

The Book of Harlan Study Guide

The Book of Harlan by Bernice L. McFadden

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: McFadden, Bernice L. *The Book of Harlan*. Akashic Books, 2016.

Told in past tense, the author introduces Emma Robinson's family as an affluent black family living in Macon, Georgia in the early 1900's. Her father, the Reverend Tenant Robinson presides over the Cotton Way Baptist Church which puts his status in a higher level category than manual laborers or day staff. The Robinson's lived in a Victorian cottage and used a buggy pulled by horses to travel. The author alluded to Emma having a lifestyle of want for nothing. A position unusual for blacks.

Emma Robinson is the only daughter of Reverend Tenant and Louisa Robinson, a natural-born pianist and the organist, since age seven, at her father's Cotton Way Baptist Church. Emma shared the church choir's spotlight with her best friend, Lucille Nelson, who had been singing to Emma's accompaniment since the age of seven and as an adult, became a famous blues singer. To Emma, Macon was not about the southern flowers or grand homes, instead the restless teenager saw a restricting, uneventful home town.

Sam Elliot, a carpenter, was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky and new to Macon. He saw Emma through the window of the barber shop. Sam asked the barber about her but learned she was the reverend's daughter and off limits. Sam pursued Emma, she noticed and liked him, they spent time together, she got pregnant and they married. Harlan Samuel Elliot was born on Christmas Eve, 1917. Harlan remained with his grandparents while his parents went off in search of the right place to settle.

Emma decided Harlem, New York City was the right place so they brought Harlan to settle into their new home. Emma spent her days doing anything it took to please Harlan. When he wanted to play the guitar, she paid for lessons. When he wanted to quit school to play guitar, she encouraged his musical talent. Harlan played on street corners with his good friend and neighbor, John Smith. Harlan went on tour with Emma's best friend, Lucille when he was 16.

While in a bar drinking, Harlan met a man he had never seen before. Harlan noticed a callous on the man's upper lip, a sign of a trumpet player, and started a conversation about music that lasted for years. Leo, other-wise-known as Lizard Robby was introduced to the music scene of Harlem that night.

Harlan and Lizard put their skills together added the essential players and a singer and became The Harlem World Band. They played some small gigs around the city and neighboring communities. The best gig they had landed came via a telegram when Eugene Bullard invited the band to Paris, France to play in his club, L'Escadrille in Montmartre. Harlan jumped at the opportunity but had to beg Lizard to go. The reason Eugene Bullard brought the group to France was to fill the void left by bands who



returned to America because of Germany's threat of war. The same reason Lizard did not want to go.

The Harlem World Band arrived in Paris and fell into the lifestyle of sleeping all day, performing at night and partying until daybreak, a cycle that suited Harlan perfectly. Their routine became disrupted when the Germans crossed into France. Americans in France rushed to get out of the country making tickets for passage difficult to come by. Harlan and his group remained performing up until four days before they were to leave for America. The clubs filled with German soldiers becoming an intimidation factor and forcing the band to leave. Harlan and Lizard headed to their room after drinks with some women, and were confronted by a group of soldiers who did not care for the casualness of Harlan's response. It was power versus anger and both guys were beaten to the ground, taken as prisoners and placed in custody at Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

In the barrack resting on the straw mattress Lizard remembered the journey that brought him to his present. Leo Benjamin Rubenstein was born to Jewish parents and grew up in St. Louis. He endured bullying from non--Jewish kids until he countered the bully's attack leaving the kid close to death and Lizard in reform school. While there, Lizard was drawn to the music he heard the black kids singing. He strayed away from the Jewish group of kids and befriended the group of blacks. His friendship deepened with Joe Brown and continued long after they were released. Joe and his family taught Lizard how to play the guitar, piano and the trumpet.

Treated as a member of the family, Lizard was transformed by the music and family bond of the Browns until Lizard's father arrived with a police officer to take him home. Mr. Brown gave Lizard his trumpet and Joe told him to stay black. Lizard moved to Kansas City to immerse himself into the music and learned he has the ability to think himself into who he wants to be. In Harlem, New York City at a bar near the room he had rented. Lizard accepted the greeting from a guy next to him and they he started talking music with a guy who knew Louis Armstrong.

At Buchenwald Lizard's Jewish identity was discovered when a guard noticed his circumcision. The star on his uniform categorized him and he was made to suffer a horrific death at the hands of Ilse Koch, the Bitch of Buchenwald.

Harlan's body returned from Germany but his mind was possessed by the horrendous events he witnessed the past five years. Harlan had a visit from a childhood friend, John Smith, planted the seed about God having a plan for him. This seed grew in Harlan and gave him the strength to confront the evil and destroy its grip on him.

In the end, Harlan accepted the freedom given him and came to know his purpose in the plan he inherited.



Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

In Chapter One the reader first learned about Emma, the youngest child, and only girl of Reverend Tenant and Louisa. Robinson in Macon Georgia. The Robinson family was considered to be advantaged because they were members of the black community who worked professional jobs compared to those who made a living as day workers in menial labor jobs. Emma grew up having all she needed including the natural ability to play the piano. Her father utilized her talent by making her his organist for the church choir since the age of seven. Lucille Nelson, Emma's best friend was the same age when her voice was added to the choir. By their teenage years, the religious songs weren't as appealing as the music that Pastor Robinson called sinful. Emma and Lucille snuck out to by the juke joint to listen to the blues being played.

In Chapter Two, Lucille returned from a seven-month singing tour after being discovered by the founder of the Leonard Harper Minstrel Stock Company while performing in a local musical. Emma noticed a matured Lucille when she returned from the tour. She wore makeup and experienced freedom from home and had met a man named Bill Hegamin. After an awkward reunion was behind them, Lucille told Emma about her travels and what it was like as a performer.

It was 1916 in Chapter Three when a carpenter from Louisville, Kentucky arrived in Macon. Sam Elliot was a quiet man with skin that looked like copper. He first noticed Emma from the barber shop when she walked past. The barber informed Sam that Emma was the reverend's daughter and wanted him to know that she was out of reach because her father was the reverend. Sam began to see Emma at different places around town and hoped it was a sign that he was meant to meet her. One Sunday morning he showed up at church and clumsily made his way to the front row near the choir. He knew he would be noticed by Emma as she played the organ. That night Sam struggled to sleep, he thought about his chances with Emma, he went to the river to think and became inspired by a memory of his mother that led him to his decision.

As Chapter Four opens, Sam had gained confidence and returned to church the following Sunday. After the service, Sam approached Emma and introduced himself. This heightened Emma's curiosity of who he was and she started asking about him in town. The following Sunday Sam didn't wait at the church to see Emma, but instead arranged to be outside when she and Lucille came out of the sweets shop with ice cream. He only acknowledged them in passing hoping to spike Emma's interest.

In Chapter Five Emma and Lucille began to spend time with Sam. As a Christian girl, Emma was only allowed to be in public with her brothers or her father, she could not take the chance of being seen in public with Sam. Lucille's reputation was already stained because she wore makeup and sang unacceptable music so she agreed to accompany Emma and Sam in public to make it appear as if Sam was after her. One



day while they were together, Lucille announced that she was moving to Chicago to marry Bill Hegamin. Emma became angry because without Lucille she would not be allowed to see Sam. The girls argued and Emma left. Lucille asked Sam if he was sure about Emma. Sam confirmed his certainty to Lucille.

Analysis

Reverend Tenant Robinson is a strong presence in his family and church community. He and his family live in a section of the city for affluent black people and it is important for Tenant and Louisa Robinson to keep an upstanding reputation. Ella knew her parents would be humiliated if she did not behave as they expected.

The author separated the within-race differences of upper class African-Americans who worked professional jobs, lived in a specific area of the city and in larger houses furnished with material goods versus the low-class African-Americans who worked in manual labor such as maids and carpenters and lived in apartments or communal housing.

Emma grew up in a privileged family, her family's house is a Victorian cottage and they have a dog, a cat and two lovebirds whose cage, the author likened to a crown. The family uses a horse-drawn buggy to travel and Emma's parents nurture her natural gift of playing the piano.

The author limits the information known on Lucille's background. Her mother, Minnie, is mentioned when she once questioned the type of song Lucille sang. Minnie and her husband agreed to allow Lucille to leave on a seven month singing tour with the Leonard Harper Minstrel Stock Company after being discovered during a community program where she sang. Emma was jealous that Lucille was given this opportunity to experience freedom.

Upon Lucille's return from the tour, Emma recognized a maturity in Lucille that came from her relationship with Bill Hegamin while on tour. Emma did not like that Lucille had changed and was upset when she saw Lucille was wearing makeup. Lucille let Emma know she was still her friend.

Emma was able to use Lucille to spend time with Sam, the carpenter from Louisville who fell for Emma upon first sight. Sam was told that because Emma was the daughter of the reverend that he should not pursue her. Despite their differences of class, Emma fell for Sam and got away with being with him as long as Lucille was with her. This is why Emma got mad when Lucille announced she was moving to Chicago to marry Bill. Emma thought she would no longer be able to see Sam with Lucille gone.

Discussion Question 1

Why was the music played at the juke joint considered sinful by Reverend Tenant?



Discussion Question 2

Why would the barber tell Sam that he would not have a chance with the reverend's daughter?

Discussion Question 3

How did Sam end up gaining Emma's interest?

Vocabulary

antebellum, angst, revered, gale, ragtime, inconspicuous, apparition, smitten, trolling, foraging, deliberate, garnering, confectionery



Chapters 6 - 9

Summary

In Chapter Six Emma begged her mother for permission to stay at Lucille's on the last night before she left for Chicago. The friends talked and promised to write. Emma left Lucille's house at midnight to go to Sam's rooming house, she feared this might be the last time she would see him. Inside Sam's room he gave her a soda and talked. Sam, nervous to express himself, told Emma that he really liked her. Sam said he wasn't good enough for her, Emma said he was fine. Sam asked her for a kiss that she graciously accepted. Their kissing intensified and they ended up in the bed and had sex. Sam comforted Emma after when he noticed she was crying. It wasn't that she regretted what they had done, she was afraid that people would find out what she had done. They promised to not tell anyone what had happened.

Chapter Seven starts with Emma telling her father that she was pregnant. Her father was outraged and wanted to send her away and give the baby up for adoption. Tenant had thought that Sam was Lucille's boyfriend since it was always Lucille, Sam and Emma who did things together. Louisa told the Reverend that the two wanted to marry and have the child together. The Reverend raised his voice at Sam and told him he was no good for his daughter, and called him just a carpenter (32). Sam calmly reminded the Reverend that Jesus was also a carpenter.

Emma and Sam got married in Chapter Eight. Her father officiated and the reception was held at the Robinson's home. Her mother used powder to cover the shine on Emma's face but regardless of the amount dusted and the number of times the Reverend distracted the guests from noticing, Emma's face emitted the glow of pregnancy. Emma and Sam lived as a married couple in her parent's house. The noise of the newly married making love came through the bedroom walls reminding Tenant and Louisa of what they dealt with when they were first married and had to share a small house with other couples who had worked in the fields with them.

In Chapter Nine, Emma announced to her parents that she and Sam were moving out of Macon to start their life in Washington DC. Louisa questioned their decision but Emma had it planned that Sam would get a job and she would make money giving piano lessons.

Analysis

McFadden emphasized the theme of status in this section when Sam and Emma were finally alone to express their feelings to one another. Sam told Emma he liked her. He knew that he would not be a match for Emma's upper class family seeing himself as low class and thought that Emma knew he was not good enough. The truth was that Emma saw Sam as no different from other men, Emma liked Sam and did not consider if he



was rich or not. She did not look at what his work was. It was Sam who was concerned with how he would be viewed by her father, the Reverend. Sam and Emma allowed their feelings to lead to having sex. It wasn't until afterwards that Emma feared of being found out.

Tenant was enraged with the fact that Emma was pregnant and that she wanted to marry Sam. Tenant made it clear that Sam was not worthy of his daughter. Tenant did not like that Sam was a low-class black man and would rather send his daughter away from home and give up his grandchild to adoption than be discovered by others that his daughter was having a baby out of wedlock with a man who was only a carpenter. Tenant understood what being poor was like. He and Louisa had worked as sharecroppers for a living and shared housing with other families before they were blessed with wealth. Tenant did not want his daughter to live without and his anger seemed to cloud his Christian beliefs because he called Sam "just a carpenter"(32). Sam was calm through the rant and his response to the Reverend was a gentle reminder that Jesus was also a carpenter.

The Reverend conducted the marriage ceremony and he and Louisa hosted the wedding reception at their home. Tenant and Louisa worked hard to distract the guests from any signs that Emma was pregnant. They had a large amount of food and flowers throughout the house, Louisa used powder to cover Emma's face and Tenant kept acknowledging Emma's glow of happiness. The women guests could tell that Emma's shine was because of being pregnant.

Emma still had a goal to leave Macon especially since Lucille's letters were filled with plans of her and Bill's success and their impending move to California. Emma's response included her and Sam's plan to move somewhere north of Georgia. Emma made these plans real by announcing to her parents her plan for moving to Washington DC after the baby was born. Emma had the need to move away to be free from Macon.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Sam think he was not good enough for Emma?

Discussion Question 2

Besides wanting things to be nice for their daughter's wedding, why did Tenant and Louisa want the reception to be at their house?

Discussion Question 3

What was Emma's motivation for leaving Macon?

Vocabulary

presumptuous, sharecropper, chattel



Chapter 10 - 14

Summary

It was Christmas Eve of 1917 in Chapter Ten when Emma gave birth to a boy on the floor of the parlor. They named him Harlan, after Sam's father. The author noted that Harlan's eyes stayed closed for two months as if he was avoiding his new world. The doctor told Emma he did that because he was lazy.

Spring had arrived in Chapter 11 and Emma announced to her mother that they were preparing to leave Macon. Louisa questioned Emma's plan to take the baby with them. Emma was offended that her mother would think that she and Sam were unable to care for Harlan. Louisa countered Emma's defensiveness by complimenting her on being good parents. Louisa built the case that it would be better for Harlan to remain in a stable environment until they get settled. Sam and Emma had planned to move to Washington DC to stay with an uncle of Sam's. Emma did not know how the uncle would take to a baby moving in. Emma decided she would let Sam decide if Harlan would stay with Louisa and Tenant or go with them. In May Sam and Emma boarded the train for Washington DC and Louisa transformed Emma's bedroom from pink to blue for Harlan.

In Chapter 12 Emma found a cabaret in need of a piano player. With her experience playing piano Emma was confident she would get the job. When she sat at the piano she could not think of any song she knew how to play. She went to seven other places and the same thing happened each time. She was unable to play. Emma gave up and wanted to move again. But the same happened in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Sam comforted Emma telling her that she played piano in the church and the clubs were considered of the Devil. Sam and Emma went to Macon for the holidays and Harlan's birthday. Emma refused to play the organ at the Christmas service when Tenant asked. She was angry at God for taking her talent away. She gave up on God.

Chapter 13 begins with Emma telling her father the next place she and Sam chose to start again was Louisville, Kentucky where Sam is from. Emma was upset that Harlan cries when she tries to hold him or reaches out to pick him up. Louisa is the mother figure he was attached with. Louisa informed Emma that she had Harlan's bag packed to go with them to Kentucky but Emma said that Harlan should stay home because there wasn't room for him in the place they were staying. Sam had noticed Emma's hesitancy around Harlan and asked Emma if she loved their son. Emma was offended with his asking that question. Sam told her how much he wanted Harlan with them and Emma said that she thought it best for him to stay with her parents because she loved him so much. Louisa was glad to keep Harlan, but she did not want Emma to know her excitement.

In Chapter 14 they moved on to Grand Rapids, Michigan from Louisville after only six weeks. They arrived in Grand Rapids in the winter and experienced the cold and snow



of Michigan. Emma's emotions followed the seasons of the year. She was happy in the warm seasons and sad during the cold. Emma gave piano lessons to some African American children but after the first few lessons her students stopped paying and she wasn't able to make much money. Emma would walk the streets of the city seeking the white women with children and offered piano lessons to them. The women either laughed or threw her contact information away. Sam's job provided enough for them to live off of until he got sick and was no longer able to work. They needed money for the rent, food and Sam's medicine so Emma went in search of a job. She went to the shops and diners who advertised jobs but was either ignored or turned away. At one of the businesses she was turned away because they only hired African Americans for certain jobs. Emma had no choice but to take a job cleaning for white people. She told Sam she was, "raised in silk and now living in burlap"(50). Sam offered to return to Macon but Emma declined. The author provided information on the successful careers of Emma's brothers and how Lucille was the second female blues singer in history. Emma and Sam stayed in Grand Rapids for two more years until a family emergency forced them back.

Analysis

Emma was concerned there was something wrong with Harlan because he didn't open until he was two months old. The author speculated that Harlan kept his eyes closed because he knew how his life was going to turn out. This event foreshadows Harlan's future. Would there be a time in his life when he needs to not see? Or when he needed to be in the dark.

Emma's goal to move away from Macon came to be. She and Sam moved to Washington DC to stay with Sam's uncle. They were going to bring Harlan but Louisa thought it was best if he stayed with her and Tenant until they could get settled. Emma thought her mother meant that she and Sam were not able to take care of their child. This could be what Louisa and Tenant thought but it was necessary that Emma and Sam had a place to live and work before bringing the baby there.

Emma went in search of a job playing piano in a cabaret. She auditioned at a place in need of a pianist but when Emma could not remember any song. She gave up the auditions when she went from one place to another and had the same problem. Sam called it stage fright. Since she was a young girl her father preached about how the jukeboxes were places of the devil and the music played there was sinful. When Emma and Sam returned home to Macon at Christmas she refused to play the organ for her father at the service. Emma had decided that God took her talent away and she kept God out of her life from that time on. Emma's decision about God was against everything she grew up believing. It was her father's job in the church that gave her everything she wanted as a child. She and Lucille were best friends because of the church choir. Sam first noticed her in church.

Emma had a difficult time attaching to Harlan the first time she returned home to him. He cried if she tried to hold him or reach for him. Sam wondered if she loved Harlan because of her avoidance of him and the fact that she still wanted him to stay with her



parents when they left again. Harlan would sit comfortably with Sam and he wanted Harlan to go with them this time. Emma made up an excuse about not having anyone to watch him if she were to get a job playing piano at a club. Sam knew Emma had no chance of getting a job playing piano but agreed to keep Harlan in Macon with Louisa and Tenant. Louisa was thrilled that he was staying but did not want Emma to know her joy. Louisa needed Emma to know that Harlan was her son and he would one day go to live with them.

Emma and Sam's next home was Grand Rapids, Michigan. Sam got work in a furniture factory while Emma tried to find children to give piano lessons. Emma wanted to get white mothers to allow her to teach their children but was laughed at her or teased by them. Emma knew the whites had money to pay for lessons but none of them would have their child be taught by a black person.

Sam's pay was enough to keep their apartment paid and food for them but when he became sick they were at risk of losing everything and rather than ask her father for money, Emma got a job. Emma had to take a job reserved for blacks, she started cleaning white people's houses. Emma was ashamed of who she turned into. Her bothers were successful, one was a teacher and the other two were preachers. She also knew that Lucille had made a record which made her very rich. Emma cried about her situation.

Discussion Question 1

What was the reason Emma could not play the piano in the audition at the cabaret?

Discussion Question 2

In what way did Emma react to her failure?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Emma ashamed to work as a house cleaner?

Vocabulary

languid, waylaying



Chapter 15 - 19

Summary

In Chapter 15, Reverend Tenant had spent the day visiting members of his congregation who were sick at home. He was in a good mood when he got home. He went about his usual routine of taking off his favorite brown shoes and put on his slippers. He ate dinner and spent time with Harlan before listening to a funny radio show. Tenant went up to bed after Louisa woke him from sleeping in his chair. Louisa finished sewing and when she got to the bedroom Tenant was snoring. At three a.m. Louisa startled awake noticing that Tenant was no longer snoring. She checked him to find that he had died that night in his sleep.

Harlan did not recognize his parents in Chapter 16 when they arrived at the house upon learning of Tenant's death. He greeted them in the same manner as all the guests by introducing himself. Emma had not recognized Harlan at first because it had been a couple of years since she was back in Macon. Emma told Harlan that she was his mother and introduced Sam as his father. He did not react but led them to his grandmother as he had all guests who visited to offer their condolences to Louisa. Reverend Tenant Robinson's funeral was in the newspaper as not only the largest black funeral but the most imposing funeral ever in Macon. Louisa was grief-stricken and remained in her bed. Harlan brought his things in to sleep on the floor next to her bed. He didn't pay much attention to Emma and Sam, they were just visitors to him. Emma took offense to Harlan's distance with her. She told Sam that Harlan hated her and he excused it as being a part of the grief they were all feeling. Anytime that Emma addressed Harlan he answered by saying, "yes, ma'am" (54). Emma yelled at him that she was his mother not his ma'am.

In Chapter 17, Louisa got out of bed and dressed in black clothing to indicate she was in mourning. Emma and Sam was packed to leave the next day but Louisa said Tenant's will was going to be read on Friday and they needed to stay. Emma and her brothers did not know that their father had the type of assets that the lawyer had listed and their father's wishes was to sell most everything and divide it amongst the siblings. Emma and Sam stayed in Macon until they received their money before leaving to New York City to visit Lucille.

Chapter 18 takes place in Harlem, New York where Lucille and Bill had moved. Lucille was a famous singer and owned a big home in Harlem. Her family from Macon was living with them and there was still room for Emma and Sam to stay. At first Emma admired Lucille's success but then she felt unworthy of herself and then jealous of Lucille. Lucille hosted a party in honor of Emma and Sam which was attended by Lucille's popular jazz and blues singer friends. Emma was in awe of the celebrities she met and came to her party. Emma told Sam that she wanted to live in Harlem.



Emma and Sam returned to Macon in Chapter 19. They wore expensive clothes when they arrived at the house, this made Louisa suspicious that Emma had spent all the money that her father had willed to her. Harlan hesitantly greeted his parents. The conversation was awkward as Emma brought Louisa up-to-date on what they have done and their plans for moving to Harlem. Emma shared information about the house they bought and that it had a bedroom for Harlan. Harlan responded with anger. He cried out that he hated them and was not going anywhere. Sam grabbed Harlan by his collar and angrily demanded he get up. Louisa held Harlan in her arms, she told him he has to behave how she and Tenant raised him. Louisa told Harlan that she would miss him.

Analysis

The Reverend got home to his usual routine of changing out of his brown shoes and enjoying his evening with Harlan and Louisa. It was during his sleep that night that Tenant Robinson died in 1922. According to the newspaper, the reverend's funeral brought out the largest number of black people that Macon, Georgia had experienced. It was reported that the crowd had imposed on the city, meaning the presence of the crowd of blacks was a nuisance to the whites of the city. This indicated the Reverend's popularity within his church community but it also identified the definite separation of race that existed. A large gathering of mourners were referred to as imposing on the same city where both groups lived. It was as if the blacks were supposed to ask the whites if they could have access to Macon on the day of the Reverend's funeral.

Louisa grieved in bed for five days after the death of her husband. Her four sons, their wives, Emma and Sam tried to comfort her. Harlan stayed on the floor of her bedroom in an effort to find his own comfort since he wasn't familiar enough with his parents to seek it from them. Harlan did not see his mother as more than a visitor and responded to her as ma'am whenever she called for him. Emma became angry because he would not acknowledge her as his mother and one day she got in his face and yelled that she was his mother. Harlan did not want his parents there and was happy when he heard them telling Louisa their plans to leave. Harlan loved and respected his grandparents, they were the ones who were there for him.

Seeing Lucille's success bothered Emma because she thought she was as talented on the piano as Lucille was with her voice. Emma had everything to end up rich like Lucille but she made the choice to follow her heart and ended up as Lucille's guest in the large home instead of the owner. There was a different time in the novel when Emma was jealous of Lucille, as teenagers when Lucille was discovered while singing and went on a seven month tour where she got to experience freedom away from home. At that time Emma longed for the freedom that Lucille gained. In Harlem, Emma saw Lucille's glamorous life and saw herself as inferior. Lucille didn't see Emma as that, instead she welcomed Emma by having a party in her honor.

Nine months after Emma collected her inheritance from her father's will, she and Sam returned to take Harlan to New York where they were ready to settle down. As Emma



described their home and spoke of Harlan's bedroom, Harlan became angry and refused to go with them. He said he hated them and clung to Louisa. Sam took control as the father and took Harlan by the collar and yelled at him to get his "black ass up off the floor" (63).

Discussion Question 1

What is meant by the comment in the newspaper that the Reverend's funeral was the most imposing funeral ever in Macon?

Discussion Question 2

In what way does Harlan fit into Emma's life in Chapter 17?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the other times when Emma was jealous of Lucille?

Vocabulary

jovial, incensed, swooning



Chapters 20 - 24

Summary

In Chapter 20 Harlan is exposed to the different types of people in New York City as he and Emma and Sam get settled into their new home in Harlem. The home was a three-story row house, the top floor was rented to Mayemma Smith with her two children, John and Darlene. Mayemma and John's skin was a lighter tone of brown than Darlene's whose skin was dark brown.

Harlan gets settled into his new neighborhood and school in Chapter 21. His personality and polite manners made him well liked and easily welcomed by teachers, the neighborhood children and their parents. Harlan was not a good student but the teachers passed him based on his being liked by them. Emma felt guilty for missing out on his early years and did not discipline Harlan and even threatened Sam if he said or did anything to Harlan for bad behavior. When Harlan was 11 years old, he got into trouble when he took Bill Hegamin's car for a drive as his parents visited with Bill and Lucille at their home Harlan searched for something to do and ended up taking Bill's car for a drive. He crashed into a police car and was taken to jail.

It was several hours later when Harlan was missed by the adults. They went through the neighborhood and with no sign of him, Emma and Sam went to check at the hospital. No one matching Harlan's description hadn't been admitted so they were led to check the morgue. Emma could not bear to see what would be uncovered, Sam had to make the call as the first three bodies were revealed. None were Harlan. There was one more body to be revealed and Emma needed to take a moment to prepare. When the last body was uncovered, Sam began to sob causing Emma to open her eyes and immediately fainted at the sight.

The truth was discovered in Chapter 22. Lucille and Bill learned what happened at the police department when they went to report their stolen car. It was fortunate for Harlan that Lucille was a celebrity and the police chief frequented her dinner parties, Harlan was released to her and Bill with no bail, charges or fees. Lucille took him by his earlobe and Bill took off his belt when Emma and Sam arrived at the station relieved to see him. Bill pulled Sam aside to talk and Lucille told Emma that Harlan had taken and crashed the car.

They walked home in silence In Chapter 23 and Emma and Sam's anger reached a heightened state. Emma was forced to discipline Harlan this time. She burst into Harlan's room flailing one of Sam's belts. She chased him around his room and down the hallway making contact with the belt. Harlan escaped further lashes by locking himself into the bathroom. Emma collapsed to the floor sobbing at the sounds of Harlan's cries. She never beat him again.



Lucille and Bill talk about Emma and Sam's parenting of Harlan in Chapter 24. They claim Harlan needs religion in his life and the music he listens to shouldn't be allowed. They suspect that Harlan will face a lot of trouble if Emma and Sam refused to beat him to behave. Bill described Harlan as acting like he knew everything without knowing anything. The author added the fact that Harlan was good at getting his mother to give him money, and identified how this skill of manipulation was later used to get girls to let him in their pants. Harlan also knew how to play the guitar.

Analysis

The first time Harlan was on his own with his mother and father was at their new home in Harlem, New York City. Emma was lenient on Harlan because she felt guilty of not being there as a mother for him and she wanted him to like her. Sam thought it was necessary to discipline the boy but stayed back when Emma threatened to divorce him if he touched Harlan.

Harlan easily adapted to his new surroundings and knew that his mother wouldn't discipline him for bad behavior. The one time that Emma did hit him was after he drove off in Bill's car and crashed it into a police car. Harlan was at the local jail where Lucille and Bill found out what had happened to Bill's car. Lucille's celebrity status in Harlem helped Harlan get out of jail with no money spent or record of the event. Emma and Sam learned the reality of being parents as they searched for Harlan in the neighborhood, the hospital and the morgue. They were forced to look at the unidentified teenage boys in the morgue. By the time Emma and Sam got to the police department they ran into Lucille and Bill leaving with Harlan. Emma embraced her son grateful to find him. Her joy turned into anger when she found out what he had done. Bill explained everything to Sam who never knew how angry he could get until that moment.

His parents would not speak to Harlan which was agonizing for him. At home, Emma came after him flailing a belt at him. She chased him around his bedroom, down the hall and through the apartment whipping him with the belt. Harlan escaped further lashings by locking himself into the bathroom. His cries got to Emma who broke down crying. She would never hit her son again. At first Sam was glad that Emma saw to Harlan's discipline but hearing the boys' screams from outside on the front steps, Sam felt bad that his son received the beating. Emma and Sam could have felt guilty not knowing their son was gone while they socialized with their friends, they did not notice that Harlan was missing for three hours, they faced reality when forced to view the faces of deceased boys in the morgue and yet Emma had taken a belt to him in her anger.

Bill and Lucille spoke of Harlan's lack of discipline as being the reason he had stolen Bill's car and crashed it. They thought the child needed religion in his life. They blamed his parents for allowing him to listen to the popular music, which including the songs that Lucille sang. Bill said Harlan reminded him of a nephew of his, a kid who was acted as if he knew everything but in reality did not know anything. The author informed the reader of the things that Harlan was good at; manipulating his mother out of money by



begging for it just as he would do when he was older begging girls to allow him to get in bed with them. The author also indicated that he was good at playing the guitar.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Harlan take advantage of his mother?

Discussion Question 2

What about Harlan's being gone help Emma and Sam learn about being parents?

Discussion Question 3

What does Lucille and Bill say Harlan needs?

Vocabulary

resplendent, harlot, repugnant, raging, superfluous



Chapters 25 - 27

Summary

In Chapter 25, Harlan dropped out of school. Sam had hoped it would be his son who would be the first of his family to graduate from high school. Sam was forced to quit school in the fifth grade so he could work and support his siblings. Emma allowed Harlan to drop out of school and encouraged him to pursue music. Harlan tried playing the piano but didn't have the passion for it. His neighbor, John, was learning the trumpet so Harlan tried the trumpet but he struggled with having enough air. Harlan found an old guitar in the music room at school, he had found his instrument of choice. Emma bought him a new guitar and paid for lessons for him. Emma was not concerned with the amount of money it cost for his lessons, it only mattered that Harlan was happy. Playing the guitar made him smile.

In Chapter 26, Harlan and John paired up with their instruments and played on the street corners collecting money in a cigar box on the ground. The two boys performed, practiced and played together forming a strong friendship between them. While John and Harlan hung out together, Darlene became obsessed with lighting matches. Emma caught her dropping lit matches out of her upstairs window. Emma told Mayemma there was something wrong with the girl. What the two moms didn't know is how Darlene got hooked on lighting matches. It was because of Mayemma's ex-boyfriend who held Darlene on his lap and fondled her. He told her she was beautiful which she loved hearing. He would light a match and have her look at the pretty flame and tell her that she was more beautiful than the flame. Darlene liked his attention and when he left without any notice she found a packet of his matches to remember him by.

One of the times John and Harlan were hanging out in John's room, Harlan opened the bedroom door to find Darlene outside the door as if she were spying on them. Darlene blocked Harlan from leaving the apartment until she showed him something. Harlan said he would see what she wanted to show him. Darlene told the boys to sit in the living room, she turned music on and told them she would not be back. Harlan questioned John on what Darlene had said, John did not know and they continued to enjoy the song which was blaring loud from the phonograph. Harlan turned the volume down and heard a high-pitched terrible scream. Harlan took off running through the apartment calling Darlene's name. Smoke came out from under the bathroom door but it was too hot to touch. Sam appeared and knocked the door down. They found Darlene burned up and in shock in the bathtub. Darlene suffered in the hospital before she finally passed away.

Chapter 27 is a narration of two ladies Lenora and Josephine discussing Darlene's funeral service, her troubled mind, and the gathering after the service at the Elliott's. The women complimented Emma's food and spoke of Mayemma's pain and John's horn playing outside afterwards. Josephine explained how and where Darlene had lit herself on fire, dispelling the false rumors. The ladies talked about how Emma and Harlan's



difficulty dealing with having seen it happening. Harlan had been having nightmares. They said Mayemma and John moved to New Jersey and Emma stopped the Saturday night parties for the time.

Analysis

Harlan dropped out of school to pursue music. He learned to play the guitar using one he found in the music room at school. Emma encouraged Harlan's decision and paid for private lessons. Emma only wanted Harlan to be happy and did not care how much money she spent.

Emma had caught Darlene dropping lit matches out of the upstairs window and told Mayemma that something was not right with the girl. Darlene got teased by girls at school because of her unusual dark skin. Darlene only felt good when Mayemma's boyfriend, Will, paid attention to her and told her she was beautiful, he would fondle Darlene between her legs and blow on her neck and tell her how great she was. He lit matches and told her she was more beautiful than the flame of the match. Will's words countered the mean things the girls at school said to her but the effects of Will's behavior seeped out of her as angry outbursts and fits of crying that her mother blamed on her age. Darlene was sexually abused by Will which caused her to have the anger fits and peculiar behavior. With Will being gone Darlene did not receive the type of attention she wanted.

Harlan and John became good friends and spent a lot of time together. They performed music on street corners and were proud of seeing people respond to their playing. Harlan was at their apartment when Darlene had blocked Harlan from leaving out of the door and begged him to look at something. Darlene put the song called Flamin' Mamie on the phonograph and said she would not be back. Harlan turned the volume of the music down and heard Darlene's screaming. Sam ran in and broke the door down to see Darlene on fire in the bathtub. The song Darlene played on the phonograph had words about; being on fire, human oven and heart scorcher. Darlene eventually died as a result of the severe burns.

McFadden added a chapter narrated by two women, Lenora and Josephine. This chapter offered a first person perspective of Darlene's funeral and the gathering at Emma and Sam's. The discussion between the women gave the reader a first person's view of what had happened. The reader learned about the closed casket and that Darlene poured grease over her body before she lit the match. While at the dinner at Emma and Sam's the woman snuck up to the apartment and said there was a bad stench in the apartment and the bathroom tiles were covered in black. The witness spoke of Harlan's bad dreams and that Mayemma and John had moved to New Jersey two days after the funeral.

Discussion Question 1

What was it that Darlene needed from the adults in her life?



Discussion Question 2

How did Harlan know to go to the bathroom after Darlene?

Discussion Question 3

Who were Lenore and Josephine in Chapter 27?

Vocabulary

ironic, bewitched, denigration, adulation, languished, repast, hiatus



Chapters 28 - 32

Summary

In Chapter 28, Lucille told Emma that she was considering going to nursing school because she saw herself as coming to the end of her career and she had to work at something other than as a house cleaner. Lucille faced the facts that her type of music would not be popular much longer and was looking at her future including moving out of her house. The two friends shared memories and tears as they knew they had to move forward. Lucille's schedule was booked for the next six months which included her final tour which she asked Emma if Harlan would want to go. Emma agreed with Lucille that he was ready to go on a tour.

In Chapter 29 Harlan was on tour with Lucille and her band. Cecil, the drummer, noticed Harlan's fear when they reached their first concert. Cecil gave Harlan some corn whiskey to help calm him down. The whiskey calmed him but made him feel and play awful. For the next concert Harlan did not drink and his performance was praised by Cecil who offered him a joint to smoke. Harlan smoked along with Cecil and another band member. Harlan also learned that being Black down south meant that they could only enter the establishments that allowed Blacks in.

In Chapter 30, Harlan wanted more weed from Cecil but this time he had to pay. Harlan was playing great and he slept without nightmares of Darlene. The band stayed at a friend of Lucille's when they reached Mobile, Alabama. Lucille said they were white liberals and were not like other white people. At three in the morning Cecil brought a woman into Harlan to show him her blue eyes. Cecil said he brought her up there for Harlan, who when he woke in the morning thought she was a dream.

Harlan returned from tour in Chapter 31, and Emma saw in his face the same she had seen years ago in Lucille when she returned for the first time. The innocence of her son was gone. Harlan did not pick up on Emma's disappointment as he greeted her with a kiss. Harlan talked all about his experience during dinner. Emma acted distant from Harlan and became angry with him when she caught him smoking a joint in his bedroom. The next day she and Harlan continued their argument, Harlan tried to tell her that smoking weed was not a big thing and he offended her by downplaying her musical ability by saying she was not a real musician.

It is four years after the tour in Chapter 32, Harlan had spent those years drinking, smoking weed and sleeping around. He had played in Lucille's band since the tour but only because of Lucille's love for Emma. This time Lucille sent him away when he showed up late and drunk again. Harlan disrespectfully waved her off acting as if she did not matter to him but Lucille started after him yelling for him to get out. Harlan is surprised and thinks she is kidding with him but a member of the band held Lucille back and told Harlan to get out of there. Harlan looked at the others hoping someone would speak up for him but no one offered. Harlan spent the day in bars drinking and gambling



and speaking bad about Lucille. Somewhere along the line, he lost his guitar. He did not know if it was stolen or if he gambled it away. He was so drunk when he got home he could not get his key to unlock the door so he slept on the step until Sam got home from work and dragged him inside. Emma came from the bedroom concerned about Harlan, Sam assured her he was just drunk. Emma's eyes were puffy from crying, she told Sam that Bessie Smith, the number one singer of blues, had died.

Analysis

Harlan started playing guitar with Lucille's band at age 16 where Harlan was introduced to alcohol, weed and women. Cecil gave Harlan some corn whiskey to drink before the first concert. Harlan got hooked on the weed that Cecil gave him and played strong with the weed and it helped him sleep without having nightmares of Darlene.

It was during this trip down south that Harlan learned about the Jim Crow Laws. Harlan was used to Harlem where the city was made up of blacks. It was different in the south, the facilities were separated, they could not go into certain restaurants or sleep in certain hotels. The band slept several nights on the bus because the hotels denied access to the blacks.

Lucille had wealthy white friends in Mobile, Alabama who were not the usual kind of white people. Lucille called them free-thinkers because they were liberal and did not believe in the division of black and white people. They allowed the band into their home and were given a big meal, cognac and conversation outside after. Harlan was asleep when Cecil burst into the bedroom with a woman. Cecil had already introduced Harlan to drinking and drugs, now he had a woman for him. This woman was black-skinned with blue eyes. Cecil laughed at the sight of her eyes, he brought her to Harlan to see. Harlan's roommate, Craig, yelled at Cecil to get out saying Harlan was too young and that it was black people like Cecil who gave whites a bad image of them. Craig was the voice of reason but Cecil would listen. The woman ended up staying and Harlan thought he had part of a good dream but he learned it was true when he saw the woman's blue panties she left for him on his pillow.

Emma saw this on her son's face when he arrived home from the tour. Just as when Lucille came home after touring years ago, Harlan had tasted the freedom and emerged from the bus a different person. Harlan tried to win over his mother when he approached her but she knew better. She was angry she lost her little boy and she responded with a cold shoulder towards him. Emma's anger escalated when she saw that he was smoking weed in the apartment and the next day she started on him again when she woke him up after sleeping most of the day. Harlan told her that smoking weed was no big deal and all of the musicians smoked. When Emma said she had never, he said she was only a piano teacher hitting Emma hard. He tried to take it back but she would not have it. Harlan's new attitude put a big distance between him and his mother. He thought he could treat everyone the way he wanted and expected them to allow him.



When Harlan took advantage of Lucille's relationship with his mother, by showing up late to practices and being drunk or high when he was there, Lucille was through with him and the next time he showed up late and could barely walk from being so drunk, Lucille told him to leave. He thought it was because he owed her money so he paid his debt but she told him to get out and when he waved his arm at her in a dismissive way she went charging at him. Lucille told him he was fired and he looked at the others but when no one tried to defend him, he left and spoke bad of Lucille everywhere he went. Harlan had no purpose at this point. He could no longer treat those he loved as he wished, he felt both his mother and Lucille's rejection for the first time.

Discussion Question 1

Other than drinking, smoking weed and sleeping with women, what other experiences matured him?

Discussion Question 2

What caused Emma's anger toward Harlan when he returned from the tour?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways did Harlan take advantage of his mother's relationship with Lucille?

Vocabulary

entourage, ravenous, verandah, regaled, sated, tersely



Chapters 33 - 36

Summary

In Chapter 33 McFadden introduced Ethel. Ethel looked at the newspaper headline about Bessie Smith's death not interested in the news, she moved it aside and called for her daughter, Gwen. Ethel was making breakfast as she recalled that it had been ten years since she and her family came from Barbados. She remembered being on the ship with her two daughters waving at the people on the shore. Her children were too young to understand the reason for her being sad about leaving her home. The voyage took two weeks to reach New York City, she recalled the cold weather upon their arrival and that Gwen was only four years old.

In Chapter 34, Aubrey Gill wore his best suit to meet his wife and daughters at Ellis Island when their ship arrived. Aubrey had left Barbados for America when Gwen was an infant, but Irene, his older daughter, remembered her Daddy when she saw him. They lived in an apartment in Brooklyn, a one family apartment divided into three rooms with a bathroom that had running water. Ethel was not pleased with the living space but having running water was a luxury for her. Their room was in the middle with a family from Trinidad on one side and Haiti on the other. Men came from the small countries to earn money. Aubrey had sent for his wife and children unlike some men who left their family behind and never went back or sent for them. Ethel's mother had told her to be grateful and accept everything he provided her. Ethel remembered her mother's words as she inspected the room that was now their home. Aubrey and Ethel had moved twice since she first arrived with the children. Each place was an improvement over the last. At 14, Gwen had no memory of living in Barbados, the trip over or their first apartments, she considered herself American.

In Chapter 35, Ethel opened the notice from Gwen's dance school that announced Gwen's opportunity to dance in a recital at Carnegie Hall. On Saturdays Gwen rode the train with a group of girls from Brooklyn to get to the Mary Bruce School of Dance in Harlem where she learned tap dancing. Ethel was proud of her daughter's achievement.

In Chapter 36, Mary Bruce brought real musicians in to perform the music that the girls would be dancing to in Carnegie Hall. Gwen had two additional practices a week plus she was supposed to practice any other times she could to be ready for the recital. Ethel would not let Gwen practice her tap dancing in the apartment because it would be too loud for their white neighbors who would end up reporting her to the landlord which could put Aubrey's job at risk. Gwen found a playground with 17 stone steps that was perfect for her to practice. Ethel noticed that Gwen's legs and thighs had thickened with all of the practice. She was forming curves that started to get looks and comments from guys. Mentally she was a young girl but her body had developed into that of an older teenager. Her age did not matter to Harlan or the other boys in the band.



Analysis

McFadden introduced Ethel and Aubrey Gill and their daughters Gwen and Irene. Aubrey traveled from Barbados to New York City ten years prior to get work and settled enough to send for Ethel and his daughters. Ethel recalled the day she and her daughters left Barbados for New York, it took two weeks before they reunited with Aubrey at Ellis Island and their new home in Brooklyn. Ethel did not like the first place they lived. They had one room for all of them and shared a kitchen and bathroom with two other families, one from Trinidad and the other from Haiti. Ethel did not like the people from either of those places.

The first apartment was temporary until they could afford something better. They moved into different places upgrading each time. The family often reminisced about Barbados, their past apartments in New York and the trip from Barbados but Gwen claimed she had no memory of these times. Gwen owned her American roots and although aware of her West Indies beginnings, she identified best as an American.

Gwen attended the Mary Bruce School of Dance in Harlem to learn tap dancing. Each Saturday she took the train to Harlem with a group of girls from Brooklyn for her lessons. Gwen was selected to dance in the Star Bud Recital at Carnegie Hall required her to increase the number of practices she had to attend. The girls had to practice with live music so Mary Bruce hired musicians to perform for the practices to help them get used to dancing to the live music. Harlan was one of the musicians.

With all of the practicing, Gwen's legs and behind were developing. Her body was more developed than her older sister's. It did not matter to men that a girl's mental maturity and physical development did not match because most men, including Harlan, only cared about the maturity of a girl's body. This is what the musicians talked about during the breaks at the dance studio.

Discussion Question 1

Why did it take ten years for Aubrey to bring his family to America?

Discussion Question 2

What was Gwen's reason for preferring to identify herself as American rather than from the West Indies?

Discussion Question 3

What made Gwen more noticeable to the guys?

Vocabulary

replica, melodious, lanky



Chapters 37 - 40

Summary

In Chapter 37 Gwen noticed Harlan watching her and since she was not a shy girl, she liked being seen and provoked his attention. Gwen exaggerated her movements to emphasize her features. Harlan heard her accent and was not pleased that she was West Indian. He thought those girls saw themselves in a higher class than black Americans who would be referred to by West Indian girls in the same manner that whites did; less than human. But in America he claimed that black was black and whites treated one as poorly as the next. Harlan kept an eye on Gwen and by the third practice he started talking nice and praising her. He had set his mind on her and despite what the other guys said, about her being "a coconut" (121).

The day of the recital arrived in Chapter 38. Ethel, Aubrey and Irene sat in the crowd waiting for Gwen's routine to start. Gwen became impatient through the different acts, waiting for Gwen to come out. Ethel disrupted the people around her when she questioned Irene about Gwen's turn. Irene was embarrassed by Ethel as she tried to teach her how to act in the theater. Before Gwen came out to perform she felt bad pain in her right toe. She was nervous and ran through a list of things in her mind that she thought would go wrong during her performance.

In Chapter 39, Gwen had recently graduated from High School. She went to Coney Island with her friends and rode the rollercoaster trying to recreate the sensation in their stomachs as the coaster went down over the humps of the tracks. They had no name for that sensation but she and her friends knew it was the same type of feeling they tried to bring about late in the night by rubbing and poking their fingers between their legs. The effort for the feeling was worth it when it came because it was better than the sensation of the rollercoaster.

She and her friends searched for coins on the boardwalk once they ran out of money. Her friends warned Gwen that it was bad luck to pick up the coins that were face down. Gwen did not agree and picked them up. Her friends had warned her and the author predicted that Gwen would find out for herself.

Gwen had forgotten about Harlan since she had not seen him since the last rehearsal when he had walked her to the subway and tried to get her phone number. She had told him before that she did not have a phone and she reminded him that she would not have given him the number if she had one. Harlan said he would not be at the performance because the band at Carnegie would be playing the music, Gwen tried not to look disappointed.

It is October 30, 1938 in Chapter 40. Music had come on the radio, Gwen grabbed Irene and they broke into a tango. Soft music played during dinner until an announcement broke in. The newscaster announced there had been an explosion on the planet Mars.



The family continued with dinner as the music returned. Another break in the music brought on a panic-sounding announcer introducing an astronomer to discuss the situation on Mars. Another break in the music came later when the announcement came that a large fire ball object fell from the sky and landed on a farm in New Jersey. Now the news came from the location in New Jersey, the family gathered near the radio. From the radio was a description of a large gray creature that was spotted, next there was a high-pitched sound followed by the sound of an explosion. The radio went silent. Back on air, there was soft music before another panicked announcer saying aliens had arrived from 40 million miles in New Jersey heading to New York City. The story continued with news of destruction caused by the aliens. The family sat together in the living room, held hands and prayed.

Sam had gotten his gun and sat with Emma in the dark, Harlan was in his room with his drinks. A night of fear had entered homes throughout the city to find out the next day that the entire alien invasion had come from the novel written by H.G. Wells, War of the Worlds. McFadden described the real monsters who were terrorizing Europe by burning synagogues and scaring citizens.

Analysis

In this section the reader learns of a connection between Harlan and Gwen when Mary Bruce brought him in to perform the music at the girls' dance practice. Harlan thought Gwen was cute despite her West Indies background the guys called Gwen a coconut. Girls from the West Indies were seen as different than black girls. There is a distinction between blacks, West Indians and whites. The whites see only skin color and clump all blacks together, but the African Americans and the West Indians were aware of their differences and discriminated against each other.

At Carnegie Hall for Gwen's recital, Ethel drew attention to herself which embarrassed Irene. Gwen was nervous before she went on stage to perform. She worried she would forget to smile or that the music was wrong. She doubted her ability.

Gwen hung out on Coney Island with friends during the summer. They liked riding the rollercoaster because the sensation from the up and down ride reminded them of the feeling they felt when they put their fingers between their legs.

Once all of their money was gone, the girls searched the ground for stray coins. According to her friends, the coins that were face down was supposed to be bad luck but Gwen picked them up anyway. Her friends warned her of the danger and McFadden added a line confirming that Gwen would find out the effect of her decision to pick up the face down coins.

At the end of summer Gwen's memory of Harlan had faded. She had not seen him since the last night of rehearsal when he asked for her phone number and she did not have a number to give. Gwen thought that she would see him at the performance and felt disappointed when he said he would not be there.



The War of The Worlds broadcast came on air the night of October 30, 1938. Gwen and her family were home when the announcement came over the radio. Little attention was given until the report came from New Jersey. When the announcement of the burning soldiers came the family closed themselves in, sat together and prayed. That same night Sam got his gun out and sat in the dark with Emma. That radio show had the attention of all of America that night. People were afraid and believed an alien attack was underway. The truth was shared the next morning and Orson Wells apologized for the prank that made him famous. McFadden likened the War of The Worlds to the real war that had broken out in Europe with real monsters terrorizing neighbors on foot, burning places of worship and bringing fear across the country. People in New York City woke up the next day to find the radio program was a hoax but people in Europe continued to face the reality of terror.

Discussion Question 1

What about Gwen's background made the author share more in this section?

Discussion Question 2

Harlan was never interested in a relationship with any of the girls he slept with, what made things different with Gwen?

Discussion Question 3

McFadden compared the War of the Worlds hoax to the real war raging in Europe. What made Gwen's family and Emma and Sam so afraid of the radio program?

Vocabulary

segued, insinuation, hoax



Chapters 41 - 44

Summary

In Chapter 41 Mike Todd walked into Mary Bruce's dance school puffing on a cigar. Mary Bruce was in her office when she smelled the cigar smoke. She walked towards the studio with her hand on the small pistol she put in her pocket. Mike Todd introduced himself as if she was supposed to know who he was. He correlated his name with the name of one of his more popular Broadway musicals that Mary recognized and praised his work, she relaxed her hand off of the gun.

Mike Todd complimented her studio and mentioned he learned of her from an assistant who saw her dancers at Carnegie Hall. He paused before finally saying that he was bringing his show to the World's Fair and wanted her dancers to perform in the program. He shared his idea of holding cabarets plus a stage that offered only dancing. He got caught up in the excitement of his explanation and realized he was running late for another appointment. He left out the door but quickly turned back to invite her to choreograph a program. Mary made sure he was gone, then let out a squeal and spun around the studio.

Gwen could not define the kind of tiredness she felt in Chapter 42. She had been Mary's first choice for Mike Todd's show and ended up being a main dancer during the course of the World's Fair doing 32 performances in a week. She liked to watch the other performers between her shows and wanted to become an erotic dancer like those in the cabarets. Gwen was 18 and not allowed to go to any parties if it was not associated with church or someone from church. Gwen was not a liar but she felt a strong urge to get out of the house, so she accepted an invitation to go to a party in Harlem.

Once there, the party was not where Gwen wanted to be. She turned to leave and walked into Harlan. When she saw him, she burst into tears. He guided her outside and sat on the step with her. The girl he brought with him wanted to know who Gwen was, he brushed the girl off and remained with Gwen who was wiping her face on his handkerchief. He asked Gwen if she wanted to go back inside to dance but she was ready to leave. Harlan said he could go with her to Brooklyn.

In Chapter 43 Ethel became concerned when Gwen was late getting home. She watched the clock and paced the floor until she finally went outside to pace the sidewalk. Gwen and Harlan turned the corner and Gwen saw her mother's mood in the distance. She started running toward home and Harlan yelled out to her to call him. As soon as Gwen was within arm's reach, Ethel's fist hit one side of Gwen's face and then the other before chasing her up the apartment stairs hitting her from behind. Inside the apartment Ethel gave Aubrey a look to stay out of the way and she followed Gwen into the bedroom where she yelled obscenities and slapped Gwen across the mouth and left out. Irene told Gwen she deserved what she got but Gwen just climbed in bed with her back to her sister. She felt bad and hurt from her mother's words but she did not regret



the time she spent with Harlan. She smiled at the memory of being on the train with him and all they talked about. Harlan had shared that he recently returned from his grandmother's funeral in Macon, Georgia. His grandmother died in her sleep just as his grandfather had.

In Chapter 44 Ethel had wished Gwen had learned from her smacks to the head but Gwen had her own mind and contacted Harlan from a pay phone at the fair and convinced him to meet her after work. They had been seeing each other for three weeks before Harlan got her to his bed. He coaxed her into taking a hit off of the joint he was smoking. Her head filled with noise and she fell back on the bed. He leaned over her and put his mouth on hers, he unbuttoned her shirt and eventually made his way inside her setting off the rollercoaster feeling within her. When they were finished they noticed her blood on Harlan's penis startling Gwen who thought she needed to go to the hospital. Harlan explained it all to her and when they heard Emma and Sam get home Harlan hurried Gwen out of the apartment without being sited. He did not ride with her back to Brooklyn.

Analysis

In this section Gwen is selected to be a main dancer in Mike Todd's musical production at the World's Fair. Mike Todd asked Mary Bruce for her best dancers to be in his shows at the fair and wanted Mary Bruce to choreograph one of the pieces. Gwen was a top performer dancing in 32 shows a week. Between her acts she had the chance to watch the other dancers and took an interest in the erotic dancers. Gwen knew her mother would not allow her to flaunt her body in public so she practiced alone in her room.

Gwen was 18 and wanted a social life outside of the family and church activities that was allowed. She felt a need to get out on her own and began to lie to Ethel to make it happen. Gwen went to a party in Harlem with a fellow dancer, she did not feel like she belonged and when she realized how different she was dressed than the others she started to leave and walked into Harlan. As soon as she saw him she broke into tears. They went outside and Harlan offered to take the train with her to Brooklyn. They talked and learned more about each other and their families. Harlan shared about his grandmother who had recently died and he had been in Macon, Georgia for her funeral.

Ethel was waiting for Gwen to get home, the later it got, the more angry she became. Gwen saw Ethel's angry face from the street corner and started running toward her calling out to Harlan that she had to go. As soon as Gwen was in reach of Ethel, she felt the contact on her cheek and then another hit on the other side. Ethel followed Gwen hitting her every chance she got and yelling out hurtful words. Gwen's lip was cut but she thought about Harlan and did not regret the time they had spent together.

Gwen still called Harlan the next day despite her mother's directive not to. They began to spend more time together and eventually Harlan took Gwen to his house when his parents were not home and had sex for the first time. Gwen was scared when she saw the blood from losing her virginity, she thought she needed to go to the hospital. Harlan



told her about why she was bleeding. When Emma and Sam got home Harlan led Gwen to the stairs and out of the apartment, the author wrote, "like an embarrassment" (146). He walked her to the train but did not ride home with her.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Gwen start crying when she saw Harlan at the party?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Ethel react so harsh towards Gwen when she came home late?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Harlan treat Gwen like an embarrassment?

Vocabulary

soliloquy, circuitous, oblong



Chapters 45 - 50

Summary

In Chapter 45 it was between the time that Lucille fired him and he met Gwen that Harlan was in the bar drinking. A light skinned guy sat down from Harlan at the bar, Harlan saw the guy's calloused lip and instrument case and started talking music with him. In the introduction, Harlan learned the guy's name was Leo, but went by Lizard and was from St. Louis. Harlan tried to convince Lizard that he personally knew Satchmo, the jazz trumpet player. The bartender confirmed the story that Satchmo visited Harlan's home on occasion. Harlan and Lizard left the bar and went for food. Harlan introduced Lizard to the waitress and took a table near the band. While they ate they enjoyed the band and the musicians who came to jam. Lizard took his horn out of the case and approached the stage. He told the band what to play and they mocked him. Lizard had chosen one of Satchmo's songs to play. Lizard took out a white handkerchief and held it in his hand along with his horn, a symbol of the great Satchmo. Harlan hid his face in his hands and the crowd jeered. Once the music started and between his horn blowing and singing, the crowd was standing cheering him on. From that night on Harlan and Lizard were the best of friends. Emma easily took to Lizard who became a regular visitor at their house. He ate dinner there on weeknights and sang and played his trumpet on Saturday nights riling the crowds everywhere.

Harlan presented the idea of starting their own band to Lizard in Chapter 46. Lizard hesitated and Harlan sulked before Lizard called him a baby and agreed to start a band. Harlan got Lincoln Watson, a piano player with a baritone voice that captured the women. Harlan recruited Bruno Franklin who played drums and six other instruments. Harlan's eighth grade crush, Ivy Reid, came into the bar and sat next to Harlan. He had not seen her in years and it took her to get his attention before he finally recognized her. He knew she had married at age 18 and asked if she was still married. She said legally but they were no longer together. Harlan remembered her amazing voice in a performance in school, he asked if she still sang and she said "like a lark" (156).

In Chapter 47 their band was complete with the name the "Harlem World Band" (157). They played at parties and some dinner clubs in Harlem. Emma helped with booking their gigs and they eventually had gotten into places in the Hamptons and beyond. Emma booked them for a three-month Tuesday night gig at an inn. Excited for having steady work, but upset because the Tuesday nights only brought in the blue collar workers with no extra money. All other nights the crowd was made up of black business men, rich white kids from the colleges and various wealthy Park Avenue residents.

It took a while after Lucille had fired Harlan before Emma allowed her relationship with Lucille to be back as it had been. On a Tuesday night at the Bamboo Inn, Lucille and Bill were having dinner when Emma and Sam arrived. Lucille waved inviting them to their table. They were having champagne to celebrate the end of Lucille's first year at nursing



school. When the band started, Lucile told Emma that Harlan looked good and was impressed with the band's performance.

A telegram from Paris, France arrived in Chapter 48. The message was from Eugene James Bullard inviting the Harlem World Band to Paris to perform at his club for two months and he would pay their travel, housing and a small salary. No one was home for Emma to share the news with so she called Lucille. Emma told Lucille about the telegram and Lucille said that she had recommended Harlan and his band for the gig when Eugene asked Lucille to bring her band.

A bon voyage party was held, in Chapter 49, for the Harlem World Band as they prepare to depart for Paris, France. Emma's surprise arrive at midnight, she told Harlan to find Lizard. Harlan told Lizard that his mama wanted Lizard to play for her. Emma had Lizard's horn case when the guys walked into the room. Lizard began to play but his heart was not in it and he struggled for the breath, he paused and apologized. As he gathered his breathing and started again he heard the perfect notes in his ear. Lizard turned toward the sound and Louis Armstrong walked in making Lizard loose his breath again. After they played some songs together, Lizard saw Louis outside talking to a group of people. Lizard joined the group and soon it was just he and Louis Armstrong talking. Louis wore a Star of David pendent on a chain and Lizard asked if he was Jewish. Louis told him the story of how he was given the pendent from a Jewish woman who had invited him into their family. He said they were white people but they never called him humiliating names that he was called by other white people. He said that even though they were white, they were treated badly by other white people because of them being Jewish. He said that whenever he feels anger which could turn into hatred of someone, he looks at the pendent which reminds him of love. Louis asked Lizard about his nickname, he said it was because Louis' nickname Satchmo was not available.

In Chapter 50, Harlan did not tell Gwen that he was leaving for Paris. They had been together only to have sex a few times before he left. Gwen believed Harlan loved her. The last time they were together he only saw her to the door and led her to believe he would see her the coming week. Gwen called on the phone but he was not there, Emma told her when she arrived at their home in Harlem, that Harlan was heading to Paris and would be gone for two months..

Analysis

Harlan and Lizard meet and become good friends from the start. Lizard played the trumpet and tried to imitate Louis Armstrong, known as Satchmo. When Lizard first jammed with a band he asked them play one of Satchmo's songs and he was mocked, but gained respect from the band, the crowd and Harlan when he performed the song so well. Lizard and Harlan became as close as brothers and finally decided to put their own band together. Harlan knew a piano player who sang baritone and a drummer with skills to play other instruments and their band was complete when Ivy Reid noticed Harlan at the bar she wandered into. Emma worked as their booking agent getting them



gigs to play. She got them a regular Tuesday night job at the Bamboo Inn which was the best place to play any other night than Tuesday.

It took some time, but Emma eventually warmed up to Lucille after she fired Harlan from her band. Lucille and Bill invited Emma and Sam to their table one night at the Bamboo Inn to celebrate Lucille finishing one year of nursing school. When Harlan's band began their set Lucille told Emma that he looked good and she was impressed with his band, the Harlem World Band.

Emma called Lucille to tell her that the Harlem World Band was invited to go to Paris, France to perform in a club owned by Eugene James Bullard. Lucille knew Eugene and had recommended Harlan's group. Emma threw the band a big party before they left for Paris. Emma had planned a surprise for Lizard at midnight. Harlan went to get Lizard for his surprise and found him smoking in the cellar of the house. Lizard said he was down there to get away from the crowd.

Emma had Lizard's trumpet for him when he came back to the party. He did not feel like playing because his thoughts and heart were elsewhere. He started to play a Louis Armstrong piece which, unlike him, he had to stop to gather breath before hitting the high notes. During the pause, he heard the notes coming from elsewhere. He started again and saw Louis Armstrong walking toward him belting out the notes. Lizard played a few songs with his idol.

Later Lizard found Louis outside and went up to the group of people. When it was just he and Louis left talking, Lizard's asked about the Star of David pendant he wore. Louis told him the story about when he was a young boy in New Orleans and worked for a white, Jewish family. He said the family brought him into their home and the white folks never said anything mean or degrading about him for being black. He explained to Lizard that he saw other white people treating the Jewish family just as bad as they did the black people. Louis said that anytime he gets angry the pendant reminds him of love. Once again the author differentiates the discrimination that occurred within races, but here the discrimination was against religion; Jewish versus non Jewish. A white Jewish person was seen by other white people as bad as they saw black people.

Before Harlan left for Paris, he had sex a few more times with Gwen. He did not give any emotional feedback but she declared how much she loved him during sex. Gwen read Harlan's wanting to be with her as his emotional feedback. Harlan did not tell Gwen he was leaving for Paris. He walked her to the door and told her he would see her the following week. She called his house to learn he was not home. Finally she went to his house and angrily rang the doorbell. Emma came out and told Gwen that Harlan was gone for about two months.

Discussion Question 1

What made the band and crowd mock and tease Lizard before he began to play at the restaurant?



Discussion Question 2

What did Lizard say was his reason for being alone in the cellar on the night before they left for France?

Discussion Question 3

Why does his Star Of David pendant remind Louis Armstrong of love?

Vocabulary

naivete, mbira, kismet



Chapters 51 - 57

Summary

It is March in Chapter 51 when Harlan and the band reached Paris. Eugene Ballard greeted them at the pier and took them to Montmartre, which was considered the Harlem of Paris. They drove past the Moulin Rouge and Eugene pointed out landmarks and places where celebrities lived or had performed. Eugene pointed out his club L'Escadrille as they headed to the hotel they would be staying. Once in his room Harlan opened the window and announced his presence. The look on Lizard's face alarmed Harlan asked Lizard if something was up. Lizard told Harlan that it was nothing.

In Chapter 52, at the time Harlan had arrived, business in Montmartre was beginning to pick up. American musicians had left France because of the threat of war breaking out in Germany and bands from Paris were not able to copy the American sound. After months of no action, club owners such as Eugene Ballard, reached out to bring musicians back but some still refused because France was too close to Germany. Harlan accepted Eugene's request with no hesitation but Lizard had declined until Harlan broke him down and again got his way.

In Chapter 53 Harlan and his band had fallen into a pattern of performing until 3:00 a.m., going to cabarets until 8:00 a.m., breakfast then bed until it was time to perform again. This life was like a long party. It was May 10, 1940 when Germany broke into France's west coast. This event alerted all of the black musicians to return to America as soon as room on a ship was found. Eugene told Harlan and his group that he was not able to get them on a ship until July. At hearing this, Lizard looked at Harlan and blamed him for this. The people who were not able to leave Paris used Montmartre as a place to go to relieve stress.

Eugene came through with tickets to New York bringing relief to everyone except Harlan. Harlan liked that blacks and whites were allowed to mingle in Paris. Four days before their departure Harlan was startled out of bed by a loud bullhorn and hundreds of soldiers marching past outside. Some people cheered while others watched in disbelief, people chanted, "this is the end as we know it" (178).

The soldiers filled the cabarets in Chapter 54. The band's performance was affected by their nervousness and Eugene told them to leave. Harlan talked Lizard into staying out instead of returning to the hotel. He reminded Lizard of only having three days left before leaving. At a bistro a white woman approached Harlan to whisper a proposition in his ear. Harlan walked past Lizard with the woman. The woman learning they were together called a friend over and introduced her to Lizard. The four stayed and had more drinks. They left the bistro after more drinks and on their route a German soldier stepped in front of them and asked for a light. Harlan did not take the situation serious and kept laughing and joking. The soldier asked again for a light and one of the girls told Harlan what the man wanted. Harlan finally saw the swastika on the uniform and began



to search his pockets for matches. He realized he left the matches behind and told the soldier. The soldier made mention of the white girls and Lizard being with a black man. Harlan indicated that Lizard was black and the soldier responded with disgust that Lizard was a mongrel. Harlan defended Lizard saying he was not a mongrel. Three other soldiers walked up and surrounded all of them. The first soldier told them to come with them. Lizard threw a punch through the air and Harlan used his guitar case and pushed the soldier down on the ground. The women ran away and Harlan and Lizard ended up on the ground being kicked and punched by the soldiers. Harlan woke up in the backseat of a military vehicle, Lizard snored beside him. Lizard came to and started swinging his fists and yelling. The soldier stopped the jeep, got out and started beating Lizard with their batons. They hit Harlan again for no reason.

In Chapter 55 Harlan and Lizard are taken to a large building with a dome. There were empty concession stands and posters of skaters and cyclists on the walls, Harlan and Lizard are led into the arena and pushed down steps where they find over one hundred people. A man calls out to them and they squeeze through the crowd to the black man who had spotted them. The man told his story of being a chauffeur and while driving his employer, he was stopped by German soldiers, ordered from the car and beaten by them. He said he did not know why that happened. They took him to the arena.

It is the next day in Chapter 56 when Harlan and Lizard were loaded into buses with all of the others who were inside the arena. After two hours on the bus they arrived at a train station where they got into cattle cars to find bread and buckets of water for the prisoners. A French soldier pointed out a prisoner to be in charge. The man was warned that he would be shot if anyone got away. They stopped the train to let the prisoners get out to relieve their bladders and stretch. As they returned to the train, a woman yelled out making everyone look to see the short black man who befriended Harlan and Lizard running away from the group. A soldier shot three times and finally hit the man in the back. A soldier then went up to the man in the cattle car who was appointed in charge and shot that man in the head. It was dark when the train stopped and the doors stayed locked, leaving all of the prisoners to sleep there.

In Chapter 57 the soldiers woke the prisoners by hitting them with their batons, spitting at them, pulling them out of the cattle car by the hair and threw them onto the ground. They walked along a road lined with trees and every so often, a cottage. Lizard noticed a mockingbird sitting on a signpost that gave the distance to Weimar. Lizard stopped walking causing Harlan to bump into him from behind causing a chain reaction. The bird looked at them, fanned its tail and flew up into the trees. Lizard slumped his shoulders as if something heavy was placed on him. They reached a large compound with security fences and rows of barracks. Lizard spoke for the first time when he translated a sign above the gate, it said: "Everyone gets what they deserve" (190). He said his father used to say it. This irony made Lizard want to scream. He kept the scream deep inside and looked Harlan in the eye and told him that his father used to tell him, "You can't go home again" (190). Lizard said his father was wrong.



Analysis

It was March when Harlan and his band arrived in Paris, France. American music was popular in Paris but a threat of war in Germany sent the American performers back to the United States causing many clubs to close. Something bothered Lizard and he would not tell Harlan what it was even though Harlan had asked. Lizard regretted going to France he only gave in because Harlan would not let him say no.

The band fell into the pattern of performing at Eugene's, going to other cabarets, eating breakfast and then back to their rooms to sleep until time to perform again. Harlan continued to drink and bring in women. Paris was one big party for him.

It was May 10, 1940 when the Germans entered France and took over. The black musicians from America made plans to return to the United States as soon as possible. Eugene was not able to get tickets home until after July. Lizard accused Harlan for being in this situation. Lizard had regretted coming here and wanted to leave but Harlan was happy to remain. As a black man, he was free to eat where he pleased and be seen with white women who he would sleep with just as he would with a black woman.

German soldiers were at the cabarets in Montmartre while Harlan and his band performed. Done for the night, Lizard and the others headed back to their rooms but Harlan poked fun at Lizard for going to hide. At the club Harlan and Lizard meet two women who they were taking to their room. As they left the club, a soldier stopped them and asked Harlan for a light for his cigarette. Harlan responded in his drunk tone and did not take the request serious until more soldiers surrounded them and Harlan and Lizard were taken down and beaten by the soldiers.

The next time Harlan opened his eyes he was inside a military jeep with Lizard who had been knocked unconscious and was snoring. Lizard came to and screamed and flailed his arms, one of the soldiers hit Lizard on the head and knocked him out again. They were taken to a large domed building that was once an arena. Lizard and Harlan was taken inside and put into the center area with over a hundred other people. A black man called to them and explained what had happened to him and how afraid he was that his family did not know where he was.

The next day they were loaded onto buses and taken to a train station and crammed into cattle cars. The man who befriended them in the arena ended up getting shot when he took off running away from the train, another man was shot in the head because of the attempted escape. As the prisoners walked to the camp, Lizard noticed a mockingbird sitting on a sign post. The bird looked at them, ruffled its tail feathers then flew into the trees. Lizard seemed affected by the bird, he slumped his shoulders as if something heavy burdened him. When they reached the entrance to the prison camp Lizard translated the words on the sign and told Harlan that his father used to say that phrase: "Everyone gets what they deserve." He also said his father told him you cannot go home again but Lizard told Harlan that his father was wrong. These phrases were significant to Lizard and foreshadowed what he is about to reveal about his past.



Discussion Question 1

Why did Lizard first refuse to go to Paris with the band?

Discussion Question 2

What did the soldier mean by calling Lizard a mongrel?

Discussion Question 3

How did Lizard know what the sign over the gate entering Buchenwald said?

Vocabulary

carnal, revelation, musings, alabaster, swastika, ogling, lewd, conjure, consorting, mongrels, rudimentary, implored, reticence, stench, sentry, reviled



Chapters 58 - 62

Summary

In Chapter 58 the prisoners gave their identification information, name, birthday and country of birth. The soldiers took all possessions from them, they were stripped of their clothes, their hair shaved and washed with disinfectant. They received a demeaning physical exam and provided with prisoner uniforms. They were informed of the rules of the prison camp and the consequences if the rules were broken. Lizard picked a bottom bunk in the barracks he was assigned. Instead of sleeping his mind reviewed the lies and choices he had made that led him to where his parents had left. His parents were Jewish and had fled Weimar after Germany lost in the first World War. Lizard recalled his father saying that it was not his choice to leave but it was because the Germans took their loss in the war out on the Jewish people and communists treated them as if they were criminals. There was no loyalty towards any Jewish person in Germany. The family made it to America in September of 1920, and made their way to St. Louis where a cousin of his father's lived. His father was a tailor and worked his way to purchase a big house. Lizard heard his father's words as he praised America by telling his children that in America you can become anything you want. Lizard realized that he had taken these words to the extreme.

Lizard shared his story in Chapter 59. Born Leo Benjamin Rubenstein a Jewish boy who grew up in St. Louis, Lizard was taunted by the kids of Polish and Irish Catholics and would go out of his way to avoid them. Every so often, someone would get to him leading him to fight. One time the kids ganged up on him with baseball bats. Lizard ran at the leader of the group and got a hold of the kid's bat and beat the kid with it. Lizard ended up spending three months in a reform school. It was during that time that he found out who he was and what direction he had to go with his life. At the reform school the boys were separated by their age and race. The Jewish delinquents took Lizard into their group and taught him how to survive in the environment. Lizard noticed a group of black boys outside on a bench singing as one played an old guitar. Lizard watched them interested in the music. He was not familiar with the black culture, his father spoke about them as good people who lacked intelligence. The Jewish boys made fun of them within their group. Lizard walked up to the boys who immediately stood up and told him to go back to his area of the yard. Lizard was not intimidated, he asked the leader what kind of music it was that they played. The boy told Lizard that black people called it the blues. Lizard said that he felt the music in his chest, and was told that is where it was supposed to be felt. Lizard said he liked how the music sounded. The song remained with Lizard into the next, he hurried outside after dinner and sat near the singing boys. The Jewish boy, Abraham asked what was wrong with him, but Lizard knew the music made him feel right.

In Chapter 60, Lizard asked Joe Brown if he could sit with them at dinner. Joe knew that it bothered Abraham so he welcomed Lizard to their table. Outside Lizard sat with them to be close to the music, to feel it from inside. A week later Lizard spent all of his free



time with Joe Brown and his friends. Joe taught Lizard to play the guitar and when he had it down in a couple of days Joe said that he is probably part black. Lizard took a lot of harassment from the guards and the white boys because he had become friends with Joe and the other boys.

Lizard returns home in Chapter 61. His sister asked him questions about being locked up and wanted to know if he was considered a hardened criminal. Lizard thought about how the experience had totally opened him up. Joe told Lizard to visit him when he got released in 30 days. Lizard took the bus to Joe's house on the 31st day. As he walked up the street toward the Brown's, Lizard could feel eyes upon him. Joe welcomed Lizard into the house and introduced him to his family. Their shock at having a white person in their home wore off as Lizard became a regular visitor and he found out that the whole family had musical talent. The twins taught Lizard the piano and Frank Brown gave lessons on the trumpet, it was the trumpet that Lizard liked best.

Lizard got his nickname in Chapter 62. Joe's twin brothers were looking at snakes and lizards in a text book and informed Lizard that he was cold blooded because their mother called white people cold blooded. Mrs. Brown said Lizard was not like other white people. One of the twins announced that he would now call Leo by the name of Lizard.

Analysis

Lizard's memories kept him from sleep on the first night at the camp. He thought about the lies he lived throughout his life. Lizard was born to Jewish parents who had fled Weimar after World War One when the Germans were defeated. He remembered his father telling about how badly the Jews were treated by the Germans. Lizard's family arrived through Ellis Island in September 1920 and lived in St. Louis. His father worked as a tailor and built up a business enough to buy a home and support his family. Lizard recalls his father telling him and his siblings that they could become anything they wanted while in America. Lizard had taken his father's advice to the extreme.

As a Jewish boy, Lizard was teased and bullied by Catholic boys at school. During one time when the group of bullies came toward him with bats, Lizard got a hold of the biggest kid and beat him up which landed in reform school. There was a definite separation of the boys by race in reform school and the Jewish boys immediately brought Lizard into their group. Outside on the grounds Lizard had more exposure to the different groups and was drawn to a group of black boys who sang while someone played an old guitar. Lizard was drawn to the music and focused on the songs. Lizard approached the leader of the singers and told him he could feel the songs in his heart. One of the boys said that was the purpose of the music, it was supposed to be felt. Lizard learned that the music was called the blues. The black boys accepted Lizard into their group and became good friends with Joe, the guitar player. Lizard studied Joe as he played guitar, Joe started giving him lessons. The friendship between the white, Jewish Lizard and the black boys were treated bad by the guards and the other white



boys. Lizard did not react to the mistreatment, he knew he had found his place in the music and with the black boys.

Joe gave Lizard his home address when his sentence at the reform school ended, Joe still had a month left before he could leave. The day after Joe's release, Lizard took the bus beyond the area where white people rode the bus to get to Joe's house. Lizard was stared at by the neighbors but Joe welcomed his friend in and introduced him to his family. Lizard became a regular house guest and was treated like family Joe played the guitar, his twin brothers knew the piano and Joe's dad played the trumpet and they each taught Lizard their instrument but he chose the trumpet as his favorite.

Lizard got his nickname from Joe's younger brother when the twins were looking at a book of snakes and lizards, he told Lizard that reptiles were cold blooded and told Lizard that he was cold blooded like the reptiles. Lizard said he was warm-blooded like all people. Mrs. Brown was embarrassed because she called white people cold-blooded but she said Lizard was not like other white people.

Once again McFadden's illustration of race provided a different point of view. McFadden brought forth the reactions white people have against other whites who associate with blacks. Lizard was treated badly by other whites because he hung around the black boys. McFadden also described the reaction of black people when a white person entered their territory such as how the black boys responded to Lizard when he approached them. They initially rejected him and let him know he did not fit with them. It was expected that Lizard would only associate with the Jewish boys but those boys spoke bad of the black boys without even knowing them just as the white Catholic boys had treated Lizard without knowing him. If Lizard would have allowed skin color to rule his actions, he would not have met Joe or his family or learned to play the guitar, piano or the trumpet. Lizard had learned from his father that he could become anything he wanted.

Discussion Question 1

What drew Lizard to want to know the black boys at the reform school?

Discussion Question 2

What did it finally take for Lizard to be accepted and be friends with the black boys at the reform school?

Discussion Question 3

What made Lizard different from other white people?



Vocabulary

lamented, ensconced, melee, unscathed, bigot, menace, cohort, resilient, corniest, shanks, balked



Chapters 63 - 68

Summary

In Chapter 63, Lizard's dad gave him a package to deliver and told him to be back in an hour. Lizard took the package and realized his destination was near Joe's house. He decided to stop in at the Brown's since he was so close. It was a Sunday so he knew Joe's mother would have a meal prepared. Part way through the meal they heard the doorbell. Mrs. Brown opened the door to Lizard's father and a police officer. Lizard's father announced he just wanted to take his son to where he belonged. Joe's father said Lizard was not being held there against his will. The police officer asked Lizard if he was alright. Lizard accused his father of following him to Joe's. Lizard apologized. Mr. Brown followed Lizard to the porch and handed him his trumpet. Joe ran after Lizard as his father started to drive away, and called out, "Lizard, stay black, man" (207)!

Life was different for Lizard in Chapter 64. His mother made him break a plate on the floor to illustrate that it did not go back to how it was before it broke. Lizard realized he had changed and his home did not feel like home any more. He had a new style of playing music and his parents would not allow him play it. Lizard had to move so he packed his clothes and instruments and went to Kansas City. Frank Brown had told him that New Orleans was where jazz was born but it was created in Kansas City.

In Chapter 65 Lizard arrived in St. Louis. He saw a man with a saxophone so Lizard followed him until he had a chance to ask the man where he could play his instruments. The man led Lizard to the black community where the jazz clubs were. The man showed Lizard a place to rent a room. After dark Lizard explored the clubs going from one to another. On his third day Lizard took a job washing dishes and would also play his trumpet in the alley to make some change. After being there a month he sent his parents a letter telling them he loved them and it was tough but he was happy. His parents sent him five dollars in an envelope and no message. Lizard was at a club named Milton's listening to a man playing the trumpet. He was hypnotized by the performance. He asked the man next to him who that was, the answer was Louis Armstrong but the man was surprised that Lizard did not know. The two spoke after Louis finished playing, Lizard told the man he played the trumpet and the man said that he just heard the world's best trumpet player and told Lizard that he needed soul to play that good. Lizard thought the man was white but the man told him, "As a man thinks, so he is" (212). Someone came up to the man and referred to him a black. Lizard thought about those words and wondered if it could be that easy.

In Chapter 66 Lizard's father became ill and Lizard took the train to St. Louis where he sat in the colored section. A porter approached him and directed him to the white section of the train but Lizard said he was where he was supposed to be. This is when he knew that it was easy to change his identity to being black. Lizard returned to Kansas City after his father died and took on living as a black man. He changed his last name to Robbins, worked at mastering the music, slept with black women and



worshipped in the black churches. He discovered that there were several white men who transformed to live the life of a black man. Lizard preferred to stay living in Kansas City but when a club member would not pay him for playing a gig Lizard beat the guy with the butt of his pistol. Lizard's only way to keep from getting caught was to leave the city so he returned to St. Louis. His mother and sister did not like that he was a musician and were embarrassed of his bright clothes, his walk and how he talked.

It was the spring of 1937 in Chapter 67 when Lizard moved to Harlem. Lizard thought about the events that led him to the bar where he met Harlan Elliot which eventually got him into the mess he found himself in as a prisoner in the concentration camp. If he would have stayed with a friend in Greenwich Village instead of renting a room in the Woodside Hotel in Harlem, if he would have gone into a different bar or if he would have ignored Harlan when he first met him. But Lizard's fate was not because of Harlan, he had no choice but to be discovered when he had to strip his clothes in the shower and the mark identifying him as Jewish could not be hidden; his circumcision. Lizard got out of his bed in the barrack that night and went to the window to think over his life. He thought about how he had two births; one as a Jew and one as a black man. He thought about having the chance to play his trumpet along with his idol, Louis Armstrong. He thought about the good life he had lived.

In Chapter 68 the reader learned that Gwen was wanting her menstrual cycle to start to relieve the fear that she was pregnant. She wanted to tell her sister but Irene had been sick and Gwen did not want to put anything more on her. In Harlem, Emma and Sam had not heard anything from Harlan and when the rest of the band and Eugene and his wife returned home without Harlan and Lizard, Emma waited and worried to hear something.

Analysis

In this section, McFadden finished the story of Lizard and the events that influenced the choices he made. Lizard's dad had sent him on a delivery which was in the direction of Joe's house that tempted Lizard to go visit since he was in the area. When Lizard's father showed up with a police officer, Lizard knew his father had followed him. His father said he was there to take Lizard back to where he belonged. Frank followed Lizard out on the porch and handed him his trumpet case, Lizard resisted but Frank wanted him to have it. Before the car drove off, Joe came running up to the car and called out to Lizard to stay black.

Lizard's parents knew that Lizard being exposed to the Brown's had changed him. His mother made him break a plate to illustrate that it can never be the same as it was before it broke. Lizard took responsibility that he was the one who changed and it was too hard for him to return to the life he had known before. His parents would not allow him to play his new style of music in their home. Lizard left home for Kansas City because Frank Brown let him know that jazz was conceived in Kansas City. Lizard was led to the black community where the jazz district of St. Louis was. After a couple of days experiencing the atmosphere of the music at night, Lizard took on a job to stay. He



made barely enough money to pay the rent for the room he stayed in but he was happy with the music around him and had seen Louis Armstrong perform. A man standing next to him informed him that he was listening to the great Louis Armstrong. Lizard said he hoped to play that good some day. The man's skin was as light as Lizards and said he needed soul to play that good. Lizard commented about how good that man played and he asked Lizard if he thought he was white. The man told Lizard that you are who you think you are. Lizard got the idea that he could make people think he was black.

Lizard's father became ill so he returned to St. Louis by train sitting in the colored section and when questioned by the porter he said he was where he needed to be. Lizard realized it was easy to pass himself off as black. After his father died he went back to Kansas City and immersed himself into the black community. He dropped his Jewish last name and changed it to Robbins, he attended the black church and picked up black women. He took on the walk, the talk and the clothes which embarrassed his mother and sister when he moved back to St. Louis.

Lizard recalled the night he met Harlan in a bar in Harlem. He turned down a friend who stayed in Greenwich Village and ended up going to Harlem to rent a room that was near the same bar Harlan was that night. Lizard reviewed his life and agreed that he had lived a great life having been born twice, first as a Jew and second as a black person. Lizard knew he could not blame Harlan for where he ended up. He knew that it was his mark from birth that the soldier saw when he was stripped down for the shower. Lizard was a circumcised Jew.

McFadden provided a frame of reference to the amount of time that had passed by returning the reader to New York to focus on Gwen and Emma. Gwen was hoping that her menstrual cycle would start so as to alleviate her feared of being pregnant. Emma had received word from Harlan with the day they were sailing back from Paris but he and Lizard were not with the band members when the ship arrived home. All she could do was wait in fear for word of their condition and whereabouts.

Discussion Question 1

What did Joe know about Lizard when he told Lizard to stay black?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Lizard's mother make him break a plate?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Lizard want to be black?

Vocabulary

bland, denigrating, nuanced



Chapters 69 - 73

Summary

In Chapter 69, Emma and Sam received a letter from the Department of Buildings that the city was buying their home for \$13,000. The city was buying out the homes in the area to tear down in order to build a tenement building. She went to the office of the Department of Buildings to protest and was told that if the city wanted the property they would get it by paying for it now or evicting them later and taking it for nothing. This situation heightened Emma's anger toward white people. It was her belief that white people could do whatever they wanted to blacks and were always trying to take things away from them too.

In Chapter 70 Gwen's sister Irene died of her illness she had been in the hospital for. The family mourned their loss and often ate their meals in silence. On night at dinner Ethel noticed the swelling in Gwen's hands and Ethel confronted Gwen in an angry tone of voice wanting to know who got her pregnant. Gwen began to cry.

The story line continues at Buchenwald in Chapter 71. Harlan first saw Ilse Koch on his way to work at the latrines. Ilse Koch was known as the Bitch of Buchenwald, the Commandant's wife. She lived in the house on property that was beyond the barbed wire fence, she had a white mare that she rode. The riding crop she carried looked like a leather wand with a red glass jewel on the top. She was an attractive woman and Harlan found it hard to believe that she was the evil acting woman that he heard other prisoners whispering about. Harlan and six other men were chosen to fix the sewage pipe that burst in the latrines. They had to use their hands to dig through the sewage and when the broken pipe was uncovered they found human bones sticking out from the pipe.

In Chapter 72 it was October at Buchenwald. Everyday groups of people arrived or were killed and some died from illness. Harlan wondered if Lizard was dead or alive, he had not seen him since the day they arrived. In the mess hall one day Harlan noticed Lizard, he got up and embraced Lizard. Lizard looked at Harlan and blinked his eyes, Harlan told him it was him, Lizard was weak, he blinked at Harlan and acknowledged him. Harlan noticed a yellow star on Lizard's shirt and was confused by the symbol. A soldier saw them and yelled out. Harlan told Lizard to hold it together. Lizard mumbled the Harlan's words. Harlan saw something big outside in the square. The prisoners were lined up in the usual way except the big object covered with canvas was in front of them. Two hours had gone by and it became windy outside making the cover flap producing an eerie noise. Three more hours passed and an officer commanded the cover to be removed revealing a large gallows big enough for up to four people to be hung. Ilse rode up on her horse at noon, the prisoners had not been allowed any meals. Ilse walked up on the gallows and gave an order to a guard to sound the sirens. Ilse walked along the line of prisoners studying each one. After 45 minutes she signaled the siren to stop and pointed out a prisoner who was dragged to the steps of the gallows. A



soldier pulled him across the platform and made him stand at the middle noose. A chair was brought to the platform, the soldier made the man look up at the prisoners. Lizard was the man up on the gallows. The soldier put him up on the chair and put the noose over his head and tightened the knot. The rope choked his throat, his eyes popped out, Lizard grabbed the rope to pull up on his toes. Ilse smiled as if entertained by his struggle. She walked over to her horse and rode away. Harlan called out to Lizard to hang on. At six o'clock Ilse walked to the square and climbed up to Lizard. She shook the chair where Lizard leaned on his tiptoes. She kept hitting the chair and laughed. She finally removed the chair and Lizard's life ended. They did not remove his body for weeks.

It was Christmas Eve in Chapter 73. Ilse brought cookies shaped as swastikas to the prisoners. Harlan did not want to eat it, she killed his friend and he felt that by eating something she made would be like forgiving her and he could never do that. He held the cookie up and began to loosen his fingers but was unable to let go, It was his birthday, he was extremely hungry and could not sleep because of the disturbing dreams he was having about Lizard and Darlene. He offered an apology to heaven, ate the cookie and began to sob.

Analysis

Emma and Sam faced the disappearance of their son and they received notice from the city that they had to move out of their house. Emma was furious and blamed the white people for doing things like this to black people. Emma believed that white people were allowed to do whatever they wanted to do which was always taking from the blacks. Emma went to the Department of Buildings to fight for her home and was told that no matter what she did to save her home, the city's decision would stand and she and Sam would have to move.

Gwen's family had received a telegram from the hospital that Irene had died. Ethel was distraught and the family fell into a deep mourning. One day while eating Ethel noticed Gwen's fingers were puffy and swollen and she immediately knew Gwen was pregnant and demanded to know who had done that to her but Gwen only cried.

On his way to work on a broken pipe in the latrines with a group of prisoners, Harlan saw the Commandant's wife, Ilse Koch for the first time. She lived in a house with the Commandant beyond the barbed wire fences. By her looks, he wondered if she was as evil as he heard others speak about. She rode a white mare and carried a riding crop that had a red glass knob carved like a diamond.

Harlan had not seen Lizard since day they got at the camp. When he saw him at the mess tent Lizard was thin with and looked gray. Harlan embraced Lizard who blinked to see Harlan but seemed confused as to who he was. Harlan saw a yellow star on Lizard's shirt and wanted to know what it was but a soldier was coming after Lizard. Harlan told Lizard to hold on and keep himself together.



Harlan woke one morning to see a large object covered up in the camp square. Later he find out that it was a gallows. The prisoners were all lined up in the square and left to stay standing all day. Ilse Koch rode up on her white mare and signaled the sirens to blow. She walked past each prisoner and signaled the siren to stop when she chose a prisoner to be hung. The man was pushed onto the platform and turned to face the prisoners. Harlan cried out, it was Lizard. The soldier lifted Lizard and tightened the noose around his neck. Lizard was left holding himself by his tiptoes. At 6:00 p.m. Ilse came back and bumped the chair causing Lizard's to lose his footing. She eventually pulled the chair and the noose tightened around his neck. Harlan could not look. The left Lizard's body hanging from the gallows to be prey for birds and other animals.

On Christmas Eve Ilse Koch brought cookies in the shape of a swastika. Harlan did not want anything from that evil woman. He held the cookie over his head, lifted his head to heaven and apologized. He tasted the sweet flavor of the cookie in his mouth and began to sob.

Discussion Question 1

Who was Emma mad at when she learned she and Sam had to sell their home?

Discussion Question 2

What did the yellow star on Lizard's shirt mean?

Discussion Question 3

Why was it hard for Harlan to eat the cookie?

Vocabulary

eminent, domain, ficus, tenement, despondent, bauble, scepter, commandant, famished, molted, gallows, heinous, emaciated



Chapters 74 - 78

Summary

It was December 28, 1940 when Gwen gave birth to twin boys in Chapter 74. She did not expect two babies and had not picked out any boy names. Gwen asked Ethel what to name them. Ethel suggested Aubrey after Gwen's father and offered naming the other one after the baby's father. Ethel still did not know the name of the man who Gwen got pregnant by and Gwen did not intend to tell her. Gwen asked about the name of their neighbor which was Robert Henderson. She decided on Robert for the second boy. They would be called Bre and Bobby. In Harlem, Emma's things were packed but she was down in bed sick from heartache over missing her son.

In Chapter 75, it was 1941 and the United States and allies had entered the war. The population at Buchenwald had increased with people of all ethnicities and differences. Anyone who did not satisfy the Fuhrer was captured. Sebastian Abel was brought to Buchenwald. He was part German and part Dutch and he was homosexual. Sebastian talked all of the time and often had a smile on his face. Others thought he was insane because of his demeanor inside a concentration camp. Sebastian was had a softness to him which made him a target for other men to have their way with him as they did to the women at night behind the barracks. Sebastian was forced outside at night and someone shoved a baton into his anus. The next morning Sebastian walked toward the line up but continued to walk past the line and toward the gate, moving his hips and swinging his arms. He refused to follow the soldier's command to halt and was shot dead through the heart. Years after, this scene returned to Harlan when he felt low and he would long for Sebastian.

The twins were almost four in September of 1944 and Gwen decided to take them on the train to Harlem to meet their father. The boys were not identical but they both looked like Harlan. Gwen felt nervous being in Harlem and was not sure what she would do when she saw Harlan. One thought was to hand the boys off to him and leave, she had tried her best but according to Ethel, Gwen could not do anything right. There were times when Gwen had thoughts about killing her children, the winter prior she had let the boys play on the frozen over water and encouraged them to go out far she finally brought them out when a police officer came by and told her it was dangerous for them to be there. She then told the boys not to tell anyone that had happened. Gwen and the boys reached the corner where Harlan had lived to find nothing there. No houses and no Harlan. She became enraged and felt stuck with the kids forever. Bre had asked her for ice cream and Gwen smacked him across his face and told him to shut up.

In Chapter 77 Harlan had to keep his memories alive so he would not go insane. Harlan would escape into his memories when the reality of Buchenwald became too much. He did not see a need to make friends with other prisoners, the death of Lizard tore his heart apart so he remained as a distance from others so to not become friends. Harlan did not know how he had kept from being killed or dying even at times he wished he



would be able to be taken out of the misery. In March of 1945 rumors of Germany losing the war were heard, the prisoners had gone ten days without eating and the weak were dying off.

It was April 11, 1945 in Chapter 78 when a man in Harlan's barracks said it was the fourth day that he saw a bunch of men go through the gates. Harlan kept his eyes closed and the man said that there had to have been 2000 men and thought maybe they were being released. Harlan was doubtful, he knew the gates in the back led to a forest of trees. Someone in the barrack reported that the front had moved closer, Harlan had heard that for years. Someone else asked what it meant that there had been three days without the prisoners having roll call. Harlan woke in the night thinking he was alone. His effort to speak was hushed by a group gathered at the door. Harlan got up to see and he was rushed and thrown down on the ground as a large explosion happened. The shooting was brief as the American tanks broke through the front gates. Harlan too weak to move was approached by an American soldier which at the realization it was real, Harlan started to cry.

Analysis

Gwen had twin boys and she still had not told her mother who their father was even when Ethel suggested to name one of the babies after the father. This was the only control Gwen could hold over her mother. One baby was named Aubrey, after her father and the other was given the name Robert because her neighbor's name was Robert and Gwen and Ethel thought it was a good name.

When the twins were almost four Gwen took them by train to Harlem. She was going to see Harlan and thought about leaving the children with him. She had thoughts in the past about getting rid of the twins. She went to the area where Harlan's house had been but was now a vacant lot. Gwen got mad thinking that she had no way of finding Harlan. Gwen was stuck with these two kids forever.

After the United States and its allies entered the war in 1941 the prisoners noticed changes at the camp. Harlan was especially affected by Sebastian, a homosexual, who was brought to the camp one day. Sebastian was attacked in the middle of the night and had a baton shoved into his anus. The fact that it was a baton offers the reader a clue that the person or people involved would have either been a soldier or someone coerced by a soldier. The next morning Sebastian walked out of the barracks shaking his body as if he were dancing and putting on a show. Sebastian was shot dead as he walked toward the gates of the camp. Sebastian could have acted like he did just to get himself shot rather than continue to endure future night tortures. There had to be a reason why this had resonated so strong for Harlan. Could he have been involved in the incident with the baton?

Events at Buchenwald were so overwhelming that Harlan used his memories to keep his mind active. Otherwise he could have gone insane. Lizard's death tore his heart apart and kept him from wanting to be friends with anyone. He felt safer when with



people at an arm's length. In April of 1945 thousands of people started leaving the camp. Role call was not taken anymore and there were less soldiers. Harlan doubted these were positive signs until an explosion went off and he heard gun fire. An American soldier approached him and he began to cry out of relief.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Gwen refuse to tell Ethel who the father of the twins are?

Discussion Question 2

Why were Harlan's memories important to him?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Harlan doubt the possibility of them being released?

Vocabulary

demoralizing, sashaying, gregarious, desolation, anvil, balladeer, melancholy



Chapters 79 - 83

Summary

In Chapter 79 Harlan arrives in New York. He was brought off of the ship in a wheelchair but his condition was so frail, Emma and Sam did not recognize him. They rode home in a cab with Harlan sitting between his parents in the way he had so many years ago when they first brought him to Harlem as a child. Harlan wanted to know why they had stopped in front of an apartment instead of their house. Sam told him that a lot has changed. Their apartment was on the third floor and Harlan was not strong enough to climb the stairs so Sam carried him up on his back. Emma had cooked all of Harlan's favorite food for dinner, they spoke about everything except what Harlan had been through during the past five years. There had been a lot of changes in Harlem, Lucille was working as a nurse and had a new husband. Harlan picked at his food, he was not used to eating full meals. He tried to sleep but he kept opening his eyes throughout the night. Emma called the doctor to come see Harlan the next day.

Dr. Carter visited Harlan in Chapter 80 and could not get him to say what had happened to him but the doctor said Harlan was dehydrated and needed vitamins. Dr. Carter told Emma that he has suspicions that Harlan had been a prisoner in a German camp because of the scars he saw on Harlan's skin. Emma would not believe that because only Jewish people were taken prisoner. The doctor reminded her that it did not matter where the white people were, none of them were good. Emma took a glass of milk to Harlan and talked to him about what Dr. Carter had said. When she mentioned the scars on his body she asked if he wanted to talk about it and he declined. Emma sat on his bed and told him to look at her. She recalled everything she had done to try and get information on him, she had gone to their old home and sat waiting for hours each day in case he came back. Harlan lifted the blankets and said, "Mama, no sense in both of us walking around with broken hearts" (257).

In Chapter 81, Harlan was drinking again. He punched the wall when Sam refused to get more for him but Emma went and got it for him so he would not fight with his father. Harlan rarely left his room, he had not showered and was either drunk or asleep. There were times when Sam and Emma heard him crying through the walls. Sam wanted to put him in the hospital but Emma would not allow him. Harlan would not speak to Emma for a week when she mentioned Lizard's name to him. John Smith had come to visit, he was in his army uniform. John burst into Harlan's bedroom grabbed the covers off of him and yelled at him to get up. Harlan recognized John and they engaged in small talk. John brought out a joint which got Harlan's attention but John would only smoke it outside. He suggested Harlan go with him for a ride. He said they could go to the church. John spoke to Harlan about his faith in God and told Harlan that even though he had been through some bad stuff, God understood and would take the anger from him. Harlan began to cry. Harlan recovered and asked John if God would agree with them smoking the joint. John assured him that it was alright since God made it.



In Chapter 82, Harlan was seeing things and people. During dinner one night he had looked at his mother and saw the Bitch of Buchenwald looking at him. Harlan stood up and soiled himself. Sam took him to get him cleaned up and Harlan hid his tears into Sam's shoulder. Harlan could not tell anyone that he saw ghosts and that outside his windows he saw the camp and soldiers pointing their guns at him. His screams became disruptive to the neighbors and they were evicted from their apartment. They had to move but could not tell Harlan so they came up with lies about why things were packed. Dr. Carter suggested they drug him to get him from one place to another. Sam informed the movers that they had to carry Harlan down to the cab and then up to the new apartment.

In Chapter 83, three more years passed having to follow the ups and downs of Harlan's moods. The stress was getting to Emma and Sam and they sat down with Dr. Carter who offered Harlan a prescription of medication that would help him. The medication gave Emma hope for Harlan's future. Emma spoke to Sam about the money they had in the bank from when the city bought their first house, she wanted to move to New Jersey. Sam was hesitant, Harlan was doing better with the medication, he was playing his guitar again and going out. Emma wanted to give him a chance to meet a nice girl and give her grandchildren. She wanted him away from the kinds of girls he met at the clubs in Harlem. She was finished with the city and since that was what she wanted then Sam agreed.

Analysis

Harlan's return home was hard for Emma and Sam. Harlan was not the same and it bothered Emma that he would not talk to her about where he had been for five years. The doctor suspected he had been held in prison camp but Emma did not want to face that scenario. Emma was hurt that he hid himself from her. When Emma confronted Harlan for not even looking at her, he told her that both of them did not need to have broken hearts. Emma had faced Harlan's rejection before when she and Sam had returned to Macon when Emma's father had died. Harlan had kept his distance back then at a time when both of their hearts had been broken.

Harlan began to drink alcohol again. Emma was back to pleasing him and getting him whatever he wanted. John Smith, Harlan's neighbor and friend when they were younger, came to see him. John would not coddle Harlan, he had been in the war as an American soldier and knew about facing death everyday. John told Harlan to get himself cleaned up and offered to take him to church. He told Harlan that he depended on God to keep him safe during the war. John told Harlan that God understood what had happened and would take away the anger. Harlan cried while John encouraged him to let it out.

Harlan began to experience hallucinations and was not able to tell anyone. He saw the Bitch of Buchenwald in his mother's face, ghosts of the people who had died, the entire camp outside his bedroom window and soldiers pointing their rifles at him. Emma and Sam was also dealing with Harlan's behavior which was exhausting for them. Harlan



had episodes of screaming which bothered the neighbors and the landlord finally had to evict them. They had to sedate Harlan in order to move him without upsetting him.

Harlan started taking medication that helped with his mood swings and allowed him to get out more and start playing his guitar again. Emma had new hope for his future. She decided she wanted to get out of the city and move to New Jersey. She hoped for Harlan to meet a nice girl and give her grandchildren. Sam gave her what she wanted.

Discussion Question 1

Emma was excited to have Harlan home but he was not who she expected. When did Emma experience this before with Harlan?

Discussion Question 2

What was the reason that Emma did not believe the doctor when he suspected Harlan had been in a concentration camp?

Discussion Question 3

How was John Smith's visit and willingness to talk about God's plan helpful to Harlan?

Vocabulary

stevedores, fedora, hubris, isoniazid, trifling



Chapters 84 - 88

Summary

In Chapter 84 Emma and Sam found a house to buy in Trenton, New Jersey. Up until the early 1950's Trenton, New Jersey was where white people lived. They would be harassed if they sold their homes to blacks and the blacks who moved in were targets for persecution. As the whites moved from Trenton to smaller towns along the seaside, more blacks moved into the area. This is where Emma and Sam planned to move. Emma said this would be their last home.

Emma, Sam and Harlan arrived at their new home in Trenton, New Jersey in Chapter 85, along with the moving truck and Lucille and her new husband. Patsy Harris heard their music and went to the window to keep the sound out. When she saw who the new neighbors were she got on the phone to spread word that blacks were moving in across the street. Still on the phone, Patsy provided a thorough description of the activity she saw from her window. Patsy counted four black families but her friend on the phone reminded her of two others making six black families now in the neighborhood. Patsy excused herself from the call, she had to contact the locksmith to have deadbolt locks put on her doors. Her friend understood because she and her husband had recently bought a gun for protection.

In Chapter 86 Emma and Sam's new home became a target of harassment. Garbage would get dumped in their yard, feces set on fire and their car scratched by keys of an angry neighbor. The police watched out for Harlan and pulled him over every chance they got which made Harlan retreat inside for days because of the stress that white men in uniforms brought forth for him. Emma refused to move, she had settled in and said they would have to kill her to get her out of there. Sam bought a dog for protection and a month later found the dog dead from someone poisoning it. After a few years all of the whites had left the neighborhood. Finally free of the racist destruction, Sam began to make repairs and had fixed up the basement which became the center for their parties every other week. Their parties of the past had made a comeback.

In Chapter 87 Emma and Sam came to expect Harlan's reactions to what had happened in Germany, the night terrors, the fear and anger inside of him would never be cured by medications, alcohol or his mother's love and care of him. Each morning Emma was relieved to find him alive. Sam started working as a janitor at the hospital in Tilton in 1954 and got Harlan a job as a floater, filling in wherever he was needed. The Korean War was ending and the returning vets were brought to the hospital as a temporary home. Harlan could relate with the stories of the veterans and often shared his own stories. He was sympathetic with the men as his parents had been with him. Emma encouraged him to take his guitar and after his shifts he would stay to jam with the musicians of the group. Harlan accidentally gave a joint away to a patient when the man asked him for a cigarette, Harlan handed him the remainder of his pack forgetting that



he had a joint in there. The next day the patient asked Harlan if he could buy the weed off of him. Harlan never thought of being a dealer but he knew it would be an easy job.

Harlan now earned his own money and was financially independent in Chapter 88. Most of his money went towards women and Scotch, but he also bought himself a convertible. It was 1955, a time in America where blacks were still be killed by whites, there were civil rights leaders who encouraged peace and there were assassinations of presidents and other leaders who publically spoke about how to treat one another. Harlan joined up with the Black Panthers in 1962 even though his mother was against it. Harlan spoke to convince her that it was not a bad thing although his purpose for being a Black Panther had to do with getting all of the female members in his bed. Lucille had also returned to the studio to record an album that year. Harlan realized his mother had gotten old when she asked him to take her and Sam to church after years of being away from her religion.

Analysis

The turmoil between whites and blacks continued into the 1950s and 1960s. Emma wanted to move into a house in New Jersey to get away from the city. The neighborhood they chose had been a white community but they were selling and moving into smaller towns near the shore. There was a time when whites where not allowed to sell their property to blacks, but when that changed not only the blacks who moved in were harassed, but the whites who brought in the blacks suffered at the hands of whites. Emma and Sam had made the sixth black family to move into their neighborhood. Their property and cars were vandalized and overall they had three dogs who they brought to the property as security, had been poisoned. Emma refused to leave and endured everything the whites did. She would not be chased away. It all finally ended when all of the houses were filled with black families. Emma started hosting fish fries every other weekend and they packed their remodeled basement with neighbors who came to eat and party.

The medication continued to help Harlan but it could not take away all of the trauma he had experienced. He continued to have reactions any time he was triggered by police officers or mail men or any white man in a uniform. The nightmares and night terrors were a part of his life and Emma and Sam knew there was nothing that would take away what had happened in Germany. Sam started a job at a hospital that was temporary housing for soldiers coming back from the Korean War. Sam got Harlan a job which turned out to be helpful for him. He could relate with what the soldiers dealt and it gave him an outlet to share his experiences.

In 1962 Harlan joined the Black Panthers against his mother's will, he explained that the Panthers stood for peace even though Harlan's only reason for joining was to get all of the girls into his bed. Lucille had her husband drive her tout o Trenton to show Emma the album she came out of retirement to do. Emma poked fun at the cover picture of an older Lucille. Harlan realized that Emma was also aging which became apparent when



she told Harlan to drive her and Sam to church. A place where Emma had not been for a long time.

Discussion Question 1

Why were white people turning on their white neighbors who sold their houses to blacks?

Discussion Question 2

What helped Harlan deal better with the anger and trauma inside of him?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Emma's age be associated with wanting to return to church?

Vocabulary

ostracized, succumbing, incriminated, wretchedness, nary, repertoire, eradicated, emancipator, dashiki, hooligans, bourgeoisie



Chapters 89 - 93

Summary

It is July of 1967 in Chapter 89, the author described the times as; the days of hippies, rebellion against the Vietnam War and free love. Free love meant that people paired up with each other no matter their color, ethnicity, gender, or age. A lot of weed was smoked and drugs such as LSD was ingested. Dealers like Harlan made a lot of money because as a small dope peddler, he was turned into a "low-level tycoon" (282). Harlan, John Smith and a couple other guys were in the basement after the rain chased them from outside. Harlan and a band member named Solomon, waited out the rain by playing dice, drinking gin and smoking pot. Solomon was beating Harlan at dice and Harlan kept putting more money up to try and win what he lost. The rain stopped and Emma called the guys to the backyard to finish jamming. John sat out front with Harlan after the rest of the band left. A girl walked up to the two guys made small talk then pulled out a wad of money. Harlan took the money, went inside and came back with a bag of weed for her.

In Chapter 90, the ringing phone woke Harlan from a dream. When he woke enough to realize the sound was the phone he answered it and heard Solomon saying John had been killed by the police. Solomon told Harlan to come to Newark. There were people, police and cars near the police precinct when Harlan pulled up, he found Solomon in the diner and asked if the crowds were because of John. Solomon told the story as he heard it from Guillermo who was across the table. John got stopped by the police, they talked then the officer pulled John out of the car and started beating on him. Guillermo said he saw it happen and ran to get Solomon. But John and the police were gone before they got back. Solomon said they went to the police station there were girls screaming, they saw a police car pull up and drag a dead guy out of their car and into the building. Solomon said he asked one of the officers where was the taxi man they beat up, the police backed away and spoke into his radio and then police started coming from everywhere. Outside the diner the crowd of people had grown, and chanted to see John Smith's body. Police shot into the air and ran at the crowds swinging their batons to disperse the people. Harlan ran into an alley and hid until morning. He saw all of the damage from the night on the way to get his car. Harlan drove slow down the street and was stopped by the police demanding guns. Harlan was thrown out of the car onto the ground, one officer searched the car while the other one restrained Harlan by stepping on his head. There were no guns in his car but they found his weed.

Harlan was taken to jail in Chapter 91. He shared a cell with two other guys. LeRoi Jones was a famous poet in Newark. LeRoi said he hoped the taxi driver appreciated what everyone had done for him. Harlan told him the taxi driver was dead but LeRoi said John was still alive. The crowds returned to the streets the next night. This time the Governor called in the National Guard and a curfew was put in place. Harlan was sentenced to ten years in prison. The author mentioned, "Prison had a way of draining



people of their hope and humanity." (Page 290) This was not true of Harlan since he went in without any. Emma brought a magazine for Harlan during a Sunday visit. It was a Time Magazine with a picture of John Smith on the cover. Emma blamed John for Harlan being in jail, she was mad that he made money while so many were in jail or dead because they had been out there in support of him. Emma quickly changed the subject and told Harlan that despite getting new glasses, his father had almost hit a truck, he might be too old to drive anymore.

In Chapter 92 John visited Harlan in jail. John had avoided visiting because he thought Harlan was mad at him. Harlan shared some insights he had gained from reading books while locked up. Harlan had read Frederick Douglass and discussed Douglass' belief that the problem caused the rebellion but in their case, the cause would never take responsibility for their actions. Harlan questioned John about the talk they had about God back when he got home from Germany, he asked John if he believed what had happened to him was God's Plan.

In Chapter 93 Emma and Sam used the last of their savings to pay for a good attorney for Harlan which helped to lessen his sentence and he was released after three years. It was a day in November of 1970 when he ran into his mother's arms for a big hug. She told him no whites would ever take him from her again. The drive home was full of talk and laughter. Harlan was happy to breathe fresh air and had put his head out the window, Emma yelled at him and Sam said he looked like an old dog hanging out the window. Sam was laughing, missed the stop sign and crashed the car into a fire truck. He died instantly. Emma was hurt bad and died two days later. Harlan's injuries were not serious and he was there with her when she slipped into the next life. The staff at the hospital that day had never heard such terror from a man as when Harlan screamed in grief for his mother.

Analysis

The late 1960's were the days of rebellion against the war and a time for self-expression with drugs and love. Harlan and John Smith played music with a couple of guys but Harlan was making his money as the neighborhood dope dealer. In Newark, New Jersey, there had been a lot of police brutality towards blacks. White officers made traffic stops and ended up beating or killing the person.

Solomon called Harlan late at night saying that John had been killed by the police. Harlan met Solomon out in Newark where crowds already gathered. Solomon's friend Guillermo said John had been stopped by the white officers, thrown out of the car and beaten to death. When cops started firing their guns in the air to scatter the crowds, Harlan took off running and ducked into an alley and hid all night. In the morning he made it to his car and started down the street but got stopped by the police and taken to jail for the weed they found in the car. Harlan was put in a cell with LeRoi Jones, a known poet in Newark. LeRoi said he was there because the police planted a gun in his car. LeRoi said he hoped that taxi driver appreciated all that his brothers and sisters had done in his name. LeRoi said the taxi driver was alive.



Harlan's time in prison was spent reading and keeping to himself. His parents visited on Sundays. Emma brought Harlan the magazine with John Smith's picture on it. Emma complained that John had probably made money on what had happened that night. She blamed John for Harlan being in jail because Harlan was in Newark after he heard that John was killed.

It took John six months to visit Harlan in prison. He was afraid Harlan would be mad at him so he kept his distance but Harlan wanted to talk about the books he had been reading. Harlan's talked about Fredrick Douglas' work about the difference between a riot, the label the police used, and a rebellion. Harlan believed the blacks were rebelling against how the white police treated them. Harlan asked John about the conversation they had after Harlan got home from Germany about if he believed that what had happened to him was part of God's plan for him. John told him he did not know but it was possible. Harlan needed to bring God to the forefront with John, maybe to prove that Harlan was right and it was just bullshit or maybe Harlan wanted John to think about what could come from his suffering.

Harlan got out of jail on early release with the help of Emma's good attorney and Harlan's good behavior. It was November of 1970. Harlan ran into Emma's opened arms. While they hugged she told him that no white person would take him away from her. The drive home was full of talk and laughter. Harlan was happy to breath fresh air put his head out the window. Emma yelled at him and Sam said he looked like an old dog. Sam was laughing and missed the stop sign and crashed the car into a fire truck. Sam died at the scene and Emma passed two days later with Harlan at her side.

Discussion Question 1

Why did it seem like the violence against blacks was on the increase in 1967 Newark, New Jersey?

Discussion Question 2

What was Harlan's reaction to the magazine with John Smith on the cover?

Discussion Question 3

What made Harlan empty of hope and humanity?

Vocabulary

dissident, martyr, rebellion, exemplary



Chapters 94 - 97

Summary

In Chapter 94, Lucille arrived to attend the funeral service. She had recently lost her second husband and now she was overwhelmed with losing Emma too. Lucille asked Harlan about contacting any family in Macon. He only knew of one uncle still alive but did not know where to find him. She had placed an obituary in the Macon newspaper. The funeral was held at the Baptist Church where Emma and Sam attended. Harlan recognized some people from visiting at the house but Lucille, John and Mayemma were there for him. Having thought he cried out all of his tears, the sadness took over and he wept at the sight of his parents in the caskets.

Emma's garden was in bloom in Chapter 95. Harlan sat and stared at the flowers most of the day then he poured bleach over the flowers and killed the entire garden. Harlan had a plan to take his life. He had a rope with a noose hung over the rafters, a bottle of pills and a gun with one bullet. His dreams were of the dead so he thought the only way to get away from the ghosts was to be with them. When he decided it was time, he opened the pills and took three different ones. But then the closet door opened, that was the door Emma complained about. Sam had tried different things to get it to stay closed. Harlan saw a pair of men's brown shoes sticking out from the shadows. Harlan called out a warning for the person to leave. The phone rang startling Harlan and he jumped back. He got brave and ran to the closet and reached in only to find clothes and hangers. Harlan laughed but wondered why those brown shoes were in the front. Harlan lifted them up and studied the brown leather and noticed the soles showed a little wear and the laces were tied which was unusual. Those shoes seemed familiar but he did not remember his father wearing them but created a memory that he could not figure out. Just then the phone rang again, Lucille was checking on him, he told her he was not well and he wanted to leave the house. He left that night to move in with Lucille.

In Chapter 96 Harlan moved into Lucille's one bedroom apartment with her. She told Harlan that his parents would be glad he was there with her. Harlan had quit drinking and smoking weed. He began walking and would walk long distances. He walked to where his first house had been and saw so much had changed. He continued to have thoughts of suicide on different occasions. His emotions were fragile, the ghosts still within him were evil. He decided he needed to live long enough to learn God's plan for him and that meant to leave Harlem.

In Chapter 97, Harlan had been with Lucille for a year. Lucille was done wearing the wig she had worn for ten years. She wanted to get her natural hair cut into the popular style, Harlan went with her to the barbershop. Women started to get their hair cut by a barber because the shorter hair styles were in fashion. Lucille had just finished admiring her new style when Herbert Bolden, a man she knew from years ago, came in. They began to talk and catch up. He wanted to know who Harlan was, Harlan introduced himself but Herbert wanted to know who he was to Lucille. Lucille reminded him of Harlan, Emma



and Sam. They talked about the clubs he used to own and Herbert asked Harlan about his work. He was still living off insurance money. Herbert asked Harlan what he could do and satisfied with his answers he offered him a job as a superintendent of his friend's building in Brooklyn. Harlan would get to live there free and keep up the place. Harlan was interested. Herbert reminded Harlan it was in Brooklyn.

Analysis

Harlan's grief was overwhelming. He did not think he had tears left to cry but at the sight of his parents in the coffins he broke down and wept. Lucille had come to be with him as did John and Mayemma. Harlan remained in the house in New Jersey but struggled being alone. He had made his mind up to kill himself. He had combined all of the pills he could find, had a rope with a noose and there was also a gun he could use.

On the day he decided to take his life, he was distracted by the closet door opening. He remembered his father trying different things with the door to keep it latched but nothing worked. Harlan noticed a pair of brown shoes on the floor sticking out which looked like a man was standing inside the closet. He called out for the person to leave but nothing happened. The phone rang scaring him.

He got up the courage and ran toward the closet reaching into the dark to find no one was there. Harlan lifted the shoes and looked them all over. There were some scuffs on the soles and the laces were tied. They were familiar to him but he could not remember seeing his father wear them. The shoes brought forth a memory but he could not bring up the details. These shoes had been in Harlan's life before. The phone rang again, Lucille was calling to check on him. He began to cry and told her he was not doing well. She told him to pack up and go to her place that night. There may have been a connection between the shoes and Lucille's phone call that saved Harlan's life that night.

Lucille's apartment was small, Harlan slept on the sofa bed in the middle of everything. He quit drinking and smoking weed. He took up walking and spent his days walking around the city or sitting in the park. He had a lot of memories of Harlem but the ghosts that were still within him were evil. Harlan saw himself as frail and easily swayed to self destruction. He still thought of suicide but he also wanted to live long enough to learn God's plan for him, he just would not be able to stay much longer in Harlem.

Harlan met an old friend of Lucille's at the barbershop. Herbert Bolden had owned clubs in Harlem back in Lucille's performing days. He was out of that business and now owned apartment buildings. He wanted to know about Harlan, Lucille told him he was Emma and Sam's son. Herbert continued to question Harlan and with all of the right answers to his questions, Herbert offered Harlan a job as a superintendent for his friend's building in Brooklyn. He would get free rent plus pay for taking care of the building. This would be Harlan's chance to leave Harlem, have his own place and have purpose.



Discussion Question 1

Why was the issue with the closet door significant for Harlan?

Discussion Question 2

What was unusual about the brown shoes?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Herbert Bolden want to make sure Harlan knew the job was in Brooklyn?

Vocabulary

epitome, litany, skank, unnerving



Chapters 98 - 101

Summary

In Chapter 98 the author introduced the characters who either lived in or near Harlan's building. There was a war veteran in a wheelchair who rolled himself around the Crown Heights neighborhood. He wore army fatigues, polished brown shoes and a helmet with dents in it. He was known for singing operas as he rolled around the city. No one knew where the man lived, but he did not stay any one place, and left almost as soon as he arrived. On Harlan's first day at 245 Sullivan Place, the old vet rolled his chair in front of Harlan's apartment door and sang Handel's "Messiah" with his beautiful voice.

The author described one of the residents as a man who kept to himself in his apartment with his cat. He spent the days looking out the window watching. Just before he left the window for bed that night, he saw his neighbor Eudora Penny down on the street. Eudora had her navy-blue purse over her shoulder which the old man believed was really a weapon hidden in the purse. He once saw her use the purse to knock out a man attempting to rob her. Eudora had pounded on the robber until he cried out for mercy. After beating the man, she turned and quietly walked away. The old man had watched the whole scene. The brutality of the assault reminded him of times from the old man's past. He dreamed about the attack all night and in the morning went looking for blood on the ground. He saw a trail of blood that led up to the gas station. It was at that point the old man realized Eudora Penny had to be someone other than who she said she was. The old man was glad because he had that in common with her.

In Chapter 99, Harlan and Brooklyn seemed to be a good fit, the air and the work were helpful for him. There was a lot of projects around the apartments to stay busy. Over the nine months he had been there he had gone into every apartment except for two. Rose Talbot lived in 2E, it was said that she kept to herself and had not been outside in over 20 years. There was a son who brought groceries once a week. The other tenant Andrew Mailer lived in 3C. He was known to only leave out in the morning or at night, he had a cat with who he talked to all day. Harlan kept busy on his day off by going to different places in the city and visiting Lucille once a month for a meal. She usually invited Herbert along too.

In Chapter 100 Andrew Mailer's day was changed up for the first time in 20 years. Harlan was preparing breakfast when a tenant came for him about water leaking from the apartment above his. Harlan went up to apartment 3C and rang the doorbell. There was no answer. He tried a few times and knocked with no response. Harlan unlocked the door and went inside. The kitchen floor was covered, Harlan went under the sink to cut off the water. He walked toward the door and called out a few more times for Mr. Mailer and still nothing. Just as he was leaving he thought that he should check the bedroom to make sure the old man is not dead. He walked through the living room and saw something that almost made him run out screaming.



Andrew Mailer started his day as usual in the grocery store in Chapter 101. For the first time in 20 years, Andrew veered off his routine. He had gone to the grocery store as usual but was distracted when a freckled arm reached out in front of him as he chose ground beef. He got next to her at the checkout but when she finished and left the store, he dropped his things so he could follow her and hoped to speak to her. Andrew only spoke once a month to Abraham, a jeweler who he traveled by train to see. The two made small talk until Abraham inspected the items Andrew brought. Abraham would offer a price and pay Andrew.

Andrew continued to pursue Eudora, when they had reached the door to enter the apartments, Andrew feared he would not catch her in time so he called out in German and she turned her head and responded in English. He saw her eyes when she turned to him, they were the same color blue as his. Andrew again spoke in German, Eudora opened the door and walked quickly to her apartment while Andrew nearly floated with happiness up the stairs. Andrew opened his apartment door and once inside saw Harlan sitting in a chair with the riding crop. Andrew knew it was a matter of time before he would be uncovered. He made his way to the couch and sat down across from Harlan. The old veteran in the wheelchair rolled to the building, he leaned over and pulled the laces tight on his brown shoes before he got up from the chair and walked away.

Analysis

The reader learns about the tenants and neighbors where Harlan has taken on his new job as superintendent. There is a man in a wheelchair who rolls around the neighborhood but is not known to actually live anywhere. The author described him as always wearing fatigues, polished brown shoes and a dented helmet. He was known for singing operas as he wheels about the Crown Heights neighborhood. When he was not singing he talked to himself. On Harlan's first day there, the old vet rolled up to Harlan's apartment door and sang Handel's "Messiah." The author also introduced an old man who spent his day watching out the window. This man became known to Harlan as Andrew Mailer. He lived in one of the apartments that Harlan had not been called to during the nine months on the job. Neighbors said that Andrew only left his apartment in the morning or at night. He owned a cat and his neighbor had said that he talked to it all day as if it were a person. Andrew knew about the other tenants just by watching them. He had watched Eudora Penny beat a man who set out to rob her. She carried a navy blue purse but Andrew Mailer thought there was something in that purse that delivered a harsh beating to a robber. Andrew was interested in watching her, the brutality sparked something inside him that he had not felt in a long time. In the morning Andre went to see if there was blood where the attack happened. He came to believe that Eudora Penny was not who she pretended to be. Andrew did not seem to be the person he claimed to be either.

For the first time in 20 years, Andrew had gone to the grocery store but got distracted when a freckled arm reached in front of him. He got near her at the checkout and followed her outside in hopes to speak to her. Andrew always avoided contact with people. He only spoke once a month to Abraham, a jeweler who he traveled by train to



see. The two made small talk until the items Andrew brought was looked at, valued and paid for. For some reason, Andrew needed something from Eudora.

Andrew feared he would not catch Eudora in time so he called out in German and she turned her head and responded in English. He saw her eyes when she responded, they were the same color blue as his and all he needed to see to know. Andrew spoke in German and Eudora opened the door and walked quickly to her apartment as a happy Andrew went upstairs to his apartment where Harlan sat holding the riding crop. The riding crop was like the one Harlan saw the Bitch of Buchenwald carry. Harlan had seen it earlier when he came to turn the water off. Andrew sat down across from Harlan, it was a matter of time before his hidden life would be found. The chapter ended with the old veteran getting out of his wheelchair and walking away.

McFadden places an emphasis on the brown shoes throughout the novel in these areas: Referring to the reverend In Chapter 15: "He removed his favorite pair of brown shoes" (51). The shoes in the closet in Chapter 95 "...he spotted a pair of shoes peaking out from the shadows" (301). Chapter 95 "How the brown shoes had broken rank...ran his fingers over the stiff chocolate colored leather...The shoes were laced...yet they looked familiar. So familiar that it triggered a memory he couldn't grasp" (302). Referring to the man in the wheelchair in Chapter 98: "He was always attired in...highly polished brown shoes" (313). Also in Chapter 101 "...leaned over, tightened he laces of his brown shoes then stood up and walked away" (323).

When the reader reviews the path of the brown shoes it becomes clear that the brown shoes belonged to Reverend Tenant Robinson. The next sighting of the shoes kept Harlan from committing suicide, as he started to take the pills he saw the shoes in the front of the closet appearing as if someone was there. He was distracted and did not take the pills. The shoes were familiar to Harlan and triggered a memory that he could not identify. Could this have been a sign that Tenant Robinson was with Harlan? Could it be that his grandfather led him to the plan God had for him? The singing veteran wore polished brown shoes and when Harlan defeated evil, the man in the brown shoes got up and walked away.

Discussion Question 1

Why did the author provide a thorough description of the singing veteran in the wheelchair?

Discussion Question 2

What did Andrew Mailer need to see in Eudora Penny?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Andrew Mailer?



Vocabulary

troubadour, savagery, loupe



Chapters 102 - 106

Summary

In Chapter 102 Harlan saw the empty wheelchair as he left the apartment. He paid no attention to the fact that it was empty since he had other things to do. He had time to enjoy being free. Harlan felt weightless as he walked down the street.

Harlan enters the 71st Precinct in Chapter 103 and greeted by officer Daniel McCollum who was not pleased to have to help a black man. Daniel did not like the fact that he got placed at the 71st Precinct because the population was made up of mainly blacks and Jews. Harlan told McCollum that he was turning himself in. When asked, he said for murder. McCollum did not believe Harlan and became sarcastic with him. McCollum asked how he committed the murder and Harlan lifted his hands and said he used his hands. Harlan's breath smelled of the Scotch he had downed on the way so the officer thought it was just an old drunk joking around. Harlan gave Andrew Mailer's name but then said that it was not his real name. Harlan said it was a long story that started in Germany. McCollum started asking him about having flashbacks. Harlan raised his voice to be heard and the room fell silent. A sergeant came up to the desk and asked McCollum if there was a problem. The sergeant instructed McCollum to send someone to the address to confirm Harlan's claim. Two officers went to the apartment building and pressed all of the buttons until someone buzzed them into the door. They found the door to Andrew Mailer's apartment unlocked and went inside. Just as reported, the body was laid out on the couch. The cat jumped on the couch and onto the body to confirm what was already known by feeling his neck for a pulse. The officer radioed the station and told McCollum what they had found.

In Chapter 104 Harlan met Detective Arthur Graham who had served 30 years on the force was retiring at the end of the week and in a month was moving to Florida. This would be his last case of his career and was supposed to be an open and shut case.

Harlan talked for eight hours in Chapter 105, Art leaned over and turned the recording off. He believed Harlan was telling the truth because his wife had also been a prisoner at Buchenwald and remembered hearing about the Bitch of Buchenwald. Art knew there were Nazi war criminals in America, they would create a new identity and sell off the jewelry and other valuables they stole from prisoners to survive. It provided satisfaction for his wife anytime she found out that a Nazi war criminal had been convicted or killed.

Art was aware that there was only one thing he could do with Harlan. He took the reels off the recorder, unraveled the tape and stuffed it in his briefcase then told Harlan to go with him. Art opened the door to the interrogation room and looked both ways into the hall before walking out. He gestured to Harlan to follow him. They walked down the hall and out an exit door. In the alley Art told Harlan not to go back to his apartment. He handed Harlan a wad of money which would be enough for a bus ticket and a place to stay for a day or two. Harlan accepted the money. Instead of shaking his hand, Art took



a hold of Harlan's should and held tight and told Harlan the world was round. Harlan thanked him and walked away into the dark night. Art thought about all the bad people he had jailed and was glad that his last case allowed him to keep a good man out of prison.

In Chapter 106 Harlan was free. It did not feel real to him. His freedom was divine, not something he worked for but something given to him. It was with him all of his life. He decided he would go to the only place where he and his mother had roots, Macon, Georgia.

Analysis

Harlan felt good when he walked away from the apartment. He took his time and enjoyed his freedom before getting to the police station. The officer smelled the alcohol on Harlan's breath and assumed he was another drunk black man wasting his time. The officer questioned Harlan's ability and raised his voice in frustration. The officer said Harlan confessed to killing someone. Officers were sent to the apartment and confirmed the dead body. Harlan was taken in for questioning.

Art Graham explained the seriousness of the situation to Harlan before he heard Harlan's story. Harlan said he had to begin at the beginning in order for the story to make sense. It took eight hours and Art Graham believed every word because his wife was once a prisoner at Buchenwald and she talked about the same things as Harlan, including the Bitch of Buchenwald. Art's wife tracked the Nazi war criminals. They would create new identities in other countries and support themselves by selling art, jewelry and other things they stole from the prisoners. This explained Andrew Mailer's monthly trip to Abraham the jeweler. He sold the jewelry and possibly even gold from the teeth of those incinerated.

Art only knew of one way to handle this case. He unraveled the tape recording and walked Harlan out the back door, handed him a wad of money and advised him get a bus ticket and leave town. Art held Harlan's shoulder and told him the world was round. Harlan did not understand that Art was telling him that when a person commits evil acts, that person will eventually be the recipient of the same treatment. The Bitch of Buchenwald tortured and brutally killed Harlan's best friend; Harlan gave her what she deserved, death at his hands. Harlan was finally free which was something he had not felt before.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Harlan turn himself in to the police?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Art let Harlan go?



Discussion Question 3

What made providence inherited and not earned for Harlan?

Vocabulary

miscreant, tzitzit, sinewy, repose, providence



Characters

Harlan Elliot

Harlan Elliot is the main character. Harlan was born in 1916 in Macon, Georgia to Sam and Emma Elliot. He was raised by his grandparents, Tenant and Louisa Robinson until his parents retrieved him from Macon to move with them to their new home in Harlem, New York City. By the time Harlan was 10, he was adjusted to his life in Harlem. He had a pleasant personality and was popular with the kids and liked by the adults. Emma, guilty for leaving Harlan as a baby, rarely disciplined his behavior and he learned to take advantage of his mother which had landed him in trouble.

Harlan showed interest in playing the guitar and his mother encourage his musical talent. He performed in some gigs around town and he went on tour with Lucille when he was 16 and was introduced to drinking, smoking weed and women. Harlan liked how the alcohol and drugs numbed his memory of Darlene's death and helped him sleep.

Harlan and his band went to Paris to play in the club of one of Lucille's acquaintances but four days before leaving for America, Harlan and Lizard were detained by German soldiers and taken to a concentration camp. Harlan was there for five years before being freed to go home. Harlan was haunted by the torture and all of the deaths he witnessed while at the camp including his bests friend, Lizard. Harlan suffered mental anguish for several years after coming home until he started on medication and became reacquainted with his childhood friend, John Smith who spoke to him about God having a plan for everyone.

Harlan spent over three years in prison for having marijuana in his car. On the day he was released, he was with his parents in the car when his dad drove through a stop sign and crashed. Both of her parents were killed from the crash. Harlan lived alone in his parent's home, he was suicidal and just as he started taking pills to overdose, the closet door opened and he saw a pair of brown shoes which looked as if someone was standing there. Harlan was distracted from going through with taking all of the pills and ended up going to live with Lucille.

Harlan met a friend of Lucille's who told him about a superintendent's job at an apartment complex. Harlan moved to the apartment in Brooklyn where there was an old veteran in a wheelchair who wandered the neighborhood singing. The man wore polished brown shoes.

In a tenant's apartment to fix a leak, Harlan saw the same horse whip that the Bitch of Buchenwald at the concentration camp carried. In America the Bitch had taken on the identity of a man but Harlan knew it was the same person who killed his best friend. Harlan strangled and killed this person. The man in the wheelchair tightened his brown shoes and walked away. Harlan saw the empty wheelchair on his way to turn himself in



at the police station. He was not convicted. He was finally free with the help of God's help.

Emma Elliot

Emma was the daughter of Reverend Tenant and Louisa Robinson from Macon, Georgia. Emma was a natural at the piano and played the organ for the church choir from age seven. Emma's family was well-off and she received everything she needed growing up but the one thing she wanted most was to be freed of restrictions she was held to as the daughter of a Reverend.

Emma fell in love with a carpenter named Sam Elliot. The only men Emma could be seen in public with was her father or her brothers so Lucille was always with her when she saw Sam. Emma became pregnant by Sam the first time she snuck out to be alone with him. Emma and Sam married and their son, Harlan, was born on Christmas Eve of 1917. Emma's need for freedom led her and Sam to Washington DC and several other states before she found her fit in Harlem, New York.

Emma struggled with feeling guilty over leaving Harlan with her parents until she and Sam settled in Harlem. Emma only wanted Harlan to be happy. Emma was taken advantage of by Harlan because he knew she would give in and give him money or go buy him Scotch. But Emma became extremely angry with Harlan when he did not respond to her generosity but took her for granted.

Emma's best friend was Lucille who may not have had as much as Emma growing up but became very rich and famous which made Emma jealous because she was on the same type of path as a piano player but got pregnant and married instead. Emma died from injuries from the car accident that killed Sam.

Lizard

Lizard was born to Jewish parents and grew up in St. Louis. He endured bullying from non--Jewish kids and when he countered the bully's attack leaving the kid close to death he ended up in reform school. While there, Lizard was drawn to the music he heard the black kids singing. He strayed away from the Jewish group of kids and befriended the group of blacks especially Joe Brown. His friendship deepened with Joe and continued after they were released. Joe and his family taught Lizard how to play the guitar, piano and the trumpet.

Treated as a member of the family until his father arrived with a police officer to take him home, Lizard was transformed by the music and family bond of the Browns. Mr. Brown gave Lizard his trumpet and Joe told him to stay black. Lizard moved to Kansas City to immerse himself into the music and learned he has the ability to think himself into who he wants to be.



Lizard ended up in Harlem, New York City at a bar near the room he had rented. He began talking music with a guy named Harlan who knew Louis Armstrong and a great friendship ensued.

Lizard and Harlan put a band together and eventually went to Paris, France to play at a club.

Lizard's Jewish identity was discovered after his arrival at Buchenwald when a guard noticed his circumcision. The star on his uniform led him to suffer torture at the hands of Ilse Koch, the Bitch of Buchenwald.

Sam Elliot

Sam Elliot was a carpenter originally from Louisville, Kentucky. He moved to Macon, Georgia in 1916 where he met Emma. Sam knew that she was the reverend's daughter but he continued to pursue her and was able to spend time with her because Lucille would go everywhere with him and Emma.

Sam got Emma pregnant and married her against the wishes of her father because Tenant said Sam was not good enough for her daughter. Sam reminded Tenant that Jesus was a carpenter. Sam deeply loved Emma and always supported her decisions.

Sam was laughing with Harlan and Emma when he drove through a stop sign and crashed the car into a fire truck. He died immediately and Emma died two days later.

John Smith

John Smith lived upstairs from Harlan in their first home in Harlem. John and Harlan became good friends and played music together. John played the trumpet and Harlan played the guitar. They used to play on the street corners for change. Harlan and John were together in John's apartment when John's sister Darlene poured oil on her body and lit herself on fire and eventually died from the burns.

John and his mother moved to New Jersey and came to visit Harlan after he returned from Germany and talked to Harlan about God having a plan for every person. John and Harlan picked up their friendship where it left off as kids after Harlan's family moved to New Jersey near John and his mother. John drove a taxi and one night was pulled over by the police and badly beaten. Crowds of people came out into the streets because they thought the white police officer had killed him. John was interviewed by People magazine and his picture made the front cover.

Lucille

Lucille Nelson was Emma's best friend. Lucille sang in the church choir from age seven with Emma. Lucille sang in a local production and was asked to go on tour for seven



months. Lucille returned from the tour with an hint of maturity about her. Lucille left Macon for Chicago to marry Bill, the man she met on the tour. Lucille went on to become the second best black woman blues singer.

Lucille and Bill landed in Harlem, New York City where they bought a home large enough to house her parents and siblings. Lucille invited Harlan to tour with her band which gave him credibility in the music scene. Lucille became a nurse later in life when her singing career was finished. Lucille was crushed when Emma, whom she loved like a sister, died. Harlan lived with her when he suffered from the grief of his parents' death. Lucille was always there for Harlan and saw him as the son she never had.

Gwen

Gwen was Ethel's youngest daughter. Gwen was a good dancer and was chosen to dance in a recital at Carnegie Hall. Gwen met Harlan when he played in the band during their dance practices. Harlan was sweet on Gwen even though she was from the West Indies. Gwen entered into a physical relationship with Harlan, although she thought it was emotionally based. Gwen became pregnant by Harlan and had twins. She named one Aubrey after her father and the other Robert, because she liked the name. Gwen never disclosed Harlan's name to her mother.

Ethel

Ethel was married to Aubrey, they had two daughters, Irene and Gwen. Ethel and the girls sailed to New York City from the West Indies when her husband had settled and sent for them. Ethel was strict with her daughters allowing them to only attend parties that where church related. Ethel allowed Gwen to dance every Saturday morning in Harlem.

Reverend Tenant Robinson

The Reverend Tenant Robinson was a strong presence in the Robinson family. He was married to Louisa and had four children, three boys and Emma, his only girl. He led the congregation of the Cotton Way Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia. The reverend died in his sleep one night after he spent the day ministering to the sick and home-bound.

Ilse Koch

Ilse Koch is known as the Bitch of Buchenwald, the Commandant's wife. She lives in the house on property that is beyond the barbed wire fence. She has a white mare that she rode. The riding crop she carries looks like a leather wand with a red glass jewel on the top.



Symbols and Symbolism

Wealth

McFadden often contrasts the affluent from those with less or those who struggle. The Robinsons are wealthy compared to the blacks who work manual labor. Lucille lives a wealthy life as a popular singer. She lives in nice homes and brings her parents and siblings to live with her in the big house in Harlem. Emma is raised in wealth but she and her husband Sam struggle to make enough to live on. The Commandant and his wife at Buchenwald are rich while the prisoners are stripped of everything they own upon arriving at the camp.

Freedom

Emma wanted freedom since she was young and was jealous of Lucille who had the chance to feel free when she went on the singing tour. Emma's freedom became limited when she became pregnant and married Sam.

Gwen wanted freedom from her parent's strict rules that kept her from parties and boys. Gwen had to lie in order to spend time with Harlan. Gwen stole her freedom and ended up pregnant and the mother of twins. Gwen realized she would never be free of the children when Harlan's family had to move from his childhood home.

Lizard felt free once he made the decision to act like a black man. He was free of the Jewish label and free to pursue the music he loved. Lizard's freedom ended as a prisoner when he was forced to be labeled as Jewish man.

Harlan gained his ultimate freedom when he was released of a life time of oppression after getting his revenge on the Bitch of Buchenwald who had tortured prisoners and killed Lizard. Harlan turned himself into the police but the detective did not arrest him because Andrew Mailer was a Nazi war criminal. Harlan found his freedom and was on his way back to Macon, Georgia.

Music

Emma grew up playing gospel music on the piano and organ but as they got older, she and Lucille snuck away to listen to the blues and jazz being played in the juke joints. Lucille became a popular blues singer and made her living as a performer. Lucille knew famous musicians and brought them into Emma and Harlan's life. Harlan learned to play the guitar and formed his own band. He met Lizard because of their common link with music.

Lizard learned to play musical instruments after meeting Joe Brown in reform school. He also changed his identity because of his connection with Joe Brown and his family.



Lizard followed the path of the great musicians to Kansas City where he saw Louis Armstrong perform.

Music was the reason Harlan, Lizard and the band went to Paris where they were captured and taken prisoner at Buchenwald. Harlan's life path was greatly influenced by music.

Religion

Religion was important to Emma's parents, her father was a reverend and their livelihood depended on the church. Emma strayed from her faith when she and Sam moved from Macon. Emma blamed God for taking away her ability to play the piano. Emma and Sam returned to church later in life.

Gwen's family took their religion serious. Gwen and her sister were only allowed to attend church related activities.

John Smith shared his belief in God with Harlan when he visited after Harlan returned from Germany. John told Harlan that he made it through the war by believing God had a plan for him. These words resonated with Harlan and even though he found himself suicidal, Harlan also had a wish to live long enough to see God's plan for him.

Star of David Pendent

Louis Armstrong told Lizard he was given the Star of David Pendant by a Jewish family who took him in as a child. Louis worked for the family and when his home life became difficult he was invited to live with them. The family received threats and were targeted because of their relationship with a black child. Louis told Lizard how great he was treated and the love he felt by these people. The pendent reminded Louis that when he gets angry about hatred, the pendent reminded him of love.

Mockingbird

Lizard saw a mockingbird sitting on a sign post as they walked between the train station and Buchenwald. The sign had the name Weimer on it. It was the name of the city that his father and mother moved from in Germany. The bird looked down at Lizard then flew off. Lizard felt a heavy weight on his shoulders at that point. Lizard's father used to tell him that you can never go home again. Lizard thought to himself that his father was wrong because Lizard was back at Weimer again.

Frank Brown's Trumpet

Frank Brown taught Lizard how to play the trumpet which became Lizard's favorite instrument to play. When Lizard's father came to the Brown's house to get Lizard, Frank



offered his trumpet to him. Lizard knew how valuable the trumpet was to Frank and was not going to accept but Frank insisted and Lizard's father allowed him to have it. It was the same trumpet that Lizard played with Louis Armstrong and was left at the scene when Lizard and Harlan were taken by the German soldiers.

Riding Crop

The riding crop looked like a leather wand with a red glass jewel on top. Ilse Koch always carried the crop with her and held it in a manner that made others notice it. She tapped it against her leg as she walked in front of the prisoners looking for one to choose to torture.

Harlan had an uncomfortable internal reaction when he saw it in Andrew Mailer's apartment. It was the rider's crop that gave away Andrew Mailer's real identity.

Star on Lizard's shirt in prison

Lizard received a shirt with a star after the soldier identified he was Jewish when he saw Lizard's circumcised penis when the prisoners were required to strip down and be showered upon reaching Buchenwald. The star on his shirt set him apart from the non-Jews and may have been the reason he was chosen by Ilse Koch to be killed.

Brown Shoes

Reverend Tenant Robinson wore a pair of brown shoes. McFadden emphasized the fact that the shoes were his favorite shoes. "He removed his favorite pair of brown shoes" (51).

The next sighting of the shoes may have prevented Harlan from committing suicide, as he started to take a hand full of pills he saw the shoes in the front of the closet appearing as if someone was there and distracted him. "...he spotted a pair of shoes peaking out from the shadows"(301).

Harlan had no memory of his dad wearing those type of shoes, but they were familiar to him and triggered a memory in him. "The shoes were laced...yet they looked familiar. So familiar that it triggered a memory he couldn't grasp" (302). McFadden used the presence of these familiar shoes to distract Harlan from taking the pills. The reader may believe the shoes symbolized the presence of Tenant Robinson.

When McFadden described the singing veteran she emphasized that he wore polished brown shoes. "He was always attired in...highly polished brown shoes" (313). After Harlan had killed Andrew Mailer, the singing veteran, "tightened the laces of his brown shoes, then stood up and walked away" (323). In this passage, McFadden once again emphasized the man's brown shoes.



Settings

Macon, Georgia

Emma's family lived in the Pleasant Hill section of Macon, Georgia. There was separation of whites, blacks with a division in each race based on status.

Harlem, New York City

Lucille and Bill bought a large home in Harlem and brought her family from Macon to live with them. Emma and Sam went to visit Lucille and Bill and liked the city and decided to settle there.

Kansa City

Lizard moved to Kansas City to immerse himself in the blues. He met many musicians and learned that he can think himself into being who he wants to be.

Montmartre, France

Harlan, Lizard and their band traveled to Montmartre, France to play in Eugen Bullard's club.

Buchenwald Concentration Camp

The camp where Harlan and Lizard were held prisoner. Harlan was there for five years. Lizard was killed by hanging after the Bitch of Buchenwald chose him out of all of the prisoners to be hung.



Themes and Motifs

Racism

McFadden addresses several facets of racism within her novel. In the south, blacks were not allowed in certain businesses and could not use the same restrooms or drinking fountains as white people. Harlan learned about this segregation while he was on tour with Lucille when the band had to sleep on the bus because there were no motels that would allow blacks to stay.

Emma blamed white people for being in control of her fate when she and Sam were forced out of their home in Harlem. Emma and Sam's home in New Jersey was vandalized by whites who did not want them living in the neighborhood. White people who sold their homes to blacks were also harassed by other whites.

In addition to the white versus black racism, there is within race discrimination between affluent blacks and poor blacks just as McFadden mentioned the whites who associated with blacks were taunted by other whites. There is also the Non Jewish whites who discriminated against the Jewish. As a boy, Lizard was faced with discrimination from non Jewish boys and in the reform school, he was harassed by guards and other boys because he befriended Joe Brown and his friends.

This occurred when Harlan first heard Gwen's West Indies accent, he and his friends called her a coconut. Ethel did not like having to share living area with a family from Haiti. In Germany the Nazis persecuted Jews, blacks and anyone different from them.

Family and Friendship

McFadden intertwined the themes of family and friendships throughout the novel. Tenant and Louisa Robinson provided a strong family presence to their church community. Emma and Lucille were best friends from childhood throughout their lives. Lucille offered stability for Emma and eventually Harlan as well. This life-long friendship gave Emma purpose by entertaining Lucille and her celebrity friends. Emma was not able to achieve relationships on her own, but she gained purpose and a place by having parties and being known for the entertainment she provided.

Emma and Harlan's relationship went through many changes throughout the novel. Emma's difficulty attaching with Harlan was significant throughout his childhood. Harlan's initial parental relationship was with Tenant and Louisa. When Emma and Sam expected Harlan fall in place as their son even though he did not know them as parents. Emma spent the rest of her life trying to be accepted by Harlan.

Lucille and Harlan had a special relationship that Harlan needed in a mother figure. Lucille gave Harlan the discipline that Harlan required. Where Emma gave in to him, Lucille let him know what she would not put up with. When he came to rehearsal drunk



and spoke rudely to Lucille, she fired him from the band. This angered him but he held her in high respect.

Lizard's mother knew Lizard had changed after he had met Joe and his family. Lizard found happiness with the Browns and with Emma and Sam. Lizard found more acceptance as a black man than he had as Jewish.

Music

McFadden's novel was built around the music of the early 1900's. From gospel to the blues Emma, Lucille, Harlan and Lizard's life was built around music. Lucille's success as a performer brought opportunity to Emma and Harlan. Emma in the sense that she was able to taste success through entertaining the artists. Lucille gave Harlan opportunity with performing which gave him purpose.

Lizard's experience with music came when he met Joe Brown in reform school. Lizard told Joe that he felt the music in his heart and needed to be around it. Joe, his father and brothers taught Lizard to play and he was not able to turn back. Lizard found his identity through the music and convinced people that he was black so he could continue to pursue what he loved.

Struggle

McFadden explores the inner struggles of many of the characters in her novel. Emma struggles with keeping her relationship with Sam from her parents because Sam does not fit Tenant's idea of the type of man for his daughter. Emma's pregnancy leaves her no choice but to disclose to her parents that she will marry Sam.

Tenant and Louisa are torn by upholding their wholesome values while they work to keep Emma's pregnancy secret. Soon after Harlan is born, Emma and Sam struggle with the decision to take Harlan when they move or leave him with Tenant and Louisa to raise their grandson.

Emma and Sam are dealt with a conflict with Harlan when they plan to move to Harlem with him. Harlan's home had always been with his grandparents in Macon but now that his parents settled in New York City, it was time for Harlan to move with them.

Alcohol, weed and women were introduced to Harlan while he was on tour with Lucille's band. Harlan learned that when he smoked the weed he did not have nightmares and was able to sleep through the night. Harlan used alcohol as a way to escape his problems which created more problems for him. Harlan used women for sex allowing him to get his needs met without committing to a meaningful relationship. Harlan struggled with knowing his true self because of who he became while under the influence.



As a child, Lizard struggled with being persecuted because of being Jewish. When he discovered the music he loved, he changed his identity to be close to and perform it. The identity he denied ended up being what sent him to his death.

Freedom versus Captivity

Emma had to live up to her parents' expectations because of being the daughter of a reverend, her choices were limited because of the need for her to maintain the status of her family. When Emma strayed from her parents, she became pregnant by Sam which restricted her future but being married to Sam she attempted to find her freedom with Sam when they moved out of Georgia. Free did not raise Harlan

Lucille first experience freedom when she left on tour to sing. Lucille moved away to marry Bill and her musical success gave her the freedom to tour and live in expensive homes. While in the south on tour, Lucille had to comply with the Jim Crow Laws which kept her and her band from staying in motels or eating in certain places.

Harlan experienced freedom in Harlem as a teenager, he dropped out of school, pursued the guitar and went on tour where he experienced alcohol, drugs and sex. Harlan lost his freedom when he was put in the prisoner camp to survive. Upon his return from captivity, he was victim to the thoughts and hallucinations in his mind. Harlan finally found ultimate freedom when he was exonerated from his crime.

Lizard found his freedom when as a black musician but being incarcerated in the prison camp removed any sign of freedom that he had created because of the star on his uniform. Lizard's true freedom came in his death.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in third person point of view narrated by the author except for Chapter 27 which offers a description of Darlene's funeral from the first person point of view told by two women Lenore and Josephine. The discussion between the two women provide information on what occurred at the funeral as if the reader were eavesdropping on their visit with each other.

McFadden may have written Chapter 27 in first person because of the heaviness of the content of the chapter. The conversation between Lenore and Josephine provides the reader a first-hand experience of Darlene's funeral and the description of the apartment. The woman who attended the funeral and went to Emma and Sam's afterward shared the details to her friend who was unable to attend. Offering this point-of-view gave the reader the chance to learn details that would have otherwise been left out because of the nature of the narration.

Language and Meaning

The novel is told in an informal voice and depends on the dialogue to create the character's image for the reader. The narration provides the background but it is the dialogue that brings the characters to life. Emma's background in an influential black family adds an educational tone to the traditional dialect of the race in the early 1900's. Lizard adopted a dialect to cover up his white, Jewish background as he took on the characteristics of a black man.

The text is simplistic and easy for the reader to interpret the meaning. Some terms are dialectal but can be understood in context. For example, in Chapter 27 the women refer to the after funeral gathering at Emma and Sam's as the repose. The use of descriptive words allows the reader to see, hear and feel the experiences of the characters. The language provides rich images for the reader to create clear visuals of the environment.

Structure

The story is historical and includes flashback memories of some characters that add to the content to the plot. The novel is structured by chronological events, beginning with the description of Emma's family from her childhood to her teen years. Each character has a tie-in with Harlan even though the focus remains primarily on Emma until Harlan moves with them to Harlem McFadden adds the storyline of Gwen and her family which eventually ties into Harlan when the two of them meet.

The novel is divided into chapters within the chronological periods of time. The chapters are from one to four pages long which adds to the easiness of reading. McFadden offers clear content within each chapter that adds to the richness of the plot.



Quotes

Him? Who is he? He's nobody. Just a carpenter. Certainly not good enough for our Emma!

-- Reverend Tenant Robinson (Chapter Seven paragraph 1)

Importance: Reverend Tenant Robinson was enraged that Emma was pregnant. He insisted that Emma move to Atlanta, Georgia or Jacksonville, Florida to have the baby and give it up for adoption. Louisa informed Tenant that Sam agreed to marry Emma. Tenant reacted to their plans to marry by s threatened Sam by yelling in his face. Tenant's words made it clear that he did not approve of Sam's status as a carpenter. As a Reverend, the Robinsons were in the upper class of Black people in Macon. Tenant disregarded his role as the leader of the church when he angrily yelled at Sam about not being worthy of marrying his daughter. Tenant doesn't want his daughter to be regarded as lower class by marrying a low class carpenter.

I'll take whatever job you've got for Negros, then.

-- Emma Elliot (Chapter 14 paragraph 10th)

Importance: During the time that Sam and Emma lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Sam became very sick preventing him from being able to work. When they no longer had enough money to buy food, pay the rent or buy the medication Sam needed for his illness. Rather than ask her father for money, she decided to find work. Emma sought jobs in dress shops, nice diners and offices but despite her nice clothes and clean presence she was turned away because of the color of her skin. She was told that Negros weren't hired for the kind of jobs she wanted. Emma resigned to take on a job that was assigned for Negros, cleaning houses of the rich white people. Emma was ashamed of what she had turned into.

I am not your ma'am. I'm your mother!

-- Emma Elliot (chapter 16 paragraph 2)

Importance: Emma and Sam went home to Macon when Tenant died. Harlan was only four years old and had not seen his parents for some time. He only knew his grandparents as his parents. He was taught to respectfully answer adults and since he did not know to answer Emma as his mother, he continued to call her ma'am. Emma felt guilty that her son did not know her as his mother and she snapped at him and told him that she was his mother.

I'm done with school, gonna pursue guitar-picking full-time.

-- Harlan Elliot (chapter 25 paragraph 2)

Importance: Harlan was 15 years old when he told his parents he was done with going to school. He chose the guitar over school. Emma supported Harlan's decision while Sam hoped that his son would be the first to finish high school since Sam only went to the fifth grade.



But I got something I wanna show y'all.
-- Darlene Smith (chapter 26 paragraph 9)

Importance: Darlene would not let Harlan leave the apartment until he allowed her to show him something. She kept telling him she had something to show him. Harlan sat down and said he would wait and let her show him. That is when Darlene went into the bathroom and lit herself on fire. There was no indication that Darlene was going to do something as horrific as setting herself on fire. Seeing her burnt had a major affect on Harlan.

Nah, it's a nickname. My mama named me Leo, but I prefer Lizard."
-- Lizard (chapter 45 paragraph 18)

Importance: Harlan and Lizard met in the bar. After Harlan introduced himself Lizard gave his name using his nickname. Harlan asked if his mama named him Lizard. He said his real name was Leo but preferred Lizard, it was a nickname he was given by one of Joe Brown's younger brothers when they talked about lizards and snakes being cold blooded and called him cold blooded because their mother called white people cold blooded. Lizard told them that he was warm blooded just like they were and Mrs. Brown said Lizard wan not like other white people.

Lizard, stay black, man!"
-- Joe Brown (chapter 63 paragraph 15)

Importance: Joe Brown called this to Lizard as his father drove him away from Joe's house. Lizard, a white Jewish boy had met Joe, a black boy, at reform school. Lizard's appreciation for Joe's music ability was what drew the two together and when they were out, Lizard visited Joe's home regularly. Lizard learned to play the guitar, piano and trumpet from Joe, Joe's brothers and his dad. Lizard did not let their difference in race affect him. He felt he had found his place with the Brown family and playing the blues which was the music of black people. Lizard's father would not allow Lizard to associate with black people and when he followed Lizard to Joe's, he took a police officer with him to bring Lizard out of the house. Joe Brown wanted Lizard to remain the way he felt the most comfortable which was within Joe's black family.

Lemme tell you something, young blood.
-- Mezz Mezzrow (chapter 65 paragraph 7)

Importance: Mezz Mezzrow a famous clarinet player told Lizard as a man thinks so he is helped Lizard be true to the advice Joe had given him to stay black. Lizard wanted to play like the greats but being a white Jewish kid he did not see that as possible. He spoke with Mezz as he watched Louis Armstrong play. Mezz was white but no one suspected it because he took on the persona of a black man. He was giving Lizard advice about what was needed.

Lizard, you gotta hold it together, man. You hear me? You gotta hang on brother, you hear me?



-- Harlan Elliot (chapter 72 paragraph 11)

Importance: Harlan had seen Lizard for the first time since they got to Buchenwald. Lizard looked weak and gray. Harlan greeted him but Lizard could barely respond. Harlan told him to hold it together. He was afraid Lizard was too frail to survive.

For God's sake, won't you even look at me?

-- Emma Elliot (chapter 80 paragraph 16)

Importance: Emma became impatient when Harlan stayed in bed all day after coming home from Germany. She had waited all of those years to have him home with her but when he came home he was very detached and barely spoke. Emma kept trying to get him to react in some way but he would push her away or only want more Scotch. Finally in frustration she yelled at him to look at her. This was reminiscent of when Harlan was a young boy and would not acknowledge Emma as his mother.

Harlan? Harlan? They killed John."

-- Solomon (chapter 90 paragraph 5)

Importance: Solomon played in the band with Harlan and John Smith. Solomon called Harlan in the middle of the night to tell him about John Smith. John was pulled over by the police and beaten. It was thought that John was beaten to death by a white police. A riot broke out in Newark because of what happened to John.

The world is round Harlan.

-- Detective Arthur Graham (chapter 105 paragraph 2)

Importance: When Detective Art Graham let Harlan leave the police station without charges he embraced Harlan's shoulders and told him the world was round, meaning a person usually gets back what he puts out. Ilse Koch killed prisoners in horrific ways almost for fun and she had finally gotten what she deserved. The same when a good person receives good things in return.