Outcasts United

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WARREN ST. JOHN

St. John was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and attended Columbia University. He served as a reporter at *The New York Times* from 2002 to 2008. His first book, *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer: A Road Trip into the Heart of Fan Mania*, explores sports fandom and chronicles the Alabama Crimson Tide's 1999 season. He published *Outcasts United* in 2009. St. John has also written for *The New Yorker*, *Slate*, the *New York Observer*, and *Wired*. He is currently the CEO and editor-in-chief of Patch, a local news network.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

St. John writes about several international conflicts that prompted many of the Fugees' families to flee their home country. The two he explores most in depth are the First Liberian Civil War and the Burundian Civil War. In the First Liberian Civil War, Samuel Doe, a member of the minority Krahn tribe in Liberia, had led a coup in 1980 and taken power. Though Doe, the nation's first Americo Liberian president, was initially supported by indigenous Liberian tribes, he began to mistreat other ethnic groups called the Gio and Mano, which led to a rebellion and eventually a civil war that involved the Liberian Army attacking unarmed civilians and burning villages. In 1990, Doe was executed and fighting continued until 1997, killing more than 200,000 Liberians and displacing a million others. In the Burundian civil war, where a Tutsi minority ruled over a Hutu majority for decades. Burundi held its first free election in 1993, and a Hutu leader, Melchior Ndadaye became Burundi's first democratically elected president. Only a few months later, Ndadaye was assassinated and violence and chaos broke out between the two groups. The fighting continued through 2003, with an estimated 300,000 people killed.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Maria Padian's *Out of Nowhere* can be considered a fictional counterpart to *Outcasts United*. It follows the story of Tom Bouchard, the star of a high school soccer team in small-town Maine. The town is turned upside-down following the arrival of Somali refugees, and several of them join the soccer team. The book explores similar topics of soccer as a unifying force and the various ways that Americans grapple with the arrival of refugees. The nonfiction work *Spare Parts* by Joshua Davis is thematically similar to *Outcasts United*. It follows the story of four undocumented immigrant boys who go on to win a national underwater robotics competition. It deals with similar topics like the necessity of teamwork, what it means to be American, and the importance of mentorship. Finally, Moustafa Bayoumi's *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?* offers a portrait of the struggles that many young refugees (and specifically Muslim refugees) face as they grow up in a society that often discriminates against them, just as many of the Fugees and their families face prejudice and hardship in Clarkston.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference
- **When Written:** 2007-2009
- **Where Written:** Clarkston, Georgia
- **When Published:** April 21, 2009
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction
- **Setting:** Clarkston, Georgia
- **Climax:** The Fugees are kicked off of their field.
- **Antagonist:** Mayor Lee Swaney
- **Point of View:** Third person, first person

EXTRA CREDIT

Family Matters. Luma continues to do work for the Fugees through an organization called Fugees Family and has even given a Ted Talk about the need to support refugee kids.

Athletic Scholarship. The tutoring programs that Luma had started have grown into full-fledged academies, with campuses in both Atlanta, Georgia, and Columbus, Ohio. The campuses also provide year-round soccer programs.

PLOT SUMMARY

The book opens on a soccer field in Clarkston, Georgia, where Luma al-Mufleh is coaching a soccer team called the Fugees, made up entirely of refugee children. The Fugees play a beautiful game of soccer, winning 9-2. This is the first game that Warren St. John ever sees the Fugees play. Though he is impressed by the team, he senses tension between the players and their coach. More than anything, he is amazed by the friendship that has sprung up among kids of many different nationalities and religions.

St. John flashes back to Luma's childhood. Luma is born in Amman, Jordan to a wealthy family. She attends the American

Community School in Amman and quickly discovers her natural athletic ability. She stands out to her coaches, particularly Rhonda Brown, who coaches volleyball. Brown is hard on her players, expecting them to be on time, work hard, focus, and improve. She knows that she is demanding and that players may not like her, but hopes they see their own improvement.

After Luma attends college in the U.S., she feels that Jordan is too restrictive on girls and moves to the U.S. permanently, cutting ties with her family in the process. She moves to Atlanta and coaches a girls' team at a local YMCA, and starts a café called Ashton's. She coaches the girls' team in the model of Coach Brown: she is very demanding but earns their respect and helps the team improve.

Beatrice Ziaty and her sons Jeremiah, Mandela, and Darlington escape civil war between ethnic groups in Liberia in 1997, after witnessing the murder of her husband. The family flees to a refugee camp, resettling in Clarkston, Georgia. Soon after arriving, Beatrice is mugged on the street, making her anxious about leaving her children and going to work. She instructs them to stay inside whenever she is not there.

Clarkston is a popular town for resettlement agencies, due to its proximity to Atlanta and its cheap housing. Between 1980 and 2000, Clarkston's population dramatically shifts so that one third of the population is foreign born. Many conservative white residents who live in Clarkston are put off by the arrival of these refugees. They elect a mayor, Lee Swaney, who bills himself as a champion of "old Clarkston." Many refugees in the town feel unwelcome by longtime residents and are discriminated against by the police.

One day, while driving outside Atlanta, Luma notices boys of a variety of ethnicities playing soccer, and she joins in a game. She gets to know the boys over the course of a few months and decides to start a free program for refugee children. Many players try out, including Jeremiah Ziaty, who is eager to escape his apartment. Beatrice worries about his safety, but Luma assures that she will take care of Jeremiah like he is her child.

During her first season, Luma notices that many of the boys lack basic education, and so she also starts a tutoring program alongside the soccer practices and makes the sessions mandatory for her players. She also notices that the boys divide among ethnic or language lines during drills, and that there is a lot of underlying racism in how they treat each other. Meanwhile, she starts to get to know the boys' families, helping them adjust to life in America. She translates documents and speaks with teachers and social workers. As she devotes more and more time to the Fugees, she decides to close Ashton's and quit coaching at the YMCA. She devotes all of her time to the Fugees.

The next year, Bien Ntwari and his family arrive in Clarkston, having fled Burundi after a civil war between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. On Bien's first day in Clarkston, he meets Grace Balegamire, who is from the Congo and speaks Swahili like Bien. Grace introduces Bien to the Fugees in the middle of their season. Luma allows Bien to join practices, knowing that the Fugees are a helpful resource to new kids. At the same time, new kids change the balance of the teams, and she finds that she constantly has to make sure that when the boys get into groups for drills, they play with kids from other regions and backgrounds. But when she is able to get talented kids to play on the oldest Fugees team (the Under Seventeens) to cooperate instead of compete with each other, they go undefeated.

In spring 2006, relations between the YMCA (which is sponsoring Luma's use of their **field**) and the Clarkston Community Center (which owns the field) deteriorate, and the Fugees are kicked off of their field. The Y finds a new field behind Indian Creek Elementary School, but it is covered in gravel and broken glass. Luma is furious, but finds she has no alternative but to play there next season.

In the 2006 season, Luma is coaching three Fugees teams: first, the Under Seventeens, who are the most mature and largely take care of themselves. She also coaches the Under Thirteens, who are the youngest and the most adaptable to her harsh rules. The Under Fifteens are the most troublesome and often disobey Luma. One talented player, Prince, skips tutoring and undermines Luma's authority, which causes others to follow suit. When Luma announces a rule that the players' hair has to be short (as long hair implies gang affiliations), he refuses, and she kicks him off the team.

In one game early in the season, the Under Fifteens arrive two players short—they missed the bus. Luma is furious, and even though Mandela Ziaty convinces St. John to drive back and pick up other players, she refuses to coach them. The Fugees lose the game 7-2. Luma announces that she is canceling the Under Fifteens season that year.

This decision is tough on Kanue Biah, a Liberian player who had arrived two years earlier and had completely bought into Luma's system. He lives with his uncle, who works most of the day and is only home for four hours at a time, and so the team has become like his family. Kanue and Mandela and another player, Natnael, convince Luma to hold a second round of tryouts. She agrees to restart the team but is worried they will have a terrible season now that they have a team of mostly new players. But miraculously, at their first game, the Fifteens win 4-2.

The next day, a boy who had been practicing with the Under Fifteens, Tito, is shot in the face after pretending to be in a gang. He survives, but Luma kicks him off the team, worried that the gang might try to retaliate, and she wants to keep her boys safe. She helps the boys come up with strategies on how best to avoid gangs.

Meanwhile, Luma has grown sick of the field at Indian Creek, which is not a healthy environment for her players, and is open to anyone walking through it. She pleads her case to the Clarkston City Council. At first they are reluctant, but Mayor Swaney convinces them to allow her to use a field at Armistead Park on a six-month trial basis. The new field is beautiful, covered in grass, and fenced off from visitors.

St. John tells the story of another Fugee, Qendrim Bushi, who was forced out of his home in Kosovo by conflict between a Serbian Yugoslav army and the Kosovo Liberation Army. They were made to leave everything behind, then walked for two days to a Macedonian refugee camp before moving to the United States.

While the Under Fifteens struggle, the Under Thirteens start to play better and better. They create inside jokes and are able to come back in a game they're losing 1-0, showing their determination to win. Luma also starts to discover more and more of her players' strengths in games—particularly those of Robin and Idwar Dikori, two brothers who had recently arrived from Sudan and lost their mother and sisters in a car accident shortly after arriving in the United States.

Meanwhile, the Fifteens are still having problems. Mandela, who was upset when Prince and then another Liberian player named Fornatee left the team, grows more and more moody. He snaps at other teammates when they make mistakes and refuses to pass the ball. Ultimately, Luma feels she has to kick him out of the program for the good of the team as a whole, even though she is very close with his mother and brothers.

One day, when Luma sets out behind the bus for an Under Thirteens game, she is pulled over by the police for a tail light. The policeman says her license has been suspended, though Luma doesn't know why, and she is arrested. She spends the day in jail, while the Under Thirteens play (and lose) their game. Tracy Ediger, who helps Luma with the Fugees, is able to bail her out, and Luma apologizes to the boys for missing the game.

The Fifteens lose their final game 3-1 after a poor season. Luma is serious, saying that they will simply have to continue to follow her rules and her way if they want to continue. Kanue and Natnael are upset but know they will simply have to work harder next season. The Thirteens, on the other hand, have had a good season. On their final regular season game, they pray together—both Christian and Muslim prayers—and are able to win 2-1 to finish third in their division. As a reward, Luma takes them to play in the Tornado Cup. They are almost able to make it to the finals, but they tie their final game, and because of tournament rules they do not advance. Luma is frustrated that they gave up a lead, and gives them a harsh message, saying they didn't play their best.

Still, after Christmas Luma plans to take the Under Thirteens and Fifteens to a tournament, and the boys help raise the money to go by washing cars and raking leaves. But then, Mayor Swaney sends the team a letter which essentially says that the Fugees can no longer play on Armistead park. Luma is upset and tries to fight the baseless decision, but in the meantime she has to find another field.

In the epilogue, St. John describes some events following this season. When he breaks the Fugees' story in *The New York Times*, people deluge Mayor Swaney with criticism, and he allows the Fugees to return to Armistead park. People also donate money to the Fugees, allowing Luma to expand her program. Luma also reconciles with Mandela, helps him get into Job Corps, and helps many of the other boys get into college.

Many of the boys move over time but are always replaced by incoming refugees to whom Luma continues to devote her time. Concluding the book, St. John recounts Tracy's words about Luma: that she is just "a normal person doing what she can for the people around her," and that she is proof that any person can do something good for their community.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Luma al-Mufleh – The founder and coach of the Fugees program. Luma is born and raised in Amman, Jordan, and attends the American Community School in Amman. At the school, she is inspired by her volleyball coach, Rhonda Brown, who is strict and demanding but gains a lot of respect from her players and helps them improve. Luma then attends Smith College before deciding to remain in America. This decision estranges her from her family, and she is forced to provide for herself entirely. She moves to Atlanta and starts coaching a girls' team at the YMCA based on the leadership model of Coach Brown. Luma then discovers the refugee population in Clarkston and decides to start a soccer program for refugee boys. The team eventually earns the name "the Fugees." Luma is hard on her players and expects a lot from them: she wants them to be on time, focus, and work hard. She expects them to respect rules like no drinking or drug use, keeping their hair short, and no cursing. Luma also makes an effort to help the players outside of the soccer team by starting a tutoring program to help them with schoolwork and getting to know their families. The program does not come without its challenges, however—the players are sometimes disobedient or lazy, and at the beginning they often divide into cliques based on nationality or language. Luma also faces challenges based in discrimination when the YMCA moves them from a nicer **field** at the Clarkston Community Center to a gravel field covered in broken glass, which she knows would never have happened to boys with affluent families. Still, despite (and perhaps because of) these extra challenges, Luma pours herself into helping the Fugees. And on the soccer field, although Luma is harsh with her players, the ones who buy into her system

respect her deeply, and she is able to tangibly improve their lives and the lives of their families.

Mandela Ziaty – The middle son of Beatrice Ziaty, and the brother of Darlington and Jeremiah. Darlington had escaped with the rest of his family from Liberia, after watching his father killed in their home. Mandela joins the Under Fifteens Fugees and becomes close friends with the other Liberians on the team, Prince and Fornatee. After Prince is kicked off the team and Fornatee quits it, Mandela tries to rebuild the team with Kanue and Natnael. But ultimately the loss of his friends causes Mandela to act out, snap at his teammates, and refuse to pass to them. This forces Luma to kick Mandela off the team, and she tells him that he "doesn't have the discipline or respect to play." Eventually, Luma and Mandela are able to reconcile, and she helps him apply and get into a program called Job Corps.

Beatrice Ziaty – The mother of the three Ziaty boys: Darlington, Mandela, and Jeremiah. Beatrice escaped the Liberian civil war with three of her sons after watching her husband be murdered by rebel soldiers. In America, Beatrice supports her sons by working long shifts at a hotel in Atlanta. One evening coming home from work, she is mugged, robbing her of a sense of security in her new home. She then instructs the boys to remain in their apartment after they get home from school. But when Jeremiah asks to join the Fugees, Luma convinces Beatrice that he will be well-looked after. Eventually, Beatrice comes to think of Luma like a sister because she is so involved in raising all three of her sons.

Kanue Biah – A Liberian player on the Under Fifteens team. He fled the war when he was just two years old and was separated from his parents. He lives with his uncle Barlea, who works twenty hours a day. This leaves Kanue to cook dinner for himself and his uncle and also keep the apartment. Kanue joins the Under Fifteens and quickly becomes devoted to Luma's system, working hard in practice and also helping with the younger team. When the Under Fifteens team is cancelled, Kanue resolves to hold a second round of tryouts and restart the team because the community is so important to him, getting Mandela and Natnael to join him as well.

Generose – The mother of Bien, Alex, Ive, and Alyah. Generose fled with her three boys from civil war between the Hutus and Tutsis peoples in Burundi, Africa. They had landed in Mozambique and spent four years in a refugee camp before being accepted for resettlement in Clarkston. Alyah is born shortly after their arrival, but Alyah's father is unable to obtain papers to immigrate to the United States. Thus, Generose must care for her family essentially alone. She is surprised by the fact that she has to choose between working and taking care of her children. She is forced to spend the day with the baby, and then leave Alyah with her sons in the evening while she goes to work.

Darlington Ziaty – The oldest son of Beatrice Ziaty, and the older brother of Jeremiah and Mandela. Darlington had escaped with the rest of his family from Liberia after watching his father be killed in their home. Darlington joins the Under Seventeens Fugees. He is one of the more talented players and at first, he is competitive with another talented player, Peshawa, as they both vie for Luma's preference. But when Luma treats them equally (not speaking Arabic with Peshawa, and inviting him to dinners with the Ziatys), they begin to work together to score, and the team is undefeated the following season.

Idwar Dikori – A player on the Under Thirteens team, Idwar is Robin's older brother and Shamsoun's younger brother. The Dikoris are from the Nuba valley of Sudan, where they had been driven out by an Islamist regime. They are forced to escape to Cairo before being resettled in Clarkston. They face even further tragedy when, shortly after arriving in America, their mother and sisters are killed in a car accident. This causes Idwar to be silent and retreat into himself, but the Fugees program gives him more confidence and provides him with a way to not think about what had happened.

Warren St. John – The author of *Outcasts United*. St. John largely absents himself from the narrative, but there are a few key instances in which he features prominently because he spends so much time following the Fugees. At one game in which the Under Fifteens are short a few players, Mandela asks St. John if he can drive him back to Clarkston to pick up the other players, which St. John agrees to. At the end of the book, St. John's publishing of a *New York Times* article about the Fugees prompts an outpouring of support for the team and for Luma.

Robin Dikori – A nine-year-old player on the Under Thirteens team, and Idwar and Shamsoun's younger brother. The Dikoris are from the Nuba valley of Sudan, where they had been driven out by an Islamist regime. They are forced to escape to Cairo before being resettled in Clarkston. They face even further tragedy when, shortly after arriving in America, their mother and sisters are killed in a car accident. After this, Robin acts out in school, but the Fugees program gives him a calm escape from his struggles.

Fornatee – A Liberian player on the Under Fifteens team, who is very close with Prince and Mandela. After Prince quits the team, Fornatee loses a lot of motivation and shows up very late to games and talks back to Luma. After he and another player try to skip a game because they miss the bus, Luma decides to cancel the Fifteens' season. While Kanue, Mandela and Natnael work hard to get a second round of tryouts going, Fornatee refuses to try out a second time. Instead, he quits the Fugees permanently.

Mayor Lee Swaney – The mayor of Clarkston, who is elected in 2001 while branding himself as a "champion of Old Clarkston." Mayor Swaney vacillates between helping and hindering the Fugees. At first, he helps Luma use the **field** at Armistead Park

on a trial basis, but then he rescinds this offer early, leaving them without a field. After St. John publishes his article on the Fugees, Swaney faces a deluge of criticism and the town allows Luma to use the field once more.

Rhonda Brown – Luma's high school volleyball coach. Coach Brown becomes a model for Luma's own coaching style: she is very hard on her players, expecting discipline and hard work. She doesn't make the team do anything that she couldn't do herself. Coach Brown understands that while she may not be liked, she will always be respected by her team. Ultimately, her methods pay off, as Luma sees the volleyball team improve over time.

Prince – A Liberian player on the Under Fifteens team. Because Prince is talented, Luma sometimes allows him to skirt the rules, letting him arrive late or skip tutoring sessions. But when this spurs other players to undermine her as well, Luma refuses to grant Prince an exception to her rules that he must cut his hair shorter than Luma's. Prince is frustrated and decides to quit the team rather than adhere to Luma's rules.

Jeremiah Ziaty – The youngest son of Beatrice Ziaty, and the younger brother of Darlington and Mandela. Jeremiah escaped with the rest of his family from Liberia, after watching his father be killed in their home. Jeremiah is the first Ziaty brother to join the Fugees, on their Under Thirteens team. He is dedicated to the team and grows very close with Luma, even refusing to eat pork because she doesn't eat it.

Bienvenue Ntwari – Generose's middle son and the brother of Alex, Ive, and Alyah. Bien escaped civil war in Burundi with the rest of his family and spent four years in a refugee camp in Mozambique before coming to the United States. Immediately upon arriving, Bien meets Grace Balegamire, who speaks Swahili like he does and introduces him to the Fugees. Bien eventually becomes a star player on the Under Thirteens team.

Alex – Generose's oldest son, and the brother of Bien, Ive, and Alyah. Alex plays on the Under Fifteens team, and he is also given the duty of caring for his baby sister when his mother is at work in the evening. Each night, he mixes her milk with baby food powder and gives it to her in spoonfuls. He also makes his younger brothers' dinner each night—an immense responsibility for a fifteen-year-old.

Qendrim Bushi – A star midfielder on the Under Thirteens team. Qendrim flees Kosovo with his family when he is only five years old due to ethnic violence between a Serbian-dominated Yugoslav army and the Kosovo Liberation Army. In America, Qendrim works hard on the Fugees and becomes close with many players, particularly with Eldin.

Grace Balegamire – A boy from the Congo who plays on the Under Thirteens team. Through much of the book, Grace's father is in prison in Kinshasa and they are unsure of when he will be released. At the end of the book, he learns that his father has been freed and is trying to get to the United States. Grace also introduces Bien to the Fugees.

Natnael – An Ethiopian player on the Under Fifteens team. After Prince and Fornatee quit and Luma cancels the Under Fifteens season, Natnael works to rebuild the team alongside Kanue and Mandela. But when Mandela continues to act out, even though Natnael is his friend, Natnael tells Luma that he should be cut from the team.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ive – Generose's youngest son, and the brother of Alex, Bien, and Alyah. Ive is seven when he arrives in the United States from Burundi and picks up English the fastest. Thus, he is often given the responsibility of speaking with American adults like landlords and billing agents.

Tito – A Liberian player who Osman recruited to the Under Fifteen Fugees. Tito pretends to be in a gang and, as a result, is shot in the face by an American teenager. Luma then kicks him off the team, worried that the gangs will try to come after other Fugees.

Osman – A Liberian player on the Under Fifteen team who is friends with Tito. When Tito pretends to be in a gang, Luma kicks Osman off the team because she worries about retaliation from gangs against the Fugees.

Shamsoun Dikori – Robin and Idwar's older brother, who plays on the Under Seventeen Fugees. Shamsoun is also one of the Fugees who is accepted to college on a soccer scholarship.

Barlea – Kanue's uncle who works two shifts at the airport to keep himself and his nephew afloat. He is usually only home for a few hours in the afternoon, and thus Kanue is expected to cook and keep house.

Eldin Subasic – A Bosnian player on the Under Thirteen Fugees. Eldin is Qendrim's best friend. He often plays goalie along with Mafoday.

Tracy Ediger – A woman Luma hires to serve as a team manager for the Fugees. Tracy drives the Fugees' bus and also helps with the tutoring program.

Mafoday Jawneh – A heavyset Gambian player on the Under Thirteen Fugees. Mafoday plays goalie along with Eldin.

Mohammed Mohammed – An Iraqi player on the Under Thirteens who just arrived in the United States and speaks very little English.

Muamer – A Bosnian player who joins the Under Fifteen Fugees after the team has been dissolved and revived. He plays right forward.

Peshawa Hamid – A star player on the Under Seventeens Fugees. Peshawa is Iraqi and competes for Luma's attention with Darlington.

Josiah Saydee – A Liberian star left forward for the Under Thirteen Fugees.

Xhalal Bushi – Qendrim's father who fled Kosovo with his family.

Alyah – Generose's infant daughter and Alex, Bien, and Ive's little sister.

Sebajden – A midfielder on the Under Fifteens team who is from Kosovo.

Hassan al-Mufleh – Luma's father.

Munawar – Luma's maternal grandmother.

Paula Balegamire – Grace's mother.

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.

REFUGEES, DISCRIMINATION, AND RESILIENCE

Outcasts United tells the story of the Fugees, a boys' soccer team in Clarkston, Georgia. The team is started by Luma al-Mufleh, a young Jordanian woman who creates the team as a free program for the many young refugee children in Clarkston. Over the 1990s and 2000s, Clarkston became a prime location for international organizations to resettle refugees from around the globe. The boys on the Fugees team faced hardships in their home countries, often due to discrimination based on their race, religion, or ethnic group. But St. John demonstrates that just because the Fugees and their families are able to immigrate to America does not mean that they have fully escaped discrimination: they still face prejudice and hardship due to their status as refugees. Still, despite their past struggles and the resistance that the town of Clarkston has to the presence of refugees, St. John also depicts the enormous amount of resilience that the Fugees bear in the face of these challenges—even though it is unfair that they have to face such discrimination in the first place.

Many of the Fugees are escaping countries locked in civil wars, trapped by fighting between rival ethnic groups. St. John provides several examples of the conflicts the boys are escaping. Beatrice Ziaty and her sons, Jeremiah, Mandela, and Darlington, escape civil war in Monrovia, Liberia. Beatrice hid with her sons and husband in their home as battles raged outside. She then watched her husband killed by soldiers for money. Despite this tragedy and their lack of resources, she and her children then walked for ten days to the Ivory Coast and arrived at an overflowing refugee camp. They built a mud hut for shelter in the camp and applied for resettlement with the U.N, demonstrating their commitment to survival despite their persecution. Bienvenue Ntwari arrives with his brothers Alex and Ive, his sister Alyah, and his mother Generose, from Burundi. They had fled because of civil war in Burundi between the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups. This civil war lasted ten years, resulting in the deaths of 300,000 people. Generose, who was Tutsi, fled the country. She and her children wait for four years in a refugee camp in Mozambique before being resettled in the U.S. These and other examples serve to illustrate the harm of racial and ethnic divisions, but also the strength within the Fugees and their families as they try to search elsewhere to rebuild their lives.

Yet even once the families reach the U.S., they still face forms of discrimination and must work extremely hard to keep their families afloat. A few months after Beatrice and her sons arrive in Georgia, Beatrice is mugged coming home from her new job. St. John implies that she is targeted because of her refugee status, because she is vulnerable and doesn't know how to call the police and hasn't yet built relationships with her neighbors, or anyone living in the U.S. Thus, not only do they receive very little support in their new home, but their status as refugees also makes them especially vulnerable to people taking advantage of them. Still, Beatrice simply instructs her boys to remain inside when she goes to work, knowing that remaining strong and stoic is the only way she can combat this kind of targeting. Similarly, Generose must find ways to keep her family afloat. Her husband could not get immigration papers to the U.S. and so lives in Canada and sends money to them. Generose must take a night job so that she can then leave her six-month-old daughter Alyah in the care of her fifteen, thirteen, and seven-year-old children. Like other refugee kids, Bien and his family bear extra responsibility and the burden of adapting to life in a new country with very little money—just one example of the unfair circumstances to which these children are subject.

In the face of these mass resettlements, the town of Clarkston is often discriminatory against the refugees. Middle-class white families who have lived in Clarkston for a long time are put off by the arrival of the refugees in the 1990s and 2000s. They start to withdraw from their neighbors, fearing the arrival of the refugees. They elect a man named Lee Swaney as mayor, who campaigns on the idea that he is a champion of "old Clarkston"—that is, Clarkston before the refugees' arrival. The fact that Swaney wins the election reflects the values and mindsets of the people of Clarkston. Refugees often feel targeted by the police: when police use the refugees' frequent traffic violations as a reliable source of revenue for the town, the refugees become understandably upset. This tension escalates until when one cab driver is stopped by the police for what he believes is no reason, he calls in backup from other cab drivers and the police, fearing a riot, lets him off with a warning. Thus, the refugees find their own ways to cope with some of the injustices that they face. The struggle that the Fugees have in finding a **field** to call home is representative of the fact that

even though the refugees have been resettled in Clarkston, they are not necessarily welcome there—St. John even refers to the "hostility" they face from opposing teams from other towns who "[resent] the newcomers." When Luma tries to find a field for the Fugees to practice on, it initiates a long conflict between Luma and city officials who are reluctant to give a group of refugees free reign of a field. Sometimes they allow the Fugees to play on nice, unused fields, and sometimes they are relegated to a "rutted, gravelly field" covered with broken glass and no soccer goals. In spite of the challenges they face with the town, the boys never complain about their situation. They recognize their fortune in being able to play on the team at all. Even though the Fugees, and the refugee community as a whole, experience prejudice and a lack of support, all they can do is face those challenges and adapt to them.

COMMUNITY AND TEAMWORK VS. DIVISION

Due to the myriad cultural backgrounds of the Fugees, Luma recognizes how, even at a young age, boys will intentionally divide based on groupings like race, nationality, or religion. At first, the boys are somewhat distrustful of each other and have a difficult time playing as a team. But over time, and with Luma's serious efforts, they gradually are able to look past their different cultures to find success together. By showing the team's arc, St. John illustrates that soccer is not only a productive activity for the boys, but also a means of creating a community.

St. John, in displaying the early dynamics of the team, acknowledges that there is comfort in finding people who share one's values and background. Luma only becomes aware of the refugee community in Clarkston because the town is home to a Middle Eastern market called Talars, which sells her favorite foods from her own culture. Thus, she too recognizes the comfort that comes with familiarity. When many of the boys first arrive in America, they are heartened to find people who speak their language and share their background. When Bien arrives in America from Burundi, he meets Grace, a boy from Congo. Bien is relieved to hear him speak Swahili, and Grace invites him to try out for the Fugees. Commonalities, therefore, can help to initiate communities. During the Fugees' first season, Luma tells the boys to divide into groups for drills. She begins to see that they split up according to common ethnic backgrounds or languages. "The Afghan and Iraqi kids would look down on the African kids," Luma said. "And kids from northern Africa would look down on kids from other parts of Africa. There was a lot of underlying racism and a lot of baggage they brought with them." Thus, despite the comfort in finding a sense of belonging, Luma also sees the harm in factions.

After recognizing the divisions within her team, Luma initially works hard to make everyone feel welcome and encourages the boys to find unity across races and nationalities. Luma understands early the necessity of combatting the divisions of language. When she puts up flyers advertising tryouts, she makes flyers in English, Vietnamese, Arabic, and French in the hopes of being inclusive. Then, once they start playing on the team, she makes everyone speak English so that the boys won't only speak to the teammates who speak their native language. Luma even follows this rule as well, despite the fact that sometimes it makes communication slightly more difficult. She refuses to speak Arabic with the Iraqi or Sudanese kids, so that other boys don't feel left out—her ability to speak Arabic with some boys and not others had made them competitive with each other. When the boys do try to divide during their drills, she forces them to mix with kids with whom they do not normally interact. She describes how if she asked for groups of four, "every single time people would group up with people from their own country." So, she explains, "I started saying to myself, *I need a Liberian there, with a Congolese, an Afghan, and an Iraqi*."

Soccer, in general, also encourages this unity and teamwork. The more the boys are able to work together, the more fun they have and the more effectively they play. Darlington Ziaty and Peshawa Hamid are two of the most talented players on the oldest Fugees team (the Under Seventeens). They initially had this cultural competitiveness, but once they are able to work together to score, their team goes undefeated in the next season. Kanue Biah is on the middle Fugees team, the Under Fifteens, and begins "to view the team as his family," calling the boys he plays with his "brothers." But when the Under Fifteens team is cancelled because some members are not respectful to Luma, he is devastated and sets out to rebuild the team with some new members. Luma agrees to let the team play with these new members, even though they are going against teams that have been playing together for years. When they are able to win the first match, Luma smiles to see that "her players, some of them still strangers to each other, [are] high fiving and shouting joyfully at the sky." Their desire to win overcomes their foreignness to each other. Qendrim, a player in the Under Thirteens, likewise begins to feel that his teammates are like brothers, viewing it as entirely normal to have friends from all over the world. The Under Thirteens, despite being from thirteen different countries and a wide array of ethnicities, religions, and languages, begin to create their own inside jokes. They even pray together before a game—Grace gives a Christian prayer in Swahili and Eldin gives a Muslim prayer in Bosnian, first and foremost for their safety, and then, for a victory.

Luma's deep love for the Fugees and her passion in coaching the boys is not only due to the fact that she loves the game of soccer. It is also because she recognizes that soccer can help build a community. For boys who are, as the title suggests, "outcasts," the Fugees are an important support system and a means for them to find brothers in a place where they never

thought they would truly belong.

LEADERSHIP AND RESPECT

The Fugees would not exist without the team's fearless leader, Luma, who is often very tough on the boys and demands they play by her rules. Although Luma's rigor is sometimes off-putting to the Fugees, her toughness is not simply for the sake of being harsh; instead, her demands are due to the fact that she truly wants the boys to achieve success, both on and off the field. Luma understands that sometimes being a leader and having respect don't necessarily mean being liked, gaining accolades, or even being kind. In the end, her only goal is for the boys' lives to have improved and for them to feel like they've achieved something together.

Luma learns leadership from her own first coach, Rhonda Brown, who coached volleyball at the American Community School that Luma attended growing up in Jordan. Rhonda sets the example for Luma that being tough can still earn respect. Rhonda expects her players to be on time to practice, to work hard, to focus, and to improve. She drills her players and subjects them to lots of running, making them exhausted. Luma sees that her other teammates are lazy, and so invites Brown's challenges because she does want to improve. Luma admits that she disliked Brown, but also acknowledges how much she wanted to play well for her and how much Brown earned her team's respect. Perhaps one of the most important things that Brown does is join in on practices with her team, setting an example for them to follow. "She didn't ask us to do anything she wouldn't do," Luma recounts. "Until then I'd always played for me. I'd never played for a coach." Eventually Luma sees that this strategy gets results, as the team improves and even the slackers begin working hard.

Luma adopts many of Brown's strategies with her own team. She does not need to be liked, simply respected. She is also keen to set an example for the boys when they question her authority. Initially, the boys are hesitant to have a woman for a coach, but Luma quickly dispenses with that hesitation. She tells a boy who questions her authority to stand in goal. She kicks the ball directly at him, and he dives out of the way instead of blocking it because it rockets so directly at him. No one questions her ability to coach a team after that, but the boys still question some of her rules. One player in particular, Prince, refuses to adhere to Luma's rules requiring the boys to keep their hair short. She kicks him off the team. Even though this prompts some further unrest between her and other boys, she knows that if she were to relax the rules for one person she could not claim authority over her team. When more and more players start to disrespect her, Luma cancels the Under Fifteens team. Kanue, one of the boys who follows all of her rules, is adamant about having more tryouts. He tells Luma that he appreciates her, and that the new team he builds is going to "follow the rules and give her the respect she deserves." He understands that the things she does, she does in order to help them succeed. Even though Luma's methods are not always popular, the boys recognize that they have a purpose and respect her for trying to build a strong and cohesive team.

Luma knows that her leadership does not have to stop with the soccer team. She also gains an enormous amount of respect by helping the boys and their families outside of the team. She assures parents that she will take care of their sons while they are playing for her, and they even start to see her as a "stand-in mother." One boy, Fornatee, says that Luma "cares about you like she's your parent." Sometimes she babysits the boys when their mothers, who are often single parents, have to work. Luma also sets up tutoring classes for the students to help them learn English, requiring her players to attend or lose their spots on the team. Everything she does is in service of allowing the boys to succeed. At the end of the book, she holds full-time classes at the Fugees Academy to help them with the specific challenges of attending school in America as a refugee. Luma helps translate documents for parents and makes appointments with doctors and social workers. Teachers reach out to her when they can't reach the boys' parents. In return, the boys' families deeply respect her and repay her kindness with food and by including her in their families.

Luma's leadership tangibly improve the lives of the Fugees, both on and off the soccer field, demonstrating the success of her methods and how the boys' respect for her pays off. Mandela, a troublemaker who has a falling out with Luma, eventually reconciles when he recognizes that some of the other boys who had disrespected her were bad influences. With Luma's help, he applies and is accepted to Job Corps, a government program that provides vocational training and offers a high school degree. Several of the students are accepted to a liberal arts college in North Carolina—some are able to do so with the help of scholarships to play soccer. With the help of Luma's tutoring program, many of the boys' grades, and particularly their English language skills, improve markedly.

Luma acknowledges that her methods aren't perfect and wouldn't be suitable for every person. But St. John demonstrates how Luma's strategies work for her unique role and allow her to invest her time and energy to do something positive for the Fugees. In showing how Luma is harsh but that the boys still respect her and are able to improve, St. John argues that leadership is not about creating miracles or even about being popular; instead, it is about being able to do some concrete good in the world.

DISCIPLINE, DEDICATION, AND SUCCESS

For children across the globe, sports teams represent a means of cultivating a good work ethic and a dedication to achieving a goal, and the Fugees are no different. Luma, the Fugees' coach, sees this discipline

and dedication as a requirement for her players—particularly for refugee children who will need to take on more responsibility than other children might. Often, these children's only alternative activities are getting involved in gangs. Both Luma and St. John demonstrate in *Outcasts United* that the more discipline and dedication the Fugees have, the more they are able to succeed.

Over the course of the book, Luma coaches many different teams: first, a girls' team at the Decatur YMCA, and then the three Fugees teams (the Under Thirteens, Under Fifteens, and Under Seventeens). At each team, Luma demands that her team be dedicated and forces them to have discipline in order to play. At Luma's first team, the girls' team at the YMCA, she makes her players run for thirty-five minutes and do sit-ups, push-ups, and leg lifts before each practice. She also makes them run longer if they are not on time. Thus, the girls are punished for their lack of discipline. Even though parents get upset about some of Luma's methods, she sees how the girls are more motivated, responsible, and are actually able to improve. By their third season, Luma's team goes undefeated and they win their year-end tournament. When Luma begins coaching the Fugees, she drives her team hard during practice. She begins with twenty-five minutes of running laps; when they misbehave, she runs them to exhaustion. She then leads them through sit-ups, push-ups, leg lifts, and bicycle kicks, pushing against the backs of players who try to cut corners during the sit-ups or pushups. They then do a series of drills and end the day with a scrimmage. Luma notes how during the scrimmage, suddenly, the boys would have a great deal of energy. Playing soccer becomes the reward for a hard practice, and they work hard to achieve that. When the Under Thirteens start slacking off and walking during their warmups instead of running, she tells them that they need to get serious and even sends one boy home. She also threatens to cancel the team like she cancelled the Under Fifteens. This threat motivates them to prove their dedication as players— at their next game, they win 5-1.

The Under Fifteens have the most difficult time proving their desire to win. When they don't have the discipline to show up on time or a dedication to the team, Luma stops coaching them, which sends them into a spiral of disarray. This proves how in the absence of discipline and hard work, the players find very little success. One particular season, the Under Fifteens become very lazy and stop following all of Luma's rules. One game in particular represents a breaking point: a few of the kids miss the bus, leaving the team two players short. Luma is frustrated. One of the boys, Mandela, asks St. John to drive back and pick up three members of the team. They make it back to the game on time, but when they arrive, Luma simply sits under a tree with her head down and watches the kids melt down. The team ends up losing seven to two because they become angry with each other and frustrated that Luma isn't coaching. At the end of the match, Luma explains, "They show up to tutoring late," she said. "They're disrespectful. They show up to practice not dressed to play, their pants hanging down. I tell them practice is at five-thirty, they show up at six-thirty. I tell them, 'You have to be at the field at one o'clock for a two o'clock game,' and they're coming, what, like ten minutes before the game?" Luma decides to cancel the team, reinforcing the idea that a team cannot succeed without dedication from its players. This setback forces the truly dedicated players like Kanue Biah to round up equally committed team members and convince Luma to continue the season. They do so, bringing boys to try out for the team—St. John describes that they are "Trying to will their team back into existence." Luma agrees to continue the team after seeing their efforts, and even though their season isn't the most successful, the fact that their dedication enables the team to continue once again proves that staying disciplined and focused on their goals is necessary for the team to exist at all.

Dedication and discipline are not only required of the boys, but also from Luma herself. She proves her own dedication to the team in all of the actions she takes to support it. She gives up her other jobs in order to devote herself to the Fugees, to their tutoring program, and to their families. Without her dedication and her desire to see the team succeed, the boys could not commit their own efforts to the team's success as well. Ultimately, it is through their collective hard work that the Fugees are able to become the remarkable story that St. John publicizes for the world in *Outcasts United*.

SYMBOLS

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

FIELDS

Throughout the book, soccer fields come to represent the Clarkston community's lack of support for the Fugees, and the refugee population as a whole. When Luma begins the Fugees program, the YMCA sponsors their use of the field at the Clarkston Community Center. But when relations between the YMCA and the Community Center deteriorate, they are forced to move to a field behind Indian Creek Elementary School. This field is covered in gravel and broken glass, and anyone can walk through games. Luma is infuriated by this treatment, because she knows that the Fugees are being discriminated against because their parents are not wealthy. Affluent parents would never allow their children to play on a field, but the Fugees' parents have neither the time nor resources to protest the decision.

Later, Luma is approved by the City Council to use a field at Armistead Park on a trial basis. But at the end of the book, Mayor Swaney authorizes a letter saying that they no longer

have use of the field and will have to find another to practice on—a decision that he does not have the authority to make alone. Thus, the Fugees' continual struggle to find a practice field is emblematic of their larger struggle to find their place in America—even though they have been able to immigrate, they are rarely welcomed or fully supported.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Delacorte Press edition of *Outcasts United* published in 2012.

Introduction Quotes

In fact, things with the Fugees were more fragile than I could have realized that day. The team had no home field. The players' private lives were an intense daily struggle to stay afloat. They and their families had fled violence and chaos and found themselves in a place with a completely different set of values and customs.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

The first time St. John sees the Fugees play, they win a 9-2 blowout against a team from North Atlanta. Both St. John and the referee admire the talent of the boys, and the quality of the soccer that they play. St. John describes that he knew little about the boys other than that they are refugees, and that their coach, Luma, is a woman. In this quote, St. John looks back in hindsight to remark on how little he knew about the situation at the time, and the relative instability of the Fugees' lives. This quote touches on some of the most important background information in the story, and some of its core ongoing conflict.

St. John introduces, even before he describes the Fugees' lives in depth, the hardships that they had already endured in order to make it to the United States, and the resilience they needed in order to "stay afloat" in the "daily struggle" that he references. The fact that they have no field also touches on the discrimination that they continue to face even in America. Throughout the book, the Fugees are invited to use a field given to them by various town community centers and councils before they are kicked off of that field and forced to find another. This ongoing conflict with the town serves as a small-scale representation of their struggle to find a home and a sense of belonging in the United States in the first place.

She was just a woman who wanted, in her own way, to make the world a better place. She had vowed to come through for her players and their families or to come apart trying.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

After St. John introduces the Fugees and the struggles that they've endured, he touches on Luma's own challenges in coaching the team. St. John highlights Luma's selflessness and her dedication to the Fugees. Just as she demands discipline and hard work from her players, she exhibits the same qualities in supporting the Fugees. In subsequent chapters, St. John describes in how she sacrifices nearly all other parts of her life in order to support the Fugees more fully.

Luma recognizes that the Fugees are not simply an active outlet for these boys, but also a community for them and their families. This is why she uses the team as an incentive for the boys to get extra tutoring and improve their English. It is also why she makes herself available to so many parents (who are often single mothers) to help them with social workers, doctors, and teachers. Luma's methods, as St. John explores, are not always popular, but they prove how much she wants the boys to succeed both on and off the field.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Brown accepted that her players might not like her at first. But she was willing to wait out the hostility in the hope that her players would eventually buy in.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Rhonda Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Luma grows up in Jordan and attends the American Community School in Amman. While there, she excels in a variety of different sports, and is particularly inspired by the volleyball coach, Rhonda Brown. St. John describes how Brown is very demanding of her players. She expects a lot, but also sets an example by working hard, being on time, and doing the drills herself.

Despite the fact that Luma dislikes Brown, she also recognizes the fact that she deeply respects her and wants to play well for her. Brown's methods eventually do pay off, as the team gradually improves and Luma sees how even the lazier players start to work harder. Luma's realization that she respects Brown represents a turning point in her way of thinking about leadership and coaching. Brown's strategies become a model for the ones that Luma employs when she is coaching the Fugees. Just as Brown's methods ultimately pay off (even if there is sometimes hostility towards her), Luma's expectations pay off as well. Gradually, the boys begin to appreciate how her demands will help lead them to success as a team, proving how respect is sometimes more important than popularity.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The incident robbed Beatrice of the hope her family would be safe in her new home. She became obsessed with her boys' safety. In Liberia, a neighbor would always look after her kids if she needed to leave them to run an errand or visit a friend. But Beatrice didn't know anyone in Clarkston.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Darlington Ziaty, Mandela Ziaty, Jeremiah Ziaty, Beatrice Ziaty

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after arriving in America with her three sons, Beatrice Ziaty is mugged coming home from work. Her stolen purse contains all of her important documentation: her new driver's license, social security card, work permit, and cash. The incident demonstrates the way in which refugees' struggles do not simply end because they have arrived in America. Although they have been given a degree of support, like the loan that allowed them to come to America, the apartment they are renting, and donated furniture that they have, there are still institutional flaws and deficiencies that leave many refugee families struggling to acclimate. This includes the fact that they are vulnerable, as Beatrice is here. She is still deeply afraid for herself and her children and doesn't know how to call the police in her new home.

Still, despite these challenges, Beatrice continues to persist in making the most of her life in America—primarily because she has no other choice. She continues to go to work, and even though she worries, she makes sure that her boys stay safe in their apartment. Thus, even in America, Beatrice shows her immense resilience to the challenges and discrimination that she faces.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ In 2001, Lee Swaney—a longtime city council member who called himself a champion of "old Clarkston," that is, Clarkston before the refugees—ran for mayor.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Mayor Lee Swaney

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

From the 1980s to the 2000s, St. John describes, Clarkston, Georgia undergoes a massive population change. As Clarkston appeals to more and more refugee resettlement agencies, the town grows increasingly diverse. By 2000, one-third of the population is foreign-born. While some of the residents are welcoming to the refugees and the changes that they have brought with them, other residents are not as pleased by the changes happening in their town.

In response to this, Lee Swaney campaigns on a message of bringing back the "old Clarkston"—Clarkston before the refugees. Swaney's election heralds some of the discrimination that the refugees face from the conservative white residents of Clarkston. The refugees aren't able to leave Clarkston and move elsewhere, and so the most that the old residents of the town can do is discriminate against them and make them feel completely unwelcome. For the Fugees, this will become especially true when Swaney helps to grant and then revoke the use of the fields around Clarkston, making them feel like they don't have a home base, as other teams do.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Soon Luma was running herself sweaty, pleasantly lost in a game with strangers. "It reminded me what I missed about my community at home," she said. "And at the time I felt like such an outsider."

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

After Luma moves down to Atlanta, she finds a Middle Eastern market called Talars in Clarkston. In a nearby parking lot, Luma sees a group of young men playing soccer and joins in the game. This simple episode reminds Luma of home, where she spent her youth playing soccer (often to her family's dismay) with other young men around their home.

The story serves as an early example of the unifying nature of soccer. The global nature of the sport allows Luma to feel at home, even though she is playing with complete strangers in a country where she often feels like an "outsider." This sense of unified community is so strong that it sparks Luma's interest in beginning the Fugees program. Additionally, it becomes key to the success of the Fugees program itself, as many of the boys who end up on the Fugees span many different nationalities, ethnicities, races, religions, and languages. Yet soccer connects them, and gradually they come to think of each other as brothers. This story is Luma's experience of the same phenomenon, if only for a short time.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Given the love for soccer in the refugee community, Luma wondered if the game and her team could attract some of these kids to after-school tutoring that might give them a better chance to succeed. She resolved to get help from volunteers and educators for tutoring before practices, and to require her players to attend or lose their spots on her team.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

After Luma begins the Fugees program, she gets to know the boys more and more. She also starts to recognize that because they had spent months or sometimes years fleeing war-torn countries, their education is often sorely lacking for their ages. This prompts a decision to begin a tutoring program for the Fugees in addition to their practices.

This decision proves how much Luma wants the boys to succeed—not only at soccer, but also in other aspects of their lives. Her requirement, that in order to be on the team, the boys must also attend tutoring, is not completely popular; many of the boys at various points skip or come late to tutoring. But Luma remains firm on this point, knowing that she has their best interests in mind, and the boys who are willing to put in the time and the work will reap the rewards. This program also shows how Luma is interested in growing a community around the Fugees, as the volunteers lend their time and support to the team as well. This community only gets larger and larger over the course of the book, and particularly as St. John breaks the Fugees story and there is even more of an outpouring of support.

❝ With her Arabic and French, Luma was able to translate documents and answer some of their questions. She made appointments with doctors and social workers. Luma gave her cell phone number to her players and their families, and soon they were calling with requests for help.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

As Luma starts to give more and more of her time to running the Fugees program, she also gets to know the Fugees' families and works to help them get acclimated to life in the United States. She becomes a liaison between the parents of her players (often single mothers) and the people involved in their day-to-day lives with whom they might not be able to communicate due to their limited English. This is, in some ways, a mirror to the tutoring program that Luma sets up for the boys. It shows how she doesn't simply want the boys to be good soccer players—she wants to tangibly improve their lives and the lives of their families. It also proves her intense dedication to the boys and their families,

as she spends enormous amounts of time and energy helping them in whatever ways she is able. But her work does not go unnoticed: she gains a tremendous amount of respect from the families for her efforts, and they reward her with food, friendship, and their own support when Luma needs help managing their children. This chapter serves as the point at which Luma becomes more than a coach to the team—she becomes like family.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"She said we're all foreigners, and this is a team where everybody unites," recalled Yousph Woldeyesus, an Ethiopian player. "And she told us she was going to kick us off the team if we didn't."

The next season, Darlington and Peshawa worked together to score, and their team went undefeated.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Peshawa Hamid, Darlington Ziaty

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

In the second year of the Fugees program, Luma continues to learn how to manage the competition and baggage within her team. She recognizes that people often divide based on nationality or common languages, and talented players—like Darlington and Peshawa—are so competitive for her attention that they don't play well together. Luma combats this by making sure to be inclusive in her language use (only speaking English), and in treating all of her players equally, with no preferential treatment.

Luma appreciates that any divisions within her team make it dysfunctional, and she tries to find as much commonality as she can between them. St. John quotes Luma through one of the players, noting that they are all refugees and are all on a team together. Her strategies and thoughts ultimately pay off, as Darlington and Peshawa setting aside their differences and competition allows them to unite as teammates and surpass what they would be able to do individually. The team, as a whole, reaps the rewards of this reconciliation.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Luma also felt that if a soccer team of well-to-do sub urban kids was assigned to play on a field of sand and broken glass, their parents would call the team's sponsors or the league—*someone*—to protest. The parents of the Fugees' players were seen as powerless, she believed, so no one thought much about making the team play on such a bad field.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

As relations between the Clarkston Community Center and the YMCA deteriorate, the Center declares to the YMCA that the Fugees are no longer welcome at their field. Instead, the YMCA finds a field behind Indian Creek Elementary School which is covered in gravel and broken glass. Luma recognizes that this treatment is deemed acceptable only because the team is made up of refugees. The Fugees would not be treated in this way if they were from wealthier families, which amounts to discrimination.

St. John returns to the issue of a home soccer field throughout the rest of the book, as this decision begins a long saga in which the Fugees are unable to find a home field. This is a symbolic parallel to the fact that the Fugees are a team of refugees, and despite the fact that they have been able to come to the U.S., they still don't feel completely at home. Likewise, they are not fully welcomed or supported within the Clarkston community, as represented by this lack of a usable field. And yet, as a testament to their resilience, the players never complain about the field that they are given.

Chapter 9 Quotes

He would leave tutoring early or skip it altogether, acts that undermined Luma's authority before the rest of the team. Players soon started to follow Prince's lead and challenge her.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Prince

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Before the Fugees' third season tryouts, Luma tells the players that they have to cut their hair short in order to remain on the team (because long hair implies gang affiliations). This rule specifically targets a player on the Under Fifteens named Prince, who keeps his hair in long braids and has a habit of flouting the rules. While much of Outcasts United demonstrates the importance of dedication and discipline as a key to success, this chapter emphasizes the problems that arise when that dedication and discipline aren't there. When Luma is lenient with players breaking the rules, like Prince, she loses the respect of other players as well.

This episode reminds Luma of why she prioritizes commitment over talent. Ultimately, Luma's decision to crack down on the hair rule leads to the cancellation of the Under Fifteens, but it allows Luma to rebuild her team with players who meet her expectations. Thus, even though her rules are unpopular, her demand respect ultimately leads to a more dedicated team.

Chapter 11 Quotes

"With no siblings in the United States, and a guardian who was hardly ever home, Kanue began to view the team as his family. "The Fugees—it's really important to me," he said. "When I play on that team, I'm with my brothers."

Related Characters: Kanue Biah, Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Barlea

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

When Luma cancels the Under Fifteens, this decision hits Kanue the hardest. Kanue lives with his uncle Barlea, who works two shifts at the airport and is only home for four hours a day. Like so many of his teammates, Kanue is forced to grow up earlier and be more responsible than their American counterparts because of the hardships that he and his uncle have had to endure in fleeing their home country. The Fugees program is important to Kanue, and to others, because it allows the boys to remain kids in some part of their lives. And, in the absence of Kanue's family, the Fugees begin to represent brothers, as he describes here. Their unity is thus crucial, not only for their gameplay, but also because the team have created a vital community for so many of the players. Kanue's devastation in the face of Luma's decision spurs him to ask his coach to rebuild the team, because it is so essential to his life in the United States.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"I told her I appreciate her," Kanue said later. "I told her thanks, and that we were going to do everything to follow the rules and give her the respect she deserves."

Related Characters: Warren St. John, Kanue Biah (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Natnael, Mandela Ziaty

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

After Luma cancels the Under Fifteens team, Kanue begs Luma to give him a chance to rebuild the team and hold more tryouts. Luma agrees, and with the help of Mandela and Natnael, Kanue is able to rally a set of new players to try out for the team. He does this not only because of his dedication to the Fugees, but also because he wants to show Luma how much he respects her and understands the importance of the entire team having respect for their coach.

The revival of the Under Fifteens team proves the efficacy of Luma's methods: even though many of the boys were upset with Luma's decision, they ultimately ended up building a team made up of more dedicated players who respect her rules—and thus, who ultimately end up being more successful as a result. Even though they go through a bumpy period, Luma knows that rebuilding a team from dedicated players is better than having a team of talented players who disrespect her and each other.

Chapter 15 Quotes

Luma dropped her head in relief. Her players, some of them still strangers to each other, were high-fiving and shouting joyfully at the sky as they ran toward her on the bench. They seemed as surprised as she did. Luma raised her head, pulled her shoulders back, and smiled for the first time in two weeks.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Mandela Ziaty, Kanue Biah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

After the Under Fifteens hold a second set of tryouts and Luma allows the team to continue, they play their first game against a team called the Lightning that is from a very good program in an Atlanta suburb. But with Kanue's encouragement and Mandela's effort, the team is able to win, despite a tense game. Luma is amazed to see boys who barely know each other work together to succeed. It reinforces for the boys that those who work hard and are dedicated to their team can find success, in contrast to the "meltdown" that they had just prior to Luma's decision to cancel the Under Fifteens a few chapters earlier. The team finds joy in their mutual win, and even Luma is happy to see that their hard work has in fact paid off. Even though hard work doesn't always necessarily correlate to success, this win helps the team believe that their hard work can pay off.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Swaney's proposal changed the energy in the room. The council's questions became gentler. They talked among themselves and agreed that six months sounded like a reasonable amount of time for a trial period.

There was a motion, and a second.

The motion passed unanimously. Luma nodded in thanks and stifled a smile. The Fugees, for now at least, had a home.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Mayor Lee Swaney

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

After tolerating the terrible conditions on the field behind Indian Creek Elementary School, Luma recognizes that it is negatively affecting her teams. She attends a Clarkston City Council meeting and requests the use of an unused field in Milam park. At first, the councilmembers' questions are skeptical and presumptuous, their tone blatantly negative. But Mayor Swaney then suggests letting Luma use the field on a trial basis.

Even though Mayor Swaney is not always on the Fugees' side, this moment shows how even one person can help facilitate a small decision that can affect many people's lives—particularly those who have been largely underserved by their communities in the past. With Swaney's proposal and the council's resolution, it is the first time Luma feels that the town of Clarkston is trying to be a part of the Fugees community, after the Fugees have already been a part of the Clarkston community for so long. The field that they are provided, St. John later describes, is beautiful—but it represents something even more powerful: acceptance, inclusion, and the feeling of belonging that comes with having a home.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ "What makes a gang different from the Fugees?" Luma asked.
"They fight."
"They shoot each other."
"Once you're part of a gang, you can't get away."

Related Characters: Luma al-Mufleh (speaker), Tito

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

After an incident in which a boy named Tito (who had attended a Fugees practice and cheered them on at a game) is shot in the face while pretending to be in a gang, Luma leads a discussion with her players on what being in a gang affords its members. Her question of what makes a gang different from the Fugees prompts both the Fugees themselves, and the reader, to examine why sports teams are much more beneficial than something like a gang. Outside of the fact that gangs are often violent, Luma emphasizes that gangs are difficult to escape once a person is in them. This is in contrast with the Fugees, where the players are constantly trying to prove to Luma how much they want to be a part of the team by choosing to work hard.

Even though Luma doesn't bring this up, there are also other factors that make gangs very different from the Fugees. It improves their lives in other tangible ways (like the tutoring sessions that Luma organizes) and also gives them a community that isn't based on race, ethnic, or geographical divisions—the same divisions that instigated conflicts that led the boys to become refugees. While many of these comparisons escape the boys, St. John adeptly weaves these themes into the story in a way that forces readers to confront the clear dangers to these boys, both on an individual and a large scale.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ It was a small, silly moment, but it also showed that boys from thirteen different countries and a wide array of ethnicities and religions and who spoke different languages were creating their own inside jokes.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Mohammed Mohammed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

At the same time as the Under Fifteens are struggling to keep their team together, the Under Thirteens are creating strong friendships. As they run laps, they chant, "Who are the kings?" "The Fugees!" "Who is the queen?" "Luma!" They roll over laughing at their joke, including a boy named Mohammed, who barely speaks any English. With this reference, St. John makes one of his primary arguments very explicit: that one of the most remarkable things about the Fugees is the team's ability to bridge different cultural gaps. Despite the fact that the boys come from a variety of races, religions, and languages, the team builds a community between them. They are able to find commonalities through humor, and that also translates to building a stronger and more effective team. Thus, St. John also implies that being able to find common humanity and ways in which the boys can relate to each other allows them to thrive on the field and accomplish great things.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ "For a while I expected you to be like Jeremiah," she told him. "Actually, you're a better athlete—but you don't have the discipline or the respect to play. You don't respect me, and you don't respect your team."

Related Characters: Luma al-Mufleh, Warren St. John (speaker), Jeremiah Ziaty, Mandela Ziaty

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

After the new Under Fifteens team wins their first big game, they have a difficult time getting into a groove. They play a big away game, and Mandela gets frustrated when his teammates make mistakes, and he starts snapping at them. Eventually he acts so poorly towards them that Luma benches him, and when he returns home she throws him off the team. Luma's reasoning to Mandela about why he is off the team reiterates her priorities. Even though Mandela is talented—even more talented than his brother—without discipline and respect for his coach, he will not succeed on the Fugees. She has done so much for him, but he still does not respect her enough to keep his cool on the field. Luma's decision is a difficult one for her, particularly because she is close with Mandela's entire family, but ultimately she recognizes that drawing a line with Mandela will lead to a more unified team until he is able to get his act together.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ Robin calmed down at school and became outgoing with his teammates. Idwar, still quiet and shy, became a confident young man on the field. Soccer, Shamsoun said, kept the boys sane.

"It kept our minds from thinking about what happened," he said. "We made friends—kids from different cultures. It broadened our minds, and we weren't the only ones going through hard times. That's why the team is so close. It became our family."

Related Characters: Shamsoun Dikori, Warren St. John (speaker), Idwar Dikori, Robin Dikori

Related Themes:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

St. John tells the story of the Dikori brothers, who were able to migrate to Clarkston after fleeing an Islamist regime that took power in Sudan. Once they arrive, however, tragedy strikes, as their mother and sisters are killed in a car accident. They become withdrawn and depressed until they find the Fugees. For many of the other boys on the team, the Fugees represents a means of finding a community in a strange and foreign place. It allows them to relate to other boys who are dealing with similar scenarios of loss and seeking asylum.

While this is true for the Dikoris as well, this quote demonstrates how, for Robin, Idwar, and Shamsoun, the Fugees also become much more than that. The team becomes a means of coping with the hardship and struggles that they are facing—a distraction from the issues. While they are dealing with situations that require them to mature more quickly than other boys, the Fugees also give them a chance to be carefree kids and have fun.

Chapter 27 Quotes

The boys formed a circle at midfield, draped their arms around each other, and bowed their heads. Both Grace and Eldin felt more comfort able praying the way they'd been taught—in their native languages. No one objected as Grace prayed aloud in Swahili and Eldin in Bosnian, first for the health and safety of their teammates, and then, if God saw fit, for a victory.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Eldin Subasic, Grace Balegamire

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

Before the Under Thirteen Fugees play their final game of the season, Grace has the idea to pray prior to the game. But they realize that they have both Christian and Muslim players on the team, and so they decide to give two prayers—one for each religion. This simple gesture, completely invented by the boys, shows how far they have come from the days when they would divide based on common nationalities or languages. Now, they are not only friends with players of a wide variety of cultures, but they also celebrate each other's beliefs. They acknowledge each other's differences and allow those unique traditions to flourish. Not every player would understand either Swahili or Bosnian, but they respect that these are the languages that Eldin and Grace feel most comfortable praying in. What is perhaps most important is that their sentiments and purpose in reciting the prayers are unified, and that they have created a community and a deep love for each other as a team.

Chapter 28 Quotes

Pull back farther, and you got a sense of where Clarkston sat in America—tucked in a green corner of the country beneath the gray ridges of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Pull back again, and the blue oceans came into view, then other continents and countries—Congo, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq—all looking deceptively calm. Pull back farther still and the curved horizons of the planet revealed themselves—a beautiful ball of green, white, blue, slate, and brown. Someday, somewhere down there, the Fugees would find a home.

Related Characters: Warren St. John (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh, Mayor Lee Swaney

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 218-219

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Luma begins practicing with the Under Thirteens and Under Fifteens in preparation for a tournament, she receives a letter from the Town of Clarkston (which she discovers later was authorized by Mayor Swaney) informing them that they could no longer use the field at Milam Park. Luma is stunned but begins a search on Google Earth in order to try to find another place where they can practice.

This quote offers a poetic description of Luma's search as she zooms farther and farther out from Clarkston—to Atlanta, then America, then to other countries and continents, and then to the world as a whole. St. John's reference to the fact that countries like Congo, Sudan, and Afghanistan look "deceptively calm" is an oblique reference to the conflicts that have forced the Fugees into America in the first place. Yet, despite the fact that they have found a new country, they still haven't found a "home." They have been kicked off of their home field several times now, again reinforcing the idea that while Clarkston (and America) might accept their presence, it does not actively support them in building their new lives. America is still a long way from fully supporting refugees when they arrive.

Epilogue Quotes

"If people can look at her and see that, that she's human, not a saint or a superhero, and that she doesn't—can't—do everything or effect miracles, then maybe they can say to themselves, 'I need to look around myself and see my neighborhood, and what is going on here and five streets over, and what I can do in terms of investing myself and my time, to be present for the people around me, and to do something positive for change in my community.'

"No one person can do everything," Tracy said. "But we can all do something."

Related Characters: Warren St. John, Tracy Ediger (speaker), Luma al-Mufleh

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

At the conclusion of the book, St. John writes about how many people now ask Luma for advice on how to handle difficult kids or situations. But both Luma, and Tracy in this quote, are adamant that Luma does not have all the answers. Instead of putting Luma on a pedestal, it is necessary for others to take up that same mantle of leadership. Tracy emphasizes how much Luma looks to help others, but still admits that Luma is simply one person who is trying to make positive change in her community.

By ending with this idea that everyone can help their own community, St. John shifts the focus away from Luma and asks readers to question how they themselves can effect change—if not to the extent that Luma does, but in some small way. Tracy's quote also highlights the idea of community and civic duty, implying that everyone is a part of a community, and it is important to look for ways to support that collective.

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.

INTRODUCTION

On a cool spring afternoon on a soccer field in Clarkston, Georgia, two teams of teenage boys are warming up. When a squadron of fighter jets passes by overhead on its way to Atlanta, the boys stop and look up. One team, from the North Atlanta Soccer Association, looks up at the planes in awe. The other team, a group of refugees on a team called the Fugees, flinch as they watch the planes. Many of them saw fighter jets in action in their home countries and watched bombs take out their neighborhoods.

Opening the book with this key difference in the teams highlights the additional struggle that the Fugees have faced in their lives, having experienced the effects of these fighter jets in action. Yet at the same time, it also highlights their strength: the fact that they had been able to escape this hardship and have now ended up safely in Georgia.

From the sidelines, thirty-one-year-old Luma al-Mufleh, the coach of the Fugees, tells them to concentrate, emphasizing that they need to take more accurate shots in order to score. The boys gather around her. On the other side of the field, about forty parents are there to watch the boys play. None came to support the Fugees, as many are from single parent homes and need to look after other children or work, and few have cars to travel.

The initial description of Luma also highlights her key values: she emphasizes discipline, trying to make sure that the Fugees don't take wild shots. St. John also mentions other discrepancies between the Fugees and the other players, noting the additional hardships the players and their families face.

A few minutes later, the whistle sounds to begin the game. Luma sits silently, allowing the boys to play for themselves. The other coach, however, shouts at the field, jumping up and down as the action unfolds. North Atlanta scores first and Luma continues to quietly pace. But a few moments later, Christian Jackson of the Fugees breaks forward and scores. Luma doesn't react.

St. John introduces Luma's leadership style: she wants to lead the boys to success, but she also does so by giving them a degree of freedom. She wants them to be able to play for themselves, and this freedom prompts the boys to have more respect for her and value the moments in which she does coach them.

The North Atlanta coach continues to shout, while Luma continues to pace, watching many of the Fugees' shots sail over the goal. At halftime, the Fugees lead 3-1, but Luma isn't happy that they've made very few of the shots that they've taken. She tells the team that she wants the other team's coach to sit down and be quiet—that's when they will know that they've truly won.

Even though the Fugees are winning, Luma's disappointment in their performance provides an example of her priorities. She wants her players to work hard and be disciplined, because that, to her, is a measure of their success as a team.

In the second half, the Fugees quickly score three goals: one from a Sudanese boy named Attak and two others from Christian. The Fugees continue to shoot; the other team starts to "[hack] away at the Fugees' shins and ankles," but the Fugees refuse to retaliate. At 8-2, the North Atlanta coach sits down. The boys try to hide their smiles. The game ends at 9-2. The teams shake hands, and the referee approaches the Fugees. He commends them on their sportsmanship and compliments them on "one of the most beautiful games of soccer" he'd ever seen.

The Fugees are able to prove their desire to be disciplined: first, they are inspired by Luma and take her instruction, maintaining the accuracy that they lacked in the first half. Additionally, they maintain their own sense of composure in the face of the other team, who have become desperate. This is the model that Luma tries to attain each time the Fugees take the field.

This is the first time that St. John sees the Fugees play. He knows little about the team other than that the boys are refugees, and that the team is coached by a woman. He soon learns that Clarkston had become one of the most diverse communities in America in little more than a decade. He notices a "sense of trust and friendship between the players and their coach," but there is also "tension and long silences."

Even when first being introduced to the Fugees, St. John picks up on two key aspects of what makes the team so special: first, the fact that these boys are able to come together and play despite their past hardships. Second, Luma's dedication to the boys and their respect, in turn. Of course, these two aspects of the team bring challenges, and the book goes on to explore some of the difficulties that the boys have as refugees in the town, and their difficulty with some of Luma's leadership style.

St. John realizes in hindsight that the team is very fragile, even at this moment. The Fugees have no home **field**. The players are struggling to stay afloat, having fled violence in their home countries only to find a place with a completely different set of values and customs. Luma is also struggling to help them as much as she can. But more than anything, it is the "surprising friendship of these kids from different cultures, religions, and backgrounds" that amazes St. John.

St. John then elaborates on some of the team's struggles, like the discrimination they are facing from the town, which is preventing them from obtaining a home field to play on. But St. John also notes the things that enrich the team, like the community they've been able to build together despite their differences.

One player on the Fugees is not quite as good as his teammates: a tiny boy from Afghanistan named Zubaid, who may be farsighted. He often misses the ball when he tries to kick it. Luma proudly explains to St. John that Zubaid had never missed a practice or tutoring session that Luma ran—he is on the field because he deserves to be. His teammates always cover for him, but at one point in the game against North Atlanta, Zubaid was able to intercept the ball from an opposing player and pass it to a teammate. At the next lull in action, the other Fugees cheered him on as though he had scored the winning goal.

St. John provides an anecdote proving the small miracles that the team creates for the boys. St. John demonstrates how Luma rewards boys like Zubaid, who work hard in all aspects of their lives and dedicate themselves to the team—even if it means that the team might have a weak link on the soccer field. Despite Zubaid's difficulty on the field, the boys still support him, and are sure to lift him up whenever he finds success. This kind of community and team is far more worthwhile for Luma than one that simply rewards talent.

CHAPTER 1: LUMA

Luma al-Mufleh is born in Amman, Jordan, to a wealthy family. Luma takes after her father, Hassan, who hides his emotions for fear of showing weakness. Hassan dotes on her, and expects that Luma will marry, stay close to home, and honor her family. But when Luma is growing up, her family notes her independence, and also her "deep concern for the weak or defenseless."

Even as a young girl, St. John (and Luma's family) notes key traits of Luma that will become crucial to her ability to lead the Fugees: first, her independence, despite her being a Jordanian woman, and second, her desire to help others who cannot always help themselves.

The al-Mufleh's send Luma to the American Community School (ACS) in Amman, a school for the children of American expatriates and elite Jordanians. Luma learns to speak English and meets other children from all over the world. Luma lives at a distance from Amman's problems, which include poverty and the tensions from Palestinian and Iraqi refugees. But her maternal grandmother, Munawar, makes a point of helping the poor when she can.

Luma learns another skill that will help her with the Fugees: the ability to make friends with kids who come from all over the world. This will eventually aid in her quest to forge a community for the boys and help them find the commonalities among them.

Near Munawar's home is a soccer field, where Luma watches young men play from a nearby wall. Eventually, she builds up the nerve to join in, until her grandmother spots her and tells her it is "improper" for a young girl to be around strange men. At the ACS, however, Luma is able to play sports with the boys.

Luma discovers her love of soccer early, and experiences how it connects her to a team and community. Her desire prevails at school, even if she is unable to play at the soccer field near Munawar's house.

Luma plays many sports and stands out to her coaches—particularly the volleyball coach, an African American woman named Rhonda Brown. Coach Brown asks a lot of her players, especially Luma. Brown expects her players to "be on time to practice, work hard, to focus, and to improve." Brown sets an example for her players—she is always on time, organized, and joins in on their drills. She also challenges them, saying that if she beats her players, they can expect the worst practices ever.

Coach Brown serves as an early model for Luma's own coaching style, as she demands dedication and discipline from Luma, just as Luma goes on to expect this from the boys. She also provides an example to Luma in showing that leadership means earning the respect of the players—sometimes by proving one's own ability.

Brown understands that her players may not like her at first, but hopes that they will eventually buy in. Luma doesn't like Brown at all, but she doesn't complain about the work. Luma also starts to realize that the practices are having an effect, and the team improves. She also knows that she wants very badly to play well for Coach Brown.

Brown also teaches Luma that leadership means earning respect from one's players, and it is clear that Luma respects Brown because she wants to play well for her coach. Leadership does not necessarily mean that all the players like their coach, and sometimes it even necessitates that they do not.

As Luma grows older, she starts to "feel at odds with the strict Jordanian society in which she had grown up." Towards the end of her junior year, she decides to go to college in the United States. She enrolls at Hobart and William Smith College before transferring to Smith College, an all-women's school in Massachusetts. She is excited by her ability to be independent at the school, a feeling she had been deprived of at home.

Luma is excited to find a community in which she feels like she belongs. This emphasizes the importance of community and a shared set of values, which will become key to the Fugees later on, even as the boys come from a diverse array of countries, ethnicities, and religions.

When Luma returns to Jordan before her final year at Smith, she realizes that she has become so independent that she could never feel comfortable living in Amman. In June 1997, Luma graduates from Smith, and tells her parents by phone that she would be staying in the United States and not returning home. Hassan is devastated and angry, and warns that he will cut her off from family funds if she chose to stay. Luma doesn't budge, and she feels the lifestyle change abruptly. She has almost nothing, and now has to fend for herself.

In some ways, Luma's stubbornness ends up cutting her off from her family. But it is a key aspect of what makes her a leader and what earns her respect from the Fugees. Additionally, it shows Luma's own dedication to a different kind of life than the one she was expected to lead, a dedication which will allow both her and the Fugees to succeed.


After graduation, Luma stays with a friend who lives in North Carolina. She doesn't yet have a permit to work legally in the United States, so she looks for jobs available to illegal immigrants in the area. She washes dishes and cleans toilet at a local restaurant. In 1999, she decides to move to Atlanta because she likes the weather, which reminds her of Amman. She doesn't have much of a plan, but is determined to make it on her own.

Luma is not a refugee, and her past is very different from that of those of the Fugees. But at the same time, Luma does experience some of what the Fugees go through: having to find difficult and underpaid jobs, having very little assistance, and having to adjust to a new culture that may not necessarily want her there.

CHAPTER 2: BEATRICE AND HER BOYS

In 1997, around the same time Luma graduates from Smith College, Beatrice Ziaty struggles to survive a civil war in Monrovia, Liberia. Beatrice has a husband and four sons: Jeremiah, Mandela, Darlington, and Erich. Rival armies have destroyed the city, and civilians are often caught in the crossfire. One evening, soldiers break into their home, waving machine guns and demanding money from Beatrice's husband.

After explaining Luma's journey to the United States, St. John starts to go into the background of some of the boys who play on the Fugees, like the Ziaty boys. The account of how they arrived in the U.S. is a heartbreaking example of the trauma that so many of these boys have faced.

Liberia was founded in 1821 by a group of Americans as a colony for freed slaves. After 1857, the freed slaves ruled under their own authority with American backing. This rule came to an end on April 12, 1980, when Samuel Doe killed Liberian president William Tolbert and proclaimed himself its new leader. Doe was a member of the Krahn tribe, which comprised 4 percent of the population, far less than the larger Gio and Mano tribes.

It is also worth noting that each time St. John explains the background of the Fugees and their families, a familiar story is painted: war is ravaging their home country because of war between rival ethnic, religious, or national groups—divisions which are in direct contrast to the unity that the boys are able to find on the soccer field.


Soon, a Liberian named Charles Taylor began fighting against the new regime, launching a rebellion with 150 soldiers. The groups motto was "Kill the Krahn." His army grew quickly, augmented by boys whom he armed and drugged. By 1990, Monrovia's water supply had been cut off, there was no food or medicine, and more than 100,000 Krahn refugees flooded into Ivory Coast. More than 150,000 Liberians died.

St. John emphasizes how these divisions of race, class, ethnicity, and religion only serve to divide people and promote hatred. This again contrasts with the unity and support that the Fugees are able to find across these lines.

In 1996, Taylor makes another attack on Monrovia and the Krahn who live there, including Beatrice Ziaty and her family. They hide in their house, praying to survive. But when her husband tells the men who barge in that he has no money, they beat him to death while she flees with three of her sons: Jeremiah, Mandela, and Darlington.

The death of Beatrice's husband and the boys' father is a shocking introduction to some of the hardships that the refugees face—an instigating incident that leads to a far more prolonged struggle, as well.

Beatrice, Jeremiah, Mandela, and Darlington make it out of Monrovia alive, though Beatrice is unable to find Erich. They walk east for ten days, searching for food and hitching rides when they can. They then arrive at an overflowing refugee camp and build a mud hut for shelter. She applies for resettlement by the U.N. They spend five years in the camp before, against all odds, they learn that they have been approved for resettlement in Clarkston, Georgia.

What is perhaps most remarkable about Beatrice's story is that even amidst the trauma that she and her sons face, they are still considered lucky because they are accepted for resettlement. It prompts unanswerable questions about the fate of the other refugees who might not have been as fortunate.

Beatrice is given a $3,016 loan by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement for four one-way plane tickets, which she repays in three years. They begin their journey on September 28, 2003, and eventually land in a new home, a two-bedroom dwelling in Clarkston stocked with canned goods and old furniture. Beatrice begins her job search immediately: she only has three months of government financial assistance. She finds a job as a maid at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Atlanta, an hour's commute by bus from Clarkston.

Here, St. John shows the immense resilience of the refugees. As soon as Beatrice is thrust into a new and completely unfamiliar environment, she works as hard as possible to start supporting her children, despite the fact that she is getting government assistance for the first few months.

The work is exhausting, and when Beatrice returns on the bus, the streets are unfamiliar. As she tries to remember her way home, a man starts to follow her. He demands she hand over her purse. She gives it up, though it contains her new driver's license, social security card, work permit, and cash. He runs off. She doesn't know how to call the police. Another man on the street helps her by calling the police and helping her get home, but the mugger is never found.

Even though the refugees have escaped some of the hardship of their old lives, they are not completely rid of struggle in America, either. St. John provides this and other examples to show how many people target refugees because they are already a vulnerable population.

The incident robs Beatrice "of the hope her family would be safe in her new home." Beatrice doesn't know who to trust, and many of her neighbors don't speak English. She'd been told by other Liberians she'd met that the police would take her children away if she left them alone, and so she tells the boys to return home immediately after school, lock the door, and stay inside.

Beatrice, along with many other refugees, are forced to contend with new customs and new norms in America, and quickly becomes afraid of the public institutions that are meant to help her. This is why navigating a new home after a crisis is so difficult: it leaves families without any understanding of whom to trust.

CHAPTER 3: "SMALL TOWN … BIG HEART"

Mayor Lee Swaney likes to say that, before refugees started arriving, Clarkston, Georgia was a "sleepy little town by the railroad tracks." Clarkston is a suburb of around 7,200 people that lies just outside the greater Atlanta area of 5 million. Clarkston was originally settled by farmers and railroad workers after the civil war. Not much happened in the following century; it was a small, conservative, white southern town.

In the third chapter, St. John establishes how many of the refugees came to live in Clarkston, and how it became such a hub for resettlement. But it is also important to establish what Clarkston was like before the refugees, which partly explains why they face discrimination after arriving.

In the 1970s, Atlanta Airport becomes the Southeast's first international hub, and soon becomes one of the world's busiest airports. The airport brings jobs, and the jobs bring people who needed housing. A few investors open apartment complexes, where middle class whites move in. The population doubles, until in the 1980s white people began to leave for roomier, newer suburbs farther from town.

The irony of the situation in Atlanta with the refugees, is that the very thing that expands the economy (and thus provides more jobs) ends up being the thing that causes the refugees to come to the Atlanta area (and thus frustrate the people of Clarkston).

Vacancies rise in Clarkston; rents fall. Crime surges, and pretty soon Clarkston catches the attention of refugee resettlement agencies. Clarkston is attractive to these organizations because it is close to Atlanta (which has a growing need for workers) and has public transportation into the city. It is pedestrian-friendly for a group that can't afford cars.

Again, it is ironic that people are frustrated at the refugees' arrival, when they are only filling the vacancies left behind when white people decide to move to the suburbs. Resettlement agencies merely take advantage of these vacancies.

The first refugees arrive in Clarkston in the late 1980s, mostly from Vietnam and Cambodia, fleeing Communist governments. Their resettlement goes smoothly, and few people take notice. The agencies then bring in other refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo. They continue to resettle refugees, now from Liberia, Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. More than 19,000 refugees are resettled in Georgia between 1996 and 2001, and many of these refugees end up in or around Clarkston.

St. John elaborates on how refugees from so many different backgrounds have come to live in Clarkston. This diversity makes the Fugees' eventual ability to find a sense of unity across these various backgrounds so remarkable.

By 2000, one third of Clarkston's population is now foreign-born, and Clarkston looks very little like it used to. Women walk down the street in hijabs. Vietnamese and Eritrean restaurants have sprung up. There is a "global pharmacy," a halal butcher, and a mosque. Clarkston high school is home to students from more than fifty countries.

This stark change is what prompts a lot of the prejudice toward the refugees, particularly from people who had been living in Clarkston for a long time. They feel alienated by these cultural shifts, as St. John goes on to explain.

The longtime citizens of Clarkston are surprised by these changes. One councilwoman, Karen Feltz, describes that Clarkston residents had been living "safe, quiet lives in their white-bread houses, and all of a sudden every other person on the street is black, or Asian, or something they don't even recognize." They often simply "[retreat] into their homes" to avoid the refugees.

Although it is somewhat unclear what Feltz personally thinks about the refugees, she is either unintentionally or intentionally pointing out the prejudice that she and the other residents in the town have prejudice against the refugees for the simple reason that they believe the refugees are not like them.

Tensions start to rise in the town. The police chief, Charlie Nelson, views the refugees as "a constant problem." Many don't speak English and are poor drivers, and so writing traffic tickets becomes one of Clarkston's more reliable sources of revenue. Many refugees feel harassed by this treatment and start to act. In one incident, a Somali cabdriver calls in other cabbies when he is stopped by the police for what he thinks are made-up reasons. The officer fears a riot and lets the driver off with a warning.

This string of ticketing involving the refugees serves as an early example of the way in which the town discriminates against them. Even though they may be more prone to traffic violations, this quickly escalates into being targeted specifically because they are refugees. At the same time, they then find a way to band together and fight these forms of discrimination by the police.

In 2001, Lee Swaney runs for mayor as "a champion of 'Old Clarkston,'" meaning Clarkston before the refugees, and wins the seat. A year and a half after he is elected, refugee agency officials announce that they are planning to relocate 700 Somali Bantu to Georgia, and many to Clarkston.

Swaney and the citizens who elected him reveal their own xenophobia during his election. In wanting to revert the town to a time before the arrival of refugees, it demonstrates their dislike of the refugees solely because they are not part of the conservative, white makeup of the town before their arrival.

The Somali civil war had begun in 1991, and warring factions had forced the Bantu off of their land in the Juba River valley. In the ensuing decade, many are raped, tortured, and killed, and the rest flee to refugee camps in northeast Kenya. Few in Clarkston know the background of the Somali Bantu, and when they do research, councilmembers are worried that the Bantu would need more help than the town could provide.

The arrival of the Somali Bantu provides a challenge for Clarkston. It is clear that the Bantu have experienced severe trauma in fleeing their homes. This, St. John implies, is precisely why they need the help of others. Yet many in Clarkston paradoxically view this extreme need as a reason that they should not come to Clarkston.

Mayor Swaney decides to act, inviting the heads of resettlement agencies to a town hall meeting to answer questions from locals. In an interview before the meeting, he comments, "Maybe we can find a way for everybody to work together, live together, and play together." The next day, the first question asked is "What can we do to keep refugees from coming to Clarkston," and the tone of the meeting only gets worse as people begin to verbally attack each other over their positions.

Despite Mayor Swaney's call for unity, the town continues to divide and break down on what to do about the refugees. It is notable that Mayor Swaney uses the words "play together," considering that is exactly what the Fugees struggle to do while lacking support from the town to find a field.

CHAPTER 4: ALONE DOWN SOUTH

Luma knows nothing of Clarkston or the refugees when she moves to nearby Decatur, only a few miles away. She gets a job waiting tables before finding a job at the Decatur-DeKalb YMCA, coaching the fourteen-and-under girls' soccer team. She coaches following the example set for her by Coach Brown, running very demanding practices.

As Luma transitions to coaching, she takes up Coach Brown's prerogatives: demanding discipline and dedication from the players, just as Coach Brown demanded of her. Though Luma resented Brown's strict rules while playing on her team, she has clearly come to appreciate her methods as a coach herself.

Luma's approach isn't universally well-received. She's very tough and expects the girls to take responsibility for how they play and behave at practices. During her first season, Luma's team loses every game. But over time, the dedicated players improve, and those who aren't dedicated leave. In her third season, the team goes undefeated and wins their year-end tournament.

Luma begins to understand that just as she didn't always like Coach Brown, she doesn't need to be universally liked by the girls on the team. Her methods ultimately prove successful anyway, as the discipline and dedication she demands ends up allowing the girls to succeed.

Luma focuses on the team, but she is also homesick, and she misses her family. In 2002, Munawar, the only family member who still speaks to her, dies. As Luma grieves, she drives around the greater Atlanta area and finds a small Middle Eastern market called Talars, which sells some of her favorite foods from home. She is surprised to find a community of people in African and Middle Eastern dress at the store, but she doesn't give much thought to it.

Although Luma eventually works to counteract some of the divisions within the Clarkston community, St. John implicitly acknowledges the comfort in finding one's own community in a foreign place. The only reason Luma is introduced to Clarkston is because she finds a Middle Eastern market that reminds her of Jordan.

Luma decides to start her own business: a café that sells ice cream and sandwiches. She cobbles together a set of investors from the contacts she'd made, and opens the café, called Ashton's. Running the café is tough—she puts in sixteen-hour days, and the café doesn't pull in enough customers to make money. She is also still coaching the girls' team in the evenings and is exhausted.

Just as Luma expects discipline and dedication from her players, she is disciplined and dedicated in her own endeavors: both in coaching the girls' soccer team, and in keeping Ashton's afloat in order to support herself.

One day, when visiting Talars, Luma notices a group of boys playing soccer in a nearby parking lot. She is amazed that they seem to come from many different backgrounds and watches them play. On her next trip to Talars, she brings a new soccer ball and asks to join in. They are wary but allow her to join. She becomes pleasantly lost in the game, noting that it reminds her of what she misses about her own community, and how much she still feels "like such an outsider."

Finding a community that reminds her of home is what actually leads Luma to the young soccer-playing refugees in Clarkston. But at the same time, she quickly realizes how soccer represents a unifying community for the boys and allows them all (including her) to find something familiar in a country that is so different from their homes.

Over the next few months, Luma continues to stop by Talars and join in on the soccer games. She gradually gets to know the boys, who are eager to connect with her. Luma understands "the loneliness of being uprooted." She also learns that pickup soccer is all that they can afford—even teams at local schools cost too much. This fact prompts Luma to decide to begin a free soccer program for young refugees, feeling a "nagging urge to do something."

Luma recognizes the boys' need for this community, particularly because they, too, feel like outsiders in Clarkston. Luma's decision to create the Fugees program stems not only from her desire to lead a soccer team, but to lead these boys to a sense of belonging, and something that can bring them a sense of success in their lives after so much hardship.

Luma floats the idea for the program to a mother of one of the players on the girls' team, who is on the board of the YMCA. The Y agrees to commit money to rent the field at the community center in Clarkston and to buy equipment. Then, with the help of friends, she creates flyers announcing tryouts in English, Vietnamese, Arabic, and French. She posts them in apartment complexes in Clarkston, unsure if anyone will show up.

From the beginning, Luma understands the necessity of combatting some of the divisions that would be present on her team—particularly that of language. This is why she makes flyers in many different languages: to invite refugees of all backgrounds. But on the field, she encourages them to speak English so that they can all communicate with one another.

CHAPTER 5: THE FUGEES ARE BORN

Jeremiah Ziaty is overjoyed to hear about the creation of a free soccer program. He loves soccer, and since arriving in America, Beatrice has kept him, Mandela, and Darlington inside their apartment all day. When he asks his mother if he can try out, she stands her ground and says he can't be on the team.

The fact that Jeremiah, who grew up in Liberia, is thrilled to hear about the soccer team demonstrates the universality of the sport and how it will ultimately serve to create a community among the boys.

Tryouts are held on the field of the Clarkston Community Center, an old building run by an energetic man named Chris Holliday, who focuses on programs for refugees. The refugees really embrace the center, in turn signing up for English and computer classes there. When Luma starts her program, parents sign their kids up in droves.

The refugees' use of the community center demonstrates that the refugee children are not the only ones looking for a sense of community: the adults are trying to create a sense of belonging within Clarkston, as well.

Not everyone in Clarkston is as welcoming to refugees as Holliday. A few Clarkston residents who serve on the board are "suspicious" of the soccer program and express their dissatisfaction with so many refugees hanging around the center. But they accept the program because the center relies on grant funds, and refugee programs help to secure grant money.

Despite the refugees' desire to create a community within Clarkston, many citizens remain antagonistic towards them, highlighting more of the prejudice that the refugees face from the town. St. John implies that the community center only accepts their presence because they receive money as a result.

In June of 2004, Luma arrives at the center for tryouts, and so does Jeremiah Ziaty—defying Beatrice and sneaking out while she is at work. He takes the field along with the other boys who have shown up to try out, but they are confused to see Luma coaching. As Luma starts a shooting drill, one boy says, "She's a girl […] She doesn't know what she's talking about." Luma orders him to stand in goal and blasts a shot directly at him. He dives out of the way and she scores. No one else questions her.

Luma again shows how she adopts Coach Brown's strategies in leading her team: when the boys are skeptical of having a female coach, she proves her leadership skills and earns their respect by besting the boy who questions her in a soccer shoot-out.

After tryouts, Jeremiah makes the team. But when Beatrice finds out about the soccer team, she scolds him, worrying that something bad could happen to him while she isn't around. Jeremiah begs her to play, but she is skeptical and asks to meet with Luma. Jeremiah asks Luma to meet his mother, and Luma assures Beatrice that she will "treat him like he is [her] own kid." She promises to pick him up before practice and drop him off afterward so he won't have to walk alone. Beatrice agrees.

Here, Luma demonstrates her leadership off the field as well. She doesn't only want to coach the Fugees, she wants to provide opportunities to the boys and improve their lives (as well as the lives of their families). With Jeremiah, Luma does this by making sure that he is safe and helping to take care of him while his mother is at work.

During the early practices, the boys slowly tell Luma more and more about their pasts. Luma discovers that Jeremiah watched his father be beaten to death; another kid was forced by soldiers to shoot a close friend. Luma doesn't know how to deal with such intense trauma.

Luma begins to fully acknowledge the struggles that these children have faced, and how much hardship they have been able to overcome already in order to get to the United States and simply play on her team.

Luma also notes that many of the refugees were in limbo for a long time prior to arriving in the U.S., and had little in the way of basic education or English skills. She decides to start a tutoring program for the boys on her team, getting help from volunteers and educators before practices and requiring her players to attend or lose their spots on the team. Slowly, the team feels more and more like a community, and eventually gets a name: the Fugees.

Luma again recognizes the fact that her leadership must extend beyond the soccer field. Knowing that the boys need help in school and with English, she begins to find resources to help them with schoolwork before soccer practice, and also begins to create a community of people who want to support the Fugees.

The first season, the Fugees play in a recreational league. Luma teaches them the basics of organized games. When she starts to run drills, she notes that the boys divide according to ethnic backgrounds or common languages. She remarks that there is "a lot of underlying racism and a lot of baggage" in how they treat each other.

While Luma understands that the boys find more comfort in people who share languages or backgrounds, they have to overcome these divisions and treat each other with respect and kindness in order to function as a team.

Luma starts to get to know the boys' parents, most of whom are single mothers. She helps them translate documents into Arabic and French. Teachers learn to call her when they can't reach her players' parents, and the families show their gratitude by inviting Luma to tea and dinner. As she devotes more and more time to the Fugees, she starts to realize that Ashton's is losing money fast. She can't keep the place open much longer.

Luma continues to show her leadership off the field, helping not only the boys get settled in life in America, but also helping their parents. Luma is then treated like a member of many of the boys' families, which is particularly heartwarming to Luma given her estrangement from her own family. Thus, not only is Luma creating a community for the boys, but she is also creating one for herself.

One afternoon, when Luma is driving Jeremiah home, he admits that he's hungry, but it's "that time of the month"— the time of the month when the family's food stamps run out. Luma is stunned, and immediately buys groceries for the family. This causes a realization: it is time to close Ashton's and focus on more important things. She wants to start a business to employ women like Beatrice and other refugee mothers. She also decides to stop coaching the girls' team at the YMCA, knowing that the Fugees need all the help she can give them.

With each detail St. John brings up, he demonstrates how Luma wants to get more and more involved in the Fugees and commit her time to the things she feels truly matters. This shows not only her leadership, but also her own dedication and commitment to supporting the Fugees and improving their lives.

CHAPTER 6: "COACH SAYS IT'S NOT GOOD"

On September 26, 2005, Bienvenue Ntwari wakes up after his first night in the U.S. Two days before, he, his mother Generose, his older brother Alex, and his younger brother Ive, left a refugee camp in Mozambique. Driving home from the Atlanta airport, he was amazed by the smooth streets and strange advertisements.

Bien and his family's story serves as another example of the brutal conditions that many of the Fugees have survived in order to make it to the United States and try to build a better life for themselves.

Bien's family is from Burundi, one of the poorest countries in the world. For decades, a Tutsi minority ruled over a Hutu majority, but in 1993, Burundi held its first free elections and elected a Hutu leader. Four months after taking office, he was assassinated. The Hutus and Tutsis then spent the next decade at war with each other, killing three hundred thousand people and displacing countless more. In 2000, Generose fled with her sons to Mozambique. She applied for refugee status and resettlement; four years later, she learned that her application had been accepted for resettlement in Atlanta.

St. John's retelling of the civil war in Burundi once again bears comparison with the divisions that Luma is finding among the Fugees. St. John repeatedly highlights how war and conflict are often born out of divisions that align people with one community or another, rather than finding a universal humanity among them. And in demonstrating how they are prevalent in the Fugees, St. John shows how these divisions are learned even at a young age.

Bien wakes up and goes outside to explore. He sees a boy his age in the parking lot of his building and tries a few words of English. The boy introduces himself as Grace Balegamire and says that he is from the Congo. Bien lights up, discovering that the boy speaks Swahili, like him. Grace tells Bien a little bit about life in America: boys wear their pants and hair differently, some have guns and fight with one another, and they make fun of people from Africa.

Bien's first introduction to American life immediately highlights some of the divisions that exist in American society. Not so different from the conflict that St. John just described in Burundi, in America conflict is instigated over many of the same things: ethnicity, territory, and cultural differences.

Grace cuts the conversation short, noting he has to go to soccer practice for a team of refugee kids like them. Bien loves soccer, and Grace offers to ask the coach, Luma, whether he can join. Bien is excited; he can't wait to tell his brothers about his discovery. Knowing that there are other kids who speak Swahili in America "quickly transform[s] his view of what his life in America might be like."

St. John also shows the power of a sense of belonging: Bien feels much more comfortable in America knowing that there are other kids like him. In fact, this is what actually leads him to the Fugees. Thus, having a sense of community and belonging is not a bad thing, but when it creates competition and conflict, it can sometimes do more harm than good.

At practice, Grace asks Luma if Bien can join the Fugees. Luma gets a lot of new kids and knows how helpful the Fugees is as a resource to them. The Fugees roster is full, but she agrees to let Bien practice with them, and to let Bien's older brother Alex join Luma's team for older boys.

Again, Luma shows that she understands that the Fugees is not simply a soccer team. Though their roster is full, she sees that it would help new refugees find something positive to which they can dedicate themselves.

New players bring fresh talent to the Fugees, but also changes the balance of the team, particularly in terms of shared languages and culture. Luma makes all of the boys speak English with each other, and when she divides the boys into groups for drills, she says, "I need a Liberian there, with a Congolese, an Afghan, and an Iraqi."

Recognizing some of the divisions on her own team, Luma actively works to counteract the language and cultural barriers among her players so that they can work together in practice.

The Fugees also start to compete for Luma's approval, as she is like a stand-in mother. Two of the most talented players on the oldest Fugees team, Jeremiah's older brother Darlington and an Iraqi player named Peshawa Hamid, spend months fighting for Luma's approval and refused to work together to score. Luma tries to get the boys to play together, making sure not to speak Arabic with Peshawa and including Peshawa in some of the dinners she attends at the Ziatys' home.

Luma also tries to combat some of the divisiveness by changing her own behavior and again leading by example. She makes sure to be inclusive to all of her players in the language that she uses, and in the way she spends time with them. With these subtle cues, she fosters a sense of teamwork among her players.

One of the players, Yousph Woldeyesus, recounts that Luma said "we're all foreigners, and this is a team where everybody unites," threatening to kick them off the team if they didn't play together. The next season, Darlington and Peshawa work together to score, and their team goes undefeated.

The fact that the Fugees go undefeated following Luma's actions demonstrates the success of her strategies, and the necessity of creating a sense of community in order to find success with the team.

Luma continues to grow close to her players' families, particularly as they all feel hostility from opposing teams of American kids who resent the refugees' presence. Luma understands what it feels like to be an outsider and values the families' friendships. They often invite her to dinner, and over time learn what she likes. The boys pick up her habits, too: Jeremiah insists to Beatrice that he will not eat pork, because Luma (as a Muslim) doesn't eat it.

Luma particularly understands the value of community because often the Fugees feel like outsiders in a completely new culture. This feeling is reinforced by the "hostility" that St. John mentions but doesn't fully describe from the American kids that the Fugees play in soccer, which serves as another example of the prejudice that the Fugees experience in America.

CHAPTER 7: GET LOST

In early 2006, problems develop with the Clarkston Community Center. The board feels that the refugees don't help enough with the upkeep of the center. They also want the YMCA to pay more for the use of the **field**, and after some refugee teenagers get in a fight near the field, the board wants the Y to hire guards. The Y refuses, and Luma receives a call from the YMCA saying that the Community Center will no longer allow the Fugees to practice there.

Being kicked off of the field at the Clarkston Community Center begins a saga of trying to find a new field that will serve as a home base for the Fugees. It is representative of the community's resistance to the refugees on a larger scale and symbolizes the idea that even in a place that represents their new home, the refugees can still feel displaced.

Luma finds an unused **field** a few miles away and borrows a bus from the Y to shuttle her players back and forth as a short-term solution. After the summer, the Y helps Luma find a new field behind Indian Creek Elementary School. When Luma visits the field for the first time, she is stunned. It is a "rutted, gravelly field" covered in broken glass, and it has no soccer goals.

The disorder and ragged nature of the field further demonstrates the lack of support that the town has for the refugees, which Luma elaborates on through the rest of the chapter. It appears to her, and to St. John, that they don't care enough to fight the Community Center or to figure out a better situation.

Luma tries to put the best face on a bad situation: it is a convenient and free **field**, and the elementary school has classrooms where she could run her tutoring program. But the field's condition makes her angry, as she knows that "if a soccer team of a well-to-do suburban kids" were assigned to play on the field, their parents would immediately protest. The parents of the Fugees, however, are seen as powerless.

Luma recognizes that this is a form of discrimination against the refugees, because she knows that if their families were more affluent or could afford to be more involved in the Fugees, the team would have never been treated in this way.

Luma realizes she needs help, and hires a woman named Tracy Ediger, who had moved to Georgia to work with the refugees. Like Luma, she feels more at home working with the refugees than she does outside of the refugee community. While teaching English to the Somali Bantu refugees, she meets Paula Balegamire (Grace's mother) and gets connected to Luma. She agrees to serve as team manager for the Fugees for a year, volunteering her time outside of having a part-time job in Atlanta to do everything from driving the YMCA's bus to tutoring.

Tracy, like Luma, works hard to make sure that the boys can succeed both on and off the field. She dedicates her time and resources to making sure that the Fugees program has the support it needs to flourish, whether this means tutoring or helping them get to soccer practice on time. Tracy quickly becomes a part of the Fugees' growing community of support.

CHAPTER 8: "I WANT TO BE PART OF THE FUGEES!"

In August 2006, tryouts start up again for the Fugees. When Bien visits the new **field**, he is surprised by its poor condition, thinking, "*it's like Africa*." Kids begin to prepare a few weeks in advance, jogging and getting in shape. Luma is coaching three different teams: the Under Thirteens, Under Fifteens, and Under Seventeens.

For Bien, who comes from Burundi, to comment that the field is like being in Africa, it suggests that the Fugees have not yet found a new, welcoming home. Instead, Clarkston has demoted them to a field in such bad shape that it looks like it belongs in a war-torn country.

There are veterans returning to each team, but Luma also needs some newcomers. Luma learns from experience that she needs about a third of her players to be "well-adjusted," and another third of her players to be dependable, even if they have a few problems at school or with others. The last third would be kids with "real problems or unstable families." These would require the most of her energy but are also the boys who need the Fugees the most.

In breaking down her philosophy on how to fill out her team, Luma again exhibits tremendous leadership. She understands that building her soccer team shouldn't exclusively be based on who the most talented players are. Instead, she recognizes that the team gives them a supportive community and also the opportunity to dedicate themselves to improving in soccer and school. Though she knows that sometimes this means putting in extra effort on her part, she doesn't shy away from a challenge.

Luma's three teams have their own needs. The Under Seventeens are the most mature, and in previous seasons, most of the problem players had left. Luma expects this team to take care of itself. The Under Thirteens have mostly been playing with her for two years, or who had joined and made the team the center of their new lives in the United States. They are the most flexible and the most responsive to Luma's discipline.

St. John and Luma both imply here that the more that the teams are able to respect her and heed her requirements for discipline and dedication, the less likely they are to have issues as a group and the more likely they are to succeed.

The Under Thirteens have star players like Josiah Saydee and Qendrim Bushi, but they are weak on defense and goalie. Luma had made this decision consciously: her goalies, Eldin and Mafoday, are both gentle and happy, and rarely play as aggressively as they need to in goal. But they do everything that Luma asks, and so she knows that this tradeoff is worth having a weak link in goal.

St. John elaborates on the ways in which Luma prioritizes dedication over talent. Having players who always show up on time and make the effort to attend tutoring sessions is more important to Luma than being the best soccer player. This is because she wants the boys to be successful outside of playing soccer, not only within the sport.

The Under Fifteens are different: they are very talented but often disobey Luma. Earlier in the summer, Luma sent around word that she expected her players to cut their hair short. This did not go over well with one of the best players, Prince, who wears his hair in long braids. Prince has no intention of cutting his hair, expecting Luma to make an exception for him because he is talented, and if he quit, other players like Mandela and Fornatee might follow his lead.

St. John contrasts the Under Thirteens with the Under Fifteens and demonstrates the issues with talented but unruly players. A player like Prince, who plays well but is undisciplined, can start to sow seeds of discontent and disobedience among the team as a whole, creating even greater problems for Luma.

Tryouts begin on a hot August afternoon. Luma and Tracy take down the boys' names and ages, then Luma divides them into two groups to watch them play a game. Luma realizes that the **field** is even worse than it looks: there are ruts, very little grass, and people walk right through the game.

The field continues to represent the Fugees' lack of a supportive, stable environment, as they are forced to use a field that is unsuitable for soccer and that anyone can walk through, making it feel like they have no real claim over it.

After the game is over, Luma circles the boys up and tells Prince that if he does not cut his hair by the first day of practice, he is off the team. She goes through other rules: tutoring is mandatory for practice; if the boys miss practice, they can't play in games; if they don't follow the rules, they are off the team. She hands them papers to sign, which include rules like having good behavior; not doing drugs or drinking alcohol; not getting anyone pregnant; and promising to be on time, try hard, and ask for help. It ends with the words, "I want to be part of the Fugees!"

Luma's contract and treatment of Prince illustrate her emphasis on discipline, dedication, and hard work. She also exhibits her leadership skills in not making an exception for Prince and standing her ground. But the fact that the list ends with "I want to be part of the Fugees!" demonstrates that the most important part of playing for the Fugees is in wanting to be a part of the team and its community. Following these rules is a necessity of being in that community.

CHAPTER 9: FIGURE IT OUT SO YOU CAN FIX IT

Luma's hair rule sets off a debate among the Under Fifteen team. Prince refuses to cut his hair and doesn't join the team, which upsets Mandela and Fornatee because they are his friends. Luma has a reason for the rule: long hairstyles imply gang affiliations, and her players had already been the target of abuse and hostility from gang members and opponents who abused them because of their accents and names.

St. John's explanation of Luma's rule foreshadows the trouble that Luma and the Fugees will experience with gangs in the surrounding area. Gangs represent a different, much more dangerous kind of team and community, and Luma hopes that the Fugees can lure her players away from the pull of gangs.

Luma was already lenient with Prince during the previous season because of his talent. He skipped tutoring sessions and undermined Luma's authority; soon, others followed suit and openly challenged her. Thus, she vowed not to let him break the rules again and kicks him off the team.

Luma already understands that part of being a good leader doesn't necessarily mean making everybody happy, and she knows that her rules have to be steadfast and universal in order for them to have any weight.

Fornatee is frustrated that he has to choose between his coach and his friends, but he knows he needs the Fugees. Earlier that summer, his father was in a car accident and was in the hospital for a month, and Fornatee came to depend on Luma. He trusts her and knows that "she's more than a coach to [him]." But Fornatee is also loyal to Mandela and Prince, particularly because they are all Liberian.

Luma is forced to confront the fact that she and Prince are causing divisions within her team, but she also understands that she has already earned the respect of many of these boys because she helps them both on and off the field.

Preseason practices start during late August in the sweltering heat, surrounded by the dust and grime of their **field**. But none of the Fugees complain about the shortcomings of their new field. Practices for all teams begin with twenty-five minutes of running laps, and if the boys misbehave Luma runs them to exhaustion. She then leads them through sit-ups, push-ups, leg lifts, and bicycle kicks, pushing on players backs so they can't cheat.

It is a testament to the Fugees resilience that even in the face of frustrating conditions and the lack of support from the town, none of the players complain about their new field. Instead, they continue to work hard and remain disciplined during practices under Luma's watchful eye.

After exercises, Luma leads drills, then ends the practice with a scrimmage. Finally able to play, the boys get a new surge of energy and sprint up and down the field. Luma expects her players to "work hard and take practice seriously, and above all, to obey her." When one boy, Hussein, starts to goof off during practice, she shouts at him to go home.

The discipline that Luma demands from her players also allows them to have fun. After working hard at the warm-ups and drills, they are reminded during the scrimmage of how much they love playing soccer with their friends.

As the Under Seventeens play their scrimmage, the Under Thirteens do their laps around the field. As soon as the younger boys pass outside of Luma's field of vision, they start to walk instead of run, picking up speed as they return to her sight. She dismisses the Under Seventeens at the end of their game, but instead of starting drills with the younger team, she has them keep running.

This story provides an example of how Luma reacts when the boys try to slack off during practices. They think that they can deceive Luma, but instead she simply requires them to run even more and makes sure that they can't slack off in the future.

The boys continue to run and run for forty minutes before they ask what they did wrong. Luma blows her whistle and tells them that they would no longer run laps around the track, but instead they would always stay in her direct line of sight as they ran. Luma comments later that because these boys face so many hardships, "they're never going to be babied," so she refuses to baby them.

Luma's expectations are high, but her requirements are never unfair. Each action she takes is to ensure that the boys respect her rules, and that they'll be able to have the discipline to succeed outside of the soccer field. Luma knows that these values are important not only in school, but also in the rest of their lives.

The Under Fifteens also test Luma. Even though Prince no longer on the team, he stops by practices with friends, smoking on the edge of the field. This bothers Fornatee and Mandela, who start showing up late and talking back to Luma. Luma is unsure of what to do; she is frustrated by the disrespect, but also knows that Prince is only lurking around because he misses the team. Still, she refuses to budge on her hair rule.

Prince's flouting of the rules now that he is off the team serves as another blow to Luma. Even though he is off the team, his display emphasizes his disrespect, and is doubly problematic because it also encourages other teammates to disrespect her.

Mandela doesn't like thinking of himself as a refugee; he's lived in the United States for seven years. At first, when Jeremiah joins the Fugees, he is hesitant to play on the team. He doesn't want other people to think that he is poor. Though eventually he gives in and tried out for the team, he never seems truly comfortable there, as though he always wants to be someplace else.

Even though the Ziaty family is quite poor (to the point where Beatrice often cannot afford food for her kids), Mandela insists on not being thought of this way. This attitude is complex, but ultimately shows Mandela's persistence to grow up as a regular American kid.

Mandela had made friends on the Fugees and at school, but Beatrice worries that he is hanging out with the wrong crowd. She doesn't like the way he dresses or acts, and she calls Luma when he stays out late or acts up, so she can enforce the rules and help to take care of her sons. Beatrice says that Luma is "really a sister to [her]." When Mandela acts out in practice, in turn, Luma appeals to Beatrice.

The way that Beatrice and Luma work together to keep Mandela in line demonstrates the community that the Fugees team has built outside of the soccer field, as Luma tries to make sure that the boys have enough support to stay out of trouble.

Beatrice constantly reminds Mandela, Darlington, and Jeremiah, of the life that they had in Liberia and their tough journey to America. She would remind them of the mud hut she built in the refugee camp, or that she would break a single biscuit into four pieces, or that even now she works ten-hour days at the Ritz-Carlton. Reminding them of these times helps cultivate their respect for her, which she hopes will keep them out of trouble.

Beatrice reminding her sons of their journey helps her sons to respect her, as they recognize how much she has done to help them get to America and have the life that they have. It also reminds them of their own resilience, and why it would be a shame for them to get mixed up with a bad crowd when they have so much opportunity in America.

CHAPTER 10: MELTDOWN

The **field** at Indian Creek can't be used for league games, so the Fugees host home matches at a field fifteen minutes away by car. Luma gets a YMCA bus to transport her players, but if they are late to meet her, they will be left behind. The Under Fifteens' first regular-season game is against a team called the Phoenix from a mostly white, middle- and upper-class town. Their sideline is full of parents, siblings, and friends. The Fugees sideline is empty.

The contrast between the two teams' sidelines emphasizes just how much the players on the Fugees need each other. Because their parents are often working or taking care of other kids, they rely on each other, and Luma, for a sense of community and support that kids on other teams automatically have.

When Luma meets the bus at the field, only nine players have shown up—two short of a full team. Mandela is on the bus, but Fornatee isn't. Mandela is frustrated that his friends didn't come and asks St. John if he would drive him to pick up Fornatee and two other teammates. St. John agrees with permission from Tracy, and they return five minutes before the game with the three players in the backseat.

The boys missing the bus is exactly the kind of lack of discipline that infuriates Luma, which is what prompts her to not coach them. But the fact that some of the boys are willing to go above and beyond to try and make the team work also illustrates that some members of the team are exceptionally dedicated to it.

The boys join the warmups, but Luma stands off to the side, giving no instructions. Kanue Biah, a veteran member of the team, realizes how angry she is. He had bought into her system more than most other players, and he tries to take charge of the team and rally them to play a good game. But minutes into the game, the Fugees are called for a foul and a penalty, and are quickly losing 2-0.

Luma responds to her players' lack of dedication with her own lack of dedication, quickly providing a lesson as to what happens when the boys don't care about the team. Not showing up on time to practice not only demonstrates a lack of respect for Luma, but it also directly leads to their losing the game.

Mandela is angry and determined to take a shot without help. He wrestles past the other team's defense and scores, but the Phoenix respond minutes later: 3-1. Just before halftime, Fornatee tries to take a shot, but it is blocked by the Phoenix goalie. Fornatee fumes to his teammates at half-time, frustrated that Luma isn't doing her job. He says that they have to play for themselves—that Luma can't play for them. He rallies his teammates, saying that they can win, and leads them in a chant, "Go Fugees!"

This game, at its core, is a demonstration of what happens when the boys let go of all of the values Luma is trying to instill in them, which amounts to a huge lack of respect for her. It is also hypocritical that Fornatee is frustrated Luma isn't doing her job, when he wasn't even planning on showing up for the game.

Minutes into the second half, the Phoenix score. The Fugees yell at each other, and Fornatee curses at the referee, getting himself ejected from the game. The Phoenix continue to score, the Fugees are lost without Luma, and the game ends 7-2. After the game, Luma calls to them to get back on the bus.

The Fugees' performance in the second half is no better than the first. Instead of working as a team, they are divided. Rather than playing with control, they are wild and acting out.

Luma tells St. John the issues: the boys show up to tutoring late, they're disrespectful, they don't show up on time for games, and they don't arrive dressed for practice. Luma says that she wanted to behave the way that they are behaving. She explains that they don't have the discipline to succeed without her, and she can't be responsible for them anymore. When she climbs on the bus, she announces to her players that she has decided to cancel the Under Fifteens' season.

Luma's own performance during the game is another leadership strategy. She wants to prove to the boys what happens when they don't respect her, and her leadership goes away. They recognize quickly that this amounts to the chapter's title: a meltdown.

CHAPTER 11: "HOW AM I GOING TO START ALL OVER?"

Luma's decision to cancel the Under Fifteens season is hard on her players, and especially on Kanue. Kanue was born in Liberia and fled the war when he was just two years old. At some point he was separated from his parents and was taken in by his uncle, Barlea. In 2004, they were accepted for resettlement in Clarkston.

St. John returns to the stories of players to continue to emphasize the resilience of those boys, and also to underscore how much some of them (like Kanue) need the Fugees.

Barlea works two jobs in back-to-back shifts at the Atlanta airport, leaving the apartment at 7 p.m. each evening and returning at 3 p.m. the next day, collapsing for a few hours before returning to work. Kanue's role is to cook for himself and his uncle and keep the apartment, a routine he had had since he was thirteen. He is not allowed to play soccer, do homework, or leave until he cooks dinner, but he never complains.

Even after arriving in America, Kanue and Barlea still have to face a lot of challenges and the intrinsic struggles of being refugees in a new country. Barlea works incredibly hard to make money for himself and Kanue. Kanue also has to work hard to keep up the household, because he is the only one who can do it, even though he is only fifteen.

After arriving in America, Kanue soon found out about the Fugees and joined their summer practices, working hard to improve and eventually make the team as a goalie. Though he was eager to play more, he happily accepted the position and only gave up three goals in his first season. Once, when the Fugees were down three players, Luma moved Kanue to striker and discovered that he was a good offensive weapon. The Fugees won the game 4-2.

Kanue represents exactly the kind of player that Luma looks for: someone who will be dedicated and who will be a team player no matter what (indicated by his taking a position that he might not necessarily have chosen for himself). He doesn't complain, instead simply working hard and leaping at the chance to show what he can do when Luma lets him.

Over his two years with the team, Kanue became devoted to the Fugees and Luma, helping with the younger team and working harder than anyone else in practices. With no siblings in the U.S. and a guardian who is never home, Kanue views the team as his family, and so Luma's decision to cancel the season hits him hard. He thinks he'll have to "start all over."

Kanue's desire for community manifests itself in dedication to the Fugees and respect for Luma's leadership. All of these factors together make the Fugees a powerful motivator in Kanue's life, which is why he works so hard to rescue the team in this chapter.

The Saturday after Luma cancels the season, she takes Kanue, Mandela, and another player named Natnael to the movies. On the way back, Kanue asks her to reconsider her decision about canceling the team. He argues that it isn't fair to the good kids who follow her rules. He vows to round up a new roster of players who will work hard.

Kanue is so motivated by the Fugees that he promises to find others who will work as hard as he will, and who will follow Luma's rules. This illustrates exactly the kind of dedication that Luma wants to see in her players.

Luma has doubts: while they hold tryouts, they would forfeit two games, and they would have a hard time competing against teams that had been playing together for years, making them even more frustrated. But at the same time, players like Mandela and Fornatee might get into trouble without the Fugees to keep them busy. She agrees to let them try to round up a new set of players.

Again, even though Luma is frustrated by her players, she also recognizes the importance of the Fugees to the boys. For players like Mandela and Fornatee, soccer not only gives them an active outlet, but it also diverts them from more dangerous activities and improves their lives in other ways (like giving them a community and improving their education through the tutoring sessions).

In the meantime, Luma still has two other teams to coach. The Thirteens' first two games did not go well: they tied one game and gave up the lead in another to lose 3-1. They aren't passing well, and they aren't talking to each other. She tells them that she cancelled the Fifteens team and doesn't want to have to do the same for them. This prompts them to get serious: they show up on time, run hard, and focus.

Luma uses the Fifteens as a negative example, pushing and inspiring the Thirteens to prove that they have the dedication and the discipline that the older boys don't have. Just like Kanue, they understand the value of the team and want to preserve it.

The Thirteens' third game is against a mostly white team called the Triumph from a nearby town. The Fugees quickly gain a 2-0 lead thanks to goals from Jeremiah and Qendrim, but Luma isn't satisfied by halftime. She tells her players that they're starting to get lazy and play like the other team.

It is notable that even when the boys are winning, Luma doesn't let up on them—demanding that they play good soccer regardless of how many goals they've scored.

In the second half, they put on a show. Josiah scores, and after Luma moves Bien from defense to offense, he makes an amazing bicycle kick. Jeremiah scores again, and Bien lobs a ball that allows Qendrim to execute a perfect header into the goal. At the end of the game, the Fugees have won 5-1. Luma tells them they played a good game—but next week she expects them to play even better.

Again, part of Luma's strategy is to make sure that she is always pushing her players to do better and better. Resting on their laurels, to Luma, is the same as being lazy, and she continues to demand rigor from them.

CHAPTER 12: ALEX, BIEN, AND IVE

Bienvenue lives with his brothers, Alex and Ive, his baby sister Alyah, and his mother, Generose. Their apartment looks almost exactly the same as it did when they arrived a year and a half earlier—filled with old furniture that had been donated to the family by a local church. The first time St. John visits, he is invited to a large meal heaped with Burundian dishes.

While earlier chapters that focus on the Fugees' families begin with their journey to the U.S., this chapter does not. Instead, it focuses more on the challenges that Bien's family faces specifically in America.

Generose knows Swahili, French, and Kirundi, but only a few words of English. Alex is fifteen and understands English, but he is shy about his thick Burundian accent. Bien, at thirteen, picked up the language more quickly, and speaks with less of an accent. Ive, at seven, speaks fluent English without an accent. He often has to speak with Americans, like the landlord or billing agents.

St. John explores how even the simple fact of language can be a real challenge for refugees, which often leaves the youngest members of the household with enormous responsibility. This is demonstrated by the fact that Ive has to take on the mature role of talking with American adults who are significantly older than he is.

Alyah had been born six months earlier, and since then Generose had been unemployed. Alyah's father is in Canada but has no immigration papers to get into the U.S. and sends money as often as he can. An Atlanta woman who often gives money to refugee families helps Generose buy groceries and make ends meet, but she knows she needs to find a job.

America also places Generose in the difficult position of choosing between work and taking care of her infant daughter, particularly because she is doing it alone. St. John shows the inherent disadvantages that refugee families, particularly those headed by single parents face, and the immense responsibility that it requires from their children.

Generose is open to a job at night, so that the boys could babysit Alyah when they returned from school. She worries about this situation, however: in Mozambique, Generose had lost a daughter when she accidentally knocked over a pot of boiling potatoes and Generose couldn't afford a ride to the hospital. She worries about leaving her children alone but has to find a way to provide for them, as well. Whereas before she thought that America might be a paradise, she now understands the difficult choices she faces.

The fact that Generose (despite the tragedy she had endured in Burundi with her daughter's death) is still willing to have her sons take care of her six-month-old demonstrates two things. First, it shows her desperation in knowing that she has to work, but also her immense resilience in overcoming this fear of leaving her daughter at home so that she can provide for her children.

CHAPTER 13: TRYING AGAIN

The second tryouts for the Under Fifteens take place on Monday. Kanue, Mandela, and Natnael have rallied many new players, in addition to bringing three players (including Alex) who had been on the Fugees previously. Fornatee had decided not to show up, feeling strongly that he shouldn't have to try out for the team again, since he already tried out.

Kanue, Mandela, and Natnael's discipline and hard work pay off, as they are able to find many other kids who could take part in the Fugees. But Fornatee's decision not to show up casts a shadow of disrespect over the event, which Luma does not forget when Fornatee tries to return later.

Luma divides the boys into two teams and watches them play, offering one boy wearing sandals her own shoes. As she watches the scrimmage, she knows that reforming the team would be like starting over. She worries that she is setting the players up for failure. Meanwhile, the boys are playing as if they are "trying to will their team back into existence."

Despite Luma's doubts, she does recognize the hard work that the boys are putting into trying to create a team together and understands that this would be indicative of their dedication to the team following tryouts.

Luma does note some good raw talent, and she starts to write down which players might play which positions. At the end of the game, she tells them that if she allows the team to continue, it is likely that they will lose most of their games because they are going to play against very experienced teams. They only have three practices to get their team together; Kanue offers that they could get an extra practice in on Saturday morning. The others agree.

Kanue demonstrates his own dedication even further, and how he would inspire others to do the same, by offering to spend even more time rebuilding the team and getting in extra practice before their first match.

Luma tells them that if they still want to revive the team, they can show up on Thursday at 5:00. She adds that practices are not going to be easy. Kanue is relieved. After all the others leave, he tells Luma that he appreciates her, and that he and the others are going to follow the rules and "give her the respect she deserves."

In addition to demonstrating dedication and discipline for the team, Kanue relays to Luma how much he understands that respect for Luma is key to forming the team. His words show Luma that her leadership style, even though it is somewhat unpopular, does earn her the respect of her players.

CHAPTER 14: THE FIFTEENS FIGHT

Luma leads two standard practices for the new Under Fifteens team, but for the third, she gives them a challenge: a scrimmage between them and the Under Seventeens. She knows that they will likely lose and wants to see how they react when they are being beaten.

Luma recognizes that Kanue and the other players have already proven their dedication to the team by rallying more teammates to try out. Now, she wants to test their disciplinee to make sure that even when they are losing, they can keep their cool.

Luma also worries specifically about Mandela, who had been quiet and angry at practice. He is still frustrated that Prince isn't on the team because of the hair rule and disappointed that Fornatee hadn't shown up to tryouts. He snaps at kids who make bad passes and barely speaks to anyone otherwise. Luma senses that he's simply upset about his friends and hopes that he will come around.

For all of these kids, the team represents not only an activity, but also a community that they want to be a part of—and which they want their friends to be a part of, as well. Without this sense of unity, Mandela grows upset, and creates even more divisions within the team by being angry and withdrawn around the others.

Fornatee hears about the scrimmage and decides to approach Luma to ask to rejoin the team. When Luma arrives, she tells Fornatee to go away and that he can talk to her after the match, startling him. He goes over to sit with some friends who have gathered for the game, including Prince.

Fornatee's decision not to try out for the team again serves as a test to Luma's authority. Thus, when he returns to try to rejoin the team, she makes it clear that she will speak to him on her own terms.

The game between the Seventeens and Fifteens begins. The Seventeens are older and also more talented, but the Fifteens display "a new energy and determination." Early on, Mandela sets up a new player named Muamer, but Muamer misses the shot. Mandela yells at him. Moments later, Peshawa fires a shot on the Fifteens' goalie and scores, 1-0.

The early moments of the game against the Under Seventeens underscores the problems with division. Mandela continues to break trust between himself and other players by yelling at his new teammates. St. John implies that this leads pretty directly to the other team scoring: if they can't work together, they cannot succeed.

The Fifteens don't give up. Soon, Mandela weaves through the defense and fires a perfect shot. By halftime, the score is still tied. Luma tells the Fifteens, "You're outhustling them—keep it up." On the other side of the field, Peshawa shouts at the other Seventeens to be more alert. He tells them to guard Mandela and control the ball.

Even with Mandela's frustrations, they are able to keep up the hustle to compete with a team that is older and more experienced than they are. Luma is impressed with the dedication that they are displaying and continues to encourage it.

In the second half, the Seventeens take advantage of their size and experience, and Peshawa is able to score again. A few minutes later, Kanue is tackled by one of the older players, but Luma doesn't blow her whistle. With the ball across the field, Kanue then slides into the player's ankles with his cleats up—a move that would have drawn a red card during a regular game. Luma tells Kanue to take a lap.

Kanue's outburst and intentional foul on the other players is exactly the kind of lack of discipline that Luma is wary of. She wants to make sure that her team can play safely and with sportsmanlike conduct, even when the other teams don't necessarily hold themselves to the same standard.

The match ends 3-2: the Seventeens win. Luma tells the Fifteens that they had played a decent game but tells Kanue that if he loses his temper again, he's off the team. Kanue shakes his head, disappointed in himself. Privately, Luma is also concerned that Mandela had lashed out at his new teammates. But the team's effort had been impressive.

Despite some of their shortcomings, the Under Fifteens are able to pass Luma's test. Though they trail the Under Seventeens for most of the game, they never give up, proving their dedication to the team under all conditions.

Luma then turns to where Fornatee had been sitting. But the boys are no longer there—Fornatee has walked away from the team for good. Luma cleans up and leaves the **field**, growing more and more tired of the scene at Indian Creek.

In contrast to the boys who had put in so much effort to keep their team alive, Fornatee is quickly pulled away from the team by the appeal of remaining with other friends like Prince. Luma barely reacts to this loss, however, knowing that a kid like Fornatee, if he wasn't fully committed, would only be disrespectful and could not be an asset to the team.

The next day, Luma drives down to City Hall to ask Mayor Swaney whether they can use another **field**, Armistead field, in Milam Park. It has grass, is surrounded by a fence, is frequently patrolled by the Clarkston police, and goes completely unused. Mayor Swaney listens, knowing that giving "a group of refugees free run of the place" would anger the residents around Milam Park, but he doesn't want negative publicity. He tells Luma that she is free to make her case to the Clarkston City Council, which is meeting in five days.

In the ongoing saga of finding a nice home field for the refugees, St. John again demonstrates how Mayor Swaney, and the citizens at large, often discriminate against the refugees simply because of their status in the community. Swaney refuses to give his permission to Luma, instead passing the responsibility onto the Clarkston City Council.

CHAPTER 15: GO FUGEES!

The morning of the Fifteens first official game, Luma throws up. Her nerves are "frayed"; she's terrified that the boys will be humiliated, and they have "little self-esteem to spare." When she arrives at the field, she is relieved to see a full roster of players, and Kanue leading the Fugees in their laps and stretches.

Luma's reaction the morning of the Fifteens' first game again shows her dedication to the team. She is so concerned about their well-being that she makes herself sick in worrying about them.

The opposing team is called the Lightning, a team from a mostly white middle-class suburb south of Atlanta. The program has a history of sending teams to state and national championships, and their sideline is filled with supportive parents, friends, and siblings. The Fugees have three fans: a couple who sometimes volunteers for the tutoring program, and a young Liberian named Tito who had been recruited late by a fellow Liberian on the team named Osman, and who hopes to join the Fugees someday.

St. John, as he does with nearly every game, demonstrates the contrast between the kind of support that more affluent teams have with the support that the Fugees have. This pattern of having very few fans makes the end of the book all the more surprising, when droves of people come out to see the Fugees play as a result of publishing the story, creating a community around the team.

Luma's pregame speech is short: no cussing, and no tackling from behind. She doesn't want her players losing their cool. They then stack their arms and chant, "Go Fugees!" The Fugees begin a bit tentatively, and ten minutes into the game, a Lightning player is able to sprint pass the Fugees and score. Kanue urges the team to keep their spirits up.

Just before the game, Luma makes sure to reemphasize that she wants her players to remain disciplined, even when they're losing. Not doing so only pulls them further away from their goals.

Muamer is called a few times for being offsides, but Kanue doesn't snap at him, simply gesturing for him to remain onside. Soon the Fugees make another run, and Mandela is able to power through the Lightning's defenders to blast a shot into the goal. The score is 1-1. As the first half wears on, the Fugees continue to charge, until Mandela is able to pass the ball to another player named Sebajden, who scores. The Fugees lead 2-1.

In addition to being disciplined, the more that the boys are able to act like a team and support each other rather than tearing each other down, the greater success they are able to find on the field.

At halftime, Luma is relieved, but tries not to let it show. She tells her players that they are playing well but warns them not to get sloppy. She also says that their opponents are going to mark Mandela in the second half. She tells him to draw in the defenders and then pass the ball to someone on the outside. After doing this a few times, he can take the shot himself. She tells them to keep up the good effort, and that this game will set the tone for the season today. She tells them to score twice more.

Even though Luma is tough, she knows that the boys need encouragement as well. This is the kind of strategy that earns Luma the most respect. She awards their resolve, but still pushing them to do better and better, emphasizing that they must play as a team and keep up the hard work.

The Fugees take the field with "a new energy and confidence." The Lightning mark Mandela, who becomes frustrated and draws a yellow card. Kanue tells him to calm down. On the next play, Mandela dribbles down the field as the defense rushes toward him. He then passes the ball out to Muamer, who is able to score: 3-1, Fugees.

Mandela is frustrated with not being able to take the shots on the goal himself because he is being surrounded by so many defenders. But, as Luma counsels, he prioritizes the team over his own desire to score and passes to an open teammate, who can then score instead.

With twelve minutes to go, the Lightning score again on a penalty kick. Kanue encourages them to keep fighting, even though they're getting tired. Moments later, Mandela is able to break free again. This time he charges the box and scores the goal himself, following Luma's advice. Tito and the two volunteers shout in celebration: Fugees are ahead, 4-2.

Kanue, who has always been supportive of Luma's strategies, acts throughout the game like a stand-in for her, which is perhaps the ultimate test of leadership for Luma. She has provided the boys with enough guidance that they can keep each other on track to win, as Kanue does here.

The final minutes of the game are "desperate and dangerous." The Lightning score another goal and the Fugees start to lose their cool, sensing the momentum against them. The Fugees are called for a foul, and the Lightning are awarded a free kick. The striker kicks the ball as hard as he can as the other players charge in front. The Fugees goalie is frozen, but in the midst of the chaos, Kanue leaps into the air and heads the ball out of the way. The referee blows the whistle: the Fugees have won.

Against all odds, and despite the fact that this is their first real game together the Fugees are able to win. Even with high intensity, their hard work and discipline (particularly from Kanue) pays off. And Luma's leadership pays off as well, as she is able to rid her team of the lazy and undedicated players, and still maintain a community for the boys who follow her rules.

Luma is amazed: her players, many of whom are still strangers to each other, are high-fiving and shouting joyfully as they run to each other—they are as surprised as she is. Luma smiles for the first time in two weeks and says to her players, "I didn't think you guys were going to come through today [...] but you played a beautiful game."

Perhaps what is most heartening to Luma is the fact that these boys, who barely know each other and who without the Fugees would have no reason to know each other, have created a team and a community together despite their differences.

CHAPTER 16: GUNSHOTS

The next day, gunshots ring out around the apartment buildings behind Indian Creek Elementary. Tito, the Liberian that Osman had recruited, is shot in the face. The details are murky: Tito and some fellow Liberians got into an argument with an African American teenager they knew who was in a gang. Tito and his fellow Liberians identified themselves as members of a gang called the Africans, and the American teenager began to shoot. Fortunately for Tito, the bullet hit his chin, not his neck or skull, and he will live.

This episode of violence comes as a shock to Luma and many of the Fugees, as they face yet another challenge in keeping themselves safe within their soccer program. Gangs serve to echo the divisions between many of the ethnic groups in countries that the Fugees had fled, once again tying ethnic or political disagreements to violence and disruption.

Luma is shaken and worries about other gang members showing up to practice to avenge the shooter, who had been arrested. She temporarily cancels practice and kicks Tito and Osman off the team. Many thought that Tito had been bluffing by saying he was in a gang (a gang which no one had heard of), but Luma knows that it is dangerous to even pretend to be in a gang. She worries about the safety of her players at Indian Creek Elementary and is eager to plead her case to use the Milam Park **field**.

Luma draws a hard line with Tito and Osman being involved with the Fugees following this incident—she understands that the safety of her players has to be her number one priority. Otherwise, she would be betraying the community of families and players that she has worked so hard to protect.

CHAPTER 17: THE "SOCCER PEOPLE"

The following Tuesday, a council meeting is called to order at the Clarkston Community Center. Luma politely requests the use of Armistead **field**, explaining that the field at Indian Creek is all gravel and is an unsafe place for kids. The council members ask a barrage of questions about the use of the field—whether the program is just for boys, how old they are, and whether they are local kids.

St. John emphasizes, from the tone of the questions, how the council is immediately biased against Luma and the Fugees. Instead of being concerned for the boys' safety on their current field, they are skeptical of the Fugees being able to use a nice field in a good neighborhood.

Luma answers their questions, and Mayor Swaney interjects to point out that the **field** at Armistead is unused. He says he doesn't see anything wrong with their using the field and suggests that they let Luma use it on a trial period. His proposal changes the tone of the room, and the council members discuss among themselves before concluding unanimously that Luma can use the field for six months on a trial basis.

It is unclear exactly what motivates Mayor Swaney to give Luma a chance. But it does show that one person, even at the local government level, has a great deal of power to change the minds of others and enact policy that affects many underserved people. This will unfortunately remain the case when Mayor Swaney changes his mind and revokes the use of the field from the Fugees later in the book.

CHAPTER 18: PLAYING ON GRASS

Luma has a discussion with her players about the dangers of gangs. The boys recognize that people join gangs for protection and belonging, because of their race, or because of money. But Luma emphasizes the things that make a gang different from something like the Fugees: they are violent, they make their members do dangerous work, and they are nearly impossible to escape. She comes up with strategies with her players on the best ways to avoid gangs.

Luma draws comparisons between gangs and the Fugees—both come with a sense of belonging, protection, responsibility, and honor. But with her guidance, the Fugees ultimately coming to the conclusion that gangs serve to divide and instigate violence and are nearly impossible to escape, while the Fugees are a supportive community.

Luma says she understands the appeal of gangs, particularly in terms of having protection when walking down the street. But she tells them that there are other ways of feeling safe, like calling the police. She also says, "If you keep getting beat up on the same road, take a different road."

Luma continues to help her players in many aspects of their lives, guiding them away from gangs and helping to instruct them on what to do if they are confronted by gang members.

This leads Luma to her segue that the Fugees have a new home **field** at Milam Park. It is flat, has grass, and no other soccer teams. She emphasizes, however, that this privilege comes with a responsibility. They have to use the field well, keep it clean, and respect the neighborhood it's in so that they can continue to use the field.

The new field finally allows the Fugees to feel like they have some support within the community. But Luma also takes the opportunity to remind the boys that they have to remain disciplined and responsible if they want to continue to use the field.


When the boys arrive at Armistead **field**, they can hardly believe how nice it is: soft grass covering the surface, trees surrounding the area with a nice hill to watch the games, and a chain link fence protecting the boundary. "The beauty of the Fugees' new home [is] so extraordinary that it almost seem[s] like a joke." When one boy comments that they should chase the nearby deer, another replies, "Nah […] We're not in Africa anymore."

The reference to Africa serves as a callback to Bien's thoughts about the earlier, gravelly field, which he thought could have been in Africa. This comparison demonstrates how the Fugees have been able (at least temporarily) to find a field that makes them feel at home, instead of being displaced and treated like afterthoughts.

CHAPTER 19: WHO ARE THE KINGS?

The Fugees have a variety of soccer idols, but Qendrim Bushi's is his grandfather, a famous goalkeeper in Kosovo. Qendrim is a tiny but talented midfielder for the Under Thirteens. His family came from an Albanian town in the mountains of southern Kosovo, where his father Xhalal owned two small grocery stores.

Like the stories of Jeremiah Ziaty and Bien Ntwari, Qendrim's story serves as another example of how ethnic conflicts and violent uprisings have displaced so many of the Fugees, introducing them to adversity at a very young age.

Ethnic violence tore Qendrim's homeland apart: his town became a battleground in the 1990s between the Serbian dominated Yugoslav army (which was trying to assert Serbian control over the Albanian-inhabited region) and the Kosovo Liberation Army. Civilians were hurt by both sides in the conflict, as KLA soldiers sometimes put pressure on civilians to flee for refugee camps in order to provoke international sympathy and aid.

Once again, contrasts can be made between these kinds of wars—which are borne of ethnic conflicts and are based on harmful divisions between groups of people—and what Luma is trying to attempt with the Fugees. She is making sure that they are a unified team and not emulating this hatred towards each other.

NATO bombing, ordered by then-President Bill Clinton, provoked a violent response from the Yugoslav army, and they ransacked towns across Kosovo. Xhalal fled with his wife and children before the fighting, walking for two days to a Macedonian refugee camp. The Bushis were grateful to learn that they had been granted asylum in the U.S. Qendrim was five at the time.

St. John again emphasizes the immense strength and resilience it takes to leave one's entire life behind and walk for days into a different country in order to seek asylum and hope for a new life.

Gradually Qendrim makes friends at elementary school, particularly with Albanian and Bosnian kids. Xhalal gets involved with the Community Center and signs Qendrim up for the Fugees program. Qendrim quickly becomes close with Eldin, who is Bosnian, and steadily grows close to his other teammates as well. Having friends from all over the world seems normal to Qendrim: "it's like they're all from [his] own country."

Like many other players, at first Qendrim gravitates towards other kids who come from the same region that he does. But eventually, and thanks to Luma's efforts, the divisions between players based on geography or language erode, and they become a more unified and familial team.

While the Under Fifteens struggle to keep their team together, The Under Thirteens start to gel more and more. Once, while running laps, the boys begin to chant together, "Who are the kings?" "The Fugees!" "Who is the queen?" "Luma!" Luma shakes her head in confusion, and the boys tumble to the ground, laughing. St. John writes that this shows that boys from an array of countries, ethnicities, and languages could create their own inside jokes. Even Mohammed Mohammed, a boy who speaks almost no English, is nearly crying with laughter.

St. John makes his argument more explicit, in directly explaining the significance of the inside jokes that the boys create. Even boys from widely different backgrounds find a community among them, and this is what the Fugees facilitates. Particularly for boys who are having trouble finding friends otherwise, the team gives them a sense of belonging.

Luma is also getting to know her team better. Bien is like "a secret weapon" she can keep hidden on defense for the first half, Jeremiah can kick with his left and right foot equally well, and Qendrim is a good midfielder and great at directing his teammates. Eldin and Mafoday are still weak on goal, but they had been with the team since the beginning. They are punctual and do their homework, and so Luma resolves to coach around their weaknesses.

Once again, Luma demonstrates that she prioritizes not only success on the soccer field, but the dedication and discipline that it takes to be on the team in other areas—which is why she wants to keep Eldin and Mafoday on the team, despite the fact that they are the weak links.

CHAPTER 20: SHOWDOWN AT BLUE SPRINGS

The Under Thirteens arrive for a 9 a.m. game against the Blue Springs Liberty Fire—a team (and a supporting crowd) made up of completely white faces, the boys notice. The Fugees are groggy due to the early start time, and when the game starts, Blue Springs quickly take the lead on an easy shot. The Blue Springs boys also get away with a couple of rough plays that go unnoticed by the referee.

The opening for this chapter, in which the boys note the racial uniformity of their opponents, is in direct contrast with the end of the previous chapter, which celebrates the diversity of the Fugees players and the fact that they are still able to find commonality with one another.

Trailing 1-0 at halftime, Luma tells her players that they're playing "lazy soccer" and allowing the other team to push them around. When play resumes, just two minutes into the half, Josiah scores after dribbling past three defenders. A few minutes later, Mohammed Mohammed is called on a foul and Blue Springs is given a penalty kick. It sails into the top corner, and Eldin doesn't stand a chance. The score is 2-1, Blue Springs.

Luma pushes her team to work harder, knowing that they have been slacking in the first half. The second half of the game becomes a test to see whether her team will give up when they are trailing, or whether they will strive to come from behind.

Luma then moves Bien up to center midfielder, and no one seems to notice at first. Bien controls the ball and passes it to Idwar Dikori, who scores—but the boys are called offsides and the goal doesn't count. Minutes later, Qendrim and Bien work the ball towards the goal. Bien looks like he's going to pass back to Qendrim, but instead, he takes a shot, surprising everyone. He scores: 2-2.

The Under Thirteens do prove themselves to be worthy of Luma's challenge. Even when the referee's calls are against them, they don't get frustrated—instead working together to score and tie the game up.

The Blue Springs coach then calls out for his players to mark Bien. The next few minutes are "frantic," with both teams playing hard and the Blue Springs team covering Bien. With five minutes left in the game, Bien receives the ball, and while he is being set upon, he passes it out to Idwar, who is able to score. The Fugees are finally winning.

Despite the fact that Bien is Luma's secret weapon, he also knows when it's best to let his teammates take the ball when he is targeted by the other team. This can be placed in direct contrast with Mandela in the next chapter, who knows he is one of the more talented players and refuses to pass the ball.

Blue Springs don't give up: they send a long pass down the field and a Blue Springs forward hurls toward the goal, passing the defenders. He has a clear shot on goal, but then Robin Dikori, the youngest player and Idwar's younger brother, streaks back between the player and the goal and kicks the ball clear. The referee then blows his whistle to end the game. Luma is thrilled—her team played as a unit and came from behind to win the game. The boys are excited, too, breaking into song and dancing together.

St. John shows throughout the book that Luma's coaching methods are very tough. But she also knows when to reward her team for solid gameplay because they have done what she has asked. The Under Thirteens are able to use teamwork and discipline to take the lead away from Blue Springs, and their celebration is completely justified.

CHAPTER 21: COMING APART

The next day, the Under Fifteens have a big away game against a team called the Santos. After their big win, the team struggled to get into a groove because of Tito's shooting and the change in practice venues. Mandela's mood also worsened.

While the Under Thirteens begin to work together very well, the Under Fifteens have some discord. Even though they found success in their first game, they have had trouble finding a rhythm as a team since then.

As the game starts, Mandela passes the ball to Muamer, but Muamer isn't there and the ball rolls out of bounds. A few minutes later, Kanue is shoved while going for the ball, but he is blamed and called for a foul. The Santos take a penalty kick and score for a 1-0 lead. Soon after, a Santos striker gets ahead of the Fugees' defense and scores again—then again. The score is 3-0. At each mistake, Mandela lays into his teammates.

Mandela, in particular, is creating conflict within the team. The more he lashes out at his teammates, the less and less they are able to work as a team, and the further and further fall behind.

For the rest of the half, Mandela refuses to pass to his teammates and makes a run for the goal, but each time he fails. At halftime, Luma benches Mandela and tries to give her players some guidance. In the second half, the Fugees play better and manage to score a goal, but the game ends 6-1, Santos. Luma tells her team that they made some sloppy mistakes on defense and weren't aggressive enough; they have a lot to work on in the coming week.

Just as Prince and Fornatee demonstrated earlier in the season, Mandela serves as another example of how a lack of discipline and teamwork directly leads to a lack of success. Even though he is a talented player, Mandela cannot win the game by himself. This again highlights the importance of the Fugees as a community.

Luma drives Natnael and Mandela back to Clarkston in her own car. She turns to Natnael, saying that she has a problem: a kid who shows up when he feels like it, curses and disrespect his teammates, and only calls his coach on the phone when he needs something. She tells Natnael all she had done for this player: taking care of paperwork to get him school lunches, bringing his family food, helping his family move, taking care of his mother and brother. Mandela squirms in the back seat.

Luma not only brings up the lack of respect that Mandela had shown to his teammates and to Luma on the soccer field, but how his performance on the Fugees is a direct reflection of how he doesn't appreciate all the things that Luma does. Luma commands respect because she coaches the team, but also because she is trying to improve the Fugees' lives in any way she possibly can.

Luma asks Natnael what he would do with this kid, if he were the coach. Mandela is Natnael's friend, and Natnael understands what Mandela is going through. At the same time, Natnael found a way to contain his frustration and work hard on the team. Natnael says to Luma, "Let him go."

Natnael's response proves that just because some kids (like Mandela) don't appreciate or respect Luma, doesn't mean that all of them do this. His response also places the benefit of the team as a whole over the benefit of one person, even if that person is his friend.

When Luma drops Mandela off, she tells him that he is a good athlete, but that he doesn't have "the discipline or the respect to play." She tells him not to call her Coach, and not to call her again. Luma spends the next day in her apartment, not talking to anyone. She's upset and tries to explain to St. John that she didn't want to give up on Mandela.

Luma again makes explicit what her values are. Even though she is trying to give Mandela many chances to remain on the Fugees, without discipline or respect, he could taint the way that the rest of the team plays and works together.

CHAPTER 22: HANGING ON AT HOME

Generose takes a night-shift job at a chicken processing plant, which runs from late afternoon to 2 a.m. Far worse than the actual work is the idea of leaving Alex, Bien, and Ive home alone to take care of baby Alyah. This task falls mostly to Alex, who hurries home after practice so that Generose can leave for work. He feeds her, then makes dinner for Bien and Ive while they do their homework. Afterward, he cleans the kitchen.

St. John continues to describe life for the refugees in America in order to show their drive in the face of difficult choices. Alex takes on an immense amount of responsibility in taking care of his siblings, but this is a necessity in order to help keep his family afloat.

One evening after practice, Alex comes home tired and starts making dinner. He places hot dogs in a pan, then puts Alyah's milk in the microwave and stirs in powdered baby food. Alyah starts to cry for dinner, and Alex hurries to feed her, placing her in the crook of his arm and patiently giving her spoonfuls of food.

Alex's patience and responsibility calls back to Luma's earlier statement that she can't baby her players, because they will not be babied at home. This is very true of Alex, who in fact takes on the role of a parent in feeding his younger siblings.

Suddenly, smoke starts to roll into the living room. Alex props Alyah against the sofa and runs to the kitchen. The hot dogs had melted into black goo. Alex grabs the scalding skillet and drops it on the back porch to keep the smoke out. Bien and Ive appear at the kitchen door. Ive asks what that was supposed to be. "Dinner," Bien replies.

Although Alex was able to contain the issue, the incident provokes questions about the different dangers that could befall children when they're home alone. This again highlights the risks that Generose and other refugee mothers have to take when they balance working with taking care of their children.

In the Ziaty home, it takes a few days for Beatrice to learn that Mandela had quit the Fugees. She starts to worry for him—without soccer, he could get into trouble, or he could get mugged or shot. A few days later, Beatrice overhears Mandela tell Jeremiah that he wants to talk to Luma. Beatrice tries to inquire why he wants to talk to her, but he shuts her out. However, he does hang his Fugees jersey on his wall.

The fact that Mandela hangs his Fugees jersey does provide a hint that he misses the community that he had abandoned. He is trapped, however, in a struggle between wanting to be with his friends who had quit and wanting to strive to make himself and his team better, as Kanue and Natnael had.

CHAPTER 23: THE DIKORIS

After her falling-out with Mandela, Luma tries to regroup. She doesn't have much time for anything outside of coaching and helping the Fugees families. Even little errands were going undone, like fixing a brake light on her car. But on the soccer field, things are looking up—particularly being on the new **field** at Milam Park.

St. John's reference to the brake light here foreshadows Luma's eventual arrest when the police pull her over for this offense. But at this moment, it is simply more evidence of Luma's own dedication to the team, as she puts off doing things for herself in favor of doing things for the Fugees.

On the coming weekend, the Under Thirteens will play an undefeated team in Athens. Luma believes that the team has a chance, particularly now that she had discovered a secret weapon in the Dikori brothers. Idwar and Robin Dikori are playing their first season. They are young and shy, but Luma was impressed by Robin's ability to appear out of nowhere to clear the ball in the Blue Springs Game.

Luma continues to find new assets to her team, like Idwar and Robin, as more and more of them show improvement and dedicate themselves to the Fugees. Together, the Fugees have combined their skills and now have both a strong community and team—so strong that Luma believes they can defeat and undefeated team.

The Dikoris are from the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, where in 1989 an Islamist regime comes to power that wanted access to the fertile soil on which the Dikoris lived. The government terrorizes civilians until they flee: bombs are dropped, and government troops kill and rape local villagers. A 1998 report estimates that 200,000 people are killed in the "Nuba genocide."

Like St. John's other explorations of different conflicts, the conflict in Sudan that he describes is born of longstanding division due to religious and geographical differences.

Robin and Idwar's family is caught in this campaign of violence, and is forced to take a days-long journey into the hills to hide from the government, before returning to try and save any possessions and goods they could. The family then moves to Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, to try and get away from the killing.

The Dikoris serve as another example of the immense strength it takes to move to a new place, with very little remaining of what they had in their old life.

Eventually, facing more pressure from the Islamist government, the Dikori family joins the tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees streaming into Egypt. There, refugees are not allowed to work, and also face racial discrimination because of their dark skin. The Dikoris' father applies for resettlement for himself, his wife, and his three daughters and three sons. In 2000, they receive word that they had been accepted for relocation to Georgia.

St. John makes it clear that refugees experience discrimination all over the world. Racism is not contained solely to America, but is prevalent in many different regions, and for many different reasons.

The family is able to settle in, learning English and becoming familiar with American culture. But in 2002, tragedy strikes: the family is visiting fellow Sudanese refugees when they get in a car crash, killing the boys' mother and sisters. The next months are difficult: Idwar becomes silent, while Robin acts out at school. But then, their older brother Shamsoun finds the Fugees, and all three boys join the teams. Gradually, they open back up and become more confident. Soccer "[keeps] the boys sane," and helps them make friends.

For many of the boys, the Fugees represent a community that allows them to assimilate into this new American culture. But for the Dikoris, it represents even more than that: it gives them a support system that helps them recover from the tragedy of losing their mother and sisters. It helps them find the strength and confidence they need.

CHAPTER 24: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

On October 21, the Under Thirteens pile into the YMCA bus and set out for Athens. Luma follows in her car, but about an hour into the drive, a police car pulls up behind her. She remembers her broken tail light and pulls over while the bus continues on. The policeman informs Luma that her license had been suspended and orders her out of the car. She doesn't understand why her license has been suspended, and under Georgia law, the policeman has to arrest her.

Although St. John never explains why (or if) Luma's license had in fact been suspended, this situation (and much of Luma's visit to jail) reeks of the same kind of police discrimination and harsh punishments that plague much of Clarkston's refugee community in the early chapters.

By this point, Tracy had turned the bus around. Luma convinces the policeman to let her give the team's player cards to the bus driver so they could play the game without her. She tells the Fugees, shakily, that she wouldn't make it to the game, but she expects them to win. The Fugees are uneasy—many of them had seen or heard of family members being carted off for minimal offenses. Some of the boys begin to cry.

Even though Luma is shaken by her arrest, she still tries to remain a leader for her players. St. John also reminds readers that this experience, while unusual for American kids, is all too familiar for many of the refugee boys who are on the Fugees.

The Fugees arrive at the game, while Luma arrives at the Walton County Jail. When the clerk notes Luma's foreign name, she asks, "What are you doing here?" meaning the United States. Luma doesn't respond. Luma is then fingerprinted, and her possessions are taken from her. Bail is set at $759.50, and Luma is escorted into a holding cell. She begins to feel afraid.

Luma's experience going to jail continues to be plagued by racism and discrimination. She is treated as though she doesn't belong in America simply because her name sounds like it is that of an immigrant.

The Fugees look good during warm ups, but then the game begins. Tracy tries to encourage them, but she's not a soccer coach. The other team, the Valiants, score two goals in five minutes. The Fugees are lost. The Valiants score again and again and again. After the first half, the score is 5-0.

St. John emphasizes that even though the Under Thirteens are talented and dedicated, they still need Luma in order to play. Without her leadership, they are literally "lost" and seem unable to score.

At halftime, the Fugees fight over who should play what position; they replace Eldin in goal with Mafoday. When they retake the field, however, they have no intention of giving up—they go after the ball, and Mafoday is able to make a good save early in the half. Midway through the second half, the Valiants get a penalty kick. Mafoday makes another amazing save, and the Fugees erupt in cheers. At the end of the game, the score is still 5-0. They held their own in the second half.

Even though the Fugees are lost without Luma, when they regroup at halftime they recognize that they can't give up—particularly because they know that this would be the biggest disappointment to Luma. Thus, they each put in their best efforts to make sure that the Valiants can't score any more.

After the game, Tracy returns to the Walton County Jail and pays Luma's bail. When she gets on the team bus, the boys tell her they lost 5-0. She tells them that the loss was her fault, and she had no excuse not to be at the game. But the boys tell her the exciting part: Mafoday stopped a penalty kick, and if she had been there, they would definitely have beaten the team.

In evaluating her own failures, Luma shows that she is just as hard on herself as she is on the players. She knows that she made a mistake in not being able to be there for the team. But the boys only care that they put in their best effort.

Back in Clarkston, Luma gets a call from Grace Balegamire's little brother, who is unhappy at home while his mother is visiting a friend and says he's "scared to be alone." She drives to the grocery store, picks up sweet rolls, then visits the boy's apartment. He tells her that he had a bad day. Luma tells him about her own bad day, but he doesn't buy it.

This is another example of Luma's leadership off the field, as she donates her time and energy to care for her players and their families—even when she is the one who truly needs some support after a very bad day. But it is also clear from her interactions with this boy that she gets some comfort in being around the Fugees, and that their relationships are mutually beneficial.

The boy wonders how Luma can be at his house if she had been in jail. She says that Tracy paid enough for "five hundred ice creams" to get Luma out. The boy is confused by this system and wonders aloud if anyone can get out of jail if they pay five hundred ice creams. Luma realizes why he is asking: his father is still in prison in Kinshasa, and the government has not issued word on when he might be released.

Throughout the book, St. John includes these small details—though it is often easy to forget some of the details of these kids' backgrounds—to reminds readers of their unique challenges and the intense ordeals they still face, even in America.

CHAPTER 25: HALLOWEEN

On October 27, the news reports that there has been a prison riot in Kinshasa: five inmates were killed, and fourteen escaped. Paula Balegamire calls friends, but no one knows whether her husband is among the dead or escaped.

The opening of this chapter bookends with the end of the previous chapter, which again reminds Luma of how much her players have gone through (and continue to go through) as refugees.

On Halloween, Luma surprises the boys by taking them trick-or-treating in a wealthy part of Decatur. It is most of the boys' first Halloween, and so Luma buys them costumes and bags for candy. They are amazed to see children in elaborate costumes roaming the streets, and the decorations. They walk through the neighborhood, gathering candy.

Luma continues to go above and beyond to take care of her players, treating them to a new collective cultural experience by celebrating an American holiday.

At one point, the boys encounter an American girl with a group of friends wearing a soccer uniform. Grace doesn't understand that she's in costume and asks what position she plays. Both the girls and the Fugees laugh at the misunderstanding. A short while later, they head back to the bus, crashing from their sugar highs. Later that evening, Grace lies in bed and hears gunshots. He stays low in his room, afraid. Later the police arrive, make no arrests, and pull away. Grace closes his eyes and tries to return to sleep.

Again, St. John juxtaposes the Fugees with some of their American counterparts. While the girls here are relatively carefree and presumably come from this world of wealth, the Fugees are only temporary visitors. When they return home, Grace is subjected to a reminder that he, as someone who has come to this country with nothing, must continue to endure the dangers of living in a low-income neighborhood.

CHAPTER 26: THE FIFTEENS' FINAL GAME

Natnael is riding in the bus to the Under Fifteens' final game alongside Joseph, a player on the Under Seventeens who is supporting the younger players. Natnael is surprised to learn that Joseph's father is no longer alive; Joseph says he doesn't tell anyone because he doesn't want people asking questions about it. Natnael asks if he cried, and Joseph explains no, because he never really knew his father.

St. John continues to reiterate the theme of the big and small ways that being refugees have affected the kids' lives. What is perhaps most tragic is that Joseph can't truly be sad about his father's death because he was too young to get the chance to remember him.

The Under Fifteens warm up for their final game. The season hadn't gone very well, and now they are fighting against the threat of being demoted to a lower division for next season if they lose against the Strikers. The Fugees play the early minutes "in a daze." By halftime they are down 2-0. Luma says that the other team is not faster or better than the Fugees: they are losing because they "do not know how to play soccer," they "don't know how to play as a team," and they "don't have the discipline or the respect to play." She says the game is a waste of her time and walks away.

Despite Kanue and Natnael's best efforts, the team is still having a hard time in its new iteration. Luma's language in her halftime speech echoes the words that she had said to Mandela when she kicked him off the team. Without discipline or respect, she doesn't view the team as worthy of her time, and so she refuses to lead them.

One player says that he hates when Luma stops coaching them, as then they're doomed to lose. Sebajden says that they're playing like little kids, and instead rallies them to try to make Luma happy. The boys put their hands together, chant "Go Fugees!" and take the field. The Fugees play harder, but they still make mistakes. They are called for fouls and give up another goal. In the end, they lose 3-1.

The Under Fifteens story does not have a happy ending, and St. John does not try to sugarcoat it. But he does show that even though Luma feels the players are not trying hard enough, the boys are truly worried about disappointing her, and they rally together to try to make her happy.

At the end of the game, Luma is not angry or yelling, but she is very serious. She says that it is "an embarrassment" to sit on the sidelines and see them make simple mistakes like doing throw-ins with their feet off the ground. And it is embarrassing to see her players lose their cool. She tells them that if they plan to continue, it will be by her rules, her drills, and her way. Kanue and Natnael bow their heads. Though they worked hard, their team still has issues. They will have to find a way to win next year.

In the end, Luma recognizes that she has to take some of the blame upon herself. If the Fugees aren't able to follow the rules of regulation soccer, it is partly due to a failure of her own leadership to teach them. Still, Luma is as demanding as ever, and ends the season with a call to do better the next year.

CHAPTER 27: MY RULES, MY WAY

In contrast to the Fifteens, the Thirteens have really improved, which Luma attributes to the fact that they followed her rules and drills. They also look out for one another: Josiah even gave a new player who just arrived some of his old winter clothes, seeing that he had none.

Not only has Luma created a community for her youngest team, but her ethos of leadership has also spread to the players as they start to go above and beyond for each other.

The Under Thirteens play a final regular season game against a team from Lawrenceville, who managed some big wins earlier in the season. Before the game, Grace has an idea: that the Fugees should pray together. But with both Christians and Muslims on the team, the boys work out that they will offer two prayers. Draping their arms around each other, Grace offers a Christian prayer in Swahili, and Eldin offers a Muslim prayer in Bosnian. They all say "Amen."

This moment serves as a touching counterpoint to the early days of the Fugees, in which the differences between them had divided them. Now, not only do the boys look beyond each other's differences and become friends with other players regardless of culture, but they also celebrate each other's cultural differences as they agree to give prayers for multiple religions.

Moments later, the game is underway. The Fugees are on the attack, and they quickly take a 1-0 lead. At halftime, Luma tells them to score even more, keep calm, and have fun. Soon, Jeremiah controls a pass and fires a clear shot that slips between the goalie's fingers. A late foul gives Lawrenceville a penalty shot, but the Fugees maintain the lead and win 2-1. They finish third in their division. As a reward, the Under Thirteens will play in the Tornado Cup, which features some of the best teams from around the state. The tournament begins in a week.

In comparing and interspersing the accounts of the Under Thirteens team with the Under Fifteens team, St. John explicitly correlates discipline and unity with the team's success rate. The Under Thirteens, who are connecting deeply on a personal level and working hard to follow Luma's rules, are able to succeed and are rewarded even more for it by Luma.

CHAPTER 28: TORNADO CUP

Luma leads an intense week of practice that culminates in a match between the Under Thirteens and the Under Fifteens. When the game begins, the Thirteens show that they have "come to play." They fight for the ball and make crisp passes, but they have a harder time making their shots. In the end, the Fifteens win 3-1, but the Thirteens have played a respectable game. Luma concludes, "it was an okay scrimmage." The Fugees know that this is high praise.

St. John provides some insight into Luma's leadership style here: the boys are so eager to do well for her that they pick up on any positive phrase. Just as Luma had been with Coach Brown, they don't want to disappoint her.

On Sunday morning, the Thirteens arrive for the first of two games, against Blue Springs. When the game begins, the Thirteens play like they did against the Fifteens: they control the ball but are unable to score. They start to lose confidence, and Blue Springs scores. The Fugees are losing 1-0. At halftime, Luma is livid. She is angry that they talked a big game, but Blue Springs is outhustling them. She says that she's been waiting to see them play their best and she hasn't seen it yet.

Luma is constantly asking her players to play their absolute best. When she believes that they are not fulfilling this expectation, she has harsh words for them. St. John shows how Luma feels that intense effort is always rewarded. If they aren't winning, it means they haven't tried hard enough.

The Fugees return to the field, more focused and determined to prove Luma wrong. They go on the attack several times, until Josiah is able to score. They continue to fire shots, but none of them go into the net. Qendrim tells the rest of the team to move farther up the field to keep the pressure on.

Even though Luma's words are severe, they do spur the boys to focus and play better. They don't want to disappoint her, and amp up the effort accordingly.

Bien takes a corner kick and the Fugees work together to and cross it to Idwar, who is able to kick the ball into the goal. The Fugees are ahead 2-1. A few minutes later, Jeremiah takes a cannon shot from fifteen yards out, scoring a beautiful goal. Luma tells them that their first half "sucked so bad," but that she almost had a heart attack to see them come back. The boys applaud their victory, but the game has come at a cost: Qendrim is limping from a twisted ankle, and the rest of the Fugees are tired.

The boys ultimately prove to Luma how her methods work. When she is tough on them, it only inspires them to put in more effort, and their effort is directly rewarded with goals and wins. Although this doesn't always happen, it happens enough that the boys buy into Luma's system, and they know that giving her respect and working hard are the keys to that system.

The boys play another game less than an hour afterward, but they are exhausted. The game ends 2-1 with the Fugees losing. The next day, the Fugees are playing another team called the Concorde Fire. Luma learns that if they win the game, they'd go to the finals. Luma tells the Fugees to "play to the whistle," warning them that if they lose or tie the game, they will be going home.

The effort that the Fugees had given in their previous game is evident in the fact that they are exhausted when they play their second game—they have nothing left to give. It is notable that during that game, St. John doesn't give any anecdotes about Luma's frustration or anger that they are losing—perhaps because she knows how much effort they have already given.

Just before the game starts, the Fugees see "a strange sight" on the sideline. Some older Fugees players have come out to cheer them on, as well as Josiah's teacher and several volunteers from resettlement agencies. They have fans for the first time.

After St. John has given so many instances of the Fugees having no support on the sidelines, this becomes a touching representation of the kind of community support that Luma has been able to build around the Fugees.

The Fugees come out shooting, going after every ball. With eight minutes left in the half, Jeremiah carves through the Fire defense and scores. Luma gathers them at halftime and tells them about the adjustments she wants. She reminds them of the stakes and tells them to get two more goals.

Luma's reminder ensures that the Under Thirteens don't get lazy in the second half, and maintain the discipline that they had been showing in the first half.

In the second half, the Fugees continue to fire shots on goal, but they miss each time. The Fire, meanwhile, is able to get past the Fugees and score on Eldin. The Fugees aren't finished, however; with fifteen minutes left in the game, Josiah controls a loose ball and shoots it just over the goalie's head. The score is 2-1, Fugees.

Despite Luma's reminders and warnings, they boys don't play as accurately—this is what makes Luma so frustrated when they ultimately end up losing the game, particularly when they had obtained a lead.

The final minutes of the game are "thrilling," and other teams come out to watch. They start to learn the names of the players and cheer them on. The Fire can't find an opening, until the their star player gets free of the Fugees' defense and sends the ball sailing over Eldin's fingertips with only a few moments left. Luma is angry—she tells the boys that they had the other team at 2-1 but couldn't finish the game. "You deserved to lose," she says. "You didn't play your best." The boys gather their equipment sadly, their eyes dropping.

One of the difficult aspects of sports is that there are clear losers and winners. Effort often, but not always, translates to success. But while the boys are disappointed, they had also had an amazing season, and became so successful in the process that they inspired other people to support them. For a team that often receives little outside support, this also constitutes a win.

The holidays approach rapidly. Luma tells the Under Thirteens and Under Fifteens that she will enter the boys in a big tournament if they can raise the $1000 necessary to go. They organize car washes, but the boys come up $130 short. She tells them that they cannot asks their parents for money, and that they need to ask themselves what they would do for their team. Jeremiah takes up this request: he and other boys rake leaves to make up the extra money and tell Luma that they've made the $130.

Even after the devastating losses of both of her teams, Luma keeps their spirits up with the promise of future games. And on top of that, she continues to inspire their dedication, as they learn important life skills on how to work hard to support their team, just as she had done.

Luma spends Christmas visiting her players' families and delivering boxes of food. The day after Christmas, Luma receives a letter from the Town of Clarkston, informing her that she can no longer use Armistead **field** because the city is reactivating its youth recreation program. Luma is stunned.

While Luma continues her acts of selflessness for the boys and their families, she is hit with hard news: once again, the Fugees are being treated exceptionally poorly, and have been kicked off of the field that they called home.

Luma calls Mayor Swaney, but he won't take her call. Later, Luma discovers that the letter was authorized by Swaney, who has no authority to go against the city council's vote. Additionally, the reasoning behind the letter is a lie—there is no recreation program planned. Later, Mayor Swaney changes his story entirely, explaining that he had seen adult refugees playing soccer in the park, assumed they were affiliated with the Fugees, and kicked the team out for breaking their agreement. But the Fugees have no affiliation with any adult soccer players.

Just as Mayor Swaney had the ability to sway the entire city council to let the Fugees play on Armistead field, he now seemingly has the power to cut off their use of the field. Any reason he comes up with appears either arbitrary or discriminatory, and this will backfire on him when St. John breaks the Fugees' story in The New York Times.

In the meantime, Luma has to find a place to practice. She logs onto Google Earth to try and find another **field**. She zooms further and further back from Clarkston, trying to find a place to play. Atlanta has a lot of open space, but those fields are out of reach for the Fugees. She pulls back further and further, as the rest of America comes into view, then other countries and continents. Someday, St. John writes, "the Fugees would find a home."

Luma's search through Google Earth reminds readers of the variety of countries and continents that the boys arrived from. But in spite of being able to immigrate to America and escape war and violence, they are still unable to find a field that they can truly call home.

EPILOGUE

In the months following, the Fugees' problems become more manageable. Paula Balegamire learns that her husband was not killed in the riot and was set free months later. He hopes to reunite with his family in the U.S. or Europe.

Although Grace's father is safe, St. John continues to point out the issue with resettlement, and America's failings in making sure that families can reunite.

Luma and Mandela reconcile gradually. She tells him that it would be a good idea for him to get away from Prince and other friends who are dropping out of school. With her help, he applies to Job Corps, a U.S. government program that provides vocational training to young adults and offers the chance to earn a high school degree. He is accepted and graduates in November 2008 with his high school diploma.

Luma continues to prove that she is willing to work hard and put faith in people who will do the same. Once Mandela recognizes that Prince is not a good influence, Luma helps Mandela find a program that will give him much better future opportunities than he would have had otherwise.

Several Fugees are accepted to Pfeiffer University, a liberal arts college in North Carolina. Shamsoun even receives a scholarship to play soccer. Other Fugees have seen their grades improve and become more fluent in English. But there are still challenges, as kids fall away or are dropped from the program if they don't meet academic expectations. Additionally, local public schools continue to fail the refugee population. Luma discovers one of her young players received an A in English, yet she knows the boy is almost completely illiterate.

St. John highlights other ways in which Luma has tangibly improved the lives of her players off the field, particularly in making sure they get an education. But he is also certain to highlight ways that the American educational system is failing refugees. It often doesn't actually help them to learn English, but simply passes them along through the system.

Many Fugees move out of Clarkston, which often just serves as a foothold in America. In 2007, Beatrice Ziaty moves with her sons to Iowa. Generose moves to Indiana. When Ive arrives, he calls St. John happily—he thought they were moving to a totally different country and is excited that he is already familiar with the culture there.

Beatrice and Generose's families both exhibit even more resilience as they continue to move on and improve their lives, finding new communities that will suit them and their sons better.

Many of the boys stay in touch with Luma, and even come back to Georgia on occasion to spend time at her home. Luma, for her part, turns her attention to other kids in need in Clarkston. She relays that the minute one kid leaves, another one takes his place, and "they're all just as beautiful and innocent or messed up as the kid before them. So you can't stop."

Luma's dedication to the Fugees is not only limited to the boys who began in her program. As more and more kids arrive in Clarkston, she knows that her efforts are just as important for them as they were for the kids who began in the program.

In January 2007, *The New York Times* runs a front-page story on the Fugees that St. John wrote while working on *Outcasts United*. As a result, Mayor Swaney is deluged with angry phone calls and emails. In the wake of public outcry, the City Council allows the Fugees to use Armistead **field** through the spring.

St. John's article is helpful in that it informs others of Swaney's discriminatory policies and allows a multitude of people who are not as vulnerable as the refugees in Clarkston to fight back against this prejudice.

Readers also donate to the Fugees in large and small amounts, including a bus. Nike provides equipment and uniforms. Luma has more funds to run her program and works to build a tutoring center and soccer facility. Additionally, the media attention prompts locals to come watch the Fugees play and cheer them on. The Fugees now have seven interns who help with the program.

St. John's article also helps the team grow its community, as more and more people come out to support the Fugees or donate to the Fugees, which helps contribute to the program's effectiveness and success.

Luma is also frequently approached by teachers for advice on dealing with struggling kids. She says she doesn't believe in any single method. Tracy once told St. John that Luma is "a normal person doing what she can for the people around her," which is a much more inspirational model than the idea that Luma is a saint. She reminds people that everyone can do something for their community. The Fugees continue to thrive, helped largely by small donors who have decided to get involved and help Coach Luma.

By ending with Tracy's evaluation of Luma, St. John is indirectly compelling readers to ask what they can do for their community. They may not be able to do as much as Luma had been able to, but they can be leaders in small ways. Everyone is a part of a community, and like the Fugees and their team, everyone has a civic duty to support one another in whatever way they can.

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