

American Street



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF IBI ZOBOI

Ibi Zoboi was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, as Pascale Philanthrope. At age four, Zoboi immigrated to New York City with her mother, a move that Zoboi has said defines who she is. Her childhood was lonely, since her mother worked and left Zoboi home alone. At one point in Zoboi's childhood, she and her mother visited Haiti—but Zoboi wasn't allowed to return to the U.S. after the visit. Her mother finally got Zoboi back to New York three months later, but when Zoboi started fifth grade upon her return, her teacher assumed she didn't speak English and put her in an English as a second language class. This jumpstarted Zoboi's writing career, as she turned to writing poetry to cope with being misunderstood and underestimated. As a young adult, Zoboi worked in a bookstore and for a newspaper. She attended the Vermont College of Fine Arts, where she received an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults. After marrying her husband, Joseph Zoboi, she changed her name to Ibi Zoboi. While 2017's *American Street* was Zoboi's first novel, she attracted acclaim long before publishing it. She began to publish short stories about a decade earlier and was even named a finalist for the New Visions Award while still in grad school. Zoboi lives in New Jersey with her husband and three children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

American Street features a number of real-life historical events and trends. A major event in Fabiola's childhood was the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010. It had a catastrophic magnitude of 7.0, killing at least 100,000 people and destroying or damaging many buildings in Port-Au-Prince, where Fabiola lived. When Fabiola arrives in Detroit, she finds the city still recovering from the aftermath of the mid-2000s Great Recession, which accelerated the city's decline. Following decades of racial tensions, redlining (a form of racial segregation), and the crack-cocaine crisis of the 1980s, many homes in Detroit were (and still are) vacant and unsellable. Finally, Kasim's murder by police in the novel is loosely inspired by the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. In 2012, 17-year-old Martin was shot and killed in what many believe was a racially motivated attack. At the time of his death, Martin was on the phone with a female Haitian friend.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In interviews, Zoboi has said that it's important to her to write young adult novels that feature Haiti and that focus on faith—as a young reader, she herself wanted to read about

teens grappling with their religion. Religious elements in young adult books are becoming increasingly common, though many don't present religion in the positive light that *American Street* does. In both Elizabeth Acevedo's [The Poet X](#) and *The Dangerous Art of Blending In* by Angelo Surmelis, for instance, the protagonists' mothers abuse them for not being devout enough. Zoboi is one of many emerging Haitian American authors writing today. She was inspired by Edwidge Danticat, specifically her short story collection *Krik, Krak* and her novel [Breath, Eyes, Memory](#). More broadly, *American Street* can be grouped with a number of young adult novels that focus on the immigrant experience in the United States. These include novels like [The Sun is Also a Star](#) by Nicola Yoon, [Girl in Translation](#) by Jean Kwok, and *La Linea* by Ann Jaramillo.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** American Street
- **When Written:** 2016–2017
- **Where Written:** New Jersey
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** Detroit, Michigan
- **Climax:** Fabiola discovers that the police shot Kasim
- **Antagonist:** Dray; racism; violence; the U.S. immigration system
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Meeting a Legend. Zoboi was able to meet Haitian American writer Danticat, one of her creative idols. Zoboi and Danticat even worked together on the anthology *Haiti Noir* and the Haiti series for One Moore Book, a nonprofit that publishes children's books featuring characters from underrepresented countries.



PLOT SUMMARY

When 16-year-old Fabiola and her mother, Manman, try to emigrate from Haiti to New York, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detains Manman in New York. Fabiola, however, is allowed to go on to Detroit to go live with her aunt and cousins. Upon landing in Detroit, Fabiola meets her cousins Chantal, Primadonna, and Princess. Chantal, the oldest, tries to track down Manman but learns that she's going to be taken to a detention facility in New Jersey. She assures Fabiola that her

mother, Fabiola's aunt Matant Jo, will take care of it.

When Fabiola and her cousins arrive at Matant Jo's house, Jo is disappointed that Manman isn't coming. Matant Jo recently had a stroke and was hoping that her sister could help take care of her and her daughters. No one feeds or properly welcomes Fabiola to Detroit, and Fabiola feels lonely. In the middle of the night, she gets up to pray to her Vodou shrine. She hears a homeless man named Bad Leg singing outside. Fabiola watches as a young man—Donna's abusive boyfriend, Dray—tries to beat him up.

The next day, Fabiola gets ready for school. As she does, she notices her cousins react strangely to a story on the local news about a white girl who died after taking designer drugs. Then, while Fabiola braids Pri's hair, Pri tells her about her father, Phillip's, murder, and how Matant Jo provided for her daughters after this. At school, the sisters are known as the Three Bees—nobody messes with them. Their reputation makes things hard for Fabiola, as she doesn't want people to think she's dangerous. Fabiola does manage to befriend Imani, a girl in her English class.

On Saturday night, Fabiola goes to a party at the Q club with her cousins. Here, she meets Dray and Dray's best friend, Kasim. She feels drawn to Kasim, but she's disturbed by how Dray abuses Donna. Later that night, back home, Fabiola takes her cousins' advice and goes to ask Bad Leg where he got his name. When Bad Leg explains that he left it "on the other side," Fabiola realizes that Bad Leg is actually Papa Legba, the *lwa* (Vodou spirit) of the crossroads. None of Fabiola's cousins believe this, however.

After school the next Friday, a woman stops Fabiola and says that she knows Fabiola's cousins and that Phillip was murdered. The woman introduces herself as Detective Stevens and tells Fabiola that she's investigating the same overdose death Fabiola saw on the news; Detective Stevens believes that Dray sold the drugs. She offers to expedite Manman's processing and get her a green card if Fabiola helps her find evidence on Dray. After this, Fabiola runs into Kasim, and he takes her out for dinner. They kiss when Kasim drops Fabiola back home.

Soon after this, Imani offers to tutor Fabiola in English. The girls take a bus to the café where Kasim works and hang out for hours. Dray pulls up outside at the same time as Fabiola and Imani leave the café, and he forces Imani to take a picture with him. Then, he insists on driving them home. At Fabiola's house, Donna rips Imani out of the car and accuses her of trying to steal Dray—she saw the picture Dray posted online. As Donna and Dray fight, Fabiola realizes that Dray is the living embodiment of the *lwa* Baron Samedi, the caretaker of graveyards. She runs upstairs and texts Detective Stevens.

Later that week, Kasim takes Fabiola to see a dance performance. Kasim admits that the expensive tickets came from Uncle Q, Dray's uncle—and he notes that Uncle Phillip

"went down for Q." This is all news to Fabiola. The next day, Fabiola feels so overwhelmed and distraught about Manman that she stays home from school. She uses the day to follow Papa Legba's cryptic poem through the city to the Q club, where Dray lives with Uncle Q. The club is also the epicenter of their drug operation. When Fabiola calls Detective Stevens to tell her this, Detective Stevens already knows—but she says that tomorrow, Fabiola can talk to Manman on the phone. Manman calls the next day, and although their conversation is short, Fabiola is happy to hear her mother's voice.

A few days later, Chantal drops Donna and Fabiola off at a beauty parlor for makeovers in preparation for Dray's 21st birthday party. Fabiola sees this as an opportunity to trick Dray and get information on him, and she realizes that the parlor itself is an altar to Ezili, the *lwa* of women. When she sees that Donna's wigs have been hiding more bruises from Dray, Fabiola tells Donna about Ezili-Danto, a version of Ezili who fights for women. She silently vows to cut Dray out of Donna's life.

At the party, Everyone but Kasim loves Fabiola's new look, but Fabiola tells herself she can't worry about Kasim. Instead, she focuses on Dray and manages to snoop on his text messages. When she sees messages that she assumes are about a drug deal, she texts Detective Stevens. Over the weekend, Donna breaks up with Dray. The police arrested and released him, and then he cheated on Donna with a white girl.

During lunch that week, a girl named Tonesha accuses Fabiola of stealing Kasim—her cousin, Raquel, has already claimed him. But when Kasim picks Fabiola up after school and hears about this, he shouts out the windows that he loves Fabiola.

That night, Fabiola wakes up to pounding on the door. Her cousins shush her and make her stay upstairs, but Fabiola eavesdrops anyway. The visitor is Uncle Q, and he wants his \$20,000—and he doesn't care that Chantal, Pri, and Donna need to lay low for a while after their drugs killed the white girl. Once Uncle Q leaves, Fabiola demands to know the truth. Chantal explains that after Phillip died, Uncle Q gave Matant Jo money to raise the kids. When Matant Jo started giving the money away, Uncle Q pushed her to become a loan shark. But now, they don't want her to have to do that anymore, so it falls to them to support the family. They swear Fabiola to secrecy and insist that she's now the Fourth Bee—but Fabiola is livid. She knows that Detective Stevens has it all wrong: Dray didn't sell the drugs that killed the girl. Now, Fabiola will never get Manman back.

The following weekend, Fabiola goes out to eat with her aunt and cousins. When Kasim shows up at the restaurant, she pretends she doesn't love him anymore and breaks up with him. They make up when Kasim drops in to join Fabiola's family for Thanksgiving. He also joins Fabiola at a basketball game later that week, but Dray is with him. Dray makes a scene by offering Donna a diamond pendant, and Donna forgives him. But that night, Donna comes home with bleeding scratches on her face.

Fabiola grows increasingly angry at Dray and at the world when she discovers that Dray has been courting Imani, but Imani is too afraid of Donna to tell him to stop. Fabiola reaches the boiling point when two girls start a fistfight with her one day after school, and ends up getting suspended for three days. Fabiola's mood doesn't improve when she learns her cousins plan to steal Matant Jo's pain pills and sell them at a party over the weekend.

On the first day of her suspension, Fabiola visits Kasim at work. When she sees Dray pull up outside, she knows what she has to do: she kisses Dray and offers to hook him up with people from a Haitian gang in exchange for a cut of his profits if he sells drugs at a party this weekend. He agrees. That night, Fabiola convinces her cousins to stay home, and she tells Detective Stevens that Dray will be at the party with drugs on him.

Later that week, Fabiola and Kasim have sex for the first time. That weekend, Kasim suddenly cancels his plans with Fabiola, saying that he has work to do. Fabiola gets increasingly nervous as she listens to Bad Leg sing an ominous song outside. When Fabiola can't get ahold of Kasim, she confesses everything to her cousins. They drive to the party, and there, Fabiola finds Detective with Kasim's dead body—the police shot and killed him. When Fabiola and her cousins get back home, Dray is there, waiting for Fabiola. He's distraught and puts a gun to Fabiola's head, but Papa Legba shoots Dray before Dray can kill Fabiola. Then, Papa Legba disappears into thin air. From the underworld, Dray reveals to the reader that he accidentally killed Phillip when he was 10 years old. This is why he hates Donna—Phillip's ghost has been haunting him since then.

After this, Matant Jo decides to move out of **8800 American Street** to escape the ghosts in the house. On the day that the family moves, they'll be able to get Manman from the airport; Detective Stevens made good on her promise to Fabiola. As they pull away from the house, Fabiola mouths "thank you" to Papa Legba.

York, where Manman was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Fabiola is able to get a handle on her grief by leaning on her Vodou practice and by getting to know her aunt and her cousins Chantal, Pri, and Donna. At first, Fabiola is shocked and disheartened by her standoffish family in Detroit, and by the violence and lack of opportunity in the city itself—none of this fits her conception of what life in the U.S. was supposed to be like. But Fabiola becomes a little happier with her new life when she begins dating a young man, Kasim, who works a regular job and rejects the violence and drug culture in Detroit. And, when Fabiola eventually discovers that the lwa (Vodou spirit) Papa Legba keeps watch outside Matant Jo's house and begins seeing *lwas* elsewhere in her life, she becomes more confident in her ability to interpret the *lwas'* messages and bring Manman to her. She even tries to share her Vodou spirituality with her cousins with some success. However, Fabiola hides the fact that she's working with a police officer named Detective Stevens, who asks Fabiola to help her arrest Donna's abusive boyfriend, Dray, for drug-dealing in exchange for Manman's release. All of this ultimately leads to disaster when, instead of getting Dray arrested, Fabiola's plan leads to the police murdering Kasim. Kasim's death results in Fabiola's loss of innocence and the realization that she can't control everything through Vodou alone. Fabiola learns that she also needs a firm understanding of how the real world works—and she needs to be loyal to every member of her family, not just Manman.

Kasim – Kasim is Dray's best friend; he later becomes Fabiola's boyfriend. At first, Fabiola describes Kasim as a *vagabon*, or a bad boy, and wants nothing to do with him because of his association with Dray. But from the moment they first meet, Fabiola feels drawn to him. He insists on calling her "Fabulous" and makes Fabiola feel "like honey." As Fabiola and Kasim get to know each other, they fall in love. Fabiola learns that Kasim was raised by his mom and grew up Muslim. When his dad left for Memphis when Kasim was still young, Uncle Q, Dray's uncle, stepped in to provide for Kasim like a son. In addition, Dray, who's three years older, was also there for Kasim and made sure that Kasim was accepted and respected in the neighborhood. Though Kasim admits that some of the things he did as a young person would destroy his mom if she knew about them, he's since cleaned up his act. He works at a local café and drives a **car** that's constantly broken down. He's saving up to buy a house, so his car is a low priority for him. If Kasim does need something expensive right away, he sometimes does favors for Dray and sells drugs, which he describes to Fabiola as "Shit you do for fam." Fabiola takes this to mean that Kasim is loyal to those he considers family and will do anything for them. Though Fabiola finds these qualities attractive, she's disturbed by Kasim's nonchalance when it comes to Dray and Donna's abusive relationship. Kasim insists that he has no reason to step in when his best friend gets violent with Donna; he simply tells Fabiola that their relationship won't ever be like that. To his



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Fabiola Toussaint – Fabiola is 16-year-old the protagonist of the novel. Because Fabiola was born in Detroit, she's an American citizen—but when she was three months old, her mother, Manman, chose to return to Haiti with Fabiola. Growing up in Haiti, Fabiola joins Manman in practicing Vodou. She grows up poor, but thanks to her aunt Matant Jo, she attends an English school in preparation for her eventual move to the U.S. Fabiola experiences the real-life earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, and this is a formative, traumatic experience for her; whenever she experiences traumatizing things in Detroit, she references the earthquake. When the novel begins, Fabiola has just entered the U.S. and had to leave Manman in New

credit, he's correct: whenever he's with Fabiola, he treats her kindly and respectfully. But the day after Kasim and Fabiola have sex for the first time, Kasim is murdered by police. His name means "divided amongst many" in Arabic, and Fabiola finds that Kasim's ghost embodies this: his spirit rests with the many people who protest his murder.

Pri/Princess François – Pri is one of Fabiola's cousins; she's Matant Jo and Phillip's daughter, Donna's twin, and Chantal's younger sister. Like Fabiola, Pri and Donna are 16 years old. Fabiola is initially perplexed by Pri, who wears baggy clothes, binds her breasts to flatten them, and wants her braids to look like boys', not girls'. But as Fabiola gets to know her cousin, she discovers that Pri takes on this look in part to project strength and danger to people who might want to mess with her or Chantal. Pri is fiercely protective of her twin, especially since Donna's boyfriend, Dray, is physically abusive. Pri acts unafraid of Dray: she's often willing to get in his face and yell at him when he brings Donna home with scratches or bruises. However, part of the reason why Pri is so willing to fight is because she's angry about everything her family has had to deal with. She believes that all she can do is fight the people who want to harm her and her loved ones. Fabiola connects with Pri before she connects with any of her other cousins—and although Pri's brisk, angry demeanor never changes, she's the first to make overtures to Fabiola. However, when Fabiola discovers that her cousins are dealing drugs to make ends meet, Pri doesn't think that Fabiola need to know anything and that her sisters' dealing. Throughout the novel, Pri is very curious about Fabiola's Vodou shrine, though she remains dismissive of Vodou's effectiveness. The one good thing in Pri's life is her crush on a girl named Taj. Though at first it seems like Pri is never going to confess her feelings and start a relationship with Taj, Fabiola eventually sees Taj and Pri together at a basketball game; Pri looks happier than Fabiola has ever seen her. Throughout the novel, Pri remains fiercely loyal to her family members—and by the end of the novel, this includes Fabiola too.

Donna/Primadonna François – Donna is one of Fabiola's cousins; she's Matant Jo and Phillip's daughter, Pri's twin, and Chantal's younger sister. Like Fabiola, Donna and Pri are 16 years old. Whereas Pri is short and stout, Donna is tall and willowy. She loves clothes, hairstyling, and makeup, so she constantly dresses up and gets her hair done. At first, Fabiola finds all of this tiring and silly. Since Fabiola isn't interested in Donna's highly stylized look, Fabiola finds it hard to understand why it's so meaningful to Donna. But as the novel progresses, Fabiola realizes that Donna has good reason to lean so hard into beauty. Since she was 12, Donna has been dating Dray—and the entire time they've been dating, Dray has physically abused her. The hair and makeup serve a dual purpose: Dray likes girls who wear wigs and heavy makeup, and Donna can also use beauty products to cover her bruises and

scratches. However, Donna still thinks of her relationship with Dray as a positive thing in her life. She consistently makes excuses for his abuse and insists that he loves her, so she's willing to put up with it. This infuriates Donna's family, but they still put up with Dray's presence. Fabiola channels her hatred of Dray into introducing Donna to elements of Vodou. She sees in Donna an iteration of Ezili, the Iwa (Vodou spirit) of women—and when Donna comes home with bruises, Fabiola suggests that Donna is Ezili-Danto, a version of Ezili who seeks vengeance for women. Seeing Donna as an iteration of Ezili also helps Fabiola appreciate Donna's love of everything feminine. Though Donna is distraught when Papa Legba shoots and kills Dray, the novel nevertheless implies that his death is a good thing for Donna. She'll no longer have to suffer his abuse, and though it will take time for her to heal emotionally, she'll have her family there to support her.

Chantal François – Chantal is Fabiola's cousin; she's Matant Jo and Phillip's oldest child and Pri and Donna's sister. While Fabiola describes Chantal as petite and pretty, Chantal doesn't agree—she feels ugly and ungainly. Of the three siblings, Chantal is the smart, bookish one. She was a stellar high school student and attended a fancy prep school on a scholarship, which gave Matant Jo hope that Chantal would be able to also attend a university on a scholarship. However, because Chantal is close with her family—and because, as a resident alien, she doesn't qualify for financial aid—she chooses to stay home and attend community college. She feels it's her responsibility to take care of Matant Jo, Pri, and Donna after Matant Jo has a stroke. Fabiola finds Chantal sensible and levelheaded, so she tries to emulate Chantal when it comes to academics. As Chantal and Fabiola grow closer, Chantal reveals that she still feels very Haitian, despite having spent most of her life in Detroit. She's studying to become a doctor, and she uses the anatomical metaphor that Haiti is her bones and muscles, while America is her skin. Because of her immigration status, Chantal often wonders if life would have been better had she grown up in Haiti, surrounded by family and Haitian culture. Chantal is the first of Fabiola's cousins to decide that Fabiola deserves to know the truth about the family's history. She tells Fabiola about Matant Jo's job as a loan shark, and she encourages Fabiola to understand that everyone needs money to survive—this is why Chantal, Pri, and Donna now sell drugs. It's silly, Chantal suggests, to look down on people for making money any specific way when money is a necessity. In this sense, Chantal becomes one of Fabiola's most important mentors, as she introduces Fabiola to uncomfortable truths about life in Detroit and what success in the city can look like.

Matant Jo François – Matant Jo is Fabiola's aunt; Manman's sister; and Chantal, Pri, and Donna's mother. She's a few years older than Manman (Fabiola's mother). Matant Jo's story is tragic: she and Manman escaped Haiti as teens after the fall of Haiti's dictator. Somewhere along the line, Matant Jo returned

to Haiti and met Phillip, the love of her life. After Chantal was born, Phillip moved to Detroit to work in car factories, and Pri and Donna were born once Matant Jo and Chantal joined Phillip in Detroit. But disaster struck soon after: Phillip was murdered, leaving Matant Jo to care for three young children on her own. This made Matant Jo feel hopeless and caused her to lose faith in the American Dream—and the stress eventually caused her health to decline. Not long before the novel begins, Matant Jo had a stroke that left the left side of her body mostly paralyzed, an event that she sees as a manifestation of her hopelessness and depression. When Fabiola meets Matant Jo, she finds her frustrating: Matant Jo is unwilling to try to get Manman out of the detention facility where she's being detained, and she continuously tells Fabiola that Vodou is nonsense. In Detroit, she insists, there's no room for spirituality—instead, hopelessness and desperation rule everything. Matant Jo spends her days in her dark bedroom, sleeping and taking pills. Much later, Chantal gives Fabiola more context for Matant Jo's hopelessness and health issues: following Phillip's death in Uncle Q's service, Matant Jo took the money that Uncle Q gave her as a payout and became a loan shark. It was all she could do to support her children—and it afforded her enough money to send her own kids to Catholic school and support Fabiola and Manman in Haiti. After Dray is murdered in her house, Matant Jo decides that it's time to leave the house and seek a better life elsewhere.

Dray – Dray is one of the novel's antagonists; he's Donna's boyfriend. At 21, he's about five years older than Donna. He's loud, imposing, and dangerous, and he has a reputation for being controlling and getting whatever he wants. The eye patch he wears over his one missing eye contributes to his fearsome appearance. Along with his uncle, Uncle Q, Dray is a high-powered drug dealer who spends most of his drug money on his **car**, a fancy BMW, and on buying Donna expensive clothes, wigs, and makeup. The money he spends on Donna makes her happy, but he still abuses her physically and emotionally. They've been together off and on since Donna was 12, and everyone refers to them as Dungeons and Dragons—Dray is the dungeon, and he “tames” Donna, the dragon. The results of this “taming,” however, are constant bruises and bloody scratches on Donna's face. Despite his abusive behavior, Dray insists that he truly loves Donna, and he has a close, brotherly relationship with his friend Kasim. Fabiola hates and fears Dray instantly—she sees him as a human iteration of Baron Samedi, the lwa (Vodou spirit) who guards cemeteries. She sees the opportunity to remove him from Donna's life when Detective Stevens offers to expedite Manman's immigration processing in exchange for information implicating Dray in the overdose death of a local girl. But when Fabiola discovers that her cousins, rather than Dray, are responsible for the girl's death, she decides to frame Dray anyway—resulting not in Dray's arrest, but in the police murdering Kasim. When Dray comes to Matant Jo's **house** to kill Fabiola in retaliation, Bad Leg (Papa

Legba) kills Dray. After his death, from the underworld, Dray shares that he's the one who accidentally murdered Phillip, Donna's father. He loves and hates Donna because Phillip's ghost has been haunting him since then.

Bad Leg/Papa Legba – Bad Leg is a homeless man who sits on the corner of American Street and Joy Road. People call him Bad Leg because he has one leg that he cannot use; when he sits on his customary overturned bucket, it sticks out in front of him. He sings songs and recites rhymes, and nobody takes him seriously. This changes when Fabiola moves in with Matant Jo, as she believes that Bad Leg is actually Papa Legba, the lwa (Vodou spirit) of the crossroads. Papa Legba is the lwa responsible for opening gates and allowing people to make transitions, so Fabiola prays to him often—she believes that he's the one who will let Fabiola's mother, Manman, into the United States after ICE detains her. Papa Legba cryptic, and his advice is never straightforward. And because Bad Leg only ever speaks in rhymes that seem to barely make sense, Fabiola decides that Bad Leg is Papa Legba after asking what happened to his leg. Bad Leg explains that he visited his daddy on “the other side” and agreed to lend his daddy his leg—but when he got back home, he found his leg was useless. Fabiola becomes increasingly convinced of her assessment as Bad Leg begins to smoke a cigar, an item associated with Papa Legba, and as his rhymes seem more and more connected to everything going on in Fabiola's life. Indeed, one afternoon Bad Leg/Papa Legba leads Fabiola through Detroit to a nightclub in search of Dray, appearing and disappearing again in various like a spirit might. Ultimately, Papa Legba saves Fabiola from Dray by shooting Dray in the head before Dray can shoot Fabiola. After this, he turns to smoke and disappears from the street corner. With this, Fabiola realizes that Papa Legba has indeed been watching over **8800 American Street** since Phillip and his family moved in.

Manman/Valerie Toussaint – Manman is Fabiola's mother and Matant Jo's younger sister. She never directly appears in the novel, because just before the story begins, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers in New York detain her and refuse to let her enter the country. Later, Detective Stevens reveals that Manman was detained because she overstayed her visa the last time she was in the United States, at the time of Fabiola's birth. After Fabiola's birth in Detroit, Manman took baby Fabiola back to Haiti to raise her. Fabiola and Manman are extremely close, so Manman's detainment is a devastating blow for Fabiola. Manman is a very strict mother, and Fabiola often hopes that the questionable or sexual behavior she sometimes engages in in Detroit will somehow make Manman angry enough to escape the detention facility. Manman was also a renowned *mambo*—Vodou priestess—in Haiti. She led Fabiola through daily prayers to the lwas (Vodou spirits) and taught her how to properly ask for help and interpret the lwas' signs. Fabiola uses everything Manman

taught her about Vodou and prayer to follow in her footsteps and become a budding *mambo* once she's on her own in Detroit. Manman always tried to foster a close relationship with Fabiola, possibly because Manman didn't have any other family around in Haiti. Their closeness is what leads Fabiola to agree to work with Detective Stevens, a local officer who's investigating the drug-related death of a young woman. In exchange for Fabiola's help, Detective Stevens promises to expedite Manman's processing and get her a green card. Though this plan doesn't go the way Fabiola thought it would, it pays off for Manman: she'll be released from the detention facility into the U.S. on the evening the novel ends.

Phillip/Jean-Phillip François – Phillip was Fabiola's uncle; Matant Jo's husband; and Chantal, Pri, and Donna's father. He's been deceased for about a decade when the novel begins. In the late 1990s, Phillip immigrated to the United States from Haiti. In Haiti, Phillip sold cars, so he has big dreams of becoming rich by working in Detroit's car factories. Like many immigrants before him, he was thrilled when he saw the **house at 8800 American Street**, which sits on the corner of American Street and Joy Road—he thought that by purchasing the house, he'd buy a piece of "American joy." But although he, Matant Jo, and their daughters were happy in that house, Phillip couldn't make ends meet working in the factory. He ultimately turned to selling drugs on the side for Uncle Q, something that resulted in his murder. While his living family doesn't know who killed him, Dray reveals to the reader (after his own death) that he accidentally shot Phillip when he was 10 years old, under Uncle Q's watchful eye. This possibly explains Uncle Q's generous payout of \$30,000 to Matant Jo to make up for what Chantal describes as "a deal gone bad." Dray also reveals that Phillip's ghost has been haunting him since Phillip died. Phillip's death also destroyed his family in important ways: Matant Jo became a loan shark to make ends meet, while their children feel compelled to defend themselves and their family history by any means necessary. In Haiti, Fabiola and Manman prayed daily for Uncle Phillip and for Matant Jo, who was devastated by her husband's death.

Detective Shawna Stevens – Detective Stevens works for the Grosse Pointe Park Police Department; she's investigating the death of a local student who died after taking designer drugs. She wears a fuzzy brown coat and sensible brown shoes, which make Fabiola decide that she's trustworthy—Manman believes one should judge others based on the state of their shoes. However, Detective Stevens knows all about Fabiola's family history and uses this knowledge to manipulate Fabiola into helping her investigation. She seems particularly skilled at influencing immigrants like Fabiola, who are eager to prove that they're "real" Americans. Detective Stevens makes a point to note that Fabiola is an American citizen and therefore has a duty to help detectives when needed. Detective Stevens proposes a trade: in exchange for Fabiola's information on Dray

that will lead to his arrest for selling the bad drugs, Detective Stevens will expedite Manman's processing and help her get a green card. However, the plan ends up going sideways: Fabiola discovers that it's her cousins, not Dray, who sold the drugs, and her information inadvertently causes the police to murder Kasim. After this happens, Fabiola realizes that Detective Stevens wasn't helpful or even all that powerful. Instead, she's a figure whom Bad Leg warned her about in a song, when he sang to "beware the lady dressed all in brown." Fabiola blames Detective Stevens for Kasim's death, but Detective Stevens does make good on her promise: mere hours after the novel ends, Manman is going to arrive in the U.S. with her immigration charges dropped.

Uncle Q – Uncle Q is Dray's biological uncle, but Kasim explains that he's also a paternal figure to many kids in the neighborhood. Uncle Q was there for these children and teens when no one else was, and he made a point to help out struggling single mothers (like Kasim's mother and Matant Jo) when they found themselves raising children alone. But Uncle Q isn't just a benevolent father figure—he's also a high-powered drug dealer, in addition to being involved in a number of other ventures, such as Matant Jo's loan sharking. He runs his operation out of the Q club and has little sympathy for his various dealers when things go south. For instance, when Chantal, Pri, and Donna aren't able to make their payment to Uncle Q on time, Fabiola notices her cousins acting very afraid to go out, as though they expect to run into Uncle Q or one of his cronies and suffer retribution of some sort. Though Uncle Q only appears in person once in the novel, he looms large as a villain in Fabiola's mind once she figures out who he is.

Imani – Imani is **Fabiola's** first friend at school. She's a beautiful and very smart young woman, with long hair that Fabiola finds beautiful. Though Imani is initially reluctant to befriend Fabiola, given Fabiola's cousins' reputation, she eventually offers to help Fabiola out when she gets a bad grade on an English paper. Imani is a stellar English student, so she teaches Fabiola how to cite her sources and build an argument. Imani and Fabiola both dislike Donna's boyfriend, Dray, and although Imani thinks he's scary, she inadvertently becomes the object of his affection for a time. While Dray and Donna are broken up, Dray begins texting Imani and having dresses and flowers delivered to her house. But because Imani's is afraid of Donna, she doesn't feel comfortable rejecting Dray's advances (she fears, not incorrectly, that Donna will beat her up for trying to "steal" her boyfriend).

Mr. Nolan – Mr. Nolan is Fabiola's English teacher. At first, Fabiola is distraught at first when Mr. Nolan gives her essays poor grades and asks her to cite her sources—but as she learns to write better, she appreciates Mr. Nolan more. He's one of the few Black male teachers she has, so Fabiola finds him especially interesting.

Ezili/Ezili-Danto – Ezili is the Iwa (Vodou spirit) of women and

fertility. She sometimes becomes Ezili-Danto when she's fighting for women's vengeance, and in this form, she has injuries on her face. Fabiola sees Donna as an iteration of Ezili because she's interested in hair, makeup, and fashion, and she often has facial injuries from Dray's abuse.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ms. Stanley – Ms. Stanley is the principal of Pri, Donna, and Fabiola's Catholic school. She's a plump and cheerful white woman.

Taj – Taj is Pri's crush. When Fabiola meets Taj once at a basketball game, she notices how happy and carefree her presence makes Pri.

Miss Sandra – Miss Sandra is one of the women who works at the beauty parlor where Donna gets her hair done.

Ms. Unique – Ms. Unique is one of the women who works at the beauty parlor where Donna gets her hair done.

Tonesha – Tonesha is Raquel's cousin; she gets in Fabiola's face at school and insists that Kasim is Raquel's boyfriend.

Raquel – Raquel is a girl at school who wants to date Kasim. She, her cousin Tonesha, and Fabiola get into a fistfight over Kasim.

Baron Samedi – Baron Samedi is a lwa (Vodou spirit) and the warden of the cemetery. Fabiola sees Dray as an iteration of Baron Samedi.

TERMS

Lwa – *Lwas* are Vodou spirit guides. **Fabiola** describes them as being akin to Catholic saints.

Vodou – Vodou is the religion that **Fabiola** practices. It's a religion unique to Haiti that draws on elements from Roman Catholicism and traditional African Yoruba practices. Practitioners pray to lwas, or spirits, for guidance and help.



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.



DIGNITY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

American Street follows Fabiola, a 16-year-old Haitian American girl. Just before the novel begins, Fabiola and her mother, Manman, passed through customs as they entered the United States—but while Fabiola is a U.S. citizen and was allowed through, Manman isn't a citizen

and so was detained. Over the course of the novel, as Fabiola settles in Detroit with her aunt and cousins, she tries very hard to get Manman out of the detention facility, all the while learning about her family's decades-long struggle to immigrate to the U.S. in the first place. As a book about immigrants, *American Street* focuses on the reasons why people try to immigrate to the U.S. While the novel makes it clear that people often immigrate in the hopes of finding dignity and pursuing their version of the American Dream, it suggests that the American Dream might not exist at all.

Fabiola arrives in the U.S. with big hopes for herself and for Manman—hopes that the novel suggests are normal and understandable but nevertheless misguided. Prior to arriving in the U.S., Fabiola believed that she and Manman would be able to integrate seamlessly into Matant Jo's household. Fabiola expected that she'd be able to get a good education for free, and that Manman would be able to find honest work that would give her a sense of purpose and dignity—things that, for the most part, were inaccessible in Haiti. But because of the way that Fabiola's family members in the U.S. talked about their lives, Fabiola had no way of knowing her dreams were unattainable. Through phone calls and her cousins' Facebook feeds, Fabiola only saw lives that seemed better than her own: her cousins could afford food, clothing, and a good education thanks to Matant Jo's job.

But as Fabiola settles in with Aunt Jo and her cousins Chantal, Pri, and Donna, she discovers that being in the U.S. doesn't guarantee stability, economic success, or a quality education. Fabiola finds this out as she learns more about her family history. Her uncle, Phillip, was the first family member to immigrate to the United States. The narrator suggests that Phillip wasn't so different from many immigrants: he came to seek the American Dream in Detroit, the car manufacturing capital of America. And like so many before him, he was enchanted when he discovered a **house** for sale on the corner of American Street and Joy Road—a house that he believed would offer him "American joy." But, in Fabiola's experience, living in the house at 8800 American Street offers her anything but "American joy." Living here, she learns that Matant Jo doesn't do the kind of honest work that Fabiola expected—Matant Jo is a loan shark. Chantal, who's 19 and wildly intelligent, feels like her only choice given Matant Jo's recent stroke is to attend the local community college while caring for her mother and sisters. And Pri and Donna are both unhappy in their own ways. Almost nothing Fabiola finds in the U.S. lives up to her expectations, and the simple fact that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detains Manman makes it clear to Fabiola that her dreams may be just as unattainable in the U.S. as they were in Haiti. If Fabiola can't have the person she loves the most with her, the American Dream seems less and less attainable.

As disappointed and disillusioned as Fabiola is with life in

Detroit, her family members and community members are nevertheless seeking the American Dream in the only ways they can, given the circumstances. Because Fabiola's family members are Black immigrants, they face a combination of racism and anti-immigrant sentiments in the U.S., which affects their job opportunities. Phillip came to Detroit to work in auto factories, but he eventually turned to selling drugs on the side when he wasn't making enough at his job—something he had to do to feed his growing family, but that also resulted in his murder about a decade before the novel begins. Similarly, Matant Jo's job as a loan shark is something she took on because there was nothing else she could do in the aftermath of her husband's death, when she found herself supporting three small children on her own. She took the dangerous and shady job out of necessity after losing all hope when Phillip died—and she sees her recent stroke as a physical manifestation of that hopelessness. The hopelessness that Fabiola notices in her aunt and cousins suggests that believing in the American Dream can only take a person so far, especially when a person loses everyone they hold dear to them. With this, the novel suggests that the pursuit of the American Dream most often results not in success but in hopelessness and the loss of loved ones. The hope, dignity, and happiness it promises are myth, not reality.



SPIRITUALITY

In Haiti, Fabiola's mother, Manman, was a *mambo*, or a priestess of Haitian Vodou. When Manman is detained upon entering the U.S., forcing Fabiola to

enter the country and start her new life with her aunt and cousins alone, Fabiola does her best to maintain her spiritual relationships with the *lwas* (Vodou spirits). Fabiola's spirituality allows her to see her cousins and peers as human iterations of *lwas*, interpret things as signs, and ultimately manipulate events through prayer. *American Street* thus portrays spirituality as something sacred but also as something that's a normal part of daily life. And given that Fabiola's new reality in Detroit is so strange and dangerous, her spirituality is also an important source of comfort and security—and, possibly, a way for her to control things that she otherwise couldn't.

The novel initially portrays spirituality as an antidote to loneliness—and, in some ways, as a stand-in for close familial relationships. Fabiola's first night in Detroit is difficult at best: after being separated from Manman at the JFK airport, Fabiola is reeling from the loss of her closest supporter and spiritual guide. And to make matters worse, Fabiola's Matant Jo and her cousins Chantal, Pri, and Donna don't welcome her with the traditional Haitian feast and neighborhood party that Fabiola expects. Instead, Fabiola is left to feed herself in their poorly stocked kitchen—and the food in the kitchen is nothing like Fabiola is used to. Feeling hungry and alone, Fabiola promptly constructs her Vodou shrine so she can pray for guidance and

for Manman. These first prayers in the U.S. give Fabiola a vision of Manman in the detention center, which allows Fabiola to feel close to Manman—and they also make Fabiola feel like she's doing something to bring Manman to her. Praying, at this point, is as much a way to feel fulfilled spiritually as it is a way to feel close to Manman and feel more in control of a frightening situation.

As the weeks wear on and as Fabiola encounters more scary situations, she starts to gain a sense of control by reframing her experiences in terms of Vodou spirituality. Religion, in this case, is a useful lens for understanding her new world. For instance, during Fabiola's first week in Detroit, she meets a homeless man who's known to the neighborhood as Bad Leg. Most people believe that Bad Leg is a mentally unstable drug addict—but Fabiola is convinced that he's a living version of the *lwa* of the crossroads, Papa Legba. Meanwhile, Donna's abusive boyfriend Dray looks like the *lwa* Baron Samedi, the warden of the cemetery. Later, when a detective contacts Fabiola and promises to get Manman out of the detention center in exchange for Fabiola's help convicting Dray of dealing drugs that killed a young white woman, Fabiola becomes increasingly confident in her ability to channel and interpret the *lwas'* messages. Indeed, it's essential that she hone this skill if she wants to free Manman and save Donna from Dray's abuse. With this, Fabiola's spirituality helps her develop confidence and feel safer. For instance, Fabiola finds Dray terrifying as a person—but when she thinks of him as Baron Samedi, she's able to reframe the situation and feel that she, as a Vodou practitioner, has the upper hand.

However, spirituality also provides difficult lessons in humility and limits; even a budding *mambo* like Fabiola cannot expect to control everything. When Fabiola discovers that it's actually her cousins and not Dray who sold the lethal drugs, she decides that Dray should still take the fall for killing the white woman. For Fabiola, framing Dray—who deals drugs, but is innocent in this case—is worth it if it means she gets Manman back; Dray stops abusing Donna; and her cousins stop selling drugs. She hatches a plan to fabricate a doom-filled vision so as to scare her cousins away from dealing at a party, while calling on the *lwa* of fertility and using her own sexuality to convince Dray to sell at the party instead. But though Fabiola carefully crafts her prayers and lays what she assumes will be a trap for Dray, the police don't get Dray—instead, they shoot Kasim, who's one of Dray's best friends and the boy Fabiola has been falling in love with. Fabiola didn't know enough about how dealing works for her plan to be effective. She had no idea that a high-powered dealer like Dray wouldn't go to a party himself to sell—he'd send a surrogate, like Kasim. In this sense, Fabiola discovers that Vodou may provide comfort and a sense of control, but it's not something she can totally manipulate to serve her own purposes. Indeed, trying to do so can bring about terrible consequences.

But despite this, Fabiola's spirituality still protects her, guides her, and extends protections to those she loves—just in ways that she might not be able to foresee or control. Most notably, when Dray shows up at Matant Jo's house to get revenge on Fabiola for bringing about Kasim's death, it's Bad Leg—Papa Legba—who shoots Dray just as Dray is about to murder Fabiola. And further, the novel implies that Bad Leg is indeed Papa Legba in that he gets away with murder, a privilege only afforded to *lwas*. Furthermore, Fabiola's prayers for Manman to return to her end up paying off, as Fabiola and her family will be able to fetch Manman from the airport the day after the novel ends (the detective makes good on her promise to speed up Manman's processing, even though Fabiola technically doesn't hold up her end of their bargain). With this, the novel suggests that spirituality can indeed provide comfort, bring families together, and rescue people from abuse and prosecution—but it's impossible to control how or when those things will happen.



FAMILY AND LOYALTY

Family is deeply important in *American Street*:

Fabiola and her mother, Manman, are extremely close, while Fabiola must try to integrate into her

cousins' tight-knit sibling group once she arrives in Detroit. This proves difficult, in part because Fabiola has an idealized view of what family should look like and how family members should act. As she grapples with her own shifting understanding of what it means to be a family, Fabiola remains firm in her belief that family should always come first—but the novel shows that this can be difficult in practice. Indeed, Fabiola discovers that part of being family (chosen or biological) means forgiving family members for their mistakes; accepting and supporting them; and going out of her way to be loyal and protect them when necessary—even if that means putting herself at risk.

Having grown up with only Manman in Haiti, with her aunt and cousins only on the other end of the phone, Fabiola has an idealized vision of what life will be like once she and Manman settle in with Matant Jo. Fabiola essentially expects to enter a home that's an American version of what family life looks like in Haiti. She expects unlimited food, love, and companionship from her cousins and from Matant Jo. Having a family, in Fabiola's understanding, means having people who are always there for one another and who connect by sharing food, space, and time. This is reinforced by the fact that Matant Jo worked so hard to get Fabiola and Manman to Detroit in the first place. Additionally, for Fabiola's entire life, Matant Jo has sent money to her sister in Haiti to fund Fabiola's education and for Manman to save and one day come to Detroit. Fabiola thus believes that in Detroit, she's wanted and loved already.

Once in Detroit, however, Fabiola discovers that there's more to family than food and love. Being a family member requires learning about who her cousins *actually* are and appreciating

them for that, not just fixating on who she *wants* them to be. Matant Jo, who suffered a stroke some time before the novel begins, is far less welcoming than Fabiola expected she'd be—this is in part because Matant Jo was counting on her sister's presence, not just Fabiola's. And for Fabiola, it's a shock to discover that neither Pri nor Donna (two of Fabiola's cousins) are entirely happy with the kind of person Fabiola is—that is, a person who doesn't like makeup or hair products, and who prefers academia to anything else. Fabiola didn't expect to have to earn her cousins' love, and for that matter, she's disturbed by her cousins' reputation at school as violent and loyal to each other, almost to a fault. Fabiola wants to make her own reputation at school and hates that people treat her with caution or suspicion so as to avoid upsetting Pri and Donna. But as Fabiola grows closer to her cousins and learns their stories, she gradually comes to see that they're nevertheless worth fighting for and will be loyal to her, even when she makes mistakes. In other words, Fabiola discovers that just because her family doesn't look like she thought it would doesn't mean her family members aren't still unwaveringly loyal.

But even as Fabiola learns that loyalty is what ties families together, she also discovers that loyalty isn't a simple concept. Rather, there are times when people have to decide *which* family members are worthy of loyalty—possibly at the expense of other family members' well-being. Fabiola first learns about this when she begins a relationship with Kasim, a friend of Donna's abusive boyfriend, Dray. Kasim seems to be the exact opposite of Dray: he's kind and generous where Dray is mean and manipulative. Because Kasim and Dray grew up almost like brothers, Kasim is willing to sell drugs on occasion to help Dray out, which he describes to Fabiola as the "Shit you do for fam." This emphasizes to Fabiola that when it comes to family, choices aren't always easy—but, in her understanding, a choice is always worth it if it will help or protect the people she loves. This is why, when a detective approaches Fabiola with the promise to get Manman out of the detention center if Fabiola helps her catch Dray in the act of dealing, Fabiola agrees to help. Things become complicated, though, when Fabiola discovers that unbeknownst to the detective, it's Fabiola's cousins who are selling the lethal "designer drugs." In this situation, Fabiola feels stuck—she has to decide if it's more important to be loyal to her cousins or to her mother.

While this idea of unwavering loyalty sounds good in theory, it nevertheless can come with major unforeseen consequences. Ultimately, when it comes to Fabiola's choice of whether to save her cousins or free Manman, Fabiola makes a third choice: to frame Dray, which she believes will save her cousins from persecution and free Manman as well. In Fabiola's mind, this is an expression of her loyalty to all factions of her family, including to her budding chosen family with Kasim (doing away with Dray will, she believes, save him from having to be

involved with drugs at all). But instead of saving everyone, Fabiola's choice results in police killing Kasim, and a neighbor killing Dray when Dray comes to seek revenge on Fabiola. Loyalty, the novel suggests, is essential to have within families, but it's impossible to be loyal to and protect everyone.



IDENTITY AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Moving to Detroit from Haiti is a shocking, uncomfortable experience for Fabiola—especially because her mother, Manman, is detained and so doesn't accompany Fabiola to live with Matant Jo and Fabiola's cousins. Feeling alone and unmoored, Fabiola has to confront the fact that in her cousins' eyes, she looks too Haitian—while Fabiola's American-born cousins Pri and Donna look embarrassingly American to her. With these difference, the novel suggests that the quest to find one's identity as an immigrant is a process that's difficult and anxiety-inducing, no matter what—and for many, that quest is never complete.

From the moment Fabiola sets foot in Matant Jo's home, she must confront the fact that being an American means that she's going to have to give up on aspects of Haitian culture, even within her own home—something the novel suggests is uniquely traumatizing. For Fabiola's entire life, she's known her aunt as Matant Jo. When Fabiola spoke on the phone with her aunt throughout her childhood, they spoke Creole. It's understandably shocking, then, when Matant Jo insists on being called Aunt Jo and threatens to punish Fabiola anytime she uses a Creole word. Since Fabiola expected to be welcomed with open arms into an extended Haitian community in Detroit, this is unsettling and even traumatizing. Fabiola thinks of herself as both Haitian *and* American, since she grew up in Haiti but was born and spent the first three months of her life in the United States. Having her aunt—someone she loves and trusts, and who has financially supported her for her entire life—essentially tell her that her Haitian identity is unacceptable makes Fabiola fear that she'll never find a home in Detroit.

As Fabiola gets to know her cousins, though, she discovers that it's not just recently arrived immigrants like her who struggle to with a dual identity. Rather, all immigrants—whether first- or second-generation, and no matter how American they may seem—feel the strain of a dual identity, to varying degrees. This becomes particularly clear to Fabiola as she becomes closer with her older cousin Chantal, with whom she shares a room. At 19, Chantal was born in Haiti and immigrated to Detroit with Matant Jo when she was a toddler. But despite having lived in Detroit almost all her life, she still feels burdened by her Haitian roots. For instance, she tells Fabiola that when she was nine and her father, Phillip, was murdered, it fell to her—as someone fluent in Creole and in English—to translate newspaper articles and conversations with the detectives. She

frames her identity in terms of having American skin and Haitian bones and muscles. Her Haitian identity is embedded within her and isn't something she can or even wants to escape, but having this dual identity poses its own problems (like losing her innocence by translating the news of her father's murder). With this, the novel suggests that people who immigrate as small children are often forced to grow up and assume adult responsibilities long before they're ready to do so. It's possible to see Chantal's parental role with her sisters as a product of her traumatic coming-of-age process.

While Matant Jo urges her daughters and niece to assimilate into American culture, the novel proposes that for the sake of one's mental and emotional health, it's essential to hold onto elements of one's home culture. For Fabiola, this means clinging tightly to her Vodou spiritual practices, which help her make sense of the confusing things she encounters in Detroit even as she becomes more American in other ways. And indeed, Chantal, Pri, and Donna all seem more confident and self-assured as they start to take Fabiola's Vodou seriously. Connecting with their Haitian heritage through Vodou helps Fabiola's cousins feel more at home in Detroit.

However, one's relationship to traditional cultural elements or customs is never static. In other words, it's possible to have a multifaceted identity that's constantly shifting and adapting. Fabiola begins to feel more American when Matant Jo gave her pocket money, and when she learns to write research papers in a way that will please her American teachers. But Fabiola also finds ways to hold onto her Haitian roots, such as when Matant Jo leaves her to prepare the Thanksgiving turkey. Rather than cook the bird whole, Fabiola prepares a version of a traditional Haitian dish where the turkey is cut into smaller pieces, fried, and put in a tomato sauce. The turkey—a symbol of American Thanksgiving—is made undeniably Haitian thanks to Fabiola's preparation method. Fabiola also comes to the conclusion that Pri and Donna aren't less Haitian just because they grew up in Detroit. The fact that they didn't grow up speaking Creole or practicing Vodou doesn't preclude them from identifying as Haitian; they can always make a point to learn more about their culture, thereby creating richer, more well-rounded identities for themselves. With this, the novel proposes that especially for immigrants, the process of figuring out one's identity is never over. As new immigrants like Fabiola assimilate into American culture or as second-generation immigrants like Pri and Donna reconnect with their roots, they are constantly learning who they are as Haitians and as Americans.



TRAUMA, VIOLENCE, AND DESPERATION

Fabiola's idealized understanding of the United States shatters when she encounters the stark reality of life in Detroit. Fabiola soon learns that Detroit isn't the vibrant, dignified, free place she thought it was—for her

family and others in her neighborhood, life is difficult, violent, and desperate. To some degree, the novel suggests this is the case for immigrants as a whole, but it also implies that the specific brand of violence and desperation that Fabiola encounters is something unique to Detroit. This seems to be born out of Detroit's historical reputation of a place of opportunity—a reputation it possibly no longer deserves thanks to a combination of racism and decreasing economic opportunities.

To understand the way the novel links trauma and desperation to the city of Detroit, it's essential to understand the history of the city's racial makeup, as well as its status as the birthplace of auto manufacturing. Throughout the novel, Zobi references the Great Migration, the mass exodus of Black people from the South to Northern cities like Detroit beginning around 1910. Many found work in Detroit's burgeoning auto industry—the same industry that eventually drew Phillip, Fabiola's late uncle, to Detroit in the 1990s. In the 1950s, many of Detroit's wealthier white residents fled to the suburbs, increasing already high racial tensions and ultimately resulting in race riots in the 1960s. In the decades that followed (due in part to the 1980s crack-cocaine epidemic), Detroit's total population declined, resulting in as many as a quarter of Detroit's houses sitting empty by the time Fabiola arrives in the mid-2010s. The boarded-up houses and empty lots that Fabiola refers to are the visible proof of the economic hardship that Detroit's residents—the Black community in particular—experienced during and after the Great Recession in the mid-2000s. All of this paints a picture of Detroit as a place where there are few opportunities. Instead, residents have a long history of racial and economic trauma to contend with as they attempt to carve out and sustain their lives in the city.

Nevertheless, the novel suggests, Detroit remains an appealing city for many people hoping to make it in the U.S.—even as the city itself seems cursed to fail its Black residents in particular. The novel shows this through Matant Jo's house on **8800 American Street**. When Phillip bought this house, which is located on the corner of American Street and Joy Road, he wasn't the first one to see the address and believe that it would give him access to a bit of "American joy." Rather, he was simply the latest resident to move into the house full of hope but leave it worse off than when he arrived. The house's first residents were a Polish couple, and the husband found more success illegally selling gin during Prohibition than he did working for Henry Ford. The house's first Black resident, meanwhile, was shot on the porch not long after moving in—and Phillip, the home's first Haitian owner, was also murdered. This, the narrator explains, is due to a curse on the house. And while the curse's roots in Vodou may be unique to the logic of *American Street*, it's significant that generations of residents have come to 8800 American Street hoping for exactly what Phillip did—and left the house in much the same way he did. The fact that all the

house's residents were immigrants and minorities suggests that the violence and trauma that immigrants and minorities suffer are cyclical and unavoidable.

To this end, *American Street* makes it clear that the desire to better oneself and one's family isn't enough to overcome systems of racism and decreasing opportunities—the violence will continue unless something major changes socially or politically in the city of Detroit. Fabiola discovers that while her Uncle Phillip came to Detroit with big dreams of working in the auto industry, he ultimately couldn't make enough money. Dealing drugs was the only way he could support his growing family, and, in the aftermath of his death, Matant Jo became a loan shark in order to care for their three children. Fabiola's boyfriend, Kasim, explains that drugs and sharking are some of the only opportunities that many young people in Detroit have—it's far harder to make an honest living, like he does, than it is to turn to drugs, as his best friend Dray does. While Dray has a fearsome reputation and drives a BMW, Kasim spends his days working in a café and trying to fix up his constantly broken-down **car**. Fabiola may not agree with Dray's lifestyle, but she begins to see that those who turn to selling drugs or other illicit means of getting by do so because in a post-Recession Detroit, people make choices out of desperation. To many, when faced with the choice of making thousands of dollars in one night selling drugs or making minimum wage at a café, the choice is obvious.

Heartbreakingly, *American Street* offers no remedies for the curse on 8800 American Street, the plight of Detroit as a whole, or even for Fabiola's family—except to leave the house and, possibly, the city altogether. Following the deaths of Kasim (who's murdered by police) and Dray (who's murdered inside 8800 American Street), Matant Jo decides there's nothing to do but leave the house to someone else. And while Dray's death may have been cathartic for Fabiola and her family (he abused his girlfriend, Fabiola's cousin Donna, for years), there's no indication that this broke the curse on the house. Rather, the house and Detroit as a whole will remain locked in a cycle of violence and trauma until things fundamentally change in Detroit—until it's easier for immigrants and racial minorities to find the dignity, respect, and comfort that Detroit promised them.



SYMBOLS

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



CARS

The cars that Fabiola's friends and family drive represent the American Dream—and what the U.S. does and doesn't offer its residents, especially those who are

racial minorities and/or immigrants. First, Chantal's sedan with leather seats initially symbolizes what's possible for immigrants in the U.S. To Fabiola, Chantal's ability to own such a nice, sensible car drives means that it's possible to make it in the U.S. if one works hard and does well in school. This, she later discovers, is something of a sham: part of Chantal's financial success comes from drug money, in much the same way that Dray is able to afford a BMW thanks to his own drug-dealing. Chantal and Dray's cars thus represent the wealth and comfortable lifestyle that a person can attain if they're willing to compromise their morals to get ahead. Success, in this sense, is possible—but the success, the novel suggests, is tainted and dangerous.

Kasim's car contrasts with both Chantal's sedan and Dray's BMW: it's an old and constantly broken down. Kasim drives such an unreliable car because he's saving his money—which he earns working in a café—to buy a house. Yet Kasim never achieves this goal—the police murder him before he has the opportunity to buy his house. Kasim is also never able to upgrade the broken, unreliable car that he purchased to leverage his goals. This speaks to the idea that for all the success and wealth that life in the U.S. supposedly offers, the vast majority of low-income Americans, like Kasim, will never be able to achieve those things.



THE HOUSE AT 8800 AMERICAN STREET

The house at 8800 American Street represents hope and the American Dream. Situated on the corner of American Street and Joy Road, generations of different residents have purchased the house hoping for a piece of “American joy” as its location seems to symbolize—but none of them have found it. The various owners—most of whom were Black, immigrants, or both—inevitably turned to illicit (and dangerous) means of getting by, or else they were murdered in or near the house. The house thus represents the idea that although the American Dream promises immigrants a joyful life, the U.S. offers them few paths to success—if success is even possible at all. The fact that the novel ends with Matant Jo moving her family out of the house suggests that there's no solution to this problem. The American Dream, and the house at 8800 American Street, will continue to disappoint people.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Balzer + Bray edition of *American Street* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ And then tomorrow, she will come to this side of the glass, where this good work that will make her hold her head up with dignity, where she will be proud to send me to school for free, and where we will build a good, brand-new life. *Une belle vie*, as she always promises, hoping that here she would be free to take her sister's hand and touch the moon.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Matant Jo François, Manman/Valerie Toussaint

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

As Fabiola leaves the Detroit airport with her cousins, she agrees to give up on tracking down Manman—who has been detained—for the evening. But she tells herself that Manman will still make it to Detroit, to the correct “side of the glass.” In the latter half of this quote, Fabiola breaks down what the American Dream looks like for her: in her mind, living in the U.S. will bring her and Manman dignity they couldn't get in Haiti. Fabiola will be able to attend school for free and presumably get a quality education, while Manman will be able to get a job to support her family. And, perhaps most importantly, being in Detroit will mean that Fabiola and Manman will be surrounded by family for the first time in Fabiola's life, and the first time in a long time for Manman.


But while it's understandable why Fabiola believes she should be able to achieve all these things, the novel ultimately makes the case that she's misguided. The United States—and Detroit in particular—aren't able to effectively support immigrants, especially immigrants who are also Black. Being in the U.S. may bring Manman and Fabiola closer to their family, but as the novel progresses, Fabiola gradually learns that her idealized vision of the American Dream isn't correct. It's an understandable fantasy—but it ultimately doesn't exist.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ The living room of this house, my new home, is a sea of beige leather. The furniture crowds the small space as if every inch of it is meant for sitting. I've seen bigger salons in the mansions atop the hills of Petionville, even fancier furniture and wider flat-screen TVs. But none of that belonged to me and my mother; none of the owners were family. Here, I can sit on the leather couches for as long as I want and watch all the movies in the world as if I'm in the cinema.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Chantal François, Matant Jo François, Manman/Valerie Toussaint

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis



Fabiola looks around Matant Jo's house in Detroit and feels like it's the fanciest place she's ever been in. Notably, it's not luxurious because of the leather couches alone or the wide-screen TV—rather, it feels luxurious because Fabiola's family (and by extension, Fabiola herself) own it. In Haiti, Fabiola and Manman were very poor—so even though Matant Jo and her daughters live in a low-income area, they live abundantly by comparison. It's understandable, then, that Fabiola thinks their home is luxurious, as even a modest life in the U.S. is much more comfortable than the lifestyle Fabiola was used to in Haiti.


Additionally, this quote gives insight as to how Fabiola thinks about family. For her, family doesn't just refer to the people she's related to by blood. Rather, family encapsulates everything that has to do with those people, including the place where they live. She also seems to think of family and property in a very communal way, since she suggests that the house also belongs to "[her] and her mother." In this sense, anything that her family owns, Fabiola owns too. This way of thinking about wealth, ownership, and family serves Fabiola well going forward, especially since she ends up sharing a room with her cousin Chantal. Because she thinks of ownership so communally, it's not a big deal to share a room—Fabiola still feels grateful for it.

Princess's Story Quotes

💬 *Ma named us Primadonna and Princess 'cause she thought being born in America to a father with a good-paying job at a car factory and a house and a bright future meant that we would be royalty. But when our father got killed, that's when shit fell apart.*

Related Characters: Pri/Princess François (speaker), Donna/Primadonna François, Chantal François, Fabiola Toussaint, Phillip/Jean-Phillip François, Matant Jo François

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

As Pri tells Fabiola her version of her family history, she elaborates on Matant Jo's understanding of the American Dream—and how that the dream isn't possible to achieve in practice. Matant Jo is understandably idealistic in her belief that her twins were set up for success from the beginning. After all, they're American citizens, and they'll have access to everything the United States has to offer. This becomes more meaningful later, as Chantal—who isn't a citizen and was born in Haiti—can barely scrape together enough money to attend the community college because, as a non-citizen, she doesn't qualify for any financial aid. Matant Jo also believed that her daughters would be well off financially because their father, Phillip, had a job that enabled him to afford a house. Matant Jo probably assumed that this meant her daughters would have stability, enough to eat, and clothes to wear—in addition to two parents who loved them.


But Pri also says that while Matant Jo may have been right about all of those things setting them up for success, it's also possible for those things to disappear in an instant. Later in the novel, Fabiola learns that without Phillip's job to support them, Matant Jo became a loan shark to support her family, something she had to do out of necessity. Without him there, Matant Jo had to find other ways of making ends meet. And while she didn't fail, Phillip's death nevertheless took a toll on the family and made it much more difficult for them to find success and comfort in Detroit.

Matant Jo's Story Quotes

💬 *This is your home now, Fabiola. This is Phillip's house—the house he bought with the last bit of money he had from Haiti. He had dreams, you know. That's why when he saw this house for sale, on the corner of American Street and Joy Road, he insisted on buying it with the cash from his ransacked and burned-to-the-ground car dealership in Port-au-Prince. He thought he was buying American Joy.*

Related Characters: Matant Jo François (speaker), Fabiola Toussaint, Phillip/Jean-Phillip François

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

As Matant Jo tells Fabiola her story, she makes it clear that she's still in this house because she believes in Phillip's version of the American Dream. For Phillip, it seemed like a dream come true to find a house that looked like the living embodiment of "American Joy." Especially after experiencing some sort of traumatic experience in Haiti, this likely made the United States look like it was meant to be. Of course, Fabiola (and the reader) know that Phillip is dead, and that he didn't actually get the American joy he was hoping for.

Matant Jo's tone suggests that she doesn't fault Phillip for his idealism, but she does believe he was misguided. In hindsight, it might seem almost like a trick that he bought this house and was later murdered, leaving his wife and three daughters to deal with the aftermath. But Matant Jo also seems to remain firm in her belief that it's her job to carry on Phillip's legacy of hope, no matter how silly it might seem to her. This is why she welcomes Fabiola to the house and makes sure Fabiola knows it's her home, and it's why she tells Fabiola this story in the first place. Hope might not be a bad thing, but Matant Jo seems to imply that people should temper their expectations.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ She stares at the magic things for a while without touching them before she asks, "Does it work?"



"Well," I say. "Has anyone ever tried to kill you?" I have to speak loudly over the music.


Pri turns around and closes the bedroom door, muting the music a bit.

"Kill me? Ain't nobody rolling up in this house to kill anyone."

"I know. We made it so. Me and my mother. Every day we asked the *lwes* to protect our family in Detroit and their house," I say, adjusting my bra.

Related Characters: Pri/Princess François, Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Donna/Primadonna François, Matant Jo François, Chantal François, Manman/Valerie Toussaint

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

When Pri expresses curiosity about Fabiola's Vodou shrine,

Fabiola explains how significant Vodou is to her family's success and safety. Fabiola believes that she and Manman are singlehandedly responsible for the fact that Pri, Donna, Chantal, and Matant Jo are still alive and well in Detroit. Their devotion to the *lwes* (Vodou spirits), in their understanding, has brought about relative prosperity and safety for the residents of the house.


To Fabiola, this is obvious. But to Pri, who wasn't raised practicing Vodou, this seems to come out of nowhere. Pri likely thinks that her safety is the result of being street smart and not getting involved with dangerous people. In her mind, the same probably goes for her sisters and mother. But, from Fabiola's perspective, it seems like Pri is divorced from Haitian culture and spiritual beliefs. Fabiola believes that it's silly to think that a person can stay alive just by trying—one needs to be devoted to the *lwes* to make that happen. The truth may lie somewhere in between Pri and Fabiola's interpretations of the world. Pri is rooted firmly in the world of the living, while Fabiola is more aligned with the spirit world—and perhaps one needs both to thrive.

☝ Cher Manman,

I see you clearer now because I light my candle and pour the libation, rattle the asson, and ring the bell to call all my guides, the lwes. You've told me that they are here for me. All I have to do is call on them so they can help me. I believe you, Manman. Even without you being here to hold ceremonies with drummers and singers and a village of followers, I will practice all that you've taught me.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Manman/Valerie Toussaint

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

In a letter to Manman, Fabiola writes that she feels more connected to Manman as she embraces rituals that she and Manman once practiced together. With this, Fabiola portrays spirituality not just as a way of making sense of her world and finding comfort, but also as a way to connect with the people she loves. Even more importantly, Fabiola discovers that she can do this in Detroit, where there aren't "drummers and singers and a village of followers" to add heft and ceremony to the ritual. Vodou, in this sense, is just

as effective when it's practiced individually as it is when it's practiced as a community.

Furthermore, although Fabiola doesn't have her Haitian community with her now, practicing Vodou allows her to connect to her home in Haiti. By maintaining her spiritual practice, she feels more settled and confident, as she calls on the *lwas* to help her make sense of all the new things Detroit has to offer her.

Chapter 8 Quotes

“Leg. Bad,” I say loud and clear, because I now see him for who he is—the old man at the crossroads with his hat and cane and riddles come to open doors for me. He is the *lwa* who guards the gates to everything good—to everything bad, too. “Bad. Leg. Legba. Papa Legba.”

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Bad Leg/Papa Legba

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

When Fabiola goes down to talk to Bad Leg, the old homeless man who sits on her street corner and sings, she realizes that he's not just a homeless man: he's Papa Legba, the *lwa* of the crossroads. At this point in the novel, it seems like Fabiola is simply applying Vodou logic to things she sees happening around her. Bad Leg fits the profile of Papa Legba—he has a hat and a cane, and he tells riddles—and so in her mind, he's obviously the *lwa* in human form. However, as the novel progresses, the narrator makes it clear that Fabiola isn't wrong to think this way. There really are *lwas* walking around Detroit, if Fabiola willing to look for them and notice when they pop up.

Finding Papa Legba sitting in what's essentially her backyard gives Fabiola a sense of comfort and security. With a spiritual guardian so close, she feels more like she can make things happen through prayer. And further, she can listen to Papa Legba's riddles and try to make sense of them herself, which will allow her to figure out what's going on in this new city. Through this, the novel suggests that the spiritual realm isn't separate from people's lived experiences—spirits are always present, not just during times of prayer or ceremony.

Chapter 9 Quotes

“I look all around the restaurant. “But this is your job,” I say. She inhales and looks around, too. “Yes, it is. But our work is not without the help of good American citizens like yourself. You are an American citizen, right?”

Related Characters: Detective Shawna Stevens, Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Donna/Primadonna François, Manman/Valerie Toussaint, Dray

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

When Detective Stevens asks Fabiola for help catching Dray in the act of dealing drugs, Fabiola doesn't believe that the detective really needs her help. To Fabiola's credit, her question is valid—it's Detective Stevens's job to come up with a way to catch Dray, using all the information that she has amassed on him and his movements. Indeed, it seems suspicious and predatory that she'd ask Fabiola, a teenage girl trying to find her place in a new city, for help.



This is especially suspect given that Detective Stevens asks specifically if Fabiola is an American citizen. Detective Stevens surely knows that Fabiola wants nothing more than to look American and like she belongs here, so she makes it seem like it's Fabiola's duty as a citizen to help out law enforcement as they try to take a dangerous man off the streets. She also preys on the fact that Fabiola doesn't like Dray and so will be more willing to help get Dray away from Donna. This paints Detective Stevens as manipulative and cruel—especially since she dangles the prospect of freeing Manman over Fabiola's head to ensure her cooperation. She's toying with an innocent teenager who doesn't know what she's doing—and this all ends, perhaps predictably, in tragedy.

Chapter 10 Quotes

“But I ain't no kingpin, know what I'm saying? So it's just favors here and there. Shit you do for fam.”

A cold chill travels up my spine. Shit you do for fam. The way he says it, it's like he would do anything for his family, like for love and respect. I say it out loud. “Shit you do for fam.” I turn to him. “Shit you do for fam,” he repeats.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint, Kasim (speaker), Manman/Valerie Toussaint, Dray

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

After a date that's a bit disastrous—every question Fabiola asks Kasim offends him—Kasim explains his relationship with Dray and with drug-dealing. He sometimes sells, but only to help out Dray or his family. For Fabiola, this is attractive. Fabiola can ignore the fact that Kasim is doing something illegal because, in her mind, Kasim is doing it for all the right reasons. Indeed, Kasim's reasons stand in stark opposition to Dray's, as Dray seems more interested in buying himself expensive things and buying things for Donna than trying to help people. His aims are selfish, not selfless—and this is part of the reason Fabiola hates him so much.

When Fabiola accepts Kasim's explanation, it also shows that she understands it's not always possible to make ends meet just by working an honest job. This contrasts with Fabiola's early belief that she and Manman would be able to get honest jobs and create good lives for themselves in Detroit with those jobs alone. As she becomes more accepting of Kasim's illicit activities, Fabiola learns that, in some cases, it's impossible to make it in the United States doing things the right way—for racial minorities or people who are already economically disadvantaged.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ “On American Street, I will live with my aunt Jo and my cousins, and go to school, and have a cute boyfriend, and keep my mouth shut because in Haiti I learned not to shake hands with the devil. But on Joy Road, I will tell the truth. The truth will lead to my happiness, and I will drive long and far without anything in my way, like the path to New Jersey, to my mother, to her freedom, to my joy. Which road should I take, Papa Legba?”

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Dray, Kasim, Manman/Valerie Toussaint, Detective Shawna Stevens, Bad Leg/Papa Legba

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

After looking down both American Street and Joy Road, Fabiola voices what each street would mean for her. Each

road represents a choice she can make, as she wonders whether to work with Detective Stevens to free Manman.

Fabiola sees American Street as an encapsulation of what it means to be a good American and a good Haitian. She'll not only live with family, get a good education, and date Kasim—she'll also use what she learned in Haiti about “not shak[ing] hands with the devil” to make the choice to ignore Detective Stevens's proposal. Joy Street, on the other hand, represents what Fabiola believes will happen if she chooses to work with Detective Stevens. She'll be able to tell the truth about Dray to someone who cares and who can do something about him, which is certainly an attractive proposition for Fabiola. And as a result, she'll get Manman back. Since Manman is so important to Fabiola, this road looks especially attractive—even though just before this, Fabiola noted that Joy Road could symbolize hopelessness and even danger.

It's telling, too, that there's no option in which Fabiola doesn't work with Detective Stevens and is still able to free Manman from the detention center. Fabiola doesn't trust the immigration system to allow Manman through without Detective Stevens's help, suggesting that Fabiola is already beginning to question whether the American Dream is possible at all.

Chantal's Story Quotes

☝☝ *Creole and Haiti stick to my insides like glue—it's like my bones and muscles. But America is my skin, my eyes, and my breath. According to my papers, I'm not even supposed to be here. I'm not a citizen. I'm a “resident alien.” The borders don't care if we're all human and my heart pumps blood the same as everyone else's.*

Related Characters: Chantal François (speaker), Matant Jo François, Fabiola Toussaint

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 116-17

Explanation and Analysis

When Chantal shares her story with Fabiola, she describes her dual identity as a Haitian citizen and an American resident. Chantal doesn't necessarily feel more American just because she's lived in the United States for almost two decades (she came to the U.S. as a toddler). Living in Detroit that long hasn't erased her grasp of Creole, or her memory of how to draw the country where she was born. She still longs to connect to her roots, which is why it's so nice for her to have Fabiola around. Fabiola, in Chantal's eyes,



represents Haiti and shows her what might have been possible if she and Matant Jo had stayed there.

All of this is complicated, though, by the fact that Chantal isn't an American citizen. As a result, she has to work harder to attend school and simply live her life in the U.S. She recognizes that, for many people, it doesn't matter that even if she's Haitian and not American, she's the same as everyone else on the inside. She suggests that people have the right to live where they want to live, and that they should have the opportunity to make it wherever they choose. But Chantal's immigration status makes this harder for her. She wants to celebrate her Haitian roots, but it's hard when she knows that being Haitian is what keeps her from achieving success in the U.S.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ Then I begin to see him for who he really is. Dray, with his sunglasses even as night spreads across the sky, and his gold cross gleaming, and his love/hate for my cousin, reminds me of the *Iwa* Baron Samedi, guardian of the cemetery—keeper of death.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Donna/Primadonna François, Bad Leg/Papa Legba, Baron Samedi, Dray

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

When Dray once again physically abuses Donna in front of Fabiola and the rest of the family, Fabiola realizes that Dray isn't just Donna's awful boyfriend—he's a *Iwa*, a Vodou spirit. Seeing Dray like this motivates Fabiola to text Detective Stevens and agree to help her arrest Dray. Because Fabiola relies so heavily on Vodou to make sense of her world, it's not surprising that she comes to see Dray as another *Iwa*. Seeing him as this particular *Iwa* firmly situates him as Fabiola's enemy, especially as she moves to help Detective Stevens arrest him. In this way, Fabiola's Vodou spirituality helps her make sense of who to trust and who to protect herself and her family members from.

Furthermore, seeing Dray as a *Iwa* helps Fabiola feel more in control as she thinks about how to handle him. She believes that she can pray to Papa Legba and other *Iwas* for help, and that help will come. Although Fabiola has felt uncertain about cooperating with Detective Stevens up until this point, leaning on Vodou helps her find the strength to do

so—and this, the novel suggests, is one of the most important benefits that spirituality can offer.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☞ But I don't want to look like a church lady. I still want to look...good. So I take off my mother's church dress and put on a plain sweatshirt that belongs to Chantal and a pair of new jeans. I wear the Air Jordans that Pri picked out for me, but I keep my hairstyle. Now I don't look so...Haitian. So immigrant.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Pri/Princess François, Donna/Primadonna François, Ezili/Ezili-Danto, Chantal François, Manman/Valerie Toussaint

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

After Pri insists that Fabiola looks like “a church lady” in Manman's red dress, Fabiola puts together an outfit that, in her mind, makes her look less like a Haitian immigrant. It's important that this is Fabiola's justification for changing: she doesn't switch outfits just because she agrees that she doesn't look as beautiful as she could in Manman's dress. Rather, Fabiola doesn't want to stand out too much in Detroit. It's important to Fabiola to look like she's assimilating into American culture.



As Fabiola gets dressed again, it's telling that she chooses garments from both Pri and Chantal. Borrowing her cousin's clothes helps Fabiola bond with them and feel more confident before she goes on a date with Kasim. It's also notable that Fabiola doesn't accept any of Donna's help or ask to borrow any of her clothes. Donna is the most stereotypically feminine of Fabiola's cousins, so she would presumably have the most fashionable clothes. But, on the other hand, Fabiola sees Donna as shallow and less intelligent because she's feminine. Eventually, Fabiola will realize that Donna is a lot like a human embodiment of the Ezili, the Vodou spirit of women—her femininity is a strength, not a weakness. But at this point, Donna seems too different from Fabiola to be someone she can connect with—so it's not as important to Fabiola to try.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ “You did well in Haiti *with* my money. You think I was going to let my sister rot in the countryside with a new baby in her hands?”

“We prayed for you. When I was a young girl and I couldn’t even understand anything, I knew that it was my job to pray for my aunt and cousins because it was the only reason my papers said that I am American. We were grateful for that, not just for the money.”

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint, Matant Jo François (speaker), Manman/Valerie Toussaint

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis


When Fabiola approaches Matant Jo again to ask about tracking down Manman, the two argue. Though it almost as seems like they’re arguing about two different things, both of them are talking about what it means to them to be American, take care of family, and find dignity. For Matant Jo, it was a mark of her success in Detroit that she was able to send money back to Haiti to fund Fabiola’s education and keep Manman afloat. In her understanding, Fabiola and Manman would have “rotted” without her help—and she implies that Fabiola isn’t being grateful enough for Matant Jo’s financial help.

Fabiola, on the other hand, insists that she’s grateful to Matant Jo for more than just the money. The money helped, but Matant Jo’s real gift was paving the way for Manman to give birth to Fabiola in the United States, thereby making Fabiola a U.S. citizen. The way Fabiola talks about this makes it seem like she and Manman prize citizenship and being American over all else. It also reflects Fabiola and Manman’s idealized view of what life is like in the United States. Citizenship, they seem to believe, is worth more than money.

☞ “Matant Jo,” I say. “Bad Leg at the corner, he’s not just a crazy man. He is Papa Legba and he is opening doors and big, big gates. I will show you. I promise.”

She turns to me. “Child, this is Detroit. Ain’t no *Papa Legba* hanging out on corners. Only dealers and junkies. You don’t know shit. But don’t worry. You’ll figure it out.”

Related Characters: Matant Jo François, Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Bad Leg/Papa Legba

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

When Matant Jo tries to shut down a conversation with Fabiola, Fabiola expresses hope for the future—while Matant Jo suggests that this is a useless exercise. For Fabiola, it’s obvious that Bad Leg is the *Iwa* (Vodou spirit) Papa Legba. He has all of the *Iwa*’s characteristics, and Fabiola has already seen him behave oddly, like a spirit might. Therefore, there’s no question in Fabiola’s mind that Papa Legba is helping her get Manman back, and that he’s creating opportunities for Fabiola’s entire family.

After 15 years in Detroit, however, Matant Jo can’t bring herself to share Fabiola’s optimism. She gave up on her Vodou spirituality years ago (her daughters have told Fabiola that Matant Jo also used to believe that Bad Leg is Papa Legba) and doesn’t believe that the religion is useful or has any place in the rough and tumble world of Detroit. Instead, the only things that are real in Detroit are hopelessness and pain. This is what Matant Jo insists Fabiola will learn at some point. As Fabiola tries to make her way through the city, she’ll eventually become just as beaten down as her aunt—and when this happens, Fabiola will also stop looking for *Iwas* and elements of Vodou in her everyday life. Detroit, in Matant Jo’s opinion, has the power to rob a person of their spirituality by presenting a version of life that’s hopeless.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☞ This is a makeshift altar for Ezili with all the things she loves in the world. My whole body tingles when I realize what’s happening.

Again, Papa Legba has opened another door. How could I have missed this? Of course, I need Ezili’s help, too. And she’d been right under my nose, working through Donna with all her talk about hair, jewelry, clothes, and beauty.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Donna/Primadonna François, Dray, Bad Leg/Papa Legba, Ezili/Ezili-Danto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

As Fabiola looks around a beauty parlor where she’s come

with Donna for a makeover. Fabiola only agreed to accompany Donna to the beauty parlor because Pri and Chantal said that was a good way to support Donna—and it's important to do this so that Donna doesn't feel like her abusive boyfriend Dray is the only person she can rely on. Thus, Fabiola enters the beauty parlor thinking that she's making a sacrifice in order to protect her cousin, not because she's going to get anything out of it. However, she realizes that she's not just here to support Donna. Rather, this is Papa Legba's work, and he's connecting her with another *lwa* (Vodou spirit).

But when Fabiola is able to think about this situation in terms of Vodou spirituality, she's able to drum up more enthusiasm and actually enjoy the experience. This is proof for Fabiola that if she's willing to look around, there are *lwas* everywhere—and she shouldn't discount someone like Donna just because Donna is more interested in beauty and fashion than Fabiola is. Donna—and the *lwa* Ezili—have important things to offer Fabiola, if Fabiola is willing to listen and pay attention.

unrealistic expectations on Matant Jo's part. Matant Jo has sent money to Haiti for Manman and Fabiola since Fabiola was an infant, and Chantal implies that this has created a major hardship for Matant Jo. This is one of the reasons that Matant Jo turned to loan sharking in the first place. She might have been able to support her own daughters doing something else, but it wasn't possible for her to feed her family in Detroit and keep Fabiola in school in Haiti without sharking.

Finally, Chantal implies that Fabiola is being condescending when she gets so upset about her cousins' dealing. In Chantal's opinion, the fact remains that people need money to live, and it's not fair to judge what people do to make that money. Especially in a country and a city that doesn't offer its Black or immigrant residents accessible, legitimate ways to make money, dangerous or illicit avenues are some of the only ones available if people want to survive.

“I used to stare at that address whenever those white envelopes with the blue-and-red-striped edges would make their way to our little house in Port-au-Prince. I'd copy the address over and over again, 8800 American Street, because this house was my very first home. But for three short months only. This house is where I became American. This house is the one my mother and I prayed for every night, every morning, and during every ceremony: 8800 American Street.

Chapter 21 Quotes

“Catholic school for all three of us out here was just pennies. But your ass over there in Haiti cost her like twenty Gs every year. Your school, money for your mom, your clothes. Hell, all this time, Ma thought y'all were building a mansion near the beach and she swore she'd go back down there to retire.

“But she's getting sick. We don't want her to do this loan-sharking shit anymore. Money was running out. We still gotta live, Fab. We still gotta breathe. Money's just room to breathe, that's all.”

Related Characters: Chantal François (speaker), Matant Jo François, Manman/Valerie Toussaint, Fabiola Toussaint

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

After Fabiola discovers that her cousins are selling drugs, Chantal sits her down and tells her why they're doing it. Her explanation will resonate with Fabiola because Chantal, Pri, and Donna are only dealing drugs to protect their mother. Their family is important to them, and they're willing to do anything—including get involved in drugs—to take care of the people they love.

Chantal also makes it clear that some of this boiled down to

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Manman/Valerie Toussaint

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

Fabiola has a nightmare about Matant Jo's house, 8800 American Street, and explains the house's significance to the reader. To Fabiola, this house is a symbol of the American Dream itself. It's the entire reason that Fabiola is a U.S. citizen in the first place, as it's where Fabiola's mother, Manman, lived when she was pregnant with and gave birth to Fabiola. It's also the place where Fabiola's family remained, even after she and Manman returned to Haiti—so it represented her only link to the U.S.

Fabiola's descriptions of copying out the address and praying twice per day for the house speak to the outside role this house played in Fabiola's life. She grew up believing

that the house at 8800 American Street was one day going to give her every happiness and every opportunity, simply because it's where she "became American." But especially as Fabiola endures the horrors of her dream—in the dream, other residents of the house end up shooting her—it suggests that Fabiola's idealization of the house is misguided. The house alone cannot give her what she needs, given that Detroit isn't set up to help immigrants like Fabiola come to the U.S. or achieve success once they're in the country.

The Story of 8800 American Street Quotes


So in 2000, Jean-Phillip François, the Haitian immigrant and the first occupant to actually land a job at a car factory—the Chrysler plant—paid the city three thousand dollars in cash for that little house on American Street.

And maybe because the little house had been revived with the sounds of babies and the scent of warm meals and love and hopes and dreams, Death woke from its long sleep to claim the life of Haitian immigrant and father of three Jean-Phillip François with a single bullet to the head outside the Chrysler plant.

Death parked itself on the corner of American and Joy, some days as still as stone, other days singing cautionary songs and delivering telltale riddles, waiting for the day when one girl would ask to open the gates to the other side.

Related Characters: Matant Jo François, Fabiola Toussaint, Bad Leg/Papa Legba, Phillip/Jean-Phillip François

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator takes a step back from Fabiola's life to share the story of 8800 American Street with the reader. According to the narrator, the house has a curse of some sort on it and is haunted by Death. It's possible that Death is Bad Leg or Papa Legba himself—Bad Leg sits on the corner of American Street and Joy Road to sing, give riddles, and talk with Fabiola. She assumes that Bad Leg is Papa Legba, a *lwa* (Vodou spirit) who also does these things. And in this quote, the narrator makes it clear that Fabiola's willingness to see elements of the Vodou religion everywhere is valid. Within the world of the novel, spiritual beings exist everywhere, if only a person is willing and able to look for

them.



However, the novel also suggests that this isn't necessarily a good thing. Death, according to the narrator, has been stalking around the house and killing people for decades—it's Death's fault that Phillip, Matant Jo's husband, was murdered. It's especially telling that Death woke up when it sensed the happiness in 8800 American Street. Phillip's death, and the family's ensuing suffering at 8800 American Street, more broadly suggest that happiness isn't attainable in Detroit—at least not for the many immigrant families that have inhabited 8800 American Street over the years.

Chapter 24 Quotes

How is this the good life, when even the air in this place threatens to wrap its fingers around my throat? In Haiti, with all its problems, there was always a friend or a neighbor to share in the misery. And then, after our troubles were tallied up like those points at the basketball game, we would celebrate being alive.

But here, there isn't even a slice of happiness big enough to fill up all these empty houses, and broken buildings, and wide roads that lead to nowhere and everywhere.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Donna/Primadonna François, Matant Jo François, Dray

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 247

Explanation and Analysis



When Donna comes home bleeding after yet another physical altercation with Dray, Fabiola grows angrier. She now sees how misguided she was to think that living in the United States would put her right in the middle of the good life—all she's seen thus far is misery and violence. And in Detroit, with no robust Haitian community, Fabiola doesn't even have a network of friends and extended family to help share the load. She also implies that part of the problem is that it's so difficult in Detroit to simply be happy. Fabiola now sees that when life is so difficult and dangerous, it's hard to appreciate what she has. To Fabiola, Detroit's empty houses and big roads are symbols of this hopelessness and desperation. There's not enough hope to make people want to buy these houses and build their lives in them, while the roads don't seem to lead anywhere good. As Fabiola makes these connections, she becomes increasingly disillusioned with the American Dream and begins to join Matant Jo and

her cousins in feeling hopeless and unmoored.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝ I want to say sorry to Chantal. I want to ask her why, with all that money, they never bought a house here. I want to ask her why, with all her brains, is she selling drugs.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Kasim, Chantal François

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 295

Explanation and Analysis

As Fabiola and Chantal approach the party where police have shot and killed Kasim, she takes stock of the wealthier neighborhood and wonders why her family couldn't have ended up here. This drives home how young and naïve Fabiola is. As a teenager, it's understandable that Fabiola isn't well-versed in home-buying. Banks that give mortgages want to verify that buyers' money comes from a legitimate source, so it would be suspicious if Chantal and her family showed up with cash (which they earn by dealing drugs) and couldn't say where they got it. Furthermore, Fabiola has seen for herself why Chantal is selling drugs. Chantal may be smart, but brains aren't enough to overcome the issue of not being a citizen and not qualifying for government aid because of that.

But even though Fabiola seems naïve, she's also been raised to expect that her family would be able to buy in a nice neighborhood like this and do well for themselves. Until arriving in Detroit a few short months ago, Fabiola had no idea that life in Detroit was so hard—and that things are so difficult for racial minorities and immigrants in the U.S. Fabiola and her family are Black, and historically speaking, discriminatory lending practices have deprived them of the opportunity to buy in this neighborhood. The American Dream, in this sense, is inaccessible for many Black Americans.

Drayton's Story Quotes

☝ *Even when I'm born again in Detroit, and I'm supposed to be free like the fucking wind, there's still some shit trying to own my life—money and the bullshit jobs my moms had to work, these shitty streets, and this whole fucked-up system. When you remember all the ways you been killed, and how that shit hurt your fucking soul, ain't no way in hell you can shake that off.*

Related Characters: Dray (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

From the underworld after his death, Dray details what his life has been like. He makes it clear that he's not entirely to blame for the way he turned out—he's the product of a system that's not set up to help him do any better than he did. In theory, Dray, like every American, is "free." But as a young Black man growing up in a low-income neighborhood in a struggling city, Dray wasn't as free as one might like to think. In fact, Dray couldn't reach his full potential because his mother had to work horrible jobs just to make ends meet. He implies that there was never enough money growing up, which means that his mother likely struggled to provide basic needs like a food on the table and a roof over their heads. And to make matters even worse, Dray saw his only opportunities for advancement on "these shitty streets." There, he was able to make a name for himself selling drugs—but he only had to turn to the drugs in the first place because the American system isn't designed to help kids like Dray flourish. In this sense, Dray has "been killed" numerous times in his life, which resulted in him becoming hopeless and disaffected.

☝ *It's war out here, son. If my pops and his pops before him been fighting all their lives to just fucking breathe, then what's there for a little nigga to contemplate when somebody puts a gun in his hands?*

Related Characters: Dray (speaker), Uncle Q

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

Dray continues to explain how he came to be the person the reader met, which he gives from the underworld after his death. Here, Dray gets at the idea that he's just one of a long line of Black men who have tried—and failed—to get ahead in Detroit. Indeed, Black people in the U.S. have been fighting for generations to, as Dray says, "breathe." From slavery to redlining (a type of racial segregation) and voter suppression, the U.S. has made it increasingly difficult for its Black residents to get ahead—or even survive. This is why Dray didn't feel anything when his Uncle Q gave him a gun

for the first time when Dray was 10. To Dray, even 10 years of trying to survive in this world was enough to make him feel like life and death don't matter. Taking a life doesn't mean anything—either for the victim or for Dray, who has to live with the aftermath for the rest of his life.

Chapter 32 Quotes

☛ We are all in white. Even Pri has shed her dark clothes and now wears a white turtleneck and pants. I had wrapped my cousins and aunt in white sheets after making a healing bath of herbs and Florida water for each one, and let them curl into themselves and cry and cry. This is what Manman had done for our neighbors who survived the big earthquake. The bath is like a baptism, and if black is the color of mourning, then white is the color of rebirth and new beginnings.

Related Characters: Fabiola Toussaint (speaker), Pri/Princess François, Donna/Primadonna François, Manman/Valerie Toussaint, Kasim, Dray, Matant Jo François

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 321

Explanation and Analysis

Fabiola describes how, in the days after Kasim and Dray's deaths, she helped her aunt and cousins heal by performing a healing ritual for them. It's telling that after Dray and Kasim's deaths, Fabiola's family members finally accept her spiritual help. Following that trauma, turning to a ritual like this is comforting and makes them feel like there's more to life than the horror they recently experienced. The healing ritual helps them cope with their grief and sadness and realize that it's possible to move on. By doing this, Fabiola can also connect emotionally with Manman, since Manman performed this ritual after the 2010 earthquake that struck Haiti. Fabiola follows in Manman's footsteps and distinguishes herself as a helper, a healer, and a spiritual guide for her cousins and aunt.

However, it's also significant that Fabiola doesn't have anyone to perform this ritual for her. Her grief isn't any less meaningful than that of her cousins and aunt; she likely needs the opportunity to cry and grieve, too. Hopefully, once the family picks up Manman, Manman will be able to help Fabiola follow this ritual and find her own new beginning in the U.S.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

Fabiola wishes she could break the glass that separates her from Manman. The people who “belong here in America” are on one side of the glass, while Fabiola is on the other. A little while ago, Fabiola and Manman went through Customs at JFK Airport. Manman had an envelope of important documents to prove that she has a visa to visit America and that Fabiola is an American-born citizen. Somehow, though, the agents read Fabiola and Manman’s minds and knew they planned to stay in Detroit and leave Haiti forever. A man took Manman away while Fabiola caught their flight from New York to Detroit. Fabiola tells herself that Manman will be on the next flight.

In Detroit, Fabiola doesn’t have to prove she belongs. She looks around for Manman, but Manman doesn’t appear. Fabiola approaches a uniformed woman and says she’s looking for a Valerie Toussaint flying in from New York, but the woman says that there are no flights from New York until tomorrow, and she points Fabiola to the baggage claim. Desperate, Fabiola explains that her mother is in New York; “they” took her. When the woman asks if Manman has been detained, Fabiola tries to find the Creole or French word for “detained.” She only blinks. Slowly, as though the woman thinks Fabiola is stupid, she tells Fabiola to go to the baggage claim.

Fabiola can’t figure out how to tell the woman that she won’t leave the terminal without Manman. She wants to say that Manman hasn’t seen her older sister, Matant Marjorie, since they were teenagers. The woman, however, steps toward Fabiola and says that she’ll escort Fabiola to the baggage claim. She tells Fabiola to come back tomorrow. At the baggage claim, the woman loads Fabiola’s suitcases onto a cart. Fabiola wants to ask how Manman is supposed to get ready for bed tonight without her toiletries. She’d like to send some toiletries with this woman for Manman, but Fabiola fears that the woman will sell the toiletries in the market, as an officer would do in Port-au-Prince. A man walks Fabiola outside. Fabiola prays that Manman will be here tomorrow to find work, send Fabiola to school for free, and find a good life.

From the moment Fabiola sets foot in the United States, she experiences trauma. Having her mother ripped away from her like this is a shocking, unexpected experience. And Fabiola’s choice to tell herself that Manman will be on the next flight suggests that she’s unwilling or unable to accept the reality of her situation. Manman’s arrest was scary and surreal, and being in a new country without her mother is too painful for Fabiola to accept.



This experience with the airport employee is difficult and humiliating for Fabiola. It’s implied that she grew up speaking Haitian Creole and French at home, but now she’s forced to communicate in English, her second language. Fabiola struggles to translate in her head and find the right words for what she’s trying to say, and she takes the employee’s reaction to mean that she’s stupid or inferior.



The woman’s brusqueness gives the impression that getting Manman back won’t be an easy process. Fabiola will likely have to jump through bureaucratic hoops to get any information about Manman. Meanwhile, Fabiola feels lost and confused, as she doesn’t yet grasp the culture of the U.S. The idea that the employee would sell Fabiola’s toiletries may seem odd to many readers in the U.S., but it seems to be something that Fabiola witnessed (or at least heard about) in Haiti. In this way, Fabiola is encountering culture shock, a form of trauma in and of itself.



CHAPTER 2

Outside the airport in Detroit, the air is cold and biting. Even though Manman says that the cold is good for their skin, Fabiola still feels like she'll freeze. Fabiola struggles to pick out her cousins in the sea of faces that are both Black and white. She wonders how she'll recognize her cousins Chantal, Princess, and Primadonna, since they haven't seen each other since Fabiola, Princess, and Primadonna were babies. A girl who barely looks like a girl steps in front of Fabiola to compare Fabiola's face to a photo on her phone—this girl is Princess. She brushes off Fabiola's attempted hug and kiss and waves over her sisters. Chantal, who's almost 20, is smaller than Princess. Primadonna follows behind. She's tall, with long hair and sunglasses even though it's nighttime.

Fabiola reaches out to hug Chantal, her favorite cousin. Chantal asks where Manman is, but Fabiola can only shake her head. Fabiola realizes that Primadonna is only so tall because she's wearing fancy high heels. She introduces herself as Donna, while Princess insists on being called Pri. Pri and Donna are twins—and exact opposites. While Pri is short and stocky, Donna is tall and willowy. Chantal leads everyone to a desk and asks an airport employee about Manman. The employee prints out a piece of paper and gives it to Chantal, and Chantal uses the information on it to lookup Manman up on her phone. She tells Fabiola that Manman will be sent to a detention center in New Jersey—and then back to Haiti. Fabiola suggests that they can go to New Jersey and get Manman, but Chantal says gently that it probably doesn't work that way.

Chantal, Pri, and Donna step aside to speak in fast English. After a minute, Chantal takes Fabiola's hand and says it's time to go home. Fabiola doesn't move. She remembers all those times when Manman left her in the market. Manman always came back. Chantal says that Matant Jo is going to handle things, and she wraps a scarf around Fabiola's shoulders. Fabiola suddenly feels suddenly like a part of something bigger. In Haiti, it was just her and Manman; now, she has cousins and an aunt to take care of her. Fabiola is certain that they can get Manman back, but she feels like she's leaving her heart at the airport.

The vast differences between Chantal, Princess, and Primadonna show Fabiola that in the United States, people can choose to look and act in any number of ways. Meanwhile, Princess brushing off Fabiola's hug is no doubt hurtful, or at least confusing for Fabiola. It implies that Fabiola won't be welcomed into her cousins' circle as easily as she may have expected.



Coming from a country as small as Haiti, Fabiola clearly has no understanding of how big the United States is—it's more than 600 miles, a 10-hour drive, from Detroit to New Jersey. Clearly, Fabiola has unrealistic expectations about life in the United States to being easy and straightforward. Chantal does her best to break it to Fabiola gently that, in reality, things here are anything but simple. This also implies that anything Fabiola does going forward might not be as easy as she expects it to be.



In some ways, Fabiola feels like Manman abandoned her—but here in the airport, Fabiola feels like she's the one abandoning Manman if she goes home with her cousins. Chantal's kindness in giving Fabiola the scarf, however, helps Fabiola feel like she should trust her cousins and aunt to help her. She believes that, if she relies on family, they'll be able to work together to make things right.



CHAPTER 3

Detroit seems impossibly dark; Fabiola can't see much of the city where she was born. She wonders if mansions like she saw on TV will sparkle in the dark, but the **car** is moving too fast. Chantal drives, while Donna admires herself in the rearview mirror from the passenger seat. In the backseat next to Fabiola, Pri stares at her phone. Everything is silent until Chantal turns the music up loud enough for Fabiola to feel it deep inside of her. It doesn't distract Fabiola from her thoughts of Manman, however. Nevertheless, Fabiola tries to savor the experience of being in Detroit—she's living the "good life" now. Chantal pulls off onto a small street, where there are no mansions and instead the houses are close together. Donna welcomes Fabiola home.

The front door of the white **house** on the corner opens. The face inside looks like Manman's, but rounder—and this face doesn't smile. Instead, half of Matant Jo's face is frozen as a result of her stroke. Manman was supposed to be here to take care of Matant Jo. Matant Jo takes Fabiola in her arms and then asks where Manman is. Fabiola replies that they're detaining Manman, while Chantal and Donna ask why the government would send Manman to New Jersey just to send her back to Haiti. When Matant Jo sees the four big suitcases, she looks defeated. She says that she'll try to help, but things are complicated. In Creole, Fabiola tells her aunt that they'll find a way. Sharply, Matant Jo tells Fabiola to speak English and asks if Fabiola actually attended the English school she paid for.

Fabiola assures her aunt that she did, but then she uses another Creole word. Matant Jo shouts at Fabiola to use English. Pri argues that Matant Jo shouldn't be so hard on Fabiola, since she now has a "good girl" again. (Chantal was the golden child, but Matant Jo is disappointed that Chantal is attending community college instead of a fancy university.) Chantal notes that there would be no one to look after Pri and Donna if she left. Fabiola decides that Chantal will be her role model. Matant Jo asks Fabiola if she's hungry, and when Fabiola answers in Creole, Matant Jo threatens to charge Fabiola for every Creole word. She asks Fabiola to call her Aunt Jo and to not be uptight about English.

Fabiola has an idealized understanding of what life in the United States is like. In her mind, the houses are supposed to be big and luxurious. Because of this, it's a shock to get out of the car in a neighborhood where the houses are cramped, and the lots are small. This seems to be a lower-income neighborhood, which will no doubt challenge Fabiola's preconceived notions about the U.S.



Fabiola's first experiences with Matant Jo are disheartening. It must hurt to see Manman's face in Matant Jo's when all Fabiola wants is her mother, especially when Matant Jo is clearly unwell. And even when Fabiola tries to look on the bright side and make everyone feel better, Matant Jo scolds her for speaking Creole and calls Fabiola's education into question. This sends the message that if Fabiola wants to earn her aunt's approval, she'll have to assimilate to American culture rather than be who she is.



The fact that Matant Jo wants a "good girl", and seems to value college so much, suggests that she has high hopes for her daughters. It's difficult for her to see them fall short of her expectations, as when Chantal chose to go to the community college rather than attend a university. From Pri's perspective, Fabiola represents a fresh start for Matant Jo. But, in reality, Fabiola's insistence on speaking Creole may remind Matant Jo too much of Haiti.



Matant Jo leads Fabiola into the kitchen while Pri, Donna, and Chantal turn on the TV in the living room. Fabiola loves that her family owns such a luxurious home. In the kitchen, Matant Jo puts a few pill bottles into her pocket. When Fabiola asks if she's okay, Matant Jo says that she had a stroke. She knows that Manman would say that death owns half of her. She brushes off Fabiola's concern and points to the kitchen appliances. Without smiling, Matant Jo says that uncle Phillip bought this house, and now, she's happy to share it with Fabiola. Her voice is dry and lifeless. Matant Jo leaves the room and doesn't come back.

Fabiola listens to her cousins in the living room and has no idea what to do. She feels alone and like a burden. This isn't how one is supposed to treat family—no one has even offered her a glass of water. If Manman were here, she'd make a meal for everyone. Fabiola opens the fridge and freezer but finds only condiments and frozen pizza. She grabs a slice of cheese and jumps when Pri comes into the kitchen. Pri says it's time for bed, since Fabiola will start school tomorrow. The cheese, which Fabiola eats on the way upstairs, is disgusting. At the top of the stairs, Chantal points to the room that she and Fabiola will share, the twins' room, and the bathroom. Chantal warns Fabiola to be smart about the bathroom, since Donna takes forever with her "fake face and her fake hair."

Chantal asks if Fabiola used an indoor or outdoor bathroom in Haiti. Embarrassed, Fabiola says that it depended on whether they had electricity. Chantal asks if they still have latrines in Haiti, but then Pri yells for them to stop talking about poop. The sisters yell at each other until Matant Jo shouts for them to stop. With a smile, Chantal leads Fabiola to her bedroom, which is warm, neat, and filled with books. Donna appears in the doorway, dressed to go out. Chantal begs for Donna to not go out with someone named Dray if he's going to race, but Donna says that Dray thinks she brings him bad luck. When Chantal points out that this is mean and disrespectful to her, Donna leaves the house. Chantal tells Fabiola to not get involved with Donna, and Dray and assures Fabiola that they'll get Manman soon.

By 1:30 am, Fabiola is ravenous. She hasn't slept well all week, since she attended so many going-away parties. Fabiola gets up to light a candle to lead Manman back to her, but she has no matches. Downstairs in the kitchen, Fabiola pockets a lighter and hears a man singing outside. The song is joyful. She pulls back the curtain and sees an old man sitting on a bucket, singing a song in which he welcomes someone to the "City of the Dead." As the man finishes, a white **car** races around the corner and stops. A man gets out of the car, shouts at the singing man (whose name is Bad Leg) to shut up, and he starts punching and kicking Bad Leg. Fabiola wants to forget all of this.

Matant Jo's seems hopelessness, and she makes no effort to comfort Fabiola. Interestingly, though, she acknowledges how Manman would see this situation: as part of her spiritual world. Even if Matant Jo seems very American in some ways, she still has the ability to empathize with how Fabiola and Manman's perspectives. In this sense, Matant Jo has a foot in each world; she's still negotiating her identity as a Haitian American woman.



Here, Fabiola implies that she expected to find a robust, traditional Haitian community in Detroit. Instead, her family members are inhospitable and "fake"—and, in Fabiola's estimation, downright rude. This compromises Fabiola's trust in her aunt and cousins, given that they're not as warm or relatable as she expected them to be. And this, in turn, makes Fabiola miss Manman even more, since she knows that Manman would be able to comfort her.



Chantal distinguishes herself as the levelheaded, sensible sister of the trio. In this way, it's easy to see why Fabiola feels connected to her—Chantal is the kind of girl Fabiola wants to be. Donna, on the other hand, seems out of control, or at least irresponsible in her decision-making. The implication that Dray is dangerous also lets Fabiola know that Detroit may be more dangerous than she expected.



Bad Leg's joyful song seems to comfort Fabiola. Seeing the other man beat up Bad Leg, however, shatters this moment. It drives home that there's danger everywhere in Detroit—even right outside of Fabiola's house. It also doesn't appear as though Bad Leg did anything to provoke the beating—his attacker is just angry and lashing out.



Another man gets out of the **car**, calls the punching man Dray, and helps Bad Leg up. At the same time, Donna gets out of the car, obviously drunk. Fabiola tries to make herself invisible as Donna stumbles into the house and up the stairs. Disturbed, Fabiola wants to tell Manman that they have to go back to Haiti, since Detroit is no better. Back in Chantal's bedroom, Fabiola moves some books aside so she can set up a shrine. She pulls out her magic objects, fills the mug with water, and lights a candle. Fabiola calls on her spirit guides to bring her closer to Manman. She wonders what Manman would say.

In a letter to Manman, Fabiola writes that this is her first night away from Manman. She writes that when she looked into her candle earlier, she saw a vision of Manman. Manman told her to trust every sign from the *lwes*—but Fabiola thinks she hasn't heard anything from the *lwes* since Manman was detained. Fabiola can see that Manman is sleeping in a bunk bed and has made other Black friends in the detention center. They all speak "a broken French." Fabiola writes that when Manman gets here, they'll speak Creole so that Fabiola can remember home.

CHAPTER 4

The next morning, Chantal asks why Fabiola spun around with the mug last night. Fabiola explains that she was saluting the four directions and Papa Legba, and then she asks if they're going to New Jersey after school today. Chantal assures Fabiola that Matant Jo is handling it, and then she asks who Papa Legba is. As Fabiola tells her that Papa Legba is the *lwa* of the crossroads who can help Manman "come to this side," Donna barges into the room in her pushup bra and asks for a pair of tights. Surprisingly, Donna looks fine after last night. Pri comes in behind her and asks Fabiola if she knows how to braid. While Donna looks proud of her breasts, Pri wraps hers tightly in fabric to make them disappear.

Chantal asks where Donna's new underwear came from, but Donna just says that everything will be fine. Through gritted teeth, Chantal says that they have to save money for Fabiola to buy clothes and school stuff, which leads to in an argument. Fabiola, meanwhile, is just happy that there's enough money to fight over. She heads downstairs to find breakfast and as she eats alone, she wonders if this is a sign. When Fabiola is finished, she goes to the living room and looks out the window. Across the street, there's a short building with a sign that reads "LIQUOR BEER WINE PIZZA CHECK CASHING." On the other corner, a sign reads "HOUSE OF GOD." The signposts at the corner read "American Street" and "Joy Road." The empty houses look like missing teeth, and they remind Fabiola of tombs.

Here, Fabiola learns that Dray is bad news on many fronts: he encourages Donna to drink too much, and he's angry and violent for no reason. Seeing Donna involved with a person like this makes Fabiola understand that the United States isn't a utopia—it's just as messy and dangerous as Haiti was.



*At this point, Vodou is a way for Fabiola to feel more connected to Manman and to feel like she's in control of her life. And indeed, Fabiola is able to have a vision of Manman in the detention center. But the fact remains that Fabiola still feels like the *lwes* (the Vodou spirits) have abandoned her. For now, Fabiola feels like she needs Manman around to connect to her spirituality and culture.*



For Fabiola, the most important thing is still to fetch Manman; she doesn't feel complete without her mother. Because of this, Chantal's assurances don't seem very useful or helpful. Chantal's questions about Papa Legba also reveal that Matant Jo didn't raise her daughters to follow the Vodou religion. In this sense, they're moving away from their Haitian roots and are becoming more assimilated into American culture.



Fabiola's aside that she's thrilled there's money to fight over clues the reader in to how poor she and Manman were in Haiti. Even if Matant Jo's family is struggling financially, they still look well-off to Fabiola. But the fact remains that Fabiola still feels alone and unmoored in her new home. The signs she sees out her window symbolize the questionable existence of the American Dream. The intersection of American Street and Joy Road should seemingly bring joy and prosperity—but the houses that look like tombs suggest that the people who've lived here never got that joy or prosperity.



Pri comes downstairs dressed in baggy khakis and an oversized white button up. She asks Fabiola to braid her hair as Donna walks by in full makeup. When Fabiola asks if Donna is going out later, Pri explains that Donna “dresses like a ho.” Chantal announces that they have 10 minutes before it’s time to leave. Fabiola only remembers seeing one **car** out front, and she asks when Matant Jo is going to work. Chantal and Pri say that she’s working now—and she worked hard to get Fabiola here from Haiti. When Fabiola is done with Pri’s hair, Pri asks Fabiola to redo it. Donna quips that Pri wants them to look like boys’ braids. Fabiola asks why Pri wants to look like a boy, but Pri that she wants to look like herself—and it’s too cold to wear “short-ass skirts.”

Fabiola wants to twist Pri’s lips for using such foul language, but she takes her time with the braids. She needs Pri to like her. Fabiola mentions the fun phone conversations she and Pri used to have, but Pri just says that they’re adults now. Chantal suddenly turns up the TV. All three cousins gather around as a news anchor reads that a 17-year-old student died of a “lethal cocktail of designer drugs.” The cousins exchange stares, and then Pri snaps that the white girl did it to herself. Chantal points out that a Black girl was murdered last month, but it didn’t make the news. Finally, Chantal turns off the TV and ushers everyone to the car. Fabiola tries to finish Pri’s hair as she and her cousins argue on the drive. Later, Pri shares her story with Fabiola.

PRINCESS’S STORY

Princess says that Matant Jo gave her and Primadonna their names because she figured that being Americans with a house and an employed father would make the twins royalty. But that dream fell apart when Phillip was killed. Princess doesn’t remember much about this time, but she does recall by the time she and Donna were in middle school, Matant Jo had the newest **car** in the neighborhood. They were also the first family to have flat-screen TVs, laptops, and cellphones. There were always shady guys around, but the family did okay. Pri learned to fight in the second grade, but Chantal had it worse since she spoke Creole. As they got older, Donna told kids that she was French, and they beat her up for being tall and beautiful. Eventually, Chantal got a scholarship to a prep school, Donna got together with Dray, and Pri became “the brawn.” Now, they’re the Three Bees—and nobody messes with them.

Fabiola’s cousins make it clear that Fabiola shouldn’t ask about Matant Jo’s work. This makes it ambiguous as to what, exactly, Matant Jo does to earn money. Pri is similarly secretive about her gender expression and how she wants to present herself, though Fabiola simply seems curious rather than judgmental.



This news story is clearly disturbing for Fabiola’s cousins. Chantal alludes to the fact that when Black people are victims of violence, it’s much less likely that they’ll be taken seriously or that others will empathize with them. She implies that this is why the Black girl’s murder didn’t make the news, while this white girl’s death did. Meanwhile, as Fabiola takes her time with Pri’s braids, she tries to ingratiate herself with her cousins and figure out more about who they are.



Princess’s story gives more context as to why Matant Jo and her daughters behave the way they do. Though all of them are flawed, they’ve all shown tenacity in their efforts to overcome the tragedies and obstacles in their lives. As Pri sees it, Matant Jo had high hopes for her daughters at first, but things didn’t work out as planned. However, this doesn’t mean that Pri, Donna, and Chantal didn’t succeed on their own terms—they were able to endure incredibly difficult circumstances after Phillip was murdered, and they did so as the Three Bees. As a united trio, the sisters can work together to make up for one another’s weaknesses, which is what the novel suggests family members should always try to do. Meanwhile, it’s telling that Pri mentions shady men hanging around the house when she was younger. This implies that Matant Jo may have used illicit means to finance the family’s fancy new items.



CHAPTER 5

As Chantal drives Fabiola up to her new school, she points out that it looks like a haunted castle. Fabiola gets out of the car, into her first snowstorm, and thinks that everyone resembles “fat iguanas” in their coats. Everything here is gray and brown. Fabiola follows Chantal into the office and tries to hike up her skirt, muttering that girls in Haiti don’t wear skirts this long unless they plan to be lifelong virgins. As Chantal laughs, a white woman—the principal, Ms. Stanley—approaches Chantal warmly. Ms. Stanley is thrilled to meet Fabiola and speaks so fast that Fabiola can’t keep up. In her office, Ms. Stanley asks for Fabiola’s documents. Chantal gives Ms. Stanley an envelope and says that Matant Jo will be in with Fabiola’s documents later. Ms. Stanley nods, says that the documents won’t be necessary, and disappears.

Fabiola turns to Chantal, who explains that Matant Jo works hard to take care of everyone—she’s a bank. Seeing Fabiola’s confusion, Chantal explains that Matant Jo loans money and charges interest. Fabiola asks why she’s not going to a free school, but Chantal answers with a question: did Fabiola go to a free school in Haiti? She didn’t. Chantal says that Matant Jo thinks that free stuff is a trick. Ms. Stanley returns and walks Fabiola to her first class. Back in Haiti, thanks to Matant Jo’s money, Fabiola attended one of the best English schools. Here, the students are disrespectful. After class, Fabiola introduces herself to the girl next to her. The girl, Imani, recognizes Fabiola as “the Three Bees’ cousin.” Noticing the look Imani’s gives her, Fabiola doesn’t want to be associated with the Three Bees.

Fabiola walks away, but Imani follows and explains that people expect Fabiola to be the Fourth Bee. Pri has been telling everyone to not mess with Fabiola. Fabiola tries to hide her smile but says that she’s not a bee. Imani advises Fabiola to be proud of having the Three Bees as family—they’ll make her royalty. In a low voice, Imani explains that Pri will fight anyone who messes with Donna. Chantal uses the connections from her rich high school to help people. Everyone thinks they do “voodoo shit” and hex people. When Imani asks if Aunt Jo is a voodoo queen, Fabiola laughs. But when other kids stare, Fabiola feels uncomfortable. For the rest of the day, she notices that her cousins are indeed treated like royalty.

Coming from tropical Haiti, seeing everyone wearing coats in the snow is a huge shock for Fabiola. This reminds the reader that a lot of what she’s experiencing is culture shock; she simply has no experience of dressing for the cold. Similarly, the novel drives home how far Fabiola still has to go with her English when she can’t understand Ms. Stanley’s rapid questioning. Fabiola implied that she and Manman spoke Creole at home and that she only spoke English at school, which means she’s at a disadvantage now that she has to speak English all the time. Meanwhile, the envelope that Chantal gives Ms. Stanley seems like a bribe, further suggesting that Matant Jo is involved in something illicit.



Fabiola specifically wanted to get a good education for free in the United States. But now, she has to confront the possibility that Matant Jo is right (that free things are no good) and that this aspect of the American Dream isn’t worth hoping for. Whether or not that’s true, Fabiola still finds herself disillusioned with school in the United States—even if she is at a private school. Here, paying money to attend doesn’t mean that students pay attention or care about their education, like Fabiola does.



Imani offers Fabiola important advice as Fabiola tries to figure out where she fits in at school. It’s understandable that Fabiola wants to create her own reputation, but Imani makes it clear that Fabiola will have a leg up if she publicly accepts the Three Bees as her family. Imani’s questions about the “voodoo shit,” however, suggest that the girls still experience some anti-immigrant sentiments and have to deal with people’s prejudices. But it’s also likely that Fabiola’s cousins are using these preconceived notions to their advantage by threatening people with hexes.



After school, back at home, Fabiola feels lonely. As she eats a meal out of paper bags, she feels like the **house** wants to squeeze her. It feels like the exact opposite of the earthquake, when it felt like everything was falling apart—here, things seem like they *already* crumbled. Fabiola knows that she can't let anything happen without Manman here, so she knocks on Matant Jo's door. Matant Jo lets Fabiola in, shuffles back to bed, and says that her hands are tied. This country is like Haiti: people "talk out of two sides of their mouth." When Fabiola asks outright if Manman is coming, Matant Jo won't give a straight answer. Instead, she points to her dresser and asks Fabiola to fetch the Bible from it. Fabiola sits next to Matant Jo, and it feels almost like sitting next to Manman.

The earthquake Fabiola mentions is likely the real-life 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti. Fabiola would've been a young girl at the time of the earthquake, so it would've been a formative event in her childhood. Indeed, Fabiola thinks about life in Detroit in terms of the Haitian earthquake—she views everything through the lens of her experiences as a Haitian person. This reflects Fabiola's status as an immigrant: she's trying to meld together her Haitian and American identities, and to marry both with her observations of Detroit. Matant Jo, meanwhile, says that people in both countries "talk out of two sides of their mouth," meaning that both Haitians and Americans lie or mislead people. This suggests that Haiti and the U.S. aren't so different after all—and that Americans aren't inherently superior to Haitians.



MATANT JO'S STORY

Matant Jo tells Fabiola that this is her home now. Phillip bought this **house** with the last of his money from Haiti; since the house is on the corner of American Street and Joy Road, Phillip thought he was buying "American Joy." Phillip then sent for Matant Jo and baby Chantal. At that time, Phillip was everything to Matant Jo, since there's no real Haitian community in Detroit. Now, the only thing they have left of Phillip is this house. According to Matant Jo, Phillip left a hole in her heart just like the bullet hole in the back of his head; the hole is like cancer. Matant Jo hoped that Manman would fill the hole, but maybe Fabiola and her cousins will fill it for a while.

As Matant Jo tells Phillip's story, she makes it clear that Phillip believed in the same idealistic version of the American Dream that Fabiola did. However, Phillip's gruesome death doesn't bode well for Fabiola; it suggests that the American Dream isn't attainable, if it exists at all. Further, the aside that there's no Haitian community in Detroit indicates that Fabiola and her family are even more unmoored than they might otherwise be in a different city. In Detroit, they stand out more, and they don't have a community to support them.



CHAPTER 6

Matant Jo keeps cash in her Bible. She gives Fabiola \$400 for her "expenses." This is the most money Fabiola has ever had, so she carries it in her purse. It makes her feel more American. On Friday, Chantal, Pri, and Donna have errands to run, so they ask Fabiola to wait for an hour after school. Instead of staying at the school, Fabiola walks to the nearby CVS. On the sidewalk, Fabiola bumps into a woman and apologizes in her best English so it doesn't sound like she doesn't belong. The woman apologizes and asks Fabiola if she's local. Fabiola says she is, and she looks the woman up and down. The woman tries to ask Fabiola about her school, but Fabiola just smiles and walks into the CVS. She buys a few small things and heads back to school. From Chantal's **car**, Fabiola can see the woman watching.

It's telling that this money makes Fabiola feel more American. For Fabiola, success in the U.S. is primarily tied to wealth—but even if the money makes Fabiola feel more American, that doesn't mean that she doesn't still have to make others think that she's American. This is why she makes a point to use her "best English" when she and the woman collide. Being obviously an immigrant, Fabiola implies, makes her seem less American to others.



CHAPTER 7

On Fabiola's first Saturday night in Detroit, loud music blasts all through the house. Matant Jo wears tight jeans and a bright shirt as she entertains four smoking, cursing men in the living room. Fabiola is hungry, but she avoids going downstairs. She knows that Manman won't believe that Fabiola has been hungrier in Detroit than she ever was in Port-au-Prince. Fabiola and her cousins are going to a birthday party tonight, so Fabiola has on a too-tight dress. Pri studies Fabiola's altar and asks if it works. Fabiola replies that she and Manman asked the lwas to protect their Detroit family every day, and that Manman has been looking for answers as to why God took Uncle Phillip away from Matant Jo. Pri tells Fabiola to never say her father's name again, and Fabiola agrees, even though she's been praying for Uncle Phillip for years.

Donna bursts in with a basket of hair supplies. She gets to work on doing Fabiola's hair and makeup—when she's done, Fabiola has fake hair, fake eyelashes, and perfect eyebrows. Pri and Matant Jo applaud the transformation, but Chantal shakes her head. Fabiola wonders if putting a picture of herself looking like this on the internet will make Manman show up just to smack her. Chantal drives everyone to the nightclub, but she doesn't stay. The club has a purple door with a big Q on it. On the street, Pri and Donna's friends come over to say hi. They make Fabiola nervous, as they remind her of scary men who frequented clubs in Petionville. The guys all look like the *vagabon* Manman warned her about.

As Pri drags Fabiola inside, Fabiola locks eyes with a *vagabon*—it's the boy who helped Bad Leg, and he's only a bit older than Fabiola. Inside the club, the men wear coats while the women are dressed in short, shiny dresses. Fabiola accepts a red plastic cup because she's thirsty, but she doesn't like the alcohol in it. Everyone in the club knows all the words to the music and dances just right. Suddenly, a guy with an eye patch steps close to Pri and tries to hug her. Fabiola realizes that this is Dray, the guy who hit Bad Leg. His face makes Fabiola think he's "been to the underworld and back." He looks like a *malfekté*—someone who's truly evil. When he shakes Fabiola's hand, it feels like "shards of glass." Dray pulls Donna and the other boy close, as though he owns them.

It's still comforting for Fabiola to think of what Manman would say in any given situation. Manman's imagined reactions are be predictable and comforting, and fixating on them helps Fabiola connect with her mother—and, by extension, with Haiti. Pri is clearly curious about Fabiola's altar and religious beliefs. This suggests that she's open to learning more about Vodou and connecting to Haitian culture that way, even if she doesn't like Fabiola's answer. For Fabiola, though, her answer is the simple truth: in her mind, Vodou is real and everywhere, and it's the reason her cousins are alive.



Even if Fabiola implies that she's no stranger to nightclubs, her experiences with clubs in Haiti leave her unable to really enjoy this night out with her cousins. Instead, she's constantly on high alert and clings to Manman's advice to look out for herself. It's telling that Fabiola remains on high alert and is so nervous around her cousins' friends, as this suggests that she doesn't trust her cousins enough to trust these friends.



Once Fabiola is inside the club, she feels even more out of place. Unlike all the other people here, she doesn't know all the words to the songs, nor does she know how to dance properly. Dray's frightening appearance makes matters worse. Trying to hug Pri, as well as pulling Donna and the boy close, suggest that Dray feels powerful and in control of his neighborhood. It's nothing for him to invade another person's space.



Donna introduces Fabiola to the other boy, who intentionally mishears Fabiola's name and calls her Fabulous. He introduces himself as Kasim, which makes Fabiola laugh because it sounds like the Creole word for "break me." She calls him Broke and turns away; if he's involved with Dray, she wants nothing to do with him. Fabiola is still wearing her coat because she's self-conscious about her short dress. She wishes that Chantal were here. Fabiola watches Pri dance in the middle of a circle, and when Fabiola tries to mimic Pri's fast movements, Kasim laughs at her. He offers to show her the Detroit Jit. Fabiola walks away until she catches sight of Donna and Dray. Dray has an arm around Donna's neck like he's choking her. When Kasim comes up beside Fabiola, she asks why Dray is treating Donna like this.

Kasim explains that everyone calls the couple D&D, like Dungeons and Dragons—Donna is the dragon, and Dray is taming her. Kasim says that he and Fabiola won't have a relationship like that. Fabiola laughs and explains why she called him Broke. They dance, but Fabiola watches Donna and Dray instead of Kasim. When a slow song comes on, Fabiola's heart beats fast—she feels as though Manman is watching her. She notices Pri staring from across the room, which makes Kasim laugh. He asks if Fabiola is going to let Pri "cock block," which offends Fabiola. She insists that she isn't going to have sex with him, and then she walks away—but Kasim stays close for the rest of the evening. Fabiola feels like there's something pulling them together.

As the club empties, Fabiola realizes that she's alone. Kasim brings her coat to her and leads her outside. There, Pri is yelling at Dray while Donna crouches on the ground. Everyone stares as Pri shouts that Donna should've left Dray a long time ago. Dray offers to take Donna home, but Pri refuses. Donna asks to go with Dray and falls into the front seat. Chantal pulls up and acts like this has happened before. Kasim offers to ride with Dray, and Fabiola surprises herself by offering to accompany Donna too. Outside Matant Jo's **house**, Bad Leg is singing. Fabiola leans forward and tells Dray to not hit Bad Leg again. But according to Dray, nobody cares about the old man. Fabiola and her cousins enter the house as Bad Leg sings a song about hitting and fighting.

At home, Fabiola writes a letter Manman, telling her that she feels more connected to Manman now that she's been calling on the lwas. Fabiola has a vision of Manman crying and wonders why Manman is being punished. Maybe it's because she's a *mambo*—a Vodou priestess—or maybe it's because Fabiola let a boy touch her the night before they left. Maybe Ezili, the *lwa* of fertility and love, is mad and summoned Papa Legba to block Manman's freedom. Then, Fabiola writes that Matant Jo misses Manman so much that she can't do anything herself.

Fabiola's loyalty to her family only goes so far, since she wants nothing to do with Dray or any of his friends. This is why she can't accept Dray's abusive treatment of Donna—she knows it's wrong, and she won't give Dray the benefit of the doubt just because Donna loves him. But even though Fabiola feels out of place, she still wants to try to fit in. This is why she attempts Pri's dance moves: if she can learn to move her body the right way, she'll look less like a newcomer.



Kasim's acceptance of the fact that Dray abuses Donna suggests that, unlike Fabiola, his loyalty allows him to excuse all kinds of bad behavior. He might not think it's right—his aside that he wouldn't treat Fabiola poorly suggests that he knows it's wrong—but his friendship with Dray means he'll stand aside and let Dray be violent. As Fabiola thinks of Manman watching her, it's almost as though Manman is making sure that Fabiola knows to stay loyal to her family, rather than to a boy she just met.



Pri's anger may be more justified than Fabiola previously thought. Given how much time the twins spend together, it may fall to Pri more than anyone else to make sure that Donna stays safe. This gives Fabiola an opening, though, given that she's the same age as the twins. She'll be in the same social circles, unlike Chantal, so she may be able to step in and take some of the responsibility off of Pri's shoulders.



Praying to lwas that Manman previously prayed to with Fabiola makes Fabiola feel more at peace, and as though she can get through this. As Fabiola wonders if the lwas are punishing them, she also tries to make sense of the situation in a way that's more familiar to her. Vodou spirituality is more understandable than the bureaucracy of the U.S. immigration system.



CHAPTER 8

Once Donna is tucked into bed, Fabiola and Pri play cards while Chantal reads. Fabiola asks if Dray hits Donna—after all, Bad Leg’s song was about an attack. But Pri explains that no one listens to Bad Leg because he’s crazy and a drug addict. When Fabiola asks why they call him Bad Leg, Pri offers Fabiola money to go ask; Bad Leg tells a different story every time. Much later, Fabiola lies awake. It’s 3:30 a.m., and she can hear Bad Leg singing. She gets up and listens carefully to his song, in which he offers to carry the listener’s load and mentions a dangerous lady dressed in brown. Fabiola slips downstairs, pulls on a coat and some boots, and walks over to the old man.

Fabiola greets Bad Leg and asks what happened to his leg. He responds by welcoming Fabiola to “American Joy,” and he tells her that he left his leg “on the other side.” Bad Leg went there to visit his daddy, who first came to Detroit in 1961 looking for money. His daddy ended up losing a leg to diabetes. When Bad Leg went to the “other side” to see his daddy, his daddy asked to borrow Bad Leg’s left leg. When a person visits the other side, Bad Leg explains, they leave their body behind, so it was no big deal to loan out his leg. But when Bad Leg got back home, his left leg didn’t work. Fabiola looks at this man sitting on a crossroads, with riddles and a cane, and realizes that Bad Leg is actually the Iwa Papa Legba. Fabiola asks why he didn’t let Manman through, but Bad Leg closes his eyes.

Fabiola races back inside to light a candle and pray for Manman. But instead of ringing her bell, she lets Papa Legba sing and “open the gates.” In his song, Papa Legba invites the listener to sit down to eat and make a deal. He warns listeners to “Beware the lady all dressed in brown.” Chantal tells Fabiola not to listen. When Papa Legba stops singing, Fabiola runs to the window and sees that the man is gone. She announces that the man is Papa Legba, and Chantal says that Matant Jo used to say the same thing—but he’s just a crazy old man. Fabiola stays up all night. She knows Papa Legba will help her free Manman.

CHAPTER 9

The next Friday, Fabiola packs a small bag for Manman. She tells Chantal it’s been too long and asks how to get to New Jersey. With a sigh, Chantal says that it’s a 15-hour bus ride and calls Fabiola hardheaded. Fabiola asks Chantal if she’s hardheaded too, and Chantal says a few years ago, she left for six days to find her father’s killer. After school that day, Pri won’t leave Fabiola alone. Pri says that bad things happen to girls who get snatched off buses, but Fabiola retorts that Manman is in a prison and that she has to help her. After giving Fabiola a long look, Pri tells her to wait for a few minutes.

At this point, Fabiola finds Bad Leg fascinating because it seems like he’s adding something beautiful to an otherwise downtrodden community. He also seems to tell the truth when few others will actually acknowledge how dire the situation is. But Pri implies that she doesn’t see it this way—in her opinion, Bad Leg, may be harmless, but that doesn’t mean he’s doing anything good for the neighborhood.



Bad Leg’s story about his daddy illustrates yet another iteration of the American Dream, specifically as it pertains to Detroit. Bad Leg’s daddy came, presumably looking for work in one of Detroit’s many factories—but instead of becoming successful, he lost his leg and died. While someone else might listen to Bad Leg’s account of going “to the other side” and hear nonsense, Fabiola’s grounding in Vodou gives her a different understanding. Now that she knows this man is Papa Legba, she has someone concrete to pray to.



Fabiola’s prayers take on new meaning now that she knows Papa Legba is just outside, working his magic to get Manman here. His presence makes Fabiola feel more secure, but Chantal encourages Fabiola to abandon this line of thinking. The fact that Matant Jo no longer believes in Bad Leg’s magic suggests that immigrating to the United States can make it difficult to hang onto one’s religious beliefs.



Chantal wants Fabiola to understand that she is hardheaded—she, like Fabiola, is willing to do anything to get justice for her family. Meanwhile, Fabiola’s choice to plan a trip to New Jersey speaks to how desperate she is to get Manman back. Already, the desperation that’s so common among people in Detroit seems to have gotten to her. She is now willing to stand up to her cousins and do what she believes is right.



When Pri walks over to some other girls, Fabiola knows she's not the Fourth Bee. She decides to head back to the CVS. In the hair aisle, the woman from last week approaches Fabiola to ask about the school. The woman has on a brown coat and nice boots; Manman always said to judge people by their shoes. Fabiola turns to walk away, but the woman asks if Fabiola is Donna's cousin. She says that she knows Pri, Chantal, and Matant Jo, and that she knows Phillip was killed. Fabiola decides to trust the woman, since she knows this part of her family history. The woman takes Fabiola to a nearby Mexican restaurant and tells Fabiola to order whatever she wants.

The woman introduces herself as Detective Shawna Stevens of the Grosse Pointe Park Police Department. Fabiola prepares to leave, but Detective Stevens says she needs help—and in return, she can help Fabiola get Manman. At first, Fabiola smiles. Then, she remembers that Papa Legba can lead people through labyrinths before opening doors, so she asks what the detective wants. Detective Stevens pulls out a newspaper: the headline is about the girl who died after taking designer drugs, and Detective Stevens says that she's investigating the girl's death. Fabiola insists she doesn't know anything, but Detective Stevens says that they're after Dray—he's selling these drugs, but they don't have proof. Fabiola points out that this is Detective Stevens's job, but Detective Stevens says that she needs help from American citizens like Fabiola.

Detective Stevens point out that Manman *isn't* a citizen, and that the last time she was in the U.S., she overstayed her visa. But if Fabiola helps with this investigation, they can get Manman a green card. Fabiola is still suspicious, so she asks what this will cost. Detective Stevens assures her that she just needs information on Dray, like when he's going to be at a party next. She gives Fabiola a business card and leaves a \$20 bill on the table for Fabiola. Fabiola leaves the money but takes the card. Outside the restaurant, a **car** honks behind Fabiola. It's Kasim. He asks why she's still here and opens the passenger door for her. Kasim tell her that Pri is downtown, making sure Fabiola didn't get on a bus to New Jersey, so Fabiola gets in.

To Fabiola, Pri walking away to join her own friends is proof that Fabiola doesn't belong—if Fabiola did belong, Pri would've invited her to come along. Loneliness and independence aren't a good thing—readers may remember Bad Leg's warning to beware a woman in brown. But Fabiola chooses to trust this woman because her cousins have made it seem like Phillip's murder should be a secret—so anyone who knows about it seems trustworthy.



Detective Stevens is a skilled manipulator and knows just how to reel Fabiola in: calling on Fabiola's "duties" as an American citizen and offering to help with Manman. This makes Fabiola feel more beholden to the detective, as Fabiola wants nothing more than to be properly American. It doesn't hurt that Detective Stevens wants to arrest Dray, since Fabiola hates Dray anyway. This means that Fabiola has all the more reason to cooperate with the detective, as putting Dray behind bars would free Donna from Dray's abuse, at least temporarily.



While the novel doesn't go into much detail about the bureaucracy or intricacies of the U.S. immigration system, Detective Stevens's proposal suggests that the system may be rife with corruption and bribery. It might not be as impartial or helpful as prospective immigrants hope—and it may be inaccessible to those who don't have connections to someone like Detective Stevens. The system, in other words, is fundamentally inequitable and is hard to navigate without help.



Kasim moves some junk out of the way and apologizes, explaining that not everyone can be a “baller” like Dray and Matant Jo. He calls Fabiola Fabulous and then calls Pri on his cell phone. He hands the phone to Fabiola, but she hands it back after listening to Pri shout for a minute. Kasim invites Fabiola to get dinner but then offers to take her home when she’s silent. Fabiola says that she’d love to eat. When Kasim suggests Middle Eastern food, Fabiola says that she loved her Syrian friends’ food back in Haiti. As Kasim fights with his broken radio, he tells Fabiola that he’s saving to buy a condo or a house instead of a BMW. He works at a café and suggests that Fabiola come visit him there sometime. Fabiola smiles and thinks that Detroit is more beautiful than ever.

Even though Fabiola is happy, she thinks about how Manman is still in New Jersey, and how Detective Stevens asked for something impossible. Kasim’s cellphone rings: it’s Dray. Fabiola wonders if it’s true about Dray’s dealing drugs. Hanging up with Dray, Kasim tells Fabiola that he can’t go out tonight. But then, seeing Fabiola’s face, Kasim calls Dray back and says that he can’t back out on Fabiola. Fabiola grins bigger than she has in a while, though she can’t understand how she can be happy with Manman in jail. When Kasim parks in front of the Bucharest Grill, he runs around to open the door for Fabiola. In Haiti, Fabiola had only been to a restaurant once. Now, she’s been to a restaurant twice in one day. She feels like she’s living up to her new name, Fabulous.

CHAPTER 10

At the restaurant, Fabiola doesn’t like any of the food. Kasim asks her if people retire to Haiti when they’re old. Fabiola says that some do, but she doesn’t have enough money to do that. Manman wanted to retire in Detroit. Kasim says this is crazy, and he mentions that his dad is in Memphis, Tennessee. Fabiola barely listens. She notices that Kasim has good table manners and neat hands that look like he cares for them. In Haiti, it was easy to tell what a boy did by his hands, but it’s harder here—and Kasim’s hands don’t look like the hands of a café worker. Fabiola asks if Kasim reads books, which offends him. He notes that Fabiola has already asked if he’s broke, and now she wants to know if he’s literate. Kasim asks for the check, and Fabiola resolves to find out what makes Kasim sad and angry.

Kasim presents a version of the American Dream that will no doubt appeal to Fabiola. He’s willing to make sacrifices in the short term—such as driving an unreliable car—in order to save for bigger, better things like a house. And, importantly, he’s working an honest job to earn the money. Given that Fabiola’s greatest desire was for Manman to find honest work in Detroit, Kasim’s story likely inspires her. He makes the case that dreams are possible and can come true, if only one is willing to work for them.



Even as things start to look up for Fabiola in terms of her budding relationship with Kasim, the fact remains that Manman is still in the detention facility. In other words, Fabiola feels like her loyalty is being pulled in multiple directions as she starts to make a life for herself in Detroit. But, nevertheless, accepting Kasim’s new name for her shows that Fabiola is starting to feel more at home in Detroit and is stepping into a new identity as she feels more and more American.



The idea that Manman wanted to retire in Detroit drives home how much Fabiola and Manman idealized living here. In their minds, the U.S. is a place to go to relax and enjoy life—while Haiti, though their home, is a place to work. Meanwhile, as Fabiola tries to learn more about Kasim, she unintentionally offends him. Asking if he reads books may reflect Fabiola’s incomplete grasp of English—she may actually be asking if he’s interested in education. This is important to her, as in her mind, education equals earning power.



Kasim pays for the meal in cash and ignores Fabiola as they get back in his **car**. There, Fabiola puts a hand on his and says she meant to ask if he likes to read and likes school. She can tell that he doesn't like this question either. After a minute, he says that you don't ask that of people around here—Donna didn't ask Dray that when they met. Fabiola points out that Kasim isn't Dray and says that she understands. In Haiti, they call boys like Dray *vagabon*. Some of them probably like school, but they like the money they get from dealing drugs more. Kasim laughs and asks why Fabiola thinks Dray sells drugs. He also asks if she thinks *he* sells drugs. When Fabiola asks if he does, Kasim is even more offended. She says that she doesn't like Dray, since he's mean to Donna.

Kasim insists that Dray and Donna do their own thing. He also explains that Dray is like family to him. Fabiola asks if that means that Kasim is going to hit his girlfriend too. Kasim lists all the offensive things Fabiola has said tonight and laughs. Fabiola is happy, but she's not sure if she can trust Kasim. Quietly, Kasim says that he's nothing like Dray. He's sold weed a few times to get money for his mom, but he's not a kingpin. His relationship to dealing is "favors here and there," and "shit you do for fam." Fabiola shivers, since she can tell that Kasim would do anything for his family. In front of the **house**, Kasim kisses Fabiola.

CHAPTER 11

Pri warns Fabiola to not have sex with Kasim too fast, while Donna yells from the bathroom that Pri should worry about her own romantic troubles. Fabiola giggles and asks if Pri is in love. Donna yells that Pri is, and when Pri won't say what the girl's name is, Donna shouts that her name is Taj. Chantal rushes upstairs. Pri shares that Kasim took Fabiola out to dinner, so Chantal cautions Fabiola to say no if Kasim asks her to marry him. She explains that Kasim always wants to marry his girlfriends. Chantal then hands Fabiola a small box, and Fabiola can't hide her smile. The thought of getting married is nice. Fabiola opens the box to find a phone inside. Pri quips that now, Fabiola can text Kasim their wedding plans.

Donna comes in and asks if Fabiola is a virgin. Fabiola is. The twins then give Chantal a hard time about wanting to have sex with a book instead of a person, and they start a pillow fight. Fabiola feels happy and lets her thoughts wander to Kasim. Donna tells Fabiola that Kasim is sweet—if he loves her, she says, he'll make Fabiola feel like a million dollars. Fabiola wonders if Dray loves Donna, or if she just feels loved because he spends so much money on her. She asks if Donna loves Dray. Though Donna says she does, the joking stops.

It's telling that Kasim insists it's inappropriate to ask people in Detroit if they like education. This suggests that an education might not get people very far, so for many, it's not worth pursuing. Fabiola seems to understand this, to some degree, when she suggests that Dray probably earns more money dealing drugs than he would finishing school. But in Kasim's mind, Fabiola's questioning suggests that she's out of touch and will never understand how things work around here. Her idealism may be understandable, but it's not going to get her very far.



Fabiola feels better about liking Kasim when she realizes how loyal he is to people he loves. Even if Dray is, unfortunately, one of those people, loyalty is nevertheless something that Fabiola values. When Fabiola and Kasim kiss, they take the first step toward becoming each other's chosen family. This means that Fabiola's sense of loyalty will begin to shift: she'll be loyal to Kasim, not just her blood family.



Talking about romance is one way that Fabiola and her cousins strengthen their relationships with each other. It gives them a way to laugh, give each other advice, and support each other's happiness. So even as Fabiola's cousins seem apprehensive when it comes to Kasim, Fabiola having this conversation with her cousins is still a positive thing. Receiving a phone also gives Fabiola more independence as she embarks on her new life. Now, she can text Kasim—and, if she chooses, Detective Stevens.



It's probably simple for Donna to say that she loves Dray. She does seem to genuinely care for him, but this is complicated by the fact that he abuses her. It's heartbreaking to see Donna in this situation, but it shows Fabiola that life in Detroit isn't all it's cracked up to be. Just because her cousins have big dreams doesn't mean that those dreams are going to come true.



Fabiola stays up late, listening to Bad Leg sing and replaying the day's events in her head. Finally, she gets up to pray and goes down to the corner of American Street and Joy Road. She asks Papa Legba what she should do. He doesn't answer for a minute but then, he sings about crossroads, bearing a cross, and hoping not to die. A cigar appears in Papa Legba's hand and the smoke drifts to the street signs of Joy Road and American Street. Fabiola looks down Joy Road, which has few streetlights and lots of open lots. It could mean lots of possibilities or empty hope. American Street has rows of houses, and the empty lots look like missing teeth. People in Haiti would thank Jesus for a street like this.

Fabiola thinks that she has to choose a path. One street represents the future, and Papa Legba will help her choose. Fabiola says that on American Street, she'll live with her family, date Kasim, and stay quiet. On Joy Road, she'll tell the truth and become happy, since she'll get Manman back. She asks which road to take, but when she looks back to Papa Legba, he's gone.

When Fabiola crawls back into bed, she lies that she was downstairs eating. Chantal says that Fabiola is going to be killed on the streets, but Fabiola insists that she feels safe in Detroit. This makes Chantal laugh; she asks Fabiola if she's seen people stomped in the face, if she's had to dodge bullets, and if she knows what a dead body smells like. Fabiola quietly shares her stories of experiencing police brutality and the earthquake back in Haiti. Chantal says that Fabiola wins, but Fabiola says Chantal won—Chantal is home, while Fabiola left her home behind. Chantal admits that sometimes, she wonders what life would've been like if Matant Jo had stayed in Haiti. Maybe, she and Fabiola would've grown up like sisters and shopped for American clothes together. Fabiola laughs—they'd have to bus to the Dominican Republic to shop.

Chantal asks about what Fabiola used to post on Facebook, but Fabiola says that she and her friends didn't do much in the city. She had to fight often, since people knew Matant Jo was sending money. Manman decided to leave because she was tired of fighting, and because she wanted Fabiola to be like Chantal. Fabiola asks if it's true that Chantal is going to be a doctor. Chantal sighs and tells Fabiola to get through school, to stop messing with Bad Leg, and to not ask about the dead white girl.

As Fabiola looks down American Street and Joy Road, she uses her Vodou spirituality to make sense of what she sees. For her, this isn't just a crossroads—this is a symbolic place that offers her two versions of her future. Furthermore, Fabiola comes to this crossroads as a Haitian person who knows just how much people back home would give up to live on streets like American Street or Joy Road. But the description of the empty houses looking like “missing teeth” connotes loss and perhaps even violence, suggesting that this neighborhood may be more sinister than Fabiola realizes.



Even if Papa Legba is a spirit guide, that doesn't mean he's going to give Fabiola clear answers. Rather, it's up to Fabiola to interpret signs and occurrences—and through that, to make her own decisions.



Chantal tries to impress upon Fabiola that even American Street and Joy Road aren't all that they seem—they're dangerous, and hanging out in that area them could get Fabiola killed. What ensues is an argument about who's experienced the most trauma and who lived in the more dangerous place. While Fabiola may make the case that Haiti was more dangerous than Detroit is, the fact remains that she still thinks of Haiti as home. It's surprising to hear that Chantal thinks Haiti is home, too. She longs to connect with her Haitian roots, but she has an idealized vision of what life in Haiti is like.



Just as Fabiola had an incorrect idea of what the U.S. was like based on her cousins' social media posts, Chantal doesn't understand what life in Haiti is like because of what Fabiola put on Facebook. Facebook allows people to curate what their lives look like, thereby presenting a version of themselves that seems great—no matter where they live.



CHANTAL'S STORY

Chantal wonders if memory is like a muscle. In her anatomy and physiology class, she learns how the body works but not how the mind works. Chantal remembers how, when she was nine, she had to translate newspaper articles about Phillip's murder for Matant Jo. Later, when detectives came to the house, Chantal had to translate their words into Creole for Matant Jo and translate Matant Jo's Creole into English for the detectives. Chantal feels like Haiti and Creole are stuck inside of her, like muscles. America is her skin. According to Chantal's papers, she's not supposed to be here, since she's a "resident alien" and not a citizen. The government doesn't care that she's human. Chantal tries to walk a path between school and the streets. Matant Jo wanted Chantal to go to a fancy university, but Chantal couldn't leave. This is home, and Fabiola reminds her of Haiti.

Here, Chantal reveals that she was forced to grow up far too early when Phillip was murdered. Because she was bilingual, it fell to her to translate what were surely gruesome, heartbreaking details of her father's death—even though she was just a child. Chantal also implies that even though she's spent a majority of her life in Detroit, she's still figuring out how to relate to her Haitian identity. This is complicated by her immigration status, but her situation nevertheless makes the case that immigrants must constantly negotiate their identities.



CHAPTER 12

Fabiola's English teacher, Mr. Nolan, hands back her paper and explains that she got a low grade because she wrote a personal essay, not a research paper. Then, Mr. Nolan leaves instead of explaining what he means. Fabiola is shocked by her low grade, since she's been writing in English for years. Clearly, Mr. Nolan thinks that everything she wrote about a Haitian revolutionary hero is wrong. Imani asks Fabiola what's wrong, and Fabiola shares that she got a D. Imani offers to help, since she gets As on her papers. At first, Fabiola doesn't want help, but she realizes that she needs to learn to game the system. Her cousins won't be much help, since they don't seem to ever have books—but Imani carries a heavy book bag, so Fabiola accepts her offer.

Both Fabiola and Matant Jo seem to have expected more from Fabiola's English school in Haiti than what Fabiola got. Fabiola implies that she doesn't understand the difference between a personal essay and a research paper, which indicates that she's unprepared for school in the United States. Meanwhile, Imani's offer of tutoring helps make Fabiola feel more welcome, and it gives her hope that she'll be able to figure out how to navigate the U.S. school system. Furthermore, relying on Imani for help gives Fabiola a relationship outside of her cousins, further rooting her in her new community.



Fabiola is thankful for Imani; she believes Papa Legba has opened the door to friendship for her. Since Kasim has been asking Fabiola to visit him at work, she texts him for his café's address. Fabiola and Imani take the bus, and Imani tells Fabiola to always sit near the bus driver. In Haiti, Manman always told Fabiola to sit in the back—it's easier to jump out that way. Fabiola looks out the window until they get off. Imani has seen Kasim before with Dray. She says that everyone knows Dray, but he makes her uncomfortable. He's cute, but he always checks out other girls and brings friends to hook up with Donna's friends. When Fabiola asks if Kasim was one of those friends, Imani says that Kasim isn't a "baller" and clearly doesn't need Dray's money.

Fabiola decides that Papa Legba has pushed her toward Imani; her spirituality seems to be the lens through which she looks at every part of her life. Imani also has useful information about Dray—and since Imani seems so sensible, Fabiola should put stock in Imani's assessment. It's comforting, then, when Imani offers a favorable assessment of Kasim. This makes Fabiola feel better about pursuing him, since her entire community—her friends and her family—support the relationship.



Kasim greets the girls as they take a table. Imani starts to talk about Fabiola's essay, but Kasim is too distracting for Fabiola to pay attention. Finally, Imani kicks her. They laugh, which annoys a white couple next to them. Kasim brings the girls hot chocolate and touches Fabiola's hand. Fabiola feels like air or like a bubble—and she feels as though she pops when she pulls out her wallet to pay and finds Detective Stevens's card. Tapping the card on the table, Fabiola is certain that Detective Stevens knows where she lives. Chantal, Pri, and Donna certainly won't want to talk to Detective Stevens, since they know Dray— but Detective Stevens must know that Fabiola doesn't care about Dray at all. The detective also knows that Fabiola needs to get Manman back.

The aside about Imani and Fabiola's laughter annoying the white couple illuminates how difficult life can be for racial minorities and immigrants. Noting the couple's race implies that they're particularly annoyed because the girls are Black, suggesting that racial minorities in the U.S. (particularly those who are also immigrants) are judged more harshly than white people might be. Meanwhile, it's telling that even though Fabiola knows she's being manipulated, she still considers Detective Stevens's offer. Even though she knows that working with the detective could have negative consequences for her and her family, she feels that getting Manman back is her top priority.



CHAPTER 13

Hours later, Fabiola and Imani are the only customers in the café when Kasim and his coworkers begin to close up. As Imani teaches Fabiola how to cite sources for a paper, the girls hear thumping music coming from outside. Imani begins to dance as Kasim walks outside to Dray's **car**, and Kasim waves the girls outside so he can finish cleaning. Dray gets out and starts wiping down the rims on his tires. In a whisper, Imani tells Fabiola how expensive the rims are—and Dray sees that Imani is impressed. He invites her to come take a picture. Fabiola can tell that Imani doesn't want to, but Imani slowly approaches him anyway. Dray pulls her down into his lap next to one of the rims and takes their picture. Imani rushes back to Fabiola as soon as Dray lets her go.

Dray again shows that he's confident in his ability to control people. He must realize that Imani doesn't want to go to him, so the fact that she approaches anyway probably makes him feel even more powerful. This situates Dray as a person who's making the violence in Detroit even worse. He traumatizes others on purpose, and he enjoys making them afraid so that he can feel powerful. Seeing him at work probably gives Fabiola yet another reason to work with the detective and put Dray behind bars.



Kasim comes out of the café, kisses Fabiola, and says that Dray is going to drive them home. Imani shakes her head, but she tells Dray her name when he asks for it. Fabiola insists that they'll take the bus, but Imani shoots Fabiola a look of surrender. She even gets in the front seat when Dray asks—and Fabiola can't muster the courage to ask to change seats. Fabiola watches Imani shrink away from Dray as he reaches for her lap. She only notices they're at Matant Jo's **house** when she hears her cousins shouting for a "bitch" to get out of the car. Donna reaches in to rip Imani out and accuses her of trying to steal Dray. She then yells at Dray for posting pictures on Instagram of himself with Imani. Fabiola tries to stop Donna, but Pri pulls her back.

Fabiola has witnessed Dray's abuse firsthand, multiple times, so Kasim's acceptance of his friend likely seems even more problematic to her. His loyalty to Dray means that he's willing to excuse Dray's inappropriate behavior, no matter how bad it gets. And while it's not clear whether Dray put the photo online specifically to provoke Donna, it nevertheless gives him another way to terrorize her. Now, he can make her feel insecure about their relationship—especially since Donna blames Imani, not Dray.



Fabiola tries to defend Imani to Donna, which makes Dray tell Kasim to control his girlfriend. Chantal gently asks Imani where she lives. In a rush, Imani gives Chantal her address and asks her to tell Pri and Donna to not beat her up. Pri rushes away, muttering that Donna will come home with a black eye later as Dray shoves Donna against the car by her neck. Everyone tries to get between the couple as Pri shouts at Dray. Fabiola feels her rage melting away as she realizes that Dray reminds her of the Iwa Baron Samedi, the guardian of the cemetery. She hates Dray and everything he does, and she vows to take him down. When Fabiola gets back in the house, she locks herself in the bathroom and texts Detective Stevens.

Because Fabiola saw exactly what happened and knew that Imani wasn't trying to provoke Dray or Donna, she feels that it's her responsibility to stand up for Imani. In her mind, this is an expression of loyalty and of her desire to do the right thing. Imani's fear of getting beaten up speaks to the Three Bees' reputation at school. Like Dray, Fabiola's cousins contribute to the traumatic experience of living in Detroit. And again, when Fabiola realizes that Dray is the Vodou spirit Baron Samedi, she's better able to make sense of his role in her and her loved ones' lives.



PRIMADONNA'S STORY

Donna says that she and Dray have been together since she was 12. Even at times when they were broken up, Dray has always given Donna everything she needs—he looks out for her. It's different from the way Pri looks out for Donna. Pri calls Donna a “ho,” and Donna knows her twin is joking, but it still hurts—especially because Dray is the only person Donna has ever had sex with. Donna remembers how, when she was 10, some of Matant Jo's male friends told Donna she'd be promiscuous because she looked sexy. Other men would tell Matant Jo to carry a gun to keep the boys away. In reality, Dray was the one who had a gun to keep the guys away. He put one guy in the hospital for spreading rumors about Donna, and then he bought Donna a diamond necklace. The two of them have been Dungeons and Dragons ever since.

Donna sees her relationship with Dray as something necessary and positive—when no one else looks out for her, Dray does. This shows how the stressful, violent nature of life in Detroit can push a young woman like Donna to justify an abusive relationship as her only option. Donna's story also shows that she had to grow up too fast, just like Chantal did. For Donna, this was largely due with Dray and the other people who were judging and pressuring her.



CHAPTER 14

Donna attempts to put a wig on Fabiola in preparation for her date with Kasim. Fabiola pulls away and wonders whether Manman would approve of Kasim or her outfit. Just then, her phone buzzes: it's Detective Stevens, promising to call tomorrow at 3:00. Fabiola tries to forget about the detective. As Donna makes another attempt with the wig, Chantal pulls up a YouTube hair tutorial and does Fabiola's hair. When they're done, Fabiola feels like Ezili, the Iwa of beauty. Donna insists that Fabiola looks like Rosa Parks and storms out when Fabiola refuses makeup too. Pri cackles. Fabiola adds lip gloss and pulls on one of Manman's dresses, but she changes into jeans and a sweatshirt when Pri says that she looks like a church lady.

Donna has a very specific idea of what makes a woman beautiful; her comment about Fabiola looking like Rosa Parks is intended as an insult. But the fact remains that Fabiola feels beautiful with Chantal's hairdo, and that's what matters. The mood still remains lighthearted, which suggests that even if Fabiola rejects Donna's beautifying attempts, their relationship is still improving.



Dressed like this, Fabiola feels less Haitian and less like an immigrant. Chantal asks where they're going. Fabiola doesn't know, so Chantal tells her to make Kasim bring her back if he's going to take her to his house. Pri tells Fabiola to practice the phrase, "Take me the fuck home!" Fabiola knows that Pri just wants to make fun of her accent, but she repeats the phrase anyway. Chantal and Pri howl with laughter.

When the doorbell rings, Fabiola sees Dray's **car** outside—Dray let Kasim borrow it. Fabiola doesn't want to get in and looks for Bad Leg, but the old man is nowhere to be found. She calls to Donna and asks if she can sit in the passenger seat before sliding in. Then, Kasim gets in and explains that he had the car detailed to make it smell and feel different. He turns on jazzy hip-hop and says that they're listening to J Dilla, a Detroit legend. He turns on Big Sean next, and Fabiola recognizes the song. As Kasim turns the corner, Fabiola sees Papa Legba staring right into the car. The bass suddenly sounds like the signal for danger. But when Kasim reaches for Fabiola's hand, she feels calm and settled.

Downtown, they get in line at the Detroit Opera House—they're going to see Alvin Ailey dance. Fabiola is speechless. She's never seen dancers like the people on the posters, and she's never seen an audience made up of so many Black people. As Kasim puts an arm around Fabiola, she realizes that she's underdressed. Kasim tells her she looks fine and pulls her close, giving Fabiola the opportunity to sniff his sweet cologne. A minute later, when he hands over the tickets, Fabiola sees that they each cost over \$100. The performance is like nothing Fabiola has ever seen. She wants to wrap up her memories of the performance and give them to Manman.

Afterwards, Fabiola asks how much the tickets cost. She tells Kasim that he should be spending money on his **car** and his mother, not her. He sighs and says that he got the tickets from his Uncle Q, who is Dray's uncle. In a lot of ways, though, Uncle Q is everyone's uncle—he owns the Q club and practically owns the entire block it's on. Fabiola says that she had an uncle too, and she's shocked when Kasim says he knows all about "Haitian Phil." He says that Pri talks about Phillip all the time and makes sure that everyone knows that her father "went down for Q." Seeing Fabiola's surprise, Kasim advises her to stay out of this matter. Meanwhile, Fabiola feels like Papa Legba is drawing her in as he works to get Manman to this side. Kasim kisses Fabiola, and the city looks uncharacteristically beautiful.

Fabiola's tone suggests that she thinks it's good to look less Haitian. Looking like an American, she implies, will make it seem like she belongs—something that would presumably make Manman proud. Fabiola also repeats Pri's phrase to feel like she belongs, even if she knows she's the butt of the joke.



For Fabiola, Dray's car represents everything that's wrong with Detroit, while Kasim's broken-down car presents a hopeful, honest picture of the city. But borrowing the car shows that Kasim understands the importance of dreaming and striving for better. He has the opportunity to put together an evening that will make Fabiola feel appreciated, fancy, and expensive—in other words, like she's achieved the American Dream.



The dance performance is both affirming and anxiety-inducing. Even as Fabiola feels more at home in this crowd of beautiful Black people, she nevertheless feels like she doesn't fit in as well as she should. This drives home that she's still figuring out how to fit in here. When she mentions wanting to share this experience with Manman, Fabiola also reminds the reader of her true goal: to get Manman back. This suggests that her relationship with Kasim is secondary to this goal.



Kasim's information about Uncle Q and Phillip further clues Fabiola in to how life in Detroit works. The very fact that Phillip "went down for Q" suggests that Phillip may have been involved in illicit activity, given the implication that Uncle Q deals in drugs. This complicates Fabiola's understanding of her uncle, who she's thought of as honest and upstanding up until this point. It's telling, then, that Fabiola and Kasim's kiss makes the city look beautiful. Love and companionship, the novel suggests, can be an antidote to the desperation and violence of the city.



CHAPTER 15

Fabiola struggles with a mix of feelings. Kasim makes her feel like honey, while thinking of Manman's absence makes her feel empty. She misses the sun in Port-au-Prince, but she's hopeful that Manman will be here soon to warm her up. One morning, Fabiola can almost feel Manman's warmth as the sun rises. She lies that her belly hurts so that she can stay home from school. Once her cousins leave, Fabiola makes herself tea and wonders what Manman and Matant Jo would be doing if Manman were here now. Back upstairs, Fabiola screams into Chantal's pillows. She's almost asleep when she hears Papa Legba singing outside. Fabiola rushes outside to listen. Papa Legba looks different than he usually does when he's out at night, but Fabiola can't pinpoint what's changed.

Fabiola asks Papa Legba for "the word," and he sings a rhyme for her. On the last line, his cigar lights up, the streetlights buzz, and thunder booms. Fabiola looks down—she remembers this sound from when she was little, when the earthquake almost split her home in half. She wonders if this street corner is going to collapse under all of Fabiola's troubles. Fabiola remembers how Manman always says it's impossible to get anything for free; sacrifices are necessary. Fabiola knows what she has to do. Papa Legba is gone, but Fabiola commits the last word of each of his lines to memory. The first two words are "street" and "block," so Fabiola heads for the block that Uncle Q owns. She's certain she'll find Dray and the underworld when she gets where she's going.

At the end of the street, Fabiola sees Papa Legba. When Fabiola crosses the street to join him, he's gone. She walks down American Street in the rain, noticing the empty houses and lots. As a car passes Fabiola, she catches sight of Papa Legba again in front of a house—but the house doesn't seem meaningful, so Fabiola keeps walking. When Papa Legba doesn't appear again, she figures it's time to figure out where Dray is without his help. Finally, she reaches the Q club. When she pulls the door, dogs bark. Fabiola sees Dray standing nearby, holding the leashes of two angry dogs. He asks why she's here, just as Fabiola notices a fat man standing near the entrance. She says, "Q," and regrets it immediately. She tries to act normal and asks if Q is the name of the club.

Even though Fabiola has had some happy moments with Kasim and her cousins, she still feels unmoored and traumatized without Manman here. She feels as though her loyalty to Manman is being tested as she immerses herself in her new life. But when Papa Legba starts singing, Fabiola sees an opportunity to make sense of this dissonance. She can listen to his song and read the clues hidden in his appearance—and hopefully, this will help her understand how to achieve the best of both worlds.



The Haitian earthquake would've been a defining event in Fabiola's childhood. So, whenever something happens that reminds her of that traumatic experience, she'll naturally think about it. But in Fabiola's mind, the earthquake is more than just a natural disaster. Rather, it symbolizes all the problems in her life. But because Papa Legba seems to be united with (if not in control of) the thunder, Fabiola doesn't fear it too much. Rather, she takes it as a sign and sets out to figure out what it means.



Papa Legba's abrupt appearances and disappearances add credence to Fabiola's assessment that Bad Leg is indeed Papa Legba. Within the world of the novel, Vodou spirits are alive and well—and they can guide Fabiola toward her goal. Meanwhile, the fact that Fabiola is going after Dray indicates that she's decided to cooperate with Detective Stevens and see what she can find about Dray's drug-dealing. But the angry dogs make it clear that tracking down Dray isn't going to be easy, and it might be downright dangerous.



Dray tells Fabiola to come inside with him. He hands the dogs to the fat man, and Fabiola knows that this is Papa Legba's doing. The club is dark. Fabiola awkwardly says that her mom is in a detention center, and that she wants to throw a party here when Manman is released. Dray laughs and says that Uncle Q threw Matant Jo a birthday party here once. Then, he tells Fabiola that if she and Kasim are serious, Fabiola will meet Uncle Q soon—and Fabiola and Kasim can have what he and Donna have. Fabiola notes that Dray hurts Donna, but Dray snaps that Donna hurts him too. Then, Dray warns Fabiola not to snoop and grabs a gun out of a drawer. He calls for Fabiola to approach, but she can't. Someone calls Dray from outside, so Dray tells Fabiola to stay put, and he leaves.

The door doesn't latch behind Dray, so Fabiola runs through it and all the way home. On the steps of the house, she calls Detective Stevens. In a rush, Fabiola says that her uncle Phillip "went down" for Dray's Uncle Q, and that there are bad things happening in the club. Detective Stevens is concerned for Fabiola but says that she knows about the club. She warns Fabiola to be careful and then says that if Fabiola is free tomorrow, she can arrange a call with Manman.

CHAPTER 16

The next day, Fabiola breaks school rules and keeps her phone in her bag. Detective Stevens texts her that Manman will call at noon, so Fabiola hides in a bathroom stall with her phone during lunch. When Manman calls, Fabiola asks her how they're treating her in the detention facility, but all Manman wants to talk about is Fabiola's studies. She also asks if Matant Jo is sending money and a lawyer. Fabiola explains that Matant Jo isn't helping; Fabiola is working for Manman's release alone. Then, the connection cuts out, and Imani knocks on the stall door. Fabiola, feeling light and happy, tells Imani that she was talking to her aunt.

That afternoon, Fabiola knocks on Matant Jo's door and lets herself in. Matant Jo throws a slipper at Fabiola and then yells for her to come in. The room is dark and stinks of alcohol and food. Fabiola tells her aunt that she spoke to Manman, and Matant Jo replies that Manman's situation her is own fault—she's always been hardheaded. She also says that she can't help. Fabiola, however, asks why Matant Jo sleeps all the time—but Matant Jo just asks for a glass of water. Fabiola fetches her the water, and Matant Jo praises Fabiola for all her work around the house. Looking around, Fabiola wants to clean up Matant Jo's room, especially the nightstand. It's covered in pill bottles.

Because Fabiola believes that Papa Legba is guiding her through this, the experience isn't as frightening as it might be otherwise. Knowing that Papa Legba is in control—and that Dray is also just a Iwa, Baron Samedi—makes Fabiola feel safe and as though she can change the situation through prayer. However, the fact that Dray seems to suspect Fabiola of snooping doesn't bode well for Fabiola, especially since he has access to a gun. Dray clearly isn't afraid to be violent and defend himself if he thinks it's necessary—even if Fabiola is Donna's cousin.



It seems like a bit of a shock for Fabiola to learn that Detective Stevens already knows about the club; this suggests that Detective Stevens might be withholding information that Fabiola needs to effectively be of help. But offering Fabiola a phone conversation with Manman keeps Fabiola invested anyway.



Manman could be so unwilling to talk about her experiences because she wants to protect Fabiola from the reality of what's going on in the detention center. However, it's also possible that Manman still has an idealized idea about what life is like in the U.S.—hence why she asks about Fabiola's schoolwork and whether Matant Jo is sending money and a lawyer. It seems beyond Manman's grasp to accept that her daughter is the one who has to work to free her.



Matant Jo seems helpless and overcome with hopelessness. In her mind, it might not be worth attempting to get Manman out of the detention center—which suggests that when Matant Jo has tried to do things like that in the past, she hasn't succeeded. Her experiences have taught her that it's useless to try, especially when dealing with U.S. bureaucracy.



Fabiola asks Matant Jo what hurts, and Matant Jo says that *everything* hurts and asks if Manman was also in pain. Fabiola explains that Manman wasn't in pain when they lived in Haiti, but she was tired of fighting for everything. She assures Matant Jo that the money was enough and they're silent for a moment. When Matant Jo asks what Fabiola's plan is, Fabiola says she's going to get Manman—and she's not tired of fighting. With a laugh, Matant Jo calls Fabiola Faboubou, like Manman does. Fabiola says that if Matant Jo is going to use that nickname, she's going to call her Matant Jo, not Aunt Jo.

Matant Jo gets up and begins to change in front of Fabiola. Fabiola studies her aunt's body: it looks swollen, and Fabiola has to help her aunt get the nightgown off her shoulder. Then, Fabiola gathers clothes and garbage. Fabiola sets her bundle down to help Matant Jo with her hair. As Fabiola braids, she explains that Manman was a *mambo* of some regard and insists that Papa Legba is on the corner. She knows that Matant Jo used to believe that too. Matant Jo laughs, says that Fabiola will learn, and points out that she and Manman needed her money in Haiti. Trying to make herself sound as American as possible, Fabiola says that she and Manman did well in Haiti, even without Matant Jo's money.

Fabiola and Matant Jo begin to argue: Fabiola insists that she's been praying for Matant Jo for years to thank her for her American passport, while Matant Jo insists that Manman should've stayed in Detroit after Fabiola was born. In Matant Jo's mind, it's Manman's own fault that she's in jail. Fabiola explains that Manman is in New Jersey, not in Haiti, and that it isn't her fault—in fact, Manman wanted to come to help Matant Jo. Matant Jo says that Manman just finally came to her senses and tells Fabiola to stop braiding. Fabiola insists that Bad Leg is Papa Legba, and he's going to open doors. Matant Jo harshly replies that this is Detroit—there are only junkies and dealers.

MARJORIE AND VALERIE'S STORY

Matant Jo says that when she was 15 and Manman was 13, their world opened up when the dictator of Haiti was thrown out. Everyone in Haiti thought that this would bring freedom, democracy, and money. Instead, everything fell apart—and as young orphan girls, Jo and Valerie felt like there were always dictators trying to rule them. They got jobs working in a businessman's house. The man liked to watch the girls work, which they put up with, but Jo screamed when he tried to touch her. The girls had to leave the house that night.

Fabiola walks a fine line as she tries to be appreciative of everything Matant Jo has done, while also making it clear that her inaction in this situation is unacceptable. Given how loyal Fabiola is to even her cousins, it's unthinkable to her that Matant Jo would abandon her own sister in a detention facility. This, however, likely reflects Fabiola's youth, naiveté, and idealism.



Even if Fabiola is annoyed with Matant Jo's behavior, she still wants to honor and appreciate her aunt for everything she's done for her. One of the ways that Fabiola wants to help is by reminding Matant Jo that Vodou is real and everywhere, if only Matant Jo is willing to believe and look for it. Since Vodou provides Fabiola so much comfort, Fabiola believes it will do the same for others. Matant Jo, however, essentially makes the case that Vodou is useless.



While Fabiola doesn't blame Matant Jo for the fact that Manman is in a detention facility, she does make the case that Manman didn't come to the United States for selfish reasons. Rather, she tried to come to help Matant Jo—so Matant Jo has some responsibility to help Manman in return. But in Matant Jo's mind, Manman messed up years ago when she went back to Haiti with baby Fabiola. By blaming someone else, Matant Jo absolves herself of any responsibility.



As young women without a family to care for them, Matant Jo and Manman had to grow up much too fast—and their daughters eventually had to do the same. With this, the novel suggests that circumstances like poverty or vulnerability as a young woman forces children to lose their innocence too early and fend for themselves.



Jo and Valerie joined crowds waiting for boats to Miami and squeezed into a fishing boat with many others. When the boat started to sink, Jo and Valerie clung to each other as Valerie prayed to La Siren—a mermaid—to save them. Then, a big boat came and answered Valerie’s prayers. Matant Jo says that she didn’t drown because she needed to find freedom in America. And Valerie—Manman—didn’t die because she had more to do.

Even if Matant Jo doesn’t fully buy into Vodou anymore, she still finds meaning in Manman’s prayers. In this sense, Matant Jo is still connected to her Haitian roots and belief systems, even if she seems too hopeless and unmoored to function in Detroit.



CHAPTER 17

After class, Mr. Nolan gives Fabiola her revised paper. Since Fabiola added evidence, Mr. Nolan bumped her grade up to an A. Mr. Nolan asks Fabiola how she’s adjusting to Detroit, but Fabiola isn’t sure how to answer. After a minute, Mr. Nolan says that he’s sure it’s hard, so he’ll give Fabiola extra credit if she ever wants to write about her experience. Fabiola asks him how he’s adjusting and realizes immediately that it’s a silly question. But she wants to know what his life is like, since he’s only the second Black male teacher she’s ever had. With a laugh, Mr. Nolan explains that he was born and raised in Detroit. He’s messed up a few times, but he made things right and expects his students to do the same. As Fabiola leaves, Mr. Nolan tells her that she’s doing well and encourages her to stay focused.

Even if Fabiola resents Mr. Nolan’s teaching methods at times, he’s still an important figure in her life as a Black teacher. He’s in a position of power and makes a decent living—he shows Fabiola what’s possible, and this makes him a role model. Mr. Nolan also makes the case that it’s possible for people to mess up when they’re young and put things back together afterward. This certainly isn’t true for everyone—lots of people lack access to education or other opportunities—but Mr. Nolan still encourages his students to try.



Outside, Imani notices Fabiola’s A and says that Mr. Nolan went easy on her. Imani insists that Fabiola has been spending too much time with Kasim to write and asks what Fabiola “put out” to see Alvin Ailey, thrusting her hips. Just then, Donna appears and asks if Imani wants to have sex with Dray. Imani looks away as Donna says that she’s just trying to look out for Imani. Fabiola assures Imani that Donna won’t do anything, but Imani insists that Fabiola’s cousins will hurt her anyway. Since Chantal is honking the horn for Fabiola, Fabiola lets Imani go and gets in the **car**. She tells Donna that Imani is just trying to help with school, not steal Dray. Donna says that she’s aware, and Pri explains that as the Three Bees, it’s their job to make people afraid.

Donna’s bullying doesn’t make sense to Fabiola, who knows that Dray is the real villain in this situation. But Pri tries to explain that they’re actually doing a good thing by frightening people like Imani. In this sense, Pri and Donna insist that the ability to endure emotional violence and trauma is necessary to survive in Detroit. Fabiola doesn’t believe this, however, which indicates that she’s not totally loyal to her cousins and their worldview.



Donna says that Imani needs to understand that she has no chance with Dray. A lot of girls wouldn’t hesitate to have sex with Dray, thinking that he’d buy them things—but Dray regularly burns those girls. Fabiola asks why Donna couldn’t just tell Imani this instead of bullying her. At this, Chantal snaps that being nice and showing weakness will give other girls the opportunity to bully Fabiola. But if the Three Bees keep doing what they’re doing, Fabiola can focus on schoolwork. Fabiola understands—her cousins need to protect their bodies, their name, and their story. And since they’re her cousins, Fabiola knows that she has to pitch in too. However, Fabiola thinks that she needs to protect her friends like Imani, as well.

Here, Donna admits that Dray cheats on her with other girls hoping to take her place. Clearly, there is a fight for Dray’s affection, and Donna feels justified in intimidating girls like Imani if it means she continues to benefit from Dray’s financial generosity. To Fabiola, though, this all looks ridiculous—until Chantal points out that Fabiola benefits from Donna and Pri’s bullying. Because they make it clear that Fabiola is one of them, she has the space and the freedom to concentrate on schoolwork.



Chantal pulls up in front of a house, where a group of girls are standing outside. Donna tells Fabiola to get out; they're getting their hair and nails done for Dray's birthday party tonight. Fabiola refuses, but Donna explains that Fabiola has to look the part if she wants to come. Then, Donna stalks off, and Chantal assures Fabiola that she doesn't have to go—if only because Dray is paying. Dray wants Fabiola to look good for Kasim. Chantal explains that Dray tried to butter up her and Pri like this too. Pri sighs that sometimes, she wishes Fabiola wasn't with Kasim, since he's so close to Dray. When Fabiola asks why her cousins still allow Dray in their lives, Pri explains that it's because Donna loves him. If Fabiola gets the makeover, it'll really be for Donna's benefit.

At this, Fabiola leaps out of the car. She knows that this is her chance to be a trickster, like Papa Legba, and put on a costume that will help her hand Dray over to Detective Stevens. Outside the car, Donna greets a tall woman with a booming voice named Miss Sandra, while another smaller, muscular woman introduces herself as Ms. Unique. Inside, Fabiola thinks that this place is an altar for Ezili. This, she realizes, is Papa Legba's doing—Fabiola needs Ezili's help to make her look like the kind of person Dray would like. Fabiola is distracted when Ms. Unique asks Donna what happened to her face. Donna's wigs have been covering up bruised scratches from Dray. As the women crowd around Donna and offer to hurt Dray, Fabiola says that Ezili-Danto would support that. She explains that Ezili-Danto is the lwa of vengeance for women. Fabiola sits for her transformation and vows to take down Dray.

CHAPTER 18

When Ms. Unique drops Fabiola and Donna off at the house, Donna shouts that she won. Matant Jo is with her male friends again and is unimpressed, but Chantal and Pri are shocked. Fabiola allows Donna to dress her in tight clothes and follows her to Dray's **car** when they hear it pull up. Kasim looks confused when he sees Fabiola, but she leads him into the backseat. At the party, Kasim asks what's up with Fabiola's new hair. He says that he doesn't like it, and Fabiola feels bad, but she reminds herself that she's not here to impress him. After dancing for a song, Kasim leads Fabiola over to Dray—and when Donna isn't looking, Dray smiles and winks at Fabiola. Fabiola feels bad for hurting Kasim, but she thinks that she's fighting a war and can't focus on love now.

For Chantal and Pri, it's more important to keep Donna in their lives than it is to try to shut Dray out of their lives. So, they put up with Dray's abuse and Donna's excuses, as it gives them their only opportunity to protect their sister. But they also want Fabiola to know that they know exactly what's going on. Dray is trying to buy Donna and her family members' affections, which is the reason he's paying for Fabiola's makeover. Allowing Dray to think he's winning in this instance will make Donna feel happier and more secure, so it might be worth it for Fabiola to go along with it.



Once again, Fabiola makes an uncomfortable situation manageable when she looks at things through the lens of her Vodou spirituality. Donna becomes more than just a cousin in this moment; she becomes an iteration of the Vodou spirit Ezili. This makes her more palatable to Fabiola and helps Fabiola accept that Donna means well and is trying to help. And by introducing Donna to Ezili and Ezili-Danto, she also helps Donna connect with her Haitian heritage. This might help Donna find the strength to leave Dray—or at least to survive his abuse until Fabiola can put Dray behind bars.



Kasim looks almost too innocent here when he implies that he didn't fall in love with Fabiola's appearance; he fell in love with who she is. After her makeover, Fabiola seems like a different person. But as sad as Kasim's disapproval makes Fabiola, it's worth it if she can leverage her new appearance to help Donna. Dray's wink at Fabiola suggests that, now that Fabiola looks more like Donna, she's more interesting to him. This could empower Fabiola to trick Dray into giving her information that she can pass onto Detective Stevens.



Just then, fat man from Q's appears and whispers something in Dray's ear. Dray's demeanor changes. He hands Donna his keys and phone and excuses himself. Donna drags Fabiola to the bathroom and says that if Kasim ever gives Fabiola his phone, she'll know it's "legit." While Donna is peeing, Fabiola secretly scrolls through Dray's phone until she finds a text talking about taking "shit" to "the spot on Anderson" tomorrow. She puts the phone down before Donna comes out of the stall, and then she asks Donna if she thinks Dray is cheating on her. With a sigh, Donna says that he isn't. Fabiola then goes into a stall and texts Detective Stevens about what she found.

Kasim is outside the bathroom when the girls come out. He leads them to Dray's private booth and whispers to Fabiola that they can leave after a toast. Dray pours champagne, and then he stares hard at Fabiola and calls her over. He gives her a glass, but Fabiola doesn't drink it. Instead, she watches Dray watch her. After a minute, Kasim leads Fabiola out to Dray's car. He drives toward downtown and pulls into a parking lot where Fabiola can see the river. Fabiola smiles because she knows that Ezili lives in rivers. Kasim's phone rings as they reach the river: it's Dray, and he wants to talk to Fabiola. He's upset that Fabiola left when he spent so much money to make her look beautiful. Fabiola hands the phone back to Kasim. She feels conflicted: Ezili makes her feel in love with Kasim, but Ezili-Danto makes her want to kill Dray to free Donna and Manman.

CHAPTER 19

Dray is so angry that the **house** seems to shake. He's downstairs, shouting for Donna—earlier, Donna cursed him out for cheating and getting caught by police. Matant Jo tries to make Dray leave, but he refuses. Matant Jo and Pri threaten Dray, but they also tell Donna to come talk to him. Donna appears and shouts that Dray got busted with a white girl. She tells him to get out, but Dray runs up the stairs. Through the gap under Chantal's door, Fabiola watches Pri's stocking feet approach Dray's boots. Barefoot, Donna steps up to Dray and asks if Uncle Q had to bail out the white girl, if the girl is "moving weight," or if she's just around for occasional sex. Fabiola concludes that her information for Detective Stevens was no good if Dray was arrested and released.

Under the door, Fabiola sees Pri's socks and Matant Jo's slippers converge around Donna to protect her, and Matant Jo shouts for Dray to get out. Dray goes back downstairs and shouts that he loves Donna. As Dray goes to his **car**, Fabiola meets his eyes from her window. She stares at him and thinks that she'll destroy him. He's digging his own grave, but she's ready to push him in.

Previously, Donna confirmed outright that Dray sleeps with other girls—but here, she denies that he's cheating on her. This may be the mental gymnastics she has to do in order to live with her situation, as she tries to protect herself from even more trauma at Dray's hands. This is also more proof that Dray is disrespectful and cruel to Donna; he doesn't treat her with the dignity and respect that she deserves.



In Dray's mind, Fabiola owes him her presence tonight since he's gone to all the trouble to make her look like his idea of a beautiful girl. But because Fabiola knows that she's playing a game and isn't actually trying to ingratiate herself to Dray, she doesn't feel bad about leaving his party with the hair and makeup he paid for. Indeed, leaving Dray's party is a chance for her to spend time with Kasim and make sure he knows that she's still herself, even if she did agree to Dray's makeover. This contributes to Fabiola's sense of loyalty to Kasim, which is disconcerting in its own right—as it might jeopardize Fabiola's loyalty to Manman.



Though Dray is outnumbered, the difference between his footwear and the women's symbolizes the fact that he's still far more powerful. With his boots, Dray has the power to crush the girls' bare and stocking-clad feet. The fact that Fabiola watches this altercation under the door and has this view of it allows her to clearly identify the power structure. Even if Pri puts on a good show of strength, she's still nowhere close to powerful enough to take on Dray. Her combative nature might make her seem more powerful, but it's merely an illusion.



As frightening as this situation was, Fabiola is still able to make it more manageable by putting this in terms of Vodou. Because Fabiola is praying and working with Papa Legba, she knows that she'll be able to best Dray and send him back to the underworld where he belongs.



CHAPTER 20

Fabiola thinks of all the food she misses. She knows she's losing weight, but she's not "a pretty kind of skinny." However, Fabiola knows that this won't last forever. She thinks of her weight loss as the drought before the rain—the rain being Dray's arrest by Detective Stevens. Imani, however, is concerned by Fabiola's weight loss. She refuses to come over and try Haitian food, even though Donna has stopped bothering her. Fabiola tells Imani that she has her back, but her accent makes Imani almost choke laughing. Fabiola refuses to say it again as Imani tells her friends that Fabiola is now the Fourth Bee. Fabiola loudly says she's not the Fourth Bee. Imani's friends laugh and ask her to teach them Haitian curses. Fabiola is thrilled; not even her cousins have asked to learn Haitian curses.

Fabiola's belly hurts from laughing when, out of the blue, a girl comes up and asks if Fabiola is Fabulous, Pri's cousin. Fabiola says that she is, and the girl introduces herself as Tonesha and says her cousin Raquel "already claimed Kasim." Fabiola shouts for Tonesha to stay away from her boyfriend, eliciting oohs from the entire cafeteria. Tonesha and Fabiola stare each other down until the bell rings. Pri comes up to Fabiola and says that she'll beat up Tonesha if she says anything to Fabiola again.

Kasim picks Fabiola up in his old **car** that afternoon. Fabiola gets in slowly, so that Tonesha sees her. Fabiola and Kasim kiss, and Pri pounds on the hood as she passes. Fabiola tells Kasim about her altercation with Tonesha and says that she had to "protect" Kasim. He rolls down his windows to shout that Fabiola is his girl. Laughing, he asks Fabiola what her last name is. Fabiola says that her name is Fabiola Toussaint, not Fabulous François, like her cousins. She tells him that he can't change her name and asks if he's Broke Carter and has Dray's last name. Immediately, she knows she messed up—she shouldn't know Dray's last name. But Kasim seems unconcerned and mimes giving Fabiola his heart. Outside the **house**, Fabiola asks if they can do this again every day. She sees Papa Legba and thinks that he approves.

The conversation Fabiola has with Imani and her friends helps her feel more welcome. Finally, someone is interested in Haitian culture and language—and, for once, Fabiola can be the expert instead of the student. Fabiola mentions that her cousins haven't asked to learn Haitian curses, which suggests that Fabiola believes her cousins don't know them. However, she seems to forget that Chantal grew up speaking Creole—the girls may very well know the curses.



The fact that Fabiola is willing to shout down Tonesha shows that she now accepts that shouting, fighting, and bullying are necessary if one wants to make it in Detroit. Pri, though, makes it clear that Fabiola won't have to do it alone.



It's a relief when Kasim shows up in his own car, as this lets Fabiola know that Kasim isn't going to imitate Dray to try to impress her. Kasim also openly shouts that he and Fabiola are together, a public display of affection that lets Fabiola know she's right to trust him. Fabiola and Kasim have essentially become each other's chosen family. Furthermore, Fabiola feels even more reassured when she sees Papa Legba. It's worth noting, however, that there's no evidence to suggest that he approves—it could be an incorrect interpretation.



CHAPTER 21

Fabiola wakes up to pounding on the front door. When she goes to the window to look out, Chantal whispers for Fabiola to get down. Chantal, Pri, and Donna are all up; they tell Fabiola to stay upstairs while they answer the door. Fabiola creeps to the top of the stairs to watch. It's not Dray at the door; it's a thin older man with two others who are both tall and wide. They step in, and the old man points out that the girls have been ignoring him, just like Donna is ignoring Dray. Pri calls the man "Q" and says that they've been lying low with everything on the news. Chantal adds that they don't want to get Uncle Q in trouble. Fabiola takes stock of all she knows about Uncle Q, and she deduces that Uncle Q is a drug dealer.

Uncle Q says that he's here to collect, but Chantal says they need more time—they tossed the last batch because it was messed up. Fabiola can't breathe as Uncle Q says that he still needs \$20,000. This is \$5,000 more than he usually requires, but he says he that needs more as "insurance" to protect himself, since the girls "g[ot] that white girl killed." Pri insists that it's Uncle Q's fault the girl died, since he sold them bad drugs. When Uncle Q remains firm that it's not his fault, Chantal icily says that they won't have a deal anymore if business dries up because their drugs killed someone. The words echo in Fabiola's head, and she realizes that Detective Stevens is wrong: Fabiola's cousins, not Dray, sold the drugs that killed the white girl. He can't go to jail if he's innocent.

Fabiola wonders if he should tell Detective Stevens the truth, but she knows she can't. That will put her cousins in jail and won't bring back Manman. She feels ready to fall over as Uncle Q insinuates that Matant Jo didn't teach her daughters to count money. He insists that he needs the money by the end of the month, taps Pri on the temple, and curses at her when she pushes him away. Chantal and Donna pull Pri back and wait for the men to leave. Once the men are gone, Donna wonders how much Matant Jo has and suggests they ask Dray for help. At this point, he doesn't even know that they deal drugs. Pri, however, sarcastically applauds Donna for not selling them out to Dray.

"Everything on the news" is vague, but the only news Fabiola has mentioned thus far is the white girl who died of an overdose. If Uncle Q is somehow connected to the girl's death, this supports Fabiola's suspicion that Uncle Q is a drug dealer. That Chantal, Pri, and Donna are somehow in cahoots with Uncle Q also calls their activities into question. His arrival at the house in the middle of the night seems like a power play, so the girls could be in danger.



Though Detective Stevens might not be wrong about Dray being a drug dealer, Fabiola discovers that she is making assumptions about which drugs Dray is responsible for. Even if Detective Stevens is supposed to represent law, order, and justice, Fabiola sees that she doesn't. As Fabiola puts this together, she finds herself at another crossroads. If her cousins are the ones Detective Stevens is after, can she give them up? Her sense of loyalty might suggest that she shouldn't, but Detective Stevens did make it seem like Fabiola's duty as an American to help catch the dealer.



In this moment, Fabiola watches all her hopes unravel in front of her eyes. Now, she won't be able to get Manman. This also suggests that Fabiola has little or no faith in the immigration system to get Manman out without Detective Stevens's help. Meanwhile, Uncle Q's behavior toward Pri offers some insight into why Dray behaves the way he does. Like Dray, Uncle Q has no issue invading someone else's space to intimidate them and get his way, and he probably taught Dray that this is an effective tactic.



Chantal shushes the twins and points to the ceiling, but Pri leaps up and finds Fabiola at the top of the stairs. Pri tells Fabiola to mind her own business, but Fabiola shouts that her cousins sell drugs. She gets in Pri's face and says that it's her right to know, since she lives here too. Chantal pins Fabiola against the bathroom door and says that it doesn't concern her, but Fabiola knows that her cousins don't understand. Now, Fabiola will never get Manman back. She calmly asks her cousins if they killed the girl on the news, and if Matant Jo has been sending drug money to Haiti. Chantal leads Fabiola to the bedroom and says that it wasn't always drug money. When Pri objects, Chantal suggests that they're supposed to be the Four Bees—a solid foundation of four, not a precarious pyramid of three.

Fabiola asks how her cousins expect to get the money. Chantal explains that Uncle Q was like a father to them after Phillip died. Pri snaps that Uncle Q isn't going to let \$15,000 slide, but Chantal turns back to Fabiola. She says that Phillip was working for Q when he was murdered, just to make some extra cash. That's why he died. Uncle Q had to pay up, so he gave Matant Jo \$30,000 to help raise the kids. Matant Jo started giving the money away, but Uncle Q made her stop, and she turned to sharking. Uncle Q provided "muscle" to make people pay her back. Chantal says that Matant Jo did all of this for Manman and Fabiola. Fabiola's school was expensive, and Matant Jo believed that Manman was building a mansion with all the money.

Chantal says that now, Matant Jo is sick, and they don't want her to shark anymore—but they have to make money to live. Fabiola asks what they do now. Pri tells Fabiola to stay silent, and Chantal insists that Fabiola just focus on graduating high school. Chantal also promises that they'll get Manman out. Fabiola feels like she's at a crossroads again as she reminds herself that her cousins, not Dray, are responsible for a girl's death. Hours later, Fabiola can't sleep. She gets out of bed and goes down into the street. Bad Leg is nowhere to be found, so Fabiola turns in every direction to bow to every possibility. She figures that if Bad Leg is Papa Legba, and Dray is Baron Samedi; and if Donna is Ezili and Ezili-Danto, then Chantal and Pri can also be lwas. They're all here to help.

Again, Fabiola feels like her world is ending. Her cousins aren't the people she thought they were—in her mind, they might be just as bad as Dray. At the very least, Fabiola questions the generous checks Matant Jo sent throughout her childhood, since she grew up believing that those checks came from honest work. When Chantal sits Fabiola down to explain, it represents a new chapter of the cousins' relationship—now, Chantal is going to treat Fabiola like an equal.



Chantal's story about Uncle Q's generosity is similar to Kasim's story. Uncle Q seems to make a habit of supporting single mothers—and at least some of the time, the children of those mothers end up dealing for him. His generosity, then, seems to be motivated by his business rather than by kindness. When Chantal talks about Matant Jo's turn to sharking, though, it becomes clear that taking jobs like this is sometimes necessary. In a system where the honest work that Fabiola dreams of doesn't exist, this is all there is.



Chantal makes the case that it doesn't really matter where money comes from, when the fact remains that people need money to live. Because Fabiola's family lives in an economically depressed city, and because they're Black immigrants, there are fewer opportunities available to them, making it more likely that they'll turn to sharking or dealing to get by. Once again, though, Fabiola finds comfort in prayer. And by deciding that each of her cousins can be a lwa sent to guide her, Fabiola opens herself up to become closer with her cousins and accept their help.



Fabiola runs back to the house, but it's locked. She steps back and stares at the address, **8800 American Street**. Somehow, the house seems different from the one that Fabiola has prayed about for years. She finally knocks on the door, but an old white man opens it. Fabiola runs back to the street and then knocks again on the door. It's a white woman this time. When Fabiola knocks a third time, a young white man answers. The man points a gun in Fabiola's face and shoots her. Fabiola wakes up screaming. She ties her hair with Manman's scarf, works on her altar, and prays to Papa Legba.

Though this frightening experience turns out to be a nightmare, it nevertheless speaks to the violence that seems to be inherent to the house and to Detroit. It's also telling that it's a white resident of the house that shoots Fabiola: this symbolizes the violence and discrimination that Black people in the U.S. suffer as they go about their daily lives. Fabiola is just trying to get home—but even in her dreams, this is impossible.



THE STORY OF 8800 AMERICAN STREET

The narrator explains that there was work in Detroit; the city seemed like the American Dream to Adrian Weiss and his wife, Ruth. They moved into **8800 American Street** in 1924 after emigrating from Poland, and they had their first baby when Adrian had been working for Henry Ford for five years. Two days later, Adrian was fired for showing up to work drunk, and he turned to selling gin instead. Ruth began hiding money and sometimes shared it with other women whose husbands lost jobs during the Great Depression. The narrator wonders if it was American Street's jealous husbands or gang violence that led to Adrian Weiss being shot on the corner of American Street and Joy Road. Since then, Death has lingered at that intersection.

The history of 8800 American Street makes it clear that every immigrant resident—no matter their skin color—has come looking for the same thing. They all hope for the economic prosperity that the American Dream promises. But just as Matant Jo turned to sharking and her daughters turned to dealing, Adrian Weiss found that illicit means of making money were more lucrative than legitimate means. Furthermore, the fact that Death apparently lingers at the intersection suggests there's an actual curse of sorts on the house.



In 1942, the next owner of the house was hit by a car. In 1947, one of American Street's first black residents was murdered. Old Detroit families fled the city, and no one sold **8800 American Street** as family members from the South moved in. "Death" moved away to other parts of the city until the riot in July 1967, when a Black resident was murdered. During the 1980s and 90s, the house was rented out, and many dealers and junkies died there. Finally, Jean-Phillip François bought the house in 2000. The narrator wonders if it was the hope, dreams, babies, and warm meals that woke Death and caused it to take Phillip. Now, Death sits on the corner of American and Joy. It sings songs and delivers riddles—and it's been waiting for a girl to "ask to open the gates to the other side."

The history of Detroit makes the city look like a place that promises its residents a good life but can't fulfill that promise. In this sense, Detroit itself represents the American Dream—and it suggests the dream doesn't actually exist. Furthermore, the idea that Death is sitting on the corner, singing and reciting riddles, suggests that Papa Legba—Bad Leg—is an iteration of Death. With this, the narrator suggests that bad things are in store for Fabiola, given the house's history. It seems too much to ask that Fabiola and her family will get out of this unscathed.



CHAPTER 22

Fabiola's head is itchy, but the fake hair sewn into her braids means she can't scratch. This feels oppressive, especially since she allowed this makeover to get Dray—and Dray didn't cause the girl's death after all. Now, Fabiola is spending more time with her cousins. Chantal shows her how to fill out financial aid and scholarship forms, but Fabiola doesn't trust the free money, and the forms that Manman filled out got her nowhere. One night, Fabiola hears Pri singing about Taj in the shower. When Fabiola asks how Pri will know if Taj feels the same, Pri says that she'll never know. Fabiola also starts borrowing more of Donna's clothes, which helps them bond. She ignores Kasim and accompanies her cousins everywhere.

One morning, Fabiola gets ready to join her cousins for chicken and waffles. Matant Jo comes out of her room and asks to join. In the packed car, Fabiola feels like this is family—but then she remembers that Manman isn't here. This makes her think of Detective Stevens and her cousins' drugs. At the restaurant, Chantal looks around nervously—Fabiola realizes that she's afraid of Uncle Q. In the restaurant, Fabiola tries to focus on her waffles and ignore all the bad, scary things happening. She rejects a call from Detective Stevens and tells Pri that the number is Imani's. Pri teases Fabiola about trying to distance herself from all the West Side drama and answers the phone when Detective Stevens calls back. Fortunately, when Pri hands the phone to Fabiola, the detective has already hung up.

Matant Jo pays in cash and tries to give Fabiola the change. Fabiola refuses it, which offends Matant Jo. On their way out of the restaurant, Dray and Kasim arrive. Though Dray tries to talk to Donna, she ignores him while Pri, Chantal, and Matant Jo get in Dray's face. Meanwhile, Kasim asks Fabiola if he can call later, but she says she's too busy. Fabiola tells him that things are complicated and that she has to help Manman. She lies and says she doesn't like him anymore. Back in the car, Fabiola feels like her heart is breaking—but she knows that Manman, not Kasim, will make her heart whole. On the drive home, Fabiola realizes that both she and Donna are breathing like they're letting "go of something heavy and deep."

Fabiola is overcome by the realization that she made a mistake in trusting Detective Stevens. Now, she knows that people in positions of power, who are meant to protect the public and uphold justice, aren't always good at doing so. This represents a loss of innocence for Fabiola, as she no longer believes that she and Manman have a chance of making it in Detroit.



Going out for brunch with everyone in the household makes Fabiola feel like a part of something bigger than herself. She feels safe and cared for—until she remembers that her cousins are dealers, and her aunt isn't doing anything to rescue Manman. Family, Fabiola discovers, is more complicated than she expected it would be. Even these happy moments are tainted by the shady, illicit things Fabiola's family members have done just to stay alive and get by in Detroit.



Even if Fabiola thinks she's taking the high ground by refusing Matant Jo's money, it's still offensive to refuse. The fact remains that Matant Jo has gone out of her way for years to support Fabiola and Manman in the exact same way she's making money now—but now Fabiola feels like it's morally wrong to accept. While Fabiola may be justified, her moral superiority suggests that she doesn't actually grasp how hard it is for Matant Jo to make a living. Matant Jo is proud of what she's done with nothing.



CHAPTER 23

It's Thanksgiving. Fabiola remembers how her aunt and cousins used to call her and Manman to wish them a happy Thanksgiving—but back then, she didn't know what the holiday was. Matant Jo has been busy planning the meal with Fabiola; Chantal, Pri, and Donna make requests but don't help. At first, Matant Jo seems competent and in control. But after a while, Matant Jo retires to her room with a headache, leaving Fabiola in charge. Fabiola isn't familiar with a lot of the foods on the list and wonders what else Matant Jo was going to do with the turkey, which only has salt and pepper on it. She begins to cook. Fabiola decides to make soup *joumou* with the pumpkin, and she cuts the turkey into small pieces. Since Fabiola feels so at peace in the kitchen, she doesn't let her cousins enter.

Finally, everyone stands around the table, holding hands. Both Pri and Matant Jo thank God for Fabiola's presence, and Fabiola sobs. She cries in part because she knows that Matant Jo isn't working to get Manman back at all, but Pri cracks a joke and makes Fabiola feel better. Then, Fabiola fetches her turkey from the oven, puts it on the table, and pulls the tinfoil off. Everyone else shrieks and explains to Fabiola that she wasn't supposed to cut up the turkey. Fabiola is incredulous. Regardless, everyone enjoys the meal until there's a knock at the door—it's Kasim. Before Fabiola can fix her hair or put a bra on, he enters and offers Matant Jo flowers. Pri attempts to get Kasim to make fun of Fabiola's turkey, but he shares that he once had jerk turkey with a Jamaican family.

Kasim explains that his family boycotts Thanksgiving as “the white man's holiday.” Chantal suggests that January 1 is the Black man's holiday—it's the day that Haiti became the first independent Black nation. As Kasim chats about food and Dray's family's thanksgiving feast, Fabiola thinks that nothing has changed since she learned her cousins sell drugs. Kasim finally reaches over to make sure Fabiola is okay. After dinner, Kasim goes upstairs to use the bathroom, and Fabiola changes into something nicer. When they both emerge, Kasim catches sight of Fabiola's altar. Fabiola explains that she practices Vodou, and that their lwas are like spirit guides. Kasim shares that he grew up Muslim and that his name means “divided amongst many” in Arabic. They both agree to pray for the other, and Kasim kisses Fabiola.

Thanksgiving is a classic American holiday, so Fabiola's first Thanksgiving in the United States is almost a rite of passage. Putting her in charge of the meal, though, is a risky venture given that Fabiola isn't familiar with traditional Thanksgiving dishes. And indeed, it's immediately clear that Fabiola is going to put a Haitian spin on the meal by cutting up the turkey and making soup instead of pie with the pumpkin.



The humorous turkey situation speaks to how an immigrant like Fabiola must constantly try to figure out how to navigate these American traditions. And it's possible, Fabiola demonstrates, to engage in the traditions while also putting her own spin on it. Meanwhile, Kasim supports Fabiola's merging of cultures when he mentions having jerk turkey at one point. He makes the points that all immigrants will tweak American traditions to make them more palatable—and rather than taking away from the traditions, this adds richness and variety.



It's telling that Fabiola and Kasim make up as they both open up about their spiritual beliefs. It's important to Fabiola that she be in a relationship with someone who respects her beliefs and is spiritual as well—so it's probably thrilling to hear that Kasim will pray for her and is happy that she'll pray for him. This also makes Fabiola feel like her loyal to Kasim is the right decision, since they seem so compatible. Rekindling their relationship also gives Fabiola hope that she might still be able to make it in the U.S. Happiness could still be possible for her.



In a letter to Manman, Fabiola wonders if Manman did this on purpose—did she know this was the only way to get Fabiola to America alone? But Fabiola notes that Manman raised her to be like an extension of herself, so Fabiola can't go on without her. Fabiola writes that her cousins sell drugs and that Phillip died because of drugs. Manman would say that this sort of thing runs in the family—so what is Fabiola supposed to do to remove this curse? In closing, Fabiola says that the Iwas are all around, helping her. Papa Legba will soon allow Manman through the gate.

Fabiola makes it clear that she and Manman are very close, and Manman is the one responsible for this state of affairs. But notably, Fabiola acknowledges that this might not be a good thing, as it prevents Fabiola from moving on—and from enjoying her relationship with Kasim. But again, as she turns to talking about the Iwas, she draws on her spirituality to feel more in control of a difficult situation.



CHAPTER 24

Now that Fabiola has new hair and clothes, she doesn't look like a recent Haitian immigrant. This is especially true tonight, as she sits in a gym for a school basketball game. She sits between Imani and another friend, ogling the players. Pri and Donna sit down in front of Fabiola, and Donna whips her braids back to hit Imani's knees. Fabiola shoves Donna's head and makes her apologize, but Donna whips her hair again. Then, Fabiola notices the girl next to Pri. Pri turns around and introduces Fabiola to Taj; the girls look happy together. Fabiola wonders how Pri can have such good taste, when Donna's taste in men is so poor.

Even though Donna has been leaving Imani alone, this doesn't mean she's done picking on her. Donna might feel as though she has to continually remind Imani of who's in charge in order to maintain her hold over Dray. For Fabiola, it's shocking—in a good way—to see that Pri has such good taste in romantic partners. Clearly, there's some hope for her family members if Pri can make good choices like this.



Fabiola spots Kasim far below them and waves. He makes his way up, and Fabiola realizes too late that Dray is with him. Kasim squeezes in next to Fabiola, but Dray tries to get Donna's attention. She ignores him as he gets down on one knee and pulls out a tiny box. He says that he loves her and opens it to reveal a diamond pendant. Fabiola almost believes that Dray is telling the truth as she watches his one good eye fill with tears. Donna seems to believe it too, since she tries to take the box. Dray, however, gets distracted trying to find the person who's upset that they can't see the game around Dray's head. Donna tells him that that he's disrespecting her by trying to start something. Then, Pri stands up, grabs Donna, and threatens to cut her off if she goes back to Dray.

Dray's offering to Donna is clearly manipulative. Giving her such a gift in public, in front of so many people, means that if she says no, she's going to cause a scene. And given how mean and manipulative Dray is, he'd probably insist that the scene was Donna's fault. In this way, he ensures that she's going to take him back. This, combined with Donna's genuine feelings for Dray, means that she's caught in a cycle of violence that keeps her in danger.



Donna, however, insists that she's fine and turns back to Dray. Fabiola tries to stop Donna from leaving with him, but she doesn't know what to say. She wonders if Dray really is sorry and does love Donna, but she knows this is a lie. Pri looks at Fabiola and shakes her head. Kasim tells Fabiola to not worry about Donna and Dray. He insists that Dray does love Donna—but he and Fabiola won't love each other like that. He kisses Fabiola deeply.

Kasim's acceptance of Dray's behavior is still concerning. It may indicate that he understands that violence is just a part of life in Detroit. However, this is complicated by the fact that he believes he and Fabiola can have a healthy, nonviolent relationship. Clearly, it's possible; Dray's violence is a choice.



Donna isn't home yet, so Fabiola dozes. She hears Bad Leg singing a song he first sang months ago, before Fabiola knew he was Papa Legba. Eventually, Fabiola snaps awake when she hears a man yelling at Bad Leg to shut up. It's Dray: he's shoving Bad Leg while Donna stands by, crying. Fabiola races downstairs and steps outside, but when Dray accuses Bad Leg of working with the cops, she can't move. She wants to help Bad Leg, but she doesn't want Dray to see her. Fortunately, Dray gets in his **car** when Donna calls to him. He zooms away, while Donna follows Fabiola inside. She grudgingly reveals her scratched, bruised, and bleeding face to Fabiola.

Fabiola hugs Donna and says that she has the battle wounds of Ezili-Danto—but Fabiola will fight this battle for Donna. Fabiola knows that her cousins and Matant Jo are hurting. She can't understand how this place is supposed to be so good when there's not enough happiness to fill the empty houses. Instead, sadness inevitably overtakes joy. Matant Jo always ends up back in her dark room, while Chantal can barely pay for school. Donna doesn't know the difference between love and abuse, while Pri fights everything. Dray and Uncle Q are in the middle of all of this. Fabiola feels her rage rising and vows to cut Dray out of Donna's life.

CHAPTER 25

Imani gets a C on her next paper. She also starts wearing big sweaters and doesn't comb her hair. Finally, Fabiola asks what's going on. Imani insists that she "wasn't feeling" the paper and refuses Fabiola's invitation to come over later. Once they're alone in the bathroom, Imani swears Fabiola to secrecy. Then, she pulls a tight, shiny dress from her book bag. It's from Dray—he sent it to her house with flowers. Imani explains that it came before Dray's stunt at the basketball game. She figured he'd leave her alone after he got back with Donna, but he's still texting her. Imani snaps that she doesn't need help, but Fabiola promises to make Dray stop bothering her.

Fabiola sticks close to Imani and her friends as they walk to the bus stop. She texts Pri to let her know where she is and looks for Pri when she hears a voice calling her name. It's not Pri—it's Tonesha, with five other girls in tow. Tonesha introduces her cousin, Raquel, and they call Fabiola a bitch and hurl insults. Fabiola insults them in return. Tonesha and Raquel get close to Fabiola, so Fabiola puts a hand up in Raquel's face. When Raquel slaps the hand away, Fabiola feels out of control. She punches Raquel and keeps punching, even when Tonesha joins the fight. Eventually, Fabiola sees dark red and wants to destroy everything. Suddenly, she can't breathe.

Dray may say he's changed, but his actions suggest that he hasn't—and probably never will. But this doesn't mean that Fabiola won't try to help Donna and get her to safety. Donna is possibly more in need of help than Bad Leg is, since Bad Leg is actually the Vodou spirit Papa Legba.



Donna's wounds are yet another indication that the American Dream doesn't exist here in Detroit. Even if Donna and her sisters make enough money selling for Uncle Q to get by, that doesn't save her from Dray's abuse—and it doesn't save Matant Jo from her hopelessness and pain. All of this makes Fabiola feel ready to lash out in order to protect her family, an emotion born out of Fabiola's fierce loyalty to them.



Between Donna and Dray, Imani doesn't feel like she can do anything about Dray's advances. And because she's already so angry at Dray and at the world, Fabiola takes it upon herself to help Imani and hopefully do something good for the people she loves. While it's unclear exactly what Fabiola plans to do, it's possible that she feels like she might have to use violence if she wants to protect herself and her family. This, the novel suggests, is just part of life in Detroit.



Tonesha and Raquel seem to want to ruin Fabiola's relationship, the one nice thing in her life right now. This is the final straw for Fabiola—and when pushed to the breaking point, she turns to violence. With this, Fabiola gives in to Detroit's pull and aligns herself even more with people like Pri and Dray, who fight others as a matter of course. Fabiola feels like she's fighting for her dignity and her ability to live and breathe—and this may make her more sympathetic to others who fight.



CHAPTER 26

Fabiola's entire body hurts. She can't follow anything that Pri and Donna say, but she does hear Ms. Stanley say that Matant Jo will have to come in next week when Fabiola's suspension is over. Fabiola has never been suspended before, but she knows that Manman would beat her when she finds out about this. Terrified, she asks her cousins if Matant Jo will beat her. Donna allows that Matant Jo beat Pri once when they were little, but she doesn't do that anymore. Fabiola asks if Matant Jo stopped just like Dray stopped being violent, but Donna ignores this. She announces that Kasim isn't cheating on Fabiola, and that Fabiola won the fight. Even Chantal seems to approve, and she admits that she was once suspended for fighting too.

Fabiola asks if Tonesha and Raquel got hurt, but Pri insists they can't say the girls' names—they'll refer to them now as "Ugly Bitch and Uglier Bitch." When the cousins stop laughing, Chantal says that Matant Jo might make Fabiola do some chores. Chantal also says that she'll talk to Ms. Stanley to make sure this doesn't go on Fabiola's record. Quietly, Fabiola says that she doesn't want to go to this school anymore. She wants to use the money to help Manman and her cousins. Donna eyes Fabiola in her mirror, but no one says anything. Chantal asks if Donna is feeling well enough to go to a party next weekend. When Pri asks what Donna is going to take, Fabiola's ears perk up.

They stop at an abandoned building, but Chantal stares at Fabiola. She tells Fabiola that she's the Fourth Bee now, teaches her how to do a fist bump, and tells her to be quiet and listen. The cousins decide to steal Matant Jo's pills and sell them, just to show Uncle Q they're trying—but Chantal mentions that that they've made \$20,000 in a night before. Fabiola can't even fathom how much \$20,000 is. They drive home in silence. Fabiola wishes that Manman hadn't been detained, and that she didn't know her cousins sold drugs. She knows she can't give her cousins up to Detective Stevens. As Fabiola looks around, she gets an idea.

When Matant Jo hears about the fight, she only asks if Fabiola won against the other girls. The next day, the first day of Fabiola's suspension, she asks Chantal to drop her off at Kasim's job. At the café, Kasim brings Fabiola a croissant and hot chocolate. He joins her on his break and touches Fabiola's bruised face. Kasim assures Fabiola that Raquel is ugly and is just trying to get attention. Fabiola grabs Kasim's hand and asks if this is real. She asks him to call her by her real name, not Fabulous. After Kasim kisses Fabiola, he tells her that Dray is going to drop something off after work—and then, Kasim has a surprise for Fabiola.

For Fabiola, being suspended for fighting isn't a badge of honor, like her cousins seem to think. Instead, it represents her initiation into a world that Fabiola knows Manman wouldn't approve of. This is why Fabiola is so concerned about Matant Jo: she figures that her aunt will also disapprove of fighting. But her cousins make the case that Matant Jo understands violence is a part of life here, so Fabiola won't get in trouble for it. Indeed, Chantal normalizes violence by admitting that even she's gotten in trouble for fighting.



Even if Fabiola has given in to fighting, she's still the sensitive, caring person she was when she arrived. This is why she asks about Tonesha and Raquel—even if they're her enemies, she still thinks they deserve to make it through this. But her cousins essentially propose that this is a dog-eat-dog world, and Fabiola can't afford to care about people like them who want to hurt her. If Fabiola wants to be happy, she'll have to fight for it—and she can't worry about her victims.



Now that Fabiola has fought like her cousins and become more American, Chantal is more open to allowing Fabiola into their group. Fabiola is no longer too Haitian for them to accept. However, this doesn't mean that Fabiola totally understands her new environment. Her inability to conceptualize \$20,000 is understandable, but it drives home how far removed she is from her cousins' world of drug dealing.



Fighting to defend her relationship with Kasim also strengthened Fabiola and Kasim's bond. Violence, Fabiola is learning, is one way to prove her loyalty to the people she cares about. Even though Fabiola is stepping into a new identity as she becomes American, she still wants Kasim to see her for who she is: Fabiola, not Fabulous. By asking him to use her real name, Fabiola asserts that her identity is a mix of Haitian and American elements.



Fabiola finds Dray's **car** outside. She waits for Dray to notice her and then, she taps on his window. When Dray unlocks the doors, Fabiola slides into the passenger seat. She inhales the marijuana scent, remembering Manman's advice: that they must let the lwas overtake them so that they can thwart people. Fabiola asks Dray for marijuana and tells him that Kasim doesn't know she smokes. Dray laughs, but he pulls out a joint. Fabiola tells him that it's his business what he does with Donna, but he has to leave Imani alone. Dray argues, but he gives in when Fabiola threatens to tell everyone that he's cheating on Donna. As Fabiola takes a deep drag off of the joint, Dray whispers that she's sexy.

Fabiola knows she doesn't have much time, so she compliments Dray's eye patch. She says he looks like an old boyfriend who used to help her. When Dray asks why Fabiola came to his and Uncle Q's house the other day, Fabiola says that she needs money to help Manman. She can't ask her aunt or cousins, since they want Manman to go back to Haiti. Dray insists that he can't help, but he perks up when Fabiola says he reminds her of a friend who was in Zoe Pound, a major Haitian gang. The gang isn't active in Detroit, so Fabiola's friend needs to make connections here. She knows that Dray sells drugs and has heard girls talking about a party this weekend in Grosse Pointe Park. Fumbling, Fabiola says that she doesn't know the American term for the type of drugs that the girls want.

Dray laughs, but Fabiola leans over and kisses him. She says that she knows what it's like to do everything in one's power to scrape by. Then, Fabiola says that she knows Dray has the drive, so he should take this opportunity—all she wants in return is 20 percent, and if Dray wants, she can connect him to Zoe Pound. Just then, Kasim and his coworker come out of the café, and Fabiola slips out of Dray's car when Kasim isn't looking. She feels like she's eaten Dray's soul, and she whispers, "Shit you do for fam." Dray rolls down a window to haggle over Fabiola's cut as Kasim approaches. Kasim asks Dray to drive them to his car, and Fabiola feels like she's in the underworld. At home, she calls Detective Stevens. Fabiola tells her that Dray will be at a party this weekend and will have drugs on him.

Given that it seems like many people are aware that Dray is cheating on Donna, it's odd that Dray backs down when threatened with exposure. It's possible that he's trying to impress Fabiola by agreeing, given that he finds her sexy. He may think that if he can make her believe he's faithful, he'll have a chance of being with her. Again, this illustrates how manipulative Dray is, and it drives home that he's bad news for Fabiola and her cousins.



Dray isn't unintelligent; he suspects that Fabiola is up to something. Fortunately, Fabiola has a good cover story in Manman's detainment, so her reasons for seeking him out seem legitimate. For Fabiola, pretending to buy into the idea that a person has to go the illicit route to make it in the United States is a way to draw Dray in and give him a reason to trust her. She also uses her status as an immigrant with an incomplete grasp of English to cover up the things she doesn't know, such as what drugs Dray is supposed to sell. She's learning to leverage her identity to get ahead.



When Fabiola mentions feeling like she's in the underworld, it shows that for her, this is an exercise in Vodou. This makes her feel more in control of the situation and as though she can manipulate it to serve her purposes. And so far, she looks poised to succeed, since Dray seems open to working with her. This shows how Fabiola can use her immigrant identity and her spirituality to get what she needs. Even if she can't rely on the American Dream to deliver, she can make things happen for herself.



CHAPTER 27

Later that night, Fabiola pretends to jerk awake from a bad dream. She whisper-yells to Chantal that they can't go to the party—according to Papa Legba, something bad is going to happen. Chantal calls Donna's cellphone, and the twins appear to hear Fabiola's news. Then, Pri gets up, looks out the window, and snaps to turn the lights off. Bad Leg is out there. Donna says that she'll stay home if Fabiola says to. Pri scoffs, but Fabiola tells her that Vodou is real, not the "voodoo" of movies. Donna puts a hand on Fabiola's cheek, whispers, "Ezili-Danto," and refuses to go. Chantal grudgingly agrees and notes that the cops will be at the party anyway. Fabiola fixates on this. Detective Stevens will find the evidence she needs to arrest Dray.

Again, Fabiola draws on Vodou to manipulate the situation and protect her cousins from Detective Stevens. Now, the trap is set, and if all goes according to plan, Dray will walk right into it. For Donna, the small introduction to Ezili-Danto and Vodou seems to have had a positive effect. By connecting to this element of her heritage, Donna feels safer in the world and more confident moving through it. Just like Fabiola, Donna is able to rework her identity to allow for this part of Haitian culture.



CHAPTER 28

During the week of Fabiola's suspension, Kasim takes her on a tour of Detroit. They go to the Motown museum and a neighborhood of mansions. Then, Kasim takes Fabiola to a Greek restaurant. They take their meals to Kasim's house. His mom isn't home, and Fabiola knows Manman would have a heart attack if she knew. The neighborhood here is nicer than Fabiola's. Kasim explains that his mom works in medical billing. She doesn't make a lot of money, but it's honest. Fabiola and Kasim settle on the couch to watch TV. After a few shows, Kasim pulls Fabiola in for a kiss. It feels different. She kisses his neck, and then Kasim leads Fabiola to his room, where they have sex and fall asleep. Fabiola only wakes up when Chantal calls.

Visiting Kasim's house shows Fabiola that the American Dream might not be so out of reach. The fact that his mom is able to afford a nicer house working in medical billing suggests that in, at least some cases, Fabiola's family members are wrong: it is possible to get by and do well on honest work. Meanwhile, when Fabiola and Kasim have sex, they deepen their bond further and reaffirm their loyalty to each other. It's a way to connect and feel as though they're becoming chosen family.



KASIM'S STORY

Kasim says that Dray used to call him a mama's boy, because Kasim's mom used to kiss Kasim when she dropped him off for school. He wasn't spoiled, though; at home, he had lots of chores. Kasim admits that he did some things that would hurt his mom's heart just to get the other guys off his back, but he hated it. Fortunately, Dray has been looking out for Kasim since Kasim was in kindergarten and Dray was in third grade. Once Dray's dad left, Uncle Q stepped in to care for Kasim. Now, Uncle Q is like a father. Kasim doesn't even miss his dad, who's in Memphis. Maybe he'll go down to Memphis once he's married to have "little half-Haitian revolutionary babies." Kasim admits that he's never felt this way about a girl before. He'd finish college for Fabiola and buy her a house.

Through Kasim's story, readers get a look at a different type of life in Detroit than Fabiola's cousins lead. But even though Kasim and his mom are doing better financially than Fabiola's family, Kasim still had to do things that Fabiola probably wouldn't like—hence why he doesn't elaborate on what exactly he did to prove himself to other guys in the neighborhood. And again, Kasim makes it clear that Uncle Q is and will always be a major figure in his life, just because Uncle Q was there when Kasim's dad wasn't. An important part of being a family, this suggests, is simply being present.



CHAPTER 29

Chantal warns Fabiola not to be pathetic and follow Kasim. Fabiola giggles and invites Chantal to have some of the pizza that Kasim is bringing over. Chantal refuses. Finally, Fabiola asks Chantal why she doesn't have a boyfriend. Chantal says that she's not interested and that she hopes that Fabiola never feels ugly, like she does. Fabiola says that Chantal can be ugly if she wants; in Haiti, they say, "We are ugly, but we are here." This resonates with Chantal. Then, Fabiola calls Donna to help her cut out her fake hair. When Donna is done, Fabiola texts Kasim asking what time he'll arrive and gets in the shower. Fabiola's body feels new, and she uses Donna's fancy soaps. As she pins her hair up in a bun, she thinks her face looks wiser after her fight.

By 8:00 p.m., Kasim still hasn't texted back. Fabiola takes Chantal's advice and doesn't text again. Instead, she puts on sweats and one of Donna's sweaters, which reveals one of her shoulders. She hopes Kasim will kiss it. At 9:00, Fabiola texts Kasim and sends him a sad face. Feeling pathetic, she invites him to a party at her house and includes a smiley face. Then, she tries to read one of Chantal's books. At 10:00, Kasim texts that he's not coming—he has business to handle. Fabiola wonders what he's doing. The only thing that's supposed to happen tonight is Dray selling drugs at the party, and Fabiola can't shake this thought.

Fabiola runs downstairs, throws on a coat, and races to the corner and Bad Leg. He's all dressed up and wearing sunglasses, just like Dray. Fabiola asks if everything went as planned, and Bad Leg sings her a song about Cupid's arrows aiming for the heart but everything getting torn apart. Fabiola begins to shake as her cousins ask what's going on. She ignores them and tries to call Kasim, but he doesn't answer. Then, Fabiola asks Donna to call Dray—she needs to know if he's at the party in Grosse Pointe. Chantal and Pri ask what's going on and why Dray would be at the party. Trembling, Chantal asks what Fabiola did.

Having sex and feeling close with Kasim makes Fabiola more hopeful about the future—especially since she believes that Dray is also going to be out of her life soon. The proverb she gives Chantal suggests that it's enough to be alive—it's not necessary to strive for more than that. Though it's unclear why Chantal feels so ugly and powerless, it may be empowering to hear that someone respects her for simply getting through the day. It helps her feel dignified and worthy.



It's understandably disturbing for Fabiola when she realizes that Kasim is cancelling on her on the same night that Dray is supposed to get caught. She knows how loyal Kasim is to Dray, so she probably suspects that Dray is involving Kasim in his deal tonight. Worrying about this makes it so Fabiola can't get in the mood and enjoy her night in any longer. Her loyalty to Kasim means that she needs to figure out if he's okay.



It's significant that it's Bad Leg who tells Fabiola that things are going to go badly—since he's actually Papa Legba, it's essentially Vodou itself that's teaching Fabiola that she can't control everything. In this sense, Fabiola learns that her spirituality has limits; it won't give her control over everything. Indeed, it may teach her that there are consequences for trying to send Dray to jail when he's not actually guilty.



Fabiola keeps her head pressed on the dashboard as she tells her cousins everything. Pri wants to punch Fabiola but doesn't. Quietly, Donna says that she's going to call Dray—she doesn't want him to get arrested. Chantal notes that Dray isn't stupid and won't go to Grosse Pointe. Pri yells that Kasim will be the one selling—Fabiola's stupidity will get Kasim arrested. Fabiola tries to remember Papa Legba's song, but it all sounds crazy to her now. This is how she felt during the earthquake: people screamed for help from God, but the destruction kept going. Fabiola isn't even sure if God or the lwas can hear her now. Suddenly, Fabiola has an idea and asks for Chantal's phone so she can call Detective Stevens. Detective Stevens won't arrest Kasim, since she wants Dray.

Donna accuses Fabiola of selling out Dray to get Manman. Fabiola feels awful; she betrayed Donna too. Chantal snaps that Fabiola can't talk to Detective Stevens. She can't talk to cops or lawyers—it's the code out here. Fabiola shrinks into her seat and wonders where Papa Legba is taking her. She remembers what Chantal said: Kasim will be the one to get arrested. The only way the detective will get Dray is if Kasim snitches.

The houses here are big, and Fabiola thinks that this is where dreams come true. Eventually, the girls see lights from police cars and ambulances on the street of the party. Pri insists they can't get closer, but Chantal suggests they wait and take Kasim home with them. Chantal stops Fabiola from leaving the **car** and Donna tries to call Dray. Pri snaps that they can't call Dray; he'll find out that Fabiola set Kasim up and that they secretly went to Uncle Q. Tired of listening to them argue, Fabiola gets out and walks toward the party. Chantal joins her, takes her arm, and says that they'll act like normal partygoers.

Fabiola wants to apologize and ask why Chantal is selling drugs when she's so smart. But they get closer to the lights and see people everywhere. An officer approaches the girls, tells them they can't come to the party, and asks Chantal for ID. Chantal explains that they walked over from a few streets away, and she offers the officer her high school ID, which doesn't have an address on it. After inspecting it, the officer sends the girls away. Chantal tries to leave, but something tugs Fabiola toward the party. She breaks away and races toward the sirens. Fabiola sees Detective Stevens staring at her disbelievingly. Behind the detective, police officers are unraveling yellow ribbon that reads "CAUTION." Fabiola remembers Papa Legba's warning to "Beware the lady all dressed in brown."

It's a mark of Fabiola's maturity, humility, and trust in her cousins that she tells them what happened. Being honest with them means that she had to admit she made a mistake and then ask for help fixing it. While this represents a leap in maturity, her desire to call Detective Stevens suggests that Fabiola still naïvely trusts the adults around her to behave honorably and have control of the situation. Previously, Chantal said that the police would be at the party; that may mean Detective Stevens will be there, but it may also mean that lots of other cops will be looking for any young Black man with drugs.



Fabiola's plan failed because she didn't know enough about how dealing works to be able to effectively trap Dray. This suggests that, in addition to spirituality, a person needs an understanding of the real world to make their prayers work.



Finally, Fabiola is in the neighborhood where she expected to live in Detroit. These big houses probably look more like the sparkling mansions she saw on TV; in her mind, these houses are the living embodiment of the American Dream. Because the girls are trying to keep so many secrets, they don't have as many people to ask for help. In this instance, family might not be enough to save them.



Now that Fabiola is here, things look increasingly sinister. It's important to note that Detective Stevens wears a brown coat, so it's possible that she's the "lady dressed all in brown" that Papa Legba warned Fabiola about. Meanwhile, Chantal went to a "fancy" high school, so her high school ID might buy her more sympathy from the police—especially since they can't tell where she lives by looking at the ID. In this way, Chantal shows that she's moving between worlds too, as she goes from American Street to parties in fancier neighborhoods like this.



Fabiola runs again until she comes upon a body under a white sheet. It's just like after the earthquake, but this time, there's only one body instead of thousands. The body belongs to Kasim. Fabiola falls to the ground, remembers that Kasim's name means "divided amongst many," and feels like she's been split in half. She wails as Detective Stevens picks her up and tells her to go. Chantal appears and can barely get herself and Fabiola back to the **car**. In the car, Chantal whispers that the police shot Kasim. Fabiola screams. She feels like Kasim is the earthquake—he shattered her heart.

While the major earthquake that struck Haiti affected thousands of people, Kasim's death affects Fabiola most of all. Equating him to the earthquake allows Fabiola to make sense of this new trauma. She survived the earthquake, and she can survive this too—but that doesn't mean it isn't devastating. Fabiola has lost one of the people she loves most. Now, happiness and the American Dream seem even more out of reach.



CHAPTER 30

Everyone cries in the **car**. Fabiola wails, and Pri curses. When they reach the house, they see Dray sitting on the steps. Donna offers to go talk to him, but Chantal says he's definitely not here to talk—he knows what happened, and they need a plan. The cousins agree that they can't call Matant Jo, since Uncle Q is probably keeping her away from the house.

Fabiola and her cousins understand immediately that Dray is out for blood. Now that the man he considered his brother is dead, the only thing he knows how to do is lash out in response. And since Fabiola is inadvertently responsible for Kasim's death, she's likely Dray's target.



Fabiola darts out of the car and approaches Dray. For once, he's not wearing his eye patch; the eye underneath is gone. He demands to know what happened to Kasim. Chantal gives Fabiola the keys, tells her to get inside, and shouts at Dray to talk to her, Pri, and Donna—not Fabiola. Dray flashes a gun, but Fabiola darts past him and into the **house**. She runs to her altar and searches for a candle, but Dray pounds up the stairs before Fabiola can do anything.

When Dray shows up without his eye patch, it makes him seem more naked and vulnerable. This allows readers to see that he is grieving; he's truly upset about what happened to Kasim. But that doesn't mean he's not still dangerous. The gun is proof that Dray believes his loyalty requires him to avenge Kasim's death.



Dray grabs Fabiola by the hair and arms and drags her out of the room. Pri, Chantal, and Donna grab Fabiola and pull her back. Fabiola digs at Dray's arms, even though Donna warns her against fighting back. Suddenly, Dray kicks Fabiola's face, and Fabiola feels numb. He snarls at her to get up and kicks her in the face again. Donna pleads with him to stop and begs Fabiola to talk. Fabiola says Kasim's name, and with Chantal's help, she stands up. Shaking, Dray says that Kasim was all he had. Fabiola stands up as tall as she can, and Dray points his gun straight at her. Chantal, Pri, and Donna plead with Dray as he puts the shaking gun to Fabiola's head.

Dray is wildly out of control. At the same time, Fabiola and her cousins seem unlikely to be able to make Dray stand down on their own. Their loyalty to one another may have gotten them this far, but it might not be enough to save Fabiola. Now that Kasim is dead, saying his name becomes almost a form of prayer for Fabiola. He was the best part of her life until his death, so repeating his name seems like an expression of hope.



Fabiola feels like Dray's wall is falling down—but she remembers the earthquake and how, after the walls fell, it unleashed zombies. She vows to take Dray down with her when he kills her. Fabiola isn't afraid of death, since Death owns half of Matant Jo and will soon own her too. Fabiola tells Dray to kill her and squeezes her eyes shut. She hears a click and a bang—and then, suddenly, things go dark and then light again.

Again, Fabiola draws on Vodou and her past experiences to make the best of a terrifying situation. Even if she can't control whether or not Dray kills her, she believes that she can still bring him down with her because of her devotion to the lwas. As she stares down her death, this provides comfort.



CHAPTER 31

Fabiola says that when the earthquake hit, she was in the courtyard doing laundry. She'd just learned how to do it and was too small to do a good job, but she was getting better. As Fabiola stood up, she felt dizzy. Suddenly, she began to dip and sway, and the walls of her house split and fell. Everything began to fall around her. Fabiola stayed standing through it all. Now, Fabiola opens her eyes. She isn't dead—Dray is. Fabiola is shaking. She turns around and sees Papa Legba standing in the doorway with his cane, which might actually be a gun. He sings a song about crossroads, bearing a cross, and hoping to survive. As he sings, he becomes translucent and disappears in his cigar smoke.

Fabiola forces herself to run after him, but he's not on the street corner. She wants to thank him, but all she can say is Kasim's name. Chantal brings Fabiola back into the house. They stand with Pri and watch Donna cry over Dray's body. Fabiola thinks that she never got to sob over Kasim's body as Pri says that hey never got to sob over Phillip's body. Finally, Chantal sends Fabiola upstairs for a sheet.

DRAYTON'S STORY

Dray says that there's no way to know what it feels like to leave your body when you die. It's not like floating; it hurts. The bullet to his head dredges up all sorts of memories he thought he'd forgotten. He feels like he's been dead before as he remembers running somewhere where he felt free. Dray wasn't supposed to be running there, so "a bullet pulled [him] back to reality." Now, Dray knows that in death, people take back everything that's theirs. When Dray was "born again in Detroit," he was supposed to be free. He wasn't, though—he had to contend with a corrupt system. This is why, when Uncle Q gave 10-year-old Dray a gun and told him to shoot the guy in the Detroit Tigers cap, it felt like nothing.

Dray says that there's war in Detroit. His family has been fighting to breathe for generations, so there was nothing to think about when he was given the gun. But Dray's aim was off. Though Uncle Q told him to calm down, Uncle Q got into Dray's head and messed up his aim. Dray missed, and instead of hitting the guy in the Detroit Tigers cap, he hit Phillip. Dray spent the rest of his life working on his aim and trying to prove himself to Uncle Q. He's never told anyone what he did, and he doesn't hate Uncle Q or himself. Instead, Dray hates Donna because she's Phillip's daughter. Phillip is a ghost who constantly torments Dray. Now, there's nothing to do but wait to return.

Dipping back into Fabiola's past keeps the reader on edge about whether Fabiola actually died or not. When it's revealed that she survived, it seems more like Fabiola is remembering the earthquake to remind herself of all the trauma she's already endured. When Papa Legba saves Fabiola and then disappears, it confirms that he is indeed a lwa, not a mere mortal. Fabiola didn't interpret his songs entirely correctly, but that doesn't mean he's going to allow her to die. The heartbreak of losing Kasim is enough of a punishment.



In a way, Dray's death gives all four girls a sense of closure. Most of them didn't get to cry over the bodies of the other men they've lost, but through Donna, they can take part in the ritual and find the strength to move on. Now, they can leave this traumatic episode behind.



Dray's story is cryptic: he could be talking about reincarnation, and his experience running and feeling free may have happened in a different life. Or, since a bullet "pulled him back," this could also be the story of how he lost his eye. Nevertheless, Dray tries to portray himself in a sympathetic light. He made bad choices, but he's a product of a world that has never loved or supported him. The system in Detroit isn't set up to help him do anything more than become a drug dealer.



Here, Dray indicates that the violence he experienced and caused has been going on for generations. Because Black people in the United States have been victims of racial violence for centuries, it doesn't feel as meaningful as it might otherwise to pick up a gun and shoot someone. This doesn't make it easy, however. Furthermore, the revelation that Dray murdered Phillip helps explain why he chose to date and abuse Donna. This was how he could express his hatred of and frustration with a world that set him up to fail.



CHAPTER 32

Fabiola sees Kasim's face everywhere: she sees him in her dreams, as well as on TV, posters, and T-shirts. People march for Kasim, and Fabiola remembers that Kasim's name means "divided amongst many." People say all sorts of things—that Kasim was selling drugs, that he shouldn't have run, that he should be alive. Fabiola hates it. In her opinion, Kasim is dead because everyone else was playing games.

In the days after Kasim's death, Fabiola meets Kasim's mother and speaks with Mr. Nolan and Ms. Stanley. She barely listens; everyone knows the story of the Four Bees now. Chantal is the brains, Donna is the beauty, Pri is the brawn, and Fabiola is brave. The girls all try to make themselves small to avoid attracting more attention. They don't go to protests and try to avoid the ghosts in their **house**. Kasim's ghost isn't in the house; he's out with the people, "Divided amongst many." Dray is still here though. Fabiola and her cousins told the police that Dray died because they were defending themselves. The detectives accept this and only conduct a cursory investigation.

Fabiola had to give a statement to the police, as did Chantal. Fabiola can't write to Manman, as she can't bear to write everything down. Instead, she tries to call, but none of the agents she talks to are helpful. Half of Fabiola wants to go to New Jersey; the other half wants to head for Haiti. She wonders if she was supposed to come to Detroit to save her cousins from Dray. But if this is true, she can't figure out where Kasim fits in. One day, a **car** pulls up: it's Detective Stevens. Fabiola only gets in when Detective Stevens says that she has information on Manman. She hands Fabiola an envelope containing cash and the name of an ICE agent. The agent is dropping all charges; Manman will go free. Meanwhile, Papa Legba doesn't sit at the corner anymore, and Fabiola can't remember his rhymes.

On the morning that Fabiola and her family will pick up Manman, Fabiola helps Pri load two suitcases into the **car**. It's freezing cold outside, and Fabiola's fingers burn. Earlier, she scrubbed the **house** with alcohol and bleach to try to get rid of the stench of death. When she couldn't scrub it out, Matant Jo decided it was time to leave the house for good. Now, everyone wears white. Fabiola had made healing baths for her aunt and cousins, just as Manman did for people who survived the earthquake. The bath is a baptism of sorts, and the white clothes represent rebirth. Pri asks if Fabiola has her "voodoo stuff," but Fabiola says that Pri has to be more respectful. Her songs and prayers are her life; she doesn't know what to hold onto without them. Pri says that she clings to her family, hopes, and dreams.

Fabiola's interpretation of what killed Kasim suggests that she's learned she can't try so hard to manipulate situations. She can and should listen to the lwas, but it's possibly too much to ask of them to do exactly her bidding—especially when the stakes were so high.



Unintentionally or not, Kasim's death has also brought Fabiola closer to her cousins. This is reflected in the way that Fabiola now accepts her role as one of the Four Bees. And for that matter, the cousins now try to attract less attention, something that suggests they've all learned to be humble. Given what the narrator said about the curse of sorts on the house, it's perhaps unsurprising that Dray's ghost is there. He's yet another name on the list of people who have died there unnecessarily.



With Manman's arrival imminent, Fabiola will have to decide whether she's going to share everything with her, or if she's going to keep things secret. The fact that she doesn't want to write to Manman suggests that she's leaning toward staying silent—which suggests that, now, Fabiola isn't loyal to her mother alone. Now, Fabiola has a life of her own in Detroit, and cousins with whom she's been through thick and thin. Meanwhile, Detective Stevens giving Fabiola money reads as an attempt to buy her forgiveness. The fact remains, though, that Detective Stevens is arguably as much to blame for Kasim's death as Fabiola is.



When Matant Jo decides that the only thing to do is leave 8800 American Street, it represents acceptance that Matant Jo is never going to find the "American Joy" that Phillip wanted here. This city, and this house, are too entrenched in a cycle of violence for Matant Jo to break free. However, Fabiola's healing baths suggest that it's possible to move on. For starters, her aunt and cousins can rely more on Haitian traditions and Vodou rituals, which give them a sense of grounding and control over their lives.



Pri goes back inside the **house**, and Fabiola looks around. She catches sight of Bad Leg near the lamppost, but just then, Chantal calls for Fabiola. When Fabiola looks back toward Bad Leg, he's gone. Inside, Matant Jo wails. She breaks down and sobs on Pri's shoulder as Chantal and Donna join her. Then, Donna extends an arm for Fabiola. The family spends a few more hours cleaning. Finally, they all get in the **car**. Matant Jo props up two old photos on the dash. One is of her and Manman as teens; the other is of her, Phillip, toddler Chantal, and babies Pri and Donna. Fabiola spots something in the background and asks for the photo—Bad Leg (Papa Legba) is there. He's been watching over the family since they moved in.

As Chantal turns onto Joy Road, Fabiola sees Papa Legba leaning on the lamppost. He tips his hat to her, and Fabiola mouths "thank you" to him. She stares out the window as the car leaves Michigan. Unlike in Haiti, the ground is flat. Fabiola thinks that dreams are limitless here. But she realizes that everyone in America is climbing their own mountain, even if the mountain only exists in people's hearts. Fabiola feels like a mountain herself.

Spotting Papa Legba in the photograph drives home for Fabiola that spirits are everywhere, if she's willing to look for them. The lwas truly do keep watch over her family and help them survive. With this, the novel positions spirituality as an antidote to the violence of Detroit. It can't do everything, but it can offer a sense of meaning and hope that there's something more to life than violence, heartbreak, and loss.



Dreams may be limitless in the United States, but that doesn't mean the American Dream exists for immigrants like Fabiola. Indeed, it's telling that her family is leaving Detroit altogether—the city isn't set up to serve immigrants and help them thrive. The only thing to do is keep searching elsewhere.





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