# The Farming of Bones

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDWIDGE DANTICAT

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969, and her father, André, emigrated to the United States two years after her birth. Two years later, Danticat's mother, Rose, joined André in the U.S., leaving Danticat and her brother to be raised by an aunt and uncle. In 1981, Danticat reunited with her family in Brooklyn, New York and settled into a predominantly Haitian American neighborhood. Danticat had difficulty adjusting to a new country, and used writing to express her disorientation, unhappiness, and sense of alienation?her teenage stories were published in *New Youth Connections*, a New York-based magazine. Although she had plans to become a nurse, Danticat enrolled at Barnard College and eventually earned a bachelor's degree in French literature. She then earned a Master of Fine Arts from Brown University; her master's thesis became the foundation for her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), which was nationally recognized after television host Oprah selected it for her Book Club. A year later, Danticat published *Krik? Krak!*, a collection of short stories. The collection was a finalist for the National Book Award. She wrote her second novel, *The Farming of Bones*, in 1998, followed by *The Dew Breaker* in 2004. In 2007, she released her memoir, *Brother, I'm Dying*, which was nominated for the National Book Award and won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The Farming of Bones* chronicles the events of the 1937 Parsley Massacre, a mass killing of more than 20,000 Haitians in the Dominican Republic. The Parsley Massacre occurred during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, a violent and bloody period of history in the Dominican Republic?it is often called the Trujillo Era. Trujillo deliberately stoked political tensions by spreading "antihaitianismo," or prejudice against Haitians, in his country. Furthermore, he was known to arrange assassinations for his rivals and opponents, and to interfere with other South American countries' politics. Although Trujillo's official terms in office spanned from 1930 to 1938 and from 1942 to 1952, his actual dominion lasted from the 1930s through to his death in 1961.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*The Farming of Bones* takes place in 1937, during the political reign of the Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo. Many historical fiction books are set in this time period, including Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Alvarez's novel fictionalizes the lives of the Mirabal sisters, who opposed Trujillo's reign and fought against his political agenda—this opposition resulted in the murders of three of the four sisters. Alvarez's book discusses internal resistance to the Dominican Republic's policies, and therefore offers an alternate perspective to the Haitian opposition. In an interview about *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat also recommends other books about the dynamics between Dominicans and Haitians. Danticat suggests René Philoctète's *Massacre River*, a novel about a marriage between a Dominican man, Pedro, and his Haitian wife, Adele. She also cites *General Sun, My Brother*, a novel about two workers who travel to the Dominican Republic to work in the cane fields.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Farming of Bones
- **When Written:** 1994-1998
- **Where Written:** Haiti and the United States
- **When Published:** 1998
- **Literary Period:** Twentieth-century Literature
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** The Dominican Republic and Haiti
- **Climax:** Amabelle flees across the Massacre River as Tibon is shot and Odette suffocates
- **Antagonist:** Rafael Trujillo, Señor Pico
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Citadelle Laferrière.** Amabelle often dwells on memories of her childhood home, which was located near Citadelle Laferrière. The citadel belonged to Henry I or Henri Christophe, a leader in the Haitian Revolution; this revolution resulted in Haiti's independence from France in the 1790s. The citadel is a national symbol of Haiti's strength and fortitude, and is outfitted with a large amount of cannons and other defenses.

**Spanish Civil War.** Papi, the father of Señora Valencia, often listens to the radio to hear news of the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Civil War pitted the Republicans against the Nationalists, notably led by General Francisco Franco. The Nationalists were supported by Nazi Germany and by fascist forces in Italy; the Republicans received resources from the Soviet Union and the International Brigades, a group of predominantly French volunteers.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Amabelle Désir, an orphaned Haitian woman in the Dominican Republic, is in love with Sebastien Onius, a cane worker. One morning, Amabelle is woken by screams, and she realizes her employer, Señora Valencia, is entering premature labor. Amabelle rushes to help, while the señora's father, Don Ignacio, calls for their neighborhood physician, Doctor Javier. Amabelle helps the señora deliver two children, a boy and girl: the girl, Rosalinda, has darker skin, and Señora Valencia comments that she might be "mistaken for one of" Amabelle's people.

Doctor Javier arrives after the birth. Amabelle tells him that her mother and father were healers; hearing this, the doctor urges Amabelle to travel back to Haiti as a midwife. Soon after, a housemaid, Juana, returns and is informed of the household's new additions; she is moved to tears, and describes how Señora Valencia's mother died in childbirth. Juana then confesses that she wished to have children of her own, but was unable to sustain a pregnancy.

Later that evening, Señor Pico, the señora's husband, returns home; he names his son Rafael, after the Dominican Republic's dictator, the Generalissimo. Amabelle overhears a conversation between Juana and her husband, Luis; Luis recounts how Señor Pico sped home in his car after hearing about the delivery, and recklessly struck a pedestrian. The man was pushed into a ravine, and died. Amabelle worries that the pedestrian is Sebastien. Don Ignacio, who was in the vehicle, tells her to inform him when she learns the name of the victim.

As the day ends, Amabelle waits anxiously, unsure whether Sebastien was caught in the car accident. To stave off anxiety, she daydreams about Henry I's **citadel**, a landmark near her childhood home in Haiti. Sebastien then arrives at Amabelle's home?he is injured, and says he must help Kongo bury his son, Joël, who was killed by Señor Pico in the car accident.

When Sebastien leaves, Amabelle has a violent dream about her parents' death: when she was young, her parents drowned in the Dajabón River, also known as the **Massacre River**. Sebastien returns and comforts her, and claims that the Haitian community in the Dominican Republic is made up of "wayfarers."

At dawn, Amabelle goes to the stream behind a "neighboring cane mill," and speaks with Mimi, Sebastien's sister. Amabelle and Mimi speculate about Kongo's plans after the death of his son, as many in the Haitian community want justice or revenge. Amabelle then visits the houses of other Haitians in the community; these acquaintances have thriving businesses, but are less wealthy than the "rich Haitians." Amabelle overhears many conversations about "being sent back to Haiti," as no one has "birth papers" that prove their identity.

Amabelle returns to her work, and serves Beatriz and Don Ignacio tea. She overhears their conversation, and Don Ignacio recounts his past: he describes fleeing "bloody battles," and his conduct in war. He also admits that he does not like the way "things are conducted" in his new home country, and distrusts the "worship of uniforms."

Afterwards, Amabelle runs into Doctor Javier, who asks if she has considered his offer to return to Haiti, but she is called away by Juana before she can answer. She then intercepts Don Ignacio, and informs him of Joël's death, before retreating into the house to help Señora Valencia with the babies. When the two women check on Rafael, the señora's son, they realize he is no longer breathing, and has passed away.

Afterwards, a neighbor's party becomes "Rafael's unofficial wake," and the guests mourn the family's loss. The party disperses, and Señora Valencia asks her husband to bury their son's clothes; she then seeks out Juana for stories about her mother, Doña Rosalinda. Amabelle visits Kongo after the wake, and tells him that Don Ignacio wishes to speak to him. Kongo, unwilling to meet, asks Amabelle to tell Don Ignacio that his son, Joël, "was a man."

The next morning, Señor Pico and Señora Valencia prepare their son's casket, and Señor Pico drives it away for the burial. Amabelle's acquaintances pass by the señora's house, and Señora Valencia invites them in for coffee. Many of them are distrustful, as there are "rumors of groups of Haitians being killed in the night." Kongo accepts the invitation, however, and ventures up to the house to give his condolences and reminiscence about his son, Joël.

Days pass, and Rosalinda's baptism occurs. After the celebration, Kongo finds Amabelle and gives her a **mask** of Joël's face in order to commemorate his death. Kongo also says that Sebastien has asked her to "promise" herself "to him," and is following the old customs by sending Kongo as a stand-in for his parents. Amabelle rushes to see Sebastien, but is warned against traveling at night by a "watchman brigade" of her neighbors; one watchman repeats the rumors about Haitians being targeted or killed. Amabelle arrives at Sebastien's room, and the two fall asleep while Yves, Sebastien's friend, mutters in his sleep.

The next morning, Amabelle returns to Señora Valencia's house. Doctor Javier arrives and tells Amabelle to leave immediately, as there are rumors that "soldiers and civilians are killing Haitians." Frightened, Amabelle runs to Sebastien, and they discuss whether to join a group that will cross into Haiti. Sebastien advises them to talk to Kongo, and Kongo reveals that he met and talked with Don Ignacio. Kongo then gives a "benediction" to Sebastien and Amabelle, who decide they will return to Haiti.

Amabelle once again returns to Señora Valencia's house, where the señora anxiously awaits her father's homecoming. The house's occupants hear military trucks, and venture outside to see Señor Pico standing with soldiers against a group of Haitian

men; these same men were members of the watchman brigade that advised Amabelle to avoid traveling at night. More people gather, and the soldiers tell the brigade to drop their machetes and get into the trucks, as they will be taken to the border. Doctor Javier's mother then interrupts the standoff, asking to speak to Señor Pico about her son's arrest, and Señor Pico brushes her off. The soldiers drive their truck into the brigade, and begin attacking any fleeing spectators.

Amabelle runs to the church where she had planned to meet with other escapees, but it is empty. Distraught, she travels through the cane fields to see Kongo, and hears that Mimi and Sebastien have been arrested alongside Doctor Javier. Kongo tells her that the soldiers will bring the prisoners to a "prison near Dajabón," and Amabelle makes this her destination. Before leaving, she informs Yves of her plans, and he agrees to travel with her.

Amabelle and Yves escape together, traveling overnight up a mountain path. They come across other refugees: Odette and her partner Wilner; Tibon, who escaped death after being told to jump off a cliff by Dominican soldiers; and two Dominican sisters, Dolores and Doloritas. Amabelle and Yves join this group, and all of them continue their journey through the mountain. Eventually, Wilner and the other Haitians tell Dolores and Doloritas to leave the group, as they are Dominican and less likely to be persecuted or attacked.

Eventually, the group arrives in a central square in Dajabón, and Wilner and Odette leave to investigate the river. The travelers realize Trujillo is inside the nearby church. Wary of attention, the travelers move into a grove, but are soon approached by young men. The men start taunting the group; Tibon fights back, and is killed. The men then ask Yves and Amabelle, "Que diga perejil," Spanish for "How do you say parsley?" The young men believe they will pronounce the word incorrectly, as they are Haitians. Yves and Amabelle are then force fed parsley and beaten.

Odette and Wilner reappear and take Yves and Amabelle, who are wounded, to a safe house. Unfortunately, soldiers are visiting nearby, so the four travelers escape to the river. They begin their crossing, but Wilner is spotted by soldiers; they shoot him, forcing Odette?who is already in the water?to panic. Amabelle, swimming beside her, holds her hand over Odette's mouth to quiet her, and when Odette struggles, Amabelle accidentally suffocates her.

Amabelle and Yves escape detection and are found the next morning "by a priest and a young doctor," who takes them to tents set up for the wounded. Amabelle falls in and out of a fever, overhearing conversations between survivors about their experiences amidst the violence. Eventually, she is reunited with Yves, who tells her he will go back to his land in Haiti; she says she will go with him.

The next day, they are driven to the Cap, a port city in Haiti, and Yves reunites with his mother, Man Rapadou. A celebratory feast is prepared, and Man Rapadou tells the story of Yves's father's death: he died over a plate of food after being released from prison.

As days pass, Amabelle continues to recover from her injuries. She learns about Man Denise, Sebastien's mother; she also tries to connect with Yves by asking him about his farming, as he spends every day in the fields. Yves tells Amabelle that a justice of the peace is writing down stories from Haitians who survived the violence in the Dominican Republic.

The next day, Amabelle joins the crowd vying for the justice's attention, and sees Man Denise. People split from the crowd to go to Man Denise's house, and Amabelle stays with her overnight. In the morning, she talks with Man Denise, who recounts the reasons for Mimi and Sebastien's emigration to the Dominican Republic. Man Denise reveals that people have told her that both of her children died in the violence. Amabelle returns home and mourns for the rest of the day. Later that night, Yves confesses that he saw soldiers put Mimi and Sebastien into a truck, alongside Doctor Javier.

Although Amabelle holds out hope that Sebastien is alive, she wishes for "a life where everything was constantly the same." Years pass, and she grows older. On the day of Rafael Trujillo's death, Amabelle joins in the town's festivities and realizes that her life has become a "routine of sewing and sleeping."

One day, Amabelle ventures down to the river and asks to be carried back into the Dominican Republic so she can visit the town of Señora Valencia, named Alégria. Amabelle arrives and speaks with Señora Valencia, who initially does not recognize her. The señora describes how her home and family have changed?Juana and Luis have left, Rosalinda married young?and tells Amabelle that she hid many of her "people" during the massacre.

One of the señora's housemaids joins them, and asks why Dominican soldiers would request that Haitians pronounce "parsley." Señora Valencia recounts a story about Trujillo, who one day tried to kill a Haitian worker fleeing through the fields. Trujillo told the worker he would spare him if he called out his location?the worker called out the name of the fields' crops, but mispronounced the word for parsley. Trujillo realized that Haitians could "never hide as long as there is parsley nearby."

Amabelle wishes Señora Valencia well, and returns home. She is dropped off by the Massacre River, and, thinking about all the violence and death she has witnessed, steps into the river. She floats and paddles in the current, and begins to express hope and cherish her future: she tells herself that she is "looking for the dawn."

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Amabelle Désir** – Amabelle Désir, the protagonist of the story, is a dark-skinned Haitian domestic worker living in the Dominican Republic. Amabelle is dreamy and prone to fantasy, often relying on her imagination to escape from her difficult reality. Orphaned at a young age after her parents Irelle Pradelle and Antoine Désir drowned in a flooded **river**, Amabelle left Haiti to work in the household of Señora Valencia. Amabelle eventually falls in love with Sebastien Onius, another Haitian migrant who works in the cane fields. Racial tensions in the Dominican Republic begin to escalate, leading to a massacre of Haitians, and Amabelle flees the country to return to Haiti. During her escape, she is brutalized and injured, and learns that her lover, Sebastien, has been killed by Dominican soldiers. Amabelle survives, and returns to Haiti, where she chooses to live with Yves?another Haitian refugee?and his mother, Man Rapadou. Amabelle's childhood trauma is compounded by the death of her lover and the violence she has experienced at the hands of Dominican soldiers; as a result, she soon turns to her dreams and fantasies as relief from her grief. Eventually, however, she begins to appreciate her new life in Haiti, and the new home she has found with Yves and Man Rapadou. In the midst of her recovery, she returns one last time to the Dominican Republic and says goodbye to Señora Valencia. Amabelle realizes that her home in the Dominican Republic has changed rapidly, and begins to understand that her dreams are no longer sufficient; instead, she must rebuild a place for herself in her home country of Haiti. Furthermore, she decides to preserve her memories of her family and her experiences?by making this choice, Amabelle embraces her role as a witness and archivist of Haitian history. Amabelle returns to Haiti with hope and a newfound appreciation for the future.

**Sebastien Onius** – Sebastien Onius, a migrant worker from Haiti, is Amabelle Désir's lover. Sebastien, like Amabelle, lost a parent to a natural disaster: his father was killed in a hurricane, which prompted him to leave Haiti for new opportunities in the Dominican Republic. Sebastien is more jaded and nationalistic than Amabelle; he does not trust the Dominican government, and is consumed by memories of the country he left behind. Sebastien often asks Amabelle to recall details of her childhood in Haiti, as a means of preserving her memories and reaffirming her cultural heritage. Moreover, Sebastien is content to live in fantasies, and even asks Amabelle to reimagine her circumstances in order to have happier dreams and rid herself of grief. Sebastien and Amabelle's happiness is eventually interrupted by the rising tensions between Dominicans and Haitians; Sebastien and his sister Mimi are captured and murdered by soldiers, leaving Amabelle to grieve over their loss. Sebastien's death eventually prompts Amabelle to cherish her life in Haiti. Although she is initially unappreciative of her daily routine, she is soon grateful for her survival, and begins to move past her dreams of a life with him. Sebastien is ultimately kept alive in Amabelle's memory, although his actual life is cut short; through recollection and storytelling, Amabelle preserves his legacy, and keeps him from being forgotten.

**Señora Valencia** – Señora Valencia, who is married to Señor Pico, is Amabelle's boss in the Dominican Republic. She and Amabelle grew up together, and often disregarded their class boundaries in order to play together as children; moreover, both lost their mothers at a young age?Señora Valencia's mother died in childbirth?and learned to cope with grief and loss. Señora Valencia and Amabelle are not only separated by class, but also by national identity. Despite their close, nearly familial relationship, Señora Valencia is a wealthy Dominican woman with family ties to the government, whereas Amabelle is actively targeted for her Haitian identity. Señora Valencia's affection for Amabelle cannot, ultimately, overcome the rising tide of racism and persecution, and Amabelle is forced to lie to Señora Valencia in order to run away. Amabelle's innocent betrayal of Señora Valencia illustrates how one's identity sometimes takes precedence over longstanding relationships. Amabelle eventually returns to the Dominican Republic after the violence and reunites briefly with Señora Valencia. Señora Valencia does not recognize her, leading Amabelle to doubt the strength of their bond and question her shifting conception of home.

**Señor Pico** – Señor Pico, often referred to as Pico, is married to Señora Valencia. Pico is very loyal to Rafael Trujillo, the Generalissimo, who is the dictator of the Dominican Republic. Pico takes pride in his national heritage, and has fervent military and political ambitions. Moreover, Pico is prejudiced and unsympathetic: he treats his workers cruelly, and obediently carries out governmental orders to terrorize and harm Haitian migrants. In fact, Pico's prejudice and nationalistic pride results in a callous murder of a pedestrian: he hits Joël, a Haitian cane worker, with his car and does not take responsibility. Pico's behavior illustrates how nationalism and excessive pride in one's identity can result in violence.

**Don Ignacio** – Don Ignacio, also known as Papi, is Señora Valencia's father and an "exiled patriot" from Spain. Don Ignacio listens to the radio for news about the Spanish civil war each night, and is seemingly unaware of the tensions brewing in his current homeland. In this way, Papi, like Señor Pico, is fixated on his identity and home country to the point of distraction. Unlike Señor Pico, however, Don Ignacio feels remorse over Joël's death; he was in the car that struck Joël, and makes some effort to take responsibility. Don Ignacio eventually reaches out to Kongo, Joël's father, to make amends?he reveals that he feels haunted by the men he killed during the Spanish war, and that Joël's death adds to his feelings of guilt. Papi's confession to Kongo reinforces how nationalism and identity can result in violence: although Papi is not complicit in the Dominican Republic's treatment of Haitians, he has still killed soldiers in the name of nationalism and cultural pride.

**Yves** – Yves is a friend of Sebastien, and escapes the Dominican Republic with Amabelle as Dominican soldiers begin targeting

Haitians for violence. Once Yves and Amabelle reach Haiti, Yves's family takes Amabelle in as a guest and new family member, illustrating how the concept of family and home can shift over time. Yves's life in Haiti is prosperous: he is an accomplished farmer, and expands his family's agricultural business into a successful enterprise. Despite this accomplishment, Yves is unable to move beyond his grief. He has lost loved ones in Haiti, and is unable to cope with their deaths in a healthy way. Instead, he loses himself in hard work and monotony, and suppresses his sadness by exhausting himself in the fields. Yves's inability to process death in a healthy way prevents him from properly memorializing his history: instead of taking the opportunity to tell his story, he acts skeptical of officials who seek to write down the testimony of Haitian refugees. Yves's repression of grief and loss, and his unwillingness to act as a witness to Haitian history, leads him to live an unfulfilled and unhappy life.

**Juana** – Juana is a housemaid in Señora Valencia's home, and has worked for Don Ignacio for many years. Juana took care of multiple generations of Don Ignacio's family, and is moved to tears by the birth of Señora Valencia's children. Juana's relationship with Don Ignacio's family illustrates how feelings of belonging can supersede one's individuality. For example, although she deeply desires a family of her own, Juana treats Señora Valencia and her children as a surrogate family; she has sacrificed her life to work for them, and has redefined her idea of home and family accordingly.

**Luis** – Luis is Juana's husband and also a worker in Don Ignacio's home. Luis badly wants a family of his own, but like Juana, he makes do with caring for his employer's family instead. At the end of the novel, Señora Valencia tells Amabelle that Luis and Juana have moved away to be with "their people."

**Doctor Javier** – Doctor Javier is a physician for Señora Valencia, and a respected man in the community. Despite his high social standing, he is unsympathetic to the Dominican government's violent agenda, and sympathetic to Haitian workers and migrants. In fact, he offers Amabelle the chance to escape and return to Haiti as a midwife, and then warns her of the impending massacre. Doctor Javier's disavowal of the Dominican government's racist regime illustrates how some characters transcend identity: he is unwilling to be complicit in his country's racism and violence. Instead, he tries to aid Haitians and help them escape the oncoming massacre; as a result, he is captured and killed for his disobedience to the Dominican government.

**Antoine Désir** – Antoine Désir is Amabelle Désir's father. He died unexpectedly during Amabelle's childhood after getting caught in a flash flood. He is an herb healer, and often helped with births and deaths in his Haitian community. Amabelle remembers him fondly, and explains to Sebastien how he would search for new cures and help his neighbors with their plowing and farm work. Amabelle's description of her father preserves him in other characters' memory; in this way, Antoine's ongoing legacy demonstrates the power of recollection.

**Señorita Beatriz** – Señorita Beatriz is Doctor Javier's sister. Beatriz dreams of escaping the Dominican Republic, and aspires to be a newspaperwoman who travels the world. Amabelle implies, however, that Beatriz is a sheltered and privileged woman; she believes that Beatriz is merely a voyeur who wishes to learn about other people's suffering. Although Beatriz is interested in people who do not share her cultural identity, she is not truly empathetic or selfless enough to transcend boundaries like her brother Javier.

**Joël** – Joël is a friend of Sebastien and Yves, and a fellow Haitian immigrant working in the cane fields. Joël is killed in an automobile accident: Señor Pico, after hearing of the birth of his two children, drives recklessly and strikes Joël, pushing him into a ravine. Afterwards, Señor Pico demonstrates a total lack of remorse, and Joël's murder goes unpunished by law. Joël's senseless death foreshadows the intensifying cultural tension between Haitians and Dominicans, and reveals the rampant inequality within the Dominican Republic. Joël's sudden and unexpected passing also demonstrates how pervasive death can be.

**Kongo** – Kongo is Joël's father. Kongo is devastated to hear of his son's murder, but is unable to seek revenge because his son was killed by Señor Pico, a powerful government official. Although Señor Pico refuses to take responsibility for Joël's passing, Don Ignacio shows slight remorse for the accident, and meets with Kongo to express his condolences. Racial tensions continue to rise in the Dominican Republic, and Kongo eventually claims he is too old to make the journey back to Haiti; in this way, he demonstrates how his sense of belonging has shifted due to his old age and his son's demise.

**Man Rapadou** – Man Rapadou is Yves's mother, and acts as a caretaker and surrogate family member to Amabelle when she returns to Haiti. As Amabelle heals from her traumatic escape, Man Rapadou teaches Amabelle multiple lessons about grief, death, and the deceptive nature of dreams. For example, she warns Amabelle that there is no cure for death, and advises her against prioritizing her dreams over her life; in this way, Man Rapadou prompts Amabelle to reconsider her coping mechanisms. Although Amabelle initially lost herself in fantasies of an impossible future with Sebastien, she eventually discards these dreams and realizes she must appreciate her survival. Additionally, Man Rapadou reveals that she poisoned her husband because he was planning to spy on his fellow Haitians in return for money. Man Rapadou's behavior illustrates how loyalty to one's culture, country, and homeland can sometimes outweigh love or marital devotion.

**Rosalinda** – Rosalinda is Señora Valencia's and Señor Pico's newborn daughter. She is named for Señora Valencia's mother, and outlives Rafael as the family's only child. Rosalinda's skin is darker in color than Rafael's, leading Señora Valencia to wonder

whether she will be misidentified as Haitian. Rosalinda's skin is another representation of how identity is malleable, and capable of crossing predetermined boundaries.

**Irelle Pradelle** – Irelle is Amabelle Désir's mother. Like Antoine, Irelle died unexpectedly in a flood; as a result, Amabelle learned about grief and loss at an early age. Amabelle remembers her mother as a woman who smiled infrequently, and often had little to say; nevertheless, Amabelle dreams of her often, and honors her for her competency as a healer, keeping her mother's legacy alive.

**Father Romain** – Father Romain is a Haitian priest and community leader. In his sermons, Father Romain prompts his congregants to remember their shared cultural heritage, and to recall Haitian traditions, foods, songs, and stories. In this way, Father Romain personifies the power of memory and recollection: he keeps Haiti's customs alive through shared memory, despite the Dominican Republic's disdain for Haitian culture. Unfortunately, Father Romain is captured during the massacre and tortured by Dominican soldiers; the trauma he sustains forces him to lose his memory, and he is only able to repeat racist Dominican propaganda. This is a paradoxical inversion of his former Haitian pride: initially, Father Romain was a key promoter of Haitian culture, but he eventually becomes an unwilling spokesman of racist rhetoric against his own community.

**Odette** – Odette is a Haitian refugee who tries to escape the Dominican Republic alongside Amabelle and a group of other evacuees. Her lover, Wilner, is also trying to escape the violence. Amabelle, Odette, Yves, and Wilner attempt to cross a **river** when Wilner is suddenly shot by a Dominican soldier. Amabelle, who is nervous that Odette will reveal their location and get them both killed, holds her hand over Odette's mouth and accidentally suffocates her in the river. Odette's death?and Amabelle's abiding sense of guilt?adds to her profound feelings of grief and loss. Odette's accidental murder contributes to Amabelle's unhealthy coping mechanisms after she arrives in Haiti. In order to avoid her grief and guilt, Amabelle initially loses herself in fantasies and the empty routines of a simpler life.

**Wilner** – Wilner is Odette's partner. Wilner and Odette are part of a group of Haitian refugees fleeing the massacre in the Dominican Republic. Wilner is spotted and murdered by Dominican soldiers while attempting to cross a **river** with a group of Haitians. Wilner's demise haunts the surviving characters after they resettle in Haiti, illustrating how death has an enduring and powerful influence over the living.

**The Generalissimo / Trujillo** – The Generalissimo is a nickname given to Rafael Trujillo, the dictator of the Dominican Republic. Trujillo is prejudiced against the Haitians; he claims that the Dominican Republic must preserve its culture and sovereignty by exterminating or expelling Haitians from the country. The Generalissimo devises a linguistic test that is meant to help Dominican soldiers target Haitians: he claims that Haitians cannot properly pronounce "perejil," the Spanish word for parsley. Trujillo's test and racist agenda illustrate the ways in which language and identity are used to prompt violence and emphasize borders between cultures.

**Don Gilbert** – Don Gilbert is married to Doña Sabine, and together they form one of the richest Haitian families in the part of the Dominican Republic where Amabelle lives. While their wealth initially protects them from the racist prejudices of Dominican culture, they are threatened like all the other Haitians once the massacre begins. They shelter Félice and a few others in their home, but they also acknowledge that sadly they can't help all the Haitians who are in danger.

**Doña Sabine** – Along with Don Gilbert, Doña Sabine is one of the wealthiest Haitians in Amabelle's town in the Dominican Republic. She and Don Gilbert occupy a privileged social position until the coming massacre threatens them along with all the other Haitians. They send away their guards for fear that the guards might turn on them, and although they shelter some people in their home, Amabelle wonders if they'll even be able to protect themselves.

**Unél** – Unél is a Haitian stonemason who forms a brigade of watchmen to protect Haitians in the Dominican Republic. He believes that Haitians have to fight for their right to live there. During a confrontation between the brigade and Dominican soldiers outside Señor Pico's house, Unél and his men refuse to kneel to Señor Pico's forces, who want to take them to the Haitian border. Soon thereafter Unél is beaten, tied up, and driven away by the soldiers.

**Félice** – Félice is Joël's lover. After he dies, Félice expresses to Amabelle her wish to help Dominicans learn to respect Haitians as equals. As the massacre begins, Félice is too scared to try and flee to Haiti, so she stays behind at the home of Doña Sabine and Don Gilbert. Amabelle also gives Félice Joël's death **mask** for safekeeping.

**Tibon** – Tibon is one of the travelers whom Amabelle and Yves meet while fleeing to Haiti. He was part of a group of Haitians whom Dominican soldiers forced to jump off a cliff, but he survived and managed to join the group of travelers. Tibon also confesses to Amabelle that as a child, he almost killed a Dominican boy out of rage that the boy would not acknowledge him as an equal, and even as an adult he wonders whether racial groups should mix. When the group eventually reaches Dajabón, Tibon is murdered by soldiers patrolling an event where Trujillo is appearing.

**Man Denise** – Man Denise is the mother of Sebastien and Mimi. Amabelle meets Man Denise back in Haiti, where Man Denise lives. Man Denise is already aware of her children's deaths when Amabelle arrives, and she expresses her sadness that both Sebastien and Mimi died so young, before they even

understood what death is. Then, she tells Amabelle to leave her in peace so that she can "dream up" her children rather than facing the reality of their deaths.

**Father Emil** – Father Emil is a priest whom Amabelle meets after she returns to Haiti. He used to listen to the stories that survivors of the massacre told him, but now he does not, because he can't do anything practical to help the survivors. Father Emil also tells Amabelle where to find Father Romain.

**Doloritas** – Doloritas is one of two Dominican sisters whom Amabelle meets while fleeing from the massacre. Doloritas and her sister Dolores only speak Spanish, but they are traveling to Haiti because they hope to find Doloritas's Haitian partner (who was taken from their bed) there. Doloritas has promised to learn Creole and live with him in Haiti, showing how cultural and linguistic identity can be flexible, even for the Dominican people whom Trujillo insists must remain pure. Along with Dolores, Doloritas leaves the group at Wilner's request, because the sisters will be safe traveling alone due to their ability to speak Spanish fluently.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Rafael** – Rafael is Señora Valencia's and Señor Pico's newborn son. He is named after Rafael Trujillo, the Generalissimo and dictator of the Dominican Republic. Rafael unexpectedly dies soon after he is born, devastating Señora Valencia's family.

**Mimi** – Mimi is Sebastien Onius's sister. Mimi, like Sebastien, is killed during the Parsley Massacre; her death, alongside her brother's, is a source of profound grief for Amabelle.

**Father Vargas** – Father Vargas is a Dominican priest who says a blessing after Rafael dies. Later on, he is arrested along with Father Romain and Doctor Javier, presumably because he is sympathetic to Haitians living in the Dominican Republic.

**Doña Eva** – Doña Eva is a rich Dominican widow and the mother of Doctor Javier. She moves away to New York in the years after Amabelle returns to Haiti.

**Dolores** – Dolores is one of the Dominican sisters who briefly travel with Amabelle's group as they flee the massacre. The sisters want to travel to Haiti to find the Haitian man whom Doloritas, Dolores's sister, has been seeing. Along with Doloritas, Dolores leaves the group when Wilner asks them to.

# 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.

## THE POWER OF MEMORY

*The Farming of Bones* recounts the stories of Haitians that have resettled in the Dominican Republic; this resettlement eventually prompts a mass killing of Haitians known as the Parsley Massacre. Amabelle Désir and other Haitians attempt to escape and return to Haiti, but many are brutalized or killed. Throughout the story, characters recount their memories to keep their legacy alive, and to testify to the atrocities they have witnessed. In this way, Danticat's story illustrates how memory is necessary to preserving history, the past, and the truth. Moreover, the story demonstrates how memory is vital for guaranteeing that suffering will not be forgotten or ignored.

The story illustrates that an individual's memory can keep personal legacy alive, despite oppression. Amabelle Désir, a Haitian domestic worker, lost her mother in childhood; despite this loss, Amabelle tenderly remembers her mother as someone who "did everything […] in her own time," and that "she was a woman of few words," but those words were "direct and precise." Señora Valencia, the higher-class woman Amabelle attends to, also remembers her own mother, Doña Rosalinda, with fondness. Still, the memory of Doña Rosalinda is not as comprehensive as the memory of Amabelle's mother; the señora must rely on her housemaid, Juana, to provide additional details. Despite the difference in power and class between the two families, Señora Valencia's memory barely preserves her mother's legacy; in contrast, Amabelle remembers her mother more vividly. In this way, memory preserves legacy regardless of class, race, or oppression.

Amabelle continues to illustrate the power of an individual's recollection. Although Amabelle's father drowned when she was young, he is a venerable figure much like her mother. To her lover, Sebastien Onius, Amabelle describes how her father selflessly "spent a lot of time doing the birthing and healing work." Amabelle's retelling of her father's generosity keeps him alive in her memory, as well as Sebastien's.

Amabelle explicitly discusses the importance of memory in a time of doubt. When Amabelle hears that men from a neighboring mill have been in a car accident, she fondly recalls childhood memories to avoid thinking about the disaster: she admits that she must "cling" to her "few remembrances," and adds that "time will not erase them." She then recalls a childhood memory of the **citadel** of Henry I near her parents' home. Amabelle's remembrance of national iconography illustrates how memory provides solace in the present, and prevents time from eroding history.

Danticat also emphasizes how a community can bear witness to the past, in order to commemorate it. For example, Amabelle describes how people in the Haitian community could "sit for a whole evening […] just listening to [others'] existence unfold." She claims that memory, in this collective context, is a "way of

returning home." By telling stories of the past, Haitians preserve their sense of belonging, even when they are living elsewhere.

Additionally, the character of Father Romain, a Haitian priest, makes the connection between communal memory and tradition explicit. His sermons often discuss "history, carnival, songs, tales, and prayers," and he preaches that "remembering—though sometimes painful?can make you strong." In this way, Father Romain embodies the power of shared recollection: by encouraging his congregants to remember their history, he preserves Haitian traditions into the future.

After Amabelle and her peers return to Haiti, they hear that "officials of the state" will "listen to those who survived the [Parsley Massacre] and write their stories down," and a large crowd to meet with these officials. This crowd is representative of the weight and fervor of collective memory: all survivors want to tell their story in order to memorialize their pain, and prevent the tragedy from being forgotten.

Although individual and collective memory can preserve the past, memory is not infallible. For instance, some surviving Haitians are skeptical of the state officials' motives. Yves, who escaped alongside Amabelle, claims that politicians are merely "collecting tales for newspapers," and that Trujillo, the dictator who engineered the massacre, is trying to "sell" the stories of the Haitians. In this way, the act of remembering is not meant to safeguard against future tragedy, but is instead used for further exploitation.

Father Romain, the priest whose sermons memorialized Haitian culture, is tortured during the massacre; as a result, he loses his memory. In fact, the only thing he remembers is the Dominican dictator's propaganda: he repeats, "We, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living." The fate of Father Romain illustrates the unreliability of memory?despite his sincere efforts to preserve Haitian traditions, he eventually forgets his heritage. Memory may be a strong force in the novel, but it's not indestructible.

Amabelle, who survives the Parsley Massacre but loses her partner, is pessimistic about the power of memory; she claims that the Haitians' stories are "testimonials like the ones never heard," and knows that many stories will go untold. Her fear is justified: the justice of the peace, for example, is unwilling to finish his work, and prevents some Haitian survivors from sharing their stories. Despite the Haitian community's ability to safeguard their stories on an individual and collective level, then, memory is not infallible; oftentimes, it fails to impact history on a national or political level. Additionally, Amabelle believes that her lost love's story is like "a fish with no tail"?Sebastien's story exists, but has no ability to endure beyond her own retelling. Still, despite her disbelief, her constant repetition of Sebastien's story and her discussion of her people's unheard testimony effectively preserves these memories for the future.

In Danticat's story, Amabelle and her community are caught between the cultures and political forces of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Through memory, the story's characters are able to shield their past against those who wish to erase it. Even in the face of a mass slaughter, the Haitians continue to preserve and testify to each other's trauma. Danticat's story thus illustrates how recollection can preserve history, culture, and the past in even the most violent times.

## DREAMS VS. REALITY

In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle and her fellow Haitians work as manual laborers or domestic workers in the Dominican Republic, after leaving Haiti due to natural disasters. Due to their living conditions, many of the novel's characters are dispirited, lonely, and homesick. As a result, they find solace and personal significance in their dreams, which feature their homeland or their family life. As these fantasies are often extremely tantalizing, they provide a means of escape; some characters within the story, therefore, begin to prioritize their dreams over reality. Danticat's story thus illustrates the complicated nature of dreams. They provide happiness, which allows individuals to endure, but they can also seem better than reality, and so threaten one's will to live. The story ultimately implies that getting lost in one's dreams can be enticing, but real life is far more precious.

Danticat suggests that dreams are alluring because they offer alternatives to painful reality, or escape from unhappiness and grief. When Amabelle describes her mother, who drowned in a flood during her childhood, she emphasizes that her mother "didn't show a lot of affection," and "also didn't smile often." After her mother's death, though, Amabelle's dreams featured her mother "always smiling." In this way, Amabelle's dreams are more comforting than reality: they provide her with the motherly affection that she was deprived of in childhood.

Señora Valencia, Amabelle's boss, is pregnant with twins and delivers them without a doctor's assistance. In the midst of her delivery, she tells Amabelle that she has "been having more than [her] usual number of dreams," and believes her mother was beside her during the birth. This exchange demonstrates how dreams substitute for reality in difficult times: dreams compensate for a missing parent's love and comfort.

Additionally, Amabelle is plagued by nightmares about her parents' deaths. When she describes this to Sebastien, he tells her to replace the nightmares with "a pleasant dream." He tells her to dream that her parents "died natural deaths" and asks her to imagine that she left Haiti to "meet" him. By asking Amabelle to refashion her dreams in order to bring her peace, Sebastien illustrates an underlying implication about dreams: they are capable of providing alternate realities that overwrite

tragedy.

As Danticat's story continues, characters experience more frequent tragedies. As a result, dreams begin to offer more than a harmless, temporary escape: they offer an impossible fantasy of peace and happiness. When Amabelle returns to Haiti, she is unsure of Sebastien's fate. She visits his mother, Man Denise, who informs her that he and his sister, Mimi, were killed. Man Denise then tells Amabelle to leave, as she wants to "dream up" her children. Amabelle later returns to see Man Denise's house "bolted shut." She is told that Man Denise likely "went someplace where only her children would find her if they come back." Man Denise's desire to dream about her children indicates that she is no longer willing to confront reality. Rather, she would prefer to get lost in her dreams and forgo the harsh truth of her children's deaths, instead of experiencing life.

After Amabelle's return, she creates a routine where each day is "exactly like the one before." She adds that "new dreams seem [like] a waste." Amabelle admits to being lost in a hollow, meaningless cycle; although she has survived, she repeats each day in a blur. This repetitive existence indicates that Amabelle has deprioritized her real life, and is content with her dreams. This eagerness to get lost in fantasies eventually begins to fade, however, and Amabelle begins to hope for self-growth. Through Amabelle's gradual change of heart, Danticant complicates the idea of dreams?and how they entice people away from the difficulties of life?by demonstrating their insufficiency.

After Amabelle settles into her friend's house in Haiti, she allows herself to remember the other refugees who escaped. She thinks of them "going forward into their lives," and wants to "ask" them how they could "walk into the future." Amabelle's wishes suggest that she is no longer content with the routine and comfort of her dreams. Instead, she wants to move forward, and learn how to embrace her future like her peers.

Amabelle's interactions with Man Rapadou, the mother of a surviving refugee, further prompt Amabelle to reconsider a life of fantasies. Man Rapadou claims that her life, like Amabelle's, has "always been rich with dreams," but warns Amabelle that "old age is not meant to be survived alone." She advises Amabelle to reprioritize, implying that the choice to remain lost in dreams can harm one's life and happiness. After receiving this advice, and thinking of the other refugees' futures, Amabelle re-evaluates. She claims that life can be "a strange gift," and admits that she initially chose "a living death." She even acknowledges that she "looked to [her] dreams [...] for relief." By the story's end, she chooses instead to look "for the dawn." Amabelle's admissions reveal that she has begun to understand the inadequacy of dreams, and that she has discovered a newfound willingness to respect her life and look towards the future.

In Danticat's story, dreams are omnipresent: many characters use them to dwell upon the past, or escape from their unhappy lives. These fantasies are often alluring, cheerful, and comforting; in fact, they provide so much relief that characters begin to lose sight of real life's importance. This escapism illustrates how dreams are often enticing alternatives to reality; ultimately, however, dreams are an inadequate substitute for life. Life, although it is difficult, is more valuable and worthwhile.

## LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

In *The Farming of Bones*, groups of Haitians have settled uneasily in the Dominican Republic. Eventually, rising racial tensions lead to the 1937 Parsley Massacre, where Dominicans slaughtered thousands of Haitians. To identify and target Haitians, Dominican soldiers conducted a "linguistic test" about the pronunciation of the Spanish word for parsley, "perejil." In Danticat's historical novel, languages are used to define and classify one's nationality, and differentiate between groups; ultimately, these differences are used to justify violence. Still, Danticat complicates the divisive power of language by creating characters that speak multiple dialects?these characters demonstrate how cultural differences are not always clear cut. In this way, Danticat illustrates how language and nationality can be closely connected, but suggests that these classifications are ultimately malleable.

Throughout the novel, Danticat emphasizes that Haitian Creole and Spanish are central to Haitian and Dominican identity, and highlights the tensions that arise between these two nationalities. In one scene, a Haitian man claims that Dominicans treat Haitians as "foreigners" even if multiple generations were born in the Dominican Republic. The man claims that this line of thinking "makes it easier for them to push" Haitians out. This man makes this observation in Haitian Creole, a language that Haitians "most often" use amongst themselves in place of Spanish. By highlighting that this conversation about identity is in Haitian Creole, the narrator emphasizes the ways in which language is used to separate communities from one another.

In another scene, Señor Valencia recalls an interaction in Amabelle's childhood: Amabelle was asked "who [she] belonged to," and had replied that she "belonged" to herself. It is significant that Amabelle makes this declaration in Haitian Creole, representing how her identity is affirmed through language. Moreover, this discussion occurs alongside the "**Massacre River**," named for a bloody dispute between French and Spanish settlers. As the river is a symbol of warring national forces, Amabelle's use of Haitian Creole reinforces her cultural identity and her loyalty to her homeland.

As Amabelle joins a group of refugees, she interacts with two Dominican sisters who do not "speak any Kreyòl." The group splits up, saying the Dominican Republic is the sisters' country; the refugees tell the sisters to "find the border themselves." In

this way, language is once again used to demarcate national loyalties, as the Haitian refugees treat the sisters differently due to their inability to speak Haitian Creole.

Danticat then illustrates how these distinctions in language are often used to justify conflict. For example, at one point in the novel, Amabelle is in the midst of a crowd of nationalistic Dominicans and hears "worried Kreyòl-whispering voices." She guesses these speakers "might have wanted" to gather together, but understands that this "would be dangerous." Amabelle begins to realize that differences in language can provoke tension: speaking Haitian Creole can draw unwanted attention and suspicion, and has the potential to spark danger.

Eventually, Dominican soldiers discover Amabelle and other Haitians, and they tell the Haitians to correctly pronounce "perejil," the word for parsley. The soldiers start to assault them before they can speak; to the soldiers, the refugees' identity is immediately self-evident, and foreign. As the attack occurs, a crowd sings the Dominican national anthem and tramples over Amabelle. As Amabelle is effectively silenced by a crowd singing in Spanish, the crowd symbolizes one language and nationality violently overpowering another.

Dominican propaganda discusses how languages "reveal who belongs on what side," thereby presupposing that two groups speaking different dialects must be enemies. This propaganda illustrates how feelings of cultural difference can be manipulated into an antagonistic relationship between nationalities. Furthermore, this messaging reinforces how language is sometimes used to define both a person's allegiance and nationality. In this way, conflicting languages are symbolic of conflicting loyalties, and provide a rationale for distrust.

Although language is a source of conflict in the novel, many characters in the novel speak both Spanish and Haitian Creole. This multilingualism challenges the idea that language reaffirms a single identity. These characters provide examples of how language can subvert static cultural labels.

As an example, one woman describes the feeling of being caught between two countries. Although she is of Haitian descent, she and her son were born in the Dominican Republic. This woman speaks "a mix of Alegrían Kreyòl and Spanish," a "tangled language" spoken by people "caught [...] between two nearly native tongues." This woman's ability to meld two languages illustrates the ways in which language defies borders?culturally, she cannot be defined by a single, national label.

Furthermore, Amabelle describes the universality of parsley to further demonstrate how words both define and cross borders. Although the word for "parsley" is used by Dominicans to test whether a speaker is Haitian, Amabelle proves that "pesi, perejil, parsley" is "commonplace." She discusses how the Haitians use it for "food" and "teas" and "baths"?these descriptions demonstrate parsley's neutrality. As an object, parsley is not special to one nation; as a word, it is used to divide Haitians from Dominicans.

Lastly, during the soldiers' assault, Amabelle claims that she "could have said the word" for parsley "properly." She admits "the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j*" is "burdensome," but asserts that she knows "how to say pesi," the Haitian pronunciation, and "perejil" in Spanish. Amabelle's bilingualism reaffirms that cultural labels are not fixed: although she is Haitian, she is capable of saying "perejil" in a way identifies her as a native to the Dominican Republic. Despite her nationality, her connection to Dominican culture transcends language barriers.

Throughout Danticat's work, language is used to draw distinctions between Dominicans and Haitians. In fact, a single world?pronounced differently in Haitian Creole and Spanish?is used to identify characters' ethnicity, demonstrating how language and identity are inseparable concepts. Language emphasizes differences between cultures and these differences are, in turn, used as justification for cruelty. Oftentimes, however, cultural differences are not straightforward: Danticat's characters, who are often capable of inhabiting multiple identities, illustrate this complexity. Danticat's story proves that language is merely a facet of a character's existence, and demonstrates that feelings of nationality and belonging are dynamic and flexible.

## DEATH, GRIEF, AND HOPE

In *The Farming of Bones*, various characters die as a result of violence or misfortune, and these tragedies illustrate how widespread and sudden death can be. The lives of those left behind are inexorably altered by the deaths they have experienced; in fact, these characters' lives often lose meaning and happiness. As the novel unfolds, Danticat illustrates how death has two victims: it impacts the deceased, as well as those who remain. Despite the persistence of grief, however, these surviving characters gradually rebuild their lives. Ultimately, the novel demonstrates that death, despite its power, does not completely extinguish hope.

Various characters in the story experience the death of a loved one. These losses are traumatic and unexpected, demonstrating that death is a powerful and omnipresent force. Early on in the novel, Amabelle recalls the deaths of her parents in a flood. After a commonplace shopping trip, her parents had waded through a **river** just as a storm began, and were swallowed by the waves. Seeing this, Amabelle screamed until she could "taste blood," and tried to "throw" herself "into the water." In this way, a joyful family outing turns into a tragedy, demonstrating that death is ever-present. Furthermore, Amabelle's chilling response?her willingness to follow her parents into death?shows the immediate impact that death has on its witnesses.

In Danticat's novel, death is merciless towards everyone, regardless of class. For example, Señora Valencia's newborn son, Rafael, passes away unexpectedly. Distraught, she says it is "too soon" for him to go; she is later consoled by another parent who has recently lost a child. The bereaved parent tells her that when his son died, "the ground sank" beneath his feet, and he learned that life is as "sudden as a few breaths." A child's death teaches painful lessons about how fleeting and unfair life can be; moreover, it illustrates how everyone?even a new, happy parent?is subject to the pain of loss.

Additionally, death's impact can also manifest as guilt. When Amabelle accidentally drowns a fellow refugee, Odette, to keep her from drawing the attention of soldiers, she is haunted by the loss. Amabelle notes that no matter where she goes, she will "always be standing over [Odette's] body." Amabelle's perpetual remorse illustrates the never-ending effect that death has on the living.

In order to persevere through the crushing weight of loss, many of the novel's characters use different coping mechanisms. For example, Amabelle begins to treat her life as a "living death," even though she has escaped the brutal Parsley Massacre. Despite her survival, her life is forever altered: she has lost her lover, Sebastien, and witnessed numerous atrocities. Grief-stricken, she tries to create a routine where "every day" passes "exactly like the one before." Amabelle's exposure to death has numbed her to the privilege of life; she looks for comfort in monotony, as this lets her avoid confronting her sense of loss. Yves, another survivor of the Parsley Massacre, loses himself in work to avoid dealing with his trauma. As a dedicated farmer, he is constantly "working the earth," which lets him "believe that he had forgotten" what he has experienced. Furthermore, he confesses that "empty fields" remind him of the "dead season," explicitly acknowledging that his workaholic behavior is a way of coping with his past and sense of loss. Yves's work is a hollow distraction: he turns his life into a cycle of drudgery to cope with sadness, which suggests that he does not value his survival. Both Amabelle and Yves's methods of distraction are unsuccessful, and drain the characters' lives of significance or meaning.

Ultimately, however, these characters realize that they must confront their grief, and they begin to move on and allow hope and happiness to reenter their lives. For example, Amabelle begins to recall lessons about life continuing in the wake of tragedy. She notes how "the dead" leave "their words" for "their children's inheritance," and discusses wanting to "pass on" her memories of the "slaughter," so that they do not "remain forever buried." Amabelle's thoughts indicate that she is becoming more comfortable with the idea of grief, and the concept of moving on. In fact, she even acknowledges that her grief should not be repressed forever; rather, it should be passed down, and become part of her future.

Amabelle joins a "parade of survivors," noting that it is a "celebration of the living and the dead." When someone compliments her on her dancing, she realizes that she has joined the festivities unconsciously. She sees people crying in the midst of dancing around her, and begins to understand that joy and sadness can coexist. Amabelle's involuntary dancing indicates that she is ready to reckon with her loss; she has begun to treasure her survival, and celebrate life.

Near the novel's end, Amabelle ventures down to the river where her parents drowned, and where she has witnessed the death of her loved ones. Amabelle reveals that she relives the moment of her parents' death frequently, in order to look for an "answer" about how to "go on living" without them. This revelation confirms that death has not overtaken Amabelle's life. Although she is burdened with loss, she searches for signs of encouragement about surviving without her parents, lover, or friends by her side.

In *The Farming of Bones*, fatal tragedies occur repeatedly. These pervasive tragedies prove that "there are cures for everything except death," and illustrate how loss is an ever-present threat to life. In order to withstand this overwhelming sense of tragedy, multiple characters choose to avoid or suppress their sadness; in doing so, they are left unsatisfied, or are unappreciative of their existence. Eventually, however, the novel ends with scenes of recovery, acceptance, and optimism. Danticat crafts a gradual shift from despair to hope, illustrating how death is pervasive and how loss can sharpen one's appreciation for life. Moreover, Danticat proves that despite its power, death cannot prevail fully over life.

## HOME, FAMILY, AND BELONGING

In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle Désir and other Haitians have left Haiti to make new lives for themselves in the Dominican Republic. Many of these characters have lost their homes, or lack a sense of belonging; as a result, they attempt to make the Dominican Republic their homeland. The Haitians are eventually driven out of the Dominican Republic by violence and racism, and attempt to return to Haiti?the ones who survive rebuild their homes once again. Through these multiple restructurings, characters learn that home is not a fixed place; rather, it is a feeling or circumstance that can change, grow, or be taken away. Danticat's story demonstrates that concepts of home and family inevitably transform over time; moreover, each recreated version of home is different, and one can never truly return to the original.

Danticat begins the story by describing how characters' childhood conceptions of home have changed as a result of their circumstances. In her childhood, Amabelle lost her parents in a flood, which forced her to find a sense of home elsewhere. She was brought to a house in Alégria, and became a domestic worker for Señora Valencia. The two women grew up together: as "girls," they "slept in the same room" and would

"play with [their] shadows, and pretend" they were a family. Amabelle's childhood with Señora Valencia offered her a different version of family; instead of remaining an orphan in Haiti, she joined another household.

Sebastien describes how the overseers in the cane fields call Haitians "an orphaned people" who "don't belong anywhere." To Sebastien, however, Haitians are a unified group of "wayfarers." Sebastien refuses to accept the idea that Haitians are merely "orphaned"?rather, he demonstrates how Haitians, as a group, redefine the feeling of home for themselves through travel. To Sebastien, rebuilding homes in the Dominican Republic brings Haitians together; despite being far from their home country, and sometimes far from their blood relatives, these Haitians have recreated families and community bonds for themselves.

After Amabelle and other Haitian refugees flee from the violence in the Dominican Republic, they attempt to rebuild their lives and households in their home country, which they originally fled. These homes take unexpected forms, however, and thereby illustrate how home is not always defined by birthplace; rather, home can also be a feeling of belonging.

During her escape, Amabelle claims that she knows exactly what she plans to do when she "crosse[s] the border": she plans to "look for a little house" near the "**citadel** road," as she wants to be close to the place she "lived as a child." She hopes to "claim the land" as her "birthright." Despite these fantasies of a home on her childhood property, however, she ends up traveling to the home of her fellow refugee, Yves. Yves's home is comprised of "mismatched pieces of timber and rusting tin," foreshadowing how Amabelle's domestic future is misaligned with her expectations. She is taken in by Yves and his mother, Man Rapadou, who becomes a surrogate mother for Amabelle. In fact, during their first meeting, Man Rapadou feeds Amabelle "as though" she is a "bedridden child." Amabelle domestic aspirations?of living with Sebastien, her lover, and of living near her childhood home?do not manifest; instead, she is taken in by a family of strangers.

Regardless of this alteration, Amabelle's new home still provides a sense of belonging. Man Rapadou, who treats Amabelle like a daughter, describes Amabelle's "sudden arrival" through metaphor: "From time to time, life takes you be surprise. You sit in your lakou eating mangoes. You let the mango seeds fall where they may, and one day you wake up and there's a mango tree in your yard." Amabelle is the mango tree that sprouted up unexpectedly in the family dynamic, but Amabelle and Man Rapadou have quickly created an unconventional family together, illustrating that the idea of home transforms over time, often in unforeseen ways.

As Amabelle continues to rebuild her life with her new family, memories of the Dominican Republic overwhelm her. She returns to Alégria, only to realize that the home she remembers is no longer intact. Amabelle notes that "Alégria [is] now a closed town," and she feels like an "intruder." She admits that Alégria feels like a place she has "never seen before," indicating that she no longer feels at home. Amabelle's lack of connection to the town demonstrates how one's original sense of belonging is irretrievable after a departure. By leaving the Dominican Republic and rebuilding her life in Haiti, Amabelle has inexorably transformed her idea of home; eventually, she understands that one's concept of home must always be evolving.

After this painful realization, Amabelle returns to Haiti. One day, she stands by the **river** where her mother and father drowned and lowers herself into the water to float in "the current." While feeling the water's "less than gentle caress," she imagines being carried into her "father's laughter" and her "mother's eternity." Although her idea of home has changed since her parents' died?and her future in Haiti will be completely dissimilar to her childhood?Amabelle's return to the river symbolizes her acceptance of Haiti as her home.

In Danticat's story, home is a feeling that changes over time. Characters are forced to rebuild their families and homes multiple times: first, they leave Haiti and recreate livelihoods in the Dominican Republic; afterwards, violence forces them to return to Haiti after many years away. With each successive homecoming, characters' homes and families transform?importantly, the original vision of home is never fully recreated. Amabelle, the only character to make two trips to the Dominican Republic, eventually realizes that the initial idea of home is irretrievable. Despite this, she returns to Haiti and the river that took her parents. Amabelle is able to create a new family with Yves and Man Rapadou, and reimagine a home for herself despite all that she has experienced.

## SYMBOLS

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

### THE MASSACRE RIVER

The Massacre River, named for a slaughter of French buccaneers in 1728, took on additional historical significance during the Parsley Massacre; many bodies were left in the river after the violence. For Amabelle, however, the river is also personally significant. It is the site of her parents' deaths, and the crossing she must make to return to Haiti in order to escape the massacre. Furthermore, when Amabelle first arrives in the Dominican Republic, her future employers find her alongside the river; in this way, the river is her constant companion, and signals the transitions that she endures throughout her life.

Additionally, Amabelle often dreams about the river and her parents' demise; in this way, the river is a representation of death, an omnipresent and powerful force in her life.

Throughout the story, the river brings grief to Amabelle and her acquaintances; when they attempt to ford the river and return to Haiti, some of their compatriots die in the crossing, and the survivors are left to mourn their loss. When Amabelle attempts to rebuild her life in Haiti, she is at first unable to confront the sight of the river?a physical representation of her grief?or offer a testimony of the atrocities she has seen. Eventually, however, Amabelle begins to live in spite of her sadness, and attempts a form of reconciliation with the river. She returns to the riverside and floats in it, in an effort to find relief from her past and offer a tribute to the violence she has witnessed and endured.

## THE CITADEL

The citadel of Henry I, a king of Haiti, is located near Amabelle Désir's childhood home. The story of the citadel is a favorite of Amabelle's father, Antoine, who used to recount the tale to Amabelle in her youth. She often daydreams about the citadel, and admits that she uses the image to avoid unpleasant or difficult truths; in this way, the citadel offers her solace, as it is a safe memory of childhood.

The citadel is also an emblem of Haitian culture and identity. Built by a revolutionary king who overthrew colonial forces, it is indicative of Haiti's nationalism and strength. Furthermore, when Amabelle escapes the Parsley Massacre and returns to Haiti, she visits the citadel and overhears a tour guide explaining the site's history to a group of foreigners. The tour guide tells the group about the citadel's bloody history, emphasizing how the king would march soldiers off the cliff to their death, and how many laborers died to complete the monument. The tour guide then warns that famous men are remembered throughout history, but nameless sufferers are often forgotten. The tour guide's story, and the lasting legacy of the citadel and its king, illustrate the importance of cultural memory: remembering the dead and their monarch keeps national traditions and stories alive for the future. Amabelle's imagination, too, preserves and strengthens the citadel's national significance, even when she is living in the Dominican Republic.

## JOËL'S MASK

Joël, a field worker and a friend of Sebastien Onius, is killed by Señor Pico in a car accident. Señor Pico does not take responsibility for the death, and the Haitian community is left to mourn the loss without a sense of closure or justice. Joël's father, Kongo, grieves deeply for his son, illustrating the strong and pervasive impact that death can have on those left behind. Kongo also creates a death mask for Joël, a physical representation of his memory for others to look upon. Kongo admits that the mask is just a reminder of his son, and cannot live up to the importance of its namesake. He also tells Amabelle that the object is meant to keep his son alive in the community's memory when Kongo passes away, as he will no longer be able to honor his son's legacy when he is dead. Amabelle then attempts to take the mask across the river as she flees the massacre; in doing so, she is hoping to physically safeguard Joël's legacy and bring an embodiment of him back to Haiti, their home country. The mask is therefore a form of testimony and remembrance: it tells the story of Joël's death and thereby preserves his image into the future.

# QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Soho Press edition of *The Farming of Bones* published in 2013.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

"And my daughter favors you," she said. "My daughter is a chameleon. She's taken your color from the mere sight of your face." […] "Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now?" Senora Valencia asked. "My poor love, what if she's mistaken for one of your people?"

**Related Characters:** Señora Valencia (speaker), Rosalinda, Amabelle Désir

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 11–12

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Amabelle has just delivered Señora Valencia's daughter, Rosalinda. The señora emphasizes her daughter's skin color, which is much darker than her own; in fact, she thinks Amabelle and her daughter have similar coloring. The señora's comments illustrate the prejudices common to the Dominican Republic at this time: Dominicans discriminate against Haitians for their cultural identity, and Haitians are singled out for looking different. The señora is seemingly aware of her country's systematic discrimination, as she calls her daughter a "poor love" due to her skin tone; she is afraid that her daughter will be "mistaken" for a Haitian.

In fact, the señora wonders if her daughter will "always" look like Amabelle's "people." This question reveals the señora's implicit racial prejudice: she hopes that others will not think her daughter is Haitian, because Haitians are treated as lower-class citizens. Instead, Señora Valencia wants others to recognize that Rosalinda is actually the daughter of a wealthy Dominican family, and treat her accordingly. The señora's casual comments to Amabelle are emblematic of the cultural tensions and racism that eventually lead to the Parsley Massacre.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ "She didn't show a lot of affection to me. I think she believed this was not a good way to raise a girl, who might not have affection the rest of her life. She also didn't smile often." […] "Her name was Irelle Pradelle," I say, "and after she died, when I dreamt of her, she was always smiling. Except of course when she and my papa were drowning."

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker), Sebastien Onius, Irelle Pradelle

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Amabelle tells Sebastien about her mother and describes how her mother used to treat her. Amabelle's memory of her mother preserves Irelle's legacy; when she shares Irelle's story with Sebastien, Amabelle is effectively keeping her mother alive. Despite death's finality, Irelle is not erased from the world; her daughter remembers her often, and keeps her spirit alive through sharing it with other people. In this way, Amabelle's memory is a defense against loss and despair.

Amabelle then admits that when she dreams of her mother, her mother is smiling. This dream version of her mother is, technically, inaccurate: her mother was not a warm or affectionate woman. Amabelle's dreams, therefore, provide her with a somewhat false sense of comfort, reshaping what was actually a colder and more painful reality. Her dreams also, paradoxically, provide an extra source of grief: they feature the death of her parents, and thereby force her to remember painful things. Amabelle's dreams, then, bring her both pain and solace: they allow her to remember her mother, but they also force her to repeatedly confront the trauma of her mother's death.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ "[A] boy carrying his dead father from the road, wobbling, swaying, stumbling under the weight. The boy with the wind in his ears and pieces of the tin roofs that opened the father's throat blowing around him. The boy trying not to drop the father, not crying or screaming like you'd think, but praying that more of the father's blood will stay in the father's throat and not go into the muddy flood, going no one knows where."

**Related Characters:** Sebastien Onius (speaker), Amabelle Désir

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sebastien is telling Amabelle the story of his father's death, which occurred in the midst of a hurricane. Sebastien's description is harrowing: he describes having to carry his father through a terrible storm while winds and debris swirl around him. This description reveals that Sebastien's childhood was filled with grief; although he was not "crying" in the storm, he was forced to witness his father's slow death and remembers it keenly. Like Amabelle, Sebastien's memory preserves his parents' legacy: when he tells her the story of his father's passing, he is keeping the memory of his father alive for others.

Additionally, Sebastien explicitly acknowledges here that death is a type of erasure. When he was carrying his father through the storm, he prayed that his father's blood would not disappear into the water, going "no one knows where." Sebastien's prayers illustrate his fear of his father's blood—a symbol of life—vanishing into an unknown place where it may be unseen or forgotten. In this way, Sebastien's thoughts demonstrate how powerful death is, as well as how important it is to keep the memory of the dead alive, since they might otherwise vanish completely.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Señor Pico Duarte bore the name of one of the fathers of Dominican independence […] His eyes lingered on his son, his heir […]"I will name him Rafael, for the Generalissimo," he said as Juana reswaddled the children even more securely than before. The señora agreed to this name with a coy nod. And so the boy became Rafael like the Generalissimo, the president of the republic.

**Related Characters:** Señor Pico (speaker), The Generalissimo / Trujillo, Señora Valencia, Juana, Rafael

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 34–35

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote reveals how Señor Pico, the husband of Señora Valencia, places a large emphasis on cultural heritage and identity. The señor himself is named for an important cultural figure, who is a symbol of national independence;

his namesake is a source of cultural pride for the señor and his countrymen. The señor seems to want to carry on this tradition by giving his son a name that is also nationally significant and instills cultural pride: he chooses to name his son Rafael, after the dictator and leader of the Dominican Republic. The señor's name choice indicates that he is proud of his Dominican identity, and wants his children to be equally invested in their country's culture.

Moreover, both Señor Pico and Rafael's names symbolize a feeling of cultural belonging. As the Dominican Republic is a country of warring cultures—Haitian and Dominican—their names strengthen their sense of allegiance to one side in this conflict. Both the señor and Rafael belong to and are welcomed by the Dominican Republic, and even their names honor their country and heritage. In contrast, Haitians (even those like Amabelle who work in this family's own home) are treated as outsiders.

> Above Papi's head loomed a large portrait of the Generalissimo, which Señora Valencia had painted at her husband's request. Her painting was a vast improvement on many of the Generalissimo's public photographs. She had made him a giant in full military regalia, with vast fringed epaulets and clusters of medals aligned in neat rows under the saffron braiding across his chest. Behind him was the country's red and blue flag with the white cross in the middle, along with the coat of arms and the shield: Dios, patria, libertad. God, country, liberty.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker), The Generalissimo / Trujillo, Don Ignacio

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 34–35

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote describes a portrait of the Dominican Republic's leader, Rafael Trujillo. The picture is "large," emphasizing how it is a domineering presence in the household of Señora Valencia, Señor Pico, and Don Ignacio; thematically, cultural heritage is very important to their family. Moreover, Señora Valencia's rendering of the dictator is unrealistic: she improves his image to make him look better than he really is. This artistic choice reveals the family's feelings towards their home country and its flaws; to the family, cultural heritage is more important than acknowledging a country's tensions or problems. The señora and the señor are unwilling to admit that their country has discriminatory practices, nor do they acknowledge that their staff—mainly comprised of Haitian workers—are not treated with respect.

The slogan on the portrait further establishes how important cultural heritage, identity, and language are to the Dominican Republic. The words are written in Spanish, the language of the Dominican Republic—not French or Creole, the languages of Haiti. Moreover, the words seem to equate Trujillo, the republic's leader, with the basic concepts of spirituality, nationalism, and independence. Trujillo's portrait, a symbol of the family's cultural pride and nationalism, indicates that the family values Dominican culture over all else and sees its leader as a superhuman figure who doesn't have normal human flaws.

> I did something I always did at times when I couldn't bring myself to go out and discover an unpleasant truth. (When you have so few remembrances, you cling to them tightly and repeat them over and over in your mind so time will not erase them.) I closed my eyes and imagined the giant citadel that loomed over my parents' house in Haiti. […] As a child, I played in the deserted war rooms of Henry I's citadel. I peered at the rest of the world from behind its columns and archways, and the towers that were meant to hold cannons for repelling the attack of ships at sea. From the safety of these rooms, I saw the entire northern cape […].

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 44–45

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Amabelle describes Henry I's citadel, a national landmark in her home country of Haiti. The citadel, which contains weapons and defensive structures, is a symbol of Haiti's national and cultural pride; it is a physical embodiment of Haitian culture. Moreover, Amabelle acknowledges that she often "played" in the "safety" of the citadel's rooms and surveyed the land from this secure vantage point. In this way, the citadel imparts a sense of belonging, comfort, and home: it allows Amabelle to feel like a part of her country, and protects her from "attack" from outsiders or strangers.

In addition, Amabelle explicitly says that the citadel is a memory that she holds on to "tightly," and explains that she

recalls the image frequently to keep "time" from "eras[ing]" it. In this way, Amabelle acknowledges the importance of memory, especially as it relates to cultural heritage and history. For Amabelle, memory preserves the past into the future; the act of remembering the citadel?a protective structure?allows her to safeguard both her heritage and her childhood.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ The water rises above my father's head. My mother releases his neck, the current carrying her beyond his reach. Separated, they are less of an obstacle for the cresting river. I scream until I can taste blood in my throat, until I can no longer hear my own voice […] I walk down to the sands to throw [myself] into the water […]

Two of the river boys grab me and […] pin me down to the ground until I become still. "Unless you want to die," one of them says, "you will never see those people again."

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker), Antoine Désir, Irelle Pradelle

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 49–50

### Explanation and Analysis

Amabelle remembers the scene of her parents' death in excruciating detail, and recalls how they drowned in the Massacre River in the town of Dajabón. Amabelle's keen memory has kept her parents alive by preserving their personalities and legacies for herself and others; however, it also perpetuates the trauma of her parents' death, as she is able to recall it clearly and feel fresh grief every time she thinks of it.

Additionally, this memory is Amabelle's first major encounter with grief and death, two overwhelming forces that will shape the rest of her life. For Amabelle, grief is so powerful that it prompts her to scream until she hurts her own throat. She tastes "blood" in her mouth, almost as if despair is silencing her cries and overpowering all other emotions. When she tries to throw herself into the river, she is saved by strangers who teach her about the finality of death: she is told she will "never see" her parents again, at least not until she dies herself.

Lastly, even though it is dangerous, Amabelle attempts to throw herself into the river to recover a sense of belonging. She wishes to be with her parents—who are representative of home and comfort—no matter the danger. In Amabelle's childhood, home and belonging are inseparably linked to her parents; even in the face of mortal peril, she associates them with home.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ "Give yourself a pleasant dream. Remember not only the end, but the middle, and the beginning, the things they did when they were breathing. Let us say that the river was still that day."

"And my parents?"

"They died natural deaths many years later."

"And why did I come here?"

"Even though you were a girl when you left and I was already a man when I arrived and our families did not know each other, you came here to meet me."

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir, Sebastien Onius (speaker), Antoine Désir, Irelle Pradelle

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 53

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Amabelle shares her recurring dream about her parents' drowning with her lover, Sebastien. Sebastien, unhappy that Amabelle is plagued by the harshness of reality, instructs her to "give" herself a "pleasant dream" and pretend that her parents died of old age. Sebastien's advice is an overt example of the way dreams and reality are juxtaposed throughout the novel: dreams are often used as substitutes for painful realities, and can obscure the suffering or grief of a character's life.

Moreover, Sebastien's advice to Amabelle attempts to replace despair and grief with (sometimes false) hope. He encourages Amabelle to imagine that she left Haiti to "meet" him; in doing so, he asks her to reconfigure her idea of leaving home. Instead of acting as if her departure from Haiti was a consequence of her parents' death, he tells Amabelle to envision a more hopeful rationale. He asks her to pretend that she was actually destined to meet him and make a new home together; in this way, Sebastien encourages her to redefine her idea of belonging and

homecoming and hints at how flexible those concepts can be.

"Sometimes the people in the fields, when they're tired and angry, they say we're an orphaned people," he said. "They say we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot. They say some people don't belong anywhere and that's us. I say we are a group of vwayajè, wayfarers. This is why you had to travel this far to meet me, because that is what we are."

**Related Characters:** Sebastien Onius (speaker), Amabelle Désir

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 54

**Explanation and Analysis**

Sebastien makes an impassioned speech about the Haitian people, and explicitly references the ongoing racial tensions in the Dominican Republic. He points out that the Dominicans use their national pride to dismiss other cultures, and emphasizes how differences in identity are used to discriminate against Haitians. The "people in the fields" consider Haitian culture to be "orphaned"?to Dominicans, the Haitians are different, or lesser, because they have had to flee their old country and resettle somewhere else.

Sebastien's viewpoint, however, is more optimistic. He notes that the Haitians living in the Dominican Republic have had to "travel" far; in doing so, they have made a new home for themselves in a foreign country. To Sebastien, this ability to revise the concept of home is central to the Haitian identity: the Haitian culture is able to persevere and adapt their ideas of belonging in order to survive. Ultimately, however, the viewpoints of both Sebastien and the Dominicans rely on comparisons between cultures and emphasize differences. Both consider culture and identity to be a static, unchanging concept defined by a person's place of birth.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

Now Kongo was bathing in the middle of the stream, scrubbing his body with a handful of wet parsley [...] We used pesi, perejil, parsley [...] for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides of old aches and griefs, to shed a passing year's dust as a new one dawned, to wash a new infant's hair for the first time and—along with boiled orange leaves—a corpse's remains one final time.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker), Kongo

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 59–60

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Amabelle describes how parsley is common and universal to everyone in the Dominican Republic, regardless of cultural identity. In fact, Amabelle uses both the Haitian Creole word "pesi" and the Spanish "perejil" to name the herb, indicating how it transcends language boundaries. By Amabelle's account, parsley is used for various activities that?regardless of culture?are emotionally significant, such as curing illnesses or washing the bodies of the dead. In her perspective, parsley does not belong to one culture; instead, it bridges Haitian and Dominican identities.

Despite Amabelle's perspective, parsley is also a polarizing symbol. Kongo, a Haitian man whose son has been killed by Señor Pico in a car accident, is washing himself with parsley as part of his morning routine. This linkage of Kongo (a Haitian) and Señor Pico (a Dominican) with parsley foreshadows later parts of the novel, where parsley is used to differentiate between Haitian and Dominican identities: parsley becomes a linguistic test that separates Haitians (who say "pesi") from Dominicans (who say "perejil"). This practice later leads to violence, as Dominicans target Haitians by watching for people who mispronounce the word.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

"I pushed my son out of my body here, in this country," one woman said in a mix of Alegrían Kreyòl and Spanish, the tangled language of those who always stuttered as they spoke, caught as they were on the narrow ridge between two nearly native tongues [...]

"To them we are always foreigners, even if our granmèmès' granmèmès were born in this country," a man responded in Kreyol, which we most often spoke—instead of Spanish—among ourselves.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 67

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Amabelle overhears other Haitians in her

community discussing their perspectives on identity. One woman speaks in two languages, Kreyòl and Spanish; this illustrates how cultural identity is not always straightforward. Instead, the dual languages symbolize how a person's identity can be built from elements of multiple nations, and how identity can exceed geographical barriers. Unfortunately, the multilingual woman is "caught" between "two nearly native tongues," demonstrating how multiple identities often trap people in between two (sometimes rival) cultures.

This conversation also complicates the idea of belonging. Despite the fact that many Haitians have lived in the Dominican Republic for generations, they are still treated like "foreigners" by the Dominicans. This revelation shows how one's location or family does not define the concept of home; rather, home is defined by a feeling of belonging. As such, the Haitians' decision to speak Kreyòl among themselves is a way of preserving their sense of belonging and community in a country that does not welcome them or respect their identity.

❝ At times you could sit for a whole evening with such individuals, just listening to their existence unfold [...] it was their way of returning home, with you as a witness [...]. In [Father Romain's] sermons to the Haitian congregants of the valley he often reminded everyone of common ties: language, foods, history, carnival, songs, tales, and prayers. His creed was one of memory, how remembering—though sometimes painful—can make you strong.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker), Father Romain

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 71

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Amabelle describes how members of her community share their legacies with one another and discuss common traditions to further strengthen their cultural heritage. Amabelle makes the connections between memory, culture, and preservation explicit: she notes that memory—especially collective memory—is a way of keeping one's home alive, even if a person cannot physically return there. By sharing remembrances of one's home with other people, that home is preserved from oblivion; the act of memory keeps places and things from being forgotten.

Additionally, memory is a method of strengthening and reaffirming one's cultural identity. Father Romain, the Haitian community's priest, often uses his sermons to talk about Haitian culture; in doing so, he strengthens his congregants' connection to their identity by prompting them to remember and value their traditions. Although the Dominican Republic is outwardly hostile to other cultures and treats Haitians and their culture with disrespect, Father Romain insists that remembering?and embracing?Haitian traditions is worthwhile. Although remembrance is dangerous, it nevertheless preserves Haitian traditions from being forgotten, erased, or destroyed.

## Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ "Are you certain you don't want to keep this face for yourself?" I asked.

"I've made many," he said, "for all those who, even when I'm gone, will keep my son in mind. If I could, I would carry them all around my neck, I would, like some men wear their amulets [...] The elder of your house, Don Ignacio, he's not asked again to come and see me, no? [...] I'm not surprised," he said, "that my son has already vanished from his thoughts."

**Related Characters:** Kongo, Amabelle Désir (speaker), Joël

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 121–122

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Amabelle meets with Kongo and receives a mask of his son's face as a memento of his life. Kongo explicitly tells Amabelle that the mask is a symbol of remembrance: it will keep his son's memory alive after his death, and thus prevent Joël from being forgotten. Furthermore, Kongo's decision to make multiple masks illustrates how a person's legacy can be strengthened through additional retellings: in his perspective, having more people memorialize Joël means that his son is less likely to disappear into obscurity. The strength of Joël's legacy contrasts sharply with the forgetfulness of Don Ignacio, who killed him. Despite Kongo's efforts to preserve his son's memory for other people, the very person who participated in Joël's death is unable to remember his victim.

Kongo also acknowledges that he would like to wear Joël's death masks like "amulets." These imagined amulets are symbolic of the burden of Kongo's grief; if he physically

wore the masks, they would weigh him down. Kongo's confession about wanting to wear the masks illustrates how pervasive grief and despair can be: he is suffering, and the physical weight of the amulets would be a comforting embodiment of his ongoing sadness.

## Chapter 26 Quotes

"You never believed those people could injure you… Even after they killed Joël, you thought they could never harm you."

[…] Perhaps I had trusted too much. I had been living inside dreams that would not go away, the memories of an orphaned child. When the present itself was truly frightful, I had perhaps purposely chosen not to see it.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir, Sebastien Onius (speaker), Joël

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 141

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sebastien and Amabelle discuss whether it is wise to flee the Dominican Republic in the midst of rising anti-Haitian sentiment, and Sebastien accuses Amabelle of placing too much faith in her employers. Amabelle acknowledges that she has let dreams overtake reality; instead of realizing that the Dominican Republic was hostile to Haitians, she pretended that Señora Valencia's home welcomed and supported her. This false sense of belonging would not "go away," and it prevented Amabelle from seeing how important identity really is to the class system of the Dominican Republic. Amabelle has refused to face the fact that the Dominican government treats identity as immovable and static: a person is either Haitian or Dominican—foreign or native, respectively—but not both.

Amabelle admits that she may have "trusted too much," and that she let her "orphaned childhood" undermine her connection to her Haitian identity and her home. Her confession foreshadows later scenes in the novel, where she will once again prioritize unrealistic dreams over reality.

## Chapter 27 Quotes

"We are Dominicanas," Dolores explained.

"They took him," Doloritas added. "They came in the night and took him from our bed."

"We have yet to learn your language," Dolores said.

"We are together six months, me and my man," Doloritas said. "I told him I would learn Kreyòl for when we visit his family in Haiti."

"I know nothing," Dolores said. "Doloritas was lost when they took him. She wanted to go to the border to look for him.

**Related Characters:** Doloritas, Dolores (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 175

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Amabelle joins a group of refugees attempting to flee the Dominican Republic. Two of the refugees, Dolores and Doloritas, immediately introduce themselves as "Dominicanas." The sisters' decision to label their cultural identity straightaway reveals the emphasis placed on nationality in the Dominican Republic.

Although the sisters clearly believe in the importance of nationality, they nevertheless subvert the idea that one's cultural identity remains static. Doloritas, despite her Dominican heritage, says that she was willing to learn Kreyòl so that she could communicate with her partner and his family. Doloritas's eagerness to learn a different language illustrates how easily the boundaries of someone's identity can shift. Although the Dominican Republic uses differences in language—Spanish versus Haitian Creole—to divide its people, some citizens are willing to ignore these differences and participate in others' cultures. Moreover, Doloritas is willing to flee her home country to find her lover; her identity, once defined solely by nationality, is flexible enough to withstand her emigration to another country.

## Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ "This is their country. Let them find the border themselves. They can go to any village in these mountains, and the people will welcome them."

[…] The sisters would not have as many obstacles as we would in Dajabón. If they were asked to say "perejil," they could say it with ease. In most of our mouths, their names would be tinged with or even translated into Kreyòl, the way the name of Doloritas' man slid towards the Spanish each time she evoked him.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir, Wilner (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 181

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, the group of refugees fleeing the Dominican Republic begins to disband: the Haitians tell Dolores and Doloritas to travel on their own, as they will be safe due to their identity and ability to speak Spanish. Wilner emphasizes that the Dominican Republic is "their country," illustrating how, despite Doloritas's cross-cultural relationship, identity is often understood to be static and immovable.

Amabelle's observations, however, challenge Wilner's conception of identity. Although Wilner has established that Dominican identity is separate from Haitian identity—and more protected in the Dominican Republic—Amabelle points out that language is able to bridge these differences. The result is an amalgam that combines elements from both cultures: Dominican names "would be tinged" with Haitian Creole, and Haitian names can, when spoken by the sisters, sound like a mix of Kreyòl and Spanish. Ironically, then, the group divides itself by ethnicity at the same moment when Amabelle begins to understand how easily cultures can blend together.

## Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ "Tell us what this is," one said. "Que diga perejil."

At that moment I did believe that had I wanted to, I could have said the word properly, calmly, slowly, the way I often asked "Perejil?" of the old Dominican women and their faithful attending granddaughters at the roadside gardens and markets, even though the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j* was sometimes too burdensome a joining for my tongue […] with all my senses calm, I could have said it. But I didn't get my chance.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 191

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Amabelle and Yves are ambushed by a group of Dominican soldiers in Dajabón; the soldiers ask them both to pronounce the Spanish word for parsley, "perejil." Amabelle believes that she could have pronounced the word correctly, an act that would illustrate how her life in a Spanish household within the Dominican Republic has expanded her own concept of her identity. For example, if she pronounced the word correctly, the soldiers would likely consider her "Spanish"; despite her Haitian heritage and dark skin, others would assume she is at least partly Dominican.

Although Amabelle is able to bridge cultures, she also describes how certain letters in the Spanish language are "burdensome" for her "tongue," a physical manifestation of how challenging it is to occupy two different identities. Moreover, she points out that although she would have been able to say perejil, the soldiers did not give her a chance to do so. The soldiers' unwillingness to allow Amabelle to speak represents the close-minded belief that cultural heritage is fixed: based on their prejudiced judgment of her appearance, they do not believe that Amabelle can be Dominican in any way, or participate in the Dominican culture (as she might have by speaking Spanish).

## Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ "You call me Man Rapadou," she said. "I know your story."

Which story of mine did she know? Which story was she told?

"Everything you knew before this slaughter is lost," she said. Perhaps she was encouraging me to […] forsake Sebastien, even my memories of him, those images of him that would float through my head repeatedly, like brief glimpses of the same dream.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir, Man Rapadou (speaker), Sebastien Onius

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 225–226

**Explanation and Analysis**

Amabelle and Man Rapadou, Yves's mother, meet when

Yves and Amabelle return to Haiti. Man Rapadou's willingness to accept Amabelle and her "story" provides Amabelle with a sense of belonging, despite the fact that Man Rapadou is not her mother or even someone she knows well.

Man Rapadou tells Amabelle that her past has disappeared, and any memories she has are "lost." In this way, Man Rapadou illustrates the hypothetical consequences of forgetfulness: if Amabelle does not deliberately remember events prior to the slaughter, "everything" she knows will fade into obscurity. Amabelle seems to disregard Man Rapadou's advice however, as she understands that memory has the power to keep Sebastien alive. As "images" of him replay "repeatedly" in her head, she is able to preserve Sebastien's legacy despite the trauma of the slaughter.

Although Amabelle's dedication to Sebastien reaffirms the power of memory, she also creates a complicated association between images of Sebastien and dreams. Amabelle's association of Sebastien with dreams foretells a future problem that Amabelle will have: by escaping into dreams, she avoids reality. Although memory is able to keep Sebastien alive in her mind after the massacre, Amabelle reveals how memory can quickly become unrealistic fantasy. If memory does not preserve the whole story, it loses its realism; instead of safeguarding every detail, both good and bad, it devolves into falsehood and illusion.

## Chapter 33 Quotes

❝ "When you know you're going to die, you try to be near the bones of your own people. You don't even think you have bones when you're young [...] But when you're old, they start reminding you they're there. They start turning to dust on you, even as you're walking here and there, going from place to place. And this is when you crave to be near the bones of your own people. My children never felt this. They had to look death in the face, even before they knew what it was. Just like you did, no? [...] Leave me now," she said. "I'm going to dream up my children."

**Related Characters:** Man Denise (speaker), Mimi, Sebastien Onius, Amabelle Désir

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 240–241

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Amabelle talks with Man Denise, the mother of Sebastien and Mimi, who tells Amabelle that many people have told her about her children's deaths. Man Denise teaches Amabelle a lesson about death and belonging: she argues that death, which is a perceptible and tangible force, forces a person to think about going home to die in one's homeland. In Man Denise's telling, death is able to overcome any convictions a person has about home's transience. Even if someone is traveling "from place to place," and does not consider a single location to be home, death is powerful enough to tempt someone to return to their birthplace.

Man Denise also acknowledges that death and grief are a terrible burden on the young. She guesses that Amabelle has been impacted by death before she was old enough to understand it; this assumption illustrates how pervasive an effect death can have on someone. Even a relative stranger (Man Denise) is able to see the trauma that death has inflicted on Amabelle; she is noticeably different due to her experience with it.

Lastly, Man Denise dismisses Amabelle after finishing her story, claiming she wants to "dream up" Sebastien and Mimi. Man Denise's willingness to recreate her children in dreams reveals how easy it is to succumb to fantasy. Man Denise's life without her children is too painful; instead, she wishes to get lost in her dreams, as they allow her to pretend her children are alive.

## Chapter 34 Quotes

❝ The priests at the cathedral listen and mark down testimonials of the slaughter [...] They're collecting tales for newspapers and radio men. The Generalissimo has found ways to buy and sell the ones here. Even this region has been corrupted with his money."

[...] "Will you go yourself to see these priests?" I asked.

"I know what will happen," he said. "You tell the story, and then it's retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, and not yours."

**Related Characters:** Yves, Amabelle Désir (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 244

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here, Yves informs Amabelle that priests are collecting written "testimonials" from survivors of the slaughter. The priests' actions are an embodiment of how memory can be a

physical means of preserving history: writing down memories allows history to become tangible, and thus encourages it to be shared with others. Yves protests the priests' actions, however, and claims that the stories will merely be bought and sold by the Generalissimo. Yves's conviction demonstrates how memory is fallible, especially when it is manipulated to obscure a leader's evil actions. If memory is used to hide a person's misdeeds, Yves suggests, it is equivalent to forgetting the deeds entirely, as their meaning will not be preserved into the future.

Furthermore, Yves seems to believe that language is an unbreakable boundary: once a story or memory is translated into another dialect, the story belongs to someone else. To him, the preservation of identity is just as important as the preservation of memory: if memories are not shared in their original language, he fears they will lose their meaning and significance. Yves's fears illustrate how memory, like culture, can be limited by social and political borders.

❝ Perhaps working the earth […] could make him believe that he had forgotten […] I imagined [other refugees] going forward in their lives, I wanted to bring them out of my visions into my life, to tell them how glad I was that they had been able to walk into the future, but most important to ask them how it was that they could be so strong […]

"How did you keep on with the planting, even when nothing was growing?" I asked Yves.

[…] "Empty houses and empty fields make me sad," he said. "They are both too calm, like the dead season."

**Related Characters:** Yves, Amabelle Désir (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 244–245

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this quote, both Amabelle and Yves grapple with the process of moving on after the massacre, and reveal their methods of coping with grief. Amabelle has gotten lost in "visions" to avoid the trauma of her past; she acknowledges that other refugees, however, have dealt with reality bravely. In this way, she finally admits to herself that fear has kept her from walking "into the future" beside the other survivors. Her admission reveals how dreams, which are desirable and powerful substitutes for reality, eventually lose their luster; ultimately, a dreamer like Amabelle will wish to be "strong" by confronting reality.

Yves also loses himself in fantasy to avoid the pressures of reality, though his chosen form of fantasy is different: he throws himself into "working the earth" and pretends he has forgotten the deaths he has witnessed. Despite his suppression of his grief, he seems self-aware of the futility of his fantasies, as he confesses that "empty fields" remind him of "the dead season." By realizing that his planting is a way to avoid the loneliness left by his friends' deaths, Yves reaffirms how dreams—even when they come in the form of productive work—are merely a way of postponing one's trauma and pain.

## Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ "On this island, walk too far in either direction and people speak a different language," continued Father Romain with aimless determination. "Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? […] We, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians."

[…] "He was beaten badly every day," the sister said. […] "Sometimes he remembers everything. Sometimes, he forgets all of it, everything, even me."

**Related Characters:** Father Romain (speaker), Amabelle Désir

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 258–259

**Explanation and Analysis**

Amabelle visits Father Romain, the Haitian priest who used to preach sermons about Haiti's traditions and culture. When she encounters him, she learns that he has fits of forgetfulness. Father Romain's fate reinforces how memory is vital to preservation, but also perilously fallible: he is one of the characters best able to talk about the Haitian experience in the Dominican Republic, but his vital perspective has disappeared with the loss of his memory.

Furthermore, Father Romain illustrates how warring cultures, separated by boundaries of race or nationality, fight for superiority. Father Romain's memory of Haiti and his time living in the Dominican Republic is replaced by political propaganda that asserts the Dominican Republic's supremacy. He repeats that the Dominican Republic's "motherland is Spain," whereas Haiti's motherland is Africa—in doing so, he reinforces how culture is sometimes defined by geographical borders or place of origin.

Paradoxically, then, the man most concerned with

preserving the memory of Haiti is the character who forgets it entirely, and instead replaces it with racist rhetoric that is forced on him by the Dominican government. Father Romain's behavior reveals that the idea of static, opposing cultures can overpower even the strongest advocate of cultural memory and shared traditions.

## Chapter 37 Quotes

❝ You may be surprised what we use our dreams to do, how we drape them over our sight and carry them like amulets to protect us from evil spells.

My dreams are now only visitations of my words for the absent justice of the peace, for the Generalissimo himself.

He asked for "perejil," but there is much more we all knew how to say. Perhaps one simple word would not have saved our lives. Many more would have to and many more will.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker), The Generalissimo / Trujillo

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 263

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Amabelle thinks about the lessons she has learned from surviving the massacre and returning to Haiti. She acknowledges that people cling to dreams "like amulets," as dreams seem to offer protection against the "evil spells" of reality. As amulets are only symbolic talismans, however, this protection is ultimately flimsy. In this way, the comparison of amulets to dreams reveals how fantasies cannot ultimately resolve genuine trauma or pain. Having understood this difficult truth, Amabelle's dreams now focus on the words she wishes she could share: she implies that she would share her complete story with government officials, the archivists of history. Amabelle's realization of dreams' emptiness, then, allows her to dedicate herself to preserving her memory for the future.

Amabelle then returns to the word "perejil"—parsley—which was used to differentiate between Haitians and Dominicans during the massacre. Amabelle insists that there is "much more" that her people can say, and realizes that "one simple word" was not likely to make a difference in such tense and violent times. Amabelle's thoughts imply that when words or languages—or cultures—are viewed in such an inflexible way, only "many more words" in the form of a shared dialogue will be able to bridge the divide.

## Chapter 39 Quotes

❝ "Old age is not meant to be survived alone," Man Rapadou said, her voice trailing with her own hidden thoughts. "Death should come gently, slowly, like a man's hand approaching your body [...] From time to time, life takes you by surprise. You sit in your lakou eating mangoes. You let the mango seeds fall where they may, and one day you wake up and there's a mango tree in your yard."

I knew she meant this as a compliment to me, a kind word for my sudden arrival at her house some years before.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir, Man Rapadou (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 274–275

### Explanation and Analysis

Man Rapadou and Amabelle have been living alongside one another for years after Amabelle's return to Haiti. Due to this level of comfort, Man Rapadou opens up to Amabelle about death, offering a different perspective on mortality. She claims that death should "come slowly," a stark difference to the type of loss Amabelle has experienced: to Man Rapadou, death is not sudden, unexpected, or violent, but the natural end to a long life. Still, Man Rapadou's fears about surviving "old age" speak to death's power and influence: even Man Rapadou, who lives a life relatively free of violence, remains cautious and wary of "old age."

Man Rapadou then tells Amabelle that life surprises a person, and describes how Amabelle's appearance in her life is akin to a "mango tree" growing unexpectedly in her yard. Man Rapadou's "compliment" illustrates how the older woman has revised her concept of family, home, and belonging: she did not expect to live with Amabelle, but she has embraced her nonetheless. Amabelle's "arrival" is also a revision to Amabelle's own understanding of belonging: she was previously an orphan who lacked a sense of home and family, but now she has lived with Man Rapadou?a surrogate maternal figure?for years. Amabelle and Man Rapadou's mutual acceptance of one another reveals that their ideas of home and belonging have shifted over time.

## Chapter 41 Quotes

❝ I thought that if I relived the moment often enough, the answer would become clear, that they had wanted either for us all to die together or for me to go on living, even if by myself. I also thought that if I came to the river on the right day, at the right hour, the surface of the water might provide the answer: a clearer sense of the moment, a stronger memory. But nature has no memory. And soon, perhaps, neither will I.

I slipped into the current […]with my shoulders only half submerged, the current floating over me in a less than gentle caress, the pebbles in the riverbed scouring my back.

I looked to my dreams for softness, for a gentler embrace, for relief from the fear of mudslides and blood bubbling out of the riverbed, where it is said the dead add their tears to the river flow.

**Related Characters:** Amabelle Désir (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 308

### Explanation and Analysis

Amabelle travels to the Massacre River where her parents drowned, and reveals how she has dwelled on the painful memories of her parents' death for decades. Amabelle's confrontation with the river illustrates one last time how profound an impact death has had on her. Despite the traumatic losses of her friends in the Parsley Massacre, Amabelle's first encounter with mortality at a young age remains preeminent in her mind, and it is the loss she recalls most frequently. Despite this constant remembrance, however, she has not accepted or dealt with death. Instead, she chose to fantasize that she would one day remember more about her parents' deaths and find out her their dying wishes. This fantasy of closure is ultimately unsustainable; here, Amabelle seems to recognize this, as she finally enters the water, a symbol of her past. Her willingness to accept—not fight against—the current illustrates that she is coming to terms with her experiences, even though they are "less than gentle."

Amabelle then admits that she "looked to [her] dreams for a gentler embrace" indicating that she has at last recognized her overreliance on dreams, and is ready to let go of her fantasies. Instead of constantly reliving the scenes of her parents' deaths, or relying on her dreams for "relief," she will instead accept that there is "blood bubbling out of the riverbed." By acknowledging that blood sometimes mixes with the river, Amabelle is accepting that people have died and will continue to die, as death is inescapable. Amabelle's entrance into the river is a symbol of her coming to peace with the inevitability of loss in the past, present, and future.

## 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

Amabelle Désir describes her lover, Sebastien Onius, and claims that his presence stops her recurrent "nightmares" about her parents drowning. Sebastien prompts Amabelle to think about her individuality and her body; he points out that "clothes cover more than [her] skin," and tells her to shed her uniform. Amabelle grieves about "who [she] was," but only when Sebastien is "not there."

*Sebastien's presence allows Amabelle to escape her grief-stricken dreams; with his help, she is able to confront reality, instead of getting lost in fantasy. Sebastien also prompts Amabelle to think about herself specifically, reminding her of her Haitian identity and who she is outside of work. Even at this early stage, Sebastien is a catalyst for Amabelle's understanding of both her reality and her identity.*

Amabelle recalls how she used to play with her "shadow," an activity that made her feel less alone as a child. When she was young, her real playmates did not feel "quite real" to her; rather, she thought the living children were "replacements" for her shadow. Her father, however, warned that playing with shadows would bring her nightmares. She explains how Sebastien both protects her from?and is one of?her shadows.

*Amabelle's recollections of her childhood with imaginary friends illustrate how, even when she was young, she was often lost in fantasies. She also hints, by referring to her childhood loneliness, that she has always been susceptible to sadness or feelings of loss. Amabelle's memories preserve that sense of sadness for perpetuity: grief, which is already a powerful force in Amabelle's life, is further strengthened when she remembers her past feelings. In this way, grief and memory are immediately established as important influences in Amabelle's life.*

### CHAPTER 2

Amabellea comments that overseeing births was her parents' work, and not something she ever expected to do herself. But one morning she hears Señora Valencia scream from inside the house. She runs inside to find that Señora Valencia's water has broken. Don Ignacio—Señora Valencia's father— rushes in, then says he will go get the doctor. As he rushes back out, he pushes Amabelle toward Señora Valencia as if to say that he is putting his daughter's life in Amabelle's hands. For a few quiet moments, Amabelle remembers when she and Señora Valencia were girls, and they used to sleep in the same room. Amabelle was supposed to sleep in a cot, but sometimes Señora Valencia would invite Amabelle to jump with her on the bed. As Señora Valencia goes deeper into labor, she asks if she is going to die, and claims that the worse pain she suffered before this was a bee sting.

*In its opening the book establishes Amabelle's social situation as a servant to Señora Valencia and Don Ignacio. Yet the novel also shows how such clear lines can at times be blurry. As a child, Amabelle and her mistress were in some ways more like friends, jumping on the bed together. As adults some of that friendship seems to remain, and yet Amabelle's status as servant—shown bluntly in the way Don Ignacio shoves her—is never lost on her. More broadly, the opening hints that Amabelle's parents aren't around, and weren't even when she was a fairly young girl—she has had to grow up among non-family members, and so her conception of home is complicated. Señora Valencia's comment that her previous greatest pain in life before childbirth was a bee sting highlights her privileged upbringing, and how different her experience has been from that of Amabelle, who has clearly suffered real loss and grief since childhood. Yet Señora Valencia's fear of death is nonetheless real—the two women's experiences illustrate how death is universal, yet its influence is unique in each person's life.*

Realizing that the local physician, Doctor Javier, will not make it in time, Señora Valencia tells Amabelle that she will have to rely on Amabelle for help. Amabelle, remembering some of her parent's birthing expertise, helps the señora through the birth and delivers the señora's son. The boy is pale-skinned, the color of "coconut cream." When Amabelle strikes him to successfully induce his first breath, he doesn't cry. Señora Valencia claims that she believed her child would be a girl, as all the local male children would "crowd" around her as if they were "in love" with her unborn child.

*Amabelle aids her employer with the delivery by calling upon the knowledge she learned from her mother, who was a healer. By doing so, Amabelle is both honoring her mother—by relying on her advice—and preserving her legacy of healing into the future. Furthermore, although Señora Valencia does not realize it, her children are a testament to Amabelle's mother's life. Their existence, which is dependent on Amabelle's ability to deliver them using her mother's past advice, will further remind Amabelle of her family in the future.*

Señora Valencia cries out in pain once more, and Amabelle at first believes she is merely delivering the afterbirth. Unexpectedly, however, another newborn arrives: a little girl. The newborn arrives with a caul over her face and an umbilical cord wrapped around her neck. Señora Valencia claims her daughter's delivery is marred by a "curse," and comments on her daughter's skin, which is a "deep bronze."

*The señora's newborn daughter looks different from her brother, as she has dark colored skin. Señora Valencia makes a negative comment about this discrepancy, revealing her discriminatory beliefs about people with darker skin colors. The señora's comment about her own child reveals how deeply prejudiced she is: even when someone is related to her, she judges them on their skin color. To the señora, then, racial identity (even when it's only superficial) comes before all else.*

The señora names the newborn girl Rosalinda, after her dead mother, and claims that her daughter "favors" Amabelle. She speculates whether Rosalinda will always be "the color" she is now, and calls her a "poor love." The señora wonders aloud whether Rosalinda will be "mistaken" for a Haitian.

*Señora Valencia names her child after her own mother, a means of honoring her mother's memory into the future. The señora then further reveals her racial prejudices by implying that her daughter's darker complexion will result in people treating her as a Haitian. The señora's comments reveal her ideas about race and identity: namely, that skin tone determines one's identity, and that some identities are better—and deserve better treatment—than others.*

## CHAPTER 3

Sebastien asks Amabelle to recall what she admires and respects most about her mother, Irelle Pradelle. Amabelle describes her mother's "tranquility," and explains how she said few words. Amabelle then emphasizes that her mother did not often smile. In Amabelle's dreams, however, her mother is "always smiling," except when her dreams shift into nightmares about her mother drowning.

*Amabelle tells Sebastien about her mother and in doing so, she strengthens her mother's legacy, since now another person will keep Irelle's story from disappearing. Amabelle recalls her mother with stark honesty, describing how she was unaffectionate and unemotional. Although this is a painful truth, it further honors Irelle's memory, because it keeps her genuine character alive. Still, Amabelle's dreams of her mother's smile foreshadow her tendency to rely on fantasies to lessen her grief. Instead of confronting her mother's loss and accepting her mother's flaws, she literally dreams of happier circumstances.*

## CHAPTER 4

Doctor Javier, a Dominican physician within the community, arrives at Señora Valencia's house and examines the newborns. Señora Valencia tells the doctor that she is grateful that Amabelle knows how to birth children. Amabelle notes that Doctor Javier wears a "wooden carving of cane leaves" on a pin in his shirt. The carving is similar to those worn by "cane cutters." The doctor asks Amabelle to go boil water so that the children can be bathed.

*Doctor Javier is Dominican, and his patients are also high-class Dominican citizens. But still, he wears a brooch of cane leaves. Cane is a crop that is vital to Haitian workers' livelihoods, as Haitians are often field laborers who oversee the harvest. The doctor's brooch suggests his affinity for Haitian culture, despite his work with Dominican members of high society. The doctor subtly crosses the socially established borders between cultures, illustrating that identity can be flexible.*

Amabelle fetches the water, and sees Juana, another member of the household staff. Amabelle recalls that Juana and her husband, Luis, have worked for the family for decades. When Amabelle returns with the water, Don Ignacio is in the room with Doctor Javier and Señora Valencia. Don Ignacio asks when the children were born; Amabelle does not know precisely. Don Ignacio writes down the time and place of the births in elaborate script, noting that they occurred in the "seventh year of the Era of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina."

*Don Ignacio, Señora Valencia's father, reveals his fixation on identity and heritage when he notes the year of his grandchildren's birth. He only uses the name of the Dominican Republic's dictator, Trujillo, to classify the babies' birthdays; he does not describe the date in any other way. By using cultural and societal information to frame his family's existence, he suggests that his country's cultural heritage is integral to his household.*

Doctor Javier comments on Rosalinda's dark skin tone, only to be chastised by Don Ignacio, who is the señora's father. Don Ignacio points out that the baby's coloring must come from her father; he then extols his own family's Spanish heritage, claiming that the daughter can "trace her family to the Conquistadores, the line of El Almirante, Cristobal Colón."

*Doctor Javier's comments echo the señora's earlier discriminatory observations about her daughter: both characters' words illustrate how culture can separate people due to prejudice. Don Ignacio then discusses his family's genealogy in detail, emphasizing his noble heritage. Don Ignacio and the doctor's comments demonstrate the outsized importance that Dominican society places on identity and lineage, labels that divide and separate groups.*

Doctor Javier and Amabelle leave the new mother to rest, and the doctor gets something stuck in his hair. Amabelle reaches up to help remove it, but then remembers she "must always be on [her] guard" while she is "working for others."

*This brief thwarted moment between Amabelle and Doctor Javier illustrates a failed attempt at bridging cultures and boundaries. Amabelle, a domestic Haitian worker, initially wishes to help a higher class Dominican citizen, but quickly reminds herself that identity prevents the two from having a true moment of connection, however small.*


The doctor then strikes up a conversation about Señor Pico (Señora Valencia's husband). He notes that the señor's rank "changes" very frequently, and claims that the military men do not like him. He then tells Amabelle to look after the children and particularly urges her to keep an eye on Rosalinda, who is smaller. He insists the son, however, is healthy. Doctor Javier then tells Amabelle that she should go back to Haiti and become a midwife. Amabelle replies that she has not been back across the border since she was eight years old. The doctor tells her to consider the option, and leaves.

*Doctor Javier's willingness to cross cultural borders by talking frankly with Amabelle seems to make him an outlier in the Dominican Republic, which the novel has already established has tacit rules about societal conduct. Furthermore, the doctor's suggestion prompts Amabelle to realize that Haiti is actually a foreign nation to her, as she has not returned for years; Amabelle's idea of home has shifted without her realizing it.*

Juana, a housemaid, comes into the room, and Amabelle informs her that the señora has given birth. Juana crosses herself, and considers it a "miracle" to have "twin babies in the house." She rushes off to the señora's room to see the children.

*Juana's response to the news of her employer's children reveals that she considers her workplace to be a surrogate family and home: it is as if the babies have joined Juana's family, as well. This reaction demonstrates the ways in which the standard definition of home—one's birthplace, or one's relatives—can evolve over time.*

As soon as Juana sees the children, she bursts into tears. Señora Valencia informs Juana that her daughter is named after her mother, causing Juana to "sob louder." Juana claims that if the señora's mother had lived to see the day, she would have been crying as well.

*Juana and Señora Valencia's interaction demonstrates the ways that death and grief manifest in the existences of the living. The señora illustrates the depths of her grief by naming her child after her mother—the name may be a comfort, but it will also serve as a constant reminder of her loss, thereby illustrating the power death will always have over the lives of those left behind. Juana also memorializes the señora's mother through tears and grief, and evokes the dead noblewoman's memory as if her presence is still felt.*

## CHAPTER 5

Amabelle claims that Sebastien is haunted by the sounds of pigeons. He believes that pigeons' moans sound similar to how "ghosts cry" especially when the ghosts "have been dead so long" that they cannot remember "their own names."

*Even the most commonplace sounds induce feelings of sadness in Sebastien, an example of death and grief's pervasive ability to alter a person's life. Furthermore, the pigeons' sounds evoke images of ghosts who cannot remember their names. These images provide a warning about the importance of memory: without remembrance, one's legacy disappears, and grief is all that is left after death.*

Amabelle describes Sebastien's past, noting that they are both from the "north of Haiti." Sebastien's father was killed in a 1930s hurricane. His father's demise, and the loss of most of his possessions, prompted Sebastien to leave Haiti and look for opportunities in the Dominican Republic. Amabelle emphasizes that their lives' paths entwined as a result of deadly winds that killed many people and "destroyed" homes.

*Sebastien's exit from Haiti was prompted by the death of his father and overwhelming feelings of grief. As such, Sebastien's past illustrates how loss and sadness can facilitate a newfound conception of home. His emigration to the Dominican Republic forces him to rewrite his sense of belonging: after losing his physical home in Haiti, Sebastien redefines his emotional home when he crosses paths with Amabelle.*

Sebastien's mother is still alive in Haiti, and he is often saddened by the thought that she lives there alone. The pigeons' cries, which continue "night after night," make him lament for his past. When he hears them, he often mutters, "My poor mother."

*Once again, everyday sounds like pigeons' coos are capable of triggering intense sadness, revealing how grief is an all-encompassing feeling. Furthermore, the pigeons sounds' are perpetual, demonstrating how loss and grief are never-ending, and, for Sebastien, a fact of day-to-day life.*

## CHAPTER 6

Amabelle comes to look at the new children. She notes that Rosalinda is "dwarfed by her brother," and picks her up. The señora, seeing this, urges Amabelle to hold the child close to her and feel her breath. The señora thinks this is miraculous, and her facial expression illustrates that there is "nothing else in the world" she sees except her children.

*The señora's insists that Amabelle cradle Rosalinda, a sign that Señora Valencia has expanded her conventional idea of family to include her employee. Still, the señora's loving expression when looking at her children implies that one's true home is often defined by one's relatives. In this way, the señora's actions both reinforce and revise traditional ideas of home, illustrating how feelings of belonging often fluctuate and change over time.*

Señora Valencia confesses that when she asked Amabelle to light a candle during the birth, it was not for religious reasons. Rather, it was because the señora "promised [her mother] that [she would] light her a candle after she gave birth." She tells Amabelle that she had been "having more than [her] usual number of dreams," but insists that during the birth, it felt as if her mother was truly "next to [her,] in this bed."

*The trauma from the death of Señora Valencia's mother has led the señora to fantasize about her mother's presence during the birth. The señora's fantasies provide her an escape from the grief of her mother's loss: she insists that her mother was present at the birth, as the lack of a maternal figure is too painful to contemplate. The señora's dreams about her mother's presence also impart a feeling of belonging: instead of feeling alone and isolated, she feels surrounded by her family, even though her mother is not actually present.*

Señora Valencia wishes Amabelle could have known her mother, Doña Rosalinda, who died before Amabelle's parents drowned. Amabelle notes that both women have lost family members, leading them to "parent all our childhood dreams out of ourselves." Juana delivers some food to the señora, but tears begin to "stream down her face." The señora explains that Juana was present for both of her mother's pregnancies.

*All three women in this interaction have had to reconfigure their idea of home as a result of grief. Amabelle and the señora, who suffered deeply after the deaths of their mothers, have lost their childhood sense of home's safety and protection. As a result, they were forced to grow up too early and create homes for themselves without a maternal figure. Juana, too, is hurt by the loss of the señora's mother, and grieves for the woman as if she were a blood relative. Juana's deep grief reveals how her idea of family has expanded to include her employers, despite the lack of biological connection.*

Señora Valencia is excited for her husband, Señor Pico, to see the children. She says that Pico is "full of ambition," and that he "dreamed" about "advancing in the army and one day becoming president" of the Dominican Republic. She admits, however, that she would not like to be the wife of the president.

*Señora Valencia's comments about her husband and her place in the Dominican Republic reveal her conflicting thoughts about cultural identity, and how she values it but does not define herself by it. She understands her husband's extreme patriotism—an indication that she finds one's cultural legacy to be important—but at the same time, she admits that she does not personally wish to be a cultural figure or symbol of political power.*

Amabelle goes into the pantry and talks to Juana; she asks why Juana is crying. Juana replies that she is happy to have new members in the household; still, the births remind her that "time passes quickly." She then confesses that she has prayed for children, but had a miscarriage many years ago. She claims her tears are for Señora Valencia, who is unable to be with her mother on a momentous day.

*Amabelle's discussion with Juana reveals how Juana's idea of home has changed over time. Juana mourns the absence of the señora's mother, but her thoughts about time's passage indicate that she is also mourning the loss of the family she might have had. Juana's confession about time's passage suggests that she may regret redefining home; it could be that she focused too heavily on building her employers' home, at the expense of creating her own.*

## CHAPTER 7

Sebastien asks Amabelle what she most admires about her father. Amabelle describes her father, Antoine Désir, with fondness: she claims he was more "joyful" than her mother and always tried to joke around with her. She recalls his dedication to finding new cures, and the generous aid he provided to his neighbors; he would often help them "plow their fields and dig waterways." She admits that she was "jealous" of the time he spent with the neighbors.

*Amabelle's memory of her dead father preserves his story from being lost to time. Instead of being forgotten, his character is being shared with a new person, whose memory will further keep his name from disappearing into history: Sebastien, like Amabelle, will recollect him fondly in the future. Still, death has taken Antoine from Amabelle, and in her grief, she attempts to recall his best qualities in order to honor his memory.*

Amabelle then asks Sebastien how his father died, and Sebastien describes what happened in the hurricane: he "carried his dead father" after a "tin roof" had slashed his father's throat. Sebastien emphasizes that he was not crying or screaming; rather, he prayed that his father's blood would not disappear into the floodwaters, "going no one knows where."

*Sebastien remembers his father's death in clear detail, a morbid counterexample to Amabelle's fond recollection of her father's life. This juxtaposition suggests that memory is an important archive of both the good and the bad. Furthermore, Sebastien did not cry, but instead worried about his father's blood disappearing with no one to remember it. His fears demonstrate how memory is sometimes more powerful than grief. That is, Sebastien was more worried about his father's life being forgotten than about the grief he was experiencing.*

## CHAPTER 8

Señor Pico is named after "one of the fathers of Dominican independence." When he arrives with Don Ignacio, he runs from the automobile into the house to see his children, and Amabelle and Juana follow him. As workers, they know that they must "be present and invisible at the same time, nearby when they [are] needed." After greeting his wife, the señor names his son Rafael, after the Generalissimo. Luis, Juana's husband, is also in the room; Amabelle notes that he looks tearful, and that "his face showed the ache of wanting."

*Señor Pico's name—and the name he chooses for his son—are signs of cultural pride. The names refer to past and present historical figures who believe in the superiority of their culture, and thus illustrate how ideas of immovable cultural differences are longstanding. Additionally, Amabelle's thoughts about workers' roles within the house reveal that she does not feel as if she truly belongs in the household in the same way that she might in her own home. Rather, she feels an obligation to the family, but acknowledges that sometimes she must not be visible in the house—an isolating feeling—even as she exists there.*

Juana and Luis convene in the yard, and Amabelle sits nearby. Luis tells Juana that Señor Pico was in a rush to return and drove recklessly. They came across three men walking in the road; the señor blasted his car horn, but one man did not get out of the way. The señor's automobile struck one of the pedestrians and pushed him into a ravine. Amabelle wonders if the victim is Sebastien, but her speculation is cut short when Beatriz arrives.

*As Luis recounts the accident, it is clear that Señor Pico's privileged identity within his country allows him to treat others with carelessness. In this way, fixed perceptions of his cultural superiority have resulted in physical harm to others, a warning that preserving cultural boundaries can prevent two groups from empathizing with one another. Amabelle is unsure if the struck pedestrian is Sebastien, and her uncertainty reveals how omnipresent death can be: within an instant, she may have lost her partner.*

Amabelle recounts Beatriz's dream of becoming a "newspaper woman." Beatriz wants to "ask questions" of people who suffer "through calamities greater than hers," but spends most of her day playing the piano and practicing Latin phrases. Señor Pico once courted Beatriz, who had "no interest in him," but he eventually asked to marry Señora Valencia after one month. Don Ignacio agreed, as long as the señora coud stay in her home; he does not want her to live near the soldiers' barracks.

*Beatriz's fascination with less privileged members of society illustrates how identity can separate people in the Dominican Republic. Although Beatriz lives in a neighborhood that thrives off of Haitian laborers' cane harvests—a physically taxing job that pays poorly—her upper-class identity keeps her from truly sympathizing with the workers. Instead, she merely observes them as a scientist might, and is unwilling to cross boundaries due to her status and class.*

Amabelle is summoned by Señora Valencia, who tells her that she is grateful for Amabelle's help during the delivery and squeezes her hand. When Señor Pico interrupts them, however, the señora lets go of Amabelle's fingers and announces that Juana will stay in the house overnight, instead of Amabelle.

*Amabelle and Señora Valencia's familial dynamic is capable of transcending boundaries between class and cultural heritage, as shown by their moment of connection here. Still, when the señora's husband intrudes on them, the señora begins to separate herself from Amabelle. This willingness to preserve the disparities between herself and her lifelong friend indicate that the señora still values cultural boundaries, even though she doesn't always uphold them. These boundaries allow her to protect her privileged identity and comfortable life.*

Amabelle overhears a conversation between Señora Valencia and Señor Pico about a new border operation that he will be placed in charge of. He will also be responsible for "ensur[ing] the Generalissimo's safety at the border." He claims that the operation will be "quick and precise," and that, in fact, the operation has already started.

*The señor and señora's conversation is a reminder that the family is politically well-connected in the Dominican Republic, a country with nationalistic pride. The señor's involvement in a border operation for the Generalissimo, who is a known dictator, is further indication that the señora's family is deeply invested in their Dominican heritage. Furthermore, this conversation occurs very shortly after the señor sees his children for the first time; in this way, the señor demonstrates that his service to his country is as important as his family.*

Amabelle departs from Señora Valencia's room and comes across Don Ignacio, the señora's father and an "exiled patriot" from Spain who is listening to a radio for news of the Spanish war. Behind Don Ignacio sits a "regal" portrait of Trujillo, the Generalissimo; the portrait also contains the country's flag, along with "the coat of arms and the shield" which reads, "god, country, liberty." Don Ignacio is engrossed in the radio, and "unaware" of the Generalissimo's "presence."

*Don Ignacio's fixation with the Spanish war is a sign that he is very invested in his cultural identity, though it is a different identity than that of Señor Pico. Moreover, the scene is further dominated by a large portrait of the Generalissimo. This portrait is a symbol of how important Dominican patriotism and heritage is to the family. Don Ignacio ignores the portrait to listen to the radio, however, demonstrating that he is stuck between Spanish and Dominican culture. Don Ignacio's position between the radio and the portrait illustrates how cultural boundaries can exist not only between countries, but also within a single household.*

Don Ignacio says that he thinks that he and Señor Pico "killed a man." He says Pico did not want to stay and search for the body, and he asks Amabelle to report back if she hears that anyone is missing. Amabelle agrees and returns to her room, and looks around at her possessions. She notes that "nearly everything" she owns is "something Señora Valencia had once owned and no longer wanted." She emphasizes that only Sebastien is hers alone.

*Don Ignacio's offhand confession of a possible murder and his son-in-law's lack of remorse demonstrate how death is considered to be predictable and inevitable. To these two men, death is not a rarity, nor is it always emotional. Additionally, when Amabelle returns to her room after this confession, she realizes that her identity and Señora Valencia's are closely bound together despite their different cultures and classes. This realization reveals the blurred borders between the two women.*

Unwilling to consider the "unpleasant truth" of Sebastien's possible death, she instead thinks about Henry I's **citadel**. Amabelle used to play in the citadel as a child, and from "the safety" of the building, she would survey "the rest of the world." Amabelle recalls seeing "armor emblazoned with the image of a phoenix rising."

*Amabelle escapes into her childhood memories of a royal citadel, a Haitian landmark. The citadel is a symbol of Haiti's strength, as illustrated by Amabelle's visions of armor, and it allows her to feel protected, as if it is a home to her. Amabelle's willingness to slip into fantasies of her childhood demonstrates how strongly she relies on dreams to sustain her: when she is faced with the prospect of her partner's death, her first choice is to imagine a faraway land.*

Her daydream is interrupted by the sound of Sebastien at the door; she opens it, and sees that he is injured. Sebastien confirms that Joël, another Haitian worker, is dead. Amabelle asks how the death occurred, and Sebastien recounts the automobile accident. She notes that he is unemotional about the situation, and thinks to herself that he has "seen death closely before."

*When Sebastien reunites with Amabelle, he tonelessly tells her about the violent death of his friend, Joël. His lack of emotion indicates that he has experienced trauma in the past, illustrating how pervasive a force death has been in his life. Moreover, Sebastien's detached reaction demonstrates how powerful and all-encompassing grief can be: he is unable to truly perceive his loss, as grief from prior deaths has paralyzed his emotions.*

Sebastien informs Amabelle that Joël's boss, Don Carlos, will not pay for a burial. He tells Amabelle he must leave to meet with Kongo, Joël's father, and Amabelle gives him wood for Joël's coffin. After he leaves, Amabelle expresses silent condolences for Kongo's loss; she thinks about how "two new children came into the world" at the same time that Kongo must bury his son.

*Don Carlos, a Dominican man who profits from the cane harvest, reacts unsympathetically to his employee's death. Don Carlos's reaction is at least partly a product of the cultural borders between Haitians and Dominicans in the Dominican Republic. Due to cultural prejudice—which gives Dominicans an excuse to look down on Haitians—he is unwilling to treat his former employee with respect. Additionally, Amabelle's thoughts about Kongo's loss and the birth of the señora's children reinforce the inevitability of death: it is a perpetual cycle, with death—and its inverse, life—occurring eternally and perhaps in balance with each other.*

## CHAPTER 9

Amabelle recalls the day her parents died. She remembers their trip to Dajabón, a Dominican town, to buy special cooking pots. They attempted to cross the **river** upon their return to Haiti, and her father sprinkled water on his face, to "salute the river." She then remembers her father flinching when he realized his "grave mistake." That day, a rainstorm caused the river to rise unexpectedly, and the water "rose above her father's head."

*Amabelle recalls her parents' deaths in rich detail, illustrating memory's ability to accurately—and painfully—preserve the past. For Amabelle, death and memory are perpetually intertwined, and she continually reinforces death's impact on her life by reliving her parents' demise. Amabelle's memory re-traumatizes her, providing a warning about the power of recollection: while memory helps to honor the past, it can also cause undue harm in the present.*

Her mother, initially traveling on Antoine's back, is separated from him as he drowns in the current. Amabelle remembers throwing herself into the current, only to be hauled out by two young men. She is told that "unless" she wants "to die," she will "never" see her parents again.

*By further recalling her mother's grisly end, Amabelle continues to fall victim to the strength of her memory. Her parents' death seems to destroy her sense of home and family, as she is immediately willing to throw herself into the river to recapture a feeling of familial togetherness. Amabelle's willingness to sacrifice herself reveals that the pull of home and unity is almost stronger than death: she was at one point ready to die in order to regain it.*

## CHAPTER 10

Sebastien returns later that night, and Amabelle warns him that he has to be careful coming and going on Señor Pico's property. She realizes that the truth of Joël's death has sunk in: Sebastien's "friend had died" and "he could have died." In fact, Sebastien was in "the house of the man who had done it." Sebastien says that he and his friend Yves helped wash and clean the corpse, and recounts how Joël's father, Kongo, "wanted to stay alone with the body."

*The grief left in the wake of Joël's death brings Yves, Sebastien, and Kongo closer together, and they collaboratively try to honor Joël's passing. Despite Sebastien's prior detachment, death is eventually powerful enough to disturb him, and he finally begins to understand the gravity of the situation. Yves and Sebastien's cleansing of the body, and Kongo's vigil with the corpse, illustrate the various methods that the living use to confront death. Death is so unknowable and wretched that those left behind must undertake rituals to understand and accept it, though its pain still persists.*

Amabelle changes the subject, and tells him that she dreamed about her parents' drowning. Sebastien, upset to hear of her nightmare, tells her that she must give herself "a pleasant dream." He tells her to dream that her parents "died natural deaths many years later." He then concocts a "new life" for them, pretending that they met in Haiti and reunited in the Dominican Republic.

*For Amabelle and Sebastien, dreams of an alternative life are a much-needed respite from grief. Sebastien's fantasy is meant to rewrite their actual, painful circumstances; this revision is meant to be a source of hope to two people who have lost family members, friends, and their sense of home. Sebastien's suggestion prompts the couple to reimagine their home—instead of feeling like isolated migrants, they act as if their new home is with one another, kindling new feelings of belonging.*

Sebastien then tells Amabelle that there is prejudice against the Haitians, who are considered "an orphaned people." He disagrees, however, and claims the Haitians are "a group of vwayajè, wayfarers." He adds that this wayfaring tradition is the reason "why [she] had to travel this far to meet [him]."

*Sebastien further illustrates his power to reinvent a feeling of belonging by explaining his vision of the Haitian people. Despite the Dominicans' oppression of the Haitians, Sebastien turns the Dominicans' critique into praise: Haitians are not lost wanderers, but travelers. Sebastien's explanation gives agency back to the Haitian people: instead of believing the Haitians are victims of misfortune, he insists they have deliberately chosen to build new homes elsewhere. This ability to rebuild makes the Haitians resilient, according to Sebastien, as they are not beholden to a single home country.*

## CHAPTER 11

Amabelle remembers being struck by a fever in childhood. Her mother made her a doll, and Amabelle recalls it fondly, noting that it made her "feel nearer to [her] mother." At the time, Amabelle believed the doll stood up, sang, and played jump rope—the doll comforted her, and told her she would get well. When the fever broke and she asked her mother about the doll, her mother claimed there was "no such doll," and blamed the image on the fever.

*Amabelle's powerful memory clashes with her faith in her dreams, producing a confusing blend of fantasy and reality. This collision between memory and illusion is an ongoing occurrence in Amabelle's life, and it is in some ways a way to cope with the grief of her traumatic childhood. Amabelle's ability to turn a credible story—a handmade doll—into a fantasy of a dancing toy illustrates how willingly she disconnects from reality: she is able and eager to believe in a fairytale, as it provides her with easy comfort.*

## CHAPTER 12

The morning after the births, Amabelle meets Mimi, Sebastien's sister, by a stream. They talk about Joël's death, and Mimi explains how Doña Eva, a rich widower, is celebrating her fiftieth birthday. Amabelle wonders if they will live as long as the doña, and Mimi claims she would rather die young. Mimi pities the older women, who have toiled in the fields and are now too poor and sick to work or "return to their old homes in Haiti."

*Amabelle and Mimi's conversation discusses the lives and deaths of different groups of women in the Dominican Republic. Due to differences in class—and the prejudice faced by Haitians—a wealthier Dominican woman is celebrating her old age, whereas the Haitian women suffer as they grow older. In this way, cultural identity and the oppression of some groups by others persist across individuals' lives.*

Amabelle sees Kongo bathing in the stream, and notes that he is washing himself with wet parsley, which she calls both "pesi" and "perejil." She describes the herb in detail, describing how the Haitians "savored" the herb "for [their] food, [their] teas" and how it is used "to cleanse" their bodies "of old aches and griefs."

*Amabelle uses both the Haitian Creole and Spanish words for "parsley," illustrating how some concepts transcend language boundaries. She emphasizes that parsley is part of Haitian culture and how it is cherished for its properties. As parsley and its pronunciation will later be used to separate Haitians from Dominicans, this initial discussion of parsley's importance to Haitian identity becomes more poignant. Parsley will eventually trigger violence between the two cultures, but it is initially presented as an herb that is universal: both cultures enjoy it equally.*

Mimi speculates about the consequences of Joël's death, pointing out that it must be painful to do nothing about the killing. She believes that since the man who killed Joël is "one of them," there is "nothing" that can be done to avenge him.

*Mimi's comments about the lack of punishment for Joël's murderer further illustrate the strained relationships between the two cultures in the Dominican Republic. Even in the context of death, the power dynamic between the two groups leads to prejudice and mistreatment. Despite the feelings of grief and despair that are growing in the Haitian community, the Dominicans' oppression continues: the Haitians are not allowed to seek justice.*

The discussion turns to Señora Valencia's new children, and Mimi points out that Beatriz will likely become the godmother. Amabelle chastises Mimi for using her name informally, and Mimi asks if she must use the honorific Señorita. Amabelle realizes that she has always called her Señorita or Señora, while she herself was always referred to by her first name, Amabelle.

*Amabelle's realization about her first name and the señora's title emphasizes how their cultural identities?as a Haitian worker and a Dominican aristocrat?have defined both women for their entire relationship, despite their close emotional bond. In this way, language (in the form of an honorific) reinforces differences in identity between a higher-class woman and her employee.*

Mimi and Amabelle go back to discussing Joël, and Mimi insists that there should be "no sad faces." She claims that they should "give him a joyous wake" and he would want everyone to "be grateful he's not here now." Félice, Joël's lover, overhears the conversation and leans on Amabelle for support; she claims Joël was "too young" to die. She tells Amabelle that she wishes to help the Dominicans learn "that [Haitians'] lives are precious too."

*Mimi's insistence on celebrating Joël's death is yet another example of how the living cope with grief: in this case, they rebel against it, and try to rejoice. Still, it may be that Mimi's coping mechanism of joy prevents her from truly confronting the reality of death. Meanwhile, Félice, wishes to break down the boundaries that separate Dominican and Haitian cultures, in order to show that both identities are equally worthy of respect. Félice's wish is a product of a country that separates its cultures through prejudice: she wants to transcend the boundaries—preserved by politics, the government, and individuals—that allow one group to consider themselves superior.*

## CHAPTER 13

Amabelle remembers Sebastien talking to her while he is asleep. She feels "masterful" when she gets him to talk, and claims that a sleeping person responding is "like a miracle." He claims his dream is to fly a kite. She says she will offer him a ribbon for his kite, but she receives no response.

*Amabelle and Sebastien have a conversation while he sleeps, and Amabelle treasures the details he reveals. Amabelle seems to highly value dreams—possibly prizing them over reality—as she feels particularly triumphant when she hears about them. Still, Sebastien's lack of response to Amabelle's question reveals how fickle dreams can be. Despite her wish to bring Sebastien's dreams into reality, she is not always able to do so; in the same way, Amabelle's fantasies often remain disconnected from her real life.*

## CHAPTER 14

Amabelle describes the hierarchy of the Haitian community in the Dominican Republic. She explains that there are Haitians "whose families had been in Alegría for generations" and have steady occupations. She emphasizes that some of these Haitians have "Dominican spouses," and that many "had been born in Alégría." To the cane cutters and domestic workers, these stable and wealthy people seem to have "their destinies in hand."

*Amabelle explains the layers of the Haitian community, emphasizing the ways in which Haitians have integrated their culture into the Dominican Republic. Through family, marriage, and time, Haitians have grown to accept the Dominican Republic as their home, illustrating how a sense of belonging can evolve. This gradual evolution challenges cultural prejudices, and provides an example of how one nationality can combine with another despite societal boundaries.*

Amabelle overhears conversations between these Haitians. One woman talks in a mix of Haitian Creole and Spanish, a "tangled language" that illustrates how she exists "between two nearly native tongues." She describes being born in the Dominican Republic, and having children in the Dominican Republic as well; she then emphasizes that she has never been to Haiti. Despite this lineage, she has not been given "birth papers" by the state, which means her son can't go to school.

*One Haitian woman's speech combines both languages, a symbol of the union between Dominican and Haitian culture. Furthermore, she emphasizes that she was born in the Dominican Republic and has never visited Haiti. She clearly does not consider herself Haitian, but still considers Haitian Creole a native language. This woman's story is a perfect illustration of how one's home and identity are mutable, and cannot be defined by simple labels, birthplace, or national borders.*

Another woman recounts recent rumors, claiming that anyone not working in the cane mills will be sent back to Haiti. In response, the Dominican-born woman who speaks both Haitian Creole and Spanish once again emphasizes how she has no birth papers to prove her identity. Amabelle, too, realizes she has no documentation proving that she "belonged either here or in Haiti." Amabelle is saddened to hear that even the more stable, wealthier Haitians are "unsure of their place."

*The novel frequently emphasizes that cultural labels and definitions of identity can often be unstable. In this scene, the emphasis on having documentation proving one's origin illustrates how identity can depend on external validation; often, cultural labels are reinforced by society and laws, not by an individual's own choice. Due to these external forces, one's sense of belonging can feel precarious, as Amabelle's does here.*

Amabelle notes that even Don Gilbert and Doña Sabine, who form one of the wealthiest Haitian families in the town, are acting wary. Amabelle describes how their wealth was generated from a "rum enterprise" that was located first on "Haitian soil." This land soon became "Dominican soil" during the countries' various "land exchanges."

*Amabelle emphasizes that the wealth of a higher-class Haitian family has come from land that has been traded between Haiti and the Dominican Republic for years. This constant change of borders illustrates that national and cultural boundaries are porous and flexible, despite the Dominican Republic's firm stance on separating Haitians and Dominicans by class and nationality.*

Amabelle then runs into Father Romain, a local priest, who is heavily invested in Haitian culture. She claims that talking with him is similar to "returning home." Father Romain, and other people like him, leave "imprints of themselves in each other's memory" when they discuss their pasts. They talk and reminisce in the hopes that these "imprints" will be taken back to Haiti.

*Father Romain and his congregants embody the act of remembering through telling stories: they constantly reminisce to deepen their recollections of their past. Their memory preserves their sense of home and strengthens their connection to their culture, even when they are far away from Haiti. Father Romain and these congregants illustrate how memory can safeguard identity and community in a county that is often oppressive and prejudicial.*

Amabelle emphasizes that Father Romain's speeches and sermons are meant to remind "everyone of common ties: language, foods, history, carnival, songs, tales, and prayers." According to the priest, memory and the act of remembering "can make you strong," even when it is sometimes "painful."

*Once again, Father Romain makes explicit that memory is vital to preserving history. He prompts his community to recollect shared traditions, so that they do not forget their heritage in a different country. Furthermore, the priest acknowledges that memory can be painful, illustrating a lesson that is central to Amabelle's life. Amabelle consistently remembers her traumatic past, despite the psychological damage it causes her, but in doing so, she protects her past and life story from being forgotten or revised.*

Amabelle returns to Señora Valencia's house, and sees Beatriz arrive to greet Don Ignacio. Beatriz asks him what he is writing in a notebook, and he replies that he is trying to capture the details of his life. Don Ignacio replies that the notebook is only for his grandchildren, and admits that his memory is potentially failing: he does not know what he "will or won't retain" in the upcoming years.

*Don Ignacio's notebook is a physical manifestation of the process of memory: it is a record of his experiences that will be passed on to future generations and will keep his story alive. Still, he confesses that his memory is failing, and thereby illustrates that memory is not always perfect. Don Ignacio's notebook and his fallible recollections complicate the idea of memory: it is not always capable of perfectly preserving the past and is subject to error.*

Beatriz asks Don Ignacio about his youth, and wonders if he enjoyed being "an officer in the Spanish army." He claims that Spain was in a "splendid little war," and that he fled "bloody battles" to settle in the Dominican Republic. He also claims, however, that he would always have left his country, even in times of peace. Beatriz asks if he enjoys the Dominican Republic, and at first, Don Ignacio only answers that he "married here" and "raised [his] daughter here."

*Don Ignacio allows a new listener to hear his story, and thereby guarantees that his past will be remembered and carried into the future after his death. Don Ignacio then admits that he was destined to leave his home country no matter what happened, illustrating how one's birthplace does not always produce a sense of belonging. By dodging Beatriz's question, he also subtly reveals that the Dominican Republic feels foreign to him. Don Ignacio's lack of attachment to either country proves that home is not always connected to a physical location.*

Beatriz persists, asking Don Ignacio once again if he likes living in the Dominican Republic. He admits that he does not like it, as "everything" is "run by military men" and there is an unhealthy "worship of uniforms." Beatriz then asks if Don Ignacio has killed anyone in his military past, and he refuses to answer, claiming it won't do any good to know what "evil things" he may or may not have done.

*Don Ignacio criticizes the Dominican Republic's emphasis on national pride and military strength, and doing so allows him to move beyond simple cultural labels that divide people in the Dominican Republic. Although he belongs to an upper-class Dominican family, he does not fully embrace that identity. He then objects to discussing his past, hinting that the violence he has participated in has left him grief-stricken. Don Ignacio's unwillingness to discuss the matter illustrates how profound an impact death can have, especially for those who cause it: years after his encounters with death, he is still unable to discuss the topic.*

Don Ignacio then tells Beatriz that he is writing about his father, who was a baker. Amabelle realizes that Don Ignacio, like the Haitians, has been "displaced from his native land." She thinks this is why he is often kinder to the Haitians, who, like him, have not always considered the Dominican Republic their home.

*Don Ignacio's kind treatment of Haitians results from a shared sense of displacement. Both he and the Haitians are far from their home countries, and feel similarly unsettled. This shared empathy overcomes the strict societal boundaries between Dominicans and Haitians, and Don Ignacio steps outside his expected role as a Dominican aristocrat to show how he and the Haitians share common traits.*

After overhearing this discussion, Amabelle runs into Doctor Javier. He asks if she has thought about returning to Haiti as a midwife, and says she will earn a small wage. Amabelle thinks about Sebastien, who is working "too hard" to "save a few pesos," and wonders if she is waiting for a sign to find "another life," one that would "fully" belong to her. She thinks that this might be a chance she should seize, but only if Sebastien will come with her.

*Amabelle is tempted to return to Haiti, realizing that her home in the Dominican Republic is not as welcoming as she once believed. Amabelle's increased interest in returning to Haiti reveals how her conception of home has changed over time; she once felt like she belonged with the señora's family, but now she yearns for a new life. Amabelle's comments about Sebastien working hard for little pay further reveals her lack of attachment to the Dominican Republic; she does not feel as if she and Sebastien are truly valued members of society.*

## CHAPTER 15

Amabelle remembers a scene from her childhood, where she eagerly lifted the lid off a pot of beans her mother was cooking. She gets scalded by the steam, and recalls her father laughing; he tells her that there will be a time in her future when she will "have to be near a pot every day."

*Amabelle's memories of her parents continue to preserve their true character into the present. Her sharp recall brings them to life, making it seem as if they are still alive; this reveals the power that memory has to protect the past. The familial warmth of her memories also illustrates the sense of belonging that pervaded Amabelle's childhood. The loss of Amabelle's parents' took away her sense of home, and this childhood scene offers a stark contrast to her present circumstances, in which she feels that she doesn't really belong.*

## CHAPTER 16

Amabelle comes across Don Ignacio in his household garden. He mentions that he heard that a man had died. She responds that she knows the man who was killed in the car accident; and that the man's father was the only living relative. Don Ignacio asks if Amabelle will bring him to see the man, and she mentions his name, Kongo. Don Ignacio asks if this is the father's real name, and Amabelle admits that only the man's son knew his "true name."

*The revelation that only the dead man knew his father's true name illustrates the complicated dynamic between death and memory. Death is able to destroy memory, even while memory preserves the legacy of the dead. For example, the father's name is unremembered and unknown, as only his dead relative knew it. Nevertheless, the son's life is preserved in his father's memory.*

Just then, the workers set fire to the cane in the fields, signaling the beginning of the harvest. Amabelle goes into the house to see if Señora Valencia needs help, and the two women hear Rosalinda crying. Señora Valencia worries that the cries will wake Rafael, but the two women realize there are "no signs of life" in the boy. Señora Valencia begins to shout that it is "too soon" for him to "leave."

*The sudden death of Rafael in this chapter is set against the backdrop of a harvest, a symbol of death and a season's end. These two deaths—physical and metaphorical—reinforce how omnipresent and powerful death can be. Rafael's passing is unexpected and abrupt, and it shows that even the most privileged families are unable to avoid death when it is fated to occur.*

Doctor Javier arrives, but it is clear that the boy has died. Señora Valencia is grief-stricken, and begins to cry in her husband's arms. Señor Pico also looks as if he "want[s] to cry." Father Vargas, a Dominican priest, says a blessing for Rafael, and claims that "from the sadness of death rises the joy of immortality."

*This scene illustrates the instantaneous effect that death has on the living. Rafael's passing results in his parents' immediate and profound grief. Even the señor, an often-unemotional character, is ready to cry about his loss. A Dominican priest attempts to offer solace by preaching about death, but the señor's and señora's reactions reveal that even the prospect of immortality is unable to lessen the impact of the child's demise.*

Señora Valencia then asks the priest to be at the family gravesite the next day, where Rafael will be buried next to her mother and brother. The señora asks Doctor Javier why her son died, and he answers that the boy "lost his breath"—but his expression reveals that he knows the explanation is weak at best. The señora begins to paint and sketch red orchids—similar to the ones in her garden—on her son's coffin. She occasionally looks at the body of her dead son, and then devotes herself to painting again.

*When the señora discusses burying her son next to her mother, she implies that the grief left behind by death is a lifelong burden that grows over time as more people pass away. Moreover, the morbid imagery of a gravesite housing three generations suggests that death is pervasive, as it can be experienced at any stage of life, from parenthood to infancy.*

Señora Valencia begins to talk to Amabelle—who has kept her company as she paints the coffin—about the day she found Amabelle by the **river**. Señora Valencia says that "after [her] mother's death, the house was so filled with her presence." She had visited Dajabón with Don Ignacio, and saw Amabelle sitting by the riverside as if she was "waiting for an apparition." During their first meeting, Don Ignacio had asked Amabelle "who [she] belonged to," and Amabelle replied, in Haitian Creole, that she belonged to herself. Amabelle remembers this, but the story is interrupted when Señor Pico comes into the room.

*The señora, like Amabelle, also recalls childhood scenes, offering another example of how memory safeguards the past against being forgotten. Memory's protective abilities are further proven by the señora's words about her mother: the memory of her mother was powerful enough to linger beyond her death. It's also significant that Amabelle's initial declaration of self-possession was in her native language, a symbolic affirmation of her Haitian identity. Even as a child, Amabelle connected her sense of self—and her sense of belonging—to Haitian culture.*

Señora Valencia tells him that there should be "no wake," as that would be "too sad for such a short life." The señor agrees, and Señora Valencia finishes her story: she tells Amabelle that after her mother died, she was "desperate" for someone to "come live with [her] in this house." Amabelle disregards the story, and envies Señora Valencia; she realizes that her parents, unlike Rafael, have no final resting place or coffin.

*Amabelle's reaction to the señora's story illustrates how thoroughly her idea of home has changed. She does not focus on the señora's confession that Amabelle's arrival was much desired—which proves how important a role Amabelle played in the señora's household. Instead, she fixates on the idea that her own family, unlike the señora's child, has no gravesite. Amabelle's priorities have changed; she no longer feels connected to the señora, but instead prioritizes the family she lost back in Haiti.*

## CHAPTER 17

Amabelle returns to her room and lies down naked on her cement floor; she has taken Sebastien's advice about being "unclothed." She does this because she hopes to feel a "flood of perspiration" roll down from her back to her toes. Such a sensation would make her feels as if there is not "a drop of liquid left" in her body "with which to cry."

*Amabelle follows a suggestion from Sebastien, who is often a source of happiness and joy in her life. He is the one who advises her about remaining unclothed—a physical representation of being unencumbered by burdens such as despair. Amabelle's actions illustrate her ongoing feelings of grief: she is so overcome with emotion that she wishes to be rid of her ability to cry.*

## CHAPTER 18

Soon after Rafael's death, the birthday party planned for Doña Eva becomes his "unofficial wake." Amabelle notices that there is "a stillness" in Señora Valencia's eyes, as if she has experienced the "shadow of a lost dream." It is also clear to Amabelle that Señor Pico wishes to be with his son and hold him in his arms before he must place him in his coffin. Doña Eva, watching the Señor's face, comments that he and his wife are "very brave."

*The look in Señora Valencia's eyes reveals the effect that her son's death has had on her: her son's passing has forced her to confront a future without him, and she is grief-stricken. His death was so sudden and unexpected that his short life was almost like a dream, as if he never truly existed. Amabelle's observation here again underscores the fine line between dreams and reality.*

Don Ignacio turns on the radio, which interrupts the party abruptly. The broadcast features a song by "La Orquesta Presidente Trujillo," and is then followed by "three long patriotic songs" and parts of speeches once given by Trujillo. Señor Pico quiets everyone in the room and then turns up the radio's volume, as if he is "seeking comfort" for his "personal loss."

*The radio's program of political speeches and patriotic music is a sudden shift in the emotional tenor of the gathering. The radio's presence reveals how cultural matters are always in the background of Dominican society, even in apolitical situations. The señor's insistence on listening to the radio illustrates how strongly he values identity and cultural heritage: even in the midst of his own son's wake, he is fixated on the idea of patriotism and Dominican politics.*

The broadcast continues, and Trujillo's voice sounds "charged with certainty and fervor." Hearing his words, Señor Pico stands at attention, as if he is ready to "charge across a field of battle." Many of the partygoers nod their heads "in agreement" as the Generalissimo declares he will fight for his people. After the broadcast ends, the guests disperse, leaving the señor, señora, and their household staff behind.

*Despite the tragic setting, Señor Pico is so moved by the words of his country's leader that his entire demeanor changes. The other members of the party also react to the patriotism and nationalism conveyed by the radio's program. In doing so, they reveal that they, like the señor, prioritize their country's nationalism and cultural identity over all else, including their feelings of grief and loss.*

Señor Pico tries to comfort Señora Valencia while she sobs, but is unable to truly help her. Amabelle, who sees this unfold, believes that the marriage is doomed, as the pair does not comfort each other well enough. Furthermore, they have become "the parents of a dead child," a "test" of their bond that neither of them anticipated. The señora asks her husband to bury her son's clothes before they bury his body; he agrees, and then tells her he will soon be leaving for the border to participate in the operation.

*This interaction between Señora Valencia and Señor Pico reveals how their lives have changed as a result of their son's death. They are no longer newlyweds, or new parents, but parents who have lost their son. As such, they are forced to readjust their relationship to deal with their grief. The señor seems to cope with grief by repressing it: he is quick to jump back into his political affairs. This further reaffirms how he prioritizes his country over his sense of loss.*

## CHAPTER 19

Amabelle describes a cave she visited with Sebastien, which is half a day's walk away from their homes. Despite the cave's hidden location, it always looks as if there is a supernatural light inside of the cave. Amabelle believes that the radiant cave inspires people to "celebrate" themselves. She points out that there is an innate knowledge in "the emptiness" of one's "bones" that, like the cave, teaches a person how to celebrate.

*The cave that Amabelle describes is a symbol of hope. Although the cave is empty—mirroring the feeling of being hollowed out by grief or loss—a light still shines out of it. Just as survivors live on without their loved ones when they die, the cave remains lit without any occupants. Amabelle's description emphasizes how hope can still emerge from the desolation of grief.*

Amabelle then claims that the light she saw in the cave is the "same kind of light" she wishes to see shining "on the grave of [her] parents." After the events of the last few days, however, she also wishes this light to shine for "both Joël and Rafael."

*Amabelle's wish to have light shine for her lost parents, Joël, and Rafael illustrates how she is gradually becoming more hopeful, despite the grief and trauma of her life. Whereas before, her life was full of endless and repetitive nightmares, she now acknowledges that light—a symbol of hope—can also enter into her memories of her lost loved ones.*

## CHAPTER 20

Back in the present, Señor Pico has granted his wife's request and begins to bury Rafael's clothes. Señora Valencia tells Juana she would like to attend the burial, and then pleads for stories of her "Mami." Juana tells her that Doña Rosalinda was at first nervous to be a wife, but was happy to bear a daughter. Juana then says that Don Ignacio was "so very unhappy" when his wife passed away.

*The grief of Rafael's death prompts the señora to ask for stories of her lost mother. Juana shares these stories, as she is the one who has preserved the señora's mother's legacy. Juana's memories of the mother are stronger than the señora's own recollections: this fact reveals that it is not always the person closest to—or related to—the deceased that remembers them best. As in other scenes memory is a source of solace to someone who is dealing with grief and loss.*

Juana continues, telling Señora Valencia that her mother was a "good-hearted lady" who treated the staff kindly. The señora then tells Juana that she has had dreams of what Rafael would have looked like throughout the various stages of his life. She adds that she has never felt like "a whole woman," due to "the absence of Mami's face."

*The señora finally reveals the extent of her grief for both her mother and son. The señora's sense of loss is compounded because both her past and her future feel affected. She lost her mother at a young age, which impacted her childhood; she is also losing her visions of the future with her son. This grief diminishes her sense of belonging: her household feels emptier and less welcoming, and she does not feel a complete person.*

Amabelle walks to the compound of Don Carlos, a mill owner. She observes the tired workers and poor working conditions, and then locates Kongo's room. She notes that there are fresh clothes laid out on the floor "as though Joël had set them down."

*The clothes on the floor are a physical reminder of Joël's legacy, and they preserve his place in his father's memory. Kongo's willingness to leave the clothes out—as if Joël will still have use of them—reveals the depth of his grief: he has yet to accept the death of his son, and his actions reflect the denial that he appears to be using as a coping mechanism.*

Kongo explains that Sebastien retrieved the clothes that are laid out on the floor, and claims that they are for his son's burial. Kongo also says that Sebastien brought a pile of wood for Joël's coffin. Amabelle expresses her condolences, and then explains that Don Ignacio has requested to see Kongo.

*Sebastien, working to preserve the memory of his lost friend, brings the clothes to Kongo, who says Joël's clothes are for the funeral. His insistence on keeping the clothes in plain sight, however, suggests that he is not yet ready to part with anything that reminds him of his son. Kongo's grief, still fresh, keeps him from moving on with his life.*

Kongo is surprised by this request. Amabelle explains that Don Ignacio wishes to pay for the funeral, but Kongo refuses. Kongo laments that he was not able to "bury him in [their] own land," but says he tried to "give him back to the soil." Kongo tells Amabelle that he will never forget how his son looked when he was first born. He instructs Amabelle to tell Don Ignacio that he and his son are both men.

*Despite the amount of time they have spent in the Dominican Republic, Kongo wishes to bury Joël on Haitian land. His wish demonstrates how one's conception of home can remain constant despite time, distance, or emigration. Kongo then reminisces about his son's birth, and the memory is especially poignant when contrasted with his son's death. Kongo's thoughts reinforce how memory and death are intertwined: memory preserves the legacy of the deceased, but it also prompts painful recollections of the deceased's former life.*

After her talk with Kongo, Amabelle goes to Sebastien's room. She relays the news about Señor Pico's deceased son, and tells him not to rejoice in the death, as the Haitians "would not have wanted Señor Pico's family to rejoice when Joël died." Sebastien asks if Señora Valencia is like family to Amabelle, and she replies that she is.

*Amabelle and Sebastien's discussion illustrates two ways in which the ideas of home and belonging can develop. Amabelle's concept of home has changed with her departure from Haiti: she considers her employers to be her family, and mourns for them as if they are related. For Sebastien, however, the Dominican Republic does not replace Haiti. Rather, his extended stay in the Dominican Republic only strengthens his affinity for his home country.*

The next morning, Señor Pico and Señora Valencia finish arranging their son's coffin; Señor Pico places him into the casket, and tells his wife that everything will be well. He does not offer any sign of affection to his daughter Rosalinda, and then drives away. The señora then cradles her daughter against her, as if to feel the "child's breath against her cheek."

*The señor and señora's discussion is stilted, as they are still processing the death of their son. The señor's assurances, combined with his lack of fondness for his daughter, indicate that something is wrong: he is repressing his emotions in order to insist that everything is fine. This reaction reveals how death, a powerful force, can rob the living of their feelings and their passion.*

The señora makes an altar for Rafael out of flowers and a candle. Señora Valencia then tells Amabelle to ask her acquaintances—cane workers—to come in from the fields and have coffee at the house. Amabelle relays the message to the group and Sebastien tells Kongo that the house is "not a place" where they should go.

*Out of grief, the señora builds a tribute to her son. She then invites Amabelle's acquaintances—who are Haitian—drink coffee together. The señora's grief allows her to break the strict borders that divide higher-class Dominican aristocrats from Haitian field workers. She is so distraught that she no longer cares about maintaining the country's cultural divisions. The Haitians, however, remain suspicious. Due to being persecuted for their identity, they do not believe that ingrained cultural divisions can be healed so quickly.*

The group begins to talk amongst themselves and debate whether it is worthwhile to accept the invitation. They discuss rumors about "groups of Haitians being killed in the night," because they cannot pronounce words such as "perejil"—parsley—in a certain way. One woman mentions "a border commission," which gave "orders to have all Haitians killed." She claims that Dominicans were told to catch and bring Haitians to the soldiers.

*This discussion shows how language is used as a test of one's identity—despite the fact that language does not dictate one's nationality—and the results of this test allegedly lead to violence. As such, distrust between the two nationalities pervades everything, even an innocent invitation to share coffee. This interaction reveals how deep-seated cultural tensions have promoted violence and prevented individuals from breaking cultural barriers in ways that promote understanding or empathy.*

Some people reject the invitation, but part of the group ventures into the garden. Juana and Amabelle pass around cups of coffee, and Kongo walks into the parlor to see Señora Valencia and Rosalinda. He raises a finger as if to touch the baby's face, but the señora stops him; instead, he kisses the señora's fingers, and expresses condolences for her loss.

*This interaction shows two characters' tentative first steps towards transcending cultural labels. Kongo and the señora, allied in their grief for their deceased children, show signs of sympathy towards one another. Still, the señora is not ready to eliminate the borders between Dominican and Haitian cultures entirely: when Kongo physically reaches out, she rebuffs him.*

Kongo begins to speak of his son's death. He claims that Joël's passing taught him about the span of a lifetime, and how it can pass either very slowly or in an instant. He tells the señora to treasure the child that still lives. The group leaves the house, and Amabelle thinks that the señora has regretted her decision to invite the men in. Señor Pico returns later that night, and shatters the cups and saucers used by the visitors.

*The shared moment of understanding continues as Kongo teaches the señora lessons he learned from grief. His advice, universal and sympathetic, allows them to commiserate together. This shared sense of loss further breaks down the cultural barriers between them. Unfortunately, this moment of cultural truce does not last: the señora regrets her decision to speak with Kongo—and thus rejects the idea of subverting cultural borders. Señor Pico's decision to violently break the dishes further reinforces how easily the camaraderie between cultures can shatter.*

## CHAPTER 21

Amabelle remembers Christmases she celebrated in Haiti. At Christmas, families would create and light lanterns; her father, in particular, "always made… lanterns shaped like monuments," which took many months of work. Amabelle remembers asking her father to make a lantern that looked like him, so she could carry it "the whole year long."

*Fittingly, Amabelle's memories of her childhood holidays expose how much she has always valued the act of recollection. Even as a child, she asked her father for a lantern that would preserve his features. The lantern, like memory, would safeguard his appearance against time and forgetfulness: she would have an object that would remind her of the way he looked at a certain point in time.*

## CHAPTER 22

In the present, Amabelle attends Rosalinda's baptism. She notices that older children are being baptized for a second time, so that the Generalissimo would "become their official, albeit absent, godfather." Señora Valencia lets Amabelle kiss the newly baptized girl, but Señor Pico takes his wife's arm and drags her away. People reconvene for a baptismal feast, but the celebration is "stilled by the memory of Rafi" (Rafael), which will haunt Rosalinda "all her life."

*The older children's baptisms, which turn them into godchildren of the Dominican Republic's dictator, reveal the country's dedication to its cultural identity. The baptisms are purely symbolic; nevertheless, they indicate that some Dominicans believe their leader—a symbol of their culture—should also become part of their families. Señor Pico further reinforces this theme of devotion to Dominican culture. He physically moves his wife away from Amabelle to separate them, expressing his desire to separate Dominican and Haitian cultures from one another.*

Later that night, Kongo comes to Amabelle's room and brings her an offering. The gift is a **mask**; the expression is caught "between a grin and a scream," and Amabelle realizes it is the "death face" of Joël. Kongo explains that back in Haiti, his occupation was crafting carnival masks.

*The death mask of Joël's face—much like the lantern of her father's face that Amabelle desired in her childhood—is a physical embodiment of memory. The mask allows Kongo to preserve his son's features for perpetuity. Still, it is also an embodiment of his grief; it forces him to confront his loss not just mentally, but also visually.*

Kongo explains that he cannot remember whether she was one of the children who hid from him when he opened the carnival parade. Amabelle, wanting to take advantage of his nostalgia, asks for his true name. He claims that "some things are too wasteful to remember," and adds that after his partner passed away, he spent all his money on liquor in order to forget.

*Kongo and Amabelle's interaction continues to emphasize the theme of memory. Kongo, recalling his past career as a carnival merchant, shares his legacy with an unknowing Amabelle; without this transmission of memory, his old work would remain forgotten. He refuses to use the power of memory to safeguard his name, however—he wishes it to be forgotten. Kongo demonstrates here how memory can be used to both protect and destroy.*

Kongo then tells Amabelle he has visited on behalf of Sebastien, who has asked her to promise herself to him. Kongo says he wanted Joël to find a woman like Amabelle, and she points out that another woman, Félice, loved him and always wanted his approval. Kongo thinks this is senseless, as his son is "only a remembrance now." He claims Joël will "slip from her mind" as the years pass and she finds another man.

*Kongo's fears about his son being forgotten reveal how powerful a force death can be. Death can erase a person's personal legacy from memory, even when others (like Félice) cherish that person deeply. Memory is the best method of preventing a loved one from disappearing from others' minds. Nevertheless, Kongo's speech emphasizes that memory can be fallible; humans are fickle, and can forget someone quickly.*

Amabelle asks if he would like to keep the death **mask** for himself, but Kongo says he has made many of them; he hopes that people will "keep [his] son in mind" after he is gone. Kongo then asks if Don Ignacio has asked to see him again, and Amabelle thinks that Don Ignacio seems "to have forgotten about him and Joël." Kongo says he is not surprised that his son has "vanished" from the other man's thoughts.

*The masks represent the act of memory: they materialize Joël's face so he cannot be forgotten. The masks, which will be given to multiple people, are meant to guarantee Joël's symbolic immortality. That is, if more people possess them, more people will remember him, despite his absence. The masks are merely a weak substitute, however, for Joël's real existence. As such, the masks both serve an uplifting purpose—memorializing Joël— and act as tragic tokens of what has been lost to death.*

Kongo leaves, and Amabelle travels to Sebastien's room. On the way Amabelle slips and falls in a stream, and is found by a group of men who are part of a night watchman brigade; they are led by Unèl, a stonemason. Unèl tells her it is dangerous to walk at night, and explains that he formed the brigade to protect Haitians.

*Unèl's brigade is a watchman's patrol that watches over the Haitian neighborhoods in the Dominican Republic. The brigade is an embodiment of cultural and national strength, and it illustrates how people are often devoted to protecting their own cultures. Still, the brigade also deepens the borders between the two cultures in the Dominican Republic: though well-intentioned, it is a testament to the deep-seated suspicions and fears that separate Dominicans and Haitians.*

One of Unèl's men explains that he is planning to go back to Haiti, and thanks Alégria?the name of his neighborhood in the Dominican Republic?for a "joyful" time spent in the country. Unèl explains that he has a right to be in the Dominican Republic, and that the brigade will stay "to fight." He explains that the "times have changed" and that "[they] all must look after [themselves.]" Amabelle later reunites with Sebastien, and they discuss whether or not the rumors are true.

*Unèl's men possess very different feelings about home, belonging, and the cultural tensions in the Dominican Republic. The men's differing viewpoints illustrate how home is not a static concept: for some Haitians, the Dominican Republic is a peaceful resting place, but for others it is unwelcoming and hostile. Unèl's words about self-preservation further underscore how the country's staunch cultural beliefs have led to societal inflexibility and distrust.*

Amabelle and Sebastien talk about Kongo's visit, and their future plans; Sebastien claims they must wait to live together. Their conversation is then interrupted by Yves, who is talking in his sleep; Yves asks his father not to die on his "plate of food." Sebastien explains that Yves's father died after being let out of prison; his wife cooked a feast, and he ate too much and passed away. Sebastien also adds that Yves just recently developed the habit of talking in his sleep—prior to Joël's death, Yves never narrated his dreams.

*Yves's dreams seem to gain strength and concreteness after Joël's passing, and it is likely that his dreams are a result of his grief for his lost friend. Yves's behavior illustrates how dreams are often a direct coping mechanism for death and despair. Fantasies allow Yves to repress or refocus on alternate realities—or past traumas, like the death of Yves's father—in order to avoid the fresh sense of loss. Still, though, the fact that he narrates his dreams aloud shows that these fantasies can also intrude on reality.*

The next day, Amabelle and Sebastien tease Yves for talking in his sleep. The two then sit outside and share a cup of coffee; both of them are happy, and glance at each other bashfully. Amabelle notes that they are keeping their joy unspoken because they are not yet able to fully commit themselves: there is still "cane to curse, the harvest to dread, the future to fear."

*Amabelle and Sebastien's joy in their shared morning reveals how they have found a new sense of belonging with one another. Despite their pasts—both tragic and lonely—they have come together in another country and feel somewhat at peace. Still, their dreams of a future together are merely fantasies: the harsh realities of life, such as death and harvesting, still remain. Their dreams merely allow them to escape for a moment, but they are nonetheless a source of strength.*

## CHAPTER 23

Amabelle dreams about a figure she calls the "sugar woman." The woman dances a "kalanda," and when Amabelle speaks to the woman, her voice sounds like the voice of "the orphaned child at the stream." Amabelle wakes up, knowing that she only talks in her sleep about her parents or the sugar woman. Sebastien asks which dream she just had, and she says he can be "impatient with [her] shadows."

*The sugar woman, a figure in Amabelle's dream, is a physical embodiment of Amabelle's fantasies. Her dreams are so powerful that they seem to speak to her, and distract her with dances. Still, the sugar woman's voice sounds like the voice of an orphan. This description reveals that even Amabelle's fantastical dreams are affected by the grief left in the wake of her parents' death.*

## CHAPTER 24

Amabelle notes that Doña Sabine's house is guarded by a group of armed peasants, and that there are people watching fearfully from behind the curtains. She walks towards Señora Valencia's house, and sees that Señor Pico is teaching his wife how to shoot a gun; Amabelle narrowly avoids getting hit by a bullet. The señora cries out in terror, but sees she is unharmed. Her husband tells her she must learn to protect herself, and she says that her family has never had "these fears before."

*In a very literal way, the homes that Amabelle has grown accustomed to—her neighbors' home, her employer's house—are changing rapidly. They are no longer friendly and welcoming; instead, they are guarded, and people hide inside them. Additionally, the señora almost shoots Amabelle, and this close call demonstrates how cultural tensions are shifting into outright violence between the country's two major cultural groups.*

Señora Valencia, seeing a cadre of military men pull up to her house, says that it feels like everyone is "at war." Don Ignacio explains that for men like Señor Pico, everything is an expedition; he claims that he, unlike these men, came to the Dominican Republic to escape from "armies and officers."

*The strict boundaries between classes and cultures in the Dominican Republic have led to distrust and tension. Eventually, even the señora—a privileged woman who was previously unaware of the Haitians' struggle—notices that the friction between Haitians and Dominicans has escalated into aggression. Don Ignacio, revealing more of his revolutionary attitude towards identity and shared cultural boundaries, admits that he does not like his country's militant ideology. He does not wish to preserve the cultural boundaries that lead to animosity and violence; in fact, he came to the Dominican Republic to escape those exact problems.*

Don Ignacio explains that he has witnessed Señor Pico's behavior before. He tells Señora Valencia that Señor Pico "believes that everything he is doing, he's doing for his country." He says that this is the reasoning Señor Pico uses to explain his behavior to himself.

*Don Ignacio recognizes that Señor Pico is driven by his abiding devotion to his country. This intense nationalism allows him to justify his behavior, even if it is prejudicial or oppressive towards other cultural groups. The señor's behavior illustrates the extreme consequences of using identity to separate people into groups. He is so blinded by prejudice against other identities that he can rationalize any actions, even if they are violent and immoral.*

## CHAPTER 25

Amabelle explains how the "valley's dust storms" make her joyous. She imagines there are people walking ahead of her in these storms; although she cannot see them, she nevertheless hopes that they will reappear when the storm settles. She sees her mother and father in these storms, and after the dust disappears, her hands are always raised up in prayer.

*Amabelle's description of her joy illustrates a growing sense of hope. Oftentimes, she is portrayed as a grief-stricken, orphaned, and desolate woman; nevertheless, the dust storms inspire her to believe in the dream of a community that moves forward. The imaginary people walking in front of her—leading her—are representative of her ability to look towards the future, despite her past.*

## CHAPTER 26

Doctor Javier examines Rosalinda, and whispers to Amabelle in Haitian Creole that she must leave the house. He has heard rumors that the Generalissimo has ordered soldiers to kill Haitians. Amabelle once again mistrusts these rumors; she claims there are always ongoing disputes, where "one side of the island [plans] to invade the other." Amabelle believes that because the Haitians are working the land, the Dominican Republic would not wish to interfere with them.

*Amabelle's interaction with Doctor Javier subverts expectations about cultural boundaries. First, the doctor speaks in Haitian Creole, revealing that he is capable of moving between cultures with ease. Secondly, Amabelle does not initially believe the rumors of Dominicans assaulting Haitians, nor is she suspicious of the Dominicans. Rather, she believes that the cultures can coexist, as the Dominicans rely on the Haitians for labor. Both characters refuse to adhere to their community's beliefs, demonstrating that people's cultural groups do not necessarily dictate their viewpoints.*

Doctor Javier tells her that he will be crossing into Haiti with a large group later that night. He says he will make space for Amabelle's lover, Sebastien, and his sister. Before she can answer, Señora Valencia interrupts the conversation. Amabelle wishes to ask her for help, but wonders if her employer will be "brave enough to stand between [Amabelle] and her husband" if a deadly situation arises.

*The doctor's plan to cross into Haiti illustrates his comfort moving between Dominican and Haitian cultures, as well as his willingness to transcend cultural boundaries. Doctor Javier does not subscribe to the narrow thinking that separates cultures from one another; rather, he is able to fit in amongst different groups. Amabelle's belief in the Dominican Republic as her home begins to waver, particularly because she starts to doubt that her employer will support her. Her family with the señora—which was once welcoming—now seems unstable, again showing how one's sense of home and family can shift unexpectedly.*


Amabelle tries to concoct a plan, but is unsure of what to do. She makes a sack in case she decides to flee: she packs Joël's **mask** and a change of clothes. She hides the bag near Juana and Luis's house, and then returns to Señora Valencia. She asks Amabelle if Don Ignacio has returned, and tells Amabelle to direct Luis to go looking for him. Amabelle does so, and follows Luis out as if she is pretending to help; she then leaves to find Sebastien.

*Amabelle packs Joël's mask to memorialize him. Carrying the mask is a literal version of the act of remembering someone: she physically carries his legacy with her as she travels, so he cannot be forgotten. Amabelle's lies to the señora reveal how her sense of home in the Dominican Republic, already unstable, is eroding further. She is unwilling to tell the truth to her childhood friend, as she no longer feels certain the señora will treat her like family.*

Amabelle and Sebastien discuss their options. Amabelle thinks they should go to Haiti together; she says that if they are wrong, they can always return. Sebastien confronts her, telling her that she "never believed those people could injure [her]." Amabelle admits that she may have trusted blindly, and that she had been living inside memories and her dreams to avoid the present, which is "truly frightful."

*Sebastien, who has always helped Amabelle to better understand herself, forces Amabelle to confront her unhealthy coping mechanisms. She admits that she has substituted dreams for reality, as she was unwilling to see her true circumstances clearly. Sebastien also gets Amabelle to realize that her belief in her Dominican home was also at least somewhat a dream. She fantasized about belonging with the señora's family, at the expense of seeing the cultural tensions that frame her actual circumstances.*

Sebastien and Amabelle agree to talk to Kongo before making a decision. They search for him and find him sitting with Yves; Kongo tells them that Don Ignacio visited him in order to talk about his son. Yves claims that he should not have wasted his time, and that only death would even things out. Kongo replies that they will never be even, until his life and Don Ignacio's life are the same.

*Don Ignacio's visit to Kongo reveals the aristocratic man's willingness to cross cultural borders and reject the nationalist sentiment of his countrymen. Still, Kongo acknowledges that this act of intercultural peace is not enough to fix the prejudice that is rampant in the Dominican Republic. Only when the two cultures are equal—when no one faces discrimination—will Kongo and Don Ignacio be truly alike, without being defined by cultural labels.*

Kongo then recounts how Don Ignacio talked to him about killing other soldiers in the war. Kongo tells the group that Don Ignacio feels as if his son's death and the death of his wife are retribution for the men he has slain. Kongo insists that they spoke man to man, and that discussing these topics helped the two understand each other better.

*Don Ignacio's memory torments him with guilt. He remembers killing other men, and the details are so raw and burdensome that he shares them with a complete stranger. Don Ignacio also reveals his philosophy about the inevitability and power of death: it can take away loved ones as a type of revenge. Put simply, death has overpowered Don Ignacio's life; he is perpetually grief-stricken and remorseful as result of the deaths he has caused and experienced.*

Sebastien informs Kongo that after hearing the rumors, they are thinking of leaving the Dominican Republic. Yves wants to stay, thinking the rumors are meant to scare Haitians away. Kongo draws an image on the floor, and tells Sebastien and Amabelle that their path will be a "trail of rivers and mountains." Sebastien and Yves seem "content" with this response; they act as if their "dead fathers" have offered them a "benediction."

*The men's decisions here reveal how complex the idea of home can be. To Yves and Kongo, home is the Dominican Republic—they wish to remain there, despite the rising sense of doubt and danger. For Amabelle and Sebastien, the Dominican Republic is no longer welcoming; they instead see Haiti as their true home. Furthermore, Yves and Sebastien both value Kongo as a father figure, demonstrating that their conception of family has evolved beyond just biological ties.*

Amabelle returns to Señora Valencia's house, and is wary of revealing her plans to her employer. Amabelle realizes there is an unsolvable tension between their two countries, as "two different people" are attempting to share "one tiny piece of land." Amabelle decides that she will not say an official farewell to the señora; instead, she will send a message once she is settled in Haiti.

*Amabelle finally begins to accept that cultural identity is a source of tension in the Dominican Republic. Her realization results in her decision to not bid farewell to the señora. This unwillingness to say goodbye shows that Amabelle no longer sees the Dominican Republic as home: she no longer values it enough to pay her respects, and wants to leave as soon as possible.*


Beatriz arrives, and Amabelle serves them water. Señora Valencia continues to worry about her father, and Beatriz speculates that he has a mistress. Beatriz then tells the señora that Mimi is leaving their household, and Amabelle feigns surprise. Beatriz once again changes the subject, and asks what the señora will paint next?her last work was the portrait of Trujillo.

*The conversation between Beatriz and the señora contrasts with the gravity of Amabelle's situation. The two upper-class women, protected by their privileged place in Dominican society, worry about relatively trivial things. Meanwhile, Amabelle and Mimi, who fear persecution due to their Haitian identities, are contemplating whether to leave their homes for good. As a result of their differing cultural identities, the two groups of women live totally separate lives even within the same house.*

Beatriz and Señora Valencia begin to talk of travel. Beatriz wishes to travel to Spain, in order to escape and expand her horizons; she claims all the girls in the Dominican Republic only have aspirations to study domestic science. Señora Valencia says she will never leave, as it is the country of her family's graves.

*Beatriz and Señora Valencia's conversation also offers new perspectives on the idea of belonging. Beatriz's sense of home in the Dominican Republic is not strong enough to temper her wanderlust. She wishes to travel, indicating that she does not feel beholden to her home country. The señora, on the other hand, feels connected to her home in the Dominican Republic through her family. For the señora, home is defined by familial relationships and loss: the deaths of her relatives and her grief keep her tied to the Dominican Republic. She does not wish to abandon her home, because it has emotional significance for her.*


Suddenly, Señora Valencia begins to have trouble breathing, and Beatriz and Amabelle carry her into the house. Amabelle sees blood on the señora's dress, and tells herself that she will only leave for the church after the Señora is safely in bed. Señora Valencia grips her hand tightly, and Amabelle asks to be released to find medicine. In the pantry she finds Don Ignacio, who has placed a wooden cross with Joël's name on the floor.

*Amabelle's ongoing concern for Señora Valencia—a character who represents Amabelle's home in the Dominican Republic—is indicative of Amabelle's conflicting feelings. Despite Amabelle's overall plan to return to Haiti, which illustrates the evolution of her idea of home, she is still emotionally tied to the Dominican Republic and the household in which she grew up. For Don Ignacio, the cross symbolizes and memorializes Joël's death, while also hinting at the grief he feels for the deaths he has experienced throughout his lifetime. Joël's cross is yet another burden that Don Ignacio bears, as well as a physical manifestation of his remorse.*


The household staff hears voices and trucks outside the house, and they walk outside to investigate. They see a line of soldiers standing in front of Unèl's armed brigade; Señor Pico is standing by one of the lead military trucks, watching the interaction. He tells the men to "kneel or sit," and claims he will take them to the border.

*The simmering tensions between the two cultural groups in the Dominican Republic begin to flare. The two groups of men—Dominican soldiers and Unèl's brigade—are facing off in two lines; their formation is a physical embodiment of the strict societal boundaries that separate Haitians from Dominicans. Señor Pico then offers to take the Haitians across the border. By making this offer, he reinforces the idea that national borders—and cultural heritage—are immovable dividing lines that separate people from one another.*

Unèl says they will not kneel, and Señor Pico claims that the Haitians' work in the cane fields is "worse than kneeling" as they work "like beasts." The men of the brigade curse at him, and the soldiers merely laugh at the Haitians' response. Doña Eva, Doctor Javier's mother, interrupts the standoff by asking Señor Pico if he can talk about her son, who has been arrested along with Father Romain and Father Vargas.

*The soldiers' taunts and the Haitians' outrage further illustrate how cultural prejudice has fragmented society in the Dominican Republic. Narrow-minded ideas about Haitian culture allow the Dominican soldiers to feel unjustly superior and separate from the Haitians, despite the fact that both groups are part of the Dominican Republic's society. Doctor Javier's arrest, however, reveals how certain people can transcend cultural boundaries. The doctor is so entwined with Haitian society in the Dominican Republic that he has been arrested alongside Father Romain, a Haitian priest. The doctor's ability to bridge cultural groups is seemingly too revolutionary, however, and gets him into trouble.*

Señor Pico brushes Doña Eva aside, and once again tells Unèl's men that they will be taken to the border, to which the men reply, "Never!" Señor Pico tells one truck to drive forward, and a man from the brigade throws himself in front of it. The truck crushes his knees and legs; other men try to help him, but they back away as the truck continues to move towards them. Amabelle runs into the road as her "countrymen" are thrown into the back of the truck, and Señor Pico tells her to get out of the road. She feels a soldier's whip strike her back as she runs away.

*Unèl's brigade continues to reject the señor's suggestion of being brought to the border. Unèl's men consider the Dominican Republic their home; like the Dominicans, they have a right to live there and treat it as their own country. Still, the señor and his men cling to their narrow views of identity: they feel as if Unèl's men are outsiders from another culture. As a result, they begin to forcibly push them out: the car's physical impact against a Haitian protestor is symbolic of cultural prejudice turning into literal violence.*


Unèl is surrounded by a circle of soldiers and throws his machete; he cuts one of the men's faces. The soldiers try to grab him, and Unèl yells that he has never lived on his knees. The soldiers grab his arms and hold them behind his back, and one of them uses a bayonet to injure him. Unèl is tied up and thrown into the back of the truck, while Señor Pico watches. Amabelle thinks that to the señor, this "seemed to have been regular work."

*Once again, narrow-minded beliefs about separating people by culture turn into full-fledged violence. Unèl is forcibly overpowered by the Dominicans—a physical representation of how Dominican society oppresses Haitians in order to reinforce their own sense of superiority. The señor is unmoved by this, revealing that he fully believes in the importance of maintaining cultural boundarie by any means. Señor Pico's actions here—and his personality more generally—illustrate how nationalism and cultural borders help to maintain societal divides.*

Amabelle travels to the church where she was supposed to meet with Sebastien and Doctor Javier. It is empty, so she begins to travel through a cane field, hoping to escape detection. The "spears" of cane cut up her legs, the marsh beneath the cane sinks under her feet, and she feels bugs crawling all over her body.

*Amabelle's flight through the cane field is treacherous. The fields are unwelcoming and even physically dangerous. Although the fields are inanimate, they act in humanlike ways: it is as if even the Dominican Republic's land is unfriendly and hostile to Amabelle, just like its people.*

Amabelle gets through the cane field and arrives at Kongo's room; he cleans up her wounds, and tells her that Sebastien and Mimi were taken by army trucks. She asks where the trucks will take them, and he tells her there is a prison near Dajabón. She decides this is where she will go, and he explains the best location for her to cross the **river**. He tells her that Yves is at Doña Sabine's house, and she decides to stop there before she leaves.

*The prison where Amabelle's friends will be taken is in Dajabón, a border town between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The river—a site of violence between the two countries—is emblematic of the cultural boundaries that separate the two nations. Amabelle plans to cross that river and return to Haiti at last; in doing so, she is illustrating how she is relinquishing her connection to Dominican identity and culture.*

She knocks on Doña Sabine's door, and Félice greets her. Amabelle asks where the watchmen and guards have gone, and Félice tells her that they were sent away, as the doña was afraid they would switch allegiances and "turn on them." Doña Sabine and Don Gilbert, who are awake, ask who has been let in; they tell Félice to be careful. The two supervise their property, and realize they will "not be able to save everybody." Amabelle thinks they may not be able to protect themselves.

*Doña Sabine and Don Gilbert's doubts illustrate the consequence of the cultural tension between Dominicans and Haitians. The Dominican Republic is no longer a place in which any Haitians feel safe: cultural boundaries have led to outright violence. Although the doña and don live a life of privilege, their Haitian identity still prevents them being treated with respect. As Haitians, they have been singled out for prejudice, despite their wealth and integration into Dominican society.*

Amabelle finds Yves and tells him her plan to travel to Dajabón, and he agrees to join her. Félice, however, chooses to stay behind; she is afraid, and does not wish to "die walking." Amabelle gives her Joël's death **mask** for safekeeping, and she caresses it lovingly. She claims it is a "good likeness of him." Félice says goodbye, and wonders if she will see the two of them again some day.

*Félice and Yves's decisions—to stay and leave the Dominican Republic, respectively—illustrate how the idea of belonging can change, and how it is different for each person. Félice elects to stay out of fear; she no longer feels connected enough to Haiti to risk the trip. For Yves, however, Haiti is still a place that he values: he did not feel like a part of the Dominican Republic, and so is willing to journey back despite the dangers. Félice also keeps Joël's mask, a physical emblem of his legacy. By owning it, she is taking on the responsibility of preserving his memory: she will continue to recall him and gaze upon him, thereby keeping him alive despite his death.*

## CHAPTER 27

Amabelle and Yves continue to travel through the night, until dawn; Amabelle's house uniform clings to her as they come across a stream. Yves believes they will reach the border by nightfall. Suddenly the two hear an oxcart traveling along the path, and they hide as the cart gets stuck in the road. Yves and Amabelle see a young girl fall out of the cart; she has sustained wounds from a machete. The girl's body falls down the slope. The men steering do not notice that the girl has fallen out of the cart.

*The body of the girl rolling off the cart unseen illustrates how death is commonplace and always present. Although the oxcart drivers do not see the girl's demise, death is still ubiquitous: it occurs even when no one is around to mourn or acknowledge it. The girl's death is also a tragic consequence of nationalistic hatred. The girl is a nameless victim of violence by Dominican soldiers—evidenced by the machete wounds— and, due to her nationality, she is unimportant to the drivers. They do not acknowledge her loss, as cultural tension has led them to be unsympathetic towards—and prejudiced against—her and other Haitians.*

Amabelle and Yves hear groaning from the cart. One the cart's owners picks up a rock and bashes it against one of the people who is stirring underneath the cart's coverings, and the sounds stop. After watching the scene, Yves seems "numb," and he tells Amabelle that at least they "survived the night."

*Once again, the presence of death and the consequences of racial intolerance become evident. One of the owners physically assaults a person being carried in his cart, possibly causing a fatal injury. This altercation illustrates how swiftly or unexpectedly death can occur. Yves, struck by the callousness of the action, feels numb: the reality of death is so overwhelming and cruel that he cannot confront it. The driver's actions, which are unsympathetic and hostile, are presumably a consequence of intolerance and prejudice: because he lives in a country that does not value people of a certain culture, he feels justified in assaulting them and knows that he will get away with it.*

Amabelle and Yves get something to eat, and a religious procession passes by. Amabelle notes that there is such an immediate connection between "desperate women" that she is already aware of the prayers they are murmuring to themselves. The last woman in line is holding a portrait of Trujillo, and praying for his good health.

*Despite the fact that Amabelle and the women in the religious procession are from different cultures, she recognizes their prayers. This sense of camaraderie subverts strict cultural labels of "Haitian" or "Dominican"—the women share an understanding, despite their different upbringings. Still, one of the praying women is holding up a portrait of the Dominican Republic's dictator, who has stoked racial tensions through propaganda. The portrait, which glorifies Dominican nationalism, thereby illustrates how cultural boundaries are reinforced and upheld, keeping people separate who might otherwise find common ground.*

Amabelle and Yves continue on their journey for a while, and then come to rest on the side of the mountain. They are approached by a group of travelers, who look like the members of a "vast family." Amabelle notes that two of the women look like they are Dominicanas, or potentially a mix of Haitian and Dominican; she emphasizes that it is sometimes "hard to tell."

*The traveling troupe seems like a family, despite their differing identities. Amabelle even emphasizes that, despite her first guesses about their nationalities, it is often difficult to truly tell whether someone is Dominican or Haitian. As such, the travelers demonstrate how narrow cultural labels are often fallible and even nonsensical. Sometimes, people transcend boundaries to form new ways of relating to one another.*

The group unites, and Yves asks where they are from. Two members of the group, Odette and her partner Wilner, claim they are from the "Yanki" mills on the other side of the island. Amabelle tells them that there were rumors that Haitians would be safe in the "big mills," but Odette does not wish to debate the truth of the rumors. Odette and Wilner are the only two members who are from the same location; they have picked up the others along the way. The travelers share a meal together, and Yves and Wilner debate how long it will take to reach the border.

*Although Amabelle has officially decided to leave the Dominican Republic behind—she rejects it as her home—she nevertheless clings to rumors that some parts of the Dominican Republic are welcoming. Amabelle thereby reveals that although her conception of home has altered, and she no longer fully feels welcome in the Dominican Republic, she is still trying to figure out where she belongs and feels safe.*

Amabelle is drawn to one of the travelers, named Tibon, whose arms are mismatched; she asks him how long he has been traveling. He tells her it has been five days, and then recounts the story of his capture: he was thrown in a truck and taken with others to a "cliff over the rough seas in La Romana." He tells Amabelle how the soldiers told groups of people to jump, six at a time. If they chose not to, they faced civilians with machetes. Amabelle imagines Sebastien's voice telling her that he is alive.

*Tibon's story reveals how deep-set cultural prejudices can turn even civilians into violent enemies. The Dominicans' prejudice against Haitians leads them to persecute the Haitians, and eventually results in Dominicans ordering Haitians to their deaths. Due to the Dominicans' belief in narrow-minded cultural labels, they do not value the Haitians in their society, and they seem to feel no remorse for the lost lives of their fellow residents.*

Amabelle begins to daydream about Sebastien, recalling many past memories: she remembers him recounting Joël's death, and reminisces about his many moods. She remembers him being angered by the sound of cane being cut, and how the smell of the cane troubled him. Tibon interrupts her memories to tell his story, and describes how he was forced to jump off the cliff.

*Confronted with the traveler's painful story, Amabelle begins to fall into fantasies. She is unwilling to deal with the grim reality Tibon describes, and instead concentrates on happier memories of Sebastien. Tibon's interruption represents the intrusive way that reality infringes on dreams, and his story highlights the inescapability of Amabelle's present circumstances.*

Tibon survives the jump and tries to escape. He recalls how he saw peasants wading into the water with machetes, and says they were looking to "cut off heads." The other travelers listen to the story, and are moved to tears. The two Dominican sisters then ask in Spanish if Yves is Amabelle's man; she answers in the negative, and Tibon claims that Yves looks at her like he can protect her.

*Tibon's story continues to illustrate the consequences of the Dominicans' prejudice against Haitians. Even Dominican peasants—who, based on their lack of wealth, occupy similar positions as Haitians in Dominican society—are hostile to the Haitians and ready to commit violence. Identity and cultural prejudices again seem to supersede any sense of sympathy.*

The two sisters?Dolores and Doloritas?continue to talk to the group in Spanish, as it is clear that they do not know how to speak Haitian Creole. Dolores explains that they are Dominicanas, and Doloritas describes how her man, a Haitian, was taken from her bed. Doloritas tells Amabelle that she wanted to learn Haitian Creole for her partner, and how she planned to visit his family in Haiti.

*The two Dominican sisters speak only Spanish, illustrating how their language reinforces their identity. The other members of the group, however, are multilingual, demonstrating that language and cultural barriers can be broken. Despite the sisters' inability to speak Haitian Creole, however, they show a clear willingness to learn. This enthusiasm is yet another example of how cultural labels can be transcended, and how one's identity can become flexible.*

Amabelle begins to walk with the sisters, and Tibon looks disappointed that she has forsaken his company. He begins to talk about the plight of the Haitians in the Dominican Republic, and claims that poor men will always be hated by their neighbors. He then adds that staying "too long at a neighbor's house" will inevitably lead to hatred and resentment, and wonders if the Generalissimo is waiting for them at the border of the two countries.

*Tibon repeats phrases that emphasize the cultural divide between Dominicans and Haitians. This propaganda reinforces how the Haitians are not true members of Dominican society, due to their heritage; rather, they are compared to visitors overstaying their welcome. Tibon's speech shows how cultural labels used to divide and separate groups of people: Haitians, a cultural group that is considered foreign to the Dominicans, are unwelcome.*

## CHAPTER 28

The group stops to rest for the night, and everyone tries to fall asleep. Each time the Dominican sisters wake up, they must remind themselves of where they are, and they speak to each other in "secret grunts." Yves, however, does not fall asleep; instead, he plays a game with a stick, and does not seem to notice smoke rising from a nearby village.

*The Dominican sisters' confusion about their location is the consequence of their willingness to subvert cultural boundaries. They are lessening their attachment to Dominican nationalism and culture by fleeing to Haiti; they wish to learn a new language and a new culture. This process, however, is disorienting, and as a result they rely on their native language as a source of comfort and security.*

Eventually, everyone in the group wakes up and observes the smoke. The ash smells like burning flesh, and to Amabelle it smells familiar. She notes that it smells like the "bonfire of corpses" that was lit on fire after a hurricane; the Generalissimo had ordered the burning, and the odor is unmistakable.

*Here Amabelle recalls the lingering scent of death. The smell, which is unmistakable and unforgettable, is symbolic of how death often has long-lasting and memorable impact on those who experience it.*

Tibon suddenly confesses to Amabelle that when he was ten years old, he almost killed a Dominican child. He was motivated to bully the child because he wished to prove that despite their different livelihoods?the child lived in a nicer home?their lives were still equal. Tibon admits that the boy never said what he wanted to hear, which was that they were of the same flesh and blood.

*Tibon's bullying is yet another example of how prejudice and rigid cultural labels can lead to violence. Tibon, who was angered by society's poor treatment of him, lashed out at a helpless child. Despite the bullying, the child never vocalized the idea that Dominicans and Haitians are equal. Tibon's disappointment—and the fact that the child apparently didn't learn anything as a result of the bullying—illustrates how violence and intolerance will never lead to effective change. Violence does not erase narrow-minded cultural beliefs, or solve cultural rifts; rather, it further separates people within society.*

The group decides to keep traveling, and Wilner tells Dolores and Doloritas that they are no longer allowed to travel with them. He says he does not want to be killed for them, and claims that, for the sisters, this land is "their country." He argues that wherever they go, "people will welcome them," and that they are capable of finding the border themselves. Tibon worries that the sisters will betray them, but Wilner "sense[s]" that they will not do so.

*The Haitian refugees tell the Dominican travelers to find their own way. The traveling troupe, initially a symbol of the breakdown of cultural borders and labels, therefore begins to re-divide along national lines. Despite this reaffirmation of cultural divisions, however, WIlner believes that the Dominicans will not betray the Haitians. In this way, although cultural boundaries are re-established, the fellowship between the two different cultures remains.*

At first, Amabelle wants to persuade the group to allow the sisters to travel with them. She then realizes that the sisters have no issues pronouncing "perejil," the Spanish word for parsley; furthermore, she understands that their names, if spoken by the Haitian travelers, would be translated into Haitian Creole. She notes that when the sisters pronounce the name of Doloritas's Haitian lover, the name sounds Spanish.

*Amabelle ponders the linguistic boundaries between Haitian Creole and Spanish, noting that the Dominicanas' pronunciation of the Spanish word for parsley is flawless. She also notes that a Haitian name, pronounced in Spanish, would no longer sound Haitian. Amabelle's fixation on pronunciation demonstrates how, in the Dominican Republic, language defines one's cultural identity. Moreover, the power of Spanish to make a Haitian name no longer sound like it is spoken in Creole indicates how powerful language and culture can be: they can reshape even something fundamental to one's identity, such as a name.*

The travelers leave the sisters behind, and Amabelle imagines what she will do when she returns to Haiti. She thinks she will "exchange the pesos for gourdes," and wonders if she can reclaim her childhood home for herself. She has no papers that prove her past ownership, but asserts that the land is "still her birthright," and that the soil once belonged to her mother and father.

*Amabelle's belief that she belongs in Haiti grows as she travels, revealing that the Dominican Republic—once a cherished home—is no longer as important to her. Still, these feelings of belonging are unstable: she has no documentation to prove that her old home in Haiti truly belongs to her. Amabelle also begins to fall into dreams of her return; as she is still a refugee in a hostile country, these fantasies indicate that she is trying once again to avoid her harsh reality.*

The group comes across abandoned huts, and they discover that the huts belong to a large family of Haitian traders; the family hid the land papers under their mattress. At first, the travelers believe that if the huts' owners return, they will welcome the travelers and protect them. The group further investigates, however, and finds twelve bodies hanging in trees near the huts. They decide to keep moving, afraid that the people who set the fires from earlier will come across them.

*At first, the refugees are optimistic when they come across an abandoned compound. They soon lose hope, however, when they see multiple corpses. The dead homeowners, wishing to reaffirm their identity as Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, made sure to prove their identities with documents. Nevertheless, they were killed. Yet again, racial prejudice has resulted in outright violence. The deaths are traumatic and instill fear in the travelers; this fear is a product of death's omnipresence, especially within a discriminatory society. The travelers, reminded that death is sudden and often violent, leave quickly.*

## CHAPTER 29

The group continues on to Dajabón, and they arrive at nightfall. Amabelle sees children and adults making music, and notes the colorful uniforms and banners that bear Trujillo's name. She then looks at herself and the group, and realizes that they all look similar; they look like refugees who have made a hasty escape. Odette and Wilner split off to investigate the **river**, and Amabelle blends into the crowd. She hears that Trujillo has given a speech that says the Dominican Republic's "problems with Haitians" would soon be solved.

*The travelers arrive in the midst of a public gathering, which is colorful and joyous. In contrast, the refugees are disheveled and somber, befitting the gravity of their situation. This difference illustrates how separate Dominicans and Haitians have become: one group is celebrating a festival, while the other group is fleeing for their lives. Identity has completely dictated these groups' trajectories and kept them separate within the same country.*

Amabelle hears voices whispering in Haitian Creole, and believes that the voices' owners would join her group, if they were not frightened of drawing attention. She notes that the Dominicans look as if they pity her group. Yves urges the travelers to leave for the border immediately, while nearby soldiers are dispersed through the crowd.

*The dynamics of the crowd further reveal how language and identity separate and divide the people in the Dominican Republic. Amabelle identifies other Haitians through their language, but believes that they fear persecution. The Dominicans in the crowd are seemingly sympathetic, however, disproving the idea that cultural borders completely separate groups.*

A group of young soldiers spot Amabelle, Yves, and Tibon. They surround the travelers, "isolating" them from the rest of the crowd that is eagerly anticipating Trujillo's departure from the nearby church. Tibon lunges for one of the younger soldiers and begins to choke him; in retaliation, the soldiers steal a machete —which belonged to Félice and Doña Sabine—out of Yves's hand. The soldiers stab Tibon in the back. The national orchestra, which is near the church because of Trujillo's presence, begins to play a "popular hymn."

*Despite most of the crowd's sympathy, there are still Dominican soldiers who believe that Haitians and Dominicans should not coexist. These soldiers reaffirm the idea that cultural prejudice leads to violence and intolerance. Tibon, who also believes that different cultures must be separated into rigid groups, begins to act violent as well. In the backdrop, nationalistic music plays, which symbolizes the way in which intolerance is always in the background of society in the Dominican Republic.*

The soldiers close in on Amabelle and Yves, and hold up a spring of parsley. They ask, "Que diga perejil"—prompting the two of them to pronounce the Spanish word for parsley. For a moment, Amabelle believes she could have "said the word properly, calmly, slowly," as she used to say it to shop vendors. She notes, however, that some of the word's consonants are "too burdensome… for [her] tongue." The soldiers do not wait for a response, and begin force-feeding her parsley.

*The soldiers ask Amabelle in Spanish to pronounce the word for parsley. Amabelle, who often bridges Dominican and Haitian cultures due to her upbringing, believes she would be capable of proper Spanish pronunciation. Regardless, she admits that the Spanish language—an embodiment of Dominican identity—is sometimes burdensome or difficult. This difficulty is symbolic of the effort it takes for Amabelle and others like her to connect Haitian and Dominican cultures in a hostile country.*

The soldiers brutalize Yves and Amabelle. The crowd begins to kick Amabelle, and she hears the distant sounds of a bugle, and then a "twenty-one-gun salute." The crowd around her cheers and begins to sing the national anthem; they stampede over Amabelle, hoping "to glimpse" the Generalissimo's car and his processional.

*The soldiers' violence against Yves and Amabelle once again demonstrates the violent consequences of prejudice. Furthermore, the national anthem begins and the crowd starts to stampede. The crowds' violent momentum and the loud music, are physically representative of how Dominican culture overpowers Haitian culture in the Dominican Republic.*

Odette and Wilner reappear, and they take Amabelle and Yves to a safe house owned by Alberto, a man that Wilner has paid to safeguard them. Yves questions whether they can trust him, and Wilner replies that they do not live "lives of certainty." Amabelle tries to communicate about Tibon, but her injuries prevent her from speaking; she is unable to tell Odette that they should bury Tibon. When the travelers arrive at their shelter, Yves asks the group why Haiti will not go to war after this attack.

*Amabelle is physically unable to vocalize the horror and reality of Tibon's death to the group. Her muteness is symbolic of the ways that death and trauma can silence those who experience or witness it. Yves then wonders why Haiti will not declare war as a result of the Dominican Republic's persecution. Yves's question illustrates how prejudice and intolerance can lead to a vicious circle of violence. Cultural groups war with one another to reinforce their borders and their perceived superiority, and the groups continue to separate from one another as the violence spurs retaliation of the kind that Yves suggests here.*

Suddenly, Alberto warns them that the soldiers are coming towards the house; the group leaves the safe house and moves towards the **river**. Amabelle begins to ask about Mimi and Sebastien, but Odette misinterprets her words and believes she is asking about Tibon. They arrive at the riverbank, and Amabelle emphasizes that the river looks more intimidating than her memory of it.

*The group comes to the river that separates Haiti and the Dominican Republic, a symbol of cultural divide and violence between the two countries. Amabelle's memory, which has preserved the river in her mind despite her many years away, has not faithfully captured the sight. Amabelle's inaccurate recollection of the river that killed her parents and affected her childhood proves that memory is not always perfect. Rather, it can be influenced by time, and it can fade and become inaccurate.*

The group begins to ford the **river**. Amabelle separates herself from Odette, claiming that she does not want to be responsible for another person's life; she would prefer to drown alone. She sees an empty dress floating in the river, and the corpse of a man. She touches the body to see if it is Sebastien; when she confirms that it is not him but rather a stranger, she wishes she could say a "ceremonial prayer."

*Once Amabelle enters the river, she begins to fixate on death. She clearly associates the river, the site of her parents' drowning, with the idea of mortality. The corpse that floats in the water only reinforces this association. Amabelle, who has witnessed others' deaths and experienced deep grief, wishes to respect the dead and honor their passing, even as she's filled with gratitude that Sebastien is not the one who died. In this way, Amabelle's behavior here shows again that death has a profound and lasting impact on those who have seen it.*

As the group continues to travel through the **river**, soldiers spot Wilner and shoot him. Amabelle seals Odette's mouth with her hand to keep her from making noise; when Odette struggles against her, Amabelle seals her nose as well. Amabelle swims towards the shore with Odette's body in her arms, but knows she will not "regain consciousness." Amabelle believes Odette has "made her choice" not to continue on the journey.

*The soldiers, who have been motivated to persecute and kill Haitians by intolerance and political propaganda, shoot Wilner. Once again, tension between two cultural groups has led to violence. Amabelle, fearing death if Odette—Wilner's partner—cries out, accidentally kills Odette in the process of trying to keep them both safe. Amabelle's actions illustrate how death can inspire profound fear in people. In this case, death inspires such powerful terror that Amabelle accidentally (and ironically) murders another person to avoid it.*

Once they are safely on land, Odette says "pesi," the Haitian Creole pronunciation of the word "parsley," before passing away. This prompts Amabelle to wonder why "parsley" is the word used by the soldiers to target Haitians: she speculates that since the Haitians use the herb to cleanse themselves, perhaps the Generalissimo is using the word to cleanse his country. Amabelle thinks Odette's pronunciation of "pesi" is a "challenge" and a "dare."

*Odette says the Haitian Creole word for parsley, instead of pronouncing it in Spanish. This word is a declaration and reaffirmation of Odette's Haitian identity. Odette speaks her own language—not the language of the country that mistreats her—before she dies, as if she is still proud of her cultural identity even when she knows that it is part of the reason she's dying.*

## CHAPTER 30

Yves and Amabelle are found by a doctor and priest; they are taken to a nearby camp, and Odette's body is taken from Yves's arms. Along the side of the road, Amabelle sees corpses laid out, and realizes Odette will be buried with them. Amabelle does not ask where Odette's final resting place will be, and sees that the priest has already moved on to another body.

*Amabelle sees multiple corpses by the side of the road; the sheer number demonstrates how pervasive and omnipresent death is in her life and in Dominican society at this time. Moreover, the priest quickly sees to Odette before moving on to tend the next body. The priest's rapid pace illustrates how death renders its victims anonymous and interchangeable: there are so many bodies to tend to that he is not able to honor all of them carefully.*

Amabelle looks at Odette's body one last time, and thinks that death was not a surprise to Odette. Rather, she thinks Odette "eased" into death. Amabelle thinks to herself that she will always be "standing over her body," and that there will never be a sufficient way to say goodbye to Odette.

*Amabelle's thoughts about Odette reveal death's ability to leave a lasting impact on one's existence. Amabelle admits that she will mourn Odette's death for the rest of her life; in this way, death is an inescapable force that permanently affects the living. Death—and the grief it leaves in its wake—is yet again shown to be a life-changing experience.*

Amabelle is examined by a doctor and sees the other victims undergoing treatment for various injuries. One woman's leg is unsalvageable, and the doctors prepare to cut it off. A drop of the blood from the woman's amputated leg lands on Amabelle, and the doctor announces that the woman will not live. Amabelle thinks the doctor is talking about her, and believes this will be "the last time [she] would see someone dying."

*In the midst of violence, Amabelle still focuses on the impact that death has had on her. Instead of worrying about the death of the injured woman, Amabelle emphasizes how she herself will never see another person die. By thinking this, Amabelle reveals that she fears witnessing others' deaths more than her own demise. The sight of death brings such grief and pain that she is relieved at the thought that she will never experience it again—even though this means that she herself is dying.*

Amabelle falls in and out of consciousness, and dreams she sees her mother. Her mother explains why she never smiled, claiming that she was saving her smile for when Amabelle might need it. She then tells Amabelle that she was teaching her a lesson about love and its scarcity. Amabelle admits she will never "be a whole woman," because of the absence of her mother's face.

*Amabelle's dreams once again bring her solace when her reality is unbearable. In this dream, Amabelle fantasizes an explanation for her mother's behavior. The reality—that her mother was cold or unemotional—is too painful to bear. Instead, she imagines that her mother was teaching her a lesson. Still, her mother's death left a void in her life, one that she describes in a similar way to how Señora Valencia described the loss of her own mother. The repeated language subtly suggests how much Amabelle and the señora have in common, even though there's also so much separating them.*

Amabelle wakes up and overhears people talking in groups. Amabelle thinks they have a "hunger" to share their experiences, and listens as a group recounts their memories. One person discusses how 700 people were placed in a courtyard and shot with rifles. Another discusses how 200 people were forced to jump off a pier.

*The survivors of the massacre's violence wish to share their stories with one another. In doing so, they are keeping their memories alive. They seem to hope that others, by listening to their tales of survival, will preserve their bravery and resilience for the future. Many of these memories, however, feature the specter of death. In this case, remembering bravery and remembering horror go hand in hand.*

One man describes how he was injured by a machete and left for dead; he recalls waking up in a pile of corpses. He recounts how his feeling of shock is similar to the confusion experienced by a new wife when she wakes up in her marital bed. The group asks the man where his wife is now, and he shrugs as if he does not know.

*The injured man recalls how he was hidden amidst a pile of bodies, providing a particularly vivid image of how horrific racial violence in the Dominican Republic has become. At the same time, it's clear that this memory may be only of the only things the man can cling to, as he does not even know whether his wife is alive. Recounting the horrific story to others gives the man one way to stay grounded in the face of the unknown.*

Another person reminisces about Haiti's past. The person states that in prior decades, Haiti was a "strong nation," comprised of famous men who were willing to fight to "defend [Haitian] blood." By contrast, Haiti's current president "says nothing" in response to the attacks occurring in the Dominican Republic.

*Another survivor recalls a time when Haitians defended their identity and culture. Similar to the Dominican Republic, it seems that this past version of Haiti would incite violence against those who challenged its autonomy. Although the two countries pride themselves on maintaining strict divisions between cultures, they seem in this way to be quite similar.*

The survivors begin to discuss the decisions they made during their escapes. They use "hindsight" to rearrange their perspectives, and discuss the "nearly dead" acquaintances they chose to leave behind. They discuss how to survive the guilt of abandoning their friends; simultaneously, they also dream of reunions with their families.

*The survivors' memories are not perfect. Although they share stories to preserve their survival, they also use memory to rewrite their circumstances. They do this to avoid guilt and grief, and to focus on the hopeful future instead of the painful past. The survivors' discussion provides a warning about memory's ability to sometimes trap individuals in regret and remorse. To avoid this pitfall, it seems, sometimes it is necessary to alter one's memory for the sake of living a better life.*

Amabelle falls asleep and reawakens three days later. She is told by a nun that she had an extreme fever, and that the doctors thought she might die. Amabelle tries to tell her that she does not want to die, and thinks that Odette and Wilner have "already died for [her]." The nun asks where her caretaker has gone, and at first, Amabelle believes the nun is referring to Sebastien; in reality, she is talking about Yves.

*Amabelle's thoughts about her survival and Odette and Wilner's passing illustrate her new perspective on death. For the first time, Amabelle emphasizes that she wants to live. Despite the grief she feels over her parents' and friends' deaths, Amabelle's desire to survive illustrates that she has a sense of hope about her future.*

Yves visits Amabelle and tells her that he is planning to continue traveling and return to his home in Haiti the following day; Amabelle nods to show that she wants to go with him. He tells her that he will take her to Sebastien's house, and she will be able to reunite with him and Mimi and talk about their escape as if it is "a bad dream."

*Amabelle has already revealed that she relies on fantasies to help her cope, and Yves's rather optimistic promise here shows that he—and perhaps anyone who faces such extreme adversity—is similarly susceptible to hopeful dreams. Yves' promise also suggests that Amabelle's idea of home has changed: she no longer belongs in the Dominican Republic. In fact, Amabelle's home is not necessarily just a location—Haiti or the Dominican Republic—but also a person: she feels part of a family when she is with Sebastien.*


Amabelle worries that rain will cause the **river** to flood, which will make it difficult for Mimi and Sebastien to cross over into Haiti. She then tells Yves that she often has a dream about her parents in the river. The conversation is interrupted when another survivor cries out that his woman is asking for his help. The nuns give him medicine, and he curls up like a baby for the night.

*Both Amabelle and the male survivor's behavior illustrate the comforting nature of dreams. Amabelle fantasizes that Sebastien and Mimi are crossing the river; the man is lulled into sleep by medicine. Neither character is able to confront the burdens and horrors of their reality: they do not want to imagine that their loved ones are dead. Amabelle and the sleeping man mirror one another here, doubly reinforcing the idea that dreams (whether sleeping or waking) are means of avoiding the truth.*

The next morning, the man who was sedated begins to call out for his woman. He is comforted by a "crippled Dominican" who is only able to communicate in Spanish. Amabelle notes that he is "black like the nun" who is treating the survivors, and he explains that he has been mistaken for a Haitian. Amabelle emphasizes that there are "many like him" in their camp.

*Despite the countries' strict cultural borders, which have divided the two nationalities, Haitians and Dominicans interact and coexist in the refugee camp. Ironically, then, the fight between two countries' cultures has resulted in some cases of cultural confusion and blending. Although the Dominican Republic's government wants to separate Haitians and Dominicans, the government's agenda results in some Haitians and Dominicans being mistaken for one another.*

## CHAPTER 31

Yves and Amabelle are placed in a truck and driven into Haiti. They travel through the Cap, a city that has survived multiple demolitions. Amabelle recounts how King Henry I had declared that he would not surrender the Cap until it was burnt down, and then set his own house on fire to prove it. As a result, the Cap's current houses are less grand than their predecessors.

*The stories of King Henry I's determination and self-destructiveness reveal the consequences of national pride. King Henry was so proud of his home—a symbol of his Haitian heritage—that he was unwilling to forfeit the home to others. Instead he destroyed it, leaving smaller houses to be rebuilt. The smaller houses that remain in Haiti thereby provide a warning: maintaining one's cultural pride above all else can result in future generations' decline.*


Amabelle looks up and sees the **citadel** of Henry I "leaning down towards the city," and wonders if Yves notices such things. As she and Yves travel through the crowd, people and merchants notice and recognize them as the "nearly dead." Amabelle believes that Yves is looking for "a place to enter," but that he is acting as if he is lost.

*Amabelle thinks about the citadel fondly, believing it almost bends towards the city in an embrace. Yves, on the other hand, seems lost and confused. Both characters' actions represent their respective viewpoints on belonging. Amabelle feels supported and welcomed by Haiti, while Yves does not yet consider Haiti his true home.*

One man recognizes Yves, and they talk about what has occurred in Haiti since Yves's departure. Yves and Amabelle then arrive at Yves's mother's house. Yves sees his mother struggling with her blouse, and helps her put it on; the two tearfully hug. Yves then introduces his mother, Man Rapadou, to Amabelle; Man Rapadou asks if she is Yves's woman. Amabelle is unsure how to respond, but Man Rapadou hugs her as well. When Yves tells his mother her name, Amabelle feels "welcomed."

*Slowly, Yves begins to grow more comfortable in Haiti. He talks with a man who recognizes him—this recognition provides a sense of belonging. He then aids his mother, an act that quickly reintroduces him into his own family. Amabelle, too, begins to reveal that she feels at home in Haiti. When Man Rapadou—a stranger—greets her, she feels at peace despite her lack of connection to the woman. Haiti is quickly becoming Amabelle's new home, even though she hasn't been there in so many years.*

Amabelle, Yves, and Man Rapadou enter the house, and Amabelle notes how it reminds her of "the compound at Don Carlos's mill." Yves greets his family, and Man Rapadou serves everyone coffee; Amabelle drinks it quickly, saying that it replaces the taste of parsley and blood.

*Amabelle's recollections demonstrate how thoroughly memory works to preserve one's past. Already, she views her new experiences in Haiti through the lens of what she experience in the Dominican Republic (like Don Carlos's mill). Unfortunately, her keen memory also preserves traumatic memories, such as the taste of blood and parsley she experienced during her assault. Again, Amabelle's experiences reveal memory to be a powerful but damaging force.*

Man Rapadou tells stories of Yves in his childhood, and Yves listens as if it is the first time he has heard the stories. Man Rapadou then tells everyone to remember the story of Yves's father. She recounts how he died in the midst of a feast after he was let out of prison. Yves pushes his food away after hearing the story, causing his mother to laugh.

*Even in Yves's first meal after being reunited with his family, the presence of death is pervasive and inescapable. Man Rapadou's willingness to bring up death even during this happy event illustrates how the effects of death linger and become part of everyday life*

Amabelle claims that Man Rapadou is the only one who seems able to turn sadness into humor. Man Rapadou reminds her of the old women who were injured in the cane fields; their wounds healed eventually, but their skin never returned to the way it was before.

*By comparing Man Rapadou's behavior to the injured can workers, Amabelle makes it clear that the effects of this trauma and death never really go away. A person experiencing grief and pain can heal over time, just as scars heal over time. Still, their psychological injuries remain, and the person can never return to their carefree, painless self—even when they have a sense of humor as strong as Man Rapadou's.*

Amabelle then remembers a lesson her father taught her. In her youth, when her father would be attending to births and deaths, he explained to her how sadness is not a gentle or light emotion. Rather, sadness always has an impact; sometimes, that impact is visible to other people, but sometimes it is hidden and known only by its sufferer.

*The lesson Amabelle remembers from her father ultimately explains how memory and grief function and exist in Amabelle's life. Memory, for Amabelle, preserves a deep sense of grief: it constantly reminds her of the people she has lost. She hides her grief and does not share her painful memories with many people—except Sebastien—so it remains secret, just as her father predicted it might. .*

Amabelle is still too injured to eat, and Man Rapadou notices her plate of untouched food. She then walks over to Amabelle and asks if she would like some soup. As Yves's family watches, Man Rapadou feeds Amabelle like a "sick, bedridden child."

*Man Rapadou's familial kindness and support is a marked contrast to Amabelle's memory of her father. The juxtaposition of her father's past lesson with Man Rapadou's present compassion reveals how Amabelle's sense of belonging may be shifting. Amabelle is slowly allowing new bonds to replace the family she has lost, which hints that she may also be able to feel a new sense of belonging in Haiti.*

## CHAPTER 32

Yves and Man Rapadou discuss Amabelle. Man Rapadou asks who Amabelle is, and where her "people" are. She asks whether Amabelle's family is still in Haiti, or whether they died in the Dominican Republic. Yves and his mother continue to talk about "old friends," acquaintances who have passed away, and his father's untilled farmland.

*Yves's discussion with his mother highlights Amabelle's isolation and lack of belonging. She is orphaned, with no ties to either Haiti or the Dominican Republic. Despite this, Amabelle is slowly integrating into Yves's family, a sign that her definition of home is evolving to include new connections. Meanwhile Yves and his mother reminisce together, recalling people who have passed away. Their shared memory keeps their loved ones' legacies alive long past their demise.*

Amabelle tries to rest, but replays images in her head of Sebastien and Mimi drowning; it reminds her of her parents' deaths. She daydreams about Henry I's **citadel** to avoid these thoughts, and tries to focus on her "childhood visions" of being protected inside the citadel's walls. She eventually falls asleep.

*Once again, Amabelle demonstrates that she uses to dreams to avoid and cope with difficult situations. Her fantasies are, in fact, explicitly symbolic of this avoidant tendency: she dreams of a castle that protects her and hides her away. Just as her dreams figuratively protect her from reality, the castle shields her from intrusive thoughts.*

Amabelle wakes up the next morning and crosses paths with Yves's mother. Man Rapadou tells Amabelle that she knows Amabelle's story, and reminds Amabelle that everything Amabelle has known has been lost after the attacks in the Dominican Republic. Amabelle wonders if Man Rapadou is telling her to forget her memories of Sebastien; she then thinks about how images of Sebastien replay in her head like a dream.

*Man Rapadou explicitly states that Amabelle's home is gone. Nevertheless, Amabelle is acclimating to Haiti and allows her memories of Sebastien to give her a sense of companionship —with her strong sense of memory, she does not feel alone. Still, Amabelle recognizes that memories of Sebastien are dream-like, and cannot sustain her forever. She worries about forgetting him, illustrating how important memory is for preserving a person's legacy.*

Amabelle locates the house of Man Denise, who is the mother of Sebastien and Mimi. At first, she decides not to visit, as Man Denise does not know her history with Sebastien. Gradually, Amabelle's body begins to get better, but she wishes that her features would return to normal: her hair has not grown, and her smile is now crooked. She grows worried that Sebastien will not recognize her when he returns.

*Amabelle remains hopeful that Sebastien and Mimi are alive, despite the grief she has experienced and the deaths she has witnessed. In fact, Amabelle is so hopeful that she seems almost delirious. She fixates on unimportant things, like her features, instead of directly confronting the possibility that Sebastien and Mimi may be dead. Here, Amabelle's hope for the future is so strong it blinds her to the truth of her situation.*

## CHAPTER 33

Amabelle and Yves discuss Yves's farming; he claims that nothing has emerged from the ground yet. Amabelle tells him that she wishes to go to the fields with him one day, to see his father's land. Yves changes the subject and informs Amabelle that there are justices of the peace who listen to survivors' stories and write them down. He explains that Trujillo has not taken responsibility for the slaughter, but has agreed to give money to those affected.

*The justices of the peace embody and symbolize the act of memory. They physically preserve the experiences of the survivors through writing, so their suffering will not be forgotten. At the same time, the Dominican Republic's dictator Trujillo refuses to be accountable for the violence, which he incited by stirring up prejudice between two groups of people with differing cultural identities. In other words, Trujillo will not admit that the boundaries between the cultures—boundaries he worked to maintain—led to violence.*


Amabelle tells him that she wishes to visit the justice of the peace, and Yves tells her that he cannot be sure she will receive money. He speculates that the government will try to keep it for themselves, or ask her to bring proof or papers that prove her story. Amabelle is not interested in money, however; instead, she seeks information about Sebastien.

*In Yves's opinion, the justices of the peace are not truly helping to preserve cultural memory. Rather, they plan to manipulate the survivors' memories, or hide them away so that the next generation of Haitians and Dominicans will forget the past. Yves's fears reveal how important memory is to the future. He worries that without a proper means of recording memory, the story of Amabelle's (and other survivors') pain and suffering will disappear, and future generations will not be to remember history accurately or avoid repeating its mistakes.*

The next day, Amabelle and Yves go to visit the justice of the peace. More than a thousand people are waiting outside to see him and as the day goes on, the crowd grows larger. People begin to share their stories with one another, as if practicing for their recitation in front of the authorities; some people recount how they have traveled miles to join the crowd. Amabelle imagines how to tell her story, and wonders if she and Yves should combine their perspectives into one tale.

*The crowd's growth is symbolic of the increasing weight and burden of memory. The crowd's collective stories, which they share with one another, turn into larger, communal tales of survival and strength. As these tales are shared, the presence of memory expands: the crowd is physically demanding that the justices safeguard their stories, while also relying on each other to accomplish the same goal.*

The justice of the peace comes out of the building to say he is done for the day; the crowd jeers at him. The last woman who spoke to the justice stands before the crowd, and Yves asks what the authorities did for her. She tells him that she did not receive money, but that the justice writes down a person's name and says he will take their story to the president of Haiti. The justice also lets the speaker cry, and asks if they have papers to prove people have died.

*The justice's acts—writing down a name, offering to share a story, and making space for emotion—are representative of how memory works. Memory saves a person's legacy, and then shares that legacy with others. The president is symbolic of a nation's historical record, so it's as if these memories being inscribed in the country's history.*

Amabelle and Yves continue to visit the justice for fifteen days; the crowd of people waiting grows and shrinks. Eventually, Man Denise?Sebastien and Mimi's mother?joins the crowd. At day's end, the justice does not address the crowd, and it is announced that "no more testimonials" will be taken. The justice had escaped the building "when no one was looking," as he knew that the crowd would be angry. As the news spreads, the crowd begins to protest.

*Once again, the crowd and the justice of the people illustrate lessons about memory. The crowd—symbolic of the Haitian nation—grows and ebbs day by day, illustrating how memory is perpetually changing. On some days, memory is strong and enduring, just like the crowd's drive to share their stories; on other days, it dwindles. The justice—the physical preserver of memory—disappears one day, however, showing that memory is always somewhat fallible and limited. The justice's disappearance is a warning about how quickly memory can vanish, if it is not properly recorded and protected.*

The soldiers guarding the building shoot bullets into the air as a warning, but the group stampedes into the station "looking for someone to write their names in a book." The crowd is searching for someone to confirm that what they "lived through did truly happen."

*This clash between the crowd and the military is symbolic of how memory—represented by the crowd—can overpower oppressive forces that seek to erase the past or suppress the Haitians' stories. The crowd's desire for witnesses demonstrates how memory requires an audience in order to persist. The crowd's stories are being shared, but in order for those stories to truly last, they must be validated by others. The crowd's fury also suggests that this kind of validation is a basic human need.*

The crowd steals a "giant official photograph" of Haiti's president out of the building. In the photograph, he is wearing a medal given to him by Trujillo; the medal is a symbol of "friendship" between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The crowd sets the photograph on fire, and the medal is the first thing in the photograph to be burned up.

*The portrait depicts a medal that is symbolic of the superficial cross-cultural ties that link Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In reality, however, the countries are not unified; rather, they are divided by cultural identities and racist social norms. This portrait is destroyed, and the medal—a false image of cultures transcending borders—is the first image to burn. This destruction reveals how the two countries still cling to the strict cultural divisions that lead to tension and violence, even though the results are disastrous.*

Yves and Amabelle leave the crowd of protestors and take Man Denise back to her house. Yves leaves for his mother's house, but Amabelle stays with Man Denise overnight. When she wakes up the next morning, she sits outside Man Denise's house with nearby vendors, who speculate whether or not Sebastien and Mimi have "disappeared" in the "country of death." Amabelle then answers Man Denise's call for water, and tells her that she knew Man Denise's children in the Dominican Republic.

*Amabelle contributes to preserving the siblings' memory by connecting with Man Denise. By telling the siblings' mother that she knew them in the Dominican Republic, she is sharing stories of their lives with someone who will safeguard those memories into the future. It's also notable, however, that Amabelle doesn't tell Man Denise this right away; she seems to sense that these memories could bring pain as well as joy.*

Man Denise tells Amabelle the story of their family's upheaval: Sebastien's father was killed in a hurricane, and he also lost his cage of pet pigeons. Their house was taken by the Yankis—North Americans—so Sebastien and Mimi left to make money. The house was eventually returned to the family. Man Denise then says that Sebastien's name comes from Saint Sebastien, who died twice. She named him this because she thinks death comes quickly, and a man should have "two deaths," just in case.

*Man Denise shares the story of her family, thereby passing on their history to a new witness. Sebastien's name, which comes from a saint who survived death, reveals how deep an impact death has left on his family. To his mother, death is so formidable that even her son's name (which is a lucky charm to avoid death) is a tribute to its power.*

Man Denise then tells Amabelle that people have informed her of Sebastien and Mimi's deaths. She tells Amabelle that those who die young are "cheated," because they die before they are able to come home. She claims that when a person knows that they are going to die, that person knows to move closer to the "bones of [their] own people." She says her children died too young to know this, and experienced death before they could understand "what it was." She then tells Amabelle to leave, so she can "dream up" Sebastien and Mimi.

*Man Denise believes that her children are dead, and laments how they lacked a sense of belonging before they died. To Man Denise, death is intertwined with the idea of home: she believes that death instills a sense of connectivity, and propels a person towards their homeland. But death took her own children before they could feel this calling; in this way, death is sometimes so powerful a force that it robs someone of their home entirely. Man Denise then acknowledges that she must resort to dreams in order to cope with her reality. Since death has taken away her children, she will conjure them in her fantasies to avoid her grief.*

## CHAPTER 34

Amabelle returns to Yves's house and meets Man Rapadou. She tells Amabelle that Amabelle does not require the help of the justice of the peace; instead, Man Rapadou will be Amabelle's confessor, and she knows her tale. She tells Amabelle that Yves has told her about Sebastien, and she smiles at Amabelle.

*Man Rapadou tells Amabelle that she knows Amabelle's story, implying that Amabelle's legacy will be preserved in her memory. Moreover, Man Rapadou also knows Sebastien's story, and thereby commits his legacy to memory as well. This willingness to protect the memories of Amabelle and Sebastien is indicative of Man Rapadou's ability to provide a new sense of belonging for Amabelle. Amabelle's homes in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which disappeared due to violence and trauma, are being replaced by Man Rapadou's home, which welcomes and protects Amabelle.*

Amabelle rests in bed and cannot accept that she will never see Sebastien again; she compares this to never seeing her mother or father again. She admits that as she grows older, her parents continue to fade away, until all she can recall are their last moments of life. She wonders if this process will repeat with Sebastien.

*Once again, Amabelle makes explicit the connection between memory and death. To her, memory is a means of preserving someone's legacy after they pass away: memory prevents death from erasing someone's existence entirely. Nevertheless, memory is not perfect: Amabelle's memory of her parents is slowly eroding, and she fears the same will happen with Sebastien's memory. Despite memory's ability to protect a person from erasure, oftentimes death still triumphs, and even the most beloved people are forgotten.*

Yves visits Amabelle and tells her that priests are also listening to the testimony of survivors. He claims they are collecting the stories for newspapers, and she asks if he will go and visit them. He responds that the priests will just take the stories they are told retell them in a language that is "theirs, not yours."

*Yet again, Yves's fears illustrate how memory does not always protect the past. Sometimes, memory can be altered to hurt the legacy it is supposed to protect. If the priests take Amabelle's memories and translate them into Spanish—a language that is meant to isolate her and her fellow Haitians from Dominican society—they are using her history to perpetuate the same divisions that caused her tragic story.*

Yves begins to talk about making money on his farm, and Amabelle realizes that the past is less scary than the future. She imagines the survivors rebuilding their lives, and wants to express her gratitude for being able to "walk into the future." At the same time, she wants to ask these survivors how they are so strong, and how they are able to escape from the past.

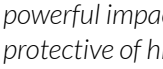
*Amabelle begins to understand that the loss she has experienced has kept her tethered to her past.. Amabelle dwelled on her grief, giving into death's power over her, in order to avoid her uncertainty about the future. Now, Amabelle is slowly becoming future-oriented, implying that she is gaining a sense of hope about her prospects, and that grief no longer weighs as heavily on her.*

Amabelle asks Yves how he is able to keep working the fields when no plants are growing. He tells her that empty houses and fields sadden him, because they feel like the "dead season." He then recounts the story of Joël's death, and tells Amabelle how Joël pushed him out of the path of the car and saved his life.

*Yves reveals that, like Amabelle, he relies on fantasies to avoid confronting his grief. His fantasies involve work: he dreams of tending to the fields and creating a prosperous farm. He acknowledges that these work fantasies are a means of helping him avoid the emptiness of the fields, which reminds him of painful memories.*

Yves then admits that he saw Sebastien and Mimi at the church the night that Amabelle was supposed to leave for Haiti. He recounts how the soldiers told Doctor Javier that they would "treat him like a Haitian" since he wanted to be Haitian, and how the soldiers told their detainees?including Mimi and Sebastien?to start climbing up the cliffs to their deaths. Yves states that he wanted to save them as Joël had saved him, but could not. He adds that seeing people die has only taught him to guard his own life.

*Yves recounts the death of Doctor Javier, Sebastien, and Mimi, revealing that he's known these truths all along. Doctor Javier often transcended cultural boundaries by being bilingual and empathizing with both Dominicans and Haitians, but this open-mindedness gets him killed, showing again how rigid cultural boundaries can lead to violence. Meanwhile, Yves admits that death has had such a powerful impact on him that he has become paranoid and protective of his life. Instead of emulating Joël's sacrifice, he gives into his fear of death and values his own life over all else.*



Amabelle tells Yves how she could have been captured at the church like Sebastien and Mimi; she was only late to the meeting because she noticed that Señora Valencia was bleeding. Amabelle and Yves embrace one another, and Yves begins to cry; his tears drip over Amabelle's body, and she says they "tasted like her own."

*This is the first scene where Amabelle and Yves cry over the deaths of their loved ones. Their tears suggest that they are slowly coming to terms with their loss rather than avoiding it through fantasy. Amabelle points out that their tears taste similar, suggesting that she realizes she and Yves are in some way united by the trauma they have experienced.*

## CHAPTER 35

The next day, Amabelle visits Man Denise's house and is told that she has left. One of Man Denise's caretakers tells Amabelle that Man Denise has left to visit a place where only her children will be able to find her. Amabelle then goes to the church, and meets a woman who has recently returned from Higüey. Amabelle tells this woman about Alégria, and the woman asks if this is the official name, or if people merely called it by that name. The woman then tells Amabelle that Father Emil is the one who listens to survivors' stories.

*Man Denise has given in to her dreams: she is unwilling to cope with reality, and disappears into her fantasies of her reunited family. Man Denise's decision illustrates death's power over the living. Her children's passing is so tragic that she is no longer willing to truly live. Instead, she leaves her home forever, seeking the solace of dreams instead of the company of the living.*


Father Emil tells Amabelle that he no longer listens to people's stories, as he cannot help them or offer them food or money. Amabelle tells him she does not wish to talk about the past; rather, she asks him for information about Father Vargas or Father Romain. Father Emil tells her that people asked Trujillo to let them go, and that the priests were released. He claims that Father Romain was told to come back to Haiti, despite his wish to remain in the Dominican Republic and help other Haitians; he now lives in Haiti.

*Father Emil who, like the justice of the peace, used to listen to survivors' testimony, is another symbol of memory. He acknowledges, however, that he is unable to provide food or money. His admission is representative of how memory cannot sustain a person; while it is important for preserving history, it cannot help a person live. Father Romain, who preserved Haitian culture in the Dominican Republic, is another character capable of transcending cultural borders. The Dominican government, however, tells him to go to Haiti. His return reaffirms the strict divide between the two countries' cultures.*


## CHAPTER 36

Amabelle writes a letter to give to Father Romain that asks about Sebastien and Mimi's whereabouts. The next day, she goes to visit Father Romain at the border. She gets dropped off in the field that housed the camp of survivors; thinking of Odette and the bodies of the dead and wounded, Amabelle faints momentarily.

*Amabelle's fainting spell is a sign of how powerful the idea of death is to her. Death physically overwhelms her: when she confronts the site of it, she passes out. Despite this, Amabelle's letter indicates that she is slowly coming to terms with Sebastien and Mimi's disappearance. Although she is not yet able to completely confront death—as seen by her fainting episode—she is still attempting to come to terms with the idea of her loved ones' passing.*

Amabelle meets a young woman outside a nearby shack and asks for Father Romain. The woman tells Amabelle not to be upset if he has forgotten her. Amabelle sees the priest and realizes he no longer seems to recognize anything; the woman tells her to speak up, as the priest's mind "wanders." Amabelle asks him if he recognizes her, and he says he does not. She then asks him if he encountered Sebastien or Mimi while he was in prison. He tells her he met many people, but does not give names.

*In the Dominican Republic, Father Romain preached about the importance of memory. He was quick to remember Haitian traditions, community members, and history. But ironically, the character known for his memory is now the one whose memory is the most addled. The priest's failing memory provides a warning: recollection is not always perfect, and even the most ardent archivist can fail to preserve the past. In some ways, Father Romain's commitment to remembering Haiti may even have* caused *him to lose his memory, since his efforts to help others led to the trauma he experienced.*

Father Romain then begins to talk about the Dominican Republic, and says that it is the "proudest birthright" he can give to them. The woman explains that he was once forced to say these things and now repeats them. Father Romain discusses how the island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic speaks two languages, and how its people have two motherlands. He asks if anyone enjoys having their own home swamped by "visitors," especially when the visitors are so numerous that they replace the household's children.

*Father Romain's memory of Haiti is overtaken by memories of the Dominican Republic's propaganda. In this way, the priest's recollection reinforces the tension between Dominican and Haitian identity: both of them cannot coexist peacefully, and one culture often overpowers the other. The priest explicitly mentions that the two countries have two languages, reaffirming that language is an important way of dividing cultures.*

Father Romain continues talking, and wonders how the island can produce two radically different cultures. He claims that "we, as Dominicans," must have unique customs and traditions; otherwise, Dominicans will become Haitians, and their blood will be "tainted." The woman explains that the priest sometimes remembers everything, including his torture; other times, however, he forgets everything.

*The priest's memory continues to demonstrate how Dominican and Haitian cultures are at odds. He repeats Dominican propaganda as he has forgotten his Haitian heritage, having been tortured into allowing Dominican culture to overpower his Haitian roots. The propaganda explicitly mentions that allowing the two cultures to mix would lead to something undesirable. This proves that the Dominican Republic deliberately maintains cultural borders to separate society.*

Amabelle leaves Father Romain and the woman, and tells them to hold on to her note. She cannot bear to visit the **river**, and instead dreams of disappearing from the world and spending her life indoors; she imagines talking to no one, and having no one try to communicate with her. She says she desires a life where every day is the same as the one before, and everything stays the same.

*The contrast between Amabelle's comforting dreams and her fears of the river illustrate the long-standing tension between reality and fantasy in her life. Amabelle has often avoided reality by escaping into dreams. Now, she is physically unable to confront the river, a symbol of her inability to accept and understand her trauma. Instead, she dreams of monotony, a kind of extreme repetition that would help her evade her unknown future.*

Amabelle tells Yves that she has visited the priest, and he tells her that he had already spoken with Father Romain. She asks why he did not tell her about his visit, and he goes to bed in a rage. Amabelle thinks that Yves, like Sebastien, only lives to work; she believes that all he can do is "plant and sow to avoid the dead season."

*Ironically, Amabelle relies on dreams as a coping mechanism while condemning that same behavior in Yves. Yves fantasizes about creating a prosperous farm; the work he does to attain this dream distracts him from thinking about all the deaths he has witnessed. Both Amabelle and Yves are avoiding "the dead season"—a symbol of their grief—through fantasies. Although Amabelle recognizes this coping mechanism in others, she is not yet able to give it up herself.*

## CHAPTER 37

Amabelle discusses how her dreams always involve her giving testimony to things or people, such as the justice of the peace, or Trujillo himself. She admits to herself that she knew that many people would die; she also claims that she can say "pesi" and "perejil," the words for parsley in both Spanish and Haitian Creole. She discusses how dreams are used to cover people's sight and protect them from "evil spells."

*Amabelle's dreams eventually begin to mimic reality. Instead of dreaming about happier things, she dreams of sharing her grief with others. This more realistic dream indicates that she is slowly accepting the circumstances of her life and starting to confront her trauma. In fact, her dreams reinforce how important memory is to her: not only does she recall memories in reality, but she also relies on memory in dreams. Amabelle also emphasizes that she is bilingual, and thereby able to transverse Dominican and Haitian culture equally. This declaration of her bilingualism is a sign that she is coming to terms with her complicated identity and how it has changed over her lifetime.*

Amabelle had believed that death would not find her. Only after she loses Mimi and Sebastien does she realize that a "river of blood" might visit her house. She remembers someone telling her that the dead pass down their words to the next generation through proverbs and sounds, and it is a type of inheritance.

*Amabelle's thoughts indicate that she is slowly accepting the presence of death in her life. Whereas before she would repress her fears by daydreaming, she now accepts that death is present in her own home, which seems to symbolize her life as a whole. She is able to accept this fact in part due to her realization that memory safeguards the dead's legacy. Amabelle recognizes that memory keeps the dead alive for future generations, preserving their words and cultural identity. Amabelle has used memory this way throughout her life, but for the first time, she explicitly acknowledges the power of her recollection and how it can make the reality of death more bearable.*

Amabelle believes that all she is able to pass along is the slaughter. She wants to put it down in a safe place, where it will not be scattered or be buried underground. Even if no one is around and it is a silent night, she still wishes to "lay it down."

*Amabelle continues to explicitly realize how her memory will contribute to history, and her recollections of the Parsley Massacre, though horrific, are also useful. She recognizes that these recollections must be kept safe from time, which can erase or bury them. She also admits that she wants to put her memories of the massacre away; in this admission, she begins to explicitly verbalize for the first time how memory has become a burden to her.*

## CHAPTER 38

Amabelle grows older as she waits for a reply to the note she gave to Father Romain. In May 1961, Trujillo is killed, which prompts a celebration in Haiti. Seeing the celebration, Amabelle comments that she has not witnessed Haitians "remembering" the slaughter since her time in the crowd waiting for the justice of the peace. She says it is a celebration of both the "living and the dead."

*Amabelle reveals that the celebration, a means of remembering Haitians' suffering, is the first communal attempt at preserving the past. This revelation demonstrates that despite memory's power to safeguard prior experiences, memory is not infallible. Moreover, the celebration illustrates that there are different ways to remember: it can happen not only through sharing stories, but also through reaffirming communal traditions. The celebration is also a clear sign of hope. It honors the past and celebrates the living, revealing how grief over the dead and optimism for the future can be intertwined.*

Amabelle discusses the conditions of her life since returning to Haiti: she lives with Yves and Man Rapadou, wakes up at the same time every day, and spends her days sewing. Although there are periods when she shuts herself in her room for months at a time, as she is plagued by old injuries, she notes that there is rarely any break from her daily routine of sewing and having "the same dreams every night."

*Amabelle has come to view Man Rapadou and Yves's house as her home, as she has made a routine for herself there. She makes no mention of the Dominican Republic, indicating that her past sense of belonging there has disappeared. Amabelle's injuries, which still trouble her, are symbolic of her traumas: her physical and emotional wounds are still so powerful that they sometimes force her to isolate herself. The fact that she has not healed from these injuries and traumas is further proven by the state of her dreams. She still has repetitive fantasies that allow her to live a monotonous, though seemingly unfulfilling, life.*

As Amabelle watches the celebrations of Trujillo's death, she sees Yves, who does not approve of the festivities. She believes that Yves feels as if the celebration is akin to "dancing on the graves" of the slaughter's victims. Amabelle notes that there truly are no graves, nor any markers for the victims' legacy. She claims the dancing is innocuous, as it is a familiar dance to Haitian culture; Haiti is used to celebrating the death of a tyrant.

*Amabelle comments that the victims of the massacre have no physical signs by which to mark their existence. In lieu of these signs, then, the celebration acts as a type of memory. Through dancing, the Haitian community memorializes its dead, celebrating their legacy and refusing to forget their passing.*

Amabelle realizes the dancing is a way of celebrating survival, even while the absence of the dead haunts the dancers. She then sees Father Romain in the celebrating crowd and realizes he has recovered. She joins the group around him, and others ask if he plans to return to the Dominican Republic. He says he will return to help the Haitians that still remain. He then adds that he is no longer a priest, as prayers could not heal him after the slaughter.

*The dance further reinforces Amabelle's realization that grief and hope are intertwined. Although the dance comes from a sense of hope, it nevertheless draws attention to the dead, who are missing and cannot dance. Furthermore, Father Romain has recovered from his amnesia. His recovery is a symbolic representation of how memory overcomes even the most oppressive of forces, such as prejudice and violence. At the same time, however, Father Romain's memories have also transformed him in a less positive way; remembering the trauma he experienced now makes it impossible for him to maintain his former religious life.*

## CHAPTER 39

Later that night, Amabelle ruminates about Yves. She notes that the slaughter affected him in many ways: he cannot bear the smell of sugarcane or the taste of parsley. Moreover, the sound of spoken Spanish—even when the speakers are Haitian—inspires "terror," and turns him mute.

*Yves is paralyzed by sensory experiences that remind him of grief. His disproportionate reaction illustrates how pervasive his grief is: he cannot bear even the most innocuous things that remind him of what happened. Moreover, Yves' terror at the sound of spoken Spanish is an extreme example of how language can be used to divide and isolate people. Spanish, once a regular language for Yves, is now frightening. Due to his fear of Spanish, he is unlikely to try and recapture his past familiarity with Dominican culture.*

Amabelle describes how Yves's farming has flourished over the years. Despite this bounty, whenever he sits in his mother's rocking chair, he is simply a "poor man alone." She notes that the two of them have chosen a hard-working life after the slaughter; the rigor is a source of comfort. She says that the two of them have too many ghosts, and quieter moments would allow these specters to appear.

*Once again, Amabelle reveals that she has learned new lessons about her relationship with grief and dreams. She acknowledges that she has relied on being preoccupied with a monotonous, busy life to avoid her ghosts, a symbol of those she has lost. But when she notes that despite his wealth, Yves is still alone, she is essentially admitting that the comforts of their rigorous life are hollow. Amabelle has realized that their hope of escaping grief through work is itself a kind of dream, even though they've done what they can to make it a reality.*

Her reverie is interrupted by Man Rapadou, who appears in Amabelle's sewing room. Man Rapadou explains that she has not been sleeping well, and then tells Amabelle that her life, much like Amabelle's, "has always been rich with dreams." She says she has always dreamed of falling: she imagines falling off her parents' roof, her husband's roof, off of hills and cliffs, and even mountains. She always wakes up before she lands, but she dreams that she is "closer to the ground every day."

*Man Rapadou's recitation of her dreams, which always involve her falling off of things, serves as a warning. Man Rapadou's sensation of falling is representative of the ways in which dreamers become unmoored and disconnected from reality. Man Rapadou never truly loses herself in dreams, as she always wakes up before she lands, but she fears that this might get increasingly caught up in dreams as time goes on. Man Rapadou's speech is a lesson about the danger of losing touch with the world for the sake of fantasy.*

Man Rapadou admits that it is hard to accept that life will go on without her. Amabelle sympathizes with her, thinking to herself that her body's sadness feels deeper with each passing day. She says that when she sees a young man, she sometimes dreams of living with him "without pain," and imagines their domestic life together.

*Despite her own realizations, as well as Man Rapadou's lesson, Amabelle is not willing to give up her fantasies completely. To soften the grief of aging and loss, she often visualizes a different life with a new man. This new life is meant to erase her grief and her experience of death, and replace it with domestic joy. In this way, Amabelle is fantasizing the life she and Sebastien never had as a way of coping with losing him.*

Man Rapadou explains that death should arrive slowly. She then discusses how life can be full of surprises; she describes eating mangoes and letting the seeds fall to the ground, only to be astonished when a mango tree suddenly grows. Amabelle understands that this is a metaphor for Amabelle's sudden arrival in Man Rapadou's life.

*Man Rapadou continues to impart lessons this time, she shares a story of hope. She compares Amabelle's arrival to the growth of a new tree, a symbol of a rejuvenated life. Man Rapadou's story of the mango tree reveals that, despite her age, her conception of home and family has grown. Amabelle's surprising arrival allowed her to reconfigure her idea of family for the better, suggesting that there's always room for positive change when it comes to one's sense of belonging and community.*

Man Rapadou then explains that her husband, who was sent to a Yanki prison, agreed to spy on his countrymen after his release. To avoid this, Man Rapadou poisoned him. She did this because she loves her country, and would not let her husband sell out their friends to the Yankis for profit.

*Man Rapadou's confession shows how deeply she values her Haitian identity, as well as her home country. Man Rapadou's national pride, however, also leads her to commit murder; it's clear at this point that the death of Yves's father wasn't an accident after all. Although her actions are in no way comparable to the violent actions of the Dominican government, both scenarios illustrate how pride in one's identity—and a sense of belonging that overrides all else—can lead to drastic decisions that harm others.*

The next day, Amabelle walks among tourists at the **citadel**. She follows one particular group, and realizes she chose them because the guide is speaking Spanish. The guide tells the story of Henry I, and how he was a slave who became a king. He also relates how many people died constructing the landmark, and says that buildings of the citadel's size are often a result of bloodshed.

*The tour guide's story of Henry I, spoken in Spanish, is a literal representation of Dominican and Haitian culture intermingling: the Spanish language helps communicate vital parts of Haitian history. The guide also emphasizes that people lose their lives in the process of building landmarks. His narrative illustrates the pervasiveness of death, especially in relation to nationalistic efforts like the construction of the citadel: even in non-violent scenarios, death is present and inevitable.*

The tour guide then relates how Henry I shot himself in order to avoid surrendering to a rising revolt. The guide says that famous men never pass away completely; rather, only nameless and faceless people disappear without a trace.

*The guide then provides an explicit lesson about the importance of memory. Famous people, immortalized by memory, can never be erased by death. Those who pass away without anyone to memorialize or recall their legacy, however, disappear entirely. Memory, then, is the best safeguard against historical anonymity; it is necessary to preserving the past from being forgotten.*

## CHAPTER 40

Amabelle says the past is "more like flesh than air." She then says that Sebastien's story is unfinished, like a fish without a tail, and that his breath fills her dreams. She then explains how new dreams are a waste, and too much to put in "the tiny space that remains." Sometimes, however, she wishes to come up with new visions and ways to keep her occupied.

*Amabelle discusses the physical tolls of memory: the past weighs on her, and feels as real and tangible as a human being. Sebastien's legacy, and his past existence—symbolized by his breath—are kept alive through Amabelle's thoughts and dreams. Though Amabelle loves Sebastien, she admits that this memory of him is burdensome: it dominates her life, and doesn't allow for a new vision of her future. In this way, memory is revealed to be both a blessing and a curse: it preserves the past, but it can also overshadow the future.*

Amabelle recalls how only nameless men die. She says that to Sebastien, death is a momentous and devastating thing, similar to a hurricane. She then explains that she can sometimes conjure him like a dream: he comes to her room, carrying a knapsack with medicine. Whenever she touches him, however, he disappears in front of her. In her dream, she explains to the empty room that she chose a "living death" after the slaughter, and then says she is coming to see him at his waterfall.

*Amabelle's memory of Sebastien keeps him from becoming nameless and forgotten. She grieves for him deeply, and dreams of him often—nevertheless, even in her dreams he disappears, a symbol of the finality of death. Amabelle finally confronts her grief, realizing that the deaths she witnessed stole away her willingness to live. She is no longer willing to give death so much power over her life, however, and decides to visit Sebastien's waterfall. This is a sign that she is starting to shake off her sadness and is more willing to move forward.*

## CHAPTER 41

Amabelle walks down to the **Massacre River** and sees an unclean man in three layers of clothing; he claims he is "walking towards the dawn," and kisses her. When he leaves, she finds a boy by the river and asks to be taken over the border into the Dominican Republic. She is told to go tonight, as she does not have papers.

*Amabelle is finally capable of confronting the Massacre River, the scene of many traumatic experiences in her life. By walking to the river, she comes to accept it as a part of her personal history and a part of her country. Having accepted that Haiti and the river are important forces in shaping her identity, she is finally comfortable returning to the Dominican Republic on her own terms.*

Amabelle returns at night, and meets a man who takes her across the border. She sleeps as she passes through the military checkpoints, and thinks to herself that sleep has been a comforting routine for her. She adds that sleeping is the closest thing to disappearing. She wakes up the next morning, and the man drops her off in Alégria, which he calls her "joyful land."

*Amabelle realizes that she lost part of her life to dreams, which have long been a source of comforting monotony to her. In this way, dreams were a sort of "death" for her. Although she survived the massacre—escaping death in a literal sense— she disappeared from the world due to grief and fear. This disappearance has been a sort of demise: it kept her from truly living her life or enjoying her existence.*

Amabelle notes that Alégria now looks like a "closed town," where the houses have defenses that make them seem like fortresses. Amabelle does not recognize much of what she sees, and feels as if she has never been in the town before. Eventually, she gets lost; she believes the cane fields have disappeared, and is too scared to ask for directions.

*The idea of home can change rapidly. The physical transformation of Alégria and the newfound unfriendliness of the houses demonstrate how a familiar place can quickly become foreign. In fact, Amabelle finds Alégria—a place she lived in for decades—so unfamiliar that she must ask for help to navigate it.*

Amabelle shows up at many houses before finding one that looks similar to Señora Valencia's new living quarters. She eventually meets a young girl and boy, and speaks to them in Spanish; she is surprised that she can still speak it clearly. She meets a woman who speaks Spanish with a Haitian Creole accent, and tells her that she wants to see the señora.

*Despite the fact that Amabelle has spent many years in Haiti and considers it much more familiar and welcoming than Alégria, she is still able to speak Spanish and communicate with the locals. By doing so, she is once again superseding cultural and lingual barriers. Despite the Dominican Republic's effort to expel her and her fellow Haitians from the country, she is still able to rejoin their society and speak the native language, demonstrating how superficial cultural divides often mask deeper unity.*

The handmaid escorts Amabelle inside, where she looks at a parlor filled with photographs of the family. Señor Pico's photos show a growing number of medals and honors; Rosalinda's photos show her married off to a man in a uniform that looks like her father's. The biggest portrait depicts a baby boy in baptismal garb.

*Only through photographs is Amabelle given a window into the life of the señora's family. The photographs reinforce how thoroughly Amabelle's sense of home has changed: she no longer knows anything about the people to whom she once felt very close. Additionally, a portrait of Rafael, the señora's dead son, takes up more space than the photographs. Symbolically, this represents how grief for the dead can overshadow the joys of the living. To the señora, it seems, the loss of her son means more than all her family's other milestones.*

She is finally introduced to Señora Valencia, who does not recognize her; the señora chastises Amabelle for using her old worker's name. When her old employer does not recognize her, Amabelle begins to feel like Alégria never existed. She wonders how the señora cannot recognize her voice, and begins to list details from their history together. The señora does not believe her, and asks her to recount how Amabelle was found many years ago.

*The señora's inability to recognize Amabelle, combined with Amabelle's feelings of unfamiliarity in Alégria, illustrate how both women's idea of home have altered over their lives. Neither woman offers the other a sense of belonging, despite their shared history and prior closeness.*

Amabelle describes being found by the **river**'s edge, and the señora finally believes her. She gestures at Amabelle to sit down, and Amabelle looks at the señora's hands, which are unscarred and pristine. Amabelle wonders to herself why she never dreamed of Señora Valencia, and considers whether she ever loved her employer.

*The señora's hands are undamaged by toil, which shows how different her life has been from Amabelle's. This clear disparity further erodes their former sense of connection to one another. Amabelle begins to realize the distance between them, and questions whether she and the señora ever truly saw each other as family. Amabelle's realization about her relationship with her employer again demonstrates how her conception of belonging has changed: she no longer feels connected to the household in which she grew up.*

Señora Valencia explains how her family moved to a new house: Señor Pico bought it from the family of a colonel. She tells Amabelle how most of her acquaintances, such as Doña Eva and Beatriz, are in New York now. She says that when she moved into the new home, Luis and Juana went back to "their people."

*The señora's stories illustrate how other characters have moved on. The señora's acquaintances have rebuilt homes in another country, and her workers have relocated to new places. Although these characters were originally members of a single household and shared a sense of familiarity, their ideas of home have all evolved. These characters illustrate how the concept of home is dynamic, and how it is always possible to uproot and start again.*

Señora Valencia then tells Amabelle that if she condemns her country, she must condemn herself; she claims that she would have had to leave the country if she betrayed her husband. She admits that she never asked him any questions about his actions. She then says that during the massacre, she hid many of Amabelle's people; she confesses that she hid these strangers because she could not hide Amabelle herself.

*The señora is a character caught in-between. She respects her homeland, yet feels unfamiliar there as she has a new home and has lost her friends. Additionally, she is willing to break cultural borders to help out the Haitians. The señora's behavior, though somewhat paradoxical, illustrates how nuanced the ideas of home and cultural identity can be: her competing beliefs and loyalties cause her to act in ways that she thinks are right while staying silent about her country's (and her husband's) transgressions.*

Señora Valencia tells Amabelle that her husband was merely following the orders he was given. She then marvels that they are both alive and awaiting a natural death. Amabelle thinks to herself that she and the señora were caught between being friends or strangers; now, however, they act like two passersby on the street.

*The señora prioritizes her Dominican identity—and the high societal position it confers on her—over everything else. Despite the fact that Amabelle is her childhood friend, and that the two once considered themselves to be family, the señora is determined to defend her country's cultural beliefs. The señora's hehavior illustrates a likely cause for Amabelle's disorientation in the Dominican Republic: Amabelle was never truly valued by her employer, and thus never truly belonged in her home. Due to her employer's belief in a separate Dominican culture, she never treated Amabelle with genuine respect; rather, she considered her a foreigner, despite their fond relationship.*

Amabelle asks Señora Valencia about a stream and waterfall she remembers from her time in Alégria, and the señora agrees to show her the closest waterfall she knows. The señora drives Amabelle and Sylvie, her housemaid, to a waterfall nearby; when they arrive, the señora comments that Amabelle was always "drawn to water" in her youth. The señora says that she would search for Amabelle near rivers and streams after Amabelle left for Haiti.

*Despite their years apart, the señora reveals how she has preserved her childhood memories of Amabelle. By doing so, she illustrates how separation cannot overwrite the past. The señora's behavior also suggests that she did care deeply for Amabelle, even though she prioritized her loyalty to the Domincan Republic over their friendship.*

Sylvie, the housemaid, interrupts their conversation to ask the señora why the Dominican soldiers used the word for "parsley" to target Haitians. The señora replies that when Trujillo was a guard working in the cane fields, one of the Haitian workers escaped. Trujillo chased him, but could not find him. He asked the worker to announce his location; if he did, Trujillo would spare him. The worker obeyed, but also kept running; he would, however, shout out the names of the field's crops as he passed through them. Trujillo realized that Haitians "can never hide as long as there is parsley nearby." The señora adds that one's language can reveal "who belongs on what side."

*This legend demonstrates the longstanding cultural divisions and prejudices in the Dominican Republic. Even before Trujillo had governmental power, he believed that language could help separate Haitians and Dominicans. The scene in the field convinced Trujillo that Haitians could not blend into their surroundings; their language (a key part of their culture) would always prevent them from truly fitting in.*

Amabelle and Señora Valencia say goodbye, and Amabelle tells the señora to go in peace. Amabelle is picked up by her driver, and she asks him what he does for a living; he tells her that he helps bring workers into the Dominican Republic to help with the sugarcane. She asks him if he knows of the massacre, and he says his mother escaped from it when he was a child, and that his father died in it. Amabelle tells him to leave her by the **river**, and insists on waiting alone.

*Amabelle says goodbye to her former friend and employer, but she is also bidding farewell to her home in the Dominican Republic for good. She then asks her driver—who ferries Haitians into the Dominican Republic—if he remembers the massacre. He reveals that his family suffered losses in the massacre, but perhaps because he did not personally experience it, his actions repeat history in a way he does not seem to notice. Before the massacre, Haitians traveled to the Dominican Republic for work; he is contributing to the same cycle. The driver's actions provide a warning about forgetting the past: people who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it.*

Amabelle walks down to the **river**, which looks nearly invisible in the darkness. With the river nearly undetectable, she thinks to herself that she can pretend, momentarily, that the river's victims?her mother and father, and Odette?died natural deaths. She admits that she used to visit the river in hopes that it would reveal what her parents wanted for her after their deaths.

*Amabelle's inability to see the river is a physical representation of how Amabelle has repressed her past. By not acknowledging the river, she has refused to confront the deaths she witnessed. Eventually, however, these fantasies of an invisible river disappear, and she accepts her reality. Amabelle understands that her fantasies were shields against her fear, and that only letting them go—and looking at the river directly—can give her the wisdom and understanding she's always wanted.*

Amabelle sees the man who kissed her back in Haiti stepping out of the **river**, and wants to ask him to lower her into the river, or into Sebastien's arms, or into her father's laughter. Instead, she takes off her clothes, gets into the river, and floats in its current. She admits that she "looked to [her] dreams" for relief and calmness, and to escape the image of blood in the river. She realizes that she, like the man, is "looking for the dawn."

*When Amabelle floats in the river—a place that has caused such deep grief—she is symbolically accepting her past and her sorrow for the first time. Finding the dawn, a symbol of a new start, is Amabelle's next priority. Amabelle learns, then, that confronting her sadness allows her, ironically, to start trying to find happiness and eventually hope. Although desolation and optimism seem like opposing forces, Amabelle's experience shows that hope for the future can actually grow from the grief of one's past.*

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