Washington Black

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ESI EDUGYAN

Edugyan was born to two Ghanaian immigrants and raised in Calgary, Alberta. She studied creative writing at the University of Victory and published her debut novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, at age 26; it was short-listed for the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award in 2005. She also earned a master's degree from the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars. Despite favorable reviews for her first novel, Edugyan had difficulty finding a publisher for her second manuscript. She spent time as a writer-in-residence in Germany and wrote another novel, *Half-Blood Blues*, about a jazz musician in Berlin between the World Wars. Published in 2011, the book was short-listed for several major literary prizes, including the Man Booker Prize, and it won the Giller Prize. Edugyan then published her first nonfiction book, *Dreaming of Elsewhere*, in March 2014. Her third novel, *Washington Black*, was published in 2018 and won the Giller Prize, making Edugyan only the third novelist to win the award twice. Edugyan currently lives in Victoria, British Columbia, and is married to novelist Steven Price, whom she met at the University of Victoria.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Washington Black takes place from 1830 to 1836 and is primarily set in places that have a legacy of slavery, including Barbados, the United States, England, and Canada. The book's protagonist, Wash, grows up at a turning point in the institution of slavery. At the time, Barbados had been a British colony since 1625, and was a primary exporter of sugar. It was part of the "Triangular Trade," where British goods were shipped to West Africa in exchange for enslaved people, who were shipped to the West Indies and exchanged for sugar, rum, and other commodities, which were then shipped back to Britain. In *Washington Black*, Wash is born on Barbados and is enslaved on a sugar cane plantation. The book documents how Wash and Titch then escape to America, where slavery was also prominent. Titch invites Wash to escape along the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States for runaways to escape into free states and Canada. At the time, Canada was still a British colony, but a series of judicial cases had effectively ended slavery in the early 19th century, which is why Wash eventually settles there. The book also touches on the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which officially abolished slavery in the British colonies and in Canada. However, slavery in America was not abolished until the 13th Amendment was ratified in 1865, and so in the book free Black men and women in free states and Canada (like Wash) still faced the threat of slavery, as white enslavers sometimes captured people who were formerly enslaved and then to transported them back into the American South and enslaved them once again.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Washington Black is a contemporary neo-slave narrative—a modern fictional work that's set in the slavery era and depicts slavery's effects. Other examples of this genre include Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women*, and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. *Washington Black* also bears resemblance to *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, an autobiography of Frederick Douglass, an enslaved man who taught himself how to read and who then escaped slavery. The book's spirit of adventure and scientific discovery can also be found in Jules Verne's works, primarily *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Edugyan has also written two other novels: *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* and *Half-Blood Blues*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Washington Black
- **When Written:** 2014-2018
- **Where Written:** Victoria, British Columbia
- **When Published:** September 18, 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Neo-slave Narrative; Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Barbados; Virginia; The Arctic; Nova Scotia; London; Morocco
- **Climax:** Wash reconnects with Titch in Morocco.
- **Antagonist:** Erasmus Wilde; John Willard; Slavery; Racism; Past Trauma
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited from Wash's point of view.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Tichborne Claimant. The book's plot has its roots in a real historical incident sometimes referred to as the Tichborne Claimant, when the heir to the wealthy English Tichborne family went missing at sea. He wrote under an alias from Australia, and a former slave on the family's plantation was then sent to identify the man. This informed Christopher "Titch" Wilde's name and background in the book.

The Aquarium's Advent. It is likely that the marine zoologist in

the book, Mr. Goff, is based on the British naturalist Philip Gosse, who is credited with inventing the modern public aquarium in 1852. However, the first person to engineer the first glass aquarium in 1832 was Jeanne Villepreux-Power, the "Mother of Aquariophily."

PLOT SUMMARY

George Washington "Wash" Black is an 11-year-old boy who has lived his whole life enslaved on Faith Plantation in Barbados. When the current master, Richard Black, dies, his nephew Erasmus Wilde takes over. Erasmus is much more brutal to the slaves than Black was: Erasmus beats them, maims them, kills them, and hires cruel overseers to do the same thing. The only person protecting Wash is Big Kit, an older enslaved woman who works in the cane fields with Wash. Big Kit considers killing Wash and herself so they can both be reborn in the African kingdom Dahomey. However, when other slaves begin to commit suicide, Erasmus vows to decapitate the dead body of any slave who does this so they cannot be reborn, and so Big Kit does not go through with her plan.

Soon after Erasmus takes over Faith Plantation, his brother Christopher Wilde (nicknamed "Titch") arrives to conduct scientific experiments and run test flights for his **Cloud-cutter**, an air vehicle. Seeing that Wash is the perfect size to accompany him in the Cloud-cutter, Titch enlists Wash as his manservant. He teaches Wash to read and write and about scientific concepts. Wash particularly likes marine life, and he discovers he has a talent for sketching. Titch also is clearly uncomfortable with the way his brother treats the enslaved people on the plantation, and he tells Wash that he's an abolitionist.

Almost a year after Titch's arrival, his melancholy cousin, Philip, visits while Erasmus is off tending to business on another plantation. Titch shows Philip the work he's been doing on the Cloud-cutter, and one day, the hydrogen that Titch is testing explodes in Wash's face, leaving him with severe burn scars on the right side of his face.

After Wash recovers and Erasmus returns from the other plantation, Philip tells Erasmus and Titch that their father, Mr. Wilde, has died. He was a scientist working in the Arctic, and Titch (who adored his father) is devastated that his father will never get to see his Cloud-cutter. Erasmus is thrilled, however, as this likely means that he will get to return to England to run his father's estate, while Titch will have to run Faith Plantation.

Some days later, Philip asks Wash to accompany him hunting while Titch is busy speaking to Erasmus. When Wash and Philip reach the base of the mountain, Philip takes his gun and shoots himself in the head, leaving Wash covered in blood. When Wash returns and explains to Titch what happened, he is terrified—he knows that Erasmus will likely have Wash killed for Philip's death even though he had nothing to do with it. Concerned for Wash and unwilling to stay on Faith Plantation and run it, Titch decides to escape with Wash in the Cloud-cutter that night.

Flying through a storm, Wash and Titch crash into a ship headed for Virginia. Once in the United States, they discover that Erasmus has set a bounty hunter, John Willard, after Wash, with a reward of 1,000 pounds for his return—dead or alive. Titch and Wash seek shelter with Mr. Wilde's friend, Edgar Farrow, an abolitionist who helps slaves escape to Canada. At Edgar's home, he informs Titch that he received a letter from Titch's father only a few weeks earlier—which would have been *after* Mr. Wilde died, according to Philip. Titch decides to go to the Arctic to find out what happened to his father, and though Titch offers for Wash to escape to Canada with other runaway slaves, Wash decides instead to accompany Titch.

Wash and Titch board a ship and sail to the icy Arctic, where they discover that Mr. Wilde is indeed alive. Titch recognizes that Wash is in danger as long as he is around Titch because Erasmus (and the bounty hunter) will always be near, but Wash insists that he would rather go wherever Titch goes. Burdened by caring for Wash and feeling that he has no other option, Titch arranges for Wash to stay with Mr. Wilde and his assistant, a deaf man named Peter House. Titch then abandons Wash by walking into severe snowstorm alone and with no provisions, ostensibly committing suicide. Though Mr. Wilde and Peter search for days, they are unable to find Titch's body, and soon after Mr. Wilde grows ill and dies.

After Mr. Wilde's death, Wash goes to Nova Scotia, Canada, to live as a free man. He still feels danger all around him, as though John Willard could appear to collect him at any moment. Over the next two years, Wash grows deeply unhappy and purposeless, and often faces beatings from white men. One day, however, he rediscovers his love for sketching, and every morning he looks for marine life at an inlet and sketches it. It is during his sketching that he meets Tanna, a beautiful mixed-race English woman whose father, Mr. Goff, is a famous marine zoologist. She asks Wash to teach her how to sketch, and she quickly expresses romantic interest in him. Wash also starts accompanying Tanna and her father to collect marine specimens, though he and Tanna have to hide their feelings for one another in front of her father. A few weeks before Tanna and Goff leave to return to work on a marine exhibit in London, Wash suggests that they make it a live exhibit and works out plans for an extravagant aquarium, hoping to impress Tanna.

A few days later, John Willard finds Wash in a local tavern and explains that he stopped looking for Wash a few years earlier when Faith Plantation closed down. He also reveals that Erasmus has died, and that he saw Titch in London recently. Willard leaves Wash stunned in the restaurant—but later that evening, as Wash walks past a dark alley, Willard attacks him. Wash is able to fend Willard off by stabbing him with a knife, and Wash staggers to Tanna's house. Goff is away for a few

days, but Tanna answers the door. After Tanna cleans up Wash's wounds, she undoes her nightgown, and they have sex.

Knowing that Titch might be alive, Wash travels with Tanna and Goff to London. Wash also helps them with their plans for the aquarium, even though Wash knows he'll never be credited for it. He lives in the Goffs' garden house, and he and Tanna continue to be secret lovers. Meanwhile, Wash and Tanna look for Titch at his family's estate in Granbourne. There, Wash doesn't find Titch, but he does learn that Titch worked with the Abolitionist Society, and they might have more information.

At the Abolitionist Society, Wash finds records of Faith Plantation and he learns that Big Kit has died—and that she was his biological mother, which shocks and moves him. A man with the Society, Richard Solander, notes that Titch's last letter to them came from an address belonging to Peter Haas in Amsterdam. Before Tanna and Wash travel to Amsterdam, they learn that John Willard is due to be hanged at Newgate Prison, and they attend the hanging. Wash thinks he sees Titch in the crowd, but he only imagines it.

Peter Haas turns out to be the same "Peter House" whom Wash met in the Arctic, and when Wash and Tanna travel to Amsterdam, Peter says that Titch is now living in Marrakesh, Morocco. Though Tanna is exasperated by all the traveling and Wash's obsession with finding Titch, she accompanies him to Morocco as well.

In Morocco, Wash and Tanna find Titch trying to recreate his Cloud-cutter, assisted by a young Moroccan boy. Wash confronts Titch about why he abandoned Wash in the Arctic. Titch explains that he simply wanted to protect Wash. When Wash says that Titch never truly saw him as an equal, but as someone to save, Titch counters that he treated Wash like family, and he never wanted to mistreat Wash. Titch also explains some things from his past that haunt him: he and Erasmus bullied Philip mercilessly growing up, and so he felt guilty about Philip's decision to take his own life. Wash realizes that Titch has no remorse for how he treated Wash, and the book ends with Wash walking off into a severe sandstorm.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

George Washington "Wash" Black – The protagonist of the novel, Wash begins the book as an 11-year-old boy who's enslaved on Faith Plantation in Barbados. Life on the plantation takes a turn for the worse when Wash's master, Richard Black, dies, and the brutally violent Erasmus Wilde takes over. Wash's closest ally is Big Kit, an older enslaved woman on the plantation who protects him. Around this time, Wash meets Erasmus's brother, Titch, who enlists Wash as his manservant. Although Wash is terrified at the prospect of living with this new man, it's with Titch that Wash gradually comes to learn how to read, and write, gets an appreciation for science, and discovers his talent for sketching. Over time, Wash realizes how much Titch has stoked his curiosity, but also how this education has separated him from the other enslaved people on the plantation. Wash also receives severe burns after a scientific test goes wrong, making him even more different from others. Then, when Wash witnesses Philip's suicide, Titch escapes with Wash in the **Cloud-cutter** because Wash will likely be blamed for the incident. Together, they take a circuitous route to the Arctic to find Titch's father, but Titch abandons Wash by walking out into a snowstorm alone. This is a major turning point for Wash, who feels aimless without the person who essentially became a father figure to him. Wash travels to Nova Scotia, but he always feels the specter of John Willard, a bounty hunter whom Erasmus has set out for him. In Nova Scotia, Wash befriends Goff and his daughter, Tanna, both of whom are marine zoologists, and Wash and Tanna become lovers. In the latter half of the book, Wash tries to confront his past in several ways. He discovers that Big Kit has died on Faith Plantation—and that she was actually his mother, which devastates him. He also goes on a wild goose chase all over Europe for Titch, ultimately landing him in Morocco. There, he confronts Titch about his abandonment, but he doesn't receive any satisfactory answers, and Wash ends the book seemingly still unsettled in his life, demonstrating how past trauma is often inescapable.

Christopher "Titch" Wilde – Titch is Erasmus's younger brother who becomes a father figure for Wash. Titch is a tall scientist with a long face and a scar cutting up from the sides of his mouth to his ears. Titch's goal at the beginning of the novel is to launch his **Cloud-cutter**, an air-balloon-like vessel he wants to sail across the Atlantic. He wants to do this primarily to make his scientist father, James Wilde, proud, as his father was never able to get the Cloud-cutter to launch properly. While visiting Erasmus's plantation, Titch enlists Wash, whom he believes is the perfect weight to balance out the Cloud-cutter. Over time, as he teaches Wash reading, writing, and scientific concepts, Titch sees Wash's brilliance and talent for sketching. Titch is also an abolitionist, and he documents the cruelties at Faith Plantation and sends reports back to the Abolitionist Society. After Titch receives word that his father has died, Titch is devastated, and when his cousin Philip commits suicide soon after, he escapes with Wash in the Cloud-cutter in part to avoid having to stay and take over Faith Plantation. Titch then goes to the Arctic in search of his father, hoping to discover what happened to him. There, he discovers that his father is alive—but his father doesn't want people to know he's alive (preferring to continue his research undisturbed) and is dismissive of Titch's accomplishments. Titch then abandons Wash in the Arctic by faking his own death, ultimately winding up in Morocco to continue his work on the Cloud-cutter. Titch reveals at the end of the book that he didn't intend to mistreat Wash by leaving him—he thought

he was protecting Wash by separating because of the bounty hunter that Erasmus sent after them. Titch also reveals that he and Erasmus mercilessly bullied Philip as children. Because of this, he worries that he had something to do with Philip's moroseness and subsequent suicide, and so he, like Wash, is haunted by his past.

Tanna Goff – Tanna is Mr. Goff's daughter and Wash's friend and lover. Wash and Tanna meet in Nova Scotia, where she and her father are conducting research. Wash goes to an inlet every day to search for specimens and sketch them, and when Tanna sees his skill, she asks him to teach her how to sketch as well. As Wash gets to know Tanna over the course of their lessons, he develops a crush on her. She is beautiful, brilliant, and mixed-race—her mother is from the Solomon Islands but died when giving birth to Tanna. Due to Tanna's race, she has never fully felt accepted by the British, which is what draws her to Wash, as he, too, doesn't feel like he fully fits in anywhere. Over time, Tanna and Wash develop romantic feelings for each other. After John Willard attacks Wash, he goes over to Tanna's for help while her father is away, and they have sex. Tanna also accompanies Wash as he searches for Titch. She knows that he wants to make sense of his past, but she is also exasperated by the fact that he is so restless and seemingly unable to make a home for himself anywhere. Tanna also arranges for Wash to see papers from Faith Plantation when they visit the Abolitionist society, because she hopes to help him understand his past. Ultimately, Wash and Tanna's relationship is similar to that of Titch and Wash's—Wash teaches Tanna and sparks her curiosity, but he also strings her along on his journeys in a way that leaves her restless as well.

Big Kit – Big Kit is an older enslaved woman on Faith Plantation and is Wash's mother, though he doesn't know this until after her death. She protects Wash as they work in the sugar cane fields together—though she sometimes gets violent with him in a way that scares him. Wash describes Big Kit as a fierce, towering presence with bright yellow eyes. When Erasmus takes over the plantation, Big Kit comes up with the idea to kill herself and Wash so that they will be reborn in the African kingdom Dahomey. However, she grows terrified when she sees another slave named William commit suicide and Erasmus cuts off the man's head afterward, meaning that, as per tradition, William cannot be reborn. When Wash leaves to work with Titch, he sees one day at dinner at the Great House that Big Kit has taken in another young boy to mentor and help with his work on the plantation. Wash never sees Big Kit after this dinner, but years later, he discovers in the plantation's paperwork both that she died on the plantation and that she was his biological mother. Wash realizes that she never told him because she knew that he would eventually leave her or be killed. This underscores for both characters how family members can provide each other with the greatest love and the greatest emotional distress.

Erasmus Wilde – The antagonist of the novel, Erasmus Wilde is the master of Faith Plantation and Titch's older brother. Erasmus takes over the plantation after his uncle, Richard Black, dies, when Wash is 11 years old. Erasmus immediately establishes himself as a cruel master, as he hires brutal overseers and carries out various beatings, maimings, and killings himself. He and Titch don't get along well, and he refuses to sell Wash to Titch or let him go free with Titch. When his cousin Philip commits suicide, Erasmus blames Wash, who was present when Philip died, thus forcing Titch and Wash to flee in the **Cloud-cutter**. Erasmus then sets a reward for 1,000 pounds on Wash and sends a bounty hunter named John Willard after him. Ultimately, Erasmus dies a few years later from illness, which Wash believes is too kind of a death for the man. Titch also reveals at the end of the novel that he and Erasmus used to mercilessly bully Philip, and that those beatings are where Erasmus's cruelty began.

Philip – Philip is Titch and Erasmus's cousin. He is introduced as a very large, morose man, and though he's never cruel to Wash, Wash is wary of him. One day, when Titch is conducting an experiment and asks Philip and Wash to stand away from the Cloud-cutter, Philip suddenly asks Wash to retrieve the sandwiches next to Titch, which leads to Wash stepping too close to the **Cloud-cutter** and severely burning his face. Soon after, Philip reveals to Titch and Erasmus that their father, James Wilde, has died. Later, Philip asks Wash to accompany him hunting, and he apologizes for what happened to Wash's face—but then proceeds to shoot himself in the head. Titch quickly flees with Wash, knowing that Wash will be blamed for Philip's death since he was present for it. At the end of the book, Titch reveals that he and Erasmus bullied Philip mercilessly as children, leading to his morose character and possibly his suicide.

Mr. James Wilde (Titch's Father) – Titch and Erasmus's father, James Wilde, is a famous scientist who works in the Arctic. Titch works on the **Cloud-cutter** in order to impress his father, who drew up plans for the Cloud-cutter but who could never successfully launch it. When Philip visits Faith Plantation and reveals to Titch that his father died, Titch is devastated, and he sets out to find his father (alongside Wash) to determine what happened. There, he discovers that his father is actually alive, but his father is somewhat dismissive of Titch's accomplishments and unwilling to set the record straight about his death so that he can continue with his research uninterrupted. Soon after arriving in the Arctic, Titch walks out into a snowstorm alone, and Titch's father searches for days for him with no sign, devastated. Titch's father subsequently falls ill and dies.

Mr. Goff – Mr. Goff is Tanna's father and a famous marine zoologist whom Wash meets in Nova Scotia. Goff is old, slightly curmudgeonly British man. Seeing Wash's romantic interest in Tanna, he treats Wash with some disdain. But as he gets to

know Wash, and Wash proves his scientific acumen, Goff warms to him. He reveals to Wash that he is only wary of Wash being with his daughter because he doesn't want society to ostracize the two of them. Later, Wash comes up with the idea for a public aquarium; Goff pitches the idea to the London Zoology Committee and they approve it, but Wash will not be credited for the work he does on it, which frustrates Wash.

John Willard – John Willard is a bounty hunter whom Erasmus Wilde hires after Wash and Titch escape Faith Plantation in the aftermath of Philip's suicide. Willard is Scottish, short, and blond, and he has a chillingly soft voice. Wash is able to avoid Willard for several years, until Willard confronts him in a pub in Nova Scotia. Though slavery has since ended in the British colonies and Erasmus has died, Willard still attacks Wash out of spite, leading Wash to stab Willard in the eye. Later, Wash learns that Willard is going to be hanged for killing a Black man, and Wash and Tanna attend the hanging.

Peter House/Peter Haas – Peter is James Wilde's loyal assistant in the Arctic. Peter is deaf, and he signs with Wilde and Titch and helps interpret between Wilde and the Esquimau people there. When searching for Titch, Wash and Tanna track down Peter at his home in Amsterdam, and Wash realizes that he misremembered Peter's last name as "House," but it is actually "Haas."

William – William an enslaved man on Faith Plantation who commits suicide towards the beginning of the book. Many of the enslaved people on the plantation, including Big Kit, believe that committing suicide would allow them to be reborn in their homelands. Wanting to make an example of William and prevent others from committing suicide, Erasmus saws off the man's head after his death, arguing that the enslaved people can't be reborn without a head.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Theo Kinast – Theo Kinast is Benedikt Kinast's twin brother and the surgeon on board the *Ave Maria*, the ship that Wash and Titch crash into on the **Cloud-cutter** and then ride to Virginia. Theo is kinder to Wash than his brother, even though he, too, believes Wash is a runaway.

Benedikt Kinast – Benedikt Kinast is the captain of the *Ave Maria*, the ship that Wash and Titch crash into and then ride to Virginia. Benedikt is German and a former naval officer; he and his twin brother, Theo, both suspect that Wash is a runaway.

Mrs. Wilde (Titch's Mother) – Mrs. Wilde is Titch and Erasmus's mother and Mr. Wilde's wife. She lives on the Wilde's estate, Granbourne, in London. Mrs. Wilde is cold and disinterested in her husband's and son's scientific exploits.

Émilie – Émilie is an enslaved young woman on Faith Plantation who works in the Great House. Wash has a chaste crush on her as a boy. However, when Émilie becomes pregnant, she is sent away from the plantation and Wash never sees her again.

Medwin Harris – Medwin is the caretaker of Wash's building in Nova Scotia. Like Wash, Melvin is often attacked in Nova Scotia because he is Black.

Robert Solander – Robert Solander is a staff member at the Abolitionist Society; he gives Wash an envelope that leads him to seek out Titch at Peter Haas's house in Amsterdam.

Richard Black – Richard Black is Wash's first master on Faith Plantation. He dies when Wash is 11, leaving Black's cruel nephew, Erasmus Wilde, to take over the plantation.

Michael Holloway – Michael Holloway is the captain of the *Calliope*, the ship that Titch and Wash take from Virginia to the Arctic in search of Titch's father, James Wilde.

Jacob Ibel – Jacob Ibel is the second in command of the *Calliope*, the ship that Titch and Wash take from Virginia to the Arctic.

Gaius – Gaius is the porter at the Great House. Wash is afraid of Gaius, particularly because he speaks and acts like a white man rather than a Black man.

Esther – Esther is an enslaved woman who works at Titch's house after Wash is injured.

Immanuel – Immanuel is an enslaved person on Faith Plantation who works in the house.

Maria – Maria is the cook in the Great House.

Edgar Farrow A friend of Mr. Wilde. He is a sexton, who is involved with the Underground Railroad, and also has a side interest in the science of human decay.

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.

FREEDOM VS. CAPTIVITY

Washington Black focuses on Wash, who, at the start of the book, is an 11-year-old boy enslaved on Faith Plantation in Barbados in 1830. As a child, Wash struggles to understand the concept of freedom, which he has never known himself. Big Kit—an enslaved woman who was once free—states that freedom means going wherever you want and doing whatever you want. But even when he escapes the plantation and travels around the world with his master's brother, Titch, Wash has a difficult time feeling truly free; he remains tethered to Titch and is afraid of leaving him, particularly because he is worried about being caught and sent back to Barbados. Titch similarly grapples with what it means to be free, as he is weighed down by his family's expectations of

him and feels encumbered by taking care of Wash. In showing how Wash, Titch, and other characters are able to travel the globe and yet feel tied down or trapped by emotional burdens, the novel suggests that being captive to an idea, responsibility, or fear can be just as restrictive and emotionally damaging as physical captivity.

Wash's enslavement illustrates how difficult physical captivity is—to the point where many enslaved people prefer to take their own lives rather than remain in captivity. When Big Kit explains what freedom means, Wash is amazed at the idea because he has never felt free. Instead, he feels constantly fearful, particularly when the cruel Erasmus Wilde takes over the plantation. He describes how he lives in constant fear around Erasmus because the master owns "not only [their] lives but also [their] deaths." Wash's suffering derives from the idea that he has absolutely no control over his life; he is physically captive to Erasmus. In order to escape this captivity, Big Kit considers killing Wash and herself. She emphasizes to Wash that "death [is] a door," and that it provides them an opportunity to be reborn again in their homeland—the African kingdom of Dahomey. Though Big Kit and Wash never go through with this plan, several other enslaved people do kill themselves for the same reason. In this way, the book demonstrates that their captivity is so physically and mentally debilitating that they end their lives in order to seek out the possibility of freedom.

Outside the institution of slavery, Wash still doesn't feel free because of the fear of being caught or the fear of losing Titch's protection, demonstrating that being captive to fear can be just as harmful as physical captivity. When Wash first learns that John Willard, a bounty hunter, is searching for him, he feels "fierce nausea." He realizes in that moment that he thought he might have been able to leave his miserable past behind, but he thinks that he has "no future before [him]." Thus, despite his newfound freedom, the fear of being caught feels just as burdensome as being physically captive. Wash is also captive in another way, as he doesn't feel that he can separate from Titch without opening himself up to danger. When Titch considers parting ways with Wash in Virginia, and then again in the Arctic, Wash thinks, "How terrifying, to think of having to make my way alone in the world." Thus, even though he is free, Wash's fear still tethers him to Titch in a way that leaves him with almost no self-determination, because he is bound to Titch's decisions about where they go and what they do. Ultimately, however, Titch does abandon Wash, and Wash travels alone to Nova Scotia. Once again, he feels constantly afraid of Mr. Willard finding him, always looking over his shoulder to see if Willard is there. Once, when a gentleman who fits Willard's description comes to his rooming house, Wash spends days holed up in his building and even fasts for two days when he runs out of food. His fear thus becomes just as treacherous and even physically restrictive as his enslavement.

The novel also illustrates how Titch's responsibility makes him feel trapped to the point where he, too, feels he has to escape aspects of his life despite his seeming ability to do anything he wants. When Titch learns that his father, Mr. Wilde, has died, Titch is devastated by the idea that he might have to remain on Faith Plantation while Erasmus returns to London to run their family estate. Unable to bear the thought of giving up his scientific career, Titch decides to escape with Wash in his **Cloud-cutter**, saying, "I will not stay in this awful place. This is not a life for me." Titch feels restricted and emotionally distressed by his family duty, to the point where he feels he has to escape in an air balloon under cover of night like a runaway. Titch also begins to feel burdened by taking care of Wash, as they first travel to Virginia and then to the Arctic to find out what happened to Titch's father. When Titch realizes that his father is alive but has no desire to correct the rumors that he is dead (preferring to continue his research undisturbed), Titch realizes that he has to make a new home for himself away from his family. When Wash offers to go with him, Titch says, "Your life is not my own […] I did not ask you to accompany me here." Titch implies that he feels weighed down by taking care of Wash and the expectation that he will continue to do so. His deep distress becomes apparent when he walks into a snowstorm alone and without any supplies. He, too, would escape his burdens, even if it means sacrificing other aspects of his well-being or seemingly even his life, showing how detrimental his captivity to Wash feels. While the novel highlights the horrors of physical enslavement, Titch and Wash's predicaments even as they roam the globe show that emotional captivity can be painful, too.

RACISM, HUMANITY, AND CRUELTY

As the book is set in 1830, the 11-year-old protagonist, Wash, faces racism both when he is enslaved on a plantation in Barbados and when he later escapes to places like Nova Scotia and London. On the plantation, Wash and other enslaved people are treated as less than human, beaten, and killed for no reason. Yet even when Wash escapes slavery with the help of an abolitionist white man named Titch, Wash realizes that Titch and the other white abolitionists do not truly view him as their equal—they still see him as a person to be saved, condescending to him as a lesser person. Other characters in the novel, such as Tanna (a mixed-race woman) and the Esquimaux people in the Arctic, are similarly treated as lesser than white people. In this way, the book shows that racism doesn't only manifest in overt cruelty, as is the case on the plantations; racism also manifests in white people treating non-white people in subtler ways that still dehumanize and belittle them.

Wash observes how the cruelty on the plantation is based on the racist idea that enslaved people are subhuman, and how the white masters use this idea to justify dehumanizing treatment. When Wash is 11, a new master arrives on the plantation,

Erasmus Wilde, who is exceptionally cruel. At dinner one evening, Wash hears Erasmus describe the enslaved people to his brother, Titch: "They are not the help, Titch. They are the furniture." This is the root of Erasmus's brutal treatment of the people he enslaves: that he believes them to be no better than objects. Erasmus's belief in enslaved people's lack of humanity then justifies his abuse: when another enslaved woman, Big Kit, takes too long to clean up a stain Erasmus made, he smashes her in the face with a plate. Though Titch tries to help Big Kit, Erasmus tells Titch to leave it and not to make a mess of himself. Erasmus's belief in their inhumanity—exemplified by the idea that helping Big Kit is not worth Titch staining his napkin with her blood—clearly enables him to treat enslaved people with complete disregard for their humanity. When Erasmus arrives on the plantation, Wash describes how Erasmus and the overseers start maiming the enslaved people; cutting out tongues; burning them alive; whipping, hanging, and shooting them to death. Thus, this belief that the enslaved people are lesser goes further than Erasmus. The white overseers use the same racist beliefs to perpetuate massive injustice.

Yet even those who try to see enslaved people as human beings worthy of equality still have a tendency to condescend to Wash, illustrating how racism can also manifest in subtle beliefs that he is still less than white or mixed-race people. Titch is the first person who treats Wash like a human being, and he helps foster Wash's scientific, artistic, and reading abilities. He tells Wash that he believes the enslaved people are God's creatures also, who are owed rights and freedoms. But he goes on, saying that "If anything will keep white men from their heaven, it is [slavery]." Hearing this, Wash realizes that Titch is more concerned with white people's own salvation than in truly valuing the enslaved people's lives. Titch helps Wash escape slavery, but he later abandons Wash in the Arctic. Towards the end of the book, Wash realizes that if Titch truly thought of Wash as an equal, he would never have discarded Wash so casually. Wash thinks, "To [Titch], perhaps, any deep acceptance of equality was impossible. He saw only those who were there to be saved, and those who did the saving." In this way, Wash illustrates how Titch only views Wash in terms of what Wash can do for *him*—reinforcing the racist belief that Wash doesn't have true value or require respect as a person. Tanna, a mixed-race English woman whom Wash meets in Canada, also sometimes reinforces these stereotypes as well. Even though she respects and loves Wash, when she realizes that he used to be enslaved and doesn't read well, she suggests that she could teach him. Wash notes, "in her suggestion there seemed to be a belittlement, a setting herself above, as if my being unlettered defined my agency and character." Wash recognizes that her suggestion sets herself up as a superior person, despite the fact that Wash's character and agency should not be tied to his ability to read.

Other characters like Tanna and the Esquimaux people experience the same treatment, showing how racism affects all people of color (not just enslaved Black people like Wash), because they, too, face the same biased belief that they are less than white people. Though Tanna sometimes condescends to Wash, she also experiences racism herself. Her mother was born on the Solomon Islands, and as her father, Goff, notes, Tanna was never fully accepted into English society because of this. When Tanna and Wash visit Mrs. Wilde at her estate in Granbourne, Mrs. Wilde is cold to them and doesn't offer them lunch because she didn't know if they would like English food, though Tanna points out that she *is* English. This is one example of how society uses Tanna's race to justify lesser treatment—to not offer common courtesy because of her race. Wash finds Mr. Wilde treating the Esquimaux people the same way, when Wash and Titch visit him in the Arctic. Titch criticizes him for not learning the Esquimaux language or history despite working in the Arctic for decades, with the clear implication that Mr. Wilde believes they are not worth his time or understanding. However, Titch also makes the mistake of calling one of them Mr. Wilde's manservant, assuming that he is there for Mr. Wilde's needs. While Erasmus and the other overseers' treatment is clearly racist and dehumanizing, the book illustrates that all of the white characters share racial bias because they imply that the characters of color are lesser than they are.

JOURNEYING AND THE PAST

Through the second half of the *Washington Black*, Wash (who used to be enslaved on a plantation in Barbados) and Titch (Wash's former master's brother) set out on several lengthy journeys across the globe. Yet despite the fact that these characters often set out on their journeys to make progress in their lives, the past continues to confront them. In Wash's case, Titch deserts Wash in the Arctic, leaving Wash to search for him across London, Amsterdam, and ultimately Morocco, as Wash feels unable to find a sense of closure on his difficult childhood without understanding why Titch abandoned him. A bounty hunter named John Willard also stalks Wash to claim a reward Wash's former master Erasmus offers—and so he becomes a constant shadow from Wash's past enslavement. Likewise, Titch is troubled by his cousin Philip's suicide (which he feels guilty for) and his own father's death, eventually traveling to Morocco in order to avoid his family and make scientific progress that would have made his father proud. Ultimately, as none of the characters truly find peace and continue to wander restlessly, the book suggests that the past is inescapable, and people can waste much of their lives trying to avoid it or confront it.

Wash constantly grapples with his past enslavement and Titch's abandonment, to the point where he feels both homeless and purposeless. After Titch abandons Wash in the Arctic by

walking out alone into a snowstorm, Wash travels to Nova Scotia in order to make a life for himself there as a free man (slavery has effectively ended in Canada). However, knowing that John Willard is still searching for him, Wash feels uneasy everywhere he goes. Wash describes how this makes him "irritable and nervous and desperately melancholy." He thinks constantly that he has to move on, so he drifts from town to town and sometimes even changes his name. This illustrates that his journeys are not motivated by a desire to move forward in his life, but instead are motivated by fear of the past confronting him. Wash travels even more when he learns that Titch is actually alive. He travels to London, Amsterdam, and eventually Morocco in order to find answers from Titch. He realizes how rootless this makes him and doesn't fully understand why he does it, Wash thinks, "something in me would not cease—a great lunging forward, a striving rooted as deeply in me as the thirst for water." Though he recognizes that putting in all this effort and energy to travel the globe is wasteful and futile, Wash can't give it up, showing how the past is inherently inescapable.

Titch, meanwhile, is also haunted by his own past, leading him to cut off all connection with his family and avoid the world by moving to Morocco—but he, too, seems unable to make any true progress. At the end of the book, when Wash and his lover Tanna find Titch in Morocco, Titch reveals the major reason why he left the Arctic. Though he has a difficult time describing the connection between these two events, he recounts how, as a child, he and Erasmus used to bully Philip mercilessly, and so he always felt responsible for Philip's melancholy nature and then for his eventual suicide. He suggests that after Philip's suicide, he felt there was more to life than the physical properties of the world, and that his disappearance in the Arctic and his subsequent trip to Morocco were meant to explore this spiritual aspect of the world—demonstrating how so much of Titch's present has been determined by trying to reconcile with his failures in the past. Even Wash realizes how little progress Titch has made in Morocco; he is simply trying to relive the past. As he looks around Titch's stone house, he thinks, "Someone else might have looked upon his life here and seen only how different it was from all that had come before. I saw only what remained the same: the scattered furniture, as if no real home could ever be made here; the mess of instruments that would only measure and never draw a single conclusion; the friendship with a boy who, in days, months, years, would find himself abandoned." Titch's attempts to make a new life for himself have only led him to repeat his past.

The book's conclusion provides no easy answers, but it implies how easily a life can be wasted by focusing only on the past rather than striving to create a future. In the book's final chapters, Titch shows Wash that he is rebuilding the **Cloud-cutter**. Wash notes that Titch is "simply re-enacting his past as a form of comfort, conveniently forgetting all that had been bad and wrong about it" and is "setting himself up for a second failure." What was once a symbol of journey and adventure has instead become an anchor, showing how Titch has been unable to escape his past. Wash, too, doesn't fully understand how to move on from his past. After Wash gets some answers from Titch (but little resolution), Tanna asks Wash if he's gotten what he came for. He thinks, "She wanted to know if anything would be laid to rest, or if we'd continue to drift through the world together going from place to place until I made her like me, so lacking a foothold anywhere that nowhere felt like home." Wash's statement recognizes how much time and energy he has wasted in searching for Titch; his restlessness has prevented him from creating a truly settled life.

In the book's final passage, Wash walks out into a sandstorm, mirroring how Titch walked out into the snowstorm in the Arctic. Though deliberately ambiguous, this ending suggests that both of the book's main characters continue to be restless and unable to fully reconcile with the past—fated to spend their lives avoiding it or repeating it.

FAMILY, LOVE, AND PAIN

George Washington "Wash" Black, who is 11 at the beginning of the book, grows up enslaved on a plantation in Barbados, never knowing his family. The closest he ever gains to a family is an enslaved woman, Big Kit, who is like a mother to him; Titch, Wash's master's brother, who is like a father to him; and lastly, a young woman named Tanna, who becomes his lover. Ultimately, Wash discovers that Big Kit was his biological mother; that Titch—who abandons him in the Arctic—actually faked his death simply to unburden himself from Wash; and that he and Tanna struggle to communicate about his feelings. All of these developments devastate Wash, as he feels betrayed and hurt by his closest companions—Big Kit for not telling him the truth, Titch for abandoning him, and Tanna for criticizing him. These events demonstrate how emotionally complicated families can be: while family members' love can foster the greatest growth, families are also able to cause the deepest pain and trauma.

Wash's relationship with Big Kit helps him survive life on the plantation, but discovering his biological relationship with her only after her death makes him feel betrayed and unmoored. On the plantation, Wash describes how important Big Kit is to his survival. When he was young, she protected him from other enslaved people who live in the huts near the cane fields. She also tells him that he is going to have a "great big life" and provides him with a glimpse into what freedom is like—something that Wash has never experienced. Thus, Big Kit essentially becomes a mother to him, and her love helps him survive the plantation's cruelty. Later in Wash's life, after escaping slavery with Titch, Wash examines the plantation's records. He discovers that Big Kit has died, and that she was actually his biological mother. He realizes that she fiercely

loved him, but always with the terror of knowing that they would likely someday be separated. Wash is grateful for her love, but he is also devastated as a result. He knows both that she betrayed him by not telling him the truth, and he also feels terrible for abandoning her to travel with Titch. In this way, Wash sees how both of them caused each other deep pain, while also still providing formative and vital love.

Titch, too, mentors Wash, saves him from slavery, and treats him like family. But Wash has a difficult time reconciling this history with the fact that Titch callously tossed Wash aside, becoming another figure who shapes his life positively but also causes him a great deal of trauma. When Titch first enlists Wash as his young manservant, he treats Wash more kindly than any other white person ever has, teaching him to read, write, and record calculations. When Titch notes that Wash has some drawing ability, he also credits Wash's illustrations in his scientific papers. Wash recognizes that Titch's mentorship is invaluable, and he becomes fiercely loyal—to the point that when Titch offers to let Wash go to Canada to be free, Wash instead opts to travel with Titch to the Arctic as "an act of fidelity, gratitude, a return of the kindness [he] had been shown and never grown used to." In this way, the book shows how important this kind of found family is to Wash—because Titch provides him with the opportunity to escape the plantation and make something better of himself. Yet ultimately, Titch abandons Wash in the Arctic. Still shattered by this, Wash later spends several years looking for Titch to find out why Titch abandoned him, desperately seeking some kind of resolution or reasoning for what happened. Yet he never receives any—indeed, when he confronts Titch in Morocco, Titch claims that he never meant to mistreat Wash, and that he "treated [Wash] as family." Hearing this, Wash realizes that Titch's "harm […] was in not understanding that he still had the ability to cause it." Wash is family to Titch, but Titch doesn't fully realize how this fact means that his betrayal has caused Wash deep pain precisely because of the familial bonds that they built.

Lastly, Tanna's relationship with Wash teaches him another love—romantic and sexual love—but she also causes him pain in not fully being able to understand him. Wash first meets Tanna when they both start sketching at the same beach in Canada, and she asks him to teach her how to improve her sketching. Gradually they get to know one another, until one day Tanna puts her hand in his. He feels immediate desire for her, and as he notes that she clearly wants him, too, he feels "a sense of wholeness," like he is being "pieced together, suddenly, a man intact." As they become lovers, Tanna gives him a deep love that he hasn't yet experienced before, and this makes him a more complete person, as he notes. And yet, as Tanna gets to know Wash better, she also misunderstands and criticizes him. When Wash tells her about Titch's betrayal and continues to dwell on it, she often questions his motivations for seeking Titch out. He eventually comes to fear her criticism, so much so that he begins to hide his thoughts and feelings from her. He feels that she is "disgusted" that he is expending energy on Titch, who is not worthy of him. But Wash can't help his feelings, and so in reality her criticism only makes him feel misunderstood and pained when she is not on his side because of how much she usually loves him and makes him feel whole.

All three of these characters—Big Kit, Titch, and Tanna—love Wash like family. But it is precisely because of these bonds that make their betrayals even more painful and traumatic, illustrating how emotionally complex familial relationships can be.

ART, SCIENCE, AND CURIOSITY

When an 11-year-old enslaved boy named Washington Black meets Titch, his master's brother, Titch introduces him to the world of art and science. Titch shows Wash various plant and animal life on Faith Plantation, while Wash teaches himself how to sketch these creatures after seeing Titch's sketches. Both of these disciplines spark Wash's immense curiosity, and the book weaves in passages of Wash's observations of the natural world around him and his attempts to depict the beauty of what he finds there. Though science and art are often viewed as opposing disciplines, the book demonstrates how both are ways of capturing and understanding the world's natural mysteries.

Titch, Wash, and the Goffs all use science to improve human understanding of the world—whether it be in exploring the past or making discoveries that could change the future. From Titch and Wash's first interaction, Titch demonstrates how science can be used to alter a person's fundamental understanding of even mundane things. When Wash arrives at his door, Titch asks Wash to look through a reflector scope at the moon. When Wash sees the moon, he sighs in amazement. He realizes that the moon has craters and ridges, understanding it as "a land without tree or shrub or lake, a land without people. An earth before the good Lord began to fill it." This amazement illustrates how science illuminates and demystifies even things people see every day. The Cloud-cutter is another scientific advancement that allows for new ways to understand the world. Even though Titch and Wash use it to escape Faith Plantation, its initial purpose is to enable people to view the world from "spectacular" heights (particularly before the airplane was invented in the late 1800s). Though Wash is terrified as they soar the skies in the storm, he sobs as they rise and he stares out into "the boundlessness of the world." This newfound freedom is particularly meaningful for someone escaping slavery, but the **Cloud-cutter** provides an opportunity for newfound freedom and discovery to *all* people. Wash continues his work in science even after he and Titch part ways. Goff, a marine zoologist whom Wash meets in Nova Scotia, explains that he is finding specimens that will help him explore

"the discrepancy between the factual age of the earth and so-called evidence of His creation." Thus, he is using scientific examination of marine life to understand the earth's history and whether it aligns with a Biblical understanding of how old the earth is. He, too, is using science to explore nature's deepest mysteries.

Just as science helps Wash and others to better understand the world around them, Wash uses sketching to more fully illuminate the world's mystery and beauty. Wash first becomes interested in drawing when he sees Titch quickly sketch the Cloud-cutter. He describes how amazed he is at seeing Titch's artistry. He thinks, "suddenly I knew that I wanted—desperately wanted—to do it too: I wanted to create a world with my hands." In this way, art stokes Wash's curiosity about the world and makes him yearn to understand it and capture it more fully. When Wash and Titch travel to the Arctic, Wash remarks, "I had not ever seen ice before, not in its immensities: I stared into the refracted light like a creature entranced. How beautiful it was, how sad, how sacred! I attempted to express the awe of it in my drawings." The ice's natural beauty astounds Wash, and it ties his desire to explore that beauty with his drawing. After Titch abandons Wash in the Arctic, Wash travels to Nova Scotia and gives up drawing for some years. However, when he sees jellyfish with "bodies all afire" in a dock one day, he digs out his papers and paints, sketching for the first time in months. He describes how he "attempted to capture what [he'd] seen in the waters. [He] could not. It had been a burst of incandescence, fleeting, radiant, every punch of light like a note of music." In this way, the book again connects Wash's curiosity about the world to his desire to draw, demonstrating how it is an attempt to appreciate the beauty around him—even if that attempt is sometimes futile.

Ultimately, Wash and several other characters recognize that not all mysteries in the world can be explained. Wash himself states that he "had seen enough strangeness to understand the world was unfathomable," even though he recognizes that this is an unscientific way of looking at the world. But despite this idea, the characters continue to try and explore those mysteries through art and science. The book ultimately suggests that even if some things cannot be understood, curiosity is a virtue, and yearning to understand the world is important in and of itself, regardless of whether one can come to definite conclusions about it.

SYMBOLS

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

THE CLOUD-CUTTER

The Cloud-cutter has two layers of symbolic significance. For both Wash and Titch, the Cloud-cutter represents freedom, but it represents an inability to escape from the past. Initially, Titch builds the Cloud-cutter to make his father proud, because his father, a fellow scientist, was never able to make the machine work. Even from the beginning of the book, then, Titch shows how he is burdened by his father's past failures, and/or by the fact that his father isn't proud of him. Thus, the Cloud-cutter becomes both a link to and a way to escape from that past disappointment.

Then, when Titch and Wash set out on the Cloud-cutter, it represents for each of them a way of finding freedom. For Wash, he is able to escape literal enslavement in Barbados, while for Titch, it means escaping the burden of family expectations, as he is supposed to take over Faith Plantation while his brother Erasmus returns to Granbourne. However, the fact that the Cloud-cutter crashes soon after Titch and Wash take off suggests that even though they have a newfound freedom, they can't escape the expectations of the world for long. They crash into a ship where the men immediately suspect that Wash is a runaway and Titch is aiding him. Thus, while the Cloud-cutter provides a kind of freedom, it doesn't allow them to fully avoid their past burdens.

This idea is further reinforced at the end of the book, when Wash finds Titch trying to rebuild the Cloud-cutter in Morocco. Wash notes that Titch is simply "re-enacting his past," haunted by the Cloud-cutter's previous failure. Thus, what is meant to be a vessel for mobility actually becomes a symbolic anchor, tying Titch to his inescapable past.

THE OCTOPUS

The octopus represents Wash's inability to build a satisfying home for himself, even years after escaping slavery. In Nova Scotia, Wash finds the octopus on a dive for father-daughter biologists Goff and Tanna, and initially the octopus spurts ink because it is afraid of Wash. However, when he holds out his hands openly and gently, the octopus swims directly into his hands. This parallels Wash's own relationship with Titch: initially he feared Titch, but upon recognizing the man's gentleness, Wash was able to trust him and even followed Titch wherever he wanted to go—even if that meant taking Wash away from the only home he ever knew.

Then, when Wash is building the aquarium that will house the octopus, he describes it as a place "where people could come to view creatures they believed nightmarish, to understand these animals were in fact beautiful and nothing to fear." This statement not only applies to the creatures within (like the octopus), but also to Wash himself, whose dark skin and burn

scars make him seem nightmarish to other people. And like the creatures in the aquarium, Wash is displaced from his home and becomes something to marvel at, making him feel isolated and like he doesn't belong.

The parallels between Wash and the octopus continue: as Wash and the Goffs transport the octopus to London from Nova Scotia, the octopus starts to grow ill and turns colorless. In other words, in going from place to place, it loses its vivacity. When Wash looks at the octopus, he sees "not the miraculous animal but his own slow, relentless extinction." Wash, too, is miraculous, having overcome the hardships of slavery and fully exhibiting his talents in science and art. And yet, his constant displacement—and his inability to make a home for himself—is also slowly killing him.

THE NAIL

The nail symbolizes Wash's futile resistance, and the threat that resistance actually poses to the enslaved people on Faith Plantation. When Titch demands that Wash come stay with him in his quarters, Big Kit gives Wash a thick iron nail to drive into Titch's eye if Titch tries to sexually assault Wash. While walking to Titch's house, Wash clutches the nail "like a secret, like a crack through which some impossible future might be glimpsed." At first, he views the nail as an opportunity for resistance, allowing him some alternative to his enslaved life.

However, as soon as Wash enters into Titch's house, Titch notices the nail and asks Wash to set it down—and Wash realizes that he could be killed simply for having a potential weapon. This illustrates how white men have so much power in this society that even the mere prospect of resistance is hopeless. While the nail provides some hope for Wash in the moment, he quickly realizes that using it would mean his own death. In fact, the way he speaks about the nail as a glimpse into an "impossible future" ties into other language in the book—the idea that death could be a door, leading to a different world. In this way, the book subtly connects the two, as Wash recognizes that the nail would spell his certain death and make his resistance pointless.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage Books edition of *Washington Black* published in 2019.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ I could feel the day's exhaustion descending on me. "What it like, Kit? Free?"

I felt her shift in the dirt, and then she was gathering me in close, her hot breath at my ear. "Oh, child, it like nothing in this world. When you free, you can do anything."

"You go wherever it is you wanting?"

"You go wherever it is you wanting. You wake up any time you wanting. When you free," she whispered, "someone ask you a question, you ain't got to answer. You ain't got to finish no job you don't want to finish. You just leave it."

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black, Big Kit (speaker), Philip, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

When Big Kit concocts her plan to kill Wash and herself, she tells him that they will be reborn free in the kingdom of Dahomey, and Wash asks her about what freedom is like. This introduces the key theme of freedom in the book: to Wash, physical captivity is all he knows, and so he relies on Big Kit to understand what it means to be free. Being enslaved, Wash understands the torment of physical captivity— he can't comprehend *not* doing what he is told or going somewhere simply because he desires to do so.

But as the book unfolds, it adds nuance to the idea of freedom. Other characters who are not physically enslaved, like Titch or Philip for example (both white men), lament that they do not feel free either. They've never experienced physical captivity like Wash has, but they nevertheless feel bound by other things in life, like familial obligations. In addition, when Wash finally escapes slavery, he also realizes that he still has some restrictions, like having to do jobs that he doesn't want to do—contrary to Kit's statement here. This suggests that while physical captivity *is* brutally restrictive—like in Wash's feelings of exhaustion and powerlessness in the passage—being captive in other ways can be emotionally difficult, too.

Additionally, this exchange sets up the familial relationship between Big Kit and Wash—Big Kit as a wise maternal figure, and Wash as the curious young boy learning from her. Their physical intimacy also reflects a mother-child dynamic, foreshadowing Wash's ultimate discovery of their true relationship as mother and son. (Wash always thought Big Kit was like a mother figure to him but didn't know she was literally his biological mother.)

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ We had lived in blood for years, my entire life. But something about that evening—the gleaming beauty of the master's house, the refinements, the lazy elegance—made me feel a profound, unsettling sense of despair. It was not only William's mutilation that day, knowing his head stared out over the fields even now, in the darkness. What I felt at that moment, though I then lacked the language for it, was the raw, violent injustice of it all.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Erasmus Wilde, William, Big Kit

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

After Erasmus breaks Big Kit's nose with a plate, Wash tells her later that he shouldn't have hit her. In response, Big Kit criticizes Wash for being soft and asks him if he's never seen blood before. In this quote, Wash comes to perhaps his first realization about the true injustice in their lives. First, he notes the injustice that their bodies seem to have no value to the white masters outside of the labor they can provide. Erasmus is willing to mutilate William's body or break Big Kit's nose because he doesn't truly regard the enslaved people as human beings worthy of respect. In this way, the book illustrates that it is easy for Erasmus and the others to be cruel because they dehumanize the enslaved Black people on the plantation and view them instead as objects.

William's mutilation also adds to the injustice of their captivity, because Wash and Big Kit realize that they have no escape from the plantation—not even in committing suicide. They don't have control over their lives, but they also don't have control over their deaths. Perhaps the worst injustice, the one that Wash isn't truly able to articulate, is the fact that he has no words for the injustice that he is experiencing. That the white masters can keep Wash and the other enslaved people completely ignorant is another kind of captivity in addition to their physical restriction—and one that causes just as much emotional pain.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ And as I began to draw what I saw with a clean accuracy, I realized I was troubled by the enormous beauty of that place, of the jewel-like fields below us, littered as I knew them to be with broken teeth. The hot wind snapped at my papers, and in a kind of ghostly sound beneath this I thought I heard the cry of a baby. For the few women who gave birth here were turned immediately back into the fields, and they would set their tender-skinned newborns down in the furrows to wail against the hot sun. I craned out at the fields; I could see nothing. Far out at sea, a great flock of seagulls rose and turned, the late afternoon light flaring on the undersides of their wings.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash and Titch ascend Corvus Peak for the first time, Titch asks Wash to draw what he sees from that perspective. As he does so, Wash acknowledges both the beauty and the cruelty in Faith Plantation. As beautiful as the "jewel-like" fields are, he also knows that atrocious murders happen in those fields, so much so that they are "littered with broken teeth." And though the wind makes the place come alive, it also carries the "ghostly sound" of babies who were born on the peak. The place is very picturesque, and yet at the same time this splendor obscures how the enslaved people there are treated as though they are worth nothing; mothers are not even given the ability to nurse their newborns after giving birth.

Drawing the environment enables Wash to recognize this contradictory beauty and ugliness in Faith Plantation, showing how art can help him understand the world around him. Drawing also makes the cruelty of his situation even more apparent to him. For while the women and men toil invisibly at the fields in the hot sun, the seagulls instead are able to fly freely out towards the boundless ocean. In this way, the passage implies that the enslaved people are treated even worse—and have less freedom than—the animals on the plantation. In this way, Wash understands how dehumanized he and the other enslaved people are by their captivity.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Three cracked ribs. Her kick had been that harsh, that swift. I refused to tell the overseers who had done it, and in this way Kit was spared. But the pain was immense and suffocating, and I was several nights in the hothouse before returning again to our huts.

She avoided my eye as I was led in, my chest still in bandages.

That evening, as I drifted into sleep, there came a touch at my face. I heard soft weeping, and realized with alarm it was Big Kit. She was running a cold palm across my forehead, whispering.

"Oh my son," I heard her say, over and over again. "My son."

I understood then that she had not meant to strike me so hard, and that my days away had pained her greatly. I closed my eyes, feeling the coolness of her skin on my brow.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Christopher "Titch" Wilde, Big Kit

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

After Wash's face is permanently scarred in an explosion, he thinks about the last time he was wounded—when Big Kit kicked him in the chest after he told her to be mindful that her machete was getting too close to him. This episode illustrates the complexity of family dynamics. Big Kit is clearly a mother figure to Wash, and her repetition of "my son" over and over again also foreshadows the eventual reveal that she is his biological mother. She takes care of him, loves him, is saddened when he isn't there, and weeps when she realizes how severely she hurt him.

But his injury is another key part of their dynamic—despite her love, she has the capacity to hurt him deeply both physically and emotionally. Because before Wash realizes that Big Kit had not meant to strike him so hard, the passage implies that he was emotionally hurt by what she had done, in addition to physically. The passage implies his shock at the idea that she was able to hurt him so severely, particularly because he believed that she loved him. Wash likely wouldn't be as wounded if an overseer caused him the same pain, but because Big Kit usually protects and takes care of him, her actions hurt even more.

The fact that Wash thinks of this incident right after he has received another wound from Titch also highlights how Wash has a similar dynamic with Titch. While Titch normally protects Wash and acts as his mentor, he and his experiments also have the capacity to severely hurt Wash.

Both of these examples illustrate how families (biological or chosen) can provide formative love, but they can also cause people great emotional pain as well.

Part 1, Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ She was much changed, it was true, maimed terribly, grown thinner, the hair at her temples silver as flies' wings. Aged, now, as though decades had separated us. But I was the more changed; that was the uglier truth.

I gripped anxiously at my hands, staring at Kit's tall figure. How solicitous she was with the boy. I saw now how she kept a careful eye on his posture, his manners. I knew instinctively what this meant, the great angry love she held that boy inside, like a fist. I tried to imagine what he might be like. He could not have been older than six or seven years, I thought. I wondered at the sudden pain coming up in me.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Philip, Christopher "Titch" Wilde, Erasmus Wilde, Big Kit

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash accompanies Philip and Titch to dinner with Erasmus, he realizes at the end of the dinner that Big Kit was serving in the dining room—and that he didn't recognize her. This quote reinforces another way in which families can cause great love and great pain, as here, both Kit and Wash have hurt each other. Despite their deep bond, having acted as family for several years before Titch arrived at Faith Plantation, Wash and Kit have both moved on from each other in their own ways. Wash watches as Kit protects and cares another young boy in the same way that she once protected and cared for him, causing a "sudden pain" within Wash as he realizes that she has substituted her love for him with her love for this boy. This also parallels Titch's actions at the end of the book, as he similarly takes in another young boy as his apprentice in Morocco in the same way he took in Wash.

At the same time, Wash knows that he, too, has betrayed Kit in his own way. Even though he loved her and thought of her often, he has now changed in ways that have separated him from Big Kit—particularly in receiving an education and putting field work behind him. Wash has completely transformed in speech, mannerisms, and routine, and in a way this has led to Big Kit becoming completely

unrecognizable to him. Even though Big Kit has changed, he is "the more changed." He is not subject to the same cruelty as she is anymore; they are not allies in the same way. All of this is underscored by Wash's recent facial scarring, providing a physical symbol of the idea that Wash can never go back to his past state; he can never unlearn what he has learned. And so this separation wounds both Wash and Big Kit, demonstrating family members' unique abilities to cause each other pain, because normally their relationships are so deeply based in love.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ "Perhaps it is easier for you," he said again. "Everything is taken care of for you. You needn't worry about what the coming days will hold, as every day is the same. Your only expectations are the expectations your master lays out for you. It is a simple-enough life, what."

It was as though he had spoken the words to determine their truth. He shook his head irritably.

I stilled my face. I said nothing.

He exhaled harshly, dragging the gun up his thighs. I looked at his hands, the pallor of them on the dark metal.

"I am sorry." His voice was so soft I barely heard him. He gestured with his chin. "Your face."

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black, Philip (speaker), Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108-109

Explanation and Analysis

Philip enlists Wash to accompany him hunting, but they never hunt—in reality Philip and Wash just sit at the base of Corvus Peak and Philip muses philosophically about life. Philip's statement here brings up another key point about freedom. Though he recognizes the difficulty of the enslaved people's lives, Philip also suggests that other people who are not enslaved feel similarly—if not more—restricted by the expectations placed upon them. While Philip's assessment is an insensitive one, the book as a whole does suggest that freedom means different things to different people. For people who *do* possess physical freedom, like Philip or Titch, other burdens can feel just as restrictive or emotionally damaging. Philip's harsh breath and the presence of his gun foreshadow just how emotionally damaging the "expectations" to which Philip alludes can be. Shortly after saying this, Philip kills himself, hammering the point home that being captive to expectations, or perhaps simply to melancholy, can be just as harmful as physical captivity.

Notably, Philip also contradicts himself here as well. For even though he suggests that enslaved people's lives are simple because they only have to fulfill their master's expectations, Philip also recognizes how difficult this can be. Philip recognizes that Wash was simply fulfilling expectations when he retrieved the sandwiches for Philip, which resulted in his scarred face—this is why Philip apologizes. Moreover, even in this moment, Wash is fulfilling Philip's expectations by accompanying him hunting, even though he is wary of Philip possibly trying to kill him. Despite Wash's intense fear, he knows that he has no choice but to obey. Thus, the book also illustrates how Wash's physical captivity is exceptionally traumatic, contrary to Philip's assessment.

Part 1, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ What did I feel? What would anyone feel, in such a place? My chest ached with anguish and wonder, an astonishment that went on and on, and I could not catch my breath. The Cloud-cutter spun, turned gradually faster, rising ever higher. I began to cry—deep, silent, racking sobs, my face turned away from Titch, staring out onto the boundlessness of the world. The air grew colder, crept in webs across my skin. All was shadow, red light, storm-fire and frenzy. And up we went into the eye of it, untouched, miraculous.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Erasmus Wilde, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

As Wash and Titch make their escape from Faith Plantation in the Cloud-cutter, Wash describes the experience of flying in it for the first time. In this moment, the Cloud-cutter represents both freedom and discovery for the characters. First, both Titch and Wash are using the Cloud-cutter to escape different forms of captivity. For Wash, the captivity is literal, as he is escaping physical enslavement and possibly death. This is what prompts Wash's emotion, because he is finally being released from both physical captivity and the emotional hardship of being enslaved. For Titch, the

captivity is more abstract, as he is trying to avoid the responsibility of taking over the plantation if Erasmus returns to London. And so for both of them, the Cloud-cutter represents a release from the burdens of that captivity.

Yet the Cloud-cutter also shows how science can be used to explore nature's mysteries. For even though Titch and Wash aren't using the Cloud-cutter for its original purpose—crossing the Atlantic—Wash is still able to appreciate the experience of ascending in the Cloud-cutter. Even though he doesn't fully understand what is happening, he is awed by the ocean stretching out below them and the storm surrounding them. In getting the Cloud-cutter to work at all, Titch and Wash have the ability to give people a greater degree of freedom and opportunity for discovery, showing how science can provide people with a better understanding of the world around them.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Titch explained we would be entering Chesapeake Bay, and would therefore soon be leaving the ship. We would also, however, find ourselves subject to the laws of American freedom. "Freedom, Wash, is a word with different meanings to different people," he said, as though I did not know the truth of this better than he.

Related Characters: Christopher "Titch" Wilde, George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

When Titch and Washington arrive in Virginia, Titch notes that they will have to obey the American laws of freedom. Titch's statement, and Wash's thoughts in response, both acknowledge that there are different kinds of freedom and captivity. In the United States, Wash can find actual freedom, as up until this point he has been enslaved in Barbados. In this way, he is actually able to fulfill the promise of his namesake—finding freedom in the United States, where George Washington helped found a country defined by freedom and democracy. Titch, meanwhile, can find freedom from his familial duties.

But Titch's belief that he can speak more to freedom than Wash can is, as Wash points out, ironic, because Wash is very aware that his captivity was far worse than Titch's. This exchange illustrates one of Titch's failings; his condescension suggests that he believes he is superior to Wash, and always understands more than Wash does. Titch isn't able to appreciate that Wash has his own perspective on freedom, one that Titch can find value in. This is an extension of racism, because it implies that Titch that he understands the world better than Wash does, when clearly in this case, it isn't true. This critique illustrates that racism manifests not just in cruelty, but in this more subtle belief that enslaved people are inferior to white people.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ It had happened so gradually, but these months with Titch had schooled me to believe I could leave all misery behind, I could cast off all violence, outrun a vicious death. I had even begun thinking I'd been born for a higher purpose, to draw the earth's bounty, and to invent; I had imagined my existence a true and rightful part of the natural order. How wrong-headed it had all been. I was a black boy, only—I had no future before me, and little grace or mercy behind me. I was nothing, I would die nothing, hunted hastily down and slaughtered.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Erasmus Wilde, John Willard, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash and Titch arrive in Virginia, they quickly discover that Erasmus has sent a bounty hunter after Wash with a reward of 1,000 pounds. Wash is shocked—he'd believed that his journey to the United States would allow him to move on from enslavement's misery and violence back in Barbados. But now, knowing that there is a man stalking his every move, Wash understands that there is no way for him to fully escape his past; he will always be haunted by the fact that he was once enslaved. This is true even after Erasmus dies and slavery ends in the British colonies, because even then, Willard *does* find and attack Wash. Here Wash seems to understand that the past is inescapable, as much as he might try to travel away from the source of his misery in Barbados.

Wash also ties his grim fate to his race, as he recognizes how little "grace or mercy" the world has for a young Black boy. He understands that society does not value him equally, even after escaping slavery. While he thought he might be able to transcend enslavement and fulfill a higher calling, he realizes that it's unlikely the world will truly let

him do so. He returns to dehumanizing language to describe himself in discussing being "hunted hastily down and slaughtered," as if he is an animal. He knows that this is how the world sees him—as something lesser than white people—and as such, cruelty and violence will always lurk nearby, threatening all he might try to accomplish.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ I suppose I believed there to be some bravery in this choice. I suppose it struck my boyhood self as an act of fidelity, gratitude, a return of the kindness I had been shown and never grown used to. Perhaps I felt Titch to be the only sort of family I had left. Perhaps, perhaps; even now I cannot speak with any certainty. I know only that in that moment I was terrified to my very core, and that the idea of embarking on a perilous journey without Titch filled me with a panic so savage it felt as if I were being asked to perform some brutal act upon myself to sever my own throat.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Edgar Farrow, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash and Titch are at Edgar Farrow's home, Titch suggests that Wash escape with a few runaway slaves to Canada while Titch searches for his father in the Arctic—but Wash insists on staying with Titch. This passage, in which Wash details his reasoning for remaining with Titch, illustrates the complicated dynamics between them. First, it makes explicit that Wash thinks of Titch as family—as someone who showed Wash kindness and who mentored Wash in both art and science. But as such, Wash also highlights how Titch has the capacity to really hurt Wash—in deciding that they should go separate ways or in removing the love that they share.

Wash's language turns extreme at the thought of having to leave without Titch—he's filled with a "panic so savage," it is like he is being asked to slit his own throat. This also shows how Wash isn't yet fully free at this point in the book. For while he has escaped slavery, he has remained tethered to Titch in a way that leaving Titch feels incomprehensible to Wash. Wash's severe panic is in and of itself a kind of captivity, keeping him from truly being able to do what he wants. While he justifies his actions as brave, in hindsight he recognizes how confined by fear he was, and how emotionally distressing that tether became.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ The air clenched to ice, stinging our cheeks. It began to pinch. Sailing, we glimpsed in the passing black waters eerie, exquisite cathedrals of ice. I had not ever seen ice before, not in its immensities: I stared into the refracted light like a creature entranced. How beautiful it was, how sad, how sacred! I attempted to express the awe of it in my drawings. For it felt very much as though we were leaving the world of the living and entering a world of spirits and the dead. I felt free, invincible, beyond Mister Willard's reach.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), John Willard, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Aboard the *Calliope*, Wash and Titch travel further into the Arctic and Wash sees ice for the first time. First, his appreciation for the ice and his attempt to capture it in his drawings illustrates again how Wash uses art to understand the world's natural mysteries. This is a particularly notable example, because Wash seems to realize here that the ice has a quality beyond its natural scientific properties. Looking at the "cathedrals" of ice and noting how "sacred" they are implies that the ice carries an ethereal quality that can only be captured by observing it, and so he tries to render it in his sketches to understand that quality even further.

Additionally, Wash's reference to the fact that he feels freer in the Arctic illustrates how fearful he has been of John Willard up until this point. For even though he is physically free and able to travel the world, he is still captive to the fear that John Willard might find and kill him. The fact that he isn't able to truly experience the world as a free person yet is only reinforced by the description of the Arctic. In saying that he is entering the land of the spirits and the dead, Wash implies that he can't feel like a free man in the world of the "living." As such, he is essentially captive in this icy prison because going anywhere else would put him in much greater danger and make him even more afraid. This description also foreshadows the isolation and death that Wash will experience in the Arctic. It also hints at the fact that Wash won't truly be able to make a life here, and that this journey is just a temporary escape from his past.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

But my true study remained, I understand now, the curious person of Titch. He was, I feared, becoming increasingly lost within himself. I suppose there must have been a deep love between him and his father, a love I could get no sense for because of its reticence. But as with most loves, it was shadowy, and painful, and confusing, and Titch seemed to me overly eager and too often hurt.

I could see a sadness coming over him, a kind of slow despair. I understood he was anguished over his father—over his failure to ever impress the man, over how to explain that Philip had killed himself and that we were now in hiding.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Erasmus Wilde, Philip, Mr. James Wilde (Titch's Father), Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 193-194

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash is in the Arctic, he accompanies Titch and his father, Mr. Wilde, on their daily scientific explorations. In this passage, Wash recognizes both the complicated dynamic between Titch and his father and Titch's difficulty reconciling with his past. In the case of Titch and his father, Wash sees that their father-son relationship is complex. While he recognizes that there must be a "deep love" that they share, it is also "shadowy, and painful, and confusing." This description of Titch's relationship with his father illustrates how family relationships, while containing the deepest love, can also be painful—particularly when that love is as "reticent" as the love between Wash and his father.

Wash's observations are doubly interesting because his relationship with Titch isn't very different—Wash is often eager and clings to Titch, while Titch is somewhat hesitant to express or maintain that love in return. Thus, this description foreshadows some of the pain that Wash will endure at Titch's hands because of the bond that they share as well.

This passage also touches on Titch's difficulty with his past. His journey has been motivated by two things: first, his desire to make his father proud and to compensate for his failure to impress his father. Additionally, his journey is also in an attempt to avoid his past on Faith Plantation—particularly Philip's suicide. Even though this won't be fully evident until the end of the book, Titch blames himself for Philip's suicide in part because he and Erasmus bullied Philip terribly as children, and he feels responsible for Philip's melancholy. This is one of the main reasons he wanted to escape Faith Plantation as quickly as possible, to avoid the fallout of Philip's death. But because Titch is still unable to impress his father, and because this despair (likely stemming from guilt) is overtaking him here, the book suggests that Titch's attempt to move on from his past by journeying to the Arctic has been futile.

A haze of pale light was furred around Kit's head, like a halo, and I could not make out her face. She reached forward and held my hand, and her touch was terribly cold. I gave her a pair of thick fur-lined mittens. Then somehow we were standing in the snow, the world so white around us. Kit's face looked wondrous to me, dark, sombre, beautiful. I studied it.

"You be my eyes, Wash," she said to me.

And reaching up and with her fingers, she forcibly pressed her own eyes in. A wide blue light shone out from the sockets.

I felt—and this is the peculiar truth—a sense of peace and well-being come over me. I understood a great gift of trust was being extended to me.

When I awoke in the darkness, I was crying.

Related Characters: Big Kit, George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash and Titch are in the Arctic, Wash has a dream about Big Kit. Although Wash doesn't discover for many years that Big Kit has died, the description in Wash's dream here heavily implies Big Kit's death. First, the halo—a hallmark of Christian iconography—suggests that Big Kit has died, and that she holds the status of a martyr or saint who lived a pure life. Her "cold touch" and the "peace and well-being" that Wash feels in seeing her also suggest her death. This is likely why Wash wakes up crying—on some level, he senses that Big Kit has likely died or soon will.

What makes her death even more tragic is the fact that unlike Wash, Big Kit was likely never able to be free after arriving in Barbados—a fact confirmed later in the book when Wash discovers that she died on Faith Plantation. The book implies this tragedy when Big Kit asks Wash to be her "eyes." This points back to one of the book's early chapters, when Wash states that he loves Big Kit because she is a

"witness" to another world that he has never known—a free one. He loved hearing stories about what it was like to be free on Dahomey, but now their roles are reversed. Wash has escaped Faith and gained freedom, and he has become a witness to a world that Kit will never get to experience. This demonstrates one of the hardships of the enslaved people's lives—the emotional damage of never being able to experience the world freely.

Wash's tears also acknowledge that while he loves her very much, she still has the ability to cause him deep pain. This is true both because he acknowledges the tragedy of her life in captivity, but also because losing her means losing one of his closest (and only) parental figures in the world. This highlights the complexity of family members' relationships, because while they provide love, their loss also becomes deep sorrow.

"You are like a ghost," Titch hollered to me. "Go back."

The roar of the wind and snow was increasing. It would be sometime past mid-afternoon by now, but the light had not dimmed, only shifted. We stood in that obliterating whiteness, as though the world had vanished.

"You will not leave me, Wash," he shouted. "Even when I am gone. That is what breaks my heart."

Related Characters: Christopher "Titch" Wilde (speaker), George Washington "Wash" Black

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

When Titch decides to walk off into a severe snowstorm in the Arctic, Wash desperately tries to follow him, worried that Titch is committing suicide and terrified of being left alone. This exchange illustrates both the complexity of their dynamic as found family members and how each character is confining the other. First, the fact that Wash is desperately following after Titch into this turbulent snowstorm emphasizes how tethered he feels to Titch, because leaving Titch feels impossible. Even though Wash has escaped slavery and found freedom, in some ways he is still bound to Titch because he doesn't feel he can survive without him. The image of Wash and Titch in a white void suggests that in this moment, Titch is Wash's entire world, and the thought of losing him would be as isolating as living completely alone in the world.

Titch understands this, and it is one of the reasons that he also feels burdened. The fact that Titch calls Wash a ghost in this moment not only refers to the translucent atmosphere in the snowstorm, but also to the fact that Wash is haunting Titch already, constantly by his side. As Titch states here, he knows that Wash will never leave him, and the responsibility of caring for Wash has become too great—he feels as much emotional hardship in their relationship because of that responsibility. Thus, this passage also emphasizes how family members, while providing each other with great love, can also cause deep pain. Because they were so close, the idea of separating causes both of them great heartbreak, but Titch feels compelled to do it to relieve himself of his burdens.

Part 3, Chapter 2 Quotes

But I cooked always behind a curtain, unseen, my scarred face being, the owner feared, repugnant. The schedule was demanding, and after some months of this I gave up drawing altogether, finding no extra hours in my day. Though I did not know it then, I had begun the months of my long desolation. I became a boy without identity, a walking shadow, and with each new month I fell deeper into strangeness. For there could be no belonging for a creature such as myself, anywhere: a disfigured black boy with a scientific turn of mind and a talent on canvas, running, always running, from the dimmest of shadows.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), John Willard, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

After Wash settles in Nova Scotia when he returns from the Arctic, he gets work as a prep cook and slowly becomes desolate. This passage illustrates the difficulty that Wash has in confronting the trauma of Titch abandoning him. Even as a free man living in Nova Scotia, Wash isn't truly able to move on from his past. The reference to the fact that Wash is always running from "the dimmest of shadows" points to his constant fear of Willard finding him, suggesting that his constant running is an attempt to avoid this aspect of his past.

The passage also implies that there are parts of his past that are inescapable. Just as Wash's scars are a permanent part of him, the fact that he is an educated Black boy with an interest in art and science means that he will never find a true sense of belonging. This aspect of his past is also what continues to propel him forward, as he searches and

searches for belonging with little hope of truly finding it. This suggests that while Wash is journeying in order to move on from his past, in reality he is simply wasting his time in doing so.

Meanwhile, Wash's fear suggests that he continues to feel confined in a way that is emotionally debilitating. The fact that he can't find time to practice his art—which is a discipline in which he is able to determine his time and activity—adds to this feeling that he isn't yet truly free. And without this freedom, he feels that his life has become desolate and essentially meaningless. His statement that he is a "boy without identity" suggests that he feels as anonymous as when he was enslaved. The expression "a walking shadow" is perhaps an allusion to a monologue in *Macbeth*, in which Macbeth implies that life is meaningless. These phrases culminate in the idea that Wash's fear of the past, his lack of belonging, and his resulting desolation are all burdens that are emotionally damaging like his former physical captivity.

Part 3, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ "It was I who had failed in my understanding, you see. Life holds a sanctity for them we can scarcely begin to imagine; it therefore struck them as absurd that someone would choose to end it. A great ludicrous act. In any case, it was then I recognized that my own values—the tenets I hold dear as an Englishman—they are not the only, nor the best, values in existence. I understood there were many ways of being in the world, that to privilege one rigid set of beliefs over another was to lose something. Everything is bizarre, and everything has value. Or if not value, at least merits investigation."

I thought it wonderful for a man of science to speak so. Staring at his bright chewing face, I realized how profoundly I liked him.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black, Mr. Goff (speaker), Christopher "Titch" Wilde, Tanna Goff

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash accompanies Goff and Tanna on a boat outing to collect specimens, Goff tells a story about how people on the Solomon Islands—where Tanna was born—laughed when he told them that his youngest sister committed suicide. Goff's assessment of other people's cultures contrasts with Titch's earlier reaction to Wash's beliefs about Dahomey and Wash's other beliefs which he deems less scientific. There, it became clear that he didn't truly view Wash as an equal or value alternative ways of looking at the world—particularly the views of an African culture.

But here, Goff illustrates that he does understand that there are other, equally (if not more) valid ways of viewing the world than the English values that he grew up with. And this more open, racially progressive view is what makes Wash like Goff even more, whereas he was deeply upset by Titch's perspective on death earlier in the book.

Goff's attitude also prioritizes curiosity in science. Even though he understands that some things are "bizarre" or even incomprehensible, it is worth being curious about the world. Unlike Titch, who believes that the only value in the world lies in things with scientific explanations, Goff voices the book's suggestion that curiosity is a virtue in and of itself, regardless of whether one can come to definite conclusions about it.

Part 3, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ The octopus arranged itself in a smatter of algae, its body hanging blackly before me. When I came forward to touch it, it sent out a surge of dark ink. We paused, watching each other, the grey rag of ink hanging between us. Then it shot off through the water, stopping short to radiate like a cloth set afire, its arms unfurling and vibrating. There was something playful in the pause, as if it expected me to ink it back. I held my hands out towards it, gently; the creature hovered in the dark waters, almost totally still. Then, shyly, it began to pulse towards me, stopping just inches away, its small, gelatinous eyes taking me in. Then it swam directly into my hands.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Mr. Goff, Tanna Goff, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash goes on a diving expedition for Goff and Tanna, he comes across a small female octopus in the water. In this passage, the book establishes the parallel between the octopus and Wash—in this moment, particularly with regards to Wash's relationship with Titch. Initially, the octopus fears Titch and shoots out dark ink in fear, trying to separate itself from Wash. But when Wash sets out his hands gently, indicating that the octopus has nothing to fear,

the octopus gradually inches closer before coming into Wash's hands. Later, when Wash returns to the boat, it even wraps itself around his arm, showing how close the octopus becomes to him.

This whole sequence echoes the beginning of Wash's relationship with Titch. Initially, Wash is very hesitant around Titch and very afraid of the man. But as Titch acts kindly towards Wash, Wash gradually begins to trust him. Eventually, Wash becomes so trusting that he insists on traveling with Titch, clinging to him as much as possible. But this parallel also reinforces how creating these strong bonds means embarking on a journey that takes them out of their homes and places them in a kind of captivity—Wash being captive to Titch's whims, and the octopus placed in a cage and soon to be used in the exhibition. Thus, the octopus ends up representing Wash's inability to find a sense of belonging, as just like him, the octopus struggles with its new, unfamiliar environment.

Part 3, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ So this was him: my ghost. This man small and calm and emboldened by outlandish morality tales and borrowed quotations. This was he, the one from whom I had been running these three years, the creature of nightmare who had driven me through landscapes of heat and wind and snow, whose shadow had forced me aboard boats and carriages and even a shuddering Cloud-cutter by night, whose face I'd pictured so many waking days and imagined so many sleepless nights, the man who'd forced me away from all I had known, so that I was obliged to claw out a life for myself in a country that did not want me, a country vast and ferocious and crusted in hard snow, with little space, little peace for me.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), John Willard

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

After John Willard confronts Wash in the tavern, Wash remains there, stunned to have finally met the person who has been tormenting him for three years. Wash's long, rambling description of what Willard came to represent shows how difficult Willard has made Wash's life, but how the mere *threat* of Willard finding him actually took on a greater life of its own. Wash was so afraid of Willard finding him—of anyone finding out about his past—that he chose to make all of the journeys that he describes (aboard boats and carriages and a Cloud-cutter; across many different landscapes). The fact that Willard spurred all of these choices shows how even though Wash was a free man, in reality he was held captive by fear. He wasn't able to make true determinations about his life or what he wanted from it; he could only do what he thought would keep him alive.

Yet the fact that in spite of all of Wash's journeys, ultimately Willard did confront him again, suggests that escaping the past is impossible. Even when Willard stopped looking for Wash, he was still able to find him. In essence, all of Wash's journeying—to Virginia, to the Arctic, to different towns in Nova Scotia—was relatively futile, because the past caught up with him anyway. This not only reinforces how inescapable the past is, but how much time and energy and well-being this cost Wash, because Wash became rootless and let himself grow despondent in a "country that didn't want him" in trying to avoid the past.

Part 4, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ As I stared into the makeshift tank, watching her, a strangeness came over me: I began to feel that everything I put my hand to ended just this way, in ashes. I had been a slave, I had been a fugitive, I had been extravagantly abandoned in the Arctic as though trapped in some strange primal dream, and I had survived it only to let the best of my creations be taken from me, the gallery of aquatic life. And I felt then a sudden urge to reject it, to cast all of this away, as if the great effort it was taking, and the knowledge that it would never in the end be mine, obliterated its worth. I looked at the octopus, and I saw not the miraculous animal but my own slow, relentless extinction.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

As the octopus grows sicker, Wash continues to illustrate the parallels between his inability to create a home for himself and the octopus's struggles with its own displacement. Just as Wash describes the octopus as

"miraculous," Wash is also miraculous, having overcome slavery's hardships and fully exhibiting his talents in science and art. However, his constant journeying is also slowly hurting him to the point of "extinction," showing how detrimental his inability to make a home for himself has become.

This passage illustrates how Wash's failure to make peace with the past is frustrating his ability to find purpose and meaning in the present. Rather than viewing his past experiences as a triumph—having escaped slavery and making a life for himself in Nova Scotia—instead, Wash only sees how this past is thwarting him from truly finding happiness. He has not been able to find a family or belonging, and the things that make him different from so many others, his talent in art and science, are not being fully appreciated and credited. Instead, he is often regarded just like the octopus—as a beautiful oddity, but one that doesn't truly belong and that doesn't have the freedom to live life as he wishes to live it.

Part 4, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ For years she had ignored me, until I had turned up suddenly in her hut, and then with a ferocity that terrified she'd fought off all who would cause me harm. She had cared for me and cursed me and cracked my ribs and clutched me so tight in her love that I thought she might break them again. She'd damned my father as cruel and my mother as foolish, and when I said she could know nothing of their natures she struck me hard in the face. […] She told me I was born of stupidity, that it must be blood-deep, and also that I was brilliant, that there would never again be a mind like mine. She loved me with a viciousness that kept me from ever feeling complacent, with the reminder that nothing was permanent, that we would one day be lost to each other, She loved me with the terror of separation, as someone who had lost all the riches of a scorched life. She loved me in spite of those past losses, as if to say, I will not surrender this time, you will not take this from me.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Big Kit

Related Themes:

Page Number: 316-317

Explanation and Analysis

At the Abolitionist Society, Wash learns that Big Kit died on Faith Plantation—and that she was his biological mother. These two revelations, but particularly the latter one, shock Wash, and his thoughts here illustrate the complex and contradictory feelings of both love and pain regarding Big Kit. The way the passage is structured, jumping from memory to memory, suggests that these various incidents are all running through Wash's mind, now with his newfound context. For he always knew that Big Kit loved him deeply—she cared for him, held him close, and told him he was brilliant. But he realizes now that there was also a viciousness to her love, and violence lurked under their relationship much of the time because she wasn't open with him. This is a severe betrayal to Wash, because Big Kit lied to Wash about the true nature of their relationship in a way that is now hurting him, and which prevented him from truly understanding his origins.

This passage also acknowledges that Wash understands how much he hurt Kit, too. Because even though he loved her, and they essentially were able to maintain their mother-son bond for a time, Big Kit also knew that one day they would be separated—and they were. Big Kit's statement that stupidity is "blood-deep" suggests that Big Kit even had conflicting feelings about loving Wash, knowing that their relationship would be bound to hurt her later when he inevitably disappeared from her life.

Lastly, while the passage shows how much family members can hurt each other even as they love each other, this is nothing compared to slavery's dehumanization, because Wash and Big Kit aren't allowed to fully enjoy the most basic human relationship—the bond between a mother and a child. Taking away that safety was perhaps the most cruel and dehumanizing aspect of slavery.

Part 4, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ How could he have treated me so, he who congratulated himself on his belief that I was his equal? I had never been his equal. To him, perhaps, any deep acceptance of equality was impossible. He saw only those who were there to be saved, and those who did the saving.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Tanna Goff, Mr. Goff, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 294-295

Explanation and Analysis

After Wash learns that Titch has recently been to London, he goes with Tanna and Goff to London to seek Titch out before quickly falling sick. After his fever breaks, Wash thinks about his and Titch's relationship, and it is implied

that Wash has been so caught up in thinking about what happened with Titch that Wash is literally making himself sick as a result. Part of what distresses Wash so deeply is understanding the reality of their relationship. Wash acknowledges that even though Titch was an abolitionist, much of their dynamic was defined by the fact that Titch, as a white man, always had power over Wash, and thus they were never truly equal. Wash recalls at another point that Titch said that slavery was a moral stain on white men, which again, places the focus on white men. He wants to think of himself as a savior, without appreciating Wash's inherent value and the need to respect him regardless. In this way, Wash recognizes how Titch only viewed Wash in terms of what Wash could do for *Titch*—reinforcing the racist belief that Wash didn't have true value or require respect as a person. Additionally, in the end, it is clear that Titch cared about Wash even less than Wash believed because Titch abandoned him rather easily.

Moreover, while Wash appreciates the opportunities that Titch gave him in opening up the worlds of art and science, he also struggles with the feeling of not belonging. So while Wash gained something by being "saved," he also began to face greater problems with being accepted by the other enslaved people and certainly never achieved true equality with Titch or any other white men in the book. In this way, Wash understands that even though Titch wasn't being overtly cruel, he still acted in ways that perpetuated racist ideology, prioritizing his own salvation and feelings of doing good over actually valuing or caring for Wash.

Part 4, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ I felt, in those moments of looking around, ferociously proud—of this strange, exquisite place where people could come to view creatures they believed nightmarish, to understand these animals were in fact beautiful and nothing to fear. But a part of me felt also somehow anguished, ravaged, torn at. For I glimpsed, in each and every display, all my elaborate calculations, my late nights of feverish labour. I saw my hand in everything—in the size and material of the tanks, in the choice of animal specimens, even in the arrangement of the aquatic plants. I had sweated and made gut-wrenching mistakes, and in the end my name would be nowhere. Did it matter? I did not know if it mattered. I understood only that I would have to find a way to make peace with the loss, or I would have to leave the whole enterprise behind and everyone connected with it.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Mr. Goff, Tanna Goff

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 354-355

Explanation and Analysis

Before Wash and Tanna travel to Morocco to find Titch, Wash appreciates what he has accomplished at Ocean House, even though he understands that he will likely never get credit for the work that he has put in. First, this passage again highlights the importance of science in enabling people to understand the world around them. Wash sees the value in the public aquarium because it helps others observe at "nightmarish" creatures and allows them instead to view them as "beautiful"—like the octopus, for example. There is a clear parallel in this description between the creatures and Wash. His dark, scarred skin also makes him appear nightmarish to others, and he would relish the same ability for others to see him for what he truly is, rather than what they believe him to be.

It is precisely this discrepancy between Wash's outward appearance and who he truly is that also causes people to underestimate him. Wash is well-educated and contributed more to Ocean House than Tanna or Goff, but because he is Black, others will never recognize his contribution. This is yet another way that society belittles him, because the world doesn't yet know how to make sense of a brilliant Black man.

Wash's final sentence here also shows the root of Wash's journeys. He continues to move on because this sense of not belonging or being misunderstood makes it painful to remain in one place for a long period of time. This is why Wash is so rootless, because even he doesn't know how to fully understand his history—why Titch educated him and then abandoned him—and as a result he has difficulty finding meaning and purpose in the present.

Part 4, Chapter 15 Quotes

Even as I spoke these words, I could hear what a false picture they painted, and also how they were painfully true. […]

Again he shook his head. "I treated you as family."

How strange, I thought, looking upon his sad, kind face, that this man had once been my entire world, and yet we could come to no final understanding of one another. He was a man who'd done far more than most to end the suffering of a people whose toil was the very source of his power; he had risked his own good comfort, the love of his family, his name. He had saved my very flesh, taken me away from certain death. His harm, I thought, was in not understanding that he still had the ability to cause it.

Related Characters: Christopher "Titch" Wilde, George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 374

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash finally confronts Titch in Morocco, he criticizes Titch for using him as a political cause and then abandoning him when he was no longer useful to Titch. This exchange illustrates the many complicated dynamics in their relationship. First, Wash acknowledges the truth in what he is saying even as Titch denies it—that Titch was primarily motivated by the fact that he wanted to "save" Wash and others, and he never truly viewed Wash as an equal. Wash acknowledges here that Titch *is* doing a lot of things to try and help abolish slavery the book, but the book illustrates that racism doesn't only manifest in cruelty. Titch's viewpoint is still based in the idea that slavery's moral stain on white people is more important than the impact on the actual enslaved people, and his actions suggest that he never respected Wash in the way that Wash deserved.

However, Wash also acknowledges that there are other layers to their relationship. For instance, Titch *did* also treat Wash in the same way he might have treated a family member: truly caring for him in a way that very few others ever had. But this is also what made Titch's betrayal so painful, as Wash points out here. It is precisely because of these familial bonds that Titch's abandonment was so hurtful to Wash, and Wash emphasizes here that family members can often cause the most harm because they usually provide the greatest love, as Titch did.

In this way, the passage tries to encompass all of the different dynamics that play into their relationship—both the fact that they are like family members, but also that their bonds were stained by the racial divide between them.

Part 4, Chapter 17 Quotes

I looked instead to my hands, thinking of the years spent running, after Philip's death. And I thought of what it was I had been running from, my own certain death at the hands of Erasmus. I thought of my existence before Titch's arrival, the brutal hours in the field under the crushing sun, the screams, the casual finality edging every slave's life, as though each day could very easily be the last. And that, it seemed to me clearly, was the more obvious anguish—that life had never belonged to any of us, even when we'd sought to reclaim it by ending it. We had been estranged from the potential of our own bodies, from the revelation of everything our bodies and minds could accomplish.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Erasmus Wilde, Philip, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

When Wash finally finds Titch in Morocco, he reflects on his journey after escaping Faith Plantation—but perhaps more importantly, his enslavement while he was there. In this quote, Wash illuminates how their enslavement lay in their physical captivity—living on the plantation and being forced to do backbreaking labor. They had no determination over their lives, nor in their deaths, as he implies here. However, Wash highlights another aspect of their captivity—the restriction on their minds. It isn't just that they had no control over what they could do, it is that they were "estranged […] from the revelation" of what they could accomplish. In essence, Wash is arguing that the most difficult or unjust aspect of slavery is in not understanding how much potential they had, and in not being able to live up to that potential.

This idea is what makes the rest of Wash's story so incredible—the fact that he was able to live up to his potential and proved that others could do the same. Wash did find out what he could accomplish, in developing his innate talent for both science and art. The achievements at Ocean House especially illustrate that Wash was able to transcend that aspect of his captivity. This is why he determines that it's important for him to get some credit on Ocean House, because it proves that he was able to become free enough to live up to his potential and that he could

show others his abilities.

That Wash is able to articulate this very point in and of itself shows how crucial education can be. This contrasts with the earlier chapter when Wash states how he was unable to name his feelings of injustice. Now, Wash is able to name that injustice, and in doing so, he is able to start standing up to that injustice. Again, the book illustrates that there are many different kinds of captivity which can be emotionally damaging, but the book suggests that Wash has been able to overcome some of them.

❝ How astonishing to have discovered Titch here, among these meagre possessions, his only companion the boy. His guilt was nothing to do with me—all these years I had lain easy on his conscience. But what did it matter anymore. He had suffered other sorrows. And these wounds had arrested him in boyhood, in a single draining urge to re-create our years at Faith, despite their brutality. Someone else might have looked upon his life here and seen only how different it was from all that had come before. I saw only what remained the same: the scattered furniture, as if no real home could ever be made here; the mess of instruments that would only measure and never draw a single conclusion; the friendship with a boy who, in days, months, years, would find himself abandoned in a place so far from where he had begun that he'd hardly recognize himself, would struggle to build a second life. I imagined the boy nameless and afraid, clawing his way through a world of ice.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Tanna Goff, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 383

Explanation and Analysis

As Wash observes the life that Titch has made for himself in Morocco, he acknowledges many parallels between his home in Morocco and their time together on Faith plantation. While Titch and other characters in the book presumably set out on their journeys in order to make progress and their lives, it is clear that Titch is still bogged down by his past. He is recreating so many of the circumstances on Faith Plantation, down to working on the Cloud-cutter with a young boy he enlists as his apprentice. It is ironic that the Cloud-cutter, which was once a symbol of freedom and mobility, is now tying Titch to his past failures in a way that he cannot escape until he finds success flying it.

It is clear that, like Wash, Titch has found his own past inescapable. His attempts to make a new life have only led him to recreate it. Wash's statement that Titch's attempts are "draining" him only underscores how Titch is wasting a great deal of time and energy in doing so—and yet he can't help himself.

Moreover, Wash also sees how Titch's own attempts to repeat the past are creating a cycle of trauma. Wash clearly recognizes himself in the young boy, whom he envisions "clawing his way through a world of ice" just as Wash did in the Arctic. This suggests that not only is Titch doomed to repeat his past, but this will cause the past to continue the same cycles, over and over again. This chapter also suggests that Wash is repeating the past by dragging Tanna along his many journeys, causing her to feel rootless and used as well. All of these descriptions culminate in the idea that the past is inescapable, and people can waste their lives trying to avoid or confront it.

❝ I stepped out onto the threshold, the sand stinging me, blinding my eyes. Behind me I thought I heard Tanna call my name, but I did not turn, could not take my gaze from the orange blur of the horizon. I gripped my arms about myself, went a few steps forward. The wind across my forehead was like a living thing.

Related Characters: George Washington "Wash" Black (speaker), Tanna Goff, Christopher "Titch" Wilde

Related Themes:

Page Number: 384

Explanation and Analysis

In the book's final passage, Wash steps out into a heavy sandstorm as Tanna calls out to him. The description here is a callback to the scene at the end of Part 2, when Titch abandoned Wash and stepped out into a snowstorm—only here, Wash is walking away from Titch. The ending passage seems deliberately ambiguous—it's unclear whether Wash will return to Tanna and his life, or will similarly disappear in the way that Titch did. Parts of the passage indicate some hope: Wash's gaze at the "orange blur" suggests that the sun is rising, a symbol of hope and the expectation of a better future.

Yet at the same time, the passage also implies that Wash could simply be repeating the inescapable past. Neither he

nor Titch has found resolution in their lives, as even when Wash confronted Titch after seeking him out all over the globe, he didn't find any truly satisfactory answers. Instead, he only feels rootless. Wash also acknowledges that he has made Tanna feel frustrated and rootless in dragging her with him across the globe, just as Titch took Wash with him after escaping Faith Plantation. The fact that Wash looks out onto the horizon—an intangible and unreachable boundary—suggests that Wash may never truly find what he is looking for. This ending, in which both of the book's main characters continue to be restless and unable to fully resolve their pasts, suggests that they may be doomed to spend their lives avoiding or repeating those pasts.

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.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

George Washington "Wash" Black is 10 or 11 years old when his first master, Richard Black, dies. The master is very old, and no one on the plantation grieves him. Wash watches in the heat, alongside Big Kit, as the overseers carry the coffin away from Great House and Faith Plantation. Wash presses the palm of his hand against Big Kit's calf, comforted by her strength and power, as the men slide the coffin into the wagon and ride away. He thinks that he and Big Kit are watching "the dead go free."

The opening scene of Washington Black *sets up the book's first key conflict: people battling slavery and captivity. Wash and Big Kit are both enslaved on Faith Plantation, and they feel their physical restriction keenly—so much so that Wash is even aware that his former master has more freedom as a dead man than Wash has as a living one.*

The master's nephew, Erasmus Wilde, arrives 18 weeks later. Wash watches with Big Kit—they are inseparable when he is a child—as Erasmus emerges from his wagon. Immediately, Wash knows that this is the new master: his eyes are terrifying and sinister, and Wash can tell he is a man who takes pleasure in controlling slaves' lives and deaths. When the man emerges, Wash can feel Big Kit shudder. Wash realizes in hindsight that this is when Big Kit determined to kill herself—and to kill Wash, too.

This passage establishes how Big Kit is like a mother figure to Wash—she is fiercely protective of him when he is a child, but Wash's narration from the future suggests that she also has the capacity to cause him great harm. Additionally, as Wash and Kit observe that Erasmus is cruel, Big Kit recognizes for herself that death might provide her and Wash with greater freedom and mercy than the inhumane treatment she knows Erasmus is soon to exact upon them.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Wash flashes back to when he is five years old, when the quarters-woman first sends him to live with Big Kit. He immediately loves and fears her. Big Kit towers over everyone and protects Wash from being spat on and bitten and struck by the other slaves—usually by fiercely attacking the others herself. Some nights she murmurs in her sleep in her native language, but the stories she tells Wash about her old life change every day. Wash adores Big Kit, as well as her songs and stories, because she is a witness to a free world that he has never known.

As Wash describes how Big Kit came to be his mother figure, he makes it clear that she is fiercely protective over him, but she also has the capacity to hurt him as well, demonstrating the complex family dynamics at play between them. Wash also loves her because of what she represents: a connection to freedom, which Wash himself has never experienced. This passage touches on one key additional point: the fact that slavery has so dehumanized the enslaved people that they even treat each other badly (biting and spitting on Wash) in order to survive.

During Erasmus's second week at the plantation, he dismisses the overseers and replaces them with rough men—usually ex-slavers or ex-soldiers. Soon the maiming begins. The overseers cut slaves' tongues out, force a girl to eat from a full chamber pot she didn't clean thoroughly, and burn a slave alive for trying to run away. Other killings follow—they hang, whip, and shoot the slaves. Witnessing these deaths, Wash cries at night, but Big Kit does not.

These events illustrate how dehumanizing and cruel slavery is both in general and specifically on the plantation—particularly after Erasmus arrives and brings in overseers who share his viewpoint. He views the enslaved people as completely disposable, allowing him to justify his abusive and murderous treatment towards them. This cruelty clearly traumatizes Wash, leaving an impression on him not only now but throughout his life as he narrates from the future.

To Big Kit, death is a door, and she does not fear it. She explains to Wash that in her faith, the dead are reborn in their homelands to walk free. One night in their hut, Big Kit tells Wash that she wants to kill herself and him—she will do it quickly, so it doesn't hurt. She tells him that he will be reborn in his homeland, but Wash is hesitant—he doesn't think he has a homeland. She assures him firmly that he will come with her to Dahomey, where he can be free. He asks her what it's like to be free, and she says that a person can do whatever they want when they're free—they can go anywhere and do anything. Wash wonders what this kind of autonomy would be like.

Here the book illustrates how emotionally difficult physical captivity can be—so much so that Big Kit and Wash are willing to die in order to find greater freedom. This exchange also hints at one of Wash's primary internal struggles, as he tries to reconcile his past origins (being from Dahomey) while also feeling as though he doesn't belong anywhere.

Days pass, and the atmosphere at the plantation grows harsher, but Big Kit doesn't kill Wash yet. She tells him that it has to be done under a certain phase of the moon, with the right words, and she instructs him not to speak of their intentions. But soon, other suicides begin, as other slaves believe that they will be reincarnated as well. One man cuts his own throat with an axe; another punctures his wrists.

The subsequent suicides on the plantation prove not only that Wash and Big Kit feel that slavery is emotionally untenable, but also that the other enslaved people similarly feel that the overseers' dehumanizing torture is not worth living through.

One day, when a boy named William hangs himself in the laundry room, Erasmus gathers the slaves together. Everyone is frightened as Erasmus studies them. He dumps William's body onto the ground, explaining that he knows many of the slaves believe that they will be reborn in their homelands when they die. Wilde then takes out a large knife and saws off William's head, driving it onto a post. Erasmus says that no man can be reborn without a head, and he will do this to every person who commits suicide. Looking up at Big Kit, Wash sees the despair in her eyes.

This moment continues to illustrate Erasmus's inhumane treatment towards the enslaved people; he desecrates William's body after his death and also disrespects the enslaved people's cultural beliefs. This represents yet another restriction on the enslaved people's lives, as they can't even find freedom in death. They are completely captive, and Big Kit's despair acknowledges how damaging it is to have no control over one's own life or death.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Wash then realizes he needs to begin again, for the record. He was born in 1818—or so he is told—on Faith Plantation in Barbados. But he also heard that he was born in a cargo hold on a Dutch vessel, which would have been in 1817. He doesn't know which version of his origin story is true, though he often has strange dreams growing up about men yoked together or dark jungles.

Wash's struggle to begin his story (not knowing where exactly to start) demonstrates that even in this unspecified future moment from which he is narrating, he is still trying to reconcile the fact that he doesn't know his origins, or which experiences and memories have been the most formative for him. This suggests that even at a much later time, he is still grappling with his past.

At two years old, Wash starts weeding and tending the cane fields. When he turns nine, he gets a straw hat and a shovel and feels like a man. He doesn't know his mother or father, and his first master, Richard Black, was the one who named him George Washington Black. The master said he glimpsed in Wash's face the "land of sweetness and freedom." This is before Wash's face is burned, before he sails a vessel into the night sky, before he is stalked for a bounty on his head, before a white man dies at his feet, and before he meets Titch.

The fact that Richard Black named Wash after George Washington, the founder of a land known for freedom, is ironic, as he knew that Wash would likely spend his entire life in captivity. However, the list of events that Wash cites here hints at the fact that he does ultimately gain freedom, and again reinforces the idea that he is still wrestling with many of the events that led him to his adulthood.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Wash meets Titch for the first time the night of William's desecration, when Immanuel and Émilie (slaves who work in the Great House) summon Big Kit and Wash to wait at the master's table. Wash is shocked: he has never been in the Great House before. Once, he crawled into the laundry room to peer into the chute at the sky above. But the height of the laundry chute is nothing compared to what Wash sees upon entering the house: the high ceilings, the elegant furniture, and the carved doors.

The description of Wash's reactions to the house illustrates his innate curiosity. The small episode in the laundry room not only underscores that same sense of wonder, but it also hints at Wash's own eventual journey into the sky. The fact that, as an enslaved person, Wash is often unable to explore the things that make him curious, is another emotionally difficult aspect of his captivity.

As Wash and Big Kit walk through the front hall, the porter, Gaius, greets them. Gaius speaks and acts like a white man, and Wash fears him. Giving Wash and Big Kit a handkerchief to clean their feet, Gaius instructs them to wait in the kitchen until they're called. Wash stares in amazement at the lace, the candlesticks, the wood floor, and the animal heads on the walls. He wants to remember everything, though he notes that Big Kit seems very afraid.

Because Gaius speaks and acts like a white man, he gains a higher position in the Great House as the porter. This illustrates how the white masters have created a racist reward system whereby people who act more like them are treated as worthier while continuing to dehumanize those who do not—particularly those who are enslaved in the fields, like Big Kit and Wash.

In the kitchen, Wash immediately notices pastries near the door and feels desire for the first time. Maria, the cook, assures him that he can eat what's left over and lick the plates. As dinner starts, Big Kit and Wash carry heaping plates of bread and vegetables into the room—Gaius warned them to be prompt, attentive, and silent. Big Kit grows nervous, as Wash can tell she is worried that they are going to be punished for their plan to kill themselves.

The fact that Wash feels desire for the first time at 11 years old underscores just how dehumanizing his treatment has been up until this point, where nothing in his life has been worth desiring. This contrasts with the white characters, who eat these heaping plates of bread and vegetables and pastries all the time.

This is the closest Wash has ever been to Erasmus, but he takes more notice of the other man at the table: his hair at his shoulders, his long face, his thin fingers. The man gives a slight smile when Wash pours water into his glass. The man is discussing how people have been able to reach 20,000 feet with nothing but hydrogen and canvas, and that seeing the world from such great heights is magnificent. Erasmus notes that the man hasn't made that journey himself, and the man concedes, saying he plans to undertake some test flights before crossing the Atlantic.

The man's introduction immediately highlights his two key characteristics: first, unlike his brother, he is not unnecessarily cruel or dehumanizing. Here, he gives Wash a smile as he pours water to acknowledge that Wash is a human being deserving of respect. In addition, the man introduces scientific exploration and discovery in the novel; he emphasizes here how science can be used to broaden people's understanding of the world.

While eating, the man notes that the potatoes at the dinner are strange—not like the ones they have in England. Erasmus grows frustrated, annoyed that the man is as judgmental as their father. Wash is surprised to hear that the second man is related to Erasmus. The two men continue to discuss the contraption, and when the brother says that he needs a second man to ride up with him for the weight, Erasmus suggests he take a slave boy, gesturing to Wash. The man asks to have this conversation not in front of the help, but Erasmus assures the brother that the slaves are like furniture.

This exchange continues to distinguish Erasmus' and his brother's attitudes towards the enslaved people. Erasmus views them as furniture, assuring his brother that they are subhuman. That Erasmus suggests his brother use Wash as an extra weight only reinforces his belief that enslaved people are expendable objects rather than human beings. While Erasmus's brother seems to see the enslaved people as human beings, his statement that they are like the "help" suggests that he nevertheless considers the enslaved people as lesser than himself.

Just then, Erasmus unknowingly spills wine, and Big Kit shuffles forward to dab at the stain. Erasmus explains that his brother is too soft with the slaves. He says that vigilance is key, speaking about how the best-respected planter can walk out amongst the slaves and just the sight of him will make them defecate. Erasmus asks Wash if Christopher's sight would make him soil himself, and Wash croaks out an assent.

Erasmus's belief that the enslaved people are inherently subhuman then informs his cruel treatment of them—like tormenting them so much that they can't help but soil themselves in terror. He sees them as something to subjugate and threaten so that they do not exercise their free will (just as he threatened the enslaved people so that they would not kill themselves).


Uncomfortable, Christopher tries to change the subject, but Erasmus says he has to do what family duty demands even though he didn't want to spend his life looking after the plantation. Christopher reminds Erasmus that the duty fell to him because he is the oldest. Erasmus then changes the subject, asking what purpose Christopher's contraption serves before noticing that Big Kit is still dabbing at the stain. He tells her to stop, but she dabs a few more times, and so he strikes her in the face with his plate, shattering it.

Here, Christopher and Erasmus introduce another type of captivity into the novel. Although this isn't comparable to the enslaved people's physical captivity, Erasmus also feels captive to family duty, suggesting that being captive to responsibility can still feel emotionally restrictive. Additionally, Erasmus's easy ability to smash a plate into Big Kit's face when she was cleaning up after his mess again highlights his cruelty and total lack of empathy for the enslaved people who are forced to serve him.


Erasmus cut his finger on the broken plate, so he storms off in search of Maria. Christopher hesitates, but he then goes over to Big Kit and dabs at the blood on her face. Glancing at Wash, Christopher asks what Wash's name is, but Wash simply begins cleaning up the broken plate. Returning, Erasmus tells Christopher to leave Big Kit and have dessert.

Christopher again extends humanity where his brother does not. He acknowledges that the enslaved people in the room are real people who have names and feel pain, while his brother thinks that the enslaved people are not worth Christopher staining his napkin. Thus, the two brothers' different attitudes shows how Erasmus's cruelty is based on the idea that the enslaved people are subhuman, while Christopher's kindness is based in greater acknowledgment that the enslaved people are human.

Big Kit and Wash mop up Big Kit's blood as Erasmus and Christopher eat dessert. Wash can tell Big Kit's nose is broken. After dinner, Gaius allows them to pick through the half-eaten food, but Wash has lost his appetite. Big Kit eats furiously, and as they walk back to the huts later, she tells him that he should have eaten what he was promised. Wash says that Erasmus shouldn't have hit her, but she assures him it's just a bit of blood—she was worried he would burn them alive for getting to Dahomey. Thinking about William's mutilation and the extravagant house, Wash is struck by the injustice of their lives—though he lacks the language to define it.

Wash's thoughts here illustrate his dawning recognition that the enslaved people should not be treated as lesser simply because of their race. And yet, the fact that he doesn't really have the language to define what is happening to them represents another cruelty in their captivity. Ignorance and lack of education can be just as restrictive and emotionally damaging as physical captivity, because Wash doesn't have the means to fully understand his situation or work to change it.

Wash asks if this means he and Big Kit won't be going to Dahomey together, and she angrily tells him to put the idea out of his mind. Just then, Gaius catches up to them on the path, saying that Christopher has asked for Wash to visit his quarters. Big Kit tries to get Gaius to tell Christopher that he couldn't find Wash, but Gaius refuses to do this. Big Kit asks what the man wants, and Gaius says he wants Wash to do what he says and not ask why. Gaius assures Big Kit that this is an opportunity for Wash, and he leaves.

Wash, Big Kit, and Gaius's exchange reinforces how difficult their physical captivity is. They have no escape—even when they wish to die in order to escape it. In addition, they don't have strong allies in each other, as their fear of punishment for disobeying Erasmus and Titch outweighs any chance for the enslaved people to give each other a little more liberty.

Big Kit and Wash walk back to the huts, and he splashes his face with water. Big Kit gives Wash a thick iron **nail** and tells him that if Christopher tries to touch him, he should put the nail through the man's eye. As Wash heads back to the house, he carries the nail like a key to a different future, even though the thought of harming Christopher terrifies him.

The nail represents Wash and Big Kit's resistance, as she means for him to use it to fight Titch. Interestingly, Wash describes it in a similar way as he described death earlier. Just as death is a door, the nail opens up a door to another future and perhaps even to freedom. This connection illustrates that Wash knows his resistance could be dangerous—it could bring him death.

Christopher is staying at an old overseer's house on the estate. When Wash arrives, Christopher asks him to come in. Wash observes the house, which is strewn with strange wooden instruments, lenses, vials of seeds, jars of dirt, and papers. Christopher immediately notices that Wash is carrying the **nail**, and he asks Wash to set it down. Wash does so, knowing he could be killed simply for having it. He wants desperately to run.

The fact that Christopher immediately notices the nail illustrates that Wash's resistance is futile. On the other hand, Wash knowing that he could be killed simply for having it shows that Wash is helplessly captive Wash—even the hint of resistance could immediately result in his death or torture.

Christopher beckons Wash to his reflector scope and asks Wash to observe the harvest moon. As Wash looks through the glass, he feels vulnerable and exposed. Christopher asks if he can see it, but Wash doesn't know what he means, and so he simply says yes. Christopher looks through the glass, realizes with a laugh that Wash hasn't seen anything, and adjusts the reflector scope to focus on the moon. Wash looks again, and he is amazed to see the huge orange moon, covered with craters—he thinks it is like Earth before the Lord filled it up. Wash breathes a sigh of amazement, and Christopher laughs.

It is in this moment that Christopher sparks Wash's curiosity for the first time. Christopher shows Wash that science can be used to understand the world better—even demystifying things that people see every day and think that they understand, like the moon. And once again, Christopher also extends kindness to Wash where Erasmus does not, trying to share his joy in scientific discovery and treating him like a person worthy of education and discovery.

Christopher asks for Wash's name, and Wash gives it. In return, Wash can call Christopher "Titch"—what his closest friends call him. Christopher explains that Wash is going to live with Christopher as his manservant and assist with his scientific endeavors. Wash is baffled, but Christopher explains that Wash is the perfect size and weight for his **Cloud-cutter**. Christopher examines the iron **nail** and wonders if he could use the nail in his contraption. He smiles at Wash without malice, which confuses Wash. Giving Wash the nail back, Christopher notes that there is a bed in the far room and tells Wash to sleep well.

Wash again highlights how dehumanizing his treatment has been in his life, in that he perhaps has never had anyone (and certainly not a white man) smile at him earnestly, like someone worthy of kindness. However, even though Titch treats Wash better than his brother does, he still implies that Wash's only utility (at least in this moment) is as an object—that is, he's the perfect size and weight for the Cloud-cutter. Even though Titch isn't openly cruel, he still thinks of Wash as lesser than himself, and white people more broadly. Lastly, Titch giving Wash the nail back is a symbolic gesture indicating that Wash doesn't need to resist Titch at all, because Titch treats him kindly.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Wash wakes the next day and realizes that he won't be returning to Big Kit or their hut. He rises, sore, unused to the soft mattress. The house seems deserted, and Wash looks at the basin in the room, realizing he should make himself presentable. As he washes, a brownish-red grime comes off of his skin, and he is amazed as he watches the water turn black.

This moment is a symbolic change for Wash—washing himself implies that this moment is like a baptism into a new life. He is shedding some of the markers of his old life (e.g., the brownish grime from the cane fields, the uncomfortable sleeping situation in the huts), again showing that he was deprived of basic human decency simply because of his race.

Wash looks through the house and finds Titch in the kitchen with a plate of eggs in front of him as he reads papers. For the first time, Wash notices a thin scar cutting up from the sides of Titch's mouth to his ears. Noticing Wash, Titch explains that staff members from the Great House will teach Wash how to do laundry and cook. Titch then guides Wash to a dining room and insists that they eat together. Wash is shocked at this invitation and eats his eggs tentatively, not betraying his disgust at the hollandaise sauce.

Wash's reaction to being asked to dine with Titch emphasizes how inhumanely he has been treated up until this point in his life, where being treated with basic respect is revelatory. In addition, the first mention of Titch's scar is notable. Scars recur throughout the novel and are a physical representation of the idea that the past (like the incident that led Titch to gain this scar) is inescapable—scars are marks from the past that people carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Titch explains that the old master, Richard Black, was his uncle. When Black passed away, Erasmus took over the plantation, as their father, Mr. Wilde, is a man of science and didn't want to run the estate. At the moment, Titch and Erasmus's father is on a voyage in the Arctic, and so Erasmus has to run several estates. Wash is amazed by Titch's talkativeness, as though he has gone several years without company.

Titch's family's backstory illustrates that he isn't the only one who wanted to avoid family duty. His father traveled to the Arctic in order to avoid having to run the family estates, shifting the responsibility onto Erasmus. This illustrates that self-determination is crucial for all the characters and implies that part of Erasmus's cruelty stems from his unhappiness at being captive to the plantations as well.

Titch explains that he came to Barbados because he wanted to avoid his mother, and that the West Indies are also a perfect place to test his **Cloud-cutter**. Wash is amazed that Titch has so little regard for his mother and yet seems like a warm person. Titch goes on, saying that Wash will help with his experiments.

Titch's discussion of his mother and his journey to Barbados illustrates that he, too, felt confined by his family responsibility and wanted to avoid it. This brings him to the West Indies to work on his Cloud-cutter, which becomes a symbol of freedom—not only because it gives him greater mobility, but also because it provides him with an excuse to escape his mother.

Procuring a paper and pencil, Titch sketches a fantastical kind of boat with wings. Wash watches in amazement as his artistry, realizing that he wants to be able to draw like Titch. Titch says that he believes his contraption can actually fly. Titch says that they will have to teach Wash to read so that he can help record measurements. Wash agrees to do this for "Mr. Titch," and Titch asks him again to just call him "Titch." Wash smiles at Titch—but it is a smile of terror.

Titch's sketch introduces art into Wash's life. Like science, art represents a way to better capture and understand the world. In addition, Titch continues to try to get Wash to view them as equals, but the book also illustrates how this is nearly impossible due to their difference in power and status. Even though he tries not to acknowledge it, Titch has control over Wash's life, and this makes it difficult for Titch not to inherently think of Wash as a lesser person meant to cater to Titch's needs.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Wash settles into his new routine: in the mornings, he and Titch examine the flora on the plantation and work through calculations for the **Cloud-cutter**. In the evening, Titch teaches Wash to read. Wash is amazed at Titch's mind as Titch examines dirt, climbs trees, and observes new animals.

As Wash learns more about science, he appreciates Titch's curiosity about the world. In this way, the book illustrates the virtue of curiosity and using science in order to better understand the world.

Titch never mistreats Wash, but this isn't a kindness, as Wash knows at some point he will have to return to the cane fields' brutality. Only once does Titch comment on the slaves' abuse, when an overseer strikes a girl with a rusted prod. That evening, Wash hears Titch and Erasmus arguing about the incident.

Wash recognizes that it's not enough for Titch to treat Wash well. Wash can never feel truly comfortable until the entire institution of slavery has been eradicated and he and the other enslaved people can be truly valued. Titch attempts to do this at least on Faith Plantation, arguing against this cruel treatment because he recognizes the enslaved people's humanity.

At night, Titch also teaches Wash to write, but Wash starts to draw when Titch isn't around. Each night, he burns the pages, worried that Titch will learn of his disobedience. But one day, Titch intrudes on Wash's room just as he is about to burn a page, and Titch asks Wash not to waste the paper. He opens the page to see a butterfly they observed earlier in the day. Titch is astounded, saying he has never seen nature so faithfully rendered; he calls Wash a prodigy. From then on, Wash becomes their chief illustrator. Gradually, Wash also learns to read and understand more of the scientific concepts that Titch references.

Drawing becomes a way for Wash to better capture and understand the scientific world into which he is being initiated. Even though science and art are viewed as opposing disciplines, Titch and Wash view them as connected—both are ways of documenting and exploring nature's mysteries. Wash's artistic talent is also key to the book, as he highlights how he—and, by extension, the other enslaved people—has so much untapped potential. But because slavery dehumanizes and confines them, they don't have the opportunity to fulfill that potential or illustrate their talents.

One evening, Titch asks about the woman who served with him at the Great House, and Wash says that Big Kit is like a mother to him. Titch says that Wash must miss her, but Wash doesn't respond. He wonders if he does miss her. He remembers her hand on his face in the darkness, how she always gave him the last scoop of her breakfast and he would eat it from her hand, and how she had seven scars from seven spears. He knows that one day she will no longer stand to be enslaved, and that she will kill many people before escaping with Wash to freedom.

Wash's memories of Big Kit illustrate how she was the closest thing that Wash had to family, and he knows that she had and always would protect him fiercely. And yet, Wash's conflict stems from the fact that he has been forced to separate from her, showing how families can be sources of deep love, but also great pain.

PART 1, CHAPTER 7

One day, Titch announces that he and Wash will be climbing Corvus Peak, a mountain on the edge of the estate. It is a fearsome watchtower, where overseers can observe the slaves' every move. Titch explains that they will survey the terrain to find a spot to launch his **Cloud-cutter**. Together, they trudge out to the fields in the scorching sun for hours, while Titch collects dirt and measures the temperature on the ground.

The book continues to juxtapose freedom and captivity in passages like this. To Titch, Corvus Peak represents a launching point for mobility and freedom in the Cloud-cutter. But for Wash, who often saw overseers watching from there, the Peak represents oppressive monitoring, again highlighting the stark differences between Titch and Wash in how they experience the world.

The mountain quickly becomes steep, and the dirt crumbles beneath them. Wash slips several times, and suddenly he falls five feet, colliding with rocks. He assures Titch that he didn't break any of their equipment, but Titch is more concerned about Wash's bones. He also notices through Wash's torn shirt the *F* branded into his chest. Titch asks if Wash wants to go back, but Wash assures him that they can keep going.

Titch continues to show concern about Wash's well-being in a way that no other white person ever has, showing how Titch tries to view Wash as someone worth caring for. Additionally, the book introduces another scar here—Wash's brand. This implies that Wash's past as an enslaved person, even if he eventually finds freedom, has left an indelible mark on him.

Titch tells Wash about a time when he fell climbing in the Andes, above 14,000 feet. At a certain point, they couldn't handle the altitude, and Titch fell and broke his collarbone. He hopes that Corvus will prove less daunting. As they start to move on, Wash suggests that he put palm leaves in his hat to help with the heat.

As much as Titch tries to uncover the world's natural mysteries, his incident in the Andes also illustrates that certain things may remain a mystery—though this should not discourage curiosity. Additionally, Wash's suggestion shows that he has knowledge to offer Titch, as well. Titch is not the only one who can educate; Wash can be equally helpful, and Titch values that wisdom.

Wash and Titch reach the top of Corvus Peak in late afternoon. Wash is amazed to see the world from that height: the expanse of the ocean, the network of roads, and the beauty of Faith Plantation. Titch asks Wash to draw what he sees. Titch examines the terrain, pleased at finding a space to launch his **Cloud-cutter** from, but Wash is troubled by the place. He hears a ghostly sound in the wind—a baby's cry. He remembers that women often give birth there, and afterwards they are turned back to the fields immediately, setting down their newborns to wail in the sun.

This passage again contrasts freedom and captivity. From the top of the mountain, Wash is able to understand a different side of Faith Plantation—a privileged perspective that he has never been allowed before, but which enables him to see its beauty. But while he has greater mobility, he knows that so many people on the plantation do not share that relative freedom. The book gives another example of how the enslaved people's freedom is curtailed to the point of inhumanity, when mothers have to set down newborn babies as they head back to the fields.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Titch needs one more thing to begin his experiment: workers. He and Wash visit the Great House to ask Erasmus for spare slaves. They wait in the hall a long time, and Titch grows irritable until Gaius comes out to tell him that Erasmus is occupied that afternoon. Titch ignores this and strides into the house with Wash in tow.

Again, even though Titch claims to value the enslaved people, he still has no problem with using their labor when it suits him. This suggests that he recognizes their humanity to a point, but still views them as people who are meant to serve him.

As Titch and Wash walk deeper into the house, Wash spots Émilie cleaning. At first he doesn't recognize her, because of her rounded belly pushing against her scullery clothes. Wash is shocked—Émilie is just 11, and he is horrified that the father might be any man on the land, even Erasmus. He is overcome with sadness. Titch asks Émilie where Erasmus is, and she deliberately glances at an open door.

This is yet another aspect of slavery's dehumanization, as enslaved women—or in Émilie's case, enslaved girls—are raped and sexually violated. Their captivity means that they have no recourse for this physically and emotionally devastating abuse.


Titch and Wash walk through the door to find Erasmus pressing a cotton blue shirt. Wash is amazed to see Erasmus engaged in such a low labor. Titch makes a snide comment about how "pressing" Erasmus's business is before asking to have 15 men for a week or two to help him transport and assemble the **Cloud-cutter** on Corvus peak. Erasmus says that he can't spare that many men, even noting that Wash is his property and he is already sparing his labor.

Erasmus's activity—ironing a shirt—shows another, unexpected side of the man, and it acknowledges that Erasmus doesn't need to have servants or to abuse others.


Erasmus agrees to spare 10 men at the end of their workday, but Titch points out that they need time to rest and that it would be dangerous to work in the dark. Titch says that he will accept 9 men, but that they must be spared from all other duties. Erasmus agrees, annoyed at Titch's persistence.

Titch continues to show his empathy for the enslaved people, recognizing that they are people who need rest just as much as anyone else, in contrast to Erasmus, who ignores their humanity and refuses to provide them with basic human decency.

Erasmus brings up another matter: that five nights earlier, he received a letter that their cousin Philip is coming to Kingston. Titch reacts as though a ghost is coming to visit them. Erasmus recalls how morose Philip is, and he hopes that Philip doesn't kill himself while he is there. Wilde asks for Titch to pick Philip up in Bridge Town when he arrives, and for Titch to lodge him. Titch agrees, and having settled the matters, Erasmus asks to continue with his day uninterrupted.

Philip's initial description paints a picture of him as morose and even fatally miserable. Though Erasmus likely intends his statement about suicide as a joke, it nevertheless points to Philip's somber and self-destructive tendencies and foreshadows his eventual death. Moreover, Titch's reaction—that of seeing a ghost—also hints at some of their history, and that despite Titch's attempts to distance himself from Philip, their past history is unavoidable.

The following morning, Erasmus's nine sickliest slaves show up. Titch gives them a day's rest and a good meal so they can regain their strength, and the following morning, they begin cutting a trail to the base of the Peak and up the mountain, constructing a rough pulley system for hauling heavy objects. Titch works with them while Wash conducts some of Titch's ongoing experiments.

Titch again tries to treat the other enslaved people as human rather than simply forcing them to work themselves ragged. But the difference between them and Wash highlights the injustice of the whole system of slavery, and that no kind treatment will end it entirely. Wash was once like those laborers, and the book suggests that white people like Titch need to recognize that the laborers have equal potential as Wash—or Titch—and therefore deserve equal treatment.

Wash asks one of the men—Black Jim—if Big Kit has any "secret missives" for him. Jim stares back with dark eyes, and Wash realizes that, to Jim, Wash must sound and act like a white man—even more than Gaius or Émilie. He feels pained and rejected.

Titch's mentorship has given Wash more freedom and opportunity, but he recognizes that his expanded vocabulary has also separated him from his former family like Big Kit, making him feel like he doesn't belong anywhere.

The day Philip arrives, Wash feels dread, realizing that another white master in the house will likely change his and Titch's dynamic. On the way to pick Philip up, Wash asks if Philip is very bad, and Titch assures him that Philip is a decent person, just a very melancholy one.

Wash's apprehension at Philip's arrival continues to illustrate how tenuous his new social standing is. Even though he has been educated and has received kinder treatment from Titch, he is still at the mercy of Titch and any other white person who might enter his life.

As the carriage approaches Bridge Town, Wash looks out the carriage and takes in the city, which he has never visited before. He is amazed to see street musicians, fish markets, and enormous windmills. Wash looks at everything greedily, wanting to hold it in his mind to draw it later.

Art doesn't just allow Wash to understand the natural world, but it also sparks his curiosity and desire to understand any new thing in his life—including this cityscape, which he has never experienced before.

When the carriage arrives at the boardwalk, Titch gets out to fetch Philip. When the men return together, Wash observes that Philip is fat, and he looks cautious and skeptical. Wash instructs the porters where to set Philip's trunks before scrambling into the carriage. Titch introduces Wash as his assistant, and Philip scoffs at Wash's name. Titch explains that Richard Black named some of the slaves very strangely: Immanuel after Kant, Émilie after Émilie du Châtelet. Hearing Émilie's name, Wash realizes that he hasn't seen Émilie in weeks—he wonders where she might have gone, knowing that he would likely never see her again.

Wash isn't the only enslaved person who shares a famous name, as Immanuel Kant and Émilie du Châtelet were both 16th-century philosophers. These names are ironic and even cruel, as the famous figures would have freedoms and opportunities that the enslaved people would likely never have. And while those names live on in history, the enslaved people's degradation also means that they would be completely forgotten to history. In fact, Wash even forgets about Émilie after not seeing her for a few weeks, showing how he, too, is starting to look past the other enslaved people.

Titch and Philip talk some about their family, and Titch notes that Erasmus wasn't able to pick up Philip because he's away dealing with business on another plantation. Philip then makes fun of Titch for being more interested in science than in women and beauty. He also tells Titch that his mother sorely misses him.

This is another example complicated family dynamics. Titch's mother clearly cares about him, while Titch seems completely indifferent to the fact that being away from her is hurting her. In this way, Titch becomes an example of how family members can both be deep sources of love and pain.

As the carriage rolls through Broad Street, Wash notices several slaves in cages. He knows that these slaves are runaways, and they'll likely be maimed and returned to their masters, or else killed outright. He thinks that he must look like "a dark apparition of a boy gliding by in his fine service linens" to them. Commenting on the dreary view, Philip wonders how Titch can tolerate Barbados.

Again, Wash starts to recognize how he is becoming an outsider to the world he used to inhabit. He's not white, so he's an outsider to Titch's world—but Wash has also gained an education and stature that ostracizes him from the other enslaved people. This hints at how Wash's past—both his time as an enslaved person and his education with Titch—will be something that alters him forever.

Over the next few days, Wash observes Philip, who is often in a somber mood. Philip accompanies Titch and Wash on their collecting expeditions, attempting to hunt with a shotgun. He also eats a lot, sleeps late, and speaks little to Wash beyond soft commands. One day, however, when he sees Wash's drawings, Philip warns Titch about putting ideas in a slave's head.

Philip recognizes how Wash's talent could be dangerous for an enslaved person, because it sparks his curiosity about the outside world and might trigger his thirst for a higher purpose than that of a servant. In this way, Philip's statement acknowledges that keeping enslaved people ignorant is as much a part of their captivity as their physical restriction.

Despite Philip's mildness, Wash is constantly afraid of him. Philip often critiques Wash's cooking, instructing him to use less salt and ginger, but he never attacks Wash. He often seems startled or disgusted by the slaves in the fields. Over the weeks, Wash's fear eases, and he even draws sketches of Philip asleep in a chair in the sitting room. These are Wash's most vivid sketches, infused with a tenderness that he doesn't understand. He doesn't show them to anyone and burns them each night.

Like Titch, Philip doesn't act with the same cruelty as Erasmus, and he treats Wash and the other slaves like human beings. However, also like Titch, this doesn't mean that he sees Wash as an equal, illustrating how racism sometimes manifests in simply viewing non-white people as inherently lesser than white people.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9

Weeks later, Erasmus returns from his business across the island, but he comes back very ill and refuses to see anyone. Wash prays that Erasmus dies of a fever. Around the same time, they start to assemble the **Cloud-cutter**, and Titch is especially excited knowing his father swore it could never be made. Philip calls it a foolish venture, but Wash whispers to Titch that his father would be very impressed. Wash asks about Titch's father, and Titch explains that his father is renowned for his specimen collection in the Arctic and is a Fellow of the Royal Society who has earned high honors.

Even though the Cloud-cutter represents the freedom to journey to new places, the book also suggests that the Cloud-cutter tethers Titch to his past. Here, the implication is that Titch wants to make up for his father's past failure, and that Titch may never have felt that he has made his father truly proud. Thus, Titch's actions are an attempt to rectify that past.

Titch explains some of the assembly of the **Cloud-cutter**—how the wings and oars will give it direction, while the hydrogen gas will keep it in the air. Calling out to Philip, Titch says that he's going to give a demonstration of the gas. He tells Philip and Wash to wait several paces away. When Wash approaches Philip, Philip asks Wash to fetch the sandwiches, which are five feet from where Titch is working.

Again, even though Philip isn't explicitly cruel or dehumanizing towards Wash, his oddly timed request for Wash to get the sandwiches and put himself in danger illustrates that he doesn't fully view Wash as an equal or consider the harm that might befall him in this moment.

Wash runs over to the sandwiches, thinking that he can collect them before Titch begins. But as he runs towards the satchel, the air explodes. Wash's face is on fire; his head strikes the ground. Later, he regains consciousness in a bed, but he can't open his eyes. He asks aloud if he's in Dahomey, but Titch only asks how he's feeling, and Wash realizes that he has not died.

The explosion shows the danger in Philip's desire for the sandwiches, as he was willing to risk Wash's safety because he couldn't wait a few moments to eat. This again implies that Philip doesn't truly value Wash's well-being. Additionally, Wash's question—asking if he is in Dahomey—suggests Wash's yearning for freedom and his hope in the idea that he could be reborn in Africa.

Titch apologizes, saying that he thought the altitude was more deficient in oxygen, and that he could do a demonstration—but he was wrong. Wash lifts a hand to his bandaged face, and Titch assures him that his body is luckily unharmed. He asks why Wash stood so close, and Wash replies that Philip sent him for the sandwiches. Wash asks to see his face, but Titch explains that he should let it heal. When Wash pleads, Titch removes the bandages, and Wash realizes that his right eye is foggy. Titch returns with a mirror, and Wash observes how his face looks like mutton—part of his face has been cut away, and his eye is full of blood. Taking out a handkerchief, Titch dabs at Wash's wounds.

This is a key turning point in Wash's life, as he gets another set of scars from the explosion. Like the brand on his chest, this part of Wash's past has now left an inescapable mark on him—both internally and externally. And even though Titch clearly cares about Wash, he has nevertheless placed Wash in danger and caused him a great deal of pain as a result of his scientific experiments. This underscores how families can provide love but also cause deep trauma.

The last time Wash was wounded, he recalls, Big Kit did it. When she accidentally cut him with the tip of her machete, he told her to be mindful—and she responded by kicking him in the chest, resulting in three cracked ribs. He was bandaged and spent some nights in the hothouse before returning to the huts. When he was lying down that night, he heard her soft weeping, saying "my son" over and over again. He realized that she had not meant to strike him so hard, and that his days away pained her greatly.

The fact that Wash thinks about this incident with Big Kit in this moment links Big Kit and Titch. Both of them have provided formative love for Wash. But at the same time, they also have the ability to cause deep pain—perhaps even more so because parental figures are usually supposed to protect their children. Additionally, Big Kit's murmuring "my son" hints at the fact that Big Kit and Wash have a deeper relationship than he knows.

PART 1, CHAPTER 10

Weeks pass, and Titch insists that Wash rest. Every day, Wash can see a little more, and his facial wounds scar over; each evening, Titch reports the **Cloud-cutter**'s progress. As Wash grows stronger, he rises and walks to the library, where he looks at sketches, or walks onto the porch. He fears that his face is ruined, but Titch asserts that Wash is getting better and can return to his duties soon.

Wash acknowledges here that he has been irreparably altered by the explosion, making him even more of an outcast than he already was. Both Wash's education, and his involvement in scientific discovery that led him to his scars, are now an inescapable part of his past.

One day, Titch asks if Wash imagined he died and was back in Africa when he first opened his eyes after the accident. Wash explains his ancient beliefs, just as Big Kit explained them to him. Titch notes gently that Wash was born in Barbados, and Wash says that Kit would bring him with her to Dahomey. Titch says that that is nonsense, and that when people die, there is nothing. Wash's chest constricts, and he turns away from Titch, pained and panicked.

This exchange illustrates the limits of scientific thinking. While Titch critiques Wash for believing in an afterlife or reincarnation—presumably thinking that this belief system is unscientific—the book clearly disagrees with Titch's assessment. The book portrays science as means to investigate and understand mysteries, not to dismiss them outright. Moreover, Titch's easy dismissal of Wash's religious beliefs illustrates another way in which he believes Wash to be lesser, as he doesn't acknowledge that Wash's beliefs might have merit.

When Philip first sees Wash's burns, he is startled, commenting that Wash is an ugly thing now. Philip says that Wash shouldn't have walked into the proximity when Titch told him to do otherwise. Wash agrees, but he notes that Philip seems pained during the exchange. He wonders if Philip feels guilty for what happened. But Philip quickly turns his attention to the cooking—complaining about the food prepared by a girl named Esther that Erasmus sent over while Wash was resting.

Wash's scars aren't only a burden that Wash will carry with him—they are also a burden for Philip. Even if Philip doesn't necessarily feel guilty for what happened to Wash, the scars are nevertheless a reminder of what Philip asked Wash to do. This is another way in which scars underscore how the past is inescapable.

When Erasmus finally recovers his strength, he invites Philip and Titch to dine with him. Wash is disappointed to learn of Erasmus's recovery, knowing that his death would have spared many lives. Wash accompanies Titch to dinner but does not serve anything; he simply stands behind Titch's chair. Wash notices an older slave woman serving who had the bulb of her right shoulder severed off. She keeps looking at him—even smiling once. Wash notes that she is taking care of a younger slave boy who is working there, making sure he has the easiest tasks, just as Big Kit used to do with him.

Seeing the older enslaved woman and the young boy, Wash recognizes that she bears the same love for the boy that Big Kit used to have for Wash. He begins to recognize that even if Big Kit didn't show a lot of affection, she protected him in the way that any good mother would, and that she was the closest thing that he had to family because of the love she provided.

Erasmus discusses Titch's progress with the **Cloud-cutter** before noticing Wash's scar. He asks what the boy did for Titch to punish him, but Titch assures Erasmus that it was an accident. Titch asks Philip to confirm, but Philip quickly changes the subject. He tells the brothers that their father has passed away due to an accident in the Arctic. He says that this was the reason for his visit, but he didn't want to say anything until Erasmus's health improved and Philip could tell Titch and Erasmus together. Erasmus grows furious, believing that Philip intentionally withheld this information from them, but Philip assures Erasmus that he didn't.

This exchange between Philip and Erasmus again hints at a previous conflict between Philip and the two brothers. This reinforces the idea that the past is inescapable: whatever conflict occurred in the past is now coloring all of their subsequent exchanges—to the point where Erasmus doesn't fully trust that Philip is telling the truth.

Philip says that it's likely Erasmus will have to leave for England to take over the estate on Granbourne and sort out his father's affairs, and Titch would probably have to run Faith Plantation. Erasmus immediately grows more interested, but Titch, who is despondent, simply gets up and leaves. Wash feels he should follow, but he doesn't want to draw attention.

Erasmus's reaction to his father's death illustrates how he feels trapped at Faith Plantation, to the point where his father's death feels like gaining freedom because Erasmus can return to England. For Titch, on the other hand, it represents not only an emotional blow in losing the person he loved most in the world, but also a blow to his freedom, as he will likely now become responsible for the Plantation and therefore captive to it.


Just then, the older slave woman turns towards Wash, and he realizes in horror that it is Big Kit. He wonders how he didn't recognize her. Even though she's been maimed terribly and has aged, in reality Wash knows that he has changed even more. He realizes again that she treats the young boy just as she used to treat him. Wash tries to catch her eye, but Big Kit is called elsewhere, and Erasmus dismisses him.

Here, Wash recognizes how family members can provide great love for each other, but they also cause each other a lot of emotional hurt. In this moment, Wash is hurt by the fact that Big Kit has essentially replaced him with this young boy. But at the same time, Wash knows that he has abandoned Big Kit and has changed so much that he doesn't recognize her—and in doing so, he has hurt her as well. This illustrates how emotionally complicated families can be, because they can hurt each other emotionally more than any other person might.

PART 1, CHAPTER 11

Wash runs back to Titch's residence and notices a light on in the study. He leaves Titch to his grief, knowing that his father meant everything to him. In the morning, Wash finds Titch still slouched in a chair in his study. Wash wakes him and asks if he can do anything for Titch. Titch laments the loss of such a brilliant mind, and he is upset that his father didn't get to see his **Cloud-cutter**. Wash says that his father would have been proud, and Titch wonders if he will have any choice in his own future now.

Titch's grief acknowledges that part of loving a family member also means experiencing pain and grief at their loss—a recurrent dynamic between family members throughout the book. Meanwhile, as Wash tries to comfort Titch in this time of grief, he shows that his and Titch's genuine care for each other is growing.

Wash leaves to prepare breakfast, but Titch stops him, showing him a paper: Preliminary Remarks Regarding the Theory and Practice of Hydrogen-Powered Aerostation in the West Indies. Underneath, Titch has written that the paper is illustrated by George Washington Black, and he says that he's going to send the paper to the Royal Society. He says that Wash is a man of science.

This is another aspect of how Titch has become a real father figure and mentor for Wash—fostering Wash's artistic ability and crediting Wash in his scientific papers.


Titch also notes that he saw Big Kit last night, and Wash grows upset. Wash doesn't want to tell Titch that he didn't recognize Big Kit, or his horror at her disfigurement, or the hurt he felt at seeing the other boy. Titch says that the science isn't his only work: his friend Samuel in London asked Titch to make notes on the plantation's conditions. Many of his colleagues in the scientific community are interested in abolition, trying to put an end to the cruelty they've observed. He says that Wash's scientific work will also prove useful.

Here, Titch reveals that he is an abolitionist: not only does he recognize that enslaved people deserve basic human decency, but he is also working towards ending slavery as an institution by arguing that people like Wash deserve true equality. Additionally, this passage uncovers some of the guilt that Wash has been feeling, as he knows that just as Big Kit hurt him by caring for a new boy, he has likely hurt her by finding a new parental figure and forgetting about her. Both of them love each other, but they also have great capacity to hurt each other because of their established love.

Titch acknowledges that slavery is a moral stain against white men—that this will keep them from their heaven. Titch says he will ask Erasmus to release Wash permanently, and Wash is shocked. Titch asks if he'd rather be Erasmus's property, and Wash replies that he'd rather be Titch's property. Wash notes that this seems to trouble Titch, but he doesn't know why.

Even though Titch's wants to help Wash overcome this idea that he should be someone's property, his motivations are also based in concern for white men's morality—not in actually valuing and helping Black men like Wash.

A week later, Erasmus arrives at Titch's house, and they sit together to drink and laugh over their late father's memory. The next day, they go hunting together along with Philip and Wash, and Titch posits that he and Wash could go to Granbourne instead of Erasmus. Erasmus says that if Wash went to Granbourne, the servants there would be insulted by working alongside him and would eat him alive. Wilde says instead that Titch must stay and keep up Faith, saying that there is no other option.

This conversation illuminates the racism inherent in Wash's oppression. For much of his life, Wash isn't valued—but this isn't just because he's in a position of servitude. Even if he were in Britain working alongside white people, they would still "eat him alive" because of his race. While white servants no doubt face classism, Wash has the added obstacle of facing racism even from other people who act as servants.

As the men continue to hunt, Titch says that their mother can keep up Granbourne, but Erasmus points out that she is old and it is her wish for him to return and run the estate. Philip affirms that he promised to bring Erasmus back—at least until other arrangements can be made. Titch doesn't answer, and Erasmus points out that Titch is just sullen because he didn't let Wash go. He wonders why Titch likes him so much—asking if Titch is "unnatural" with Wash. Titch tells Erasmus to leave Wash be.

Though Erasmus implies that Titch is sexually abusing Wash, even Erasmus notes how much Titch seems to care for Wash. This illustrates the familial bond that Titch and Wash have built together. However, because Erasmus refuses to let Wash and Titch go to England together, Titch is starting to appreciate the emotional damage of being forced to remain on Faith Plantation in service of his family.

Philip tells Erasmus to sell Wash to Titch, but Erasmus says that Wash's illustrations could be of great value—a doctor is coming from Liverpool and he could use Wash to draw diagrams for his experiments. Suddenly Philip fires off a shot, and a bird falls from the sky as the hunting dogs run loose.

Again, Erasmus, Titch, and Philip's interactions all seem tinged with past grievances, though the book doesn't yet reveal what they are. Instead, imagery of a bird falling from the sky and dogs hunting the bird punctuates their exchange and hints at their underlying conflict.

The next day, a storm brews, but Titch and his workers continue. Wash knows that hurricane season is approaching, and Titch won't be able to continue working. Titch mumbles his disappointment about his father not being able to see the **Cloud-cutter**, and he tells Wash that someone should travel to the Arctic and put up a marker for his father.

Titch considers embarking on a journey to the Arctic as a way of avoiding his complicated past with his mother, brother, and cousin. It's also a way of confronting past failures by putting up a gravestone for his father, and a way of avoiding his responsibility. This shows both the distress that his family and its associated responsibility has caused him and why he then feels the need to seek out freedom.

Some hours later, a cry rings out from the field, and Titch decides that he and Wash should hike down the mountain earlier than usual. At the base of the peak, Esther and a boy are waiting for them, and Esther tells Titch that Erasmus sent over a new boy for Titch. Titch explains that he's happy with the boy he has, and he will discuss the situation with Erasmus. Esther states that Erasmus ordered Titch to bring the boy back, and knowing that Esther will be beaten if Titch does not comply, Titch says that he and the new boy will return to the Great House together to clear the situation up while Esther and Wash return to Titch's house.

Here, Erasmus reveals even more of his cruelty. Not only is he trying to split up Titch and Wash, but he is also using Titch's empathy for Esther and this boy to have to entertain Erasmus's idea so that they are not beaten or otherwise treated cruelly. This also illustrates Titch's loyalty to Wash, demonstrating how much he values the familial bonds they have built.

As Wash and Esther are returning to the house, Philip comes down the path with a gun and dismisses Esther, asking Wash to join him hunting and asking Wash to carry Philip's things. Wash is nervous and suggests that it may not be the weather to hunt, but Philip ignores him. Noticing that Philip hasn't brought any hounds, Wash grows increasingly anxious.

This moment suggests the emotional cost of Wash's captivity. Wash is immediately on edge about what Philip is asking him to do, knowing that something seems off about the request—and yet he has no choice but to comply.

Less than an hour later, Wash and Philip sit at the base of Corvus Peak. Philip hasn't taken a single shot, and Wash is terrified. Philip looks out in the distance and says to Wash that maybe life is easier for slaves, as every day is the same for them and they only have to fulfill their master's expectations. Wash says nothing. After more silence, Philip apologizes for what happened to Wash's face.

Though Philip's assessment shows a callous disregard for the racism and violence that enslaved people face on the plantation, Philip also suggests that he feels a degree of captivity as well. He suggests that he is restricted by his melancholy or the expectations he implies that other people place on him—which is also emotionally damaging.

Then Philip tells a story: he was eating bread on a bench in Vienna near a cemetery when he heard a horse approaching. The horse was diseased, and it didn't have a driver. A few minutes later, a man appeared and approached Philip. The man said that he just passed Philip's grave, and Philip thought he was joking, so he followed the man to a cemetery. There, Philip found a grave with an image carved into it that looked exactly like him, and the man died 50 years earlier on the exact day of Philip's birth. Philip wonders who the real ghost in the tale is.

Philip represents another example of how the past can be inescapable, as he is haunted by this trip to Vienna in which he thinks he sees a ghost. The ghost shows him either his own death or a previous reincarnation, which also makes him feel like a ghost. Additionally, the diseased horse is perhaps a reference to one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, hinting at Philip's imminent death.

Then, suddenly, Philip stands and shoots himself in the head. Wash cowers, feeling blood on his face, teeth shards on his arm. He is terrified that he is the only person present at Philip's death. He wipes himself off and runs, taking one glance back at the body, seeing the flesh of Philip's face peeling away from his skull.

Through Philip's violent suicide, the book illustrates how Philip's own past trauma—hinted at through his interactions with Erasmus and Titch—has become so inescapable that Philip didn't feel like he could live with it.

Back at Titch's house, Wash stammers out an explanation for his bloody condition, trying to convince Titch that he did nothing and that Philip killed himself. Titch believes Wash and wonders why Philip took Wash along. Titch asks Wash to bring him to Philip's body, and though Wash is hesitant, he knows he has to do this. As Wash watches Titch take slow, ghostly steps through the grass, he thinks that Titch reminds him of Philip.

Here, the language connecting Titch and Philip hints at the fact that Titch feels he played some part in why Philip killed himself, and that he, too, is haunted by the past events that might have led to Philip's fate.

PART 1, CHAPTER 12

From a distance, Philip's body looks whole, but as Titch and Wash approach, they see bits of fabric hanging off nearby branches, Philip's torn face, the explosion of teeth and bone. Wash remembers Philip's hand on the gun and his weariness walking through the field, and Wash can't bring himself to touch Philip. Titch says nothing and also does not touch Philip, simply retrieving the gun.

Both Titch and Wash's somber treatment of the body also suggests that they have been deeply affected by witnessing this graphic imagery of Philip's body, and that the images will inevitably haunt them throughout the rest of their lives.

Wash can't sleep that night, feeling his heart thumping in his chest. He knows that death by choice is an opening door—a release into another world. But he doesn't understand why Philip involved him. Philip's death surely now means Wash's own, as Esther told Titch and Erasmus that he and Philip went off together. Worried now that Titch is right and that the only thing to come after death is darkness, Wash only hopes for a swift death.

In returning to the metaphor of death as a door, Wash acknowledges that just like himself and Big Kit, Philip felt a kind of captivity from which he believed only death could release him. This suggests that sometimes emotional burdens can feel as confining as physical captivity, and can require as extreme a solution (such as death) to escape.

That night, Wash hears a noise, and he gets out of bed to find Titch awake in the dark. Wash asks what is happening, and Titch says that they are leaving that night for another island. He tells Wash to take only what is most valuable to him—but to mind the weight of what he brings. Wash is stunned, realizing that they are taking the **Cloud-cutter**. Titch tells him to hurry, explaining that this is their only option, because Erasmus knows that Wash was with Philip when he died. Titch notes that he's not doing this only for Wash—that he can't stay at Faith. Wash is struck by all that Titch is risking for him, and he agrees to go.

In this moment, Wash is touched by the fact that Titch is willing to risk so much in escaping Faith Plantation and the love and protection inherent in this gesture. But as Titch notes, Wash and Titch are both *using the Cloud-cutter to find freedom: Wash to attain freedom from literal enslavement, and Titch to escape the responsibilities that he would have to take on if he remained at Faith Plantation.*

Wash flees with Titch in the half moonlight, increasingly afraid that they will be discovered and worried about the incoming storm. But Titch seems steady as they walk up to the mountain's peak. They urgently get onto the **Cloud-cutter**—Titch has been inflating it all night—and they check the bolts and knots. Giving Wash a look, he starts a fire from the central canister, and the Cloud-cutter shudders. Titch cuts each rope tethering them to the ground, and the wicker basket lifts from the grass.

Here, the Cloud-cutter represents both literal and metaphorical freedom for Wash and Titch. They are literally able to escape Faith Plantation, but in doing so, they are also both attempting to escape their past traumas and burdens—including Philip's death, slavery, and family responsibility.

The sky howls as they rise, and Wash aches with anguish and wonder, sobbing as he stares out into the boundlessness of the world. All is shadow, red light, and frenzy, and they go up into the eye of the storm, miraculously untouched.

Even though Wash and Titch are using the Cloud-cutter much earlier and in a much different way than intended, the Cloud-cutter is still a means for scientific discovery. It allows them to more fully explore the world, and Wash is even overcome in this moment by the "boundlessness" of the world in the Cloud-cutter's ascent.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

An hour later, the squall strikes Titch and Wash, a sudden force roaring into them. Both of them are thrown around the **Cloud-cutter**'s basket, and Titch finds a small pile of things that are the least necessary to them and hurls it over the side of the basket, insisting that they have to find a way to rise higher, even though all they are doing is falling. Wash grasps for Titch, trying to point out the rolling waves below them.

While the Cloud-cutter represents mobility and escape for Titch and Wash, the fact that they are immediately endangered by a storm and begin to fall illustrates that they cannot escape the world for long—they are immediately confronted with and confined by danger.

Titch leans into the guide ropes, and suddenly a ship rolls into view. As the ocean swells drench them, Wash realizes that Titch is aiming directly for the ship. They crash brutally into the mast and drag across the deck. Wash is caught in the ropes as the **Cloud-cutter** slides toward the edge of the ship, and Titch desperately tries to free him. Suddenly, a man appears, swinging an axe and chopping the knot of ropes pinning Wash down. Wash gasps as the Cloud-cutter is thrown over the side of the deck and sucked out into the storm.

The Cloud-cutter is supposed to represent and provide freedom for Titch and Wash. But that it pins Wash down and nearly kills him foreshadows the idea that even when provided with freedom, Wash is constantly burdened by his past and doesn't feel fully free.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

The burly man with the axe is the ship's captain, a German man named Benedikt Kinast. He is at least 60, with extravagant wrinkles and red hands. He drags Wash and Titch down into the hold, yelling at them for damaging the ship. He asks who they are and why they were out in the storm. Titch gets equally angry, suggesting the man owes him for a new **Cloud-cutter**, pointing out that the ship had no lights on. Titch wonders if this is a smuggling vessel.

For Titch, losing the Cloud-cutter is devastating, because not only did it represent freedom, but it also represented Titch's desire to outdo his father and rectify the failure to make his father proud. Now, he has lost all that progress and will continue to try to recover that loss, suggesting that the Cloud-cutter is still tethering Titch to the past.

The men glare at each other, and Benedikt asks their names. When Titch hesitates, Benedikt suspects that they're fugitives. Titch introduces himself, and says that Wash is his property. He explains Wash is an excellent scientific illustrator and that the crew should treat him with respect. Benedikt scoffs and says Titch still owes him a ship's worth of repairs.

This exchange highlights how even though Wash has technically escaped slavery by escaping the plantation, he still isn't really free. Because they have run away, Wash still has to keep up the ruse that he is enslaved to avoid causing suspicion, and Titch clearly worries about what might happen if they are found out. This suggests that captivity isn't limited to physical restriction, and that Wash is still bound by inescapable tethers.

Wash's scalp is bleeding, and Benedikt gives them directions to the surgeon's cabin before leaving the room. Titch leads Wash on, exhausted. The surgeon opens his cabin, and Wash is surprised to find Benedikt there, his hair drawn, his coat changed. But when Wash sees the man is missing a few fingers, he realizes that the man is Benedikt's twin, who introduces himself as Theo.

Theo's missing fingers are another example of the recurring scars throughout the book; they hint at the fact that the past has also made an indelible mark on Theo and Benedikt, and their past is part of what is spurring their journeys, just as Wash and Titch's pasts are spurring their journeys.

Theo starts to bandage up Wash's cut, joking that Titch and Wash gave the sailors a scare, dropping out of the sky like gods. Theo asks what they were flying away from—his brother thinks the boy is a fugitive. Titch explains that he is Wash's master, and that he was testing his **Cloud-cutter**. Theo questions him about their plantation, and Titch lies that they are from Saint Lucia. Despite Theo's menacing look, Wash sees kindness in his eyes.

Theo's exchange with Titch again emphasizes that even though Titch and Wash are trying to make their journey in order to avoid their past on the plantation, they aren't fully able to escape that past because they continue to arouse people's suspicions.

In the morning, the waters are calm. The night before, Titch fell asleep immediately, but Wash didn't sleep at all. Wash thinks about Titch's lie that Wash is his property—this rattled him, knowing that in another life, it could be true. When Titch wakes and sits up, he smiles at Wash, relieved that they made it out of the plantation. Wash can't help but be uneasy knowing he is partially responsible for why they had to leave, even though he knows it's not his fault.

Wash's uneasiness with Titch's lie exposes the fact that even though Wash is now free, in another respect, Wash isn't free at all. Though he is no longer enslaved, he is still dependent on Titch to remain free and essentially acts as though he is still enslaved to Wash. And the fact that he is so distressed by this fact illustrates that this kind of intangible captivity can be just as emotionally difficult as physical captivity.

Later, at breakfast, Theo explains that Titch and Wash can accompany them to Haiti, unless they want to go all the way to Virginia with the ship. Titch asks if they sail the triangular trade, and Theo explains that they trade rum, molasses, and sugar for hemp and tobacco—he doesn't know much about it though, as he just sails with the ship. Titch says that he has a friend in Virginia and asks if they can accompany the ship all the way there. Theo is suspicious, and when he asks what their original destination was in the **Cloud-cutter**, Wash blurts out a question, asking what happened to the man's fingers. Theo explains that they were removed by a knife during the wars.

Again, even though Wash and Titch were trying to avoid their past in embarking on their journey in the Cloud-cutter, their past continues to surface. The reference to the triangular trade (where goods and enslaved people were traded in a triangle from the West Indies, Africa, and the United States or Britain) shows that the economic system that fuels racist and cruel treatment of slaves is codified throughout the world, not just on the plantations.


The rest of the day, Wash and Titch peruse the ship (called the *Ave Maria*), and the next day, Wash goes up to the deck and watches the sailors at work—coiling ropes, fixing the rigging from the accident, washing the deck. Days stretch into weeks, and Wash sketches the open water. He thinks about how Faith is only miles away, and he wonders how it's possible for such cruelty to exist while so many men move freely. And he is amazed, once more, that Titch risked so much for him—as though he is worth saving.

Here, again art becomes a way for Wash to explore his curiosity: he wants to more fully understand and capture what is happening on the ship. Additionally, Wash recognizes the true injustice in slavery, to a greater degree here, particularly because so many people (like the crew on the Ave Maria*) benefit from it without caring about enslaved people's oppression and abuse.*

One day, Titch approaches Wash and discusses their plans in America, explaining that they will likely catch a ship for Baltimore. He impresses on Wash that they can't let anyone find out which plantation they came from. Wash asks where they'll go after Baltimore, but Titch doesn't say and suggests they go get some breakfast.

Wash relies on Titch to know where they are going, but he doesn't really have agency in what they do. Meanwhile, Titch is now bound to protect this person he took from the plantation, but he hints that he may not have fully reckoned with taking care of Wash afterwards. This suggests that both men are bound by a burdensome tether and in some ways are captive to each other.

Though Benedikt never speaks to Wash, Theo explains some of their family history—they were German but their father fought against the French with England in 1756. He and their mother were stationed in Kent, and the twins grew up there. Both their parents died of cholera at the end of the war, and after a week of them wandering the streets for food, the doctor who treated their parents took the boys in.

This is another example of how racism pervades society even among people who come from relatively destitute backgrounds. Theo and Benedikt are orphans and grew up in difficult circumstances like Wash, which means they should be able to empathize with him. But Benedikt's racism means he doesn't recognize Wash's humanity and thus refuses to speak to him.

The English doctor and his wife raised the boys as their own. Benedikt joined the Navy and served five years, while Theo studied medicine in Edinburgh and London—particularly the foot. But he grew tired of dealing with plantar warts and toenails, and one day when he cut into a man's foot one day he smelled the putridness and couldn't continue. And then, he says dreamily, he met a woman, but Wash doesn't fully understand what he means.

Theo's description of his time as a foot doctor illustrates another side of science. Here, Theo portrays science as much less interesting when it is not fueled by curiosity—suggesting that it is the desire to understand the world that draws people to science in the first place, and holds people's continued interest in it.

Wash sees less of Titch as the days pass, as Titch grows closer to Benedikt. Wash thinks he is likely trying to become friendly with him to avoid suspicion. To busy himself, Wash wanders the decks and observes the crew, who all seem to know what is needed and where, working together like a machine. On the 68th day at sea, Titch says that they will soon make land in Chesapeake Bay—but they will find themselves subject to the laws of American freedom. He tells Wash that freedom means different things to different people, as if Wash does not know the truth of this.

Titch's discussion brings up two important points—first, that there are different kinds of freedom, and along with it, different kinds of confinement. The book has already illustrated two kinds of captivity: Wash's physical captivity when he was enslaved, and Titch and others' restrictions because of family duty. But Titch seems to not understand that Wash knows this, which the book suggests is an extension of racism—he condescends to Wash and isn't able to understand or value Wash's perspective.

The night before they strike land, Wash stands on the upper deck when suddenly Benedikt appears behind Wash, smoking. Benedikt asks if Wash noticed that all of his crew members are about the same age, explaining that they were all orphaned boys whom Benedikt took on when their orphanage was shut down. Once, Benedikt nearly drowned, and five of the boys leaped into the waves to rescue him. Now, the orphans are the only ones who have remained.

Benedikt's story highlights the importance of found family and the love that builds from those relationships—the kind of love that plays a big part in Wash's life as well. Here, Benedikt shows that forming bonds with the young orphan boys created deep love between them for which they were willing to risk their lives.

Benedikt tells Wash that he knows he's a runaway slave, and that Titch is a thief. He says that they must have come from Barbados. Wash remains still and silent. Benedikt asks if the boy is human, reaching out to touch his burned face and drawing his hand back immediately. Wash is stunned, thinking that Benedikt's touch was gentle—and somehow filled with sadness.

This is Wash's first real acknowledgment that his past will forever change how people look at him. Benedikt can't fully comprehend an educated Black boy who was formerly enslaved, which perhaps provides an explanation for why he questions whether Wash is human. The fact that Benedikt reaches out to touch Wash's scars only underscores this point, as though Benedikt is trying to determine that Wash is real. But in touching the scar, Benedikt calls attention to the fact that Wash's past has internally and externally marked him as an outsider in a way he'll never be able to escape.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3

The docks at Norfolk stink of tobacco, mud, and unwashed deck hands, but it's nevertheless a grand city. Benedikt and Theo don't give Titch and Wash any trouble as they leave, only asking that they be discreet and not mention their names or the ship's name when people ask how they arrived in Virginia.

Even though Benedikt and Theo don't give Titch or Wash any trouble, their request not to disclose the ship's name hints at the fact that this is not the last time that Wash and Titch's past will continue to hound them, and that other people may question how they arrived in Virginia.

On the dock, Wash looks in amazement as men walk freely, but not all men have the same freedom—not the people who look like Wash. He and Titch walk through the crowd with a bundle of sailor's clothes, salted ham, and a few coins that Benedikt gave them. Titch goes to inquire at a post office about his friend's address, leaving Wash on a street corner.

As Wash looks around Norfolk, he recognizes that Black people do not get to enjoy the United States's promise of freedom. Thus, the book emphasizes that racism exists all over the world and is used to justify dehumanizing treatment, even in a country that values freedom above all else.

When a nearby shop door opens, Wash is struck by the smell of his old life: sugar. He presses his face against the shop window, but someone strikes him hard, telling him to get his face out of the shop window. Frightened, Wash steps back, and the man asks if he's a runaway. The man starts to punch him in the chest, until Titch comes out and stops the man. The man apologizes, saying that he thought Wash was a runaway. Titch takes Wash by the arm and they walk away.

Here, Wash's past proves inescapable, particularly because people can instantly identify him as someone who shouldn't be alone, due to his race. This man's racism, coupled with the society's sanctioning of slavery, allows him to cruelly abuse Wash with no repercussions. This adds to Wash's feeling of having to remain close to Titch despite the fact that he is technically free. Paradoxically, he has to be connected to Titch in order to maintain his freedom, suggesting that he may not be truly free at all.

Titch acquires directions to his friend's address—the man, Edgar Farrow, is the acting sexton of St. John's parish, which is 10 miles west. Titch and Wash walk together, and Titch says that the man is his father's old associate. But Titch warns Wash that in addition to being a man of the church, Edgar is a scholar of human decay; he examines the way that human flesh rots. Wash walks uneasily, and Titch correctly guesses that he is thinking of Philip.

Titch and Wash continue to be plagued by other aspects of their past—particularly Philip's death. Despite the fact that they are now quite far from Barbados, they both seem to recognize that this past trauma is something that will affect them for the rest of their lives (and already has, in shifting their path so drastically).

Suddenly, Titch stops and takes out a piece of paper he saw in the post office. It advertises a reward of 1,000 pounds for Wash, giving a description of him and of Titch. It is signed John Willard, acting agent for Erasmus Wilde of Faith Plantation. Wash is shocked, and Titch says that he remembers Willard—a guest of Erasmus's on occasion, who enjoyed being a transnational bounty hunter. Titch says the man has done terrible things, and is never held to account. He's surprised that Erasmus would stoop so low as to offer 1,000 pounds as a reward, but he knows that this is only to get to Titch.

This description of Willard introduces another aspect of Wash's past that will become a constant shadow on his life. For though he has escaped Faith Plantation and journeyed far away from it, he now realizes that this journey doesn't necessarily mean that he can put his life as an enslaved person completely behind him.

Wash asks if Titch could take him to England or if he could pay the bounty himself, but Titch knows that neither of those strategies will work. Then, a driver passes in a cart, offering them a lift. As they ride, Wash is despondent, realizing how easily he got used to the idea that he could outrun death or leave misery behind. But he is just a Black boy, with no future in front of him, and no mercy behind him. He would die as a nobody, hunted down and slaughtered.

Here, Wash recognizes that his history as a slave will likely be inescapable for the rest of his life. In addition, his belief that he would die "slaughtered" like an animal and as a nobody—this extreme language of despair and degradation—suggests that Wash's fear is both dehumanizing and holding him captive. This shows how Wash's fear is almost as debilitating as the fear that he experienced on Faith Plantation.

Soon Wash and Titch arrive at St. John's, and when Edgar answers the door, Titch introduces himself, saying that he is James Wilde's son. Edgar straightens and asks where Titch's **Cloud-cutter** is. Titch explains their experience with the storm, which landed them in Virginia. Edgar invites them in, saying mysteriously that it is storm season, and strangeness will soon blow in.

Storms frequently recur in the book to punctuate the emotional turmoil characters experience surrounding the past (like Wash and Titch escaping in the storm to highlight their desire to escape their pasts on Faith Plantation). Thus, Edgar's mysterious statement foreshadows how they will be forced to confront their past again soon.

PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Inside, Wash notices wet soil on Edgar's palms, and a sour vinegar smell in the air. Edgar asks who Wash is, and Titch immediately gives Wash's real name and origin, which unsettles Wash, given the bounty on Wash's head. Edgar gives them a tour, and Titch thanks Edgar for letting them stay. Edgar asks Wash if Titch explained his peculiar habits, and Wash says that he knows Edgar studies the dead.

Here, Wash starts to realize that because he and Titch have built such a close bond, this also leaves Wash totally vulnerable if Titch decides to reveal information about themselves, as he does here. While Wash trusts Titch, the love between them also opens Wash up to a great deal of potential harm at Titch's hands, suggesting the complexity and vulnerability of this loving relationship.

Studying Wash, Edgar says that he doesn't care for childhood because it is a state of terrible vulnerability. Children rarely have good parents to help them grow up—he was an orphan himself. He says that sometimes, when there is a baptism, he looks upon the baby's face and can't stand it, knowing that such purity will never be kept intact.

Edgar's monologue here acknowledges two things: first, that families can cause its members deep pain, such as parents who aren't able to fulfill their responsibilities to their children. Second, Edgar highlights the pain of life experience, as all children start out innocent and pure, but over time they experience difficulty that marks them for the rest of their lives—implying perhaps that no one can truly escape their past.


Edgar then leaves to fetch bedding for his visitors, and Titch goes into the sexton's office. There, they see a severed woman's arm preserved in liquid in a washbasin. Wash asks if they have to stay, saying that Edgar is a madman and that he'd rather risk meeting Willard in the city than stay in the sexton's home. Suddenly, Edgar returns to invite them for dinner, and Wash doesn't know how much he heard.

While Wash recognizes the value in understanding natural mysteries, he also recognizes that science has its limits when it comes to experiments on humans. Though Wash values curiosity, he is troubled by a man who finds beauty in death and decay, suggesting that some things are too disturbing to try to understand.

At dinner, Edgar tells Titch that he knew they were coming—he had a sense during his morning prayers, saying that God infused the knowledge into his flesh. He notes that everyone's bodies carry history, like Wash's burns, or Titch's scar across his mouth. Edgar says that it was caused between the ages of four and six, when a thick wire was pressed into his mouth and dragged back for two or three minutes before it was removed. Titch says vacantly that Edgar's guess is remarkable.

Here, Edgar makes an idea explicit that has been running throughout the first part of the book. Scars are a literal representation of the idea that the past is inescapable: no matter how much time passes, history (particularly violence) can be read on a person's body. Similarly, the past can make the same kind of unhealable scars on a person's consciousness as well.

Titch then explains their adventures: the storm, the *Ave Maria*, Philip's death, and the bounty on Wash's head—describing Willard's soft voice, small stature, and blond hair to Edgar so he knows to look out for the man. Wash is stunned to hear Titch talk so openly about all of this. Edgar suggests that Titch tell his father about what's happening so he can intervene, but Titch explains that his father passed away.

Wash's thoughts here highlight his vulnerability and necessary dependence on Titch, and how Titch is still determining all of Wash's decisions. Even though Wash is free now that he's escaped the plantation, both Titch and Willard are preventing Wash from achieving true self-determination, and the book illustrates how fearful that makes Wash.

Hearing this, Edgar leaves the room and returns with an envelope—a letter from Titch's father that references Titch having been nearly a year at Faith, meaning that the letter is very recent. Titch is bewildered, and Wash can see that the hope his father may be alive is almost too much for him. Titch tells Edgar that they can leave it until tomorrow, and Wash can see that Titch wants to believe in the impossible.

Here, the book highlights again how family members can both spark the most love and also the most pain in each other. Titch desperately wants to believe that his father is alive because of the love that they bear for each other, but at the same time Wash suspects that Titch is setting himself up for despair once more.

That evening, Titch falls promptly asleep, but Wash cannot. Both Edgar and the description of John Willard leave him unsettled. He can imagine Willard's pale, expressionless face, and he drifts off before a sound startles him awake. He sees that Titch isn't there, and Edgar enters in a wool coat and with a shovel. When Wash asks where Titch is, Edgar asks to follow him. Edgar leads him to the edge of an opened grave with a coffin in it. He says that Titch is down there, and seeing Wash's frightened face, he assures Wash that it is a doorway before he climbs down and disappears.

Wash's dream, followed by this exchange with Edgar, illustrates that Wash's past continues to haunt him, and that his fear is debilitating. His worry that Edgar is leading him to a literal grave connects Wash's fear to dying, implying that his fear is suffocating and confining him like a coffin.

Peering in, Wash sees that what he mistook for a coffin was actually a lid covering a ladder inside the grave. He drops down into the earth and descends the ladder, walking through a low, carved-out passage. At the end of the passage, Wash sees Titch, Edgar, and two runaway slaves. Wash knows what they are at once because of the way they tremble, but they are powerful men.

The runaways whom Wash meets highlight that he is not the only one who hasn't really achieved freedom despite escaping a plantation. Fear traps and emotionally depletes these men, just like it does for Wash.

Titch introduces the runaways as Adam and Ezekiel, but the men say nothing. Titch says they are traveling north to Canada, which will make them free men. Titch says that it is a risky journey, but that it seems like a risk worth taking. Titch says that Wash should go north with the men to save his life—Titch plans to go to the Arctic to find out what happened to his father.

Titch's suggestion that Wash should go with the other runaways is an attempt to protect Wash and help him find true freedom. But it also hints at the idea that Titch is starting to feel weighed down by Wash's companionship, and that he is trying to find a way to make them both *feel freer.*

Wash realizes that Titch is saying that if Wash doesn't go to Canada, he'll likely die. Titch explains that so long as Wash is with him, Erasmus will be near and will not relent. Wash says if he is a free man, then it is his choice where he wants to go—even if that means hiding in the Arctic. Wash thinks in hindsight that, at this time, he thought he was making a brave choice—an act of loyalty to the only family he has. But in reality, he was just terrified at the thought of embarking on a perilous journey without Titch. Wash is resolved, and Titch is confused and pained but doesn't say anything more.

Here, Wash believes that he is acting out of loyalty and bravery in going with Titch. But his decision actually reveals how much his fear is tethering him to Titch, since Wash doesn't know how to survive without him. But it does nevertheless show the strength of Wash's love and loyalty for Titch because Titch has given him so much up to this point.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

Every night, Wash wonders about this choice—what might have happened if he went with those men. The morning after this decision, Titch and Wash return to Norfolk to find a charter heading towards the Arctic. Wash doesn't speak to Titch during this whole journey; he feels like Titch wants to cast him off even though he knows Titch is trying to protect him. But Titch showed him curiosity, and fostered his intelligence, and Wash wanted a life with the man. In hindsight, he doesn't wonder if he would make the same choice again, because he knows that the path can never be retaken.

With this shift in narration (looking back on these incidents from the future), Wash foreshadows how these incidents also become a part of his past that plague him, and from which he cannot escape. But again, he emphasizes that he made his decision based on the love that he had for Titch, despite the pain that Titch caused him by suggesting they separate—even though Wash knows Titch did this for Wash's own protection.

Titch and Wash board the *Calliope*. The captain, Michael Holloway, was raised in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and has clear prejudice against Wash. But the captain's second, Jacob Ibel, speaks to Wash like a human being and often plays cards with him. Wash likes Ibel very much, but he doesn't trust either man. As they were boarding the ship, Wash noticed a short, portly man watching Wash on the railing as the ship set out, but by the time Wash pointed him out to Titch, the man was gone.

Wash continues to face racist attitudes aboard the Calliope, *as the Captain refuses to talk to him like a human being (though the second in command is more open). Additionally, this marks the first time that Wash starts to become truly nervous about John Willard coming after him, as he grows more and more intent on trying to avoid this shadow from the past by journeying to the literal ends of the earth.*

Titch and Wash settle back into the routine of ship life, and Wash starts to feel like he's leaving Willard behind. When they are sailing through Labrador, Titch asks Holloway and Ibel what kind of expedition they're on, and Ibel explains that they are seeking the wreck of a whaler to find barrels of oil that were left on a nearby island. They aimed to be the first ship out that season to collect it before anyone else.

Wash again emphasizes how he is using his journey in order to escape his past, while Titch is using the journey in order to seek out his father and fully acknowledge the past failings in their relationship. Despite journeying forward into new places and into the future, Titch and Wash are largely preoccupied with their pasts.

Wash has never seen ice before, and as the ship sails past ice formations, he is amazed by their beauty and sadness and feels like they are leaving the world of the living. He tries to sketch it as they sail slowly across the channels. Wash bundles up so much that he waddles, and the crew starts to call him a penguin. When Ibel shows Wash a sketch of a penguin, he laughs at the nickname. With every league, he and Titch feel lighter. But the ice also makes them feel more solitary, and Wash keeps thinking of Willard, Philip, of Big Kit and his long years at Faith.

Wash again uses art to try to understand the ice's beauty—particularly its natural, haunting quality that surpasses scientific understanding. This illustrates how art and science can also complement each other, providing different perspectives on the same phenomena. Additionally, the book implies here that Wash and Titch do feel that their journey is helping them avoid their past on Faith Plantation, but Wash's constant thoughts about what happen suggest otherwise.

Finally, the ship arrives at the Arctic trading post, and Titch and Wash bid the ship goodbye. Titch asks the trader at the outpost about his father's camp, and the trader points out a man who can take them. The man is alarmingly ominous, with a large boil on his nose, but Titch thanks the trader and approaches the man. To Wash's surprise, they greet each other warmly—it is Peter House, his father's assistant. Wash watches in wonder as Titch and Peter make elegant gestures at each other, and Titch tells Wash with tears in his eyes that his father is alive. When Wash asks if Peter said this, Titch explains that Peter talks with his hands. Soon, they find an Esquimau guide with a sled and dogs, and they all set out toward the camp.

Titch's tearful joy at discovering that his father is alive contrasts with the deep pain he felt at hearing that his father was dead. This again highlights the complexity in family dynamics, because families can both foster deep love but also can cause a great deal of pain, particularly when family members are separated from one another.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6

Titch, Peter, and Wash journey through the piercing cold and snow. Wash marvels at the snow's changing color and vastness. When they make a quick stop to rest the dogs, Wash makes a quick sketch of them. He and Titch speak very little, and when they continue to ride, Wash notices Titch's increasing uneasiness, as though Titch is not yet ready to address his father.

Although Titch is overjoyed at discovering his father is alive, this passage suggests that Titch's feelings towards his father are complicated. Even though he loves his father, he seems vulnerable or nervous reuniting with him, again reinforcing how difficult and convoluted family dynamics can be.

The sled stops at five enormous igloos, which Titch explains are insulated from the cold. Wash doubts this, but he understands that a lot of the world is unfathomable (though he knows this is an unscientific thought). As Peter and the Esquimau unpack their bags, Titch and Wash enter the third igloo. And there, out of a fire's smoke, Wash glimpses James Wilde. He is short, fat, and brutally ugly, peering out from his hard, round face with four teeth missing.

Wash's belief that parts of the world are unfathomable is interesting, particularly because he admits that this is unscientific. But this belief implies that Wash acknowledges some aspects of life aren't meant to be understood. However, curiosity about those things, like Wash displays, is in and of itself a virtue even when one might not be able to find distinct answers.

Titch hugs his father desperately, and his father leads him out to the fifth igloo. Mr. Wilde understands that Titch and Wash are there because they thought he was dead. Mr. Wilde acknowledges that he heard the rumor from a friend, but he doesn't know how it started and didn't think it would reach Titch or Titch's mother. Titch asks how the lie got to them, but Mr. Wilde snaps at Titch, saying he doesn't know. Mr. Wilde then tries to smile, thanking Titch for making the journey even though it was a fool's errand. Titch asks his father not to mention to his mother that he came to the Arctic.

This exchange with Titch and his father starts to flesh out the complexity of their dynamic. Even though Titch and his father clearly love each other and Titch's mother, they also lie to each other and criticize each other. This illustrates how family members can be very hurtful to one another, particularly because they are subverting the love that they are supposed to show each other in doing so. Mr. Wilde's statement that coming to the Arctic was foolish also hints at the idea that journeying to confront one's past can be unhelpful and a waste of time.

As Titch and his father talk in the smoky warmth, Wash drifts off. When he wakes, he and Titch receive heavy furs for sleeping and a small candle. As they lie down to sleep, Wash asks Titch what he's feeling, and Titch says he is very shocked, and he's reminded how complex his father can be. Wash asks what they'll do now, and Titch says that they can sleep and discuss in the morning.

Titch acknowledges that families are complex here; his tone even implies that he has been hurt by his father's words, as he simply cared about his father's well-being.

In the morning, Wash and Titch eat breakfast with Mr. Wilde, though Wash is disgusted by the greyish cubes they are given to eat. Mr. Wilde asks what Titch has been doing, as Erasmus wrote that Titch was wasting resources at Faith. But before Titch can respond Mr. Wilde starts talking about Peter, who is his true assistant, his translator, and his best companion for years. He says it's like what Titch has with Wash, but Titch contradicts him. Titch asks why his father hasn't learned the Esquimau language and histories, but his father ignores him.

Titch critiques his father for being unwilling to learn the Esquimau language or history—implying that Mr. Wilde doesn't believe that the Esquimaux are worth his time or respect despite working alongside them for decades. The book positions this as another example of racism, as Mr. Wilde believes that the Esquimaux are lesser than he is and does not treat them as equals.

Titch then tells his father that they improved upon his **Cloud-cutter** and got it to fly, and his father asks where it is. When Titch says that it's at the bottom of the ocean, Wash chimes in, assuring the man that this is only because of the storm and that he would have been proud to see it. Mr. Wilde says he hopes they are better haulers than aeronauts so they can help carry his instruments.

The exchange between Titch and his father about the Cloud-cutter reflects both their relationship and how the Cloud-cutter has evolved to be a symbol of Titch's inability to escape the past. While Titch wanted to use the Cloud-cutter to make his father proud, his father easily dismisses his accomplishments, which pains Titch. And so rather than being a symbol of freedom, the Cloud-cutter tethers Titch to his past failures and causes him to be even more intent on fixing the Cloud-cutter.

The days pass, and daylight is short. Titch and his father don't speak of the **Cloud-cutter** again. Instead, they talk about their family travels to Paris, their estate in England, Titch and Erasmus swimming naked in a lake together, how Mr. Wilde took Titch to witness a balloon ascent, and how Titch was terrified when the balloon crashed and the balloonist drowned. They talk of Titch's mother, and how she and Mr. Wilde met at a ball and talked about imprecisions in maps. Titch says that he and Erasmus used to watch his mother as she sat for Italian lessons in the afternoons. She was beautiful. Mr. Wilde says that they knew nothing about beauty, but Titch counters that children know everything about beauty.

As Titch and his father discuss their family life, they paint a picture of a generally loving family. And yet underneath these fond memories are hints of pain, like a traumatizing balloon observation. This is another reason why families can contain both love and pain, because they tie people to both good and bad memories in their childhoods. Additionally, Titch's comment on children and beauty is notable, because it reinforces the connection between children's curiosity and their ability to appreciate beauty (just as Wash does in his art).

PART 2, CHAPTER 7

In the mornings, Mr. Wilde works on his experiments and specimens in the fourth igloo. One day, Wash sketches a specimen, and he is astounded at his own skill—how much he has grown in the past few months, both in life and in art. Mr. Wilde peers at the sketch, and he notes the talent there. Wash can sense both awe and mockery, as if Mr. Wilde is watching a houseplant learn to speak.

Again, the book emphasizes how cruelty and dehumanization aren't the only ways in which racism manifests. Mr. Wilde's compliment also has an underlying condescension, as though it's surprising that Wash could have artistic talent or a desire to paint.

In the afternoons, Wash walks with Mr. Wilde and Titch, and Wash can see that Titch is eager with his father but often gets hurt as a result. He also sees Titch's anguish over not impressing his father, and over not knowing how to explain that they are in hiding. One day, Wash insists to Titch that he has to tell Mr. Wilde the truth of what happened, but Titch doesn't respond.

Wash acknowledges the complexity of Titch and his father's dynamic—that Titch wants to please his father, but as a result he often gets hurt. Ironically, this mirrors Wash and Titch's dynamic, as Wash is eager to please Titch and cares deeply for the man, but because Titch doesn't always return his love, Wash can feel similarly hurt.

That night, Wash dreams of Big Kit standing at the edge of the cane fields with a halo around her head. She reaches for him, and her touch is cold. Then suddenly they are standing in the snow, and Big Kit asks Wash to be her eyes. She presses her eyes in with her fingers and a blue light shines from them. Wash feels peace and well-being, but when he wakes in the darkness, he is crying.

Wash's dream is filled with descriptions that imply Big Kit's death, which is why he wakes up in despair: her halo, her cold touch, Wash's sense of peace and well-being in her presence. At the same time, the dream acknowledges that Wash was able to achieve freedom while Big Kit never did. In the book's opening chapters, Wash loves Big Kit because she witnessed a world that Wash never knew (he was born into slavery; she was not). Now, their dynamic has flipped, as Wash has become Big Kit's "eyes" into a world that she was barred from for most of her life.

The next day, Wash lets Titch go with his father alone and sketches the igloos. When Titch returns, he says angrily that Wash doesn't know what a family is, because he has never had one. Wash tentatively asks what happened. Titch says that his father doesn't want to inform anyone that he is still alive so he can continue undisturbed in his research. Titch even wonders if his father started the rumors himself.

This exchange again highlights the capacity for family to cause deep pain. Unwilling to take on the burden of his responsibilities at home, Mr. Wilde essentially refuses to tell others that he is alive so that he can continue research undisturbed—in effect, pushing that responsibility onto his sons, which hurts Titch deeply. However, Titch also has the capacity to hurt—by implying that Wash doesn't know what a family is, he is taking away from the familial bond that they share and hurting Wash in the process.

Titch says angrily that he doesn't want to stay in America, or England, or the Indies, or the Arctic. Wash assures Titch that he'll go wherever Titch wants. Clasping Wash's hands, Titch says that he didn't ask Wash to accompany him. Wash will be safe in the Arctic, and he has made arrangements and left money so Wash can stay. Titch then takes up his pack of supplies and exits the igloo into the blistering wind and snow.

Here, Titch implies for the second time that Wash has become a burden to him. Just as Wash feels tethered to Titch in order to remain free, Titch feels that Wash is stifling him in turn because Titch constantly has to take care of him. Their link, therefore, has taken a toll on both of their freedoms.

Wash crawls out of the igloo after Titch. He can tell that Titch is trying to liberate himself from Wash, but Wash is terrified at the idea of being alone. Wash walks stubbornly after Titch, and Titch hollers at him in the wind to go back, saying that Wash is breaking his heart in trying to follow him. Wash worries that Titch is trying to kill himself, and he can't even see the path back anymore. Wash calls after Titch, asking Titch to come back with him to at least wait out the weather. Titch sets his pack down and walks out into the white void.

Titch's attempt to separate from Wash is a drastic turning point in Wash's life. Wash feels like Titch is abandoning him despite Wash's deep loyalty to and family-like connection with Titch. Wash's desperation in this moment shows how tightly he was clinging to Titch, but also how deeply hurt he is by this man who acted as a father figure for him, again reinforcing how loving family members can sometimes cause the greatest pain in a person's life. Additionally, the snowstorm that pops up here again punctuates the emotional turbulence between them.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1

Wash begins to cry, and then panic, as he realizes that he won't be able to find his way back in the snowstorm and will likely die. At some point, an arm drags him back through the snow, and he awakens later in a smoky warmth. Mr. Wilde tells Wash that he'll get to keep his fingers and toes. When Wash asks about Titch, the man softens, and Wash understands that Titch was the man's favorite son. Mr. Wilde says that the men in the camp are out looking for Titch now. When Wash asks how long he's been asleep, Mr. Wilde doesn't answer.

Wash and Mr. Wilde's reaction to Titch's abandonment illustrates through two different dynamics how emotionally difficult families can be. In Mr. Wilde and Titch's case, the dynamic has reversed between father and son. Now Mr. Wilde acknowledges his deep affection for Titch—but also how much pain his son has caused him by walking off into the storm.

The days pass and there is no sign of Titch. One morning, Mr. Wilde is fed up, and he goes out in search of Titch himself. Peter follows to make sure that Mr. Wilde doesn't get lost as well. Several more days pass, and Mr. Wilde and Peter return home with no news. Mr. Wilde curses, calling Titch a foolish boy who was always running away. Wash recognizes that Mr. Wilde doesn't expect his son to come back.

Again, Mr. Wilde's pain illustrates that just as he had the capacity to hurt Titch, Titch has a similar capacity to hurt him precisely because of the love that they shared for each other. This highlights again how families can both foster deep love but also cause deep pain at the same time.

Mr. Wilde says that Wash will be all right, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder. But some hours later, Mr. Wilde falls very ill, and as the days pass his condition worsens. One day, Wash watches over Mr. Wilde when Peter makes a trip to the outpost, and he sketches the old man. As he draws, he thinks of Titch, Willard, and Philip. It strikes Wash that Philip's suicide granted Wash a new life, as Titch would never have risked taking him if Wash weren't in danger. When Wash looks back at Mr. Wilde, he realizes that his breathing has ceased—he is dead.

Mr. Wilde's death shows the depth of his love for his son, because he was willing to risk his health by venturing out into the snow for days, looking for Titch. It also shows how deeply his son's actions have hurt him, because his grief and dejection likely made him even more vulnerable to his illness and subsequent death, perhaps even implying that he could not live with his son's death.

What Titch tried to prevent is now reality: Mr. Wilde's fake death is now real. Wash realizes then that he doesn't want to stay in that place—the cold doesn't suit him. Peter lets Wash take whatever he wants from the Wildes' possessions, as well as food, provisions, and the money that Titch left for him. Peter and Wash take another sled to the outpost, where Peter gives Wash some of Titch's handmade telescopes and departs.

As Wash sets out on his next journey, he does so with the mindset of putting this trip to the Arctic behind him and making a new life for himself. But as Wash takes the remnants of Titch's life, it is also clear that this journey, too, has made a deep mark on Wash that will be difficult to fully move on from.

PART 3, CHAPTER 2

Titch often spoke of the Loyalists in Nova Scotia, and Wash resolves to go there. Wash arranges passage on a vessel, terrified to be a small Black boy alone at sea. One evening, a sailor ties him to the rigging until Wash agrees to drink a quart of rum. After that, Wash hides in his room, alone, looking through the one book Wash took—Titch's leather-bound tract on sea creatures.

As Wash returns to Canada, it's clear that he will face much greater racism and violence than he did back when he had Titch by his side, because people do not respect Wash as a man in his own right.

Wash travels by boat, cart, and carriage until he arrives in Shelburne, which is wet and dreadful. He works for a time in a small fishery, but he is constantly uneasy about John Willard and other kidnappers who often capture freed men in the streets to ship them South and make them slaves again. Sometimes white men would simply attack the Black men who worked for cheaper wages and destroyed their livelihoods. One night, someone tries to strangle Wash outside a dark tavern, but he is able to shake the man free.

This passage demonstrates that as much as Wash tries to move around, he finds much of his past inescapable. First, he is afraid of Willard and the other men who try to enslave him again. Second, he also has to deal with violent incidents that spring from racism even after having escaped from slavery, as his past enslavement forever marks him as a target.

Over time, Wash grows bitter and hard (though he is only 15), and he knows he has to move on. He settles in Bedford Basin, finding work as a dishwasher and a laundry boy. These days, sketching makes him feel sad and drained. Instead, he finds work as a prep cook and discovers he has a knack for it. The schedule is demanding, and over time Wash grows desolate, feeling like a boy without identity, always running.

Again, while journeys are usually meant to help people progress in their lives (e.g., having new experiences or visiting new places), Wash instead continues to run from his past. That he continues to be restless no matter where he goes shows how much time and energy he is wasting in trying to avoid his past when it seems inescapable.

When Wash is 16, he realizes that he has to improve his circumstances or he will die. He finds intermittent work at the docks, trying to live up to the idea of a free man that Big Kit described. But it is difficult when he is once again treated brutally—even his colleagues at the docks beat him and urinate on him. Occasionally, Wash thinks of Titch and is surprised that Titch would kill himself the way he did.

While Wash continues to face racially motivated violence, he realizes that he isn't free despite escaping slavery. He doesn't have the freedom of movement that he aspires to, which Big Kit described in the early chapters. His lack of freedom continues to cause him despair, showing how being captive to societal violence can be just as emotionally difficult as physical captivity.

During Wash's lowest days, he is unloading a sailing vessel when he sees jellyfish glowing yellow and green. Wash is amazed to watch the sea pulse with color. Later, Wash takes out his papers and paint and sketches for the first time in months. But he isn't able to fully capture what he saw in the waters: a burst of fleeting incandescence.

Wash isn't able to sketch the jellyfish adequately, but the book again associates Wash's curiosity and spark of interest in the world with his desire to draw. This demonstrates how sketching is an attempt to capture and understand the beauty around him.

PART 3, CHAPTER 3

Wash realizes how much he has let curiosity and wonder out of his life. He finds a new job as a delivery man, which allows him to begin drawing again. He realizes how poor his sketching has become and is excited at the idea of rekindling his passion for drawing.

Wash again connects his curiosity with his sketching, illustrating how art provides an avenue for him to understand the world around him.

This same feeling of renewal allows him to make a friend, Medwin Harris, who takes care of the rooming house that Wash lives in. Medwin's family arrived in Nova Scotia as refugees in 1815, and he worked for a while at a hotel near Niagara Falls—amazingly, earning the same as his white colleagues—until he decided to return to Nova Scotia. He and Wash drink together and joke together. He is a very tall man and five years older than Wash. Wash suspects that even though Medwin is not a bad man, he is not a good one either—they are all quite hardened in that house.

Like Wash, Medwin is another Black man who is struggling to fit into life in Nova Scotia after having been enslaved. As Wash notes, many of the men are hardened due to the racism and subsequent violence that they face in a place where they can't achieve a true sense of belonging. Wash is the same, as his past experiences have made him an outcast in society.

When Wash hears news of the English establishing an apprenticeship system in the Indies (thus ending slavery), Medwin and Wash go out to celebrate. Wash wonders about Big Kit, and where she would go. Wash also realizes that she might be dead, and his hands start to shake. Just then, two Black men approach Wash and Medwin, spitting racial slurs and threatening to beat them. Medwin stands, smashes his glass on the table, and drives the edge into the two men's faces.

Slavery ends in the British colonies with the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. But the book emphasizes that racism neither begins nor ends with slavery's cruelty. The threat that Medwin and Wash face—at the hands of other Black men, no less—illustrates how racism can manifest in belittling or discriminatory language from any source, not just explicit cruelty and enslavement on the plantations.

PART 3, CHAPTER 4

Wash tries to avoid conflict, but this is difficult with an aggressive friend like Medwin, so he keeps more and more to himself. Each morning, he brings an easel and paints to an inlet, where he steps into the tide pools to grab some sea creature to draw. On one particular morning, as he wades out, he notices a man standing on the shore, looking at him. Wash is alarmed, but when the man sets up his own easel, Wash is relieved.

Wash returns not only to art, but also to scientific discovery. He studies the scientific world by examining marine life and then draws it in order to capture it more fully. In Wash's world, science and art have always gone hand in hand as a way to explore the world's natural mysteries.

Wash's art is his one pure pleasure and his one freedom, when he is able to control his time and activity. And so it bothers him that the man sets up so close to him, and continues to do for the next few days. The man waves to him on the third day, and Wash realizes that he's being selfish to deny the man his own pleasure. One morning, the stranger approaches Wash as he is sketching a hermit crab, remarking on how talented Wash is. Wash looks up and realizes that the stranger is actually a woman in oversized clothes and a man's hat, with tanned calves and her left hand in a cast.

Art feels like "freedom" to Wash because it allows him to determine his own time. It also provides him with a distraction from his fear of Willard or other people who might attack him, which is one of the reasons why he finds this stranger so threatening. Freedom is not just physical liberty, therefore—it is also emotional and mental ease.

The woman introduces herself as Tanna Goff, and Wash introduces himself as well. She jokes about his name, while Wash simply stares at her golden skin with dark freckles. She is not entirely a white woman, and her small stature makes her seem vulnerable despite her strong speech. She seems older than him—perhaps 19 or 20. She asks if he'll teach her to paint, saying that she'll pay him; Wash agrees despite his distress at losing his solitary mornings.

Tanna, like Wash, is immediately set apart for her skin color and features, as he recognizes immediately that she is not a white woman. Thus, the book hints at how Tanna, too, is ostracized and belittled because of her race.

Every morning, Wash and Tanna wade out into the tide pools together. He points out the sea creatures while she tries to memorize their features. Tanna is comical and blunt, and she tells him about herself. She was born in the Solomon Islands; her mother died giving birth to her. Her wrist was broken two months earlier, and she is frustrated by the restriction on her movement. She asks many questions about him, and he's flustered at her attention and her desire to get to know him. But despite her prying, he tells her little and instead focuses on teaching her to paint.

Here, Wash starts to take on the role that Titch took on with him—mentoring Tanna through both art and science. However, Wash is unwilling to tell Tanna much about himself, which the book implies is because he is either ashamed or afraid of revealing his past. This shows how Wash's past is ever-present in his mind, and it is also preventing him from developing real relationships and love with others.

Wash is surprised at how much he grows to enjoy Tanna's company. One day, he is embarrassed to learn that she has a greater knowledge of sea creatures than he does, but she comforts him when he discovers this, placing her hand in his. Wash is unused to receiving such overt interest from a woman, and to feeling desire in return. Tanna asks how Wash got his scar, and he wants to step closer to her, but he glances worriedly at the shacks in the distance and returns to their painting, pulling his hand away.

Here, the book shows how Wash and Tanna are beginning to fall in love. It is also notable that Tanna seems to understand and love Wash because of his scar and knowing that he is likely ostracized by others, not just in spite of it. However, it is Wash's past that makes him want to avoid Tanna as he worries about who might see them, again showing how difficult it is for Wash to escape his past trauma.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5

Later, Medwin tells Wash to stay away from white women, but Wash isn't sure that Tanna is white. Medwin says the whole thing seems fishy—that she's from the Solomon Islands and is interested in him. He says that this is the kind of thing that gets men killed. Wash recalls his only times being intimate with a woman: one a prostitute, the other a girl he met at the dockyards whose father threatened to crush Wash's skull when he learned about their relationship. Medwin says that Wash could hang from a tree for what he's doing.

Medwin's worry about someone seeing a young Black man with a woman who could pass for white is another illustration of racism. Many people in their society don't believe that Wash is worthy of Tanna's affection simply because she has lighter skin, to the point where he could lose his life over it. Again, this illustrates how society dehumanizes and devalues Black men like Wash, even when Tanna is clearly interested in him.

Medwin then tells Wash that a small, soft-voiced white man came looking for Wash, but Medwin said he didn't know Wash. Wash thanks Medwin, who doesn't pry any further. The next morning, Wash wants to see Tanna again and kiss her. But now he's worried that John Willard is looking for him. He wonders why the man is still searching—Wash can't still hold any value, particularly now that slavery has ended in West India.

Again, Wash doesn't fully feel free even when he escapes slavery—and even when slavery has ended in the British colonies. Even after traveling around the world, he still feels haunted by the idea that his past might catch up with him, demonstrating how the past can feel inescapable.

Rising, Wash begins to pack his tools and walks toward the beach. He scans the horizon for Tanna and for Willard, but no one comes for an hour. He then tucks a knife into his waistcoat and goes to work, still worried about Willard, but his deliveries go smoothly. The next day, when Tanna doesn't appear again, Wash wonders if he did something to put her off. He also wonders if she is somehow working for Willard, but he decides that that's a stupid thought.

Again, Wash's past is so present in his mind that it is also coloring how he interprets other people's motivations and actions (like believing that Tanna could be working for Willard). His nervousness shows how afraid he still is of Willard and how that fear takes control of his thoughts and actions.

Days pass, and despite knocks on Wash's door, he never answers. Towards the week's end, he runs out of food and fasts for two days before going out to a fruit stand. There, he sees Tanna, focused on the apples. At first he makes his way toward her, but he realizes that he doesn't know what he'd say, so he turns and flees.

The fact that Wash spends days in his room fasting out of fear that Willard might be outside illustrates how he has become captive to his fear—it becomes treacherous and physically restrictive like his actual enslavement.

PART 3, CHAPTER 6

Some days later, Wash has to deliver an order for a Mr. Goff, and he realizes in despair that Tanna must have a husband. When he reaches the house, though, an old, pale man answers the door and invites Wash to set the parcels down on a desk, which the man clears by shoving a stack of books to the floor.

Wash's severe disappointment at the idea that Tanna might have a husband illustrates both his deep love for her, and how that deep love also means her betrayals can severely hurt him.

Wash sets the parcels down and picks up the books, noticing that one of them is an old marine zoology book he read with Titch. Wash says he loves this book, and asks if the man is familiar with the author's other work—before realizing that the man *is* the author, famous marine zoologist G.M. Goff. Goff asks what area of science Wash is interested in, and he shyly says marine life. Goff explains that he and his daughter Tanna have been looking for company while they research, and they are taking a boat the next afternoon to record observations. Goff invites Wash, and Wash agrees to go.

Goff quickly becomes another spark for Wash's lost curiosity about science and the world, as Wash hasn't had the chance to pursue scientific discovery without Titch. The fact that Wash read Goff's book with Titch also links Goff and Titch, hinting at the fact that Goff will become a new sort of mentor and father figure for Wash.

The next day, Wash joins Tanna and Goff at the cove, and when Tanna sees him, she stares at him angrily. Noting Wash's paints, Goff says that Tanna has been coming down early mornings on her own to paint—but when he insisted on coming with her, she said she wanted to stay home rather than have her freedom compromised. Wash looks at Tanna, but she doesn't return his glance.

Goff's story provides an explanation for Tanna's absence at the cove the past few days, but it also illuminates more about her character. Like Wash and other characters, Tanna also experiences difficulty with a lack of freedom—as a woman, she, too, feels restricted by what society and her father will allow her to do.

On the boat, Wash makes sketches of the fish they pass, which Goff admires. Later, while they eat lunch, Goff asks if Wash has children, and he says no. Goff says that children are a blessing: his daughter was born on a journey to the Solomon Islands 20 years earlier, and she takes after her mother. She is a true partner in his studies and has been his salvation. Tanna listens to this without any reaction.

Goff and Tanna's relationship represents another peek into the theme of complicated family dynamics. Goff clearly loves Tanna as his daughter, but her silence, general anger, and frustration at the limitations he places on her show that he can also cause her deep pain and that their relationship carries a lot of weight under its surface.

Goff and Wash continue to talk: Goff tells Wash how death is a different thing to different cultures. When he told people on the Solomon Islands that his youngest sister killed herself, they laughed. To them, life is sacred, and so to end life strikes them as absurd. It was then Goff realized that English values are not the only, nor the best, way of living. Wash notes then how much he likes Goff.

This story makes Wash like Goff better because it is counter to so many of Titch's, Erasmus's, and Mr. Wilde's racist attitudes about non-white people. Unlike them, Goff recognizes that his English attitudes and perspectives are no more valid than the beliefs of others.

As Goff examines a crab, Wash asks what Goff is working on now, and he says exploring the age of the earth. He is curious if there is evidence to dispute creationist theory. When Wash asks what evidence Goff is gathering, Goff tosses the crab to Tanna, who says that Goff is collecting New World specimens for an exhibit as she gently deposits the crab back into the sea.

Goff's exploration of creationist theory (the belief that the Earth began with an act of divine creation, often including the belief that the Earth is only as old as what the Bible dictates) shows that he, too, uses scientific discovery to try to understand life's greatest mysteries.

Wash spends the following Saturday with the Goffs, and Tanna softens a little. Wash can see that she is brilliant, stifled, and devoted to Goff. She and her father are both intelligent and kind, but they are short with each other. He likes them both, but he hates the way they interact—though he notes that this hatred might stem from his own jealousy that she has a father and he does not.

Wash continues to note the complicated dynamic between Goff and Tanna— they clearly love each other, but also don't treat each other very kindly. Because Wash has never had a strong sense of family, he has a difficult time understanding their interactions (just as he had a difficult time understanding how Titch could be so dismissive of his own mother). And yet, Wash also had his own complex dynamics with Titch and Big Kit as well, all of which show how families (biological or chosen) can involve both deep love and deep pain.

Wash also senses Goff's disapproval whenever he catches Wash staring at Tanna. Wash knows that Goff isn't openly prejudiced—he's just protective of Tanna and wants better for his daughter. But Wash can't curb his desire for her, even as he knows that he can't be with her. He's plagued by erotic dreams about her, and he always wakes up aroused and ashamed.

Although Wash acknowledges that Goff isn't openly prejudiced or cruel, the fact that he doesn't like Wash or believe Wash is good enough for Tanna shows an inherent racial prejudice, believing that Wash isn't as worthy of her as a white man might be.

PART 3, CHAPTER 7

One morning, Wash is leaving his rooming house to go out to work when Tanna appears. He asks how she found him, and she sarcastically comments that she's happy to see him, too. Wash notices that she removed the bandage from her wrist. She's glad to be done with it, and she asks where they should go. Wash scans the road, knowing that it is risky for them to be seen together if she's mistaken for a white woman. He also worries about John Willard finding him, knowing that he couldn't protect her if that happened.

Again, even when Tanna is explicitly expressing her desire to be with Wash, Wash is paralyzed both by the fear of society's reaction and the fear of John Willard coming to find him and Tanna. Again, this suggests that Wash isn't fully free, as his fear and society's judgment both prevent him from fulfilling Big Kit's statement in the book's first pages that being free means going wherever he wants and doing whatever he wants.


Tanna then pulls out a note, saying that when she's with him she's not always able to say what she means. Wash stares at the paper, and Tanna realizes that he can't read. He says that he can, though inwardly he knows his reading is poor. Tanna suggests that she can teach him, and Wash is bothered by her condescension.

Although Tanna is a mixed-race woman, and though she isn't cruel to Wash, the book shows that she, too, reinforces racist stereotypes. When she belittles Wash for not being able to read, he recognizes that her suggestion sets herself up as a superior person, despite the fact that Wash's character and agency should not be tied to his ability to read.

Tanna explains that Goff said Wash was a slave, and she told her father that Wash could never be a slave, even if he were born in chains. Wash is upset that she seems to think that slavery is a choice, or a question of temperament, as if it weren't an outrage. But Tanna counters, saying she only meant he is strong, and he has made so much of his life after such hardship.

As Wash points out, Tanna's words imply that Wash could only escape slavery because he is especially brilliant or strong. However, Wash knows that he was only able to escape slavery because of luck—the fact that Titch picked him and taught him. Other enslaved people could be similarly brilliant if given the chance, which is why her suggestion that Wash is exceptional actually plays into racist stereotypes again.

After some silence, Tanna says that she and Goff will be leaving to return to London in a few weeks. They are still in need of a few specimens, and she can't dive for them because of her wrist, and her father can't dive because he is too old. Wash realizes that this is why she sought him out. She corrects him, saying that she wanted to give him a note and she wanted to see him because she thought *he* wanted to see *her*—but she was wrong. She walks away, leaving Wash confused.

As Tanna and Wash start to become more open about their feelings for each other, Wash realizes another way in which love and pain can mix. Despite their clear affection, Wash and Tanna both dance around exactly what they might want out of a relationship together, in a way that ends up confusing and hurting both of them.

PART 3, CHAPTER 8

The following Saturday, Wash returns to the harbor, where Goff and Tanna have moored a small seafaring vessel. Goff thanks Wash for agreeing to help collect specimens, while Tanna avoids his eye. As they set out, Wash wonders about her strange twists of mood. He also notices her hair and neck and feels longing wash through him. At sea, Goff helps Wash into the diving suit and affixes the helmet.

Wash and Tanna have deep affection for each other, but their inability to communicate their feelings also tempers and obscures that affection. This shows that, like love between parents and children, love between romantic partners can be both deeply caring and sometimes painful.

When Tanna is below decks, Goff notes that Tanna is young. Wash points out that he is younger than she is, and Goff replies, "in years, yes." Wash realizes then that while Goff respects Wash's mind and sketches, he sees Wash as a burnt slave and does not want Wash to be with his daughter.

Wash again recognizes Goff's prejudice, as Wash understands that his past as an enslaved person and his burns make Goff believe that Wash is unsuitable for his daughter, even despite the fact that he recognizes Wash's intellect and talent for marine zoology.

When Wash hits the water, he is shocked at the cold, but he sinks lower, observing all the marine life shimmering in the light. He notices something white, only to realize it's his own eyes, reflected in the helmet's glass. And then he feels all of his anger and terror—of Goff's disapproving glare, Big Kit's skin, Titch in the snow, Philip's face, Willard's shadow. He lets it all drop away, and he feels like nothing.

Floating in the water is a transformative experience for Wash because when he is alone, Wash is able to let go of much of the pain of his past. But the fact that he is able to feel like nothing as he floats in the water only contrasts with his life on land. Normally, when Wash travels to different places, he is forced to consider or confront his past. If the ocean is an escape, it's because it's difficult for Wash to find that respite anywhere else.

An approaching poisonous jellyfish rouses Wash from his stupor, and he propels himself along, keeping the helmet upright. He sees a wreck that Goff told him to examine and starts to search for specimens. He notices an ancient-looking female **octopus**, brilliantly vivid, and the thought of Goff killing her fills him with nausea. He hopes that they can somehow transport her alive. When Wash approaches the octopus, it sends out dark ink and shoots through the water. But when Wash holds his hands out gently, the octopus swims directly into his hands.

The book immediately connects Wash to the octopus when he discovers it, as it mirrors much of his dynamic with Titch. At first, the octopus is afraid of Wash, but when presented with a gentle open hand, the octopus immediately swims toward Wash. This is the same as Wash and Titch's relationship, as Wash was at first afraid of Titch, but when Titch displayed his gentle nature, Wash warmed to him. And in taking the octopus out of the ocean, Wash displaces the octopus in the same way that Titch essentially took Wash captive as well.

The sun is low when Wash surfaces, after collecting the **octopus** and several other specimens. Wash gasps for air, and Goff helps him into a blanket. When Tanna joins them, he thinks she might have been crying. Wash opens the cage with care, showing them the octopus, which wraps itself around his arms. Goff notes that the octopus likes him, and Wash laughs.

This rare laughter from Wash shows how he is recapturing some of his childhood curiosity and innocence in returning to science. The fact that the octopus wraps itself around his arm also connects them further. Out of the water, the octopus clings to Wash just as he clung to the only thing he knew outside of Barbados—Titch.

PART 3, CHAPTER 9

Later, Wash joins Goff and Tanna in their home to eat—Wash is surprised to be invited in. Tanna says she hopes he likes mackerel, and he assures her that the food smells great. As Tanna serves him, his plate snaps in half in her hands, and he asks if she's hurt. She has a small cut, and she goes to patch it up herself. Noticing the oil paintings around, Wash comments to Goff that Tanna is a fine painter, and Goff observes that Wash has taken a real interest in Tanna.

Wash acknowledges that even though Goff isn't thrilled about his growing close to Tanna, Goff and Tanna still both treat him more humanely than most other people in Nova Scotia (or in any of the places he's traveled) ever have. The fact that Goff continues to warm to Wash and invites him into their home also shows Goff's potential for growth.

Sipping wine, Goff explains that English society never accepted Tanna, which has wounded her. He says that he doesn't wish her any more hardship, and Wash understands that what he fears for both of them is social disdain—under different circumstances, he would have accepted Wash. Goff then comments on how meticulous Wash's drawings are, and he asks if Wash would illustrate Goff's next tract. Wash assures him that it would be a pleasure.

Goff suggests that his prejudice doesn't really stem from his own judgment, but rather the judgment that society places on both Wash and Tanna. Goff recognizes that English society already sees Tanna as lesser than white people, and her association with Wash would make this attitude even worse. His points emphasize how racism doesn't just manifest in cruel words and actions, but in the societal acceptance of white superiority as well.

Tanna returns just as Wash agrees to illustrate the book, and she glances at Goff. Goff, meanwhile, moves on to talk about his exhibition, and Wash wonders if he would make the exhibition a live one, filled with tanks where people could visit and observe the animals. Goff is amazed at the idea, saying that this would be a marvel. They all start to enthusiastically discuss the conundrums of needing to seal the tanks but giving the creatures oxygen, and of getting the right acidity in the water.

Science is a way for Wash, Tanna, and Goff to understand the world around them. But in suggesting a live exhibit (essentially the first public aquarium), Wash illustrates that science can also help spark curiosity in others, as they discover the beauty in creatures they wouldn't normally get to see.

After Wash uses the restroom, Goff tells him that he is leaving Tanna and Wash the following weekend to sort out the crinoids, as he will be traveling to a hamlet up the coast. He says that it won't be a pleasant journey, so he didn't think Tanna would mind being left behind. At this, Tanna starts to clear the table.

Even though the book never fully fleshes out the source of Tanna and Goff's conflict, their coldness toward each other shows how complicated and emotionally painful even loving family relationships can be. For example, Tanna feels slighted by her father doing scientific business without her, or choosing Wash to illustrate Goff's papers over her.

PART 3, CHAPTER 10

A few days later, Wash gets an idea, and he goes down to the shores to dredge specimens. When he returns, he places the specimens in a cask filled with seawater by the window. After two days, they are dead, but then he tries again with an entirely clear glass receptacle. He realizes that animals absorb oxygen and exhale carbonic acid, while plants do the opposite, so they will have to be housed together with access to light. In the clear glass tank, the specimens survive a long time.

Wash again rediscovers his curiosity through scientific exploration. In trying to figure out how the aquarium might actually work, he has to understand what enables plants and animals to live together in the ocean. This also shows Wash's brilliance in being able to come up with inventive solutions that will allow other people to appreciate science as well.

Wash travels with Medwin to Halifax, where finds an old builder to help him think through calculations for a large-scale tank. It takes Wash three days to build a two-foot tank frame made with birchwood. He then seeks out a glassblower who owes Medwin money—the glassblower cuts four pieces for him at no charge, and Wash seals them with putty. He hopes that it will all come together and that he can make something that will astonish Tanna.

Although Wash wants to create an aquarium out of his own curiosity and desire to explore nature, at the same time, part of his work comes out of a desire to impress Tanna and prove his worth to her. The book suggests that Wash has internalized some of the racist messages that he isn't worthy enough to be with her as a formerly enslaved person without proving himself to be extraordinary.


The next evening, Wash goes to a rundown restaurant, and as he trudges to an empty stool, he feels people staring at his burns. Even though he's used to it, he feels alien and alone. As he waits for his food, he makes calculations for his tank in a ledger, and when his stew comes, a white man settles beside him.

Wash notes here how his burns—the marks of his past—have made him feel like an outsider wherever he goes, showing how his past continues to affect his life even as he tries to avoid it.

The man comments that Wash enjoys equations, and Wash feels like he's being slowly submerged underwater. The man has blond hair, is very short, has a soft voice. The man asks what he would recommend, but Wash cannot speak and can hardly breathe. He feels a bitter sense of inevitability—of his life being taken away.

This description exactly fits Titch's original description of John Willard, suggesting that as much as Wash tried to escape his life on Faith Plantation through his various journeys, the past always catches up to him.

The man makes small talk about his tailor, about his daughter, and about being raised at St. Joseph's—he says that he knows hard work better than anyone from being raised there. Wash recalls his last moments with Philip, and his conclusion that life was simplified by slavery. Wash still says nothing. The man asks if Wash has seen the new locomotives, and after prompting, Wash says he has not. The man says he will always go by carriage, rather than steam engine or aerial contraptions.

The man's reference to the aerial contraptions—an allusion to the Cloud-cutter—essentially confirms that the man is Willard, and that he knows who Wash is. Like Philip's comments about slavery being somehow easier, the man suggests that he, too, was confined by the hard work he had to do at St. Joseph's, and perhaps also by his constant chasing of slaves. Ironically, his freedom is curtailed because it is his job to follow the enslaved people.

The man tells Wash of a trip he made recently to a village in America, where he found a woman out alone at night. But when he approached, she was actually a life-sized doll. The deeper he went into the village, the more dolls he found. At a nearby inn, a man told him that the village children all grew sick, and so they were sent away. Only the old people remained, and they began to die off, so a widow in the village made a replica doll for everyone who died. The man concludes that the true and the living disappear, and in their place rise the "unnatural and the damned."

This eerie tale reflects the man's attitude toward Wash. His statement about the "unnatural and the damned" is a reference to Wash, whose burned skin and supposed crimes (i.e., killing Philip) make him the "damned." The man thus suggests that Wash is rising up over white people like himself—the "true and the living." Again, this attitude positions Wash as someone lesser than the man.

Wash looks at the exit, and John Willard addresses him for the first time: Mr. Black. He asks if it is natural to "sever low beings" from their natural purpose—as if cows don't exist to be eaten. He quotes Aristotle, who said nothing is accidental in the works of nature. Willard assures Wash that he has not come for him—that he did not even know Wash was in the country. He says that he is in insurance now and Erasmus is dead. Wash asks how Erasmus died, and Willard says that it was some illness. Wash thinks that Erasmus was granted too merciful a death.

Although Wash usually views science as a positive way to spark curiosity and understand the natural world, he also sees how it can be used to justify racist ideology. Here, Willard uses Aristotle—an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist—to justify that some "low beings" are naturally inferior to higher beings. His implication is that Wash—whom he dehumanizes by comparing to a cow—is naturally lesser than a white person like Willard.


Willard says that he is shocked to find Wash in Nova Scotia, just after giving up on finding him. Wash caused him a lot of embarrassment—his reputation suffered from not being able to find Wash or Titch. And then he also saw Titch when he was in Liverpool last. Wash is stunned to learn that Titch is alive. A long moment passes, and Willard comments on how strange the moon looks in the northern hemisphere. He says that he'll let Wash eat, and then he leaves.

Ironically, Willard, too, hasn't been able to fully escape his past, despite his own journeys. Just as Wash has been haunted by the idea that Willard might find him, Willard has been plagued by the fact that he never found Wash or Titch until after he was no longer a bounty hunter. Additionally, the revelation that Titch is alive sparks Wash's own grappling with the past, as he wrestles once more with the fallout from his relationship with Titch. This coincidental encounter again suggests that the past is truly inescapable, and Wash must at some point confront it rather than run away from it.

PART 3, CHAPTER 11

Wash sits in the restaurant, shocked at having met the man who'd caused him so many sleepless nights, who'd forced him away from all that he knew, who made him carve out a life for himself in a country that doesn't want him. He wonders if Willard actually saw Titch in Liverpool. And even as Willard assured him he wasn't after Wash, hatred lay beneath the whole exchange.

Here, it truly dawns on Wash that despite spending so much of his life trying to avoid Willard, the man was able to find him anyway. This reinforces the idea that, for Wash, the past is truly inescapable despite his attempt to avoid it by moving to Nova Scotia.

Wash breathes for a few moments before leaving with his ledger. He thinks about Willard quoting Aristotle—corrupting science to support his own ideas. Wash passes a dark alley, and he remembers a time when he was four years old, climbing to sit on a fence that he'd sat on many times before. He had a feeling that the fence would break but told himself that fear was stupid. So he climbed up anyway, and the fence broke and he fell, driving splinters into his thigh. Now, as Wash turns away from the dark alley, he feels a blow to his head.

Wash recognizes the cruelty in Willard using Aristotle to justify his racist beliefs, because Wash knows from his own scientific discovery that he is not any less than white people—he just needed the opportunity to learn and foster his curiosity. Additionally, Wash's memory here implies that his past gives him an instinct for danger—one that proves true when he immediately faces a violent assault.

Wash falls to the ground as a second blow lands on his collarbone. White hands grab at him, digging into his cheeks as blood gushes down his face. Wash struggles away, trying to grab at the man's—Willard's—throat. Willard hisses a slur at Wash and grabs Wash's throat in return. Wash can feel his breath choking off when he remembers his knife, and he eases a hand from Willard's throat, takes the knife from his pocket and drives it as deeply as he can into Willard's face. Willard screams in horror, and they kneel side by side as Willard screams and Wash catches his breath before he stumbles away.

The fact that Willard attacks Wash even though he won't get a reward shows that Willard is clearly still trying to resolve what he sees as his own past failures. The knife also reminds readers that Wash has fully expected this confrontation for years, which is why he carried the knife with him at all times. This again underscores the idea that Wash was constantly burdened by his fear that Willard would find him.

PART 3, CHAPTER 12

Wash staggers to the Goffs' house, where Tanna answers the door in her nightgown. She's stocked to see him covered in blood, his shirt torn. She immediately turns to get her medical bag, and despite his pain, Wash feels a heat flow through him at seeing her. He follows her into the room, noticing the pitiful fire in the hearth. As Tanna dabs at Wash's face and heats a needle for suturing, she starts to cry. She stitches his torn face, cursing whoever did this to him.

This exchange illustrates how despite their emotional turmoil, Wash and Tanna can still provide each other with a great deal of support and comfort, as in this moment when she helps stitch him up.

After Tanna finishes the wounds, she notes that Wash thinks her fire is bad. He asks to fix it, but she refuses, instructing him to rest. Still, he gets up to fix the fire and tells her that the timber is still damp. She shrugs, saying she's hopeless. Wash gets up to leave, knowing Goff is likely due back the next day. Tanna tells him that he's a gentleman—perhaps too much so. Wash stares at her, wanting to put his hands and mouth on her. Then, Tanna slowly steps forward and unbuttons her gown.

While Wash doesn't have a traditional family, Tanna is already a partner to him in many ways—both romantically and in the scientific work that they do together.

Later, as Wash and Tanna lie on the floor, they watch the rain pound at the windows. Wash is amazed at how natural their bodies felt together, and he kisses her forehead. He asks if Tanna was going to illustrate Goff's book, and she says no. She hoped her father would ask, which is why she aimed to get better, but Wash is the better choice. He tells her that he will turn her father down, but she refuses. She says it's important for people like Wash to get the chance to do it, to show his talent.

As Wash and Tanna deepen their love, they also can already cause each other a great deal of pain, like Wash in some sense taking Tanna's place as Goff's illustrator. In addition, Tanna acknowledges the value of Wash illustrating the book to counter people's stereotypes that a "person like Wash" (which is to say, a Black man) couldn't have his artistic talents.

As Tanna turns away, Wash notes three birthmarks on her lower back, and she says she hates her birthmarks as she kisses him. He asks her what her favorite marine life is, saying his is the nudibranch, which will steal the harpoon off a jellyfish and mount it to its own back. Tanna says she likes the **octopus**, because it can match its surroundings, stretch and fold itself, and is clever. He kisses her ear, saying that an octopus also has three hearts.

While the book has already established a connection between Wash and the octopus, Tanna's connection to it is just as revealing. She likes the octopus for its intelligence, but also because of its adaptability. This is particularly salient for Tanna, as she often feels like an outsider in English society because she is mixed-race. Therefore, she would be able to avoid people's racist assumptions if she could adapt her appearance like an octopus.

As Wash gathers Tanna closer to him, she says that she always felt she was different, and she knows he feels the same. She meant him no ill will when she said he was a slave, and as she says this, Wash recalls the pain of the last hours and thinks he might cry. He tells her about Faith, Erasmus, Big Kit, Titch, Philip's suicide, and the trip to the Arctic.

Tanna's comments here illustrate that as much as Wash is trying to get away from his past, it is an unavoidable part of him that other people can see, much like his scars. And in telling Tanna about his life, he deepens their bond even though it causes him a great deal of pain. This shows how loving family members can also cause pain by letting each other be vulnerable, but in a way that ultimately helps them process their experiences.

Wash says he feels life with Titch wasn't real—but he was afraid of returning to the real world when he was with Titch. He is ashamed of how he turned away from Big Kit and everything he knew, and the cruelty that others experienced. Tanna asks then if it was John Willard who attacked him. He says nothing, and she asks if Wash killed the man. Wash says no, knowing that his angle had been awkward and that Willard likely only lost an eye.

Here, Wash acknowledges that much of his life with Titch didn't feel real—it only felt like a way to avoid his past. But he also acknowledges how much pain he caused to Big Kit by abandoning her, in the same way that he was hurt by Titch abandoning him. In this way, Wash knows that he has both been hurt by complicated family dynamics and that he has hurt others as well.

Tanna says that Wash has to come with them to London—he'll be more protected there. Wash points out that Titch argued differently, but Tanna says that Titch only saw Wash as an assistant, and never as his equal. It is unlikely that he saw anything in Wash beyond his immediate usefulness. Wash disagrees internally but says nothing.

Up until this point, the book has portrayed Titch as a fairly virtuous abolitionist, particularly in contrast with Erasmus. But Tanna's statement here highlights that Titch also dehumanized Wash, albeit to a lesser extent: he only saw Wash as a person who could be useful to him, not as a person in his own right who deserved equal treatment.

Wash notes that Erasmus is dead now, and Willard said that he saw Titch in Liverpool. Tanna states that Willard just wanted to put Wash off guard—and even if it's true, Wash is his own man, and he doesn't owe Titch anything. She asks Wash again to come with them to London, saying that if she's not tempting enough, he should think of the specimens. She kisses his forehead, and he presses his face into her hair.

Up until this point, Wash has been traveling in order to run from his past. But here, the book hints at the fact that Wash will soon spend a great deal of time trying to confront his past by seeking out Titch, despite Tanna's warnings that dwelling on his past hurt isn't useful.

PART 4, CHAPTER 1

The building for Goff's exhibition is lovely, and Wash is amazed they have been granted anything given their outlandish plans. London's Zoological Committee offered the land, and if all goes well, they can open Ocean House the following year. Wash thinks how much this means to him—a thing of his own, the invention of a boy born for toil and death. He is amazed that he will leave this mark (even though he will likely never get credit for it).

Wash is delighted to share his scientific curiosity with the world, particularly because it is a mark of how much he has grown and how he has achieved the freedom to engineer an aquarium like this. However, noting that he won't get credit for Ocean House illustrates that racial bias exists in London as well. Despite the fact that the aquarium is his idea, he will not be able to put his name on it because he is still not considered as equal or worthy as a white scientist like Goff.

The Goffs give Wash their small garden house behind their main house. It is cramped, but Wash adores it—he finally has a private space of his own, walled off from the world. And it allows Wash and Tanna to keep the ruse that they are not lovers, even while remaining so. Even Goff warmed to Wash during their travels as they joked and cared for the live specimens.

This is another marker of how Wash has been able to take steps toward achieving true freedom. He has a home all his own now, and he gets to determine what he does and maintain relationships according to his desire. Escaping to London also helps him avoid his burdensome fear of Willard, which had a hold on him for so long.

Goff also defended Wash on the ship to London from a lady who suggested that Wash was better kept with the animals below deck. With each new insult after that, Goff spoke roughly to the aggressor, only backing down when Tanna cautioned him.

Here, the book illustrates how Goff is trying to combat racial bias. He is actively trying to force others to see Wash as an equal instead of dehumanizing him and comparing him to an animal.

The winter ship crossing was rough, and some of the less hardy animals began to die. The **octopus** grew colorless and lethargic, and Goff and Wash descended to the lower hold to gather clean sea water, sometimes tasting it themselves. Occasionally a crowd gathered to watch the strange man and his burnt slave drinking from the sea.

The fact that the octopus grows sick on the ship has another parallel with Wash's situation: after being taken from Barbados, Wash wasn't really able to make a true home for himself and grew dejected. This foreshadows Wash's own illness as remains restless and out of place in London.

In the dark afternoons Tanna sat next to Wash on the deck and listened to him read. She made no corrections, and soon his reading became fluid. Weeks before they reached England, he understood the sentences in all of his cherished books, and the drawings in the books came alive for him. Those hours at sea were rich and peaceful, and Wash thought upon his earlier journey to the Arctic as something very far away, as though a crust grew over Titch's loss.

Here, Wash and Tanna continue to deepen their bond. Wash implies that this time with Tanna becomes even richer than the time he shared with Titch because she doesn't condescend to teach him in the way that Titch did. Even though Wash asserts that he is moving on from his experiences with Titch, his description of a crust growing over Titch's loss suggests that he hasn't fully let go of that loss—though it might grow further from his mind, it is a part of his past that he can't fully escape.

PART 4, CHAPTER 2

Weeks after arriving in London, Wash catches a chill, and within hours he is too weak to stand. Tanna creeps in every few hours and makes tea for Wash, lying beside him on his bed. Coming in and out of consciousness, Wash calls out for Big Kit. He also recalls an earlier weekend, when he and Tanna waded into the ocean at dawn and he floated on his back, watching the stars fade and the sun rise.

Wash's sickness connects him to the octopus once again—in both their cases, being displaced from their homes leads them to fall severely ill. This illustrates how Wash's constant wandering is hurting him deeply, as he never feels truly able to belong. Part of this is spurred by the fact that he no longer has resolution about his past with Titch, and so part of his journey is spurred by his desire to confront his past and find that resolution.

Some time later, Wash wakes, his fever finally broken. He goes out for a walk and thinks again of Titch, and how casually the man discarded him though Titch was Wash's only tie to the world. Walking into the storm was just another act to rid himself of Wash. Wash knows that Tanna is right: that Titch's actions, in the end, were more telling than his words of kindness, because he abandoned Wash when he wasn't useful anymore. Even though Titch said they were equals, perhaps equality between them was truly impossible, since Titch saw slaves as people to be saved.

Wash himself starts to realize how traumatic Titch's actions were—the pain that he caused Wash, who was like a family member to Titch. In addition, though he claimed to support Wash and tried to pursue freedom for the enslaved people, Wash recognizes that Titch only viewed Wash as something that he could fix, teach, or save. In other words, Titch seemed to think that Wash didn't deserve true equality on his own merits. In this way, the book shows that racism can manifest in more than just cruelty: overcoming it requires white people to truly view people of color as equals.

Wash returns home to a note from Tanna inviting him to dine in the main house. Wash starts to draw forcefully, recalling his memories of Faith Plantation. He draws the huts, the bright frogs, the stony paths, the frogs in the grass, the redwoods. He draws the boulder on which men were whipped, the knife marks in the tree's bark where men had been pinned there by the throat, and the grasses where men's bodies rotted. And he draws Wilde Hall, pristine above it all, with a clear view to the sea.

Just as Wash sketches nature to understand it better, here Wash uses drawing to try to understand Faith Plantation better. Again he is struck by the fact that it has so much natural beauty, but alongside this beauty it carries the trauma and pain that the enslaved people endured there. This is not so different from the way that Wash has to reckon with his relationship with Titch, as Titch gave him many opportunities but also caused him severe trauma.

PART 4, CHAPTER 3

Wash realizes that he has to find Titch, to know if he lives and to confront him. He realizes that he still doesn't fully feel on solid ground. He writes a letter to Titch at Granbourne and surprisingly, Titch's mother writes back. When he tells the Goffs that he plans to go, Tanna wonders irately why he's seeking Titch out. Wash isn't fully sure, but he thinks that he likely just wants an apology or an explanation, or the reason why Titch chose him in the first place.

Here, Wash becomes more invested in trying to see Titch again. While he acknowledges that he doesn't fully understand his desire to see Titch again, he is plagued by wanting some resolution, underscoring how Wash is unable to put the past behind him.

Tanna and Wash argue, but ultimately Wash still decides to go. Tanna tells him the days he should work around, because they have appointments to plan their exhibition. Tanna also suggests that she could go with him to Granbourne. Wash is admittedly anxious about going alone, but he doesn't want her criticism as he goes, saying that the trip is foolish. She assures him she'll bite her tongue.

Wash recognizes that he wants Tanna's help and company, but he is also hurt by her criticism—demonstrating again that loved ones can cause a lot of emotional distress because they are supposed to be the most supportive, and so taking away that support can be especially painful.

The next week, Wash and Tanna set out for Granbourne together. As their carriage approaches the estate, they see rotted buildings and rickety shacks. Wash realizes that Grandbourne is like the center of a wheel, and Faith was one spoke to help power this estate. As Wash approaches, he wonders if he'll actually find Titch there—it has a sense of vacancy, of an estate fading away.

As Wash and Tanna observe the crumbling Granbourne estate for the first time, Wash's thoughts about the place highlight slavery's cruelty and inhumanity. All of the enslaved people's labor—their lives and deaths—were in service of keeping up this scattered family and their disintegrating household.

When Tanna and Wash arrive at the old house, it is forbidding, grand, and crumbling. An old manservant steps out onto the landing and brings them into the reception hall, which is unlit, and then through darkened corridors. He leads them out to a back terrace, which feels warmer than inside the house. Then, Mrs. Wilde appears—very tall and in a damp riding dress. Her face is waxen and her spine is slightly curved.

The house represents Mrs. Wilde's despair. Even though she is still a proud English woman, she has now lost her husband and at least one of her sons. As such, the house takes on this sense of loss, so much so that it has trapped a coldness within it. For Mrs. Wilde, like so many other characters, she has devoted herself to loving a family that has caused her a great deal of loss and pain.

Mrs. Wilde welcomes Wash formally, and Wash bows to her. She then crosses to sit on a bench, and Wash and Tanna follow. Mrs. Wilde says that she hopes they ate before coming, because she didn't know if they enjoyed English food. Tanna explains that she is English—her father, Geoffrey Goff, is a zoologist. Mrs. Wilde says that Mr. Wilde was interested in science, but she didn't care for it at all.

Mrs. Wilde shows her own bias in not offering Tanna and Wash any kind of lunch. This is one example of how society uses Tanna and Wash's race to justify lesser treatment. She does not offer common courtesy because they are not "English"—by which she means they are not white.

Tanna asks if Titch is at the house, but Mrs. Wilde says that she hasn't seen her son in three years. Wash realizes that this means Titch did survive, if she saw him three years ago. Tanna asks where Titch went, but Mrs. Wilde doesn't answer. She instead tells Wash that they sold the plantation. When Wash asks what happened to the slaves, she says many of them worked as apprentices and some left to work elsewhere.

Not only is Wash trying to understand his past by confronting Titch, but he also expresses a desire to find some resolution regarding his enslavement, implying that he is also trying to find some resolution for his guilt over abandoning Big Kit. This illustrates how Wash's complicated relationship with found family like Titch and Big Kit is a part of the reason that Wash is trying to confront his past, because despite his journeys away from them, they are still an inescapable part of who he has become.

Mrs. Wilde then asks Wash if he was with Mr. Wilde when he died, and Wash says yes. Wash realizes that she wants to know about his life there and about Peter House—that she had questions that unsettled her. Tanna again presses about Titch, and Mrs. Wilde says that he might be at Grosvenor, at his cousin Philip's house. Wash also realizes then that she knows about Phillip's death and Wash's possible hand in it. She asks if they mean to stay long in London and hopes that he can see the zoo in Regent's park. She says he should feel quite at home—in London, that is.

Mrs. Wilde has also experienced a great deal of pain at the hands of the people she loves most—particularly her husband, who spent decades away from her in the Arctic and whom, it is implied, she believes may have had a romantic relationship with Peter. Additionally, Mrs. Wilde's final comment is a sly insult to Wash, as she implies at first that Wash would feel at home with the zoo animals, again dehumanizing him.

Later, as Tanna and Wash leave, the manservant tells Wash that Titch visited two years earlier and left quite upset. He meant to sail out of Liverpool on behalf of the Anti-Slavery Society—he also left his reports on the plantation with the Society. The man suggests that they inquire with the organization for his whereabouts, explaining where their offices are. Tanna and Wash thank him profusely.

The manservant provides the next link in Wash's attempt to find Titch. But all of this traveling illustrates how much time and energy Wash is now wasting in trying to confront his past, rather than simply attempting to move on and live his life. This demonstrates again how the past is becoming inescapable for Wash.

PART 4, CHAPTER 4

The name of the organization is actually the Abolitionist Society for the Betterment and Integration of Former Slaves. On the morning that Wash and Tanna are to visit, the **octopus** falls sick, laying curled in a ball dejectedly in the corner. Wash begins to feel that everything in his life ends this way—in ashes. As he watches the octopus die, he doesn't see a miraculous animal, but instead he sees his own slow extinction. Tanna stares at Wash and asks what's wrong with the octopus. Wash says they'll get to the bottom of it, but he doesn't feel very sure.

The octopus's illness again connects to Wash's own mental state. Just as the octopus's health is flagging because of its displacement, Wash feels similarly sick because he does not belong in London as an educated free Black man. Wash, too, is "miraculous," but his displacement makes him feel that he is dying. This is part of what pushes Wash to want to understand his past and why Titch abandoned him, in the hopes that if he stops seeking out or running from the past, he can find some resolution in his present.

PART 4, CHAPTER 5

At the Abolitionist Society, Tanna has already made arrangements to view Titch's papers. She also asks the woman at the desk where Titch might have sailed out of Liverpool, but the woman knows nothing about his trip. Tanna and Wash step into a small reading room with the crate of Titch's papers. Wash looks at clippings—advertisements for lost slaves, including the one for himself. He shivers, seeing it again and knowing how it all ended.

Tanna reserves the papers from Faith Plantation because she recognizes how much energy Wash is exerting in trying to find Titch. She understands that he will never stop seeking it out unless he gets some kind of closure surrounding his childhood, illustrating her own understanding that the past is unavoidable.

There is a log of apprentices who were still working on the plantation after Emancipation, along with a list of names and deaths. On this log, he sees Big Kit's name, her death date inscribed. He knew deep down she would be dead, but to see her listed like an object is agonizing; he knows how unceremoniously she would have been treated in death. He wants to smash something, and he hates Tanna in that moment for trying to give him back his past.

In discovering Big Kit's death, Wash is forced to confront the fact that he caused her a great deal of pain in abandoning her, even though she was the closest thing he had to family. In addition, Wash understands the injustice of her situation—how she wouldn't have gotten any kind of ceremony or respect in death because the white masters on the plantation didn't view the enslaved people as fully human.


Wash opens a second log, this time with records of births by Wash's first master, Richard Black. He catches sight of his own name under Big Kit's—Big Kit was his mother. Wash is stunned. He recalls how she cared for him and cursed him and cracked his ribs and held him close. She damned his father as cruel and his mother as foolish, then hit him when he said she could know nothing about his parents. She told him he was stupid and that he was brilliant. She loved him despite knowing that one day they would likely be separated.

Even more than learning about Big Kit's death, realizing that Big Kit was actually his biological mother causes Wash immense pain. Wash realizes in this moment that she treated him as her own son, but she also kept him at a distance because she knew that one day he would break her heart when they separated. Though Wash felt her love growing up, he also feels completely betrayed. In recognizing the full context of their relationship, Wash underscores how both he and Kit gave each other great love, but they ways they were absent from each other also caused deep pain.

In his mind, Wash sees Big Kit on a boat from Africa, on a long walk to the coast. He knows that she was raped and beaten—how she starved on the ships in the midst of urine, feces, vomit, and people committing suicide. He sees how she lived at Faith. And he sees how he left her behind in the cane fields and the sun so he could run off with Titch, so he would gradually forget her face. He feels Tanna's hand on his shoulder, and he realizes he is crying.

Wash recognizes how he broke Big Kit's heart in running off with Titch, essentially replacing her with Titch as his mentor and parent. While Big Kit certainly had times when she caused him both deep love and deep pain, Wash realizes that her love for him likely ended up causing her deep pain as well after he ran away.

PART 4, CHAPTER 6

When Tanna pulls away, Wash sees a man has entered the room. The man introduces himself as Robert Solander, explaining that he heard they were looking for Titch's whereabouts. Solander says that Titch appeared there two years ago. He says that Titch's brother had recently passed away, and near the end of Titch's time there, he seemed to be wearing another person's clothes—like he became too big for them.

Although Solander doesn't fully flesh out the mystery of Titch's clothes, the information he gives paints a picture of a man who is lost and uncomfortable in his own skin—perhaps particularly following Erasmus's death. Though Wash doesn't know the full story, the book implies that Titch, too, is embarking on his own journeys to avoid his past and loss.

Solander goes on, explaining that he received a letter from Titch about 15 months earlier. He gives it to Wash, who is amazed to see that the letter was posted from a home in Amsterdam—an address belonging to Peter Haas. Wash realizes that in his youth, he must have gotten Peter House's last name wrong. Solander gives Wash the envelope with the address, apologizing that he can't be more helpful.

Solander provides Wash with the next path for Wash to try and find Titch. As Wash continues to retrace Titch's steps, the book again implies that Wash is trying to make all of these journeys because he feels he can't move on from his past without confronting it.

PART 4, CHAPTER 7

The next weeks pass painfully as the revelations about Big Kit weigh on Wash. Tanna tries to comfort him, but she only ends up annoying him by never leaving him alone. Meanwhile, after a day's work at Ocean House, Wash writes a long letter to Peter Haas. When he doesn't receive a response after several weeks, he writes again, followed by a third time, but nothing comes. Wash doesn't feel that he can confide in Tanna, knowing that she would likely criticize him for expending energy on someone who isn't worthy of his effort.

Tanna and Wash's growing conflict illustrates another way in which families can both foster deep love and cause pain. Tanna knows Wash well and usually supports him, which is why her criticism of his decision to try and find Titch at any cost hurts Wash so acutely.

But gradually, things ease between Tanna and Wash, and they rekindle their love as they go daily into the city to inspect new equipment. Finally, when they are traveling to view the completed tanks for Ocean House, he tells her of his failure to reach Haas. Instead of disapproval, Tanna admits that her father has a colleague in Amsterdam named Mr. Visser, who has a two-headed crab with one brain that he can contribute to Ocean House if someone would travel to get it. She suggests that they could take a trip.

Tanna and Wash have their moments of conflict as her criticism stings him. But the book also illustrates that even though family members can cause each other pain, they can nevertheless retain the capacity for immense love, forgiveness, and support, as Tanna shows when she suggests that they go to Amsterdam together.

Wash and Tanna arrive at Wolcott and Sons to see the completed tanks, and Tanna admires the work. She and Wash plan to pick the tanks up a week from Wednesday. The builders at Wolcott remark that this timing is good, because they can avoid the "business" (implying hangings) by the nearby prison, which will attract many people. Tanna asks what the men's crimes were, and the builder hands Wash a newspaper so he doesn't have to say the crimes aloud. As they leave, Wash scans the paper and stops short at seeing one of the names.

While the book doesn't yet reveal details of the hanging, Wash's startled reaction at the newspaper suggests that it is a recognizable name from his past. This is another example of how Wash is unable to avoid his past, despite traveling across the ocean and away from everyone and everything he knew.

PART 4, CHAPTER 8

That evening, Goff insists on having a winter picnic, and so they dine outside at Regent's Park. After visiting Walcott's, Tanna and Wash wandered silently through the city, unable to talk about the hanging. On a blanket, Goff has set out cold meats, salads, and a frosted cake. When Tanna complains about the cold, Goff says that he'll be dead soon and asks that they allow an old man this pleasure.

The fact that Tanna and Wash seem unable to talk after learning about the hanging builds up mystery around it, but again suggests that it is someone who played a part in Wash's past. This again shows how omnipresent Wash's past has become in his life, that he can't seem to escape it.

As Tanna, Goff, and Wash eat, Wash feels that his mind is elsewhere. Tanna and Goff reminisce about Tanna's favorite aunt, Henrietta Lemieux, who is very accomplished and has had four husbands. She says that Henrietta used to accompany them to the seashore, and now she is interested in glass-blowing—she makes tiny glass trees. Wash and Tanna both fall silent, unable to keep up their enthusiastic chat, while Goff smiles and eats happily.

Even though Goff often annoys Tanna, she and Wash do their best to make Goff happy by cheerfully talking about Tanna's aunt. But their silence also suggests that they all fall short of supporting each other, as Wash and Tanna don't feel they can discuss Wash's concerns with Goff.

PART 4, CHAPTER 9

Wednesday arrives slowly, and Wash and Tanna decide to go to the hanging. Wash knows he could never accept the death if he didn't see it himself. They drive to Newgate prison in a carriage and join the 400-person crowd. Wash observes the hideous brick building, in front of which is a large platform with gallows and a fence to block out the crowd. Tanna is uneasy, and Wash thinks that he should not have brought her.

Although the book still does not reveal who is being hanged, Wash continues to imply that it is someone from his past, whose death would provide a meaningful degree of closure on a previous chapter of his life that remained unresolved.

The newspaper stated there were two to be hanged: a Black man named Louis Hazzard, for theft and arson, and John Francis Willard, for the crime of murdering a Freeman. Wash wonders if Willard killed another man, believing the man to be Wash, or if he just struck out at someone else. Wash notes the irony: Willard's indictment for killing a Black man, and dying alongside another Black man.

The reveal that Willard is the man being hanged provides context for why Wash felt so compelled to attend the hanging. Wash is attempting to finally put his life on Faith Plantation behind him, and he hopes that Willard's death will bring him closure and no longer cause him the deep fear that has haunted him since learning of Willard. It is also ironic Willard murdered someone another free person, and will spend his final moments in captivity and fear.

Wash and Tanna push forward through the crowd, which is angry and tense. Vendors sell snacks; fiddlers tune up to play. At noon, the two men are led out into the yard. Wash sees Willard on the other side of the fence, like it is the dividing line between life and death. He sees Willard's white, sightless eye. In that moment, Wash is disgusted at his own bloodlust, knowing that true mercy would have been to kill Willard. This would have made Willard a martyr—to die for the cause of catching Wash.

Wash's observations of Willard's hanging show how much Willard has haunted him these past years. Even though Willard's side of the fence represents death in Wash's mind, Willard has always been a shadow of death lurking in Wash's life. Wash also understands that Willard has been just as plagued by Wash, and would rather have died finding resolution for his past. Additionally, Wash recognizes Willard's cruelty even in the act that caused him to lose his life, again dehumanizing Black men by perhaps mixing up Wash with someone anonymous, or by indiscriminately taking out his rage on any Black man whose life he deemed unworthy.

Willard steps up to the noose. Wash can see the fear in his eyes just before a hangman sets a bag over Willard's head. A priest steps forward, and the crowd begins to hoot and jeer. Wash holds Tanna so that she won't see, and the hangman draws on a pulley as the floor swings away. Wash hears the crack of the ropes, and watches as they hang for two minutes to ensure their deaths. The crowd erupts in cheers, and Tanna glances up to stare at the lifeless legs.

Even though Wash believes that killing Willard would have been more merciful, for Willard to die for killing a Black man is important. It recognizes that Black men are equally deserving of life, and those who murder are just as worthy of losing their lives as those who murder white men.

Just beyond Tanna's head, Wash sees a figure in the crowd. He is tall, with a long face and a blue coat. Wash feels himself going cold as the man turns away, and Wash calls out "Titch!" He claws his way towards the man, repeating his name until he turns. And then, Wash realizes, he is another man entirely.

Even moments after Wash finds a degree of peace from John Willard's death, his mistaking a stranger for Titch illustrates that he still needs to find resolution for his past with Titch. In this way, the book again emphasizes that the past is inescapable because Wash will always be searching for answers as to why he is rootless and unhappy in his present life.

PART 4, CHAPTER 10

Over the next few days, the hanging haunts Wash. He doesn't rejoice at the brutality of it, even though Willard deserved it. Willard wasted all his talents, all his boyhood curiosity, in senselessness and cruelty. And Wash thinks of the man he thought was Titch, realizing more strongly than ever that he must go to Amsterdam.

Wash understands how Willard's brutality not only dehumanized the Black men and women whom he hunted and killed, but it also dehumanized Willard himself.


Tanna insists on accompanying Wash to Amsterdam, and they are excited to go away on a trip without Goff. Tanna lies to Goff and says she will visit Goff's sister Judith in the Dutch countryside while Wash brings back the two-headed crustacean.

Tanna's insistence that she accompany Wash again shows how even though she can criticize and hurt him, she also provides him with love and support when she knows that he needs it the most—continuing to show how families can both foster love and cause pain.

The day that Tanna and Wash travel to Peter Haas's address, it rains. Up until that point, their journey has been very successful. A day earlier, they were able to collect the stillborn, two-headed crab, which was a shocking breach of nature. They spent the rest of the day walking around the city, and Wash tried to remember it so that he could later draw it—the same city the Old Masters sought to capture.

Wash still maintains his curiosity in both art and science. Referencing both in Wash's trip to Amsterdam shows how vital both disciplines are in illuminating some of the world's mysteries, like a two-headed crab or the beauty of an old city.

After arriving at Haas's house, Tanna and Wash meet the very young master of the house, who is not the Peter that Wash once knew. Wash is deeply disappointed at having traveled for nothing. But the man says that his father is also Peter Haas, and when Wash asks if his father worked with James Wilde, the young man brings them into the dining hall for lunch and retrieves his father.

Even though Wash does end up reconnecting with Peter, his momentary disappointment illustrates a key idea. Wash is exerting an enormous amount of time and energy for the slightest chance of reconnecting with Titch, illustrating how his search to confront his past has become all-consuming.

The elder Peter Haas takes Wash into his arms and then begins to sign while his son interprets. Peter is glad to see Wash and to know that he survived. Wash explains how they found him, and Peter says that he did not receive any letters. He explains that Titch was there about a year and a half earlier, and he did not seem to be himself. Peter has a hard time explaining how Titch is different, but he says this: Titch believes that, after walking into the storm, he returned to the camp and lived there alongside them in a kind of parallel realm.

Like Richard Solander, Peter has a difficult time fully explaining what was unsettling about Titch the last time that they saw him. But it is clear that Titch also became haunted by his own experience in the Arctic. His belief that he lived in a "parallel realm" opens up another mystery for Wash to find his own resolution for. The fact that the more Wash seeks Titch out, the more he only raises more questions suggests that understanding the past may never truly be possible, and Wash will only waste time in seeking Titch out.

Peter goes on, saying that Titch was able to recount events of what happened at the camp after his disappearance. Titch said he knew Wash was present at Mr. Wilde's death. Wash doesn't understand, noting that Titch is a man of science. Peter confirms that he still is, but now he is interested in discovering something beyond reality. Titch grew even more unsettled by Erasmus's death, becoming interested in using sunlight to burn images on paper (which he called shadow grams), but Peter couldn't always follow his ideas.

Titch's experiences and new obsessions show how he evolved following the deaths of his three closest family members: Philip, his father, and his brother. Whereas Titch always believed that the only viable explanations for phenomena (including death) were scientific, now he seems to acknowledge that science cannot explain all of life's mysteries. Still, he continues to use both art and science to explore marvels like death or an afterlife, suggesting that even if someone can't find definitive answers, curiosity in and of itself is a virtue.

Wash asks where Titch went, and Peter explains that he is in Morocco, outside Marrakesh. Peter says that he is happy to give them the address. He also says that he has something, and carries a large wood case into the room. Peter says that if they find Titch, to give him the box.

Peter becomes the next step to finding Titch, this time sending Wash the furthest distance yet—to Morocco. With each new journey, Wash feels more and more unmoored, chasing Titch. This again illustrates how the past becomes inescapable, as Wash becomes obsessed with confronting his past trauma and overcomes any distance in order to do so.

When Wash asks what's in the box, Peter explains: his first expedition, in Tahiti, was meant to study Venus as it moved across the sun's face—which would not happen again for another hundred years. The night before, someone stole their quadrant, rendering the expedition worthless. So he sought out the thief, accompanied by an interpreter. He came upon a group of Tahitians, who were hostile to them because of the men's guns. But Peter began to negotiate, and very slowly, the quadrant was returned—because of the only man without a voice.

Peter's tale shows how he, like Wash, was often underestimated growing up, and yet ultimately his talent shone through in a way that proved his worth to the other scientists and expanded their understanding of the world. Similarly, Wash is able to use his knowledge and unique curiosity to advance his own field, allowing others to understand the world better.

PART 4, CHAPTER 11

Later, Tanna and Wash lie naked in their room in Haarlem. Kissing Tanna, Wash says he admires her lack of adornment—that she only uses small things to augment her beauty so that her actual features shine through. She says that she often begged Goff to let her wear jewels and makeup and fashionable dresses growing up. And when he finally let her, she looked breathtaking. But she also noticed people staring at her constantly, and she felt that she disappeared as a person. She got a reputation for being stupid or silly. Wash teases her, saying now she is silly and plain.

Tanna's story illustrates how other people look down on her for her mixed-race identity. But people also discriminate against and dehumanize her because she is a woman. She suggests here that the more she emphasized her beauty, the more people looked at her as an object rather than as a human being with intelligence and value.

As Wash lies back, Tanna says that Peter's story had the opposite effect than the one intended on her—she kept thinking that the poor Tahitians had to deal with being shot at, and the strange Englishmen with their frightening tools. Only half listening, Wash wonders what drew Titch to Morocco, and Tanna points out that Wash has become obsessed with Titch, even mistaking strangers for him. She says she thought Wash's obsession was about finding Wash's origins, but they did that at the Abolitionist Society. She asks him why he hunts for Titch. Wash is flooded with anxiety, but he feels a striving that he can't stop.

While Tanna points out the bias in Peter's story—prioritizing his perspective over the Tahitians'—she, too, frames the story in a racially biased way, as though the "poor" Tahitians were not able to hold their own against the Englishmen's "frightening" tools. At the same, noting that Wash is dwelling on finding Titch, Tanna struggles to understand what keeps drawing Wash to Titch. The fact that Wash can't fully explain himself only emphasizes how even though he recognizes that his journey might be futile, he feels compelled to confront his past—it is unavoidable.


Tanna asks if Wash is running away from her and Goff because Wash feels that her father stole his idea. Wash admits that he spent a year working out the science of it, and it won't bring him anything in the end—his name will be nowhere. She asks if it's a question of his name, and he admits no. He thinks that the project was a testament to his contributions, but now he's not sure that his existence has been truly meaningful.

Wash's thoughts here illustrate that his past pain has become so unavoidable that it is even preventing him from being able to find meaning or purpose in his present life, because he feels he isn't yet able to understand how or why Titch chose him and then abandoned him.

Tanna tells Wash softly of her Uncle Sunshine, who was very morose and delighted in his misery. When her grandmother died, she left him 300 pounds, and he used the money to buy himself a gravestone for the family plot, and he would leave flowers on it and visit it every day. Once, he left Portuguese figs that Tanna and Goff brought back—she wanted him to taste those figs, but they went onto the grave. When he finally died, it was more like a homecoming. After a pause, she says that she will go with Wash to Morocco. Exhausted, Wash falls asleep, reaching out for her fingers.

Tanna's story about her "Uncle Sunshine" highlights the dangers in being so caught up in the future that he forgot to live—like paying tribute to his future death rather than getting to taste the figs. Likewise, Wash has become so obsessed with his past that he is forgetting to live in the present, wasting a great deal of time traveling the world rather than appreciating the life and the family that he has in front of him.


PART 4, CHAPTER 12

Tanna and Wash return together to England with the specimen, and Goff gives them his blessing to go to Morocco together—even though he knew very well that Tanna accompanied Wash to Amsterdam and did not go to Judith's, as he happened to run into Judith herself, traveling in London. Goff scolded them for the lie but said nothing else, arranging for them to retrieve a rare squid from another colleague.

This moment is an important benchmark for Goff, as he seems to have relented to Tanna and Wash's relationship. After working with Wash for so long, it seems that Goff no longer fears the social disdain that might spring from his daughter having a relationship with Wash—and the book gives no indication that they've faced any. In this way, the book suggests that sometimes the perception or fear of prejudice can perpetuate bias just as much as actual prejudice, because he didn't give Wash the same treatment that he might have given a white suitor for Tanna.

Weeks pass as Wash and Tanna make arrangements for their journey, and they continue their work at Ocean House. Looking around one day, Wash feels immensely proud. He has created a place where people can come to view animals they thought were nightmarish and see instead how beautiful they are. But he also sees his hard work, his late nights, and his sweat, and he is anguished knowing that his name will not be credited. He knows that he has to find a way to make peace with this loss.

Wash recognizes the potential that scientific discovery has on opening people's eyes to amazing creatures and enabling them to understand more about them. The creatures are also a metaphor for Wash's place in society, as others often view him as "nightmarish" until they have a chance to get to know him and see how brilliant he is.

PART 4, CHAPTER 13

Peter Haas arranged for a guide to meet Tanna and Wash in Marrakesh, but the guide is nowhere to be found when they arrive, so they have to take rooms in Marrakesh. They try to hunt down Goff's marine zoologist, but this leads to a dead end as well, and so they begin to explore the bright city and its markets, trying to find someone who might be able to help them.

Wash continues to journey in order to confront Titch about their shared past. But time and again he ends up in a situation where he is simply floundering, purposelessly wandering the city on the slightest hope that someone can help. This again underscores how much time and energy Wash is wasting in order to confront the past, not even knowing whether he will truly be able to find satisfactory answers for what happened.

One morning a few days later, near the markets, a man introduces himself to Wash—he is the original guide who was supposed to lead them to Titch. He explains that he was very sick the last few days and apologizes. He then gets Wash and Tanna a caravan that will take them to Titch's house. As the hours crossing the sand drag on, Tanna falls asleep, and Wash wonders how far Dahomey is from there. He thinks that again, Titch has brought him to another unfamiliar place.

The fact that Wash's mind goes to Dahomey in this moment only reinforces how his journeys stem from a kind of rootlessness. He is moving from place to place in order to try and find closure or make a home for himself, when in reality understanding his past will not make him less restless or give him greater belonging in the present.

Night falls quickly, and the heat drops dramatically as small buildings rise up in the distance. Tanna and Wash disembark and see the town—which is really a few scattered stone dwellings. A boy steps out, and the guide talks to him and the boy starts to lead them to a courtyard. Once there, Wash sees a man step from a doorway, with a live hen in his hands. Wash calls out, "Titch," and in surprise the man lets go of the hen. Titch jokes that he's late for dinner, but Wash can see that Titch is trembling.

Even though Titch makes a joke upon first seeing Wash, his trembling illustrates that he is very afraid of what Wash might do or say. While Wash has been traveling in order to confront his past, Titch has likewise been journeying in order to avoid the past. But just like with Wash, the past is actually inescapable for Titch, as Wash was able to find him anyway.

PART 4, CHAPTER 14

Titch leads Tanna and Wash inside to his front room, draped with local tapestries and baskets but also European-style furniture. They go to a second, smaller room in the back, and when Titch turns back to them, Wash starts to tear up. Some indefinable thing has shifted in Titch's features. He now has a pain in his gaze—a darkness like the one Philip had. Titch says he always dreamed Wash would come and remarks on how grown he is, but Wash can't bring himself to embrace Titch.

This passage again shows how much family members can be sources of sadness. Realizing how Titch has changed and picked up some of Philip's melancholy causes Wash a deep pain. In this moment, Wash both has to confront his past trauma when Titch abandoned him, but he also sees how the years have taken their toll on Titch as well.

Tanna, Wash, Titch, the young boy, and Wash's guide sit in the front room, eating vegetable stew. Tanna and Titch make small talk, while Wash thinks about how unreadable Titch has become to him. He is amazed how kind Tanna is being to him, given how harshly she spoke of him before their arrival. Perhaps, he thinks, she also sees the pain in his eyes and doesn't want to tax him further, but this makes Wash feel alone in his resentment towards Titch.

Again, Wash emphasizes how much family members (or in Tanna's case, found family) can be sources of conflicting emotions. When Wash wanted to find Titch, he was upset at Tanna's criticism. But seeing her try to support Wash and act kindly toward Titch, he is equally upset and feels that she has subtly betrayed him.

Titch comments that Tanna and Wash's arrival was well-timed, as a storm is due. As they continue to talk, Wash peers at the young boy's intelligent face—when Titch looks at him, he can sense a tenderness there, which upsets Wash. Titch asks about their trip to Granbourne, and he apologizes for his mother's rudeness. Wash is frustrated at how willingly he takes this responsibility, and yet he doesn't seem guilty for what he did to Wash. Looking at Wash squarely for the first time, Titch says he is amazed that they came to Morocco. Wash asks about what Titch said when they arrived—that he always dreamed Wash would come. Titch is puzzled and says he doesn't know what he meant by that.

Titch's interactions with this young boy parallel the dinner when Wash saw Big Kit taking care of another enslaved boy. In both cases, Wash sees immediately how he has been replaced by someone who was once a parental figure to him. This is one of the most painful parts of Wash's experience with both of these parental figures, because they protected him and loved him for so long—and yet they also let go of him. This reinforces how both Titch and Big Kit represented family to Wash, but as a result they were also able to cause him pain.

PART 4, CHAPTER 15

Titch offers Tanna the back room with the cot, while Wash can sleep on the settee in the front room and Titch will sleep alongside the boy and the guide in a tent outside. Wash has trouble falling asleep, but he eventually dreams of Ocean House as a huge, shimmering glass structure. Big Kit is beside him in a state of calm. Her eyes are bright, but she doesn't look at Wash. Wash stands quietly beside her, looking at their reflections in the glass panes.

The fact that Wash dreams of Big Kit while he is in Morocco further illustrates how Titch's betrayal and Big Kit are tied in Wash's mind. Like Titch, Big Kit won't really look at him in his dream—an inherent acknowledgement that both of them know that they hurt Wash, and Wash can only ever really see a facsimile of them—Big Kit in the glass panes, and Titch as a new, altered version of himself. That Wash and Big Kit are in Ocean House suggests the idea that Wash shouldn't spend more time trying to confront his past—instead, he should seek out resolution and purpose in what he is doing in the present.

Wash wakes with a start and tries to find the front door, but instead he finds the door to the back room. Tanna wakes, and Wash goes to lie with her, kissing her hand. She remarks that England feels far away, and he agrees. She asks if he despises her for being kind to Titch, but he says that he loves her for being so decent and merciful. She replies that she's never seen such intense pain in a man's eyes.

In recognizing how far he has taken Tanna away from London, Wash sees how his travels have started to exhaust her. Wash and Tanna's dynamic now mirrors Titch and Wash's old dynamic—he is dragging her around the world just as Titch dragged Wash around the world. Thus, Wash is repeating his past, illustrating another way in which his past, and the lack of belonging that has resulted from his past, is repeating itself.

Tanna asks if this is what Wash imagined, and he says no. He understands what she doesn't want to ask—if he has found what he was seeking, if this trip would calm his restlessness, or if they would continue to drift through the world without a home. He tells her that he's sorry for coming to Morocco, but she has already fallen back asleep.

Here, Wash recognizes how futile coming to Morocco was, as he understands that he will never truly be able to get answers from Titch. Moreover, the constant journeying has only succeeded in making him rootless. In this way, the book illustrates how journeying doesn't always allow people to move on from the past; often they simply try to keep confronting it instead.

Just then, Wash notices a door beyond Tanna's cot, and he walks out into the night, gazing at the bright stars. In the dark, he sees another room filled with light, and he finds dozens of scientific instruments, papers, and scales. Black sheets with blots of white on them are nailed to the walls. Next to them is a portrait of the boy, his eyes clear, his right cheek distorted, as though light attacked one side of his face.

As Wash discovers some of Titch's recent work, the book illustrates how Titch is still trying to use both art and science to understand the world's mysteries. The portrait of the boy also suggests that despite Titch's attempts to journey far away from his past life, he is still haunted by his past. Even though the portrait is of the young Moroccan boy, the distortion on the right cheek recalls Wash's scars, suggesting that Titch couldn't let go of Wash entirely.

Titch steps into the room, still dressed. He explains that the sheets with the blots of white are images of the moon, which he made by treating copper with fumes and exposing it at midnight—but he notes the process works much better with human faces. He wants the moon images to be sharper. Wash notes that human faces are more interesting, and Titch counters that looking at one face privileges that one over another. Wash asks if the boy is his assistant, and Titch nods. He says, though, that he didn't want Wash to think that he simply replaced Wash.

Titch's statement is ironic, because as he says, looking at one face privileges it over another. In this way, Titch shows that he now cares more for the young boy than he does for Wash, because he rendered the boy's face on the images—despite his assertion that he didn't simply replace Wash. This again shows how hurtful and complicated families can be, because Titch believed he could simply remove Wash from his life without repercussions, but as a result, Wash feels completely abandoned.

Wash asks if Titch is happy, and Titch says that there are many kinds of happiness, and sometimes people aren't able to choose the happiness granted to them. Wash asks where Titch went after he left Mr. Wilde's camp in the Arctic—a search party was sent out, but they never found him. Titch stays quiet, until Wash points out that he came all this way for answers. Titch says he knew Wash would never leave him, so he couldn't go in a simple way. Wash concludes that it was a ruse, then, but Titch says nothing.

Titch admits that part of the reason that he abandoned Wash was because he felt burdened by Wash clinging to him. This again illustrates how they were both captive to each other—Wash reliant on Titch for his survival and well-being and Titch burdened by having to take care of Wash. And in showing how emotionally damaging the fallout of splitting up was, the book reinforces the idea that captivity to fear or responsibility can be just as harmful as physical captivity.

Titch says he was glad that Wash was with Mr. Wilde as he died. He notes that Erasmus died two years earlier as well, and he was shocked at how little he cared. Wash doesn't know what to say about Erasmus, whom he thinks was an evil, cruel man. He is only surprised to hear Titch contradict Peter and Solander's accounts, as they said he was very upset about his brother's death.

The book again illustrates how sometimes the most painful thing about families is the lack *of love between them when they are supposed to be great sources of love, as Titch reveals how little he cared about his brother's death.*

Titch says that he went a few years earlier to clean up Faith and put its records in London. He notes that Kit was Wash's mother and that she died naturally, but Wash doesn't want to talk about this wound with Titch. Wash says that Titch never truly saw him; he only saw what every other white man saw—his surface. Titch says that that is untrue, and asks to show Wash something.

Again, Wash recognizes that families can be complicated and painful. As much as Titch wants to talk to Wash about Big Kit, Wash is deeply hurt by both of their betrayals—Titch abandoning him and Big Kit not being honest with Wash that she was his mother.

Wash stops Titch, and asks what he saw in Wash the night he was serving dinner—if it was just that he was the right size for the **Cloud-cutter**. Titch agrees, saying that that's why he initially chose Wash, but not why he *befriended* Wash. He says that Wash was a rare thing—and Wash replies that he wasn't so rare that Titch couldn't abandon him.

This exchange encapsulates the root of Wash and Titch's conflict. Titch admits that he initially picked Wash essentially because of his weight—making him no better than an object, which Titch needed to make his own escape from Faith. This is what Wash feared, because for all of Titch's abolitionist leanings, he still did not think of Wash as an equal, which is particularly harmful to Wash because he considered Titch to be like family.

Wash says that Titch took in a young Black boy and educated him like an English boy, but not for Wash's benefit—only to write about it. Titch took Wash on because he was helpful in Titch's political cause and could aid in his experiments. But beyond that, Wash was of no use to him and so Titch abandoned him. Titch never saw Wash as an equal—he was more concerned about slavery's moral stain on white men than the danger it wrought on Black men. Wash knows that his words are true, but they also paint a false picture of their relationship.

Wash's words here demonstrate his and Titch's complex dynamic. Because Titch did use Wash until he was no longer useful, viewing him only as something to be saved, but this doesn't fully capture the entirety of their relationship. What makes Wash particularly unhappy is knowing that they were also like family members, and yet Titch abandoned him anyway. It is precisely the loving parts of their relationship which made Titch's betrayal so painful.

Wash waits for a response, and Titch only says that he treated Wash as family. Wash thinks that it is strange he once thought of Titch as his whole world, and yet they cannot understand each other. Titch is a man who has done far more than most to end slaves' suffering—he risked his own comfort, his family, his name, and saved Wash from certain death. But Titch's problem, Wash thinks, is that he doesn't understand that he can still cause harm. Titch asks again to show Wash something; seeing the pain in his eyes, Wash goes with him.

Wash's final thoughts here suggest that just because Titch fought for enslaved people's rights doesn't exempt him from all bias, as he still isn't fully able to see Wash as an equal or deserving of full respect. In addition, Wash shows that Titch's abandonment hurt so keenly precisely because they viewed each other as family. Titch doesn't fully realize how his betrayal has caused Wash deep pain precisely because of the familial bonds that they built.

PART 4, CHAPTER 16

Titch leads Wash to the front courtyard. There on the ground, Wash sees a two-man boat with white masts and wings—another **Cloud-cutter**. Titch says he still wants to cross the Atlantic. Wash thinks that Titch is reenacting his past as a form of comfort, forgetting all that was bad about it. And Wash knows, too, that Titch is setting himself up for another failure. But as Wash peers at the masts, he remembers Barbados, and a bright pain comes into his head.

The fact that Titch is still working on the Cloud-cutter demonstrates two ideas: first, while the Cloud-cutter once was a symbol of freedom, now it is an anchor tying Titch to his past. Even though Wash knows that Titch will fail, Titch is compelled to try to rectify his past failures—showing how Titch, like Wash, has been unable to escape his past trauma.

PART 4, CHAPTER 17

Later, Wash and Titch sit on the floor in the dark, drinking tea. Wash asks how far they are from Dahomey, but Titch says it is far away, and it would be a dangerous journey. Titch asks if Wash remembers Edgar Farrow, explaining that the man is dead. Titch comments that he was a great man, in all that he did for people. Wash thinks that he was kind, despite his dark hobby.

Wash's interest in Dahomey is another extension of his desire to fully understand his past, as he can't seem to find belonging in any of the places to which he travels. But when Titch says that it is a dangerous journey, and Wash doesn't pursue the idea, he seems to understand that that journey would simply be another futile attempt to confront the past.

Wash tells Titch about Ocean House, and Wash knows as he describes it that he will fight to get credit for the work he has done when he returns to England. Titch is noticeably interested and says that it sounds astonishing. Titch says again that he always felt Wash was family, and he tried to be kind—he never thought he mistreated Wash.

Wash's resolution to gain some credit for Ocean House perhaps indicates that Wash is finally moving on from his fixation on the past, even if he knows that the past left a permanent mark on him. Whereas earlier, Wash felt like his work didn't truly bring him meaning because he didn't understand his past, now he recognizes how he can find belonging and pride in his work at Ocean House.

After some silence, Wash says that John Willard died and Wash attended the hanging. He says that he thought he saw Titch in the crowd, and Titch comments that it was perhaps his spirit. They briefly discuss Peter Haas and Robert Solander, and Titch explains their comments about how he looked: when he went to England, he had his luggage sent to Amsterdam, and so he only had old, ill-fitting clothes in England.

Solving the mystery of Titch's clothes—that they were older, and therefore too small—is also symbolic. It suggests that people who remain stuck on the past, such as both Titch and Wash, will always be ill at ease with themselves, never truly fitting in their own skin. They are trying to recreate a previous version of their life despite having grown in a way that makes the past unrepeatable, suggesting that trying to relive the past is futile.

Titch also returns to what happened in the Arctic. He says that in that moment, when he walked into that storm, he didn't feel like himself. He tries to explain that when he was younger, he, Erasmus, and Philip played together, but Erasmus and Titch always teased Philip—doing things like locking him in rooms or making him strip on a hike and walk home naked. Eventually they started beating him—Erasmus especially—and only stopped when Philip lost consciousness. He thinks that Erasmus's cruelty started with Philip.

Although Titch isn't fully able to connect the dots between his escape in the Arctic to his childhood bullying, it is clear that what he and Erasmus did to Philip still weighs heavily on him, and is one of the reasons that he wanted to travel away from the Arctic. This suggests that Titch, too, has been journeying in an effort to reconcile with his past mistakes.

Meanwhile, Titch never understood Philip. After he died, they learned many surprises about Philip—every month, he donated half his income to a ladies' society to establish a home for orphaned children. Meanwhile, he owed significant gambling debts, and he socialized but never had friends. Titch says he doesn't feel like he truly knew Philip.

Titch's revelations about Philip perhaps hint at some of the expectations Philip alluded to on the night he committed suicide—that despite his freedom, he felt confined by his melancholy and spent much of his life trying to make up for the trauma that he experienced at Titch and Erasmus's hands. This again shows how mental captivity—like Philip's relentless sadness—can be just as damaging as physical captivity.

Titch again comments how awful they were to Philip—one night, when Philip's father lay dying, Erasmus and Titch asked Philip to come out with them, because he had not left the man's bedside for weeks. He returned to his home drunk only to learn his father died while he was away. Titch goes on, saying that when he retrieved Philip's body from the field when he died, he realized that there must be more in the universe than just the physical properties of the world.

Here, Titch again emphasizes how he and Erasmus, despite the familial bond between them and Philip, caused Philip an immense amount of pain. He implies that his journey to Morocco—where he is exploring the world beyond its physical properties through his shadow grams—is an effort to make peace with his past failures and perhaps because he contributed to Philip's suicide.

Wash thinks about his years running after Philip's death, and about his existence before Titch's arrival. And it seems to him that slaves' lives never belonged to themselves, even when they tried to reclaim them by committing suicide.

As Titch thinks about Philip's suicide, Wash recognizes how Philip still had freedom where the slaves did not—they had no self-determination, especially when Erasmus deprived them of the ability to kill themselves. And the fact that Wash was still so restricted even after escaping—having to stay with Wash and constantly afraid of Willard—shows how so much of his life has been determined by captivity.

Titch asks if Wash is disgusted with what he did, and Wash says to Titch that it's hard to know the truth of any life, or of any other person's suffering. Titch counters that you can at least try not to worsen it. Wash then gets up and puts a hand on Titch's shoulder.

This moment represents a small reconciliation for Wash and Titch. Because even though Titch has hurt Wash deeply, Wash shows that he still cares about Titch like a family member. He seeks to comfort Titch even when there is a great deal of pain between them, reinforcing how families do involve both love and pain.

Titch and Wash sit like this for some moments until Wash takes his hand away, and Titch lies down in the corner. Titch falls asleep quickly while Wash listens to the rising wind, hearing sand click against the window panes. He is amazed to realize that Titch's guilt has nothing to do with Wash. Titch's wounds have rendered Titch a child, trying to recreate the years at Faith. Wash observes that Titch isn't making a home here, and that soon the young boy will be abandoned in some foreign place, just like Wash was.

Wash recognizes how much Titch has been haunted by his past. Like Wash, Titch has been unable to truly make a home for himself, and will someday abandon the boy in the same way that he abandoned Wash. Despite his attempts to make a new life in Morocco, Wash recognizes that this journey has simply led Titch to repeat his past.

Wash thinks he hears Tanna rising, but she never comes to the front room. At the window, Wash sees the dark sky completely empty, and unthinkingly, Wash goes out into the sandstorm. The wind is furious, tree branches whipping past the stone house. There is no trace of any human presence, and it is so cold that he expects to see his breath. The sand stings his eyes, and behind him, he hears Tanna call his name, but he can't take his gaze from the horizon, tinged orange from the sun about to rise. He takes a few steps forward, gripping himself and feeling the wind across his forehead.

In this final passage, Wash's journey into the sandstorm mirrors the moment when Titch walked out into the snowstorm in the Arctic. Tanna even calls after Wash, just as Wash called after Titch in the earlier incident. The ending is ambiguous: while the rising sun is a symbol of hope, Wash's motion towards the horizon suggests that he is still pursuing something unachievable—a horizon that he can never actually reach. In this way, the ending also suggests that both Wash and Titch may continue to be restless and unable to fully reconcile with the past, doomed to spend their lives avoiding it or repeating it.

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