Copper Sun

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHARON DRAPER

Draper, the oldest of three children, was born in Cleveland, Ohio. She was an avid reader as a child, devouring almost every book in her library's children's section by age 11. She earned a bachelor's in English from Pepperdine University and went on to pursue a master's in English from Miami University of Ohio. Following the completion of her education, she began teaching high school in Cincinnati. In 1990, one of her students challenged her to write something of her own. The resulting short story, "One Small Torch," won a writing contest sponsored by *Ebony* magazine. A decade later, Draper retired from teaching to focus on writing instead. Over the course of her career, she's won awards both for her teaching and for her writing. She's won five Coretta Scott King Book Awards (one of which was for *Copper Sun*) and has had several of her novels listed as ALA Best Books. Several of her books have won local and regional awards as well. Many of Draper's books focus on the experience of Black Americans or of racial tensions in the U.S. more broadly.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Atlantic slave trade began in earnest in the early 16th century as European powers, specifically Portugal and Spain, colonized the coasts of West Africa and shipped abducted Africans to South American colonies. By the 1730s, when *Copper Sun* takes place, the English, French, and Dutch had joined the Portuguese as the primary traders of enslaved people. Draper has said that she was inspired to write *Copper Sun* after a visit to one of the slave factories (the buildings where slaves were held on the coast) in West Africa and after crawling through one of the passages of no return, as Amari does in the novel. Once at sea, bound for the colonies, the mortality rate for slaves was high—some estimates put it above 15 percent due to a combination of disease, unsanitary conditions, suicide, or brutality on the part of sailors. Most slaves were shipped to the Caribbean or South America, not the North American colonies—but Charles Town, where Amari is auctioned, was the biggest hub in North America. In the southern colonies, enslaved men and women cultivated sugar, tobacco, and rice in horrific conditions—and white masters regularly raped slave women. Their children were born into slavery. Fort Mose in Spanish Florida, however, offered refuge to runaway slaves beginning as early as 1687. Francisco Menéndez (the only real-life historical figure Draper depicts in the novel) served in the Spanish military there until 1763, when Britain took control of East Florida. He, like most former slaves at Fort Mose, left Florida with the Spanish for Cuba or Mexico.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

One of the clearest precursors to *Copper Sun* is the 1976 novel *Roots*, written by Alex Haley. It follows a man abducted in Africa, sold into slavery, and eventually transported to North America. Though *Copper Sun* doesn't follow future generations, Roots does: it follows the original protagonist's descendants until it reveals that the author, Haley, is a descendent. It's also essential to mention Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon*, a memoir and slave narrative that Hurston wrote after months of interviews with Cudjo Lewis, one of the last slaves brought to the U.S. from Africa. Other young adult novels also seek to illuminate the atrocities of the slave trade and slavery in North America. These include Paula Fox's *Slave Dancer*, which takes an approach similar to the one that Draper takes with Polly in *Copper Sun*. It follows a young white boy who's kidnapped and forced to play his fife on slave ships, forced to confront the horrors of the slave trade from an outsider's perspective. Ann Rinaldi's novel *Hang a Thousand Trees with Ribbons* tells the story of the real-life Phyllis Wheatley, the first published Black poet in America who was abducted from Senegal and sold into slavery in 1761.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Copper Sun
- **When Written:** 1996–2005
- **Where Written:** Ohio
- **When Published:** 2006
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction; Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** West Africa and the North American colonies, 1738
- **Climax:** Amari and Polly shoot Clay Derby, tie him up, and leave him to fend off a rattlesnake.
- **Antagonist:** Mr. Derby, Clay Derby, racism, slavery, sexism
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

True Story. Francisco Menéndez, whom Draper portrays in *Copper Sun*, was a real and highly celebrated figure. As Inez explains in the novel, Menéndez escaped slavery and was recaptured several times—once at sea, where he was purportedly whipped 200 times but still returned to Fort Mose. Following the British acquisition of Spanish Florida, Menéndez evacuated to Cuba and set up a settlement similar to Fort Mose.

Reading Across Continents. In 2008, *Copper Sun* was selected for the Reading Across Continents project, which had students in the U.S., Nigeria, and Ghana read three novels, one by an author from each country. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Purple Hibiscus*; *The Thing Around Your Neck*) represented Nigeria, while Ama Ata Aidoo (*Our Sister Killjoy*; *Changes*) represented Ghana.

PLOT SUMMARY

Fifteen-year-old Amari laughs as her little brother, Kwasi, plays in a coconut tree. Kwasi teases Amari that her fiancé, Besa, is coming, and then he runs back to their village. Besa approaches and greets Amari warmly but says he's concerned—he saw men with light skin coming to the village. Amari relays this to Mother and her friend Esi. Mother scolds Amari for being concerned about the visitors; she says it's uncivilized to judge people on looks. The village prepares for a celebration as the white men and Ashanti warriors arrive. Amari thinks that they look dangerous, but she throws herself into preparations, listens happily to Father's ceremonial story, and enjoys the drumming. Then, disaster strikes: the white men begin shooting and Ashanti warriors club down women and **children**. Amari and Kwasi try to run, but an Ashanti spears Kwasi. They capture Amari.

The Ashanti and the white men shackle Amari and the remaining villagers, all young people, and force them to march. As the days pass, many die. They finally reach a city on the coast, and once the white men separate the men from the women, they unshackle Amari and push her into a dark room. It smells of sweat, blood, and waste. Later, a woman named Afi helps Amari get food and explains that they'll be sold and sent into the sea—she and Amari are slaves. Over the next few days, Amari's captors sell her, brand her, and imprison her in a pen on the beach. After two meals, they load male slaves into small boats and ferry them out to a larger ship on the sea. Amari catches sight of Besa and cries, but Afi tells her to forget him. The female slaves are next. Two women jump into the water, but sharks eat them. The sailors lead the women past the men, who are stacked tightly on shelves, and chain the women in the hold. Hours later, they bring the women and children up to the deck. There's no land in sight.

The journey is horrifying. Though on some nights a sailor named Bill teaches Amari English, sailors rape the women nightly. The sailors also force the slaves to dance every day for exercise. As Amari's command of English grows, she learns that they're heading for someplace called Carolina. When she sees the land, she's shocked that it's beautiful. Afi cautions her to look for the beauty when things are bad; she'll survive that way. In the warehouse near the shore, Besa finds Amari and tells her to never forget him. Then, the slaves are shipped to Charles Town for auction. Amari is terrified and confused as white men strip her, bind her wrists and ankles, and slather her in oil.

A white girl named Polly is at the slave auction. She's uninterested since she doesn't like Black people, so she reads her certificate of indenture instead. It reads that Polly will serve Mr. Derby for 14 years. Polly sees Mr. Derby purchase a slave girl, Amari, and watches her struggle when Mr. Derby tries to lead her away from the older woman next to her. Polly wonders if Black people actually have feelings. While Mr. Derby purchases Amari, his son, Clay, arrives whipping a well-dressed slave named Noah. Polly asks why Clay beats Noah—she doesn't think that slaves need to be beaten, even if she doesn't like them. Clay insists that it's how he shows he cares and tells Polly that if she remains so feisty, Mr. Derby might whip her. Mr. Derby returns, ushers Polly into the back of the wagon, and begins the long journey home. On the way, he tells Clay that Amari is his birthday present. Clay decides to call Amari Myna, since she belongs to him. They discuss that while white women should be treated delicately, Black women are different—and having sex with them shows them who's boss. When they reach the plantation, Polly is aghast and upset when Mr. Derby tells her it's her job to "civilize" Amari. She expected to serve at the house and learn to be a lady—but instead, she's stuck in a slave shack.

Amari and Polly meet Teenie, the slave cook; her son, Tidbit; and his dog, Hushpuppy. Teenie feeds the girls and listens to Polly's story: Polly's father was an indentured servant, but both he and Polly's mother died of smallpox. Polly's indenture is twice as long as usual, since she has to pay her parents' debts. Teenie reminds Polly that someday, she'll get to be free. That night, Clay calls for Amari; he calls her often over the next few months. Amari hates him. Meanwhile, Amari learns English and helps Teenie in the kitchen. Teenie's mother came from Africa; one day, as she comforts Amari, she tells her that as long as she remembers Africa and her parents, they're never gone. After an especially bad night with Clay, Amari asks Teenie if she has herbs that could kill her. Teenie insists that Amari must live and shows her the **kente cloth** that Teenie's mother managed to hang onto all the way from Africa. A week later, while Amari, Polly, and Tidbit pick peaches for a pie, Amari and Polly talk about what they've lost.

Mrs. Derby, Mr. Derby's second wife, is lovely, caring, and pregnant. She comes daily to Teenie's kitchen to plan meals—but Teenie cooks whatever she wants anyway. Mrs. Derby looks at Amari with compassion, and once, she even apologizes for Clay's behavior. Amari listens to Teenie and Lena, a house slave, discuss Mrs. Derby. Lena thinks that Mrs. Derby's life is idyllic, but Teenie insists that she is almost a slave given how controlling Mr. Derby is. Mr. Derby married her because she's young and rich and came with land. Meanwhile, Polly never loses sight of her dream of working in the house. As Amari settles in, Polly realizes that this could be a real possibility soon. Teenie sends Polly, Amari, and Tidbit to the rice

fields with food and water for the slaves there. At the fields, Cato, the oldest slave on the plantation, says that Amari will be in the rice fields as soon as Clay gets tired of her—and when Tidbit is old enough, he'll work in the fields too. In the fields, slaves rarely survive more than five years because of the snakes, alligators, malaria, and cholera. Both Polly and Amari are aghast. Just then, a woman named Hildy screams—a snake bit her. Other slaves drag her to dry land, but they have to get back to work. She'll die by nightfall.

Back at the kitchen, Teenie says that she has an idea to keep Amari from the fields: one of the house slaves is Hildy's daughter, and Amari and Polly will take her place at dinner. Polly is thrilled. As dinner progresses, Polly realizes that Mrs. Derby is deeply unhappy and powerless. After dinner, Mr. Derby trips Amari while she's carrying a pie. The pie goes all over the carpet. He whips Amari until Mrs. Derby makes him stop, and Amari spends three weeks recovering from the ordeal. Polly, Teenie, and Mrs. Derby nurse her. When she's better, she tries to lay low in the kitchen—Mr. Derby insisted she go to the fields after the dining room debacle. She feels like her spirit is dead. To make matters even worse, Clay comes into the kitchen one afternoon to fetch Tidbit and use him as alligator bait. He makes Amari come so he can show her off to his friends. Amari cannot believe their cruelty.

Several weeks later, Mr. Derby bursts into the kitchen. Mrs. Derby is in labor, and he can't find any of the house slaves. He runs to the neighboring plantation and sends Amari and Polly to help his wife. Amari easily delivers Mrs. Derby's baby—but the baby is Black. Mrs. Derby begs for the girls to save her baby. She believes her husband will kill her, the baby, and Noah, the baby's father. With Teenie's help, they get the baby to a slave woman named Sara Jane. Though they tell Mr. Derby that the baby was stillborn, he insists that the doctor is on his way and will need to examine the body. Polly runs to meet Noah and Dr. Hoskins on the road, but Dr. Hoskins refuses to turn around—and when he arrives, Mr. Derby realizes that his slaves and his wife are hiding something. While Dr. Hoskins and Mr. Derby are inside, Teenie tells Noah the news, and Noah shares that he loves Mrs. Derby. Clay arrives with the baby as Mr. Derby drags Mrs. Derby outside. He makes her watch as he shoots Noah and the baby. Then, he locks Amari, Polly, Teenie, and Tidbit in the smokehouse and announces that he's selling the girls and Tidbit. That night, Cato tells the captives that Dr. Hoskins doesn't believe in slavery. He'll let them escape, and then they should head south to Fort Mose. He follows Teenie's instructions to poison Clay and make him ill so that he can't accompany the doctor. Teenie gives Tidbit her mother's kente cloth and wails as the wagon pulls out. Mr. Derby whips her.

An hour from the plantation, Dr. Hoskins says that he's ashamed. He gives Amari, Polly, and Tidbit food, money, and a gun and sends them into the woods. Hushpuppy soon catches up to them. They hurry night and day for several days but have to stop when Amari gathers fruits that make them vomit. Amari is concerned when she seems not to fully recover from the ordeal. She's nauseous and dizzy. Occasionally, Amari catches fish or they're able to find crayfish in rivers they cross. One evening, Tidbit wails that Hushpuppy is gone. It begins to rain, and late in the night, they discover a cave and build a fire. The girls are terrified when they notice an animal lurking outside, but it turns out to be Hushpuppy with a fat rabbit. A few days later, Clay reaches out and snatches Amari. He ties her, tells her that his father died, and wonders how to punish her for running away. Polly shoots Clay in the head, just grazing his temple and knocking him out. The girls tie him up, and as Clay wakes up, he comes face to face with a rattlesnake. They leave him to his fate.

Not long after, the travelers meet a boy named Nathan. He confirms that Fort Mose is real and hides them in his father's barn; but Amari, Polly, and Tidbit have to hide in a swamp when Nathan's father discovers them. Not long after that, a woman named Fiona finds them in her husband's hunting shelter. Though she owns slaves and believes that slavery is okay, she's excited to be able to make her own decision for once and has one of her slaves hitch up a wagon for the runaways. The slave is Besa, but his spirit is broken. He refuses to let Amari touch him and insists that he doesn't have dreams anymore. Several days later, they come across a Spanish soldier. Though he pretends to buy Polly's story—that she's heading home to her father—he gives them valuable information about Fort Mose and where to cross the river into Spanish Florida. Not long after, they reach the river and ride the horse across. After a night of sleep, they ride toward Fort Mose. Tidbit still misses Teenie, but asks Amari to be his mother now. Amari agrees. On the outskirts of the city, a woman named Inez feeds the runaways, assures them that they're safe, and introduces them to Captain Menendez. He's an escaped slave, and he decides that Amari will weave and Polly will teach children to read.

Inez takes Amari to show her where she'll live. They discuss the difficulties of slavery and Inez asks how Amari has been feeling. Inez insists that Amari isn't unwell—she's pregnant. Amari is distraught, but Inez insists that Amari already loves her baby and needs to tell her baby all her stories. She leaves Amari alone. Amari vows to never think of Clay and realizes that her baby holds the spirits of her mother, her father, Kwasi, and all her murdered villagers. She looks at the **copper sun** and feels like she's found a home again.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Amari – Amari is one of the novel's protagonists; she's a 15-year-old young woman from the Ewe tribe in Western Africa. Amari is open, loving, and curious, and she looks forward

to her future marriage to Besa. Though she wants to weave—a profession reserved for men—she's generally happy with life in her village. But Amari's world turns upside down when she's abducted; sees her mother, father, and brother Kwasi murdered; and is sold into slavery. She comes face to face with the fact that not all people look at the world with her open, curious outlook—and many white men in particular, see her as subhuman and only good for her body and the labor she can perform. On her journey across the ocean, she befriends a woman named Afi who encourages her to keep going and to survive. Though Amari finds it extremely difficult to do so, she does manage to survive the journey. And thanks to Bill, a kindly sailor on the ship, she lands in the colonies understanding some English. However, slavery on Mr. Derby's rice plantation is a continuation of the dehumanizing treatment she experienced before: she's purchased as a birthday gift for Mr. Derby's son Clay, and so she must submit to him raping her. Clay and Mr. Derby's cruelty regularly shock Amari—she doesn't understand how anyone can torture **children** by using them as alligator bait, or how Mr. Derby can feel no compassion for slaves who die in the rice fields. Her friendship with Teenie, the slave cook, connects her with a person who thinks much like Afi does and reminds her that she must remember her past and pass it onto future generations. She also forms a tentative friendship with Polly, a white indentured servant. After Mrs. Derby gives birth to a Black baby fathered by one of her slaves—and Mr. Derby murders the baby—Amari, Polly, and Teenie's son Tidbit escape south to Fort Mose, where slaves can find freedom. Upon their arrival, Amari discovers that she's pregnant with Clay's baby. Though she's initially horrified, she comes to realize that the baby will carry her mother's spirit forward. This helps Amari decide that Fort Mose is her home.

Polly – Polly is one of the novel's protagonists; she's a 15-year-old white indentured servant whose indenture is purchased by Mr. Derby on the same day that he purchases Amari. Polly has grown up believing that as a white person, she's better than Black people. She's openly racist and questions whether Black people experience feelings and pain, or if they even have a grasp on language like she does. Polly was raised by poor parents whose biggest goal was to see her become a fine lady. She thus expects to use her time on Derbyshire Farms to observe how the wealthy live so she can one day become a great lady. Instead, when Mr. Derby tasks Polly with "civilizing" Amari, Polly embarks on a journey during which she learns to humanize Black people and recognize the horrors of slavery. Prior to coming to Derbyshire Farms, Polly believed that it was right that Black people are enslaved. But as she gets to know Polly, Teenie, and Tidbit, she begins to understand that slavery is deadly and denies the humanity of its victims. This becomes especially clear to her when she sees the rice fields firsthand and learns how deadly they are. She becomes even more disillusioned when she realizes that Mrs. Derby isn't a powerful figure just because she's wealthy and white. Rather, Mrs. Derby is deeply unhappy and powerless under her husband's authority. Seeing Mr. Derby whip Amari for tripping and spilling a pie is the final straw for Polly, as it shows her that Mr. Derby—and other white slave owners—will punish slaves for things that aren't their fault (and she also suspects that Mr. Derby purposefully tripped Amari). Following the birth and subsequent murder of Mrs. Derby's Black **baby**, Polly escapes south with Amari and Tidbit toward Fort Mose. Though Polly still retains some of her racist views, she begins to shed some of them and see Amari as a true friend as they have to work together to survive their journey. In Fort Mose, Polly's education is a boon for the first time in her life, and she agrees to teach children to read and write.

Teenie – Teenie is the slave cook at Derbyshire Farms. Teenie is diminutive in stature, but she's larger than life in personality and commands respect from everyone—even from her white masters. Amari notices that no matter what Mrs. Derby wants to eat, Teenie always cooks whatever she wants to anyway. Teenie is extremely kind and generous with everyone. She expresses genuine interest in Polly's life story, and she helps Amari feel at home by sharing stories of her own mother, who came from Africa. She even feels deep sympathy for Mrs. Derby, whom she believes is heavily monitored by Mr. Derby. However, even as Teenie sympathizes with Polly and Mrs. Derby, she remains firm in her conversations with Polly that white people—no matter how poor or beaten down they are—are not as oppressed as slaves. Despite having been born in the colonies, Teenie clings tightly to the stories her mother told her about Africa. She also keeps a small scrap of **kente cloth** that her mother managed to hide all the way across the Atlantic, which Teenie sees as a reminder of the tenacity and hopefulness of Black slaves. On the plantation, Teenie knows everything and everyone—and she has more power than she lets on. In her garden, she grows plants that are poisonous and saves the seeds. Following the birth of Mrs. Derby's Black **baby**, whom Teenie tries to protect from Mr. Derby, Mr. Derby chooses to punish Teenie by selling her four-year-old son, Tidbit. Tidbit is Teenie's reason for living and holding on—but another slave, Cato, convinces Teenie that sending Tidbit with the girls is the best way to give Tidbit a chance at freedom. She sends Tidbit with her scrap of kente cloth and makes him swear to remember all her stories. Though it's never confirmed, it's likely that Teenie poisons and kills Mr. Derby in retaliation. Amari learns that Mr. Derby died and that Clay suspects his father was poisoned, but Clay doesn't seem to realize who did it.

Mr. Derby – Mr. Derby is the white master of Derbyshire Farms and one of the novel's antagonists. Though not as overtly cruel or as physically abusive as his son Clay, Mr. Derby consistently dehumanizes the slaves on his plantation. Amari hates him immediately, as he purchases her especially for Clay to use as a sexual plaything. Mr. Derby is an exacting master

who expects his slaves (and indentured servants, in the case of Polly) to be consistently busy and to never question his authority. Despite not appreciating his rudeness toward her, Polly nevertheless aspires to be like Mr. Derby—that is, wealthy and landowning—until she listens to him speak about slaves during dinner one night. He speaks about slaves as though they're animals rather than people, and he's totally unconcerned when one of his slaves, Hildy, dies due to a snake bite. For him, it's an in inconvenience and a problem for rice production, not a reflection of the horrific, dangerous, and dehumanizing conditions in the rice fields. In addition to abusing his slaves, he's also very controlling when it comes to his wife. Mrs. Derby is his second wife, and though she believes that Mr. Derby truly does love her, he married her for her money and for her land—and in Teenie's estimation, he controls everything she does and everyone she has contact with. Thus, when Mrs. Derby gives birth to a Black **baby** fathered by her slave Noah, Mr. Derby takes it as a personal insult. The baby's conception and birth is proof that both his wife and his slaves can and will attempt to make their own choices, something he cannot allow if he wants to remain in power. Thus, he forces Mrs. Derby to watch as he murders the baby and Noah. To punish Teenie for her role in trying to hide the baby, he also decides to sell Tidbit. Later, Clay shares that Mr. Derby died and insinuates that he believes his father was poisoned—though Clay doesn't know it, Teenie likely poisoned him as payback for selling her son.

Clay Derby – Clay is Mr. Derby's 16-year-old son and one of the novel's antagonists. Like his father, Clay is cruel, callous, and unfeeling, and he has a disgusting habit of spitting. He fully believes in slavery and revels in the amount of power he has over the slaves on his father's plantation. Mr. Derby purchases Amari for Clay as a 16th birthday present, and Clay regularly rapes Amari. Unsurprisingly, Amari hates him—he often makes her stay with him after raping her and wants to talk to her, which means Amari has to pay attention to him instead of retreating into happier memories. Clay's penchant for cruelty means that he often turns to violence and power games when he deals with the slaves. For instance, when he takes Tidbit to use as alligator bait in the river, he forces Amari to tie the rope onto Tidbit, thereby emotionally abusing Amari in addition to abusing Tidbit. He also openly loathes his stepmother, Mrs. Derby, and goes out of his way to be cruel to her. His behavior is somewhat confusing for Amari, as Clay occasionally expresses what seems like genuine affection for her—but he remains overwhelmingly abusive. Polly notices that Clay seems to enjoy discovering that Mrs. Derby gave birth to a Black **baby** and seeing his father punish everyone involved by murdering Noah (the baby's father) and the infant. Weeks after Dr. Hoskins lets Amari, Polly, and Tidbit go free, Clay catches up to them and manages to capture Amari briefly. Still intent on asserting his dominance over slaves and women, he attempts to rape Amari and threatens to mutilate her when they return—but Polly shoots him, grazing him in the head and knocking him out. The girls tie Clay up and leave him to fend off an angry rattlesnake on his own. They don't stay to find out if he survives the ordeal.

Tidbit – Tidbit is Teenie's four-year-old son. Tidbit is a bright, happy, and mischievous **child**. He can often be found underfoot in Teenie's kitchen playing with his dog, Hushpuppy. He is instrumental in teaching Amari English, as he often talks to her as he teaches her how to perform tasks around the plantation. Occasionally, Amari speaks to him in Ewe, which fascinates Tidbit—he's captivated by the idea of living in Africa, though he's too young to fully understand what it means to be free. Both Amari and Polly come to genuinely love Tidbit, and both take it upon themselves to care for him when Teenie cannot. Polly begins to understand just how horrible life is for slaves when she learns that Tidbit will one day work in the rice fields—and she can't fathom how anyone can condemn such a bright, innocent child to such deadly work. Amari does everything she can to protect Tidbit when Clay takes him from Teenie to use as alligator bait in the river. Following the birth of Mrs. Derby's Black baby who's fathered by one of her slaves, Mr. Derby punishes Teenie for her involvement by deciding to sell Tidbit. However, Tidbit escapes with Polly and Amari thanks to Dr. Hoskins's kindness. Along the journey, Tidbit struggles to understand why they have to leave at all. For him, despite having experienced abuse at the hands of his white masters, being with Teenie is still more important than freedom, a concept he's perhaps too young to fully understand. However, he promises to remember everything Teenie told him about Africa and her mother, and he ultimately asks Amari to be his mother in Fort Mose. In Fort Mose, Tidbit shares that his real name is Timothy. He begins to go by Timothy and decides that he'd like to be a soldier when he grows up so he can fight for his freedom.

Mrs. Isabelle Derby – Mrs. Derby is the lady of Derbyshire Farms. She's Mr. Derby's second wife; she's only 18 years old, comes from a wealthy family, and brings land and slaves to the marriage. Mrs. Derby is extremely kind; she's the only white person Amari knows of who looks at her with compassion, and she's the only one to apologize for how Clay consistently rapes Amari. Several slaves on the plantation resent Mrs. Derby's personal bodyguard and slave, Noah, as rumor has it that he can read and will be granted freedom upon Mrs. Derby's death (though neither of these things are ever confirmed). Mrs. Derby is pregnant, and the slaves often gossip about whether she's going to have a girl or a boy. Teenie sympathizes with Mrs. Derby, as she recognizes that Mr. Derby treats his wife more like a beautiful object to control than a person in charge of her own life. Polly eventually comes to this conclusion as well; observing Mrs. Derby at dinner one night leads her to recognize that becoming a fine lady doesn't mean that a person will be happy. And indeed, when Mrs. Derby finally gives birth,

it's revealed just how powerless she is. Her **baby** is Black, and Noah is the father—the two grew up together and have been in love since they were children. Mrs. Derby desperately wants her child to survive and conspires with Teenie, Amari, and Polly to try to save her baby. Mr. Derby figures out the plot, however, and forces Mrs. Derby to watch him murder her baby and Noah. Though it's unclear what happens to Mrs. Derby in the aftermath, Mr. Derby implies that he has every intention of making her life even more hellish to punish her for her transgression.

Afi – Afi is an older woman whom Amari befriends in the slave factories at Cape Coast and remains close with up until they're sold at the slave auction in Charles Town. Afi is large and motherly, and she does everything she can to keep Amari alive. She insists to Amari that dying is allowing the white men to win, and she coaches Amari through how to handle each increasingly dehumanizing assault. Afi lost her **children** and husband several years ago, and so Amari suspects that Afi needs her as much as she needs Afi. One of Afi's constant refrains is that Amari needs to stay alive so that she's able to pass along her story and her history to future generations. Afi suggests that this is one of the only ways that slaves will be able to hold onto their humanity and their history as they're transported to the English colonies. Upon arriving in the colonies, Afi and Amari's separation in Charles Town is traumatic, as Amari can't bear to leave her mentor and her only friend. Once Amari is on her own, she thinks often about Afi's advice and occasionally believes that Afi was wrong to insist that they must survive. However, once Amari reaches Fort Mose and discovers she's pregnant, she begins to see that Afi was onto something when she insisted that Amari had to keep going for the sake of future generations. Though Amari never finds out what happens to Afi in the colonies, she decides to name her baby Afi if it's a girl to honor her friend and mentor—and to keep her memory alive.

Besa – Besa is Amari's fiancé. He's handsome and kind, and he's an assistant to the village drummer. They've been engaged for about a year when the novel begins, and Amari is looking forward to her future with Besa. Though Besa survives the massacre and the raid on their village, the limited contact that Amari has with him between their abduction and being sold in Charles Town reveals that Besa's spirit begins to break early. He refuses to look at Amari out of shame at not being able to protect her, though he asks her to always think of him when she looks at the stars. Though Amari believes she'll never see him again after the slave auction, she's surprised and shocked when she finds him on Fiona O'Reilly's farm. By the time they meet there, Besa has had five owners and has tried to run away several times. One of his eyes and many of his teeth are missing, and it's clear he's been beaten and physically abused in myriad ways. He shares that simply existing is painful for him, both emotionally and physically, and he no longer sees the point in hoping for better. Amari recognizes that Besa's spirit is broken and leaves him on the farm when he refuses to come with her and Polly.

Dr. Hoskins – Dr. Hoskins is the local doctor, though he lives several hours away from the Derby plantation. Mr. Derby sends for the doctor when Mrs. Derby goes into labor, but Dr. Hoskins doesn't arrive in time to attend the birth. When the truth comes out about the paternity of Mrs. Derby's **baby**, Dr. Hoskins is disturbed by the fact that Mr. Derby murders both Noah and the infant—though as a white man, he feels as though he must keep silent about his feelings in front of Mr. Derby. However, this does give him the opportunity later—when Mr. Derby entrusts him with selling Amari, Polly, and Tidbit on his behalf—to free his charges and give them a chance at finding freedom. He insists that he doesn't believe in slavery, but aside from one-off acts of resistance like freeing Amari, Polly, and Tidbit, Dr. Hoskins doesn't feel like he can do anything to stop or change the cruel and dehumanizing nature of slavery on a grander scale.

Inez – Inez is the Black woman who is the first to welcome Amari, Polly, and Tidbit to Fort Mose. A former slave from Georgia Colony, she and her husband escaped to Fort Mose about a year ago—but while Inez has her freedom, her husband is serving in the Spanish military in order to earn his. She thus recognizes that Fort Mose isn't as wonderful as some might think. A kind and generous woman, Inez feeds the travelers when they arrive in Fort Mose and takes it upon herself to show them around. She also is the one to tell Amari that she's pregnant and assure Amari that this is an ordeal she can survive. Inez tells the story of her own daughter, who was the product of rape by her master. She encourages Amari to focus on telling her **baby** her stories and her history, and to protect her baby from the horrors of slavery in whatever way Amari can.

Noah – Noah is Mrs. Derby's personal slave and bodyguard. Amari sees little of him throughout the novel, since he serves primarily at the house, but several of the other slaves resent him. It's rumored that he's literate and will be freed upon Mrs. Derby's death, and his superior treatment and duties don't sit well with the other slaves either. In Polly and Amari's experience, however, Noah is kind and supportive of the other slaves on the plantation. When Mrs. Derby gives birth to a Black **baby**, Teenie correctly infers that Noah is the father. Noah explains that he and Mrs. Derby grew up together and have been friends and lovers for a long time. His love for Mrs. Derby means that he's unwilling to try to run away and save himself. Mr. Derby murders Noah and the baby in front of Mrs. Derby to punish them.

Fiona O'Reilly – Fiona is a white woman who discovers Amari, Polly, and Tidbit sleeping in one of her husband's hunting shacks. She agrees to help them. Fiona is a puzzle for Amari and Polly: she and her husband, Patrick, own slaves, yet Fiona feels

compelled to help Amari and Tidbit, who are clearly runaways. She insists that while she has no standing to interfere with her husband's business of owning slaves, she can also make her own choices when it comes to slaves whom Patrick *doesn't* own. It's also clear that Fiona feels little loyalty toward her husband, as he doesn't want to engage in trade that would give Fiona access to goods like cloth. Instead, she has to make do with making heavy garments out of pelts. Heartbreakingly, Amari realizes that Fiona and Patrick own Besa.

Cato – Cato is the oldest slave on the Derby plantation; he works in the rice fields but has a reputation for doing very little work and getting away with it. Though he has a sense of humor, he's also serious and subdued when he describes the mind-numbing and exceedingly dangerous work of tending to the rice fields. His descriptions are what causes Polly to begin to rethink her belief that it's only natural that slaves work in rice fields, especially when Cato notes that most slaves only survive an average of five years once they begin working in the fields. Cato is the one who shares with Amari and Polly that they should head south to Fort Mose instead of north, and he poisons and sickens Clay Derby, which makes it possible for Dr. Hoskins to free Clay's charges.

The Red-Haired Sailor/Bill – Bill is a red-haired sailor on the ship that transports Amari and other African slaves to the English colonies. Unlike his colleagues, Bill doesn't seem interested in raping the female captives and often busies himself doing other work on the ship when his colleagues torment the slaves. However, he understands the necessity of looking like he condones the other sailors' behavior, so like the other sailors, he takes a Black woman to his bunk every night—but instead of raping her, he teaches her English. Because of Bill's efforts, Amari learns enough English to know what's going on by the time the ship arrives in the colonies.

Lena – Lena is a house slave on the Derby plantation. Amari and Polly have little contact with her, though they do sometimes spend time together working in the kitchens. Lena is jealous of what she perceives as Mrs. Derby's cushy life, and she doesn't buy Teenie's insistence that Mrs. Derby lives a life much like theirs due to Mr. Derby's overbearing, controlling nature. When Mrs. Derby goes into labor, Lena disappears—suggesting she knows that Mr. Derby isn't the father and doesn't want to be around to get in trouble when the **baby** is born.

Amari's Mother – Amari's mother is murdered when the Ashanti and the white men raid their village to abduct and enslave people. Amari thinks of Mother often once she's enslaved in the colonies, as she wishes she'd listened better when Mother talked about herbs or cooking. Amari only begins to make peace with her mother's death when she realizes that her unborn **baby** carries Mother's spirit—and one day, the child can carry Mother's stories and knowledge forward.

Nathan – Nathan is a red-haired young man whom Polly, Amari, and Tidbit meet on their journey south to Fort Mose. He's somewhat snotty and sarcastic, but Polly develops an immediate crush on him. Nathan agrees to help the runaways, though he's ultimately unsuccessful in keeping his alcoholic father from finding them. Though it's never confirmed, he was supposedly in Fort Mose several days before Polly, Amari, and Tidbit get there, presumably looking for Polly.

Tybee – Tybee is a Black slave who gives instructions to newly arrived slaves on Sullivan's Island. Though he presumably says what he's supposed to say in English, when there are no white people present, he switches to Ashanti and warns the new slaves to hold onto their native languages if at all possible.

Captain Francisco Menendez – Captain Mendez is the Black captain at Fort Mose. He's an escaped slave. Meeting Captain Menendez is exhilarating for Amari, as he's the first Black man in a position of power she's met since being captured and enslaved. He treats Amari, Polly, and Tidbit kindly and assures them that in Spanish Florida, they'll be safe and free.

Amari's Father – Amari's father is the head storyteller and one of the elders of her village. He's also a skilled weaver. Amari adores Father's stories and desperately wants to weave, like he does, but weaving is forbidden to women. Father is murdered when the Ashanti and the white men raid Amari's village.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Domingo Salvador – Salvador is a drunk Spanish soldier whom Amari, Polly, and Tidbit encounter close to the border between the English colonies and Spanish Florida. His drunkenness, however, seems like an act as cover for him to pass along important information to Amari.

Sarah Jane – Sarah Jane is a slave woman who works in the rice fields on Mr. Derby's plantation. She has a **baby** who's several months old, so Amari and Teenie ask Sarah Jane to nurse Mrs. Derby's baby while they figure out what to do with the infant.

Patrick – Patrick is Fiona O'Reilly's husband. He never appears in person in the novel. Fiona describes him as a good man but a hard one; he prefers hunting to farming and seems to be very controlling of his wife and slaves.

Esi – Esi is one of Amari's friends in her village. She's recently married and is pregnant with her first **baby**. However, Esi miscarries on the forced march from their village to Cape Coast and dies due to complications and blood loss.

Jeremy Carton – Carton is a dirt former and the original holder of Polly's indenture. He sells her indenture to Mr. Derby for reasons unknown to Polly. Polly describes Carton as cold and unfeeling.

Kwasi – Kwasi is Amari's spunky eight-year-old brother who loves to climb trees and run wild. The Ashanti murder Kwasi when he and Amari attempt to flee the massacre in their village.

Tirza – Tirza is Amari's childhood friend. She gives up all hope

and dies on the march from their village to Cape Coast.

Hushpuppy – Hushpuppy is Tidbit's dog. He's extremely loyal to Tidbit and consistently growls at Clay Derby.

Hildy – Hildy is a slave woman who dies from copperhead snake bite that she sustains in the rice fields.

The Chief – The chief is the leader of Amari's village.

TERMS

Ashanti – The Ashanti are a tribe native to Western Africa.

Ewe – The Ewe are a tribe in Western Africa; the term Ewe also refers to the language spoken by many related tribes. In *Copper Sun*, **Amari** is Ewe.

Indentured Servant – An indentured servant is person who voluntarily enters into a contract to work for a set amount of time, usually four to seven years. At the end of their indenture, they become free and can integrate into white society. **Polly** becomes an indentured servant to pay off debts; others, like her father, chose indentured servitude in the colonies to escape jail in England. A person's indenture could be sold or traded without that person's consent.

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.

SLAVERY, DEHUMANIZATION, AND RESISTANCE

Set in 1738, *Copper Sun* follows Amari, a 15-year-old young woman from the West African Ewe tribe, as she's captured, transported across the Atlantic to the Carolinas, and sold into slavery. The journey is horrifying: Amari goes from being a loved and respected member of her community to being treated like an animal. Her captors starve her, rape her, and dehumanize her in countless other ways along her journey. Although Amari wishes at many points that she could simply die and no longer have to suffer the indignity and the pain of being enslaved, the friends she makes along her journey all make the same point: that Amari must survive, and that to do so, she needs to hold onto and assert her humanity at every opportunity. With this, the novel proposes that the institution of slavery is so hard to topple because those in power so thoroughly dehumanize their victims—and victims can only resist by acknowledging the humanity and dignity of all people, especially themselves.

From the moment the neighboring Ashanti tribe and a group of white men capture Amari and other young people from her tribe, Amari is subject to nothing but horrific dehumanization. This, she comes to realize, is by design: the constant abuse is meant to gradually wear her down and break her spirit as she begins her life as a slave to Mr. Derby, a white plantation owner. Indeed, Amari often wants to die rather than suffer the abuse and indignities she suffers as a slave. This is especially true as she begins to learn English and can then understand what her captors and enslavers are saying about her and other African slaves. Amari and other young, beautiful women are referred to as "breeders"; Clay, Mr. Derby's son, decides to name Amari "Myna" because she belongs to him (she's his 16th birthday present); and Mr. Derby talks about purchasing and "breaking in" slaves for the rice fields as though they were livestock rather than human beings. But even as Amari wants to die, her friends insist that she must resist this dehumanization and remember who she is—forgetting this, and essentially giving in to what her enslavers want, is unacceptable.

Though Amari feels as though she and her fellow Black slaves are alone in their resistance to slavery, she ultimately discovers that this isn't entirely true—there are white people who resist slavery, but they must do so in ways that allow them to still be accepted in white society, so their actions tend to be subtler or isolated occurrences. Mrs. Derby, for instance, treats the slaves her husband owns with respect and even provides medical attention to them when she can—actions that, for the most part, escape Mr. Derby's notice, which therefore allows her to continue with these small acts of resistance. Dr. Hoskins, meanwhile, can resist only once, but he does so in a big way. When tasked with selling Amari, the white indentured servant Polly, and four-year-old slave Tidbit on behalf of Mr. Derby, Dr. Hoskins frees his charges. Unlike Mrs. Derby who can quietly, steadily resist slavery, Dr. Hoskins knows that it's only a matter of time before Mr. Derby finds him out and spreads the word that he sympathizes with slaves—something that will destroy Dr. Hoskins's reputation and his ability to continue caring for his white patients. Despite the danger that Dr. Hoskins and Mrs. Derby put themselves in, they feel that the personal sacrifice is well worth it if they can acknowledge the humanity of others and, in the case of Dr. Hoskins, hopefully give slaves the chance to find freedom.

On her journey south to Fort Mose in Florida Territory, Amari comes face to face with an unrecognizable version of her former fiancé, Besa. The sight of him shows Amari the true consequences of the dehumanization of slavery as Besa, who now goes by Buck, is a shell of his former self. Since arriving in the Carolinas at the same time as Amari, less than a year ago, Besa has had five owners and has tried to run away several times. Former owners cut off several of his fingers as punishment, his body is covered in scars from whippings, and it's clear that Besa's spirit is broken. Being told and treated like

he's nothing more than an animal has heartbreakingly resulted in Besa internalizing that lie and believing that it's no longer worth trying to strive for a better life. And when Amari leaves him, she knows she is dooming him to a life that's likely to be short, miserable, and hopeless. Though Amari didn't need any more proof of slavery's horrors, coming across Besa crystallizes in Amari's mind why she and as many slaves as possible must hold onto hope and seek their freedom at every opportunity. The result of slavery is death, whether a slave dies in the rice fields from a snakebite or cholera, or on a farm due to being treated as subhuman and beaten when they show any sign of independent thought. While Amari ultimately finds freedom at Fort Mose, the reader must sit with the fact that a happy ending like Amari's was far less common than Besa's fate—and that slavery persisted in the American South for more than a century after Amari's story ends. But ultimately, *Copper Sun* suggests that acknowledging and understanding the gross inhumanity of slavery and the immense toll it took on its victims is an essential first step to honoring the humanity and the lives of those victims and of their descendants.

HORROR VS. BEAUTY

Amari's capture, journey across the Atlantic on a slave ship, and subsequent enslavement on Mr. Derby's plantation is nothing short of horrific. She details all the horrible things that she witnesses and experiences firsthand, including being branded as a slave, seeing the male slaves on the ship stacked in the cargo hold, and being raped by sailors and by Mr. Derby's son, Clay. However, even as she sees and experiences such deep pain and suffering, Amari never loses her ability to appreciate the beauty of the world around her—whether it's the titular **copper sun** that rises and sets no matter where she is in the world, or the beautiful and hopeful **children and babies** whom she meets in the colonies. Using Amari as an example, the novel makes it clear that there's potential to find evidence of beauty everywhere—and that while it may seem frivolous, it's actually necessary to look for beauty if one hopes to survive in the face of so much horror.

The novel's early passages make it clear that Amari and her tribe's way of life in Africa has taught her to look for the beauty in the world. For example, even as Amari scolds her little brother, Kwasi, for climbing trees and being rambunctious, she still loves watching him climb and asks that he collect fruit if he's going to be in the trees anyway. To Amari, Kwasi's rebelliousness isn't something to get seriously angry about—it's something to celebrate and channel. This habit of looking at potentially dangerous or unnerving situations as opportunities, the novel shows, extends to her entire tribe. When members of the nearby Ashanti tribe arrive with white men, Amari ignores her underlying sense of unease about the visitors and instead, with the rest of her tribe, prepares a feast and a party—the only way, in her culture, to welcome visitors. This outlook becomes Amari's downfall when the Ashanti and the white men begin a massacre during the celebration, but it's important to note that this tragic turn of events isn't Amari's fault or that of the Ewe tribe more broadly. They had no way of knowing that the Ashanti, whom they trust, would facilitate the murder of the Ewes' very young and very old, or the capture and enslavement of the teens and young people. Looking for beauty in everyone and everything is simply part of Amari's tribe's way of life.

However, as Amari and other members of her tribe are taken to a city on the coast and loaded onto a ship bound for the colonies in North America, Amari's ability to look for the beauty in her surroundings is what keeps from falling prey entirely to despair. Life at sea is miserable: the ocean itself is terrifying, living on the ship is horrifying, and the sailors are overwhelmingly cruel and abusive to their human cargo. In the face of so much suffering, Amari finds she must look to her friend Afi in order to find a reason to endure her circumstances. Afi, importantly, provides Amari with companionship and information about what awaits them. She treats Amari like a daughter or a little sister, impressing upon Amari that even if she can't count on her surroundings to uplift her, she can take comfort in the kindnesses of others. And indeed, Afi isn't the only one who is kind to Amari on the ship: a sailor named Bill begins teaching her English. Though he's certainly not Amari's friend in the way that Afi is, his small kindness begins to take the edge off of her suffering and helps her survive, as knowing English helps her understand what's going on and how she should react to each new circumstance.

Once in the colonies, despite the horrors that Amari encounters as a result of her enslavement by Mr. Derby, a wealthy white plantation owner, she finds a new reason to keep going: the slave children on the plantation are spots of beauty and brightness in her otherwise miserable world, and it's essential to do everything she can to protect them. Amari works in the kitchens alongside a slave woman named Teenie and her four-year-old son, Tidbit. Tidbit provides much-needed brightness to Amari's life as he bounds along with his puppy, Hushpuppy, cracking jokes and reminding Amari of her brother Kwasi. However, Amari is also forced to reckon with the fact that due to what slave owners are legally allowed to do to their slaves, the lives of young children like Tidbit are at particular risk—Clay Derby, on one occasion, scoops Tidbit up to dangle him in the river as bait while he and his friends hunt alligators. And later, when Mr. Derby discovers that his wife gave birth not to his own child, but to a baby girl fathered by Mrs. Derby's slave and bodyguard, Noah, he shoots Noah and the infant. This act symbolically destroys the innocent beauty and the hope of a better future that the baby represents. Then, to punish Teenie for her role in attempting to cover up the baby's parentage, Mr. Derby decides to sell Tidbit. Tidbit, along with Amari and the indentured servant Polly (both of whom attended the birth),

are able to escape and head south to Fort Mose, where it's rumored that they can all be free. And as Amari leads her companions south, she focuses less on her own prospects of freedom and more on Tidbit's future—Teenie, she knows, wants desperately for her son to experience freedom, even though Teenie believes that she herself will never be free. Ultimately, the novel suggests that it is the beauty that can be found in other people that enables individuals to survive and strive for better for the next generation.

FRIENDSHIP

Over the course of Amari's march as a captive from her home village in Africa to an oceanside city, where she begins her journey across the Atlantic to be sold as a slave in the Carolinas, nearly all her friends from her village die. Seemingly alone, Amari must find and foster friendships with other women along her journey, first with a fellow captive woman named Afi and later with Polly, a white indentured servant about Amari's age who also serves Mr. Derby. While Amari's friendship with Afi develops easily and comfortably, Amari and Polly's relationship—and Polly's friendships with the other Black slaves with whom she lives—is much slower to develop. By exploring how these different friendships take root, the novel makes it clear that friendship can happen anywhere—but only when both individuals are willing and able to recognize others' humanity, and that the other is worthy of care and respect.

Over the course of Amari's journey, she begins to realize that friendship is necessary if she wants to survive. She first begins to realize this on the forced march from her village to the coastal city, over the course of which many of her friends die of disease or fatigue—or in the case of one young woman, a horrific miscarriage. Thus, when Amari arrives at the coast, she enters the holding building for female slaves totally alone and very afraid. By a stroke of luck, however, Amari ends up seated next to an older woman named Afi who, without asking any questions, takes Amari under her wing, offering advice and support as they begin their journey west to the colonies. Afi's care of and concern for Amari is, Amari believes, the main reason why she survives the journey and feels able to go on. However, it's worth noting that their friendship develops easily because they share so many qualities: they're both women, they're both Black and soon to be slaves, and they're from neighboring tribes. If both parties are willing, this suggests, it's not difficult to make meaningful friendships with a person if they have enough in common with each other.

Amari's relationship with the indentured servant Polly, however, takes much longer to develop, mostly because Polly is so very different from Amari. Amari and the other Black slaves understand that as an indentured servant and as a white woman, Polly will one day be able to assimilate into white society—a privilege that none of the slaves will ever have. And for that matter, because Polly is white, she believes that she's better than her Black companions, even though she performs the exact same work and reports to the Black slave cook, Teenie. Resentment and distrust simmers on both sides—the slaves don't like Polly and she doesn't like them—especially since Amari's owner and the holder of Polly's indenture, Mr. Derby, puts Polly in charge of "civilizing" Amari and teaching her English. Both young women, however, soon find common ground: Mr. Derby, they agree, is cruel, unfeeling, and treats everyone who isn't a white male like they're possessions—and his son Clay is even more entitled, full of himself, and cruel than his father is. Polly and Amari's friendship, in this sense, begins due to mutual hatred of their master, not necessarily out of genuine interest or affection for each other.

Gradually, though, simply through spending time together, talking with Teenie, and learning about each other's lives, respect and genuine care begin to grow between Polly and Amari—and between Polly and the Black slaves more generally. Polly begins to view the Black slaves as her friends when she learns that after a disastrous spill in the dining room, Amari will be sent out to work in the rice fields. There, slaves only survive an average of five years due to the prevalence of waterborne illnesses, snakes, and alligators—and though before, Polly thought it was right and expected that slaves work in rice fields, she now cannot bear the thought of her friend performing backbreaking labor and inevitably dying an early, preventable death. Polly's transformation and the girls' developing friendship speaks to one of the novel's most important ideas: that while friendships may be easier to form when people share many qualities and, in particular, have undergone many of the same experiences due to the color of their skin, that's not the only way that friendships form. Rather, friendships can form between any two people as long as they are each able to regard the other with genuine curiosity and to acknowledge their dignity and humanity.

MEMORY AND STORYTELLING

Upon boarding the slave ship bound for the North American colonies, it becomes immediately apparent to Amari and her friend Afi that they will never return to Africa. When they realize this, Afi encourages Amari to cling tightly to her memories of home—soon, they'll be all she has of Africa. However, Amari's enslavers are aware that these ties to Africa are what helps the slaves feel human and connected to their happy pasts, and so they make a point to discourage slaves from speaking in their native language. They also rename the Black slaves and insist to one another that slaves are, on the whole, unable to remember much. But it's clear that the slaves do, in fact, remember their old lives and their cultural legacies. The novel ultimately suggests that as slaves arrive in the colonies, have **children**, and attempt to create lives for themselves in whatever way possible in light of

being enslaved, their connections to their memories, stories, and names carried over from their past are exceedingly valuable. Those memories—which, in later generations, become stories—are what help them connect with and take pride in their African identity. Memories, in essence, allow them to be more than slaves.

As Amari is forced into slavery—she's captured, shackled, branded, and transported to the American colonies—her captors understand that the best way to break the slaves' spirits is to deprive them of their language and thus, their ability to communicate with each other. To do this, those who manage the warehouses where slaves are quarantined prior to being sold violently forbid their captives from "talking African." Any conversations that do take place amongst the slaves must be short, quiet, and to the point—so there's no time to either remind each other of where they came from, or to encourage each other to bravely face whatever comes next. Forbidding the native languages, in other words, fractures any sense of community shared amongst the slaves—and alone, unable to either communicate or understand what's going on, Amari recognizes that she and her fellow slaves struggle to remain strong. Further, Amari's memories of home begin to seem less and less useful as she finds herself purchased by Mr. Derby as a gift for his son Clay's birthday. The memories of her fiancé, Besa, or of her former happiness doesn't make being raped nightly by Clay Derby any less horrific.

However, as Amari gets to know the slave Teenie, who was born in the colonies to a woman who came from Africa, she begins to see that it's nevertheless essential to hold onto her memories and pass them on—this is how, Teenie suggests, they can maintain a sense of who they are. Though Teenie never learned her mother's native language, she does keep a small scrap of **kente cloth** (traditional West African woven cloth) that her mother managed to hold onto during her transatlantic journey. For Teenie and her four-year-old son, Tidbit, that cloth is a symbol of the tenacity, courage, and the history of not just Teenie's mother, but of all Black enslaved people in the colonies. Without language, then, Teenie's memories of her mother and of her mother's stories of Africa become even more essential to her conception of who she is. Those memories keep her grounded and reminded that she has a rich history and that her heritage and identity extend well beyond the life she leads as a slave.

However, the novel makes it clear that this kind of quiet hope isn't something that every slave can hang onto, as slavers are often successful in permanently divorcing slaves from their language, names, and history. At one point during her journey south, Amari encounters Besa, her fiancé from home—but he looks nothing like the man she remembers. He speaks in English, barely seems to recognize his Ewe name and insists that he's now Buck—and most heartbreaking of all, he's adamant that he has no future now. Besa's fate makes it clear that the consequences of being a slave go far beyond simply being ripped away from one's home, denied respect and agency, and forced to work for free. Rather, for the many individuals who don't see the point in remembering the past or for the many others who struggle to pass down their stories from one generation to the next, the consequence is a loss of culture, a loss of history, and a loss of one's very identity. Though it is, of course, impossible to go back and remedy the atrocities committed against enslaved people, the novel itself—a work of historical fiction—nevertheless proposes that in order to honor those individuals who suffered abduction and enslavement, it's essential that they and their stories not be forgotten.

GENDER, RACE, AND POWER

While *Copper Sun* primarily concerns itself with the horrors and struggles that enslaved Black people (particularly enslaved Black women) faced, the novel nevertheless offers a nuanced picture of who had power in the North American colonies and who doesn't. Though enslaved Black people certainly suffer the most, they aren't the only demographic who did. Rather, *Copper Sun* delves into a power structure that puts wealthy, white, and male slave owners—like Mr. Derby—at the very top and everyone else (including wealthy white women and poorer white slave owners) beneath them. By exploring different intersections of race, gender, and wealth, the novel suggests that in order to understand the time period in which the novel takes place (1738) and the colonial South more broadly, it's essential to move beyond thinking strictly in terms of white versus Black. While the system at work in the colonies is undeniably racist, it's also sexist and classist—and this system (to varying degrees and with differing consequences) harms nearly everyone who isn't white, wealthy, and male.

By following two different protagonists—Amari and Polly—in close third-person narration, *Copper Sun* shows how each young woman experiences classism, racism, and sexism in the colonies. While Amari undeniably suffers more and in different ways than Polly does, due to their sex and economic situations, they experience some overlapping mistreatment. Amari, being a Black slave, is treated like an animal. The slave traders, and later her owners, Mr. Derby and his 16-year-old son Clay Derby, talk about Amari as though she can't understand and as though she's an inanimate plaything. Since Polly is white, the Derbys treat her somewhat better—they at least speak to her as though she's a human being. But Polly is an indentured servant, a person who enters into a contract of their own will, stipulating that they'll work for a set number of years to pay off debts. Under this contract, Polly is required to live and work with the Black slaves, but she struggles to figure out exactly where she fits in on the Derby plantation. Because she's white and holds a number of racist views, she sees herself as better than the Black slaves. But because she's an indentured servant

and performs the same work as those Black slaves, in practice, she has no more power than they do. The differences between Amari and Polly begin to illuminate just how multilayered the power structure is in colonial America—and make it clear that women, especially Black women, struggle in this system most of all.

In the same vein, even though Mrs. Derby is white and of a high class, her womanhood means that she's nonetheless treated poorly. As Amari, Polly, and a house slave named Lena discuss how wealthy Mrs. Derby is and how idyllic her life must be, Teenie, the cook, shatters this fantasy by insisting that Mrs. Derby is "pretty close to" a slave. In Teenie's estimation, "[Mr. Derby] decide where [Mrs. Derby] go, who she talk to, what she wear—everything." Indeed, when Amari and Polly attend Mrs. Derby's labor with her first **baby**, they discover that the baby's father isn't Mr. Derby—it's Mrs. Derby's slave and bodyguard, Noah. The color of the baby's skin makes it obvious that she isn't Mr. Derby's child, and Amari and Polly realize that Mrs. Derby could now be in just as much danger of her husband's wrath as any of the slaves are. And indeed, when Mr. Derby figures out what happened and shoots both the infant and Noah, he makes it abundantly clear that he's well within his rights to "deal with" both his slaves and his wife as he sees fit—the fact that Mrs. Derby is his wife (and therefore his property) means that she can't love who she wants to love, or give birth to a dark-skinned baby, without consequences. However, she does have some sliver of privilege because she's white and Mr. Derby's wife—she isn't shot immediately. Being white and wealthy protects her from immediate death, even if it can't save her from a miserable life.

Following this disaster, as Polly, Amari, and Teenie's four-year-old son, Tidbit, run away to the Florida Territory where they believe they'll be free, they encounter people along the way who continue to illustrate that sexism, classism, and racism all work together to create a complex social structure that places enslaved (or runaway) Black people at the bottom. This hierarchy gives others varying degrees of power depending on their economic status or their sex. Nathan, a white boy who helps them, is from a family too poor to purchase slaves—and, possibly because he empathizes or simply doesn't stand to benefit as much from slavery, he doesn't believe in the system of slavery at all. Another white woman who helps them, Fiona O'Reilly, is married to a man who owns slaves, and she fully supports the institution—the slaves' unpaid labor is how they're able to scrape by on their farm. But because her husband shows her so little respect and doesn't allow her to make any decisions, she delights in helping slaves who *don't* belong to her husband escape. Polly suspects that Fiona's choice to help them is the first decision Fiona has ever made on her own, and to Fiona, it likely seems like a way to feel powerful and in control when the rest of the time, she has little or no say in what goes on in her life. With this, *Copper Sun* makes it clear that it's impossible to look at the social structure of the colonies as simply a matter of racism, sexism, or classism. Rather, the novel encourages readers to understand that while enslaved Black people (and especially women) had the least amount of power and while wealthy white men had the most, it's nevertheless essential to take the many different facets of a person's identity into account when evaluating their choices, their prospects for advancement, or their degree of vulnerability in the colonial system.

SYMBOLS

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

THE COPPER SUN

The titular copper sun is a symbolic reminder for Amari that she can—and should—find beauty everywhere she goes. The sun is a constant in Amari's life: it rises and sets on her homeland in Africa, on the ocean while she's being transported in a slave ship, and in the American colonies once she arrives. This impresses upon her that no matter how her circumstances might change, some things will still remain the same. However, the sun isn't simply a symbol of hope and beauty. At points, such as when Amari is forced to remain on deck under the hot sun without enough water, the sun feels oppressive. This reflects Amari's hopelessness during her time on the ship. The sun doesn't become beautiful again until Amari is able to reorient herself to a more optimistic perspective, suggesting that it takes intentionally changing one's outlook to be more hopeful to be able to truly appreciate the beauty—both physical and immaterial—that life has to offer.

BABIES / CHILDREN

Babies—and, sometimes, older children—are symbols of hope and innocence. The many babies and children who are murdered or who otherwise die during the journey to the colonies, including Esi's unborn first child and Amari's brother Kwasi, represent the lost innocence of people abducted in Africa and enslaved in the American colonies. However, the children and infants whom Amari encounters in the colonies suggest there's still hope. Tidbit, though a slave, is bright and happy, and he shows Amari that there's something worth fighting for: his future, his right to life, and ultimately his ability to carry on the story of his ancestors and maintain the ties to African culture. This is ultimately what helps Amari accept and find peace when she realizes she's pregnant with a baby that Clay Derby fathered through rape. Despite the horrific circumstances surrounding the baby's conception, Inez encourages Amari to focus on the fact that her

baby will, like Tidbit, offer Amari an opportunity to pass along her optimism, tenacity, and strength—especially in the face of such horrors.

The fate of Mrs. Derby's own biracial infant daughter, however—Mr. Derby shoots her and her father, Noah, a slave, when the baby is only hours old—makes it clear that the hope that Black babies represent is especially tenuous. All Black slaves, whether children or adults, are in constant danger of being killed, raped, or otherwise harmed in some way, either directly by their masters or as a result of neglect. And the birth of Black babies may be hopeful for other Black people, but for white masters intent on keeping control of their slaves, those babies represent humanity, choice, and agency on the part of the Black slaves that directly threatens the control of those white masters.

KENTE CLOTH

The bit of kente cloth—traditional West African woven cloth—that Teenie and Tidbit treasure represents the resistance on the part of Black slaves to sever their connections to Africa. Teenie's mother, who was abducted from Africa, managed to keep a scrap of kente cloth from her home, even hiding it in her mouth at various points along her journey to the American colonies. Especially since Teenie didn't grow up speaking her mother's native language, the kente cloth represents Teenie's only tangible connection to her ancestral homeland.

In Fort Mose, Amari has the opportunity to build a loom and weave cloth of her own—something she's wanted to do for years but which was a profession reserved for men in Africa. This offers hope that in the colonies, slaves and freed Black people alike will be able to hold onto their cultural traditions and tweak them to suit their own purposes. Amari's opportunity to weave represents a significant change from what weaving entailed in her village in Africa, but it will nevertheless allow her to keep the knowledge of how to make the cloth—and the symbolism woven into the cloth—alive for future generations.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon Pulse edition of *Copper Sun* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Besa said that a band of unusual-looking strangers are coming this way, Mother," Amari informed her. "He seemed uneasy and went to tell the village elders."

"We must welcome our guests, then, Amari. We would never judge people simply by how they looked—that would be uncivilized," her mother told her. "Let us prepare for a celebration."

Related Characters: Amari's Mother, Amari (speaker), Esi, Besa

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

When Amari relays the news to her mother that white strangers are headed for their village, Amari's mother insists that they can't judge people by the color of their skin. This reflects the general ethos of Amari's village, where people tend to be open, accepting, and curious about others. They see everything as an opportunity to celebrate, learn something new, or share information of their own. While this is an admirable trait, however, it's also the reason why Amari and the rest of her village are so easily murdered and enslaved. It's not their fault that someone else took advantage of them—seeing the good in others is just a part of their culture. This stands in stark contrast to the violent, dehumanizing way in which Amari, her family, and the rest of the villagers will soon be treated.

Amari's mother's warning reads as both ironic and sad, given that Amari goes on to be enslaved simply because of the color of her skin. Her mother makes the case that it's impossible to actually acknowledge others' humanity while also holding racist views—and unfortunately, she also incorrectly believes that others think the same way. In reality, this attitude is fundamentally opposite from how white slaver owners perceived Black slaves, viewing them as subhuman and unworthy of even basic courtesy simply because of how they looked and where they came from.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"You know, certain people are chosen to survive. I don't know why, but you are one of those who must remember the past and tell those yet unborn. You must live."

"But why?"

"Because your mother would want you to. Because the sun continues to shine. I don't know, but you must."

Related Characters: Amari, Afi (speaker), Amari's Mother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

As Afi and Amari discuss their coming journey out to the slave ship, Amari wants to die. Afi, however, insists that Amari has a responsibility to survive. She knows that if Amari dies, Amari's story will die with her. And without Amari's story—and the stories of other enslaved women—it will be too easy to forget the trauma and abuse they suffered over the course of the transatlantic slave trade. Passing on their stories, on the other hand, will keep their histories alive and ensure that future generations aren't ignorant of the horrors that took place. And, on a brighter note, these stories will continue to connect enslaved people in the colonies (as well as their descendants) to their African roots. In other words, it's not just Amari's job to pass on her horrific story of being kidnapped and transported across the ocean. It's also her responsibility to make sure that those who are born into slavery in the colonies nevertheless know where their ancestors came from—and that their ancestors haven't always been slaves.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"Perhaps it is better to die," Amari told her sharply.

Afi sighed. "If you die, they win. We cannot let that happen."

"They have already taken everyone I loved," Amari replied, ashamed to look Afi in the face. "And tonight they take the only thing I have left that is truly mine. Death would be a relief."

"You will live because you must," Afi said sternly.

Related Characters: Afi, Amari (speaker), Amari's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Once on the slave ship, Afi warns Amari that the sailors will undoubtedly rape her, another grim reality which makes Amari long for death. As Amari sees it, her body and her sexuality are all she has left that are totally hers, since her captors have taken away her agency, her future, her family, and her home. Allowing herself to be raped seems like giving in—but Afi suggests that giving in is actually its own form of resistance. Given the horrific conditions on the slave ship, simply surviving is a form of resistance all its own—and if Amari gives in, she's more likely to survive. If she survives, she'll be able to pass her story on to future generations and make sure that they know where they came from. For Afi, who's about the age of Amari's mother, it's essential that Amari realize this and understand the necessity of passing along her story. Without history, Black people in the colonies will be totally unmoored and will have no opportunities to learn that they haven't always been slaves. They'll have no way of knowing that Black people were once free—and no hope that they'll ever be free again.

Chapter 12 Quotes

"Afi," she whispered, "the land is lovely. I thought it must surely be an ugly place."

"Yes, it is beautiful to look at. Remember that when the ugliness overtakes you," Afi told her. "Find beauty wherever you can, child. It will keep you alive."

Related Characters: Afi, Amari (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

When the slave ship arrives in the colonies, Amari is shocked that North America is so beautiful. Afi's advice impresses upon Amari that it's absolutely essential to look for the beauty every chance she gets. It may seem frivolous to do so, but given the horrors that are in store for Amari and other slaves, it's necessary to find beauty and happiness wherever they can. Looking for these bright spots, the novels suggests, can give people the will to live when it seems as though all other hope is lost.

This idea also applies to Amari and Afi's friendship, and to friendship more broadly. Their bond has been one of very few bright spots during their journey from Cape Coast to Sullivan's Island, and it's likely true that Amari didn't allow herself to give up and succumb to death due to the strong friendship she shared with Afi. Beauty, in other words, doesn't have to just come from the natural world—it can also come from a person's relationships and experiences with other people.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ "Will you be wantin' her mama, sir?" the auctioneer said to Mr. Derby. "I offer her to you first, out of respect, you see."

Polly watched as Mr. Derby, who had walked up to the stage to claim his property, glanced at the older woman standing next to the slave girl, then said, "No, Horace, but thanks for the offer. Family ties only confuse the poor creatures. They'll forget each other as soon as the sun sets. Trust me."

Related Characters: Mr. Derby (speaker), Polly, Afi, Amari

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

During the slave auction where Mr. Derby purchases Amari, the auctioneer offers Mr. Derby a woman who is presumably Afi. Mr. Derby refuses to purchase her on the grounds that her presence will "confuse" Amari. First, it's telling that the auctioneer assumes that Afi is Amari's mother. This suggests that he doesn't care or understand that Black people can form relationships with people who aren't family members, just like people everywhere can. His assumption reflects his racism and his preconceived notions about African people.

Mr. Derby's notion about "confus[ing] the poor creatures," however, represents something even more sinister. His description of the slaves as "creatures" rather than people further reinforces the racist attitude that Black people are somehow less than human. Moreover, Mr. Derby likely knows that family isn't "confus[ing]" for slaves at all—but familial bonds are dangerous because they remind slaves that they're human and have people who love them, which goes entirely against the dehumanizing tactics of slavery. In other words, to most effectively enslave Amari and break her spirit, it's necessary for Mr. Derby to separate Amari from everyone she loves. He knows full well that she'll remember Afi for a long time, but by fracturing Black slaves' relationships, friendly or familial, he can assert his dominance and dehumanize them more easily.

❝ Polly wondered if Negroes from Africa had feelings and intelligent thoughts or if that gibberish they spoke was more like the scream of monkeys or the barking of dogs.

Related Characters: Mr. Derby, Afi, Amari, Polly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Polly watches with disgust as Mr. Derby forces a distraught Amari off the stage and away from Afi. With this, Polly reveals her own racism. She essentially proposes that individuals who speak a language that she doesn't understand are less intelligent and less human than she is, simply by virtue of not speaking English. Polly is able to think this because even though she's a poor indentured servant, she's still been raised to believe that a white person—no matter their social status or their moral character—is still inherently better than any Black person.

For that matter, Polly clearly doesn't see that Black people are even human, since she doesn't even recognize that their thoughts and feelings are just as valid and real as her own. This sense that they're barely human is why Polly is able to watch Amari's separation from Afi with such cool indifference: if Amari is little different than a dog, then Polly believes there's no reason to get upset. Exposing Polly's racist internal monologue like this sets her up to reevaluate these thoughts as the novel progresses and as she gets to know Amari as the complex human being that she is.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ The young Master Derby carried a small whip, and he used it liberally to make Noah work faster. Polly noticed that the slave breathed slowly and loudly, as if he was tense, but he made no attempt to stop the young man from hitting him. She was always amazed at how much abuse slaves took without it seeming to bother them.

Related Characters: Noah, Clay Derby, Polly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

When Polly meets Clay Derby and Noah for the first time, Clay is whipping Noah seemingly for no reason. Polly's internal monologue in this moment reveals that she has absolutely no understanding of the precarious position that enslaved Black people are in. Polly thinks that perhaps slaves don't fight back because they don't feel pain or aren't intelligent enough to care. This, however, is wildly misguided and untrue—rather, the power structure

inherent to slavery leaves slaves no option but to put up with abuse and mistreatment. They don't have any recourse to fight back, for one, as they don't have any legal rights in the colonies. Fighting back or resisting openly when they're beaten might also mean that the beating either intensifies or ends in murder. The fact that Polly cannot recognize that it's unsafe for slaves to be outwardly bothered by the abuse is a result of Polly's privilege. As a white woman who has never gotten to know a Black person before, she's only ever seen abuse like this at a distance. She's never had to humanize the victims before, and it takes humanizing Black people and recognizing how little power they have to understand why they can't and don't fight back.

Chapter 16 Quotes

"I am Polly, and I work for Mr. Derby just like you." She hesitated, then added, "Well, not exactly just like you. You're a slave, which means you belong to him."

"Slave," the girl said clearly. Her eyes narrowed and her lips drew back fiercely over her teeth as she said the word. *She knows exactly what that word means*, Polly thought.

Related Characters: Amari, Polly (speaker), Mr. Derby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Derby leaves Polly to "civilize" Amari, Polly begins teaching Amari English words and explaining where she fits in on Derbyshire Farms. It's a shock for Polly to see that Amari is already well aware of what it means to be a slave. In this moment, Polly has to confront the possibility that Amari—and indeed, all Black people—aren't as unintelligent as she thought. Rather, they have thoughts, feelings, and emotions just like she does, and they're capable of learning and understanding English. They also know exactly where they fit into the social hierarchy as slaves and have thoughts on the matter, something that further challenges Polly's understanding of how Black people think and feel.

It's telling, too, that Polly takes great care to differentiate between her status as an indentured servant and Amari's status as a slave. While Polly works for Mr. Derby, Amari is forced labor and will never have the opportunity to be free. In order to maintain her own sense of racist superiority, it's essential that she make this clear to Amari.

"Well, pick my peas! A white woman as a maid and a beggar! Must not be no slaves from where she come from," Teenie commented.

"Not all white people are rich landowners," Polly said, almost coldly. "Most white folks I know scuffle for every scrap of food they get."

"But they ain't slaves," Teenie reminded her quietly.

Related Characters: Polly, Teenie (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100-01

Explanation and Analysis

While telling Teenie her family's story, Polly takes care to note that not all white people are wealthy. She implies that since they're not wealthy, they're in a similar predicament as slaves. As Teenie points out, though, this isn't correct at all. As a white indentured servant, Polly—and her parents, had they survived—will have the opportunity to one day become a part of free white society. They may not be wealthy, but other white people will look at them and treat them as though they're real people, not animals. Black slaves have no chance at that sort of respect, at least in the Southern colonies. Essentially, what Teenie tries to make clear is that white people, no matter how poor, will almost always be seen as human beings who are worthy of sympathy and basic kindness. Black people who are enslaved may have to "scuffle" for food, just like white people, but they have no opportunities to do more than that.

Chapter 17 Quotes

Amari took a deep breath and grabbed a yam from Teenie's basket. "My mama," she began, then tears filled her eyes and she gave up trying to explain. She closed her eyes and sniffed it. She could almost smell her mother's boiled chicken and yams.

"You know, my mama came from Africa too," Teenie told her. "She teached me what she knew 'bout Africa food. Long as you remember, chile, it ain't never gone."

Related Characters: Teenie, Amari (speaker), Amari's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

When a basket of yams makes Amari emotionally remember

her mother, Teenie kindly shares that her mother came from Africa too. By sharing this with Amari, Teenie makes it clear that she and Amari have more in common than Amari might have thought. Their connection to Africa connects them to each other as more than just slaves owned by the same master. They can now celebrate the fact that they both came from a place where Black people are free and are more than just slaves—their pasts and their ongoing connections to their respective cultures are validated through this simple recognition.

Further, Teenie makes an important point when she identifies that remembering something keeps it from ever fully disappearing. She encourages Amari to understand that as long as she remembers her mother and where she came from, Amari will never have to fully give up that part of herself—some part of her can still be a young, free, and happy woman in her village. And just as Amari and Teenie's growing relationship helps them transcend their identities as slaves, the same will happen as Amari holds onto her past. Doing so will allow her to hold onto the fact that she isn't just a slave—she's a human being with a family line, a culture, and a story that's worthy of being told.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Teenie paused, then said, "For me, it was the overseer, Willie Badgett. Eventually, they gets tired of you and moves on—but the terribleness of it just goes to another slave woman."

Related Characters: Teenie (speaker), Clay Derby, Amari

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

After a particularly horrible night with Clay, Amari and Teenie discuss the horror of being raped by powerful white men. Teenie makes the case that sexual assault and harassment like this is part of what it means to be female and a slave. And given how little power enslaved Black women have, there's no way for them to resist or stand up to this abuse. Surviving it is the only way to resist.

However, Teenie also insists that even surviving and having the abuse eventually stop doesn't mean the abuse is over—powerful white men simply find new victims when they get tired of their old ones. Both Teenie and Amari are part of a long line of enslaved women who have suffered sexual abuse, and the line unfortunately won't end with them. For Amari, this helps her see that Teenie may have been born in the colonies, but she still understands much of what Amari is going through. And with Teenie's support and friendship, it's more likely that Amari will be able to get through the abuse herself.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ "Money ain't everything, chile. And ain't none of his money belong to her—she got 'bout as much chance to use his money as you do."

"Yeah, but she ain't no slave," Lena insisted.

"Pretty close to it," Teenie said. "He decide where she go, who she talk to, what she wear—everything. She just sleep in a better bed than you do!"

Related Characters: Lena, Teenie (speaker), Mrs. Isabelle Derby, Amari

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

One morning, as Amari listens to Teenie and Lena discuss Mrs. Derby's situation, Teenie proposes that Mrs. Derby's life is really little different from the lives the slaves lead. And while Lena is absolutely right—Mrs. Derby is not a slave and doesn't have to fear the same dangers or kinds of abuse as enslaved Black women do—Teenie is nevertheless correct in illuminating that women in general have less power than men in the colonial system.

Even though Mrs. Derby is white, comes from a wealthy family, and is married to a wealthy plantation owner, Teenie understands that being a woman with wealth means little. Mr. Derby is the one who has control of their finances, which means that Mrs. Derby isn't even able to use her wealth to save herself from what Teenie implies is a controlling (if not outright abusive) marriage. Women, Teenie suggests, find themselves with the least amount of power no matter where they go. Their power relative to others may shift depending on the color of their skin, who they're married to, or how much money they have—but women on the whole have few ways to gain power in the colonial system.

Chapter 21 Quotes

"And that's just the first part. Then you gotta tend to the plants and flood the fields and cut the stacks and thresh the seeds—seem like it go on forever. That's what be in your future, Miz Africa. And when he get old enough, this here boy's future too."

Polly looked at Cato in disbelief. "They'd put Tidbit out there?" she asked, horrified. The thought of little Tidbit sweating and working in the dangerous swampy water made Polly feel ill.

Related Characters: Polly, Cato (speaker), Tidbit, Amari

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

When Amari, Polly, and Tidbit take food and water to Cato in the fields one afternoon, Cato frightens the girls by saying that both Amari and Tidbit will, at some point, find themselves working in the rice fields. It's telling that Polly's reaction is so strong. This shows that while she may have once thought slavery was right and just—and may still think that, as long as slaves perform work that's safe compared to the rice fields—realizing that people she cares about will have to perform that work makes it much less palatable for her. Now that Polly spent so much time with Tidbit and Amari, it's impossible for her to see Tidbit as anything but a spunky and delightful little boy. He's a child who, in her mind, should be able to live a long life—but Cato made it very clear that slaves in the rice fields only last about five years.

In this moment, then, Polly begins to reevaluate how she feels about slavery in general. She finally understands how dehumanizing and dangerous it can be, and this makes her recognize that the wealthy people who enslave others—people she has, for the most part, admired and aspired to be like before now—are cruel and heartless. They don't see slaves as human beings worthy of respect and dignity.

Chapter 22 Quotes

"Do you think Mrs. Derby knows what Clay is doing?"

"She know," Amari said angrily.

"Maybe she can help you," Polly offered tentatively. "She seems to be very pleasant."

"She need help herself," Amari replied sharply.

Polly tried to understand, but she couldn't truly fathom the depths of Myna's apparent distress. Slave women were always called to the bedrooms of their masters—it was simply a fact of life. Myna should understand that by now and be getting used to it.

Related Characters: Amari, Polly (speaker), Mrs. Isabelle Derby, Clay Derby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

Polly is annoyed and perplexed to discover that after about four months in slavery, Amari—whom Polly knows by her slave name, Myna—still isn't used to being raped whenever Clay feels like it. This speaks to how far Polly still has to go as she gradually learns to humanize Black people. It's unfathomable to her that Amari would have objections to being raped in the first place, since to Polly, rape is just a part of slave women's duties. As a white indentured servant, Polly luckily doesn't have to contend with rape essentially being part of her job description. Her privilege, in this sense, blinds her to the fact that Amari is a human being who should have control over who, if anyone, has access to her body.

Her suggestion that Amari go to Mrs. Derby for help, meanwhile, suggests that she also thinks that Mrs. Derby has a great deal of power over Clay, simply because she's the lady of the house. This suggests that she doesn't know about Amari and Mrs. Derby's conversation several weeks ago, in which Mrs. Derby apologized for Clay's behavior and expressed sympathy for Amari's predicament. Mrs. Derby is at the mercy of her husband and has very little say in regards to his or Clay's sexual abuse of the slaves. That Polly believes otherwise reflects Polly's naïveté.

Isabelle Derby sat pale and quiet, her eyes cast down through most of the meal. It was as if she was one of the many room decorations. Unhappiness seemed to ooze from her like perspiration on a humid day. Polly shook her head as she realized that being a fine lady didn't necessarily mean finding joy.

Related Characters: Clay Derby, Mr. Derby, Polly, Mrs. Isabelle Derby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

Through observing Mrs. Derby and listening to the way that Mr. Derby and Clay talk about her, Polly comes to the conclusion that Mrs. Derby actually has no power. For Polly, this is surprising. She grew up aspiring to be a fine lady, as she believes (and her parents believed) that having wealth will mean that she'll have power, be happy, and be comfortable. Mrs. Derby, however, is proof that even white women are unable to have true agency within the colonial system. They must contend with the fact that their male relatives are the ones who hold all the power—and if one has no power over one's life, Polly begins to see, it's difficult (if not impossible) to find joy or fulfillment. In this moment, then, Polly starts to reevaluate her goals for her life. She begins to understand that becoming a lady might give her fine things, good food, and a soft bed—but the one thing it won't give her is agency.

Chapter 26 Quotes

"My beautiful baby," she murmured over and over. Finally calmer, she looked up at Teenie and the girls. "I must explain," she whispered, "before I die."

"You ain't gonna die, Miz Isabelle," Teenie assured her. "You is fit and fine. Everybody feels a little poorly after havin' a baby."

Tenderly, Mrs. Derby touched the infant's velvety brown face. "You don't understand. My husband will kill me," she said with certainty.

[...]

"He would never do such a thing!" But Teenie knew that Mr. Derby was probably quite capable of murder and would be within the limits of social acceptability to do so for this impropriety.

Related Characters: Teenie, Mrs. Isabelle Derby (speaker), Noah, Polly, Amari

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 170-171

Explanation and Analysis

After the birth of Mrs. Derby's baby, who is Black, Mrs. Derby fully believes that Mr. Derby will murder her; her baby; and Noah, the enslaved man who's baby's father. This reflects Mrs. Derby's understanding of where she fits in on the social hierarchy, and how much power she lacks within this system. She recognizes that as a woman, there's nothing she can do, legally or otherwise, to stop Mr. Derby from murdering whomever he chooses as punishment for Mrs. Derby having an affair with Noah. Indeed, she suggests, she's at just as much risk of murder in this situation as any of the involved Black slaves are—but while this may seem true to her in the moment, the fact remains that Mr. Derby will likely still want to assert his dominance over her in other ways, not just by killing her.

It's also telling that the birth of a Black baby—is tinged with such horror. This baby should represent hope for the future, but instead, Mrs. Derby recognizes that to her husband, at least, this baby will symbolize an unthinkable rebellion on the part of his wife and slaves. The baby herself is innocent, but this means nothing to Mr. Derby because of the way he dehumanizes Black people and his wife, and how he needs to control everyone under his jurisdiction.

Chapter 31 Quotes

He took a deep breath, then said quietly, "I am ashamed to be a human being this morning. I witnessed not just murder last night, but violence and cruelty and vicious hatred. By saying nothing, I feel I am as responsible as my so-called friend who pulled the trigger."

Amari and Polly exchanged stunned looks.

Dr. Hoskins continued. "I am just one man. I don't know how to fight everything that is happening around me. I don't understand how one man can own another. And I don't know how to stop it." He looked around at the deep woods and the darkness within them. "But I can help the three of you."

Related Characters: Dr. Hoskins (speaker), Mr. Derby, Tidbit, Polly, Amari

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

Though Mr. Derby sends Amari, Polly, and Tidbit with Dr. Hoskins with the understanding that Dr. Hoskins will sell them in Charles Town, Dr. Hoskins tells his charges that he cannot and will not continue to be complicit in the abuse and enslavement of other people anymore. Importantly, he recognizes that because he said nothing and did nothing yesterday, when Mr. Derby heartlessly murdered Mrs. Derby's Black baby, he's partially responsible for that abuse. With this, the novel makes the important point that even those who don't directly dole out abuse are still significant players in the system—the institution of slavery can only be challenged if those on the sidelines stand up against injustice and advocate for enslaved people. Setting these three free may not entirely settle the scales, but it will help Dr. Hoskins feel as though he's doing something to improve the situation.

However, it's also worth considering that if Dr. Hoskins had spoken up last night, it's very possible that Mr. Derby would've turned on him. In order to keep himself safe so he can go on to free other slaves, it may have been necessary for him to remain silent and allow Mr. Derby to think that he condoned his actions. As a white man who still has to fit into white, upper-class society, Dr. Hoskins needs to resist quietly in situations like this, where there's no one to see him and call him out for his actions.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ "My name be Amari," she informed the two of them.

Polly opened her eyes and looked at Amari with a slight frown. "What's wrong with the name they gave you?" she asked. "We're used to it now."

Amari took a deep breath of the woodsy air. "Not Myna no more. Amari." She spoke with clarity and certainty.

If you say so," Polly said with a shrug. "I suppose it is a good name for a free woman."

"Free!" Amari exclaimed in quiet exultation. She had no intention of ever using that slave name ever again.

Related Characters: Polly, Amari (speaker), Tidbit, Clay Derby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

Not long after running into the woods, Amari announces to Polly and Tidbit that she wants to be called Amari, not Myna. For Amari, this finally allows her to announce her ownership over her body and her identity after months of abuse and dehumanization. The name that Clay gave her, moreover, is a symbolic representation of her slavery—he called her Myna because it sounds like "mine," and she belonged to him. In order to come into her identity as a free woman, Amari must drop that name as soon as she can.

Polly's pushback, however, continues to illustrate Polly's privilege and lack of understanding as to what Black slaves have to endure under slavery. Though she was there when Clay named Amari Myna and thought his reasoning was disgusting, she still can't understand how dehumanizing it is to be stripped of one's name and forced to take on another, especially given Myna's meaning. Even though Polly is on the run with Amari and is undoubtedly on Amari's side, this shows that she still has a long way to go as she learns to respect her friend and see her as a full person, not just a slave.

Chapter 34 Quotes

❝ Amari sat close to Polly for warmth and companionship, looking at the fire, thinking not of the horrendous fire that had destroyed her village, but of the smoky cooking fires that decorated the front of each household as the women prepared the evening meal. If she closed her eyes, she could almost smell the pungent fish stew.

Related Characters: Tidbit, Polly, Amari

Related Themes:

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

When the Amari and Polly discover a cave and feel safe building a fire, Amari is able to think back fondly on the nightly cooking fires in her village at home. Amari is able to focus on this positive memory because for the moment, she's free—and she's therefore able to draw on her happier memories rather than wallowing in the abuse and violence she and her fellow villagers suffered when the white men came to enslave them.

This also speaks to how close Amari and Polly are becoming as they journey south together. Though Polly is white, Amari

doesn't associate her with all of the horrible white men who have abused her since her capture. Rather, Polly is a reasonably safe person who helps show Amari that it is possible to look forward to a future in which she has friends and support and can recreate some of the community she remembers from her childhood village.

Chapter 37 Quotes

"Of course, child. Everybody has slaves. How do you think we handle this land? But my Patrick is a good man and does not mistreat his property. Our slaves like it here." Amari couldn't understand how the woman could see no wrong in owning slaves as long as they were well treated.

Related Characters: Fiona O'Reilly (speaker), Tidbit, Polly, Amari, Patrick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

Amari is aghast when Fiona, a white woman who agrees to help Amari, Polly, and Tidbit move south, admits that she owns slaves and sees nothing wrong with that. Having been enslaved, it's not difficult for Amari to recognize that owning another human being is abhorrent, no matter the terms of that person's enslavement. Fiona's words, however, betray that she might not even think of her husband, Patrick's, slaves as real people. She does refer to them as "property," after all—and given the power imbalance, it's highly unlikely that any of her slaves would tell her to her face that they're unhappy. It's possible Fiona simply doesn't recognize the power imbalance, especially since she later goes on to say that Patrick gives her no opportunities to make any decisions for herself. She may see herself as just as powerless as any of the slaves. This doesn't excuse her behavior, however; it merely illustrates how a person can struggle to recognize how their privilege works and what power it might afford them.

"It's like this: if my Patrick brings home a new slave like he did last week, for example, that's his right as master and man of this house, and I dare not interfere. As a woman, I ain't got muckle to say about those kind of decisions. But when I got the chance to decide for myself, I find it gives me pleasure to choose to help you be free. That's the truth, and I did not know it until I spoke the words."

Related Characters: Fiona O'Reilly (speaker), Tidbit, Polly, Amari, Patrick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

When asked why she's willing to help Amari, Polly, and Tidbit despite being a slave owner herself, Fiona suggests that her desire to help the runaways is rooted in a desire to make a decision—any decision—for herself. Fiona may describe Patrick as a good man and a fair master, but this doesn't mean that she doesn't chafe under his rules and seeming unwillingness to allow his wife to have any say in the trajectory of her own life.

It's telling that here, Fiona does acknowledge that as a woman, she has far less power than her husband does. To some degree, she's able to recognize the power structure and see that she and other women across the board have less power than white men. However, Fiona redeems herself somewhat by making it clear that in the moments when she has power, she'd rather use it to help others escape slavery than to enslave people herself. Her noble idea doesn't excuse her racism and her complicity in the system of slavery, but it does suggest that she has the capacity to rethink her beliefs and someday recognize that even seemingly benevolent slavery is unacceptable.

Chapter 38 Quotes

"You know, I never really knew any black people before I came to Mr. Derby's place. I mean, everybody had slaves, of course, but I never actually thought about them. And I certainly never had a black friend before," she admitted.

Amari looked away. "Sometime I hate white people," she admitted softly. "I never hate before I be a slave." She stretched her arms. "I never even see white person until they attack my village. It be hard to have hate feeling and like feeling at same time."

Related Characters: Amari, Polly (speaker), Tidbit, Teenie, Mr. Derby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

While stopped one day, Amari and Polly express all the ways they've changed over the last few months and reaffirm their

friendship with each other. Polly makes it clear that the most essential contributing factor to her newfound rejection of slavery is her friendship with Amari (and though she doesn't say so, probably Teenie and Tidbit as well). Friendship has the power to humanize Amari, whom Polly didn't initially consider to be human. And in addition to giving Polly a good friend, it means that Polly also becomes kinder and more empathetic toward those who have less power than she has.

For Amari, meanwhile, her enslavement means that she learned to hate for the first time in her life. And now, she has to balance this new emotion with the proof that white people can also be good, kind friends sitting right in front of her. Thus, through their friendship, both Amari and Polly have come to a more nuanced and compassionate understanding of other people.

Chapter 40 Quotes

❝ "What did your mama keep a-tellin' you while you be with her?"

"She tell me stories about Africa and about her own mother, and she tell me, 'Long as you remember, ain't nothin' really gone.'"

Amari, blinking away tears, hugged him. "You gonna always remember?"

"I ain't never gonna forget nothin' she done tell me," the boy said with great seriousness. He squeezed the leather pouch.

Related Characters: Tidbit, Amari (speaker), Afi, Teenie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 282-83

Explanation and Analysis

As Amari, Tidbit, and Polly get close to Fort Mose, Amari kneels down to comfort Tidbit when he once again asks for his mother, Teenie. Amari struggles to help Tidbit understand that he's probably never going to see Teenie again—but if he makes a point to never forget her or the stories she told him about Africa and his grandmother, he'll never truly lose his mother.

Now that Amari is in a position where she has to impart knowledge to a young person, it's her turn to draw on what both Teenie and Afi implied: that memory has the power to connect people to something bigger, and it allows them to be more than just slaves. As Amari reminds Tidbit of this, she helps him understand that he's also not a slave anymore. Like his ancestors, he's a free man. The kente cloth inside Tidbit's pouch came from Teenie's mother, and it reminds Tidbit of this fact. It also acts as a symbolic representation of Teenie, thereby connecting Tidbit to his past and to his family even as he moves forward without any blood family members beside him.

Chapter 42 Quotes

❝ *What shall I do?* Amari thought helplessly. She willed herself to imagine her mother who would know what to say and how to comfort her. All of her mother's dreams of growing old and watching her grandchildren play had been brutally dashed into the dust. *This child carries the spirit of my mother*, Amari realized suddenly, as well as the essence of her father, little Kwasi, the murdered people of her village, and the spirits of all her ancestors.

Related Characters: Amari (speaker), Kwasi, Amari's Father, Amari's Mother, Clay Derby

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 300

Explanation and Analysis

After Amari discovers that she's pregnant with Clay Derby's child, she initially panics—but she soon realizes that her baby represents an opportunity to pass along her story and keep the memories of her deceased family members alive. In this moment, Amari must choose to focus on the beauty and the hope of the situation rather than the horrific circumstances surrounding her baby's conception. Her baby may have been conceived by rape, but especially since Clay Derby is no longer part Amari's life, Amari has total control over her child's life and how they grow up.

Additionally, rather than telling her child about their biological father, Amari can instead choose to tell them stories about their maternal relatives—and she can look for connections to her own family in her child rather than focusing on what her child may have inherited from Clay. This is an awful thing for Amari to have to do, but if she wants to be able to regain her sense of power and control over her life, it's essential that she come up with a way to reframe the birth of her child as a positive thing, as she begins to do here.

She inhaled sharply as she thought of Mrs. Derby, of the infant who had been given no chance to live, and of all the other women, both black and white, who continued to suffer as property of others.

Related Characters: Inez, Afi, Mrs. Isabelle Derby, Teenie, Fiona O'Reilly, Amari's Mother, Clay Derby, Amari

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

As Amari thinks about her own baby, she also thinks about Mrs. Derby's baby and on all the women she's met along her journey who have no say in their lives. Indeed, Amari hasn't met any women over the course of the novel who have been truly in control of their lives. And most importantly, Amari recognizes that in the English colonies in 1738, all women are property. For instance, Mrs. Derby has wealth and her white skin to protect her from rape and murder, but she still suffered abuse at the hands of her husband—and it's unknown whether Clay is continuing that, or whether Mrs. Derby has found some sense of power and control over her life since her husband's death.

Even worse than what Mrs. Derby experiences as a white woman, however, is what women like Teenie, Afi, Amari, and Inez experienced in slavery. While Mrs. Derby was at least human in the eyes of her husband, Black women are subhuman in the eyes of their owners and their abusers. Amari also recognizes in this moment that because she was able to escape to Fort Mose, she's one of the lucky ones. For the first time in a long time, she's not property—a privilege that few of the other Black women she knows will ever have.

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. AMARI AND BESA

Amari jokingly teases her eight-year-old brother, Kwasi, who is high in a coconut tree. Kwasi shouts that he wants to speak to giraffes, dutifully tosses down a coconut, and teases that Besa is heading Amari's way. When Amari asks him to, he runs with the coconut back to their village, Ziavi, making kissing noises as he goes. Amari splashes water from a stream on her face and strolls along behind Kwasi, waiting for Besa. She thinks of her love for her village as she watches a friend, Tirza, chase a goat and sees the chief elder's wives pounding cassava *fufu* for supper. Soon, Amari and Mother will do the same thing for Amari's father. Other women giggle at Tirza.

It's clear from the way that Amari engages with Kwasi and looks around her village that she makes a point to look for the good and the beautiful in life. To her, everything is beautiful—and even Kwasi's teasing or ill-advised climbing is something to celebrate, not punish him for. When the other women laugh at Tirza's predicament too, it suggests that this outlook is something unique to Amari's village, and possibly her culture on the whole.

Amari and Besa have been formally engaged for a year now, but they don't get to spend much time together. Amari pretends to not notice Besa until he touches her shoulder. She smiles at him, taking in his dimple, and he says worriedly that he has to run—he saw strangers who were the color of milk in the forest, and he needs to tell the council of elders. Amari watches him go, feeling nervous herself. When she gets to her home, Mother and Esi are spinning yarn for Father, a master weaver of her tribe's special **kente cloth**. Mother gently scolds Amari for not helping them spin, but Amari wishes she could weave instead. Weaving is forbidden to girls, and Mother is aghast. Amari agrees to help dye the yarn tomorrow. Kwasi quips that Amari is more interested in Besa than spinning and darts away.

Besa's reaction to seeing what are presumably white men suggests that their village hasn't had much—or any—contact with white people before this. Yet Besa isn't angry or seemingly interested in sending out people to kill these white men—he just wants to make sure everyone has the information they need. This may also reflect the culture of their village, which seems to be peaceful rather than confrontational. Meanwhile, Mother makes it clear that there are distinct gender roles for men and women. Amari's desire to transcend these roles speaks to her independent nature.

Amari shares with Mother that Besa saw odd strangers heading their way, but Mother sternly says it would be uncivilized to judge people by how they look. They must prepare a celebration. Esi heads home to prepare and Amari throws herself into her own preparations with Mother. Mother assures Amari that the strangers' arrival will certainly be enough reason for a celebration and Father's storytelling. Excited, Amari takes in the smells and sounds of her village. It smells like "hope and possibility."

Here, Mother makes their village's ethos plain: they're friendly and curious, not looking to judge others. And furthermore, it's telling that she uses "uncivilized" to describe people who would judge others by their looks, as this will prove to be significant when the white men arrive. The fact that Mother has to remind Amari to be hopeful and excited shows that Amari is still learning to follow her tribe's culture of openness and curiosity.

CHAPTER 2. STRANGERS AND DEATH

The strangers arrive about an hour later. They look pale and unhealthy, and they don't smile. Amari thinks they smell of danger, but since some neighboring Ashanti warriors accompany the strangers, she's certain they'll explain soon. The village throws itself into preparing a formal welcoming ceremony, but Amari still feels uneasy. The chief invites the guests to sit and welcomes them with wine and prayers. After the strangers drink, they offer gifts of sparkling beads, wine, and cloth so fine that Amari is sure humans didn't weave it. Following this ceremonial exchange of gifts, Amari feels more at ease. They'll get to business after they celebrate, and she gets excited to hear her father's stories.

Because Amari has had nothing but good experiences with her village's approach to being open, welcoming, and generous with newcomers, it's not hard for her to ignore her growing sense of unease. For that matter, it's possible that she thinks of her nervousness as a sign of being "uncivilized," as Mother suggested earlier. Judging these white men for looking odd or not smiling, Amari may conclude, would point to a need for her to rethink her position—not for them to have to change.

Amari's father is the chief storyteller; the villagers gather around him while the strangers sit politely. Amari's father tells the story of wicked Chief Agokoli, who assigned his people impossible jobs. After the story comes the drumming, Amari's favorite part of any celebration. Besa is the assistant to the village master arts man and she knows that Besa will be excited to show off his skills. As soon as the drumming starts, the villagers begin to dance. Kwasi dances with the **children** and tries to pull Amari into the dance, but she'd rather peek at Besa.

It's telling just how important the ritual of storytelling is to Amari and her neighbors. Aside from the drumming—which is likely Amari's favorite part partially because of Besa—it's one of the most important and beloved parts of a traditional celebration. This suggests that on the whole, Amari's village is interested in preserving stories and passing them on to future generations.

Suddenly, one of the stranger's "weapon sticks" explodes, and the chief falls over, blood flowing from his chest. Everyone begins to scream in terror and confusion. An Ashanti warrior clubs down a woman and her **baby** as the woman tries to flee. Amari knows she should run, but she feels stuck. She watches an Ashanti and a stranger murder Father as Mother falls and hits her head on a rock. Kwasi races for Amari, telling her to run, and she finally can. Hand in hand, they plunge into the forest. They hear footsteps behind them, and as they leap over a log, Kwasi moans and falls—there's a spear stuck through his body. Amari holds him until he dies and doesn't move until strangers lift her up and shackle her wrists. They march her back to the village and sit her with other survivors.

Seeing an Ashanti murder a woman and her baby makes it clear that something is horrifically wrong. Throughout the novel, babies represent hope and the future—and this Ashanti warrior is heartlessly murdering the future of Amari's tribe. Though seeing her parents murdered is heartbreaking and traumatizing for Amari, it's perhaps even worse to see Kwasi murdered. Kwasi, being so young, still embodied innocence and represented the future. Now, tragically, he won't be able to go on and keep the stories and traditions of his people alive.

CHAPTER 3. SORROW AND SHACKLES

The next morning, Amari sees with horror that all the homes in her village are burned. Bodies lie everywhere. Amari knows that the strangers probably don't know their burial customs, but the Ashanti are supposed to be the brothers of Amari's people. She can't figure out why the Ashanti would do this or who these strangers are. The other survivors are all young and healthy people. Esi huddles with her husband. Amari remembers how just yesterday, Esi announced that she's pregnant with her first **baby**. Finally, Amari notices Besa at the other end of the group. His eyes are glazed, and she spots his crushed drum.

It's telling that Amari gives the white men the benefit of the doubt when she reasons that the strangers probably don't know their burial customs. In essence, she's telling herself that they're leaving the bodies because they don't know what to do, not because they don't care about their victims. This mindset speaks again to Amari's ability to see goodness and beauty anywhere, an outlook that the cruelty of the Ashanti and the white men will test.

One of the strangers comes over and shouts in a strange language for the captives to get up. Amari tries to ask an Ashanti what's happening, but someone whips her across the back. One stranger pulls out iron neck shackles that will link the prisoners to each other, six to a group. Amari wouldn't even use such a thing on animals. Amari is shackled in behind Tirza. Besa is at the front of his group, and he won't look at Amari. For days, the Ashanti and the pale strangers whip their captives as they slowly march along the big river. One day, Amari hears a captive asking an Ashanti guard why he's doing this. The Ashanti says that their tribes have been at war and that he'll be rewarded.

Amari and her neighbors believed that since they and the Ashanti are friends, they could trust the Ashanti to not betray them. Now, they have to reevaluate this belief in light of what the Ashanti are doing—purely for economic gain, no less. The shackles that are too dehumanizing even for animals begin to show Amari what's to come: horrors that will make her feel like an animal, if not less than an animal. The experience of being chained and constantly whipped discourages Amari and her friends from talking, thereby denying them the ability to even make sense of what's happening.

The captives are shackled to one another at all times and have to sleep and relieve themselves while shackled. Amari notices after a few days that Tirza seems to give up. Tirza whispers one night that she'd rather die than be enslaved, and the next morning, she's dead. Their captors curse, unshackle her body, and toss it to the side of the road. One spits on it for good measure. Amari is sad when she realizes that her group moves faster and more easily without Tirza.

Amari's realization about Tirza's death making things easier suggests that she's beginning to shift her thinking to focus on survival rather than community and caring for the group. This is one of the other horrors of slavery that the novel highlights—if enslaved people want to survive, they must sometimes think and act selfishly.

CHAPTER 4. DEATH MARCH TO CAPE COAST

Amari loses count of the days. Her neck, ankles, and wrists are bruised and raw, and her feet are bloody. Several captives die along the journey, including Esi, not long after she miscarries her **baby**. On occasion, other groups of slaves join Amari's group. The path grows wider and more traveled until finally, they arrive in the city. Amari marvels at all the different people, their many skin colors, and the many languages she hears. Everyone in the city, however, turns away from the group of slaves. The air feels salty and Amari can smell a huge, frightening body of water. She begins to recognize some of the words of her white captors, like "slave," "price," and now, "Cape Coast." Realizing that she's never going home, Amari weeps.

Under any other circumstances, being in a city for the first time would give Amari the opportunity to look around with wonder at all the new things. But because of the way that people in the city react to the group and because of the words she recognizes, this experience instead impresses upon her that everyone and everything she once knew is gone. Her ability to learn the white men's language, however, is a useful skill. Knowing what's going on will help Amari temper her reactions to new situations and to protect herself.

The slaves approach a huge white building and a white man ushers them into the darkness. It smells like blood and death. Amari's captors separate the men from the women and take their shackles off, but Amari's relief is short lived. They shove her into an even darker room filled with dozens of women. It stinks of waste, sweat, and fear; few even acknowledge Amari and the other newcomers' presence. Amari sits and notices that there are women from many tribes here. She wonders if their captors killed these women's families too. As she looks around, she notices a woman rocking a **baby** that isn't there. Amari is grateful when guards toss bread into the room, but by the time she reaches it, it's all gone. She drops and weeps, but a large woman sits next to Amari and offers Amari some of her own bread.

Seeing women from so many different tribes begins to impress upon Amari and the reader the magnitude of the abductions that took place in Africa to fuel the transatlantic slave trade. This also implies that although the Ashanti may have been the ones who brought Amari and her village to this town, they might not be safe from slavery either, given how indiscriminate the other abductions seem to have been. Meanwhile, the large woman's kindness suggests that even in the darkest of situations, Amari can find hope and friendship.

The woman tells Amari that she must steel herself and learn to sing again. The woman answers Amari's questions: this is Cape Coast Castle, a prison for their people until they're "sold and sent into the sea." Amari is confused and insists that she has no value, but the woman says that white men will purchase Amari to work for them during the day and entertain them at night. The woman knows this because she's been sold before. Her master, a white man in this city, sold her to men here. She watched other captives leave through a small door that heads to the sea, but a guard took a liking to her and she now goes to him at night. It's awful, but she knows her spirit is too strong to die here. Amari begins to sob, and the woman holds her.

Amari, understandably, has been raised to think of herself as just a normal young woman. As a 15-year-old girl, she believes she has little to offer, since thus far in her life she's only been asked to perform chores for her family and village. Amari's sense of horror at realizing that others will exploit her for her body and her labor represents a loss of innocence for her. Now, she cannot escape the reality that humanity can be ugly, cruel, and unfeeling—and that as a Black woman, there are endless opportunities for those in power to abuse and exploit her.

CHAPTER 5. THE DOOR OF NO RETURN

Once a day, the women leave the cell in small groups. Guards toss buckets of water on them, and the soldiers like to rip the women's tops to expose their breasts. Afi, the woman who befriended Amari, helps Amari get food and shows her how to look vacant, thereby escaping the notice of soldiers looking for women to rape at night. Afi's husband and daughter died about two years ago, so Amari figures that Afi needs her as much as she needs Afi. One night, they wonder whether the gods can hear them. Afi says that the gods can see them and that they're weeping, and she gently reminds Amari that they can't escape from this place.

The sexual abuse that Amari and the other female slaves suffer makes it clear that as women, they're particularly vulnerable to violence. Slavery makes it so they have no power to stand up to this abuse, so their only course of action is to look undesirable. Afi's information helps Amari learn that she's going to have to come up with new ways of looking at the world if she intends to survive. Her friendship, however, suggests that friends are one thing that Amari should never stop looking for.

One day, all the women are brought into the center of a prison and chained at the wrists and ankles. Strange white men inspect the women like they're animals for slaughter. One man tries to lift Amari's upper lip, but she jerks away. He slaps her so hard that she almost falls. Afi hisses for Amari to open her mouth; terrified, Amari does. The white man pokes around in Amari's mouth and then prods her arms, thighs, and breasts. Finally, the men seem to come to an agreement; the men who captured Amari accept cowrie shells, cloth, and gold. Then, the men push their captives through a low door. Frightened, Amari slowly crawls through. When hands pull her up and outside into the bright sunshine, she sees white sand and, for the first time, the ocean. It's beautiful, powerful, and frightening.

Afi makes it clear that if Amari wants to survive and suffer as little physical abuse as possible, she'll have to give in to some of their enslavers' demands—no matter how dehumanizing those demands may be. The poking and prodding Amari suffers dehumanizes her and makes it clear to her that she no longer gets a say in what happens to her body. Seeing the trade happen right in front of her only reinforces this—to the men, Amari isn't a person. She's the equivalent of some cowrie shells, fabric, and gold.

Amari wonders if they're going to throw her in the sea and notices a "house" resting far out on the water. It can't be a boat, since boats can only hold a couple people. Amari decides the house must be a place for the dead. Men drag Amari to what looks like a goat pen with a fire burning in the middle. A Black man shoves her down and another man picks something up out of the fire and approaches Amari. Amari hears her flesh sizzle and screams as he brands her. Someone smears a salve on her wound and throws her into a different holding pen. Afi follows not long after, though she doesn't cry when they brand her. Afi doesn't know what happens next, but she's heard that the ocean spills over the edge of the world and that there's only death there.

Again, when Amari thinks the pen looks like a goat pen, it speaks to just how dehumanizing this experience is—Amari is being treated worse than she'd treat an animal. And since Amari and Afi know so little about the world beyond their own homes, their future is entirely unknown and therefore more terrifying. Fortunately, Afi has heard rumors about what might be across the ocean, but denying the slaves clear information about what's happening is another way to dehumanize them and keep them terrified.

Amari figures the white men have to have come from somewhere, and Afi agrees—whatever is on the other side of the ocean is a horrific place if the people who live there are willing to brand other people. Before the women can continue their conversation, several men are thrown into the cell. Several are the Ashanti warriors who captured Amari's village, one is the Black man who branded her, and the last is Besa. The guards separate the men from the women. Amari wants to run to Besa, who looks defeated. The prisoners sit all day in the hot **sun** without water as uniformed men walk around, seemingly preparing. Amari watches, horrified, as several climb into a small boat and row to the floating house. They return with more men and chains for the prisoners.

That the white men turn the tables on the Ashanti drives home that no African people are safe from the slave trade, even if they're the ones facilitating it. This speaks to the inhumanity of the white men engaged in the abduction of African people, since they clearly don't even see those Black people who are willing to help them as human beings. Rather, they're bodies who are convenient until the time comes when they're not anymore—and then they become slaves.

Amari has never seen a sunset like tonight's. The **copper sun** seems to bleed for the prisoners as it sinks. After dark, the captors prepare food and give generous portions to the prisoners. Afi explains that this is probably to prepare them for the journey. She hesitates before saying that they'll go out to the "boat of death" and will never return. Amari feels a chill and doesn't understand. Afi reminds her that they're slaves. Amari knows this—but in her village, the slaves are respected and sometimes, their masters adopt them as extended family members. She asks if their slavery will be different, and Afi says she doesn't know but suspects it will be horrific. Amari thinks that she can't imagine worse than the night she was captured. She realizes that she's glad Kwasi is dead—he'll never have to endure any of this.

Amari is no stranger to slavery, but the kind of slavery she's familiar with is fundamentally different from the slavery she's a victim of now. When she feels like the copper sun is bleeding for the prisoners, Amari is using the beauty of the natural world to make sense of her own thoughts and emotions. Because of her grief and sadness in this moment, the sun isn't the beautiful entity it was when she was happy at home. Now, it reflects her grief and her sense that everything about her and her life is changing.

CHAPTER 6. FROM SAND TO SHIP

In the morning, Amari wakes up cold. She remembers everything from the night before, and Afi ominously says that this is the day. After another generous meal, guards kick the men, shackle them together, and march them away. Besa gives Amari a sad look as he goes, and Amari sobs. Afi notices, asks about him, and then tells Amari to forget him. Harshly, Afi says that Amari is a slave now. Amari asks why Afi won't just let her die, but Afi gently says that Amari has a power in her. She believes that Amari must remember the past and tell future generations—because Mother would want her to and because the **sun** keeps shining.

Though it may seem a bit odd that Afi tells Amari to forget Besa but to remember everything else, she's likely just trying to protect Amari. If Amari "forgets" Besa in that she stops hoping for their shared future together, she may be able to better move on. However, this doesn't mean that she should block out her memories of Besa or of her life before slavery altogether. Rather, it's her responsibility to keep those memories alive for future generations.

The soldiers come for the women next. They shackle the women together in pairs, and fortunately, Amari and Afi are together. They then march down to the shore. Amari is terrified of the churning water, but she knows it won't kill her today. The men shove the women toward small rowboats and Amari struggles to stay upright. Afi falls, and a soldier has to haul them upright again and into the boat. As the boat leaves the shore, the women in it shriek with terror. Their captors whip them, and Amari wonders if they do so to try to quiet the women. Nothing makes sense. She lifts her head and looks back at shore, where soldiers are loading another rowboat of slaves. She knows she'll never see this place again.

Because Amari is a fundamentally kind person who looks for the good in everyone, it's unthinkable to her that men would want to whip others just for the sake of doing so—but in this case, her attempts to humanize her captors come up short. Their goals are likely to frighten and dehumanize the women to make them more compliant, which will eventually make them more useful slaves. If the women believe they have power and agency, they might resist—and so their captors can't let the prisoners think that they have any power.

CHAPTER 7. SHIP OF DEATH

As the rowboat gets closer to the ship, Amari knows this place is a place of death. She can't see the top of it. Two women grow hysterical and leap together into the sea. The soldiers toss nets out to catch them, but before they can, two huge fish surface, and one woman screams—one of the fish has the woman's arm. The women sink under the surface. Amari is stunned. Her captors whip the women still in the boat, and no one else tries to leap. Soldiers watchfully guide the women up a plank, and once onboard, Amari is amazed: there's a small city on the ship. Men run around shouting and moving barrels and boxes. They all carry weapons. Someone whips Amari until she follows the other women to a hole in the floor. Amari is certain that she's entering the underworld.

The "fish" in this passage are almost certainly sharks, the presence of which makes it clear that it's not just the white men that Amari and Afi have to worry about. The journey itself is extremely dangerous, and there's little hope that slaves who defy or resist will return slaves to their homes in one piece. In this sense, even though the slavers didn't intend for the two women to jump and die, those women likely taught the other captives a lesson that's very useful for the slavers: that resistance is futile. If slaves believe this, they'll stop trying to escape—effectively giving up on their humanity.

Amari wishes she'd breathed more fresh air outside, because the hold smells like sweat, vomit, and urine. She stares in disbelief at the male slaves, who are shackled together and lie on narrow wooden shelves. There are several layers of shelves, and each man has about six inches of headroom. The men on the lower levels are already splattered with blood, urine, and feces of the men above them. Not wanting to see Besa, Amari turns away.

The gross inhumanity of what Amari sees of the men's conditions drives home just how horrifying the slave trade was. It's clear that the men are in danger of dying due to disgusting, unsanitary conditions on the ship and might never even make it to the colonies—illustrating just how little regard the slavers have for the slaves.

The guards chain the women in a separate location, but the women aren't stacked and have fresher air. There are some **children**. Amari discovers that the people on the ship came from all over Africa. She briefly wishes she had Kwasi to hold, but she doesn't want him to experience any of this. She listens to the white men laugh far above, and then things begin to slow down. Afi begins to sing an old Ewe funerary song, and most of the other women join in.

The funerary song allows the women to find a sense of community with each other and collectively mourn the lives they've lost. In addition to grieving for their dead loved ones, they can also grieve for their own fates—and doing this together, in their native language, helps them feel a sense of community and solidarity.

CHAPTER 8. TOWARD THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

Hours pass. Amari, hungry, nudges Afi, who tells her to feel the motion of the ship. She explains that they're floating on the sea toward the edge of the world. There's no land to escape to anymore. Before Amari can ask what Afi means, sailors arrive, unchain the women, and lead them up to the deck. Amari gasps when she sees that the land is gone. One woman clutches Amari's arm as she lurches with fear, and another faints. The sailors throw briny water on the women, which stings. They point the women toward buckets to relieve themselves and then give them food. Then, a sailor calls the women monkeys and tells them to dance. The women have no idea what he means. A young sailor brings out a small drum and starts pounding a rhythm, but it's dull and is no reason to celebrate.

Importantly, the female slaves don't speak English. Because of this, though the women might not catch or understand the slur of being called a "monkey," readers will—and this drives home just how racist and inhumane the system of slavery was. And in this case, while the women are certainly trapped on the ship and have few options for resistance, they're even less able to resist the mistreatment because they have no idea what's going on around them.

A whip lashes across Amari's face, and she jumps away. The soldier holding the whip nods and jumps up and down. Amari realizes the men want them to jump to the rhythm, and reluctantly, the women comply. She figures it's for exercise, but she's horrified when the men walk among the women, who barely have any clothes now, to inspect and touch them. A huge red-haired sailor watches Amari's face. He frightens and fascinates her. When the so-called dance is over, the soldiers tie the women to the sides of the deck and allow the **children** to run free. Though Amari is thirsty and hot, it's more pleasant on deck.

The drumming and attempt at exercise are a clear bastardization of African cultures. It stands in sharp contrast to the fun-filled, exciting drumming during the celebration in Amari's village—there, Amari felt at home and loved. In this situation, however, she sees that this is not just humiliating and offensive, but it's also a way for the sailors to choose their victims to rape later. And because Amari knows how drumming and dancing should be, this experience is even worse.

Afi whispers to Amari that the men will come for them tonight. She counsels Amari to silently submit; fighting back will make things worse. Amari suggests that it's better to die, but Afi sighs that the white men win when they die. Ashamed, Amari says that the men have already taken everyone and everything she loves—and now, they're going to take the only thing she has left. Afi tells Amari that she must live, and then she looks away. Amari shudders as she thinks of the white men touching her, but she feels as though she can't die. She watches as the male captives are made to dance, and then Afi notes that death has already claimed some. Sailors throw several bodies overboard. The male slaves return below deck. Amari watches the setting **coppery sun** and focuses on how beautiful it is. She hopes it'll shield her from the ugliness to come.

Afi's insistence that Amari has to survive and get through the abuse and humiliation is a way for her to ensure that the horrors female slaves suffer on slave ships is never forgotten. If slaves survive—one of the most significant acts of resistance in and of itself—and go on to tell others exactly what happened, it's impossible to ever really forget the horrors they suffered during slavery. Meanwhile, Amari looking at the copper sun again to help herself feel better speaks to her optimism and tenacity—she's still fighting, even if she's terrified and wants to give up.

CHAPTER 9. LESSONS—PAINFUL AND OTHERWISE

When it's finally dark, the sailors come for the women. They untie and drag the women away to secluded corners of the ship. Afi goes without a fight, while Amari tries to make herself look like a **child**. The red-haired sailor grabs her, though, and pulls Amari to a small room. She's shocked to see that these men don't sleep on mats on the ground, but then she realizes what's going to happen and looks for an escape route. He pushes Amari to the floor and says, "Scream!" She doesn't know what he means, so he raises an arm as though to hit her. Amari shrieks. The sailor seems pleased, but he puts a finger to his lips and covers Amari's mouth. He talks, but she has no idea what he's saying.

Again, it's significant that Amari doesn't understand a word this sailor is saying, which makes the impending possibility of rape even more terrifying for her. Though the reader can infer that the sailor doesn't actually intend to rape Amari, the fact that he still has to rely on physically scaring her to get her to comply and cover up what he's doing means that Amari has even fewer reasons to trust white men, even if they do show her bits of kindness.


Then, the red-haired sailor takes something out of a pouch around his neck and offers it to Amari: it's a small carving of a **child**. The man points from the carving to himself, then takes it back, kisses it, and pretends to rock it. Amari thinks the man is mad, or the carving is of his child. The sailor says "child," but Amari is still confused. He offers her a dipper of fresh water and then says, "water." After he repeats the word several time, Amari hesitantly says, "wa-ta." This makes the sailor laugh. He says, "bucket" next, and Amari realizes that he's teaching her his language. Catching on, Amari vows to be a good student. She thinks briefly of Father, who loved learning new languages, and her expression causes the soldier to look at her with concern. Amari is sure that Father's spirit protected her from rape tonight.

As Amari begins to figure out what's going on here—the sailor is trying to teach her English, not rape her—it's telling that he leads by offering her a representation of a child. Though Amari is possibly too afraid to make the connection, he suggests that adults' hope for a better future as represented by babies and children is something that exists in all cultures, even ones like his that engage in such inhumane acts as enslaving other humans. This, of course, isn't to excuse the behavior of his fellow sailors, but it does suggest that there's beauty and hope to be found everywhere.

The red-haired sailor teaches Amari a number of simple words and phrases. Knowing that the language is powerful, Amari soaks it all in. When the screaming elsewhere on the ship dies down, the sailor gives Amari more water, lets her relieve herself, and then gently ties her back up. Afi joins Amari not long after, bruised and bleeding. Amari is almost ashamed that she wasn't raped, and when Afi asks, she realizes that the sailor showed her kindness. Afi is happy for Amari, but she warns her that many men will still rape her before the journey is over.

Amari fully understands that knowing English will help her get by and figure out how to respond to situations. Learning the language, in this case, is a way to ensure her survival. It's worth noting that the sailor's kindness is itself an act of resistance. But because the sailor is white and presumably wants to keep his job, he must resist in quiet ways like this that will escape his superiors' notice.


Amari asks how long their journey will be; she's never heard of journeys lasting more than a few days. Laughing, Afi says that this is just the beginning. Many will die, and they'll all change. Afi says that they must find strength within. Amari feels powerless and says this isn't fair, but Afi says that Amari's destiny lies beyond. She won't explain what she means.

As frustrating as Afi's caginess about Amari's destiny must be for Amari, it's possible that Afi is simply trying to use the fact that Amari trusts her to get Amari to see the point in living. If she can make Amari believe there's more to life than this, Amari has a better chance of surviving this ordeal.


CHAPTER 10. THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

The next night, a skinny sailor rapes Amari and beats her. The night after, two sailors take turns raping her. The following morning, Amari spots Besa as the men come up on deck. He tries to make eye contact with Amari, but she feels ashamed that she's not the innocent girl he loves anymore. She turns away. As the days pass, they become monotonous. The **copper sun** seems to imprison the captives and Amari grows to hate the white men's drum. She stops smiling. The sailors rape women every night, and Amari's only respite is when the red-haired sailor rescues her. Amari learns that his name is Bill, and he teaches Amari counting and some conversational phrases. Soon, Amari realizes she can understand more than she can speak. She runs through phrases in her head to keep from going mad.

The fact that Amari feels shame for having suffered rape ends up being a boon for her captors, whether they intended this or not. Her unwillingness to look at Besa—even though being raped wasn't her fault—begins to deprive her of community and distance her from others on the ship who might be able to help her remember who she is and tell her that she's valuable as more than a sexual plaything. Bill's kindness and language lessons do the opposite: they remind Amari that she is human and that if she focuses on learning and moving forward, she can survive.

One morning, Amari wakes to see that a storm is brewing. The ship rocks, throwing the women about, and one woman's young daughter falls overboard. The woman breaks free and tries to get the sailors to save her daughter, but they ignore her pleas. She leaps overboard. After this, the soldiers take the women below deck. It smells like the ship has never been cleaned, and Amari notices that the bottom shelves in the men's quarters are mostly empty. Rats chew on some of the men who are too weak to fight back. Once she's chained, Amari and many of the women vomit. The storm lasts for days. When it's over, the sailors lead the women back on deck. Sixteen of the 90 women died during the storm, and the sailors toss the bodies overboard. Amari wishes that *she'd* died.

Given the way the sailors respond to the women during the storm, it's clear that they care about them as valuable cargo, not as people. Refusing to rescue the woman's child is cruel and inhumane—it reinforces that in the sailors' minds, Black children aren't worth trying to save or nurture. In the men's quarters, Amari is reminded again that even if Bill might be kind to her, he's an anomaly—and his reach only goes so far. Clearly, no one is showing any kindness or concern for the men, giving their horrible conditions.

CHAPTER 11. LAND HO

If Amari listens carefully, she can understand some of the sailors' conversation as they scurry about repairing the damage done to the ship. She also learns that they're headed someplace called Carolina, and Afi says that's where Amari's destiny is. Amari questioningly says that Afi's destiny is there too, but Afi stares into space. Over the next few days, the sailors give the slaves more food and allow the men on deck for longer periods of time. The ship's doctor checks each slave, and the sailors aren't allowed to rape the women at night. One day, Amari asks what will happen in the new land. Afi says that they'll be sold, possibly many times. It'll probably have a **sun**, the moon, and trees, but it will be very different. Both women admit they're afraid. Amari hears Bill shout, "Land ho!" She's terrified.

Now that the slaves are getting close to being sold again, they're treated somewhat better. This drives home for the slaves and for readers that to the white men in charge of the ship, the slaves are only goods—not people. Afi's unwillingness to talk about her own destiny implies that at this point, she may only be living for Amari's sake—and if she and Amari are separated in the Carolinas, Afi might not have any more reasons to live. However, by giving Amari the strength to live, Afi will still ensure that Amari will tell her story to future generations and keep her memory alive.

CHAPTER 12. WELCOME TO SULLIVAN'S ISLAND

The ship's cannon fires, frightening the slave women. The sailors seem unconcerned. Amari peeks over the edge of the ship and sees a surprisingly beautiful landscape before her. She marvels to Afi that it's lovely, and Afi counsels Amari to remember the beauty "when the ugliness overtakes [her]." It will keep Amari alive. Amari says that she couldn't have survived without Afi, and Afi echoes the sentiment. A small boat brings a white man to the ship. He's clean, and he acts as though the ship reeks. Amari figures the man is an official of some sort, and she realizes that she and the other captives are cargo. The new man and the captain exchange money, and then the captain points to the women on deck.

Amari's ability to notice that the colonies are beautiful makes it clear that she's still optimistic, even if she's beaten down—and hopefully, she'll be able to maintain this outlook going forward. Afi's warning suggests that if Amari ever loses this ability to notice the beauty in the world, that's when she'll know that her life is effectively over. As the women talk to each other, they make it clear that friendship can be life-saving, a lesson that Amari should take with her as she continues her journey.

The official examines Afi first, checking her mouth and her genitals. He smacks Afi's buttocks and says, "Good breeder," but Amari doesn't know what this means. He inspects Amari next. Amari fights her desire to pull away from him. After all the women and all the men have been inspected, the official says that the ship is approved to land. He welcomes them to Sullivan's Island.

It's telling that the price, so to speak, of landing at Sullivan's Island is being molested—to move from one version of hell to another, the women must consistently put up with sexual assault and harassment. That this happens in the colonies impresses upon Amari that the harassment won't stop just because she's not on the ship anymore.

CHAPTER 13. THE SLAVE AUCTION

As Bill helps Amari into a small boat the next day, he mumbles for her to be brave and for God to have mercy on her. He won't look at her. When the boat reaches Sullivan's Island, Amari struggles to walk on the solid land. The sailors struggle too, but the slaves are forced to a large building a half mile from the beach. They're offered food and water to drink and in which to bathe, and white men cover their wounds. A tall Black man with a limp enters the room. He's dressed in a ragged version of the white men's clothes, and he gives instructions in English.

Bill's parting words suggest that he detests his job but doesn't feel able to resist in any other way than teaching female slaves a bit of English. Even if he doesn't actively keep slaves or possibly even believe in slavery, as a white man, he still has a lot to gain from the system of slavery: his livelihood. Though he helps Amari, he's still complicit in the system.

When all the white men have left, the Black man switches to Ashanti. In a hurried whisper, he advises the slaves to learn English quickly but to not forget their own languages. They'll be here for 10 days until they're cleared of disease, and then they'll go to auction at Charles Town. The soldiers and sailors call the man Tybee. Tybee passes out rough garments for the slaves and teaches them necessary words, like "massa" and "yessir." One hot night, Amari can't sleep. She sits up and sees Besa close to her. They greet each other and try not to cry. Besa asks her to think of him and smile whenever she sees the **sun** and the stars, and he says that she'll always be lovely to him. Besa is interrupted by a guard slashing at him with a whip; he returns to the men's area.

Here, Tybee makes it abundantly clear that if the slaves want to retain their sense of humanity, they can't forget their native languages. English will erase their history as Africans and disconnect them from their stories, their songs, and their memories. This final conversation with Besa impresses upon Amari that she must focus on the beauty in the world—such as the natural world and her love for Besa—going forward in order to maintain some sense of self and survive what's to come.

The next morning, the guards shackle the slaves and load them onto more boats. They arrive in Charles Town. Amari is in awe—there are no trees, but tall buildings instead. Amari and Afi decide that they're in a backward world when they realize that all the Black and brown faces are probably slaves. Guards lock them in a shed for several days. One morning, white men slosh water over the slaves and force the slaves to slather their bodies in foul-smelling oil. Amari watches Besa and other men leave and hears them be auctioned off. She knows she won't see him again.

For Amari and Afi, who have spent their lives in Africa, it's normal to see Black men in power. Therefore, being here in the colonies where they recognize that Black people have no power reinforces just how far away from home they are. Nothing here is as it should be—not only are Black men not powerful, they're actively abused and dehumanized as a matter of course.

By midday, it's the women's turn. Amari trembles; nothing seems to make sense in this evil land. She wants to die. The guards strip the women's clothing, and Amari screams as a guard ties her hands behind her back. They put her in shackles and make her shuffle onto a raised table. None of the white men in the audience look at her with pity or care; to them, she's no better than a cow. Only a white girl about Amari's age seems uninterested in the auction. Amari looks up and wishes she'd died with Kwasi.

When forced once again to confront that she's nothing more than an animal to her white captors, Amari wishes to die. This speaks to just how dangerous dehumanization like this is, as it can quite literally rob people of their lives. And in this situation, there's no way for Afi to encourage Amari to stay strong. She's truly on her own, and therefore, she's weaker.

CHAPTER 14. THE SLAVE SALE

Polly doesn't like Black people—she thinks that they're ugly, that they talk funny, and that they smell bad. They also make it difficult for "regular folks" like her to find work, since they work for free. Polly unrolls her certificate of indenture; proud that she's able to read, she reads it once more. The certificate says that King George II, in 1738, sets 15-year-old Polly's indenture to Mr. Percival Derby for 14 years. Polly frowns. Indentures are normally seven years, but since Polly has to pay off her parents' debts too, she had to sign up for a double indenture. She looks back to the auction, where the slave women wail. Polly snorts; this has to be better than the jungle these slaves came from.

Polly is an indentured servant, meaning that she voluntarily entered into a contract to work for a certain amount of time—after her servitude is up, she'll be free to integrate into white society. Her thoughts on Black people are influenced by the fact that she's white and impoverished as a member of the servant class. As she sees it, no one in their right mind would willingly pay someone like her to work when they can get Black people to work for free; her own racism keeps her from empathizing with the Black slaves who are forced to work for free. Even though Polly is an indentured servant, she still believes that she's better than the slaves because she's white. Her race allows her to be treated like a person—like she belongs among "regular folks."

As the auctioneer invites buyers to "inspect the merchandise," a rotund white man hurries onto the riser and approaches the youngest woman, who's about Polly's age. He puts his fingers in her mouth, runs his hands down her legs, and offers 10 pounds for her. Polly doesn't feel sorry for the girl, but the man is repulsive. The bidding begins, and finally, Mr. Derby purchases the girl for 60 pounds. Polly shrugs. She hopes he'll send this girl to the fields. The auctioneer offers Mr. Derby the girl's mother, but Mr. Derby refuses. He insists that "family ties only confuse the poor creatures" and tries to lead his purchase away.

The young woman is presumably Amari—and her mother is likely Afi. The fact that the auctioneer refers to Afi as Amari's mother suggests that the white men don't acknowledge or understand the power of friendship to bind people together. Despite this, Mr. Derby's insistence that family ties "confuse" slaves suggests that he actually understands how meaningful family ties can be. They're not confusing; they simply give slaves another person who loves them and can help them remember that they're human. But the fact that the auctioneer refers to the slaves as "merchandise" to be inspected further strips them of their humanity.

The girl, however, goes wild. Polly wonders if African people have feelings and actual thoughts. She remembers playing with slave **children** when she was little, though her father discouraged her from doing so. Her mother insisted that Polly was going to grow up to be a fine lady, so she needed to leave the slave children alone and learn to read. Polly returns her attention to the present and notices that the slave girl is crying real tears. Mr. Derby pulls the girl from the stage, forces her into the wagon, and goes to pay for her. Polly is annoyed when the slave girl won't stop crying.

Polly's memory of playing with Black slave children when she was little is an indication that prejudice and racism are learned, not innate. Polly probably didn't think horribly about her childhood friends—but her father taught her to be racist as he encouraged her to disassociate with them. As a young child, then, Polly followed the advice of Amari's mother to not judge people by their looks—a mindset that the book suggests comes naturally when a person is still innocent.

CHAPTER 15. POLLY AND CLAY

Polly believes that crying shows weakness and is a waste of time—tears didn't keep her father out of prison or save her parents when they died of smallpox. Mr. Derby's son Clay arrives, whipping a well-dressed slave who's struggling with heavy supplies. The slave, Noah, doesn't try to stop the abuse. Polly marvels that the slaves never seem bothered by all they suffer; she wonders if they just don't feel pain. Polly asks Clay if the Derbys dress all their slaves so finely. Clay furiously reprimands Polly for speaking, but Polly pursues her questioning. Clay finally laughs and says that his father likes to dress his driver nicely when they come to town. Polly asks why he hits Noah, then—she doesn't like Black people, but she doesn't think they should be beaten all the time. Clay explains that the slaves expect it, and it's how he shows he cares for them.

Polly is understandably jaded, given how much loss she's suffered. However, this doesn't excuse her clear racism or her unwillingness to see the humanity of the Black slaves. It's telling that she marvels at how much slaves will put up with, as this suggests that she doesn't fully understand the power structure. If slaves resist, they're beaten more, tortured differently, or killed—so from a survival standpoint, it's better to just put up with the whippings. Clay, however, has grown up believing that abuse is a kind of love. This is horrifically misguided and blatantly false—and it's a belief he can hold only because as a white man, he has a great deal of power in the colonial system.

Clay warns Polly to keep her mouth shut going forward. Polly insists she's not afraid, but she feels nervous. Clay asks if she can read, and Polly nods, unsure if this is the right answer. He insists that women don't need to read and warns her that if she teaches a slave to read, Mr. Derby will whip her. Polly is shocked; she thought that whippings were reserved for slaves. She watches Noah gently move the trembling slave girl onto a blanket as Mr. Derby approaches. Mr. Derby forces Polly to give her thoughts on the slave auction, scolds the slave girl for crying, and snaps at Noah to finish loading. When Noah is done, Mr. Derby orders Polly into the back of the wagon and introduces her to his "new little savage," whom he suspects is the same age. He laughs, but Polly sees nothing funny.

Here, Clay makes it clear to Polly that she won't receive special treatment just because she's white—in his eyes, she's little better than the slaves. Despite this, though, it's telling that Clay and Mr. Derby actually address Polly as a human being rather than treating her like an animal. She may have much less power than the Derby's do, but in their eyes, she's still human. This passage hints that there's potentially room for Polly to grow and develop empathy, since she at least notices Noah's kindness toward Amari and doesn't find Mr. Derby's racist jokes funny.

The group begins its journey. Polly eyes the slave girl and tries to stay as far away as possible. Polly knows she's pretty and she figures the slave girl is looking at her with admiration. The slave girl is ugly and even smells bad. Polly watches Clay spitting off the wagon until, several hours in, Mr. Derby asks Clay what he's going to name his gift. Polly quietly suggests the girl already has a name, but Mr. Derby insists she's wrong. Clay declares he's going to name her Myna, because she belongs to him. Polly thinks Clay sounds extremely self-centered. Indulgently, Mr. Derby says he's giving Clay the same gift his own father gave him when he turned 16—and someday, Clay will do the same for his son. Polly finds that she feels bad for the slave girl.

Even though Polly is fully able to see just how self-centered Clay is and recognize how silly that makes him look, she's not able to notice the same quality in herself yet. For instance, Amari and her friends have so far described white men as looking sickly and unhappy, so it's very unlikely that Amari is admiring Polly the way that Polly thinks she is. Again, though, Polly has room for change: it's a major step that she feels bad for Amari once she realizes that Amari is here for Clay to rape. This suggests that as the girls get to know each other, they may bond over a shared hatred of Clay.

Mr. Derby also tells Clay that Black women are different, and choosing them for "special favors at night" reminds them who's the master and who's the slave. A moment later, the wagon lurches violently. Noah calmly apologizes and says that a mosquito must've bitten the horse, but Polly is sure that Noah knows exactly what's going on with the horse. She also decides she doesn't like Clay. The men go on to discuss Mr. Derby's new wife and white women in general, whom Mr. Derby says should be treated delicately. Clay hates his new stepmother. He asks why his father purchased Polly's indenture, but Mr. Derby is just thrilled that Polly's indenture is so long. Clay laughs, calls Polly "Polly-girl," and says that she'll like it at Derbyshire Farms. Polly's father used to call her Polly-girl, and she hates that Clay used this nickname.

Mr. Derby draws on the false idea that Black women are more promiscuous than white women—and he uses this to try to justify raping them, while also insisting that rape is a good way to control them. In essence, he's trying to blame Black slave women at large for the sexual violence they experience, while also acknowledging that rape is dehumanizing and wears away at victims' spirits. And in referring to rape as "special favors at night" rather than calling it what it is, Mr. Derby downplays a horrible act of violence. It's also important to remember Clay's earlier threats to Polly in the context of Mr. Derby's opinion that white women should be treated well. Clearly, he's only referring to wealthy white women—not to poor indentured servants like Polly.

Polly focuses on the landscape and thinks of her past. After her parents died, she lived in the attic of a dirt farmer named Jeremy Carton. No one there ever spoke kindly to her. Polly vows to learn about how the upper-class lives while serving the Derbys so she can become a lady. When she wakes up from a nap, Polly catches sight of a white brick manor house ahead. It looks perfect and is surrounded by lush grass, fields, and slaves. Polly wishes she could own such a gorgeous property as several slaves rush out with refreshments. Mr. Derby ignores them and sends Noah to the right, down to a wooden shack. He orders the girls out of the wagon and tells Polly that she and the slave girl will live here. Polly must "break in [the] new African."

For Polly, the house is a representation of all her dreams. It's huge and white, and it represents an opulence she's never experienced before. Therefore, it's extremely disconcerting when Mr. Derby informs Polly that she'll be living with the slaves. This forces Polly to reconsider how she thinks of herself in relation to the Black slaves. She's grown up believing she's better than they are, but being forced to live with them and "break in" Amari tells her that at least in Mr. Derby's eyes, she's little better than the slaves.

Polly is aghast and humiliated that she won't be working in the house. She tries to push back, but Mr. Derby sharply tells Polly that this is her job: she must teach the slave girl English and obedience, and she must get the girl to Clay whenever Clay asks for her. Mr. Derby says that the girls will assist Teenie and be busy all the time, and they cannot question orders. He threatens to take Polly back to Jeremy Carton if she disobeys, and then he heads back to the house. Polly and the slave girl eye each other suspiciously.

Mr. Derby does his best to impress upon Polly that while she's on his property, she has no power. As an indentured servant, she's bound to do whatever he asks of her, no matter what Polly's thoughts might be on the matter. With this, Polly is made to feel powerless—and while she doesn't suffer like the other slaves do, she gets a taste of what they experience.

CHAPTER 16. TEENIE AND TIDBIT

Polly and the slave girl enter the shack. It's sparsely furnished with a table, a chair, a bed, and a mat. The slave girl sinks to the ground and begins to whisper, so Polly scolds her for using "jungle talk." Polly has never been so close to a slave; she studies the girl closely. Suddenly, Polly realizes that she hasn't eaten in hours and grabs her stomach. The slave girl does the same. Polly feels like she'll never be able to civilize the slave girl and pounds on the mattress. With a sigh, she rubs her stomach and says, "Hungry." The girl surprises Polly when she repeats the word. Polly says that this is Derbyshire Farms, a rice plantation. She asks the girl to repeat "plantation," and then tells the girl that she's a slave. Disturbingly, the girl seems to know exactly what the word means.

For Polly, it's disconcerting to realize that Amari already knows some English. It means that Amari isn't as unintelligent as Polly believes all Black people are, thereby forcing Polly to rethink her preconceived notions. When Polly notes that it's disturbing that Amari understands what it means to be a slave, it's an indicator that Polly is beginning to see Amari's humanity. Before this, Polly thought that slavery was right and good. Now, though, she has to confront the fact that enslaved people aren't as happy as she may have thought.

Polly introduces herself and tells the slave girl that she's Myna. The girl shakes her head and says she's Amari. They argue for a moment, but Polly sighs and calls the girl Amari. Just then, the door bursts open, and a short, skinny Black woman bursts in. Despite her diminutive size, she seems like a giant. A little boy clings to her skirts. Polly introduces herself, and Amari as Myna, and the woman introduces herself as Teenie and her son as Tidbit. Polly calls her Miss Teenie, but Teenie warns her that they'll get in trouble for that and leads the girls to the kitchen for food. When Amari says, "hungry," Teenie is thrilled—but she warns Amari to play dumb for as long as she can.

Despite not believing that Black people should have any power, Polly still recognizes a powerful presence when she sees one. However powerful Teenie might seem to her, though, it's unsafe for a slave like her to allow others to use honorifics like "Miss" for her—that would threaten Mr. Derby's power. The language that slaves are forced to use in the colonies clearly doesn't allow them to enjoy any sense of power or respect.

Teenie puts steaming bowls in front of the girls. When Amari begins to eat with her hands, Polly realizes that she'll have to teach table manners. Tidbit sits with a dog, Hushpuppy, under the table as Polly and Teenie discuss the dish. Polly shares that her mother wasn't much of a cook, so she's never had food like this before. After serving pie, Teenie says that Polly and Amari have a few days to learn their way around. It'll be Polly's job to teach Amari as many words as possible—Mr. Derby will want her to get up to speed soon. Clay, she spits, has a "thumpin' gizzard for a heart." Polly calls Teenie ma'am as she agrees with this—and though Teenie scolds her, she says that Polly's mother raised her right. Polly says that both her parents are dead.

Teenie is probably delighted that even a white girl like Polly can so easily recognize that Clay is horrible and cruel. This helps Teenie and Polly begin to form a respectful relationship with each other—but again, their relationship begins based on a shared hatred of Clay, not on shared experiences or necessarily genuine interest in the other. Teenie also makes it clear that life won't be easy on the plantation, especially for Amari. Because the Derbys think little of their slaves, they see no reason to give Amari time to grieve for what she's lost.

Teenie asks how they died and seems to truly want to know. Polly tells her family's story: her father was born in England but eventually ran out of money. He came to the colonies as an indentured servant to get out of jail. He entered the service of Jeremy Carton, married Polly's mother, and had Polly. He worked like a slave but couldn't pay off his debts. Polly's mother was an orphan who worked as a maid and a beggar. At this, Teenie suggests that there must not have been slaves, but Polly coldly says that most white people she knows are very poor. Softly, Teenie says that they still aren't slaves. Polly says that her father kept getting in trouble and landing in jail. Finally, a few months ago, her parents both died of smallpox. Mr. Carton sold Polly's indenture to Mr. Derby for some unknown reason.

It doesn't take long for Polly and Teenie's relationship to move forward and for Teenie to show genuine interest in Polly. Despite Teenie's kindness for asking about Polly's story, though, Polly still goes out of her way to use racist language and convey that she thinks poor white people have it just as bad as slaves do. Teenie, however, makes it clear this isn't true—poor white people, even indentured servants, are not *slaves. As uncomfortable as Clay makes Polly, it's implied that Polly won't ever have to put up with Clay raping her—an abuse reserved for Black slaves.*

Sounding emotional, Teenie suggests that Polly has hope; she can pay back her indenture and eventually, fit in. Polly says that she has to pay back 14 years and will be old—almost 30—by the time she's free. Teenie quietly says that she's about 30. Amari moves to Teenie and touches her arm, and a look of understanding passes between them. Amari says something in her own language, but Teenie leaps away and sends the girls to get some sleep. Amari curls up on the mat on the floor. A few hours later, Tidbit knocks on the door—he's been sent to fetch Amari for Clay. Amari cries and begs not to go. Polly touches her arm but doesn't know how to help.

Teenie again makes it clear that it's impossible to say that poor white people and Black slaves suffer an equal amount. Even if Polly is old by the time she's free, she'll still have the opportunity to be *free—something that Teenie, Amari, and Tidbit will probably never get. When Teenie leaps away from Amari after hearing Amari's native language, it reinforces the idea that simply surviving and preserving one's roots is a potentially dangerous act of resistance. Teenie seems afraid, suggesting that the slaves could be punished for using their native languages.*

CHAPTER 17. AMARI AND ADJUSTMENTS

Amari's next few months are miserable as she works to assimilate. She and Polly chop wood for Teenie and tend to the fire. Polly seems to still resent that she's not at the big house, though she relaxes some. She refuses to touch any of the slaves, and she and Amari merely tolerate each other. Tidbit shows the girls how to perform tasks. Amari learns to cook food she's never seen before, like venison. She learns that the smokehouse is the only building on the plantation that's locked all the time. When fish arrive, Amari shows Teenie how to make fish stew like Mother made. One day, when yams come in, Amari babbles excitedly and is only able to get out "my mama" in English. Teenie kindly says that her mother came from Africa too, and that as long as Amari remembers Africa and her mother, they'll never disappear.

Because Polly continues to believe she's better than all the slaves simply because of the color of her skin, it's impossible for her to form any truly meaningful relationships with them. Teenie and Amari, on the other hand, are able to connect thanks to their shared experiences. Teenie is able to help Amari figure out how to hold onto her memories and her sense of self, something that will be essential if Amari is to survive. Essentially, Teenie proposes that they can never forget their memories or, in later generations, their ancestors' stories—those stories allow them to be more than just slaves.

Tidbit laughs constantly and makes the days easier. He's a trickster, and he teaches Amari English. Amari is glad that Polly talks to her all the time—it makes learning easier. However, though Amari improves and can understand more, she knows she sounds stupid since she still speaks so poorly. She learns the value of staying silent and acting ignorant, and Teenie silently praises these efforts.

Amari's life becomes a balancing act as she tries to simultaneously learn as much as possible while not letting the Derbys know that she's learning anything. Language can still be a useful tool—but only if she uses it to understand what's going on, not to freely express herself.

At least twice a week, Clay summons Amari to his bedroom. Amari thinks of her childhood while she's with him, but it's hard to do this on nights when he wants to talk. One night, he scornfully vents about Mrs. Derby and how Mr. Derby is excited for her pregnancy. He then asks if Amari likes him. Amari pretends she doesn't understand, but finally she says she does. She says she got the blanket he sent for her, though she secretly gave it to Sarah Jane, a slave who recently had a **baby**. Warmly, Clay sends Amari back to her hut and says he'll "let" her come back tomorrow. Amari shivers uncontrollably.

Amari's memories don't seem to mean as much when they can't protect her from Clay's constant abuse. However, Amari isn't entirely powerless: though she must submit to Clay if she wants to survive, she can still resist him by passing along his gifts to others who need them more. By supporting Sarah Jane and her new baby, Amari can make sure that the next generation survives to hear and keep slaves' stories alive.

CHAPTER 18. ROOTS AND DIRT

One afternoon, Amari helps Teenie in her kitchen garden. Teenie points out medicinal plants, which makes Amari wish she'd paid more attention when Mother tried to teach her these things. Amari is very quiet after her night with Clay, which had been worse than usual. She asks Teenie if she has roots that kill, and Teenie quietly says she does—but she won't show them to Amari. Teenie says that the overseer used to rape her. Eventually, the men move on, but then another slave woman has to suffer. Amari says she wants to die, but Teenie says that Amari was brought here for a reason. After a moment, Amari asks how long Teenie has been here. She's shocked that Teenie was born here, but Teenie's mother was from Africa. They sold her when Teenie was a teenager.

Here, Teenie makes it very clear that the sexual abuse Amari suffers won't end with Amari. Once Clay gets tired of Amari, he'll just choose another Black woman to rape—and until Black women are free, this will continue. By refusing to give Amari a poisonous plant with which to kill herself, Teenie insists that Amari has to stay alive so she can focus on the beauty. Staying alive also means that Amari will survive to pass on her own story, just as Teenie now passes on the stories of her mother.

Teenie says that her mother was a strong Ashanti woman. She told Teenie stories about the **sun**, which looked like a copper pot, and all the animals. Now, Teenie passes the stories on to Tidbit. Teenie reiterates that if they remember, nothing is ever really gone, and she pulls a small scrap of **kente cloth** out of her apron pocket. Amari is in awe. Teenie explains that when they kidnapped her mother, she tore a piece off of *her* mother's headwrap and hid it until she got here. This is all Teenie has left of Africa. The women sit in sad silence for a minute.

It's likely that Teenie never learned her mother's native language, given how dangerous it can be to speak one's native language in the colonies. In the place of that language, Teenie instead has her mother's stories and this scrap of kente cloth. The scrap of cloth represents the tenacity and the power of abducted Black people—and it makes it clear that it is possible to keep their stories alive.

Amari asks how Teenie became the cook here. Teenie says that the first Mrs. Derby put her in charge right before she died, after the old cook tried to poison Mr. Derby. The first Mrs. Derby died giving birth to Clay, and Teenie thinks that maybe Clay is so evil because his mother wasn't there to love him. Amari asks if Mr. Derby misses his first wife. Teenie figures he does; he was obsessed with her. She was cruel, however. After she died, Mr. Derby wouldn't look at Clay until Clay was six or so. Amari asks why Mr. Derby married Mrs. Isabelle. Teenie doesn't know, but she does know that Mrs. Derby has to put up with Clay and paintings of the first Mrs. Derby, and she has no contact with her friends. Teenie refuses to talk anymore. Amari sweeps and feels that her future is nothing but dust.

Despite being at the mercy of the Derby family's whims, Teenie and Amari are nevertheless able to humanize and sympathize with their masters—in particular, with Mrs. Derby. To Teenie, Mrs. Derby is in a horrific predicament herself: though she may live in luxury, she nevertheless has to put up with the cruelty of Mr. Derby and Clay. Judging by Teenie's descriptions, it seems that Mr. Derby is highly controlling and potentially abusive to his wife. It's a testament to Teenie and Amari's senses of compassion that they're able to sympathize with a white woman who, by all accounts, is far more powerful than they are and is complicit in their enslavement.

CHAPTER 19. PEACHES AND MEMORIES

About a week later, Teenie sends Tidbit, Polly, and Amari to pick peaches for pie. Tidbit climbs into the tree and is supposed to hand peaches down to the girls. Instead, he pelts the girls with them. Amari, thinking of how much Tidbit reminds her of Kwasi, tells him to come down in her own language. Tidbit comes down and asks if that was "Africa talk." He wants to know where Africa is, and Polly asks what it looks like there. Amari smiles and says it's full of bright, happy colors, family, chickens, and goats. She thinks of her happy childhood with Tirza, the annoying monkeys, and the overbearing cousins. Everyone there was Black, and she can't find the words to express what she's lost. She almost cries as she thinks of how, if she fell in her village, any woman would comfort her.

In the colonies, where nearly everyone around her speaks English, Amari isn't fully able to pass on her story. While both Teenie and Afi make it clear that Amari must tell her story to future generations, it's impossible to say just how much of her life in Africa Amari will actually be able to convey in a language that's not her own. Meanwhile, Tidbit's mischievous nature and the memories it stirs up in Amari remind her that no matter where she is in the world, children are still the future—and she must protect them, nurture them, and educate them about where they came from.

Tidbit asks if there are boys like him there. Amari says she had a brother a bit older than Tidbit, but he's dead. The group is silent for a few minutes, and then Tidbit asks Polly where she came from. Polly says that she grew up in the low country and that she was her parents' "shining star." To help Tidbit understand what this means, she asks him to think of how worried Teenie is when Tidbit is out too long—that's how her parents loved her. Amari is surprised that she understands Polly's grief. She thought that because Polly is white, her life must've been easier. Polly looks off and says that her mother never got to be a lady, but she hoped that Polly would. Amari touches Polly's hand. Tidbit asks if Amari is going back to Africa, and Amari replies that she isn't. Silently, they head back to the kitchen.

Though Polly certainly has much more to learn in terms of compassion, kindness, and unlearning racism, this is nevertheless an important moment for Amari. She begins to see that some white people suffer too, in ways similar to how she does. As the girls discover that they have life experiences in common, such as losing their parents, their friendship has more fodder to help it grow and flourish. Polly's desire to be a lady, however, shows that she still prioritizes being upper class over being kind—becoming a lady, in all likelihood, would entail owning slaves and forgetting the humanity of people like Amari.

CHAPTER 20. ISABELLE DERBY

Mrs. Derby is motherly and caring, and Amari hears rumors that Mr. Derby controls everything she does. The slaves constantly whisper about her being pregnant. Every morning, Mrs. Derby comes to the kitchen, cheerfully greets everyone there, and plans the day's meals. Teenie will prepare whatever Mrs. Derby wants, and no one questions her authority. Amari is fascinated with Mrs. Derby. The white woman doesn't look at Amari like she's an animal—she seems genuinely compassionate. One early morning, Amari almost runs into Mrs. Derby on the path. Mrs. Derby kindly asks how Amari is adjusting and says she knows what it's like to be unhappy. Amari, shocked, and stares into Mrs. Derby's green eyes. Mrs. Derby says that she knows about Amari and Clay and hopes that it ends soon.

It's possible that because Mrs. Derby finds herself in what is likely an abusive marriage with Mr. Derby, she has a better understanding of what the slaves her husband owns experience on a daily basis. This isn't to say that their experiences are equivalent—after all, Mrs. Derby hasn't been kidnapped, renamed, and raped—but it does illustrate how sharing difficult experiences helps individuals develop compassion and form friendships. Her kindness toward the slaves is another spot of beauty amid a horrific circumstances.

That afternoon, Amari peels potatoes in the kitchen and listens to Lena, a house slave, gossip with Teenie. They argue about whether Mrs. Derby's **baby** is a boy or a girl. Teenie hopes it's a girl so that Mrs. Derby will have someone to keep her company. Lena doesn't understand how Teenie can feel sorry for a wealthy white woman, but Teenie points out that Mrs. Derby doesn't have access to her money and is pretty close to a slave, given how Mr. Derby treats her. Lena gripes about Noah, who came with Mrs. Derby and will become free when she dies. Lena wanders off, and Amari asks how old Mrs. Derby is. Teenie says that she's only about 18. She's just what Mr. Derby wanted: young, rich, and landowning.

Even as Teenie chafes at her own enslavement, she's still able to sympathize with the mistreatment that Mrs. Derby suffers. And she tries to make Lena understand that while their enslavement is undoubtedly worse, Mrs. Derby, as a woman, still has very little power. Her wealth and status as Mr. Derby's wife only protects her so much, since she lives in a world that elevates wealthy white men above everyone else. Learning Mrs. Derby's age also likely makes her more relatable to Amari, as she's only a few years older.

At dusk a few days later, Amari hears a man and a woman's voice speaking quietly. The woman sounds upset. Amari is terrified—the other slaves are no risk to her, but she doesn't want to run into Clay. The people seem to retreat, and Amari knows not to ask any questions. Every night, Amari collapses on her mat in the cabin. She thinks of how much she hates Clay's bed and feels bad for the other slaves, who have their own gardens and **children** to attend to when they're done with their work. The slaves sing late into the night. One night, Polly asks why they sing. Amari says that the songs fly free in the sky, and she thinks of Mother's voice.

Amari's terror when she thinks of running into Clay in the dark makes it clear that she lives her life in fear of what the white men who control her may do to her at any given moment. She has no power to control what happens to her—her only hope is to just avoid as many confrontations as possible. Meanwhile, the other slaves' nightly singing is another form of resistance. Singing helps them remember who they are and where they came from, and as Amari explains, it allows one part of them—their voices—to be free.

CHAPTER 21. RICE AND SNAKES

Polly has her sights set on working in the big house—Amari is adjusting, and Teenie doesn't need the help. Teenie keeps Polly busy with menial labor that Polly thinks is suitable for slaves, not white people. Derbyshire Farms is a rice plantation; one afternoon, Polly asks if Mr. Derby's wealth comes from the rice. Teenie doesn't know, but she says that Mr. Derby buys male slaves from Africa for the rice fields every year. She explains that the men work rice in Africa, and they're the brains behind the rice operation here. Polly wonders out loud if she could help Mr. Derby keep his books, but Teenie snorts and sends the girls with water and food for Cato and the other field slaves. Polly groans; this is another duty fit for only a slave. Teenie sends Tidbit too, but she warns him to stay out of the water.

Though it may not be out of the realm of possibility for Polly to move up to serving in the house, her desire to serve Mr. Derby by keeping books speaks to how naïve she still is about how wealthy white men like him operate. This may also possibly suggest that as racist as her own father was, he was surprisingly progressive when it came to women's roles, given that Polly has no idea that her literacy might not go over so well with other white men. Polly's insistence that delivering food to Cato is a slave's job also shows that even as her relationship with Amari is improving, she still believes she's better than Black people simply because she's white.

Tidbit laughs, slithers like a snake, and runs ahead with Hushpuppy. Polly has never been so far from the big house, and she's amazed when she sees the rice fields. About two-dozen slaves stand in knee-deep mud, bent over rice plants. They sweat and move joylessly. Polly wonders how people can live like this. A skinny old slave on the bank of the river, Cato, greets Tidbit and cracks jokes. Polly knows that Cato is old; he knows everything but does minimal work. He suggests that Polly will start sewing for Mrs. Derby soon, while Amari will be in the rice fields as soon as Clay gets tired of her. Amari moans.

It's important that up to this point, Polly has never seen the rice fields—so it's likely that she has no idea what working in them entails. It's telling, then, that she's so shocked by what they look like and how joyless and beaten-down the slaves are. Cato's assessment of where Polly and Amari will end up reinforces that within the colonial system, Polly has significantly more privilege and agency than Amari—her work will be comparatively cushy and far less dangerous.

Tidbit asks if anyone ever goes back to Africa. Cato, serious, says that they don't, but in the rice fields it doesn't matter—everyone dies in five years. Polly is shocked. Cato explains that the rice slaves toil in the hot **sun** and must contend with mosquitos, flies, malaria, pneumonia, and snakes. Women have stillbirths, or their **babies** die young. Cato scolds Tidbit, who got too close to the water, and says that tiny rice seeds are planted one at a time. The work goes on forever. Amari will soon do it, and Tidbit will do it too when he's older. Polly is horrified that Tidbit will be in the rice fields one day. Cato just advises Amari to make herself useful to Clay as long as she can.

Cato makes it abundantly clear that life in the rice fields is nothing but horror—it's dehumanizing and will inevitably kill any person who is forced to cultivate rice. Polly's shock stems from the fact that for the first time, she has to face the prospect of people she's close to performing this backbreaking work. Before, slaves were just a faceless, homogenous group that she didn't have to care about. But, however, slaves in Polly's mind have faces, names, and histories—they're her friends.

Suddenly, one of the slaves in the rice field screams. Cato rushes to the sound, and Polly, Amari, and Tidbit follow. A man, Jacob, hauls his wife, Hildy, out of the field—a snake bit her. Several women wrap the wound in strips of cloth as Hildy calls out and goes still. Cato says that she'll be dead by sunset. Hildy will be second copperhead death this season. Two others died of malaria, one person was bitten by an alligator, and another drowned. He tells Amari to do whatever she needs to do to stay out of the fields. As the girls and Tidbit head back to the kitchen, Polly hears the other slaves being called back to work.

As quickly as the slaves move to help Hildy out of the field, it's telling that no one seems particularly surprised that a snake bit her. The dehumanizing nature of life in the rice fields means that it's expected that people will die with shocking regularity. Most horrifically, Jacob and the other slaves cannot even sit with Hildy and comfort her in her last hours. They might be punished for doing so, and there's nothing they can do to help her given how little the white people who oversee them care.

CHAPTER 22. LASHED WITH A WHIP

Teenie has already heard about Hildy when Polly and Amari return to the kitchen. She asks if Cato also scared them about Amari's future in the rice field. Polly thinks that last year, she thought that slaves were just supposed to work in rice fields. But she knows Amari and maybe cares about her, and it troubles her that Amari's fate is so grim. Teenie says she has an idea and sends the girls to wash up. She hands them maid outfits and explains that one of the house slaves is Hildy's daughter, and since she's with Hildy, Amari and Polly will take her place.

Now that Polly has put faces, names, and histories to slaves, the thought of them performing dangerous labor and dying is suddenly horrific to her. This speaks to the power of friendship: even if Polly isn't entirely ready to call Amari a friend yet, knowing more about her means that Polly is beginning to humanize Amari. Now, Amari is a fellow human being in Polly's eyes, not just a faceless slave.

Polly is thrilled and helps Amari tie her apron. She asks if Amari has seen Mr. Derby since they arrived and if Amari has been in the house. She gasps when she remembers that Amari is there most nights. Polly asks if Mrs. Derby knows what Clay is doing and suggests that she could help Amari. Amari sharply says that Mrs. Derby also needs help. Polly doesn't understand why Amari is so upset. Slave women are just expected to serve in their masters' bedrooms, and she thinks that Amari should be used to it.

Even if Polly has come a long way in the last few months, she still has a long way to go—in her mind, Clay's constant raping of Amari is normal and expected, not something to get upset about. She still isn't able to understand that rape—and more broadly, the dehumanization of Black people through slavery—is horrific and unacceptable.

The girls each take a platter of food and head for the house. Lena rolls her eyes but sends Polly and Amari back for the rest of supper. Polly studies the lavish dining room and peeks into the next room, Mr. Derby's study. There are lots of books, and she knows that if she were employed in the house, she'd sneak in and read every chance she got. Lena formally introduces Polly to Noah, who acts as the coachman, butler, and Mrs. Derby's bodyguard. Lena whispers that it's rumored he knows how to read, but she cuts herself off as Mr. Derby escorts the heavily pregnant Mrs. Derby into the room. Clay comes in behind them, gives his stepmother a disgusted look, and tries to catch Amari's eye. Amari refuses to look up.

Polly's naïveté shines through yet again. If she were employed in the house, the idea that she'd be able to get away with sneaking into Mr. Derby's study is wildly misguided. To Mr. Derby, she's still just help, and female help at that—which to him means that Polly has few or no rights. However, as a white woman, it's still far more likely that Polly will end up working in the house at some point, which is a mark of her privilege. Amari doesn't have that to look forward to.

Lena explains the change in staff to Mr. Derby. He grumbles that he hates when his workers are injured and tells Mrs. Derby not to go check on the injured slave. His only concern is Mrs. Derby's health and that of their **baby**. Mr. Derby asks Clay to pull a slave from the fishing crew tomorrow to work in the rice, but Clay lazily suggests sending Noah to the rice field. Mrs. Derby looks alarmed and turns to her husband, but Mr. Derby assures her that she can keep Noah at the house. He asks Clay to be nicer, but Clay rolls his eyes. Amari looks nervous, so Polly does everything she can to help. Throughout the dinner, Mrs. Derby eats little unless prompted, and Polly notices that Mr. Derby treats her more like a possession than a person.

The way that Mr. Derby talks about Hildy's snakebite is significant: it's an inconvenience *for him rather than a tragedy. He doesn't seem to recognize that Hildy is going to die and that this is a direct result of the inhumane conditions in which he forces his slaves to work. Meanwhile, seeing how cruel Clay is to Mrs. Derby impresses upon Amari that though Mrs. Derby may be the lady of the house, she still is at the mercy of the men—even her own stepson—when it comes to her choices in life. Clay is free to harass her, threaten to take Noah away, and disobey his father—all because he's a white male.*

Mr. Derby and Clay discuss purchasing more slaves to increase rice production next year. Mr. Derby says he'll keep his eyes open and they'll "break them in" before planting time. Polly is disturbed by how they talk about slaves, and she wonders if she could talk about purchasing people like they do. Clay asks if they need to sell slaves to buy supplies, but Mr. Derby insists they'll make a profit without selling "property." Slaves, Polly realizes, are property. She's upset about the thought of selling them. Clay says that he has friends in the North talking about ending slavery, but Mr. Derby insists that this won't happen. Both men insist the slaves are better with them than they are in the jungle, but Polly isn't sure anymore if Mr. Derby is right about this.

In this moment, Polly finally understands that becoming a fine lady might not be all she imagined it would be. For one, it would likely entail owning slaves, something that suddenly seems far less normal and reasonable than it once did to her. Essentially, as Polly becomes increasingly empathetic and understanding of the struggles that Black slaves face in the colonies, reaching the upper echelons of colonial society seems less and less appealing to her. She also now recognizes that slaves are people—they're not "property" that needs to be "broken in."

As Polly watches Mrs. Derby, she notices how unhappy the woman is. She realizes that being a fine lady doesn't mean being happy—Mrs. Derby is clearly miserable. Finally, Polly and Amari clear the last of the dishes. Polly vows to talk to Mrs. Derby about serving her personally as Mr. Derby lights his pipe. He sticks a leg out as Amari walks past with the last of the pie. She trips, spilling berries all over the light carpet. Amari cowers as Mr. Derby sends Lena for his whip. The lash is laced with wire.

Here, Polly begins to realize not only that being a fine lady isn't all that fun—it also won't guarantee her any power. Mrs. Derby is, by all accounts, a fine lady, but she's miserable because she has little or no power over her life. Thus, Polly begins to see that even if she does become a lady someday, it may not improve her situation much or at all.

Mr. Derby lashes Amari's back as Lena prays and Polly clenches her fists. Polly feels furious at how helpless she is—and she knows this ruins her chances of working in the house. Mrs. Derby finally stops her husband. Mr. Derby tells Polly that she failed to civilize Amari, so Amari will replace Hildy in the rice fields. He tells Polly to clean the floor and escorts Mrs. Derby from the room. Polly is terrified and doesn't know what to do. Amari is unconscious. Noah whispers that vinegar will get the stains out of the carpet.

Mr. Derby's seeming loss of control suggests that on some level, he's simply a cruel man—and with slaves around, he doesn't see the need to temper himself. This speaks to how he sees the slaves as subhuman and not worthy of compassion. Though Mrs. Derby stopping her husband is a way to push back against his cruelty, she has no standing to do anything more—as a woman, she's powerless to advocate for anything else.

CHAPTER 23. FIERY PAIN AND HEALING HANDS

Amari doesn't remember being carried to the cabin. Any movement makes her scream in pain. For three days, she barely wakes and just dreams of her parents and of her pain. On the third morning, she opens her eyes and sees Polly. Polly helps Amari drink and says that the welts have finally stopped bleeding. Amari apologizes, but Polly storms around, throws a bucket, and says that Mr. Derby deserves to be whipped. She thinks he probably tripped Amari on purpose. Amari starts to move, knowing she must clean the carpet, but Polly assures her that she and Lena already did it. She tells Amari to work on getting better. Amari apologizes again for ruining Polly's chances of working in the big house and starts to cry when she remembers that she's headed for the rice fields. Polly says they'll make her recovery slow and runs off to help Teenie.

Polly once wondered how and why slaves put up with so much abuse, and if slaves could even feel pain. This incident makes several things abundantly clear to her: slaves are people and absolutely feel pain, and they submit to the abuse because they literally have no other choice. Polly's insistence that Mr. Derby probably tripped Amari speaks to how disillusioned she is with the plantation—and possibly, she's disillusioned with becoming an upper-class slave owner more broadly. It's a mark of how much Polly has changed that she focuses on healing Amari instead of wallowing about not being able to work at the house.

Amari drifts in and out of consciousness. She dreams of Besa and the hot **sun** over the rice fields. She dreams of Mother and, oddly, of Mrs. Derby. When it's dark, Amari wakes up. Mrs. Derby is there, and Amari is so startled that she almost knocks over the tea that Mrs. Derby tries to help her drink. She apologizes, knowing that she must stink and that she's "incapable." Mrs. Derby apologizes for how Mr. Derby hurt Amari and helps Amari drink the tea. Over the next two weeks, Amari manages to stay awake for several hours at a time. Tidbit makes jokes when he can, and Teenie makes Amari special foods. One evening, Amari feels well enough to sit up. She and Polly discuss how Mrs. Derby visits Amari daily. Polly remarks that the woman looks sad, but Amari insists that she'll be happy when the **baby** comes.

It's telling that Amari is so ashamed in front of Mrs. Derby because she feels "incapable." This shows that while she may be able to stay strong and resist the dehumanization inherent to slavery in many ways, she's also beginning to truly believe the horrible things that Mr. Derby says to her. In essence, she's possibly beginning to believe that she deserved to be punished for dropping the pie and shouldn't hope for anything better. Mrs. Derby's choice to help Amari and her apology, however, are kind acts that push back on this thought process.

After another week, Amari returns to work in the kitchen. She tries to stay invisible, and fortunately, Clay doesn't call for her. Clay does send a bag of sweets for her with Tidbit, but Amari is disgusted and gives them to Tidbit. One morning, Teenie remarks that Amari looks sad. She says that the pain of the welts will fade, but Amari will have the scars forever. Teenie adds that Amari has a strong spirit. Amari doesn't know why she has such a strong spirit—she's just surviving. She thinks of how Afi told her the same thing, but she tells Teenie that spirits sometimes die.

It's perhaps unsurprising that the beating had such a negative effect on Amari's outlook. It plunged her into a world of pain and suffering for three weeks—and the emotional pain will continue for the rest of her life even after her physical wounds have healed. Though Teenie insists that Amari has to keep going, it's far more difficult now that she's seen another aspect of Mr. Derby's cruelty and lack of care.

CHAPTER 24. GATOR BAIT

Clay strolls into the kitchen one afternoon while Teenie, Amari, and Polly work on an apple pie and Tidbit and Hushpuppy sit under the table. Amari shrinks away, but Clay spits that Hushpuppy needs to be out of the kitchen. Teenie sends Tidbit and Hushpuppy out, but Clay snatches Tidbit and kicks the dog into the yard. Teenie looks afraid, but she sooths screaming Tidbit. Clay announces that he has friends visiting, and they need bait for an alligator hunt. Teenie tries to argue, but Clay invites Amari to come along and watch. He wants to show her off to his friends. Amari has no idea what's happening, but Teenie's terror scares Amari. Clay announces that Amari will return either with a whole Tidbit or parts to bury, and he marches away.

Clay knows exactly what he's doing as he snags Tidbit. In addition to terrorizing Tidbit himself, this abuse will also terrorize Teenie, Amari, and all the other slaves who work together to keep their children safe. In this way, hurting Tidbit hurts the entire enslaved population on Derbyshire Farms. This also makes it clear that no slaves—no matter their age, sex, or any other factor—are safe from abuse. And for children, abuse can be especially lethal.

Amari follows behind. Tidbit sees that Hushpuppy is okay and then fixes his eyes on Amari. They head for the river, where three other young men Clay's age wait. They all exude power and superiority. The four young men laugh uproariously as Clay puts Tidbit down. One man nudges Tidbit with his toe while another pats Amari's bottom and asks who she is. Clay fiercely jumps between Amari and his friend and says that Amari is his. Amari is shocked and feels like an animal on display. Clay tells her to tie Tidbit with the rope. As Amari does, she whispers to Tidbit to be brave. Clay tells Tidbit to swim and then tosses him into the river.

Everything Clay does here allows him to assert his power and his dominance over Amari and Tidbit. Forcing Amari to tie Tidbit herself makes her complicit in the abuse—and if the knots come undone, Clay will no doubt insist that Tidbit's certain death would be Amari's fault, not his own for torturing Tidbit in the first place. But because Amari is a slave, she has no power to stand up to Clay. All she can do is hope that her knots are good enough and that Clay might show some mercy.

Tidbit paddles as hard as he can, terrified. Clay and his friends laugh. Amari feels angry enough to kill and begs Clay to bring Tidbit back to shore. Clay's friends stare, astonished, and Clay calmly tells Amari to shut up. She doesn't understand how these men can torture a **child** like this. An alligator approaches, and one of Clay's friends shoots it. Amari can't tell if Tidbit is still alive. Clay orders his friend to pull Tidbit out to let him catch his breath. Amari grasps Tidbit when he's onshore and whispers Afi's words to him: that he's strong and that he'll endure. She tells him the same in English before Clay tosses Tidbit back in. Amari wants to scream, but she understands that Tidbit is in more danger if she distracts the hunters.

Even though Amari wonders how Clay can do this to a child, it's worth noting that because Clay has so much power over Tidbit, Tidbit isn't *a child in Clay's eyes—he's a mere plaything, albeit a living one. For that matter, the same goes for Amari, and this is why Clay is able to justify raping her whenever he feels like it. This horrific experience impresses on readers once again that slavery is so hard to topple because victims have so few ways to effectively resist. To survive something like this, they have to comply.*

The young men throw Tidbit in several more times. By the time they call it a day, Tidbit seems to be in shock. Amari picks him up as Clay's friends all laugh and mount their horses. Clay asks Amari if she had fun and warns her to never contradict him again. They gallop back to the house, and Amari carries Tidbit slowly. Hushpuppy meets them halfway, and Tidbit buries his face in Hushpuppy's fur.

Holding Tidbit on the walk back to the kitchen allows Amari to help Tidbit feel alive, loved, and supported after his horrific experience. Showing him love like this is one small way in which she can resist Clay's dehumanizing actions—and hopefully, help Tidbit hang onto his will to live.

CHAPTER 25. BIRTH OF THE BABY

About two weeks later, Mr. Derby bursts into the kitchen looking agitated—he can't find Lena or Flora, his other house slave. He throws dishes to the floor and demands to know why Amari isn't in the rice fields. Amari says nothing. Then, he asks Polly what she knows about childbirth and explains that he sent Noah for the doctor, but they won't return for hours. Polly agrees to help, and Mr. Derby tells Amari to help too—she's delivered babies before. He runs to the next plantation. Teenie sends the girls to the house with hot water. They go to Mrs. Derby's room and find her in bed, moaning. Between contractions, she says that she'll die, but that the girls must help her **baby**. Amari sooths Mrs. Derby. Mrs. Derby's labor progresses and Amari delivers the baby. Amari croons that the baby is beautiful: she has green eyes, black hair, and dark skin.

Before the baby is born, it's easy to write off Mrs. Derby's insistence that she'll die to the pain of childbirth. However, once the baby arrives and is clearly Black, her meaning becomes clear: no matter how this baby was conceived, the father definitely isn't Mr. Derby, and he's guaranteed to be livid when he finds out. Given how little power Mrs. Derby has despite being white and wealthy, she may legitimately fear for her life—and that of the infant and the father—due to the color of her baby's skin. This fear and uncertainty, however, doesn't change the fact that the baby still represents hope and life, even if her life is tenuous.

CHAPTER 26. FACING MR. DERBY

As Amari carefully cleans the infant, she says that a Black **baby** born to a white mother is trouble. Polly wonders if Mrs. Derby was raped and feels disgusted that a white woman gave birth to a Black baby, but she knows that Mr. Derby will be enraged. Amari sends Polly to ask Teenie for help. When Teenie gets to the bedroom, she sucks her teeth and says that Noah is certainly the father. Mrs. Derby wakes up and asks for her baby. Amari places the infant in her arms, and Mrs. Derby cries. She brushes off Teenie's insistence that she'll be fine and insists that Mr. Derby will kill her, in addition to Noah and the baby.

In Polly's mind, it's inconceivable that a white woman could have consensual sex with a Black man. This reflects her own racism, which is still alive and well, as it suggests that she doesn't believe Black people are worthy of romantic love from white people. Teenie attempts to convince Mrs. Derby that her skin color will protect her—but, significantly, she makes no guarantees about the safety of Noah or the baby. As Black individuals, they're at a much higher risk of violence.

Mrs. Derby suggests they tell Mr. Derby that the **baby** died or was horribly deformed and then take the baby to safety. Teenie insists that Mr. Derby will want to see the baby's body, but Mrs. Derby won't listen. Polly, Amari, and Teenie get Mrs. Derby cleaned up while the baby nurses, and then Mrs. Derby hands Amari the baby and asks Amari to protect her. As they creep down the stairs, Teenie says that Sarah Jane just had a baby, so they'll take the baby to her for now. They sneak past Clay, and then Tidbit takes Amari and Polly down to Sarah Jane's. Teenie tells Polly that she should only say that the baby's mother is dead—though she's certain Sarah Jane will know where the infant came from. Sarah Jane, however, lovingly takes the baby without question.

It's telling that Mrs. Derby believes that her baby can find safety anywhere—if the baby survives, she'll grow up a slave, which the novel makes clear is a life that's fundamentally unsafe. Mrs. Derby's optimism about her baby's outlook suggests that while she might sympathize with the slaves and be compassionate, she doesn't fully understand the danger and the horrors they encounter every day. Meanwhile, Sarah Jane's unquestioning acceptance of the baby affirms that the baby represents hope that life and love can persist, even in such horrifying circumstances.

Back at the kitchen, Teenie sends Polly to sit with Mrs. Derby and tells Amari to help her with dinner. Polly brushes Mrs. Derby's hair and then hears Mr. Derby coming up the stairs. Mrs. Derby is asleep, and Polly pretends to sob. Polly says that the **baby** was stillborn. His voice breaking, Mr. Derby asks to see the baby, but Polly says she was deformed. Mrs. Derby wakes up, apologizes, and echoes the lie that the baby was deformed. At this, Mr. Derby becomes suspicious. Mrs. Derby whispered that she prayed for this baby as Mr. Derby mutters that he couldn't have "fathered an imperfect child." He demands again to see her and says that he wants the doctor to examine the body. When he leaves, Polly assures Mrs. Derby that the baby is safe and runs to confer with Teenie. She doesn't know what to do.

Even before Mr. Derby is truly aware that Mrs. Derby and Polly are hiding something, he's already beginning to blame Mrs. Derby for what supposedly happened. The idea that he couldn't father an "imperfect" baby betrays a belief that if there are any problems with his children, those problems can be attributed to their mothers, *not to him. This is another way that women are victimized in the colonial system. Men are able to absolve themselves of any responsibility when it comes to their children, while women are forced to shoulder the blame for anything bad.*

CHAPTER 27. DEATH IN THE DUST

In the kitchen, Polly asks Teenie what to do. Teenie points out that as a white girl, Polly is the only one who can be on the road to try to turn Noah and the doctor around. Polly jogs down the road until she hears the wagon. She ignores Noah and instead addresses Dr. Hoskins. She tells him that Mrs. Derby and the **baby** are fine, so he can turn around. Noah seems to understand immediately and offers to drive Dr. Hoskins back to Charles Town, but Dr. Hoskins insist that he'll check on his patients anyway and go home in the morning. He pulls Polly into the wagon. Polly introduces herself but won't answer when Dr. Hoskins asks if Mr. Derby sent her to send him back.

The plan, with as many holes as it has, is nevertheless a valiant attempt on the part of the slaves to save the life of an innocent baby whose only crime is being Black. And the plan is only as poor as it is because Teenie, Amari, Polly, and Mrs. Derby really have no other options given how powerless they all are. Next to Mr. Derby and a white doctor, the women conspiring to save the baby have little more than luck and the ability to cause distractions on their side.

At the house, Mr. Derby is out front. He thanks Dr. Hoskins for coming and says that the **baby** was stillborn. Dr. Hoskins, confused, says that Polly said the baby was fine. Mr. Derby grabs Polly but before he can force her to explain, they hear Lena yelling from upstairs that Mrs. Derby fainted. Mr. Derby and the doctor rush inside. Amari emerges from the kitchen and tells Noah the baby girl is Black. Polly is surprised when Noah looks genuinely anguished. Teenie says that everyone is alive *now*, but Mr. Derby will figure it out soon. She sends Tidbit to hide. Noah explains that he and Mrs. Derby grew up together and have loved each other since they were kids. When her father married her off, he allowed Noah to come too. They figured that the baby was Mr. Derby's.

Again, Polly's surprise at seeing such emotion from Noah reveals her own racist convictions that Black people don't experience emotions the same way that she does as a white person. Teenie's choice to hide Tidbit shows that she's well aware that Mr. Derby can punish her for her involvement via Tidbit if he so chooses. This speaks again to the vulnerability of Black children and babies. They are easy targets when powerful white men wish to punish those parents—and hurting or killing them means that the children cannot pass on their parents' stories of resistance.

Polly didn't know it was possible for a slave and a master to fall in love. Noah says that if it's happened before, no one has lived to tell the tale. Teenie tells Noah to run, but Noah refuses—he loves Mrs. Derby. Mr. Derby stalks out of the house, dragging Mrs. Derby with him. He has a gun. Dr. Hoskins remains inside. Noah stands with dignity and looks at Mrs. Derby with love. She reaches for him, but Mr. Derby slaps her arm. Clay arrives with the infant in his arms. He looks like he's enjoying this as he lays the **baby** on the ground. Mr. Derby accuses his wife of betraying him and says that he won't kill her—he just won't let her die. He makes sure she's watching and shoots Noah in the chest. Then, as Mrs. Derby crawls toward her baby, he shoots the infant.

For Clay and Mr. Derby, the most important thing to them is to assert their power over everyone under them, from the Black slaves to Mrs. Derby. Murdering Noah and the baby in front of an audience sends a clear message that any resistance from his wife—especially when that resistance means falling in love with a Black man—will result in the deaths of anyone who gets involved. With this, Mr. Derby ensures his wife's compliance and that his slaves will be unwilling to help her in the future for fear of their own lives. Additionally, murdering the baby symbolically destroys any hope for the future.

CHAPTER 28. PUNISHMENT

Polly hasn't felt agony like this since her mother died; she clings to Amari as Mrs. Derby faints. Mr. Derby sends Clay to punish Sarah Jane. Then, Dr. Hoskins emerges, and Mr. Derby asks him to attend to Mrs. Derby—he says that she couldn't handle seeing him discipline "some unruly slaves." The doctor says nothing as he gathers Mrs. Derby and carries her inside. Then, Mr. Derby tells Teenie, Polly, and Amari to follow him. They stop at the kitchen, and he forces Teenie to call Tidbit. Then, he unlocks the smokehouse. He tells Polly that he won't have liars in his household, scolds Amari for being trouble, and tells Teenie that she failed to obey. He says that he's sending three passengers with Dr. Hoskins and Clay in the morning and pushes them all into the smokehouse.

The language that Mr. Derby uses to talk to the doctor betrays his cruelty once again. Murdering Noah and his wife's infant daughter is "discipline," not murder—to him, their lives mean nothing and are a fair price to pay if it means he gets to terrorize his wife and slaves for longer. The doctor's behavior, meanwhile, suggests either that he's afraid or horrified by what Mr. Derby did—but either way, he doesn't stand up to Mr. Derby. In this sense, then, he is complicit in what is happening, even if he has legitimate reasons for not wanting to publically contradict Mr. Derby.

Mr. Derby says that he'll sell Polly's indenture to a New Orleans whorehouse. He tells Amari that he'll find another "toy" for Clay—and Amari will bring him lots of money, since she's "broken-in" now. Amari stares back stonily as Mr. derby locks the door. As he begins to leave, Teenie asks if he's selling her too. Mr. Derby says he could never sell Teenie, so he's selling Tidbit. Teenie wails.

Finally, Polly sees that Mr. Derby doesn't actually respect her at all, despite her being white. In his mind, she deserves sexual violence and exploitation, just like the slaves do. And as expected, Mr. Derby wields Tidbit as a weapon to punish Teenie, showing again that children are at risk of being exploited as tools and punishments.

CHAPTER 29. LOCKED IN THE SMOKEHOUSE

Teenie moans and holds Tidbit close. Polly asks if they can escape, but Teenie insists the smokehouse is secure. Amari asks if slaves ever run away. Teenie says that they do, but the dogs usually find runaways. Some have succeeded, but Teenie thinks this is true even if they died on their journey—they never had to come back. She tells Amari that freedom is in the North. There, Black people have jobs and houses. Teenie points out to Polly that it's hard to run away when you're Black, but Polly could have a chance. Polly insists she'd never abandon Amari and Tidbit and asks if people go after indentured servants too. Teenie tells the story of an indentured boy that Mr. Derby owned. After he tried to run, Mr. Derby put an iron collar on him. The boy drowned—Teenie believes that he willingly let the weight of the collar pull him down.

Though Polly will never not *be in a better place than Amari, Teenie, or other Black slaves, she learns here that it's absolutely possible for her situation to get even worse. The iron collar impresses upon her that while Mr. Derby might not kill her outright as he did with Noah or whip her like he whipped Amari, she's still at risk of being punished, humiliated, and dehumanized because of her place in society. It's a testament to how bad slavery is that Teenie insists dying as a runaway is better than living in slavery. There's dignity in dying if it frees a person from the trauma of being alive.*

Polly wonders what freedom even means to Amari, since she can't get back what she lost. They all hear a scratching and then Cato's voice. Teenie warns Cato that he'll be killed if he's caught, but Cato insists that he'll be free if he's dead. Then, very seriously, he tells Teenie to send Tidbit with the girls and insists that Dr. Hoskins doesn't believe in slavery. Polly notes that Clay is coming with them, so Teenie quietly tells Cato to dig up her bag of seeds and put a couple in Clay's midnight wine. Cato tells Teenie again to send Tidbit with the girls and reminds him that he'll be alligator bait again if he stays—if she lets him go, he might be free. Teenie groans but tells Cato to be careful with the seeds. She'll need lots of them soon, when she fixes Mr. Derby a meal that he won't remember.

It's one thing for Teenie to say that dying in pursuit of freedom is better than living as a slave; it's another entirely for her to stare down the possibility of letting Tidbit leave her to potentially find freedom. Having Tidbit around is one of the only things that makes Teenie's life worth living. He represents her future and the future of her mother's stories—Tidbit will be able to pass them along and keep them alive, long after Teenie is gone. However, it's also worth noting that Teenie has no choice here: Mr. Derby will force Tidbit to go, whether Teenie believes that Tidbit is heading for freedom or not.

Amari asks Cato where North is and where to be free, but Cato tells her to go south. Polly says that doesn't make sense at all, but Cato points out that trackers, dogs, and newspapers all expects runaways to go north. If they go south, they can find Fort Mose in Spanish Florida. There are streets of gold there, and the Spanish set slaves and indentured people free. He says that there will be danger, but they should follow the river south and then keep inland. He walks away.

The way that Cato describes Fort Mose suggests that in some ways, Fort Mose is an idealized, hopeful story to him—it might not be as wonderful as he insists it is. However, he does have a point when he notes that trackers will look first for slaves heading north—so if anything, heading south might give them more time.

Polly feels powerless and tries to erase the bloody images of Mrs. Derby's **baby** from her mind. Amari falls asleep and Teenie whispers to Tidbit that as long as he remembers, nothing will be gone. Polly thinks of the sorrow and anguish that Teenie and Mrs. Derby both feel right now.

Polly recognizes that the connection and love between these mothers and their children is a shared experience, and both will grieve the loss of their babies. Both are losing the one spot of beauty and hope in their lives, even if Tidbit might have a chance at freedom.

CHAPTER 30. TIDBIT'S FAREWELL

Polly wakes when she hears Mr. Derby tell Dr. Hoskins that Mrs. Derby will quickly recover from the stillbirth. He says he'll keep a close eye on his wife. Polly wakes Amari and Teenie continues to ask Tidbit, who looks confused, if he remembers all her mother's stories about the Ashanti, the drums, and the **copper sun**. She asks if he remembers how her mother took a piece of cloth from her own mother and then watches Teenie tie a leather pouch around Tidbit's neck. She pushes the piece of **kente cloth** into the pouch. Teenie tells Tidbit he's going to go be a free man, but Tidbit says he just wants to be her little boy. Polly remembers her mother's final words and knows that Teenie is dying right now. Teenie lies to Tidbit and says she'll follow soon. Tidbit doesn't seem convinced.

For Mr. Derby, insisting Mrs. Derby's baby was stillborn is a convenient way to take control of his wife and the narrative of what happened. Meanwhile, Teenie must take this time to pass on as much as she can to Tidbit, as this is likely the last time she'll ever see him—lying to him about following later is an attempt to make the parting easier on Tidbit. Sending him with the kente cloth allows Teenie to symbolically send her entire history with him and keep him connected to Africa, even though he's two generations removed.

Mr. Derby pulls the door of the smokehouse open, orders everyone outside, and tells Dr. Hoskins that Clay is sick—so Dr. Hoskins will have to deal with the sales himself. Dr. Hoskins promises to send the money and the wagon back with a courier. Mr. Derby yells to Polly, Amari, and Tidbit to get in the wagon and to Teenie to have breakfast ready in a half an hour. The girls get in, and Mr. Derby tosses Tidbit in after them. Teenie wails and pleads with Mr. Derby not to take Tidbit as Hushpuppy barks madly. Mr. Derby whips Hushpuppy and then whips and shoves Teenie. Dr. Hoskins starts the horse, and Tidbit begins to shriek. Mr. Derby continues to whip Teenie and throws her into the kitchen. Polly knows there's nothing she and Amari can do to comfort Tidbit.

Seeing Teenie and Tidbit separated drives home yet again the inhumanity of slavery. Slavery destroys families by allowing slave owners to sell slaves, thereby eroding family ties among Black people in the colonies. Further, this makes it clear that Mr. Derby knows full well how important family ties are to slaves and knows that they won't forget their sold family members either. Rather, he chooses to use it to his advantage, a mark of his cruelty and his power.

CHAPTER 31. THE DOCTOR'S CHOICE

Amari notices that the leaves on the trees are turning gold and rusty. Tidbit sobs in her arms as she wonders if she's going to be sold like a cow for the rest of her life. She remembers how convinced Afi was of Amari's spirit and her future, but Amari feels weak. After an hour, Dr. Hoskins pulls over and says he's ashamed to be human after witnessing murder, violence, cruelty, and hatred. He feels just as responsible as Mr. Derby, since he stayed silent. He doesn't know how to stop slavery, but he can help Amari, Polly, and Tidbit. Dr. Hoskins points to a bundle of food and money and then to the Ashley River, and he tells Polly to head north. Tomorrow he'll report the "escape' to Mr. Derby, but they'll have a day to get ahead.

For Amari, knowing that she has no agency over her life is enough to crush her spirit and make it seem as though even trying to resist is futile. However, Dr. Hoskins's choice to help Amari, Polly, and Tidbit escape gives her hope and reminds her that even in what seems like utter darkness and cruelty, she'll always be able to find someone willing to help or something beautiful to look out. And Dr. Hoskins makes it clear that he still has to be able to function in white society, so he has to resist slavery in these smaller, isolated ways.

Amari doesn't understand what Dr. Hoskins says and asks how they're escaping. Dr. Hoskins reiterates that *he's* setting them free, but they still have to hope that they can actually make it. He warns Polly that this could still destroy their lives—the dogs will be after them soon, and they can't hide from the dogs. When Amari asks, Dr. Hoskins says that he's going to tell Mr. Derby they were attacked and fake an injury. Dr. Hoskins assures her that he'll tell Teenie that Tidbit wasn't sold. He pulls out a musket and warns the girls to use it in self-defense, not for hunting. Polly says her father taught her how to shoot, but she's not a good shot. Dr. Hoskins hands her the gunpowder and says there's only enough for one shot. The girls and Tidbit jump down and dart into the woods.

Dr. Hoskins is well aware of the fact that getting off a plantation and into the woods is only the first step. The runaways still have a long, frightening, and difficult journey ahead of them as they run for freedom. However, his small action of letting them go and giving them time does have the potential to save them and begin to atone for the horrors he didn't try to stop last night. Promising to share this with Teenie at some point also means that he'll be able to renew Teenie's sense that it's worth resisting and staying alive.

CHAPTER 32. THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Amari, Polly, and Tidbit move into the woods until Polly suggests they stop. Amari feels at home in the dense green woods. They sit to catch their breath, and Amari tells Polly and Tidbit that her name is Amari, not Myna anymore. Polly frowns and says she's used to Myna, but Amari remains firm, and Polly relents. Tidbit says he wants his mother, but Amari tells him he'll be free and make Teenie proud. Polly asks where the river is and wonders how they'll get to the North if they can't find it. Amari knows exactly where the river is and says they're going south, like Cato said. Polly argues and insists that Amari will always be a slave if they go south, but Amari refuses to give in. Amari says that Polly can go north alone, though she hopes Polly will stay with her.

Insisting that Polly and Tidbit refer to her as Amari, not Myna, is a way for Amari to take back control of her identity and her body. She's not Clay's anymore—she belongs to herself. This is also likely why she chooses to go south instead of north: going south shows respect for Cato and for other Black people. While she no doubt appreciates Dr. Hoskins's gesture of setting them free, she also recognizes that as a white man, he probably knows little about how to effectively find freedom—while Cato, a Black slave, likely knows more.

Amari knows that Polly could easily make it alone, as a white girl, but Polly says that they need each other. Before Amari can reply, they hear someone approaching: It's Hushpuppy. He rushes to Tidbit. Smiling, Polly asks if Amari really believes Fort Mose is real. Amari says she is and points out that patrols are looking for them if they go north. She says that spirits will lead them, and though Polly doesn't believe in spirits, she agrees to come. They silently walk for the rest of the afternoon. Amari relaxes for the first time in a long time. At dusk, Amari says that they'll follow the river overnight. Tidbit whines and sits down, so Amari agrees that they can rest for a bit.

Because Polly is white, it'd be far easier for her to blend in by herself—and impossible for Amari and Tidbit to do so, given that there are no free Black people in the South. Their skin marks them as slaves, whereas Polly is just another poor white person without her certificate of indenture or something to prove her identity. This speaks to just how much danger Amari and Tidbit are in while on the run: anyone who sees them will know instantly that they're runaways.

The girls can hear people on the river and slaves singing in the rice fields. Amari whispers to Polly that they must leave the river, like Cato said. Polly shakes her head, but after a short nap, they wake Tidbit and march south. Amari looks to the stars. She wonders if they're the same stars she remembers from home.

Now that Amari is out of Mr. Derby's grasp, she can once again start to take notice of the beautiful natural world around her. Her tenuous freedom makes it far easier to see the beauty. This makes the emotional damage of slavery abundantly clear: it sucks meaning and beauty out of a person's life.

CHAPTER 33. DEEP IN THE FOREST

When morning comes, Amari is unwilling to admit how tired she is. She's glad when Polly suggests they rest. They find a place between three fallen trees and try to sleep, but the mosquitos and ants bite incessantly. Near dusk, they collect water from the river, and Amari announces that they've spent one day free. Tidbit asks how far away freedom is and then asks Polly what freedom is. Polly pulls a leaf off an oak tree and says it's delicate, like a leaf in the air. Freedom is hard to catch and might not live up to expectations. Amari doesn't entirely understand what Polly says, but she catches her meaning. Tidbit does not. He says he wants Teenie and cries when Amari suggests that Teenie would be proud of him. Polly says that to protect Hushpuppy, he has to stay quiet. They move on.

Tidbit is too young to really understand what it means to be free, especially having spent his entire life in slavery. For him, it's normal and expected to see white people in charge. In this sense, no matter how much enslaved adults attempt to teach their children that they're valuable and loved, the messages they receive from society at large convinces them of the opposite. And for Tidbit, freedom doesn't matter as much as his mother does, which speaks to just how important and meaningful family is. Teenie and Tidbit's strong mother-son bond is what made slavery somewhat bearable for them.

By the fifth day, Polly, Amari, and Tidbit are exhausted. Amari suffers from dizziness and occasionally has to stop to catch her breath. Polly reminds her that she's not entirely recovered after her beating. Sometimes they're able to find nuts and berries, but Amari wishes she'd listened to Mother more when she told Amari about how to gather food. Fortunately, Amari listened to Teenie and one night she gathers a feast of nuts, berries, and roots. Polly asks how Amari knew what to pick as she nibbles a mayapple. Tidbit says the mayapple tastes funny but asks why Amari didn't pick more. Amari says that one should never take all of a plant and should ask the plant permission. This piques Polly's interest, and Amari tries to explain. Polly understands showing respect for nature. Tidbit is still hungry, though, and he doesn't believe Polly that they'll find food later.

It's important to keep in mind that Tidbit is young, hungry, and grieving, so it's very hard for him to see the point of not picking all of something. Amari and Polly have to work together to keep Tidbit moving forward—it's the only way that either of them will ever see freedom. When the girls discuss respecting nature and find common ground there, it suggests that while they're forced to work together along this journey, their friendship will have more opportunities to grow and develop. As they talk to each other and learn more about the other's culture, they'll find that they have more in common.

A few hours later, Tidbit runs off to vomit. Both Amari and Polly vomit as well, and Polly angrily says she thought "you Africans knew all about plants and herbs!" Amari is angry, since Polly didn't try to find any food herself. They spend a day and a night trying to recover and Polly's anger doesn't dissipate. Amari tells Polly that she's free to leave whenever, but Mr. Derby is going to sell Polly to a whorehouse. Amari knows they need real food. She finds a stick and goes to the river. She returns with three catfish and insists they can eat them raw. Polly is aghast, but Amari skillfully butchers the fish, and Polly hesitantly says the fish isn't bad. When they're finished, Polly helps Amari stand up. They seem to understand each other. They bury the bones and head off.

Mayapples are poisonous—but importantly, there's no way that Amari would've known that, having never encountered plants in North America before arriving on the continent a few months ago. Polly's outburst again reflects her racism and her preconceived notions about what African people are like. Polly will have to continue to reevaluate her racism time and again, even as she and Amari grow closer and develop a friendship.

CHAPTER 34. LOST HUSHPUPPY

Amari isn't able to catch any more fish. Polly and Tidbit seem to have recovered from the mayapples, but Amari still feels nauseous and dizzy often. The forest begins to thin, which makes traveling unnoticed difficult. One evening, Amari stumbles over a log. While she's on the ground, she looks under the log and finds a bunch of bugs. She grabs a handful of grubs, says they're safe to eat, and tells Tidbit that they taste like chicken. Surprisingly, they join her in eating some. They continue to walk, occasionally crossing streams that yield crabs or clams. No one seems to be after them, and Amari wonders if Cato was right.

Because Amari is so focused on survival, she only looks at her illness in terms of how it might affect her survival and her ability to keep traveling. It's a testament to Polly and Tidbit's willingness to trust and forgive Amari for her mayapple mistake that they join her in eating bugs—though it also speaks to their understanding that they're all going to have to make sacrifices and take chances if they hope to make it.

One morning, Tidbit cries out that Hushpuppy is gone. Amari and Polly assure him that Hushpuppy is just hunting mice and will come back soon. However, Hushpuppy hasn't returned by evening. Tidbit refuses to go, but the girls insist he come. It starts to feel like rain, which both Amari and Polly are thrilled about—but Tidbit wails that Hushpuppy won't find him now. Amari picks Tidbit up and carries him, wondering if they're just going in circles. When she's totally exhausted, they come upon a cave and decide it's probably safe to start a fire. Amari mimics Mother's way of starting a fire, but she realizes she's never had to start one from scratch. After a while, smoke finally rises from the twigs and leaves.

Even though Amari is far away from home, she's still able to call on the memories of her mother to start a fire. By doing this, she's able to feel more connected to her past and introduce both Polly and Tidbit to another aspect of her native culture. For Tidbit, losing Hushpuppy represents a total loss of family and of meaning. The girls are fine, but Hushpuppy has been Tidbit's constant companion for a while now—and losing him only compounds Tidbit's grief for Teenie.

Amari feels weak and dizzy. She suggests they use the gun for food, but Polly reminds her that they might miss and someone could hear them. Tidbit falls asleep in Amari's arms and Amari sits close to Polly. She remembers the cooking fires from home and can almost smell fish stew. Suddenly, she hears an animal outside the cave and grabs Polly's arm. They can't tell what it is and they don't have enough wood to keep the fire going—or a stick to defend themselves. The animal creeps forward and leaps over the dying fire. The girls scream, but Tidbit wakes up—it's Hushpuppy with a fat rabbit in his mouth. Amari skins the rabbit while the others gather wood and they cook the rabbit on the fire. When they're full, Amari holds Tidbit close and remembers her mother. Then, she focuses on what's ahead.

Amari's ability to think back to cooking fires and fish stew speaks to how preferable it is to be on the run and hungry than it is to be enslaved. These happy memories of home weren't enough to distract her from the horrors of being raped by Clay—but here, they're enough to distract her from her hunger and her fears. Hushpuppy's return provides both levity and much-needed sustenance for the travelers and impresses upon the reader the need to trust one's traveling companions. Tidbit seemingly doesn't need to fear that Hushpuppy will run away, as it seems he'll always come back to the boy he loves.

CHAPTER 35. DIRT AND CLAY

The rabbit boosts Amari, Polly, and Tidbit's spirits. For four days, they keep walking and discover crayfish in the rivers they cross. Amari is exhausted and feels sick all the time, and she's not sure how much longer she can keep going. She's also still afraid that they'll be found. One night, the branches of a tree seem to move and grab Amari. Polly snags Tidbit and pulls him away, but Amari finds herself face to face with Clay. He drawls that Mr. Derby would've been proud of him, spits, and says that Amari's feet are huge and easy to follow. As he ties her up, he explains that he never bought Dr. Hoskins's story and figured they'd gone south. Amari asks why he even cares, and Clay gently touches her face, says she's his, and points out that she likes him. Amari is amazed.

To Amari, there's no reason Clay should care so much about chasing down runaways. But in Clay's mind, Amari, Polly, and Tidbit belong to him, and it's necessary to capture and punish them to make it clear to all his slaves that running away will not be tolerated. Chasing after them and capturing them allows him to assert his power and his dominance over the runaways, thereby further breaking their spirits and making it seem as though it's hopeless to look forward to a better life anywhere.

Clay says that he's here to take back what's his. Amari spits directly in Clay's face, and he slaps her. She faints but comes to when Clay slaps her again. She can hear Hushpuppy growl and tells Clay that Tidbit died and Polly went north. Clay calmly reminds Amari that he followed footprints and knows she's lying. He says he'll enjoy punishing her when they get back to the plantation. He's the master now since Mr. Derby died. Amari is surprised and wonders if Mrs. Derby is relieved. Clay says he believes Mr. Derby was poisoned. He says that when they get back, he'll punish Amari by cutting off a finger or a toe, or branding her face. Tonight, however, he's going to "make up for lost time." He strokes her leg and ignores her kicks.

The aside that Mr. Derby is dead suggests that Teenie may have gotten revenge on Mr. Derby for trying to sell Tidbit—and since Clay doesn't try to scare or hurt Amari by detailing how he's punishing Teenie, it's possible that Teenie has gotten away with it thus far. Meanwhile, it remains a mark of Amari's compassion that she's still able to think of Mrs. Derby even while Clay threatens her.

Polly leaps out of the woods holding the musket and shoots at Clay. Clay falls to the ground. Terrified, Polly inspects him. He's not dead; the bullet just grazed his head. Polly unties Amari, and they tie Clay up. They know he'll probably get loose, but they'll have time to get away. Polly agrees with Amari that Clay *should* die, but it's not for them to do. As Clay begins to stir, Polly says they have to leave before Clay comes after them and kills them. Amari, though, points to a big rattlesnake moving toward Clay. Clay opens his eyes, realizes he's bound, and begins to shout. Amari says that they're not going back as Clay victoriously unties one of his arms. He asks how Amari can repay him for his kindness like this, but Amari looks at him with pity. Clay notices the snake, and Polly, Amari, and Tidbit hurry into the woods.

If the rattlesnake bites Clay, he'll die a similarly horrific death as so many of his father's slaves who were bitten by copperheads in the rice fields. However, even if Clay does die, it's important to remember that this small victory doesn't mean that the slaves on Derbyshire Farms will be safe or free. They'll likely end up enslaved elsewhere or by whoever assumes control of Derbyshire farms. In this sense, the novel makes it clear it's not enough to take out single bad actors. Rather, the entire institution of slavery must be eradicated for Black people to live without fear.

CHAPTER 36. SHOULD WE TRUST HIM?

Amari, Polly, and Tidbit race through the woods. After miles, they stop to rest. Amari vomits from the exertion. They wonder whether the snake bit Clay, and Tidbit asks if Clay is going to take him to Teenie. Polly is shocked and sad to hear Tidbit ask this and carefully tells Tidbit that Clay will hurt them if he finds them again. Tidbit insists he doesn't care if Clay beats him; he just wants his mother. The girls sit to comfort Tidbit and wonder if they did the right thing leaving Clay. Polly finds food in Clay's knapsack and gives Tidbit a biscuit from it, but the biscuit just makes Tidbit cry—Teenie made it. Amari says that they're not going back, since she's never going to be a slave again. Amari picks up Tidbit, and they resume their journey.

Tidbit is, importantly, a child born into and raised in a traumatic situation—and to him, his abusers don't look nearly as scary as they do to Amari and Polly. This illustrates another way in which slavery harms young people in particular. Tidbit has no conception of the fact that Clay might take him home to Teenie—but he'll certainly hurt or murder him or Teenie if he does. Polly's sick feeling about Tidbit's question shows that she now understands how harmful slavery is, and possibly that she shouldn't aspire to being a fine lady if it means owning slaves.

They walk for two days straight; the girls have to carry and cajole Tidbit into moving. One evening, when they stop to look for crayfish in a river, Polly notices a white boy about her age fishing. Amari, Tidbit, and Hushpuppy disappear into the woods as the boy notices Polly. They stare each other down, and Polly immediately regrets telling him her real name. He laughs at her, introduces himself as Nathan, and says he's out in the middle of the night because his father drinks and his mother is dead. He compliments Polly's looks and asks if she knows where she is. He tells her that she's near Savannah, Georgia and asks if she's where she wants to be. Nathan asks about the others—he's been following the group for a day.

As a young white man, Nathan represents danger to Amari and Tidbit in particular. He has the power—and possibly, the motivation of reward money—to turn them in, thereby dashing any of their dreams of freedom. In this situation, it's important to note that Polly is also in danger of being turned in and punished harshly, so it's in her best interest to be cautious and concerned here. However, her punishment will still likely be nothing like what Amari and Tidbit will face, a mark of her privilege as a white person.

Polly nervously asks Nathan if he works for Clay, but Nathan says he's certain Polly is an indentured servant and the others are runaway slaves. He stares at Polly and says he's sure there's reward money for turning the group in. Polly begs Nathan to not turn them in, but Nathan says to bring the others out and he might help. He calls her Polly-girl, but this time, Polly finds that she likes it. Amari and Tidbit step out and Nathan asks if they're hungry. Nathan warns them that his father would cash in on the reward money and drink it away immediately, but Nathan doesn't believe in slavery—he thinks the country is big enough for everyone, even Indians and Black people. Polly's heart flutters, and she blushes.

Despite Polly's immediate crush on Nathan, he's clearly not above abusing his power as a free white man to intimidate those who have less power than he does. His behavior is still cruel, even if he does insist he doesn't believe in slavery, and he's still part of the problem. It's also worth considering, given how Nathan described his family earlier, that he might not believe in slavery simply because his family doesn't profit off the back of slaves. He may simply have less to gain from slavery.

Nathan leads them to a barn near a small house and goes to fetch food. Amari teases Polly about liking Nathan, and Nathan soon returns with food. Tidbit even eats apple cores and then falls asleep. The girls tell Nathan they're headed south and Polly asks if he knows about Fort Mose. Nathan is surprised but says that it's way south in Spanish territory. He's amazed that they're heading someplace they're not sure is real and says that a while ago, a Spanish priest from Fort Mose tried to convert his father. Amari asks if Fort Mose has streets of gold, but Nathan says that the streets are probably mud. He says the Spanish soldiers and priests run it and welcome runaways who swear allegiance to the Spanish king. Amari asks if there are whippings there, and Nathan sympathetically says no.

As flawed as Nathan may be, he still gives Polly and Amari valuable information about Fort Mose and what they'll find there. By giving them this information, he's able to help them gain a bit more power—the knowledge of what's ahead is its own kind of power. His sympathetic behavior toward Amari suggests that he may be more genuinely interested in helping them than he previously seemed. By doing this, he can resist the system of slavery—though he'll need to rethink his controlling behavior if he really wants to make a difference on a bigger scale.

Nathan is impressed when he learns the girls have come all the way from Charles Town. He says he knows the woods around here, and Polly decides she likes him—he reminds her of her father. Nathan warns the girls that his father is mean and leaves them to sleep. In the morning, they wake to an angry, red-faced man with a pitchfork. Nathan enters the barn and shoots a scared and apologetic look at Polly, but Polly isn't sure she believes it. She musters up a tear and tells Nathan's father that she's taking the slaves to Savannah; her mother is sick and they need the reward money. She begs for help, but Nathan's father insists that Polly is lying. He tells Nathan to lock the barn and strides away.

Because Polly is white, it's possible for her to spin this as a plausible story to Nathan's father, but it's also significant that she seems to see no issue with women existing in positions of power (as evidenced by her earlier desires to keep Mr. Derby's books and sneak into his study). Nathan's father may be less inclined to believe her simply because she's female.

Nathan assures the girls that he didn't betray them. He tells them to run west to the swamp, hide for a few days, and then head south. He then tells Polly to hit him with the pitchfork. Polly refuses, so Amari picks it up and says she's hitting Nathan with gratitude. Polly asks if they'll ever see Nathan again. With a smile, Nathan asks Polly to remember him. Amari hits him, and then they race for the swamp. Polly and Tidbit are afraid of snakes and alligators, but Amari leads them into the deep mud. They hide under a mimosa tree that shields them from view.

With this, Nathan is able to truly demonstrate to Amari and Polly that he's on their side. Allowing them to hit him means giving up his power as a white man and putting it briefly in the hands of those who have far less. When the runaways wade into the swamp that may very well be teeming with dangerous animals, it speaks to how intent they are on freedom—death by alligator is preferable to capture.

CHAPTER 37. LOST AND FOUND AND LOST

Well after dark, Amari leads Polly and Tidbit out of the swamp. They're covered in thick black mud. It begins to rain not long after and though Amari is tired, she insists they keep moving while the dark can protect them. They detour around Savannah, and Amari teases Polly about Nathan. Amari says that evil men father good men, but she has no answer when Polly asks about Clay. At daylight, they find a small shack that looks like a hunter's shelter. It looks like it's been empty for a long time, so the girls and Tidbit crowd in.

When Amari says that evil men father good men, it's a nod to the idea that experiencing mistreatment makes a person more empathetic and encourages them to treat others better. That clearly doesn't hold true Clay—though aside from Mr. Derby's neglect when Clay was little, it's unclear if Clay actually experienced any abuse or mistreatment at the hands of his father.

Amari snaps awake when she hears a woman bellowing for someone named Patrick. Tidbit shrieks as the door flies open. A woman dressed in buckskin stares them down and asks where Patrick is. Polly answers that she hasn't seen anyone, that they came from Savannah, and that they're sleeping. At this, the woman doubles over with laughter. When she recovers, she confirms that Amari and Tidbit are slaves and learns that Polly is an indentured servant. She says that the punishment for runaway indentured servants is the pothook—an iron collar with hooks on it. Punishment for slaves is worse. She introduces herself as Fiona O'Reilly and asks Amari if Tidbit is hers. Amari says that he is.

When Amari answers that Tidbit is her son, she takes on the responsibility not just of encouraging him to remember Teenie's stories. She also makes a promise to tell her own stories to Tidbit and ask him to carry those forward as well. Though Fiona doesn't try to hide that punishment for indentured servants is awful, she also doesn't try to sugarcoat what happens to runaway slaves—leaving it ambiguous leaves it up to the reader's imagination, but Clay made it clear that it's mutilation or death.

Fiona says that the girls and Tidbit can't stay in the shelter; Patrick is good but hard—though he's lazy and prefers hunting to farming, which is why Fiona is dressed like she is. Polly says they'll go and that it's been a long journey. This makes Fiona think that Polly lied about where they came from. She agrees to help them and stows them in a wagon in her barn. On the walk there, Amari notices slave quarters. She asks if Fiona keeps slaves, and Fiona says that *everyone* has slaves—but Patrick is a good man who "does not mistreat his property." Amari can't fathom how Fiona thinks owning slaves is fine if they're treated well.

As far as Fiona is concerned, the issue isn't the fact that Patrick owns other human beings—the issue is that other people are physically violent or cruel to their slaves. Though Fiona and Patrick don't seem as cruel as Mr. Derby and Clay, they still view Black slaves as "property" rather than human beings. This reflects Fiona's own privilege—her farm likely requires the labor of many people, and she probably shares some of Polly's earlier views that Black people simply belong in slavery.

Polly asks why Fiona is helping them if she has slaves. Fiona explains that it's Patrick's business when he brings home slaves or not. As a woman, it's not her place to get involved. However, if she has the opportunity to make her own choices, she's happy to help them be free—and until this moment, she didn't know this about herself. She bustles away. Polly whispers that Fiona seems like a good woman, but she's afraid and seems to have never gotten to make her own decisions before. The barn opens, and a stooped and thin Black man comes to harness the wagon. Amari recognizes the voice and asks the man his name. He says his name is Buck, but Amari begins to cry. In Ewe, she asks if he's Besa. He softly asks if she's Amari, and Amari runs to him.

Here, Fiona elaborates and makes it clear that she chooses to help Amari, Polly, and Tidbit because she never has the opportunity to make her own choices elsewhere. The fact that this choice has to do with slavery means little to her; it's simply the first time she's gotten to make a meaningful decision all on her own. However, it's also worth noting that helping Amari and Tidbit is essentially a way for Fiona to thumb her nose at other men like her husband—it allows her to feel powerful.

As Amari reaches Besa, he puts a hand out. Amari sees that Besa is changed: his right eye is gone, his face is scarred, and half his teeth are gone. He spits that he's had five owners, and when Amari insists that they're alive, he says he'd rather be dead. Amari says that she hasn't been treated well either, but she points out that they're alive. Besa says that his spirit is dead and that he lives in constant pain. Amari invites him to come with them, but Besa says that freedom doesn't exist. He's tried to escape several times and he no longer believes in anything. He cautions Amari against trusting a white girl and says he doesn't take risks anymore. Amari, however, says that Polly is her friend. Besa says he has a woman here who doesn't have dreams. He finishes harnessing the horse, and Amari knows she'll never touch him again.

Seeing Besa in this horrible, heartbreaking state makes the consequences of slavery abundantly clear to Amari and Polly. Clearly, slaves who show signs of life and a desire to be free are harshly punished until their spirits are fully broken, as Besa's now are. Further, Besa has lost any ability to even consider trusting a white person. While this is entirely understandable given his experiences, this also illustrates how such horrific abuse shuts him off from potential avenues for friendship, no matter how rare interracial friendships might be in practice at this time.

Fiona bustles in, tells Besa to put hay in the back of the wagon, and swears him to secrecy when Patrick returns. She sends him away. Besa looks once more at Amari before he goes, but he doesn't look back after that. Amari covers her face with her hands and lets Polly put a hand on her shoulder. When Fiona looks concerned, Amari straightens up. She struggles to hate what white people have done to her and Besa while still being grateful to Fiona and Polly for their help. Amari thanks Fiona. Fiona offers the girls clothes and gasps when she sees the scars on Amari's back. She exclaims that Amari must've been very disobedient to receive a lashing like that. Amari is enraged, but she says simply that her master thought she was disobedient. Fiona also comments on Amari's brand, making Amari feel ashamed.

Amari has to reckon here with the fact that not all white people are equally awful—but all of them, even Polly, have in the past or currently play complicit roles to the system of slavery. It's telling, too, that Fiona insists Amari must've been disobedient to be whipped so badly. She seems to naïvely believe that no white slave owner would be outright cruel for no reason, something Amari recognizes as naïve. This again reflects Fiona's relatively privileged place in society. She profits from slavery, and as a white woman, she'll never suffer the abuse or indignities that Amari has.

After Tidbit changes, Amari shares with Fiona that they're headed south. She explains that everything they know is gone. They only have hopes and dreams left. Fiona nods and says that her father came to the colonies for freedom and died. Patrick also works for freedom, and hopes and dreams are all anyone has. Amari wonders how a slave owner can talk about freedom like this. Fiona says that Spanish territory is too far away to walk, so she's giving the girls the horse and wagon. Polly pulls out coins from Dr. Hoskins's bag and offers them to Fiona. Tidbit hugs Fiona, who he says is soft like Teenie. Fiona offers them food and tells Polly that they can travel on the road if Polly can play the part of a mistress. As they drive away, Amari looks back for Besa. Hushpuppy leaps into Tidbit's arms.

It's worth considering that while the Revolutionary War is still more than 30 years away at this point in history, the "freedom" that the colonists fought for was really only afforded to white men who owned land until much later. Because Amari is both Black and female, her idea of freedom is very different from Fiona's, which is potentially very different from how Patrick or Fiona's father might think about it. And even in the present day, some individuals are still freer than others depending on their sex, their socioeconomic status, their skin color, and a host of other factors.

CHAPTER 38. THE SPANISH SOLDIER

The wagon allows Amari, Polly, and Tidbit to make great time. Polly laughs to herself as she remembers her father and misses him. She asks Amari what Amari misses about her mother. Amari says that Mother always had the right answer. Polly nods and says that her mother deeply loved her father and was worried about others to the very end. Amari shares that her mother fought bravely to the end. Polly insists that Amari is brave too, but Amari admits that she's always scared. Tidbit asks about Teenie and says he wants to go home, but the girls hug him and tell him he needs to remember that Teenie loves him, even if she's not here.

Through talking about their families, Amari and Polly are able to continue to get to know each other and recognize that they both grew up in loving families, no matter how different their upbringings may have been. And particularly when they talk about their mothers, Polly is able to encourage Amari to embody her mother's bravery—which, in turn, will help Amari honor her mother. Polly, too, can honor her mother by caring for others, as she now tries to care for Amari and Tidbit.

Polly notices that Amari seems to have trouble sleeping. One afternoon, Polly offers her condolences about Besa to Amari. Amari suggests that it may have been better had she not seen him, but Polly says that it might give Amari the strength to go on. Amari says it just makes her feel sick and angry. Polly notes that she didn't know Black people before coming to Mr. Derby's, and she never had a Black friend. Amari admits that sometimes, she hates white people—and she didn't feel hatred before becoming a slave. It's hard, she says, to hate and love at the same time. Shyly, Amari says that she has a pale-skinned friend. Polly agrees.

In this moment, Polly and Amari are able to acknowledge that though they come from wildly different upbringings and circumstances, they can still be friends—and they can both continue to learn more about each other and develop their senses of empathy. Especially since they both experienced the horrors on Mr. Derby's plantation, this gives them shared ground to start from as they develop their relationship.

Amari asks Polly if she'll stay with them in Fort Mose. Polly hasn't thought about it, and Amari points out that this is the white man's land—Polly should be able to find a place for herself. Amari puts her head in her hands and wonders if Besa is right and they'll be caught. Polly insists they'll make it and reminds Amari that Tidbit is hers now, and he needs a strong mother. Amari points out that in her village, the women mother all the **children**—so maybe Tidbit belongs to *both* her and Polly. Tidbit opens his eyes and says he belongs to himself. They laugh.

Even in Spanish Florida, Amari is well aware that Polly is part of the powerful majority because of the color of her skin. Amari may still face fewer opportunities for advancement in Fort Mose, simply because she's Black and will never fully be able to escape the fact that she was once a slave. Polly also makes the point again that it's important to go on for the sake of young people, as they need to grow up and carry previous generations' stories forward.

In Southern Georgia, there are fewer settlements—but there are soldiers. Polly and Amari try to travel silently, but this is impossible with such a noisy old wagon. After several hours, a man steps out and stops them with a shaky voice. Polly wonders if it's Clay, but the voice speaks in English and Spanish and says that if the girls are ghosts, they should go away. Amari whispers that they should run, but Tidbit won't cooperate. The man roars and snatches Tidbit. Tidbit bites the man, and he drops Tidbit. Everyone stands still. Polly asks the man if he's drunk. The man says he isn't, but he's afraid of wolves and bears. Amari realizes he's a soldier, and the man confirms this. He introduces himself as Domingo Salvador, a Spanish soldier from Madrid.

This soldier will test whether or not Polly can really pass as a fine lady (or at least appear affluent enough to own a cart, a horse, and slaves). When the man lets Tidbit go after only a bite, it suggests that this man really has little interest in tormenting Amari, Polly, and Tidbit—the novel has shown thus far that if he were so inclined, harming children unfortunately isn't hard. The revelation that Domingo Salvador is a Spanish soldier offers hope that he truly isn't interested in tormenting them—the Spanish will supposedly free slaves, after all.

Polly doesn't understand Domingo Salvador's Spanish, and she's suspicious. The soldier admits he grabbed Tidbit because he was afraid, and Polly asks why he's out alone in the middle of the night. Domingo Salvador says that he's patrolling for English troops, but he wishes he were home with his new wife. Polly asks what the Spanish do with runaways. Domingo Salvador says that runaways don't officially exist until they leave the colonies, but once they cross the St. Mary's River, the Spanish help them to St. Augustine, as King Philip doesn't believe in slavery. Amari asks the way to the river, but the soldier asks if they're runaways. Polly haughtily says that they're returning from her grandfather's house. The soldier warns Polly that English soldiers are cruel, and the river isn't far.

When Polly doesn't understand Domingo Salvador due to his mixed Spanish and English, she gets a small taste of what Amari has been dealing with from the moment she was captured. Without being able to understand what others are saying, especially those who are in power, it's very difficult to know what to do and how to act. Domingo Salvador, however, makes it clear that the Spanish make a point to resist the English in everything they do—this is why they free slaves held by Englishmen.

Domingo Salvador says he knows the girls are looking for Fort Mose. Amari asks what he knows about it, and he says that it's a small settlement. There, everyone owns their land, and they're free. Most residents are former slaves, some are Spaniards, and others are Creek, Seminole, or Cherokee. Amari asks if there are white soldiers in charge, which makes the soldier laugh. He says the captain of the fort is Francisco Menendez, a former Black slave. The soldier assures Polly he believes she's just returning home to her parents, but if she's ever in Fort Mose, she'd find churches, shops, and lots of **children**. Polly insists they must get home, and the soldier tells them to go with God. Polly says Cato was wrong about the streets of gold, but Amari says there are "streets of free," and that's better.

Francisco Menendez is a real historical figure—and for Amari, it's shocking and exciting to hear that there's a Black man in a position of power. He is, in many ways, a symbol of hope for the future, as he shows what's possible for free Black people in North America. More generally, Fort Mose stands as a place where a person's skin color or place of origin doesn't matter as much, suggesting that Amari and Tidbit might find a community that accepts them as they are. For Amari, this is more than she could've ever hoped for—and it renews her willingness to believe that Afi and Teenie were right about persevering.

CHAPTER 39. CROSSING THE RIVER

Amari feels anxious with anticipation in the morning. She and Polly decide to travel by day, but Amari can't ignore her hunger. She tries to walk a few steps but stumbles. Polly helps her into the wagon and Amari offers Tidbit a pouch of berries. Later, they come across an apple grove and gorge themselves. They reach the St. Mary's River by evening. Tidbit is terrified of alligators. They decide it's too wide to swim across and decide to ride the horse. Amari mounts and then pulls Polly and Tidbit up behind her. The horse loves being in the water and swims happily, Hushpuppy at his side. Tidbit cries out with joy, and Amari holds her breath, too excited to speak.

Just as when Amari, Polly, and Tidbit hid in the swamp, the possibility of coming face to face with dangerous animals like alligators aren't nearly as frightening as the prospect of being returned to a life of slavery. Especially now that they know Fort Mose is real, that it sounds like a utopia, and that it's so close, the hope that they feel far outweighs any fears they might have of dying along the way.

When the horse reaches the shore, Tidbit leaps off first and the girls follow. Hushpuppy begins to whimper and growl and Amari leads Tidbit away. She looks back and sees a ten-foot-long alligator chasing Polly, but Polly is fast enough to escape. When they're clear of the river, the travelers laugh.

It's telling that Amari goes first to try to save Tidbit—she's fully stepping into her new role as Tidbit's adoptive mother. It's now her sole responsibility to protect him so that he can carry Teenie's stories forward.

CHAPTER 40. TIME TO MEET THE FUTURE

Amari, Polly, and Tidbit wake in the morning to birds singing. Amari isn't sure if Fort Mose is days or weeks away, but she feels as though she's already arrived. They climb onto the horse and head south. The palm trees remind Amari of home. After a while, Tidbit and Amari get down and walk. They discuss what Fort Mose will be like and Tidbit asks if Teenie will be there. Amari kneels down with Tidbit and tells him that Teenie loves him and that she's happy he's safe. She assures him that Teenie is glad because *Tidbit* is glad. She asks Tidbit why Teenie gave him the **kente cloth** and asks if he still remembers her words—that if he remembers, nothing's gone. She asks Tidbit if he'll always remember, and he promises he will.

It's possible that in this moment, Tidbit finally realizes that his mother is probably never coming for him. But as heartbreaking as this is, Amari tries to make the point to him that Teenie desperately wanted her son to be free—and she'd be happy to know that Tidbit will his spend his life a free man, rather than be condemned to a life in slavery. In other words, Teenie fully believes that even if she can't help herself, she must support the next generation's struggle to find freedom.

Amari assures Tidbit that Teenie is smiling at him from every cloud and flower. Very seriously, Tidbit asks Amari if she'll be his mother now, and Amari agrees that she will be. Amari says that Polly will always be there too, and she tells Tidbit he isn't a slave anymore—and neither is she. Amari remembers what Polly said about freedom, though, and wonders if she won't actually be happy now. By afternoon, they catch sight of Fort Mose. The fort is tiny and around it, small houses dot the landscape. Polly laughs at the muddy streets, and Amari declares that freedom isn't big or pretty, but it feels good.

Now that Amari so close to freedom, it's easier for her to recognize that freedom in Spanish Florida might not look the same as her free life in Africa did. Simply by virtue of not being a native resident, not knowing the language well, or even being Black and female, Amari may still face difficulties and discrimination as a free woman. The system that trapped her in the Carolinas may not exist in Spanish Florida—but that's not to say she's guaranteed to be as free as she hopes she'll be.

CHAPTER 41. FORT MOSE

Tidbit asks what they do now, and Amari says they head down. They all hold hands and nearly run down the hill. A small house sits close to the road, and a woman with dusty brown skin calls to them from the house. Amari says that they're headed for the fort and the woman asks if they're hungry. As she prepares bowls of corn pudding and rabbit, she asks where they came from. She glances at their feet when she hears that they came from Charles Town. She confirms that this is Fort Mose, and when Amari says she's dreamed of Fort Mose for a while, the woman notes that dreams disappear when one wakes up.

This woman implies that Amari may have been right to wonder if freedom might not actually be all she hoped it would—clearly, there's something unsavory about Fort Mose for this woman to talk about dreams disappearing. However, it's significant that Amari and Tidbit still experience kindness and help from the moment they set foot in the settlement. This offers hope that Fort Mose will at least be able to give them some of what they hope for.

The woman introduces herself as Inez and explains that she and her husband were slaves in Georgia. They escaped to Fort Mose last year, and then the Spanish took her husband to serve in their army. The Spanish, she says, aren't saints. They free slaves because it annoys the English, and sometimes, they make runaways serve in the army before they allow them to be free. Polly exclaims that this isn't fair, but Inez points out that life isn't fair. Inez says that in any case, she's free. She asks the girls for their story. Amari introduces herself and introduces Tidbit as her son. Tidbit says quietly that his name is Timothy—Teenie named him Timothy and said it'd be his name when he's a man. Polly says she was indentured and ran off with Amari and Tidbit.

Inez may be free, but her husband has to essentially pay for his freedom by serving in the Spanish army. In this sense, women might have more privilege than men in Spanish Florida, since they seemingly don't have to do anything special to earn their freedom. Inez also makes the point that while they may be free in Fort Mose, this isn't necessarily because the Spanish are entirely wonderful people. Rather, the runaways are bargaining chips in an ongoing conflict with the English.

Inez softly says that troubles are never over, but it's good to share them with friends. Polly and Amari smile at each other, and Polly says that they needed each other to make it here. Inez answers their questions about Fort Mose. Only about 100 people live here, and Black people sometimes marry Indians; other times, they marry white people. Inez says that a while ago, they had 20 slaves arrive from Georgia. Their master arrived, but the former slaves laughed at him. The master had no power here. She assures Polly that they're safe here and notes that a young redheaded boy came through a few days ago looking for a Polly. Polly is shocked and says she thinks it's a friend.

The story of the group of slaves laughing down their former master impresses upon Amari that she really can trust in the goodness of Fort Mose—here she could, in some ways, be more powerful than Clay or Mr. Derby. Inez's aside about a boy looking for Polly suggests that Nathan is out looking for Polly, which would imply a happy ending for Polly. By leaving the English colonies, moreover, Nathan may be willing to give up the power he had there as a white man.

Amari asks Inez what they do next. Inez says they'll meet Captain Menendez and get registered in St. Augustine, which will entail becoming Catholic and promising to serve the Spanish king. They'll also get their papers saying they're free. Amari looks up and sees a tall Black soldier. The soldier nods at Inez, introduces himself as Francisco Menendez, and welcomes the girls and Tidbit to the fort. Amari, Polly, and Tidbit bow, but Captain Menendez laughs and tells them to sit down. Amari introduces her group and is amazed at how well she can communicate her thoughts in English. Captain Menendez is also impressed and asks if she's ready to learn Spanish. He says that life here isn't easy, but Fort Mose is better than slavery.

Getting to meet Captain Menendez seemingly makes all of Amari's dreams come true. Finally, she can see that Black people have the potential to hold positions of power in this strange new land. This is especially meaningful for Tidbit, as it helps him fully understand that his life can now be more than that of a powerless slave. Captain Menendez's compliment of Amari's English also helps Amari feel more secure in how she's changed since arriving in the colonies. Now, she knows she's capable of adapting to any situation.

Polly says she has 14 years left on her indenture, which causes Captain Menendez to insist that Mr. Derby must be crazy. Polly shares that Mr. Derby killed a slave and a **baby** before they left. Captain Menendez promises the girls protection and asks about their skills. Amari says she knows how to cook, hunt, spin, and weave. If she's allowed to weave here, she'd like to. Inez quietly says that Amari has more than that, but Captain Menendez says that if Amari can build a loom, she can weave and earn a good living. Amari is amazed that she can earn money here. When Polly admits that she knows how to read and write, Captain Menendez excitedly says they can open a school. Freedom, he says, means little if no one is educated. He tells Tidbit that when he's not in school, he'll learn to be a carpenter.

In Amari's village, weaving was reserved for men. In Spanish Florida, Amari may find more freedom—of a very different kind—than she could at home. Being able to weave here will also allow her to more successfully pass on the history of her people through the kente cloth that she can weave. Tidbit's tiny piece won't have to be the only evidence of this traditional craft—Amari can make sure that Tidbit and other children descended from slaves learn their history. And by teaching them to read, Polly can give them the power to wield language as a means of sharing their stories with others.

Captain Menendez tells Inez where to settle the newcomers, salutes, and walks away. Amari is thrilled. She hasn't seen a Black man in power since leaving home, but Inez assures her that there are Black men in charge around here. Tidbit asks if he can be a soldier and fight for his freedom. Polly says she's happy and could sleep for a week. Inez asks Amari to walk with her.

Tidbit's desire to grow up and be a soldier offers hope that he'll adjust to life in Fort Mose, even if Teenie isn't here to guide him. He now has role models that simply didn't exist on Mr. Derby's plantation, and they show him that he can grow up to be a powerful Black man—not just a slave.

CHAPTER 42. COPPER SUN

Inez shows Amari where the settlement's boundaries are. She points out several blended families and Amari asks how Fort Mose came to be. Inez explains that people have been living here for a long time, but the king just made it official this year. It's supposed to protect St. Augustine from English soldiers in case of invasion. They finally reach Amari's new cottage: it's bigger than the slave shack back at Derbyshire Farms and has a window, two doors, and a hearth. There's plenty of room for her, Polly, and Tidbit. Amari asks if there's fighting here, and Inez says that there isn't any yet, but the men will be the first to die. Amari insists it's better to die for freedom than live a slave.

No matter how big or lavish the new cabin is, it's likely it would still seem exciting to Amari—it's where she'll live as a free woman, after all. Now that she's actually free, it's far easier for her to take pleasure in what she sees around her. And what she sees is exciting on its own merit, especially since Amari sees proof that even a relationship like Mrs. Derby and Noah's would be able to survive here.

Slowly, without looking at Amari, Inez says that it's hard to women to be slaves when masters consistently come for them at night. Amari shares that she was a birthday present for her master's son. Inez touches Amari's shoulder and asks how long she's been on the road, and when Amari answers it's been about two months, Inez asks if Amari has been feeling unwell. She tells Amari that Amari isn't sick—she's pregnant. Amari slumps to the floor and feels ready to vomit at the revolting memories of Clay's bedroom. She tells Inez she can't do this since the **baby** makes her think of being a slave, but Inez says that babies know nothing but love. Amari insists that she hates it already, but Inez says that Amari is already trying to protect it from her bad memories.

The revelation that Amari is pregnant challenges Amari's sense that she's finally free, since Clay is definitely the father. At first, Amari believes that the baby will trap her, force her to consistently remember her enslavement, and in particular make her remember that the baby is a product of horrific rape. However, Inez suggests that Amari has the ability to raise her baby exactly how she wants to and show them nothing but love—and in Fort Mose, Amari will be able to ensure that her baby will never suffer enslavement like she did.

Amari is afraid to admit that Inez is right and admits she's afraid. Inez says there are women here to help and Amari won't be the first. Inez had a daughter who was definitely her master's **child**, but her master's wife forced him to sell the girl when she was about Tidbit's age. Amari offers her condolences and says she feels stupid for not figuring it out sooner, but Inez reminds Amari that she didn't have a mama on her journey to notice and care for her. When Amari asks what she'll do now, Inez tells Amari to wait. Her baby will be born free. Inez announces that she's going to get Tidbit to help her gather twigs to make Amari a broom and leaves Amari to think.

Inez tries to make it clear to Amari that she isn't the first and won't be the last to find herself in this predicament. But at least in Fort Mose, she'll be surrounded by a community of women who understand what she's going through and will be able to help her through all of it. And again, Inez makes the point that Amari's baby won't have to suffer under slavery, and in this sense, he or she will lead a better life than Amari did.

Amari puts a hand on her belly and thinks that she can't do this, but she feels too exhausted to run. She thinks of Clay. The most disconcerting memories those of the genuine affection he sometimes exhibited. Amari cries again and thinks of Mother, who would know what to do. She realizes suddenly that this **baby** carries her mother's spirit—as well as her father's, Kwasi's, her other neighbors, and the spirits of her ancestors. She notices that the **sun** is about to set and thinks of Afi. Amari thinks that Afi's insistence that Amari's life lay beyond the horrors of slavery is starting to make sense. She remembers Teenie's advice that remembering can keep things from disappearing. She vows never to forget and suddenly remembers Mrs. Derby and her baby—and all the women who "suffer as property of others."

In this moment, Amari realizes that she can put Inez's advice into practice and see her baby as a living memorial to her family and her murdered neighbors. This baby represents Amari's hope that the future will be brighter now that she's found freedom. Thinking about Afi and Teenie also makes their advice make sense. Now, Amari has another child with whom to share her story and the story of her ancestors. This child will be able to keep the story alive for another generation, and he or she will hopefully keep Amari's story from being forgotten in the future.

Amari vows to never think of Clay again. He can't change her love for her **baby**. She decides that if the baby is a boy, she'll name him Freeman and teach him her native language. If it's a girl, she'll name her Afi. No matter what, she'll tell her child about her ancestors and she'll pass on her father's stories. The child will never be enslaved. Amari watches the **copper sun** set. It's the same sun that set on her homeland and she feels as though she has found home again.

Having these thoughts while watching the titular copper sun set suggests that as Amari begins to feel more optimistic about her situation, she's once again able to find joy and beauty in the natural world. This hope and interest in beauty got her to a place where she can give birth to a free child—and now, she can look forward to making her future what she wants it to be.

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