—mourn the loss of the home they've been forced to

leave behind while they struggle to survive in a new place that will never feel fully like home. The second-generation immigrant characters born in England are disconnected from their parents' homelands, but their racial and ethnic identities cause their communities in their native England to treat them as outsiders, as well. Tired of dealing with the overt and covert racism embedded in the mainstream theater world, Amma and Dominique create a refuge for themselves and other women of color when they found The Bush Woman Theatre Company for women of color in the arts. Carole spends her childhood desperate to escape her low-income community where cycles of violence, addiction, and broken families make upward mobility a rare opportunity. She's forced to leave behind her mother and her friends like LaTisha to make a new home within white, middle-class English society. Hattie's sense of home is deeply rooted in the land that her family has stewarded for two centuries, but that legacy contains secrets that will complicate her firm sense of home.

Finally, the third generation represents new possibilities. They are most at home in England, but they still face similar struggles, especially as renewed right-wing movements threaten the progress their parents' generation made. Yazz finds solace in two other brown girls on the mostly white Oxford campus, and Morgan finds a home in the trans community. On a meta level, the characters look for community in stories. Amma's play—like the book itself—is a story that brings these disparate women together. Even though a single play can't fully represent or speak for all the women, they sit together in the audience as witnesses to Amma's groundbreaking moment that shatters barriers enforced by a white-supremacist society. Ultimately, the story ends with a literal homecoming between Hattie and her long-lost daughter Penelope that reinforces Evaristo's overall message that though home and community are tenuous and ever-changing, affected by loss and sacrifice, people can also find and (re)construct home and community in unexpected places.

CONTRADICTION, COMPLEXITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Girl, Woman, Other is a deeply complex novel with both direct and subtle connections at every turn. The characters are related in intricate ways that are often unknown to the characters themselves and to readers, who only gradually discover the extent of these connections as the novel unfolds. In this way, the structure of Evaristo's novel underlies one of its central messages about the intersectional nature of human lives and social movements. Each character is strong and assured in their beliefs, often asserting that their view of the world is the only correct one. Perhaps because of these uncompromising beliefs, each character contradicts themselves at every turn. For example, Amma and her group of radical friends profess a commitment to changing the world for the marginalized. At the same time, they look down on those like Carole, who take a more mainstream approach to social change, without recognizing the different social factors that led Carole down this path. Carole's class background (she grew up with a poor, single, immigrant mother in a struggling community) is different than Amma's upbringing, which afforded her more class privilege and exposed her to radical ideas.

Yazz provides another example when she plays what writer and social commentator Roxane Gay calls "the privilege Olympics." She's constantly ranking her friends from most to least oppressed. She not only fails to see the ways in which different factors, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, intersect to complicate the simple picture she tries to paint, but she also contradicts her own professed social beliefs by putting Waris, who she sees as her "most oppressed" friend, on a pedestal that victimizes her in just the way that Waris has asked Yazz not to. Roxane Gay's criticism of the way we talk about oppression and difference runs throughout Evaristo's novel. Courtney paraphrases Gay's claim in her book *Bad Feminist* that "we should be able to say, 'This is my truth,' and have that truth stand without a hundred clamoring voices shouting, giving the impression that multiple truths cannot coexist." Each chapter of *Girl, Woman, Other* contains those hundreds of "clamoring voices" that assert themselves while tearing down others. Amma's play, which is only one truth and one story about Black women, brings the characters together with all their differences, but where those difference intersect and connect. The after-party is a space where all their truths exist simultaneously and thus represents Evaristo's assertion that the future must be one where individuals come together to acknowledge that all oppression is intersectional.

RADICAL VS. REFORMIST SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

All of the characters featured in *Girl, Woman, Other* are committed to making social change, but each varies in their approach. Broadly, the characters fall into two opposing attitudes. On the one hand are those who want to work within systems, believing that reforming the societal structures that already exist is the clearest path toward progress. On the other hand are the radicals who believe that dismantling society's broken systems and creating something new in their place is the only path to real change. What the characters from both sides of this spectrum have in common is their judgment and scorn for those on the other side.

Amma and her friends like Dominique and Sylvester are all radicals in their early 20s. Although Amma scorns her friends who became less revolutionary as they settled into comfortable lives in middle age, her decision to take her play to **the National Theatre**, a revered social institution, is an act aligned with reformist values. Her play is supposed to make change from

within, and it does. Sylvester, still committed to fighting from outside of institutions, chastises her for "selling out" and Amma starts to see his stubborn commitment to the revolutionary as immature. In fact, as the characters age, more and more of them abandon the radical ideologies that defined their 20s in exchange for a more conservative approach. Amma is one of the last holdouts of her generation, and as she starts to adopt a reformist approach, the next generation—which includes her daughter Yazz and Yazz's peers, like Morgan—now carries the torch of radicalism and disparages its elders for being ignorant and out of touch. Characters like Roland, Carole, Shirley, and LaTisha all work within the system from the start. Differences in class, upbringing, and opportunities each play a role in their decisions to work as reformers.

What each character fails to recognize is what Slim, Hattie's husband from Georgia, knows to be true. He admires both Malcolm X, who takes a radical approach, and Martin Luther King Jr., who takes a more reformist approach. He understands that both approaches are critical to the movement at a time when many felt compelled to take sides. Through characters' mutual criticisms and Slim's broad-minded insight, *Girl, Woman, Other* highlights the reality that social movements are as varied as the people within them, and that although this may seed division and derision, everyone plays a critical role in achieving progress and change. Furthermore, social movements are most effective when their advocates come together to defeat a common oppressor rather than succumb to internal judgment and scorn.

SYMBOLS

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

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

The National Theatre symbolizes the debate over whether lawful reform or radical change is the best path to achieving social justice. The National Theatre represents the historically white-supremacist, patriarchal foundation and culture of English society. For years, women like Amma and Dominique were shut out from that world. When the pair were first getting their start in the arts, the mainstream theater world typecast them into demeaning and stereotypical roles. These injustices forced them to the margins where they formed their Bush Women Theater Company, which centered the stories and voices of women of color and therefore was the antithesis of the National Theater. As outsiders of the mainstream theater world, Amma and Dominique stormed the balcony of the National to protest the institution and the white, patriarchal society it represents. By middle age, however, Amma and her formerly radical friends shift their approach, opting to reform the system from within rather than disrupt the system as outsiders. Amma's latest play shatters the glass ceiling that kept women of color off the National Theatre's esteemed stage and reveals a National Theatre that is slowly starting to diversify and become less exclusionary. In her new relationship to the National Theatre, Amma is straddling the middle ground. While premiering her play at the National Theatre makes Amma a lawful reformer, bringing subversive ideas to the National Theatre allows her to sustain her role as a radical.

Each of the novel's main characters falls in their own place along the spectrum of radical versus reform. The National is the bridge that connects these wildly different characters and their different approaches to creating systemic change and, as such, it symbolizes how reformers and radicals play equally vital roles in inspiring change and seeking social justice. Amma and Dominique's work from outside the mainstream theater world, which generated buzz and asserted a place for women of color in English culture and society, helps make possible the monumental moment of reform that is Amma's premiere at the National Theatre. At the same time, characters like Roland and Carole make change from *within* existing institutions, ascending the ranks and infiltrating historically white, male institutions. Throughout the novel, the radicals and the reformers criticize and dismiss one another, but through their final convergence at the National (to witness the premiere of Amma's play), the novel highlights that both sides have their role to play in social change, and that neither path is more noble or worthy than the other.

THE GREENFIELDS FARMHOUSE

The Greenfields Farmhouse symbolizes land, legacy, and power. The Greenfields Farmhouse is a powerful source of empowerment, identity, and legacy for Hattie. It's kept her young, powerful, and independent even in her later years, illustrating the physical benefits of privilege of land ownership. It's a place where she, a Black woman, has carved out power within a white, patriarchal English society as represented by the predominately white village where her farmhouse sits. Hattie's husband Slim, an African American man from Georgia, emphasizes the importance of land ownership when he recounts his family's experience as sharecroppers in the wake of the broken promise of 40 acres and a mule that was meant to be a financial reparation in a post-slavery society. His co-ownership of the farm is therefore a significant and exciting moment for him. When Hattie and Slim eventually discover that the farm was built with blood money from her ancestors' involvement in the slave trade, Slim is outraged. Hattie is too, but she also sees their co-ownership of the farm as a roundabout sort of reparations. Hattie's deep love for the farm and all it represents is why she is intent on honoring her ancestors' wishes that it stay in the family, and it's also why she

chooses Morgan as her heir. Hattie's own children married into white families. Leaving the farm to Morgan and their partner, Bibi, not only keeps the farm in Black hands, but it also symbolically allows Hattie to pass down the empowerment of land ownership to future generations of Black people. What's more, Hattie suggests that Morgan and Bibi turn the farm into a refuge for the transgender community, which means the land would continue to serve as a site of empowerment those pushed to the margins by a still patriarchal and white-supremacist England. Ultimately, Hattie's decision about the future of Greenfields symbolizes her hope for a future when race, gender, and class no longer limit who owns land and has access to the empowerment that comes with it.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *Girl, Woman, Other* published in 2019.

Chapter 1: Amma Quotes

Amma then spent decades on the fringe, a renegade lobbing hand grenades at the establishment that excluded her

until the mainstream began to absorb what was once radical and she found herself hopeful of enjoying it

which only happened when the first female artistic director assumed the helm of the National three years ago

after so long hearing a polite no from her predecessors,

Related Characters: Amma (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Amma spent her life working to change society from the outside as a true radical. As opposed to reformers who believe that they can create change from within pre-existing systems, radicals like Amma spend their lives throwing "grenades" at society's institutions, aiming to figuratively blow them up and create entirely new systems in their place. For Amma and other radicals, the world needs to be torn down and built up again in a new image.

Society has suddenly shifted in her lifetime, however, blurring the line between radicalism and reform. The mainstream, represented by the National Theatre, is starting to invite the radicals into its once intentionally exclusive spaces. In Amma's case, this invitation comes from a reformer, the female artistic director who fought to be the first in that previously male-dominated position at the National. In other words, if that woman hadn't made the decision to work as a reformer within society, then Amma may have never been given the chance to put her radical play on stage at the National. This highlights how both reformers and radicals depend on each other, and each play their own role in social change, counter to prevailing narratives that the two sides of this political debate are at odds with each other.

However, the mainstream dilutes and defangs the radical by inviting it inside. Is a radical play still radical when it's accepted by and put on the stage of a historically white-supremacist, patriarchal institution like the National? Amma struggles with an internal identity conflict born of this question. She worries that she's selling out and is reluctant to surrender her radical identity.

look at it this way, Amma, she says, your father was born male in Ghana in the 1920s whereas you were born female in London in the 1960s

and your point is?

you really can't expect him to 'get you,' as you put it

I let her know she's an apologist for the patriarchy and complicit in a system that oppresses all women

she says human beings are complex

I tell her not to patronize me

Related Characters: Amma, Dominique (speaker), Kwabena

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Although a radical like Amma, Dominique is more willing to acknowledge and forgive people's contradictions and complexities. Amma cannot forgive her father who, although politically radical, lacks intersectional awareness and perpetuates sexism that she sees so clearly at odds with his professed beliefs in justice and equality.

What Amma doesn't realize, and what Dominique tries to show her, is her own hypocrisy and similar lack of intersectional awareness. Amma refuses to acknowledge the role that generational and cultural differences play in

this conflict between herself and her first-generation immigrant father. She fails to acknowledge how the traumas he suffered upon being exiled from his native country mean he's experienced a suffering beyond her comprehension.

While Amma vehemently insists on seeing the world in stark, uncompromising black and white, Dominique sees the grey area, the many potential places for political allyship between a passionate father and his equally passionate daughter. Dominique understands that only in coming together would Kwabena and Amma be able to make their radical dreams for a more socially just future come true.

> they decided they needed to start their own theatre company to have careers as actors, because neither was prepared to betray their politics to find jobs
>
> or shut up to keep them
>
> it seemed the obvious way forward
>
> they scribbled ideas for names on hard toilet paper snaffled from the loo
>
> Bush Women Theatre Company best captured their intentions
>
> they would be a voice in theatre where there was silence
>
> black and Asian women's stories would get out there
>
> they would create theatre on their own terms
>
> it became the company's motto
>
> On Our Own Terms
>
> or Not At All.

Related Characters: Amma (speaker), Dominique

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

After facing repeated experiences of discrimination from within the mainstream theater world, Amma and Dominique decide that they won't compromise themselves or their politics to win acceptance into the mainstream. Entering the mainstream would require assimilating into and deferring to white culture. It would mean accepting the subservient roles and dehumanizing narratives about Black people that perpetuate racism and discrimination.

The Bush Woman Theatre Company is the opposite of the National Theatre. On the National's stage Black women are viewed through the eyes of white society. A bush woman on stage at the National would be seen as "savage" and "uncivilized," but on their stage the bush woman is a symbol of power and pride. The Bush Woman Theatre Company is by and for Black women and women of color. They will amplify each other's voices that the mainstream tries to silence. They will tell their own stories, stories that center their lives and experiences, rather than the stories told by white people that intentionally leave them on the margins.

> she surprised herself at the strength of her grief
>
> she then regretted never telling him she loved him, he was her father, a good man, of course she loved him, she knew that now he was gone, he was a patriarch but her mother was right when she said, he's of his time and culture, Amma
>
> my father was devastated at having to fell Ghana so abruptly, she eulogized at his memorial, attended by his elderly socialist comrades
>
> it must have been so traumatic, to lose his home, his family, his friends, his culture, his first language, and to come to a country that didn't want him
>
> once he had children, he wanted us educated in England and that was it
>
> my father believed in the higher purpose of left-wing politics and actively worked to make the world a better place
>
> she didn't tell them she'd taken her father for granted and carried her blinkered, self-righteous perspective of him from childhood through to his death, when in fact he'd done nothing wrong except fail to live up to her feminist expectations of him

Related Characters: Amma, Helen (speaker), Kwabena

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Amma only comes to accept the truth of Dominique's advice when it is too late to repair her relationship with her father. Only after Kwabena dies does Amma realize that his political identity, which to her often felt overbearing and suffocating, was his way of holding onto a piece of all that he lost when he was forced to leave his home country.

Just as first-generation parents often have suffocating and limiting expectations for their children, so too do second-generation children have impossible expectations for their parents. Amma wanted Kwabena to be something that he

never fully could be, and the years spent fighting, demanding that he live up to her standards, are years that they lost. These were years that could have been spent loving each other, but that were spent divided instead. While generational differences commonly divide parents and their children, that rupture is especially acute between first-generation parents and their second-generation children living in white-supremacist, Western society.

Chapter 1: Yazz Quotes

❝ you've really suffered, Yazz says, I feel sorry for you, not in a patronizing way, it's empathy, actually

I haven't suffered, not really, my mother and grandmother suffered because they lost their loved ones and their homeland, whereas my suffering is mainly in my head

it's not in your head when people deliberately barge into you

it is compared to half a million people who died in the Somali civil war, I was born here and I'm going to succeed in this country, I can't afford not to work my butt off, I know it's going to be tough when I get on the job market but you know what, Yazz? I'm not a victim, don't ever treat me like a victim, my mother didn't raise me to be a victim.

Related Characters: Yazz, Waris (speaker), Xaanan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Yazz's comments to Waris highlight the shaky line between empathy and pity. Yazz believes that acknowledging the hardships that Waris has faced in her life due to her multiple, intersecting marginalized identities is a form of empathy. Despite her claim that she's not pitying and patronizing Waris, her words, "I feel sorry for you," contradict her assertion of empathy. While empathy is a way of showing understanding and support, pity reinforces inferiority and can come off as condescending and even insulting.

Yazz's words also highlight how good intentions can have negative impacts. Yazz thinks that acknowledging the sometimes difficult realities of Waris's life makes her an ally; however, couched in these good intentions are assumptions that don't reflect the reality of Waris's lived experiences. Yazz assumes that Waris has suffered, and when Waris pushes back and articulates her own story, Yazz continues to insist and impose her own narrative onto Waris.

Ultimately, Yazz's good intentions in this scene function to victimize Waris, perpetuating stereotypical and disempowering narratives about marginalized groups, even though she herself has intersecting marginalized identities.

❝ yes but I'm black, Courts, which makes me more oppressed than anyone who isn't, except Waris who is the most oppressed of all of them (although I don't tell her that)

in five categories: black, Muslim, female, poor, hijabbed

she's the only one Yazz can't tell to check her privilege

Courtney replied that Roxane Gay warned against the idea of playing 'privilege Olympics' and wrote in *Bad Feminist* that privilege is relative and contextual, and I agree, Yazz, I mean where does it all end? is Obama less privileged than a white hillbilly growing up in a trailer park with a junkie single mother and a jailbird father? Is a severely disabled person more privileged than a Syrian asylum-seeker who's been tortured? Roxane argues that we have to find a new discourse for discussing inequality

Yazz doesn't know what to say, when did Court read Roxane Gay – who's amaaaazing?

was this a student outwitting the master moment?

#whitegirltrumpsblackgirl

Related Characters: Yazz, Courtney (speaker), Waris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Yazz has an absolutist view of oppression and privilege. Yazz ranks herself and her friends in order from who she perceives to be most and least oppressed. She turns oppression and privilege into a competition. Those who are "most" oppressed in her view are held up as morally superior. This absolutism is problematic for two main reasons.

For one, her insistence that Waris is most oppressed victimizes her in the exact way that Waris has previously asked her not to. The fact that Yazz doesn't share this opinion with Waris indicates that she knows this opinion would upset Waris because it is loaded with pity.

The second problem with her uncompromising view of oppression is that she fails to recognize the true complexity of intersectionality, which is what Courtney calls her out for. Courtney cites Roxane Gay, a Black scholar who

complicates simplistic understandings of privilege and oppression. Gay asserts that creating hierarchies of oppression is useless, not only because it simplifies what is ultimately a complex narrative, but because it distracts from the possibility of disparate groups uniting against the systems that keep them oppressed in different ways.

Yazz is stunned that Courtney has read Roxane Gay, which challenges her assumptions that she's the expert on social justice issues and that Courtney is completely clueless and needs Yazz to rescue her from her ignorance. While, of course, Courtney has revealed many of her problematic and racist beliefs, Yazz's condescending approach erases Courtney's own experiences of oppression as someone who grew up poor in a rural community and on a struggling farm. Yazz fails to see the potential for allyship with Courtney, which would be a more productive dialogue.

Courtney boast about their racial dating preferences as proof that they aren't racist, in effect turning their partners into props for their own benefit. Similarly, when she walks alongside Courtney, Yazz becomes a prop that helps Courtney broadcast that she is a white person who accepts Black people.

Although Yazz isn't even interested in these men on the street, on principle the situation bothers her because these men are ultimately perpetuating society's narrative that Black women are undesirable. They're reinforcing white beauty standards and narratives of white supremacy that portray white women as the pinnacle of beauty and desire above women of color, and especially Black women. Yazz is used to being admired by men, but when she walks alongside white friends she becomes invisible. Yazz has experienced this erasure repeatedly, and contending with these instances of racism leaves her feeling worn out.

❝ Yazz noticed that those 'buns' reciprocated Courtney's attention, her creamy softness pouring ostentatiously over the top of her denim blouse

they stared at Courtney, not at Yazz, who wasn't the one getting checked out as usual, and she usually got checked out *a lot*

not that she's interested in the kind of male who belts their trousers underneath their bum

today it's all about Courtney, who's not even particularly hot and it's like Yazz is invisible and her friend is an irresistible goddess

a white girl walking with a black girl is always seen as black-man-friendly

Yazz has been here before with other white mates

it makes her feel so

jaded

Related Characters: Yazz (speaker), Courtney

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This scene highlights the relationship between race, romantic desire, and sexuality. Courtney's insistence that she only dates Black men is a form of fetishization. Seeking out Black partners and being attracted to that piece of their identity above all else functions to erase their individuality and the many different qualities and personality traits that make them attractive and lovable. White people like

Chapter 1: Dominique Quotes

❝ Nzinga had suggested that her relationship history of blonde girlfriends might be a sign of self-loathing; you have to ask yourself if you've been brainwashed by the white beauty ideal, sister, you have to work a lot harder on your black feminist politics, you know

Dominique wondered if she had a point, why did she go for stereotypical blondes? Amma had teased her about it without judging her, she herself was a product of various mixtures and often had partners of all colors

in contrast, Nzinga had grown up in the segregated South, although shouldn't that make her pro-integration rather than against it?

Dominique wondered if she really was still being brainwashed by white society, and whether she really was failing at the identity she most cherished – the black feminist one

Related Characters: Dominique, Nzinga (speaker), Amma

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Nzinga challenges Dominique's pattern of dating white women, pointing out that it may be a byproduct of internalized racism. In Western, predominantly white countries like the U.K., white supremacy infiltrates beauty and desire. White women are held up as the pinnacle of beauty, and features such as light skin, blond hair, blue eyes,

silky hair, and thin frames are upheld as the most desirable. Nzinga believes Dominique has internalized this white supremacist beauty standard and that it's led her to almost exclusively pursue white partners. Even though Dominique is herself a Black woman who doesn't fit the white beauty standard, it has subconsciously influenced her romantic life. In a way she perpetuates the white beauty standard by elevating white women above all others.

Amma and Nzinga have different views of Dominique's dating history based on their own personal identities and experiences. For Amma, interracial relationships are normal because both she and her mother are mixed-race. She pursues partners indiscriminately, not worried about their racial identities. So while she teases Dominique for her long history of white girlfriends, she doesn't think it means that Dominique doesn't value herself and other Black women. On the other hand, Nzinga grew up in the segregated South, and counter to what Dominique expects, that experience has left her wary of integration. For Nzinga, resistance and power come from sticking together and not siding with the oppressors even on an individual and interpersonal level. Nzinga's comments in this passage are some of the first of many that leave Dominique questioning herself and her identity.

❝ why did Nzinga think being in love with her meant she had to give up her independence and submit completely?

wasn't that being like a male chauvinist?

Dominique felt like an altered version of herself after a while, her mind foggy, emotions primal, senses heightened

she enjoyed the sex and affection – outside in the fields when summer arrived, wantonly naked in the heat, unworried about anyone coming across them, what Nzinga called Dominique's sexual healing, as if she'd been suffering terribly when she met her

Dominique let it pass

she wanted to talk this through with friends, Amma most of all, or the women at Spirit Moon, she needed a sounding board, it wasn't going to happen, Nzinga kept them at a distance, kicked up a fuss when Dominique made overtures of friendship

Related Characters: Dominique, Nzinga (speaker), Amma

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Dominique's experience with Nzinga deconstructs assumptions and stereotypes about domestic abuse. Society views both physical and domestic abuse as something that heterosexual men assert against heterosexual women. While this may be most common, Dominique's story highlights that abuse transcends gender and sexuality. There are abusive same-sex relationships, and women are capable of being abusers.

Nzinga gaslights Dominique and isolates her, which are common tactics of abuse. She paints herself as Dominique's savior, when in truth her abuse has left Dominique feeling completely removed from her own identity and the world around her. Dominique can't think because her mind and body live permanently in flight or fight mode. She describes that her emotions and senses exist in a constant, heightened state because she is forever anticipating the next physical or emotional blow from Nzinga.

Dominique questions the contradictions and complexities of Nzinga's character. Although she is a self-proclaimed, radical Black feminist, she's taken on the role of oppressor, functioning as the patriarchal, chauvinist abuser in Dominique's life. Nzinga herself was abused as a child by her mother's boyfriend. She learned abuse at a young age, and has subconsciously internalized that same chauvinist, patriarchal dominance over women. Now she is an abuser herself, which highlights how abuse becomes a vicious cycle passed down from one person to the next.

Chapter 2: Carole Quotes

❝ did me and Papa come to this country for a better life only to see our daughter giving up on her opportunities and end up distributing paper hand towels for tips in nightclub toilets or concert venues, as is the fate of too many of our countrywomen?

you must go back to this university in January and stop thinking everybody hates you without giving them a chance, did you even ask them? did you go up to them and say, excuse me, do you hate me?

you must find the people who will want to be your friends even if they are all white people

there is someone for everyone in this world

you must go back and fight the battles that are your British birthright, Carole, as a true Nigerian

Related Characters: Bummi Williams (speaker), Carole Williams, Augustine Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133-134

Explanation and Analysis

Bummi's speech to Carole highlights how first-generation immigrant parents often put their second-generation children under immense pressure to succeed. This pressure is fueled by a searing guilt. Bummi reminds Carole that she and Augustine sacrificed themselves so that Carole would have better opportunities in life. White supremacist, English society makes it exceedingly difficult for Nigerian women, and Black women in general, to escape the fate of working in underpaid and undervalued service jobs. Every first-generation immigrant parent wants their second-generation children to break that cycle.

Bummi acknowledges the complexities of Carole's identity. As someone born in England she has every right to the elite opportunities a place like Oxford provides. However, taking advantage of those opportunities and assimilating into white, English society in order to do so is a difficult battle. As someone born Black in England, that battle against racism and discrimination is as much her birthright are those opportunities to succeed. Bummi reminds her to show up as a true and strong Nigerian who won't allow white people and white supremacist society to stop her from claiming what is hers to have.

> Carole amended herself to become not quite them, just a little more like them

she scraped off the concrete foundation plastered on to her face, removed the giraffe-esque eyelashes that weighed down her eyelids, ripped off the glued-on talons that made most daily activities difficult

such as getting dressed, picking things up, most food preparation and using toilet paper

she ditched the weaves sewn into her scalp for months at a time, many months longer than advised because, having saved up to wear the expensive black tresses of women from India or Brazil, she wanted her money's worth, even when her scalp festered underneath the stinky patch of cloth from which her fake hair flowed

she felt freed when it was unstitched for the very last time, and her scalp made contact with air.

She felt the deliciousness of warm water running directly over it again without the intermediary of a man-made fabric

She then had her tight curls straightened, Marcus said he preferred her hair natural, she told him she'd never get a job if she did that

Related Characters: Carole Williams (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

Carole makes the decision to assimilate into white, English culture, a decision that many immigrants and their second-generation children end up making. However, the decision to assimilate is not so much a choice as it is a survival tactic. Assimilation presents itself as one of very few available options for achieving financial and material stability as an immigrant living in a white supremacist society.

Feeling like an outsider and imposter at Oxford, Carole decides to make efforts to assimilate, but only "just a little" as she doesn't want to completely surrender her identity. Carole's physical transformation in this scene represents the start of her assimilation. Carole changes her outward appearance, shedding her "giraffe-esque eyelashes," "glued-on talons," and her weave, which leaves her feeling "freed." On the one hand, Carole is removing these items that the white people at Oxford might view as stereotypically "Black" or "hood." She wants to distance herself from her past and the impoverished community she came from that white people would likely dismiss as "ghetto." On the other hand, Carole's word choice reveals that she's happy to be free of these accessories that were their own kind of mask

she wore to fit in with the girls she grew up with.

As soon as she removes her weave, she covers up her natural hairstyle again by straightening it, knowing that Black women are repeatedly discriminated against in the workplace for wearing natural hairstyles. This, too, is a sacrifice in the name of assimilation, one that her white boyfriend doesn't comprehend as he's used to having the freedom to be his authentic self.

Though she starts out intending to change "just a little," she'll continue to peel back layers until she becomes almost unrecognizable in Bummi's eyes, creating a gulf of distance between them.

Chapter 2: Bummi Quotes

my point is that you are a Nigerian

no matter how high and mighty you think you are

no matter how English-English your future husband

no matter how English-English you pretend yourself to be

what is more, if you address me as Mother ever again I will beat you until you are dripping wet with blood and then I will hang you upside down over the balcony with the washing to dry

I be your mama

now and forever

never forget that, abi?

Related Characters: Bummi Williams (speaker), Carole Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

This interpersonal conflict between Carole and Bummi reveals that when second-generation children of immigrants assimilate into the white-supremacist societies they were born into, two things can happen; they can lose sight of themselves and also internalize a sense of superiority over their first-generation parents that threatens to destroy familial bonds.

Bummi hates that Carole has tried so hard to distance herself from her Nigerian identity. She confronts Carole with a harsh reality: that she'll never be "English-English" because "English-English" implies white. Carole has surrendered so much of herself in order to assimilate into white English culture, but Bummi knows that because she is Black, white English society will never fully accept Carole.

The more Carole assimilates, the further she drifts from her mother. That distance is reflected in her change in language. She goes from calling Bummi "mama" to the more British "mother." Bummi demands that Carole never forget who her mother is and where she comes from. She won't let white-supremacist society erase Carole's Nigerian identity nor break their bond as mother and child.

Bummi and Augustine agreed they were wrong to believe that in England, at least, working hard and dreaming big was one step away from achieving it

Augustine joked he was acquiring a second doctorate in shortcuts, bottlenecks, one-way streets and dead ends

while transporting passengers who thought themselves far too superior to talk to him as an equal

Bummi complained that people viewed her through what she did (a cleaner) and not what she was (an educated woman)

they did not know that curled up inside her was a parchment certificate proclaiming her a graduate of the Department of Mathematics, University of Ibadan

just as she did not know that when she strode on to the graduation podium in front of hundreds of people to receive her ribboned scroll, and shake hands with the Chancellor of the University, that her first class degree from a Third World country would mean nothing in her new country

especially with her name and nationality attached to it

Related Characters: Bummi Williams (speaker), Carole Williams, Augustine Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

Bummi and Augustine's experience reveals how the opportunities and success the West promises immigrants in exchange for their hard work and sacrifice is quite often a myth.

Like many highly educated, first-generation immigrants, Bummi and Augustine arrive in their new country ready to find work that befits their qualifications, but their degrees are considered useless in white-supremacist society that dismisses the legitimacy of universities and professionals from what they label as "underdeveloped" or "Third World" countries.

Not only does this rob Bummi and Augustine of a chance at financial stability and material comfort, but because their personalities were intertwined with their academic passions, it robs them of significant pieces of their identities, too. In the U.K., both lose their individuality and become one among many immigrants of color that white people ignore, mistreat, and expect will serve them in various capacities. In other words, when white people imagine a mathematician, they don't imagine a Black woman with a "foreign" name like Bummi.

Soon after arriving in England, both Bummi and Augustine realize this country will not be the home they hoped it would be. They quickly find themselves up against the myth of meritocracy, and their best hope is that their second-generation child, Carole, will have a shot at the success that white supremacist society intentionally denies them.

❝ Freddy arranged for Bummi to meet his parents in a London restaurant, which she was looking forward to

except he warned her that although they'd warmed to the idea of Carole, once they saw how classy, well-spoken and successful she was (most importantly for his mother, how slim and pretty, too)

they're still old-fashioned snobs

Freddy's father, Mark, looked uncomfortable, said little at the dinner, Carole sat there with a fake smile plastered on her face the whole time

Pamela, his mother, smiled at Bummi as if she was a famine victim, when she started explaining the meaning of hors d'oeuvres to her, Freddy told her to stop it, Mommy, just stop it

Related Characters: Bummi Williams (speaker), Carole Williams, Freddy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

This scene highlights how racism can infiltrate interracial relationships and complicate or even preclude efforts to merge extended families. After finally coming around to Freddy, Bummi is excited to meet his parents, the people who will now be hers and Carole's extended family.

Freddy doesn't try to hide the fact that his parents were initially unhappy with his decision to be with Carole. He explains that they'd only come around once they saw that she fit their white, upper-class standards for "respectability" as well as his mother's standards for feminine beauty. They "accept" Carole because she has assimilated into white culture, which they view as superior to Black culture. For example, they are impressed by how "well-spoken" she is, meaning that she speaks "standard" white English rather than Black vernacular English, the vernacular that Carole forced herself to stop speaking years earlier when she was at Oxford.

As Carole's partner, Freddy should confront his parents and challenge their racist thinking. Instead, he couches their racism in euphemism, calling them "old-fashioned snobs" rather than calling them out directly for their racism. This leaves Carole to shoulder the burden of their racism as she sits with a fake smile on her face watching her in-laws condescend to her mother.

Mark and Pamela's perception of Bummi, a Nigerian immigrant, is shaped by their inaccurate perceptions of Africa in general. Westerners often view Africa through a singular lens of suffering and poverty. Freddy's parents impose this narrative onto Bummi, regarding her with pity and assuming that she is uneducated. They make no effort to get to know her. If they did, they'd find out she is a college educated business-owner.

Ultimately, this scene shows how people of color and their families are often forced to contend with white people's unchecked racism and bias within the context of interracial relationships.

Chapter 2: LaTisha Quotes

❝ Losing her dad the way she did was something LaTisha never talked about; whenever people asked, she told them he'd died of a heart attack

it was easier than explaining what had happened, people thinking there must be something wrong with her and her family

else why would he leave?

she ran wild, hated school, couldn't concentrate, even Mummy couldn't control her and she was a social worker, I'm sending you home to Jamaica where they'll beat some sense into you, LaTisha

yeh, whatevs, I could do with a Caribbean holiday

Related Characters: LaTisha Jones (speaker), Bummi Williams, Shirley King, Glenmore Jones, Pauline Jones, Sister Omofe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199-200

Explanation and Analysis

LaTisha's story highlights how losing one's home has devastating effects both internally and externally. LaTisha's home life was happy and stable before her dad abandoned LaTisha, her mother, and her sister. His abandonment is devastating and leaves her severely depressed.

On top of her own inner turmoil, her father's abandonment changes how society views her family and by extension how they view LaTisha. Society stereotypes and stigmatizes fatherless families, especially fatherless families of color. LaTisha's teachers, like Shirley and Penelope, judge and scorn these "broken" families. This is why LaTisha lies about her father being dead. No one will judge or stereotype her for having a dad who died of a heart attack. Missing father figures become one more in a long list of perceived "failures" that white-supremacist society holds against people of color, and especially Black people. Of course, white supremacist society never stops to consider how the oppressive conditions it has created are what breed turmoil within communities of color.

LaTisha responds to these inner and external conflicts by acting out. She becomes so unmanageable that not even her mother, who is a social worker, can handle her. Like many first-generation parents overwhelmed by how their second-generation children are struggling, she threatens to send LaTisha back to her home country (Bummi's friend Sister Omofe actually follows through on this threat with her second-generation sons). LaTisha, who has never set foot in Jamaica, sees a return to her mother's homeland as a vacation, highlighting yet another divide between immigrant parents and their children.

Chapter 3: Shirley Quotes

Shirley

was praised by the headmaster, Mr. Waverly, as a natural teacher, with an easy rapport with the children, who goes above and beyond the call of duty, achieves excellent exam results with her exemplary teaching skill and who is a credit to her people

in her first annual job assessment

Shirley felt the pressure was now on to be a great teacher and an ambassador

for every black person in the world

Related Characters: Shirley King (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

When Shirley first starts teaching, she's resoundingly successful. Just as she dreamed, she is reforming society from within its preexisting institutions. She has an easy rapport with the children, with many of whom she shares both a common racial identity and identity as the second-generation children of immigrants. Shirley is a success story and role model for her students who see themselves in her and want to grow up and make their immigrant parents proud just as Shirley has. This connection helps her succeed and highlights the importance of representation within society's mainstream institutions.

Shirley's success simultaneously makes her hyper-visible to the white people around her. Her boss, thinking he's complimenting her, says "she's a credit to her people," but this compliment is underhanded because it simultaneously puts down the rest of the Black community. He's implying that she stands out as an exception among Black people, for whom white people have low expectations in general. This is evident in the way her white colleagues talk about their Black students who they write off as failures from the minute they walk through the school's doors.

While a white person's success is theirs alone, successful Black people like Shirley are expected to represent their entire race. Shirley now works under the pressure to make Black people look good in the eyes of white society, as if any one person can or should be expected to represent an entire, wildly diverse community.

when Shirley drove up to the school in the mornings

moments before the inmates charged up the Paupers' Path to destroy any sense of equilibrium

its monstrous proportions settled in her stomach

like concrete

and as the eighties became history the nineties couldn't wait to charge in and bring more problems than solutions

more children at school coming from families struggling to cope

more unemployment, poverty, addiction, domestic violence at home

more kids with parents who were 'inside,' or should have been

more kids who needed free school meals

more kids who were on the Social Services register or radar

more kids who went feral – (she wasn't an animal tamer)

Related Characters: Shirley King (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 236-237

Explanation and Analysis

Shirley, like many others who set out to reform society's institutions from within, burns out when she realizes that making change within one system, in this case public education, isn't enough to make the sweeping societal changes that she once imagined she could.

When she started teaching, Shirley believed that education alone could secure upward mobility for students of color from working-class, immigrant families. This was an assumption partially based on her own experience of being a second-generation child of Caribbean immigrants whose academic success propelled her into a comfortable middle-class adulthood.

She soon realizes, however, that she is one of the few who managed to escape the web of social issues that intersect to keep the majority of kids like her trapped in a cycle of poverty and struggle. Kids can't succeed at school when their lives are a struggle to survive in the face of poverty, food scarcity, parental addiction or incarceration, and abuse.

Although Shirley understands that these larger systemic issues are what cause her students to act out and perform poorly in school, her burnout has led her to automatically condemn her students to failure, calling them animals and inmates. She now views her students through the same stereotypical and dehumanizing lenses as the coworkers she once despised, like Penelope. Shirley's ideological change also highlights how people of color can end up perpetuating white-supremacy and oppression.

Chapter 3: Winsome Quotes

Shirley

who's never satisfied with what she has: excellent health, cushy job, hunky husband, lovely daughters and granddaughter, good house and car, no debts, *free* luxury holiday in the tropics every year

tough life Shirl

compared to Winsome who spent her working life standing on the open platform of a Routemaster bus

bombarded with rain or snow or hailstones

climbing stairs a million times a day with a heavy ticket machine hanging from her neck and big money bag around her waist that got heavier as the journey progressed giving her round shoulders and back problems to this very day

having to deal with non-payers and under-payers who refused to *get off de dam bus* who cussed her for being a silly cow or a nig nog or a bloody foreigner

Related Characters: Winsome Robinson (speaker), Shirley King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

Winsome highlights how first-generation immigrant parents often envy their children's lives while simultaneously feeling like their children have taken their hard work and sacrifice for granted.

While the West perpetuates the myth that theirs is the land of opportunities, where first-generation immigrants of all backgrounds can come and achieve success and material comfort through hard work, more often the best first-generation immigrants can hope for is that this myth of meritocracy will pan out for their children.

In Shirley's case it does. Winsome worked a backbreaking job and suffered racist abuse all so her children could have better opportunities in life, so when Shirley complains incessantly about her life Winsome feels hurt and frustrated. Winsome dreamed of a life like Shirley's when she first set out for England. This conflict highlights a divide between the first and second generations, born out of second-generation children's privileges afforded by their parents' hard work.

she herself is a grateful person

grateful she had Barbados to return home to when her English friends had to stay over there and spend their old age worrying about the cost of heating and whether they'd survive a bad winter

grateful that as soon as she stepped off the plane to walk into the blast of heat, her arthritic joints stopped playing up

haven't so much as muttered a word of protest since

grateful that the sale of the house in London allowed them to buy this one by the beach

grateful that she and Clovis, now in their eighties, have a reasonable pension, and won't have to worry about money for the rest of their loves so long as they stay parsimonious, which is true of her generation anyways, who only buy what they need, not what they want

you go into debt to buy a house, not a new dress

Winsome counts her blessings every day and thanks Jesus for bringing her home to a more comfortable life

she thanks Jesus she made new friends with women who'd also returned from America, Canada and Britain and asked her to join their reading group

she was honoured, she'd been a bus conductor, they didn't mind

Related Characters: Winsome Robinson (speaker), Shirley King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 252-253

Explanation and Analysis

While Winsome and Clovis's hard work never earned them the fulfilled life they may have dreamed of in England, it grants them the opportunity to return to their native Barbados where they live a comfortable and peaceful life. Their return to their homeland upends the myth that life in an immigrant's adopted country, especially when that country is a Western one, will automatically and always be better than the one they left behind.

Winsome describes the hardships they left behind in England. On a larger scale, the harsh and unforgiving winters they've escaped represent the coldness and vitriol that white English people typically treated them with. Back in Barbados, even Winsome's body is imbued with new life after decades spent working backbreaking jobs for low pay.

At the same time, if Winsome and Clovis had never left Barbados the comfortable life they've created for themselves would not have been possible. It's only because of the money they earned in the U.K.—through both their pensions and the sale of the home they worked hard to buy—that they can afford their happy and materially stable retired life back home.

Winsome is surrounded by other women who also returned home after years abroad. She's bolstered by this community of women who share her Barbadian identity, something she lacked in all her years in England. Their reading group is a space where they get to explore the intellectual part of themselves that they had to sacrifice when they moved abroad and gave themselves completely to securing a better life for their children. It's finally their time to enjoy the spoils of their hard work and suffering.

Chapter 3: Penelope Quotes

at first she'd enjoyed teaching the disadvantaged children of the area whose parents had an inter-generational history of paying taxes in this country, even though she knew most of them wouldn't go on to great things

a supermarket till for the ones who were numerate, a typing pool for those who were numerate *and* literate, further education for those who could pass exams sufficiently well

she felt a sense of responsibility towards her own kind, and didn't like it at all when the school's demography began to change with the immigrants and their offspring pouring in

in the space of a decade the school went from predominately English children of the working classes to a multicultural zoo of kids coming from countries where there weren't even words for please and thank you

which explained *a lot*

Related Characters: Penelope Halifax/Barbara (speaker), Shirley King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297-298

Explanation and Analysis

Like Shirley, Penelope felt motivated and excited to teach her disadvantaged public-school students at the beginning of her career. She, too, wanted to reform society from within its existing institutions. Unlike Shirley, however, from day one Penelope had low expectations for her students. Additionally, while Shirley wanted to help all her students, and even helped bridge racial divides between the white and Black students, Penelope is only interested in helping "her own kind." She draws a harsh line between "us" and

"them," and she fills that distance with hate and resentment.

Penelope is deeply racist, and that racism shows most in the way she talks about her students. She often compares them to animals, calling them "offspring" instead of children and calling the school a zoo. Her words dehumanize them, which makes it easier for her to continue to ignore, deride, and mistreat them. She perpetuates conservative tropes that suggest immigrants don't pay their taxes. Her assertion that the students come from countries without "words for please and thank you" plays into white supremacist beliefs that immigrants, and especially immigrants of color, come from "uncivilized" countries.

Penelope highlights how racism shows up in efforts towards social change. Penelope's racism prevents her from seeing the potential for the working class English and immigrants to unite around their intersecting oppressions, and instead she gives up on social change altogether.

❝ she loathed that feminism was on the descent, and the vociferous multi-culti brigade was on the ascent, and felt angry all the time, usually at the older boys who were disrespectful and the bullish male teachers who still behaved as if they owned the planet

…

Shirley was barely out of her teaching probation when she took a pot shot at Penelope at that staff meeting all those years ago – at the only woman in the school who dared stand up to the men

why didn't Saint Shirley attack one of the male chauvinist pigs who pontificated *ad infinitum* instead of a strong woman who'd brought petitions into work for both the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, both of which were eventually passed into law

improving the situation for all working women

she should be admired and respected by her female colleagues

Related Characters: Penelope Halifax/Barbara (speaker), Shirley King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298-299

Explanation and Analysis

Penelope's anger towards Shirley and other racial justice advocates highlights her lack of intersectional awareness and demonstrates how white feminists exclude and oppress women of color.

Penelope identifies as a fierce feminist. In the beginning of her career, when the students and faculty at the school were predominately white, Penelope was the most progressive person in the building. When no one else would, she stood up to the male teachers who oppressed and discriminated against the women in the workplace. When Shirley arrives with her own progressive agenda, Penelope feels threatened.

Penelope believes that younger women like Shirley should be grateful and defer to her because of the progress she made for "all working women." However, she doesn't see how her racism contradicts this claim, and in fact holds back women of color like Shirley. Penelope is angry and offended when Shirley challenges her racist beliefs. She doesn't see that her racism makes her an oppressor; she is more like the male teachers who think "they own the planet" than she would like to admit.

Ultimately, white feminists like Penelope claim they fight for all women, when in reality they fear and oppress the "multi-culti brigade" of racial justice advocates who threaten their white supremacy and white privilege.

Chapter 4: Megan/Morgan Quotes

❝ Megan wondered aloud how she could put her gender-free identity into practice when they were living in a gender-binary world, and that with so many definitions (sane *and* insane, she refrained from saying), the very idea of gender might eventually lose any meaning, who can remember them all? maybe that was the point, a completely gender-free world, or was that a naïve utopian dream?

Bibi replied that dreaming wasn't naïve but essential for survival, dreaming was the equivalent of hoping on a large scale, utopias were an unachievable ideal by definition, and yeh, she really couldn't see billions of people accepting the abolition of the idea of gender completely in her lifetime

Megan said in which case demanding gender-neutral pronouns for herself from people who'd no idea what she was going on about also seemed utopian

Bibi said it was a first step towards changing people's minds, and although yes, like all radical movements, there'd be much resistance and Megan would have to be resilient

Related Characters: Megan/Morgan Malinga , Bibi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 326-327

Explanation and Analysis

Megan and Bibi debate and explore the challenges, and sometimes impossibilities, of being a radical activist and embracing a radical identity in a society not only intolerant of, but actively against, radical change.

Megan has come to accept that gender is a social construct, and now she comes to the overwhelming but exciting realization that something constructed can be deconstructed. As she's about to make her own, personal step towards deconstructing gender within herself by choosing to use they/them pronouns, she simultaneously worries about the consequences of this decision. Bibi doesn't try to sugarcoat the reality that Megan will face resistance and rejection for her choice, and Megan wonders if the choice is even worth it because changing people's perceptions of gender feels like a losing battle for an unachievable utopian ideal.

Bibi teaches Megan that dreaming of a utopian ideal is not just what fuels radical activism but is what keeps people who are oppressed and on the margins of society alive and fighting. In other words, dreaming itself is a radical act of survival and resistance. Bibi shows Megan that daring to be who you are is a form of radical activism and is the place from which all radical social change starts. Soon after, Megan begins to go by Morgan and to use they/them pronouns instead of she/her.

Chapter 4: Hattie Quotes

❝ Hattie asked him to tone it down with the stories, it was scaring their children and would make them hate themselves, he said they needed to toughen up and what did she know about it with her being high-yaller and living in the back of beyond?

you liked that I'm high-yaller, as you put it, so don't you go using it against me, Slim

he said the Negro had reason to be angry, having spent four hundred years in American enslaved, victimized and kept downtrodden

it was a powder keg waiting to explode

she replied they were a million miles from America and it's different here, Slim, not perfect but better

he said his little brother Sonny was the children's uncle and they needed to know what happened to him and about the history of a country that allowed him to be murdered, and it's our duty to face up to racial issues, Hattie, because our children are darker than you and aren't going to have it as easy

Related Characters: Hattie "GG" Jackson , Slim Jackson (speaker), Ada Mae , Sonny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 355-356

Explanation and Analysis

This conflict between Hattie and Slim highlights how the contradictions and complexities of colorism show up in families. Hattie is mixed-race and is much lighter than Slim and their children. While Hattie wants to shield their children from the horrifying realities of racism in Slim's stories, Slim knows that it's impossible to shield Sonny and Ada Mae from how the world will treat them as darker-skinned people. He knows they can't ignore history, because that violent history still lives on and affects them in the present.

Slim calls Hattie out on her light-skinned privilege and tells her that she must engage with racial issues in a new way that she hasn't had to before if she wants to be fully supportive of her children.

At the same time, Hattie calls Slim out for contradicting himself. When they first met, he was immediately attracted to and commented on her complexion. Subconsciously or not, Slim was perpetuating white supremacist beauty standards that uphold the false, racist belief that whiter is more beautiful.

❝ they both followed the news about the civil rights protests, Slim said the Negro needed Malcolm X and Martin Luther King

when they were assassinated within three years of each other

he disappeared into the hills for a few days

Related Characters: Hattie "GG" Jackson , Slim Jackson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 356

Explanation and Analysis

Slim understands a truth about activism that every other character throughout the novel fails to see: both the radical and the reformer are necessary for social progress. This belief is couched in his assertion about the necessity of both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., to the civil rights

movement. At the time, most Americans supported either Malcolm or Martin. Malcolm X was often demonized because of his radical beliefs, charged speeches, and open condemnation of white people and white-supremacist American society. Martin, on the other hand, was more widely accepted because his beliefs were more palatable to white people.

However, Slim understands that both men were necessary for the movement. They each nudged the needle towards justice in their own ways, ultimately assisting each other in service of similar goals. That both met the same fate and were assassinated speaks to the critical role each played in the movement. They were both viewed as threats to the status quo because they both activated and inspired so much social change.

Ada Mae married Tommy, the first man who asked, grateful anyone would

she didn't exactly have suitors lining up in Newcastle wanting to proudly introduce their black girlfriend to their parents in the nineteen-sixties

Tommy was on the ugly side, a face like a garden gnome, her and Slim joked, none too bright, either

Hattie suspected the lad didn't have too many choices himself

a coalminer from young, he was apprenticed as a welder when the mines were shut down

he proved to be a good husband and really did love Ada Mae, in spite of her colour

as he told Hattie and Slim when he came to ask for her hand

lucky that Slim didn't lay him out

there and then

Sonny's experience was somewhat different, according to Ada Mae who reported back that women queued up round the block for him

they thought he was the next best thing to dating Johnny Mathis

he married Janet, a barmaid, whose parents objected

and told her to choose

Related Characters: Hattie "GG" Jackson (speaker), Slim Jackson , Ada Mae , Sonny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 359-360

Explanation and Analysis

This scene highlights how love and sexuality intersect with race and racism and how that intersection looks different for Black men versus Black women. In predominately white Newcastle, Ada Mae struggled to find love, not only because she doesn't fit the white supremacist beauty standards, but because men didn't want to take a Black girlfriend home to their racist families who would disapprove of an interracial relationship. Because she's overlooked and ignored, Ada Mae ends up settling for the first man who shows interest in her, and even though Tommy turned out to be a decent husband, racism still severely limited her possibilities for love.

Sonny is angered by Tommy's comment that he loves Ada Mae "in spite of her color" because he should love her for all parts of herself and her identity, and that includes her racial identity. Saying he loves her "in spite of her color" implies that he sees her race as a negative quality that her other qualities make up for.

On the other hand, Sonny is incredibly desired by the white women in Newcastle who compare him to Johnny Mathis, a popular mixed-race musician. Sonny's race makes him exciting and exotic in a town where he is one of few men of color. Unlike Ada Mae, his race makes him desirable, but this, too, is problematic. His race becomes the first and foremost reason that women are attracted to him, which erases all the other qualities that make him who he is. Sonny still has to contend with racist in-laws who disown their daughter rather than accept her interracial relationship.

after Joseph died, Slim broke open an old library cabinet when he couldn't find the keys, said that as the man of the house he needed to know what was in it

he found old ledgers that recorded the captain's lucrative business as a slave runner, exchanging slaves from Africa for sugar in the West Indies

came charging like a lunatic into the kitchen where she was cooking and had a go at her for keeping such a wicked family secret from him

she didn't know, she told him, was as upset as he was, the cabinet had been locked her entire life, her father told her important documents were inside and never go near it

she calmed Slim down, they talked it through

it's not me or my Pa who's personally responsible, Slim, she said, trying to mollify her husband, no you co-own the spoils with me

she wrapped her long arms around his waist from behind

it's come full circle, hasn't it?

Related Characters: Hattie "GG" Jackson , Slim Jackson (speaker), Megan/Morgan Malinga , Joseph Rydendale , Captain Linnaeus Rydendale

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 368

Explanation and Analysis

The truth about Greenfields' founding reveals how historical atrocities live on in the present and complicate understandings of home, family, and individual identity.

Slim is horrified to learn that the land he and Hattie live and work on was built using blood money earned in the same slave trade that devastated his family. Although Hattie didn't deceive him, because she herself didn't know this family secret, their discussion still poses the question of culpability and responsibility. Hattie and her father aren't personally responsible for their ancestor's actions, but they've reaped the benefits and privileges of those actions in the form of land, a significant source and foundation of wealth and stability. On the other hand, Joseph married a mixed-race woman and Hattie, his mixed-race child, inherited the land and its wealth. Now Hattie is with Slim, and as she sees it, their co-ownership of the farm is a form of long-awaited justice. The land has been returned to the hands of those who suffered for it, and in a sense, Hattie sees it as a long overdue reparation that makes up for the forty-acres and a mule Slim's family was promised but never given.

Hattie is born of contradictions, and there is no clear or easy way to resolve these contradictions that coexist within her. Hattie's choice to leave Greenfields to Morgan is her way of trying to make peace with the farm's legacy. Her father wanted it to stay in the family, and she knows that if she leaves it to her own children they'll sell it to wealthy, white developers. By leaving Greenfields to Morgan the farm stays both in the family and in Black hands.

Chapter 4: Grace Quotes

❝ nights

they made love with the gas lamp dimmed

she was his expedition into Africa, he said, he was Dr Livingstone sailing downriver in Africa to discover her at the source of the Nile

Abyssinia, she corrected him

whatever you say, Gracie

Related Characters: Grace , Joseph Rydendale (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 393-394

Explanation and Analysis

The Dr. Livingstone reference imbues this scene with an additional layer of meaning. Dr. Livingstone was a Scottish physician and Christian missionary who is most known for his expeditions into Africa. He was obsessed with discovering the sources of the Nile River and hoped that his discovery would make him famous so the world would pay attention to his advocacy against the slave trade. Dr. Livingstone's abolitionism is complicated by his working with slave traders at points during his expeditions. Despite his good intentions, Livingston was a colonizer whose missionary work threatened indigenous cultures in the communities he visited across the continent. Livingstone was ultimately a white man who thought he knew what was best for Africa when he set out to implement his Vision for Africa plan.

From the first moment that Joseph spotted Grace on the street, he exoticized her and her Blackness. In their sex life, that exoticizing is intertwined with Joseph's role-playing of Dr. Livingstone that reveals how he views Grace as something to be conquered, just as Livingstone conquered and colonized the African continent. This dominant-submissive fantasy reveals the complexities of interracial relationships, and the way that the white partner's unexamined biases, stereotypes, and racism shows up in their relationships.

Chapter 5: The After-party Quotes

it was so odd seeing a stage full of black women tonight, all of them as dark or darker than her, a first, although rather than feel validated, she felt slightly embarrassed

if only the play was about the first black woman prime minister of Britain, or a Nobel prize-winner for science, or a self-made billionaire, someone who represented legitimate success at the highest levels, instead of lesbian warriors strutting around and falling for each other

during the interval at the bar she noticed a few members of the white audience looking at her different from when they'd all arrived in the lobby earlier, much more friendly, as if she was somehow reflected in the play they were watching and because they approved of the play, they approved of her

there were also more black women in the audience than she'd seen at any other play at the National

at the interval she studied them with their extravagant head-ties, chunky earrings the size of African sculptures, voodoo-type necklaces of beads, bones, leather pouches containing spells (probably), metal bangles as thick as wrist weights, silver rings so large their wingspan spread over several fingers

she kept getting the black sisterhood nod, as if the play somehow connected them together

Related Characters: Carole Williams (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 418-419

Explanation and Analysis

Carole's discomfort with Amma's play and the significance of its premier at The National Theatre highlights how the theater represents a bridging of the radical and reformist approaches to social change.

Amma's play was finally invited to premier at The National thanks to a woman who worked her way up to the historically male-dominated position of artistic director, giving her the power to choose which plays made it to the esteemed stage. In this sense, Carole's work as a reformer, in her traditionally white, male-dominated position of power as a vice president of a major bank, also helped propel society towards this point in history when more women, and especially women of color, are breaking into leadership roles and opening doors for others once there.

At the same time, while Carole helped make Amma's moment possible, she doesn't see herself reflected in the story as she might have hoped when she was initially so excited to see so many women who looked like her on a stage so significant. Carole finds herself wishing that the play was about a Black woman reformer like her, rather than a radical play about Black lesbian love.

Another reason why she feels uncomfortable is because she knows that white audiences will associate her with the play simply because she is Black. In the lobby at the intermission, Carole already sees that white people are looking at her kindlier than before, but their kindness is undermined by the fact that they are erasing Carole's individual identity by assuming that all Black women must love and identify with this play.

Finally, Carole experiences something similar from the other Black women in the audience, too. They keep giving her the "sisterhood nod," as if the play and what its presence in The National represents bonds them together in new ways, but Carole doesn't feel that connection, highlighting the limits of shared group identity.

Epilogue Quotes

this metal-haired wild creature from the bush with the piercingly feral eyes

is her mother

this is she

this is her

who cares about her colour? why on earth did Penelope ever think it mattered?

in this moment she's feeling something so pure and primal it's overwhelming

they are mother and daughter and their whole sense of themselves is recalibrating

her mother is now close enough to touch

Penelope had worried she would feel nothing, or that her mother would show no love for her, no feelings, no affection

how wrong she was, both of them are welling up and it's like the years are swiftly regressing until the lifetimes between them no longer exist

this is not about feeling something or about speaking words

this is about being

together

Related Characters: Penelope Halifax/Barbara (speaker), Hattie "GG" Jackson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 452

Explanation and Analysis

In this final scene, Penelope finally confronts and starts to unpack the racist beliefs that were handed down to her by her adoptive mother and reaffirmed from a life spent living as a white person with all the associated privileges. Penelope heads to this reunion still shocked and distressed by the revelation that she's part Black. When she sees her birth mother, Hattie, for the first time, she describes her through a stereotypical and dehumanizing lens. She views her as a feral, wild animal, similar to how she describes the school she worked at as a "multi-cultural zoo," implying that she sees people of color as more like animals than people. She's playing into age-old stereotypes that paint Black and African people as animalistic.

As she further internalizes the reality that this woman who stands before her is the woman who gave birth to her, her tone suddenly changes. She had feared that she and her mother would struggle to connect, and that perhaps she wouldn't be able to feel anything for Hattie at all. When they're face to face, however, she realizes her fears were unfounded. She describes the newfound bond as "pure and primal," describing an animalistic, essential desire and love that bonds mothers and their children.

All of Penelope's fears of rejection dissipate, and in that moment their togetherness transcends all else. It's incorrect to think that this meeting and realization will immediately erase Penelope's decades worth of learned and internalized racism, but this final scene suggests that people have the capacity to unlearn their racism and break the generational transfer of white supremacy—and that personal relationships are a major, even irreplaceable part of that.

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: AMMA

It's early morning, and Amma Bonsu is walking along the River Thames in London. A violinist plays an uplifting tune in the near distance as the sun is rising. Tonight her play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, will premiere at the **National** Theatre. Amma thinks back to when she first started out in theater. She and her friend Dominique protested shows that were in conflict with their political beliefs. They believed in bold and disruptive public displays of protest. Amma remembers pouring a beer on a director whose play featured semi-naked Black women running around on stage "like idiots." She and Dominque ran from the scene and into the streets of London laughing.

By premiering her play at the National, Amma risks becoming what she once protested. The National is one of London's most esteemed theaters, but for years it—and the mainstream theater world in general—excluded actors and directors of color like Amma and Dominique. When stories featuring Black women made it to the stage, they were often demeaning, stereotypical, or problematic, like they play they so boldly protest. Amma and Dominique's commitment to daring acts of protest situates them as radicals, working from outside of society's preexisting institutions to either change or dismantle them altogether.

Amma thinks about the decades she spent excluded from the mainstream theater world. Now radical theater is becoming mainstream, and Amma was invited in by the **National Theatre's** first female artistic director, who loved her play. As Amma continues to walk, the National Theatre comes into view, and she reflects that years ago people dressed up to come here and would have looked down on someone like her, clad in a Che Guevara beret, PLO scarf, and feminist buttons. Now the theater is considered progressive, and Amma is an insider. Her own style has changed now, too, preferring sneakers or Birkenstocks, black slacks or patterned harem pants and bright, asymmetric tops. She wears dreadlocks, hoop earrings, African bangles, and her signature pink lipstick.

Amma's plays were rejected by the mainstream theater world for years, but now the National is seeking radical stories. As society has become increasingly diverse, so too has the theater, earning a progressive reputation that it wants to keep. It's the theater's first female art director, someone who worked to reform the institution from the inside, who brought Amma and her radical story onto the stage, which demonstrates how the reformer and radical achieve social change side by side. At the same time, the theater threatens to erase Amma's radical identity. By working from within the mainstream, Amma risks losing her edge. Her art, like her clothes, might become more modest and moderate over time in this new context.

Amma's daughter, Yazz, describes Amma's style as the "mad old woman look." Yazz is embarrassed to be seen in public with her mother. At 19, she thinks her 50-something mother is old, but Amma is not ashamed of aging. However, she feels she's the only one among her friends who considers aging a privilege. Gathered at her house in Brixton for a potluck dinner, she tells them that aging is preferable to dying prematurely, but rather than agree with her unconventional interpretation of middle age, they smile and talk about their typical middle-age maladies.

Yazz enforces a clear generational divide between herself and her mother. Amma's style represents something old-fashioned and embarrassing to Yazz. Like she does with most things in life, Amma views aging through a radical lens. She's frustrated with her friends who are settling into conventional middle age, rather than questioning or rebelling against it.

Amma is nervous for opening night. She worries that critics will call her an imposter and write negative reviews. She reminds herself that she's experienced—having written 15 plays and directed over 40—and has a fantastic cast of actors for the play. She's suddenly reminded of a young actress in her cast who, full of herself after landing a job at the **National** straight out of school, complained that Amma was working them too hard. This interaction made Amma miss Dominique, who left for the United States years ago. Amma feels Dominique should be in London to share this long-awaited moment in her career.

Now that she's inside the mainstream theater world after years of being shut out, Amma is struggling with imposter syndrome, a feeling that she's not qualified for or deserving of the esteemed stage. She's internalized the years of rejection and racism, causing her to doubt her own skills and experience. Amma's young cast member reveals how much the theater world has changed since Amma started out. While she complains about having to work too hard, she's landed a role in a play by and for Black women right out of college, while Amma and Dominique struggled to find any work at all at that age. It's unclear why Dominique isn't in London, but it's clear Amma feels hurt by her absence.

Amma has a flashback to meeting Dominique in the 1980s at an audition for a movie about a women's prison. They bond over their frustration with being typecast for roles like slave, servant, nanny, and prostitute and still not landing any jobs. After the audition, in a café in pre-gentrification Soho, Amma admires Dominique. In stark contrast to the subservient roles available to her, she's a gorgeous woman, tall and thin with sharp cheekbones, smoky eyes, and thick lashes. She exudes coolness when she bikes around the city decked out in leather and sporting a short haircut. Dominique confidently shouts, "can't they see I'm a living goddess?"

Amma and Dominique initially bond over their shared experience of discrimination in the arts. The only roles available to Black women were either stereotypical or subservient. The nature of these roles is so far from the reality of the Black women seeking roles out, like Dominique. When Amma looks at Dominique, she sees a multi-dimensional goddess with many stories to tell. But when casting directors look at Dominique, they only see a handful of potential stories.

Dominique was born in Bristol to an Afro-Guyanese mother whose ancestors were enslaved and an Indo-Guyanese father descended from indentured laborers. Dominique knew she was a lesbian from a young age but kept this a secret from her friends and family for fear of being a social outcast. At 16, Dominique left home for London, where she could proudly be herself. She learned everything she could about Black history and devoured Black feminist books in independent bookstores. Politically radicalized, she enrolled in drama school, where she pushed back against traditions that limited the roles women and people of color can play. The other students remained silent when she spoke this way, and she was threatened with dismissal.

Growing up, Dominique feels pressured to keep her sexuality a secret, fearing rejection from both her immigrant parents and the discriminatory, white British society she was born into. She leaves her childhood home in search of a new home and community where she will be accepted for who she is, both as an artist and a lesbian. In London she finds home and community in the stories and histories of other powerful Black women. She grows into a radical, political identity. However, London fails to provide the theater community she hoped to find. She's told to accept a tradition that limits who and what she can be, and when she speaks up to assert herself and her beliefs, she's not only rejected but threatened with being cut out of that community entirely.

Amma's own political passion comes from her father, Kwabena, a Ghanian journalist forced to flee to the UK after supporting the independence movement. Amma's mother, Helen, grew up mixed-race in Scotland at a time when that was rare. She felt ugly until she moved to London where African men, like Kwabena, started to tell her she was beautiful. Amma's three older brothers lived up to her father's expectations to become lawyers and doctors. He expected Amma to become a wife and mother, viewing her acting as a temporary hobby. Amma describes him as a patriarchal revolutionary. As Amma tells this story at the café, Dominique reminds Amma that she can't expect her father—a man born in 1920s Ghana—to understand a woman born in 1960s London. Amma tells Dominique that she's an "apologist for the patriarchy," but Dominique argues that humans are complex.

Amma's mother grew up in an England even less progressive than the one Amma comes of age in. As a mixed race woman growing up in a white-supremacist society that upholds a white beauty standard, she was made to feel ugly. She finds a new home and community in London where being Black means being beautiful. Amma's home growing up was likewise imperfect. Although her father was himself a radical, he still held her to traditional gender roles and expectations that conflicted with her identity as a strong feminist. With her outsider's perspective, Dominique understands that Amma's father is a first-generation immigrant shaped by wildly different social and political forces than his second-generation, English-born daughter. She can see him in all his complexity, as a man who is neither wholly good nor wholly bad. Amma's proximity as his daughter leaves her unable to be forgiving of his shortcomings, and instead her identity cultivated in the West becomes a cultural divide between parent and child.

Amma explains that Helen worked full-time and managed the household with no help from Kwabena, who was preoccupied with fighting against capitalism and colonialism and advocating for socialism. Amma is still frustrated with her mother for continuing to put up with her unaffectionate father. She thinks Helen is unfulfilled and oppressed, never standing up to her husband. Amma now admits he'd probably be an important person in Ghana if he'd returned after independence, but instead he became "President for Life" of his family, who became the involuntary audience for his political preaching. Amma is gay, which her mother still thinks is a phase and insists she keep secret from her homophobic father.

Amma's anger extends to her mother, who likewise fails to live up to her feminist expectations. Again, Amma fails to see the impact of the social and political forces that shaped her parents. She acknowledges that her father's life would likely be very different if he'd been able to stay in his home country, without realizing that these missed opportunities and his forced migration have left him deeply wounded. He remains a fervent activist, so he doesn't lose touch with the radical identity his migration threatened to erase. While it's not fair that Amma must contend with a homophobic father, it's yet another example of how social and political differences between the first-generation parents and their second-generation children fracture family bonds.

After exchanging these stories about their families, Amma tells Dominique about her first time attending a Black women's group, where they discussed their experiences as Black women encountering white feminism, sexism, and racism. It felt like "coming in from the cold." Amma stayed after the meeting to make out with a woman, which felt like another "coming home." When she returned to the meeting the following week, she was disappointed to see the woman snuggling with someone else. She never attended another meeting.

Like Dominique, Amma is in search of a new home in her early 20s. She craves a community that, unlike her childhood home, will accept her entire identity as a queer, Black, feminist woman. The discussion and her connection with one of the women in the group felt like a warm, joyful homecoming to a place where she is finally valued for who she is. When the woman has already moved on from her a week later, Amma feels cast out from that community and gives up on it.

That day in the café, after several hours and glasses of wine, Amma and Dominique decide that the only way to stay true to their politics *and* be actors is to open their own theater company. The Bush Woman Theatre Company will give voice to women of color silenced by mainstream theater. They come up with a motto: "On Our Own Terms or Not At All." At first their constant fighting threatens failure, but once they decide Amma will be the artistic director and Dominique the company manager, they begin to find success. They employ a crew, put on shows at small community centers, and even start to draw the attention of the alternative press. Most importantly, their shows adhere to their feminist mission.

Frustrated by their many failed attempts to enter the mainstream theater world, to be reformers from within, Dominque and Amma decide to pursue radical change by opening their own theater company completely outside of the mainstream. Rejected by their families and by the existing theater community, they carve out their own home that exists on their own terms, allowing them to be their full selves. Amma and Dominique see their struggles as Black women as interconnected with the struggles of all women of color. The company focuses on telling different stories from diverse women who are all united around their common experiences of marginalization in a white-supremacist England.

In the early years of the company, Amma bounces between shabby apartments until finding a permanent home in an old office building that, with the rich owner's permission, becomes a commune called the Republic of Freedomia, made up of all types of political and artistic outsiders. Amma starts sleeping with multiple women in Freedomia, and her behavior starts to anger her lovers. She views commitment as imprisonment and doesn't sleep with the same woman twice because she thinks they'll become too needy and attached. She brags that she'll sleep with any woman of any culture, race, or class.

In her continued quest to seek home and community, Amma settles into the radical Republic of Freedomia, made up of fellow outsiders who accept each other as they are. To Amma, Freedomia represents a truly radical way of life. However, there's a clear contradiction inherent to the set-up. They are squatting in the building with permission of the rich owners, which undermines the alleged radicalness of the act. Amma believes that her approach to love and commitment are radical without acknowledging how her behavior is hurting others. Her boasting about her multi-cultural love interests borders on fetishization.

As they become more and more popular in the art community, both Amma and Dominique have their choice of lovers, but Dominique is a serial monogamist who falls for blondes. Amma's friends suggest therapy might help her settle down. Insulted, she points out that promiscuous male rockstars are never told to seek therapy. In her present middle-age, pieces of her past have started to haunt her as former "conquests" call her out for her behavior on social media. Amma no longer sleeps around, and instead has settled down in a non-monogamous triad with her long-term partners, Dolores and Jackie.

Dominque's story highlights the intersection of race, sexuality, and love. Although she has her choice of lovers, she always ends up with the blonde, white women who fit England's white-supremacist beauty standard. Her choice of lovers reflects how she may have subconsciously internalized society's messaging about who and what she should find desirable. Meanwhile, Amma's story highlights how internalized misogyny shows up in the lesbian community. She treats the women she has sex with as conquests, people to be dominated and then forgotten, and defends her behavior by positioning it as a feminist argument: if a man can do it then so can she. Under the banner of feminist freedom, she's replicating misogynistic behaviors she's internalized from living in a patriarchal society that says women are meant to be dominated. Even when women start to speak up about how her actions affected them, she refuses to acknowledge the problematic nature of her behavior.

When she thinks back nostalgically on her youth spent with Dominique, Amma remembers a trip they took to a legendary gay bar, The Gateway. Inside they found only a few people. Two middle-aged lesbians, sporting old fashioned suits and men's haircuts, looked like they were "straight out of the pages of *The Well of Loneliness*." An old couple, one in a suit and one in a dress, danced to Dusty Springfield. Amma noticed that the dancefloor was dark, with no disco ball to sprinkle "stardust on to them."

The two middle-aged lesbians at the once legendary, but now empty and forgotten, gay bar foreshadow the future in store for Amma and Dominique. The women at the bar are from a different era, a time when lesbianism was far less accepted, when it was forced to remain furtive and hidden and adhered to stricter gender roles of butch and femme. Both The Well of Loneliness *(a 1928 lesbian novel by Radclyffe Hall) and Dusty Springfield are cultural relics of this time. To Amma, a member of a new generation, these women are sad and pathetic. They've lost the shine and "stardust" of their youth. Amma and Dominique, like many young people, think their youth will last forever, but in the present day, Yazz, who represents the next generation, sees Amma and her friends the way Amma once viewed this older generation of queer women.*

Back in the present, temporarily shaken from her flashback, Amma walks into the **National** Theatre and onto the stage. She stares out at the seats where more than 1,000 people will sit tonight. The play's entire run has sold out in advance, everyone eager to see something "different." The play is based on the 18th- and 19th-century women warriors of the West African state of Dahomey. The warriors, all married to the king, were forbidden from any other sexual relations and commanded to kill off any male children they bore. Amma's certain that this forced sexual segregation meant the women must have been in relationships with each other, and this idea inspired her play.

Amma stands on the stage she was excluded from for so long. The fact that a large audience is about to see her play accomplishes what she and Dominique always wanted: to get the voices of women of color heard. However, putting the radical play onto a mainstream stage threatens to undermine its radicalness altogether. The middle-class audience eager to see "something different" may in fact be more eager to prove themselves as tolerant and liberal connoisseurs of diversity. Their interest in the play may have more to do with what their attendance says about them, rather than what the play itself is saying. Amma's play is centered around powerful, Black woman characters, in stark contrast with those stereotyped and subservient roles once available to her and Dominique.

The main character of Amma's play, Nawi (who is unable to bear the king's child) is forced to become one of the king's warriors. She becomes a legendary general with many women lovers. Even after she tires of a lover, she remains loyal by protecting her from the king's wrath. Eventually, old and alone, Nawi reconnects with the holographic ghosts of past lovers and relives the wars she battled in. Controversially, the king did business with outlawed slave ships, exchanging prisoners of these wars in order to build his own wealth. The play ends with Nawi's death.

Amma's experience with her many lovers is reflected in Nawi's story, but unlike Amma, Nawi is loyal and protective of her past lovers. While Amma's play is radical for its centering of powerful Black woman characters, it's simultaneously imperfect. Nawi fought in wars that contributed to the continuance of slavery in a post-abolition world. This reality highlights the complexity and contradictions of people, history, and stories. Amma was always tired of being typecast, but her own play contains traces of the very things she fought against.

While Dominique won't be in the audience tonight, Amma's friend Shirley, a teacher, will be, having never missed one of her shows. Shirley is Amma's oldest friend. They met at 11 when they were the only two brown girls at school, and Shirley has always been Amma's opposite. Shirley is neat while Amma is messy; she's ordinary compared to Amma's eccentricity. Amma's friends think Shirley is boring, but Amma always defends her. She frequently babysat Yazz, a favor Amma rarely returned, and she often lent Amma money, which Amma usually never repaid. Amma assuaged her guilty feelings about the seemingly one-sided nature of the friendship by convincing herself that she made Shirley's boring life more exciting.

Amma and Shirley found community with each other when they were young girls each yearning to connect with someone who looked like them in a society that was predominantly white. Although they are opposites in terms of their personalities and ideologies, they bond over their shared racial identity and the isolation that has often come with it. While Amma defends Shirley when her radical friends criticize her for being too normal or mainstream, the way Amma conceives of her relationship with Shirley is itself problematic. Amma justifies her selfishness in the friendship by belittling Shirley's life choices, and uncritically assuming her own superiority.

Amma thinks about the rest of her friends. She misses who they were in their youth before they changed with age. Mabel "went straight," Olivine—who Amma suggests is "too dark" for success in the UK—is a star in Hollywood, and Katrina settled down as a "born-again Anglophile" with her wife outside of London. Lakshmi, who will be there tonight, is a saxophonist who once composed for Amma, but she now plays avant-garde music that Amma scoffs at. Amma gives Lakshmi, who is in her late 50s, a hard time for exclusively dating people in their 20s and 30s.

Amma's assumption of superiority extends to many of her other friendships. She looks down on them for exchanging the radical lifestyles of their 20 for more settled lives in middle age. Amma mocks Mabel's bisexuality and discounts Olivine's mainstream success after years of struggling against racism and colorism in the U.K. She criticizes these women while she herself stands on the precipice of surrendering her radical identity by premiering her play at the National. Amma fails to see her own hypocrisies, that her friends could say the same about her as she does about them. Amma's criticism of Lakshmi's avant-garde music and choice of romantic partners may indicate her own anxiety that someone's work and lifestyle is more radical than her own.

Amma remembers their friend Georgie. Disowned by her religious family, she drank, did drugs, and had trouble attracting women. Deeply insecure, she thought she was too ugly to attract women, and nights out often ended in tears. The last time she saw Georgie, Amma had to force her to throw up pills she took in a bar. For the first time, Amma felt fed-up and angry with Georgie's insecurity and hopelessness, and she was frustrated that Georgie was failing at being an adult. A week later, Georgie fell from her balcony in a likely suicide. Amma still wonders if it's her fault.

Georgie serves as a reminder that not everyone survives in a world that is dead set against them and their identities. Amma wonders if she failed to be the home and community that Georgie so desperately needed.

Then there's Sylvester, who never misses an opening night and whose own theater work is inspired by avant-garde films. Sylvester used to be Sylvie, and he and his life partner, Curwen, lay claim to being on the forefront of what's now become the trend of challenging gender norms. Recently, he and Amma got drinks at the Ritzy after he called her a sellout. At the bar they glare at the yuppie gentrifiers interloping in this space full of people like Amma and Sylvester who arrived when the neighborhood was cheap and crime-ridden.

Sylvester stood on the radical, cutting edge of gender in a time when it was more difficult to do so. He fought to make progress, but now contradictorily denigrates how that progress has made freedom of gender expression and identity mainstream. Sylvester criticizes Amma the way she criticizes the friends she believes have abandoned their radical identities. Both Amma and Sylvester fail to see their own hypocrisies when they glare at the gentrifiers with disdain. The first wave of gentrification is often made up of artists, radicals, and outsiders who initially descend on neglected and marginalized neighborhoods. In other words, Amma and Sylvester refuse to acknowledge their own complicity in the very thing they now hate.

Amma notes that Sylvester is as revolutionary as ever but that this is not always a good thing. Sylvester calls Amma a sellout again. He still runs his socialist theater company, and thinks Amma should still be running hers, too. He wants her to return to community centers, making her plays accessible to all. She argues that she has the right to direct at the **National** and that the theater should be trying to attract more diverse audiences, not just the middle-class. Amma holds back from reminding Sylvester of his economically privileged background, but when he tells her she's abandoned her political principles for the sake of ambition she walks out on him.

While Amma criticizes her friends she deems not radical enough, she simultaneously criticizes Sylvester for being too radical. She positions herself as above everyone else. Her path alone is the most noble one. Sylvester wants Amma to reclaim her radical identity, to go back to working for change from the outside. Amma takes up the argument in favor of reforming society from within its existing institutions. She asserts that her work at the National is an important marker of progress, and while this may be absolutely true, it flies in the face of her professed radical beliefs and identity. Sylvester, who fails to acknowledge his economically privileged roots at odds with his radical identity, reflects Amma's hypocrisies back at her, but she still fails to see her own. They both ignore anything that blatantly contradicts who they profess themselves to be.

Amma walks home from the **National**, thinking about how grateful she is to be a homeowner. When the tenants at Freedomia were finally evicted, she bounced between places until her parents died. Helen died of cancer, which Amma saw as a symbol of her oppression. Amma's father, Kwabena, died shortly after, and his death filled her with a grief she didn't expect. Amma was overcome with guilt for not recognizing he was a product of a different time and culture and never expressing her love for him. She regrets taking him for granted and holding him to her unforgiving feminist standard. In her eulogy, she reflected on the trauma he must have endured when leaving his country. Her brothers gave her the largest share of the inheritance, which she used to buy her house.

Amma argues that her mother's cancer grew out of her acceptance of the subservient, repressed life she led, which comes close to suggesting that her death was in part her own fault because she failed to be a feminist. She imposes her own narrative onto her mother without ever having asked her how she felt about her life choices. It's only after her father dies that Amma can see him through the compassionate lens Dominique tried to get her to see him through all those years before. Amma finally understands the weight of the trauma he endured as a first-generation immigrant exiled from his homeland, but it's too late for them to reconcile. Amma criticizes Sylvester for his financial privilege, yet, meanwhile, she's benefitted financially from her own inheritance.

Amma thinks about Yazz's birth 19 years ago. Determined to raise Yazz unconventionally, she decided to co-parent with her gay friend, Roland, Amma's sperm donor who took Yazz on weekends. She breastfed in public, let Yazz wear whatever she wanted, and let her speak her mind. Amma wanted to raise a powerful feminist. As Yazz got older, however, men started to notice her and Amma became protective, policing her clothing and worrying about her boyfriend. Yazz identifies as a humanitarian, more interested in the non-binary present than her mom's old-fashioned "*women's* politics."

As she did all things, Amma was determined to parent radically. The way she conceived and raised Yazz, while radical then, is now increasingly common. Amma contradicts her own radical beliefs once more when she starts policing Yazz's body and sexuality. Defying the objectifying male gaze herself is one thing, but watching her daughter go up against it and the constant threat of harm is another. Even the feminism that Amma wished to pass down to Yazz is outdated by the time Yazz is grown and developing her own political identity.

Now that Yazz is away at college and Amma misses her, she doesn't miss the hurtful words Yazz spews her way. Young people, she says, think they're the only ones with feelings. But she misses her presence in their home, her noise and chaos and her idiosyncratic ways of being. Still, she hopes that Yazz, like most people her age living in a now unaffordable world, will come home after she's finished at university. Amma wants Yazz to come back home forever.

Amma is now on the receiving end of the same incessant criticism she used against her parents. From her new position as a parent, she understands the emotional pain her words must have caused back then. The cycle of generational criticism continues. Regardless, Amma misses the home she created for herself and her daughter. With Yazz's departure, Amma has lost another home.

CHAPTER 1: YAZZ

Yazz sits in the seat her mother, Amma, saved for her, the best in the house. She's worried that the **play** will be another embarrassment. Yazz quickly gets lost in thought as she observes everyone around her. Waris and Courtney, two members of her "squad" dubbed "The Unfuckables," sit next to her. The squad are determined to get good degrees because to them it's the only way to save the world that their elders have destroyed. The climate is in crisis, the UK is exiting the EU, America has a "perma-tanned" president, and their generation is doomed to live in their parents' homes forever thanks to the economy. Yazz wants to become a journalist to make her voice heard.

Amma wants the person she loves most to have a front row seat to her premiere and the major accomplishment it represents. Meanwhile Yazz, ever critical of her mother, is preoccupied with the worry her outdated, once-radical mother will embarrass her as usual. Yazz upholds the generational divide that Amma once upheld in her own youth. Yazz blames her mother's generation for all the world's ills, meanwhile ignoring all that her mother did to make social change within the arts. The name of Yazz's crew asserts power and defiance against a society that threatens them at every turn with the rise in white-supremacy and nationalism in the wake of Donald Trump's election and Brexit. Yazz doesn't realize that her goal in life, to make her voice heard, is the same goal her mother set out to achieve in her own youth with her theater company, revealing that the generational divide is not so wide as she thinks.

As usual, the theater is full of old people—including Amma's friends, like Sylvester, whom Yazz pities. Amma has been complaining that he refuses to change, and Yazz thinks Amma was guilty of that herself until landing the gig at the **National** and suddenly looking down on her old theater friends. She also criticizes her mom for getting angry about gentrification, when she's been a gentrifier for years and was even spotted at the new café that sells expensive breakfast cereal.

Yazz easily sees through her mother's hypocrisies. Yazz sees her mom struggling with her decision to give up her radical identity, that once aligned her with Sylvester, for her place at the National where she risks becoming a sellout like the old friends she also criticizes. Yazz can also see her mother's role in gentrification, which Amma herself can't or won't acknowledge.

Yazz spots her dad, Roland, a couple rows ahead, who wears expensive clothes but claims he can't help pay for her college. He's a professor and bestselling author. Yazz criticizes his white-male-dominated syllabi as being at odds with his own identity as a person of color. He's speechless in the face of her critiques. He's become a TV personality and Amma says he's sold out to the "establishment," but still agrees with everything he says. Yazz knows she and her dad will have a healthy relationship one day, but that it's her job to educate him.

Yazz likewise homes in on her father's hypocrisies and criticizes him incessantly. Yazz sees Roland as someone who has unquestionably internalized the norms of white-supremacist society. His syllabi uphold a traditional canon that excludes people of color despite being one himself. There's a clear generational divide between Roland and Yazz, just like there is between Yazz and Amma. In the same way that Sylvester calls Amma a sellout, Amma hurls the same insult at Roland. Yazz condescendingly thinks it's her job to educate Roland on progressive social and political values without recognizing the social change Roland has effected by rising through the ranks in academia as a Black man. Like her mom before her, she's ignorant of her own hypocrisies.

Yazz's godfather Kenny, Roland's partner, is seated next to him. He's also old-fashioned but she likes him because he isn't arrogant like her father. Recently Kenny asked her to be less harsh on her dad, but she's reluctant to concede. After "being born into poverty," as she describes it, Yazz implores her mom to sell their house, which is now worth a fortune thanks to the gentrification she herself jumpstarted. Yazz wants to buy an apartment with the money. Amma doesn't respond to this proposal.

Kenny understands the impact that Yazz's criticisms have on her father in a way that she can't see. Yazz believes she was born into poverty, when in reality she was born to two academically successful parents, who could provide her with a comfortable life. Her mother's status as a homeowner is itself a financial privilege. Yazz's ignorance of her relative privilege is evident in her very selfish demand that Amma sell her home in order to buy her an apartment.

Yazz wants the play to be a success because she doesn't want to deal with the emotional fallout that's sure to follow if it's a failure. She anticipates being trapped on the phone, subject to Amma's angry lectures about how the critics don't understand Black women's lives, leaving them unable to appreciate the play. She'd complain that they only understand stories about aid workers in Africa, troubled teenagers, African American blues singers, or white people rescuing slaves. Yazz thinks emotional caretaking is the price she has to pay as an only daughter.

Yazz's fear of the fallout that would follow a failure reveals that despite some of her material privileges, Yazz's childhood was emotionally difficult at times. Amma looks to Yazz for emotional support, forcing Yazz into the reversed role of caretaker. Amma is understandably frustrated by the mainstream theater world that overlooks stories that center Black women, instead favoring stories that center and celebrate white saviorism or depict Black people in roles that white people are comfortable with.

Yazz hoped to fall in love at college, but instead finds only loud, drunk, and obnoxious boys. She's given up on her love life for now, lamenting that she's living in the era of dating apps among men who expect sex to be like the porn she assumes they watch all day. She admits that Amma has more game, and despite her "multicultural whoredom," is happy she's settled down with her two white partners, Dolores and Jackie. Yazz has watched women come in and out of her mother's life, even fight over her, and she expects a new woman will enter the picture soon. The women always try to impress Yazz, and she takes full advantage. Although she's constantly criticizing her parents, Yazz defends them against the people who assume she's been emotionally damaged by her unconventional childhood.

Yazz's struggles to find love highlight how online dating has allowed misogyny to flourish in new ways. Yazz plays off her mother's tendency to bring new women in and out of her life by highlighting how she worked this situation to her advantage. Amma's constant parade of partners is another aspect of Yazz's unconventional upbringing that others assume may have negatively affected Yazz, and that Yazz defends her parents against. However, it's clear that Yazz does find comfort in the stability that Dolores and Jackie bring into her mother's life. Yazz is often torn between celebrating the unconventional aspects of her childhood and acknowledging the parts that made it difficult at times.

The one boy Yazz did go on a date with at college swiped through his dating app right in front of her before leaving to go out with someone else. She knows she's attractive, but no one can compete with the artificially attractive women online. Yazz wants a monogamous, long-term relationship, but until then maintains a casual relationship with an American boy who has a girlfriend back home. She worries that she's doomed to be single forever, like all Amma's straight friends who can never find someone good enough, who her mom describes as having "Looking for Obama Syndrome."

Yazz's experience with this boy points to how the digital era has reduced love and relationships to an algorithm that presents people with seemingly endless potential partners. This ultimately leaves young people reluctant to commit to any one person because the prospect of someone better is always just a swipe away. Amma describes this same concept when she talks about "Looking for Obama Syndrome." The world of celebrity and social media presents impossible ideals that leave people unsatisfied with reality. Yazz wants a monogamous relationship, which contradicts with her willingness to be involved in the American boy's infidelity. Like Amma, she too is full of contradictions and hypocrisies.

The fourth member of the squad, Nenet, is already engaged through an arranged marriage. She resisted at first, but quickly gave in to avoid getting a job after college. She eventually warmed up to her fiancé Kadim. She still gets straight A's and she passionately defends herself and her classmates against misogynistic men on campus. Waris also has a boyfriend, Einar, and the two geek out over anime. Waris draws a comic about a Somali superwoman who castrates men who hurt women.

Nenet's situation eliminates the problem of seemingly endless choices. While Western society and feminism in particular view arranged marriage as an outdated and misogynistic practice, Nenet challenges that assumption by being both satisfied with her impending arranged marriage and maintaining an identity as a fierce feminist on campus. Her desire to marry and have a man provide for her is likewise frowned upon by white, Western feminists, which ultimately undermines Nenet's right to make this choice for herself. Waris's comic is a story, like those Amma tells, that centers and celebrates the strength of Black women.

Yazz was instantly drawn to Waris, bonding over their criticisms of their immature classmates who run around getting drunk—on their way to rehab, Yazz thinks—unlike the squad, who all prefer sobriety. Waris wears her hijab as a political statement, not a religious one. She thinks she's ugly and fat, refusing to leave the house without a mask of makeup, and Yazz tries to convince her that she's beautiful. She often wears sunglasses on overcast days, to appear fearless she says, but Yazz suggests she may be hiding her fear behind them. Waris concedes both theories might be true, and Yazz loves that they see the world similarly.

Yazz and her friends value being outsiders. Like Amma and Dominique before them, their Blackness sets them apart from their predominantly white classmates, and rather than assimilate they choose a more radical path, embracing and proudly asserting their difference. While white, western feminists see the hijab as a symbol of oppression, Waris challenges this stereotype, wearing it as a bold, feminist, and political statement that defends her culture and identity against white feminist assumptions. Despite her fierce feminist and political beliefs, Waris still struggles with internalized beauty standards that leave her feeling insecure about her body. The dual meanings of her symbolic sunglasses represent the difficulty of remaining fearless in a society endlessly critical of women, and especially women of color.

Waris says the world was different before 9/11 even though she can't remember what that world was like. Her mom, Xaanan, explains that in the "before," Americans looked at women in hijab with pity, but in the "after" with hostility. Every time there's a terrorist attack, Waris steels herself for more racist abuse. She hates that when Muslims carry out an attack it's called terrorism, but when a white man does the same he's called mad. The racism has forced her grandmother into hiding in her apartment, where she disappears into prescription pills.

Waris, a Black woman and Muslim, contends not only with racism and misogyny, but Islamophobia. 9/11 didn't create Islamophobia, it always existed, but the event transformed and intensified it. Waris highlights the double standards in society that portray all Muslims as villains when an individual Muslim participates in violence, while white violence is individualized, sparing white people as a whole from this gross generalization. Waris's grandmother highlights the devastating impact that racism can have on mental health.

Xaanan taught her kids that they could let themselves be crushed by these harsh realities or become fighters. She works at a community center for Muslim women and teaches martial arts to women, including Waris. Waris lists all the terrible, racist remarks made to her over the years, and Yazz says she feels sorry for all the ways she's suffered. Waris says her suffering pales in comparison to what the generations of Somali women before her have endured. She pushes herself to be successful in the UK because of the sacrifices that made her life possible. She tells Yazz not to treat her like a victim.

Xaanan is a powerful Muslim feminist who obliterates the stereotypes that white, western feminists impose on Muslim women. Her work is dedicated to strengthening and empowering her community in the face of a hostile white society. Yazz's tendency to victimize Waris reveals how women of color are capable of internalizing and reproducing the same harms as white women. Despite her progressive political beliefs, Yazz fails to see how her well-intentioned sympathy for Waris is in fact harmful. While Waris has suffered from Yazz's perspective, Waris herself understands the privileges she has as a second-generation child of immigrants. Yazz isn't the child of immigrants, so she doesn't understand the realities of this experience.

One night Waris, Yazz, and Nenet dance to their favorite Egyptian singer. Courtney, a white girl, knocks on the door in her pajamas and asks them to turn it down, and Yazz says no. Nenet breaks the tension. She says she learned how to handle conflict from her dad who was a diplomat during Mubarak's presidency, which Waris calls a dictatorship, but Nenet calls political stability. Nenet's grandfather was family friends with Mubarak. Nenet tells Waris her parents are so diplomatic they'd be nice to her, a Somali, who Egyptians typically look down on. Nenet's family flew to the UK when Mubarak was ousted, made possible by the dual citizenship her father paid a hefty sum for. Nenet doesn't know where her family's money that bought privileges like boarding school comes from.

Courtney replicates white people's tendency to police Black people for having fun. Nenet's role as peacekeeper represents, on a small scale, her and her family's alignment with the West, in contrast with Yazz and Waris's standing defiantly outside and against it. Nenet's family's privilege is rooted in their political connections. Her father and grandfather were close to Mubarak and his regime, which was installed and supported by the West. They were part of the country's elite that had to flee in the wake of the Arab Spring, and their wealth makes this escape possible. Egyptian discrimination against Somalis, as well as their differences in political opinion, highlight how political realities complicate friendships like Nenet and Waris's.

Nenet invites Courtney in and teaches her how to dance. Courtney is having fun "belly dancing," as she describes it, and Yazz calls her out for being Orientalist. Nenet steps in to explain the dance to Courtney who just shrugs while she dances better than the rest of them. At breakfast the next morning, Courtney tells them she grew up on a farm, which the other three joke explains her farmgirl looks. Waris and Yazz have never been on a farm, but Nenet's parents own one. Yazz and Waris conjure romantic images of farm life that Courtney says are nothing like where she's from.

Courtney is immediately confronted with her unexamined bias and racism when she enters this predominantly Black space, which is a rare experience for white people who are used to being the majority in white, Western society. It's an inversion of the broader reality on campus, where Yazz, Waris, and Nenet are surrounded by whiteness. At the same time, Courtney introduces complexity and intersectionality. Her dance skills undermine stereotypes that white people can't dance, and Yazz and Waris make stereotypical assumptions about her life growing up on a farm that Courtney tells them are untrue. Nenet's family owns a farm because of their wealth, whereas Courtney grew up in an impoverished rural community on her parents' struggling farm. Courtney reveals how class intersects and complicates simple narratives of privilege, while at the same time she's held accountable for her racism.

Courtney asks Waris why she wears a headscarf, and though this would usually make her angry, she simply says her mother, Xaanan, told her she never needs to explain herself to anyone. Courtney offers an apology that's more an excuse, pleading ignorance. Yazz thinks that, even though she's ignorant, Courtney is tough like the rest of "The Unfuckables." She likes her, so she's in the squad. A few months later, she formally tells Courtney that she's an honorary "sistah." She explains that being a sistah is about responding to how they're perceived as Black women and claiming who they are.

Courtney's insincere apology reveals how white people often avoid or refuse to own up to their racism. Despite her imperfections, Yazz lets her into the squad, revealing that socio-political realities complicate but don't completely preclude friendships. Courtney's honorary "sistahhood" invites her to be an ally to the rest of the squad.

Yazz warns Courtney that being a white woman with brown friends she'll be perceived as different and lose some of her privilege. Courtney pushes back, telling Yazz that her intellectual parents grant her a lot of privilege, while she's from a poor, rural community. Yazz says that being Black makes her more oppressed than anyone, except for Waris who is black, Muslim, female, poor, and wears hijab. In return, Courtney quotes Roxane Gay, who argues that playing the "privilege Olympics" ignores the context and relativity of privilege. Gay calls for a "new discourse for discussing inequality." Totally shocked that Courtney has read Roxane Gay, Yazz is left speechless by this "#whitegirltrumpsblackgirl" moment.

Yazz tells Courtney that being a white ally to people of color comes with its own set of consequences. Throughout history, white activists have sacrificed, to some extent, their standing among other white people by fighting for justice. At the same time, Courtney will always maintain white privilege that spares her from the harsher consequences that people of color face for standing up for justice. Courtney confronts Yazz with her own hypocrisies and lack of intersectional awareness. While Yazz claims that she grew up in poverty, she was economically privileged compared to Courtney. Yazz is constantly playing what Roxane Gay calls the "privilege Olympics," ranking her friends in order from most to least oppressed, which Gay asserts is a reductive and ineffective way of talking about privilege. Courtney's ability to call Yazz out undermines Yazz's condescending belief that she is the ultimate progressive authority who educates the helplessly ignorant like Roland and Courtney. When Yazz gets caught up in the "privilege Olympics" and elevates Waris as the "most" oppressed in their friend group, she continues to victimize Waris in the exact way that Waris has asked her not to.

Courtney says she only dates Black men, so will have mixed-raced children who will compromise her white privilege by "at least 50%." Before college she'd never met a Black person. Her town was all white except for three Asians. Yazz invites Courtney to stay at her house the summer after their freshman year. Courtney explains that she'd only been to London once because her parents think the city is full of "coloureds," "gays," "left-wingers," and "immigrants" who are ruining the country's economy. Courtney calls her father a hypocrite because he's friends with a South Asian man in town, but her father insists he's "*different*" from the people he reads about in his papers. Yazz says the British economy would collapse without the people he hates. Courtney can't wait to see his reaction when she has a mixed-race baby one day.

Courtney's unexamined racism shows up in her beliefs about dating and relationships. Her insistence that she only dates Black men borders dangerously on fetishization. She believes that being with a Black man and having mixed-race children means she'll be less privileged by association. In reality, this belief ignores the enduring power of white privilege and the stories of mixed-race children who, as adults, express how they were deeply harmed by their white parent's internalized and unconscious racism that showed up in the way they treated their own children. Even though Courtney criticizes her father's blatant racism, she's inevitably internalized some of this ideology and hasn't done the work to fully unpack her own racism. Her desire to use a mixed-race baby as a prop to upset her father is just as problematic as his outward racism, although she doesn't realize the extent of her hypocrisy.

Yazz takes Courtney all over the city. Courtney is excited by all the attractive Black men on the streets, and they notice her, too. Yazz usually gets checked out a lot when she's out in the city, but now Courtney is the center of attention. Yazz thinks to herself that Courtney isn't even that stunning. Instead, she knows that a white girl walking with a Black girl signals that the white girl is "black-man-friendly." Yazz is used to becoming invisible when she walks around with a white friend, and this makes her feel jaded.

This scene reveals how white beauty standards often make Black women invisible, even in the eyes of Black men. Yazz is a prop that helps Courtney project her supposed racial tolerance and acceptance, similar to the way in which Courtney anticipates using a mixed-race baby as a prop. Yazz's desirability is erased when she walks alongside her white friends, highlighting how racist beauty standards mean Black women are overlooked not just by white men, who often won't even consider dating a Black woman, but by members of their own community, too.

They meet up with Nenet at her house, where a maid lets them in through the imposing security gate. While Courtney is seemingly enamored by Nenet's wealth, Yazz realizes that seeing her wealth is a lot different than just knowing about it. Seeing just how wealthy she is permanently changes her opinion of Nenet. They go for a walk in Hyde Park. Nenet is in heels, toting a Chanel bag, and noticeably changing her body language as they pass groups of men who check her out. Nenet identifies as Mediterranean and tries to convince her friends that she isn't Black. Waris implores her to admit that she's African. The men in the park ignore Yazz who is "too dark" in their eyes but eat up Courtney, who loves the attention and is oblivious to their objectifying gazes.

Although Courtney calls Yazz out on her financial privilege, forcing her to confront her lack of intersectional awareness, she is awed by and uncritical of Nenet's extreme wealth. For Yazz, this realization immediately shifts her perspective of Nenet. Yazz's desirability is once again erased not just by Courtney's whiteness this time, but by Nenet's lighter skin tone, which highlights how internalized racism shows up in communities of color, in this case the problem of colorism. Nenet's lighter skin affords her a degree of privilege, and she uses that privilege to try and distance herself from her Blackness. Waris calls her out on this, but at the same time she's assigning an identity to Nenet, compromising her right to asserting and defining her own identity. Ultimately, each character contains a multitude of contradictions that complicate any attempt to impose simple narratives of race and identity.

They talk about college and their ambitious summer plans. Nenet reveals that she pays someone to write her essays. Yazz is shocked and angry that she's cheating, and Nenet tries to downplay it by saying everyone else is doing it, too, including her fiancé. Yazz doesn't know if their friendship will survive now that she sees Nenet in light of her wealth and her dishonesty. Yazz questions if there's really any substance binding "The Unfuckables" together besides being brown girls on a mostly white campus. She thinks about how she's going to fight, not cheat, her way into the name she wants for herself in journalism, the way Waris has to fight, too.

Nenet's extreme wealth, and her admission that she's paying for good grades, is a lesson in intersectionality for Yazz. She realizes that their shared Blackness may not be enough to hold them together. Intersectionality complicates simple definitions and assumptions of community. It's possible Yazz has more in common with Courtney than she does Nenet, despite Yazz's initial assumptions. Without such extreme financial privilege, Yazz and Waris have no choice but to work hard if they want to succeed in a white society that marginalizes Black women.

Yazz reflects that Courtney has become so much more worldly thanks to the rest of the squad, who aren't your typical English university students. Of them all, Yazz thinks Waris's family's painful history lends her a depth the rest lack, but is careful to remember that Waris doesn't want people to feel sorry for her. She thinks Waris's circumstances have forced her to grow up too fast, as have her own. Yazz's thoughts are interrupted as *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* begins.

Despite all these lessons and realizations, Yazz still hasn't unpacked all her own biases and hypocrisies. She still sees herself as Courtney's teacher, forgetting or ignoring that Courtney has taught her things, too. Although she remembers that Waris doesn't want to be victimized, she can't help but do it anyway.

CHAPTER 1: DOMINIQUE

Dominique spots Nzinga in Victoria station at rush hour. Nzinga has fallen amidst the bustle, her bag spilling all over the floor, and Dominique helps her pick up her things. She is stunned by her beauty. Nzinga is statuesque with glowing skin, flowing robes, and waist-length dreadlocks adorned with beads. Suspecting that she's a lesbian, Dominique asks her out to coffee in the station cafe and Nzinga accepts. Nzinga explains she doesn't abuse her body, so drinks only hot water with lemon. Dominique is suddenly self-conscious for dunking biscuits in her sugary coffee.

From the minute Nzinga appears in Dominique's life, Dominique puts her on an unrealistic pedestal of god-like perfection. Nzinga believes her way of living is superior to all others, and that assertion of superiority immediately functions as a subtle critique of Dominique, specifically a critique of her body.

Dominique has never met an African American, so is fascinated with Nzinga's accent, which reminds her of the cornbread, gumbo, collard greens and other foods she's read about in African American literature. Nzinga is in England after making a pilgrimage back to the "Motherland," Ghana. She visited Elmina Castle, where thousands of Africans were imprisoned before they were sent to the Americas as slaves. Nzinga describes violently sobbing as she felt 400 years of painful history enter her body. More than ever before she understands the white man's crimes. Dominique holds herself back from mentioning that African men sold Africans into slavery, too, making for a more complicated history.

Nzinga's African American identity is exotic and unfamiliar to Dominique. It's an image and identity Dominique imposes onto her. Dominique wants to complicate Nzinga's narrative about visiting Elmina Castle, in the same way she wanted to critique Amma's single narrative about her father. Dominique is hyper-aware of the ways that intersectionality complicates historical and social realities.

Back in the U.S., Nzinga builds houses on women's communes. At five she moved from the UK to the "Dis-United States," so her mother could be with a man she'd fallen in love with from afar. They lived in a run-down trailer, her mother worked at a factory, and the man spent most of his time drunk and high. He beat her mother when she tried to curb his substance abuse, and eventually her mother turned to drugs, too. One night the man raped Nzinga. She told a teacher at school the next day, and she and her brother were sent to live in foster care with a caring but not loving family.

Nzinga highlights the deep divisions that exist in the United States, counter to its narrative of unity and freedom. Nzinga's early childhood was deeply affected by the institutional inequities of poverty, addiction, and misogynistic violence. Her mother's story is a common one that upends the stereotypical narrative that men are the providers.

Nzinga's brother called her a "bull-dyke" after discovering her lesbianism. He joined the army and Nzinga was accepted to the recently desegregated University of Texas. After graduating, she moved to a women's commune where she wouldn't have to deal with men like her brother and her rapist. She and her brother never spoke again, not even when their mother died of an overdose. Dominique admires her perseverance in the face of these struggles. She's used to being perceived as strong, but feels she pales in comparison to Nzinga who is a "zami," a "phenomenon." For the first time since she left home, she wants to be cared for. She feels herself falling in love with this stranger.

Along with the abuse she suffered within her own family, Nzinga had to contend with homophobia as well as southern racism both during and after Jim Crow segregation. Her early years were traumatic both in and out of her home. Dominique, awed by her strength, thinks she's phenomenal, a nod to Maya Angelou's Phenomenal Woman, and a "zami" in a nod to Audre Lorde's biomythography. She turns Nzinga into one of her heroes. Dominique's own childhood traumas, namely being forced out on her own at the young age of sixteen, leave her vulnerable to Nzinga's power. Nzinga offers to care for Dominique, who is yearning for that care at any cost and sees Nzinga as a home she never truly had.

Nzinga tells Dominique that her series of blonde girlfriends indicates a self-loathing and internalization of white beauty standards. Dominque remembers that Amma always teased her for this, but without judgement. Dominique is suddenly worried that she's failing to be a Black feminist, an identity she proudly wears. She believes Nzinga will make her a liberated Black woman. They sleep together every night. Dominique raves to Amma about how this is the first time she's truly been in love. Amma invites them over for lunch at Freedomia, and Nzinga agrees so long as there are no white people and only organic, vegan food.

On the one hand, Nzinga points out a pattern in Dominique's life that may have some merit, one that her friends have noticed, and one that is common in a white-supremacist society that portrays white women as the most desirable. On the other hand, Nzinga's incessant scrutinizing of Dominique's life leads her to question her own identity. She suddenly feels inadequate and like her identity as a Black feminist, one that she cultivated through her hard work at the radical Bush Woman Theatre company, is now up for debate. Nzinga is positioning herself as Dominique's liberator and savior, and Dominique's outsized admiration for Nzinga as well as her need to be cared for threaten her autonomy and individuality. It's also clear Nzinga's radical lifestyle has very strict rules governing who she, and by extension Dominique, can eat or associate with—a red flag.

Nzinga stuns everyone at Amma's with her beauty. Amma notices that her presence is so powerful that she diminishes everyone else. She wants Nzinga to prove herself worthy of Dominique. Offended by Nzinga's demands, Amma didn't buy organic food as instructed. Everyone admires Nzinga, who sits at the center of what Amma thinks is an unearned, overly devoted attention. The gathering turns tense when Nzinga declares it's "weird" to hear so many Black women speak with British accents. Amma balks at this implication that their accents make them in-authentically Black, one she's encountered many times before. Dominique, usually opinionated, sits silently at Nzinga's side.

Amma immediately sees through Nzinga's charming façade to her narcissism and need to exert power and absolute superiority. Amma refuses to give in to her demands and is extremely worried about Dominique, whose personality has already noticeably changed under Nzinga's influence. Her radical politics go so far as to undermine the women she claims to represent when she passive-aggressively criticizes the women's accents, as if it's impossible to be both British and Black.

Glaring at Amma, Nzinga warns that there are dangerous women among them. Nzinga tells the women that wearing black socks is symbolic of stepping on their own people, to never use black garbage bags, or step on a black doormat. Amma finds this absurd and can't believe the rest of the women nod along in agreement. Amma challenges Nzinga, and the two argue before Nzinga and Dominique leave. Amma is glad to see them go but worried by Dominique's blind devotion to this woman. Amma hopes the relationship will end, but Dominique, faced with an ultimatum—move or break up—follows Nzinga to America.

Nzinga sees Amma seeing through her, and immediately recognizes her as a threat to exerting total control over Dominique. Her sinister warning starts to put a calculated distance between Dominique and Amma. Amma, who at this point is living at the peak of her radical lifestyle and identity, is shocked by Nzinga's extreme radicalism. When Amma and Nzinga fight, Dominique is stuck in the middle between her best friend and her new lover. In the face of Nzinga's ultimatum, Dominique chooses her over Amma, and leaves her British life and home behind.

Dominique moves with Nzinga to a rural "wimmin's" commune called Spirit Moon. She becomes a strict vegan, radical feminist housebuilder just like Nzinga. They live in a cabin isolated from the rest of the commune. Dominique is enchanted by the surrounding nature and upset with Amma, who tried to convince her not to come. Nzinga tells her that Amma is jealous that she's replaced her as the most important person in Dominique's life. Dominique was tired of running the Bush Woman Theatre company, and Nzinga is the new adventure she yearned for.

With Dominique separated from her home, friends, and community in London, Nzinga can control and change her entirely. Dominique adopts Nzinga's extreme way of life without realizing that Nzinga is in fact forcing this new life and identity on her. Nzinga continues to poison Dominique's opinion of Amma to strain their relationship even further. At this point, Dominique is too enchanted by this new and exciting adventure to notice any of these red flags.

They attend a dinner at Gaia's house, the woman who owns the estate. Inside there are no pictures of men, women artists drone from the record player, and the women are glowing and enthusiastic. Dominique feels she's entered an alternate society, and briefly wonders if it's a cult. Men are strictly forbidden from this divine feminine utopia, and if a woman "goes straight" she's forced to leave. Dominique attracts attention as a Black British woman. She notices that Nzinga sits alone looking angry, monitoring her every move until telling Dominique it's time to leave.

The Spirit Moon commune is meant to be a safe harbor away from the misogyny and violence of men. However, Dominique immediately notices the cracks in its utopic façade. Like Nzinga, the commune operates under extreme and strict rules. Additionally, the way that the other commune members tokenize Dominique for being both Black and British highlights the limits of a predominantly white, feminist community that wants to unite around womanhood without addressing the intersections of gender and race. When Dominique attracts all this attention, Nzinga gets angry because other people threaten her total dominance over Dominique.

On the way back home Nzinga tells Dominique they aren't going to socialize anymore because these white women offer fake friendship but will turn against them. Confused, Dominique asks why they live here if she hates the other women so much, and Nzinga says it's preferable to living among men. Nzinga tells Dominique that she's safe and complete with her, though Dominique was feeling neither unsafe nor incomplete before. Nzinga decides to rename Dominique Sojourner, after Sojourner Truth, despite Dominique's protests. She decides she won't respond to this unwanted new name and starts to worry that maybe Amma was right to tell her not to follow this woman.

Nzinga uses race to strategically separate Dominique from the women on the commune. She knows that Dominique looks up to her as an ideological authority, and will therefore comply, which Dominique does even though there is a voice in the back of her mind that questions Nzinga's claims. Ironically, Nzinga's behavior is becoming more and more misogynistic now that they've moved onto the commune that she claims is their escape from men and the harms of a patriarchal society. Finally, Nzinga quite literally robs Dominique of her identity by forcing her to change her name, ironically naming her after Sojourner Truth whose life cause was freedom. Dominique is starting to see what Amma saw in Nzinga, but now she's too far away to reach out to her friend for help.

Nzinga tells Dominique it's clear that they'll be together forever. Dominique thinks it's too early to declare this. They're only in their 20s, after all. Nzinga tells her about her first partner, Roz. They met on a women's commune in Oregon, but after discovering Roz's alcoholism they got into physical fights, culminating in one that sent Roz to the hospital with a broken bone and head injuries. Nzinga explains that the all-white community blamed and evicted her alone. She moved between women's communes and had a series of relationships that all ended badly until meeting Dominique. Nzinga grips Dominique's head tightly in a "mechanical" embrace, imploring that they never keep secrets from each other. She asks Dominique if she still loves her, and Dominique says more than ever, truly meaning it.

Nzinga is intent on trapping Dominique and controlling her future. The story of her past partner, Roz, foreshadows a dark future for Dominique. When Roz breaks one of Nzinga's strict rules, sobriety, the relationship descends into physical abuse. Nzinga presents the fight as mutual, but it's notably only Roz who suffers serious injuries. Nzinga uses race and the threat of racism to convince Dominique that she was blameless in this situation. Nzinga's "mechanical" embrace of Dominique reveals her absolute, crushing power over her. Escaping that embrace will be hard, if not next to impossible, all on her own. Dominique's love for Nzinga is so powerful that, despite her misgivings, she's still deeply invested in the relationship.

Soon their relationship is plagued by constant arguing. Dominique questions the truth of the story about Roz. She is still enamored with this woman who "rescued" her from London but doesn't know why she puts up with the way she controls her life and mind. Nzinga's expectation that she give up her independence for love reminds Dominique of male chauvinism. Dominique no longer feels like herself and desperately needs to talk to Amma, but Nzinga gets upset when Dominique tries to talk to anyone. She sends Amma letters, but never hears back. When she tells Nzinga that she wants to call her, Nzinga is upset for days, so Dominique never brings it up again.

As conflicts arise, Dominique begins to understand the story about Roz as a warning. She's still in love with the idea of Nzinga as her "rescuer" and caretaker, but is beginning to realize that she's also her warden. Dominique recognizes that she's giving up her life and mind, but lacks the resources to escape. Dominique is beginning to articulate the hypocrisy in Nzinga's behavior. Nzinga professes to hate men while at the same time weaponizing misogyny against Dominique, revealing that women can internalize and assert destructive patriarchal violence against other women. Nzinga can sense that Dominique is coming to these realizations, so she doubles down on keeping Amma out of Dominique's life.

The strenuous eight-hour days building houses are drastically different than what Dominique imagined. Nzinga secures Dominique easier work duties and takes over all household chores. At first, Dominque is happy with this arrangement, but after a while is desperate for something to do. Her life is suddenly reduced to loving and obeying Nzinga. Nzinga criticizes Dominique's "provocative" clothing, blames her when men in town check her out, and forces her to keep her hair buzzed. Dominique must constantly reassure Nzinga that her past, white lovers aren't a threat. Nzinga preaches that only a Black woman can truly love another Black woman. Dominique gives in to her ranting, but Nzinga isn't satisfied. She wants Dominique to change, to accept her reasoning as the truth.

Nzinga's misogyny and abuse further escalate. She forces Dominique into the role of housewife, leaving her trapped in the house where she's totally isolated and completely dependent on Nzinga. She polices Dominique's body and becomes extremely jealous and possessive, worrying about Dominique's past white lovers. Nzinga continues to inundate Dominque with her extreme beliefs about love and race and Dominique gives into her ranting in order to try and restore peace. However, Nzinga can sense Dominique's doubt and insincerity, and this outrages her because she wants total and complete control not just over Dominique's body, but terrifyingly, her thoughts as well.

Dominique has been at Sprit Moon for a year when Amma shows up unannounced. They're thrilled to see each other. Amma's been worried because Dominique never replied to her letters. Dominique is about to explain that she never received any letters when Nzinga comes up from behind and rudely addresses Amma. Nzinga's anger fills the house with tension as she silently cooks dinner. Amma ignores her, immediately questioning Dominique to try and understand what's going on in her life here. Dominique reveals how limited her life has become but insists that everything is perfect this way.

Amma shows up and infiltrates the bubble that Nzinga has created around Dominique. It becomes clear that Nzinga went to great lengths to prevent communication between the two by throwing out or hiding Amma's letters. Nzinga is violently and palpably angry that Amma has arrived and threatens to upend the control she's worked so calculatingly to exert. With Nzinga hovering angrily in the background, Dominique is afraid to confide in even her best friend. Nzinga's presence alone keeps Dominique trapped.

Behind this façade of perfection, Dominique thinks about how much she misses the life of drama and protest she and Amma lived back home. That life feels so far away to her now. She realizes that being cut off from Amma has meant being cut off from her "Number One supporter" who would have questioned the facts of her life with Nzinga. The three women are eating one of Nzinga's tasteless, vegan dinners. When she's finished eating, Nzinga gets up and violently hurls her bowl across the room. She stomps past Amma towards the bedroom, addressing Dominique: "Sojourner, you coming?" Amma asks who Sojourner is, and Dominique silently follows Nzinga.

With the distance between her and Amma temporarily bridged, Dominique realizes how their separation was critical to Nzinga's ability to take complete control over her. Even in Amma's presence, however, Dominique complies in the face of Nzinga's violence. Nzinga continues to erase Dominique's identity every time she calls her Sojourner. It's Sojourner, not Dominique, who follows Nzinga to bed.

The next morning Amma and Dominique have ten minutes alone while Nzinga showers. Amma wants to get away from "the madhouse," but Dominique says a walk would make Nzinga too suspicious. On the porch, Dominique hopes the beautiful view will convince Amma that everything is fine. Predictably, she isn't convinced and instead speaks her mind. She tells her that she and a group of their friends in London are going to launch a rescue mission to get her out from under Nzinga's control.

The fear that Nzinga has instilled in Dominique leaves her unable to break free, even though she knows Amma sees through her façade of happiness, and even when Amma announces her plan to launch the rescue mission. Nzinga's anger and power are stronger than what Dominique and Amma once shared, leaving Dominique unable to open up to her best friend who is there to rescue her.

Dominique defends Nzinga, insisting that she's helping her live a better life and regurgitating her absolutist views. Amma asks Dominique what's happened to her, and Nzinga, having snuck up behind, says "*nothing's* happened." Nzinga pushes herself between Dominique and Amma, who were sitting with arms linked. She starts railing against men, with her arm wrapped tight around Dominique's neck. Amma grabs her bags, announces she's going home, and tells Dominique to come with her. Dominique shakes her head, thinking she doesn't need rescuing, and Nzinga holds her tighter, kissing her on the cheek.

Dominique still believes in the lie that Nzinga is her educator and savior, even though Nzinga's abusive extremism so blatantly contradicts with the Black feminism she claims. Nzinga literally inserts herself between Amma and Dominique, physically dividing them in the same way she's been keeping them divided from afar. Even with Amma there to help her get away immediately, Dominique has too deeply internalized the belief that she doesn't need rescuing, still believing that Nzinga is her rescuer.

Dominique and Nzinga complete their contract at Spirit Moon and have permission to stay in their cabin until they can find more work elsewhere, leaving them with nothing to do but be with each other. Dominique knows she should leave but is so unused to making decisions for herself that she can't imagine making such a significant one. Nzinga is increasingly obsessed with keeping Dominique away from both men and women, convinced they threaten to end their relationship. Nzinga escalates to physical violence and Dominique can neither leave nor fight back. Dominique hears Nzinga's voice inside her head all day and spends most of her days sleeping and staring into space.

Now that they are both trapped in the house, Dominique is under Nzinga's constant surveillance and suffers her abuse without even a brief escape. Nzinga has so broken her down that she doesn't remember how to make her own decisions. While Nzinga's violence keeps Dominique physically trapped in the relationship, her ideological aggression and brainwashing are what keep her emotionally and mentally trapped. Nzinga lives completely inside Dominique. Dominique descends into a deep depression, making it even more impossible for her to take action.

One Saturday morning, Nzinga says she is going to town for the day, which usually means she'll sneak up on Dominique in a few hours. Nzinga leaves and Gaia approaches the house. She tells Dominique that they're worried about her. Dominique insists everything is fine, but Gaia says that everyone knows the truth about Nzinga. Dominique doesn't want to betray Nzinga, but finally admits that she's trapped. Gaia plans to help her escape the following Saturday. Dominique is too embarrassed to return to England, so instead will stay with some of Gaia's friends in West Hollywood.

Gaia and the other women on the commune step in for Dominique. They become the community she needs to finally escape. In betraying Nzinga Dominique is rediscovering how to be true to herself. Dominique has internalized the blame and shame that women often feel when they've been trapped in an abusive relationship. Dominique blames herself and can't face her community back in England as a result, even though they'd welcome her back without judgement. Nzinga's abuse has therefore robbed her of that home and community she once had.

For years after she escapes from Nzinga, Dominique beats herself up for losing three years of her life to her. She is grateful to recover her strong identity. Gaia's friends in California care for her as she suffers through nightmares and struggles to get Nzinga's voice out of her head. Now that she's finally able to choose what to eat, her roommates treat her to a big barbecue, but after eating Nzinga's vegan food for so long she throws up the meats. She and the roommates stay up late exchanging stories. This night spent socializing over wine fills Dominique with energetic joy that starts bringing her back to life.

Dominique struggles with her internalized blame for years, and it takes her as long to build herself back up after being psychologically detached from herself for so long. Her nightmares and the fact that she gets sick when she can finally eat what she wants both represent the extent to which Nzinga was able to completely infiltrate her mind and body. Dominique is finding a new home and community now that she is able to socialize again.

Dominique loves the West Coast and marries a gay man to stay in the U.S. Americans, and especially lesbians, are drawn to her because she's British and beautiful. She stays with Gaia's friends for a couple of years until she can afford to move out. As soon as she's stable, she invites Amma to visit. Amma never rubbed it in that she was right about Nzinga. Dominique starts attending a women's support group for survivors of domestic abuse, a therapeutic outlet where she realizes she sought mothering from Nzinga that growing up—as one of 10 children— she lacked.

Dominique finds a new and welcoming home and community in L.A. that gives her the love, support, and safety she needs to heal. She's recovered enough now to let go of the shame that prevented her from reconnecting with her old friends in London. The support group is likewise a new home and community for Dominique. It's critical in helping her overcome her internalized blame. It's where she comes to understand that her desire to be "rescued" by Nzinga was rooted in that desire to have the caring home she never had growing up. She was in search of someone who could fill that void in her life.

Dominique later hears from Gaia that Nzinga went on a violent rampage after Dominique escaped. The police were called and Nzinga was evicted. Dominique starts a Women's Arts Festival in L.A., and years later meets Nzinga's last girlfriend, Sahara, there. Sahara was likewise trapped in Nzinga's cycle of abuse until Nzinga died after suffering a massive stroke. This news leaves Dominique both relieved and sad. Dominique meets Laverne, her wife, at the support group. They share a deep intellectual bond before becoming lovers, careful to respect each other's free will. They adopt baby twins and marry once it is legal. It's been 30 years since Dominique arrived in the U.S., the place she calls home.

Dominique creates another community within her larger L.A. community with the women's music festival. It becomes an affirming, feminist space that reinforces Dominique's identity as a radical, Black feminist, one that was so central to her understanding of herself and that Nzinga had convinced her she lacked. It's clear that it's Nzinga who lacked a true feminist approach to life. Nzinga's abuse was rooted in the abuse she suffered in her childhood. Those early experiences trapped her in a cycle of violence in her adulthood. She made her lovers suffer the way she did all those years ago. The cycle of violence only ends when Nzinga dies. From a distance of several years, Dominique, who has always been perceptive of life's contradictions and complexities, can feel both relieved that this cycle of abuse has finally ended but also sad because she knows Nzinga's behavior was rooted in the trauma she never resolved. Her new community of domestic violence survivors leads her to Laverne, the woman who becomes the true caring and supportive home she's been searching for ever since she left home at 16.

CHAPTER 2: CAROLE

As Carole Williams walks through Liverpool station, she thinks about people who throw themselves under trains. She remembers the times she stood on the platform contemplating suicide, just one leap away, while appearing normal from the outside. Now, however, she's alive and looking forward. Today she's a "willing orchestral player in the cacophony" of London's rush hour. Carole is a workaholic, constantly immersed in the world of finance. She thinks social media is a waste of time. Instead, she gets stuck online in the endless deluge of news, using it to avoid sleep which is when "bad things happen to little girls who ask for it."

Carole is a master of façade. She's able to maintain a seemingly flawless exterior as a successful woman in the fast-paced and elite world of finance while crumbling on the inside. It's clear she's often been dissatisfied with the drudgery and stress of modern living within an unforgiving capitalist society, but today she's able to blend in and keep up with its demands. Carole's obsession with the news, and particularly bad news, reveals her deep-seated anxiety that's rooted in an experience she suffered as a young girl. The reference to "little girls who ask for it" suggests that she was sexually assaulted, as it's a phrase society often uses to blame women and girls for their own assaults.

Carole is on her way to a meeting with an exceedingly rich client from Hong Kong, worried that he'll read her as the person who's meant to deliver office refreshments rather than run the meeting. She's used to clients looking past her or sexualizing her. She remembers a client who went so far as to mislead her into a lunch in his hotel room, undermining her "hard-won professionalism." Today she is determined to project positivity, but she's flooded with memories of past microaggressions—businesspeople who are surprised that she's "so articulate;" customs officers that pull her aside while her colleagues pass through unbothered.

As one of few Black women in a position of power within the white, male-dominated world of finance, Carole is often mistaken as someone who works to serve the men in charge. This is one among many unfortunately common microaggressions that people of color who work in elite, white supremacist spaces experience, and these experiences complicate simple narratives of meritocracy that suggest hard work and achievement within society's mainstream institutions can alone eradicate inequality. Additionally, like many women in male-dominated workplaces, Carole is sexualized by her colleagues. Her identity as a Black woman specifically compounds that misogynistic sexualization as the hyper-sexualization of Black women has deep, historical roots within white-supremacist societies, dating back to the era of slavery.

Carole is desperate to delete these memories, to be one of the privileged members of society unencumbered with emotional baggage born of experiences like the time she was strip searched in an airport, abroad on another business trip. The physical invasion brought back debilitating memories from the first party she attended at her friend LaTisha's house, memories she'd shut out for years. At 13 Carole wasn't interested in boys or parties. She was the "Super Geek" of her class who loved math, just like her single mother, Bummi. She was enamored with her mother's strength and mathematical intelligence. Carole loved math because she was the best at it and this set her apart from her peers.

Carole, and all other women of color, carry the immense weight of the racism they suffer daily, a weight that white people don't have to carry. This added weight often makes daily life much harder for people of color. Additionally, these microaggressions haunt Carole and often retrigger the sexual trauma she suffered as a young girl. Carole grew up with a smart, strong mother, who instilled those traits in her. The trauma she suffered interrupted this safe and empowering upbringing.

In Carole's flashback to the party, she's drunk for the first time when she spots a college student, Trey, who she thinks is much more attractive than boys her age. She starts dancing for him, her top showing off her newly developed breasts. She's so drunk she falls, and Trey swoops in to help her. He puts his arm around her, tells her that she's hot, and Carole wonders if this is love. He takes her outside, his arm tightening around her head until she feels like she's floating. She hears other voices around her, then is lying naked on the grass. She closes her eyes, suddenly yearning for sleep, but when she opens them again discovers she's been blindfolded. Her body is taken away from her as she's sexually assaulted. In pain, she thinks of her favorite number until it stops. Then the boys are "gone and so was she."

Carole is young and innocent, and Trey, much older, picks up on that vulnerability. Carole, who has been relatively sheltered so far, gets swept up in the excitement that comes with receiving male attention for the first time. Naively, she thinks she might even be in love with Trey, the first boy who has really ever noticed her. His attention gives her a brief sense of power that immediately dissipates once they step outside the party. His tight hand around her head leaves her feeling like she is floating, literally separating her further from her body, which already feels out of her own control because she's so drunk. Carole dissociates during her sexual assault, detaching from her body completely in order to survive the horrific trauma. She tries to retreat into her favorite number, into math, which is a steady, comforting constant in her life. When the assault is over and the boys leave, they take who Carole was before the assault with them. Her very self and identity have been stolen.

Carole never tells anyone about the assault. She thinks it was her fault for wearing sexy clothes. She sinks into depression, losing her passion for learning, until exactly one year later she's overcome with motivation to escape poverty, the projects, and the futures she imagines will trap her peers: low-paying jobs, pregnancy, single-motherhood. She wants to prove her teachers wrong, especially Mrs. King, the teacher who'd once praised Carole for her intelligence but had given up on her once she lost her passion to depression.

Patriarchal society commonly blames women for their own assaults, suggesting that it's their fault for being out late or dressed a particular way. Carole has internalized these beliefs. Her depression threatens her once bright future until one day her desire to achieve upward mobility reignites and supersedes her depression. It's in this moment that Carole decides to reform the system from the inside. She is going to pursue success within mainstream society not only to avoid being trapped in the cycle of poverty, but to prove everyone wrong.

Mrs. King is old and has a reputation for being strict. However, Carole knows she is the best person to ask for help. Risking reproach, she asks Mrs. King for advice and is surprised when she agrees to help— so long as Carole adheres to strict rules, among them to stop skipping school and to change her social circle. Mrs. King harasses her for the next four years, for things as incidental as laughing too loud or walking too fast. When Carole earns an interview at Oxford, the admissions tutor is especially impressed by her achievements given the subpar conditions at her high school. When Carole is accepted to Oxford, Mrs. King takes all the credit. At an end of year assembly she makes a speech about her dedication to Carole, rather than letting Carole shine.

Although Mrs. King is Black herself, she sets Carole down the path of assimilation, revealing that assimilation is not only imposed by white people, but by people of color who themselves have assimilated and believe in it. This assimilation requires a separation from her friends, the people who were once her community, but who are seen as bad influences who will interfere with Carole's ability to conform and assimilate for success. Mrs. King polices Carole's behavior to make sure how she comports herself adheres to white, middle-class expectations. When Carole gets accepted to Oxford, Mrs. King makes it all about her. She wants to be known as Carole's savior, and this problematic desire for recognition undermines Carole's achievement and her empowerment.

Carole arrives at Oxford, relieved Bummi couldn't drop her off because she'd come in a colorful Nigerian outfit looking like an embarrassing, "mad African mother." There are very few brown people at Oxford, and Carole stands out as the darkest. Out of place among her privileged peers, she withdraws into herself feeling worthless and invisible. When she overhears a student call her "ghetto" she wants to speak up for herself but instead starts questioning if she'd heard correctly. Campus security eyes her with suspicion and a classmate assumes she sells drugs.

Carole wants to keep her Nigerian roots separate from her new life at Oxford because she knows this will make assimilation easier. Assimilation is a hard task here because she stands out not only among her predominantly white classmates, but the other students of color as well, due to the colorism that Carole is subject to as someone with darker skin. As a Black woman on this white supremacist campus, Carole is both hyper-visible and invisible. Her race makes her stand out and when people notice her they automatically stereotype her. At the same time she feels invisible, ignored, and overlooked by her privileged classmates whose lives don't have room for someone like her.

Home on break, Carole tells Bummi she doesn't want to return to Oxford because she doesn't belong. Her mother tells her she must overcome these early setbacks to ascend to the heights that Black women like Oprah, Diane Abbot, and Valerie Amos have achieved. She tells her that she didn't come to the U.K. so Carole could give up the opportunities she sacrificed so much for. She tells her that she has to go back to school and find her people, even if they end up being white people. That Oxford is a battle, and it's her "British birthright" to fight them "as a true Nigerian."

Bummi dreams of a better life for her child and wants her to take full advantage of the opportunities Oxford has to offer. Like many immigrant parents, she highlights the sacrifice and suffering she endured for Carole's sake. Carole, like many second generation children, is left feeling guilty. To pay her mother back she herself must return to Oxford and endure her own suffering. Bummi references three Black women who have achieved mainstream success, and uses their stories to convince Carole that she can work her way down that path to success, too. Bummi wants Carole to claim her British birthright, which is her hard-earned place at Oxford, while fighting to survive and thrive in that space as a Nigerian. Bummi still believes it is possible for Carole to balance her identities as both a Brit and a Nigerian.

Carole returns to Oxford ready to fight and ready to forge connections. She surprises herself when she makes friends and gets a boyfriend named Marcus. He's a white Kenyan with "a thing for black girls," which Carole doesn't mind because she is so happy to be desired. She keeps her relationship a secret from her mom who wants her to marry a Nigerian. Carole was scared of men after her assault so is especially surprised that she was able to enter a romantic and sexual relationship with him. Marcus grants her social credit and she loves the way he proudly shows her off and treats her to special dates.

Carole returns more determined than ever to successfully assimilate into her new environment. It's the only way forward she sees if she wants to escape her misery and isolation. Although Carole has never worked through her trauma from her assault, and so is still very fearful of men, she's happy to be desired, treated, and showed off by Marcus. Because she is so unused to being desired, she overlooks the way Marcus fetishizes her Blackness.

From her new friends Carole learns to change her speech patterns. "Who was you talking to?" becomes "to whom were you speaking?" She eats what they eat, discovering foods like sushi, asparagus, and brioche. She doesn't want to lose herself entirely but wants to be a little more like them. She gets rid of her long nails that make grabbing things difficult and her weaves that irritate her scalp. Ridding herself of these feels freeing. She straightens her hair, and when Marcus tells her he likes it better natural, she replies that she'll never get a job with natural hair. Carole visits her wealthy classmates' homes and learns what life and leisure in the upper classes looks like.

Although Carole doesn't want to lose herself completely, she's shedding pieces of her identity that are seen as stereotypically Black. She stops speaking Black vernacular English and assimilates to what society deems "proper" or "correct" English. She likewise changes her appearance. While some of those changes seem to affirm and free her, others, namely choosing to straighten her hair, she makes because she knows they'll help her succeed in a white supremacist world. Black women are often policed in the workplace for wearing their hair in certain styles. Carole's decision is significant because hair is often a symbol of self-expression and pride for Black women. She feels forced to trade that piece of who she is in order to find mainstream success. Becoming successful for her means being forced to give up pieces of her Black identity.

Jolted from her flashback, Carole exits Liverpool station, heading towards the bank where she works. She thinks of Freddy still asleep at home. Carole is an avid runner, and she runs to escape drowning in the memory of her rape at 13, for which she'd blamed herself for too long. Carole gets to work, a place where she has to dress in heels, where she relies on her morning mantra to power her through: "*I am highly presentable, likeable, clubbable, relatable, promotable and successful.*" Carole thinks about how much she loves dancing to Fela Kuti's polyrhythmic and political music. When she dances, she leaves her body and it becomes hers alone with no one watching or judging. She feels free.

Although she no longer blames herself, Carole's sexual assault still haunts and threatens to drown her. Carole can't escape the assault because she can't escape her body. It's only when she's dancing that she can temporarily leave the body that, to her, has been scarred and tainted since that day. At work, as she knew all those years ago when she straightened her hair in university, Carole has to put on a costume in order to fit in and succeed in this patriarchal, elite society. Her mantra is a way of talking herself out of her imposter syndrome.

Carole walks into the building where she joins her boss, Brian, on the elevator. She remembers going out for drinks with him her first year at the bank, and his long-winded monologue about how he worked his way up to success after growing up in a poor family. Brian was going to get Carole, a meticulous worker, quickly promoted to Associate because he believes meritocracy is a myth in banking. He told her that the days of women having to sleep with their superiors to advance are long gone. He got drunker and eventually propositioned Carole, telling her that he has room for a third woman in his life.

The same type of sexual violence Carole experienced at 13 follows her into adulthood at the bank when Brian propositions her. Like most women, Carole has to contend with sexual harassment in her workplace. Additionally, Brian admitting that meritocracy is a myth in elite banking represents the myth of meritocracy on a larger scale. The white men in power in society, like Brian, perpetuate false narratives of meritocracy that suggest society is equal, as long as people work hard enough. This myth of meritocracy fuels immigrants' hopes and dreams, and especially impacts second-generation children of immigrants like Carole, who grow up under intense pressure to work hard and make good on their parents' sacrifices. But just like Brian, the rich, white, and powerful know that meritocracy is a myth for all but the few like Carole who give up so much of themselves in order to succeed.

In the elevator, Carole and Brian say polite hellos. She can tell he still wants her, but she was still quickly promoted to Associate even though she turned down his advances. Now, she's a Vice President, something her mom is incredibly proud of. She stares out the giant glass windows of the office, studying the Millennium Bridge and the pedestrians crossing it immersed in their phones more than the world around them. She thinks about how life is all about posting online now. She thinks people will be cyborgs one day, easily controlled so that men won't commit terrible acts of rape so girls won't have to live feeling that it's their fault.

Perhaps because he fears Carole will expose him in a society that increasingly calls men out for harassment in the workplace, Brian promotes Carole. Against all odds and in the face of the many challenges that her intersectional identity as a Black, second-generation woman presents, Carole has made it to a position of power typically reserved for white men. She's reforming society's institutions from within and is making English society more diverse and equitable. Her success makes her first-generation mother incredibly proud. She's lived up to Bummi's expectations and repaid her for her sacrifices. Carole ruminates on the artificiality of human life and connection in the modern era. But rather than a fearful foreboding of a dystopian future, Carole hopes that technology can become more powerful than men. For Carole, the prospect of a future society controlled by cyborgs is better than the current one controlled by abusive and misogynistic men.

Carole sees a plane flying towards the airport over the projects where she grew up. The plane makes Carole wonder what happened to LaTisha, who she hasn't see since she was in high school. She marvels at how they'd once been such good friends and assumes LaTisha must be a "babymother" or in a gang. Carole's friends from college are all high achieving professionals like her, and she doesn't see them often. She enjoys a few hobbies. She gazes out at the Tate art museum, thinking about the vast imagination of artists and doubting she has any imagination herself.

From a great height and distance, Carole looks down, both physically and metaphorically, on the projects where she grew up alongside LaTisha. Carole has separated herself from her old home and identity so completely that she now views LaTisha through the same stereotypical lenses that her classmates at Oxford once viewed her through. Her own internalized racism comes out in the way she looks down on and dismisses LaTisha. The art museum reveals that Carole gave up her ability to imagine and dream in order to pursue the rigid and limited path of assimilation and mainstream success. As the second-generation child of immigrants desperate to escape poverty, this is yet another sacrifice she's made.

Carole looks out at the **National** Theater, where a play about Black lesbian warriors is premiering. Freddy bought tickets, joking that it'll inspire her to have a threesome. She laughs at the joke, enamored with his humor and the way he intuits and respects all her needs. Freddy is one of the two boyfriends she's had. She's never dated a Black man, not because she didn't want to, but because they weren't interested in her. There weren't many at her university, and the ones there didn't go for girls as dark as her. She doesn't blame them because she sees it as part of what they have to do to survive in a world that views them as a threat.

Carole's experiences reveal the ways in which race complicates love and romance in white supremacist society. While her mother expected her to date Black, specifically Nigerian, men, Carole has spent most of her adulthood in predominantly white spaces, so didn't have the opportunity to meet many potential Black partners. She found that colorism rendered her undesirable in the eyes of the few Black men that attended Oxford with her. She understands that their colorism is rooted in their own internalized racism and struggle to succeed in a white supremacist world. Just as she felt she had no choice but to surrender pieces of her Black identity in order to assimilate, she understands that they too are trying to distance themselves from their Blackness, and that dating her would interfere with that objective.

Carole fell in love with Freddy fast. He grew up very wealthy and so was fascinated with Carole's impoverished and difficult upbringing. He admired how she'd overcome so many obstacles to get where she is now. Freddy made it to where he is now, a corporate position, through his family's wealth and connections. Carole lived with Bummi after college to save money, then moved into Freddy's house once they were engaged. He took on the household duties so that she could pursue her career. His parents, who wanted him to marry someone with an elite lineage like theirs, were shocked when he announced his engagement to Carole.

Freddy lived his entire life in rich, white, privileged spaces. Getting to know Carole is the first time he's getting to know the world that exists outside of his own privileged bubble. Carole and Freddy's journey to the point in time when their lives intersected were polar opposites. Carole worked hard and sacrificed so much of herself to achieve what Freddy was born into. Freddy strays from conventional gender roles in order to help her along on her arduous path to elite success. Freddy's parents' disappointment highlights how racism shows up in and complicates interracial relationships.

CHAPTER 2: BUMMI

When Carole comes home from her first semester at Oxford in tears, begging not to go back, Bummi insists that she return, not yet knowing how dramatically Oxford will change her. Soon her voice loses its Nigerian power, her body language changes, she looks down on their apartment, and she starts buying expensive clothes. Eventually, she stops coming home at all, spending holidays at a friend's country estate instead. Bummi sobs at Carole's graduation and wishes Augustine, Carole's father, were there to see. Bummi hopes Carole will embrace her Nigerian culture, will eat with her hands again instead of looking at her mom like "a savage from the jungle" for doing so.

As a first-generation immigrant, Bummi has sacrificed so much so that Carole could have access to better opportunities in life. An elite university like Oxford is the pinnacle of opportunity and upward mobility, so Bummi won't let her give it up. Simultaneously, Bummi expects Carole to embrace and preserve their Nigerian culture. What she doesn't anticipate is that balancing those two identities is often impossible for second-generation children of immigrants. Bummi cries at Carole's graduation both because she's proud of her successes but also because she's mourning the fact that this degree cost Carole her Nigerian culture and identity. She holds out hope that Carole will reclaim them once she leaves university. However, Carole has so completely separated herself from her culture that she judges her mother for eating with her hands. She's internalized the racism of the white society around her.

Carole moves back in with Bummi in London. She hasn't brought home any boyfriends, and Bummi reminds her how important it is to get a good job and a Nigerian husband. Carole goes out partying and Bummi is worried she's sleeping around like "tarty English girls." Carole quickly finds her respectable job at the bank, and Bummi finds three eligible Nigerian men that Carole refuses to meet. Bummi warns that past 30 she'll be too old to find someone. Despite Carole's partying, she and Bummi get along well for those few years after graduation, until one day Carole announces she's engaged to a white man, Freddy.

Despite Bummi's hopes that returning home from college will also mean Carole returns to her Nigerian culture, the divide between first-generation mother and second-generation child persists. Bummi's understanding of gender roles is more traditional than Carole's. Carole lives up to her mother's expectations by getting a respectable and well-paying job. She achieves the upward mobility that immigrant parents want for their children. On the other hand, however, Carole defies Bummi's expectations that she marry a Nigerian man by getting engaged to a white man.

Bummi is furious and asks Carole why she's spitting on her father's life, her people, and bringing shame upon the family. She wishes Augustine was alive to convince Carole otherwise, and wonders if Carole would have turned out different if she hadn't had to raise her alone in the U.K. She feels as helpless as she did when Carole sank into her deep depression at 13. She remembers how glad she was when Carole reemerged as the girl with good grades who got into the "famous university for rich people." Bummi was so proud that she made three framed copies of her acceptance letter. This was before Bummi realized that Carole's going to Oxford meant turning her back on her culture.

For Bummi, getting engaged to a white man is a betrayal of Carole's Nigerian identity, heritage, and culture. She betrays her people by siding with their oppressors. Bummi worries that Carole's lack of a father figure is what led her to this decision. Perhaps if she'd grown up with her strong, Nigerian father figure, then she would have wanted the same for herself in a husband. In part, Bummi blames herself for encouraging Carole to pursue mainstream success within English society by going to Oxford. The three framed acceptance letters represent the overwhelming pride Bummi felt when Carole achieved what every immigrant parent dreams of. However, she didn't realize that dream came at the cost of the culture that Bummi holds so dear. In just one generation their Nigerian identity and culture has been lost to assimilation and whiteness.

In her anger, Bummi has cornered Carole in the kitchen. She trades her anger for concern, explaining that marrying a white man means losing her culture. She's Nigerian above all else and there's no use in living a successful life in England if she loses her identity. Carole remains unmoved, so Bummi decides to ignore her. That night, when Carole expects that, as always, they'll cook dinner together, Bummi's thrown out all their food. Bummi ignores Carole for almost three months, afraid of what will come out of her mouth if she speaks. She doesn't want to lose Carole, the only person left in her life whom she loves. She breaks her silence on the day that Carole announces that she's moving in with Freddy.

Bummi realizes that their Nigerian identity matters more than success in a white supremacist, English society. Material success seems arbitrary compared to the spiritual satisfaction that comes from maintaining a strong identity and connection to one's ancestors. Bummi's anger is so fierce that she retreats into silence, temporarily cutting Carole out of her life to ultimately salvage the relationship in the long run. She lost her husband to England, after he worked himself to death just to survive as a first-generation immigrant. Now she's lost her daughter to her success that she sacrificed so much for. It's a biting irony.

Bummi gestures to the rice she's sifting through and tells Carole that English people give immigrants like her dirty looks for buying affordable food from immigrant-owned stores rather than fancy packages from overpriced supermarkets. The point, she explains, is that no matter how "high and mighty" or "English-English" she pretends to be, no matter how "English-English" her husband, Carole is forever Nigerian. Bummi threatens to beat her if she ever refers to her as "Mother" again, a post-Oxford change. She's her mama and will be forever. Carole is sobbing, happy that Bummi is finally speaking to her again. When Carole leaves for work Bummi realizes that soon Carole will "belong completely to them."

Bummi's anger stems from the way that immigrants are treated by white people in England. She's endured so much racism and discrimination from white people that she can't understand why Carole would marry into a rich white family that no doubt are the kind of people that judge immigrants for both their class status and their race. Bummi understands that no matter how successful a Black person may be within English society, white people will still see their Blackness first above all else, and with it will attach stereotypes, microaggressions, and discrimination. Carole adopting English language and calling Bummi "mother" represents how English society and the pressure to assimilate into white culture threatens to destroy the relationships between first-generation parents and their second-generation children. Bummi realizes that Carole marrying a white man means she's lost her completely to white, Western society.

Bummi thinks back on her own childhood. She and her mother, Iyatunde, ran from their home in the Niger Delta after her father, Moses, was killed while illegally refining diesel. This was the only option for people living in the Delta, where big oil companies destroy the land that produces profits and fuels the world. Moses's family takes his farmland after his death, claiming that Iyatunde wasn't his legal wife and that they don't want to see her again. They abandon their hut and go to live with Bummi's grandparents. Iyatunde's father wants to marry Bummi off as soon as she hits puberty, but Iyatunde doesn't want this traditional life for her daughter.

Bummi thinks back on her childhood and the suffering she endured to get to the point where she is in life, the life that granted Carole the opportunities to be successful but ultimately led to her assimilation. Bummi's oppression at the hands of white supremacist society started long before she migrated to England. Bummi's father was killed by the white man's greed that has destroyed the Niger Delta in order to reap immense profits and fuel the daily lives of white Westerners in countries that import the Delta's oil. In addition to enduring the effects of white supremacy's global reach, Bummi had to contend with sexism in her early life. Like her mother, Bummi was expected to marry young, but her mother fights back and disrupts this cycle of tradition that keeps women beholden to men.

The two sneak away early one morning, making a treacherous journey across burning oilfields to Lagos, where they settle in Makoko, a floating slum. They share a bamboo hut on stilts and a canoe with another family. Iyatunde begs for work around Lagos, and Bummi follows, embarrassed. Finally, she finds work at a sawmill. She funds Bummi's education, determined that her daughter will one day have a good job and an educated husband. When Bummi is 15, her mother dies in an accident at the mill.

There are clear parallels between Iyatunde and Bummi's mother-daughter relationship and later Bummi and Carole's mother-daughter relationship. Both Iyatunde and Bummi moved to new places where they were forced to work hard and live in poverty to give their daughters a chance at a better life. Iyatunde wanted Bummi to have an education and a husband, just like Bummi encouraged Carole to stay at Oxford and insisted she marry a Nigerian man. Ultimately, Iyatunde died in order to give Bummi greater opportunities in life, just as Augustine died for Carole and Bummi sacrificed so much.

Bummi survives alone in Lagos until a distant cousin, Aunty Ekio, offers to take her in and fund her schooling in exchange for housework and nannying. Bummi arrives at Aunty Ekio's expecting a warm family greeting, and instead is told to be grateful for her Aunty's offer. Aunty Ekio's house is the first concrete house Bummi's ever been in, and Aunty lives a life of luxury and leisure. She bosses Bummi around, commanding her to complete tasks as minor as changing the TV channel. Despite her aunt's harshness, Bummi has nightmares about losing this home, too. She enrolls in university to study mathematics, but dozes off in classes, exhausted after waiting on her aunt all day.

When Bummi moves in with her aunt, she's thrown into a new and unfamiliar realm of the upper-class, just like Carole experienced when she arrived at Oxford. Bummi's new home is inhospitable, too, but for vastly different reasons. Bummi puts up with her aunt's incessant demands because she has no other home to turn to. Since both her father and mother's deaths, Bummi has been continuously displaced, without a stable home and community.

One day a teaching assistant, Augustine Williams, wakes her up, calls her pretty, and invites her to lunch. They quickly fall in love. Unlike other university boys, Augustine respects Bummi's body and waits a long time to kiss her. Augustine completes Bummi and her loneliness fades. Augustine grew up in a progressive family with educated and well-off parents. When he proposes to Bummi, his parents accept her wholeheartedly regardless of the fact that she has no family or dowry. Unable to find work in Nigeria, even with his PhD in economics, Augustine dreams of moving to England where he envisions a successful future as a businessman.

Bummi describes Augustine as completing her because he gives her the home that she has lacked since her parents died. Augustine's progressive background has honed his feminist outlook on love and dating. Bummi's mother's sacrifice has paid off. She's both in college and with an educated man who respects her autonomy as a woman. Although both Bummi and Augustine are highly educated, they have to leave Nigeria to find work, highlighting the economic realities and lack of opportunities in developing, post-colonial countries. So, as soon as Bummi's found a home in Augustine, she is forced to leave another home, her native Nigeria. Augustine believes that England is a land of opportunity where an educated man like him will be able to succeed.

Bummi and Augustine immigrate to the U.K. where he's unable to find work and forced to drive a taxi. He dreams of saving money to open an import-export business, but that dream is quickly crushed when the Nigerian economy nosedives and he has to send money home. Both Bummi and Augustine quickly see through the façade of meritocracy in England. Augustine puts up with passengers that look down on him, while people view Bummi as a cleaner, not an educated woman. Her name, nationality, and "Third World" degree leave her unemployable, and the constant stream of job rejections she suffers is why her daughter, Carole, doesn't even have a Nigerian middle name.

Bummi and Augustine arrive in the U.K. and discover what many highly educated immigrants do upon arrival: their degrees are deemed worthless because they're from a university in a developing nation. British people see them as two Black immigrants meant to work for the English, not alongside them. Augustine's dreams come crashing down as he realizes that meritocracy and the narrative that immigrants can succeed so long as they work hard are just myths. Like many immigrants, Augustine has to send money back home to his family, where his British pounds are highly valuable. Forced into service jobs, they work hard to try and make that myth a reality for their second-generation daughter. Part of striving to make that myth reality is already setting Carole down the path of assimilation by giving her an English name. Surrendering pieces of their culture becomes a survival mechanism. Now there's one less way for Carole to be discriminated against.

Augustine's mother reminds him to be a good father. He's affectionate and loving rather than authoritarian and emotionless. Bummi loves how Augustine fathers Carole, and is heartbroken when he hopes that Carole will make it in the U.K. even if they can't. Both Bummi and Augustine work hard, until Augustine works himself to death, suffering a heart attack while driving his cab on New Year's Day. When Bummi sees Augustine laid out in his casket she loses her faith. Without Augustine and without God she's completely alone. In the face of her new life as a single mother, Bummi is determined to open her own cleaning company.

Augustine defies stereotypes of men as distant and disengaged father figures. His feminist identity extends to his parenting. Despite all that has happened since they came to the U.K., Augustine still holds out hope that they can make the myth of meritocracy real for Carole. This optimism breaks Bummi's heart because she feels this dream is too far out of reach. Augustine's death represents the extreme sacrifices immigrants make for their children as well as the terrible labor conditions immigrants are forced to endure just to survive in their new countries. His death directly parallels Iyatunde's. He dies while working to give his daughter more opportunities in life. Augustine's death, so much like her mother's, breaks Bummi but at the same time inspires her to make Augustine's dream of owning a business in the U.K. come true.

Bummi dreams of employing immigrant women from all over the world. She dreams that they'll become the "Worldwide Army of Women Cleaners" and will fight the oil companies out of Nigeria, and restore the Delta where her father will fish, her mother will take it easy, and Augustine is a Green Finance Economist. Bummi needs money to make her dream into a reality, and the only person she knows with money is Bishop Aderami Obi. Obi objectifies and harasses the women in his congregation, including Bummi after Augustine dies. Bummi feels it's her right to ask him for a loan after years of donating to the church, a scheme that Bummi knew filled Obi's pockets.

Bummi's cleaning company has a feminist mission that parallels both Amma and Dominique's Bush Woman Theatre Company as well as The Last Amazon of Dahomey. *Like the women warriors of Dahomey, Bummi envisions an army of women who will defend and restore her native Nigeria, ridding it of the destruction wrought by the neo-colonial oil business. Like the Bush Woman Theatre Company, Bummi dreams of giving jobs to brown, immigrant women overlooked and discriminated against in white British society. The starting costs of opening a business are what stand in the way of this dream. Bummi must turn to Bishop Obi who, although both Black and an immigrant himself, still has more power than Bummi because he has male privilege in a patriarchal society.*

Bummi and Obi meet to discuss the loan. She has sex with him, pretending to enjoy it, and afterwards he gives her an envelope of cash that she will pay back with low interests over two years. This is her first transaction as a businesswoman. At home that night she runs a bath with salts, and bathes for hours until she's sufficiently clean of Obi. She never tells anyone what she's done to provide for herself and her daughter. When she closes her eyes, she's transported back to that moment with Obi. She feels his hot breath on her body as he calls her a whore and "spear[s] the most sacred part of her body."

Bummi uses the only asset she has to exchange with Bishop Obi for a loan. She compromises her body for her dream as well as for Carole, again highlighting the extreme lengths immigrant parents go to for their children. Bummi is traumatized by her sexual encounter with Obi. She cleanses her body to try and reclaim it from his degradation.


BW Cleaning Services International's first client is Penelope Halifax, who lives in an old house with servants' quarters in the attic, a vestige from a time when people could afford more than a weekly cleaner. Penelope's wealth is greater than any Bummi has ever seen. Penelope is a retired teacher who used to work at Carole's school, and when Bummi goes to share this fact with her, Penelope tells her she's meant to work, not socialize. She tells her to never open any drawers, cupboards, pockets, or bags. Bummi bites her tongue, suppressing her desire to cuss Penelope out. Penelope follows Bummi around the house divulging stories about her sexist ex-husbands. Bummi feels bad for Penelope, clearly lonely without her children, as she cleans up her dozens of empty wine bottles.

Penelope's servant's quarters highlights how society hasn't progressed nearly as far as mainstream narratives claim. Although the circumstances and language have changed, Black people are still forced into positions of service to white people. Bummi is stunned by Penelope's wealth, just as Carole will be stunned by her classmates' wealth years later at Oxford. Penelope stereotypes Bummi, associating her Blackness with criminality and assuming that she'll steal from her drawers and bags. Bummi is forced to bite her tongue because defending herself against this gross discrimination could cost her her business. Penelope maintains her white supremacy by silencing Bummi, but then quickly breaks her own rule to unload her emotional baggage on Bummi. This follows a pattern of white women demanding emotional labor of Black women. Penelope complains about her sexist husbands while simultaneously oppressing a Black woman. This situates Penelope within a long history of white feminists oppressing and silencing Black women, whose racism blinds them from seeing their intersecting oppressions. Bummi, Carole, and Penelope's stories surprisingly intersect through Carole's school.

Bummi accrues regular clients and has 10 immigrant woman employees by the time Carole starts working at the bank. Sister Omofe is her best employee. Omofe is a single mother after her husband returned to Nigeria to live with his second wife, and she pledges to poison him if he returns to the U.K. Omofe laments that her boys are getting into trouble without their father around to discipline them. She can't control them and they're getting in trouble with the law, headed, she thinks, to early deaths by a gangland shootout or life in prison. Bummi tells her to send them back to Nigeria to attend boarding school, and Omofe does.

Bummi and Carole both have successful careers. In their own ways each has achieved what Augustine always dreamed of. Bummi and Omofe are drawn together as single, immigrant mothers. Like many children who have been abandoned by a father figure, Omofe's sons are struggling emotionally. Omofe recognizes that they're at risk of being trapped by the fates that commonly befall Black men in white supremacist societies. White society manufactures the conditions that sentence Black men to death or life in prison. England has failed to deliver on the promise of a better life for her second-generation children, so Omofe sends them back home where they'll be free of the racism that condemns them and threatens their freedom.


Now both Bummi and Omofe are alone, and Bummi finds herself falling in love with her. What should make her feel bad just makes her feel right. One night Bummi sleeps over at Omofe's. Omofe emerges from the shower wrapped in a towel and invites Bummi to sleep in her bed before dropping her towel and climbing in bed. Bummi joins her, and when they have sex Omofe's body feels like home. Bummi stays at Omofe's as often as she can, realizing that she's satisfying a hunger unsatiated since Augustine's death. She never found another husband because Augustine was irreplaceable, but Omofe is different because she's a woman.

Bummi, who has felt without a home since Augustine's death, finds a new home in Omofe. Bummi understands her bisexuality as a way of filling a void that's existed in her life since Augustine's death without betraying her love for him.

When Omofe's children return from Nigeria, she and Bummi have to meet at Bummi's place, but Bummi feels ashamed sleeping with a woman in the apartment she'd shared with Carole and Augustine. She cuts Omofe off without explanation, and eventually Omofe moves on to another cleaning company and shows up at church with Sister Moto. Bummi sits behind them and feels the intimacy that radiates between them, wondering if other churchgoers noticed the same between her and Omofe. She's surprised that she's so upset about Omofe moving on so quickly.

Bummi is able to set aside her internalized homophobia when her bisexuality exists outside of the home and life she once shared with Carole and Augustine. But when she's forced to merge these two homes together, she's overcome with shame. In her mind, these two lives cannot coexist. Bummi loses another home, this time not to death but to the suffocating norms of society. The jealousy and sadness she feels when she witnesses the intimacy between Omofe and her new partner reveals how much she truly loved this woman.

Soon Bummi starts a relationship with Kofi, a retired Ghanian who starts working for her to make extra money. For their first date he takes her to the Ritzy for a Ghanian fusion night. Bummi is unused to seeing people of different races socialize, and people being openly gay, but notices Kofi is comfortable. She loves the way Kofi looks at her. When he asks her about her life she simply shrugs, and he assures her that he'll listen when she's ready to talk. Kofi continues to take her out, cooks for her, which she loves, and tells her that he'd like to enter a sexual relationship with her after a respectable amount of time has passed.

Kofi offers Bummi another home. He is loving and supportive, and, unlike Bishop Obi, respectful of Bummi and her body. His progressiveness leaves Bummi in awe, but also suggests he might not be upset if he were to ever find out about her past with Sister Omofe.

Bummi asks herself if he is what she wants. She questions if she should be with a Ghanian man. She decides that Kofi is what is being offered to her. Carole approves of him and suggests it's time for Bummi to remove her wedding ring, which takes fifteen minutes of scrubbing with dish soap. He takes her on vacation and she opens up to him about her early life. Kofi offers to visit her hometown with her, but Bummi tells him she can't face the harsh realities that await her there. She tells him that she's terrified he'll die, just like everyone else in her life.

Bummi is unsure if she should be with a Ghanian, as she's breaking her own conviction that Nigerians should be in relationships with other Nigerians. She accepts Kofi because he's what's being offered to her in this life that has taken so much from her. These losses haunt her, so she fears the worst at all times. She fears that she'll lose Kofi and the new home he provides her, too. That it's so hard for Bummi to remove her wedding ring represents how hard it is for her to let go of Augustine, the truest love of her life and her greatest loss. Bummi hasn't been back to Nigeria since she left all those years ago, and she's too traumatized to return to the country that was her first home and is filled with too many heartbreaks. For Bummi, as for many immigrants, returning home is impossible.

Bummi tells Kofi about Carole and Freddy. She explains how Carole's marriage to Freddy will wipe out their "pure Nigerian family line" in just two generations because Carole and Freddy's children will be mixed, then their grandchildren will look white. She questions if this is what they came to England for. When Bummi finally meets Freddy she is ready to hate him. Freddy is kind and cheerful, watches Nollywood movies with Bummi, loves Nigerian food so much that Carole has started eating it again, and overall makes Carole a happier person.

Bummi fears that Carole's marriage to Freddy threatens the Nigerian culture that she's tried so hard to preserve in her adopted home. These fears are justified. Carole and Freddy's interracial relationship represents, on a small scale, the ways in which Western, white-supremacist society erases the cultural and racial identity of immigrants through assimilation, which often feels like the only path forward for second-generation children. Bummi assumes the worst-case scenario, without considering that Carole and Freddy's mixed children may end up with other people of color, that the possibilities for love and identity in a more modern, progressive England are endless. Freddy complicates Bummi's narrative by bringing Carole back to her Nigerian culture through his enthusiasm, suggesting that he'll likewise make an effort to help their future children connect with their Nigerian identities.

Bummi, Carole, Freddy, and his parents meet for dinner, and Bummi looks forward to the occasion. Freddy explains that while his parents warmed up to Carole after they saw how "classy, well-spoken, and successful" she is, they are still "old-fashioned snobs." Throughout the dinner, Freddy's father looks uncomfortable and Freddy's mother condescendingly explains what hors d'oeuvres are while looking at Bummi like "she was a famine victim." Carole wears a fake smile the whole time. Bummi hopes the wedding will be the next and last time she has to see them and is relieved when Freddy and Carole are married in a registry office.

Freddy's parents accept Carole only because she defies the stereotypes they've internalized about Black people, the same stereotypes that Carole's teachers imposed on her and her classmates all those years ago. "Old-fashioned" functions here as a euphemism for racist, and couching that condemnation in less harsh language functions to shield both them and Freddy from confronting and challenging their biases. Freddy's parents impose their stereotypical understandings and imaginings of Africa on Bummi, assuming that she's ignorant and regarding her with pity. Carole and Bummi both suffer through the encounter, highlighting how people of color in interracial relationships must shoulder microaggressions and racism from withing their new homes and extended families, while the white people involved are not asked to change or correct their behaviors and assumptions.

Bummi lies sunning in the garden while Kofi is in the house cooking dinner. Like Carole and Freddy, they married in a registry office. Bummi misses Omofe more than ever and wishes she could have both her and Kofi, like how men are allowed to have multiple wives. Bummi hears Omofe works in Moto's salon, and that they may even live together. Freddy and Carole come over to Bummi and Kofi's house on Sundays bearing gifts. Freddy calls Bummi "Mum." Sometimes Kofi's children and grandchildren come, too. She sits back, sipping the lemonade Kofi's made her, thinking: "see me now, Mama, see me now."

Although Bummi is content with her new life, she years for an unconventional romantic relationship, akin to the polyamorous triad that radical Amma maintains. Bummi is held back by tradition and the need to survive. As a first-generation immigrant her options for love and life in general have been more limited. Survival and sacrifice limit Bummi's ability to be radical, despite what she ultimately wants for herself. So she accepts the cards she's been dealt and settles for what she has. Bummi has built a life and home that her mother would be proud of. Her life lives up to the dreams Iyatunde had for her and that she ultimately sacrificed her life for.

CHAPTER 2: LATISHA

LaTisha KaNisha Jones, or "Major General Mum" if you ask her kids, walks through the supermarket 15 minutes before opening. She's a supervisor, the "Chief Fucking Bitch," and checks off all her morning tasks. Her delivery and inventory records are spotless. The fruit and vegetable section, her territory, is perfectly organized. She thinks about her kids, how she tries to make learning fun for them because they need to do well in school or else be chained up in the basement for 24 hours.

LaTisha is a fierce and powerful woman and mother. She works hard at her job and strives to achieve. She's dedicated to her children and their education, seeing it as the key to their upward mobility.

LaTisha is dressed in her crisp navy blue uniform looking smart and professional. She's reinvented herself after escaping the "horror movie" that was her adolescence. She's great at her job in retail, having won colleague and supervisor of the month many times. She doesn't make a lot of money but hopes to make general manager someday through hard work and the right amount of sucking up. A promotion requires focus, and for LaTisha that means no dating. When she first started at the supermarket, right out of high school, LaTisha didn't take orders from anyone. The supermarket, like school, was full of senseless rules.

LaTisha has turned her life around. She's buying into the myth of meritocracy because it's her only way forward, even though her hard work hasn't paid off financially yet. LaTisha used to challenge society's often arbitrary rules, but society punishes people who try to exist outside of its confines. Now she complies with society's demands, seeing it as the only way to achieve success and a better life for her children. For LaTisha, love and dating have distracted and derailed her in the past.

LaTisha remembers Mrs. King, who told her she wasn't stupid, she just didn't apply herself. She rebelled against everything, dreamed of rallying her generation to mass rebellion. She wanted to create the havoc she felt when her dad, Glenmore Jones, left her. Her dad was an exterminator and he loved his job. He was funny and tall, with long dreadlocks and strong muscles. He worked as a bouncer at a club frequented by famous soccer players who gambled away their fortunes in the back. They'd offer him private security jobs, but he declined in order to be home with his family, which was his life: "L is for *love*, I is for *immortal*, F is for *family*, E is for *eternal*."

Like Amma, LaTisha becomes radical and rebellious in high school, but LaTisha's rebellion is rooted in the emotional aftermath of her father's abandonment. Her father, Glenmore, was a model, loving father before he left. He was devoted to his family, and his sudden abandonment is especially painful because it betrays the eternal love he professed for his family as LaTisha was growing up.

LaTisha's parents took her and her sister, Jayla, to museums and aquariums, and on vacations. Her mother, Pauline, explained that these were the things children needed to be successful in life. Pauline immigrated to Liverpool from St. Lucia when she was two years old. Glenmore immigrated from Montserrat at 13. He was singled out in school. When he complained about the cold his teachers said he had behavioral problems, held him back a year for speaking Patois, and sent him alone to the "Sin Bin" when he and his white classmates got into trouble. His teachers labeled him as aggressive, and when he threw a chair at a teacher he was sent to juvenile detention.

As first-generation immigrants, LaTisha's parents worked hard to give their second-generation children the privileges and enrichment that help foster success and are typically reserved for the white middle and upper classes. Her father was subject to the same racism, bias, and stereotypes that LaTisha will face in England's schools. Glenmore's teachers internalized the bias and stereotype that Black boys are violent and dangerous, so that's all they could see when they looked at him, when really he was a young, immigrant boy struggling to adjust to his new home. In this way, Glenmore gets caught up in the school to prison pipeline, a system that continues to trap young, Black boys.

Determined not to turn out like the other boys there, Glenmore got out and worked hard creating a life he wanted to live, channeling his anger into bodybuilding. When he told these stories to LaTisha and Jayla he was really speaking to LaTisha, his favorite. The Jones family was happy until Glenmore left with no warning. He left when the girls were at school and Pauline was at work, with no explanation beyond a note saying he was sorry. LaTisha's mother panicked and found out from his friends that he'd left the country. LaTisha waited by the window hoping he'd return. She and Jayla stayed home from school and their mother from work. Her Aunty Angie had to force her to bathe, eat, and sleep.

Glenmore survives and escapes the fate that awaits Black boys trapped and condemned by society's racism. LaTisha admires her father's strength and basks in his loving attention, thus the sting of his abandonment hurts her even more severely. Inexplicably, Glenmore abandons the life he worked so hard to create. In the process, he devastates the three women he leaves behind, highlighting the ways in which men disregard others, especially women, for their own benefit.

In LaTisha's memories, Pauline finally gets Glenmore on the phone and finds out he's in New Jersey living with one of Pauline's friends and the daughter they have together. Pauline burns his clothes, takes down his photos, and rids the house of anything connected to him. LaTisha and Jayla are banned from talking about him, but his ghost haunts LaTisha. He lives in the memories triggered by every room in their house. Her mom starts overeating and drinking to excess. One day Pauline sits the sisters down and reveals that Jayla's father was a violent ex-boyfriend who she'd escaped and who never knew she'd had his child. She met Glenmore at the end of her pregnancy, and he vowed to love the child as if it was his own.

Pauline tries to erase Glenmore from their lives entirely in efforts to erase the pain of his abandonment. However, his absence becomes a searing presence in their lives. He is impossible to erase. He lives in the house they once shared, and in the alcoholism that Pauline develops as she struggles to cope. Because their happy home and family are already broken, Pauline shatters the façade further by revealing the truth about Jayla's father. The men in Pauline's life have consistently disappointed and betrayed her. Like many women, she's been subject to violence and abandonment, tools of sexism and misogyny that men wield against women.

After this revelation, Jayla refuses to talk to LaTisha about it. One morning Jayla declares that she wants to meet her father. Pauline warns that she shouldn't seek him out. Aunty Angie takes Jayla to her parents' house. Her father's mother is shocked when Jayla shows up looking exactly like her father, and not happy to see that her son has *another* child. She speaks to him on the phone, then tells Jayla that he can't meet her because he already has too many children. She tells her she's better off without him, but Jayla is devastated. LaTisha tells her he's just another bastard like Glenmore, who called LaTisha on her birthday a year after he left to apologize. LaTisha hung up on him.

Just as her mother has been devastated and betrayed by men, Jayla is, too. The women in her life, all too familiar with the ways men abandon and disappoint, try to protect her from this emotional devastation, but she has to find out for herself. Jayla's father highlights the ways in which some men move irresponsibly through the world without regard for the women they enter into relationships with or for the children they have only to leave behind.

When people asked LaTisha about her dad, she lied and said he'd died of a heart attack. The truth, she thinks, would make people assume there's something wrong with her family. She starts acting out, and not even Pauline, a social worker, can stop her. She throws a big party when she's 13 and is caught when her mother comes home earlier than expected, finding her house destroyed. Her mother beats her as a punishment, which she'd never done before, and views the incident as a turning point in their relationship.

LaTisha is ashamed of the truth about her father. She's internalized his abandonment as an indication that something is wrong with her, rather than the other way around. She doesn't want the world to see her family as a stereotype, a Black single mother with fatherless children, but that's exactly the lens through which her teachers view her family. White-supremacist, English society judges families like LaTisha's without acknowledging how oppressive systems and structural racism create generational trauma that keeps families broken and unstable. Glenmore's abandonment not only destroys LaTisha's father-daughter relationship, but her relationship with her mother, too. Her behavioral issues, a direct result of her father's abandonment, devastate their relationship and lead to abuse.

Not wanting to be beaten again, LaTisha promises to behave at home, but still runs wild at school with her crew of friends that included Carole until she decided to be studious and cut LaTisha off. Even as an adult Carole ignores her old crew. When Lauren, another friend, saw Carole on the train recently she'd looked past her as if Lauren didn't exist. LaTisha looks Carole up online and discovers she's a Vice President at a bank. Her picture shows a professional and satisfied woman who is not the Carole that LaTisha knew. LaTisha still wants to prove to Carole that she's not the delinquent teenager she once was, that she's good enough to be her friend now.

Carole betrays LaTisha by viewing her through the same damaging, stereotypical lenses that white society views her through. Carole condemns LaTisha to a bleak future and leaves her just like Glenmore did, compounding LaTisha's trauma and fear of abandonment. Once again, the abandonment suggests that she's not good enough or worth sticking around for. All these years later LaTisha still yearns for Carole's approval, perhaps even more so now that Carole is successful by mainstream standards as someone who's made it and is reforming white supremacist society from within its existing, elite institutions. Carole represents what LaTisha could have been. They are both second-generation children of immigrants who grew up poor, in single-parent, fatherless households, and attended an under-resourced public school. Carole, like Glenmore, was one of the few able to escape the cycles that trapped many of her peers like LaTisha.

LaTisha heads to the hot foods section to cover for the manager who's late. One of the employees in this section was fired last week for eating chicken wings without paying, and this reminds LaTisha of how she had to steal from the store. Her story, she thinks, gave her a more valid excuse to steal. LaTisha suddenly flashes back to her early days at the supermarket when she met Dwight in the lunch room at work. Dwight showered her with attention and took her on dates. He was the first person LaTisha opened up to about her dad's abandonment. Dwight tried to comfort her, but soon abandoned her himself when a new girl came along. By then, she was pregnant with his child, which she didn't discover until she was seven months along.

LaTisha stole from the store because she had no choice, highlighting how the intersecting societal injustices of race and class function to criminalize those who are struggling to survive. When LaTisha meets Dwight he takes advantage of her emotional vulnerability, still fresh from her father's abandonment. She finds a home in him that she's been missing since her childhood family was shattered, but Dwight abandons her, too. Like Glenmore and Jayla's father, Dwight leaves a woman and child behind in pursuit of his own pleasure. LaTisha remainstrapped in this cycle of abandonment that reinforces the false notion that she is worthless and forgettable.

When she tells Dwight, the two argue, blaming each other. LaTisha is livid because Dwight refused to use condoms, and he tells her she should have known better than to let him not. Pauline is outraged when LaTisha breaks the news. One night, after her son Jason is born, LaTisha and her mother fight. Her mother is angry and ashamed that her daughter is a "*babymother*." When LaTisha smarts back that she's not one to judge, her mother throws her out of the house and onto the pavement. LaTisha throws a brick at the living room window, it shatters, and her mother threatens to call the police. Her mother tells her that she works with girls like her and doesn't need one at home, too. She gives LaTisha an emergency number as she leaves with Jason.

Dwight blames LaTisha for the pregnancy, placing the burden of birth control and family planning on women, the way that society does as a whole. In this case, Dwight actively refused to use protection, refusing to take no for an answer, placing his pleasure over LaTisha's comfort and safety, and asserting a sexual dominance that men too frequently wield against women. Then, Dwight blames and gaslights her when he's faced with the consequences of his own actions. Pauline is ashamed that LaTisha is fulfilling society's stereotypical expectations of young, Black women. She's been trapped by a narrative that society imposed and forced upon her. Pauline's shame is rooted in the fact that she, too, was abandoned by a man and forced to be a single mother. She feels she failed to live up to her own dreams of giving her second-generation children a better life. This conflict escalates to more violence, and like the brick through the window, shatters their relationship and home further.

The phone number leads LaTisha to emergency housing for young mothers. She can't believe the one person who could teach her to be a mother has kicked her out. Dwight's only effort to help is making sure his shifts as the store's security guard line up with LaTisha's so she can steal as much for the baby as possible. A week passes, and Pauline comes to pick her up. Back home, Jayla watches Jason when LaTisha is at work all day.

LaTisha has been abandoned by yet another person in her life, but this time by her mother, not a man. This betrayal is especially painful now that LaTisha needs her mother to guide her through motherhood. Her mother eventually reclaims her to give her the support she lacked after Glenmore's abandonment.

LaTisha settles back into life now that Pauline and Jayla are there to share the responsibilities of motherhood. A single mother at 18, LaTisha's dating prospects are dim. She meets Mark at the club she goes to with friends once a month. He has a solid job, takes her on real dates, and tells her they were meant to be. She dreams he'll be a father to Jason, but instead winds up pregnant with Jantelle. Mark doesn't know about Jantelle because he gave LaTisha a fake number. While her friends are out living their young adult lives, responsible only to themselves,LaTisha is 19 with two kids. Her mother and sister are her only support system because her friends abandoned her once she became a mother.

Mark offers LaTisha the promise of the home she still yearns and searches for. He's a man she hopes can fill her father's void. Not only is she abandoned once more by another man, but her friends abandon her as well. They are preoccupied with their independent twenty-something lifestyles, an important life phase of self-discovery that LaTisha's young motherhood takes away from her. LaTisha transitions straight from childhood, when her life wasn't fully her own, to motherhood that leaves her beholden to her children.

LaTisha gets pregnant with her third child, Jordan, with Trey. LaTisha remembers that she wanted him when he came to the party she threw at 16, but Carole beat her to it. Carole denied sleeping with him, but LaTisha knew she was lying. Trey asks LaTisha out on Facebook, and LaTisha accepts, excited but determined that she won't have sex with Trey at first, and when it did eventually happen she'd demand a condom. They were supposed to go to a restaurant, but instead he changes the plans and takes her back to the place he shares with roommates for a "*private* romantic meal." When she sees his place, she wants to walk out, but he convinces her to stay and dance. Still determined not to have sex with him, Trey suddenly shoves her hand down his pants. She wants to leave, but no words come out.

In a tragic coincidence, both Carole and LaTisha encounter Trey's violence. LaTisha knows that Carole and Trey had sex, but has no idea that Carole was actually raped. Carole never told anyone about her assault because she was ashamed and had internalized blame. That silence leaves LaTisha unaware of the threat he poses and allows Trey to continue his pattern of behavior. It's in this way that society wields shame and blame against women to protect men and allow violence against women to continue unabated. LaTisha's experience with Trey highlights how difficult it can be for women to say no and escape when confronted with a man's power and entitlement.

LaTisha is giving Trey a hand job on the bed, when suddenly he beings to penetrate her. She tells him to stop, but he doesn't. Trapped underneath him she gives up, blaming herself for leading him on. After he finishes, he falls asleep on her. Afraid to wake him up, she waits until he moves enough for her to escape. When she gets home she takes a long shower wondering if what happened was her fault. She thinks maybe he didn't hear her ask him to stop, or maybe she was so irresistible that he couldn't stop himself. She waits for him to call her, but he never does. Instead, nine months later, Jordan arrives. She's not even yet 21. LaTisha blames herself for being so stupid. Her mom alternates between blaming LaTisha for being irresponsible and blaming herself for raising someone so irresponsible.

Like Carole, LaTisha internalizes the blame for her own assault. When she gets home she takes a long shower trying to rid herself from what just happened, much the same way as Bummi did when she got back from her encounter with Bishop Obi. All three women in chapter two now unknowingly share sexual trauma. They represent the larger truth that too many women experience sexual violence, and that shame and internalized blame imposed by society keep women silent and alone in their experiences. LaTisha's mother unknowingly compounds her internalized blame when she berates her for being irresponsible. Her mother's own shame is what fuels her biting comments. The myth of meritocracy promises first-generation parents that their second-generation children will succeed in their new country, but LaTisha's story highlights how that story is only for a select few. Unlike Carole does for Bummi, LaTisha doesn't live up to Pauline's first-generation dreams for her daughter.

In the present, the New LaTisha is a "good citizen" who plays by the rules and suppresses the old LaTisha who lashes out and fights. The New LaTisha is 30 years old, pursuing a retail management degree while holding out for the right man who will be a good father to her children, but she's done getting pregnant. She still lives her mother and Jayla, and together they parent her children. Jordan, the youngest, looks like Trey and causes trouble at home and school. So when one day LaTisha comes home from work and finds Glenmore inside the house with Jordan snuggled up alongside him, she decides to take him back because she realizes he needs a father figure in his life.

LaTisha is reinventing herself as someone who is going to work within society's systems in order to succeed. Like Carole, but in her own way, LaTisha sees assimilation as the most viable path to success. Although society often either pities or condemns single mothers, LaTisha isn't raising her kids alone. She's created an alternative version of home and family for her children who have three mothers in their lives. LaTisha's life is getting back on track for the first time since her father left when he finally shows back up in her life, threatening to upend her again. However, she takes a risk on letting him back into their lives in order to give Jordan the father figure she lost and so desperately wanted.

CHAPTER 3: SHIRLEY

Shirley, who is not yet Mrs. King, is about to start her first day as a teacher at Peckham School for Boys and Girls. She's full of pride as she walks through the halls in her neat, professional outfit, determined to be a great teacher who will propel her working-class students into greatness. Shirley herself is a local girl who made it in life and is here to give back to her community. Shirley is especially proud for having made it because her older brothers didn't. Her brothers were spoiled, spared from housework and allowed to speak their minds. Now Shirley is the "Family Success Story," a university graduate who makes her parents proud.

Shirley, the second generation daughter of immigrants, has achieved the elusive upward mobility that the myth of meritocracy promises. Of her parents' children, she was the only one able to do this, despite the privileges her brothers had as the boys of the family. Shirley believes in the power of education to help Black and brown children of immigrants achieve the same that she did. Through her work as a teacher, she is determined to reform society from inside its institutions.

As Shirley passes a home economics classroom she thinks about how she won't be a full-time teacher and housewife, a balancing act foisted upon women in the wake of the Women's Liberation Movement. Instead, she and her fiancé Lennox have agreed on an equitable distribution of domestic duties. She enters her classroom and her students arrive excited to be in the young new history teacher's class. Shirley is thrilled to be embarking on her journey to make history fun and relevant. She regales them with her motto: "the future is in the past and the past is in the present." The students respect her, which she chalks up to her being relatable and excited.

Shirley is critical of the second wave feminist movement that earned women the right to work outside of the home and pursue careers while at the same time not necessarily alleviating their domestic duties. Moreover, the second wave feminist movement often prioritized the voices of white women, drowning out the voices of women of color like Shirley. Black women were already working both outside and inside of the home prior to the second wave movement. Shirley brings her passion into the classroom and her efforts to reform society. Her students find her relatable because they can see themselves in her. She's Black and the second-generation child of immigrants. It's critical for students to see themselves represented in their teachers and mentors.

Conflicts break out in Shirley's multicultural classroom. A group of boys show up with swastikas and National Front badges, which she deals with by showing them pictures of concentration camps that shock them. Race wars break out in the classroom, and she shows them horrific pictures of lynching in the U.S. The students admire and love her deeply, showering her in gifts. The principal praises Shirley for her dedication and outstanding results. In her first review he tells her she is "a credit to her people," and suddenly Shirley feels pressured not only to remain an amazing teacher, but also "an ambassador for every black person in the world."

Shirley is reforming systems from within her classroom. She's fighting racism from within her classroom, changing young minds before they go out into the world as adults and perpetuate white supremacy. Shirley's white colleagues see her as representative of all Black people. To them she's a "credit" to Black people who they otherwise view through negative and racist stereotypes. White people often see one Black person as representative of all Black people, flattening a worldwide, diverse group of people into one image and understanding.

Shirley hates eating lunch in the staff room with the old, grumpy teachers. They eat their English lunches of pork pies and Cornish pastries in contrast with Shirley's salt-fish and sliced plantain, which she hopes they won't notice and ask her to explain. A colleague reads a newspaper, and on the cover is a mugshot of a Black teenager, which feels personal and embarrassing to Shirley. Her colleagues never acknowledge her race, and she wonders if they'd understand if she confided in them about what it feels like to be attacked by the media or what it's like to watch women clutch their bags when she walks past them. Although her mother advised her against thinking people don't like her because of her race, Shirley struggles to quiet the voice in her head that tells her every negative reaction from others is due to her race.

White people's judgement for other cultures seeps into every aspects of daily life. Like Bummi, who points out how white people judge immigrants for shopping at immigrant-owned grocery stores, Shirley fears her white colleagues will pass judgement on her food and Barbadian culture. Just as her white colleagues see Shirley as representative of all Black people, when they see headline news about a Black person they lump all Black people together as criminals. White people get to be individuals, while people of color are one homogenous group in the eyes of white supremacist society. Shirley's coworkers adhere to the false notion of "color blindness," ignoring Shirley's race and therefore ignoring an important part of who she is. Shirley knows they wouldn't understand if she were to confide in them about the microaggressions she faces on a daily basis, including from them, and she can't escape the notion that every slight against her has to do with her race despite her mother's advice.

Shirley tries to charm the older coworkers who openly dislike her, like Penelope. Penelope is not just the only woman who speaks up in staff meetings, her voice overpowers all the men in the room. Shirley hates that the rest of the female staff is beholden to the decisions that Penelope and the men make without their input. In one staff meeting, Penelope rails against the half of the student body that misbehaves and performs badly on exams. Everyone knows that Shirley is referring to the kids of color, who are suspended when they misbehave while white kids get detention.

Shirley feels like she has to charm her way into her coworkers' good graces, not because she wants it, but because it's necessary to her survival in the school where her race and gender intersect to make her an outsider. Penelope thinks she's being a fierce feminist by asserting herself against the male faculty but fails to recognize how her voice is drowning out the other women in the room, making her, in a sense, just as bad as the men who silence women. Penelope does not and cannot represent all the women in the school, especially Shirley and the students of color. Despite her liberal, feminist ideology, Penelope doesn't recognize how race and gender intersect, how both movements are stronger if united together. Instead, she perpetuates stereotypes about her students of color. Rather than help fight against the structural injustices that leave students of color behind, she regards them with vitriol. The school suspends kids of color at a much higher rate than white kids, a troubling, common phenomenon that fuels the school to prison pipeline.

Shirley can no longer contain herself and speaks up against Penelope. She explains that she believes educating "our kids" is what will make society more equitable. She says that exam scores aren't everything. The other teachers clearly want Shirley to take a seat, but when she asks Penelope who will help the kids if they don't, the room goes silent with shock and excitement. Penelope responds by telling Shirley she isn't a social worker and that she needs to work more than just one school year before challenging someone wearied by 15 years of experience.

Shirley can't remain silent and speaks up in defense of both herself and her students. Shirley believes in the power of education to change society for the better. Shirley has a more expansive and progressive view of education. Penelope and Shirley represent two different generations butting up against one another. Penelope tries to wield her age and experience against Shirley, but experience isn't everything. As a person of color, Shirley can relate to and understand her students on a level that Penelope will never be able to.

Shirley goes home to Lennox and regales him with talk about her hatred of Penelope, just one of many nights that she'll do this. While he cooks she says that Penelope doesn't deserve to call herself a feminist when she attacked Shirley, a woman who dared to speak up. Although she believes that power and privilege won't disappear from society, she fiercely believes that she can help the disadvantaged through her teaching. Shirley believes that selective grammar schools have leveled the playing field for smart, marginalized kids who would otherwise be stuck in public schools. The current Prime Minster, Margaret Thatcher, wouldn't have climbed the ranks without such opportunities.

Shirley calls Penelope out on her hypocritical version of feminism. Like many second generation feminists, Penelope's feminism lacks intersectional awareness. Her feminism is for white women alone, and unexamined, internalized racism excludes and marginalizes women of color. Shirley believes in the possibility of reforming society's systems from within. She uses the example of Margaret Thatcher, but on the other hand Thatcher could be viewed as an example of how representation alone isn't enough. Having a women prime minister means little if that woman upholds white supremacist, patriarchal norms, the way Penelope does on a smaller scale at the Peckham School.

Shirley admires Lennox as he cooks, a man who treats her equally and is risk averse just like her. They're saving to buy a house and have kids. Shirley flashes back to meeting Lennox on the dancefloor in a bar full of Afro-Caribbeans who bouncers kept out of the city's clubs where they wouldn't hear their favorite songs anyways. They start dating and trade life stories. Lennox's Guyanese parents sent him to live with his Great Aunt Myrtle in Harlem while they established themselves in the U.K. Aunt Myrtle stressed that school was the ticket to a better life. He returned to his parents once they had enough money, determined to do better in life then they had. In school he was a good student, but out in the world he was an enemy because of his race.

Shirley and Lennox are drawn together through their shared experiences as second-generation children of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. As was true for Shirley herself, and as she works hard to make true for her students, Lennox has achieved upward mobility through education. In Lennox's case, the financial hardships and realities facing immigrants divide his family. He's forced to spend a significant portion of his childhood without his parents, highlighting how immigrant divides homes and families with significant emotional impacts.

Starting at age 12 he's stopped and frisked by the police, which leaves his body feeling violated and emasculated. Lennox is a good boy who avoids the bad boys, who is made fun of for wearing suits, and spends Saturdays at the library filling himself with knowledge as his Aunt Myrtle advised. His experiences with the police inspire him to become a lawyer, and now when they mess with him, he tells them and they back off. Shirley's brothers survived similar experiences as all Black men were forced to. They had to be tough.

Like many Black boys and men, Lennox is harassed and threatened by the police from a very young age. Lennox was growing up in the heyday of stop and frisk in New York City, a policy that allowed police officers to stop and search anyone on the basis of any "reasonable suspicion," which in practice just fueled the problem of racial profiling. Despite all the efforts Lennox makes to look like the good, hardworking student that he is, he's stopped because his race leaves him suspicious in the eyes of the police above all else. These experiences leave Lennox physically and emotionally traumatized, and they also fuel his desire to reform the system from within as a lawyer. That choice to work from inside the system where he can use the system to fight back against corruption is his way of taking his power back. While Lennox and Shirley have experienced racism in different ways, they can share in their understanding of what it's like to be discriminated against. Shirley knows some of what Black men go through from growing up with her brothers.

When Shirley and Lennox graduate they move to London and move in together. They get married and Shirley Coleman becomes Shirley King. Shirley's best friend is Amma, who she'd known since they were 11, the only two Black girls in their class. Amma was shy and Shirley was protective of her. While Amma's parents were educated socialists, Shirley's parents were uneducated and apolitical. Once Amma joined the youth theater she found her voice and became a radical. Although Shirley believes it's ultimately impossible to change society, she can't live without Amma.

Shirley and Amma initially come together, and need each other, because they are the only two Black girls in a sea of white classmates. They find a necessary home and refuge in each other and their shared racial identities. At the beginning of the relationship, Shirley was the guide and protector, but after Amma takes the path of radical and Shirley takes the path of a reformer, their roles switch. Amma becomes the leader who later defends and protects Shirley. Amma and Shirley's paths diverge in part because of their class backgrounds. Amma grew up with educated parents who were themselves progressives. Although her father was an immigrant, Amma's life was very different from Shirley's life growing up with two immigrant parents, both of whom were uneducated. Amma had more privilege, which granted her a greater ability to take the financial risks that come with a life as a radical changemaker. Shirley, on the other hand, needed to survive financially and wanted to achieve the upward mobility and success her first-generation parents sacrificed so much for.

When they were 16, Amma came out as a lesbian, which disgusted Shirley at first. Only after she's convinced that others won't assume she's a lesbian by proxy, she becomes more, but never completely, accepting. Amma brings new, unconventional, mostly gay people into Shirley's life that she finds fascinating. Lennox and Amma really like each other, even ganging up on Shirley, teasing her for being so uptight. He's totally accepting of Amma's sexuality because his Aunt Myrtle lived with her "special friend" for years until she died. Lennox had once discovered photos of his aunt and her lover dressed up in formal menswear. He wishes she was still alive so he could tell her how much he loves and accepts her.

Shirley's discomfort with Amma's lesbianism highlights how intersectionality complicates identities and allegiances. Although Shirley is a fellow Black woman, her homophobia impacts her perception of her best friend. In other words, although they both know what it's like to be discriminated against, Shirley still struggles to fully accept Amma's sexuality. Lennox accepts Amma's sexuality easily because his aunt was gay, highlighting how exposure to different types of people from a young age helps foster acceptance.

As Shirley gains experience teaching, she remains passionate about helping her students. She fights against the conditions at her school, the large class sizes and lack of resources, as well as Thatcher's Master Plan for Education, which forces her to use a standard curriculum among other restrictions. Soon Shirley feels like a "Cog in the Wheel of Bureaucratic Madness" and starts to feel overwhelmed by all the ways her students' families are struggling in the face of issues like unemployment, addiction, incarceration, or poverty. The 90s are worse than the 80s, and by the 2000s the school is plagued by gang violence, drugs, and sexual assaults.

The limitations of Thatcher's "Master Plan" is another example of how representation in positions of power is, by itself, not enough for true social progress. Both Thatcher and Penelope may be women who are boldly breaking into male-dominated spaces, but their lack of intersectional awareness means they are harming people of color in the process. In Thatcher's case, her actions directly impact what Shirley is allowed to do. By forcing her to stick to a standard curriculum, one that is likely depoliticized, Shirley can no longer use her classroom as a radical space for transforming society. Working from within the system means having to work around and against its rules, a tiring battle that starts to burn Shirley out. She's eventually overwhelmed by the difficult reality that educational reform alone can't change the systemic socio-economic problems endemic in her students' communities. She's beginning to lose faith in the power of education alone to transform lives on a grand scale.

Shirley slowly slips into the mentality she once abhorred in her colleagues. She loses control over her classes, resents her students for their misbehavior, and doesn't encourage them to pursue college. She's tired of repeating herself, hates grading, and starts to bond with Penelope when she finds herself among the group of teachers ignored by the new, young, passionate ones. They despise the young teachers with their lofty ideals, and delight in their failures and burnout. Eventually, Penelope retires and Shirley's left alone. She thinks about leaving to work in a private school full of polite, studious middle-class girls. She and Lennox themselves have bought into the "great middle-class scam" by sending their daughters to a private school.

As her older coworkers like Penelope predicted, Shirley has lost her passion entirely. She's lost faith in her ideals and has become the kind of teacher she used to abhor. Although a Black woman herself, she looks down on her students through the same stereotypical lenses that her colleagues like Penelope do. Her mission to reform the system has failed, and now she's perpetuating the same biases and beliefs she once fought against. Her story reveals how systems threaten to break activists down until they give into the status quo. Additionally, Shirley has given up on living out her ideals in her personal life, opting to send her daughters to private school as a matter of survival. From working in the public schools, she knows how Black children are viewed and treated within that system. Shirley at once recognizes that the myth of meritocracy and the middle class is a scam, while she is one of the lucky few who's managed to make that myth reality. Society points to successes like Shirley and Lennox's to claim that society offers equal opportunities to those who work hard and play by the rules.

Shirley can't completely abandon her morals, so she stays at Peckham. Her life has been a series of successes—an elite college acceptance, a job at the first school she applied to, a husband she loves, and a house in a nice neighborhood—so the prospect of rejection stops her from applying to another school. Over the years both Shirley and Lennox have changed. He never became a criminal barrister, sticking instead with a better paid position, which Shirley thinks was the right choice. Despite not being very religious, she and Lennox went to church every Sunday to get their daughters' spots in the private school. Now, Karen is a pharmacist and Rachel is a computer scientist. Shirley reflects that she's done well as the second generation in the U.K. and that her daughters have done even better.

Ultimately, Shirley's idealism isn't entirely lost. She still wants to believe in the potential for reform, but no longer lives by her ideals on a daily basis. Lennox, too, abandoned his dreams of reforming the criminal justice system, his initial motivation for becoming a lawyer, by taking a better paid legal job. Both Shirley and Lennox stayed true to the course expected of second-generation children of immigrants, and that has paid off, as promised, in the third generation, even more successful than their parents. Their story highlights the ways in which the need to survive and thrive as a person of color within a white supremacist society can mean abandoning one's ideals to instead assimilate into the mainstream status quo. Activism is itself a kind of privileged lifestyle that flies in the face of the sacrifices that first-generation parents make for their kids.

Shirley and her family are on vacation at her parents' house in the Caribbean. Her time spent at her parents' house is the best part of her summer. Shirley thinks back to the school year. She'd started eating lunch in her car, when one day Carole knocked on the window. Shirley is shocked and thrilled when she asks for academic help. Shirley holds Carole to strict standards and she gets into Oxford. Carole's success makes Shirley believe in the power of education to change lives again. From then on she's motivated to mentor promising but at-risk kids with unsupportive families. They don't all make it to Oxford like Carole, but even when a kid finds stability as a plumber she celebrates the success. Shirley's mentoring makes her job more bearable but isn't completely fulfilling. Carole, Shirley's "greatest achievement," never returned to her to thank her, and Shirley feel used.

Returning to her parents' home country each summer offers Shirley temporary relief from the exhaustion of her life in the U.K. that, although materially successful, is spiritually deficient. Carole is a diamond in the rough that reignites Shirley's passion. She works to help Carole become, like her, one of the lucky few who beat the odds to escape the poverty and hardship that await other second-generation children of immigrants like themselves. Shirley resolves that helping the promising few who come through the school is the best she can do, though it's far from the democratic ideal she'd once so passionately believed in. In this new role as mentor, Shirley teaches students like Carole how to assimilate into white, middle-class English society, seeing it as the only path to the success she earned in the same way. In this way Shirley is perpetuating white supremacy, and, despite her good intentions, is robbing Carole of her culture and identity. Shirley takes credit for Carole's accomplishments and feels entitled to her gratitude.

CHAPTER 3: WINSOME

Winsome is cooking her family's favorite meal as the sea breeze drifts into the kitchen. Shirley, Lennox, her granddaughter Rachel, and Rachel's daughter are visiting and the rest of the family will arrive later in the summer. She loves when her family visits. Shirley's best friend Amma has even visited before. While Winsome loved that her daughter had such a close friend, she didn't want her to follow in Amma's bold footsteps. When Amma came out Winsome feared she would suffer in an intolerant society, and feared that Shirley might end up gay, too. Her fears, she admits, all turned out to be wrong.

Winsome feared that Shirley would follow in Amma's radical footsteps, which would risk her chances at the upward mobility she and her husband sacrificed so much for. A radical political identity is itself a privilege less accessible to those who are fighting just to survive. It's not so much that she's not accepting of gay people, but that another intersecting, marginalized identity would make her daughter's life as a Black woman more complicated than it already is. Her fears didn't pan out in reality, but that fear is real and can be all-consuming in the lives of immigrants struggling in a discriminatory, white-supremacist society.

Shirley acts like a tourist when she visits Barbados and doesn't help around the house. She never confronts her though because Shirley's unbearable when she's upset. She notices that Shirley arrives looking exhausted after a year spent at her terrible job, which she complains about all summer long. Winsome encourages her to quit, but instead Shirley dumps her emotions on her mother and leaves at the end of the summer imbued with new life. Winsome likes that she leaves looking like a girl from Barbados rather than one raised in the cold U.K.

Shirley is not at home in her parents' native Barbados. She's a girl from the U.K. who's been transformed by her assimilation into the white middle-class. Winsome has to tiptoe around Shirley's emotionally explosive personality. Her unhappiness at work isn't what she expected for her daughter after struggling for all those years in the U.K. to earn her better opportunities in life. Winsome's complicated feelings about Shirley's identity highlight the ways in which first-generation immigrant parents can't fully anticipate how their decision to raise their children abroad will impact their racial and cultural identities. Winsome and Shirley's story parallels Bummi and Carole's in this way. At the end of the summer, however, months spent in Barbados return pieces of that culture and identity to Shirley.

Winsome is frustrated with how Shirley is never satisfied with the life that is so much better than the one she led as a newly arrived immigrant whose work as a bus conductor was backbreaking. She's incredibly grateful that she was able to escape the cold U.K. to retire in Barbados. She belongs to a book club where she bonds with other women who've come back home after years spent abroad. All her favorite books are authored by Caribbean women. She loves the intellectual stimulation the book club provides.

Winsome feels Shirley's dissatisfaction as a betrayal. Shirley doesn't express her gratitude for her mother's sacrifices, and perhaps doesn't even realize how ungrateful she appears in her mother's eyes. As the first generation, Winsome worked hard to survive and tolerated the physically demanding, low-paid work available to immigrants. Winsome's return to her native country challenges narratives of immigration that claim life in Western countries is always better than the life available back home. In Barbados she can live a life that's more than just backbreaking work. She's surrounded by friends and is able to pursue an intellectual life not afforded to her in the U.K. Her ability to retire comfortably in Barbados, however, is dependent upon the financial advantages that she earned through her years working abroad.

Winsome watches Lennox and her husband, Clovis, head out to fix up a fishing boat. Winsome admires Lennox from afar. She's attracted to him and tells Shirley she's lucky to have him, but Shirley retorts he's lucky to have her. Lennox helps Clovis out more than his own sons, Tony and Errol, do. Winsome suspects they may still be angry at him for how he beat them as kids, but he was protecting them from their racist society the best way he knew how. Girls needed less protection, she thought. All three of their children did well in life because she and Clovis provided them with a solid foundation from which to launch.

Winsome admires Lennox because he's different from both her husband and her sons. Lennox and Shirley's relationship is an equitable, feminist one. The need to survive in a hostile, white-supremacist society causes conflicts between first-generation parents and their second-generation kids. Clovis hurt his own sons because, to him, it was better than them being hurt by white people. Either way, for Tony and Errol, there was no escaping the hurt. Winsome feels satisfied that she and Clovis were able to do what all first-generation parents strive to do, give their kids the opportunity to get ahead in life.

Winsome's granddaughter, Rachel, and great-granddaughter come into the kitchen. She inhales her granddaughter's shampoo smell, still clean from the flight. Winsome taught Shirley that it was important to be clean and properly dressed when traveling, and Shirley passed this knowledge onto her daughter who passed it on to her own daughter. Rachel asks Winsome to tell her about how she and Clovis met. Winsome is taken aback, accustomed to hearing about her grandchildren's lives but never being asked about her own. She's forgiving because she knows young people are self-centered, viewing the elderly as only their caretakers. So Winsome is happy that Rachel is curious about who she was before she was a mother, when she was "a person in her own right." But Winsome realizes that she's never been her own person. She went from daughter to wife and mother, to grandmother and great-grandmother.

Even the small piece of advice about air travel demonstrates how knowledge is transferred down through the generations of a family. In both big and small ways, the first generation of a family will shape and affect the generations that come after. Winsome's choices as the first generation in the U.K. are what paved the path for the life that her granddaughter lives now. The younger generation doesn't always appreciate their elders, despite how their lives, both successes and failures, are inextricably tied to them. When Rachel shows interest in Winsome she's showing interest in how her life, as the third generation in the U.K., came to be. Winsome realizes that she, like many women of her generation, was never afforded the time and space to be her own person. Instead, she was always defined in relationship to others, forced into a supporting role. It's only now in her retirement in Barbados that she's able to live life on her own terms and discover who she is among her friends and intellectual pursuits.


Winsome flashes back in time and tells her story. She meets Clovis at a West Indian gathering shortly after she'd moved to London. He'd been in England for two years already and warned her how hard it's been. Clovis becomes a huge source of support to her as she adjusts to life in this new country and culture. Even though he's not as handsome or charming as she expected her future husband to be, Clovis is loyal, not like other men who sleep around with many women and abandon their children. She accepts that "it was easier to dream" of the perfect man "than it was to make the dream come true."

Winsome settles for Clovis, a good man, but not the man of her dreams, because he can provide her with a new and familiar home. As a newly arrived immigrant, she'd just lost the home and community she'd always known, and she struggles amidst hardships to put down new roots in the U.K. Winsome has to sacrifice her personal dreams in order to survive in this new place. The dream of finding a perfect partner is as hard to fulfill as is the dream of becoming successful as an immigrant in this new country. She chooses Clovis in hopes that, together, they'll be better positioned to make that latter dream come true.

When they marry, they move into a room in a crowded boarding house. They work 12-hour shifts in a fertilizer factory and save money for a house. Clovis wants to move to south-west England, to be near the sea and work as a fisherman like both their fathers had back home. Having grown up a fisherman's daughter who had to wake up early to help her father, she knows being a fisherman's wife will be hard, too. But women are expected to obey their husbands, and marriage is a "life-sentence," so they move.

Winsome and Clovis work hard in physically demanding, low-paid jobs as many immigrants are forced to upon arrival. Clovis wants to move south in an effort to reestablish the home he once had, and misses, in Barbados. From a distance, Clovis romanticizes the life he left behind, but Winsome remembers the reality. She knows that making a living as a fisherman won't be any easier. She's part of a generation of women that obeyed their husband's wishes and desires, shaping her life around his ambitions alone. Winsome can't say no, despite the fact that she has very logical reasons to do so. In this way, her relationship with Clovis stands in stark contrast with the relationship Shirley will later share with Lennox.

When they arrive in the seaside town of Plymouth, Clovis can't find work. The people in town are poor and don't want to give work to a stranger. Winsome wants to return to London, but Clovis insists on becoming a fisherman. She asks him why they don't just move back home where they belong if that's what he wants to do. Instead, he convinces her to move further south to the Isles of Scilly where the townspeople stop in their tracks to ogle at these "monkey people" who've shown up on their island. Restaurants and hotels won't let them in, let alone give Clovis a job.

In both southern towns they travel to, Winsome and Clovis are met with racism and xenophobia. The poor, white working class harbor anti-immigrant sentiments because they see immigrants, and their willingness to work for low wages, as an economic threat. They're unable to see how their oppressions intersect. Both immigrants and the white lower class are economic allies, and would be stronger together if not divided by racism. Far from London, where there are large immigrant communities, Winsome and Clovis are subject to especially hostile and severe discrimination.

A policeman tells them the only thing they can do is leave and never come back, so they do. That night they're forced to sleep in the doorway of a church when the people inside won't let them in. Winsome insists they go back to London where there are other people of color, but Clovis is determined to give Plymouth another chance. He says that once they have kids, living in the countryside will be better. They'll be able to "roam free like on Barbados." He tells Winsome to trust his instinct that his plan will work out.

That they are dismissed by the policeman shows how racism and xenophobia are enforced by white-supremacist society and its institutions. Symbolically, not even the church, a supposed refuge for all, will let them in. The only option is to run. Clovis, however, doesn't want to give in to this command. He's desperate to recreate a life that resembles the one he left behind in Barbados. He has a vision for how he wants his kids to grow up, and the countryside is the setting for that vision. Unlike on Barbados, though, a country whose population is predominantly of African descent, in the U.K. his Black children won't be free to roam. They'll not only be limited by racism, but in potential danger because of it.

They settle in Plymouth, Clovis becoming a longshoreman unloading cargo from ships and Winsome having three children in three years. Clovis drinks after work, on bad days coming home drunk, leaving Winsome alone with the kids until late at night. The townspeople are openly racist towards them, serving her last in shops, leaving rats on their doorstep, and painting "go home" on their front door. Eventually, after they prove themselves "civilized," people get used to their presence in town. Mrs. Beresford, a neighbor, becomes Winsome's first friend, inviting her into her home, introducing her to new people, and teaching her how to prepare English foods.

Winsome continues to give in to Clovis's wishes for their lives. While he works and drinks, she gets pregnant and cares for the children as is traditionally expected of women, especially women of her generation. Winsome and her family continue to endure acts of outright and hostile racism, confirming that Clovis's vision for this new home is far from what he imagined. Only once they prove themselves as "civilized," meaning once they've assimilated enough to appease their neighbors, are they tolerated, a far cry from acceptance. Winsome's first friend helps her further her assimilation into English culture.

At school Shirley and her brothers are called racial slurs and punished unfairly by their teachers, their liveliness interpreted as misbehavior. Winsome goes to the school to complain but is ignored. One day another Black girl shows up at school. She's mixed, her mother white and her father Black, and with her lighter skin and loose curls she's readily accepted by teachers and students at the school. At wit's end, Winsome asserts herself and tells Clovis she is taking the children back to London with or without him.

Shirley, Tony, and Errol are disproportionately targeted and punished at school. Black students are punished and suspended at disproportionately higher rates because white schools and teachers view Black students through stereotypical and biased lenses. Years before she herself becomes a teacher, Shirley is being looked down on and singled out in the ways that her future students will be, too. For Winsome, the hypocrisy she witnesses when the students and teachers accept the new, mixed-race girl becomes too much to bear. In the eyes of the white townspeople, this girl is Black but not "too Black" to be accepted. Winsome's anger gives her the strength to stand up against her husband, breaking free of the gender norms that kept her silent.

Mid-story, Winsome is distracted by Lennox and Clovis headed back from fixing up the boat. She thinks Shirley likely married Lennox because he subconsciously reminded her of her father, and Winsome thinks maybe that's why she's also attracted to this younger version of her husband. That summer they'll eventually restore the boat and take it out for early morning fishing trips, which are still a crucial part of Clovis's identity and manhood. Rachel thanks Winsome for telling her "trailblazing" story, but Winsome doesn't see anything trailblazing about her immigration experience.

For Winsome, Lennox represents what Clovis could have been in a different time, place, and life circumstance. Winsome yearns for the lifestyle that her generation worked hard to make possible for their second-generation children. Rachel, the third generation, has more distance from Winsome than her own kids do, which affords her a more generous and expansive view of what she sacrificed in order to make their lives possible. Rachel thanks Winsome for sharing her story, but on a deeper level is thanking her for making her life possible. Winsome doesn't give herself credit for how her presence and fight to survive in the U.K. as a Black, Caribbean, woman immigrant itself achieved social change.

When Shirley, Clovis, and the children move back to London, life settles into a predictable and secure routine. Although Winsome craved this comfort and security when she first moved to London and first fell in love with Clovis, as the years passed, she found herself craving an excitement her domesticated husband couldn't give her. So, when Shirley first introduces them to Lennox, Winsome is flooded with sexual desire for his youthful vigor and beauty. After that first meeting, Winsome tries to visit with Shirley and Lennox as much as possible. His small affections—a kiss on the cheek or an arm around her shoulder—electrify her and she has to have sex with Clovis more often to get the excitement out of her system. She's attracted to Lennox's intelligence and sociability, which Clovis lacks. Winsome envies Shirley's youth, beauty, and the opportunities she had in life that led her to her life with Lennox.

Winsome and Clovis finally build the secure and stable home that they desperately wanted for themselves and their children when they first immigrated. But now that life isn't just a daily fight to survive, Winsome wants more for herself. She yearns to reap the benefits of her hard work and sacrifice. Shirley's life and all that she has, including her husband, are rooted in the sacrifices Winsome made. Lennox is the dream man that Winsome couldn't make real for herself. He's come true for her daughter instead.

She notices that Lennox's kisses linger on her cheeks too long. She doesn't want to betray Clovis or Shirley but admits that if he made a move she couldn't resist. One day Winsome is home alone and Lennox shows up. He passionately kisses her in a way Clovis never has. He undresses her and she feels like a new woman. She enjoys passionate sex with him in a way she never enjoyed sex before. They stop only when Winsome has to go pick up Karen and Rachel. Her guilt keeps her up late, but she decides that at almost 50 she deserves him. The affair lasts a year. They meet once or twice a week, and on weekends take Rachel and Karen to the seaside under the pretense of giving Shirley a break. Winsome tells herself that it's better that Lennox satisfy his urges with her than with some other woman.

Winsome convinces herself that she deserves this happiness. It's true that she deserves happiness at her age after working so hard, but her happiness puts the home and family she worked so hard to build up on the line. Winsome doesn't want to betray her daughter or husband but betrays them both and fails to acknowledge how this betrayal is far worse for Shirley than if Lennox slept with another, random woman, because this is a betrayal by both her mother and her husband. Their deception and lies would hurt twofold.

Lennox ends the affair suddenly and without explanation, and Winsome never finds the courage to ask him why. Lennox can't look at her for a while afterwards and Shirley notices that the two are less close than they once were, which Winsome tries to deny. Winsome wants Lennox more now that he's retreated. She needs him to fill the longing and desire he'd awakened in her. Even now, decades since the affair, her attraction is reawakened when he visits each summer. Shirley always brags to Winsome that Lennox will never cheat, and Winsome always tells her that she's so lucky to have found a good man.

One of the initial reasons Winsome loved Clovis is because she knew he wasn't the type of man to run off and have an affair. In this crucial way Clovis and Lennox, who Winsome finds so fundamentally similar, differ. It's deeply ironic that Shirley brags to Winsome about Lennox's faithfulness. This part of Winsome's story challenges the narrative that suggests immigrant parents must always sacrifice their entire selves and desires for their second generation children.

CHAPTER 3: PENELOPE

Penelope, 14, writes in her diary about how boring her parents' lives are, unlike her own, which she believes will be full of exciting opportunities. Her father Edwin grew up in York. His life is dictated by his strict routine and the most exciting thing about him is the porn Penelope found stashed away inside his toolbox, a place he never expected a woman to look. Her mother, Margaret, is equally boring despite her "exotic" background. She was born in the Union of South Africa, where her parents moved to escape their failing farm and take advantage of the Natives Land Act of 1913. Her mother explains the act gave 80 percent of South African land to white people, the "only people capable of looking after it."

Penelope yearns to escape the confines of her home. Her parents shape her worldview in important and lasting ways. Her father teaches her traditional gender norms, and her mother teaches her racism. Her mother's racism was developed in an extremely hostile period of South African history, so Shirley is exposed to deeply problematic ways of thinking about race. Her mother is an unabashed white supremacist. Although Penelope dislikes her parents, she will internalize pieces of these beliefs, nonetheless. Penelope's childhood highlights how racism and white supremacy are passed on and perpetuated from one generation to the next.

After the forced transfer, native South African people were desperate for work, and landowners like Margaret's father would hire them for cheap. The farm isn't successful, and he blames it on the "idleness" and "resentment" of his workers. Other farmers tell him to tie the worst of the workers to a tree and beat them to scare the rest of the workers into submission. Margaret's father takes this advice and his workers seem quelled until one day a group of them attack him with his own whip. Margaret's father was psychologically scarred forever, and they returned to England where he never worked again.

Margaret grew up in a society where horrific violence against Black people was normalized. Her father's farm resembles a plantation from the era of slavery. Margaret's vitriolic racism is further intensified after her father faces the consequences of his own deplorable actions. In this way, her father passed racism and white supremacy down to her, so she could later perpetuate it by teaching it to her own child, Penelope.

Margaret was happy to return to "civilized" England to get away from South Africa, which was no "place for a white girl to grow into womanhood" because of how the "hateful" native men looked at her. Margaret enjoyed her adolescence in England. She snuck out, wore short skirts, and smoked cigarettes, something only "*sapphics*" could get away with in those days. She met Edwin shortly after her father died in an asylum, and he quickly became a source of comfort and support during that difficult time. Edwin was a sensible choice for a husband, so they married even though that meant Margaret had to give up on her dream of being an elementary school teacher. Married women couldn't work.

Margaret perpetuates enduring and false stereotypes that position Black men as a threat against white women. False claims of sexual assault by white women have been used to justify horrific lynchings of Black men throughout history. Margaret has a white, heterosexual feminist identity. Her feminism doesn't just exclude women of color and queer women, but openly derides them. She passes this problematic version of feminism down to Penelope, who wields it in similar ways later in life. Margaret comes of age in the decades before the second wave feminist movement normalized working outside of the home for white, middle-class women like herself. She gives up her dream of working as a teacher to settle down with Edwin, who provides her with a safe home after she loses her father. She goes from daughter to wife, never having the chance to live on her own terms without being tied to a man.

Edwin took Margaret out but didn't let her do things he found unbecoming of a woman, like swimming, dancing, or drinking. While caught up in her domestic duties, Margaret tells Penelope how much she misses dancing, but Penelope can't imagine her mother doing anything lively or rebellious. She feels bad that her mother had to choose between marriage and a career. Penelope can't wait to go to college and pursue a career, escaping both her mother's fate and the dullness and routine of their home.

Penelope can't imagine her mother as anything other than the domestic shell she's become under the hand of her husband. Penelope is determined to avoid the same fate. She envisions a different type of home and family for her future self, where she'll have self-determination and freedom of choice as a woman. Penelope's feminist identity is born from the sadness and anger she feels for her mother.

Everything changes when Penelope's parents tell her that she was adopted. She no longer feels bad for Margaret, only resentful for the way they revealed this information to her. Over dinner one night they tell her that she was left on the steps of a church with no information, and that they'd adopted her from an orphanage after years of being unable to get pregnant. Shocked by this information, Penelope is desperate for them to tell her they love her, which is something they've never done. Instead, they carry on as normal, ignoring her tears as they finish their meals.

The revelation that she's adopted shatters the already shaky semblance of home Penelope shared with Margaret and Edwin. Both Margaret and Edwin are emotionally unavailable after they drop this life-changing news. They can't or won't express their love for Penelope, and that leaves her feeling unwanted and unloved, both by her adoptive and birth parents.

Penelope is depressed for months but hides her sadness from the two people who "used to be" her mother and father. She hides this new information from her friends, too, because she's ashamed to admit that she is an unwanted, rejected child. She wonders how her biological parents could've given her up, and feels like she'll never know herself if she doesn't know them. The adoption explains why Penelope feels so different from her dull parents. The more she looks in the mirror, the more she sees how much she doesn't look like Margaret and Edwin. Edwin and Margaret have light eyes and pallid skin, while Penelope has hazel eyes, curly hair, freckles, and skin that tans easily.

Penelope's revelation leaves her identity hanging in the balance. For Penelope, knowing who she descends from is critical to fully knowing and understanding herself. She's lost the home she'd always known with Margaret and Edwin, and the home and community she was born into will remain a mystery. She's different from Margaret and Edwin not only in terms of personality, but physically in significant ways that suggest they may come from different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

Penelope feels unloved and unwanted, like a nobody, and decides to become a teacher, get married to an adoring man, and have children to fill the void left by her adoption. She meets Giles shortly after the news of her adoption destroys her, and he puts her pieces back together. He is older and all the girls want him, but Penelope edges out all the other girls and wins him over. They get engaged when she is 18, which makes her the "golden girl" among her peers who are still single and worry they will be forever.

Penelope's unknowable origin is a gaping void in her life story and identity. She rushes into marriage and family to fill that void and build the family she lacks. She looks to a man to heal and complete her, not stopping to question or consider if he is the right man for her. The fact that Giles desires her is enough after being rejected by both sets of parents in her life. The envy she garners from other girls her age soothes her deeply wounded self-esteem.

Penelope and Giles get married after she earns her teaching degree. Giles is loving and affectionate, and their life together feels perfect. Her career is delayed by their first child, Adam, and then Sarah comes only a year later. Penelope is overwhelmed with love for her children and is happy to stay home and care for them, but after three years of being a stay-at-home mom, her kids start to feel like little vampires sucking all the life out of her. She's desperate to finally begin her teaching career. Penelope feels especially left out because countercultural movements, including the feminist movement, are shaking up the world outside her home. Giles doesn't help her with the children. One night she tells him she wants to start working and he earnestly replies that it's "impractical to have two masters: a boss at work and a husband."

Like many women of her generation, Penelope's career is sidelined by the duties of home and family. In her rush to repair the emotional fallout of her realization she was adopted, Penelope rushed headlong into the same life that her mother once led, that she was so fiercely determined to avoid. She's gone from daughter to wife to mother. She's never lived life on her own terms, but only in service of others. She wants to live out her mother's dream of becoming a teacher, but her husband stops her just as Edwin stopped Margaret. Giles is grossly misogynistic, positioning himself as Penelope's ruler rather than a partner.

Penelope finds a friend in the local librarian, Gloria, who'd ordered six copies of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* that she was recommending to local young mothers seemingly burdened by motherhood like Penelope. Penelope loves the book, which she hides in the closet where she keeps her cleaning supplies, a place Giles never enters. The book reveals that her misery isn't hers alone but is shared by thousands of women who are going crazy trapped in their boring domestic lives. The book empowers her to fight against Giles's old-fashioned beliefs.

The Feminist Mystique *is a fundamental text of the second-wave feminist movement; however, it speaks almost exclusively to white women. Its thesis that women should be allowed to work outside the home may have been radical for white, upper-class women like Penelope whose husbands wouldn't let them work and who were bored with motherhood, but this idea wasn't radical for women of color who were already working outside of the home out of financial necessity while at the same time caring for their kids. Symbolically, she hides the book in a closet that she knows Giles will never open because he never contributes around the house. This mirrors the move her father made in her childhood when he hid his porn in the shed, thinking it'd be the last place a girl would ever want to go.* The Feminist Mystique *connects Penelope to a greater community of women who are oppressed in the same way that she is, and, like many other women of this time, she has a radical feminist awakening.*

Penelope resents working class English women and the "Third World" women who get to work and be mothers. Giles laughs at her, but undeterred, Penelope follows him around day and night on her "freedom crusade," determined to change his mind. One day he snaps, punches through the window on the front door, and tells her she's lucky he didn't punch her face instead. They divorce, and she keeps the house and the kids. She hires a babysitter and starts working at the Peckham School for Boys and Girls.

Penelope's feminism doesn't extend beyond upper-middle-class white women like herself. Rather than see how working-class white women and women of color are her natural allies, even if their oppression plays out differently from her own, instead she's resentful of what she perceives as their freedom. She doesn't understand that working, immigrant mothers work for low wages in order to survive, not because they want to pursue an intellectual calling like teaching. She also doesn't understand that they work hard on top of managing the majority of housework and childcare. Giles responds to Penelope violently when she tries to advocate for herself, and this is Penelope's final straw. Leaving him allows her to launch her career, but it also leaves her a single mom.

Penelope is charmed by Phillip, when she meets him only six weeks after her divorce is finalized. With him, the regret, sadness, anger, and loneliness left by her divorce fade almost immediately. He's a "Clitoris Man," unlike her clueless ex-husband, and so their sex is unlike anything she's ever experienced. They have a courthouse wedding and Phillip moves into her house. She's delighted that he works from home as a psychologist while she gets to leave the house to teach. Her children grow attached to him because he's affectionate and playful with them, while Giles never was.

Like she did with Giles, Penelope rushes into her relationship with Phillip in the wake of an emotionally traumatic event and in order to fill a gaping void in her life. She is still searching for that perfect home and family that she's lacked her whole life. Penelope and Phillip's sexually fulfilling relationship leaves Penelope feeling more clued in to the sexually liberated second-generation feminist movement. Penelope relishes the role reversal in their relationship, happy to have Phillip home bonding with the kids while she's at work. Phillip is a different, seemingly more open-minded type of man than Giles. He's willing to be a stay at home dad, while many other men would be embarrassed or emasculated by this role. He's also loving and affectionate with the children, taking on some of the childrearing duties.

She loves that Phillip wants to know who she is as a person, not just as a woman and mother. He doesn't try to impose sexist gender roles on her either. In her diary she describes him as a "New Man," "in touch with modernity." Everything was going well until his interest in getting to know her transformed into psychological interrogations. When she spoke her mind he'd suggest they "find out what's prompting this negative behavior." She feels "psychologically *raped*" when he goes into therapist mode, probing into her childhood and subconscious.

Phillip is the first man in Penelope's life who wants to know who she is as a person, not just in the role of daughter, wife, or mother. Penelope has hardly had much time on her own to explore and invent herself outside those societally imposed roles. Phillip is seemingly a perfect, supportive, feminist husband, until he starts to control her in his own way through his psychological probing.

Phillip criticizes everything she does, and Penelope starts to question their marriage after he accuses her of drinking too much. She's incensed and insists a bottle of wine per night isn't too much. She realizes that she'd married Phillip too soon when her love for him was fresh and blotted out reality. Their once fantastic sex-life has dwindled to the "unimaginative missionary pumping" that she and Giles resorted to once he'd no longer found her attractive after childbirth. She's unhappy but staying is preferable to enduring public humiliation and ostracization for a second divorce.

Phillip's criticism becomes too much, and Penelope wants to end her second marriage, realizing too late that she rushed into the relationship. It's no longer liberating or freeing. Instead, Penelope is trapped by the unhappiness that has led to her nightly drinking that she doesn't recognize as a problem. Despite her staunchly feminist identity, she'd rather suffer through an unhappy marriage than face the shame and judgement that society passes on divorced women, let alone twice-divorced women. Leaving him would also mean having to survive alone as a single mom for the first time, an incredibly difficult reality she's never had to face and one that her version of feminism doesn't account for.

By the time Adam and Sarah leave home, Penelope and Phillip are living completely separate lives in the same home. Eventually, Penelope finds used condoms in the trash, evidence of his affair with the 19-year-old version of herself. She corners him in the kitchen with a pot of boiling water in hand, most angry that he'd been sleeping with a woman younger than her daughter in their shared home. Penelope misses Giles, who seems appealing now in comparison. Giles is living in Hong Kong with his second wife, an Indian woman, and their sons. Penelope's kids love their half-siblings, who they'd met once they started spending holidays with their dad. Whenever Penelope criticizes Giles's new family, her kids call her racist. She thinks Adam and Sarah are examples of "political correctness gone mad." After she and Phillip divorce she's left to live alone in her house.

Penelope and Phillip's marriage ends with another moment of violence, mirroring the end of her and Giles's marriage. Penelope is betrayed in a way many women are, by a man who wants a younger, "more beautiful" woman. This type of betrayal is rooted in a misogynistic culture of unrealistic beauty standards, ageism, and sexual double standards. A man is never too old to be desired, but women lose their desirability after reaching a certain age that's deemed "too old" to be beautiful. Penelope's children recognize and call out her racism that underlies her judgement of Giles's new family, but she accuses them of being too politically correct. Phillip's infidelity is the final straw and Penelope gets divorced from him regardless of her shame. She's on her own for the first time in her life, removed from her restrictive roles of daughter, wife, or mother. Once again she's left without that home she's been searching for, leaving another broken family in her wake.

Penelope hires a maid named "Boomi" and rents the upstairs rooms to Japanese students. She doesn't like being middle-aged and single because she doesn't know how to attract men; she attracted them effortlessly when she was younger. She fleetingly wishes she was a lesbian because an article said older and younger women often fall for middle-aged women, while men of all ages go for younger. Penelope tries to be happy alone and heed the advice of her women's magazines that say women shouldn't be defined by a male partner. She wants to love herself and her body, so she gets rid of her full-length mirrors.

Penelope is okay with letting people of color into her life so long as they serve her in some capacity, whether by cleaning or paying her rent. She doesn't bother to correctly learn Bummi's name, revealing the subtle ways she undermines her humanity. Penelope struggles with her sexuality in her middle age. Although she still professes strong feminist beliefs, she struggles now that she's free of the gendered roles that she once wanted to escape. She's still so much like her mother whose boring and limited life she never wanted for herself. She's deeply internalized society's judgement and disgust for women's aging bodies, and gets rid of her mirrors in an effort to learn to love herself—a step that reveals just how deeply her self-loathing permeates.

Penelope should be happy at work, which she'd given her first marriage up for, but starts to hate it when it shifts from a school made up of "her own kind," the "English children of the working classes," to "a multicultural zoo of kids." The disrespectful students and male teachers leave her perpetually angry and she laments that feminism is going out of style to make room for the "multi-culti brigade." She stands up to the male teachers now, after years of feeling silenced and left out.

Penelope still holds fast to her feminist beliefs, standing up to the male teachers at the school. However, her version of feminism continues to lack intersectional awareness, so much so that she begins to hate the job she fought so hard to have and that was her feminist achievement. She continues to undermine the humanity of people of color, by comparing the children to zoo animals. She hates that society is evolving, that discussions of diversity and acknowledgement of racism is slowly pushing society towards equality. Penelope represents an old England, one built on white supremacy and concerned with preserving a homogenous population and culture, but that England, and the people like Penelope who believe in it, are fading into irrelevance.

Penelope remembers when "Saint Shirley the Puritanical of the Caribbean" confronted her in the staff meeting when she was still a brand new teacher. She was angry that Shirley attacked her rather than the "male chauvinist pigs" who objectified the female staff and even had affairs with students. Shirley, meanwhile, thought she should be respected by female teachers like Shirley because she'd petitioned for the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts that were both made law. She eventually forgave Shirley and they became work friends.

Penelope views herself as a reformer as much as Shirley views herself as one. Penelope believes her feminism has benefitted every woman on the school's faculty, and thinks she deserves thanks and respect for those contributions. While it is true that she has made the school better through her pushing back against the male teachers, and through her petitioning for the Discrimination Acts, the good she achieved is overshadowed and undermined by her own racism at odds with a truly inclusive and intersectional feminism. Equality of the sexes will never be achieved without equality of the races, too, because white-supremacist, patriarchal society thrives and depends on both forms of oppression to maintain the status quo. Penelope and Shirley will be stronger if they unite around their causes together, but by the time they do unite it's over their mutual burnout and disdain. They've both lost their political passions, and instead collectively perpetuate society's harmful status quo.


Penelope comes home from work every day to her Golden Retriever, Humperdinck, who cuddles and listens to her for hours. She reaches out to her "Sisterhood" of college friends that she'd ignored when she was married, explaining that she'd "lost the me of myself and was subsumed within the we of marriage." She's quietly happy when one of her friends gets divorced, too. They become close and do everything together. Sarah supports her after her divorce from Phillip. Penelope phones her drunk to tell her she's her best friend, and Sarah never hangs up, worried that her mother is suicidal, which Penelope insists she's never been.

Penelope's mental health suffers as she's left mostly alone and still without the home and family she's yearned for her entire life. She's never managed to fully rebuild the friendships she lost when she lost her independence to marriage and the all-consuming and isolating roles of wife and mother. Penelope demands significant emotional labor from Sarah, reversing the roles of mother and child.

Sarah still hasn't found love, but tells Penelope that when she becomes a mother she'll quit working. Long having given up on her feminist politics, she's happy for Sarah, wanting her only to be self-fulfilled. Giles is the kids' favorite parent because he supports them financially, which makes Shirley sad since she's the one that raised them. With Adam off in the U.S., Sarah lives with Asian roommates who Shirley describes as "well-educated and well-spoken so hardly Asian at all." She comes over for lunch every other Saturday, and Penelope cooks her favorite foods. Sarah works as a celebrity agent and tells Penelope her life is hardly messed up compared to celebrities, before quickly trying to walk back on the statement.

Penelope's feminism hasn't earned her the exciting life that she once dreamed of. She turned out very much like her mother Margaret, who she both loathed and pitied. Now Penelope directs those feelings towards herself. She's happy that Sarah is pursuing the path that she'd scorned, hopeful that it will lead her to the self-fulfillment that still eludes her. Giles, who has more financial power in a patriarchal society that privileges men, buys his way into the position as the children's favorite parent, while Penelope's hard, though imperfect, work as a mother goes both unpaid and unacknowledged. This points to the way that society undervalues the labor women invest in their children and families. Penelope's racism continues to define her view of the world. She constantly views the people of color around her through stereotypical and discriminatory lenses. Sarah accidentally reveals her true feelings about her mother's life. It's clear she pities her, much as Penelope pitied her own mother years ago. She's come full circle and is living the life she'd wanted to avoid.


A few years later Sarah has a family and her especially rowdy children bother Penelope when they visit. Sarah's husband insists on letting the kids roam free and when Penelope says they need to be slapped, he tells her that's child abuse. She hates visiting their apartment because the walls are covered in the kids' drawings and everything is dirty. After Penelope gets the kids to sleep during one of their visits, Sarah tells her they are moving to Australia, where her husband is from and has been offered a job. Penelope immediately breaks down. When she retreats to her room Sarah sends the kids in to comfort her. As they jump all over her and tell her not to be sad, Penelope realizes how sad she'll be to miss their growing up.

Penelope's problematic and old-fashioned views on childrearing are another point of division between her and Sarah, just like her racist views. She longs to be closer to her children and their children, but pushes everyone around her away with her negative attitude. It's not until Sarah and her grandchildren leave that Penelope realizes that she's lost the last chance at a home and family that she had.

CHAPTER 4: MEGAN/MORGAN

Megan thinks back to her "problematic childhood" during which her mother, Julie, treated her like it was the 19th century, not the 1990s. It's only because of Bibi that she's been able to have this revelation about her youth. Megan preferred to dress and look like her brother growing up, but her mother, "repeating patterns of oppression," insisted on dressing Megan in cute dresses "for the approval of society." Being cute defined Megan's entire childhood, and her mother basked in the compliments, which validated her marriage to an African man. They'd made the world a better place by having this perfect child.

Megan's mother suppressed her queer gender identity in her early childhood because, for a parent, a child's deviation from society's norms reflects on them, too. Her mother, who already subverted mainstream norms by entering into an interracial marriage, wants her biracial daughter to stand out positively, for her good looks, not negatively and shamefully, for going against gender norms. Julia feels pressured to present an image of a perfect family because society judges them for being mixed race and she wants to prove those judgements wrong.


Megan thinks that she should have been happy that her looks got so much attention, but she understood that being cute meant she was supposed to be compliant. When she rebelled against Julie and threw tantrums against wearing dresses, she felt like a disappointment. Once she heard her otherwise liberal mother tell an aunt "there's something not quite right with Megan." Despite her beauty, she isn't feminine, and her mother worries for her and hopes she'll outgrow it. Her dad Chimongo, who's from Malawi, agrees with her mother and the day after her meltdown about the dress commands her to play with her Barbies. Megan hates her Barbies, going so far as to destroy them, for which she gets punished.

Although Julie asserts a liberal identity, her liberalism isn't intersectional. Her progressiveness doesn't extend to the queer community, at least not when it's her kid who is the queer one. Julie openly expresses her opinion that there is something wrong with Megan because of who she is. Additionally, her definition of beauty is limited to the feminine, whereas beauty can be much more expansive than that. When Julie forces gendered items on Megan, she highlights how women, even though themselves oppressed by patriarchal gender norms, police other women and become enforcers of those harmful norms themselves. She does this work for the man in the house, Megan's father, who plays a supporting role in this enforcement. Helpless in the face of her parents' criticisms, Megan's only way to express her feelings is by destroying the Barbies that, feminine and white, are nothing like who she is.

Her great-grandmother on her mom's side, GG, was the only person who accepted Megan for who she was. Megan spends summers at her home in the countryside and loves that GG lets her run wild. When she turns 13 and gets her period, however, her mother shows up and tells GG that she can't allow Megan to run around anymore because she needs to outgrow her tomboyishness. Her mother threatens to take away Megan's summer visits, so while she's around GG teaches Megan how to bake. GG promises that next year, when her mother isn't there, she'll let her run wild with her brother Mark again. They need to make sure Mark won't reveal their secret, and he doesn't.

GG provides Megan with a supportive home that she lacks with her parents. At the farm she's allowed to be at home in her body and her identity. Julie thinks she can make Megan more feminine by having her perform stereotypically feminine tasks. She views Megan's gender identity as a phase she'll outgrow, rather than an integral and fundamental part of her identity. GG is Megan's first ally and Mark is her second.

Megan's mother is a nurse born and raised in England. She's a little Ethiopian and African American through distant relatives but looks almost white. Her family is proud that each progressive generation gets lighter skinned, but Megan's mother ruined that progression by marrying an African man. Her mother insists she's color-blind when she looks at her husband, Chimongo, seeing only the "lightness of his spirit." Megan doubts her mother's color-blindness because her dad's race is all anyone sees in him, including her mother's own family, who were unhappy when they married.

Julie's family has been deeply affected by their own internalized racism. Their shame over their Blackness is so great that they're proud to have distanced themselves from it, the later generations now passing almost totally as white. Julie, however, rebels against her family by marrying a Black man and having children who are very clearly Black. Julie adheres to a common and problematic narrative of color blindness. While intended to suggest an acceptance of others regardless of race, the phrase implies that race doesn't matter, when in an unjust society it really does. When Julie says she doesn't see her husband's race she is saying she doesn't see an integral part of his identity. She's not acknowledging how his experience of the world is shaped by his race, which everyone sees and often holds against him, including her own family.

The different parts that make up Megan's background make people assume that she's mixed race, which she lets them believe even though she feels like she's "just a complete human being." The girls at school want her "natural suntan" and blond curls, and the boys are attracted to her. When her body starts to change with puberty, the hips and curves of womanhood don't feel right to her. She hates her breasts and hates what she sees when she looks in the mirror. She hopes she'll grow into her body, but with time she only hates it more.

Megan's story exemplifies how mixed-race people are often exoticized. Her lighter features like her blonde curls lend her a proximity to whiteness that render her desirable in the eyes of the white people around her. She's different, but not "too" different. Megan hates the term mixed race because she feels it undermines her humanity, chopping her up into categorizable pieces rather than seeing her as a whole person. The discomfort and dysmorphia she feels as she enters puberty add another layer of negative self-image. She's neither growing into her body nor out of her tomboyishness as her mother hoped.

Megan shaves her head when she's 16, much to her classmates' dismay. Her friends start to abandon her, and GG reassures her that a haircut shouldn't end a friendship. There was something wrong with those girls. Megan starts wearing men's shoes and feels liberated when men stop checking her out. On her last day of school her classmates graffiti the chalkboard, calling her the butchest and ugliest girl in her graduating class. She walks out of school, knowing that brighter prospects await her in college, but still feeling like there will be something wrong with her forever.

GG remains one of Megan's only allies as she's abandoned by her friends and bullied by her classmates for her deviation from societal norms. Her friends, like her mother, are afraid to be associated with someone who doesn't fit society's gender norms for fear it will reflect badly on them by association. The classmates that call her butch and ugly reinforce what her mother has been suggesting Megan's whole life: that being beautiful means being feminine, and that masculinity in a woman is not just ugly but pathological.

At night, Megan hangs out on the Quayside with people who are also outsiders. She does any drug she can get her hands on, anything that takes "her to a higher, happier plane." Soon her experimentation gives way to cravings that have her sleeping with men for drugs. She sleeps with women, too, which she enjoys more. She drops out of school, instead working at McDonald's and living at her parents' house; they charge her rent because she's ruined her life.

Megan retreats to the literal margins of society where she seeks refuge among other social outcasts. They provide her with a temporary home and community where she can be herself. She starts using drugs to cope with the pain of the rejections she's suffered. She discovers that she's more sexually interested in women, uncovering another marginalized identity that intersects with her race and gender. The emotional fallout from years of oppression and discrimination have sent Megan down a path of self-destruction. She's imploding from within, but as a result of how she's been treated out in the world. Rather than attempt to understand the causes of Megan's behavior, or even recognize their role in her troubles, her parents punish her.

One night she lurks on her old classmates on social media, and is jealous of their happiness and success, even though she knows many of them have their own problems. Still, their posts make her decide to stop going to the Quayside, and she quits drugs cold turkey when her parents are out of town so she can hide her painful detox from them. Afterwards, she feels "born again." Megan gets a full sleeve tattoo on her eighteenth birthday. When her mom sees it she pulls the tablecloth, and the special birthday dinner she'd prepared, straight off the table. Her dad threatens to throw her out for upsetting her mother, but Megan walks out first. When she realizes she left without money or keys, she asks to be let back in and all three apologize to each other.

Megan wants to be like her classmates who have played by society's rules and lived up to its norms and expectations. Even though she knows their happiness online is a façade that hides inevitable problems, she wants and needs some of that happiness and success for herself. She returns from the margins to try and make it once more in the hostile world she lives in. The tattoo is a symbol of Megan's rebirth. The fresh ink marks a fresh start and a proud assertion of her identity. To Julie, however, it forever marks Megan as different and deviant. Despite her own rebellion years before when she brought a Black man home to her racist family, Julie can't or won't accept Megan's gender rebellion.

Megan realizes she needs to move out to find herself. Her mom begs her to stay, but by then it's too little too late. She moves into a hostel and is ready to live her life on her own terms. As time passes, she sheds the expectations and identity that her parents wanted for her. She doesn't feel like a woman and wonders if she wants to be a man. She turns to the internet and online chat rooms where she finds a trans community she didn't know existed. She meets Bibi, who calls her out for being ignorant about things like gender being a social construct.

Megan has to leave the home that never sheltered her to find a new home and community where she'll be free to not just be herself, but truly find and understand herself. Away from her parents, she's freed from their gender enforcement. While Megan has spent her life suffering in the face of judgement and criticism, when she initially enters the trans community she brings her internalized biases and assumptions despite being a queer person herself. She's lived as a queer person her whole life without knowing it. The experience and feelings are familiar to her, but she doesn't have the knowledge or intersectional understanding of what queerness means.

From Bibi, Megan learns about the reawakened feminist movement. Megan grew up thinking feminist was a bad word, one her mom equated with manhater, which Bibi quickly dispels. Bibi wants to change the world, but Megan just wants to be herself first. Megan is attracted to Bibi, whose photo shows that she's Asian with square glasses and shoulder-length hair. Megan asks Bibi to school her in feminism and gender. Bibi explains how society reinforces gender through constructed roles and traits. Although Bibi rejects gender roles, she knows she's female and transitioned seven years ago so she could be what she always knew she was.

Again, despite her self-proclaimed liberal views, Julie instilled stereotypical and conservative thinking about feminism in Megan. Bibi is a radical whose identities and experiences fuel her desire to make social change. Megan, not yet at home in herself, isn't ready to take on yet another new identity as an activist. Bibi gives Megan the language to understand what she went through in her childhood with her mother when she explains society's reinforcement of gender norms. Bibi is Megan's first example of a queer person living proudly and securely in their identity.

Megan's mind is blown with the idea that she was born a woman and maybe wants to be a man and is attracted to someone who was born a man and is now a woman. She and Bibi spend hours chatting online, afraid that Skyping will kill the fantasy if they find they aren't attracted to each other after all. Bibi grew up in England and moved far away from her parents who didn't understand her transgender identity. In her parents' eyes, she was supposed to grow up, marry a nice woman from the right caste, and continue the family line. Her gender-bending in a Hindu community was shameful, so her parents disowned her.

Morgan is growing into herself, exploring the possibilities not just for her gender but her sexuality, too. Bibi comes from first-generation immigrant parents. As their second-generation child they had dreams and expectations for her at odds with who she really was. Their relationship is shattered when Bibi fails to live up to those expectations. Bibi loses both her home and family as well as her Hindu community because they don't accept her queerness. She reconstructs a new home and community within queer spaces.

Bibi works in a nursing home and the old people there who witnessed her transition are loving and accepting of her. She was happy to be in the body she'd always wanted, but also surprised at how much she'd taken the privileges that come with being a man for granted. Now she's afraid to walk home alone at night and is taken less seriously when she talks. Her experiences, she explains, are what made her an intersectional feminist. Bibi tells Megan it's her turn to talk about her gender identity. Megan is still unsure as she encounters all the options she didn't even know existed.

Bibi's experience in the nursing home challenges the assumption that older generations are unaccepting of the LGBTQ+ and especially transgender community. GG is another example that challenges this stereotype and generational divide. Bibi's unique experience of having lived as both a man and a woman in a patriarchal, white-supremacist society means she has a stark understanding of just how much harder it is to be a woman in this world. These experiences helped her realize that all oppression is intersectional. The fight for transgender rights is deeply intertwined with the fight for women's rights. Bibi opens up a vast world of gender to Megan, and Megan is still figuring out her place in that new world and community.

She discover identities like non-binary and Two Spirit and others like "quivergender" and "polygender," which she describes as the "batshit-crazy end of the Transgenderverse." Bibi is enraged by Megan's cavalier dismissal of the way some trans people choose to identify, telling her she sounds like an ignorant oppressor. The call ends with both girls angrily dismissing one another. They don't speak for four days and Megan fears the relationship is over until Bibi reaches out and asks to meet in person.

Megan's internalized homophobia and transphobia is evident in her derogatory comment about the many gender identities that exist under the transgender umbrella. Just as her mother once did the work of patriarchal society by inhabiting the role of the oppressor and trying to change Megan's gender identity, Megan, although gender queer herself, can likewise inhabit the role of oppressor. Although she's doing this unintentionally, out of ignorance, her actions and mindset still perpetuate discrimination and oppression by upholding the status quo. Her ignorance almost costs her friendship with Bibi and her connection to her new queer community.

They meet in a café and Megan is immediately struck by Bibi's beauty. Megan finds it hard to believe Bibi had ever been a man, until she starts "mansplaining" the gender expectations forced on women. Megan realizes Bibi is a woman with a man's confidence and calls her out for trying to school Megan on her own lived experience. Bibi thanks Megan for this callout, and Megan is happy that this confrontation doesn't derail their meeting. They talk for hours, holding each other's hands across the table and delighting in strangers' confused stares as they try to figure out their genders. Megan explains she doesn't want to be a man, instead wants to be gender-free. She doesn't want to take testosterone but wants to remove her breasts. They end up at Bibi's house where they kiss and spend the night.

Although Bibi is a woman, she was socialized to become a man, and so sometimes slips back into the misogyny she internalized growing up as a young boy. Like Megan, Bibi unintentionally slips into the role of the oppressor, but her willingness to be called out and correct her behavior speaks to how committed she is to un-learning the problematic habits and behaviors she's absorbed. Bibi and Megan challenge people's understanding of gender. Their very existence is an act of rebellion and protest that forces those around them to expand their understandings of what gender can be. Megan finally understands what will make her feel at home in her body, settling for a non-binary identity. Bibi and Megan's relationship is shifting from a mentor-mentee relationship to something romantic.

Megan looks to Bibi for guidance for how to start living gender-free in a world defined by the gender binary. Bibi tells her that dreaming is necessary for survival. When Megan worries that switching to gender neutral pronouns is too lofty a dream, Bibi tells her that she has to take this first step at changing the world, even though she'll be met with resistance. Tucked away in the countryside where they feel safe, Megan and Bibi are falling in love with each other. Megan decides to try out they/them pronouns to see how they feel, excited to embark on their "quiet revolution" no matter the outcome. Bibi warns Megan that people are going to get their pronouns wrong all the time.

Bibi understands that dreams are fuel to keep going in a hostile and unaccepting world. Without dreams of a better future, the queer community would have nothing to fight for. Megan's personal choices when it comes to their gender expression are an act of radical protest that will be met with judgement and discrimination. Bibi explains that just being a queer person living authentically out in society on a daily basis is a step towards radically changing the world. In other words, each queer person is their own one-person revolution.

Megan now goes by Morgan. It's been six years since they decided to identify as gender-free. They've adjusted to being misgendered all the time. Tonight, they're hanging outside the after party for *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, directed by Amma Bonsu, the "legendary black dyke theatre director." Morgan already misses Bibi even though they've only been gone a few hours. They've lived together for the past six years and have a happy and harmonious routine. Morgan spends every other weekend with GG who still lives on her **farm** despite being 93. GG doesn't fully understand Morgan's gender identity but is leaving the farm to them in her will so that Morgan can "invite all [their] non-binding people to come and stay," so long as they promise to keep it in the family after they die, too. Morgan and Bibi are thrilled by GG's idea.

Morgan has settled into their identity and knows how to deal with the judgement and discrimination that come with living life gender-free. Unlike Yazz, who thinks her mother, Amma, is outdated, Morgan looks up to Amma as someone who radically changed the theater world. Although GG doesn't fully comprehend Morgan's identity or the vocabulary of the queer community, her decision to leave the farm to Megan and Bibi is a radical act of allyship. Land is power, and by transferring that power to Megan and Bibi she is helping them carve out a safe, queer community that will provide refuge from a discriminatory world.

GG's mother, Grace, never knew her father, Wolde. All she knew was that he was an Ethiopian seaman who got her mother, Daisy, pregnant on a stopover in England, never to be seen again. Grace wanted to know who he was up until the day she died, and in her old age GG felt sad that he'd remain a mystery forever. So, Morgan buys GG an Ancestry DNA test in hopes that it may help solve this mystery.

Grace spent her whole life longing to fill the void her father left in her life. His absence leaves her feeling like she's without a complete home or community. She passes this feeling of loss and incompleteness down to her daughter, GG. Morgan wants to solve this intergenerational mystery that runs through the family history.

Back at the after party, Morgan is ready to get away. They're only there to write a review for a magazine. Even though they're a high school dropout, their massive Twitter following @transwarrior has launched them into "influencer" status. Their Twitter started off as a place to record their gender journey, and later transformed into a site of activism. With Morgan's rise to internet fame, Bibi warns them not to let it get to their head, and though they insist they aren't, Morgan sometimes worries they're not being truthful. A publisher wanted Morgan to write an autobiography, but they declined because much of their family has since come around to their gender, so they don't want to write anything hurtful about them. Morgan's mom loves Bibi because she's so feminine.

Morgan has become a leader in their new, queer home and community. Morgan is a radical activist, working from outside the mainstream as someone without a college or even high school degree in a world that makes it incredibly difficult for a person without formal, higher education to be successful. Against the odds, Morgan's activism, which started with their one-person gender transformation and revolution, now exists on a large, truly world-changing scale. Still, Morgan has to carefully tread the line between activist and celebrity, making sure that fame doesn't corrupt their political rebellion. While Morgan's family has grown, too, her mother Julie still praises femininity and is more readily accepting of Bibi because her gender presents as traditionally feminine.

Morgan tweets a rave review for *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* that's already racking up hundreds of likes and retweets. They finish off their wine and throw the glass into the Thames and are thinking about getting out of London first thing in the morning when they recognize Roland, the TV personality, standing next to a girl who'd stood out in the audience of one of their lectures last year. Morgan accepted the offer to lecture at the university to make some extra money. It was their first time ever in a university. They talked about their experience growing up and coming out as a trans person. Morgan remembers that Yazz, the girl now at the after party, was the only one in the audience that didn't look at them like they were a "circus freak."

In a move that parallels Amma's choice to enter the mainstream by putting her play on at the National, Morgan, too, takes their radical politics into society's preexisting institutions. Morgan shifts from radical to reformer when they decide to enter the university to give a lecture on gender, attempting to make change from within. Working from within society's existing institutions also comes with financial benefits, but with that also comes the fear of selling out. Because of her progressive upbringing with two gay parents, Yazz is the only one in Morgan's audience who isn't judgmental.

The students were enthralled and Morgan revealed more personal details including their decision to get top surgery. During the Q&A Morgan was applauded for being brave and entertaining. Yazz rushed up to Morgan, and excitedly announced that she, too, might become non-binary by getting a trendy haircut. Morgan told her that being trans isn't "playacting an identity," but is "something inside you" that's been there for a long time, not just something "woke" or "hip." Yazz, flanked by her crew, convinced Morgan to grab a coffee with them. At the coffee shop Yazz and her friends were overeager to share their opinions on gender, "as if *they* were suddenly the experts." At the **National**, Yazz spots Morgan and rushes over to talk to them, explaining that she's Amma's daughter. Morgan was about to leave, but Yazz insists they stay and takes them inside to find Waris and Courtney.

By the end of the lecture, the audience looks at Morgan with respect and admiration, speaking to the change Morgan's work is making. Yazz and her friends, a few years younger than Morgan, represent the younger generation caught up in being woke and hip. Yazz wants to try queerness on with a haircut, while Morgan's queerness isn't a costume that they can take on and off. In being so desperate to demonstrate and prove their wokeness, whether through a haircut or their opinions, young people like Yazz and her friends can end up being the opposite of woke.

CHAPTER 4: HATTIE

Hattie is 93 years old. Known to her family as GG, she sits at the head of the table with her large family gathered around the sides. Her children are in their 70s now. Ada Mae is named after her father, Slim's, mother and Sonny after Slim's brother who was lynched. At the center of the Christmas feast sits the turkey that Hattie overfed all year and killed herself yesterday. Bibi and Morgan helped prepare the rest of the food. Hattie loves to walk around barefoot on her "hooves," insisting that this is how she's maintained her mobility for so long. Her feet are callused, and she refuses to moisturize with cancer-causing lotions ever since Slim died in 1988.

Hattie is the strong matriarch of a large family. Her position at the head of the table signals her role as the family's leader. Although she is in her 90s, she remains active and agile enough to kill her own Thanksgiving turkey. Hattie is deeply attached to and rooted in her land. Not even shoes come between her and the land. It's clear she's still in pain from her husband's death and that she's been terrified of cancer ever since. Her home and heart are incomplete without Slim.

Hattie thinks Christmas should be called Greedymas because it has nothing to do with religion and is all about overeating and giving unnecessary gifts. She stopped giving gifts after Slim died and doesn't want any of her own, but still her family showers her in unwanted presents that she donates later. What she wants for Christmas is the one thing she can't have: Slim. Hattie sits quietly among her family's holiday chaos, and they ignore her until she starts to doze off, at which point they check to make sure she's alright. Hattie suspects they're disappointed when she wakes up because her kids are desperate for their inheritance. They want her to move into a nursing home and sign over her power of attorney, "giving them power over her life."

Hattie hates that modern life is all about consumerism and materialism. Christmas is also a painful reminder of the home and family she lost when Slim died. Her family disregards her wishes by giving her gifts, and then ignore her altogether, highlighting how younger generations disregard and discard their elders. It's clear Hattie's relationship with her children is broken. In her view, they want nothing to do with her, but want to rob her of her money and autonomy.

Hattie doesn't want her children to inherit the **farmhouse** just to sell it off to foreign investors. If they ever try to force her out of her house, she plans to shoot herself in the head. Hattie thinks most of her family doesn't deserve her inheritance because they hardly visit. The village at the bottom of the hill where her farmhouse sits has become a "ghost town" that awakens only for a few weeks in the summer when the rich come to stay in their holiday homes. Hattie thinks the tourist economy and lack of farm jobs are what has depleted rural communities.

Hattie can't bear to lose the farmhouse that is so much a part of not just her family legacy, but of her own soul and identity. She's disheartened that her love for the land wasn't passed down to her children who see only its financial value. Hattie threatens to shoot herself if they try to take the land because it is her life source. While Hattie sees great value in both family and ancestral legacy, the younger generations of her family barely even bother to visit her. Unlike most of the women in the novel, Hattie has lived her entire life in a rural community. Over the years that community has changed drastically and for the worse. Rural communities in modern England are no longer centers of agricultural production home to working class families, but are being gentrified by foreign investors and vacationers.

Hattie refused to hire cheap foreign labor because she feels loyal to the locals, and she blames her **farm's** decline on globalization and the influx of foreign produce. She recently voted for England to leave the EU after they'd denied her application for farm benefits. When her father was alive she voted Conservative to appease him, Labour when Slim was alive, and Green a few years ago when she finally voted for herself. In the most recent election she voted UKIP, which she knows Slim would have hated.

Hattie's politics have changed over her lifetime. She starts and ends her life as a conservative, like her father. When Slim arrives he leads her down a more progressive path, but the rural, economic downturn turns her on to the right-wing UKIP party and their Brexit campaign. Hattie highlights how economically depressed rural communities often come to lean right politically, as seen both in Brexit-era England as well as the Trump-era United States.

When Hattie's family visits, they drink and descend into chaos. Both Ada Mae and Sonny married white people, so all of Hattie's grandchildren pass as white. They don't identify as Black, which would've made Slim sad. Hattie doesn't see why they would "wear the burden of colour to hold you back" if they didn't have to. The only time she got mad was when the family objected to Julie's marrying an African man, Chimongo. The family was getting whiter with each generation and he'd "ruin" that. Hattie was furious, expecting them to be more enlightened. Chimongo, like Slim, was a hardworking man, so he won the family over. He bought his children picture books with Black characters in them, so they could see themselves represented. Hattie felt guilty, wondering if there'd been books like that back when her children were growing up and if she'd failed at being a mother.

Hattie's family and their obsession with maintaining their whiteness reveals how insidious and destructive internalized racism and oppression can be. While she knows Slim would be devastated to know that his children and their descendants have intentionally erased their Black identities, rather than wear them proudly, Hattie views it as a practical choice made to make life easier in a hostile and racist world. However, she hates that their racism isn't just internal, but that they wield it against Chimongo and Julie. They've turned their backs on their ancestors and heritage, and instead have sided with the oppressors. In this way they preserve, maintain, and defend white supremacy. Chimongo tries to protect his kids and their self-esteem as much as possible in their white-supremacist society and family. Hattie feels guilty, but when she was raising her children society was less progressive and there were fewer books and other media that provided representation for children of color.

Morgan and their partner Bibi stay with Hattie through the New Year. She loves when they're around because they genuinely like her and the farm. Hattie remembers that Morgan always loved spending summers on the **farm** and that'd she'd known early on that Morgan was a "sexual invert," not the Barbie Julie wanted her daughter to be. Hattie was okay with Morgan's identity because two gay women who ran the grocery store in the village—one who dressed like the "wife" and the other who dressed like the "husband"—were kind to Hattie's mother, Grace, when she first arrived in town. The town accepted the two as a couple though it was never said out loud. Hattie still puts flowers on their graves.

Unlike the rest of the family, Morgan and Bibi genuinely care for Hattie, likely because Hattie has always been an ally and source of support for Morgan. Just like it's easier for Lennox to accept Amma because his aunt was gay, it's easier for Hattie to accept Morgan because she personally knew a lesbian couple. Both cases highlight the role that interpersonal relationships play in fighting oppression and discrimination. While the town accepted the couple, it was still too taboo to acknowledge their identities out loud, so it was an imperfect acceptance. Hattie's tradition of leaving flowers on their graves speaks to her loyalty to her now dwindling community.

While Hattie could accept Morgan being a lesbian, she thought her declaration of her gender-neutral identity was too extreme. Confused, she tells Morgan she sounds "mental," and they don't talk for two months afterwards. Hattie can accept Bibi because she'd never known her when she was male, but saying you're neither male nor female makes no sense to her at all. When Morgan finally comes to visit again, Hattie draws a truce, telling Morgan that she can't expect a woman born in the 1920s to understand this. Instead, she asks that Morgan be who she wants without the two of them having to talk about it. Hattie thinks Morgan looks and acts the same as when she was Megan. While she refuses to use they/them pronouns, she's fine with calling her Morgan.

The conflict between Hattie and Morgan mirrors the conflict between Amma and her father Kwabena. Both Hattie and Kwabena can't understand the identities and politics of the younger generation, which left both Amma and Morgan furious. Morgan, however, is forgiving of Hattie, willing to recognize and accept that a woman from her generation might never fully understand queer identities. Hattie may be too old at this point to fully unlearn the narratives society ingrained in her about sex and gender. Because Morgan accepts Hattie's resolution to meet them in the middle, they can focus on enjoying the time they have left together as grandparent and grandchild, as opposed to Amma who came to this understanding too late, when her father was already gone.

Hattie looks across the table at Ada Mae whose body is worn down from 40 years spent as a factory worker. Sonny has emphysema after working in mines and as a bartender when bars allowed smoking. She thinks she might outlive her own son. Hattie thinks her children would be healthier if they hadn't left the **farm** where the work would've kept them fit and young like her. Because they abandoned her and the farm, she thinks they don't deserve their inheritance.

Hattie is deeply hurt that her children abandoned the home that is so precious to her. It's meant to be passed down through the generations, and their abandonment is a stinging betrayal. This also compounds Hattie's fear that she'd somehow failed as a mother. Hattie sees the farm as the source of her life and health. It's not just the physical labor that kept her in good health, but the deep sense of purpose and connection to her ancestors and family legacy that it gave her. Hattie is steadfast that her children don't deserve their inheritance because they don't value their ancestors, including her. For Hattie, family is about staying rooted and loyal both to people and places.

Hattie remembers that she always wanted to defend and comfort her children when something bad happened to them. Slim, on the other hand, wouldn't tolerate their "sob stories." Kids at school pinched Ada Mae to see if her skin bruised and Sonny's classmates held him down to see if they could scrub the color off his skin. Slim told his children to rise above these abuses, to attack back when attacked. He told them these troubles are nothing compared to what he faced growing up in the U.S. and reminded them that his brother was lynched because of a white woman's false rape allegations.

Slim and his family faced horrific racism and violence back in the United States. His brother was one among the thousands of Black men lynched on false rape allegations based in society's untrue stereotypes of Black men and hyper-aggressive sexuality. Because his experiences were so much more brutal in comparison to Ada Mae and Sonny's, he tells them to toughen up rather than comforting them and acknowledging that they, too, were accumulating the trauma of racism.

Hattie told Slim his stories scared the children and would make them hate themselves, but Slim insisted they needed to know what happened to their uncle, thinking the stories would toughen them up. Slim told Hattie she wouldn't understand because she's "high-yaller" and from England, but Hattie snapped back, reminding him that he liked that she was "high-yaller." Slim told her it's her duty to confront racial issues as the mother of children who are darker-skinned than her. Eventually, Hattie accepted his point of view, and they followed the civil rights movement unfolding in the U.S. Slim admired both Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and argued both were imperative to the movement. When both were assassinated, he disappeared for a few days.

On the one hand, it is important for Ada Mae and Sonny to know their family history. On the other hand, Hattie was right that they'd wind up hating themselves after hearing these stories on top of the racism they experienced every day. Due to colorism, Hattie's lighter skin gives her privilege over other people whose skin tones are darker. As a result, she can't fully understand what it's like to be her children, whose skin is darker than hers. Hattie calls Slim out for his own colorism, reminding him that her lighter complexion is one of the traits that attracted him. Slim's appreciation for both Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X speaks to his belief that both the reformer and the radical have their role to play in social justice movements. While other characters throughout the novel have pitted these two roles against each other, Slim understands that one cannot exist without the other. Progress depends on the gains that both sides make.

Ada Mae painted herself as white in her childhood drawings, while Sonny dreaded being seen in public with his father. Hattie didn't know what to do about the fact that her kids didn't like being Black. Once Sonny lied to a friend that Slim was a hired laborer, which broke Hattie's heart because she knew her husband would've died for his children. When Ada Mae and Sonny were 16 and 17 respectively, they declared that they were done living and working on the **farm** and were leaving forever. They left for London on the expensive motorbike Hattie and Slim bought for Sonny's birthday. Ada Mae left dreaming of being a secretary for a pop star and Sonny hoped to become a businessman.

Ada Mae and Sonny struggle immensely with internalized racism and attempt to distance themselves from their Blackness at a very young age. Society's racism breaks their family apart as the kids distance themselves from their darker-skinned father. Ada Mae and Sonny choose to abandon the family altogether, determined to escape the racism of their small, rural town for the big city.

Back on the **farm**, Hattie and Slim felt strange in their newly empty house and worried about their kids incessantly. The siblings didn't make it even three months in London where they'd worked low-paying service jobs and lived in "a run-down house with coloured immigrants in a slum area." The immigrants told them they acted too much like white people, which Hattie was surprised they hadn't received as a compliment. Having failed in London, they settled in Newcastle, much closer to the farm.

Although the move to the city meant escaping the racism of their hometown, neither sibling reclaims their racial identity. Instead, their internalized racism spills over and become racism against other people of color, a blatant hypocrisy and contradiction. The immigrants of color they live with in the city notice that Ada Mae and Sonny have assimilated into white culture, and although they've spent their lives intentionally distancing themselves from their Blackness, this statement still offends them. This contradiction confuses Hattie. They give up on their dreams of London, where their identities were only more complicated.

1960s Newcastle wasn't progressive. There weren't many men who were excited to take a Black woman home to their parents, so Ada Mae married the first man who asked her. Tommy, a coalminer turned welder, wasn't very attractive or smart. Hattie suspects he didn't have many dating prospects either, but he turned out to be a good husband who loved Ada Mae regardless of her race. Sonny's experience with dating was the opposite. Women fawned over him like "he was the next best thing to dating Johnny Mathis." He married a bartender named Janet whose parents told her she had to choose between them and Sonny.

Ada Mae and Sonny's disparate experiences reveal a double standard in interracial dating, specifically white and Black coupling. While white men view Black women as undesirable, ignoring them and fearful to bring them home to their racist families, white women objectify and over-sexualize Black men. What remains consistent across genders is that racist white family and in-laws protest against the interracial couplings. While Sonny knows what it's like to be cast out from a family due to race, he and his family do the same years later when Chimongo and Julie marry. While Ada Mae's husband may have loved her "regardless" of her race, their marriage wasn't a place where she could celebrate or embrace her racial identity either. Marrying white partners allowed both siblings to distance themselves even further from the Black identities they'd been trying to outrun since childhood.

Hattie remembers that her first impression of Slim was that he looked like the Masai warriors she and her dad saw in *National Geographic* magazine. They met in 1945 at a dance for "American Negro regiments" who were about to be sent home. Her parents drove her to the dance hopeful that she'd finally meet someone there. Inside, the dance was filled with other mixed-race English women who had come from all over to attend the dance. Surrounded by so many people who looked like her, Hattie felt more comfortable and welcomed than ever.

Hattie, herself mixed race with a white father, objectifies Slim the first time she sees him. She exoticizes him and his darker skin tone when she compares him to the African warriors she saw in National Geographic *growing up. The magazine is now widely criticized for portraying people of color as "exotic" and promoting stereotypes and bias. In Hattie's majority white hometown, her only hope for finding someone to marry is at this dance. When she gets there she feels at home in a community that, for the first time in her life, is filled with people who look like her. Among these women of color, she is not alone in her struggle to find love due to her race.*

In Hattie's flashback, her homemade dress pales in comparison to the glamorous ones the other girls wear. She shows up without makeup and the other girls, feeling bad for her because she lives on a **farm**, help her put some on. Every girl is paired up on the dancefloor, so unlike dances in her hometown where the only one willing to dance with her was her dad. The other girls share similar experiences. White Englishmen either wouldn't touch them or would expect easy sex from them. The women who are used to being treated horribly by white men are treated like queens by the Black American men "in thrall to such high-class, light-skinned" ladies.

Hattie feels at home among these women because of their shared racial identities, but her intersecting class identity as a rural farmgirl sets her apart. The other girls embrace her nonetheless and help bring her into the fold by doing her makeup. White men either ignore Black women entirely, never entertaining the possibility of romantic love with them, or oversexualize them, playing into societal stereotypes about Black women's sexuality. Colorism also shows up on the dancefloor. The Black American men have internalized racism that leads them to perpetuate the same bias and discrimination that affects Black women in the world of dating. The soldiers view these lighter-skinned women as higher-class and more desirable.

Slim approaches and asks Hattie to dance. He compliments her complexion, telling her that "those blushing cheeks alone will give you high stock value back home in Georgia." For the first time, Hattie feels like a man sees her as a woman and not a workhorse. Hattie and Slim marry within a year with her parents' approval. They're happy that she's found someone to care for her, and Joseph is especially happy that Slim doesn't boss her around. Hattie tells him she'd never let that happen.

Slim's first words to Hattie are likewise objectifying, even if that objectification is couched in a compliment. His internalized colorism shows in his privileging of her lighter skin. He dehumanizes her when he talks about her "stock value" as if she is an object to be bought and sold. At the same time, Hattie has never been treated so well by a man. He doesn't view her as a farm laborer, but as a beautiful potential wife. Ultimately, both Hattie's father and Slim are progressive for the time. Each of them wants Hattie to maintain her natural power and autonomy.

Slim likes England because he doesn't get called "boy" and doesn't have to worry about the Ku Klux Klan burning crosses and lynching men. He says he'll never go back to the U.S. Slim is confident, outgoing, and polite, and these characteristics help him find acceptance with even the most hostile strangers in their English town. He explains that his father was a sharecropper who was always in debt to the merchant who sold seeds. Many other family members left the land altogether because sharecropping reminded them of slavery. When the government didn't deliver on their promise of forty acres and a mule, they were stuck being wage slaves. With Hattie and her parents, Slim explains, he's working land that will be his one day. Hattie reminds him that she'll be an owner, too.

Despite the terrible racism he and his children face in the U.K., it's still better than in the United States where Black people have suffered great atrocities. For Slim, marrying into ownership of Greenfields farm is his way of living out the dreams and promises denied to his family after the abolition of slavery. Although he understands the power that land grants, and how that power is especially important to marginalized groups who were denied that power for generations, he still lacks intersectional awareness. He assumes that, as a man, he will possess the land alone because land is traditionally passed down from one man to the next. Hattie has to remind him that they are co-owners.

Hattie and Slim share a sexually fulfilling relationship and since he died 30 years ago, she hasn't had any kind of sexual intimacy. When Slim died, Hattie started taking long walks all over her own land and beyond. On her walks she carried a walking stick that she'd carved a Black power fist into in homage to her husband. In summer she takes a blanket out into one of her fields and looks up into the sky imagining Slim "waiting" for her up in the stars.

Slim made Hattie feel at home in her own body. He loved her for who she was and thought her Blackness was beautiful. She's lost that loving and intimate home with him. Hattie goes out searching for Slim on these long walks. The cane with its Black power fist keeps her connected to him, and to the ways he made her feel proud of her identity. Without him, the land no longer feels like a complete home. At this point in her life she looks forward to reuniting with Slim in the afterlife because life is so incomplete without him.

Slim always admired Hattie's strength, and she kept their **farm** running into her 80s. Over the last decade the farm has fallen into disrepair. The fields that were once well-tended and productive are now fully wild. The farm is still home to all of Hattie's memories. She remembers riding horses as a child and how easy it was to get back up after falling. She misses those years when her body could do what she wanted it to without a second thought. Now tasks as simple as standing up or getting dressed leave her tired.

The farm is slowing down as Hattie's body does. They are both losing their lives. Her beloved home is changing, but what remains the same are the beloved memories that root her in this place and her identity.

Hattie was always close with her mother, Grace. They were like best friends, and Hattie loved the time that they all—her, Slim, the kids, and her parents— lived and worked on the **farm** together. Hattie remembers that her mother was tortured by the mystery of her father, "the Abyssinian," forever wanting to discover his identity. Grace falls sick and, facing death, mourns that she won't see Ada Mae and Sonny grow up. Hattie's father, Joseph, dies shortly after, and before he passes he tells Hattie that she has to upkeep the family farm and legacy and eventually pass it on to Sonny. After spending the 93 years of her life on the farm it's her "bones" and "soul."

Hattie's love and loyalty for family comes from the strong bond she shared with her mother. Grace's wish to know her father is a family mystery she passes down to Hattie, so that it haunts her to this day. Joseph wants Hattie to pass the farm down to a man after they'd had no choice but to stray from patriarchal tradition because their only child was a girl. Joseph wants Hattie to turn the land, and its power, back over to a man, but she bucks tradition by giving it over to Morgan and Bibi whose genders defy the binary.

The **farm** has been in Hattie's family since 1806. Her ancestor, Captain Linnaeus Rydendale, who'd started out as a cabin boy, eventually had enough money to buy the land and build the farmhouse. Rydendale returned from a business trip to Jamaica with a young wife named Eudoré who was rumored to be Spanish. When Slim first sees a picture of her he's certain she's Black, and Hattie thinks he might be right. Slim breaks into one of Joseph's cabinets after he dies and discovers documents that reveal Rydendale made his money as a slave runner. Slim is furious, assuming that Hattie had kept this family secret from him, but the cabinet was locked her entire life. She calms Slim down, telling him neither she nor her father are personally responsible and that everything has "come full circle" now that he is a co-owner of the farm with her.

Since its founding, Greenfields has been home to Black people. Despite the fact that Hattie's family now desperately wants to maintain their perceived whiteness, Blackness runs throughout their ancestry. Slim discovers that Hattie's beloved home was built with the blood money earned through the slave trade. He's furious because the place he now calls home was funded with money that cost his ancestors their dignity and freedom. It's a cruel twist of fate. Hattie, however, thinks this discovery is a sort of karmic justice. The farm now belongs in the hands of a Black couple, rather than a white, slave-owning man. From that point of view, it's a roundabout reparation.

Hattie has her own secret. At 14 she got pregnant by a boy named Bobby. Hattie never got attention from boys, so when Bobby notices her she's thrilled. They have sex in the church pews one day, though Hattie doesn't remember it happening. He doesn't talk to her again after that. Hattie hates being pregnant and feels stupid for falling for Bobby. Her parents decide to keep her hidden until she gives birth. Grace delivers the baby, loves her, and wants to keep her. Hattie is unsure how she feels, but names her Barbara. Hattie's parents fight worse than ever before over whether to keep Barbara. The first time Joseph comes to see the baby he takes her away despite Hattie's protests. He tells her no one can ever know about the baby because it will ruin her life and marriage prospects. Marriage is the last thing on Hattie's mind.

Growing up in an almost all white town, Hattie was used to being ignored by boys. Her Blackness made her undesirable in their eyes. In her excitement that comes with finally being noticed, Hattie ends up pregnant. The pregnancy is traumatic for her physically and emotionally. She struggles with internalized blame while at the same time contends with her father's shame, which is what leads to their decision to keep her hidden. Joseph exerts patriarchal authority over both Grace and Hattie when he takes Barbara away against their wishes. He is more concerned with protecting his pride than he is worried about the emotional damage this decision will cause. He doesn't want Hattie to be "ruined" for marriage, putting some future man's comfort above his own daughter in the present.

Hattie still has Barbara's baby blanket, which she's never washed, hoping it would smell like her for as long as possible. She used to imagine Barbara was adopted by royalty. She never tells anyone about the baby, just as Joseph instructed—not even Slim or her children. Back in the present, Ada Mae wakes Hattie up when she checks to see if she's still alive from where she's fallen asleep at the Christmas dinner table. Hattie is startled from her dream of the sister that Ada Mae doesn't know she has.

Barbara is a ghost that haunts Hattie the same way that her mother, Grace, was haunted by her mysterious, unknown father. Hattie so deeply internalized her father's shame over Barbara that she kept her existence a secret from even Slim, the most beloved person in her life. Her daughter, Ada Mae, who takes her for granted, wakes her up from this dream of the sister that she'll never know.

CHAPTER 4: GRACE

Grace's mother, Daisy, tells her that her father, Wolde, was an Abyssinian seaman who she met while he was on a stopover in South Shields in 1895. Daisy, 16, gets pregnant and he doesn't find out until she's about to give birth. Daisy describes him as otherworldly because he's unlike the boys in her town and had been all over the world. He doesn't speak English, so their conversations are limited, but before he sails off he tells Daisy he'll come back for her. Daisy promises that they'll go looking for him one day to show him the daughter he left behind.

Daisy is attracted to Wolde because he represents a far-off culture and different way of life. Her naïve, youthful love leads to her teen pregnancy that will parallel her great-granddaughter, Hattie's, own teen pregnancy years later. Daisy spends the rest of her life waiting for Wolde to come back and deliver on his promise to make a home and family with her.

Daisy gives birth in the tenement she shares with her large family. When her father sees that the baby is "a half-caste," he's furious and ashamed. He tells her to give it up, but unable to abandon her child, she moves out instead and cuts her mom off for not being strong enough to stand up to her father. Daisy gets a job at a factory and lives with another young woman who has a child. Daisy has little money but takes care of Grace the best she can. She promises to move to the countryside where Grace can run free and she can find a husband who will be a good father.

Daisy's father reacts to her pregnancy in much the same way that Hattie's will two generations into the future. He demands that she give the baby away in order to protect his own pride and reputation. This demand is compounded by his fury that the baby is mixed race. Both racism and sexism intersect here to drive Daisy out of her family and onto the streets. Having lost her first home, Daisy dreams of building a new one for herself and her daughter in the countryside.

Daisy is diagnosed with tuberculosis when Grace is eight. She's put into quarantine, leaving Grace with the other young mother they live with. Not wanting to take care of Grace, Daisy's roommate sends her to the girl's home she herself had grown up in. In this unfamiliar home in the countryside, the other girls gawk at Grace's brown skin and hair. She explains, proudly, that her dad was Abyssinian, remembering that her mother told her never to be ashamed of where he was from.

Like many of the working class and poor, Daisy falls victim to her harsh living and working conditions before she can escape poverty and make her dreams come true. In a cruel twist of fate, Grace makes it out to the countryside, like Daisy had dreamed, but to live alone in the care of strangers. When Grace arrives in the majority white countryside and girls home, she's faced with her peers' ignorance and racism. However, her mother, although she was a white woman, instilled in Grace a deep pride in her racial and ethnic identity that allows Grace to stay afloat in this new place. This pride will be lost generations later when Sonny and Ada Mae make desperate attempts to distance themselves from their Blackness.

Grace has nightmares that wake the others, who tell her she'll adjust soon. She curls up in her blanket remembering her mother's promises that she'd never leave her, remembers that her mother screamed out that she'd be back as she was dragged off to the sanatorium. Every time someone knocks on the door of the home, she hopes that it's her mother, but eventually that hope fades. She starts dreaming that her father will come instead to take her away to his paradise.

Grace is haunted by the ghosts of her parents. The horrifying image of her mother's forced departure is seared into her mind, a trauma that will follow her for the rest of her life. With her mother gone, she's lost the only home and family she had. Her mysterious father becomes her only hope of ever having a home and family again. She was already intrigued by the mystery of her father's identity, but now her desire to know him is even greater.

At the home, Grace learns how to cook, clean, sew, and garden alongside reading and math. They have the girls walk with books on their heads in deportment class and Grace imagines she's from Abyssinia and walking on air. Her teacher tells her she has a natural elegance, which makes Grace proud. The girls in her dorm all become friends and each has their own special talents. Grace does the best impersonations and when she's caught by Mrs. Langley is told she has too much personality, which is unattractive in a girl. Grace notices that she wasn't the only one misbehaving but the only one who got caught. She's scared while she's being reprimanded because girls who misbehave can be kicked out.

The girls home begins to feel like a warm and supportive community that fills at least some of the void that her parents left behind. Grace continues to remain deeply proud of her Ethiopian heritage and mixed-race identity. Grace is targeted unfairly for discipline at school, like many Black children are in educational settings where white teachers stereotype and expect misbehavior from Black students. If she gets kicked out, Grace will be left homeless once more.

Grace is told that she's not like the other girls and needs to be on her best behavior because her life will be hard and full of rejections by people who are "less enlightened" than the people at school. Mrs. Langley tells her to "tone down" her personality and exercise restraint. She threatens to kick her out onto the streets where she'll be forced into prostitution. She threatens that if she doesn't behave the school won't be able to recommend her for employment as a maid. Grace commits to becoming restrained and decorous.

While the women at the school claim to be "enlightened," they are perpetuating racism against Grace by singling her out and telling her that she needs to change her personality. These white women highlight how even those who believe they have good intentions can perpetuate harm. They think they're helping Grace by trying to prepare her for adult life in a discriminatory world but are harming her emotionally in the process. At the end of the day, they see only two options for a Black girl in life: sex work or housekeeping. Their own biases keep them from fighting for any other future for her. Rather than encourage her to break barriers and dream big, they predetermine her future. Fearful of the material consequences she would face if kicked out, Grace gives in to behaving in a way that makes the white people around her feel comfortable.

Grace hoped to become an assistant at a department store, and breaks into tears when, instead, Mrs. Langley finds her a job as a maid for a baron who'd just returned to his family's castle after years away running a plantation in India. The baron has Indian servants, an Indian mistress, and their two sons, so doesn't have a problem having a "half-caste" maid. Years later she's shopping in the department store, the last place she wants to be after a manager had shut the door on her when she asked for a job. Two girls from the home are working, and they complain about the job, enraging Grace who suffers harder conditions as a maid even though she was just as smart as the rest of the girls at school.

Grace dreamed of reforming society, breaking racial barriers in employment by working in a department store. Instead, she becomes a maid for a baron who made his wealth on the backs of people of color. Because he has two mixed-race children of his own, he takes Grace on, but it's clear his racism runs deep. He has Indian servants and the mother of his children is his "mistress," not his wife. When confronted with her two former classmates who are oblivious to their own privilege, Grace realizes that no matter how smart she is or how hard she works, some opportunities will be denied her no matter what on the basis of her race alone.

Grace finds the material she needs for her dress. She and the other maids are making themselves "risqué" dresses that fall below the knee. She'd seen the lady of the house and her rich friends modeling this look. Grace knows she'll never look like them but is happy she'll have a trendy dress for the rare special occasions she gets to enjoy. As she's walking home through the busy town, a man approaches her and says she "must be the Lady of the Nile." The man has bright red hair and blue eyes. He doesn't ogle her the way other men do.

As Grace walks home from the store lost in her thoughts that she'll never be rich and regal like the woman she works for, she's intercepted by the man who will invite her into a life far more privileged than her current one. While this white man doesn't look at her through a hypersexual gaze, he exoticizes her from the minute he meets her. While he intends his line about her being the Lady of the Nile as a compliment, he's imposing a fantasy of otherness onto her. Grace, after all, is English and has never even left the country.

He introduces himself as Joseph Rydendale and, as he walks her across the street, tells her he's just left the bank where he made a large deposit. Grace guesses he's trying to impress her, something a man has never tried to do with her before, and she is impressed. Unlike the seedy men who call her a tease, he seems like a good man. Up until this point she's been able to fend off advances from the types of men who assault women or leave them pregnant, once even suffering a close call with a guest who snuck into the servants' quarters. She'd accepted that she'd likely be single her whole life because no man wanted a "mongrel" as she was often called.

Like Hattie will be years later, Grace is thrilled that a man is paying her positive attention. She's used to going unnoticed or being excluded as a woman of color in this white, rural town. In Joseph she finds a man who not only respects her body but is attracted to her regardless of her race. It's clear Joseph is rich, and his wealth plus his whiteness will give Grace access to privileges she'd be otherwise denied.

Joseph survived World War I unscathed, unlike many of his compatriots. He returned home to his family farm, **Greenfields**, and found it in disrepair. His father had gone senile and wandered the fields in his underwear searching for his long-dead wife. It takes him years to restore the farm and when he's finished he's ready for a wife. After years spent abroad, however, none of the girls back home attract him until he sees Grace on the street. Grace soon starts to fall in love with Joseph, who visits her at the estate where she works every Sunday. When Joseph proposes to her, Grace can't believe that a man truly wants her. They marry and move to the farm.

Greenfields farm is an important family legacy that Joseph invites Grace to share in. Joseph devotes himself to rebuilding this home, and it provides Grace with the true home she's been without since her mother's death. Additionally, Grace makes her mother's dream of a home and family in the countryside come true when she finds a good husband in Joseph and moves onto his farm in the idyllic countryside.

Joseph's father, who died three months prior, never would have approved of their relationship. The day he brings her home on his horse cart, the townspeople stare at Grace, never having seen a Black person before and shocked that she was able to "steal" one of the most desired men in town. The townspeople eventually warm to her because her accent reveals that she's "local-enough." But she still faces racism. The grocer threw her change down on the counter rather than hand it to her, so she does the exact same thing when she goes to pay the next time. She walked away "with her Abyssinian nose in the air" thinking her mother would be proud.

Joseph and Grace's relationship suffers the scrutiny that many interracial relationships do. Grace is spared having to confront racist in-laws, but their town is so rural their neighbors haven't seen a Black person before. That she's with Joseph makes them hate her even more, and she's left with the burden of slowly gaining their acceptance. The racism she experiences in this town never shakes her pride. She's not ashamed to be Black, just as her mother taught her.

Greenfields farmhouse was dirty and dark compared to the estate Grace had grown used to living on. Joseph had a maid who he said would do all the housework so Grace could do as she pleased, which she finds amusing both because she'd been a maid herself so recently and because the house was still filthy. Grace begins to act and speak like the rich people she served at the estate. She notices that the maid doesn't take orders from her the way she does from Joseph, that she refuses to listen to "a half-caste, a negress." Grace tells Joseph to fire the maid, which he does, and finds that she likes doing housework now that she's doing it for herself.

With Grace's new life comes a sudden role reversal. She adopts the behaviors of the rich people she spent years serving, and after years spent as a maid, she now has one of her own. Still, Grace's new life and status don't erase her race and the discrimination that comes with it. The maid Joseph hires, a white woman, refuses to work for a Black woman, a move that would go against the white supremacist hierarchy of English society. Grace has made it into the white, English elite, but even from the inside she's met with discrimination. Tending to this house feels different now that she owns the property. It's a source of pride and empowerment.

The house starts to come back to life and Grace convinces Joseph to refurbish the house in preparation for their future children. They fill the house with new furniture and jazz records. They dance into the night and read and talk for hours. Joseph loves her curls and she can't believe he loves the thick hair she'd always been embarrassed by. The only part of the house she doesn't clean is the cabinet in the library that Joseph says is full of important records that can't be thrown out. He says he'll deal with it eventually, but for now puts a lock on it.

Grace is creating the home of her dreams after losing so much in her youth. He still loves all of her features that made her unlovable in the eyes of most men. The cabinet in the library contains the secret of the farm's origins that Hattie and Slim uncover years later. When Joseph puts the lock on his cabinet, it's clear that he wants to hide his family's involvement in the slave trade from Grace. He fears how this knowledge would impact her love for this new home she's settling into.

When they have sex, Joseph calls Grace "his expedition into Africa." He compares himself to Dr. Livingstone heading down the Nile. Grace reminds him she's Abyssinian and Joseph responds: "whatever you say, Gracie." Joseph wants ten sons, but Gracie thinks five children would be enough and wants at least two daughters. In their efforts she suffers two miscarriages. Then she gives birth to a boy who dies hours after delivery. Grace becomes severely depressed. She and Joseph can't speak of the losses. Finally a daughter, Lily, arrives and survives for one year, two months, and four days before passing away in her sleep.

Although Joseph loves Grace, he continues to exoticize her. In their sex life, his Dr. Livingston fantasy reveals how he still views Grace through problematic, white supremacist lenses. Dr. Livingston was an "explorer" and missionary of colonial England. Joseph positions himself as colonial explorer, dominating and conquering Grace. When Grace tries to remind him that she's actually Ethiopian he brushes her off, revealing that he loves her not so much because of who she really is, but because of the racialized fantasy he's built up around her. Sex becomes another form of domination, another way of making Joseph's dreams a reality, when they set out to try and have the sons he wants. However, death arrives and starts to break up Grace's new, happy home, the way it did when her mother got sick and she lost her home for the first time.

Joseph doesn't give Grace any time to grieve because he's desperate for an heir to the 120-year-old family **farm**. Grace suddenly understands how much the farm means to him as his way of honoring his ancestors. Joseph starts drinking and is angry all the time. When they have sex he's more a robot than a lover, concerned only with impregnating her. She endures the sex, committed to her role in helping him continue the family legacy. She's afraid he'll leave her if she can't provide. They don't read on the couch together anymore, instead sit across the room from one another as he reads *National Geographic* and she reads anything that gets her mind off her "body that [gives] birth to death." They stop sleeping together at night.

Joseph puts his own desire for patrilineal legacy over his wife's physical and mental well-being. He is determined to uphold patriarchal norms by handing power and privilege down to a male heir. Soon this series of devastating losses, along with Joseph's unyielding obsession, ruins their relationship. Grace sacrifices herself to try and give him what he wants, even when it comes at the cost of her connection to her own body. Joseph's love for National Geographic *likewise symbolizes his exotification of people of color. He becomes a colonial explorer when lost in its pages, internalizing stereotypes that he then applies to his wife.*

Grace gives birth to another daughter. After three brutal days of labor, Grace refuses to name or breastfeed the girl, convinced that she's doomed to die. Joseph names the baby Harriet after his grandmother who'd lived a long and healthy life. Joseph knows that Hattie will survive, that she's "a fighter" even though she's a girl. He stops talking to Grace, who views Harriet as a screaming demon unlike her peaceful baby Lily. Grace is severely depressed for months, unable to do anything. A nanny moves in to care for Harriet.

Grace is severely traumatized from the losses she suffered without being allowed to recover and heal. However, Hattie's namesake imbues her with the power Joseph wanted her to inherit: she lives well into her 90s. From the minute she's born, Joseph celebrates her strength, challenging gender norms of the time. Joseph's insistence that Grace birth him an heir has not only broken their relationship, but Grace's relationship with her newborn daughter, which is too painful for her to bear.

Grace becomes suicidal and one night Joseph catches her looking at the kitchen knives. He snatches one from her hand, warning her "don't you dare." She thinks about drowning herself in the nearby lake and Joseph threatens to take her to the asylum. She is too miserable to care. Their relationship is broken, the powerful love they shared is only a memory. When Joseph tries to force Grace to mother Harriet, she walks away refusing to even touch her. He calls her a "wicked woman" and says she's failing at her duty.

Although their relationship is broken, Joseph doesn't want to lose Grace or the life and home they'd built together. Joseph threatens to take her to the asylum, paralleling Grace's separation from her own mother, Daisy, who was removed to an asylum where she died alone from tuberculosis. Grace is so depressed at this point that this near repeat of history doesn't even register or scare her. In Joseph eyes, and society's, there is nothing worse than a woman who won't care for their child. Per traditional gender roles, a woman's duty in life is to sacrifice herself and her own well-being for the sake of her child.

Grace feels as alone as she did when her mother was taken from her, and wishes she was here now to guide her. Harriet is 30 months old when Grace's depression breaks suddenly one morning. She can see the world again the way it was before her dread settled down as a thick fog. She gets showered and dressed, then walks into the kitchen where Harriet and the nanny are eating breakfast. Grace looks like an entirely new person to Harriet, and Grace, really looking at Harriet for the first time, sees a healthy baby girl. Grace notices that Harriet and the nanny have grown too close. Grace sits close to Harriet and announces that everyone will call her Hattie now. Hattie sits on Grace's lap only after the nanny urges her to, which hurts Grace. Later that day Grace reads to Hattie outside while Joseph looks on stunned.

Grace feels as rootless and homeless as she did when she was separated from her mother. The home she'd finally found with Joseph at Greenfield is slipping away. Grace's depression lifts suddenly and without explanation. Perhaps the memory of her separation from her mother and the emotional fallout she suffered pushes her to make sure that her own daughter doesn't grow up motherless. Harriet is two years old and has bonded with the nanny, hardly recognizing her mother in her post-depression state. Grace is hurt that her child hardly knows her, and bestowing her with a new nickname is her way of reclaiming the girl and starting to rebuild their relationship.

Grace carries out a conversation with her mother in her head. She tells her how she and Hattie found each other once her darkness lifted. She loved her and gave her everything she wanted. Hattie and Joseph were close, too, and he let her follow him around the **farm**, teaching her to work and not caring that she was a girl. Grace wishes her mother was there to be Hattie's grandmother and see how strong she was. She mourns that her mother missed her own growing up and the love she shares with Joseph. She wishes that her mother could have met Hattie's American husband Slim, and her grandchildren, Ada Mae and Sonny, that Grace herself only knew for a few years. She remembers how happy Joseph was when Sonny was born. Finally there was a boy to keep the family's legacy alive.

Grace had never been able to find her mother and father, who both remained lost to her forever. She finds Hattie, and in the process rediscovers the home and family she'd created with Joseph, the home and family she'd been searching for since losing her parents all those years ago. The farm and the home and family it represents is meaningful to both Grace and Joseph, who instill that value in Hattie. As she grows up, they root her identity in the land that she lives and works on. Joseph has made peace with the fact that he doesn't have a son, and instead allows Hattie to break traditional gender roles of the time, teaching her everything she needs to know to maintain the family farm and legacy. Hattie will later extend the same privileges to her gender-defiant granddaughter Morgan, showing how this piece of Joseph lives on in Hattie. Although he'd made peace with not having a son of his own, Joseph still believes the farm should return to male hands through his grandson, Sonny, but won't live to see how little that legacy will mean to Sonny.

CHAPTER 5: THE AFTER-PARTY

Amma enters the after-party of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* and is greeted with a champagne toast, ecstatic round of applause, and Roland, who kisses her on the cheeks. She looks beautiful in a wraparound dress that she's paired incongruously with sneakers, an homage to her rebellious teenage self. Everyone agrees the play is a success. A "usually savage pit-bull of a critic" has already given it a five-star review. She's finally achieved the large-scale success that Roland told her she could have had earlier if she'd produced some "multi-culti Shakespeares" early in her career rather than her "agit-prop rants."

Roland narrates the beginning of chapter five, becoming the only male narrator in this chorus of voices. His narration highlights Amma's entry into the mainstream where he's existed for years at this point. The play's resounding success marks her transition from radical to reformer and puts the play's radical subject matter into question. Amma's story, by and for Black women, is radical, but its place on a mainstream stage threatens to dilute that radicalness. Roland's comment about "multi-culti Shakespeares" likewise questions the radical potential of the cultural mainstream. Racially non-traditional casting, the practice of having people of color play traditionally white roles in white-authored narratives, can be viewed both as a sign of progress or a lazy attempt at diversity and inclusion.

Roland spots "Chairman Mao Sylvester" who he'd hooked up with in his younger, partying years. Reminiscing on those days isn't nostalgic, but a reminder of "*El Diablo*" who took so many of their peers. Sylvester reluctantly admits to Roland that the play is Amma's best work, but he's still resentful that she sold out to the "Boring Suits" who are scattered throughout the party. Sylvester rants against the corporate sell-outs. Roland is still upset that Sylvester has never acknowledged his success. He rehearses what he's going to say about the play on the news the following day out loud to Sylvester.

Roland's derisive nickname for Sylvester underscores the division between radicals and reformers. On the other hand, their queer identities, and their shared experience of loss during the AIDS epidemic, brought them together, pointing to the potential for radical and reformer to unite. Sylvester admits that this is Amma's best play yet, but couches that compliment in a further criticism. Similarly, Sylvester is unwilling to acknowledge Roland's success. Roland desperately wants his approval while at the same time he is unwilling to reciprocate and acknowledge Sylvester's successes in life. Both Roland and Sylvester are uncompromising in their views, representing on a larger scale how both radicals and reformers struggle to acknowledge that each side contributes to overall social change.

Annoyed with Roland's academic ramblings, Sylvester cuts him off and walks away. This deeply offends Roland, who thinks, "you can keep your social conscience, *Comrade*" because Roland has cultural capital, which he sees as a far more powerful currency. Roland is "too sophisticated" to shout at Sylvester, so he suppresses the urge. He spots Shirley, whose outfit he derides for being old-fashioned, and Dominique, who is still "sexy in a dykey-bikey way." He sees his partner, Kenny, fawning over a Black security man. They've been together 24 years and are polyamorous. Roland ruminates on the simple fact that he "prefers white flesh" while Kenny prefers black.

Having cultural capital means having knowledge, skills, and behaviors considered valuable within a particular culture and community, often the dominant culture in a society. In Roland's case he's referring to the knowledge, skills, and behaviors he's developed in order to gain access into the mainstream, white and patriarchal English society around him. To Roland, cultural capital and the material benefits that come with it are more important that social consciousness, which offers an internal, moral reward. Roland's proximity to whiteness and white culture is also seen in his romantic life. Roland's preference for white lovers can be read as a symptom of internalized racism. He elevates whiteness in his interpersonal life the same way he does in his professional life, where he strives to retain his position among the "educated classes," teaching the white, male canon in his college courses and contributing to mainstream news media. Kenny's race is never specified, but given Roland's preference for white partners, it's reasonable to infer that Kenny is likely white. A white person's preference for a racial category outside their own always risks crossing the line into fetishization. Both Kenny and Roland highlight the way in which race and racism intersect with romantic desire and sexuality.

Roland walks outside and looks out onto the Thames. He loves London and the city loves him back. But the current political trends threaten to disrupt this equilibrium. He remembers a recent appearance on BBC news with a "Brexiteer" who called him "a metropolitan elite" at odds with the "ordinary and hardworking" British outside of the city. Roland is angry because, as a son of working-class African immigrants, he worked hard to ascend the ranks of class and education to where he is now. He asks the commenter if he means to suggest that Black people should work only in service professions. Roland tells the Brexiteer that his family was chased out of the English countryside by racists mere months after they arrived from Gambia. He explains that this is why Black people made their homes in cities.

Roland contends with a political climate that is marked by a rising tide of conservative and far-right extremism of which Brexit and its advocates are but one branch. Roland highlights how Black people in white supremacist Britain are condemned no matter what they choose to do. When his family chose to live in the countryside they were chased out by racism. Now successful and living in the city, Roland is condemned for that, too. Roland's predicament highlights how white-supremacist society will never accept people of color, even when they assimilate and work hard to achieve mainstream success. In fact, that success becomes fuel for increased division. Roland is more materially successful than many working-class white people living in rural areas and small towns, and this flies in the face of white supremacy.

While responding to the critique, Roland thinks to himself that he's loath to use the word black, which he thinks is "crude." The audience cheers Roland on. The debate ends and he's the clear winner, but rather than feel proud he's angry that he had to discuss race and that he's viewed "as a spokesman for cultural diversity" when the debate goes viral. Roland is decidedly not an ambassador of cultural diversity.

For Roland, being Black is just one piece of his identity, but society often sees him through the lens of his racial identity alone. He resents that Black people working in academia and the public eye are often turned into a de facto spokesperson for the Black community. Roland wants to speak on the issues that he has knowledge of and that he's dedicated his life's work to. Roland doesn't even like the word Black, highlighting how the language of identity means different things for different people.

An arm around his waist interrupts this memory. He's happy Yazz is hugging him rather than yelling at him. Yazz tells him she's so glad the play is a success and they both agree they're proud of Amma. Roland credits Yazz with his success, dividing his life into "Before Yazz" and "After Yazz" eras. He was honored when Amma asked him to be her sperm donor and co-parent, and he wanted to be as successful as possible for his future child.

Roland was only more motivated to pursue mainstream success after he decided to become a father. He wanted to provide the best life possible for his future child, and saw assimilating into society's mainstream elite as the best possible way to give Yazz opportunities he didn't grow up with. Ironically, now that Yazz is a college student deeply invested in radical politics, the life and identity that Roland chose for Yazz now separates them. Yazz is overly critical of Roland for being too mainstream, not acknowledging that the economic privileges he was able to provide her growing up contributed to her ability to become who she is and pursue the life she wants.

While Amma's career is intertwined with her identities, his has never been that way. Roland hates that Black intellectuals, like all Black people in Britain, are still so defined by their race. He sees his Blackness and gayness as "footnotes" in his life, genetic factors he was born into. He doesn't feel like he can identify as Gambian since he immigrated when he was only two. Early in his career he decided to become a part of the establishment that wasn't going to accept him. He decided against "carrying the burden of representation," which would hold him back while white people, who aren't expected to represent their entire race, would easily get ahead.

Roland's life as a reformer versus Amma's as a radical reflects their respective understandings of identity. For Amma her racial, sexual, and gender identities are the most important pieces of who she is, and they drive her work. Roland sees his work and intellectual interests as the most important pieces of his identity. Unlike Amma who is a second-generation child of immigrants, Roland himself is a first-generation immigrant; however, because he immigrated to the U.K. at such a young age, he feels he can't claim a Gambian identity. Although he's always known that he'll never be fully accepted by the mainstream, he made the decision to work from within as a reformer regardless, thinking it was the best of his available options. He knows that, as a Black man, and especially one who is successful in the mainstream, public eye, society will often expect him to represent his entire race, as if that's even possible. Roland resists this as much as possible, not only because it's an unreasonable expectation, but because it's a heavy weight to carry that white people, who are seen only as their own, individual selves, don't have to carry.


From the moment Yazz was born, Roland has loved Yazz more than he loves anyone else, even Kenny. Like Amma, she refuses to play by the rules, and he's worried what will happen to her in a world that punishes rebels. He wants her to become "proficient in the discourse of diplomacy." Yazz comments how the skyline looks so beautiful at night, which launches Roland into a lecture about the ancient predecessors of skyscrapers. Yazz drifts off to talk to an androgynous, tattooed person. Roland is overcome with an emptiness as she leaves. He misses how she loved him so unconditionally when she was young. So many people are stunned by his success. All he wants Yazz to say is a simple "you done good, Dad."

Roland worries about Yazz's decision to be a radical like her mother because he knows how the world already punishes Black people in general. It's not so much that he disagrees with her radicalness, but he worries and wants the best for her in a society that he knows will try and hinder her success at every turn. Just as Roland wishes that Sylvester would acknowledge his success, he wants Yazz to acknowledge his successes too, especially because they provided her with so many opportunities in life. Everything he's done has been for her.

Carole stands alone in a corner, self-conscious about the fact that she and the other bankers in their business attire look out of place at this after-party. Her husband, Freddy, works his way around the room charming everyone with his "upper-class confidence." Carole envies his natural social skills. Carole was intrigued by the play, but didn't know much about Benin, the neighbor of her parents' homeland, Nigeria, which she also knows little about. Her lack of knowledge about her heritage isn't her fault. Her mother couldn't return to Nigeria after her parents' deaths. Carole understands that her mother will "never be one of those West African matrons one sees at airports with a trolley-full of excess baggage." Carole would like to visit Nigeria one day with her mother, Freddy, and Kofi, who she loves because he's perfect for her mom.

The narration suddenly shifts to Carole's perspective. Carole and the other mainstream professionals at the after-party stand out among the crowd that is predominantly made up of radical hippie-types like Amma and her friends. The National has brought these two different groups, the reformers and the radicals, together, but there's still a clear divide between the two groups despite the fact that each has assisted the other in achieving social change. Even though Bummi once felt Carole was rejecting her Nigerian heritage, Carole still yearns to connect with that part of herself. Whereas Bummi blames England and Carole's choice to assimilate into white, English culture for her distance from her Nigerian heritage, Carole blames Bummi for never taking her back to visit. Carole understands that her mother's trauma is what prevents her from visiting, but still seems to wish that her mother was one of those immigrant women traveling between their home countries and native countries with overflowing bags full of gifts for family back home, and, on the return, specialties from their homelands unavailable in their adopted countries. This conflict highlights how first-generation parents, and their second-generation children, often struggle to understand one another and have different perspectives on the same issues. Carole wants to take Freddy to Nigeria to share and experience that culture with him, too, especially given that he has always shown interest in her Nigerian heritage.


Carole felt embarrassed when confronted with a stage full of Black women "as dark or darker" than her. She may have felt validated if the play was about a black woman achieving "legitimate success," rather than a bunch of lesbian warriors. During the intermission she noticed white audience-members looking at her with more friendliness and approval. She noticed that there were more Black women in the audience than she'd ever seen at the **National**. They're decked out in "extravagant head ties," "voodoo-type necklaces," and "leather pouches containing spells (probably)." They give Carole the "black sisterhood nod, as if the play somehow connected them together." She panics at the thought that the nod might be the "black *lesbian* sisterhood nod," which prompts her to grab onto Freddy.

Amma's play was a major cultural achievement for the Black community, and especially Black women. However, Carole's discomfort with the play highlights the limits of shared racial identity. Although the women on stage look like Carole, she didn't feel represented by or reflected in it as a woman whose life and career have been devoted to achieving mainstream, professional success. Despite the fact that Carole doesn't feel represented by the play, both the white people and Black women in the audience assume that she does. The white audience members are hyper-aware of Carole at the intermission, regarding her with a new kindness and approval after seeing Black women on the stage of a theater as esteemed as The National. Their kind intentions are undermined by their assumption that Carole relates to the play, in effect reducing all Black women to one collective entity. On the other hand, the Black women likewise assume that Carole feels represented by the play. Carole's description of their outfits highlights how she sees herself as totally different from these women who share her racial identity. Carole's homophobia is another factor that separates her from these women.


She's ready to leave the party when she spots Mrs. Shirley King walking towards her. Carole and Shirley are mutually shocked to find each other at this most unlikely of places after all these years. Shirley notices Carole looks elegant and refined, which she takes as a sign that she's been successful and makes her feel frumpy in comparison. She's suddenly overcome with anger and old feelings that Carole failed to keep in touch after all she'd done for her. Carole greets Shirley with an unrecognizable accent and reveals that she's a banker. They agree that they aren't very into the play, though Shirley feels ashamed for betraying Amma. She wishes she could boast about her friend in the teacher's lounge but can't, given that it's about lesbians.

Shirley is the one who guided Carole towards her success, and encouraged her to assimilate into white, English society. Now both she and Carole have devoted their lives to reforming systems from within and are too mainstream to like Amma's play. Shirley's resentment that Carole never thanked her or stayed in touch is compounded by her realization that Carole—in her elegant clothes and with her elite job—has surpassed Shirley. The power dynamic in the relationship has shifted. Although Shirley doesn't like the play, she is still proud of Amma, but her homophobia prevents her from fully expressing that pride.

Carole assumes Shirley must be retired, but Shirley tells her she's still working at the "insane asylum" that continues to churn out the next generation of "prostitutes, drug dealers, and crackheads." Shirley laughs at her own comment, expecting Carole to do the same, but instead Carole looks astounded. Shirley tries to backtrack, explaining that she still "rescues" the exceptional students. Shirley flushes with embarrassment, while Carole wishes Freddy would deliver her from this awkward interaction with this old, sweating woman. She's shocked that Shirley is so nervous when, the last time they'd seen each other, Shirley held an abusive power over her.

Shirley is comfortable expressing her true opinions of her students to Carole because Carole has climbed the social ladder and achieved mainstream success. Carole, however, is horrified, and Shirley positions herself as the "rescuer" or "savior" of her exceptional students like Carole. This condescending approach undermines Carole's agency as an individual whose success was ultimately earned through her own hard work. Shirley is mirroring the white savior trope that is common in under-resourced public schools. Carole remembers the immense power that Shirley once held over her, and that power is rooted in Shirley's savior complex. Now, however, Carole also realizes that the power dynamic has shifted. Shirley is noticeably flustered, revealing that she's intimidated and embarrassed in front of her student who has now far surpassed her.

They sit in an awkward silence until Shirley says goodbye. Carole sees a sad glint in her eyes, surprised to see she seems capable of having feelings. Carole suddenly sees Shirley through adult eyes, not the eyes of an angry teenager, and realizes that she was doing her best even if she went about it in the wrong way. Worried she's upset the old woman, she tells Shirley that she owes her an overdue thank you for all she'd done to help her. Shirley insists that she was only doing her duty as a teacher, and that Carole's success was thanks enough. Shirley starts crying, and it's only in this moment that Carole realizes that Mrs. King helped her when no one else could.

Carole is surprised to see a glimmer of vulnerability underneath Shirley's brash comments and actions. That one glimmer of sadness in Shirley's eyes allows Carole to see through to her complexities. She realizes that Shirley has good intentions, but executed and communicated them poorly. In other words, Carole suddenly gets a glimpse of the teacher Shirley was when she first started teaching, years before Carole was her student. When Carole finally gives Shirley the thanks she wants, Shirley downplays it as if she doesn't want to claim any credit, despite how she'd claimed credit all those years ago at Carole's graduation. When she breaks down in tears, baring her vulnerability completely, Carole understands that despite her many imperfections, Shirley was an invaluable mentor to her. While she wasn't Carole's savior, she was a key piece of her young life and later success.

Embarrassed by her uncontrollable emotions, Shirley rushes off feeling lighter and excited to tell Lennox about this encounter. She's eager to leave the party, which she finds grating. She'd rather be at a party where everyone is like them and where there's "rice, peas, curry goat simmering [...] in the kitchen." Searching for Lennox, she spies Roland who she got to know after she became Yazz's godmother, and who she used to dislike because he made her feel inferior. Now his air of superiority makes her laugh.

The narration shifts again, this time to Shirley's perspective. Shirley feels out of place at the after-party not just because it's filled with free-spirited progressives like Amma, but because it has an air of pretention and elitism that feels alienating to her. While that superiority from people like Roland used to make her feel badly about herself, now it seems absurd to her and makes her laugh. Shirley contradicts herself, however, because she projects a similar superiority over her students and their families. Like Carole, although she's at an after-party for a groundbreaking play by a Black woman playwright and featuring a Black women cast, Shirley doesn't feel like she is surrounded by her people. People "like them" are people who attend informal gatherings in each other's kitchens, eating the foods of the Caribbean diaspora.

Shirley wants to find Amma so she can say goodbye, but spots Dominique making her way over to her first. Earlier in the night when Dominique asked Shirley about her life, she felt Dominique looking down on her "pathetic little life." Shirley was never jealous of Amma and Dominique's friendship because she and Amma had already drifted apart ideologically at that point. They maintained a friendship based on loyalty and history. She wanted to say goodbye to Amma, who she'd hardly had a chance to speak to at the party, but instead lets her walk off with Dominique. She and Lennox finally leave the party, passing Yazz on the way out who, earlier, hadn't introduced Shirley to her edgy-looking friends, a slight she assumes means Yazz thinks she's boring. Shirley's happy to be heading home where she and Lennox will drink hot chocolate and watch *The Great British Bake Off*.

Although Shirley tells herself that Roland's superiority complex no longer bothers her, it's clear she still feels inadequate compared to Amma and the people in her life, including both Yazz and Dominique. While Amma and Shirley's friendship has survived all these years thanks to the loyalty that comes with a shared history, Shirley has existed in that friendship knowing that Amma's friends look down on her, and that even Amma herself looks down on people like Shirley. Shirley is the one exception to her strict expectation that everyone in her life be as progressive as she is. She lets Amma walk away at the party, symbolic of how they continue to drift from one another. Instead, Shirley is content to retreat back into her life and the simple pleasures that she enjoys with her husband.

Tucked away in the bathroom, Amma waits while Dominique cuts lines of coke just like it's the old days. No amount of distance or time can dilute their friendship. They get high, Dominique remembering that this used to be their opening night ritual. Amma asks Dominique if she truly liked her play, and Dominique reassures her like she has been doing all night. Dominique took an overnight flight to surprise Amma at her premiere. She flies out in the morning. She rarely visits to see her friend's plays because she wants to avoid all these people from her past, like Roland and Sylvester, who she'd caught up with briefly earlier.

The narration shifts to Dominique's perspective. Dominique and Amma have the ability to jump back into their friendship as if no time has passed at all while they've been oceans apart. When they get back together they revert to the selves they once were as young twenty-something radicals living in London. Amma, still feeling insecure about her decision to premier a play at The National, looks to Dominique for reassurance that this doesn't detract from her progressive identity. While Dominique is happy to see Amma, she avoids London because it reminds her of the past self and the trauma she went through with Nzinga.

She'd unfortunately run into Shirley earlier, too, Amma's most boring friend, a closet homophobe who Amma nonetheless defends fiercely. Dominique thinks all these old acquaintances have gotten worse with time, and that their worst traits are more prominent than ever. Dominique loved the chance to see Yazz, who is feisty as ever flanked by her cool university friends, including an especially "funky" girl in a hijab. Yazz tells her she's her "Number One godmother," and asks her to pay for a trip out to Los Angeles.

As Shirley suspected earlier, Dominique was looking down on her, as she always has. Dominique sees through Shirley's attempts to hide her homophobia. Like Amma, Dominique is hyper-critical of their old friends and elevates herself above them. Dominique singles out Waris the same way that Yazz does, further highlighting how people make assumptions about her identity based on her appearance alone.

Dominique takes a black and white photo out of her bag and hands it to Amma. It's a photo of them with their middle fingers up, triumphantly standing on an exterior balcony of the **National**. Amma marvels at how young they look and how much time has passed since those days. Dominique sees the photo as a relic of a bygone era. Now Amma is an unstoppable powerhouse blowing up the National Theatre. This is the praise Amma was seeking out all night, and in that moment everything is perfect.

While Dominique and Amma temporarily relive their younger, wilder days in the bathroom, when she looks at the old black and white photo Dominique knows those days are over and that they've both left those old identities behind. They're no longer standing outside the National making a bold statement against it. Instead, they're on the inside and celebrating the success and acceptance they'd wanted all those years ago. They've come full circle, which is what lends the moment its air of perfection.

Back at Amma's place, the two friend stay up chatting long after the rest of Amma's friends have gone to sleep. Amma tells Dominique that *The Last Amazons of Dahomey* is likely the peak of her career. She's worried that she still has a lot left to give, but her ability to make social change through theater will be limited in England from here on out. Dominique agrees and tells her to join her in the U.S. where there's more potential, despite the country's own political problems. Amma says she doesn't want to leave Yazz, and that she likes England even though it frustrates her endlessly.

Amma fears that the peak of her career will also be its end. She's broken the impenetrable glass ceiling of the National and feels there aren't many other avenues for making social change in theater for her left in the U.K. Dominique sees the U.S. as a place with more potential, a place that despite its deep rooted, abhorrent injustices, also has a rich history of activism that lives on in the present. Amma loves her country even though it frustrates her because that frustration is what fuels her work and passion. She maintains an insatiable drive to make it better through social justice.

Dominique says that she loves England, too, but that it's a "living memory," stuck in the past while she's living in the present. Amma jokes that it sounds like she's been talking to her therapist, and Dominique suggests that Amma should try seeing one herself. Amma insists she doesn't have any "disturbing psychological" issues to work out. Dominique explains that she views therapy as a type of consciousness-raising, which Amma critiques as an outdated word.

It's not just that Dominique feels the U.S. is a "younger" country literally, but that England triggers her own memories and makes her feel stuck in a past she needs to leave behind. Dominique suggests Amma should talk to a therapist, hearkening back to their younger years when Amma's friends thought she needed to see a therapist to understand her sexual promiscuity that was hurting the people she was with. Amma sees therapy as unnecessary, while Dominique sees it as something as powerful as consciousness raising, a form of political education and activism popular during the second wave feminist movement, once was. Amma tells Dominique the term is outdated, perhaps because she's been influenced by Yazz, who is forever telling her that she is an outdated feminist herself.

Dominique asserts that feminism is making a comeback these days. It's on trend and Dominique hates that. Amma doesn't understand why this is a bad thing, and Dominique explains that it's because feminism is being commodified by the mainstream. Amma argues the media has always elevated beautiful women within the feminist movement, like Gloria, Germaine, and Angela. Dominique says that the "trans troublemakers" these days also bother her. She was called out for being transphobic when she advertised her festival as being for "women-born-women." The protest was started by a relentless Twitter activist, Morgan Malenga.

Dominique hates that feminism is on trend because it loses some of its progressive edge when it's co-opted and diluted by mainstream society, similar to how Amma's play loses some of its radicalness when it's onstage at the National. Dominique hates that feminism and feminists are being glamorized in the media like celebrities, undermining their power by objectifying them, but Amma insists this has always been true. Dominique's transphobia reveals that her feminism is, in fact, outdated. She and her festival were called out by the trans community, but rather than learn from the experience, she regards the community with derision.

Amma points out Dominique's hypocrisy, reminding her that she used to be the troublemaking protestor. Amma warns her that she'll become irrelevant if she doesn't stay open-minded. Amma explains that Yazz is helping her stay "woke" by confronting her outdated thinking. Amma tells Dominique she's sure she has her own devoted following of "heroine" worshippers back in the States, but Dominique says the young people see her as an old person who is part of the problem. Amma says that Dominique needs to talk to these young people and focus on celebrating this new evolution and reawakening of feminism. "How can we argue with that?" she asks.

Amma points out Dominique's obvious hypocrisy. She calls the activists "troublemakers," showing just how far she's come from her younger years when she was the one proudly stirring up trouble. Both Amma and Dominique struggle to contend with the fact that they aren't the world's young radicals anymore. There's a clear divide between their generation and the younger generations like Yazz's. As much as Amma tries to keep her activism up to date through Yazz, their age will forever make them irrelevant and problematic in the eyes of younger activists. Rather than shut down and dismiss these new activists, Amma wants to celebrate the evolution and progress that these young people are making. After all, older activists like she and Dominique are the ones who helped pave the path that Yazz, Morgan, and other young activists are blazing down now.

EPILOGUE

Two days away from her 80th birthday, Penelope is traveling first-class on the train and reading a review of a new play at the **National**, her favorite theater in London. It's a play about African Amazons and despite its five-star review she definitely won't be seeing it. She's surrounded by loud and rowdy passengers that she assumes upgraded their seats last minute and wants to yell at them to shut up but fears they might attack her. In her old age, she notices she has less tolerance for people other than her partner, Jeremy. She's finally happily "co-dependent with a lovely man."

The National, a symbol of England's enduring white supremacist legacy, is unsurprisingly Penelope's favorite theater because it caters to, and represents, the white middle and upper classes like her. In her mind, Amma's play doesn't fit her vision and version of the National. Penelope's classism is evident on the train when she is bothered by the other passengers who she assumes are in first class on a fluke because they are rowdy, a characteristic that white supremacist society assigns to the lower classes. She fully believes in and perpetuates harmful stereotypes when she assumes that they are violent and would want to attack an upper-class woman like herself. Her fear highlights how fearmongering itself is a tactic for preserving white supremacist ideologies. In her old age, Penelope's become less strict about her feminist beliefs. Whereas she was once staunchly against being co-dependent with a man, now she enjoys it.

At the suggestion of her doctor—a woman who retired and was replaced "sadly" by a Nigerian man— Penelope takes Tai Chi classes, and that's where she met Jeremy. He is a divorcee, a few years older than her, and she quickly won him over by turning herself into a "Fun Person." She does all the things she'd usually find bothersome: she buys him gifts, they go on dates to operas and cricket matches, and she listens to him attentively. Jeremy explains that his ex-wife transformed from a "well-behaved" wife and mother in the fifties to a "manhating feminist" who hung out with unfeminine women. One day he found her having sex with another woman in their house. Penelope agrees that "feminism has a lot to answer for," quick to betray her feminist beliefs to be with Jeremy. In general, Penelope and Jeremy agree on their right of center politics.

Penelope's racism seeps into all aspects of her life. When she meets Jeremy she changes herself in order to win him over, trading her feminist principles for the comfort and security of a home and relationship she's been yearning for her whole life. Jeremy's ex-wife had a feminist awakening similar to Penelope's. Both felt called to action by the second wave feminist movement, but now in her old age that ideology is less important to her. Penelope is desperate to be rid of her loneliness, even if it means being with a sexist man. It's easier for Penelope to overlook his sexism because they share otherwise conservative political views.

Penelope waited 18 months to be physically intimate with Jeremy. She was self-conscious of how her body looked when she was naked now that she's older. When they do finally have sex, she realizes that Jeremy loves her body as it is. Penelope moves into his house and though she dislikes its interior design that's unlike her own eclectic style, she doesn't try to change anything about it. They both love to read, and when Jeremy reveals that he could never get past even the first chapter of a book written by a woman, Penelope says nothing. Their life is comfortable, and she believes that the secret to their easy relationship is that she never stirs the pot.

Penelope's relationship with Jeremy is physically freeing. She's comfortable with herself and in her body despite its age. However, she continues to defer to Jeremy, even in matters of interior design, concessions she wouldn't have made for any man years earlier. That Penelope is willing to settle for a man who can't bear to read a book by a woman highlights how thoroughly she's abandoned her feminist beliefs for the comfort and stability of this relationship. After years of failing to maintain a relationship with a man, she believes abandoning her feminist principles and resigning herself to the role of an agreeable and obedient woman is the only way to stay partnered at this point. In Penelope's eyes at this point, the only way for a woman to be happy in this life is to finally give in to what society prescribes and enforces on women.

A cancer scare renews Penelope's curiosity about her birth parents. At Sarah's suggestion, Penelope orders an Ancestry DNA kit and when the results finally arrive she's shocked. The science brings the reality of who she is crashing into who she expected she might be when it reveals that she's 16 percent Jewish and that 13 percent of her DNA comes from Africa, with 4 percent coming from Ethiopia. She gets drunk, thinking she could've handled being Jewish but being African on top of that was too much. She conjures up images of her ancestors "attired in loincloths running around the African savannah spearing lions, at the same time wearing yarmulkes." She wonders if she should get a "dreadlock wig," become a Rastafarian, and start selling drugs to match her new identity.

Penelope has created a new, longed-for home with Jeremy, but also realizes that the mystery of her birth parents is part of her yearning and search for a home. Her DNA results upend everything she's ever known or understood about herself. With the realization that she is both Black and Jewish, Penelope suddenly belongs to the groups of people she's spent her life hating. To come to terms with this new identity, to accept herself, she'll need to unpack years' worth of racist thinking. Her immediate reaction to this news is to conjure up grossly exaggerated stereotypes of her new identities.

Penelope Skypes Sarah to break the news. Sarah looks at the results and realizes that she has over a hundred genetic relatives listed on the site including a parent. Penelope goes pale and breaks into tears. Sarah emails a person named Morgan who replies that "he/she(?)" is managing the account for their great-grandmother, Hattie Jackson. They'd been hoping to find out more about her mother, Grace, who they'd thought was half Ethiopian but discovered she had ancestry spread across Africa. Morgan never expected to find someone claiming to be Hattie's daughter, because Hattie had only one daughter, Ada Mae. When Morgan tells Hattie, she's shocked, but then explains that she'd given birth at 14 to a baby named Barbara who her father forcibly took away. Hattie had kept her daughter a secret her entire life but thought of her every single day. She's thrilled to find out she's still alive.

Morgan and Hattie complicate Penelope's understanding of the world. She's now suddenly related to people whose identities she's spent her life maligning. Penelope was separated from her mother, and by extension her identity, because Hattie's father exerted patriarchal control over Hattie's body. That decision impacted not just one but two women's lives. Hattie is thrilled her daughter is still alive, without yet understanding that her daughter was socialized to hate Black people and that this will dramatically impact their relationship.

Morgan emails Penelope to explain that her birth mother, Hattie, is still alive but old and in shock so she should come right away. Penelope gets off the train and into a cab driven by an African man who she is surprised to see so far outside the city. Two hours later they arrive in a deserted village and head up a hill to **Greenfields**. Penelope notices that the entire place looks wild and rundown. She gets out of the taxi, tipping the driver since "he's practically a sixth cousin or something." Hattie steps out of the farmhouse. She's barefoot with wiry grey hair that stands up on her head and raggedy blue overalls. She's old but still tall and strong with a fierceness that Penelope recognizes in herself. Hattie is ambiguously brown but inarguably brown. She could pass as being from any number of countries.

Penelope struggles to unlearn a lifetime of racist thinking. She calls herself out for being surprised to see a Black person, the cab driver, so far outside the city, but racist thinking permeates even her effort to correct herself with her problematic aside that he may as well be a distant cousin simply because he's Black. On the one hand, Penelope judges what she finds at Greenfields. On the other hand, she recognizes herself in this place. Her mother is as fiercely feminist as she has been for most of her life, and Greenfields is her feminist legacy. Penelope tries to make sense of Hattie's racial identity, which is ambiguous like her own.

Penelope realizes that "this metal-haired wild creature from the bush with the piercingly feral eyes is her mother." Suddenly she no longer cares about her race and can't understand why it once mattered to her so much. She's overcome with the "pure and primal" connection between mother and daughter and feels them both becoming whole again. Her fear that she'd feel nothing is proven wrong as both are overwhelmed with emotion in this moment that is about nothing other than "being together."

On one hand, Penelope describes her mother through what could be read as a stereotypical and dehumanizing lens. She assigns animalistic traits to Hattie ("wild creature," "feral"). At the same time, she describes that something "pure and primal" is overtaking her, suggesting that the meeting and her description of Hattie may also be rooted in a feeling that this meeting is bringing out the fierce bond and connection that mothers and their young share in nature. It's unclear where Penelope's racism begins and ends. Even though meeting her mother and feeling this immediate connection prompts a major realization that she was wrong to have racist beliefs for all these years, it is also certain that her meeting Hattie won't immediately eradicate the racist ideology that was passed down to her and developed over a lifetime of living as a white person. In that moment, however, their togetherness supersedes all else.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Parks, Rebecca. "*Girl, Woman, Other.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 28 Nov 2022. Web. 28 Nov 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Parks, Rebecca. "*Girl, Woman, Other.*" LitCharts LLC, November 28, 2022. Retrieved November 28, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/girl-woman-other.

To cite any of the quotes from *Girl, Woman, Other* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Evaristo, Bernardine. Girl, Woman, Other. Grove Press. 2019.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Evaristo, Bernardine. Girl, Woman, Other. New York: Grove Press. 2019.