Americanah

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Adichie was born as the fifth of sixth children and raised in Nsukka, Nigeria. Her father was a professor at the University of Nigeria and her mother was the university's first female registrar. Adichie studied medicine at the university and then moved to the United States at age 19. She received master's degrees from Johns Hopkins and Yale, and she was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship "Genius Grant" in 2008. She has published poems, short stories, a play, and three novels—*Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Americanah*—which have been awarded the Orange Prize among other honors. Adichie is currently married and divides her time between Nigeria and the United States.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nigeria first gained its independence from British colonialism in 1960, but then faced a brutal civil war seven years later (described in Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*). *Americanah* takes place in contemporary Nigeria, and spans the military regimes of Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1992), General Abacha (1993-1998), and General Abubakar (1998-1999), who finally returned the country to a democracy. Since then Nigeria has been headed by the presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Yar'Adua, and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. The 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City also affect the characters of *Americanah*, as does the Presidential campaign of Barack Obama.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Adichie was first inspired to write by Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian fiction writer most popular in the West and author of *Things Fall Apart*. She was also inspired by Camara Laye, author of *Dark Child*. Both Achebe and Laye gave Adichie a "shock of recognition" that "people who looked like [her] could exist in books." Another influence is the Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina, who is Adichie's contemporary and friend.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Americanah*
- **When Published:** 2013
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Literature, Political Fiction
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** Nigeria, America, England
- **Climax:** Dike's suicide attempt
- **Point of View:** Third person limited, following Ifemelu and Obinze

EXTRA CREDIT

Chinua Achebe. The great Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe was one of Adichie's most important inspirations and influences, and when she was a child Adichie's family even lived in Achebe's former house.

Feminism. In 2012 Adichie gave a TED talk titled "We Should All Be Feminists," discussing the problems with gender roles. Part of this talk was later sampled in Beyoncé's song "Flawless."

PLOT SUMMARY

Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman living in America, gets her **hair** braided at an African salon. She interacts with the women there and remembers her past. Meanwhile Obinze, a rich man living in Nigeria, emails Ifemelu and remembers his own past. The chapters are also scattered with posts from Ifemelu's blog about race in America.

Ifemelu grows up in Lagos, Nigeria. She is close with her Aunty Uju, who becomes the mistress of The General, a wealthy married man. Ifemelu meets Obinze at school and they fall in love. Obinze introduces Ifemelu to his mother, a professor. Aunty Uju gets pregnant and has The General's baby, named Dike. The General dies and Uju flees with Dike to America.

Ifemelu and Obinze go to university together. They start having sex and Ifemelu has a pregnancy scare. There are many strikes and the university is shut down. Ifemelu considers going to America, and she gets a visa and a scholarship to a university in Philadelphia.

When Ifemelu arrives she stays in Brooklyn for the summer with Aunty Uju and Dike. Uju seems stressed out and unhappy. She gives Ifemelu a fake identity card to find work, and Ifemelu goes to Philadelphia for school. Ginika, her friend from Nigeria, helps introduce Ifemelu to American culture and its racial politics. Ifemelu can't find a job, and she starts using an American accent. She makes friends with some African students.

Ifemelu's money runs out, and she accepts a job helping a tennis coach "relax." He touches her sexually and gives her $100. Ifemelu goes home and feels guilty and depressed. She breaks off contact with Obinze, and stops eating and sleeping. Ginika finds her a job babysitting for a wealthy woman named Kimberly.

Kimberly and Ifemelu become friends. Ifemelu visits Aunty Uju who has gotten married and moved to Massachusetts, and flirts with a young man named Blaine on the trip there. Ifemelu starts dating Kimberly's cousin Curt, a rich, handsome white man. Curt takes Ifemelu on many trips and helps her get a good job and a green card.

Meanwhile Obinze is hurt by Ifemelu's sudden silence. He graduates and moves to England. He stays with friends but can't find a good job, and his visa expires. He rents an identity card and finds menial work. He makes friends with a boss and coworker, but then is turned in as an illegal immigrant. Obinze borrows money from Emenike, an old friend who has gotten rich in England, and pays for a green-card marriage with a girl named Cleotilde. On the day of his wedding, though, Obinze is arrested and sent back to Nigeria.

Ifemelu, feeling the pressure of her interracial relationship, cheats on Curt and he breaks up with her. She gets depressed again. Her parents visit. Ifemelu starts her race blog and it gets very popular. She becomes well-known and is asked to give talks. She meets Blaine again and they start dating. He is a professor at Yale and very principled. Ifemelu also meets his domineering sister Shan.

Ifemelu and Blaine start following Barack Obama's presidential candidacy. They have a fight when Ifemelu skips a protest Blaine arranges. They get back together, but are mostly united by their shared passion for Obama. Ifemelu wins a fellowship to live at Princeton. After a while she grows restless and decides to quit her blog, break up with Blaine, and move back to Nigeria.

It is a week before she plans to return to Nigeria when Ifemelu goes to the hair salon. As she leaves the hair salon, Aunty Uju calls to tell her that Dike tried to kill himself. Ifemelu rushes to be with him.

Obinze has gotten rich selling real estate. He is married to the beautiful Kosi and has a daughter.

Ifemelu spends lots of time with Dike and then goes to Lagos. Her old friend Ranyinudo helps her readjust, teasing her about being an "Americanah." Ifemelu goes to a club for Nigerians back from living abroad. She starts working for a women's magazine but then quits and starts a new blog about life in Lagos. Dike visits her.

Ifemelu finally calls Obinze and they meet up. They start seeing each other daily and rekindle their romance. They spend blissful weeks together, but then break up again in the face of his marriage. Obinze tries to divorce Kosi, but she won't accept it. After seven months Obinze shows up at Ifemelu's door, saying he is leaving Kosi and wants to try again with Ifemelu. She invites him in.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ifemelu – The novel's main protagonist, an intelligent, stubborn, outspoken Nigerian woman who moves to America to attend university. She has difficulty adjusting there but eventually becomes a citizen, wins a fellowship at Princeton, and starts a popular blog about race. She has periods of deep depression at times and often feels like an outsider. She has three serious boyfriends: Obinze, Curt, and Blaine. She eventually moves back to Nigeria, reconnects with Obinze, and builds a life for herself there.

Obinze Maduewesi – The other protagonist, a calm, thoughtful, intelligent young Nigerian man. He is raised by his mother, a professor, and is very well-read and obsessed with America. He moves to England after graduating university and tries to become a citizen, but is ultimately deported. He then becomes rich selling real estate in Nigeria. He marries Kosi and has a child, but never falls out of love with Ifemelu, whom he dated as a teenager.

Aunty Uju – Ifemelu's aunt, an intelligent, strong-willed doctor. In Nigeria she becomes the mistress of The General and lives off of his wealth, but then she has to flee to America, where she lives a life of stress and hardship. She is always the closest to Ifemelu of any of her relatives, even after she seems to change and harden in America.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dike – The child of Aunty Uju and The General, a precocious and innocent boy who grows up to be a funny, popular teenager. His outgoing personality hides depression and a crisis of identity, however, as Dike once attempts suicide.

Ifemelu's Mother – A super-religious woman who uses her faith to try to hide from the corrupt realities of the world. She loves Ifemelu but doesn't understand her very well.

Ifemelu's Father – An intelligent, verbose man who always wanted to go to graduate school but had to work instead. He uses big words and humors his wife's extremism without joining in.

Obinze's Mother – A professor at the University of Nigeria, she is intelligent and plainspoken, feeling no shame about discussing sex or injustice. Ifemelu comes to admire and love her, as she respects and cares about Ifemelu.

Ginika – Ifemelu's sweet, quiet friend who was first set up with Obinze before he pursues Ifemulu. Ginika moves to America and then helps Ifemelu adjust there, finding her the job with Kimberly.

Blaine – An African-American professor at Yale who is very principled and high-minded. Ifemelu dates him for a long time, and they share a passion for Barack Obama.

Curt – Kimberly's cousin, a rich, handsome white man who falls in love with Ifemelu and dates her for a long time. Curt is very optimistic and spontaneous, and everything always seems to fall into place for him.

Kosi – Obinze's wife, an exceptionally beautiful women who is very traditionally-minded and domestic. She is a good wife but has little in common with Obinze.

Buchi – Obinze's young daughter with Kosi, whom he loves dearly.

Kimberly – Ifemelu's first boss and friend in America, a wealthy, liberal white woman who is charitable and friendly but very privileged.

Ranyinudo – Ifemelu's friend from school who stays in Nigeria. She helps Ifemelu adjust to moving back to Lagos.

Aisha – The African hairdresser braiding Ifemelu's **hair**. She wants to marry an Igbo who has U.S. papers in order to get American citizenship.

Shan – Blaine's beautiful and intelligent but domineering sister. She seems to have a special power over people, but uses it selfishly.

Chief – A Nigerian "big man" who helps Obinze get rich.

Nneoma – Obinze's cousin who lets him stay with her after he is deported, and introduces him to Chief.

The General – A wealthy, powerful man in the Nigerian government who takes Aunty Uju as his mistress and then supports her. He is the father of Dike. He dies in a plane crash that is rumored to be an assassination.

Sister Ibinabo – A sanctimonious, domineering woman at Ifemelu's mother's church.

Kayode – The most popular guy in the secondary school, Obinze's friend.

Emenike – A boy who is very ambitious and lies about being rich. He is friends with Obinze but then goes to England, gets wealthy, and becomes pretentious and patronizing.

Odein – A young man Ifemelu is attracted to at university in Nsukka.

Mariama – The owner of the salon where Ifemelu gets her **hair** braided.

Halima – The other woman braiding **hair** at Mariama's salon.

Marlon & Jane – A couple from Grenada whom Ifemelu befriends in Brooklyn until Marlon propositions her.

Bartholomew – A rude Nigerian man whom Aunty Uju dates and marries in America, before ultimately leaving him.

Elena – Ifemelu's white roommate who has a dog and dislikes Ifemelu.

Cristina Tomas – A white girl at the American university who is patronizing to Ifemelu because of her accent.

Wambui – Ifemelu's friend in the African Students Association. She encourages Ifemelu to embrace her natural **hair**.

Mwombeki – An outgoing Tanzanian student in the African Students Association.

The Tennis Coach – A white man who posts online about a job helping him "relax." He touches Ifemelu sexually and then gives her $100.

Laura – Kimberly's unfriendly sister.

Don – Kimberly's narcissistic husband, whom she adores.

Taylor – Kimberly's son, an innocent and playful boy.

Morgan – Kimberly's daughter, who is withdrawn, intelligent, and judgmental, though she seems to like and respect Ifemulu.

Kelsey – A white girl who comes into Mariama's salon to get her **hair** braided.

Abe – A white man Ifemelu has a crush on, but he doesn't see her as female or romantically viable.

Curt's Mother – A chilly, wealthy woman who seems to disapprove of Ifemelu.

Barack Obama – A black politician who is elected president. Ifemelu becomes a passionate supporter of his candidacy.

Michelle Obama – Barack's wife, a black woman whom Ifemelu greatly admires.

The Angolans – Two seemingly identical men who take care of the business behind Obinze's green-card marriage.

Cleotilde – The young woman Obinze is supposed to marry to gain citizenship in England.

Nicholas – Obinze's cousin who lives in England. He used to be wild in Nigeria but the responsibilities of parenthood and the stress of life as an immigrant in England have made him very responsible.

Ojiugo – Nicholas's wife, who also used to be wild in college.

Nosa – Obinze's friend who works in the subway in England.

Iloba – Obinze's distant (and technically unrelated) cousin who lives in England and helps Obinze find work.

Vincent Obi – The Nigerian man who lets Obinze use his National Insurance card for a fee, but later turns him in.

Roy Snell – Obinze's kind and welcoming boss at his warehouse job.

Nigel – A young Englishman who works with Obinze and later becomes his "General Manager" and moves to Nigeria.

Georgina – Emenike's English wife, a lawyer.

Araminta – Blaine's best friend.

Paula – Blaine's white ex, an activist and academic.

Boubacar – A Senegalese professor at Yale whom Ifemelu befriends.

Mr. White – An old security guard at Yale who is racially

profiled.

Jonathon and Isioma – Two of Kosi's wealthy friends.

Don – Ranyinudo's rich married boyfriend.

Aunty Onenu – Ifemelu's boss at *Zoe*.

Priye – Ifemelu's friend from school who becomes a wedding planner.

Zemaye – Ifemelu's coworker at *Zoe*, a very sexual woman.

Doris – Ifemelu's other coworker at *Zoe*, who lived in New York.

Esther – The super-religious receptionist at *Zoe*.

Fred – A pretentious man from the Nigerpolitan Club whom Ifemelu sleeps with.

Edusco – A friendly businessman Obinze haggles with in Abuja.

Okwudiba – Obinze's good friend in Nigeria, another wealthy but honest man.

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.

RACE AND RACISM

While *Americanah* is a tale of individual characters, it is also a sweeping analysis and critique of race and racism in America, England, and Nigeria, and the novel is peppered with Adichie's biting observations on the subject. In Nigeria, Ifemelu doesn't really think of herself as black. There is still a racial hierarchy in Nigerian culture, however, as light-skinned or mixed-race people are considered more attractive, and people use products to make their skin lighter. But when Ifemelu and Obinze go to America and England respectively, they find that racism is a much more pervasive part of life. Ifemelu first truly discovers race—and starts to consider herself black—only when she is forced to adapt to America's complex racial politics. Adichie gives many examples of racist incidents, like Obinze being mocked for scraping his knee because he's a "knee-grow," people assuming the white Curt couldn't be dating Ifemelu, or patients refusing to have Aunty Uju as their doctor. Ifemelu then starts a blog about race, and Adichie scatters blog posts throughout the novel. Through these posts Adichie is able to be most outwardly critical of racism in America: Ifemelu describes many microaggressions, incidents, and assumptions she has experienced that many whites wouldn't always notice or understand, and she is able to do so bluntly and humorously. Many of these posts (as well as Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine) involve navigating the differing experiences of African-Americans and "American-Africans," or Africans who come to live in America and experience racial prejudice for the first time.

Most of the novel's discussion of race involves pointing out racism and humanizing it (both the victims and the perpetrators), but Adichie also gives some examples of people overcoming racism through close friendship and romantic love. Characters like Curt, Kimberly, and Nigel achieve this to varying degrees of success in their relationships with Ifemelu and Obinze. As Shan complains about in describing her own book, most editors don't want a novel that focuses on race—the issue must somehow be made more "complex" or described so beautifully that the reader doesn't even notice it. With this Adichie comments on her own work, declaring that race and racism are big and complicated enough issues on their own, and they deserve a novel as sprawling and complex as *Americanah*.

IDENTITY

Identity is an important theme in the novel, as the plot follows Ifemelu and Obinze growing up and finding their place in the world. Because of their life situations, identity as a person is inextricably linked to racial and national identity for both these main characters. When they are teenagers Ifemelu is already smart and outspoken, and Obinze is calm and thoughtful, and as they grow up these qualities are then affected by outside cultural forces. In America, Ifemelu must struggle with her identity as an American-African, or someone seen as an outsider. First she deals with this by taking on an American accent and straightening her hair—seemingly giving in to a new identity as an American. She even has to use a fake identity to look for work, as she only has a student visa. Later Ifemelu gains confidence and comes to embrace her Nigerianness, even as she adapts more easily to American culture and finds success there. She gives up her American accent and lets her **hair** grow naturally, while at the same time dating a rich white man and later winning a fellowship to Princeton. This blend of cultural identities seems healthy and natural for Ifemelu, but it then means that she inhabits a kind of in-between place, where she is neither wholly American nor (when she returns home) wholly Nigerian: she is an "Americanah."

Obinze has a more difficult experience adapting to a new cultural identity in England. His visa expires and he is forced to take on other people's identities to find work, and to buy into a green-card marriage. Everywhere there is a fear of immigrants, and Obinze feels invisible and worthless. He is finally caught and deported back to Nigeria and then sets about building a new identity for himself, having been forced to give up his old dream of America. The new Obinze makes lots of money, marries a beautiful but uninteresting woman, and becomes a Nigerian "big man." He is seen as a huge success by his peers, but it all feels slightly false to Obinze until Ifemelu returns. Ifemelu, having her own identity crisis in returning to Nigeria

and feeling out of place, then reconnects with Obinze and the two begin to work toward reconciling the differing identities they have constructed in their separation. Apart from these two, many secondary characters also relate to this theme, like Emenike, who totally changes his personality to become a cultured and wealthy British citizen. Overall the situations and characterizations of the novel show the many forces working upon the creation of someone's identity: cultural, racial, and economic ones, as well as personal will and preference.

ROMANTIC LOVE

The central plot tying *Americanah* together is the romantic relationship between Ifemelu and Obinze. They have a kind of idealized teenage love as they find each other in school and become incredibly close, but they are then separated when Ifemelu goes to America. Ifemelu cuts off contact with Obinze during her period of depression, and this silence goes on for years. During this time each character has their own romantic experiences: Ifemelu dates Curt and Blaine, while Obinze marries Kosi. Even while Obinze and Ifemelu are separated, their romantic lives remain the central plot focus, particularly as Ifemelu deals with racial and cultural issues in her romantic relationships. With this Adichie not only creates tension and an interesting plot, but also delivers social commentary through an individual and emotional lens.

Apart from this central relationship, Adichie examines other kinds of romantic relationships as well, like Kimberly's idolization of her narcissistic husband Don, Aunty Uju becoming the devoted mistress of The General, and many of the women of Lagos dating and marrying for money alone. Most of the novel's romantic relationships are portrayed as somehow unhealthy or lacking, and the contrast to this is the kind of pure, romantic love and connection between Ifemelu and Obinze. The novel ends without them reaching any definite conclusion, but it does at least end on a hopeful note, implying that Ifemelu and Obinze's love might be able to rise above the world of materialistic, one-sided, or unhealthy relationships.

SEPARATION VS. CONNECTION

A more metaphorical theme that spans the novel is the idea of separation versus connection. This involves personal misunderstandings, physical distances, and cultural and racial divides. The most obvious separation that defines the plot is when Ifemelu and Obinze are physically separated by thousands of miles, with Ifemelu going to America and Obinze staying in Nigeria and then going to England. This then leads to the personal separation between the two when Ifemelu breaks off contact with Obinze. The later parts of the novel are then about reestablishing that close connection between the two, as they reconnect geographically by both returning to Nigeria.

Other personal separations concern the other characters as well, like Ifemelu's mother's disconnection from the corrupt realities of life, Aunty Uju's disconnection from Dike's experiences, and Obinze's personal distance from Kosi. Among all these personal and physical separations, there are also the many cultural and racial divides focused on in the themes of race and identity. Ifemelu's experience and blog focus on the many misunderstandings and prejudices that fill her life in both America and Nigeria. But just as Ifemelu's relationships with Obinze and Dike are shown as hopeful portrayals of real connection, so there are also examples of human connection crossing racial and cultural divides, as with Ifemelu's friendship with Kimberly and her relationship with Curt, the diverse characters at Shan's "salon," and Obinze's friendship with Nigel.

CULTURAL CRITICISM

As with the themes of racism and identity, *Americanah* allows Adichie to observe and critique the cultures of Nigeria, America, and England through scenes that are sometimes humorous and sometimes tragic. In Nigeria (particularly Lagos), Adichie focuses on the culture of corruption and materialism, where most people get rich through fraud or corruption, officials expect bribes, and women date or marry a man based on his wealth and prestige. Everyone is expected to grovel before the rich, who are expected to ostentatiously show off their wealth by visiting Western countries and sending their children to Western schools. This leads to a Nigeria where essentials are lacking for most of the population (there is rarely consistent light or water), and Western culture and whiteness are idealized over Nigerian culture.

In America, Adichie focuses mostly on the racial hierarchy and prejudices Ifemelu discovers there, but she also comments on the prevalence of depression and anxiety in American society. She especially focuses on liberal white Americans, who like to criticize their own country but still imagine it as superior to others, the one dispensing charity instead of needing it. Adichie spends less time on England/Europe, and much of that involves racism, but she also highlights the fear of immigrants—a fear that ignores England's own colonial past, as the people from the countries England itself created eventually make their way to England. Along with all these serious criticisms, the novel also contains many lighthearted observations about the different cultures, like ways of speaking or dressing. *Americanah* is a large and complex enough book that it can encompass individual stories of romance and personal growth, searing critiques of racism, and many astute observations about the cultures of Nigeria, England, and America all at once.

SYMBOLS

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

HAIR

Much of *Americanah* takes place as Ifemelu sits in a salon getting her hair braided. For Ifemelu personally, her hair represents her struggle for confidence and an identity as both a Nigerian immigrant and a black American. In Nigeria, Ifemelu always braided her hair, but when she comes to America she learns that she is supposed to relax (straighten) her hair with chemicals or else people will think she is unprofessional. She does so, and feels that a part of herself has died with her hair's natural curl. Thus the cultural pressure for black women like Ifemelu to straighten, dye, or somehow make their hair look more like a white woman's hair becomes a symbol of the racism inherent in American culture. Racism is not just explicitly racist acts, but also social hierarchies like the fact that most popular women's magazines offer no hair-styling tips for black women.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor edition of *Americanah* published in 2014.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"And after you register your own company, you must find a white man. Find one of your white friends in England. Tell everybody he is your General Manager. You will see how doors will open for you because you have an oyinbo General Manager. Even Chief has some white men that he brings in for show when he needs them. That is how Nigeria works. I'm telling you.

Related Characters: Nneoma (speaker), Obinze Maduewesi, Chief

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Obinze's cousin Nneoma has just gotten him some work with the "big man" Chief, and now Nneoma explains how Obinze can get even richer. On one level, this quote is part of Adichie's ironic, sometimes humorous criticism of Nigerian culture. The concept Nneoma outlines touches on the corruption Adichie sees at all levels of the Nigerian government, in which flattery, deceit, and an extravagant show of wealth are seen as common and even necessary traits.

This particular kind of corruption also deals with race and racism, however, as it's suggested that (black) Nigerian "big men" must hire white men to act like their "boss" in order to seem legitimate. The Nigerian is the real boss, but the English employee's whiteness gives him a kind of respectability and power (in society's eyes) that no amount of money can buy. Even in Nigeria, where race is much less of an issue than it is in America, whiteness is still seen as inherently better.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"But Obinze said little, and Kayode was left to carry the conversation, his voice getting boisterous, and from time to time he glanced at Obinze, as though to urge him on. Ifemelu was not sure when something happened, but in those moments, as Kayode talked, something strange happened. A quickening inside her, a dawning. She realized, quite suddenly, that she wanted to breathe the same air as Obinze.

Related Characters: Obinze Maduewesi, Kayode, Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This is the moment when Ifemelu and Obinze fall in "love at first sight." Originally Obinze was meant to be set up on a date with Ifemelu's friend Ginika, but then it turns out that Obinze is more interested in Ifemelu herself. This is an important scene because it starts off the love story that carries throughout the entire novel. Ifemelu and Obinze will eventually grow apart and live on different continents for decades, but they always share an intimate bond that begins with this somewhat idealized, nostalgically-portrayed teenage romance. Here Adichie also shows that for all her incisive cultural criticism, she also knows how to tug at the heartstrings with her language.

"She rested her head against his and felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection. He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease; her skin felt as though it was her right size.

Related Characters: Ifemelu, Obinze Maduewesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from the same scene in which Obinze and Ifemelu first meet, but now they have begun explicitly talking and flirting with each other, and are alone together—experiencing a first intimate moment of connection. Adichie continues the language of teenage romance and young love here, but also introduces a crucial aspect of the relationship between the two protagonists—it is not only based on romantic love for each other, but also on self-love, or a particular way the relationship makes both of them feel more affirmed and comfortable with their identities. At this point in the story this particular quality is just another aspect of a young crush, but as Ifemelu goes through different relationships later in life, it will seem more and more important to her. With Obinze she can truly be herself—she doesn't have to modify or suppress her identity for someone else's sake, or explain why she does what she does.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"Ginika, just make sure you can still talk to us when you come back," Priye said.

"She'll come back and be a serious Americanah like Bisi," Ranyinudo said.

They roared with laughter, at that word "Americanah," wreathed in glee, the fourth syllable extended, and at the thought of Bisi, a girl in the form below them, who had come back from a short trip to America with odd affectations, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred *r* to every English word she spoke.

Related Characters: Priye, Ranyinudo (speaker), Ginika

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Here Adichie brings up for the first time the term "Americanah," which also gives the book its title. Ifemelu's friend Ginika is about to move with her family to America, and her friends tease her about how this might change her personality. It has become a stereotype that after living in America, Nigerians purposefully try to act "special" and pretend that they are foreigners in their own country—as the students say here, speaking with an accent or even pretending to no longer understand the Yoruba language.

This is another one of Adichie's critiques of Nigerian culture—a kind of self-hatred, or assumption that Western countries like America are automatically superior to Nigeria or other African countries. This comes from a past of Western colonialism and racism, but it is still present in Nigerian culture, even in jokes like this. On a more personal level, the idea of an "Americanah" is just something to laugh about for Ifemelu and her friends at this point, but, decades later, Ifemelu herself will return from America to Nigeria and be a true "Americanah." Ifemelu won't have to pretend to be foreign though—she really will feel like a stranger in her own country, and will have to reconcile her identity to this fact.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"You know, we live in an ass-licking economy. The biggest problem in this country is not corruption. The problem is that there are many qualified people who are not where they are supposed to be because they won't lick anybody's ass, or they don't know which ass to lick or they don't even know how to lick an ass. I'm lucky to be licking the right ass."

Related Characters: Aunty Uju (speaker), The General

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu's Aunty Uju gives a rather straightforward "lesson" about how Nigerian society works. At this point Uju is the mistress of the General, a powerful military figure in the Nigerian government, who provides Uju with a house and many gifts. Here Adichie again criticizes the corruption in Nigerian society, albeit in a humorous way. What seems most frustrating (but also amusing) to some of the characters in the book isn't just the corruption in Nigeria, but also how obvious and open it is. As Uju says, the entire economy is based on flattery and manipulation, and the best way to succeed is to acknowledge this fact and work within the system.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "Dike, put it back," Aunty Uju said, with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. *Pooh-reet-back*. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing.

Related Characters: Aunty Uju (speaker), Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

At this point Ifemelu has just moved to America, while her Aunty Uju has been there for years, so Ifemelu is observing both this new culture and the way it has changed her aunt's identity. In Nigeria, Uju was a confident, outspoken woman who seemed to understand Ifemelu better than anyone else, but now it's clear that living in America has "subdued" Uju's identity in many ways. As this quote shows, Uju has learned to be apologetic about her foreignness, and she tries to speak with an American accent in front of white people so as to bring less attention to herself. Clearly many instances of racism or ignorance have led to Uju's creation of this new "persona," but Ifemelu is seeing it for the first time and is appalled.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Later, she said, "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair… If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional."

"So there are no doctors with braided hair in America?" Ifemelu asked.

"I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed."

There it was again, the strange naivete with which Aunty Uju had covered herself like a blanket. Sometimes, while having a conversation, it would occur to Ifemelu that Aunty Uju had deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place. Obinze said it was the exaggerated gratitude that came with immigrant insecurity.

Related Characters: Aunty Uju, Ifemelu (speaker), Obinze Maduewesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146-147

Explanation and Analysis

Aunty Uju has just passed her exams and is licensed to become a doctor in America, so she is planning out what she has to do to get a job practicing medicine—and part of this involves straightening her hair. This quote is an important explanation of the symbol of hair (and particularly black women's hair) in the novel, as Uju has learned that for a black woman to wear her hair naturally or in braids is considered "unprofessional"—or essentially, not white enough to be professional. Here Adichie is critiquing American culture for the way racism is ingrained at every level—even including standards of beauty and fashion—but also showing another way Uju's identity has been "subdued" by this society. In order to protect herself, it seems that Uju has given up an important part of her character, and this feels tragic to Ifemelu.

Obinze then has a good explanation for this (that immigrants are taught to be so grateful for being allowed to live in America that they submit to its society's racist practices), but it's also worth noting that Obinze himself is not yet an immigrant—he's still in Nigeria. He can observe this phenomenon from the outside, but it's only once he's illegally in England that he too can understand real racism and the pressures to conform and subdue one's own identity.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ They mimicked what Americans told them: *You speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It's so sad that people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa.* And they themselves mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock, because it was a mockery born of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again. Here, Ifemelu felt a gentle, swaying sense of renewal. Here, she did not have to explain herself.

Related Characters: Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170-171

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu has recently started college in America, and she feels isolated and disconnected from the rest of the students—until this scene, where she is invited to the "African Students Union" and she meets other students

from Africa. Surrounded by people who experience the same kind of racism, ignorance, and homesickness that she does, Ifemelu feels a new sense of connection with these students, and she also feels reaffirmed in her identity as a Nigerian. She doesn't want to have to subdue herself and change her identity like her Aunty Uju has, but she also doesn't want to keep being hurt by racism and ignorance. In moments like these Ifemelu gets a renewal of strength and personal connection as she seeks to adjust to a new culture while also staying true to herself.

Chapter 15 Quotes

"Isn't she just stunning?"

"No, she isn't." Ifemelu paused. "You know, you can just say 'black.' Not every black person is beautiful."

Kimberly was taken aback, something wordless spread on her face and then she smiled, and Ifemelu would think of it as the moment they became, truly, friends.

Related Characters: Ifemelu, Kimberly (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu is now working for Kimberly, a wealthy white woman, and this new environment exposes Ifemelu to yet another aspect of American culture—the subtle racism and condescension of some wealthy, liberal Americans. Ifemelu has noticed that whenever Kimberly is talking about a black woman, she uses the word "beautiful" to describe her, even if the woman isn't actually beautiful. This is an astute and humorous bit of cultural commentary about white America on Adichie's part. Many white people do things like this and don't even know it, or intend any harm by it, but it still adds to the narrative that blackness is different from the cultural norm and needs to be lifted up by well-meaning white people. This scene is also important because Kimberly doesn't get angry or defensive when Ifemelu calls her out—and it's for this reason that Ifemelu feels a sudden sense of connection with Kimberly, and feels like the two women are now really friends. For the isolated, depressed Ifemelu, this is a crucial moment.

Chapter 16 Quotes

It was like a conjurer's trick, the swift disappearance of his hostility. His face sank into a grin. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be.

"How are you doing? Know where she wants me to start?" he asked.

"Upstairs," she said, letting him in, wondering how all that cheeriness could have existed earlier in his body. She would never forget him… and she would begin the blog post "Sometimes in America, Race is Class" with the story of his dramatic change, and end with: *It didn't matter to him how much money I had. As far as he was concerned I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America's public discourse, "Blacks" as a whole are often lumped with "Poor Whites." Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites. A curious thing indeed.*

Related Characters: Ifemelu (speaker), Kimberly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204-205

Explanation and Analysis

Kimberly has called a carpet cleaner to come to her house, and the man acted confused and hostile when Ifemelu answered the door (Kimberly's house is huge and in a fancy neighborhood). When Ifemelu made it clear that she was "the help" rather than the homeowner, however, the carpet cleaner immediately became friendly. It's thus suggested that the carpet cleaner initially acted hostile because Ifemelu was "out of place"—as a black woman, it seemed strange to the carpet cleaner that she would be in that house in that neighborhood, and perhaps the carpet cleaner also didn't like the idea of having to work for a black woman. But once Ifemelu assumed her proper place (as a worker for the rich white homeowners) then everything was once again in its proper order and the carpet cleaner became comfortable and friendly.

For her part, Ifemelu is mystified but also hurt by this interaction, and the realization that her unique identity is, in society's eyes, less noticeable than her race. Ifemelu then goes on to later write a blog post about this, critiquing American society again for its inherent racial hierarchy, and also the way different groups are portrayed in the media. Here she particularly points out that blacks are presented as a homogenous group, and that group is assumed to be poor.

Chapter 18 Quotes

She recognized in Kelsey the nationalism of liberal Americans who copiously criticized America but did not like you to do so; they expected you to be silent and grateful, and always reminded you of how much better than wherever you had come from America was.

Related Characters: Ifemelu, Kelsey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 232-233

Explanation and Analysis

This scene takes place in the hair salon where Ifemelu is getting her hair braided before she returns to Nigeria. The women working there are from different African countries, and they focus on black African customers. A white girl named Kelsey then comes in and asks to get her hair braided. She seems well-meaning, but then says several ignorant and offensive things as she tries to make conversation. Here Ifemelu gets annoyed by Kelsey and makes an obervation about some liberal Americans—they feel comfortable criticizing their own country, but still dislike it when a foreigner criticizes it. Immigrants are supposed to be "grateful" for the privilege of living in America, because its assumed that even if America has flaws, it's still on an entirely different level from African countries. This kind of assumed superiority and condescension (whether intended or not) is an aspect of American culture that Adichie often critiques in the book, as it is particularly evident when Americans speak about Africans or African countries.

Chapter 19 Quotes

"Just a little burn," the hairdresser said. "But look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing!"

Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss.

Related Characters: Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

This quote also centers around the symbol of hair, and black women's hair in particular—an issue that has suddenly become personal for Ifemelu. She just got her hair straightened for a job interview, because she has learned that black women's hair, if left naturally curly or in braids, is considered "unprofessional." The injustice of this suddenly strikes Ifemelu once her hair is actually straightened—not just that it's racist for society to have a standard of beauty and professionalism that centers around whiteness, but also because she feels like a part of her own identity has been burned away when her hair is burned straight. She, like so many other immigrants, is forced to subdue parts of her identity, and even appearance, in order to fit into American culture without being judged or dismissed.

Chapter 22 Quotes

Later that day she would send an e-mail to Obinze's Hotmail address: *Ceiling, I don't even know how to start. I ran into Kayode today at the mall. Saying sorry for my silence sounds stupid even to me but I am so sorry and I feel so stupid. I will tell you everything that happened. I have missed you and I miss you.* And he would not reply.

"I booked the Swedish massage for you," Curt said.

"Thank you," she said. Then, in a lower voice, she added, to make up for her peevishness, "You are such a sweetheart."

"I don't want to be a sweetheart. I want to be the fucking love of your life," Curt said with a force that startled her.

Related Characters: Ifemelu, Curt (speaker), Obinze Maduewesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

At this point Ifemelu and Obinze have been separated by an ocean and several years of noncommunication, and this email is Ifemelu's first attempt at reaching across that gap. The separation between the two protagonists makes up the majority of the book, and its last parts describe how Ifemelu and Obinze gradually move closer to each other and reestablish the powerful connection and love they once had.

At this point, however, we only see things from Ifemelu's point of view, and it seems like Obinze doesn't want to reconnect—he doesn't respond to the email.

Meanwhile, Ifemelu is dating Curt, a wealthy, handsome white man who introduces her to a world of spontaneous travel and luxurious living. Ifemelu is happy with Curt, but always feels like something is missing in their romance. Here it becomes clear that Curt feels no reservations whatsoever about Ifemelu—he wants to be the "love of her life"—but Ifemelu still feels a disconnect between herself and Curt.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ Vincent's Igbo had a rural accent. He put the National Insurance card on the table and was already writing his bank account number on a piece of paper. Iloba's cell phone began to ring. That evening, as dusk fell, the sky muting to a pale violet, Obinze became Vincent.

Related Characters: Obinze Maduewesi, Vincent Obi, Iloba

Related Themes:

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

Obinze has been illegally living in England ever since his visa expired, and in order to find work he is forced to pay a Nigerian man with UK citizenship to use his identity card. Obinze's cousin Iloba finds a man named Vincent Obi, and Obinze promises Vincent a share of his salary in exchange for assuming his identity—essentially posing as a legal citizen. The crucial point here is the final line—"Obinze became Vincent"—as it shows just how much Obinze has compromised his identity in order to make a new life in England. Obinze is not just pretending to be Vincent; he is erasing his own identity, his own personhood, in order to assume an identity that the UK will accept. If he remains "Obinze," then to England he is nothing more than trash to be discarded.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ The wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with fear of asylum seekers, infecting everybody with the panic of impending doom, and so articles were written and read, simply and stridently, as though the writers lived in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered this to be the normal course of history: the influx into Britain of black and brown people from countries created by Britain. Yet he understood. It had to be comforting, this denial of history.

Related Characters: Obinze Maduewesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 320

Explanation and Analysis

Here Obinze reflects on the current environment in Europe, in which white people feel that their culture is under attack and fear that they will be "overrun" by immigrants from Africa or the Middle East. This is one of Adichie's overarching cultural criticisms of the West—that wealthy countries want to exploit poor countries, but then Western citizens feel afraid or hateful when the people from those exploited countries seek asylum.

This idea also shows how race and racism affect even people's views of history and memory. Adichie suggests that white Europeans choose to forget their history of colonialism precisely because its victims were so far away, and were people of color. And once this history comes back to haunt them, in the form of refugees and immigrants from countries exploited by colonial powers, it's easier for white Westerners to distance themselves from their past and only deal with their present fear—essentially separating themselves from history, and pretending that present events are happening in a vacuum, without precedent.

Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ He was making fun of his wife, but Obinze knew, from the muted awe in his tone, that it was mockery colored by respect, mockery of what he believed, despite himself, to be inherently superior. Obinze had remembered how Kayode had often said about Emenike in secondary school: He can read all the books he wants but the bush is still in his blood.

Related Characters: Emenike, Obinze Maduewesi, Georgina, Kayode

Related Themes:

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

This quote refers to Emenike, Obinze's old classmate from Nigeria, who has now come to England and become rich and successful, and has also married a white Englishwoman. Even as a teenager, Obinze remembers, Emenike was ambitious and would pretend to be richer than he was (he was actually from a very poor bush village). Now Emenike has assumed a new identity—that of the successful Englishman who also retains his Nigerian roots. Obinze will later learn that Emenike really is romantically in love with his wife (Georgina), but here Obinze only notices how Emenike holds his wife to a different standard because she is white. Emenike might complain about her or make fun of her, but he still considers Georgina inherently superior to himself. This is another of Adichie's cultural criticisms of how race is viewed in both the West and Nigeria—whiteness is assumed to be best, and this view is so normalized by those in power that even black Africans have developed an inferiority complex about their blackness.

This quote also suggests that Emenike may have been so successful in England precisely because he is so skilled at assuming new identities to fit his situation. When he was friends with the rich teens like Obinze, he pretended to be rich, and now he pretends to be fully English (but he also knows how to flatter white people and play his role as a "grateful immigrant"). Seemingly no one has any idea who the "real" Emenike is, as he has learned to adapt so well that he has no fixed identity or personality aside from his adaptiveness and ambition to better his social standing.

Chapter 30 Quotes

Obinze watched him leave. He was going to tick on a form that his client was willing to be removed. “Removed.” That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing.

Related Characters: Obinze Maduewesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 345

Explanation and Analysis

Obinze has just been caught living without a visa in England, and now he is about to be deported back to Nigeria. He is allowed to see a lawyer, but Obinze feels defeated and decides he's not even going to argue his case. Because of this, he will now be "removed," and this word makes Obinze feel like a thing to be discarded, rather than a human being moving from one country to another. This is another instance of Obinze feeling "indentity-less" as someone living illegally in England, as if Obinze himself has disappeared and he has either "become" Vincent Obi (whose ID he was using) or has become nothing at all. This poignant moment also allows Adichie to critique the dehumanizing language used to describe immigrants and refugees, particularly those from non-white countries. It is much easier to lump them all together and dehumanize them than to deal with them as real people with real needs and desires—but acting this way allows white Westerners to avoid any sense of culpability for their fate.

Chapter 31 Quotes

The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it’s a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you’re alone together because it’s just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we don’t talk about it. We don’t even tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood better, because we’re worried they will say we’re overreacting, or we’re being too sensitive.

Related Characters: Ifemelu (speaker), Curt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu is at a party, and addresses a black Haitian woman who claims she had dated a white man for three years, and "race was never an issue for them." Ifemelu is a little drunk, so she decides not to let the issue pass, and she accuses the woman of lying. Ifemelu then gives this statement that encapsulates many of her (and Adichie's) ideas on race in America.

Because of this quote's subject matter and position in the narrative (right after Ifemelu and Curt's breakup), it's clear that Ifemelu is here referencing her own past relationship

with Curt, and finally admitting some things to herself that she had been unable to see when she was actually dating Curt—like the fact that there was always a kind of separation between them because of their experiences of the world, and the way society viewed them racially. In private they experienced a real connection, and were in love with each other romantically, but in public they were always separated by the issue of racial identity and experience. Ifemelu had an entirely different experience because she was black—meaning that American culture treated her as different or inferior—while Curt had no idea this was going on, and was inherently unable to understand it. The privilege of white ignorance is a divide in interracial relationships, Ifemelu suggests, because the non-white partner will always seem to be offended or hurt by things that the white partner doesn't even have to recognize as existing.

These are issues of racial justice and social criticism, but here Adichie also shows how these issues affect one's personal life, like one's identity and romantic relationships. Ifemelu's identity is inherently divided from Curt's because of their different experiences, and the way that society sees them affects their relationship even in private. Essentially Adichie is saying that nothing exists in a vaccuum, and these issues of racism and isolation affect even the most seemingly private of human affairs.

❝ The simplest solution to the problem of race in America? Romantic love. Not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved. And because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved.

Related Characters: Ifemelu (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 366-367

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from one of Ifemelu's blog posts, and relates to her earlier discussion of her own relationship with Curt. She here takes her ideas on race as related to romantic love and puts them in the wider context of "the problem of race in America." Ifemelu suggests that the best way to "cure" racism is for more white people and black people to fall in love—truly in love, not just a "safe, shallow love." (The "breathing" language here is also reminiscent of Ifemelu's first true love, Obinze, whom she "wanted to breathe the same air as.") But then Ifemelu laments the fact that American society has made it so difficult for this to happen. Ifemelu has just discussed the separation between herself and Curt during their romance because she had a totally different experience of the world, as a black woman, than Curt did as a white man, despite the fact that they were lovers and equals when they were alone together. American society, whether intentionally or not, places obstacles in the way of interracial relationships, in that the non-white partner will always be treated and viewed differently from the white partner, and the couple itself will be seen as something "different" or even dangerous. This is just another way cultural racism affects one's personal life, as Adichie continues to explore the nuances of race in America.

Chapter 37 Quotes

❝ So if you're going to write about race, you have to make sure it's so lyrical and subtle that the reader who doesn't read between the lines won't even know it's about race. You know, a Proustian meditation, all watery and fuzzy, that at the end just leaves you feeling watery and fuzzy.

Related Characters: Shan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 417

Explanation and Analysis

This is a statement from Shan, Blaine's sister, who is a writer and an ambiguous figure in the book. Shan has just written a memoir and is trying to get it published, but her editor has criticized her for writing too much about race. Shan then delivers this statement, saying that it's impossible to write directly about race in America without being pigeonholed as a writer. The (mostly white) American literary world doesn't consider race a "universal" issue, and so writers of color are expected to tone down their discussions of race and make them vaguer, more "watery and fuzzy"—essentially so that white readers won't feel uncomfortable or like they've been accused of something. On one level this is a criticism of how racism subtly affects even the structure of the literary world and our culture's ideas of aesthetic quality (the belief that it's only great writing if it somehow "transcends race," whatever that means), but on another level Adichie uses

Shan's statement to comment on her own project: Americanah itself. In the novel Adichie is trying to write directly about race and racism without being "watery and fuzzy," and is trying to prove that race is a universal issue, and is a big and complex enough subject to warrant a sprawling work of literature like this one.

"You know why Ifemelu can write that blog, by the way?" Shan said. "Because she's African. She's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about. It's all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African American, she'd just be labeled angry and shunned."

Related Characters: Shan (speaker), Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 418

Explanation and Analysis

Here Shan continues her speech on racism and America, and delivers a broad statement that also subtly criticizes Ifemelu and makes her seem like an outsider. Shan suggests that Ifemelu can only write her blog about race in America and be praised for it because she herself is not American—she's disconnected from the real experience of being AfricanAmerican and experiencing that particular kind of racism. This implies that white Americans are willing to listen to outsiders' perspectives on their culture moreso than to oppressed Americans themselves. At the same time, Shan also makes Ifemelu feel isolated and separated with this statement, as if her experience of racism is less important or less real because she isn't African American.

Chapter 40 Quotes

Her phone beeped with a text from Dike.

I can't believe it. My president is black like me. She read the text a few times, her eyes filling with tears.

Related Characters: Dike (speaker), Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 447

Explanation and Analysis

It's 2008, and Barack Obama has just been elected president of the United States. Ifemelu, who has been a fervent Obama supporter during his campaign, then receives this text from her cousin Dike, Aunty Uju's son. This is a poignant moment in the book, as it shows Dike, a young African American, feeling affirmed and empowered in his identity and blackness. With Obama's election, Dike has something direct and tangible that proves that blackness is not something negative, shameful, or inferior—a black man like himself has just become the most powerful man in the world. This doesn't mean that racism is "solved," of course, but it is a big step in affirming black identity and moving away from the inequality of the past.

Chapter 44 Quotes

"Americanah!" Ranyinudo teased her often. "You are looking at things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!"

Related Characters: Ranyinudo (speaker), Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 475-476

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu has now returned to Nigeria after living in America for many years, and she is basically having an identity crisis—is she American, Nigerian, both, or neither? Her confusion seems encapsulated by the word "Americanah," which she and her Nigerian classmates had long ago used to mock Nigerians who go to America, come back, and pretend to be more sophisticated or Western. At the time the word was just a joke for Ifemelu, but now she really does feel unsure about her identity as either an American or a Nigerian. In America she was always an outsider, separate from the culture at large, and now that she's back in Nigeria she feels like a stranger or foreigner as well—even her tastes and instincts have changed to become more "American." And as her friend Ranyinudo points out, Ifemelu doesn't even fit the stereotype of the "Americanah" because she hasn't assumed an American accent. Ifemelu feels separated from both her cultures, and must learn to affirm her own unique identity.

Chapter 46 Quotes

"Yes. She approached me, but their budget was too small for me. That girl never understood the first rule of life in this Lagos. You do not marry the man you love. You marry the man who can best maintain you."

Related Characters: Priye (speaker), Ifemelu, Ranyinudo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 492

Explanation and Analysis

Now that she's back in Nigeria, Ifemelu tries to reconnect with some of her old school friends. One of these is Priye, a woman who is now a wedding planner. Here Priye discusses a friend's wedding that she was considering planning, and then gives a half-joking statement about romance in Lagos, Nigeria. Adichie has spent most of the book's middle section critiquing American society, but in the final sections she turns her attention back to Nigeria, and offers a cultural criticism of Lagos society in particular. Much of this centers around romantic love, and also connects with the kind of corruption, flattery, and extravagance that Adichie has previously criticized in the Nigerian "big men."

Most of the romantic relationships Adichie portrays in her book are unhealthy or lacking in some way, and in Nigeria she often sees that unhealthiness as related to money and prestige. Romance is more transactional in Lagos, as Adichie sees it—women are supposed to find the richest and most powerful man, rather than the man they actually like most. It is also assumed that women should keep moving from one man to another in order to climb the social ladder—dating progressively richer and more powerful men. On the male side, "big men" assume that their money or power can buy them anything, and so if they find a woman attractive or desirable, they assume that they can "have" her. This is basically an exchange of sex for money, with a show of beauty and prestige mixed in, and very little real romance or love.

Chapter 48 Quotes

He was looking at her, soliciting her agreement with his eyes: they were not supposed to watch Nollywood, people like them, and if they did, then only as an amusing anthropology.

"I like Nollywood," Ifemelu said, even though she, too, thought Nollywood more theater than film. The urge to be contrarian was strong. If she set herself apart, perhaps she would be less of the person she feared she had become. "Nollywood may be melodramatic, but life in Nigeria is very melodramatic."

Related Characters: Ifemelu (speaker), Fred

Related Themes:

Page Number: 504

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu has gone to a "Nigerpolitan" meeting—a group of various Nigerians who have lived for a long time in Western countries, returned to Nigeria, and now feel out of place. Ifemelu finds herself relating to a lot of their stories and complaints (mostly about how unsophisticated Nigerian culture is, how it doesn't have food "they" can eat, etc.) but then feels uncomfortable about this fact. Ifemelu doesn't want to be the kind of "Americanah" who returns to Nigeria only to look down upon it, or to feel disconnected and separate from her home culture. At the same time, Ifemelu is still feeling confused and conflicted about her identity. At this meeting, at least, she realizes the kind of person she doesn't want to become, and so she purposefully goes against her actual feelings and defends Nollywood (the Nigerian film industry).

Chapter 51 Quotes

Finally, he said, "I can't imagine how bad you must have felt, and how alone. You should have told me. I so wish you had told me."

She heard his words like a melody and she felt herself breathing unevenly, gulping at the air. She would not cry, it was ridiculous to cry after so long, but her eyes were filling with tears and there was a boulder in her chest and a stinging in her throat. The tears felt itchy. She made no sound. He took her hand in his, both clasped on the table, and between them a silence grew, an ancient silence that they both knew. She was inside this silence and she was safe.

Related Characters: Obinze Maduewesi (speaker), Ifemelu

Related Themes:

Page Number: 543

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu and Obinze have reconnected after decades apart, and now Ifemelu finally tells Obinze the story of why she broke off communication. This is a cathartic and poignant moment—one that most of the book has been leading up to—and also a lovely passage in itself, as Adichie intertwines language of the scene's intimate physicality and the vast significance of the moment in the emotional lives of both

protagonists. The physical and interpersonal separation that made up the center of the novel—Ifemelu and Obinze's separation—is now in the process of being dissolved, as it seems that the two characters are reestablishing the powerful connection they once shared. In the arc of the novel's romantic plot, this also shows Ifemelu returning to her first true love, Obinze, after many relationships with other men in America.

back in America: mostly the problem of separation of experience or cultural misunderstanding. She was always having to explain things to Curt or Blaine, and vice-versa, because they all came from such different backgrounds and even experienced society and American culture in totally different ways (mostly because Ifemelu is a Black African, while Curt was a wealthy white American and Blaine was an African American and Ivy League professor).

Chapter 54 Quotes

❝ Once she had told him, "The thing about cross-cultural relationships is that you spend so much time explaining. My ex-boyfriends and I spent a lot of time explaining. I sometimes wondered whether we would even have anything at all to say to each other if we were from the same place," and it pleased him to hear that, because it gave his relationship with her a depth, a lack of trifling novelty. They were from the same place and they still had a lot to say to each other.

Related Characters: Ifemelu (speaker), Obinze Maduewesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 563

Explanation and Analysis

Ifemelu and Obinze have rekindled their old romance, and feel like they are having a whirlwind teenage romance all over again. Here we see this from Obinze's point of view, as he reflects on something Ifemelu told him that made him feel special and affirmed in their relationship. The quote is a sign of the strong romantic love and connection that has survived for years between the two protagonists, but it also highlights issues Ifemelu experienced in her relationships

Chapter 55 Quotes

❝ The pain of his absence did not decrease with time; it seemed instead to sink in deeper each day, to rouse in her even clearer memories. Still, she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being.

Related Characters: Ifemelu, Obinze Maduewesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 585-586

Explanation and Analysis

After reconnecting and rekindling their old romance, Ifemelu has "broken up" with Obinze again because of his refusal to leave his wife, Kosi. This quote then sums up a crucial kind of growth that Ifemelu has experienced over the course of the book, and particularly since returning to Nigeria—a new maturity of both romantic love and self-love. Though they are divided again, Ifemelu still loves Obinze deeply and feels the "pain of his absence," and yet at the same time Ifemelu also feels peaceful and whole without Obinze. She has finally found an identity for herself as a writer, as a woman, and as a Nigerian/American citizen.

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

Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman living in Princeton, New Jersey, must travel to another town to get her **hair** braided properly. She likes Princeton, but its population is mostly white and so there are no hairdressers there who know how to braid her hair. She gets on the train and looks around at the passengers, wondering if they would make good subjects for the lifestyle blog she used to run, which was called "*Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*." She used to interview random people she encountered on public transportation about racial issues and their opinions.

Ifemelu getting her hair braided acts as a frame story for the first part of the novel, and immediately introduces hair (particularly black women's hair) as an important subject and symbol in the novel. Adichie introduces Ifemelu at a time when she has created a successful identity for herself as an American citizen: she has a fellowship at Princeton, a successful blog, and feels comfortable talking to American strangers.

Her blog became very popular, but Ifemelu has recently decided to quit writing it. She wonders if this was a good decision. As the train leaves Princeton and arrives in Trenton, many more black passengers get on. She noticed something similar when she took the New York Subway system, how some places were full of slim white people and others with "fat" black people. Ifemelu thinks about how she has stopped saying "fat" since living in America. Recently a man at the grocery store called Ifemelu fat, and later she looked in the mirror and accepted that this was true.

Posts from Ifemelu's blog will be interspersed throughout the narrative, and through them Adichie is able to give more direct cultural commentary. We already see that Ifemelu's gaze is similar to Adichie's own—always noticing the small things that make up the big pictures of culture, race, or identity. Ifemelu is comfortable enough with herself right now that discovering she is "fat" is no big deal for her.

Ifemelu had recently become dissatisfied with her successful blog, her healthy relationship with her boyfriend Blaine, and her general life in America. She found herself longing for Nigeria, and thinking about her first love, her old boyfriend Obinze. After the rude stranger at the supermarket insulted her, Ifemelu found herself goaded into action. When her academic fellowship at Princeton ended, she told Blaine that she was moving back home to Nigeria.

Ifemelu is comfortable with herself as an American citizen, but now less so as a Nigerian. An important part of Ifemelu's character and identity is a restlessness and dissatisfaction, a desire to know herself better and explore every option. Her decision to move back to Nigeria is the initial impetus for the novel's action.

Ifemelu and Blaine had been together for three years, especially bonding over their shared enthusiasm for Barack Obama. Blaine could only ask "why" when she told him she was leaving, despite the fact that he is a professor who always looks for the complex reasons behind things. Ifemelu felt guilty, but had always known that Blaine could not give her what she needed in life.

Adichie tells the novel's story in a complex way, framing memories within back stories and scattering scenes from different times throughout the narrative. Ultimately it all comes together, but for now we are thrown into the middle of Ifemelu's busy life. This first major separation is Ifemelu's break-up with Blaine.

Back in the present, Ifemelu gets off the train and takes a taxi to the **hair** braiding salon. She is relieved that her taxi driver isn't Nigerian, as Nigerian taxi drivers always like to boast about their success in America to her, or else look resentful that she seems so successful. Ifemelu has never been to this salon before, but she knows it will look like all the other African hair braiding salons she has been to.

Adichie holds nothing back in her cultural criticism, and Nigerians get just as much satire as Americans. Here she starts to introduce the many struggles of immigrants in America. For these taxi drivers, it is a crisis of identity to find themselves suddenly ranked lower in society.

They arrive and Ifemelu goes into the salon. The three women working there are Mariama, Halima, and Aisha. Ifemelu haggles with Mariama and Mariama says that Aisha will do her **hair**. It is very hot inside and there is no air conditioning. A Nigerian movie is playing on the TV. Mariama says that she and Halima are from Mali, while Aisha is from Senegal. Halima gives Ifemelu the special smile that Ifemelu recognizes as being only for fellow Africans.

The hair salon becomes the setting for all of Ifemelu's initial flashbacks. It is a good encapsulation of the kinds of scenarios Adichie explores in depth—these are women from various African countries who are now struggling in America, where they find that they are second-class citizens. America is not the paradise they may have imagined, but in fact a hot and uncomfortable place.

Ifemelu tries to read the novel she has brought, but it's too hot to concentrate. Mariama apologizes and says that the air conditioner broke yesterday, but Ifemelu knows that this isn't true – it probably broke long before, or never worked at all. Aisha finishes the customer she's working on. She asks Ifemelu what color of **hair** attachments she wants, and disapproves when Ifemelu requests a more natural color than the usual pure black.

Ifemelu makes the kinds of small cultural observations that make up much of the novel—like noting that Mariama is lying about the air conditioner, but in a way that preserves a kind shared fantasy about their status in America. Hair becomes more of a symbol now as Ifemelu chooses natural over artificial.

Aisha asks Ifemelu why she doesn't relax her **hair** with chemicals, and Ifemelu finds herself preaching (as she often does to black women) about keeping her hair "the way God made it," and how it can be combed if it's properly moisturized. Ifemelu brought her own comb and combs her hair herself. Aisha snorts derisively, and then starts to braid Ifemelu's hair. They watch the TV and Aisha asks if Ifemelu knows the Nigerian actors. Ifemelu says she doesn't.

Black women are expected (according to American standards of beauty and professionalism) to relax their hair or somehow make it look more like white women's hair. Ifemelu, however, has decided to embrace her natural hair and not subject it to chemicals. Thus hair starts to represent how American society makes no place for black independence or beauty.

Aisha says that Nigerian films (Nollywood) used to be bad but now are good, and Ifemelu is pleased to hear Nigeria praised. She has been looking for good omens about her decision to return home, as everyone she knows seems to think she is making a bad decision. Only her old friend in Lagos, Ranyinudo, seemed pleased. Ranyinudo was the one who had told Ifemelu about Obinze's marriage, newfound wealth, and child. Ifemelu, overcome with emotion, had then sent Obinze an email after years of silence between them. He had responded, but she hadn't answered back.

The overarching plot of the novel will be Ifemelu's romantic relationship with Obinze. At this point they have been separated by thousands of miles and many years of silence. This is the great physical separation of the book, and the action begins as they move towards reconnecting. Obinze has a successful life in Nigeria, and Ifemelu is leaving her own successful American life to move back home.

Aisha asks Ifemelu if she is Yoruba, and is surprised to hear that she is Igbo (two of the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria). Aisha says she is dating two Igbo men right now, and she wants to marry either one, but they both say that Igbo people can only marry other Igbo. Ifemelu is amused by this, and says that Igbo people marry all kinds of people. Aisha talks more, and in describing her sister she says "Africa" instead of a specific country. Ifemelu points this out, and Aisha says that she has learned to just say "Africa" or else Americans will be confused.

Ifemelu is a successful and well-adjusted American at this point, but characters like Aisha are still going through the struggles of immigrant life and trying to cling to their old identity from home while adjusting to a totally different culture. Aisha has adopted even the American insensitivity and ignorance regarding Africa, as she doesn't bother naming specific countries but only the continent.

Aisha asks how long Ifemelu has been in America, but Ifemelu decides then that she doesn't like Aisha, so she ignores the question and checks her phone. She feels suddenly reckless and composes an email to Obinze, sending it off without rereading it. Aisha refuses to be discouraged and repeats her question. Ifemelu says fifteen years—it has only been thirteen, but she is used to lying about this because most Africans in America respect you more the longer you've been there—and Aisha is impressed.

We start to learn more about Ifemelu, whose character will carry most of the novel. She is strong-willed and proud, but also impulsive at times, as in sending this email to Obinze. She knows how many cultural exchanges work, and so knows what fellow Africans expect to hear and what will impress them.

Aisha ask where Ifemelu lives, and then looks intimidated when she says Princeton. Ifemelu takes a "perverse pleasure" in this. She tells Aisha that she is moving back to Nigeria next week, but Aisha can't understand why she would do this after fifteen years in America. Ifemelu thinks of how her family and friends have wondered if she can "cope" with living in Nigeria again, as if America has fundamentally changed her. She hasn't told her parents that she broke up with Blaine, instead saying that he would be following her after a few weeks.

Ifemelu knows that according to the status quo, "someone like her" isn't supposed to live in a place like Princeton: a wealthy, white, and well-educated community. Ifemelu's new crisis of identity both leads her to move back to Nigeria and makes her afraid to do so. She worries (and so do her family members) that America has somehow changed her, so that she is no longer truly Nigerian.

Ifemelu lies to Aisha and says that she is going to Nigeria to see "her man," and Aisha finally accepts this as a good reason. Aisha then declares that she will invite her two boyfriends to come talk to Ifemelu, so Ifemelu can tell them that Igbo people don't always have to marry other Igbo. Ifemelu tries to dissuade her, but Aisha is persistent. Ifemelu thinks about how this would be a good subject for a blog post about "How the Pressures of Immigrant Life Can Make You Act Crazy."

Again Ifemelu knows what Aisha expects from her, and so doesn't try to explain the complexities of her decision, which even she doesn't fully understand. She has recently given up her blog, but still sees her interactions through the lens of cultural criticism and racial commentary.

CHAPTER 2

Meanwhile Obinze, who is stuck in traffic in Lagos, Nigeria, receives Ifemelu's email and reads it. In it she congratulates him on his child and says that she is moving back to Nigeria. She calls him "Ceiling," her old nickname for him. Obinze remembers her other emails: especially one that had mentioned Blaine, the black American she was dating. Obinze had then jealously researched Blaine, who was a lecturer at Yale and seemed overly pretentious to Obinze. Obinze had responded to that email somewhat sarcastically, and then later asked about keeping in touch, but Ifemelu had never written back.

We now meet the other central protagonist, Obinze. Like Ifemelu, he has constructed a successful life for himself entirely separate from her, but he still feels incomplete and is deeply affected whenever Ifemelu contacts him. After years of silence the two have been tentatively reconnecting through a few scattered emails. Most of the scenes set in Nigeria take place in the city of Lagos.

Obinze's driver, Gabriel, complains about the beggars in the street, but Obinze is suddenly in a good mood because of Ifemelu's email. He remembers the first time they touched each other sexually, and how afterwards she said her eyes were open but she couldn't see the ceiling. After that they used "ceiling" as a euphemism, and later (in university, when they actually started having sex) Ifemelu started calling Obinze Ceiling. Their friends would ask why, but she would always give a joking answer. Obinze wonders if she "saw the ceiling" with Blaine.

The fact that Ifemelu is calling Obinze "Ceiling" even after years of separation shows how close their emotional connection really is—they can immediately pick up a kind of easy intimacy. Obinze is married, but still clearly jealous of anyone Ifemelu is dating. His romantic feelings for her are still very strong.

Obinze's wife Kosi calls him, reminding him that they have a party that night with a man named Chief. Obinze arrives home to his huge house and thinks about his daughter Buchi and all his new possessions, and the flat comfort of his current life. Kosi greets him, and he thinks of how very beautiful she is. People always compliment her beauty, asking if she is half-white, and Obinze is uncomfortable with how much Kosi enjoys these racial compliments.

Obinze remembers his old life, and now compares it to his current one. He has built up an identity for himself as a rich Nigerian businessman with a beautiful wife and child, but he is still unsatisfied. We will see that race isn't really an issue in Nigeria, except for this aesthetic idea that lighter skin is more beautiful than darker skin.

Buchi, who is a toddler, runs up to greet Obinze. Kosi asks him about work—he rents and sells property—and Obinze lies vaguely, and is then disappointed when Kosi doesn't question further. She is only concerned with his work as far as it maintains the comfortable conditions of their life. Obinze isn't looking forward to Chief's party, but he must go because Chief is the one who first brought Obinze his success.

Obinze and Kosi don't seem to share a very intimate connection, as she is uninterested in his work and he mostly admires her beauty rather than her personality. Adichie now begins to explain how Obinze has reached his current level of wealth and success.

Obinze remembers when he first came back from England years earlier, depressed about what had happened to him there. He had stayed with his cousin Nneoma, but soon she got impatient with him and made him apply for jobs. Obinze had no luck, and then Nneoma decided to introduce him to "Chief," a very rich man whom Nneoma had rejected romantically, but who still liked her and sometimes did her favors.

Ifemelu managed to find success as an immigrant in America, but here Adichie alludes to the fact that Obinze did not have nearly as good an experience in England. With the character of Chief, Adichie starts to explain and criticize the culture of the rich in Lagos.

Nneoma took Obinze to Chief's extravagant home. Chief flirted with Nneoma, who introduced him to Obinze. For the rest of the evening Chief held court, talking at length about whatever he liked, while his guests agreed with him and laughed at his jokes. Obinze would later learn that almost all Nigerian "Big Men" and "Big Women" acted like this. Obinze was almost amused at how transparent the flattery of Chief was, but Chief seemed to like it. He invited Obinze to come see him again in a week.

The culture Adichie criticizes here is one of casual corruption and inequality, where the rich are extremely rich and expected to flaunt their wealth. Adichie particularly critiques how many Nigerian men feel entitled to "hold court" and talk over others, especially women.

Obinze kept going back for several weeks, and Nneoma told him to just keep hanging around Chief until something good happened for him. Obinze was fascinated by how unsubtle the hierarchy was with Chief and his guests—anyone with money was supposed to be flattered, and anyone with less money was always supposed to flatter—"to have money, it seemed, was to be consumed by money." Obinze pitied them, but also wanted to be one of them.

When a man becomes rich in Lagos, he basically achieves immunity, and is allowed to act however he pleases. Years of corrupt governments have led to this system, where it is relatively easy to get rich through fraud or bribery, and almost impossible to succeed through hard work or innovation.

One day Obinze spoke up and offered his services to help Chief. Chief sized Obinze up and then gave a speech about how he was friends with all the Nigerian leaders—Babangida, Abacha, and now President Obasanjo, and so he has insider information about everything. Chief told Obinze that he was going to buy seven properties that were listed as being worth one million each, but he knew that they were really worth fifty million, and he will resell them as such. He said that Obinze should front this deal, and Obinze accepted the offer.

The "Big Men" are expected to dispense favors to whomever grovels before them most appealingly, but luckily Chief decides to help Obinze even without flattery. Obinze's quick road to wealth basically just involves being invited into this exclusive club of Big Men—being given the insider knowledge to make huge amounts of money through little merit of his own.

Nneoma was excited about this, and told Obinze how it would work out: he would soon start his own company buying properties and reselling them. Once he gets successful, she said, he must find one of his white friends from England and make him his "General Manager," just for show, because then even more "doors will open" for him. Nneoma declares that this "is how Nigeria works."

Once Obinze enters the inner circle, the system is all set up to work for him. We see more hints of racial issues in Nigeria here, as people get more respect if they have a white "General Manager," even if it's only a sham position.

It did indeed turn out the way Nneoma described, and Obinze was amazed by how easy it suddenly was to make huge amounts of money. Years earlier he had been refused an American visa, but now that he was rich he got one easily. Obinze always wondered why Chief decided to help him instead of the many other visitors always asking him for favors.

We will later see all the struggles Obinze went through when he was young, making it painfully ironic that all doors are open to him now because of his money. He knows that he didn't get rich through any special merit of his own—it was just Chief's whim.

Back in the present, Kosi leads Obinze through the guests at Chief's party. She is very socially adept and always agreeable. Obinze sometimes finds her constant agreeableness and modesty to be almost immodest, as "it announced itself." They start talking to a group of people who are discussing sending their children to French and British schools. Obinze mentions that they all grew up with the "Nigerian curriculum," and everyone looks politely confused. Obinze used to always admire people with rich families and foreign accents, but he no longer does.

Part of the worldview of the rich is elevating Western culture over Nigerian culture. Wealthy parents are supposed to scorn Nigerian schools and instead send their children to British, French, or American schools. Just as light skin is still valued over dark skin in Nigeria, so does this mindset show the lingering effects of colonialism. Obinze used to idolize the West like this, but he has clearly grown disillusioned by his own experiences.

A party guest declares that it would be a "disadvantage" to send a child to an inferior Nigerian school instead of a British, French, or American one. Kosi defuses any argument by agreeing with them and Obinze at the same time. Obinze notes that "she always chose peace over truth, was always eager to conform." Obinze squeezes her hand in apology, knowing that he should have kept his mouth shut and let the conversation continue smoothly.

Obinze gets along well with Kosi and is still attracted to her, but there is no deep connection between them. The thoughtful, intellectually curious Obinze cannot truly relate to the very conservative and domestic Kosi, even though their marriage is otherwise a happy one.

They reach Chief, who greets them expansively. Obinze wonders if Chief has ever propositioned Kosi, as he does so many women. A group of men clusters around Chief, trying to be the first to compliment him and laugh at his jokes. Obinze drifts away from Kosi and talks to a young journalist named Yemis. Obinze tries to discuss books with him, but discovers that the college-educated Yemis only likes books with big words in them. Obinze considers other careers he could have had, like a teacher.

Another thing Adichie criticizes about the "Big Men" of Lagos as that they feel entitled to any woman who catches their eye. On the other side, we will see that many women consequently view men as sources of wealth and material things. Obinze is dissatisfied with his life, and considers his potential to have pursued something less lucrative but more fulfilling.

Obinze returns to Kosi. He wants to go home and write an email back to Ifemelu. He wonders if Blaine is coming with her to Nigeria. Obinze remembers how he and Ifemelu used to hold hands. He remembers when he most recently ran into Ifemelu's friend Ranyinudo at the mall. Ranyinudo had called him "the Zed," his old nickname, and gushed about his new success and how humble he was. Obinze is considered humble just because he isn't ostentatious with his wealth. He doesn't like this attitude, however, as it seems to normalize the rudeness of the rich. He and Kosi leave the party.

We meet Ifemelu during a time of her dissatisfaction with Blaine and her successful American life, and likewise we meet Obinze when he is feeling disconnected from Kosi and his successful Nigerian life. Ifemelu and Obinze then reach out for each other and start to tear down the many layers of separation between them. Big Men are supposed to be rude and arrogant, so Obinze is considered virtuous just for being polite.

Obinze and Kosi return home, where their house girl Maria has cooked a meal. Obinze remembers the girl who preceded Maria. As soon as she arrived, Kosi went through her bag, and was horrified to find condoms inside. The girl had quietly said that in her last job, her employer's husband would force himself on her. Kosi immediately sent her away angrily. Obinze felt sorry for the girl, and wondered how Kosi couldn't.

Kosi gets angry at the house girl because she is supposed to: one doesn't admit that a rich man might be a rapist, so a house girl must take the blame for any indiscretion of his. Obinze is detached from this narrow worldview, however, and sees things with more empathy.

Obinze had then realized that Kosi felt insecure about the house girl. Kosi was worried whenever Obinze associated with a single woman, as the culture of materialistic, seductive women in Lagos had made her constantly afraid that Obinze would cheat on her. Obinze had reassured her, but since their marriage Kosi had grown to dislike all single women, and had also grown more religious. Obinze once found out that Kosi had been to a prayer service for "Keeping Your Husband."

As the counterpart to the lustful, entitled rich men of Lagos, many women also see men merely as sources of material support and comfort. These relationships have little romance and are mostly transactional—lust for wealth. Kosi assumes that Obinze will act like a traditional Big Man and feel no qualms about cheating, so she works to prevent that.

Obinze goes into his study and listens to Fela, a famous Nigerian musician. He remembers listening to Fela with Ifemelu. Obinze carefully composes an email to Ifemelu. He doesn't mention Kosi, even though he knows Ifemelu knows about her. Obinze sends the email and immediately feels both nervous and weary. He looks out the window and imagines himself floating away.

Adichie closes this first section with another tentative attempt at connection between Ifemelu and Obinze. Both of them are dissatisfied with their current lives, even though they have built complete identities apart from each other. Their pure romantic connection has lasted even through years of silence.

CHAPTER 3

Back at the **hair** salon, Mariama leaves to pick up Chinese food for everyone. Ifemelu says she doesn't want anything, as she has a granola bar to eat, and the other women are surprised and dismissive of this, until they learn that Ifemelu has been in America for fifteen years. As soon as Mariama leaves, Aisha takes out her cell phone and makes a call. She says that one of her boyfriends can come and talk to Ifemelu about marrying Aisha. Aisha asks if Ifemelu can speak Igbo, and Ifemelu defensively says yes.

With her granola bar Ifemelu is living up to one of her fears of having become too "Americanized." For these other women, however, that is a compliment, as they are still struggling to become Americanized at all. But for Ifemelu, who is concerned with her identity as a Nigerian, Aisha questioning her Igbo is troubling.

Ifemelu slips into a memory about her mother's **hair** when she was growing up in Lagos, Nigeria. It was long, thick, and beautiful, and people always complimented it. One day when Ifemelu was ten, her mother comes home and cuts off all of her hair. She puts it in a bag along with all the Catholic objects in their house, and then burns it. She comes back inside and tells Ifemelu that she has been saved, and is going to a new church.

Hair is Adichie's symbol of oppression and independence in America, but it is also just a major motif in the novel, as here it leads Ifemelu into the first of her flashbacks. The symbolism carries over as well—cutting off her hair represents Ifemelu's mother giving up her independence for the sake of religion.

After that day Ifemelu's mother becomes super-religious, and often starves herself as part of her prayers. Ifemelu's father remains "an agnostic respecter of religion," but he humors his wife's seeming madness, even one Easter when she declares that she sees an angel and runs out of the apartment. She comes back in and says that the angel told her to go to a different church.

Ifemelu's mother will not play a major role in most of the novel, but we do see how her religious mania shaped Ifemelu while growing up—Ifemelu became more skeptical and independent in opposition to her mother.

Ifemelu's mother starts going to a different church, and later sees another angel and switches churches again. At her new church the rules are more relaxed, and though she remains enthusiastically religious, she is less obsessed with what is sinful. Ifemelu's father makes Ifemelu wake up early to pray with them, as it makes her mother happy. At the new church Ifemelu is already suspicious that God is not the reason for the Pastor's big house and many cars, but she is pleased that her mother is eating again.

Even at a young age, Ifemelu already has the kind of critical eye to see through the hypocrisy and materialism of her mother's new church. The idea of separation or disconnection is introduced in Ifemelu's childhood through her mother, who becomes increasingly detached from reality (and Ifemelu herself) as she grows more religiously obsessive.

As all this is going on, Ifemelu's father's sister, Aunty Uju, becomes the mistress of "The General," a powerful military man who buys her a car and creates a new job for her at the hospital. Ifemelu's mother sees all this through the lens of her faith, however, and calls The General Aunty Uju's "mentor," insisting that all her new financial success is a "miracle." Aunty Uju has a medical degree, and only weeks earlier she had been unemployed, until she went to a friend's wedding and met The General. He told her "I like you. I want to take care of you."

Ifemelu's mother's separation from the corrupt reality of life is most apparent regarding The General. Aunty Uju falls in love with The General, but she also understands the transactional part of their relationship—he finds her attractive, so he buys her things—while Ifemelu's mother insists on a chaste explanation for The General's patronage.

Ifemelu's father is fired from his job at the federal agency for refusing to call his new boss "Mummy." He searches for work for a long time but is unsuccessful. When his wife disparages him for losing his job in the first place, he takes her words to heart. Ifemelu feels sorry for him—he has always longed to get graduate degrees, but has been forced to work his whole life to support his siblings instead. He uses big words in English, which impress many people, but Ifemelu comes to learn that this is a "costume," a way of pretending to be what he is not. He grows more and more depressed, and Ifemelu knows that he regrets not calling his boss "Mummy."

Ifemelu's father's boss is a "Big Woman," who, like the Nigerian Big Men, expects personal flattery and her every whim catered to. We see more evidence of Western culture being seen as superior, as Ifemelu's father's verbose English is a kind of costume for him to seem better educated and more impressive to others.

One Sunday morning the landlord comes by, angry that Ifemelu's father hasn't paid the rent. Ifemelu's mother then comes home from church, wearing makeup that is "one shade too light." She takes Ifemelu to church to do "Sunday Work"—making fundraising materials or decorating for a holiday. This work is run by Sister Ibinabo, a powerful woman in the church whom everyone respects and fears.

Like many of the Nigerians Adichie portrays, Ifemelu's mother tries to make herself lighter-skinned when she wants to seem more beautiful or formal, as in dressing up for church.

Sister Ibinabo orders Ifemelu to join a group making garlands for a rich man named Chief Omenka. Ifemelu declares that she won't decorate for a thief, as Chief Omenka and many of the church's wealthy members and donors are "419 men," or people who have gotten rich through fraud and scamming. Sister Ibinabo says that this work is still "God's work," and she orders Ifemelu to leave.

Ifemelu first shows her propensity for speaking her mind even when it might be rude or inappropriate—and also her keen sense of what is unjust or unfair. Sister Ibinabo, like Ifemelu's mother, cloaks the corrupt nature of the church's money under a disguise of religiosity.

Ifemelu goes outside and waits for her mother to pick her up, knowing she will be in trouble. Like everyone else, Ifemelu usually says nothing about the "dirty money" that runs the church, but today she was feeling especially repulsed by Sister Ibinabo's religiosity as a cover for materialism and pettiness. Ifemelu sees the same thing in her own mother—cloaking worldly desires in religion to make them seem more acceptable.

Adichie's main criticism of the society in Lagos is the widespread corruption inherent in the system. Over years of colonialism and corrupt governments, people are now expected to take and receive bribes, to make money through fraud and have it legitimized by religion, or to trade sex for wealth or favors.

Ifemelu's mother is angry, and takes her home. Aunty Uju comes to visit, and Ifemelu's mother tells her to give Ifemelu a talking-to. Aunty Uju and Ifemelu have always been very close, as Uju seems to understand Ifemelu better than her own mother. Uju is Ifemelu's father's sister, whom he helped leave their home village and come to Lagos with him. Eventually she went on to university.

Ifemelu feels more connected to Aunty Uju than to her own mother, and Uju will play a much larger role in the novel. Ifemelu's mother disapproves of Ifemelu's outspokenness, as she has to keep up the smokescreen of religion covering the corruption.

Aunty Uju sits with Ifemelu and reminds her that she can't always speak her mind. Ifemelu asks why her mother can't accept that Aunty Uju's gifts are from The General, and must insist they are from God. Uju says that they still might be from God. Ifemelu remembers stories about her own childhood, how only Aunty Uju could calm her down when she was having a tantrum. Uju helped her all her life, including when she met Obinze, "the love of her life."

Ifemelu can't relate to her mother's need to legitimize less-than-pure affairs through her lens of religious faith. Aunty Uju is intelligent and outspoken like Ifemelu, and so is able to give her more relatable advice. Obinze now enters Ifemelu's memories as the overarching plot of their romance begins.

CHAPTER 4

When Ifemelu is a teenager, Obinze comes to her school from Nsukka. He lives with his mother, who was a professor at the university at Nsukka. The rumor is she was forced to leave after physically fighting with a male professor. Obinze quickly becomes one of the "Big Guys," the cool group at school. The leader of this group is Kayode, who decides to set Obinze up with Ginika, Ifemelu's best friend and the second most popular girl in school. Obinze and Ginika seem destined to be together, based on the hierarchy of popularity at the school.

Obinze is new at Ifemelu's secondary school. His mother is immediately presented as a strong, independent woman, which lays the foundation for Obinze being drawn to another outspoken woman in Ifemelu. Ifemelu and Obinze's romance begins with typical teenage politics and drama.

At a party at Kayode's huge mansion, Kayode introduces Obinze to Ginika, who is there with Ifemelu. Kayode makes small talk, expecting Obinze to start talking to Ginika, but Obinze seems more interested in Ifemelu. Ifemelu has a sudden realization that "she wanted to breathe the same air as Obinze." They keep talking and Obinze invites her to dance. Ifemelu goes with him, suddenly understanding all the romantic clichés she had assumed were false in books.

Adichie portrays Ifemelu and Obinze's initial teenage romance in an idealized, nostalgic light, but it does indeed seem to be love at first sight, and it lasts for years. "Breathing the same air" is a romantic illustration of their instant connection.

Ifemelu and Obinze dance and then go outside to talk. Obinze tells her about his childhood, and what happened with his mother at the university. She publicly accused another professor of misusing university funds, and he slapped her. She wrote articles about this and got many students involved, and now she is on a "sabbatical." Ifemelu says Obinze will be in trouble with his friends, as he is supposed to be chasing Ginika. Obinze replies with "I'm chasing you." Ifemelu will always remember that moment.

"I'm chasing you" comes to represent their first attraction and love, and it will return on the novel's last page to show how that love endures. Obinze's mother is clearly very strong and outspoken, but the university couldn't handle her activism, showing the sexism apparent even in the highest levels of academia.

Obinze and Ifemelu discuss books. Obinze loves American literature and the classics, while Ifemelu only likes crime novels and thrillers. Ifemelu asks him what Kayode had said about her. Obinze says he heard that Ifemelu was "too much trouble," and he should go for a "sweet girl" like Ginika instead. Obinze wanted someone independent, so he liked hearing that about Ifemelu. He puts his arm around Ifemelu and she feels suddenly comfortable with herself. It seems totally natural for them to be together, even though they hardly know each other.

Adichie portrays most Nigerian men as preferring "sweet" pliable women, so Obinze stands apart in finding Ifemelu's outspokenness attractive. They are both independent already, but find a pure connection with each other even on this first night. One important part of this romance is that it isn't co-dependent—Ifemelu feels more secure in her own identity when Obinze is around.

Ifemelu and Obinze keep talking and flirting, and Ifemelu is surprised to hear that Obinze knows so many Igbo proverbs, as most boys try to only speak English so as to be impressive. They kiss. Later Obinze would say that it was "love at first sight," and Ifemelu would try to deny it but couldn't. After this party the two become inseparable. Obinze joins in Ifemelu's extracurricular activities while Ifemelu joins Obinze's. Ifemelu feels so close to Obinze that sometimes she worries she is "too happy," and her joy will fly away one day.

Ifemelu's fear of her happiness flying away shows the restlessness inherent in her personality, even when she is happy and satisfied. Obinze also differs from most other Nigerian boys by not being ashamed to speak Igbo, or trying to impress by only speaking English. Their initial romance seems perfect, but outside circumstances have yet to affect their future.

CHAPTER 5

After Kayode's party, Ginika and Ifemelu feel awkward around each other, even though Ifemelu apologizes and Ginika isn't angry. Soon afterward Ginika's family decides to move to America, however, and in their last weeks together Ginika's friendship with Ifemelu is restored. Once, at Ginika's house, Ifemelu hears her father say that the current government is treating people like "sheep," so he must leave if he is to do any real research instead of just organizing strikes.

We see things through Ifemelu's young eyes right now, but there is clearly trouble in the government: professors and teachers aren't being paid. Ginika's departure sets the stage for her future reunion with Ifemelu in America. But for now the best friends experience a painful physical separation.

Ginika doesn't want to leave her friends and go to America. Ranyinudo says that maybe she'll come back and be an "Americanah" like another girl who came back from America with an affected new accent. Almost everyone is jealous of Ginika, however, especially Emenike, one of the "Big Guys" who pretends to be rich even though everyone knows he isn't. Ifemelu feels uncomfortable in the discussion about foreign travel, as her family is too poor to have ever traveled.

The word "Americanah" is first introduced here. It is a slang word making fun of Nigerians who go off to live in America and then come back pretending they are superior or foreign. Ifemelu is like Emenike—too poor to travel—but Emenike builds up a false identity for himself, even though everyone knows it's a lie.

Obinze, on the other hand, seems worldly and comfortable among the rich popular students. He is obsessed with American culture, and whenever he wants to compliment Ifemelu's appearance he says she "looks like a black American." He tries to get Ifemelu interested in American literature, but she doesn't like any of it. Sometimes Ifemelu feels insecure and thinks that Obinze would be better off with the wealthy, well-traveled Ginika.

Obinze's lifelong fascination with America leads to a cruel irony when he is the one denied an American visa and Ifemelu ends up becoming an American citizen. Obinze's compliment doesn't elevate lighter skin over darker skin, but it still elevates American culture over Nigerian culture.

One day Obinze tells Ifemelu that his mother wants to meet her. Ifemelu is surprised, as usually kids their age keep any dating secret from their parents. Ifemelu is nervous but comes to Obinze's flat. She meets Obinze's mother and is surprised by her beauty and confident intelligence. Obinze banters easily with his mother, and they discuss literature and her romantic life. Ifemelu is shocked, and thinks of how, compared to Obinze's mother, her father's big words seem pretentious and crude, and her mother "provincial and small." Obinze cooked the meal, and Ifemelu admits that she doesn't ever cook at home.

In Obinze's mother, Ifemelu has a female role model she can aspire to. Obinze's life with his mother is much more liberal, intellectual, and nontraditional than Ifemelu's life with her parents, showing where he gets his thoughtful maturity. Ifemelu connects at a deep level with Obinze's mother.

After that Ifemelu often visits Obinze's mother at her apartment. One day the three of them are watching a movie, and then Obinze's mother leaves to go pick up her allergy medicine. Immediately Obinze and Ifemelu pause the movie and start kissing and touching each other on his bed. They return to the living room when they hear Obinze's mother's car, and press play on the movie. Obinze's mother walks in and notices that no time has passed in the movie. She calls Ifemelu to her bedroom to talk.

Ifemelu is afraid that Obinze's mother is like her own mother, and would see any kind of unmarried sex as sinful or evil. Obinze and Ifemelu are still in the throes of their teenage romance but they haven't slept together yet.

Obinze's mother discusses sex frankly with the embarrassed Ifemelu. She says she knows how it is to be young and in love, but "Nature is unfair to women" and so she would wait to have sex with Obinze until they are at least in university. Obinze's mother tells Ifemelu to tell her when they do start having sex, so she can make sure they're being responsible. Ifemelu nods, thinking that the whole scene feels surreal, especially the absence of shame or secrecy in Obinze's mother's voice. Later Obinze is embarrassed about his mother's directness, but he and Ifemelu joke about it.

Obinze's mother truly shows her progressive nature in the way she deals with sex. She is very practical about the subject, and there is no shame or mention of sin in the whole conversation. Obinze's mother recognizes that society (and the nature of pregnancy) is unfair to women, so Ifemelu must be more careful than Obinze.

CHAPTER 6

Aunty Uju, meanwhile, spends all her free time focused on The General. She avoids the sun and uses special creams to make her skin seem lighter than normal. Ifemelu visits her new house and is amazed at its extravagance. Ifemelu doesn't want to leave, and she asks her parents if she can stay with Aunty Uju during the week. Ifemelu's mother thinks it's a good idea, but her father says she can only visit after school and on weekends; she cannot live there. One day Aunty Uju brings Ifemelu's family's house an extra TV that The General had bought over. Ifemelu's mother is ecstatic, but her father looks disapproving.

Aunty Uju was an independent woman similar to Obinze's mother, but her love for The General starts to change her into a more traditional woman of Lagos—concerned mostly with her beauty and pleasing her man. Ifemelu's mother has totally denied the reality of Aunty Uju's relationship with The General, so she supports it wholeheartedly, while Ifemelu's father accepts reality but disapproves of his sister's relationship.

The landlord comes again, asking for two years worth of rent. Ifemelu's father says he has asked his wealthy relative for a loan. Ifemelu knows he won't ask Aunty Uju for money, but he wouldn't reject it if she offered it. Ifemelu tells Aunty Uju what happened, and Uju says she will ask The General for the money. Ifemelu is shocked that Uju doesn't have the money herself. Uju says that The General never gives her money, but only buys things for her. He likes it when she has to ask him for things instead of buying them herself. Ifemelu feels suddenly frightened for her.

We fully see the inequality in the relationships between Big Men like The General and women like Aunty Uju. The General enjoys being the one with all the power, dispensing favors and buying things for Aunty Uju without giving her any financial autonomy of her own.

The next weekend Aunty Uju takes Ifemelu to her upper-class **hair** salon, and says that The General gave her the money. Ifemelu comments on how the hairdressers flatter and compliment Aunty Uju, and Uju laughs and says that they live in an "ass-licking economy," where everyone is supposed to grovel before people richer than they are and ask for favors. She says she is just "lucky to be licking the right ass."

Aunty Uju has become changed and partially blinded by her love for The General, but she still sees the truth about the society she is living in now—it is the same thing Obinze will notice about Chief, how everyone is expected to flatter the rich without shame. Aunty Uju knows she is lucky, and she enjoys her good luck.

Aunty Uju is still infatuated with The General, even though she recognizes that he is physically unappealing. She can see that Ifemelu is worried about her after finding out that she doesn't have any money, but Aunty Uju assures her that she will slowly make The General "change." Aunty Uju gives Ifemelu's father the rent money, and he thanks her, but neither looks each other in the face.

Aunty Uju sees clearly how people grovel before the rich and how flattery wins favors, but she is disconnected from reality regarding The General. He has a wife, but Aunty Uju prefers not to think about her—just like Ifemelu's mother prefers not to think about the true nature of Aunty Uju's relationship.

One night Ifemelu meets The General at Aunty Uju's house, and is surprised by his "gleeful coarseness." He always gives Uju the gossip about scandals among powerful people, and talks at length without allowing any interruptions, but Uju seems to find his boorish manner endearing. Ifemelu cannot understand why Aunty Uju likes him so much. One day there is a report of a military coup. Aunty Uju has a panic attack until The General calls her and says that he is fine, and the coup has failed.

Adichie shows many unhealthy or unequal romantic relationships throughout the book, and one of these is Aunty Uju's infatuation with The General. The General acts like a typical Big Man, expecting everyone to pay always attention to and admire everything he says.

There is a holiday, and The General is supposed to spend it with Aunty Uju instead of his wife. Aunty Uju spends a long time preparing for his visit, but then he calls at the last minute and says he cannot come. Aunty Uju immediately starts putting away the food she was cooking, and then yells at her servant when the soup spills. Ifemelu says that Uju should be angry at The General, not the servant. Uju is enraged and slaps Ifemelu. Then Uju goes up to her room and doesn't come out.

Aunty Uju has truly been changed by this relationship, and her violent outburst severs some of the close connection she shared with Ifemelu. Earlier Uju was the one giving Ifemelu advice, but now Ifemelu feels like the more mature one in this situation.

That evening Aunty Uju's two "friends" visit—she knows they only like her because of The General, but she finds them entertaining—and they discuss a party where there will be many "serious big men." Uju declares that she doesn't want to go, as she doesn't want to meet a new man. After her friends leave, Uju apologizes to Ifemelu. Ifemelu suddenly feels more mature than her aunt, and wishes she could make Uju see how blind she's being about The General. Later The General sends a cake along with an apology.

Aunty Uju's friends are more like the typical female socialites of Lagos—always looking for a new man who might have more wealth or prestige than their current one. Aunty Uju disrupts the status quo by refusing to look for a new man. Her feelings are real love, not just excitement and materialistic lust.

Soon Aunty Uju gets pregnant. Ifemelu's mother is distraught, as the pregnancy shatters her created idea of The General as Uju's "mentor." Uju says that she will keep the baby, and that The General will take care of his child. The General is indeed pleased about the pregnancy, and he provides for Aunty Uju to have the baby in America. She hears that his wife found out about the pregnancy as well, and was furious.

Ifemelu's mother's purposeful disconnection from reality is destroyed by the pregnancy, as it leaves no doubt that The General was not Aunty Uju's "mentor," but in fact her lover. The General seems to have real feelings for Aunty Uju as well, as he is pleased about the baby.

Aunty Uju has the baby, a boy named Dike. She gives him her own surname instead of The General's. Ifemelu's mother is now disgusted with The General, and Ifemelu thinks of how fervently her mother used to pray for Uju's "mentor." The General and Aunty Uju visit with the baby, and both of them seem very happy.

Ifemelu watches the adults around her being hypocritical or purposefully ignorant and acting foolish. All of this sharpens her perceptiveness regarding flaws or injustices. That perceptiveness becomes an important part of her identity and later leads to her successful blog.

A week after Dike's first birthday The General dies in a plane crash. It is rumored that the Head of State engineered it, fearing that the officers on the plane were planning a coup. When Aunty Uju hears the news she can't believe it, and then she starts to weep. Immediately some of The General's relatives show up at the house, demanding that Aunty Uju give up all her possessions, and calling her a "prostitute." Aunty Uju calls her friends and they tell her to leave immediately, taking everything she can. She decides to take Dike and go to America, as she has an American visa. It all seems like a blur to Ifemelu.

There are more allusions to government corruption, and here it actually ends in assassination at the highest levels of government—the Head of State having a general killed. This is during Nigeria's years of military rule, when there were many violent coups. Aunty Uju is heartbroken about The General's death, but must immediately recognize how precarious her situation was the whole time.

CHAPTER 7

Ifemelu and Obinze decide which university they want to attend. Obinze wants to go to the University of Ibadan, mostly because he loves a poem called "Ibadan." Ifemelu cannot understand this, but she wants to go to Ibadan as well, because that's where Aunty Uju went. Before they submit their applications, however, Obinze's mother has a fainting spell in the library. Obinze decides to go to the university at Nsukka to be near his mother, as she is moving back there.

Aunty Uju is off living in America now, her physical distance echoing the growing distance between her and Ifemelu over The General. But she is still the adult Ifemelu feels closest to, and so Ifemelu wants to follow in Uju's footsteps at Ibadan. Ifemelu and Obinze's romance is strong and important enough that it informs their university decisions.

Ifemelu then decides to go to Nsukka as well, though her mother is upset at how far away it is. Some of her friends are going too, and also Emenike, whom Obinze agrees to room with. Later Obinze wonders if his mother's fainting episode was deliberately planned to keep him near her in Nsukka.

Obinze stays with his mother, while Ifemelu moves farther away from her own. Her mother remains disconnected from Ifemelu's reality, and so Ifemelu feels closer to Obinze's mother than to her own.

Ifemelu likes Nsukka, partly because it helps her understand where Obinze came from. She quickly becomes popular at the university, and befriends a young man named Odein, whom she finds attractive. Odein convinces her (and she convinces Obinze) to join in a student demonstration protesting the lack of electricity and water at the university. A car is set on fire during the protest. Later Obinze's mother says that she understands the students' anger, but there is no money for the professors either. The school is then shut down when the lecturers strike.

The students protest because there is no electricity and water, and the teachers strike because they aren't being paid. The corruption at the upper levels of government trickles down and leads to a lack of resources for the majority of Nigerian citizens. Ifemelu and Obinze's romance first starts to be tested at the university.

The strike lasts a long time, and Ifemelu goes back to Lagos and gets bored with all her free time. Odein lives in Lagos as well, and he takes her to parties sometimes. Obinze finds out about this and gets jealous. Ifemelu says she is just curious about Odein, and she asks if Obinze ever gets curious about other girls. Obinze says he doesn't, and tells her that she doesn't realize how different she is from other girls.

Ifemelu and Obinze are separated by a relatively short distance (only Lagos to Nsukka, not Nigeria to America like later), but already the separation puts strains on their relationship. Ifemelu's restlessness manifests itself in her curiosity about Odein.

The strike finally ends and Ifemelu goes back to Nsukka. Her relationship with Obinze is briefly disturbed by their fight over Odein. The harmattan (a dry, dusty trade wind) begins and everything dries up in the wind. One day Ifemelu gives Obinze a massage, and then they have sex. Obinze doesn't use a condom, as he says they will surely get married anyway. Ifemelu is slightly disappointed by the sex, especially by how unplanned it was after waiting so long.

The major arc of the novel's plot follows the progression of Ifemelu's relationship with Obinze, and here they cross a major landmark in an anticlimactic and very human way. Adichie portrays romantic love and all the mundane interactions between people in a very realistic but sympathetic way, like here with the couple's first time having sex.

A week later Ifemelu has a pain in her side and she starts throwing up. She fears that she is pregnant. She calls Aunty Uju, who tells her to go to the medical center and get a pregnancy test. Ifemelu feels angry at Obinze, though he offers to go with her. The girl at the medical center looks down on Ifemelu self-righteously. Her pregnancy test comes back negative.

Obinze's mother is relatively unique in her lack of judgment regarding sex, as seen through the disapproving attitude of the girl in the medical center. The pregnancy scare briefly hints at an alternate future for Ifemelu and Obinze, one where they settle down with a child in Nigeria.

Ifemelu's sickness worsens that night, and Obinze's mother takes her to the doctor. In the car Ifemelu suddenly blurts out that she and Obinze had sex. At the doctor Ifemelu learns that she has appendicitis. She calls her mother and tells her that she will have the surgery in Nsukka, and then stay at a friend's house. Ifemelu's mother assumes the friend is a girl, but Ifemelu corrects her.

Ifemelu's mother is now denying reality again, this time regarding Ifemelu herself, assuming that any close friendship she might have must be chaste and with another girl. But now Ifemelu's relationship with Obinze is forced to reveal itself because of her medical emergency.

After the surgery Ifemelu sits in the hospital bed and watches Obinze's mother greet her parents. Ifemelu's father is very impressed by Obinze's mother and her education, and Ifemelu's mother is impressed by Obinze. A few days later, Obinze's mother has a talk with Obinze and Ifemelu, and she tells them to always use a condom when they have sex. Obinze gets embarrassed and angrily leaves the room.

Obinze's mother is again frank to the point of embarrassment, especially for Obinze, but she proves her value as an intelligent and practical role model for Ifemelu. The couple's parents meet and it goes well. Everything seems in place for them to eventually get married.

CHAPTER 8

Strikes grow more common, and university life is often disrupted. Many people leave, including Emenike, who goes to England. The process of getting visas seems arbitrary, and many are rejected. In America, Aunty Uju is working three jobs and isn't yet qualified to practice medicine. She has been there for four years now. One day she calls and suggests that Ifemelu come to America to study and help take care of Dike. Obinze thinks it is a good idea too, though he feels he must finish his degree before joining Ifemelu there.

Emenike, the boy who tried to create a false identity for himself as wealthy and worldly, now gets the chance to move to the West he has so admired. Time passes quickly, and Aunty Uju is not nearly as successful in America as she had hoped to be. The novel's setting now starts to expand and lead towards the wide separation between Ifemelu and Obinze.

Ifemelu decides to try, and Ginika starts applying to schools on her behalf in the Philadelphia area. Ifemelu starts imagining herself living in a house like that on *The Cosby Show*. The strike ends and Ifemelu goes back to university, but then she hears that she has been accepted and gotten a scholarship to an American university. She applies for a visa, expecting to be rejected, but she is quickly accepted.

First Adichie shows the idealized version of America that Obinze obsesses over and Ifemelu admires. Ifemelu seems halfhearted about this move, but decides to do it with Obinze's encouragement, and she starts to vaguely imagine herself as an American.

Ifemelu packs up her stuff with her friends. Ranyinudo tells her that the next time she sees her, Ifemelu will be a "serious Americanah." Ifemelu's father gives her some money. Ifemelu has second thoughts, but Obinze tells her to go, assuring her that she will find work. Obinze's mother says goodbye to Ifemelu and tells her to make sure that she and Obinze "have a plan." This makes Ifemelu feel better. Obinze plans to come to America as soon as he graduates.

"Americanah" is now used to apply to Ifemelu, foreshadowing the struggle for identity that will follow her for the rest of the book. Obinze and Ifemelu's seemingly perfect relationship is now disturbed by this separation of thousands of miles, but they are both optimistic that their romantic connection will remain unbroken.

CHAPTER 9

Back in the present, Mariama returns to the **hair** salon with the Chinese food. Halima's customer, who is very young, talks about her children. When she leaves, the women all comment on how sexually active young people are in America, saying it wasn't like that in Africa. Ifemelu doesn't join in agreeing with them, and she knows that they will talk about her too when she leaves: the Nigerian girl who thinks she's so important because she lives in Princeton.

Adichie portrays this disparagement of American sinfulness as a common part of immigrant identity. Mariama and her employees want to be American citizens and have American accents, but they also like to idealize their homeland as somehow less corrupt. In the same way they will gossip about Ifemelu, even though they are jealous of her.

Back in her recollections, Ifemelu arrives in America and is surprised at how hot it is, as she had always assumed America would be cold. Aunty Uju picks her up from the airport in New York. Uju seems tense and unhappy, different from how Ifemelu remembers her. In the car Uju answers the phone and pronounces her own name differently. She tells Ifemelu that that's what people call her here. They arrive at her small apartment in Brooklyn and Dike greets Ifemelu excitedly.

Ifemelu is now thrown into an entirely foreign world, separated from Obinze and her parents. This begins Ifemelu's great realization that America is not like "The Cosby Show" or the place Obinze had so idealized. Aunty Uju now pronounces even her own name differently—showing how America has affected her identity.

Dike has a Hispanic babysitter. At the time Ifemelu assumed she was white, but later she would write a blog post about this called "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Hispanic Means." In the blog post Ifemelu says that Hispanic is an American racial category spanning all of South and Central America, people of many different colors and nationalities. If you speak Spanish and aren't from Spain, then when you come to America you are suddenly a race called "Hispanic."

On her first night in America Ifemelu is immediately introduced to the country's complicated racial politics and hierarchies, though she doesn't realize it yet. As soon as Ifemelu moves to America, Adichie starts sprinkling the chapters with posts from Ifemelu's later blog about race, showing just how all-encompassing an issue it is.

Back in her memory, Ifemelu is entranced by Dike, who is now a precocious first-grader. Ifemelu has to sleep on the floor, as Aunty Uju and Dike share the single bed. Ifemelu expected everything to be more glamorous than it is, and she can't fall asleep, overcome by the newness of it all. She looks out the window and notices how different the street looks from the one on *The Cosby Show*.

Ifemelu's first introduction to America is anticlimactic, as might be expected. She has learned about the country from Obinze's praises and idealized television shows, and so is disappointed by the reality of America. Aunty Uju clearly still hasn't found success yet in "the land of opportunity."

The next morning Aunty Uju wakes Ifemelu up with brisk instructions, telling her that she should take care of Dike for the summer and then find a job in Philadelphia. Uju has a friend who will let Ifemelu use her Social Security Card, as her student visa won't let her find work. Aunty Uju seems scornful of Ifemelu's naiveté, and Ifemelu feels hurt by this new "prickliness" about her. Uju goes off to work and Ifemelu tries to adjust to cooking things like hot dogs, which she tries to fry like a sausage. That evening Ifemelu tells Uju about the hot dog, but Uju isn't amused. She seems distracted and harried.

Aunty Uju has been changed by the difficulty and foreignness of her new life, and she no longer shares her old natural connection and intimacy with Ifemelu. Ifemelu is immediately introduced to the harsh realities of life for an immigrant—she has a partial scholarship, but her student visa won't allow her to work, so she must illegally borrow a citizen's identity card in order to make any money.

At the grocery story Aunty Uju only buys what's on sale. Ifemelu notices that she takes on an American accent when she speaks to white Americans. At the store Dike makes a scene about buying a more expensive cereal, and afterwards Uju twists his ear and complains about how all the children in America misbehave.

Aunty Uju acts like the women at the hair salon—complaining about how America corrupts people—even as Uju herself changes her very voice to try and fit in with white Americans. She has been working multiple jobs and saving for years, but Uju is still very poor.

That night Ifemelu talks to Dike in Igbo, and Aunty Uju rebukes her, saying that things are different in America, and learning two languages will confuse him. Ifemelu asks what is wrong, and Aunty Uju finally admits that she recently failed her medical exams. She says they weren't testing knowledge, but only test-taking ability. She had thought things would be better for her and Dike after all this time in America, but she is still studying and working several jobs. Ifemelu feels bad, and notices that Aunty Uju looks so much less put-together than she did in Nigeria. She thinks, "America had subdued her."

Everything since her arrival seems disappointing and even unfriendly to Ifemelu, and Aunty Uju provides an example of how the pressures of immigrant life can "subdue" and change someone. Adichie delivers some extra cultural criticism through Uju, noting how standardized tests are biased towards native English speakers and those used to taking such tests.

CHAPTER 10

That summer Ifemelu feels like she is always waiting for the "real America" to show itself. She spends all her time with Dike and feels a strong companionship with him, despite his young age. She writes long letters to Obinze. She befriends a family from Grenada in the next apartment: a young couple named Marlon and Jane, and their children who play with Dike. Jane and Ifemelu discuss their similar childhoods and how hard it is to adjust to America, even though Jane has been there ten years. Jane says she wants to move to the suburbs soon, before her children "start behaving like these black Americans."

Ifemelu feels newly disconnected from Aunty Uju, but she starts developing a strong love and connection with Dike. She and Obinze still keep closely in touch despite the great distance between them. Adichie hints again at the complexity of racial and national interactions in America. Jane is black, and so experiences the same prejudice that African-Americans do, but she still chooses to distance herself from black Americans.

One day Marlon propositions Ifemelu while Jane is out of the room, and after that Ifemelu avoids the couple. Ifemelu invents games to play with Dike, and is surprised that he can't do simple division, as she could at his age. She starts teaching Dike math. She also spends the summer enjoying some new American foods and missing some Nigerian ones. She watches TV but is especially entranced by the commercials, as the lives they portray seem like the "real America" she imagined. She watches all the violence on the news—still used to the patriotic Nigerian news—and soon starts to feel paranoid and afraid. Aunty Uju laughs at this, saying that the only difference is that they don't report all the crimes in Nigeria.

Ifemelu had always heard of America as a place of superior education and opportunity, so she is disappointed yet again to find that Dike seems behind where he would be if he were schooling in Nigeria. Ifemelu starts to realize that the America she has been looking for was never real at all—it only existed in media and hearsay. Adichie scatters more cultural criticisms throughout the narrative, like noting that Nigerian news is falsely optimistic, while American news is overly sensationalist.

CHAPTER 11

Aunty Uju starts dating a divorced Nigerian man named Bartholomew. He comes over for dinner one day and Ifemelu is appalled at how unintelligent and arrogant he is, and that he takes no interest in Dike. She is especially surprised at how Aunty Uju fawns over him. When they are watching TV Bartholomew makes a blanket statement about Nigeria and Ifemelu contradicts him. After that Bartholomew ignores her.

Aunty Uju has been "subdued" by America not just in her stressed-out, impoverished life and personal appearance, but also in her romantic life. She has gone from being the lover of one of the most powerful men in the country to desperately pursuing someone like Bartholomew.

Later Ifemelu reads the articles Bartholomew said he posts on a website called *Nigerian Village*. She notices all the angry and pointless arguments in the comments. Ifemelu imagines all the other expatriate Nigerians like him, working constantly and saving up to visit Nigeria, trying to keep up their appearances to relatives back home, and then returning to America to argue about Nigeria on the internet.

With this website Ifemelu sees another facet of immigrant unhappiness—this lashing out at other immigrants and desperately trying to keep up a facade of success and happiness. The arguments on the website prefigure the comments on Ifemelu's own blog.

Aunty Uju asks Ifemelu what she thought of Bartholomew. Ifemelu points out that he used cheap bleaching creams on his face, and that in Nigeria a man like him wouldn't even have the courage to talk to her. Uju seems tired and anxious and reminds Ifemelu that they aren't in Nigeria. She is pleased enough that Bartholomew has a good job, and she wants to have another child. Ifemelu is sad that Aunty Uju has "settled merely for what was familiar."

Aunty Uju has lowered her standards so drastically because she has been worn down by her life in America, and longs for anything comfortable and familiar—any Nigerian man with a job, no matter how rude or unintelligent he might be. Here is another example of Nigerians lightening their skin.

Ifemelu visits Manhattan and is intimidated because of how Obinze had idealized it. Afterward she informs him that "it's wonderful but it's not heaven." Ifemelu and Obinze promise each other that they will be together again soon, which makes their plan seem more real. Aunty Uju gets her results and finds that she passed her medical exams. She immediately says that she needs to take out her braids and relax her **hair** for her interviews, as Americans think braids are unprofessional. Ifemelu is mystified by this.

Ifemelu's phrase describing Manhattan will later echo Obinze's own experience when he first visits the America he has so idealized. Black female hair as a symbol is introduced (chronologically) here, as Aunty Uju has learned that she must "subdue" her natural hair to be considered respectable and professional as an American doctor.

Ifemelu thinks that Aunty Uju seems to have left something of herself behind in Nigeria and cloaked herself in a "strange naiveté" since coming to America. Obinze tells Ifemelu that it is the "exaggerated gratitude that came with immigrant insecurity." The summer comes to an end and Ifemelu is eager to start school and find the "real America," but also hesitant to leave Dike. She takes him to Coney Island on her last weekend in Brooklyn.

Obinze is still in Nigeria, but he still has a surprisingly apt explanation for Aunty Uju's changed personality. Grief for The General has also affected Aunty Uju's change, as she seems to have left part of her heart back in Nigeria. As Dike grows up he becomes more of a major character.

Aunty Uju gives Ifemelu her friend's driver's license and social security card, as Ifemelu now has to pretend to be "Ngozi Okonkwo" to find legitimate work. Ifemelu is worried because she doesn't look like the woman at all, but Aunty Uju assures her that "all of us look alike to white people." She says the only important thing is to remember her new name. Dike cries as Ifemelu leaves for Philadelphia.

Ifemelu literally takes on a new identity as she leaves the relatively familiar world of Aunty Uju's apartment and ventures out alone into America. Ifemelu can't yet believe the pervasive racism in American society. She experiences yet another separation in leaving Dike.

CHAPTER 12

Ginika is waiting to pick Ifemelu up at the bus terminal, looking much thinner than she did when Ifemelu last saw her, and with straight blond-streaked hair. They are overjoyed to see each other, and Ginika drives Ifemelu through Philadelphia, a city Ifemelu will come to love. Ginika talks excitedly, using outdated Nigerian slang to prove to Ifemelu how unchanged she is.

Ginika too has been changed by America, but she has adjusted much more successfully than Aunty Uju. Ginika has changed, but she wants to prove to Ifemelu how Nigerian she still is. She is experiencing uncertainty about her Nigerian identity, now that she is so "American."

Ginika tells Ifemelu stories of cultural misunderstandings, like the fact that she is supposed to say "biracial" instead of "half-caste," which is offensive. She says that Ifemelu will have a harder time with white people because she has darker skin than Ginika. Ginika says that she came to America and discovered that she's supposed to have "issues" because she's biracial. She says that Obinze should hurry up and come to America before someone snatches Ifemelu up, as she is "thin" in the way American boys like. Ginika immediately started losing weight when she came to America, and was close to anorexia.

Adichie gives more examples of cultural disparities, from the innocent to the tragic. Another issue Adichie brings up about American society (other than racism and prejudice) is the prevalence of mental disorders like depression, anxiety, and anorexia. A new immigrant like Ifemelu doesn't yet understand all the things that would be offensive to an African-American, as she doesn't think of herself as the same race as an African-American—but to whites she is, because of her skin color.

Later Ifemelu drinks beer with Ginika and her American friends, including a Japanese American, a Chinese American, and an Indian. Ifemelu is surprised at how well Ginika fits in. They all have an American vernacular and rhythm of conversation that Ifemelu can't keep up with. Later Ginika takes Ifemelu shopping, but Ifemelu is afraid to spend any money until she finds a job.

Ginika clearly struggled after coming to America—she almost developed an eating disorder, and has her hair streaked with blonde to seem "whiter"—but by now she is an example of a well-adjusted immigrant, one who has found a relatively comfortable identity as an American.

At the clothing store there are two young saleswomen, one black and one white. Ginika decides to buy a dress, and afterwards the cashier asks her which girl helped her, so she can get her commission. The cashier asks questions that don't distinguish the two saleswomen at all, and finally says she'll figure it out later. When they leave the store, Ifemelu asks why the cashier didn't just ask "Was it the black girl or the white girl?" Ginika laughs and says in America you're supposed to pretend not to notice race.

This is a humorous example of both how important and how taboo the issue of race is in America. Part of Ifemelu's adjustment to America is "discovering" race, and realizing that she is not considered Nigerian anymore, but just black. Race is a huge issue, as Adichie shows, but most people like the cashier, are also afraid to talk about it.

Ifemelu tries to find an apartment she can afford, and finally moves in with three white American girls and their dog. Ifemelu wishes the dog would stay outside, but Elena, its owner, keeps it inside. She notices that Ifemelu hasn't petted the dog, and asks if it's a "cultural thing." Ifemelu moves in and is mystified by some of her roommates' habits. When they go out to a party Ifemelu expects them to get dressed up, but they purposefully look slovenly and casual. Later Ifemelu would blog about this—the privilege of choosing to look bad. At the party Ifemelu takes note of anything she finds strange or amusing, to tell Obinze later.

Ifemelu's initial adjustments to America allow Adichie to make all kinds of observations about American culture and ways in which it is different from the rest of the world. For now these cultural disparities are innocent and humorous, but they will later become much more serious. Elena's comment shows how as a black woman and an African, everything Ifemelu does is somehow seen as representative of all black people and all Africans.

CHAPTER 13

Ifemelu starts applying for jobs. She interviews to be the live-in caretaker of an old man, and at first forgets that her name is supposed to be Ngozi. The woman interviewing her doesn't ask further, but thinks Ifemelu isn't strong enough for the job. Later Ginika laughs and tells Ifemelu to make up a story about a "jungle name" and a "tribal name," as Americans will believe anything about Afrika.

Ginika echoes Aunty Uju's comment that Americans will believe anything about Africans and think they all look the same. This is humorous in this instance, but it is still a side effect of deeply-ingrained racism in American society. Ifemelu forgets that she is changing her identity.

The world starts to seem hazy to Ifemelu, as she is constantly confused by her experiences and recognizes that there are many "layers of meaning" slipping past her. She applies to many jobs but is always denied. She frantically tries to save her money, and worries constantly. The university sends her a letter that her records will be frozen if she cannot pay her tuition fees. She talks to Obinze often and he helps keep her calm. She also calls Dike, who cheers her up. She gets her first piece of junk mail with her name on it and feels validated that someone knows she is there, like she is less invisible.

The newness of everything becomes scarier for Ifemelu as time passes and she still feels disconnected from American life. The cultural misunderstandings that were humorous at first now are probably contributing to her continued failure at finding a job. Ifemelu feels so identity-less by now that even getting a piece of junk mail with her name and address on it feels like an important validation.

CHAPTER 14

When Ifemelu first registers for classes, a white girl named Cristina Tomas sits at the registration table. She speaks very slowly to Ifemelu, who at first thinks Cristina has a speech defect, until Ifemelu realizes that it is because of her own foreign accent: Cristina Tomas doesn't think she knows English. Ifemelu "shrinks" in this moment of shame and condescension, and after that she starts practicing an American accent.

Ifemelu now feels her identity and personhood being "subdued" just like Aunty Uju's is. The oppressive power of white America, as personified by Cristina Tomas, wears Ifemelu down until a moment like this makes her suddenly feel valueless. So she starts to change herself in order to fit in better.

Ifemelu finds her classes easy, but is confused as to why there is so much importance given to "participation," when it is mostly just students taking up class time talking about things they don't know about. Ifemelu is a communications major, and she makes friends with a girl named Samantha who lets her borrow her textbooks, as Ifemelu can't afford to buy them all.

Adichie comments on the differences in education in America and Nigeria. Adichie herself has several degrees (in both Nigeria and America) and has taught university classes, so she has an insider's knowledge on this subject.

Ifemelu wants to learn more about American culture, and Obinze suggests that she read American books. He suggests a James Baldwin book for her, and she is intrigued by it. She reads all the James Baldwin she can find at the library, and finally starts to understand Obinze's love of language and literature. At the same time the books teach Ifemelu about "America's tribalisms—race, ideology, and religion."

Ifemelu does at least start to experience a connection with American culture through this new love of literature. James Baldwin is a famous African-American writer who wrote boldly about racism, and Ifemelu is now starting to identify with his experiences.

Ifemelu finds herself using more American slang and "participating" in class just like the other students. She takes a film class, where they discuss the show *Roots*. The few black students in the class (including Ifemelu) argue about whether the word "nigger" should have been bleeped out, and whether it should ever be used by black people in general. Finally the white professor meekly changes the subject.

Adichie gives more observations and examples about the complexities of racial issues in America. Different black students disagree about the same subject, and there is no clear-cut answer to anything. Adichie seems to mostly advocate listening to each other respectfully.

After class one of the students, Wambui, (who is Kenyan) introduces herself to Ifemelu and invites her to the African Students Association. Ifemelu goes and the members all talk about the insensitive questions they get asked all the time. They also mock Africa, but Ifemelu senses that there is a homesickness in their mockery, a longing "to see a place made whole again." Ifemelu feels a little more at home here.

Ifemelu feels less invisible and separated from American culture among the other African students. Ifemelu is observant of the African students' psychological tendencies, just as she is with Americans. The situations they discuss become later subjects for her blog.

Mwombeki, a Tanzanian student who reminds Ifemelu of Obinze, gives Ifemelu and some other new students a "welcome talk" about America and its strange customs. Mwombeki suggests that they make friends with African-Americans, in a spirit of solidarity, but to make sure to have African friends too to keep perspective. He points out that Africans generally go to the African Student Association and African-Americans go to the Black Student Union. He suggests making friends with immigrants of other races too. Ifemelu thinks of Dike, and wonders if he will be considered "African-American" or "American-African" when he goes to university.

Mwombeki gives a humorous address, but he also has advice for feeling less alone and out of place. Ifemelu has learned that America can be a harsh and prejudiced place, but there are many others in similar situations and they can then form their own community within the community. As Dike grows up he does indeed struggle with his identity, as an African raised in America, as one of the only black students at his school, and as a child without a father.

Ifemelu has more job interviews, but even the ones she thinks go well don't hire her. One day Aunty Uju calls her to say that Dike was found in the closet with a girl, "showing each other their private parts." Aunty Uju is appalled, though Ifemelu reminds her that everyone is curious as a child. Uju says that she is going to move to Massachusetts with Bartholomew, to have a new start and get Dike away from the "wild children with no home training." She is going to marry Bartholomew.

Aunty Uju continues with the tendency that Adichie has pointed out—for immigrants to idealize their home country as purer than the sinful and modern America. She also starts to echo Jane in disparaging African-Americans as having lots of "issues" that Africans don't share.

CHAPTER 15

Ifemelu answers an ad looking for a "female personal assistant" for a tennis coach. The blonde man invites her into his office, which is in the basement, and says that he's looking for an assistant to "help him relax." He'll pay one hundred dollars a day. Ifemelu feels uneasy, and finally decides to leave. She keeps applying to jobs, but doesn't find anything. Obinze even sends her some money. Ginika helps Ifemelu with her job search, and finds her an interview for a babysitting position that pays cash under the table.

Ifemelu's "American dream" is definitely over by now, as she finds herself unable to find any but the most unappetizing job and is constantly panicking about money. It is cruelly ironic that Obinze must send Ifemelu money, as usually immigrants imagine going to America, getting rich, and sending money back home.

Ifemelu goes to the woman's house, which is large and extravagant. Her name is Kimberly, and her sister Laura is there as well. Ifemelu introduces herself, and Kimberly says her name is beautiful, and that she loves "multicultural names" because they always have "rich" meanings. Later Ifemelu would learn that Kimberly uses "beautiful" in a certain way—whenever she mentions or describes a black woman, she calls them beautiful. When Ifemelu figured this out she said to Kimberly "you can just say 'black.' Not every black person in beautiful." Kimberly smiled at this, and Ifemelu would consider that the moment they became real friends.

With Kimberly Adichie introduces a character that allows her to observe and criticize wealthy, liberal white Americans. Racism in America isn't always obvious or intentional. It is present even in the way Kimberly calls every black person "beautiful"—seeing them as "other" and so being unintentionally patronizing. This moment is a rare example of real connection across races and nationalities—Kimberly accepts Ifemelu's critique, and the two develop a real friendship because of it.

At the interview Laura and Kimberly ask Ifemelu questions about her transition to America. Kimberly comments on all the "wonderful organic food" Ifemelu must be used to. Laura boasts that she doesn't have a babysitter for her children. Ifemelu wants to talk back to her, but restrains herself. Kimberly shows Ifemelu the house, where there are many pictures of her and her husband with poor people in exotic locales. Ifemelu would later learn that for Kimberly, "the poor were blameless," especially the foreign poor.

Kimberly often says insensitive things, but she is well-intentioned, receptive to Ifemelu's point of view, and sees Ifemelu as a whole person and friend. Laura shares many of Kimberly's views, but lacks her better qualities. Adichie analyzes the subtle national and racial hierarchies of charity, as being charitable implies a kind of superiority and condescension, even if one's motives are pure.

Kimberly's husband Don arrives before Ifemelu leaves. He is charming and attractive, but clearly knows he is so. He and Kimberly talk about their charity work, and Kimberly looks very sad when she talks about how they hope to do work in Africa. Ifemelu suddenly feels sorry for having come from Africa, for being from a place that makes people like Kimberly force themselves to feel sad. The next day Kimberly calls Ifemelu and says that they hired someone else, but they'll "keep her in mind."

In many social situations Ifemelu finds herself as a representative of all of Africa, and so feels like she is personally requiring charitable work of people like Kimberly. Don and Kimberly's relationship seems flawed and one-sided, as Kimberly adores Don and Don mostly adores himself.

Ifemelu is a week late for rent, and her roommate leaves her a note about it. She considers applying for a job as an "escort," but Ginika warns her that it means prostitution. One day her roommate Elena's dog eats Ifemelu's bacon. Ifemelu tells Elena, who says that Ifemelu hates the dog, and tells her not to "kill my dog with voodoo." She smirks, and Ifemelu suddenly feels a rush of rage. She raises her hand to strike Elena but then catches herself and runs upstairs. She hears Elena on the phone calling her a "bitch."

Ifemelu is nearing a breaking point now, as all of America seems against her, and the microaggressions (small or subtle incidents/comments that reinforce larger prejudices like racism and xenophobia) like Elena's add up, wearing her down to the point that she wants to lash out. The cultural misunderstandings aren't humorous anymore.

Ifemelu realizes that she isn't especially mad at Elena and her dog, but is "at war with the world," and everyone seems against her. Her other roommate comes asking for the rent, and Ifemelu pays her, using up the last of her money. Then Ifemelu calls the tennis coach and says she wants the job. He tells her to come over right away.

Ifemelu is desperate for money now, and seems truly "subdued" by America. Her struggles for identity and success in America are all too common, and Adichie makes them personal and sympathetic through Ifemelu's character.

Ifemelu arrives and the tennis coach brings her up to his bedroom. She tells him that she won't have sex with him, and he says she doesn't have to, his manner very confident. Ifemelu feels defeated. She lies down next to him as he asks, and he starts to touch her. She is horrified to find herself becoming aroused. Afterwards she feels unclean even after she washes her hands. The man gives her a hundred dollar bill and asks her to come back twice a week.

This is Ifemelu's low point in her struggle to earn money in America. She has gone from her pure and empowering romantic love with Obinze to this quasi-prostitution with a white man who is confident in his total power over her. Ifemelu feels totally defeated by America.

Ifemelu goes back to her apartment and feels small and alone in the world. She keeps scrubbing at her hands. She finds herself unable to call Obinze. She calls Aunty Uju, who is pleased that she earned money and doesn't even ask how she made it. Ifemelu then listens to her messages. One is from Obinze, telling her he loves her. She lies down and falls into a deep depression. She considers murdering the tennis coach. That night it snows for the first time.

Ifemelu now falls into a deep depression, and her self-hatred and lethargy lead her to stop talking to Obinze. They were already separated by thousands of miles, but now Ifemelu suddenly disconnects herself from the relationship with this sudden and total silence. Ifemelu hits bottom and feels totally broken.

After that the days pass in a haze. Ifemelu doesn't answer Obinze's calls, and she deletes his messages. She feels listless and hopeless all the time, and sometimes cries at random. She stops going to class and sometimes forgets to eat. One day her roommate bangs on her door, saying that she has a phone call. She gives Ifemelu her phone and it's Ginika, saying she's been worried and Obinze has been calling her frantically. Ifemelu can only say "I've been busy."

Ifemelu and Obinze's relationship falls apart along with Ifemelu's mental health and sense of self. She has never experienced depression like this before, and so doesn't know how to handle it. She abruptly ends all communication with Obinze, feeling overwhelmed by trying to explain it all.

Ginika says that Kimberly's new babysitter just left, so she wants to hire Ifemelu. The next day Ginika comes to get Ifemelu. She says that she thinks Ifemelu is suffering from depression. Ifemelu thinks it can't be true, as only Americans suffer from depression. Later Ifemelu would write a blog post about this—foreign immigrants coming to America and experiencing all the symptoms of depression or anxiety, but refusing to accept that anything is wrong because such ailments are "only for Americans." Ifemelu wishes she had told Ginika about the tennis coach, but finds that she can't talk about it now. She only says "thank you" and then starts to cry.

Part of Adichie's cultural observations and criticisms involves the prevalence of mental health issues in America. Ifemelu had never experienced real depression until she was faced with the overwhelming stress and isolation of life as an immigrant in America. This works both ways, however, as many people from foreign countries then discount any mental health issues as "only for Americans," and so further isolate those suffering.

CHAPTER 16

Kimberly gives Ifemelu some extra money as a "signing bonus," and Ifemelu is relieved. She buys some shoes and sends them to her mother. Her mother calls and says that Obinze came to visit her, and that Ifemelu needs to talk to him about whatever problem she is having. Ifemelu changes the subject. She keeps trying to overcome her self-hatred and call Obinze, but she can't do it. She deletes his messages and emails. One day she gets a letter from him, and its presence makes her incredibly sad. It sits unopened on her table for a week, and eventually disappears under other papers and books.

Ifemelu is now making a conscious decision to strengthen the silence and separation between herself and Obinze. We don't get Obinze's point of view about this time yet, but he is clearly very worried. Ifemelu's impulsive nature (and the ease of deleting computer messages) leads her to continue down this path of destroying the romance that had brought her happiness and confidence.

Kimberly's two children are a younger boy named Taylor and a slightly older girl named Morgan. Taylor is innocent and playful, while Morgan is very intelligent and withdrawn. She seems far older than her years, always appearing quiet and judgmental. One day Morgan calmly goes into her room and starts tearing down the wallpaper and ripping up the carpet. Ifemelu finally stops her, and later Kimberly cries and asks Morgan what was wrong. Morgan only says that she's too old for the "pink stuff" in her room. After that Kimberly sends Morgan to a therapist.

Adichie delves into the lives of Kimberly's family while Ifemelu works for them, offering some observations and critiques about raising children in America. Morgan is a brilliant child, but doesn't do well with Kimberly's compliant style of parenting. Adichie's observations about mental health issues in America continue: here they begin even at a young age.

Don tries buying Morgan presents, but she ignores him. Kimberly notices that Morgan only listens to Ifemelu. Ifemelu wants to say it's because she isn't as easily pushed around as Kimberly lets herself be, but doesn't. She just tells Kimberly that it's a "phase." She finds that she wants to protect Kimberly from the harsh truth.

There is a disconnect between Morgan and her parents, and Morgan only listens to Ifemelu because of Ifemelu's straightforward, no-nonsense approach—arguably a less modern, liberal, American way of childcare.

One day Laura, Kimberly's sister, brings over a magazine with a picture of a celebrity surrounded by skinny African children. Ifemelu remarks that the celebrity is skinny by choice, while the kids are not, and Laura laughs and calls her "sassy." Later Kimberly apologizes for her sister. Kimberly often apologizes for Laura, who questions Ifemelu aggressively whenever she visits. Eventually Ifemelu finds Kimberly's apologies "self-indulgent," as if she could fix everything wrong with the world just by saying sorry.

Kimberly recognizes that "sassy" is a stereotypical term for black women, and she apologizes for Laura's patronizing comment. Ifemelu eventually grows weary of Kimberly's apologies because Kimberly chooses to simply say she's sorry, instead of trying to fix things or change her sister's ideas.

A few months later Kimberly decides to let Ifemelu use their "spare" car to go to and from work. Laura questions the decision, asking if Ifemelu has an American license. Ifemelu notices that both sisters are unhappy, but in different ways. Ifemelu tells the story of the driving class she took in Brooklyn, and how the instructor changed people's answers to make sure they all passed. Ifemelu says that before that, she thought that nobody in America cheated.

Adichie's cultural criticisms of wealthy, liberal Americans show Laura as unhappy because of a bitter sense of defensiveness, and Kimberly because of a sense of guilt and unworthiness. The drivers' class was yet another experience to shatter Ifemelu's ideals about America.

One day Ifemelu gives Taylor an orange, and he is disgusted to find that there are seeds inside—he doesn't even know that oranges have seeds, as he has only eaten seedless ones all his life. A carpet cleaner arrives, and he is shocked when Ifemelu answers the door. He looks hostile until she reveals that she is the "help," and then he visibly relaxes and acts friendly.

The carpet cleaner's attitude is a good example of a small incident that has a large and complex issue behind it: racial hierarchy. Ifemelu might have been rich enough to own such a house, but the fact that she was black is enough to upset the status quo.

Later Ifemelu would write a blog post about this, commenting how in America race often *is* class. The carpet cleaner hadn't cared how rich Ifemelu was—the fact that she was black and the potential owner of a mansion meant that she was upsetting the proper social order. Ifemelu notes that in America's public discourse, it is always said "Blacks and Poor Whites," instead of "Poor Blacks and Poor Whites."

In Ifemelu's blog posts Adichie can be more direct in her criticisms about race, identity, and American culture. Ifemelu is examining these things as an outsider, and so perhaps has a unique point of view. Here she shows how race and class often overlap in America.

Ifemelu doesn't tell Kimberly about the carpet cleaner, but she does tell her about the orange. Laura arrives with her young daughter, Athena, and she and Kimberly discuss the party they're having the next day. Laura talks about a Nigerian doctor she met recently, and says he reminded her of Ifemelu and other "privileged Africans" who are allowed to come to America. She compliments how "well-groomed and well-spoken" he was.

Laura uses more phrases that aren't racist in themselves but are associated with racial stereotypes, like complimenting an African man for being "well-groomed and well-spoken," which implies that most Africans are not so. Calling African immigrants "privileged" to come to America also implies America's superiority.

Laura then compares the doctor to another African woman she knew at school, who didn't get along with the African-American in the class because "she didn't have all those issues." Ifemelu points out that the African woman could have had a father running for parliament or studying at Oxford, while the African-American's father was still unable to vote because he was black. Ifemelu says that Laura should understand history better before making such a simplistic comparison, and Laura goes upstairs in a huff. Ifemelu follows her and apologizes, but only because the incident made Kimberly look so sad.

Laura repeats the sentiment that Jane and Aunty Uju had expressed earlier—that black Americans have more "issues" than black Africans. Ifemelu now understands this idea better and knows what lies behind it—that the "issues" come from a recent history of slavery and discrimination. Ifemelu speaks out, as she often does, even when it might be impolite to do so. Unlike Kimberly, Laura cannot accept that her views might be wrong.

The next day Don and Kimberly throw a party for a friend who is running for Congress. Kimberly invites Ifemelu and Ifemelu senses that Kimberly needs her. Laura ignores Ifemelu during the party. The guests talk to Ifemelu about how beautiful African women are, "especially Ethiopians," and they discuss their various charities doing work in Africa. Ifemelu recognizes that there is a kind of luxury in being able to be charitable, and she wishes she had this confidence of always having enough.

Ifemelu can tell that Kimberly now counts on her as a supportive friend, not just an employee or interesting acquaintance. The guests offer more examples of vaguely offensive comments, as they are essentially well-meaning but still stereotype or condescend to Africans. Ifemelu again feels the insecurity of being from the place that receives charity.

Another guest invites Ifemelu to apply to work for her charity, as she's always looking for "local labor." Ifemelu suddenly wishes she was from a "country of people who gave and not those who received," so she could feel the confidence and self-satisfaction that Kimberly and her guests feel. Ifemelu goes out on the deck and sees Don on the phone, looking secretive about something. He makes awkward small talk with her and then they both go back inside.

As the only African surrounded by people who see Africa as a sad case requiring their help, Ifemelu feels like she herself is somehow inferior and being patronized to by these wealthy Americans. The scene with Don strengthens the idea that his relationship with Kimberly is uneven, or even that he is cheating on her.

Ifemelu leaves the party early to call Aunty Uju. Uju says that Dike has been asking why he doesn't have his father's last name, and if it means that his father didn't love him. Ifemelu has noticed that since moving to Massachusetts, both of them have changed. Dike seems to have put up walls around himself, and his grades are failing. Aunty Uju scolds him more and more, and she uses Igbo whenever she is angry. Uju has been surprised by how everyone is white, and she feels out of place. Dike's principal has called her and said that Dike is "aggressive," which she says is "marking" him as different. The principal assured her that they don't see Dike as different at all.

Adichie doesn't focus on Dike much yet, but she does offer hints like this about his struggle for identity. He is not only one of the only black children at his school (and being singled out because of it, even by white faculty that might be totally well-meaning), but also a an illegitimate child growing up without a father, and even without his father's name. Uju likewise continues to feel alone and like everything is working against her in America.

CHAPTER 17

Ifemelu eventually makes enough money to get a studio apartment for herself. She has perfected her American accent by now, as she learns when a young male telemarketer calls her. He is surprised that she is Nigerian, as she sounds "totally American." When she hangs up, Ifemelu starts to feel ashamed of this. She wonders why "sounding American" should always be a compliment or an achievement, and realizes that this means that Cristina Tomas, the girl at the college registration booth, has somehow "won." After this, Ifemelu decides to stop faking her American accent. She immediately feels more like herself.

After hitting her low point, Ifemelu has now found more and more success at building a new identity in America. She is now confident enough that she no longer feels the need to pretend to be more American than she is, and so she gives up her new accent. We have seen that most Americans (and even other immigrants) see a foreign accent as inferior, but Ifemelu decides to embrace her Nigerianness and speak as she would naturally.

That same day Ifemelu takes the train to visit Aunty Uju. She sits down next to a good-looking young man who introduces himself as Blaine. She can tell (as she is now able to) that he is African-American, not African. They immediately start to flirt, and Blaine says that he is an assistant professor at Yale studying African politics. Ifemelu is drawn to him and starts to imagine them as a couple. They discuss grad school and malls, which Blaine hates and Ifemelu doesn't see a problem with. Ifemelu sees it as a meaningful coincidence that she met this man on the day she returned to her true accent.

Because of the roundabout narrative structure, we know that this meeting is significant and Ifemelu will later end up dating Blaine for years. Blaine appears as an intellectual equal and kindred spirit to Ifemelu, but he has a different experience and worldview than she does because he is an African-America, not an African. Through Blaine and his interactions with Ifemelu Adichie will be able to explore these differences.

Blaine gets beers for them, and then tells Ifemelu about his years as an undergraduate. Ifemelu is disappointed when the train reaches her stop at New Haven. She gets Blaine to write his phone number on a piece of paper, and he seems sad to see her go. She calls him from Aunty Uju's house an hour later, and then many more times over the next few days, but he never answers.

This brief romantic encounter seems to fizzle out, but Adichie has already revealed that Blaine will reappear as a more major character later. Ifemelu is clearly smitten, as she keeps calling him.

Aunty Uju lives in Warrington, Massachusetts now. Every time Ifemelu visits, Uju tells stories of new grievances, like a white patient who didn't believe that she was a doctor, and asked to be transferred to a different doctor after her visit. Uju says that she hardly sees Bartholomew, but she is still trying to have another child. Dike is both taller and more reserved every time Ifemelu visits, but the two cousins are still close.

Through Aunty Uju Adichie gives another perspective on racial relations in America. Uju is a doctor twice over (having passed her medical exams in both Nigeria and America), but some white people still automatically consider her unqualified because of her race.

After a day at summer camp Dike comes home to play soccer with Ifemelu, but he looks unhappy. Ifemelu asks him about it, and finally he tells her that his group leader gave sunscreen to all the other kids but wouldn't give it to him, because she said he didn't need it. He tries to say it was funny, because one of his friends was laughing about it. Ifemelu tries to comfort him. Dike says he just wants to be "regular."

As Dike ages his insecurities grow, even though he tries to laugh them off. When his peers say offensive or isolating things to him, he has to consider them funny to avoid being ostracized. Because of the society he has grown up in, Dike considers black to be "irregular."

The chapter ends with a post from Ifemelu's blog, this one about "American Tribalism." She explains the four kinds of tribalism: class (rich vs. poor), ideology (liberals vs. conservatives), region (North vs. South), and race. Race is the most complicated one, but white is always on top, and American Black is always at the bottom. The hierarchy of who is in between depends on time and place. Ifemelu describes how she first learned that Jewish was a race considered slightly inferior to other whites, even though Ifemelu couldn't tell the difference between Jewish people and any other white people.

Once again Adichie delves into more non-fiction lectures through Ifemelu's blog posts. Because they are written in Ifemelu's voice, they also show just how much Ifemelu has learned and observed about American culture and the forces at work behind it. Here Ifemelu also reinforces the idea that she didn't even think about race as a concept until she came to America.

CHAPTER 18

Back in the present, two new customers come into the **hair** salon. One asks about the many Nigerian DVDs in the salon. She says she is from South Africa, and so is biased against Nigerians because they are known for stealing credit cards. The salon workers are amazed that the woman has a perfect American accent and they flatter her about it. They talk more about how untrustworthy Nigerians can be. Aisha asks Ifemelu why she doesn't have an American accent after living here for fifteen years. Ifemelu ignores the question, and wonders if she has made a bad decision in giving up her blog and moving back to Nigeria.

Ifemelu's memory of first deciding to give up her American accent is then juxtaposed with this scene, more than ten years later, when she still has her Nigerian accent and is thought less of because of it. Ifemelu experiences this microcosm of female African immigrant life in America at the same time as she is questioning herself and about to leave everything behind.

A young white woman comes into the salon and asks to get her **hair** braided. She is "aggressively friendly," and introduces herself as Kelsey. She asks Mariama about her business, and whether women are allowed to vote in her country. She tries to talk to Ifemelu about the book she's reading. Ifemelu can tell that Kelsey is the kind of liberal American who likes to criticize America but doesn't like foreigners to criticize it—they're supposed to be grateful for being allowed to come here.

Kelsey offers an example of a liberal young white person who condescends to foreigners under the guise of open-mindedness. Ifemelu's observations about her hypocrisy will be repeated later, and are part of Adichie's cultural criticism of the racism that exists even in liberal America.

Kelsey keeps pursuing a conversation with Ifemelu, and says that she is visiting Africa soon. She says she recently read the book *A Bend in the River*, which helped her "truly understand how modern Africa works." Ifemelu starts to get a headache, and she decides to tell Kelsey what she really thinks of that book—that it is about a longing for Europe and a contempt for Africa. Kelsey looks surprised, and then says that she can see why Ifemelu would read it that way. Ifemelu says the same thing to Kelsey.

Kelsey is being truly patronizing to claim that she "truly understands how modern Africa works," when she has never been there and has only read one book about it. She is surprised to hear resistance and individuality from Ifemelu, as she is expecting the African women to be quietly grateful that they are now in America.

Ifemelu feels sick, and realizes that she doesn't know what she's doing with her life right now, or why she's moving back to Nigeria. Mariama asks Kelsey if she wants **hair** attachments, and Kelsey is surprised, as she assumed that black women with braided hair just "had such full hair." Mariama braids Kelsey's hair quickly. Ifemelu watches Mariama, thinking of "her own new American selves."

Hair is once again presented as a complicated symbol, as Kelsey shows how white American society appropriates parts of black culture for itself (like music, fashion, or in this case a hairstyle) while continuing to oppress black people themselves. Ifemelu thinks of the identities she and the other women have created to fit in better in America.

Ifemelu slips into a memory of Curt, her first serious boyfriend after Obinze. Curt is Kimberly's cousin, and he visits from Maryland. He claims that he fell in love the first time he heard Ifemelu laugh. Ifemelu hadn't realized this, however. She had recently had a crush on another white man, a fellow student named Abe. Abe liked her, but couldn't seem to consider her truly female, and so was unable to have romantic feelings for her. She first noticed Curt when he retrieved a lost ball for Taylor, but gave it to her first instead of Taylor.

Ifemelu's relationship with Curt allows Adichie to examine both romantic love and interracial, cross-cultural relations in depth. Abe shows another way that racism exhibits itself—through romantic attraction or the lack thereof. Curt, unlike Abe, is romantically attracted to Ifemelu, which means he sees her as both a person and as a beautiful woman.

Later that day Curt asks her out, and Ifemelu feels happy to be so wanted by this rich, very handsome white man. They go to dinner and he tells her about himself, his business, and his wealthy family. She is attracted to his good-natured enthusiasm and confidence. Afterward he kisses Ifemelu, and immediately says that they have to tell Kimberly that they're dating. Ifemelu is surprised at his assumption that they're dating after just one kiss, but she goes along with it.

Curt is not only white, he is also rich, handsome, and sociable. He is a good person and Ifemelu is smitten (and a little overwhelmed) by him, but their experiences are vastly different. Everything always seems to go Curt's way, so he automatically assumes that Ifemelu will want to date him after a single kiss.

The next day Kimberly and her children all talk about Curt and Ifemelu's new "relationship," and Ifemelu feels overwhelmed. Don is surprised when he hears about it, as if he had never considered that they could be romantically linked. The first time they have sex Curt tells her he's never slept with a black woman before. He seems totally smitten by Ifemelu, and she is pleased and amused by his compliments. She never mentions Obinze to him, as it would seem sacrilegious to refer to him as an "ex." She still tries to write to Obinze sometimes, but never sends anything.

Don's surprise will be echoed many times over by other people—people who otherwise might not be racist at all, but are still surprised to see someone like Curt dating someone like Ifemelu. Curt is Ifemelu's first serious boyfriend after Obinze, but clearly he hasn't replaced Obinze. Ifemelu can't even talk about Obinze because their lost love seems so pure and almost holy to her.

As her relationship with Curt progresses, Ifemelu finds herself leading a lavish and carefree life—going to nice restaurants, going hiking, and kayaking. He is spontaneous and upbeat, and everything always seems to go his way. Sometimes Ifemelu has a perverse desire to crush his relentless optimism, but she is also happy with him, and partly admires his happiness and his unwavering belief that the future will always hold good things.

Ifemelu had struggled very hard to make it in America, but now that she is dating Curt everything suddenly comes easy for her, and she starts living extravagantly. Curt is a good person, but he is also the ultimate beneficiary of society's privileges, and so everything always seems to go his way.

CHAPTER 19

On Sundays, Curt and Ifemelu have brunch with Curt's mother at an ornate hotel. The only other black person in the room is a waiter. Curt's mother is aloof and chilly, and Curt says she "doesn't like beautiful women." One weekend Morgan visits Ifemelu and Curt (Ifemelu now regularly stays with Curt in Baltimore). Morgan seems happy as they walk along holding hands, and Ifemelu imagines herself married to Curt. They had joked about marriage before—he about going to Nigeria to pay her relatives the "bride price," she about his relatives being horrified that "the help" was wearing the bride's dress.

With Curt, Ifemelu is allowed into the inner circle of privilege. Theoretically she is no longer an outsider, as she now lives the same kind of life that Curt does, but she recognizes that she always will be an outsider just because she is black. No matter how rich or socially elite she might become, she recognizes that other rich white people will always mistake her for being "the help."

One day Ifemelu and Curt sit on the couch, she reading and he watching sports. Ifemelu feels content and at ease: she is now used to a life of satisfaction and comfort. Curt takes her on trips to different countries and buys her clothes and textbooks. She keeps babysitting and sends more money home to her parents. Her father finally finds a new job and seems more like his old self.

Ifemelu has now made it, and is living the kind of life most immigrants dream of. She has entered the inner circle of wealthy white Americans, is making enough money to send some home, and leads a comfortable, happy life. But her restless self always catches up with her.

Ifemelu feels strange talking to her parents on the phone, as she cannot remember some of the things they describe. She doesn't tell them about Curt. Ifemelu's father discusses the new president, Obasanjo, and asks about her future job prospects, but she only answers vaguely. Ifemelu has been to the career services office, but doesn't have any definite dream job or passion, and when recruiters learn that she isn't a citizen, they are always afraid to "descend into the dark tunnel of immigration paperwork."

Ifemelu's sudden success at being American makes her feel more disconnected from her life back home: her parents, her old home, and Nigeria itself. We get another glimpse of the difficult world Ifemelu just left, however, at the career services office. It is possible for non-citizens to find a good job, but the convoluted American immigration system makes it a huge ordeal.

Curt says he can help, and he makes a few calls and gets Ifemelu a job interview at a public relations office, which will help her get a work visa and a green card. She is pleased and grateful, but recognizes how different it is for her now because of Curt—her friend Wambui, for example, is working three jobs to raise money to pay for a green-card marriage. Ifemelu can't help feeling a slight resentment that Curt can so easily "rearrange the world" to work out for him.

Ifemelu moves even further along the ideal path most immigrants hope for. She is grateful to Curt, but can't help comparing herself to her friends without a "Curt," like Wambui. This is an explicit example of the kinds of privileges white Americans have but might never recognize unless they are pointed out.

A friend and Aunty Uju both tell Ifemelu to get rid of her braids and straighten her **hair** for her job interview. She buys a relaxer but it doesn't do anything, so she goes to a professional hairdresser. The second relaxer burns her scalp some, but the hairdresser compliments her newly straight hair as having the "white-girl swing." Ifemelu leaves the salon and feels sad, as if a part of herself has been killed by the straightening chemicals.

This is when her hair starts to become symbolic and important to Ifemelu. She has always had it braided and never felt any shame, but now she is supposed to consider braids "unprofessional" and to straighten her hair like a white woman's. The actual smell of burning brings home the point of independence and confidence being destroyed.

Curt is upset by Ifemelu's burned scalp, and comments on how wrong it is that she has to do this. Ifemelu's job interview goes well, and she wonders if it would have been the same if she were wearing her "God-given halo of **hair**, the Afro." Her parents rejoice when she tells them that she can become an American citizen in a few years now that she is going to get a green card, but she doesn't tell them how she got the job interview.

Curt often recognizes his own privilege, or at least society's constant prejudice against black people. Ifemelu acts as Adichie shows many immigrants acting—she lies to her family about the less-romantic details and tells them only about her successes. Ifemelu starts to recognize her own hair as a symbol now.

The chapter ends with a post from Ifemelu's blog about what different races in America aspire to. She tells a story of "Professor Hunk" meeting a European Jewish professor, and them arguing about the "oppression olympics." Ifemelu argues that there *is* an oppression olympics, and that every American minority gets "different kinds of shit, but shit still." But American black is still always at the bottom.

Ifemelu's experience in America informs her blog, and by the time she is writing it she has lots of knowledge of the shifting racial hierarchies in America. Other minorities like Asians, Hispanics, gays, and Jews all face different kinds and degrees of discrimination in America, along with blacks.

Ifemelu tells a story about her aunt firing a Hispanic cleaning lady who was arrogant and cleaned badly. Her aunt complained that the woman "thought she was white." Thus every race aspires to whiteness, or at least the privileges that whiteness brings. Ifemelu asks, rhetorically, what WASPs must aspire to then.

This story is clearly about Aunty Uju, who has now lived in America long enough to have absorbed its sense of racial hierarchy. Thus she sees a sense of entitlement or arrogance as being a "white" quality.

CHAPTER 20

Ifemelu moves to Baltimore. She arrives at the train station and has an Ethiopian taxi driver. He says that she doesn't look African at all, because her blouse is too tight, and he warns her to not let America "corrupt her." She then angrily goes into a bathroom to make sure that her blouse isn't actually too tight. Ifemelu would later write a blog post about this.

This is another example of an African immigrant seeing America as a sinful and corrupting force upon the Africans who move there. Ifemelu doesn't share this sentiment, but it is all too familiar to her.

Curt likes to tell this story to his friends, who are all like him: white, happy, and wealthy. One day Ifemelu hears Curt use the word "blowhard" in talking to a friend, and the extreme Americanness of the word reminds her that on some level Curt and his friends will "never be fully knowable to her."

Ifemelu has joined Curt's inner circle, but something as simple as a word can remind her that there will always be a divide between her and them. The story of the cab driver is a funny anecdote to them, not something personally frustrating.

Ifemelu gets her own apartment, but she mostly stays with Curt. They often go on spontaneous trips to other countries, and as she spends more time with him Ifemelu sees just how much he needs to be always doing something. He also seems to need her constant reassurance, both that she enjoys all the traveling and that she enjoys him in bed.

Because of his privilege and natural optimism, Curt feels like the world will be good to him, but he still has a constant insecurity about his own worthiness, and so he asks Ifemelu for reassurance.

Ifemelu's **hair** starts to fall out. Wambui tells her it's the relaxing chemicals that are making at happen, and she tells Ifemelu to cut her hair and "go natural." She says that "relaxing your hair is like being in prison," as you are always doing battle with your hair and trying to make it do what it isn't meant to do. Ifemelu is convinced, and lets Wambui cut off her hair then and there. Ifemelu then looks in the mirror and thinks she looks horrible.

The oppressive outside force of the relaxing chemicals actually start killing off Ifemelu's hair, so she is forced to cut it all off and start over. She has Wambui, a strong, independent African friend, to help her with this decision, or she might never have done it. Immediately afterward Ifemelu feels insecure and ugly.

Curt says she looks good, but Ifemelu is so ashamed that she wears a hat to go out and calls in sick for work the next day. Wambui suggests that she go to "*HappilyKinkyNappy.com*" to be inspired. Ifemelu decides she'll do it right away, and she goes to use Curt's open laptop. He immediately looks frightened and tells her that "the e-mails mean nothing."

Ifemelu is insecure about herself now that she looks so drastically different—she discovers that much of her natural confidence was based on her looks. Even the devoted Curt has something to hide.

Ifemelu is shocked, as somehow she had never considered that Curt might cheat on her. She reads the e-mails, which are from a blond woman that Curt says he met in Delaware. Nothing ever happened between them, but he didn't discourage her suggestive flirting. Ifemelu is angry, and especially angry when she looks up the woman and sees her confident, flowing **hair**. She knows she is being unreasonable, but she gets her things and leaves. Curt apologizes, but makes it seem like it is the woman's fault, not his own.

Ifemelu has always felt confident with Curt, even though she knows that she can never truly be a part of his privileged world, and so she is especially hurt to learn of this unfaithfulness and disconnection between them. She is also feeling especially insecure about herself at this point, and so can't help comparing her hair to the other woman's and feeling inferior.

Curt comes by later with lots of flowers, and they take a walk, Ifemelu's **hair** covered in a headwrap. After that Ifemelu calls in sick for three more days, and then finally goes to work. One of her coworkers asks if her haircut means "something political." The only other black woman in the company asks if she cut it because she's a lesbian. Years later, when Ifemelu resigned, the woman would ask if she thought her hair was part of the problem.

Ifemelu takes three days to reconcile herself to going out in public with her new hair. Her coworkers' reactions almost justify her insecurity, however, as her new hairstyle is seen as something more than just a hairstyle—reinforcing the idea of black female hair as a political symbol.

Ifemelu peruses *HappilyKinkyNappy.com* and finds a whole online community of black women embracing their natural **hair**. Ifemelu starts ordering homemade products for her hair and feels better about herself. One day she is at a farmers' market, holding hands with Curt, and a black man asks her, "You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?" Curt doesn't hear him, but Ifemelu is upset. Later she goes back on the website and receives more affirmation—it is an almost religious community of women supporting each other. Ifemelu looks in the mirror and realizes that she has fallen in love with her real hair.

This incident shows how deeply ingrained racist aesthetic ideas about beauty are in America. Even a black man automatically sees black women's natural hair as less beautiful—and even less civilized. Ifemelu finds an online community and discovers the power of this kind of support and discussion. Ifemelu "falling in love" with her hair is an important moment of self-love, confidence, and independence.

There is another post from Ifemelu's blog, this one about why dark-skinned black women love Barack Obama. Ifemelu says that black people everywhere are always eager to have mixed ancestry or to seem lighter than they are. In modern America, most successful blacks are light-skinned or else marry light-skinned or white people. Barack Obama is different because he broke the mold by marrying a dark black woman. Ifemelu says that dark black women are invisible in American culture (except as a mammy or sassy friend), but they are hopeful that this will change because of Michelle Obama.

The online community and sense of connection Ifemelu found at HappilyKinkyNappy eventually leads to her own blog. Loving herself and her natural hair and dark skin is an important part of Ifemelu's self-confidence, but in her blog she explains how it is also a political issue. Black women, especially dark-skinned black women, are made to feel inferior according to America's beauty standards, so for them self-love is also a radical act against racism.

CHAPTER 21

One day Aunty Uju calls Ifemelu, upset that Dike won't wear the shirt she wants him to wear for church (a shirt Bartholomew bought for him). Ifemelu talks to Dike and tells him to humor his mother, who is still anxious because she is in unfamiliar territory. That weekend Ifemelu visits them and brings Curt. Aunty Uju and Ifemelu's college friends are all charmed by him, though Ifemelu finds his solicitousness somewhat unappealing. Dike ignores him until Curt offers to play basketball with him.

Even years later, Aunty Uju still feels like she is living in a strange and unfriendly land, and so she clings to any kind of familiarity she can, even when it is of the inferior kind, like Bartholomew himself. To Aunty Uju and Ifemelu's African friends, Ifemelu's relationship with Curt seems like the pinnacle of success in America.

Aunty Uju compliments Ifemelu about making Curt like her, even with her **hair** "like that." Uju complains that Dike has written an essay about "not knowing what he is." Ifemelu says that she should respect his feelings, but Uju says that he is being taught to have issues and be conflicted about his identity. She also complains about Bartholomew, who wants Uju to cook for him and give him her salary, and about the racist people she has to deal with. She blames the former Nigerian leaders for ruining her country, but never mentions The General.

Aunty Uju has at least assimilated enough American culture to consider Ifemelu's hair as unattractive and unprofessional. A rich, handsome white man like Curt is like a trophy for Ifemelu among her family and friends. We get more hints that Dike is depressed and struggling with his identity, but Aunty Uju, who is still totally Nigerian, remains disconnected from his American "issues."

Curt and Dike come in, and Ifemelu can see that Dike is now charmed by Curt as well. They soon go back out to play more basketball. Aunty Uju tells Ifemelu that Curt "holds her like an egg," and she agrees. She feels fragile and precious with him. Later that night she holds his hand and feels proud to be with him, and to belong to him.

Ifemelu doesn't treat Curt like a "trophy boyfriend," but she does recognize that she seems somehow more special because of Curt, and she likes the feeling. She feels a real romantic connection with Curt by now.

One morning Aunty Uju has a fight with Bartholomew about him always leaving toothpaste in the sink. He says he is busy with work, but she reminds him that she works too, and that she is paying for his car. This seems to be the last straw, and Uju tells Ifemelu that she is leaving with Dike to move to a town named Willow. Dike seems pleased.

Bartholomew has the sense of male entitlement that Adichie has criticized in many Nigerian men, but here in America he has nothing to back up his arrogance—Aunty Uju is the one making all the money and supporting him.

There is another post from Ifemelu's blog. She says that no matter how much a Non-American Black might try to say that they're Jamaican or Ghanaian, not "black," America will always consider them black. Even if you weren't considered black in your home country, you become black when you come to America. And part of this is learning to be offended by certain things, to support other black people, and to realize that when a black person commits a crime or does something wrong, you are somehow implicated in their guilt. But she advises not to be bitter when talking about racism to white liberals, or they won't be sympathetic. She says don't even bother talking about racism to white conservatives, as they will accuse *you* of racism.

This post encapsulates an important part of Ifemelu's experience and the themes of race and identity in the novel. Ifemelu didn't consider herself "black" when she lived in Nigeria, but only Nigerian or Igbo. In America, however, the outside force of racist society reduces everyone of a certain skin color to "black," no matter their nationality or origins. Adichie doesn't even deal with conservative Americans in this book, as she assumes that most wouldn't be receptive to her arguments.

CHAPTER 22

One day Ifemelu is at a mall when she runs into Kayode, Obinze's friend from high school. He says he still talks to Obinze, and Obinze had asked him to try and find Ifemelu to make sure she was okay. Obinze moved to England a year ago. Ifemelu feels somehow betrayed by the fact that she did not know this. Kayode tries to talk, asking her what happened with Obinze, and how her life is, but Ifemelu cuts the conversation short and leaves, feeling overwhelmed.

With Kayode's appearance, Obinze suddenly seems to intrude himself into Ifemelu's comfortable and glamorous life. Ifemelu was the one who began the long silence between them, but she still can't bear the thought of Obinze living his life entirely apart from her and unknown to her.

Ifemelu gets in the car with Curt and tells him that she ran into an old friend. She is clearly upset and distracted, and Curt asks if it was an old boyfriend. She says Curt is a "sweetheart," but Curt responds that he wants to be "the fucking love of your life." Later that day Ifemelu sends an email to Obinze, apologizing for her silence and saying that she misses him. He does not respond.

This is the first tentative attempt at reconnection between Ifemelu and Obinze. As we have seen, it eventually leads to more emails and Ifemelu finally moving back to Nigeria. Curt's feelings for Ifemelu are very real and very strong.

CHAPTER 23

The narrative now follows Obinze, who has been in London for two years now. He is an illegal immigrant, as his visa has expired. He watches people at the subway station and thinks of how fortunate they all are to be "legal" and "visible." He has met two Angolan men who are going to arrange a green-card marriage for him, but he has to pay them more than two thousand pounds.

Obinze's experience in England is not nearly as successful as Ifemelu's is in America. This section focuses on the theme of identity, as Obinze feels invisible as an illegal immigrant, and it also allows Adichie to observe and critique English culture.

A few days later Obinze meets Cleotilde, the young woman he is supposed to marry. He is surprised at how pretty and innocent-looking she is. She seems surprised to see Obinze as well, and soon Obinze realizes that she is attracted to him. They discuss their business transaction, awkwardly shepherded along by the Angolans, and then Obinze gives her his phone number.

Obinze doesn't find a "Curt" to make a few calls and get him a green card. He has to take the difficult route and work menial jobs to save up and pay an EU citizen to marry him—which will make him a legal citizen.

Obinze and Cleotilde meet up again later, this time without the Angolans, and Cleotilde gets more dressed up. They eat dinner and talk about their homelands—Cleotilde is Portuguese but has an Angolan father. They are clearly both attracted to each other, but make an unspoken decision to wait until the marriage is over to become romantically connected. They meet more over the following weeks, and the sexual tension between them continues to grow. Obinze trusts Cleotilde, and knows she won't cheat him out of any money. She tells him that the Angolans only gave her five hundred pounds out of the two thousand.

This planned green-card marriage is made more interesting by the fact that Obinze and Cleotilde find themselves attracted to each other, so there is a romantic element to what is basically a business transaction. The Angolans can take most of the money in their business dealings arranging marriages for illegal immigrants, for they know just how helpless their clients are without them.

The Angolans take care of all the documents, and a mysterious man named "Brown" gives Obinze his driver's license. A few days later Obinze brings his license to register for the marriage. He hears someone in the office complaining that all the marriages being registered are "shams," and he is suddenly afraid. But the registrar offers his congratulations. Obinze looks at a whiteboard with scheduled marriage dates on it and sees a name he recognizes from his high school in Nigeria.

Adichie doesn't spend as much time narrating the story in England as she does in America and Nigeria, but the main focus of her cultural criticism for England (and all of Western Europe by extension) is the widespread fear of black and brown immigrants.

The sight of the Nigerian name makes Obinze feel melancholy, and makes him think of his mother. She had always been sad about her professor friends leaving Nigeria, which made Obinze feel guilty about his own lifelong dream of moving to America. Ever since he was a child, Obinze had imagined America as the place where everything was better, and he had never wanted to go anywhere else.

Obinze's story, like Ifemelu's, is told in a roundabout manner, so Adichie begins after two years in England and then gives earlier details of Obinze's life through memories and flashbacks. Obinze had idealized America much more than Ifemelu had.

After he graduated university, Obinze had applied for an American visa, but he was denied many times. His mother said it was the American fear of terrorism that made them not want foreign young men. He had then taken a year and lived with his mother, trying to find a job, but inexplicably failing despite his degree. One day his mother told him that she had been invited to an academic conference in London, and she was going to put him down as her "research assistant," which would get him a six-month visa.

The September 11 terrorist attacks have far-reaching effects, as they set off a new fear of young foreign men who might be terrorists. This lingers in the fear of immigrants (mostly Muslims) in Europe even years later. Obinze had longed to be an American much more than Ifemelu had, but he is denied the chance she is given.

Obinze's mother said he should take this opportunity to see what he could do in England. Obinze recognized what a big deal this was for her, as she never lied or compromised her morals about anything. But she had lied for him, and so he felt even more pressure to succeed. He hadn't contacted her often once he came to England, because he wanted to wait until he had good news to give her. Later he would feel guilty about how rarely they had talked, and how estranged they had become through his silence.

Adichie has commented elsewhere on this tendency of immigrants to paint a rosier picture of their lives to their families back home. Because the Western countries are idealized as so much better, when immigrants experience the disappointing reality they don't want to disappoint their relatives as well. This is another powerful separation and silence of the book.

CHAPTER 24

In Obinze's first months in England, the first job he finds is as a janitor cleaning toilets. Another worker at the company is a woman from Ghana, but she ignores Obinze and only is friendly to the white cleaners. Obinze wonders if this is because she hopes to invent a new identity in England, which she won't be able to do around another African. Obinze doesn't mind the job for a while, but one day he discovers "a mound of shit on the toilet lid," and he decides to quit. That same day he gets the first email from Ifemelu.

Adichie shows the difficult struggles facing an African immigrant to Europe, as the well-educated and cultured Obinze is forced to stoop to the most menial of jobs just to survive. Obinze recognizes that every immigrant, no matter their class in their home country, has to build up a new identity when they move to a Western country.

Obinze had been deeply hurt and unable to sleep when Ifemelu's sudden silence began. He had been even more wounded when Ginika told him that Ifemelu had depression, and that was why she needed space. Obinze resented that Ifemelu talked to other people, but not to him. In the five years since then he has been sometimes angry at Ifemelu, sometimes confused, and sometimes sad. The email he gets seems to not acknowledge all the distance between them or how much he has suffered, and he impulsively deletes it.

We finally get Obinze's side of the sudden separation between him and Ifemelu. Five years have passed, but his romantic feelings and their accompanying pain are still intense. Obinze's feelings are almost an echo of Ifemelu's—as the silence and distance between them grew, it seemed impossible to overcome it, and so not worth it to even try.

Back when Obinze first went to England, he stays with his cousin Nicholas. In Nigeria Nicholas had been the most popular student at the university. Girls liked him, but he remained unattached until he met Ojiugo, Obinze's mother's student and research assistant. Nicholas and Ojiugo fell in love and became the wildest and most glamorous couple on campus. In England, however, Obinze finds that not a trace remains of Nicholas's youthful personality. He and Ojiugo are married and have children, and he is very sober and responsible now.

Nicholas and Ojiugo are the first example Obinze sees of people completely changing personalities or identities after immigrating from Nigeria. In Nigeria Nicholas and Ojiugo were carefree and wild, but the difficulties of adjusting to life in England have made them serious and practical.

Obinze stays with Nicholas and Ojiugo, and reminisces with Ojiugo about how she and Nicholas used to act in Nigeria. She says that marriage and all the difficulties of immigrant life changed Nicholas—he was illegally working under other people's names for years, and constantly in fear of being deported. Obinze cooks dinner one night, and Ojiugo praises his cooking, and then asks about Ifemelu. Obinze says she went to American and forgot about him.

Nicholas experienced the same hardships Obinze is now facing, as he too was forced to work menial jobs and use other people's identities to find work. Obinze and Ifemelu's romance was well-known to all their friends, so Obinze has to talk about Ifemelu when reminiscing.

Obinze is constantly waiting to hear back from a job, and always nervous. Nicholas's young son Nna comes home from school that day and says he wants to become a rapper. Ojiugo laughs and says she didn't come to London for her son to become a rapper. Nicholas and Ojiugo have their children involved in lots of extracurricular activities, and all their time is scheduled.

Nicholas and Ojiugo's children face similar struggles to Dike, as they must grow up and reconcile their parents' identities and wishes with their own, as well as with the culture they are living in. This echoes Aunty Uju's statement about African-Americans having too many "issues."

Nna talks back to Ojiugo, and Obinze wonders if she would allow that if Nna didn't have a British accent. Ojiugo denies this, and says that in England parents want their children to respect them instead of fear them, like they do in Nigeria. Obinze talks more to Ojiugo about their past, and is surprised that she has no regrets about how things might have turned out differently.

Ojiugo is different from Aunty Uju in that Ojiugo prefers the parenting methods of England to those of Nigeria—instead of thinking that her new country is corrupting her children. Obinze is still idealistic and ambitious, and so the disappointing present is especially painful to him.

Ojiugo has gained a lot of weight, and sometimes she goes to different weight loss groups. She complains that white people want to turn everything into a "mental problem," even her simple love of food. Sometimes Ojiugo's friends visit while Obinze is around. Ojiugo complains to them about how people don't expect "people like us" to be talking about private school and music lessons for their children. She especially complains about one rich black woman who seems threatened by her, as the woman always "wants to be the only black person in the room."

This is another comment on the prevalence of mental disorders like depression and anxiety in the West, and also on how many non-Western immigrants refuse to label their own issues as such for fear of seeming too "white." In England, as in America, there are differences and tensions between black English and black Africans.

CHAPTER 25

Obinze remembers his friend Emenike back in school. He was always very clever and ambitious, and pretended to be richer than he was. He told everyone that his father was local royalty, but one day his actual father appeared as a poor old man, and everyone laughed at Emenike. Obinze was drawn to Emenike's boldness, however, and the two became friends. Emenike was always restless and unsatisfied, as if feeling that he had been born below his "true destiny." He had left for England during a strike their second year of university. Now he was married to an Englishwoman and had a good job.

Emenike was trying to create his own identity even as a teenager, to make himself seem richer and more cultured than he actually was. Now that he has moved to England and found success there, he is able to entirely cast off his past self and become a new man. We will see the extent of his transformation later, but for now he is an example of an African immigrant finding great success in England.

When Obinze first comes to England he calls Emenike right away. Emenike seems pleased to hear from him, but says that he is going to be traveling for a while. Obinze has heard stories of friends and relatives who turn unfriendly "in the harsh glare of life abroad," but he assumes it won't happen to him. Obinze calls another old friend, Nosa, who meets him.

Emenike was laughed at in school, and even though Obinze was friendly to him, Emenike now seems to take pleasure in lording his success over his own past—which includes Obinze.

Nosa works in the subway. He seems resentful when he talks about Emenike, who is so "posh" now and "doesn't talk to ordinary people anymore." Nosa asks about Obinze's cousin Iloba. Obinze had forgotten that this cousin (who isn't actually related to him) lived in England now. He gets his number from Nicholas and calls him. Iloba is excited to hear from Obinze, and he seems as good-natured and oblivious as ever. Iloba offers to help Obinze find work. He says he is working a security job and studying management at the same time.

Nosa confirms that Emenike has indeed become one of those friends who becomes unfriendly "in the harsh glare of life abroad." Iloba was also a somewhat laughable figure in Obinze's youth, but unlike Emenike Iloba remains good-natured and carries no grudges. He too is working hard to get by, but has at least found some success in England.

Two weeks later Iloba finds a Nigerian man willing to lend Obinze his National Insurance card for a fee. Obinze goes to Iloba's apartment, and his cousin's small gestures of hospitality make Obinze feel homesick. The man giving Obinze his identity is named Vincent Obi. He seems scornful of Obinze, and affects a strong British accent when he speaks. He insists on taking thirty-five percent of Obinze's earnings, but they make a deal and Obinze "becomes" Vincent Obi.

Here Adichie makes the theme of identity most explicit, as Obinze is forced to "become" someone else just to find work. Vincent Obi is another person (like Emenike) who was of a lower class than Obinze back in Nigeria, but here in England Vincent Obi has all the power because he is a legal citizen, and so he rubs it in Obinze's face.

CHAPTER 26

The narrative picks up after Obinze quits his first job as a toilet cleaner. He next finds a job cleaning a detergent-packing warehouse, but then is fired because of downsizing. He then works helping build kitchens, working with white people who call him "laborer." Once he trips and falls on his knee, and one of his co-workers says "His knee is bad because he's a knee-grow!" and everyone else laughs.

This scene is a good example of the casual and socially-ingrained racism that Obinze discovers in England, just as Ifemelu discovers it in America. Obinze already feels invisible as an illegal immigrant working under someone else's identity, and even moreso when he is so expendable as a worker.

Obinze is then transferred to work at a new warehouse. His new boss, Roy Snell, is friendly and welcoming to him, immediately calling him "Vinny Boy." Obinze starts working with Nigel, the youngest driver. Obinze is amused by the men at this new warehouse, how they boast and talk about women, cars, and soccer. Roy seems protective of Obinze, and finds extra shifts for him.

Obinze experiences racist and dehumanizing work, but then he finds a boss and coworkers who respect him as a real person and try to help him. When he is treated as an equal and friend, Obinze gets to experience more of English culture without always being afraid.

One day Roy suggests that Obinze should find a girl for a "shag," but Obinze says that he has a girlfriend back home who has "magical powers." Roy thinks this is hilarious, and says he would like to visit Nigeria with Obinze sometime. Nigel offers to show Obinze the London sights, and so after their deliveries they drive around and see the landmarks, with Nigel talking about his girlfriend.

Obinze hasn't spoken to Ifemelu in five years, but he clearly still has deep feelings for her if he can so quickly invoke her presence when trying to come up with a diverting lie. Now that he has a real English friend, Obinze gets to really experience more of England.

One day Nigel asks Obinze for advice about talking to a girl. Nigel admits that his girlfriend isn't really his girlfriend, but he wants to ask her out. He says Obinze looks like he knows "what to say to the birds." Obinze gives simple advice, and Nigel seems disappointed. Nigel always splits his tip with Obinze, which the other drivers don't do. Once Obinze is working with a different driver, and an old Jamaican woman slips Obinze a secret tip, saying "thank you brother."

Nigel not only treats Obinze as an equal, but also respects him as the kind of man Nigel might aspire to be. Nigel's friendship with Obinze is an example of real human connection across racial and cultural lines. There are often differences, but there is still often a sense of kinship between black immigrants to England.

CHAPTER 27

Once a week Obinze allows himself to go into a coffee shop to read, so he can feel like he is really Obinze again. He continues to read American fiction and news. The British news is all about immigration, and it makes Obinze frightened. A young Sri Lankan or Bangladeshi woman and her little boy come into the coffee shop and share Obinze's table. The woman talks to Obinze. He says that he lives in London, but thinks of how that doesn't truly describe his invisible, frightened existence.

Obinze has to live as someone else as he works, and must answer to the name "Vincent," so he must indulge in small pleasures like reading just to feel like he is still Obinze. We get more details about the feelings of invisibility and worthlessness that come with being an illegal immigrant in a country terrified of foreigners.

The woman mentions her husband, who died last year, and she looks longingly at Obinze, obviously attracted to him but still in mourning. The woman leaves with her boy, looking wistful, and Obinze thinks of love, and then he thinks of Ifemelu. Suddenly Obinze feels horny, and he texts a woman he has had sex with before.

Any thought of romance or love immediately reminds Obinze of Ifemelu. He has been romantically involved with other women, but no one has replaced the pure connection he felt with Ifemelu.

Obinze gets on the train and sits across from a woman reading the newspaper. There are many articles about immigrants. The British seem suddenly afraid of foreign people seeking asylum there. Obinze thinks of how they are denying their own history of colonialism with this—it seems only natural that the people once ruled by Britain should eventually come to Britain—but it must be comforting. Obinze thinks of Ifemelu and his mother, and the life he thought he would have had by now, and he feels incredibly lonely.

This is Adichie's own critique of the immigration situation in England. The British Empire (among other colonial European powers) divided and ruled much of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and even after these areas won their independence, they were still deeply scarred by their colonial past. And so poor or unsatisfied citizens of such countries eventually make their way back to England, who started it all and benefited from the colonies' oppression.

CHAPTER 28

One day Obinze comes to work and can tell that something is different. Everyone acts awkwardly towards him, and he is sure that they have found out he is an illegal immigrant. He is about to run away when Nigel appears with a birthday cake for him, and they all have a celebration. Obinze is intensely relieved, and he suddenly weeps with joy and feels safe. He hadn't remembered his own fake birthday, but his coworkers had.

Obinze must live with such a constant sense of fear and unworthiness that he never even considers that a surprise might be a good thing for him. With his coworkers he has found a real sense of connection and belonging, even in a country where everything seems to be working against him.

That evening Vincent calls Obinze and says that he wants a raise; he wants forty-five percent of Obinze's earnings now. Obinze decides to ignore him, assuming that Vincent is just bluffing. But a week later Roy calls Obinze into his office and says that someone called him and told him he was using a fake identity. Roy tells him to just bring his passport tomorrow and "clear it up." Obinze works the rest of the day, trying to control his rage at Vincent, but grateful to Roy for not turning him in. Obinze doesn't return to work after that day, but he wishes he had told Roy and Nigel his real name. Years later, when Obinze was rich and wanted a white "General Manager," he had called Nigel, told him his real name, and offered him a job in Nigeria.

Obinze has no real bargaining power against Vincent, except for his consistent paycheck, and so Vincent abuses his power and turns Obinze in. Just when Obinze had found a sense of community and belonging, he has that snatched away from him by greed and the unfair, convoluted immigration system. Unlike Emenike, when Obinze becomes rich and successful he remembers his old friends who helped him when he was poor.

CHAPTER 29

The Angolans keep raising the price for Obinze to get the green card marriage, and they have Cleotilde's passport as well so neither can escape the deal. Obinze doesn't have any more money, so he has to ask Emenike for help. Emenike agrees to meet at a restaurant. He is dressed in cashmere and immediately starts complaining jokingly about his white wife, but in a way that shows he still thinks her to be "inherently superior" to him. Emenike says they just came back from a trip to America, and that Obinze should visit there sometime.

Just as Obinze was helpless to oppose Vincent's new demands, so Obinze and Cleotilde can do nothing but meet the Angolans' new price. Emenike has "made it" in England, but he still manages to idealize the West and whiteness, even after marrying a white Englishwoman. His comment about America is especially cruel considering Obinze's old dreams.

Obinze wishes that Emenike would just give him the money, but Emenike rambles on, telling stories of different adversities he has overcome. Emenike says he misses Nigeria, but his wife wouldn't survive a visit there. He seems to have made Nigeria into "the jungle" and himself the "interpreter of the jungle." Finally Emenike gives Obinze the money, which is twice what he had asked for. He asks Obinze to count it, which is very rude in the usual Nigerian way of exchanging money.

Emenike appears as an extreme example of reinvented identity. He has willingly taken on a Western worldview and now portrays Nigeria as foreign and uncivilized. He has purposefully forgotten Nigerian etiquette and rubs his newfound wealth in Obinze's face, creating a deep sense of disconnection between the former friends.

Obinze slowly counts the money, feeling humiliated, and he wonders if Emenike hated him all those years at school. Obinze hadn't made fun of him like the other kids, but he hadn't defended him either. Emenike takes a call from his wife, Georgina, and says that she wants to meet them for dinner. Georgina arrives and Obinze is surprised at how confident and forceful she seems, unlike the "hapless English rose" Emenike had described.

Georgina as a strong and capable woman doesn't fit into Emenike's narrative of her as an idealized, white "English rose," and so even though he seems to truly love her, Emenike doesn't describe Georgina as she is when he is boasting about his success to Obinze.

Obinze watches Emenike and Georgina interact and realizes the way in which Emenike is different now: he is self-satisfied. He has a British wife, a British passport, and a British job, and has finally achieved the life he always longed for. He and Georgina take Obinze to a fancy restaurant, where Emenike does most of the talking, telling exaggerated stories about their school days. Georgina invites Obinze to a party they're having the next night.

Emenike has changed his identity through his outward situation, but his personality has also been changed by those outside forces. In Nigeria he was always insecure but ambitious, and in England he is now self-satisfied and complacent. He still has his old tendency to present exaggeration as truth.

Obinze arrives at their large home the next day and Emenike invites him into his study. Obinze looks around at all the photos of Emenike in famous places, thinking of how Emenike visited those places not because he wanted to but just so he could take these photos. Obinze and Emenike discuss literature briefly, and then Emenike starts talking about antique furniture, which is a totally alien concept in Nigeria.

Emenike has built up his whole life in opposition to his past, creating exactly the identity he always wanted. The problem is that living this way offers no real joy, but only self-satisfaction. The concept of antiques implies the luxury of being bored with new things, and so idealizing the old.

The guests arrive and Emenike introduces them to Obinze. One of them is a flamboyantly gay man, and Obinze thinks of how once in school Emenike had lured a boy suspected of being gay into the bathroom and helped beat him up. The guests compliment the mismatched plates, and Emenike says they got them in India, "handmade by rural women." Obinze wonders whether Emenike really thinks such plates are beautiful now, or if he has just learned to pretend.

Emenike is now acting like someone like Kimberly—idealizing the foreign poor, making himself feel sad and charitable now that he has the luxury of happiness and bounty. Emenike's new self is a positive change in that he is at least less homophobic now.

Emenike discusses his recent trip to America, and in doing so says "us Brits," confirming to Obinze that he considers himself only British now. The other guests talk about America, particularly the nationalism of its citizens. One remarks that American progressives like to criticize their country, but don't like it when foreigners do.

Emenike's guests make a similar observation to that expressed by Adichie earlier, regarding liberal Americans. Emenike has remade himself to the degree that he no longer considers himself a Nigerian—he is an Englishman now.

One guest, Alexa, says she is working with a charity trying to keep African doctors in Africa, as they have a "responsibility" to help their people. Another guest argues that English doctors should then have a responsibility to work in the poor towns of northern England, not in London where they get paid more. There is an awkward silence and then dinner is served. The conversation turns to immigration, which makes Obinze tense up.

The guests were criticizing liberal Americans, but they fall into a similar trap. Alexa assumes that the situation in Africa is entirely different from that in England, and never even considers that she might be giving hypocritical advice. The guest who rebukes her delivers Adichie's biting response to a condescending and racist sentiment.

The guests discuss the differences between immigration in America and in England, and seem to conclude that America is more racist. They then ask Emenike about racism in England, with Alexa implying that the English aren't racist, only prejudiced like all people are prejudiced. Emenike then tells a story of being explicitly denied a cab, but he tells it like an amusing anecdote. Earlier he had told the same story to Obinze, but explained how he was shaking with rage at the time.

Alexa again plays the part of the hypocritical progressive, seeing racism elsewhere but disconnected from the reality of it in her own country. As with Curt telling his friends the story of Ifemelu and the carpet cleaner, Emenike's experience with obvious racism is reduced to an amusing anecdote instead of a dehumanizing experience.

Alexa says that England needs to remain open to refugees from wars in other countries, and she asks Obinze for his opinion. He agrees, but feels a shiver of alienation. He realizes that all the guests would understand immigrants fleeing from war or starvation, but not immigrants like him, who are "merely hungry for choice and certainty," raised to always consider other countries as superior.

Adichie makes a very important point here—that immigration isn't always about escaping physical violence or starvation, but it can also be about longing for more choices, for a better place that has been idealized as superior to your own country. The novel's immigrants are all relatively well-off in Nigeria, but feel that their potential will be wasted if they stay.

CHAPTER 30

On the day of his green card wedding Obinze borrows a suit from Nicholas, and Cleotilde wears a dress Obinze bought her. Obinze is nervous but excited for the freedom the marriage will bring. Iloba takes pictures of the couple, and when it is their scheduled time, they go to the civic center. When they walk inside two policemen confront Obinze. They ask him for his name, and Obinze recognizes that it is all over. They say that he is "not allowed to be present in the UK."

The marriage is basically a business transaction, but there is a romantic element as well, because of Obinze and Cleotilde's mutual attraction. Obinze is also excited to finally become a legal citizen, and to be able to live and work under his own name. It is never said what went wrong, whether the Angolans betrayed Obinze or it was just bad luck.

The policemen put Obinze in handcuffs and Cleotilde throws herself on the ground, crying, as he is taken away. The policemen ignore her, however, as she is a legal citizen. Obinze is taken to a cell. A lawyer visits him and looks relieved when Obinze says he is willing to return to Nigeria. He is desperate to retain a little dignity. He watches the lawyer check off a box saying that his client is willing to be "removed." The word makes Obinze feel like a thing, not a person.

Just as he was about to regain his full personhood as a citizen of England, Obinze is arrested and dehumanized yet again. He doesn't struggle to remain in England, as the process has broken his spirit and ambition. He feels like a thing now, something which has been found wanting and must be returned.

Obinze is led in handcuffs to the airport and put in a cell there with three other Nigerian men. They all talk familiarly with each other, some of them comparing their experiences of being deported other times before. They all plan on coming back and trying again. Obinze avoids talking to them, but is jealous of their confident plans.

These other men might be fleeing more desperate circumstances in Nigeria, and so they don't feel as distraught and dehumanized by being deported as Obinze does.

As he waits in the detention cell Obinze thinks of Ifemelu and considers contacting her. Iloba visits him and sometimes talks about lawyers, but sometimes just laments how close Obinze was to achieving his goal. On his last visit Iloba starts crying. Nicholas and Ojiugo visit him as well, but they treat him as if he is in a hospital and not about to be deported.

Obinze's friends react to his deportation in different ways, just as Obinze reacts differently from the other Nigerian men being deported alongside him. In any time of strong emotion Obinze thinks of Ifemelu.

Obinze is taken to a different cell in Dover. Finally a flight to Lagos is found for him, and he is marched through the airport in handcuffs along with five other men and two women. They are seated at the back of the plane. When they land, an immigration officer fetches them, and immediately asks for a bribe. Obinze steps outside and feels light-headed and sad. His mother is waiting for him outside the airport.

The whole experience is like a bad dream, and Obinze wakes up to find himself right back where he started. For someone as intelligent and ambitious as Obinze, his failure in England is a crushing disappointment. He returns to Nigeria and immediately to a different kind of corruption from England.

CHAPTER 31

The narrative returns to Ifemelu, who almost purposefully sabotages her relationship with Curt by cheating on him with a man from her apartment. She realizes that she never was able to truly "believe herself" while with Curt, and didn't feel everything she wanted to feel. She has sex with the man, a white man who purposefully dresses shabby, and then tells Curt. He can't believe it, and then he tells Ifemelu she gave the stranger "what he wanted." Ifemelu corrects him to say that she took what she wanted. Curt breaks up with her and calls her "bitch," and Ifemelu is hurt to know that she has made him the kind of man who would say that.

Ifemelu's restless side takes over and destroys the satisfaction and complacency she finds with Curt. We have already seen this rebellious, slightly self-destructive side of her, and here it manifests itself through cheating and ruining her relationship with Curt. Ifemelu is then hurt by what she has done, and angry at herself. She assures Curt that the act was her decision—she was the one with the power, "taking" something, not the other man.

Ifemelu goes back to her apartment and cries on the floor. She wonders why she destroyed the relationship when it had been so good to her. She spends weeks calling Curt and waiting outside his building, but finally accepts reality. Ifemelu goes to a bar. She feels like there is something wrong with her, like she is always restless and incomplete within herself.

This restlessness in Ifemelu's heart leads her to do self-destructive things like this, but it also inspires her intellectual curiosity, incisive cultural criticism, and her constant search for pure, true human connection and romantic love.

The novel then jumps to a scene at a party years later, when Ifemelu argues with a Haitian woman who says she had dated a white man for three years and "race was never an issue for them." The woman is shocked that Ifemelu would try to explain her own experience to her, but Ifemelu says that the woman is just in denial, or trying to make others feel comfortable. She says that in Nigeria race was not an issue, but she "became black" when she came to America. Race might not be an issue when you and your white romantic partner are alone, but whenever you are in public it is always an issue.

Now that Ifemelu's relationship with Curt is over, she can step back (years later) and examine the social dynamic of it apart from her own emotion. This is one of Adichie's important points of the book: that romantic love can provide true human connection across racial or cultural divides, but that there are also outside forces of racism and society trying to maintain the status quo.

Ifemelu is slightly drunk, and would later apologize to the woman and the party's host. She goes on to talk about Curt. She and Curt never avoided the issue of race, but though he was very sensitive and understanding about many things there were many things he seemed unable to grasp. She was often amused by the constant looks of surprise from people when they saw that she was Curt's girlfriend, but eventually it started wearing her down.

No matter how close they were romantically, there were still many issues dividing Ifemelu and Curt, even if it was only misunderstanding or ignorance. As Curt's girlfriend, Ifemelu enjoyed some of his privilege, but she also had to constantly watch people being surprised by their relationship.

Curt would sometimes be insightful, like correcting his mother when she claimed that America is now "color-blind," but sometimes he wouldn't understand, as when he defended his aunt for talking about nothing but the black people she liked when Ifemelu came to visit. Once they walked into a nice restaurant together and the host asked Curt "table for one?" Curt assured her that the host didn't "mean it like that."

In this speech Ifemelu is able to quickly relate many racist situations and microaggressions that she experienced during her time with Curt. He was usually understanding, but sometimes not—and these divides affected their romantic relationship.

Ifemelu eventually accepted that there were just some things Curt couldn't see. Once he flipped through one of her magazines and said that it was "racially skewed." Ifemelu then took him to a bookstore and made him flip through many women's magazines, all of them with white or light-skinned women on the covers. Even the makeup and **hair** advice inside had nothing to offer for black women. Curt apologized, but that night Ifemelu had emailed Wambui, going deeper into the same subject. Wambui suggested she should write a blog.

This scene allows Adichie to offer more criticism of prejudice in American culture, and also to reintroduce black women's hair as an important symbol. The observant, intellectually curious Ifemelu finds herself intrigued by this cultural and racial criticism applied to daily life, and it ultimately leads to her successful blog.

Ifemelu considered the idea, and wondered how many other non-American black women chose to be silent about their experiences. It was a few weeks after that that Ifemelu broke up with Curt, and then started her blog. At the party Ifemelu finishes her story, but ends with words from her first blog post: that the solution to the problem of race in America is not friendship or tolerance but romantic love. The problem is that there are many obstacles to romantic love between black people and white people in America, and so the racial issue will never be truly solved.

This is the most explicit explanation of Adichie's theme of romantic love: that it can provide pure, genuine human connection across racial or cultural divides, but society and a history of racial inequality have set up many obstacles that make such love difficult to find. Ifemelu wonders if other women like her might benefit from an online community like she found regarding her hair.

The chapter ends with a different post from Ifemelu's blog. She talks about how she and a white friend are both "Michelle Obama groupies." But the white friend doesn't understand that Michelle Obama's **hair** doesn't naturally look that way. Ifemelu then says that black women's hair is a "perfect metaphor for race in America." Black women are always supposed to do something to their hair, because to leave it natural is unprofessional or unsophisticated. She says she would like to see at least once what Beyoncé or Michelle Obama looked like with their hair left untouched. Ifemelu ends with her own regimen for taking care of her hair.

Adichie now comes out and explains the meaning of her symbol of black women's hair—it isn't just a literary symbol in the novel, but also an encapsulation of American racism in real life. Barack Obama and Michelle Obama start to emerge as important figures for Ifemelu. Ifemelu's blog is not only about cultural criticism and humor, it is also another inclusive community for black women choosing their natural hair.

CHAPTER 32

After breaking up with Curt, Ifemelu feels aimless for a while. She visits Aunty Uju on weekends. Uju has met a new man, a divorced Ghanaian doctor, and she seems happy. She tells Ifemelu to do whatever she can to save her relationship with Curt, warning her that she will never find another man like him. Dike seems to see that Ifemelu isn't doing well, and he brings food to her room and tells her about school. He seems happier in Willow and his smile looks "unguarded" again. Ifemelu likes Kweku, Uju's new boyfriend, because Kweku likes Dike.

Aunty Uju saw Ifemelu's relationship with Curt as the epitome of her success in America, and so she advises Ifemelu to do anything she can to win him back. Dike and Ifemelu still share a close connection, and Dike can relate to Ifemelu's depression because he has experienced it himself. Aunty Uju finally seems to find a healthier, more rewarding romantic relationship.

Ifemelu talks to her parents on the phone and they notice that she sounds different, but she still doesn't tell them about Curt. Ifemelu's father gets some leave from his work, and so he and her mother get American visas to visit Ifemelu. Ifemelu has wanted them to visit for a long time, but she is still depressed and the thought exhausts her.

When Ifemelu's parents re-enter her daily life we see just how much she has changed in America. She is also dealing with depression again at this point (an "American" issue) and so can relate to them even less.

Ifemelu's parents come for three weeks, but they seem like strangers to her. When they arrive they seem somehow small and provincial, in awe of everything about America. Ifemelu feels guilty because she can't help sneering at them, even after she had guarded her memories of them so carefully. Before she leaves, Ifemelu's mother reminds Ifemelu that women are "like flowers," and so she needs to find a man before her "time passes."

Another example among the many sad separations in the novel—how disconnected Ifemelu feels from her parents now. She had idealized her home and treasured her memories of her parents, but when they arrive in the flesh they seem disappointing. Ifemelu has grown and changed a lot, but her parents are still the same.

The day her parents leave Ifemelu collapses on her bed and cries, relieved that they are gone and guilty about feeling relieved. She still feels apathetic and depressed for a while, though she is now writing her blog. She resigns from her job on a whim. The chapter ends with a short blog post. Some "studies" say that race is a social invention, and there are no genetic differences between the races, while other studies say that black people are more likely to get certain diseases and white people more likely to get others. Ifemelu asks "is race an invention or not?"

The major crises Ifemelu experiences at this time—breaking up with Curt, feeling disconnected from her parents, and quitting her job—ultimately lead her to a stronger sense of self and independence, as she starts her blog, where she can write with her own voice about the things that interest and relate to her.

CHAPTER 33

Ifemelu's blog starts to get very popular suddenly, and she is overwhelmed. She sets up a link for donations, and gets a huge contribution from one anonymous donor each month. She wonders if it's from Curt, and wonders what he thinks of being called "The Hot White Ex" in the blog. Ifemelu then gets offers from advertisers, and she starts getting invited to speak at schools and conferences.

Ifemelu had wondered if other women like her felt alone and silenced, and it turns out she was right, as she suddenly finds a large community of readers for her blog. She discusses serious issues but also humorous ones, and uses a comic, casual tone in her writing.

Ifemelu and her blog keep getting more famous, and she decides to give her first "diversity talk" at a small company in Ohio. All her listeners are white. She gives a carefully prepared speech about racism, and at the end everyone seems shocked. Later she gets an angry email calling her a racist and saying "you should be grateful we let you into this country." Ifemelu then realizes that the point of these "diversity workshops" isn't to effect real change, but to make people feel good about themselves.

She is writing about racial issues, but Ifemelu learns an important lesson here, which allows Adichie to deliver a searing point: many white people want to talk about diversity and equality, but they don't like to feel any personal guilt or pressure to change. This is similar to the observation of Americans who criticize America but don't like foreigners to do so.

After that, Ifemelu always gives the kinds of talk expected of her, while in her blog she remains blunt and critical, saying things like "Racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it." She hires a student intern to do research and moderate the comments. Ifemelu buys a condominium, and is surprised and frightened to find that she is now a real "homeowner." Soon Ifemelu feels "subsumed by her blog," obsessed with her readers' opinions and judgments. The chapter ends with a short post inviting all the "Zipped-Up Negroes" to open up and share whatever they want.

Ifemelu remains blunt and unrelenting in her blog, but she recognizes that she has to give the kinds of talks expected of her or she won't get more invitations. She sees that the audience for her blog is receptive to the harsh reality and real calls for change, while the audience for her talks just wants to feel satisfied with themselves. Ifemelu's blog suddenly becomes a huge part of her identity, and allows her to thrive in America apart from anyone else's help.

CHAPTER 34

One day Ifemelu is giving a talk at a "Blogging While Brown" convention in Washington, D.C., when she sees Blaine in the crowd. After her talk he pretends not to recognize her, but then brings up something from their old conversation, and Ifemelu suddenly feels like her life has become a romantic film "in which people found each other again." Eight years have passed since their first meeting, and Blaine now writes his own blog about academia and pop culture. Blaine says that he was in a relationship at the time, which was why he didn't answer Ifemelu's calls.

Blaine now becomes the third major romantic relationship of Ifemelu's life, after Obinze and Curt. Blaine and Ifemelu share many interests, and both are obviously very intelligent, but Blaine has taken a more academic route with his life. They also have very different life experiences, notably in that Blaine is African-American, while Ifemelu is American-African. These divides will later come between them.

After that Ifemelu and Blaine talk and flirt via phone, email, and blog comment, he still living in New Haven and she in Baltimore. Finally he comes to visit her, and she cooks coconut rice for him. They sleep together that night, everything playing out as expected. After that it is as if the years never happened between their first train encounter and now. Blaine and Ifemelu feel immediately intimate with each other. Blaine still teaches at Yale, and cooks organic foods and grains like quinoa. Blaine seems to know about everything, which both attracts and slightly repels Ifemelu.

Ifemelu and Blaine clearly share a strong connection, as they are able to resume their flirtation (which lasted only a day originally) even after years in between. Blaine is idealistic and principled about every aspect of his life, even what he eats.

Ifemelu especially notices Blaine's discipline and moral character, and she imagines him as a perfect father. Ifemelu starts being more "good" just from being around him: flossing every day, eating better, and exercising. Blaine's best friend is a woman named Araminta, and Ifemelu gets along well with her. Araminta gently mocks the inscrutable academic jargon of Blaine and his friends, and mentions his sister Shan.

This section of the book now delves into the details of Ifemelu's new relationship with Blaine. With Curt, Ifemelu found herself adopting his spontaneity and luxurious lifestyle, and with Blaine she starts picking up his strict principles and self-discipline.

Ifemelu moves in with Blaine after a year. Soon she realizes she is writing her blog with his academic criticism in mind, and she feels annoyed that her posts seem less spontaneous and personal. Sometimes Ifemelu feels like "his apprentice," as he tries to teach her to appreciate abstract art or John Coltrane, and finds offence or injustice in certain situations that Ifemelu can't understand.

Blaine measures all his words carefully and uses more academic jargon, and Ifemelu is irritated to find that she picks some of this up and loses her writing's spontaneity. Ifemelu, as a foreigner, can't recognize everything that might seem racist to an African-American.

One time an older white woman asks to touch Ifemelu's **hair**, and she lets her. She doesn't see a problem with it, but it clearly upsets Blaine. Ifemelu sometimes feels out of place with his friends, who are all righteous about different causes and speak in references she doesn't understand.

This is one example of something that is a typical racially insensitive act in America, but might not be anywhere else, so Ifemelu doesn't understand what's so offensive about it.

When she moves to New Haven Ifemelu tells her parents about Blaine. Her father is confused as to why she would choose an African-American over a Nigerian. Her mother immediately starts talking about marriage, but Ifemelu tells her they are taking it slow. The chapter ends with another blog post, this one discussing how white people will admit that racism still exists in America, but no one wants to actually be a "racist." Ifemelu proposes a new term that would better show how otherwise good people can be racist: something like "Racial Disorder Syndrome."

This is another important aspect of the book: not demonizing "racists" as some separate class of monsters, but acknowledging the racial prejudice in many parts society, and how even people with good intentions often perpetuate racism through their actions or lack thereof. Adichie humanizes not only the victims of oppression, but also the oppressors themselves, and this includes pointing out just when they are being oppressive but might not notice it.

CHAPTER 35

Blaine invites Ifemelu to visit his sister Shan, who has recently moved back to New York from France and is about to have a book published. Blaine says that Shan often has all her artist and writer friends get together for a "salon" at her place. When Ifemelu first meets Shan she is overwhelmed by Shan's presence, and Blaine suddenly seems like a little brother trying to win her approval. When they first meet, Shan ignores Ifemelu and immediately starts complaining about her publisher. Finally Shan introduces herself to Ifemelu. Shan seems like someone strangely "chosen" to be special, and Ifemelu is intrigued by her.

Shan becomes an interesting and slightly antagonistic character when she suddenly enters Ifemelu's life. Shan is brilliant and magnetic, but also self-absorbed and sometimes manipulative. Her character also helps explain more about Blaine himself, particularly his constant striving after perfection—he has been trying to impress his sister all his life.

Shan brings Ifemelu and Blaine into her apartment, and she stretches confidently as she talks to them. Shan compliments Ifemelu's blog, and says she has a friend who was sure that the writer of *Raceteenth* couldn't be African, because "Africans don't care about race." Ifemelu finds herself stammering in the face of Shan's poise and power. Soon, Ifemelu starts to get irritated with Blaine for agreeing so eagerly with Shan, even when Shan disagrees with or dismisses Ifemelu's words.

Blaine naturally takes on the role of educator or expert with most people, but with Shan he is suddenly eager to agree and please. Shan also writes about race, but she emphasizes her identity and experience as an African-American, casting Ifemelu as an outsider who doesn't experience the same kind of history of oppression.

The chapter ends with a blog post about Barack Obama. Ifemelu says that he will only be able to win the election if he remains the "Magic Negro": an archetypal character of a black man who never complains about his suffering, who always forgives, who is wise, and who teaches white people through his peaceful acceptance. Ifemelu fears that Obama might not be this "Magic Negro" because of his pastor, who spoke harshly about the realities of race in America, the realities that white people don't like hearing about.

Obama's presidential candidacy becomes a beacon of hope for Ifemelu and Blaine, and it seems to promise greater racial equality in America's future. Ifemelu remains practical, however, and here acknowledges that part of Obama's appeal to whites is the fact that he seems more like a character or archetype than a real person, and that he doesn't ever accuse anyone of racism.

CHAPTER 36

Ifemelu attends a surprise birthday party for Blaine's friend Marcia. The guests at the party talk about Barack Obama's announcement that he is running for president. Ifemelu has started feeling more uncomfortable around Blaine's academic friends, as they seem to live only within their specialized fields and not be curious about other knowledge. Ifemelu has met Blaine's ex by now, a white professor named Paula who seems to fit more comfortably than Ifemelu herself does in his world of academia.

Just as in her relationship with Curt, Ifemelu starts to find cultural divides and misunderstandings between herself and Blaine. They are both black, but they are also from different continents and move in totally different circles of friends. Ifemelu once again feels like an outsider, disconnected from Blaine's academic friends.

Paula is at the party as well, and she acts excessively friendly towards Ifemelu. Paula compliments her blog and then reads out loud a post from it called "Friendly Tips for the American Non-Black: How to React to an American Black Talking About Blackness." The post is telling white people to stop bringing up their own suffering or their ancestors who might have been discriminated against, because everyone has suffered, but not everyone has suffered for the particular reason of being black. Ifemelu says that black people don't want everything to be about racism, as this doesn't actually help them in any way—so if they say something is a racial issue, then it probably is.

We get another blog post in its entirety, but here it is part of the action of the novel itself. This is yet another important point Adichie makes: that everyone has experienced some kind of discrimination or suffering, but only black people have experienced the particular kind of discrimination that comes with being black in America. So when talking about racism, white people should stop bringing up their own suffering, and just listen.

Ifemelu's post criticizes many of the things white people say to avoid admitting that racism exists: things like "my ancestors were Irish" or "black people can be racist too." The truth is that racism is different from simple prejudice, because racism has a complex system of power behind it, and white people have that power in America. Paula finishes reading and the guests compliment the post.

Ifemelu points out that when white people try to compare their own suffering to systematic racism, it doesn't offer a meaningful human connection, but instead actually drowns out the voices of black people and alienates them further.

They replay the video of Barack Obama announcing that he is running for president, and different guests have different reactions: some think he has no chance, others that he could do it, and others are simply glad that he makes them feel good. Ifemelu doesn't know much about Obama yet. One guest says that she is ready for a black president, but she doesn't think the country is. Paula criticizes this, saying that there is no "the country" apart from themselves, the voters.

Barack Obama becomes a more major figure in the novel now. Obama was ultimately elected president in 2008, and became the first black president in America's history. His candidacy and the hope it inspires becomes an important part of Ifemelu and Blaine's relationship.

Ifemelu later borrows this sentiment for a blog post about the ridiculousness of asking whether the country is "ready" for a black president. After the party Ifemelu admits to Blaine that she was jealous of Paula. Paula seemed like a true activist and idealist, and Ifemelu realizes how much she and Blaine have in common. She isn't jealous that anything would happen between Blaine and Paula, but only jealous because Paula is "good" in the same way Blaine is.

As a semi-outside observer of American culture, Ifemelu can emphasize how ridiculous it is that the country might not be "ready" for a black president, and even the fact that there hasn't been a potential black president until now. Ifemelu once again feels disconnected from Blaine in that she doesn't share his activist passion.

The chapter ends with another blog post, this one called "Traveling While Black." It discusses how black foreigners are viewed in different countries, and how they are often looked down upon, even in non-white countries. Ifemelu mentions a friend saying that "native blacks are always treated worse than non-native blacks everywhere in the world."

This is more commentary on racial prejudice as it appears around the world—the history of slavery and Western racism have made even some non-white countries automatically prejudiced against blacks.

CHAPTER 37

Dike seems to grow up very fast, and before Ifemelu knows it he is six feet tall, with a white girlfriend and a group of white friends who all seem to admire him and laugh at all his jokes. Ifemelu imagines how successful he will be in college. Ifemelu also goes to Shan's first "salon" and is nervous about it. Shan introduces her to her many interesting friends.

We have had many hints of Dike's struggles with his identity and depression, but at this point he seems to be doing well. He is surrounded by white people, but he adapts well and doesn't outwardly show any feelings of alienation or loneliness.

Shan then starts talking about her book, which is about to be published. Shan says that her editor was always wanting her to change the parts of her book about race to be something more subtle or complex and to "transcend race." Shan asks why she has to transcend race, when race is a large and complex enough issue already, and sometimes there is nothing "deeper" to the issue—it's just about race.

Shan mostly complains about herself, but in this speech Adichie makes several points about her own work. Americanah *tackles race as its central issue without trying to disguise it or make it more palatable—showing that the issue is indeed large and complex enough to deserve a sprawling novel of its own.*

One guest suggests that Shan turn her book into a novel. Shan, who is getting drunker, says that it's impossible to write a novel about race in America. If you're going to write respectable literary fiction about race, she says, "you have to make sure it's so lyrical and subtle that the reader who doesn't read between the lines won't even know it's about race."

This is an explicit commentary on the novel itself. Adichie is taking a risk by not disguising the issue of race with lyrical subtleties. Instead she takes it on directly, and so does what many editors or writers would consider disastrous for a work of literary fiction.

Someone says that America isn't like "this room" (Shan's salon filled with many racially diverse friends), but Blaine says that it potentially could be, if privilege and oppression were properly dismantled. Someone suggests that Ifemelu should blog about this conversation. Shan says that Ifemelu can only get away with writing her blog because she's African, and so an outsider to African-American struggles. Ifemelu hesitantly agrees, disliking Shan for saying that and disliking herself for "bending to Shan's spell." Blaine vaguely defends Ifemelu, but it seems too little and too late.

The members of Shan's "salon" are another example of sincere human connection crossing many races and cultures. The problem is that the world outside is not like the salon, and the divisions between most people are very real and very strong. Shan emphasizes one of these divisions by casting Ifemelu as an outsider to the struggles of being African-American. This will then translate into division between Ifemelu and Blaine.

There is another blog post from Ifemelu about Obama. This is about how many non-black people say that Obama is half-white, not totally black. But Ifemelu says that race is sociology, not biology, and so it only depends on how you look. Obama looks black, and so he is black. If you look white, she says, even if you have a black or Native American ancestor, you can't complain about racism.

Adichie makes another important point about race and prejudice here. When she can't weave it into the plot, her arguments can then be made directly through Ifemelu's blog posts.

CHAPTER 38

Ifemelu becomes friends with a Senegalese professor at Yale named Boubacar. Blaine doesn't like him and seems jealous of him, but Ifemelu feels a connection with him because they are both African and they share many similar experiences. Boubacar tells Ifemelu about a humanities fellowship at Princeton, and says she should apply. Boubacar often invites Ifemelu to visit his class, a seminar on contemporary African issues. She sits in one day and watches his students browse the internet on their laptops as he lectures.

The cultural differences between Blaine and Ifemelu have seemed especially wide lately, so Ifemelu finds comfort in befriending a fellow "American-African" who can better understand many of her experiences. Adichie throws in more critiques of academia and university life.

After the class Blaine texts Ifemelu about Mr. White, the old security guard at the library, whom Blaine had befriended but Ifemelu slightly disliked because of his sexist comments. Another employee had seen Mr. White exchanging money with a black friend and thought it was a drug deal, and so called the police, who arrested him. The university claimed that it was just a mistake, nothing racial at all. Blaine plans to organize a protest in front of the university library.

This is another all-too-common example of systemic racism, which is especially prevalent in the American criminal justice system. Mr. White, unlike most victims of this kind of prejudice, at least has someone like Blaine to speak up angrily on his behalf.

Blaine assumes that Ifemelu is going to his protest, but she decides to go to a lunch with Boubacar and some other professors instead. She feels bad about it when he starts texting her, and she goes back to the apartment and tells him that she took a nap and slept through it. Blaine comes home, very pleased at how the protest went, and happy that Shan made an appearance. The next day he finds out that Ifemelu was at the lunch, however, and he confronts her, horrified that she lied to him.

This is a less extreme example than cheating on Curt, but Ifemelu purposefully skips Blaine's protest almost knowing that it will lead to trouble between them. She is sometimes dissatisfied with Blaine's constant uprightness and moral discipline, and she rebels against this (mostly subconsciously) by telling a harmless but definite lie.

Ifemelu apologizes, but Blaine brings up other issues—how she writes her blog but doesn't really *live* it, and won't protest with him. He says the blog is just a game for her. She can tell that this is because she is African—he sees her as not angry enough because she is not African-American. Ifemelu calls Blaine's friend Araminta for advice. Araminta says that Blaine can be "ridiculously high-minded sometimes," but that he'll get over it. But Blaine doesn't seem to, and so Ifemelu goes to Willow to stay with Aunty Uju.

Blaine now gives voice to some of Shan's implied criticisms of Ifemelu—that she doesn't really know the suffering of an African-American because she is an outsider looking in. Ifemelu doesn't have the family and cultural history of oppression, and so Blaine sees her as not angry enough about racism. The divisions and misunderstandings between them grow.

There is a blog post about what white privilege means, even if you're poor and white. You might not be "privileged" in a monetary sense, but if you and a black person were both arrested for drugs, you would be less likely to be sent to jail. There are different kinds of privilege, but race privilege is an undeniable one. Ifemelu links to some questions from Peggy McIntosh (an anti-racism activist) about white privilege. They ask things like "Do you worry that your children will not have books and school materials that are about people of their own race?" or "If a traffic cop pulls you over, do you wonder if it is because of your race?"

Here Adichie even quotes an outside source verbatim, directly confronting white readers and making them acknowledge their own privilege. One point she makes about privilege is that you usually don't notice it when you have it—you notice it when you lack it. Thus Peggy McIntosh's questions highlight aspects of life that white people may have never considered, and shows how even there society favors them over other races.

CHAPTER 39

Ifemelu stays with Aunty Uju, who does yoga now. Ifemelu, however, takes a perverse pleasure in buying unhealthy, inorganic chocolate bars now that she is fighting with Blaine. Uju complains about how Dike's school immediately blamed Dike for hacking into its computers, when Dike isn't even good with computers and was with her the day the hacking took place. Dike just says "you have to blame the black kid first," and laughs. He tells other stories of small racist incidents, but always remarks how funny they are.

Once again Dike shows how alone and alienated he often feels as one of the only black students at his school, and also as an African growing up in America, but he is forced to laugh at himself along with his white peers, because there is no one else to stand up for him. Ifemelu briefly enjoys giving up the healthy habits she picked up from Blaine.

After nine days, Blaine finally answers Ifemelu's calls. She suggests coming over and making coconut rice. They cook together in awkward silence, and Blaine steps away when she hugs him. This chapter's blog post is about certain euphemisms regarding race in America, like "diversity," "urban," and "racially charged," all of which generally mean different things for black people and for white people.

Ifemelu and Blaine reconnect and don't break up, but something between them has been severed by this fight. This blog post relates to Ifemelu's experience speaking at "diversity conferences," where "diversity" is often a word used to make white people feel better about themselves.

CHAPTER 40

Blaine ultimately forgives Ifemelu, but their relationship is different after that. Ifemelu still loves Blaine, but now sees him as "a person far away" from herself, and there is no more passion in their romance. They do find themselves bonding over a new passion, however: Barack Obama.

Ifemelu can now even visualize the separation between herself and Blaine, although they are still technically together. Instead of focusing on each other, they now find common ground in Obama's candidacy.

Ifemelu was skeptical about Obama at first, but then she read Obama's book, *Dreams from My Father*, which Blaine had read and left on the bookshelf. When Blaine came home the next day, she said, "If only the man who wrote this book could be the next president of America." They realized then that they shared a new hope and passion.

Blaine and Ifemelu find a new form of connection in their shared passion for an outside cause—the hope for progress and greater racial equality that came with Obama's race for president.

Ifemelu is constantly nervous that Obama will be killed, or that some scandal will emerge about him. She reads online chat rooms about him and cries at the many racist slurs thrown at him. Ifemelu becomes a fan of Michelle Obama too, and comforts herself and Blaine with the fact that if Michelle married Barack, he "can't be that bad."

Ifemelu has lots of experience with internet comments by now, but she becomes personally sensitive about the hateful things said about Obama, as they show all the spiteful racism still lurking in American society.

Ifemelu gets the Princeton fellowship she had applied for. She is to live at Princeton, use their library, and give a talk at the end of the year. Ifemelu is excited about it, but decides not to move to Princeton until she and Blaine have seen Barack Obama through all the way to the election. All of Blaine's friends except for one support Obama, and Ifemelu no longer feels as out of place among them.

The shared passion for Obama also helps Ifemelu feel like less of an outsider among Blaine's academic and activist friends, now that they all have a powerful common interest. Ifemelu reaches a new level of success in America with the fellowship, and becomes a kind of academic herself.

They all discuss how different demographics are assumed to vote for Obama or Hillary Clinton: blacks for Obama and women for Hillary, but no one mentions black women. One friend says that if Obama wins, "he will no longer be black, just as Oprah is no longer black." Blaine says that real progress will have been made when an average black man from the South can be voted president. Everyone agrees, and Ifemelu is again encouraged by how much they all agree about this, and how they are "true believers."

This is similar to Ifemelu's blog post about "blacks and poor whites." "Blacks and women" is another phrase used to lump some groups together and erase others. This conversation also echoes Ifemelu's post about Obama as the "magic negro": somehow a larger-than-life or fictional character instead of just a human who happens to be black.

Blaine and Ifemelu have sex for the first time in weeks on the day that Obama becomes the Democratic Party presidential nominee. They go to hear him speak, and are encouraged by the joy and faith in the crowd. Later they worry when footage appears of Obama's pastor harshly criticizing America for its racism. Obama then gives a speech smoothing everything over and effectively closing any conversation about race while he is running. Blaine is disappointed, but his friends and Ifemelu know that Obama has to do this to have any chance of winning.

Blaine and Ifemelu's romantic relationship is now explicitly linked to Obama's political career, as their shared joy in his success leads them to find new passion for each other. Just as Ifemelu couldn't say anything too blunt or critical in her diversity talks, so Obama can't risk alienating his white voters by talking too much about racism and making them feel bad about themselves.

Blaine says that Shan has been having a "nervous breakdown" about her book not getting any attention. When Ifemelu had last seen her, she had tried to bring up Obama, but Shan said she wasn't following the election. She only complained more about her book and a writers' festival she had spoken at.

Shan seems to lose some of her manipulative power in the face of Ifemelu's new passion and connection regarding Obama. Shan remains self-absorbed and distant, and avoids that sense of optimistic community.

On election day, Ifemelu, Blaine, and Blaine's friends are all extremely nervous. They gather together to watch the news. When it becomes clear that Obama is going to win, everyone starts crying. Ifemelu gets a text from Dike saying "I can't believe it. My president is black like me." As Obama appears with his family to accept his victory, Ifemelu suddenly feels that America is a very beautiful place.

Here Adichie offers us an inspirational moment, as Obama's victory means there is the possibility of progress in race relations in America, and more personally it means intimate connections between people based on a shared conviction. Dike gets some affirmation for his self-worth.

The chapter ends with a blog post about "The White Friend Who Gets It." This is a shout-out to the all-too-few white people who can see through the racist euphemisms many white people use, like "playing the race card" or claiming that slavery ended long ago, and so its legacy must be over too.

This blog post is still critical of racism in everyday society, but it mostly focuses on hope and gratitude—reaching out to white friends and allies and adding to the sense of hope and connection built up in this chapter.

CHAPTER 41

Back at the **hair** salon, Aisha complains that her Igbo boyfriend won't show up to talk to Ifemelu. Ifemelu starts feeling frustrated, until Aisha asks her about how she got her green card. Aisha describes her own hard situation in America of trying to send money back home and trying to find a husband to become a citizen. Aisha's father had died last year, but she didn't go home because she wouldn't have the papers to come back. Ifemelu tries to reassure her that things will be okay.

The memories and flashbacks of the book have now caught up with the present hair salon scene, as Adichie already described how Ifemelu broke up with Blaine and decided to move back to Nigeria. Aisha is yet another immigrant facing many hardships and just struggling to get by while separated from her loved ones.

Suddenly Aisha starts to cry, and Ifemelu promises that she will go visit her boyfriend tomorrow and talk to him about marrying Aisha. Aisha thanks Ifemelu and finishes her **hair**. Ifemelu wonders why she has made such a promise, but feels like it is the least she can do. She takes the train back to Princeton and then gets a call from Aunty Uju. Aunty Uju says that Dike tried to kill himself by overdosing on Tylenol. She happened to go into the basement to get meat from the freezer, and found him lying on the couch. Ifemelu says she will come tomorrow. She wonders what she was doing while Dike swallowed the pills.

Ifemelu feels a suddenly empathy and connection with Aisha, and so offers to help her even though she had disliked her moments before. This sudden crisis with Dike divides the action of the novel, as the past reconnects with the present at this horrible moment. We have had many hints of Dike's struggles with identity and depression, but his extreme act is still surprising to both his family and the reader.

CHAPTER 42

Obinze checks his email obsessively, but it takes four days for Ifemelu to respond. Obinze looks up more things about Blaine, and is disappointed to find himself interested by the articles Blaine has written. Ifemelu sends Obinze a short email, and Obinze responds by telling her about his mother's death. His mother had been somehow disappointed by his extravagant new wealth, and the state of academia in Nigeria made her more and more sad, which made Obinze sad as well. She died at home in her bed. Her funeral devolved into a fight about the caterers stealing the meat.

Obinze's narrative is now in the present as well now, as the two protagonists slowly work towards bridging the distance between them. Adichie doesn't give us as many details of Obinze's life after England, but here she explains how the tragic distance between Obinze and his mother never truly disappeared. Obinze's mother could relate to his dreams of America and academia, but not to his new identity as a Nigerian "big man."

Ifemelu writes back an hour later. She says she is crying, and that Obinze's mother was the only adult other than Aunty Uju "who treated me like a person with an opinion that mattered." She says she is going through some pain right now too, and is with Aunty Uju and Dike. She asks Obinze to give her his phone number.

Before this, Ifemelu and Obinze's emails had been relatively short and guarded, but they both let down their defenses and connect over their shared grief for Obinze's mother's death.

The email makes Obinze feel better, and he hopes that Ifemelu has broken up with Blaine. He tries to imagine how America might have changed her. He sends her a short but intimate email, but then immediately regrets it. Many days pass and he realizes she isn't going to respond. Obinze starts sending her more emails, telling her the story of his time in England, and he realizes it is the first time he has really reflected on it.

Obinze is still basically acting like a smitten teenager when it comes to Ifemelu—obsessively checking for messages from her, jealously researching her boyfriends, and hoping that she is single again. Obinze has felt incomplete without Ifemelu, and hasn't had anyone to really discuss England with.

Finally Ifemelu replies, apologizing for her silence. She says that Dike attempted suicide, and she has become depressed again, but is spending lots of time watching movies with Dike. Obinze reads the email and is shocked, as he can only remember Dike as a toddler. Obinze wishes he could go to Ifemelu right now, but realizes how absurd that is.

This discussion of the recent crises in their lives makes the two characters feel suddenly close again. Ifemelu's depression is a recurring problem for her, a medical condition rather than a circumstantial coincidence.

Obinze's wife, Kosi, interrupts his thoughts. She thinks he is distracted by work. They are driving to a school to visit it with Kosi's friends Jonathon and Isioma, to see if it would be a good school for Buchi, Obinze's daughter. Obinze has only met Jonathon and Isioma once. He thought Isioma was interesting, but she constantly downplayed her own intelligence to avoid bruising Jonathon's ego.

In these last sections Adichie moves away from America and England and turns her critical eye back on Nigeria, and no longer through the somewhat naïve lens of Ifemelu's youthful memories. Jonathon is another example of a rich Nigerian man expecting to have his ego flattered.

At the school Obinze, Kosi, Jonathon, and Isioma talk with the headmistress. She declares that many "high-level expatriates" send their children there, and knows how impressive this will sound to most Nigerians. Later they watch the children put on a Christmas play, where there is fake snow on the stage. Isioma asks why they are teaching the children that there has to be snow for it to really be Christmas. Kosi can tell that Obinze is distracted.

There is an obvious distance between Obinze and Kosi, even though their marriage has no visible strife. In the culture of the Nigerian wealthy, the West is always considered superior, and so expatriates are seen as more cultured or prestigious than those who simply stay in Nigeria, and even Christmas pageants are snowy.

At home Obinze reads all the posts from Ifemelu's blog. He is surprised by the slangy American voice in her writing, and cringes when he reads posts about her boyfriends. He reads one about "Professor Hunk" (Blaine) being stopped by the police and searched for drugs. Blaine said he had a high school teacher who told him to focus on getting a sports scholarship, because "black people are physically inclined and white people are intellectually inclined." Blaine had then spent years proving her wrong. Reading Ifemelu's posts makes Obinze sad, as she has experienced so much without him that she sometimes seems unrecognizable.

Obinze feels disconnected from Kosi and still very close to Ifemelu, despite their years of silence, so some of his idealism is disappointed to learn how much Ifemelu has changed in his absence, and how she seems to have a whole and complete identity of her own without him. Adichie focuses less on racism in America for the rest of the novel, but still includes sporadic passages like this blog post about Blaine's personal history with prejudice and alienation.

CHAPTER 43

Ifemelu sleeps on Dike's floor for a few days after she arrives. She can't stop thinking about his suicide attempt, and is always on the verge of tears. Dike acts normally and they don't discuss it. Ifemelu can't sleep at night, thinking about what might have happened if Dike's attempt was successful. Sometimes she blames Aunty Uju for not supporting him and listening to his experience. She points out one time Dike said "we black folk" and Uju told him "you are not black." Then Ifemelu starts crying, and apologizes to Uju and blames herself. She wishes she had paid more attention to what lay behind all of Dike's laughter.

Ifemelu and Aunty Uju both look back now and see all the signs that Dike had been unhappy and confused, despite his outward persona of humor and confidence. Ifemelu's example shows how Uju still hasn't adjusted to the racial politics of America like Ifemelu has, and his mother's willful ignorance has added to Dike's inner turmoil. Ifemelu renews her closeness with her cousin, including physically staying around him all the time.

Weeks pass, and Ifemelu asks Dike what he wants to do for his birthday. He jokingly suggests they go to Miami, but Ifemelu agrees and takes him and they stay at a hotel. They sit by the pool and Ifemelu assures Dike that she loves him. Dike says that Ifemelu should go on to Nigeria like she was planning to. He says he's going to be okay. Ifemelu suggests that he could visit her, and he agrees.

In their mutual pain Dike and Ifemelu still have a close connection, and finally Dike feels comfortable enough to reference his suicide attempt and tell Ifemelu that he is okay now. This section ends Ifemelu's time in America, and she prepares to finally go home.

CHAPTER 44

Ifemelu arrives in Lagos and feels overwhelmed by the noise and bustle. Her old friend Ranyinudo picks her up from the airport, teasing her about being an "Americanah," but not even a real Americanah because she doesn't have an American accent.

Ifemelu had built up a successful life for herself in America, but now she has left it behind and finds herself a kind of "immigrant" again, trying to find her old identity as a Nigerian.

Ranyinudo comes straight from a friend's wedding to pick up Ifemelu, and she talks about how she met a rich man there while waiting outside the church. Ifemelu asks why she had to wait outside, and Ranyinudo laughs and says all the bridesmaids did, because their dresses were too "indecent." Ifemelu can't remember if this kind of thing used to happen in Lagos, but she feels like it didn't.

Ifemelu now feels disconnected from life in Nigeria, and can't tell where it might have changed or if she has been the one changed. Ranyinudo's anecdote brings up the subject of religious hypocrisy again.

Ranyinudo takes Ifemelu to her apartment. The gatemen says "welcome back" to her, as if he somehow knows she has returned. These words, combined with the smells in the air, make Ifemelu feel suddenly nostalgic and melancholy, and when she goes into Ranyinudo's apartment she can't believe that she has really gone through with it and returned to Nigeria.

Ifemelu is in an in-between state now, an "Americanah" who doesn't even fit that stereotype. She feels nostalgic and out of place in Nigeria, but doesn't even have the American accent or new arrogance to go along with the typical expatriate attitude.

They watch TV and Ranyinudo disparages the Nigerian news, which she says can't even tell lies well. Ranyinudo mostly watches American channels. She gossips about their old friends, and who has married rich or has gotten rich through fraud. Ifemelu watches Ranyinudo and wonders if she would resemble her friend if she had never left Nigeria. Ranyinudo has been dating a married executive for two years, but she is always looking for a husband. Ranyinudo has Don (the boyfriend) buy things for her instead of paying for them herself.

Ifemelu had observed American culture with an outsider's eye, and now she is doing the same thing with Nigerian culture, since so many years have passed that it feels foreign to her. Adichie turns her critical eye on the materialistic culture of Lagos, and the unhealthy romantic relationships that are based on money and power instead of love or mutual respect.

There hasn't been power in Ranyinudo's building for a week straight, and everyone has generators for these outages. Ifemelu complains about the humidity and Ranyinudo makes fun of her for being an Americanah. Ifemelu feels guiltily grateful that she has an American passport, and so she always has the choice of leaving again if she wants to.

Ifemelu feels almost like a tourist in her own country, disconnected from the intimate daily life and grateful that she now has the freedom to leave whenever she wants to. The lack of basic resources is still a problem in Nigeria.

CHAPTER 45

Ifemelu finds a job as a features editor for a women's magazine called *Zoe*. Her employer invites her to her home for the interview, which Ifemelu finds unprofessional. She asks Ifemelu to call her "Aunty Onenu." It soon becomes clear that the magazine is a hobby for her, and she is mostly interested in competing with *Glass*, another women's magazine. Ifemelu immediately makes some suggestions for improving the magazine, and Aunty Oneneu comments on how she is a "real American."

Ifemelu is used to writing for high-level publications in America, and this new job seems provincial and unprofessional to her. The more she actually readjusts to life in Nigeria, the more Ifemelu feels like a real "Americanah." Aunty Onenu is an echo of Ifemelu's father's old boss, who wanted her employees to call her "Mummy."

Ranyinudo drives Ifemelu back from the interview and gossips about how Aunty Onenu started *Zoe* just to compete with the publisher of *Glass*, as they are personal rivals. Ifemelu comments on how ugly Aunty Onenu's house is, but Ranyinudo says she thinks that it's beautiful. Ifemelu recognizes that once she too would have thought a gaudy, extravagant house like that beautiful.

Part of Ifemelu's change is taking on Western aesthetic tastes. She now finds new and extravagant things tacky, and things like antiques beautiful. This is part of being used to having enough—gaudiness is beautiful when it is unattainable, but not when you are used to it as an option.

Over the next few weeks Ifemelu often thinks that she sees Obinze, but it always turns out to be a stranger. Ifemelu tries to find an apartment, and one landlord says he doesn't usually rent to Igbo people, but he will make an exception for her. Ifemelu is surprised that people can say things like that, and wonders if it used to be so before she left as well.

Ifemelu is finally in the same country as Obinze once more, but she avoids contacting him until she feels secure and confident enough. Adichie shows the prejudices still alive in Nigeria between the country's major ethnic groups: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba.

Ifemelu likes the apartment because it is across from a crumbling colonial mansion, and the first time she saw it there was a peacock on its roof. Ifemelu writes the landlord a check for two years rent, as is expected. She thinks of how this is why people take bribes and ask for bribes in Lagos, as asking for two years rent in advance is absurd.

Decades earlier Ifemelu's father's landlord had been demanding two years' worth of rent, and the practice is apparently still the same. Corruption is ingrained in the Nigerian system, just like racism is ingrained in the American one.

Ifemelu hires someone to put new tiles in the kitchen and bathroom before she moves in. She finds that the work is shoddily done, and gets blustery and angry at the worker and estate agent. They finally agree to do the work again. Ranyinudo says she isn't acting like an Americanah anymore, and Ifemelu is pleased despite herself. Ranyinudo suggests she reconnect with Obinze, because he is rich now. Ifemelu can only shake her head, as for Ranyinudo men are just "sources of things." Ifemelu and Obinze continue to email each other sometimes, but Ifemelu hasn't told him that she's back in Nigeria yet.

Ifemelu is starting to readjust to the more subtle differences between American and Nigerian social life. Ifemelu is still afraid to contact Obinze—she has idealized their relationship as something pure and sacred, different from the many materialistic romances of Ranyinudo and her Lagos peers.

CHAPTER 46

Ifemelu visits her parents, who like to talk about their visit to America. Whenever she visits her old friends, it always seems like the subject of marriage comes up. Ifemelu doesn't tell anyone that she and Blaine have broken up, and everyone assumes that she wants to marry him. Ifemelu sees her friend Tochi, who puts down America constantly in their conversation. Ifemelu is relieved when they part ways.

Ifemelu continues to tell the rosy lies of someone living abroad, even though she is now back in Nigeria. Blaine is still far away, so no one has any way of knowing if she's telling the truth or not, and she avoids stirring up any stress or trouble.

Ifemelu's friend Priye is now a wedding planner. She boasts about how many famous people come to the weddings she plans. She and Ranyinudo talk about marriage, and Priye says the first rule of life in Lagos is "You do not marry the man you love. You marry the man who can best maintain you." Ifemelu keeps going along with her own charade, discussing her future potential wedding with Blaine. She can't help planning it out herself in her imagination.

Ifemelu's friends who never left Nigeria have grown into the Lagos culture of materialism and greed, and now Ifemelu can observe it as an outsider. Priye explicitly states the philosophy of romantic love in Lagos, and doesn't see anything wrong with it.

CHAPTER 47

Ifemelu starts work at *Zoe* magazine. She is unnerved at first when the receptionist, who is older than she is, treats her like a "madam." Ifemelu then finds herself playing her part, and being friendly but patronizing. Ifemelu's two main coworkers are Doris, who lived in New York and speaks with a teenaged American accent, and Zemaye, a very sexual Nigerian woman. Doris and Zemaye don't like each other and snipe back and forth all day.

Ifemelu still feels disconnected from some of the "foreign" parts of Nigerian social life (or what would seem especially foreign to a Westerner) but she also finds herself easily slipping into the roles expected of her. This is like when she started faking an American accent so many years earlier.

Ifemelu and Doris eventually start talking about America, and Doris invites Ifemelu to the "Nigerpolitan Club," which is a group of Nigerians who are recently back from living in the U.S. or England. When Doris leaves, Zemaye asks Ifemelu about her race blog. Ifemelu says she "discovered race" when she moved to America. Zemaye asks "why is it only black people that are criminals over there?" She says she loves the show *Cops*. Ifemelu doesn't even know how to answer.

All the intricacies of race and culture Ifemelu had examined in her blog seem totally foreign to a Nigerian, as Zemaye shows just how the media portrays American blacks to foreigners. Doris has also lived in America, and so she relates to Ifemelu's struggle to readjust to Nigeria.

CHAPTER 48

Ifemelu goes with Doris to the Nigerpolitan meeting. Everyone there has some kind of "self-styled quirkiness" to show how chic they are. They discuss **hair** salons, and how ridiculous it is that African hairdressers always assume you want to relax your hair. They discuss things they miss about America, and Ifemelu says "Low-fat soy milk, NPR, fast Internet." They talk about restaurants in Nigeria, and someone says of one that "they have the kinds of things we can eat." Ifemelu feels uneasy about how comfortable she is in this crowd.

Adichie now observes the traits of this particular social group—the "Americanahs," or the Nigerians who have returned from living in Western countries and now find themselves strangers in their own country. Ifemelu is critical of them, but also finds herself relating all too easily to them.

One of the club members is a man named Fred, who went to Harvard, and he discusses how silly Nollywood (the Nigerian film industry) is. Ifemelu declares that she likes Nollywood—she doesn't really, she just doesn't want to be the kind of person who mocks it from afar. Fred talks and flirts with Ifemelu, putting on a practiced act of referencing classical composers and artists to prove how cultured and Western he is. Ifemelu finds it exhausting, but she gives him her number.

Fred is a new potential romantic interest for Ifemelu, but she finds his posturing off-putting. Ifemelu doesn't want to be like a typical Americanah, and so she purposefully says things she doesn't mean just to distance herself from the rest of the group.

CHAPTER 49

Finally Ifemelu starts feeling like she is truly home again. She no longer has to ask Ranyinudo for advice in going to the market, and she is used to waking up to the sound of peacocks. She gains some more weight, and vaguely thinks that she wants to lose it before she sees Obinze again. Her work at *Zoe*, however, becomes stifling. She is always supposed to interview the same rich, vapid women and mingle with advertisers at parties.

The focus of this final section (apart from Ifemelu and Obinze reconnecting) is Ifemelu finding a new identity for herself back in Nigeria. She is both American and Nigerian now, and must find her niche within both cultures, but now she is finally starting to feel comfortable and confident in Nigeria again.

At one of these parties Ifemelu thinks she sees Obinze again. Ranyinudo has told her how beautiful Obinze's wife is, and Ifemelu feels almost betrayed imagining Obinze's mother meeting this other woman. At the same party Ifemelu sees Don, Ranyinudo's boyfriend. He makes a halfhearted pass at her, because that is the way things are done: he is a "big man" and she is an attractive single woman.

Just as Obinze is jealous of Ifemelu's ex-boyfriends, so Ifemelu is jealous of Kosi even after years of separation from Obinze—a separation that she initiated. At these parties Ifemelu experiences the Lagos culture Adichie criticizes, where men assume women will want them for their wealth.

At *Zoe* Ifemelu, Doris, and Zemaye all bicker. They have a meeting to discuss their articles with Aunty Onenu. Aunty Onenu doesn't like it when Ifemelu is snarky or criticizes the people she interviews. During the meeting Ifemelu takes a call from Ranyinudo, as she is eager to get out of the meeting. Ranyinudo says that Don has been complaining that she isn't a "sweet girl" anymore. Ifemelu knows that "sweet" just means malleable and submissive.

Ifemelu is used to being blunt and incisive with her writing, exposing the injustice behind mundane daily life, but Aunty Onenu just wants fluff pieces that fit her preconceived notion of a women's' magazine. Don plays his "big man" role completely, only wanting a woman who is submissive and adoring.

Esther, the receptionist, has typhoid, but doesn't know what kinds of pills the doctor gave her. Ifemelu suggests writing about this, as the pill bottles are unlabelled and could contain anything. Doris tells her to calm down and stop being such an activist, but this makes Ifemelu imagine starting her own blog about Lagos. Esther is very religious, and has diagnosed the staff with different spiritual ailments. Zemaye apparently has the "spirit of seductiveness."

Ifemelu felt almost apathetic and naïve among Blaine's friends, but here she finds herself a kind of activist, stirring up trouble and looking for the corruption infiltrating Nigerian society. Her dissatisfaction with Zoe will lead her to start her own blog once more, this time to observe and critique Nigerian life.

Ifemelu keeps complaining about the boring interviews Aunty Onenu publishes, and Doris tells her that those rich women pay Aunty Onenu to write about them. She says that "a lot of things happen in this country like that." Ifemelu says that she never knows where Doris stands on anything, and Doris suddenly gets angry and calls Ifemelu a "judgmental bitch." Ifemelu mocks Doris's appearance and how she sucks up to Aunty Onenu, and then walks out, feeling ashamed of the pettiness of what just happened. She decides to take it as a sign to start her own blog. On her way out, Esther suggests that Ifemelu has the "spirit of husband-repelling."

Doris gets annoyed with Ifemelu's attempts at activism, telling her to just accept that corruption is everywhere and stop trying to make trouble about it. Ifemelu's attempt at working for someone else fails in this dramatic and farcical scene, and so she decides to do what might have been predicted all along: start her own blog. Esther's super-religious worldview ironically coincides with Ifemelu's friends' obsession with marriage.

CHAPTER 50

Dike has been seeing a therapist three times a week, and Ifemelu calls him every other day. One day Dike asks to visit Ifemelu, and Aunty Uju reluctantly buys him a ticket. When he arrives, Dike says "Oh my God, Coz, I've never seen so many black people in the same place!" Dike's arrival coincides with Ifemelu resigning from *Zoe* and starting her own blog.

Dike was only a toddler when he left Nigeria, so he isn't really coming "home" on this visit, but he is surprised to suddenly not feel like an outsider or someone inferior because of his race. As Ifemelu has stated before, race isn't really an issue in Nigeria.

Ifemelu's new blog is called "The Small Redemptions of Lagos." She interviews Priye about weddings, and Zemaye writes an anonymous piece about body language and sex. Ifemelu's most commented-on article is one she writes about the Nigerpolitan Club. She admits that she is a member, but is critical of the attitude there of disparaging Nigeria. She also writes an article about the expensive lifestyles of some women in Lagos who live totally dependent on men.

Ifemelu now once again has the freedom to write about what she wants, and can both observe and humorously critique daily life in Lagos as a semi-outside observer. She, like Adichie, often focuses on the culture of materialistic romantic relationships.

In the article Ifemelu references Ranyinudo without naming her, and Ranyinudo calls, upset that she will be recognized. She gets angry at Ifemelu for passing judgment on Nigerian women, when Ifemelu herself only got her green card because of a man: Curt. Ifemelu apologizes, and Ranyinudo says that she is just emotionally frustrated, and needs to find Obinze.

Ranyinudo makes a valid point about Ifemelu—that she too relied on a favor from a rich man. Ifemelu is not a dispassionate observer, and her posts start causing some trouble and making her reflect on her own past.

When Dike visits he helps Ifemelu moderate the blog's comments, and is amused at how personally people take the articles. Dike asks about his father, and Ifemelu vaguely talks about The General. She takes Dike to see Aunty Uju's old house, the one The General had bought for her. Dike says that he likes Nigeria. Ifemelu wants to invite him to live with her, but she doesn't.

Dike is used to the American culture of sensationalism, and so is amused by the Nigerian response to Ifemelu's critical articles. Dike finds some answers about his own identity in learning more about his father and visiting his birthplace. He leaves on a hopeful note for the future.

After Dike flies back to America, Ranyinudo says she doesn't understand why Dike would want to kill himself. She says that is "very foreign behavior." This makes Ifemelu suddenly angry, and she asks if Ranyinudo has ever read *Things Fall Apart*. Ifemelu knows she is angry at Ranyinudo partly because she said exactly what many other Nigerians would say.

Ifemelu once again comes up against this discouraging attitude about mental disorders in the U.S. In Things Fall Apart, by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (one of Adichie's influences), the Igbo protagonist kills himself.

CHAPTER 51

Ifemelu goes to the bank, worried about her money because Bank of America has repeatedly warned her that Nigeria is a "high-risk country." While there, she thinks she sees Obinze again and panics. It turns out to only be a stranger, but when she gets back in her car and calms down she finally calls him. He answers, and they impulsively decide to meet up at a bookstore right away.

Ifemelu is still acting like a foreigner, in terms of banking at least, seeing Nigeria as a scary place for her accounts—although this is partly valid because of the prevalence of fraud there. Ifemelu and Obinze finally are about to reconnect after so many years.

They meet and there seems to be a "caving of the blue sky" before they embrace. Ifemelu talks awkwardly but Obinze remains calm. They go inside and sit down. Obinze turns off his phones and asks about Dike and Aunty Uju. Obinze and Ifemelu talk about Nigeria, and there is a nervousness but easy intimacy in their conversation. Ifemelu says that relationships in Lagos are "depressingly transactional," and Obinze says that not all are.

This is the vital moment of reunion, and it feels both significant and powerful. They are both different and older now, but find their intimacy and easy sense of connection still there. Obinze implies that their relationship is something purer than the materialistic ones Ifemelu has observed in Lagos.

They start to flirt, and Ifemelu asks Obinze about his new status as a rich man. Obinze complains about how undignified most Nigerians are in the face of money, and how everyone is expected to flatter and praise him. As they talk, Ifemelu is reminded of all the things she had loved about Obinze. Obinze then asks about how Ifemelu's blog, and how she has grown and changed. Ifemelu talks about how she feels snobbish now in her taste. She finds most Nigerian houses to be ugly now.

Part of Ifemelu and Obinze's connection is how observant and intelligent they both are—they immediately start critiquing aspects of Nigerian culture and how they themselves have been changed by the West, all points Adichie has brought up before.

Obinze reveals that he has visited America a few times, and isn't as infatuated with it as he once was. Ifemelu can't help feeling bad that he had been there without her knowing. They approach talking about the past, but both seem afraid, not wanting to break this fragile new intimacy between them. They talk about what friends they still keep in touch with. Obinze says that Emenike finally contacted him again only once he heard that Obinze was rich.

Their interpersonal dynamic feels immediately close, but as soon as any real aspect of their past or present lives is mentioned it risks bringing up feelings of pain and isolation. They are both cautious but also eager. We learn that Emenike changed his attitude towards Obinze only after Obinze made enough money.

Obinze says that he has to go, and they embrace and part ways. Immediately Obinze texts Ifemelu and asks to have lunch tomorrow, and she accepts. They don't mention Obinze's wife and child. Obinze comes to Ifemelu's apartment the next day. He compliments her new blog. He starts discussing the difference in Europe in Africa regarding architecture—how one fetishizes its past, and the other wants everything to look modern—and he says it's "refreshing to have an intelligent person to talk to." Ifemelu wonders if this is a reference to Kosi, and it irritates her.

Infatuated with each other and with their instant connection, Ifemelu and Obinze start creating a kind of cocoon for themselves, not mentioning Obinze's wife or their old breakup. They discuss what Adichie has brought up before—how in the West old things are considered more beautiful, while it is the opposite in Africa.

They look at the peacocks, and discuss literature, and Obinze says that he does what is expected of rich people, and pays school fees for children in his home village and his mother's village. They stand by the bookshelf and start to kiss. Obinze asks Ifemelu why she suddenly cut off contact in America. She sits down and tells him about the tennis coach, and how she hated herself and felt that she had betrayed Obinze. Obinze is silent for a long time, and then says he wishes Ifemelu would have told him, so she wouldn't have to be so alone. Ifemelu starts to cry, and Obinze takes her hand. She feels safe.

This is one of the most powerful moments of the book, when Ifemelu and Obinze truly reconnect and discover their old love still pure and unbroken. Ifemelu finally shares the secret that had been weighing her down for years, and they both feel as if a missing part of themselves has been restored. Obinze feels uncomfortable in his role as a "big man," but he does most of the things expected of him.

CHAPTER 52

One day Obinze takes Ifemelu to a club he belongs to play table tennis. They sing along with new Nigerian music as they drive. After playing table tennis they have lunch. Ifemelu feels "relaxed and happy," and she suggests Obinze should write an article for her blog. She talks more about her blog, and a rich man she is looking to interview. Obinze is clearly jealous of him, and this pleases Ifemelu.

This is a strange new courtship, but it is definitely a courtship. Obinze and Ifemelu are newly smitten with each other even after decades of being apart. They still avoid mentioning Kosi or Blaine (whom Obinze thinks Ifemelu is still dating).

They keep going out for meals each day, and Ifemelu stores the happy memories of buying food from hawkers (merchants selling food to passersby) with Obinze. Whenever he drops her off, Obinze always kisses Ifemelu on the cheek, but one day she tells him that she bought some condoms. She says they are obviously "hot for each other." She suddenly gets angry that he can drop her off and go off to his other life with his wife and child.

This is almost like their old idyllic relationship in school, as Ifemelu and Obinze ignore all the complications and baggage both of them carry. When they start to get more serious, however, real life intrudes.

Obinze asks if Ifemelu is still with Blaine, and she says it doesn't matter because Obinze is married. He gets her to invite him into her apartment, but there Ifemelu starts to taunt him about cheating on his wife. Obinze gets up and leaves. A few minutes later he comes back and apologizes. He says he doesn't like Ifemelu referring to "what they have" as something normal or common like cheating.

Ifemelu acts somewhat rebelliously and self-destructively again, but only because she still feels the many layers of separation and pretense between herself and Obinze. Obinze sees their love as something pure and holy—his marriage to Kosi is more like cheating on Ifemelu than vice versa.

They start to kiss and then have sex. Ifemelu had never liked the phrase "making love," but she feels that it applies to them now. She tells Obinze "I always saw the ceiling with other men." Obinze tells her that he has always felt as if he was waiting to be happy. They eat oranges together and Ifemelu feels complete. She falls asleep and wakes up to Obinze calling her, asking if he can come back to see her.

Ifemelu stops fighting against it and they finally experience this blissful reunion of passion and love. They are both older and more worldly now, but they feel like teenagers once again. The sardonic Ifemelu even finds the phrase "making love" to be sincerely applicable.

CHAPTER 53

In the following weeks Ifemelu starts to live out a series of clichés, as she feels herself falling in love again and feeling all the heady romantic emotions of a teenager, except seemingly even stronger. Obinze tells her "you are the great love of my life," and she believes him, but she still can't help being jealous of every woman he ever liked or whoever liked him. She is suddenly aware of all the "hungry" women of Lagos (like Zemaye) looking to snatch up a rich, good-looking man like Obinze.

In these final chapters Adichie focuses on Ifemelu and Obinze as they rekindle their romance despite all the complications and divides between them. Their love is pure and strong, and they find themselves totally smitten right away. They have all the passion of their teenage romance, but now the maturity and experience of many years to add to it.

For a long time neither one mentions Kosi, until one day Obinze says he wants to cook, as he isn't allowed at home. Suddenly his marriage seems very real and present, and he explains that Kosi has very traditional ideas about marriage, so she doesn't like her husband to cook. Obinze tells Ifemelu that there's a lot of pretending in his marriage, and that he married Kosi during a time of personal upheaval. Ifemelu is suddenly upset, and she asks Obinze to leave.

Just as when Ifemelu was talking about cheating, so Obinze talking about Kosi and his unsatisfying marriage somehow seems to cheapen the love between Ifemelu and Obinze, and it upsets them both. Ifemelu tries to lash out in her pain, as she is used to.

They both start to cry, and then they hold each other and have sex. Obinze invites Ifemelu to come with him to Abuja, a town in central Nigeria, that Friday. Ifemelu says yes. The next day, however, he texts her and says that he should go alone to think. Ifemelu texts him and says "fucking coward." Obinze comes to her apartment to apologize, but she is angered by the vagueness of his words, as she knows he knows how to communicate clearly. She tells him to "go to hell," and watches as he drives off.

After their idyllic new romance, Obinze and Ifemelu are separated once again. This time it isn't be distance or depression, but by Obinze's hesitation and Ifemelu's pride. They both know that Obinze is being halfhearted about dealing with his other life, and Ifemelu demands total straightforwardness and truth.

CHAPTER 54

Obinze goes to Abuja and imagines what Ifemelu would think of its atmosphere of rich businessmen buying sex. He likes that he can never predict what Ifemelu is thinking, and he has never felt so alive with anyone else. Obinze meets with a businessman named Edusco. They like each other and haggle good-naturedly over the land that Obinze is trying to sell. Obinze suddenly realizes that everything seems to have "lost its luster" without Ifemelu, and he wearily gives Edusco the land for a low price.

We now see Obinze's side of the situation, and that he is truly in love as well. He realizes just how unsatisfying his relationship with Kosi is in comparison to Ifemelu's intelligence and unpredictability. In his strong emotion Obinze starts slipping out of his role as a money-hoarding "big man."

Obinze imagines what Ifemelu might be doing right now. He wonders if she realizes how obsessively he thinks of her, and he wonders how many other men she has been with. He longs to know everything about her experiences in America. He remembers her telling him how her cross-cultural relationships could be difficult because you "spend so much time explaining." This had pleased him to hear.

Ifemelu acknowledged the many levels of ignorance and misunderstanding she felt between herself and Curt and Blaine. It shows just how close she and Obinze are that they don't have to spend time explaining things to each other, but they still never get bored with each other.

Obinze is at the airport headed back to Lagos when Kosi calls him to remind him of a party that night. Obinze thinks of the day Buchi was born, how Kosi had immediately apologized to him for not having a boy. Obinze had realized then that Kosi didn't know him at all. They were good friends and got along well, but Obinze never discussed anything that was truly important to him with Kosi. When they first met Obinze had pursued her avidly, intrigued by her perfect beauty and overwhelmed by his own newfound wealth. She had seemed like an anchor of reality to him, with her predictable and domestic personality combined with her extraordinary beauty.

Obinze now thinks directly about his relationship with Kosi, and we get their personal history. There is no real love between them, at least on Obinze's side. He is infatuated with Kosi's beauty, and the fact that she was attainable to him, but they have no strong intellectual or emotional connection. Kosi is very traditional-minded and has no intellectual curiosity—she apologizes for having a girl just because she knows she is supposed to want a boy.

Nigel, Obinze's old coworker, moved to Nigeria when Obinze asked him to become his "general manager," instead of just visiting when he was needed. Obinze expected Nigel to get tired of Nigeria, but he seems to still love it. Obinze and Kosi take Nigel out for his birthday that night. Nigel brings his new girlfriend Ulrike. Obinze is irritable and outspoken at dinner, and he gets up to go to the bathroom and call Ifemelu. He is angry when she still doesn't pick up.

We see how Nigel and Obinze's friendship is still strong, and a rare example of true connection across racial and national divides. Nigel decided to move to Nigeria to be with his friend, instead of just visiting whenever a white "general manager" was needed.

Nigel comes into the bathroom to ask Obinze what's wrong. Obinze wants to tell Nigel about Ifemelu, but doesn't. That night Kosi offers to have sex, but Obinze remains unaroused. He has been turning away from her ever since the day he kissed Ifemelu. Kosi is always compliant and never complains. Obinze wonders how he can tell Kosi about Ifemelu without it sounding like "something from a silly film."

Kosi is the kind of "sweet girl" that most of the Lagos's rich men long for, and an echo of Kayode's original description of Ginika—she is always submissive and adoring and never makes trouble. Obinze wants a "difficult," independent woman like Ifemelu, however.

Kosi puts her arms around him but Obinze gets up and goes to the bathroom. He impulsively empties Kosi's bowl of potpourri into the toilet, and then feels guilty. Obinze had told Kosi that Ifemelu was back in town after their first meeting, and Kosi had been carefully indifferent in her reaction. Obinze hadn't mentioned Ifemelu again, but had been making other excuses for his absences. He almost hopes to provoke Kosi by being so obvious in his infidelity, but she never says anything.

Obinze feels like a teenager in his romantic passion, but it is also making him act immaturely in other aspects of his life as well. Obinze wants Kosi to speak up on her own behalf or get angry, but she remains the "perfect" quiet, submissive wife.

The next morning Obinze wakes up feeling sad. He makes eggs for Kosi's breakfast, plays with Buchi, and then goes upstairs, where Kosi is cleaning. He tells Kosi that he loves someone else and he wants a divorce, but they he will make sure to provide for her and Buchi. Kosi stops him before he can say more. She kneels before him and says that they have to keep their family together. Obinze wishes she would be angry, instead of begging him like this.

Obinze finally gathers his courage to be honest with himself and everyone, acknowledging his love for Ifemelu and his lack of love for Kosi. Kosi doesn't react as he expected, however, but remains totally submissive—acting like she *is the one at fault, not Obinze.*

Obinze repeats his declaration and Kosi says she knows that he has been sleeping with Ifemelu, but that Kosi has been a good wife, and they took a vow before God, so Obinze cannot destroy their family just for the sake of his old girlfriend. Obinze suddenly hates Kosi for having known but not saying anything. He feels guilty for ever having married her in the first place, but recognizes that he must take care of her and Buchi.

Kosi has been going to prayer services about keeping one's husband, and so she sees this as just a natural phase for her "big man" husband. She has known about Ifemelu the whole time, but said nothing. Obinze is disgusted by this silent compliance, which is the opposite of how Ifemelu would have acted.

Obinze sleeps in his study that night, and the next day Kosi acts like nothing has happened and everything is normal. Obinze suddenly feels angry about her mild speech and euphemisms, and thinks of Ifemelu's harsh directness, like calling him "fucking coward." Obinze feels like a coward again for letting himself be drawn back into to Kosi's pretense of domestic bliss.

Obinze can't help comparing Kosi to Ifemelu once again. Kosi acts as many rich Nigerian man would want, but Obinze has always been unique among his peers, just like Ifemelu is among hers.

Obinze and Kosi take Buchi to a child christening ceremony for Obinze's friend's son. Kosi tells Buchi to hold Obinze's hand, and he realizes that she is trying to "will a good marriage into being." At the party Obinze feels detached, and thinks that they might be attending christening parties now, but soon it will be funerals. He looks around and sees all the people "trudging through lives in which they were neither happy nor unhappy." Obinze worries about Buchi if he manages to leave Kosi, as divorced parents or an absent father always lead to trouble and unhappiness for the child.

Obinze now feels especially disconnected from his seemingly perfect family, and feels a kind of existential unhappiness infecting all of his thoughts. Instead of looking at the people around him with an appraising or critical eye, in this new wave of depression he sees it all as futile and meaningless. Obinze wants to leave Kosi, but he won't abandon his child, even for Ifemelu.

Obinze's friend Okwudiba is at the party, and they greet each other joyfully. Obinze follows him upstairs to where all the rich men are drinking and talking together. One talks about how it is almost impossible to be honest in Nigeria, as "everything is set up for you to steal." Eze, the wealthiest man in the room, is "an obliviously happy man" because of his riches. He has decided to become an art collector, as that is what he heard wealthy and civilized people are supposed to do. One man comments that Obinze is quiet, but the others say that he is always quiet. Some think that it is because Obinze is a well-read "gentleman," but others think it is because he is secretive about his wealth.

In this dark mood Obinze now has to mingle with his peers, the other "big men" who seem constantly self-satisfied in their own wealth and success. They all openly acknowledge the corruption in Nigerian society, as almost all of them have gotten their money in some kind of shady manner. Because most of them are loud and boastful about their wealth, they consider Obinze's quietness and humility to be a sign of miserliness.

Obinze is colder and more frank than usual when he talks about the oil companies in Nigeria, and Okwudiba looks surprised. The men tease Obinze because he never flies British Airways, which is what all the "big boys" fly. Obinze says British Airways treated him horribly when he was poor. He says he needs the bathroom, and goes back downstairs. Okwudiba follows him.

Obinze's strong emotions again affect his ability to play his expected role. This is the first time we have seen Obinze talking openly about his bad experience in England, but it clearly still deeply affects him, even after his success as a Nigerian businessman.

Okwudiba asks Obinze what's wrong, and Obinze tells him that Ifemelu is back in town. Obinze says he wants to marry her, and he never should have married Kosi. Okwudiba reassures Obinze that most men don't marry the woman they truly loved, and so he should forget this "white-people behavior" of getting a divorce for the sake of love. He suggests that Obinze keep seeing Ifemelu, but not leave Kosi as long as he has no problem with her. Downstairs, Buchi falls and reaches out for Obinze to hold her.

Okwudiba echoes Priye's maxim about marrying for comfort or status, not love. Neither of them understand that Ifemelu and Obinze consider their romance somehow purer than others, and cheapened by complications like cheating and marriage. Buchi symbolically reaches out for Obinze as he struggles with both of their futures.

CHAPTER 55

Meanwhile Ifemelu is suffering for love as well: an idea she always found silly until she really experiences it now. Her memories of Obinze are vivid and painful, and she avoids going anywhere she might run into him. Ifemelu knows that Obinze still loves her, but is hurt by his halfhearted efforts of texting and calling instead of showing up at her door. Ifemelu writes a blog post about government workers pitilessly destroying the shacks and booths where poor hawkers were selling their wares. Someone comments "this is like poetry," and Ifemelu knows that it is Obinze.

Once again Ifemelu finds herself living out the clichés she once had scorned. She knows that Obinze is still hesitant about giving up everything for her, and they know each other well enough to be at this communication standstill. Yet they aren't totally out of contact, and they still live nearby, so there is a greater hope for reconnection than after their first breakup. Ifemelu continues to document the corruption she observes.

Ifemelu keeps writing more blog posts, but she always writes them with Obinze's opinion in mind. She writes about the daily life she observes in Nigeria. The pain of Obinze's absence doesn't seem to get better with time, but Ifemelu feels complete, having come back to Lagos and "spun herself into being" with her new blog at home.

Ifemelu has now found success in Nigeria as well, and this is a kind of victory over her ongoing restlessness and struggle for identity—she feels comfortable and confident with herself as both an American and a Nigerian now, having found her place in the world with or without Obinze.

Ifemelu calls Blaine to say hello and to tell him that she always thought he was too good and pure for her. She calls Curt and asks if he was the anonymous donor to her blog, but he denies it. He asks about her new blog, and whether it's about race too. Ifemelu says that race doesn't really exist in Nigeria—she "got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black." Curt tells her that he hasn't felt the same about anyone else, and they make vague plans that he might visit sometime.

In her new contentment and solitude Ifemelu reaches back to her old boyfriends and makes more peace with her past. She repeats her earlier sentiment about "being black" only in America, and so now having other issues to write about in her Nigerian blog.

One night Ifemelu runs into Fred (the man from the Nigerpolitan Club) at a play. Fred starts up with his act of referencing Western cultural figures, until Ifemelu says she'd like to know what he's like when he isn't performing. Fred takes her to a nightclub later and then they go back to her apartment and watch films. They have sex, and Ifemelu likes him, but she cannot make herself feel anything strongly for him.

Ifemelu tries to find a new romance for herself outside of Obinze, but fails. Fred might have been her boyfriend at a different time in her life, but Ifemelu's feelings for Obinze are still too strong right now. Fred is another man (like Emenike) to put up a pretense of Westernness to impress others.

Seven months after Ifemelu last saw Obinze, he appears at her door. She is surprised to see him. Obinze gives her a piece of paper, and says he has written out all his thoughts for her. He tells Ifemelu that he wants to be a part of Buchi's life and see her every day, but he has moved into his own apartment and has stopped pretending to be happy with Kosi. He tells Ifemelu "I'm chasing you." Ifemelu stares at him for a while and then says "Ceiling, come in."

Obinze repeats the words he spoke to Ifemelu on their first night together. The book ends with yet another reunion between the two, and a tentative hope for the future. Everything is still complicated and painful, but they are at least being honest and open with each other now, and their love for each other is undiminished. Adichie ends with this mood of quiet contemplation, where self-love is just as important as romantic connection.

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