

Delicious Foods Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Delicious Foods begins with one of the main protagonists, Eddie, who had recently lost his hands, driving a white Subaru towards Houston, TX. In this prologue, readers learn that Eddie had just left a very abusive place of employment where his mother still resided. After reuniting with his estranged aunt, Bethella, he eventually overcame his disability using a prosthesis and became a successful handy-man, found a wife, and had a child named Nathaniel.

The narrative then shifts between a third person narrator narrating Eddie's actions after his mother disappears, to Scotty, the personification of crack cocaine (who speaks to the reader in the present but recalls the past). The narrator changes from one to the other various times throughout the novel, with one chapter narrated by Darlene.

First, the reader is told about Darlene's past. She met her husband, Nat, in college, where they had an affair that betrayed Darlene's best friend. They eventually moved to another town where they opened a general store, and Nat became a political activist. Due to this, Nat was murdered and Darlene blamed herself. Darlene and Eddie dealt poorly with loss, and when the insurance money started to dry up, Darlene first turned to crack cocaine and later prostitution to finance her family and her addiction. Eventually, during a night of street walking, Darlene went missing. Eddie (several years before the prologue) decided to search for her by asking a variety of people including bums, prostitutes, and addicts. During this period, readers learn that Darlene had gotten a ride on a minibus, where inside a woman named Jackie offered her steady employment and access to crack. Darlene and other addicts were taken to a place called Delicious Farm.

It is revealed that Delicious Farm was a brutal place to work. The workers were put into arbitrary debt to the company (through transportation, drug purchases, and demerits), forcing them to stay with the company. Drug use was rampant at the farm. Here, Darlene developed a sexual relationship with another worker named Sirius who eventually escaped. Thanks to a bum named Tuck, Eddie eventually found the minibus, and Eddie and Tuck left for Delicious Farm. Eddie reunited with his mother and began working at the farm, where much of his wages went toward his mother's crack addiction. Darlene later developed a sexual relationship with the farm's owner Sextus, and Eddie essentially was promoted to Sextus' handyman.

Later, two reporters showed up to the farm asking about the farm's working conditions. Darlene then learned that Sirius successfully escaped and alerted the press. A worker, Michelle, told them to return at roll call. During roll call, the reporters and Sirius arrived in a Subaru, and Sirius stated that no one could leave without Eddie and Darlene. Darlene, Eddie, and a group of workers decided to escape, but after Eddie failed to punish his mother by a supervisor's orders, he was bound to his workshop. The group was unable to free Eddie with his hands intact, so they cut them off. Eddie, with his hands freshly amputated, escaped by himself in the Subaru, after Sextus was shot and disabled.



The narrative then shifts after the prologue. Eddie and Darlene have had a strained relationship because she refused to leave managing the farm due to the consistent access to crack. After Sextus was sent to prison and Darlene learned that her grandson is named after Nat, she got clean, but later had a heart attack. Eddie then allowed her to visit his family.



Prologue: Little Muddy

Summary

The novel begins with a prologue that takes place after many of the coming chapters.

The chapter opens with 17-year-old Eddie Hardison driving a stolen Subaru, using his newly handless arms. The reader is told that he was fleeing some sort of farm. He drove to Houston, to seek a childhood friend named Mrs. Vernon, but found that her bakery was boarded up. He then attempted to find his Aunt Berthella (whom he had not seen in roughly five years, and readers are told that she had a rocky relationship with Eddie's mother). It became apparent to Eddie that she no longer lived in Houston, and a neighbor told Eddie that she moved to St. Cloud, Minnesota. When he reached St. Cloud, Eddie ate at a diner, met a waitress named Sandy, and looked to the television, where he saw that a rock star has shot himself in Seattle. After this, Eddie attempted to find Berthella by visiting various beauty parlors in the area. Eventually, one of the beauticians told Eddie where she lived. He successfully found her.

Berthella asked Eddie what happened to his hands. He responded by simply telling her that it happened a few days ago. She asked how long Eddie would need to stay (in an impatient tone of voice) and told him that she would call a doctor. He resisted, but eventually she called a doctor. Before the doctor arrived, readers learn that Berthella's husband died of heart disease and that Eddie's mother, Darlene, was still at the farm named Delicious Foods. The doctor told Eddie he needs an operation.

After the operation, Eddie began taking odd jobs and eventually moved out of Berthella's home. He also eventually made his own hook-like prosthesis out of wood. He began making a name for himself and a young girl coined him as the "Handyman without Hands" (19). Not long after, he acquired a better prosthesis, opened up his own shop, met a woman named Ruth, became her fiancé, and had a child out of wedlock. His son, Nathaniel, had the tenacity of his father.

Analysis

The title of the prologue, Little Muddy, is a reference to Eddie's memory of his father, who died some years ago. This prologue is quite unusual, as it does not actually take place before the beginning of the actual first chapter. Instead, readers learn that it is like an epilogue in a prologue's place. Due to this odd placement, Eddie does not provide all of the details the reader needs to understand the entirety of the situation. Readers are not told how his hands were removed or why. Further mysteries include why his mother is still at the farm, how long she has been at the farm, and what the nature of the farm actually is. However, the unnamed third-person narrator does provide an allusion to the time period that this prologue takes place in. When Eddie visits the diner, he notices on the television program that a rock star has killed himself in Seattle. This rock star is



most likely Nirvana front-man Kurt Cobain, who shot himself with a shotgun while under the influence of heroin in 1994. This allusion is also similar to Darlene's drug addiction, regardless of the fact that readers are not given the full details in this chapter. Eddie's prosthesis is utilized in this and later chapters.

This prosthesis symbolizes Eddie's tenacity and willingness to overcome a variety of obstacles. Also, the loss of appendages will act as a motif in this novel, and will symbolize the cost of freedom.

This chapter also attempts to characterize Eddie. From this prologue, we can tell that his life is tragic; he lost his hands and his father, and his mother is a drug addict. Regardless of this, he perseveres thanks to his will and intuitiveness. He becomes a self-made man, by starting his own business and making the most out of his previously unfortunate situation. This characterization informs readers of his character, even before readers learn about the majority of his story.

Discussion Question 1

What many plot elements that the prologue alludes to can you name?

Discussion Question 2

Based on the information given in the prologue, what is Eddie's opinion of his mother?

Discussion Question 3

How would you describe the relationship between Eddie and Darlene?

Vocabulary

prosthesis, gangrene, disintegrating



Chapter 1: Braindancing

Summary

This chapter introduces readers to an unnamed narrator that talks about Darlene. He states that his name is Scotty (who narrates the past, but exists in the present), that he has millions of friends, and that he partied with Darlene. He mentions that her son was about 11 or 12 and that she would have done anything to party with him. It is eventually revealed to the reader that Darlene was working as a prostitute, but not a very good one (according to Scotty), as she wore very long skirts and refuses to bend over. A potential patron called her lazy, and Scotty explains that calling her lazy is also calling her “nigger” (25). Darlene talked to herself for a short period and was eventually approached by a father and son in a VW Rabbit (Scotty tells readers that Darlene thought that they were middle class).

Readers learn that the father was buying his son a prostitute because he did something unholy. Darlene saw a symbol on the man’s keychain that looked like a swastika, and she made a comment about Jews that confused the two men. Scotty tells us that Darlene was once paid to watch someone have sex with a watermelon, and that he knows this because he was in a vial at the bottom of her purse. As Darlene and the son were about to have sex, the boy refused and was told to get his father’s money back. Darlene ran and she was tackled by the son, which knocked some of her teeth out. She put the teeth in her bag, and Scotty told her that she had to get back out on the street, so that they could party 27-9 (27 hours a day, 9 days a week).

Analysis

As the chapter progresses, readers figure out that Scotty is not actually a human character. Instead, he is the drug that Darlene is addicted to (probably crack cocaine), and that the title of the chapter is what Scotty and Darlene do together. Throughout the entire novel, Scotty will symbolize the destructive nature of addiction. Here, Scotty motivating her and pushing her is a representation of the nature of her addiction.

Readers also learn a lot about Darlene here. She does not actually mention her son, Scotty does, which reveals that her drugs are a higher priority than her son. The reader also learns that Darlene will do almost anything for drugs. It is implied that she was not a prostitute prior to becoming addicted to drugs, and that it is solely the hunt for a high that is motivating her.

The reader is never told what act the son in this chapter performed that disgusted his father so much. The only details the father gives is that it is unholy and that he learned it from his cousin. Based on this and the fact that his father is bringing him to a female prostitute, the reader can assume that the son performed some sort of homosexual act.



Scotty's comment about the words "lazy" and "nigger" (25) signifies that racism is quite palpable in the society of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

What does the author accomplish by making a drug a narrator in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What does the 27-9 comment tell you about Darlene's current mindset?

Discussion Question 3

What social issues are being commented on in Chapter 1: Braindancing?

Vocabulary

trick (slang), muttering



Chapter 2: Blackbirds

Summary

This chapter takes place around the same time as Chapter 1; however, it is told from Eddie's perspective. The narrator explains how Eddie's mother used to "party" every night. Eddie recollected the time when he found his mother sprawled out on the couch with her rear exposed. He found this very confusing, because when he saw her, he had an erection originating from when he woke up.

Readers learn that Eddie decided that the neighborhood chickens contained the soul of angry black people.

The narrator describes one instance when Darlene did not return home. Eddie went to the local bakery, owned by Mrs. Vernon, who called the police and learned that she was not at the police station. Eddie decided that his mother was kidnapped. One night, he went out looking for her. He spoke to the local prostitutes who told him that they had not seen her.

Eddie remembers how his father went missing six years ago and how they eventually found him dead. After Eddie failed to receive any more leads from the local "night people" (46), Eddie then ran from some cars.

Analysis

In this chapter, readers learn about young Eddie's naïve thought process. As he is only 12 here, and he does not realize that when Darlene says "parties," she actually means doing drugs or working as a prostitute. The instance when Eddie finds his mother with her rear exposed while he has an erection could possibly be a reference to Sigmund Freud's Oedipus Complex (especially the part about having sexual urges towards one's mother), however this is not clarified.

Through Eddie's search, we learn a great deal about the area of Houston where Eddie and Darlene live. The citizens are not exactly friendly, and there seems to be a large amount of prostitutes who do not seem to be part of any community. The second prostitute that Eddie meets seems to be under the influence of drugs, alluding to the drug problem of the area.

At the end of the chapter, Eddie runs from cars, which symbolize privilege, as those who have cars have somewhere to go.

Discussion Question 1

Explain Eddie's remark about chickens having the souls of angry black people.



Discussion Question 2

Why does Eddie assume his mother had been kidnapped?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Eddie decide to run from cars?

Vocabulary

engulfed, fluorescent, undulate



Chapter 3: Conjure

Summary

The chapter begins with the narrator telling the reader that Darlene studied at Grambling State University in Louisiana. The narrator informs the reader that while studying, she was part of the Sigma Tau Tau sorority and was best friends with a student and female basketball player named Hazel, who acted as one of the organization's leaders and was the target of rumors insinuating that she was a lesbian. These rumors were eventually put to rest when Hazel and a basketball player named Nat entered into a relationship. Not long after, Darlene began a secret relationship with Nat. She told her roommate Kenyatta about the relationship, who implied that she would tell Hazel.

Nothing happened regarding the relationship until Nat brought Darlene to a fancy bed and breakfast when Hazel was supposed to be at an away game. They were caught by Hazel whose game was cancelled. Hazel attacked Nat and threw a mysterious dust at Darlene. Unfortunately for Darlene, word eventually spread about the encounter and Nat became a common target for violence while Darlene was a constant target for hateful pranks.

Eventually, Nat and Darlene changed schools and moved in together. Here, the reader learns that Nat was adopted by a man named Puma Hardison, who did not appreciate his son's fornication. After they moved in together, Darlene became pregnant, but the child was stillborn. Eventually, she became pregnant with Eddie and the couple purchase a space for a general store. The narrator explains that Nat eventually got involved in politics against the advice of their neighbor, Sparkplug.

Analysis

This chapter's main purpose is to give the backstory of both Darlene and Nat. The chapter reveals that Darlene's poor decision making did not start with her later drug use, as evident by her betrayal of her supposed friend, Hazel.

A massive piece of symbolism also appears in this chapter that gives an alternative reasoning behind the bad things that happen to Darlene and her family. This reasoning is the black dust that Hazel puts on Darlene. Hazel warns Darlene that she has no idea about the things that will happen to her later. In further chapters, we learn that Darlene acknowledges that this dust may be an aspect of some sort of Caribbean or African magic (this is also where the chapter's title comes from). However, this takes the human element out of many of the low-points of Darlene's life. This hypothetically removes her agency, which is possible but not likely.

Foreshadowing also occurs during this chapter. At the end of the chapter, we learn that Nat eventually gets involved with local politics, and Sparkplug warns him against this. At



this point, the reader knows that Nat eventually disappears and ends up dead. This political activity could be a possible motive for his murder. The narrator also briefly mentions Nat and Darlene's stillborn child and the way that it affects them mentally. This could be interpreted as the first step to Darlene's psychological break.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways, if any, can Nat and Darlene's relationship not be interpreted as a betrayal?

Discussion Question 2

How does Nat's upbringing form his identity?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the relationship between Darlene and Hazel.

Vocabulary

vivacious, camaraderie, obstinate



Chapter 4: We Named the Goat

Summary

This chapter is narrated by Scotty and takes place directly after Darlene's incident with the father and son. Scotty recalls Darlene meeting a woman named Jackie outside of a minibus on the street. Jackie told Darlene about an agricultural job that pays above the minimum wage, with housing, a pool, and vacation time. Darlene was interested in this and asked to call her son. Jackie said that she could, free of charge, once they reach the job site. Darlene then briefly remarked about how Eddie probably thought that she loved his father more than him.

In the bus, Darlene could hear crack pipes and the popping of crack rocks, but she thought she could be imagining it. Scotty states that he approved of these people, and Darlene entered the bus. As Darlene suspected, inside the bus were men smoking crack cocaine. Jackie passed around a clipboard with a contract (already turned to the last page) and asked the passengers to sign. Scotty remarks that he was happy about this because it seemed like the job would accept Darlene, Scotty, and their relationship.

Darlene and the men signed the contract and the bus departed. Songs such as "Never Gonna Give You Up" played on the radio. Scotty remarks that he knows the radio DJ and that they played these songs just for the passengers. One of the men started talking about horoscopes, and Darlene responded that they mean nothing and that people make them up and name them.

Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the twisted reality of Darlene's motivations. According to Scotty's recollection of Darlene's thought process, her decision to take this strange job is almost directly due to the high chance that she will be able to obtain and use drugs. She does ask to call her son, but it does not seem like supporting him is one of the reasons she chooses to take this job.

It is also worth noting that Darlene does not even try to read the contract that Jackie provides. Already turned to the last page, there is almost no knowing what the full contract contains. Darlene's state of mind is also commented upon. Before it is revealed that there are men within the van smoking crack, Darlene mentions that she could be imagining the sounds, because she often imagines hearing the noises of crack smoking. The fact that she hallucinates the noises of crack only further demonstrates her addicted state.

Finally, the title of the chapter lies in the conversation about the horoscope. Darlene uses an example of a goat constellation, and explains that humans thought we saw a goat in the sky, so we named it.



Discussion Question 1

Does Darlene have any other motivations for taking this job?

Discussion Question 2

What do we know about Jackie's character?

Discussion Question 3

One man attempts to read the contract and gives up. What does this say about his state of mind?

Vocabulary

legumes, suspension, pagoda



Chapter 5: Show Us the Planets

Summary

This chapter takes place shortly after Chapter 3. The narrator first explains that due to the fact that Eddie was conceived out of wedlock, that Nat and Darlene often lied about the time of his conception. The narrator continues that before the general store opened, many people would come to the couple's house to watch sports on the television. However, after the store opened, many people visited and signed clipboards. Later, before Eddie turned six, Nat disappeared. Eventually the police showed up to tell Darlene that she had to identify a body. Soon, a funeral took place and Eddie asked his aunt why they did not invite his father.

After this, Darlene's mental state declined. Eddie would find her hunched over with bloodshot eyes talking to a photograph of Nat. Eventually the two moved to Houston, and Darlene explained that she could avoid temptation in Houston. It did not work. One day Eddie found a crack pipe and started playing with it because it looked like the Starship Enterprise. His mother eventually stopped him. Eddie asked his mother if someone killed his father, and his mother confirms that he was murdered, but that they do not know who killed him. At some point afterwards, Eddie saw an unconscious Darlene laying down with a shoe rack.

Later, Eddie and Darlene visited a dying Sparkplug. There, Sparkplug told Eddie that someone killed Nat by beating him with a tire iron, stabbing him 18 times, and burning his body in the general store. Soon after, a hallucinating Darlene put on one of Nat's old hats and told Eddie to show her the planets.

Analysis

This chapter gives further background about Nat's murder and Darlene's mental descent. Based on what we are told through a limited perspective that seems to be a 3rd person narrator recollecting Eddie's thoughts and experiences, the reader can assume that Nat is most likely registering disenfranchised people to vote and possibly sign petitions. Clearly, this angers the status quo (which it seems Sparkplug is somehow a part of) and his opposition has him killed in his general store. After this, a remark is made by a random family friend regarding the fact that the police would have a suspect if Nat had been white. This further explains both the racial and political tensions in their town.

Based on this chapter, it becomes clear that Darlene's descent in drug abuse is a direct result of Nat's murder. After Nat is killed, Darlene seems to lose all will to live and slips into drug culture. The temptation that Darlene attempted to escape by moving to Houston is obviously the temptation of drug use. Eventually, the reader is witness to most likely Darlene's lowest point depicted so far. At the end of the chapter, Darlene is



so intoxicated by drugs that she seems disconnected from reality. She basically speaks nonsense to her son and looks for Venus outside of her home. Coincidentally, Venus is visible during that night, but there is no evidence that Venus has anything to do with her behavior.

Discussion Question 1

What might the shoe rack be foreshadowing?

Discussion Question 2

What does the remark regarding Nat's color and the police say about the town?

Discussion Question 3

Would any of this have happened if Darlene and Nat had not moved away?

Vocabulary

pessimism, soloist, abstraction



Chapter 6: Your Own Cord

Summary

Eddie continued his search for Darlene. He approached some cops and asked them for help. They informed Eddie that there is a waiting period, and that they would start the investigation after the period had passed. One cop mentioned the possibility that Darlene left on her own accord, and Eddie misinterpreted this as leaving on her own “cord” (90). A frustrated Eddie left. Later, the police left a message on Mrs. Vernon’s answering machine stating that they had begun the investigation. Eddie did not return this call, as he thought it should be him who found Darlene. Eddie thought that Darlene may be dead or with her pimp, regardless of the fact that he was not sure that his mother sold her body on the street. Using a map, Eddie continued his search.

Eddie eventually ran into his landlord, Nacho Vasquez. Eddie told him that Darlene was off on a business trip. Nacho asked him if his mother ever dated a man like him and stated that maybe he would give her a rent break if she went out with him.

Analysis

A previous narrator informed the reader that Nathaniel inherited Eddie’s tenacity, and this chapter proves that Eddie does have tenacity. Eddie, a child, is performing his own in-depth investigation and believes that he is one who should find his mother. Eddie’s misinterpretation regarding the police officer’s words shows Eddie’s naïve nature. However, later, we learn that he is not naïve about everything. Eddie does mention that his mother may be a prostitute, showing that he is catching onto the nature of his mother’s behavior.

This chapter also introduces the character Nacho Vasquez. The contents of this chapter does not give much insight about his character, however his statements can be interpreted in two ways. The first is that he actually wants to date Darlene, while the other is that he wants to hire Darlene for sexual services and is using the word “date” since he is speaking to her son.

Discussion Question 1

Compare Eddie from the prologue to Eddie in this Chapter 6: Your Own Cord.

Discussion Question 2

What does Eddie’s refusal to return the police’s call say about the situation?



Discussion Question 3

How has young Eddie changed throughout the chapters so far?

Vocabulary

recognizance, reconnaissance, accord

Chapter 7: Who is Delicious?

Summary

The chapter starts during the minute that Darlene arrived at the farm. Jackie took the new workers through a wide one-story building with two sections. The first section acted as a chicken coop, while the second section acted as a type of bedroom for the workers. In the bedroom, Jackie showed them to their beds, which consisted of very low quality mattresses with no sheets. Darlene asked Jackie if she could call Eddie, and Jackie explained that it was too late and offered her a hit of crack. She also informed Darlene that she owed \$600, \$500 for the ride to the farm and \$100 for lodgings. Darlene attempted to lay down and use her purse as a pillow, but she noticed that the purse had gone missing. She looked for it and found that many of the workers were pretending to sleep after having smoked crack. Jackie then offered Darlene a hit of crack for \$10. The staff woke the workers up and many of them went to smoke crack.

Darlene stepped outside and a man with a gun ushered her inside, telling her that she will be charged \$10 for missing roll call. The men and women were split up, and Darlene decided to work with the men as an attempt to prove her worth. The men began picking watermelons. The workers formed a line and threw the watermelons to each other until finally the last person threw them to a catcher on the bus that took them to the fields (the warden gave his friends the jobs of the catchers).

Darlene recalled the time when she attempted to call Eddie. The phone told her that she would be charged \$5 for 5 minutes, so she walked away. The reader is told that Darlene struggled greatly due to the difficulty of the work and her crack cravings.

Analysis

This chapter begins to show the type of strange place that the Delicious Foods farm actually is, and the chapter title demonstrates the apparent confusion of the new workers. It seems that one of the main practices of the farm is to control its workers through the debt that they obtain. By the time the workers arrive at the farm, it is so late that they cannot leave or make any phone calls. In addition to this, before the workers even start working, they are already several hundred dollars in debt. It is clear that the farm is intentionally taking advantage of the drug-addled state of its workers. It is very doubtful that someone under the intense influence of crack cocaine would choose to read an entire employment contract, as evident by the swiftly made signatures on the contracts.

We also learn that the people who work at the farm are not entirely trustworthy. They were seemingly solely motivated by their drug addictions and are willing to betray their fellow workers. It is readily apparent that either Jackie or one of the workers stole



Darlene's purse, probably for the crack inside or her valuables (so the thief can buy crack).

It is implied that a period of time passes towards the end of the chapter. Therefore, it seems that Darlene should have made some sort of money during that time. If this is true, the price of a phone call still discourages her from contacting her son. Because Scotty narrates this chapter, we are unsure if she had this money, and whether that if she did, she wanted to use the money for crack instead. Darlene's encounter with the armed man is also important. Firearms are a recurring theme in this novel and represent a tool of power that the supervisors have over the average workers.

Discussion Question 1

At one point, Jackie tells the workers that they can leave. Why does Darlene not leave?

Discussion Question 2

What real-world practices does the farm's debt policy seem like?

Discussion Question 3

What is the benefit of having a workforce primarily made up of crack addicts?

Vocabulary

musty, high-bougie, pellets

Chapter 8: Driftwood

Summary

This chapter recalls the actions and thoughts of Darlene during Nat's disappearance. Darlene thought that it was entirely possible that Nat's disappearance was due to his political opponents. Sparkplug spoke to her, telling her that the police were corrupt and that it was no use speaking to the police.

The narrator then tells the reader exactly what happened on the night Nat disappeared. Darlene put on tight shoes that gave her a migraine, so she asked Nat to go down to the store and buy her Tylenol. The next morning, when Nat did not come back, Darlene asked around. Sparkplug told her that he was in jail for vagrancy that night, and he did not see Nat at the jail. Some women blocked Darlene's path and tried to distract her. She eventually got past them and noticed smoke coming from the general store. Soon after, the police asked her to identify the body.

Darlene's family did not come to the funeral, but Puma and Bethella did. Puma refused to believe that the body belonged to his son. The police eventually put the blame of the murder on a group of young hoodlums ordered by older hoodlums. The police could not acquire enough evidence to convict them. Luckily, Darlene received some insurance money, but when it began to dwindle, she got a job at a drug store. Later, the young hoodlums entered the store and Darlene attempted to help them. After an argument about the price of a case of beer, the hoodlums began yelling and spraying beer all over Darlene. Her boss then told her to take the next few days off.

Analysis

In this chapter, the reader finally learns what happened directly before and after Nat's disappearance; it also brings up some interesting questions. The main question is whether Sparkplug had anything to do with Nat's murder. We already know from a previous chapter that Sparkplug was privy to the exact way that Nat was killed, but he does not really say that he, or anyone else for that matter, participated in the murder. It is quite suspicious that Sparkplug would tell Darlene that he was in jail on the night of the murder, regardless of the fact that we know that he somehow gained information about it. It is possible that Sparkplug was either at the scene of the murder, or that someone told him about it afterwards. In the former case, Sparkplug is lying about his stint in jail.

In this chapter, we also learn why Darlene (who described Nat's corpse as looking like Driftwood, hence the title) was found unconscious next to a shoe rack. It is now clear that she is mourning Nat while feeling guilt, because shoes were the reason that Nat went outside and died. These shoes symbolize the frustrations and guilt of Darlene.



Finally, through Darlene's actions directly after the murder, we learn that Darlene's psychological break starts well before she begins smoking crack cocaine.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Puma refuse to believe that the body belonged to his son?

Discussion Question 2

Why would the police not have enough evidence to convict the hoodlums?

Discussion Question 3

What does the hoodlums' behavior toward Darlene say about the racial tensions in the town?

Vocabulary

apropos, matron, unhinged

Chapter 9: An Improvement

Summary

In this chapter, the narrative shifts back to Darlene's situation at the farm and is narrated by Scotty. The reader is told that technically, the Delicious workers were paid about \$10 per day, off the book. This is a rough estimate, as pay was determined on productivity. If a worker questioned the wage decided by the company, the company would dock the worker's pay. After payday, the company would bring the worker to a place called Richland (which the workers called the depot) to buy goods. Scotty also mentions that the workers bought many things on credit. Normally, workers did not have much money left over due to their crack or alcohol addictions (they also often bought drugs on credit).

Scotty then recalls a debate that the workers had about what state they were in. Shortly after, Darlene started a sexual relationship with Sirius (seemingly part of the titular improvement). We then learn that the current narrative takes place 2.5 months after Darlene arrived. Sirius asked Darlene about her son and told her that Sirius is a nickname that he created because, as a child, he was interested in the stars. Sirius then escaped through a culvert and Darlene told him Mrs. Vernon's phone number and asked him to call Eddie.

Analysis

This chapter gives the reader further details about the working environment of Delicious Foods. It is now confirmed that a main objective of the farm is to keep the workers in such a high amount of debt that they must continuously work in order to ever have hope of paying the debt off. The farm is using the worker's drug addictions in order to further this goal. It is made very clear that the farm supervisors supply the workers with crack cocaine, and many of the workers purchase this cocaine from the administrators through credit, further worsening their situation. We also are made privy to some more of Darlene's psychology. When Sirius and Darlene begin their relationship, Darlene initially thinks of Nat, but that thought eventually fades. It seems that this part of her psychological issues are gone, but the issue due to her substance abuse still remain.

Discussion Question 1

What might Sirius' escape foreshadow?

Discussion Question 2

What does Sirius' interest in science and the stars say about his character? About his current situation?



Discussion Question 3

What does this passage of time say about Darlene's situation at Delicious Foods?

Vocabulary

culvert, carat, meteorologist



Chapter 10: Drunken Bum Knows

Summary

The narrative shifts back to Eddie in Houston a few months after Darlene's disappearance. At this point in time, Eddie explored the seedy parts of Houston and asked people if they have seen his mother. Eddie was constantly told to ask this person or that person to no avail. Eventually, he met a prostitute named Giggles who seemed to like Eddie, and Eddie wondered whether she would eventually have sex with him.

After Giggles rode off with a john, Eddie spotted a bum. The bum told Eddie that he knew where his mother went and that he would tell Eddie if Eddie bought him some alcohol (Eddie was 12 years old at the time). Eddie got someone to buy alcohol for him and gave it to the bum. The bum explained that Darlene was taken away in the Death Bus. The bum did not want to take Eddie to the bus, but relented after Eddie threatened his malt liquor.

They hitched a ride to where the bus was normally located. During this ride, the bum claimed that he was called Tuckahoe Joe and was formerly a famous musician. Once they reached the bus, they met a woman named Jacqueline. Eddie asked Jacqueline about Darlene and she said she knew Darlene. Joe acted as Eddie's father and Darlene's husband and they both left on the bus.

Analysis

In this chapter, the reader witnesses Eddie's burgeoning pubescence. Prior to this point, Eddie has said nothing about any sexual urges, but in this chapter, he does wonder if Giggles will have sex with him. Additionally, the character of Tuckahoe Joe elaborates on Houston's many substance abuse problems. It does not seem like Joe is a crack addict like many of the other people that Eddie meets. Regardless, it is clear that he is heavily addicted to alcohol. Eddie mentions that he seems rather twitchy and uneasy prior to drinking the malt liquor. This may foreshadow what Delicious Foods will use to keep Joe in debt. We know that alcohol is sold at the farm (usually on credit), and that Joe will most likely take advantage of this, creating a cycle of continuous work. Finally, like the last chapter that consisted of Eddie looking for his mother, the reader can see that the statement about Eddie's tenacity is quite true. Eddie continues to portray this tenacity.

Discussion Question 1

Is it possible that Joe is telling the truth about his past?



Discussion Question 2

What does Eddie and Joe's willingness to enter the van say about Jackie and the farm?

Discussion Question 3

Eddie briefly mentions that the company of people on the street is more comforting than his empty apartment. What does he mean by this?

Vocabulary

john (slang), transsexual, semitrailer



Chapter 11: Eclipse

Summary

This chapter takes place at the farm and is narrated by Scotty. The chapter opens during a time when Darlene was remarking about the change in the seasons (and the fact that an eclipse took place recently) and, therefore, a change in the crops. She also made a quick remark about how she used to think of herself as Nat's wife, like Coretta Scott King.

At this time, the farm stayed relatively quiet about Sirius' escape. One day, when Darlene was picking lemons, TT fell to the ground injured. Darlene learned that TT was struck by a warden for asking about Sirius. Shortly afterward, Darlene heard that a bum with gangrene and a flu along with a child had arrived at the farm, but they were placed in a barn to quarantine them.

One night, Darlene spotted Jackie moving in the night. Darlene spied on her and saw her putting a fluid on some rat corpses (Darlene assumed this was Jackie's menstrual blood and that she was using it for magical purposes) and dripped the blood onto the worker's boots. A few days afterwards, Darlene calculated her options of escape, but realized that she owed the farm \$908. She then hallucinated and thought that Nat's voice was coming out of a bird, saying that he expected better of Darlene. Scotty (in present tense) remarks that this is probably due to himself being laced with PCP or LSD.

Analysis

This chapter reveals that the conditions at the farm are only getting worse. After Sirius' escape, the farm has become more ruthless about escape or the mentioning of Sirius' escape. They seem to have no issue with using fear tactics (violence) in order to silence the worried workers. In addition, it is very clear that the bum and the child are actually Joe and Eddie. According to a worker, Joe is in very poor condition with some sort of flu. If this is true, it is possible that Eddie may become sick as well, lengthening the amount of time until Eddie and his mother finally reunite.

In this chapter, it is not made very clear what exactly Jackie is doing with the fluid and the rats. In previous chapters, we learn that Darlene is relatively superstitious, so her assumption that Jackie is doing something supernatural with her own menstrual blood may be unfounded. It could also be possible that this recollection is part of Darlene's very vivid hallucinations. This particular hallucination - specifically the bird with Nat's voice - symbolizes Darlene's grief and the way that crack is affecting her mind. But if it is not, Jackie is certainly doing something mysterious to the sleeping workers.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the farm's attitude towards Sirius' escape.

Discussion Question 2

Who could be dosing the crack?

Discussion Question 3

Could Darlene's hallucinations be representative of something more in her psyche?

Vocabulary

jonesing (slang), snickering, plucking



Chapter 12: Obeah Juju

Summary

This chapter recalls the events that took place directly after Joe and Eddie got on the Death Bus. Eddie noticed that Jackie gave drugs to many of the passengers while Tuck (what Eddie calls Joe) became very sick. When they arrived, Eddie asked about his mother, but he received no new information.

How and Sextus (the owner) met to determine what to do with the sick Tuck. They decided to lock both Tuck and Eddie in a barn. They stayed there for four days, Tuck asked for alcohol on credit, Eddie explored the woods, and a worker stated that Tuck's sickness must not have been medical, but Obeah Juju. Tuck recovered and told Eddie about his life. He stopped touring because his bandleader had a drug problem and blamed many things on the band, which lead Tuck to drink. Eddie asked Tuck if he was sick due to Obeah Juju, and he said yes. He had been cursed, as many African Americans were. Later, while Tuck thought about getting a GED, a drunk driver hit him giving him many concussions. Tuck blamed these injuries on why he could not get work. Eventually, the medical bills piled up and he was forced into the street.

Eventually, Eddie noticed a woman outside wearing dirty clothes and a rope belt chasing a bird. Eddie realized that this was Darlene, and they reunited while Darlene was slowly coming off her crack high.

Analysis

This chapter continues with the trend of jumping back and forth in time, as this partly bridges the gap between Eddie leaving and Darlene hearing about the boy and bum coming to the farm. This chapter is also the first time the reader meets Sextus, as prior to this chapter, he is only mentioned by the workers. Sextus seems primarily concerned with the efficiency of the farm. This is made obvious when How states that Tuck's sickness would not hurt productivity that much, but it could make other workers briefly sick. Sextus clearly knows how efficiency workers much more than How, and decides that the man and the boy who he thinks is his son (Eddie) must be quarantined in order to secure optimized profits.

At the end of the chapter, Eddie and Darlene finally reunite. This is not a heartfelt and cliché reunion however. When she first spots Eddie, Darlene is coming off of massive hallucinations (which we learn about in a previous chapter) due to crack. They reunite while she is still incredibly high. It is not a mutually coherent experience, as Darlene only starts to understand what is happening a time after the initial reunion.



Discussion Question 1

What do we learn about Darlene's episode through Eddie's thoughts?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast How and Sextus.

Discussion Question 3

Does Tuck's story about his past change the perception of his character in some way?

Vocabulary

ostracized, deadlocked, indoctrinated



Chapter 13: Meet Scotty

Summary

This chapter takes place after Nat's death and is narrated by Scotty. Shortly after Nat's death, Darlene decided to burn her shoes and her blouse, parts of the outfit she was wearing which caused her migraine and Nat's death. At Nat's funeral, Darlene wanted to jump in the grave because of her guilt. She did not even feel anger towards the hoodlums during their trial, because she believed that it was just what white boys do, and that Nat's death was truly her fault.

After the trial, Darlene gave Eddie whatever he wanted, because Darlene believed that Eddie was the innocent person in the house. After the insurance money dried up, Darlene began working at a drug store. Scotty explains that two months later, he and Darlene met for the first time. One day, Darlene was sitting outside of the store smoking. Her boss, Spar (short for Spartacus) came up to her, looked at the sky and compared it to Darlene (Scotty remarks that he flirted with every woman). He eventually asked her to come home with him to smoke and drink. She did and after a few beers, he convinced her to try Scotty. Scotty explains that he gave her confidence that she lacked for a long time. He describes her as a puzzle piece, stating he pushed her into the proper shape to complete the puzzle.

Analysis

This chapter allows the reader to further understand Darlene's psyche after Nat's death. It is very clear that she takes full responsibility for her husband's death, even though she did not pull the trigger, stab him, or set the store on fire. She believes that by putting on the wrong shoes and getting a migraine, that she essentially killed her husband. While this may sound ridiculous, it is very apparent in this novel that grief makes people do extreme things.

Darlene's remark about what white boys do exemplifies the institutional racism in this novel's Louisiana. According to Darlene, it is the norm for white men to hunt down black men and kill them (198). This could be her grief mixed with the institutionalized racism. Her grief is not allowing her to place blame on everyone but herself, and the fact that we do not know the true circumstances of Nat's death makes it unclear if the hoodlums even committed the crime. This is not saying that institutionalized racism is not a factor in Darlene's thinking, but it does not seem like the only factor.

Discussion Question 1

What evidence exists that points towards the white hoodlums being the perpetrators of Nat's murder?



Discussion Question 2

Which of Darlene's earlier behaviors does Chapter 13: Meet Scotty clarify?

Discussion Question 3

What is Darlene's mental focus in Chapter 13: Meet Scotty? Scotty's?

Vocabulary

synthetics, resenting, dabbing



Chapter 14: Lost Years

Summary

The narrative shifts back to a 3rd person narrator narrating Eddie's thoughts and experiences. Eddie explained that after he reunited with his mother, there were times where drugs did not change her personality. He also explained that most of the adults were very nice to Eddie because he was a child. Darlene told him that he must go to school, but Eddie refused, saying that he was smart enough. Eventually he relented, but started working for Delicious pulling weeds.

Darlene decided that she and Eddie would eventually make a profit to pay off her debt and leave the farm. Tuck often helped Eddie earn more money by arguing with the administrators, but unfortunately much of this money went to Darlene's drug habit.

On Halloween of the year, Sextus arrived on a tractor to inspect the workers. He asked How for Eddie's age and he stated that Eddie was 16. Sextus eventually drove off but got stuck in the mud, and all of the workers had to work to free the tractor.

Analysis

This chapter highlights Eddie and Darlene's relationship after their reunion (the lost years seem to be referring to the period between their reunion and their attempted escape). While Darlene is still almost constantly under the influence of crack cocaine, she does seem more focused on actually getting out of her horrible situation. She seems motivated by the fact that in order to help her son have a better life, they must eliminate Delicious Foods from their lives. However, her drug addiction is not helping this situation. Tuck is helping Eddie get more money, but it seems like the majority of it is being given to Darlene so she can purchase more crack.

We also learn more about Sextus in this chapter. It is unclear whether he actually believes that Eddie is 16. As Eddie is only 12 (which is quite a long way from 16), Sextus either really has no idea, or is ignoring it for business purposes. Sextus' tractor is important to the power dynamic of the farm, as the height of the tractor symbolizes his top place in the farm's power structure.

Discussion Question 1

It seems like Tuck really wants to help Eddie. Why?

Discussion Question 2

Have Darlene's priorities changed in the last few chapters?



Discussion Question 3

Describe the relationship between Sextus and How.

Vocabulary

stubbing, matted, muse (verb)

Chapter 15: Inertia

Summary

This chapter is narrated by Scotty and recalls incidents of escape at the farm. Michelle began talking to Darlene about wanting to escape the farm (probably promoted by Sirius' escape). Michelle mentioned that there was a window in the chicken building with no lock. Darlene argued with her by reminding her that she owed the farm more than \$1,600 and that the administrators had guns (later we see How dock her pay for talking back to him). Darlene had heard stories about people escaping, but none of them ever came back.

One night, when Jackie and Hal went out (to either drink or recruit more workers), Michelle woke Darlene up. She informed her that TT would lift them out the window. As they started, TT informed them that he needed to be high in order to accomplish the task. Darlene, worried that Eddie could be hurt in the escape, went along anyway. Michelle ended up escaping through the window but ran into a non-barking dog. The dog chased her up the fence. As the dog bit down on her leg, the minibus arrived causing Michelle to be caught. It is implied that Michelle was later beaten. They cemented the window closed the next day. Darlene briefly mentioned that escapes usually ended badly, as Hannibal attempted to run away, was caught, and ended up with a neck scar. Regardless of this, Darlene stated that it was inertia that kept her going.

Analysis

This chapter foreshadows the difficulties of future escape attempts and explains the results of prior attempts. It is clear that every escape attempt discourages workers from planning future escapes. This creates a type of indoctrination for the workers. The workers are made to believe that they are indebted to the farm and are therefore obligated to work. In prior chapters, we see that this is one of the reasons that Darlene does not want to leave the farm. The workers are also subject to a type of routine that tricks them into acclimating to the farm and accepting their role there (think Stockholm syndrome). Finally, the lack of successful escapes leads the workers to believe that escape is simply not possible.

We also see some character development for Darlene. In many previous chapters, it is implied that Darlene puts her drug addiction on a higher place on her priority list than her son. However, we see that in this situation, Eddie's safety and freedom are on Darlene's mind. It is possible that Eddie's possible future in the outside world is one of the reasons that Darlene decides to participate in the escape attempt. Finally, this chapter foreshadows the level of violence that the farm administrators use on the workers.



Discussion Question 1

What has changed about Darlene in Chapter 15: Inertia?

Discussion Question 2

What could be the reasons that the author uses Scotty as a narrator in Chapter 15: Inertia instead of the 3rd person narrator we see in the Eddie-centric chapters?

Discussion Question 3

By what we learn in the conversations between Darlene and Michelle, explain Michelle as a person.

Vocabulary

inertia, hoist, palmetto bug



Chapter 16: Summerton

Summary

This chapter takes place briefly after Chapter 15 and is narrated by the unnamed 3rd person narrator. Eddie was assigned to the maintenance crew. He began with the tasks of changing equipment's lightbulbs and repairing equipment. One night, when Eddie was harvesting carrots Sextus stated that he heard that Eddie was a good repairman, and Sextus asked Eddie if he could fix a computer. Eddie reluctantly said yes.

A week later (even though Sextus said tomorrow) Darlene (dressed up) and Eddie got to Sextus' extravagant estate, Summerton. Sextus gave them a brief tour while eyeing Darlene. He explained that his wife was pregnant and that it would be a boy. He recalled how they originally thought it was going to be a girl, so they painted the room's walls pink. He refused to repaint the walls, even if it would mean that the child would become homosexual. As Eddie attempted to fix the computer, Darlene and Sextus disappear. Eddie explored and heard Sextus grunting behind a door and figured he and his mother making "invocations to God" (240).

Analysis

This chapter is full of information about who Sextus is and what he symbolizes. Sextus symbolizes the cliché white male plantation master that a reader would see in slave narratives or a work involving slavery. This master is usually very wealthy, intolerant, and takes advantage of his slaves (or workers in this case). These qualities are very indefinable in Sextus. By the narrator's descriptions, it is clear that Summerton is very extravagant and could only be built by someone with a great amount of wealth. We can see his intolerance in his remarks about homosexuals (he calls them queers). The last quality is much more muddled in this novel. It does not seem like Sextus is actually taking advantage of Darlene, as the sex seems consensual and he does not seem overly aggressive. However, he is taking advantage of Eddie by using him to get to his mother. Even though this has no true negative affect on Eddie as a person, Sextus is still taking advantage of his presence.

This chapter is also very important for understanding the prologue. In the prologue it is clear that Eddie is good at repairing things; we learn in this chapter that these experiences are what lead him to be skilled enough to open his own business.

Finally, the relationship foreshadows things to come, as Darlene and Sextus' relationship continues.

Discussion Question 1

Why might Darlene want to enter into a sexual relationship with Sextus?



Discussion Question 2

Are there ways that Sextus does not fit into the white master stereotype?

Discussion Question 3

What benefits could the relationship between Sextus and Darlene have for Darlene and Eddie?

Vocabulary

milled, stopgap, proprietary



Chapter 17: Your Punishment

Summary

This chapter is narrated by the unnamed 3rd person narrator. At this point, Eddie accepted that his poor experiences at the farm are conditions for being with his mother. Eddie eventually signed the contract and continued working at the farm and fixing things for Sextus (while he would disappear with Darlene). Eddie began to make a good amount of money by not accruing debt, but the majority of his profits still went to his mother.

Around this period, Eddie grew violent and destroyed food and toilets. He would be punished for many of these things by being pistol whipped or beaten. At some point, a worker handed a crack pipe to Eddie, and Darlene took it away from him. Later, this happened again, but Eddie crushed the crack pipe, resulting in a fight. Eddie was punished for this fight, and Jackie stated that he would be punished later. Shortly after, Tuck was caught stealing Jujubs from the depot, and he too was told that he would be punished later.

One day, Jackie and How bound Tuck and took him and Eddie out to a field. Jackie explained that Eddie's punishment would be to punish Tuck. He was handed a shovel. Eddie refused, but Jackie poured salt all over one of his open wounds (the result of a previous punishment). Eddie eventually began beating Tuck. Tuck initially forgave him, but as the beating went on, he begged for mercy. After the punishment was over, Eddie ran into Tuck, and Tuck seemed quite angry at him.

Analysis

In Chapter 15, the violence of the farm is foreshadowed, but it is truly revealed in this chapter. The violence also develops Jackie as a character, as we learn much about her mindset. We learn that the administrators of the farm, especially Jackie and How, are incredibly sadistic. Fully aware that Tuck and Eddie are close, How and Jackie require Eddie to brutally injure Tuck with a shovel anyway. It is possible that the reasoning behind this is to diminish the relationship between the two workers. Beyond this fact, Jackie brings salt with her. When Eddie refuses to injure Tuck, Jackie pours the salt on Eddie's open wounds. There are probably other, less tortures ways to convince Eddie to do this, but Jackie chooses one of the most initially painful ways.

Prior to this, Jackie seemed like a non-violent, yet harsh administrator who happens to force her workers into debt. However, in this chapter, we learn that she is no better than the other administrators. She uses violence as a tool. We also learn that Eddie is now able to talk his way out of most punishments, as some people believe that he has Sextus' ear, no matter how accurate that actually is. If this is actually true, this could foreshadow a way that Eddie could escape, or gain influence to help his fellow workers.



Discussion Question 1

It is now clear that Darlene and Sextus' relationship is not a one-time affair. What does this mean for Sextus and Darlene?

Discussion Question 2

Eddie is beginning to accept the farm's conditions. Is this a sign that his morale has changed?

Discussion Question 3

Could Chapter 17: Your Punishment foreshadow conflict between Tuck and Eddie?

Vocabulary

miniscule, sloshing, tantalizing



Chapter 18: How

Summary

This chapter is narrated by the unnamed third-person narrator. Eddie continued working in the Summerton home, and because of this, Michelle enlisted him to look for evidence regarding the farm's layout and location. Eddie checked for this information and only discovered that they were most likely in Louisiana and that Delicious Foods was a shell company for Fantasy Groves LLC, a massive food distributor. Eddie was clearly privileged over the other workers, as Sextus allowed him to bathe using real soap.

One day, once Darlene and Sextus were done with their "sex prayers" (253), Eddie asked him about the location of the employment records and pay information. Sextus became angry and told him not to ask those questions. However, he did tell Eddie that he could be a farm supervisor one day, due to his authority and intelligence (and the fact that he did not have a crack addiction). Eddie also began babysitting Sextus' new son, Jed, as Sextus' wife could not, as she had seizures and a stroke after the pregnancy. Sextus also stated that he may teach Eddie how to drive his tractor.

Eventually, Sextus had a barn cleaned out so Eddie could have his own workshop. How refused to call it Eddie's workshop, and later bet that he could fill up a tomatoes bucket (Eddie was picking tomatoes) in three minutes. He even bet that if he could not, he would reduce Darlene's debt. He failed and refused to reduce Darlene's debt. However, during this interaction we learn that How was an illegal immigrant who worked at a farm, was deported, joined a gang, and ended up at the farm.

Analysis

This chapter demonstrates a character shift for Sextus. During this chapter, he seems relatively fatherly towards Eddie, and Eddie seems to be enjoying it. Eddie has had a fatherly figure missing from his life since his father died, and this seems to be filling part of that whole. This seems to shift his view of Sextus from the overall antagonist to an unlikely protagonist. However, the chapter does reveal that Sextus can be quite harsh at times. This can be seen when Eddie asks about the employment records and Sextus gets rather mad at him.

This is also setting up an internal struggle for Eddie. He is working as a double agent for Michelle and the other workers but is gaining great benefits from Sextus. Eventually, this dynamic must change. Eddie could completely side with Sextus and gain power but lose his relationship with his fellow workers, or he could lose the favor of Sextus and attempt to help the workers gain an upper-hand.

However, not everyone is benefiting from Eddie's relationship with Sextus. How seems quite cross with Eddie. The easiest explanation of this is jealousy, as he has been at the farm far longer but has not gained the benefits Eddie has. However, the fact that How



tells Eddie part of his life story could imply that How may like Eddie after all. The idiosyncrasies of How are not completely explained in this chapter, but it foreshadows things to come.

Discussion Question 1

What exactly is a “sex prayer” (253)?

Discussion Question 2

How is Sextus filling a hole in Eddie’s life? Could Sextus be sincere?

Discussion Question 3

What do Eddie’s expanding responsibilities imply?

Vocabulary

letterhead, shell company, pretense



Chapter 19: The Wrong Limes

Summary

This chapter takes place briefly after Chapter 18 and is narrated by Scotty. Darlene thought about Sirius during this period, and she even walked over to the culvert and began talking to it. Scotty complained that Darlene was keeping Eddie away from him even though he began to smoke cigarettes at age 15.

One day, the workers were sent to a citrus orchard in order to pick limes. Hannibal noticed that the trees were key lime trees that did not make fruit outside of Florida, meaning the wrong lime trees had been planted. Darlene (while high) was standing on a ladder not picking limes (because there were none) when she spotted a white Subaru. She met Jarvis and Frank, two newspaper writers who interviewed her and mentioned a man by the name of Marvin Jenkins. Darlene made little sense during the interview, but praised the farm. She then attempted to seduce Jarvis and failed.

How approached and told them to leave the farm while reaching for a gun. Directly after this, How brutally beat Darlene while many of the other workers watched. She laughed through the beating because she realized that she knows that Marvin Jenkins was Sirius' real name.

Analysis

The titular limes in this chapter symbolize the incompetence of the farm's management, as it makes it clear that the company does not have advanced knowledge of agriculture. This chapter also contains massive foreshadowing for conflicts to come on the farm. It is clear that Sirius was able to escape past the borders of the farm and has gone to the press. It is possible that the media attention is quite wide-spread, especially if the farm is located in Louisiana, as the workers believe. The journalists mention that they work for a Houston-based newspaper and record Darlene in case they decide to make a documentary. Regardless of the fact that How scares them off, it is doubtful that the press will relent in learning the truth about Delicious Foods.

Darlene also mentions that the men drive a Subaru. This is an intentionally given detail (by the author), as in the prologue, we learn that Eddie escapes in a white Subaru. It becomes perfectly clear that, regardless of the contract, Delicious Farms is doing something illegal, as How responds by beating Darlene more brutally than he has ever done before. This is the worst infraction that she has ever made, and the punishment is bound to not stop with the beating.

This chapter could also foreshadow a return of Sirius, as Darlene mentions (while she is being beaten) that Sirius is coming to save them.



Discussion Question 1

The narrator uses a simile comparing Sirius to Jesus Christ. What does the narrator mean by this?

Discussion Question 2

What does Darlene's laughter during her beating say about her mindset or her thoughts?

Discussion Question 3

The orchard is filled up with trees that seem to not bear limes. What might this mean?

Vocabulary

pitched (slang), flag (verb), divot



Chapter 20: Doing Nothing

Summary

This chapter takes place directly after Chapter 19 and is narrated by the 3rd person narrator. Eddie continued to do odd jobs for Sextus as well as his usual work. While at Sextus' house, he was told that How needed to speak to him, as he had a special project for Eddie. As Eddie entered the workshop, he saw How and his mother bleeding on the ground (still high). He tried to comfort her, but How stated that his job was to discipline his mother. How gave Eddie a spoon gouge and a wood plane and turned around to leave. As How was walked out, Eddie acted like he was hitting his mother. Eddie checked the entrance and noticed that the door was chained and locked. After Eddie stabilized his mother, How returned with Sextus. How proclaimed that Eddie did nothing. Because of this, How bound Eddie to the barn using the chain, a cable, and a pair of handcuffs, cutting off his circulation. How struck Eddie with a board and Sextus twitched.

Analysis

This chapter reveals more possible origins of many things that appear in the prologue. Eddie being bound using the cable, chain, and handcuffs could be the possible reason why Eddie had lost his hands by the time of the prologue. However, due to the unclear time period that this chapter takes place in, we are unsure of how much time passes between his hand incident and his escape, though we do know that it has been years since Eddie arrived. If Eddie does not escape directly following this incident, his situation at the farm will certainly decline. It seems like due to Eddie's lack of obedience, he may have lost Sextus' favor. Regardless, the timing between the appearance of the white Subaru and the bounding of Eddie's hands cannot be coincidental. This is clearly foreshadowing the events that will lead up to the period of the prologue of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Sextus have come with How? Is this a test like Eddie thinks?

Discussion Question 2

What could be the purpose of hitting Eddie with a board after binding him?

Discussion Question 3

Darlene seems oddly happy during Chapter 20: Doing Nothing. Why?

Vocabulary

spoon gouge, plane (not the aircraft), balming



Chapter 21: The Plan

Summary

This chapter is narrated by Scotty. Jarvis went back to speak with Sirius and to let him listen to the recording of Darlene. Sirius (who was now a semi-successful Houston rapper who rapped about social justice) came to the conclusion that Darlene and the workers were brainwashed, and a rescue attempt must be made. He also informed Jarvis about the time he escaped from Delicious and lived in the drainpipes for weeks.

Jarvis explained that while How was beating Darlene, Michelle and Tuck caught up to them and told them to return during roll call. They did and Tuck and Michelle entered the car, Sirius stated that they had space for five escapees and they would not let them escape unless Darlene and Eddy were with them. Tuck sneaked into the workshop (while drunk) and saw Eddie's hands, which looked like Chinese noodles. He attempted to free Eddie using shears (because How removed some of the other cutting instruments) but to no avail. Tuck left to go get Sirius while Darlene was in withdrawal and infected, and Eddie was still chained to the barn.

Analysis

This chapter marks the near end of the novel's rising action. Due to the circumstances, we now know that Jarvis' Subaru is the vehicle that Eddie will escape in, and that Eddie's hands will be removed in order to free him from captivity. Early in the chapter, Sirius comes to the conclusion that all of the workers are brainwashed. He is right. Many of the workers have not expressed interest in escaping, due to the drug filled nature of the farm.

We also notice great character development in Sirius. We learn that he overcame withdrawal while within the drain-pipe and now raps about anti-drug messages. Also, he raps about social justice. Sirius' experiences at Delicious have a direct correlation with his messages within his music. Sirius experienced and witnessed brutal injustices in order to get to where he is today. His pro-human message and his mission to save people further exemplifies the Jesus simile that the narrator uses previously in the book. However, the prologue has foreshadowed that only Eddie escapes during this attempt, so the fate of the other workers and Sirius are unknown.

Discussion Question 1

Sirius is known to exaggerate. Could Sirius be exaggerating about his time in the sewer pipe?



Discussion Question 2

Are Tuck and Michelle helping Eddie and Darlene because they want to, or do they need to in order to escape?

Discussion Question 3

What does Tuck's drunkenness during Chapter 21: The Plan say about his reaction to the rescue mission?

Vocabulary

social justice, fanzine, gape

Chapter 22: We Could Get You Free

Summary

This chapter is narrated by the 3rd person narrator. Tuck, Jarvis, Michelle, TT, Darlene, and Sirius arrived at the workshop. Eddie made a comment that he heard about Sirius' music and compared his message to a second coming of MLK. The group tried to use bolt cutters to free Eddie, but they did not work. Tuck commented, "We could get you free" (292), alluding to cutting off Eddie's hands, and Eddie caught on. The group found a circular saw and tried to figure out ways to cut off Eddie's hands without making it obvious who the cutter was.

The narrator explains that later, Eddie will look back and realize that God willed the removal of his hands so he could become the handyman with no hands. The cutting began and Darlene left. They saw cut through the cable but not the chain. A blindfolded Eddie thought about all of the things he would never get to feel after he lost his hands, even though Tuck stated that they would ice his removed hands. After they cut off one hand, they created a tourniquet for the wound. After the second hand was removed, Eddie passed out.

Analysis

This chapter moves the narrative closer to the period described in the prologue. Eddie makes a comment comparing Sirius to MLK. This is yet another comparison that of Sirius to an almost universally loved figure, pushing forth the idea that many of the workers do see Sirius as some sort of savior figure.

This chapter also shows another interesting comparison, this one between the mindset of this chapter's Eddie, to that of the prologue's future Eddie. This period's Eddie is sorrowful about the loss of his hands. He mourns the things that he will never be able to experience due to his lack of hands. However, the brief paragraph regarding the future Eddie's recollection explains that he does not look back at the happenings of this chapter with sorrow or anger. Instead, he accepts that this unfortunate circumstance was due to God's will, and that he would not have his current happy life without this incident. This shows a massive amount of character development between this chapter's temporal setting and that of future Eddie.

Discussion Question 1

Why would the group not want Eddie to know who cut off his hand?



Discussion Question 2

What other character development do we see in Chapter 22: We Could Get You Free?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Darlene leave before the cutting begins?

Vocabulary

deliverance, sheathing (noun), fainter

Chapter 23: Gators

Summary

This chapter is narrated by the 3rd person narrator. The group walked to the car while holding Eddie upright. TT and another worker (because of the blindfold) had to stop and smoke some crack before they could proceed. Michelle accused Jarvis of actually working for Sextus, and Jarvis compared the workers to soldiers returning home from an unjust war. Eventually, the group spotted a sole headlight ahead, they initially thought it was a motorcycle, but TT remembered that a headlight on the minibus had broken. They reached the bus and Sextus appeared with a shotgun. Michelle fled toward a brush area, Sextus fired a warning shot and explained that alligators lived in that area. Michelle then accused Sextus and How of being alligators. Eddie stayed laying in the car until he saw Darlene attack Sextus while shouting some odd phrases. The other workers attacked How. Two shots were fired while Eddie decided that they left him in the car so he could flee. He drove away, using the skills that he learned from Sextus' tractor driving lessons.

Analysis

It could be argued that the content of this chapter acts as the novel's conclusion, and that the very end of the chapter acts as the beginning of the book's falling action. This chapter is the conclusion, as the confrontation between the administrators and the protagonists and antagonists finally take place. Eddie seems to thwart the administrators' plans by escaping in the Subaru, denying them the chance to recapture him. However, if we view the book as having two separate identifiable narratives, this chapter only acts as the above devices for the narrative that is narrated by the unnamed 3rd person narrator.

There is also an element of irony at the very end of the chapter. Eddie successfully escapes by using the skills that the antagonist, Sextus, taught him. Of course, Sextus' motivations for teaching him this were to either encourage him to stay or to get closer to Darlene, so it seems that Sextus did not foresee this consequence.

Discussion Question 1

What did Michelle mean when she called the administrators alligators?

Discussion Question 2

What are the meanings in the strange phrases that Darlene yells at Sextus?



Discussion Question 3

What does Jarvis mean by his soldier comparison?

Vocabulary

jetting, jostle, sternum



Chapter 24: Scotty is Surprised

Summary

This chapter opens with Scotty recalling the confrontation between the workers. He states that as soon as Darlene saw the shotgun, she lost her mind. Scotty explains that prior to this point, she blamed herself for her life, but at this instant, she blamed Scotty. After Darlene charged at Sextus, a struggle ensued, and the shotgun shot off some of Sextus' fingers. How attempted to fire at Darlene, but he missed and shot Sextus in the lung and spine, shattering it. Jackie fled in the van, and the workers bound and sat on How. Jarvis plead to Darlene to not to kill Sextus after she picked up the shotgun, while Sextus begged for death, as he did not want to be an invalid like his wife. Darlene enjoyed this interaction of having control over Sextus. Sextus told Darlene that she could have anything she wanted, so she lowered the gun and she replied that she wanted a real job.

Analysis

This chapter demonstrates a power shift for Darlene and Sextus. During every one of their prior interactions, Sextus has held all of the power, but now, after Sextus has been wounded, Darlene has complete control over Sextus. Due to his wounds, Sextus may never have any sort of power over the workers ever again. This is an example of situational irony.

We also see some possible character growth for Darlene. It seems that she has begun to understand that drugs are part of the problem that led her to where she is. However, Scotty states that she should still blame herself. It seems to foreshadow that Darlene may finally quit smoking crack cocaine. However, this is a red-herring, as in later chapters, we learn that Darlene continues to smoke.

Discussion Question 1

What is the purpose of having two different point of views during this event (3rd person narrator and Scotty)?

Discussion Question 2

What about this event makes Darlene realize that crack is part of the problem?

Discussion Question 3

What examples of irony occur in Chapter 24: Scotty is Surprised?

Vocabulary

moonbeam, self-preservation, safety (part of a firearm)



Chapter 25: Summerton Revisited

Summary

This chapter is narrated by the 3rd person narrator. A few weeks after the confrontation, Eddie finally heard from Darlene. Darlene explained that she had taken control of the farm and would be taking care of Sextus and his wife. She explained that in a few months, workers would be allowed to leave freely, and that they had recently reconnected the payphones. Eddie stated that he wants to rescue her and she refused and asked Eddie to come back to the farm. Eddie wondered if Darlene ever wanted to leave Delicious Farms. He asked Darlene about his hands, and Darlene explained that TT had accidentally left them on the ground while fleeing.

After that, Darlene and Eddie often spoke on the phone, but he could never convince her to leave, and she could never convince him to return. A year after the confrontation, Eddie met with Jarvis who read him part of his many-part expose on Delicious Farms. Eddie learned that if Darlene was running the farm, it was not official or legal.

The narrator then begins narrating events in Summerton. The narrator recalls Sextus meeting with his investors who proposed different things to do with the land (while Darlene sat in the background making noises when investors stated certain things), but none of them came to fruition. Eventually the investors sued the company. The narrator then states that Darlene had some people sit the disabled Sextus on his tractor. After he sat there for a while, he stated that he was cold. The narrator explains that it meant both that he was cold due to the temperature and that he was dead inside.

Analysis

This chapter is the only chapter where the 3rd person narrator shifts from events regarding Eddie to events regarding Darlene. This could be another element of the red herring stated in the analysis section of Chapter 24. The author is attempting to make the reader wonder whether Darlene is actually no longer smoking crack cocaine. If she has kicked her habit, it would explain why Scotty is no longer narrating Darlene's side of the narrative. However, in the next chapter, we learn that this is untrue. However, there is evidence that this is a red-herring within the chapter. Eddie wonders whether Darlene ever wanted to leave the farm. In previous chapters, we learn that Scottie often encourages her to stay at the farm so that they can continue to be with each other. In fact, there are points where Darlene thinks that herself. In short, Darlene could be staying at Delicious due to the ease of acquiring crack. Of course, there could be other reasons that she stays. It is possible that she pities Sextus now that he is disabled. In her strange rantings during the confrontation, she does say to Sextus that she loves him. So, she could be staying due to a combination of pity and love. Finally, her reason for staying could be the fact that she enjoys having power over her once abusive employer.



Discussion Question 1

What possible reasons might Darlene have for staying at the farm?

Discussion Question 2

What is the purpose of the noises that Darlene makes during the business meetings?

Discussion Question 3

Why might Darlene put Sextus on the tractor?

Vocabulary

receiver, needling, eulogize



Chapter 26: Chronicle

Summary

The chapter is narrated by Scotty and begins two years after the escape, with Elmunda screaming at her television. She told Darlene that she had heard the names of Darlene, Sextus, and herself on the television. Darlene dismissed this as Elmunda's paranoid delusions (Darlene decides that Elmunda's problems are mental rather than physical). Eventually, Darlene turned on a different TV and saw TT talking about Delicious Farms, stating that a woman brought her son to the farm before he was of working age. After seeing this, Darlene immediately fled to a different room to smoke crack. Jed entered the room and asked what was wrong. Darlene lied in an attempt to protect him, stating that everything was fine.

After she was intoxicated, Darlene called Eddie and screamed at him, telling him not to cooperate with the investigation. Eddie asked if she was still on crack and she said no. A couple of days later, Darlene watched the TV again and heard her own voice yelling at Eddie. After she heard this, she left the room to smoke more crack. She began hallucinating.

Analysis

The title of this chapter originates from the name of Jarvis' employer, the Houston Chronicle. This chapter confirms that what the previous chapters implied was indeed a red-herring. Succinctly, Darlene never quit smoking crack. In the middle of this chapter, Darlene lies to Jed in order to protect him. She lies again, later in this chapter, but does not lie in order to protect Eddie. Instead, she lies to herself. This shows that Darlene is struggles with her priorities, as it seems like she prioritizes her drugs above her own son. Regardless of this lie, Eddie goes on to seemingly betray his mother. Of course, Darlene sees this as a betrayal, but it is possible that Eddie hands the recording over to the investigation in order help Darlene leave Delicious and find some help. It is also quite ironic that Darlene dismisses Elmunda due to her delusions. This is ironic that in the same chapter, after smoking crack, Darlene encounters her own delusions.

Discussion Question 1

What might be the meaning behind Darlene's delusions?

Discussion Question 2

Has Eddie truly betrayed his mother?



Discussion Question 3

What does Darlene believe she is protecting Jed from?

Vocabulary

anchorpeople, clattering, lengthwise



Chapter 27: Trials

Summary

This chapter is narrated by Scotty and opens with Scotty discussing Sextus' trial. According to Scotty, it had taken three years to start Sextus' trial due to officials owing his ancestor's favors. Darlene sent Sextus, Elmunda, and Jed off and told them that she would arrive later. She went back inside to smoke crack. When she finally arrived at the courthouse, she sat with Michelle, who was missing an arm. The two did not talk much about how she lost her arm.

Darlene then recalled some of the changes she made to Delicious (and that no one knew where Jackie was, but they did know that How moved to Juarez). She allowed workers to leave and erased their debts. She explained that about half the workforce left soon after. She also spotted Sirius in the courtroom, and they exchanged glances. Darlene was surprised that the prosecutors were not talking about worker abuse, but instead were accusing the farm of sanitation, IRS, and drug distribution violations.

After Sirius and Tuck left the room, Darlene went to find Eddie. Darlene met Eddie's wife, Ruth, and his son, Nat. After hearing the child's name, Darlene had an introspective moment about quitting crack, which Scotty did not appreciate.

Analysis

In the span of this one chapter, we see a huge amount of character growth in Darlene. At the beginning of the chapter, it seems like Darlene has no inkling of intention to kick her crack cocaine habit. She smokes twice that morning, once before she even leaves for the courthouse, and again when she reaches the courthouse. However, that all changes when she learns that her grandson's name is Nat, the name of her dead husband. At this moment, the reader witnesses Scotty panic, as he does not want to lose Darlene to the realm of sobriety. With this, it is foreshadowed (again) that Darlene may finally stop smoking crack.

During the trial, Darlene is surprised that the prosecutors are not going after the farm for abuse. This may be because the abuse may be hard to prove, since the escape happened years ago, and any wounds from that time may have healed by this point. Instead, they are going after Delicious for things they can prove. It seems that they have physical evidence that they had poor sanitation (and therefore poisoned the water supply), lied on the IRS forms, and dealt drugs to their workers. Darlene seems to believe that, with all of this evidence combined, Delicious is bound to be declared guilty.



Discussion Question 1

Darlene decides to quit crack in Chapter 27: Trials. What is different about this time than the last time she made this decision?

Discussion Question 2

Eddie still seems rather cold towards Darlene. Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Scotty consider Darlene his best friend?

Vocabulary

depositions, tete-a-tete, squintched



Chapter 28: Almost Home

Summary

This chapter consists of a 1st person narration by Darlene. Darlene explains that Sextus was sentenced to 15 years in prison and most of the farm was sold off. She also mentions that she somewhat misses Sextus. She moved to Shreveport to get sober (after horrible withdrawal symptoms), joined an AA type group, and stopped thinking about her book about success. She started an exercise routine and decided to eat healthy. One day, she walked into the dome of their old school and looked at the trophy case, which displayed trophies the school won when Nat attended. Darlene had also decided to always be aware about where her food comes from. She started working as a waitress, where she made enough money to move out of the addict program's lodgings and into an apartment. Later, on a run, Darlene began feeling short of breath, and experienced pain in her arms. Soon after, she woke up in a hospital with an oxygen tube attached to her.

Analysis

The chapter's title seems to mean that, while Darlene is in a better place, but without her family, she is not home. It is finally revealed that this time, Darlene's decision to become sober was not a red-herring. In fact, she has done more than just become sober, she is actually living a much healthier lifestyle. This chapter also is the first and only chapter where Darlene is the first-person narrator. This is interesting, as there is a large difference between the chapters narrated by Scotty, and this one. Scotty seemed to speak in an urban dialect, similar to traditional African-American English. Scotty also made it seem like Darlene spoke in this way. In this chapter, we learn this is not true. Darlene's narration dialect is much closer to that of the unnamed third-person narrator than Scotty's. This seems to be the author's way of portraying crack. Crack changes you and controls you. In short, crack controls and narrates your life.

Discussion Question 1

Darlene ends up in the hospital at the end of Chapter 28: Almost Home. What could be wrong with her?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Darlene decide to live and healthier lifestyle?



Discussion Question 3

Why might Darlene visit Nat's trophies?

Vocabulary

acreage, foyer, mundane



Chapter 29: Daydreaming

Summary

In the final chapter of the novel, the narrative shifts back to the 3rd person narrator. Eddie flew to Shreveport because he feared that Darlene would die, or worse, die alone. Darlene shared a hospital room with a high-school athlete who also went through heart surgery. Eddie was pleased to see that Darlene had gotten dental implants. Darlene asked Eddie when she would be able to see Nat, because she will not be around forever.

Eddie decided to let her come to his home the next month and pay for her airfare. Then, Darlene realized that her five-step program was similar to her success book but better. She told Eddie a story (that she often daydreamed about) about her and Sirius looking up at the stars when they were picking citrus fruit at Delicious Farms. She then recalled when Sirius stated that the Lord did not help him survive (as his lawyer implied) because the Lord is just another story. He also stated that stories may get you through your life, but they do not help you survive. Eddie commented that Eddie survived, and through this, became free.

Analysis

In this chapter, Darlene and Eddie cease being estranged. Eddie seems genuinely happy that his mother has finally stopped smoking crack and found a new life. Due to this, he allows her to enter his family life once more. This is partly due to Eddie's fear that Darlene will die and never get to truly know her daughter-in-law or grandson.

The very end of the chapter includes some clear irony. Sirius states that stories do not help someone survive, but they get people through their lives. In a way, the author is commenting on his medium. He seems to be arguing that if something dire happens in your life, reading stories will not change anything. Instead, you must change something yourself. The irony lies in the fact that he is stating this as a character in a story, which is rather meta. Regardless, taking action seems to have helped all of the main characters. Eddie left the farm and becomes a family man, Sirius left and becomes a musician, and Darlene left the estate and improves her life.

Discussion Question 1

What other meanings could be behind Sirius' statements?

Discussion Question 2

What does Eddie mean when he says that Sirius is free?



Discussion Question 3

Why does the author shift back to the 3rd person narrator?

Vocabulary

threshold, premonitions, pincers



Characters

Eddie Hardison

One of the two main protagonists in the novel and Darlene's only son, Eddie is a tenacious young man who truly cares for his family. When his father died, he was too young to understand what was happening. Later, when Darlene begins using drugs Eddie begins to slightly care for her when she comes home from a night of drug use. When Darlene disappears, Eddie searches for her for weeks. Eventually, he meets Tuck and makes his way to Delicious. There, he is reunited with his drug-addled mother.

Eddie begins working at Delicious and gives the majority of his money to his mother so she can support her drug habit. When Darlene begins a relationship with Sextus, Eddie gains Sextus' ear and is told that he is being groomed to be a supervisor. Before the workers attempt to escape, How binds Eddie, which causes the workers to cut off his hands.

Eddie escapes and goes on a journey looking for Bethella, his aunt. He finds her and begins a new life in St. Cloud. During this period, Eddie and Darlene do not have a civil relationship.

Eddie eventually becomes a handy-man, regardless of his disability. He meets a woman named Ruth and has a son named Nathaniel. Eventually, after Darlene has a heart attack, he and his mother reunite, and Eddie allows her into his family.

Darlene Hardison

Darlene is one of the two main protagonists in the novel. Darlene went to school with Nat in Louisiana, where they developed a romantic relationship. It is clear that Darlene had intense loyalty and love towards her husband. When they moved away from Houston, the two decided to enter the world of politics. During this time, Darlene gave birth to Eddie. (she was pregnant before, but it ended in a miscarriage.) Due to their political activism, Nat was murdered.

This sent Darlene into a spiral of depression and frustration. She blamed herself for the murder as she had Eddie go out to go get her Tylenol for her headache. Eventually, after the insurance money dried up, she worked at a store and began to use crack. After this and due to her addiction, she then became a prostitute.

During this period she starts neglecting her son, as she is overwhelmed by the hold that Scotty has over her. Later, she is lured, to Delicious Farms where she works and is supplied with a steady supply of crack. She is content for much of this time and begins a relationship with Sirius. When Eddie finally finds her, she is happy but continues to use drugs. During her time at Delicious, Darlene has constant thoughts regarding her guilt about Nat's death, but she still begins a sexual relationship with Sextus.



When Eddie escapes, Darlene takes control of the farm. She stays due to her power of Sextus and the steady stream of drugs. While she is in control, she has a very hostile relationship with Eddie. Once Darlene meets her grandson, Nat, she decides to start living a better lifestyle. Her narrative ends with Eddie allowing her to see Nathaniel after her heart attack.

Nat Hardison

Nat Hardison is Darlene's husband and Eddie's father. He went to school with Darlene while playing on the men's basketball team. Both he and Darlene were cursed by Hazel. Eventually they moved in together, and Nat attempted to enter the political world. It is implied that this action played a role in his murder. He was stabbed and burned inside his general store before the action of the novel takes place.

Sparkplug

Sparkplug is a family friend to the Hardisons. He warned Nat and Darlene to not attempt to politically alter the status quo. On his deathbed, he implies that he was involved in Nat's murder.

Sirius

Sirius is one of the workers at Delicious Farms. He seems to be the most ambitious and realistic of the Delicious workers. He enters into a sexual relationship with Darlene before he escapes the farm. After he escapes, he moves to Houston and becomes a locally respected rap artist. He testifies against Delicious during the trial.

Michelle

Michelle is one of the workers at Delicious Farms. Michelle is one of the workers who is most eager to escape. She becomes friends with Darlene, Edide, and TT and includes them in her escape plan. She flees the farm on foot during the worker's confrontation with the supervisors. Darlene speaks to her at the trial and notices that she is missing an arm.

Jackie

Jackie is one of the supervisors at Delicious Farms. She is in charge of finding new workers, distributing crack cocaine, and helping with punishments. She acts superior to the workers even though she is addicted to crack as well. At the end of the novel, her location is unknown.



How

How is one of the supervisors at Delicious Farms. He is a former illegal immigrant who was deported, joined a gang, and ended up back in the United States. He is cruel and violent towards the workers. By the end of the novel, he flees to Juarez.

Sextus

Sextus is the owner of Delicious Foods. He is portrayed as the stereotypical male white plantation owner. He usually allows his supervisors, How and Jackie, to run the day-to-day operations. Eventually, he takes a liking to Darlene and starts a sexual relationship with her. However, he is fully aware of the abuses that happen at the farm. At the climax of the novel, he is accidentally shot and disabled. This changes the power dynamic between Darlene and himself.

Elmunda

Elmunda is Sextus' wife. It is implied that she has a combination of physical problems, mental problems, or both. When we first hear of Elmunda, she is pregnant with Sextus' child. After the pregnancy, she suffers from seizures and a stroke, which causes her to be bedridden. Darlene believes that all of her problems are mental issues.

Scotty

Scotty acts as the personification of crack cocaine. "He" attempts to control many of the adult workers. he has a deep relationship with Darlene until she quits using crack towards the end of the novel.



Symbols and Symbolism

Scotty/Crack

The author makes use of crack cocaine in order to show Darlene's (and others) altered state and chemical dependence. If readers look to Scotty in particular, when Scotty narrates he often speaks of having control over Darlene, as he fills her with his smoke. Delicious Farms takes advantage of this by providing a steady stream of drugs to the workers. Due to the work's dependence, they stay in order to secure a consistent supply. The drug also causes hallucinations, symbolizing their deteriorating mental state.

Darlene's Shoes

The author uses Darlene's shoes to symbolize Darlene's frustrations, and the shoes are used as an object that can be used to relieve her guilt. After's murder, Darlene is found sleeping next to the shoe rack, and readers eventually learn that Darlene decides to destroy the hoses. At this point in her life, she is using the shoes as a scapegoat in order to not be overwhelmed with guilt and destroys them. However, this symbol falls away once Darlene stops blaming the footwear.

Limes

The author uses Delicious' limes to symbolize the farm's overall incompetence. According to the workers, the limes that they were instructed to pick were key limes, a variety that does not really grow outside of Florida. Regardless of this, the farm plants them anyway. One would expect for a successful farm to know these agricultural facts, but it is clear that they do not. They are incompetent and force the workers to pick the non-existing limes.

Cars

According to Eddie (and the author), cars symbolize privileged. While living in Houston, Eddie remarks that people with money or a decent job own cars because they have somewhere to go. This seems to be true, as none of the African American workers own cars, as crack has made them lose their way. Eventually Eddie gets into a car and escape Delicious; in this case, Eddie had somewhere to go (away from the farm).

Talking Bird

The author uses the talking bird (or grackle) to symbolize the boiling over of Darlene's guilt and the way crack is affecting her mind. The bird speaks with Nat's voice, which



causes Darlene to profess her guilt to it, apologize, and chase it. This makes it clear that, years later, Darlene still has not overcome the guilt. In reality, the talking bird is not actually talking, and Darlene is just having an auditory hallucination. So the affects of crack and her mental state, manifest into the symbol of the bird.

Tractor

The author uses the Sextus' tractor to symbolize the power dynamic at the farm. Sextus, the owner of the farm is at the very top of the farm's hierarchy. In order to exemplify this, Sextus sits on a very tall tractor, making him elevated over both the workers and the supervisors. The tractor allows him to intimidate and look down at the workers.

Firearms

The varied firearms that appear over the course of the novel signify some sort of power. How has a gun which allows him to have power over the workers. Sextus' gun represents that type of power and more. The gun also represents a sexual power dynamic between Sextus and Darlene (it also could be considered a phallic symbol). This can be seen when Darlene attacks Sextus and implies that he had sex with her using his gun.

Prostesis

The author uses Eddie's prosthesis to symbolize Eddie's tenacity. When his hands are first removed he is quite distraught (as he should be). However, after he moves to St. Cloud, he realizes that he could not have lived the life he does without losing his hands. Eddie, using this tenacity brought about by his injuries propelled him to who he becomes.

Loss of Appendages

The author uses the loss of appendages to signify the cost of working and escaping Delicious. The conditions are so tyrannical at Delicious that both Eddie and Michelle lost some sort of appendage. This shows that not just working for Delicious is dangerous, but trying to escape is too.

Hazel's Magic Dust

Hazel's magic just symbolizes the bad luck that both Darlene and Nat will eventually be subject to. It is clear the Hazel, and possibly Darlene, see the magic dust as some sort of magical item. If this is true, it could be the cause of all of the couple's misfortunes.



Settings

Shreveport

Shreveport is the town in Louisiana where Nat and Darlene went to school together and fell in love. The couple lived in this town until they were forced out due to the fact that Darlene had a relationship with Nat while Nat was dating Hazel.

Darlene eventually returns to Shreveport after she leaves Delicious Farms. It is here where Darlene finally kicks her crack habit and starts living a healthy lifestyle. It is clear that Darlene returns here due to her previous life with Nat.

Houston

Houston is the city in Texas that Darlene and Eddie lived after Nat was murdered. According to Darlene, the reason they moved to this city was so Darlene could resist temptation. Eddie lives here for the majority of his younger and preteen years.

In the novel, Houston is described as a city infested with crime. Prostitutes wander the streets at night and crack cocaine is prevalent. This is also where Delicious Farms recruits its workers. This is not a coincidence, as Delicious takes advantage of the drug addled state of many of the Houstonites.

St. Cloud

St. Cloud is the city in Minnesota that Eddie's aunt, Bethella, moves to, and is eventually where Eddie ends up after he escapes Delicious Farms. St. Cloud seems to be the foil for Houston. The novel seems to portray the city as a low-crime area, where people like Eddie can flourish. This is also where Eddie finds happiness; while living in St. Cloud, he meets Ruth and she gives birth to their son, Nat.

Delicious Foods

Delicious Foods is the farm where the majority of the novel takes place. It is located somewhere far off from civilization in Louisiana (which makes it difficult for workers to escape on foot). The farm makes use of workers that have alcohol or drug addictions and motivates them to work by making their drug of choice available. Darlene and Eddie end up here and work until Eddie is 17. After Eddie escapes, Darlene takes over management of the farm, but it takes advantage of people's addictions. Eventually, Sextus, the farm's owner is found guilty of cheating the IRS, poisoning water supplies and providing unfit sanitation, and drug trafficking. Due to this, the farm is shut down.

Summerton

Summerton is Sextus' estate located on the property of Delicious Foods. The home is quite extravagant, as Sextus is quite wealthy due to his family history and the profitability of the farm. Summerton is where Darlene and Sextus begin their sexual relationship and Eddie begins to earn Sextus' ear. After Eddie escapes, Darlene begins living at Summerton, taking care of Sextus' family. Eventually, Darlene moves out after the trial and after she meets her grandson, Nat.



Themes and Motifs

Addiction

The author uses the theme of addiction to portray the vastly negative affects it has on one's life. The destructive force that is both drug and alcohol addiction can be seen in literally every addicted character. Most of these characters are addicted to crack cocaine (portrayed as Scotty), while Tuck is purely addicted to alcohol. In this novel, addiction ensures two things, first that the addicted person is easy to control, and secondly, that there is a high chance that their life will fall apart.

For most of the novel's characters, addiction ensures that the addicted person will be on the bottom of the power and economic structure. Darlene is a prime example of this. After Darlene becomes addicted to crack cocaine, she slips further into poverty. Her altered state makes it incredibly difficult to hold a job. Her impoverished status lowers the quality of life for both her and her son. Her economic status also affects her role in many power structures. Eventually, Darlene has to begin selling her body as a prostitute. While doing this, she forfeits power to her clients and is forced to do their bidding (think the watermelon incident). Other than quitting crack, Darlene cannot change her status, as she is firmly under the control of her addiction, her client, and later Delicious Farms. Delicious further exemplifies this problem by keeping its workers working by enticing them with crack, which in turn, increases their debt.

While under the influence of addictive substances, many of the character's lives fall apart. Characters like Darlene enter illicit professions to provide themselves with their drug of choice, while others, like Tuck, are forced onto the street. Darlene's family life slowly falls apart due to her addiction. This begins with her absence from the household and later intensifies once Eddie escapes and Darlene will not leave the farm. One of the main reasons that Darlene does not leave is because of the reliable source of her drug.

Finally, all of these woes are solved once the addicts quit their respective addictions. Once Darlene quits crack cocaine, she is able to lead a normal life and eventually meet her grandson. This is true for Sirius as well, as once he leaves the farm and his addiction behind, he is able to become a successful local rapper.

Wealth and power do not equate to a guaranteed "normal" family

The author uses two different examples of family in order to put forth the idea that wealth and power do not necessarily ensure a normal and stable family. The two families in question are Sextus' family and Darlene's family. Sextus' family is quite privileged due to their race and financial situation, however their family situation is quite strained. On the other hand, Darlene's family is not privileged and impoverished (for the majority of the novel) but her family ends up in a much better overall situation.



In order to make this clear, let us analyze Sextus' family unit. It includes Sextus, who is a cruel man who takes advantage of addicts and children, and there is Elmunda, the troubled wife and mother of Jed. Sextus seems to be the main issue with this family, as he does not seem to truly love his wife. He constantly has sex with Darlene, and does not show affection towards her in the last third of the novel. One would expect for a family that lives in Summerton and has the benefits of Sextus' family name to lead happy lives. This is clearly not true, as Elmunda deteriorates, Sextus continues to be cruel, and Jed is almost entirely ignored by his parents.

In contrast, while Darlene's family does have its up and downs, the members end up in a much better situation than Sextus' family. Even though Nat is dead, Darlene constantly thinks about him and makes it very clear that she still deeply loves him. Eddie stops at nothing to find his mother, and, once he gets to Delicious, makes sure her crack needs are met (for her health), even though he does not agree with the drug. At the end of the novel, the family ends up happy and drug-free.

Through this, it is explicitly clear that privileged and wealth does not ensure a stable family unit. In fact, the novel seems to put forth the opposite claim.

Freedom comes at a cost

The author uses the theme of freedom to highlight what is often the incredibly high cost of such freedom. Many of the characters in the novel could be considered slaves or (illegally) indentured servants. For many of these workers, freedom seems unnecessary or impossible due to their position and their addictions. However, for those like Darlene, Sirius, Eddie, and Michelle, freedom is plausible, but often comes with a high price.

The three most clear examples of this are the struggles of Eddie, Michelle, and Sirius. Eddie becomes an indentured servant at Delicious solely because he wants to find and help his mother. He does find and help his mother, but it ends with the loss of his hands. If Eddie did not seek freedom, his hands may have never been amputated. Michelle has a similar story. Her freedom is completely motivated by her own mission to be free. Like Eddie, her journey ends with an amputation - her arm. However, after she escapes, also like Eddie, she is in a much better place. But, her loss is the price of her freedom. Sirius has a taxing, yet less brutal journey towards freedom. According to Sirius, he goes through massive withdrawal symptoms while in the sewer pipe and has to eat lizards for weeks. However, Sirius pays the cost and is able to escape.

Overall, the novel demonstrates that, often times, freedom does not come without a cost. Of course, the cost that these workers end up paying is incredibly unfair, as they are treated unfairly and are taken advantage of. However, in the novel, if one is willing to pay the price, freedom is able to be obtained.



Tenacity and ambition can achieve more than most

The novel uses the theme of tenacity and ambition to explain to the reader that if one is highly tenacious or ambitious, they can achieve more than most. This phenomena can be seen in characters such as Nat, Eddie, and Sirius.

While Nat did die due to his ambition, it seems that he still made a difference. After going through financial and familial hardship, Nat eventually became an entrepreneur and political activist. Nat attempted to make a difference in his community, and seemingly did so, as readers know that many disenfranchised individuals were shown the political system thanks to Nat's actions in having people register to vote. He was murdered, but still achieved great things and helped those who may have not been able to help themselves.

Eddie clearly inherits his father's tenacity. Even after his amputation, he escapes and is able to live a normal life. The narrator even explains that Eddie looks back at the time when he lost his hands and realizes that it was meant to happen. If he did not lose his hands, he would not have been able to start his own business (like his father) and become successful. Not only does he overcome the hurdle of being a double amputee, but he overcomes the hardship that is Delicious Farms as well.

Sirius also overcomes Delicious Farms. At the time that he leaves, he is addicted to crack and can barely function without it. Regardless of this, he escapes, overcomes his brutal withdrawal symptoms, beats the odds, and escapes. Thanks to this, he is able to become a successful rapper who fights for social and economic change.

Power structures are fluid

The author uses the various power structures within the novel to claim that power structures are not concrete, but are fluid and can change. There are two main power structures in the novel. The first is the structure between Scotty and his friends, the drug addicts. The second structure is that of the farm. This structure is simply portrayed as How, Jackie, and Sextus ruling over the Delicious workers.

Scotty himself states that addiction allows him to have power over individuals. Those who are addicted to crack cocaine live in accordance to Scotty's wills and ways. They often smoke crack when Scotty wills it, and are punished when they do not interact with Scotty. However, this power structure does not stay stable. Scotty explains that when Darlene quit him, he lost all power over her. In short, by quitting crack, Darlene completely destroyed the power structure, throwing Scotty out of the equation.

Darlene is also involved in the fluidity of the second power structure. After Sextus is injured in the escape attempt, he is no longer able to take care of himself. He loses true managerial power over both Delicious Farm and his workers (most notably, Darlene). Before this, Sextus had more literal power than anyone else in the novel. He had professional power of his employees and sexual power over Darlene. After the

confrontation, Darlene takes that power from him by taking control over Delicious and eliminating the sexual dynamic between herself and Sextus. In short, this power structure is figuratively flipped upside down.

Styles

Point of View

The author uses three different points of view within the novel: an unnamed third person narrator, Scotty (the personification of crack cocaine), and Darlene. There are distinct reasons why the author chooses to do this. The author uses Scotty as a narrator in chapters centered around Darlene in order to make it clear to the reader that Scotty has immense power over Darlene. Scotty tells the reader that Darlene's reasoning behind many of her actions is to obtain crack cocaine.

Darlene is the narrator for a single chapter. The author chooses to use Darlene as a narrator here in order to show the reader that Scotty no longer has any control over Darlene, and that Darlene now has full control over her actions. Finally, the unnamed third person narrator is used in chapters centered around Eddie in order to inform the reader about things that Eddie does not have knowledge of. For example, in chapters that use the 3rd person narrator, the reader is privy to both Eddie's thoughts and some of Darlene's thoughts. Each of these point of view choices are deliberate and effective in their own way.

Language and Meaning

The language that the novel uses in a particular chapter directly relates to which narrator the chapter utilizes. Chapters that are narrated by Scotty use language and slang that are commonly associated with urban American English or African American English. For example, Scotty says, "She knew she done something ridiculous—you couldn't hold no shoes responsible for nothing (194). This is most likely used because of the locations where crack cocaine is prevalent (usually urban environments). The language used by both Darlene and the third person narrator is much closer to Standard American English, this may be used because these chapters are narrated by people who are not influenced by Scotty. The language in all chapters include profanity as well as some complex words as the novel seems to be written for adults readers.

Structure

The novel is written in a slightly non-chronological way. The book begins with a prologue that actually takes place after the majority of the book's chapters. It is not until the final handful of chapters that readers actually reach a temporal setting that takes place during or after the prologue. This is used as a foreshadowing method. For example, in the prologue, readers are told that Eddie lost his hands, however it is not explained at that time how it happened. Readers only learn the true answers to the mysteries alluded to during the prologue much later in the novel. It also must be noted that the vast majority of the novel consists of the 3rd person narrator narrating past events and

recollections. However, during Scotty's passages, Scotty does speak to the reader in present tense while also recollecting the past



Quotes

Y'all think a body be who you is, but it ain't nothing but a motherfucking sack of meat.
-- Scotty (Chapter 1: Braindancing paragraph 32)

Importance: This shows Scotty's outlook on the universe. Essentially, he believes that the physical body does not matter, but there is something more, within us, that makes us who we are.

The men passed laughter between them like beer, mollifying a shared disappointment, frustration, and rage intense enough to turn murderous if you provoked it, though the opportunity to vent wouldn't ever arrive. Even if they got a chance, the talons of injustice would swoop down soon enough, dismember these men, and be gone, and everybody would forget that any of it had happened, aside from a lingering miasma that might rise into the spanish moss.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 3: Conjure paragraph 52)

Importance: This describes the injustice that took place in Darlene and Nat's town. Nat is essentially attempting to fight this injustice, but the narrator is foreshadowing his failure.

Hazel reached into her pocket. She squatted over Nat, and as he rose up to his knees, brought a cupped hand to her lips and forcefully blew some kind of acrid dust into each of their faces, enough of it that they had to close their eyes against the stinging grit.

-- Narrator (Chapter 3: Conjure paragraph 26)

Importance: This instance gives a possible reason why terrible things happen to both Nat and Darlene. It is possible that Hazel casts some sort of spell on them using the dust.

The one in the seat in front of that, passing round a little red light. The one in front took it in his palm, and she bugged out when she saw that pipe. The man put it up to his face, and the light be getting brighter as he sucked it in and the pipe started fizzing that fizz that gave Darlene an orgasm of hope. She love the sound of my voice.

-- Scotty (Chapter 4: We Named the Goat paragraph 15)

Importance: This shows the relationship between Scotty and Darlene. Darlene seems to have an overwhelming physical response when she sees the men smoking crack. This feeling will drive her actions for the majority of the novel.

She knew she done something ridiculous—you couldn't hold no shoes responsible for nothing, shoes ain't got no intentions. But shoes also can't talk back, they helpless, and what's helpless always gon take the biggest part of the rage.

-- Scotty (Chapter 13: Meet Scotty paragraph 3)



Importance: This demonstrates how Darlene takes her frustration with Nat's murder on the shoes, while still acknowledging that it is her fault.

When it came to their workplace, only God would show mercy.”
-- Eddie (Chapter 17: Your Punishment paragraph 8)

Importance: Here, Eddie describes that the administrators of the farm are completely merciless.

Eddie took a tool in each hand and turned them so that their handles faced out. He suspected that How, or even Sextus, had some kind of test in mind --- of Eddie's ruthlessness, his loyalty to the company, his willingness to follow orders. He wondered how close they thought he was to the kind of monster who would perform this task without hesitation, then considered what a mother would have to do to deserve such treatment from her son...

-- Narrator (Chapter 20: Doing Nothing paragraph 10)

Importance: Eddie ponders the motivations for How's actions. He also attempts to determine what crime his mother committed.

Looking back later, from the distance of St. Cloud, Eddie would say that he reckoned he'd done well. Best thing that ever happened to me! He'd say. How could I have become the Handy-man Without Hands if I had hands? I wouldn't give up that experience for anything in the world.

-- Narrator (Chapter 22: We Could Get You Free paragraph 16)

Importance: This quote shows the reader that, later in life, Eddie comes to the conclusion that losing his hands is actually beneficial for his future.

And I knowed her ass wasn't kidding, neither. But I am a badass drug with a reputation for keeping the loyalty of my friends and lovers in a very tight grip, so I laughed at her --- a long, nasty, spiteful, smoky laugh --- praying that all my ridicule gonna keep her from knowing that without her, I would lose all my strength.

-- Scotty (Chapter 27: Trials paragraph 35)

Importance: Here, Scotty's feelings towards Darlene change. Darlene threatens to quit crack, so he tries his best to reel her back in, because if she quits, he will have no power over her.

In comparison to the almost supernatural comforts that Shreveport gave me, I sometimes thought of my program as bland, but Tony, my sponsor from group, had recently reminded me, and everybody else, that party people think only self-destructive activities are pleasurable and exciting; everything else bores them. The mundane parts of my day had become vital, and so had my acceptance of the past, though the latter sometimes stunned me into silence or tears, and both — the mundane present and the sorrowful past — now had to keep me straight, each one like a rope thrown to me from a boat while I thrashed around in a cold, churning river.



-- Darlene (Chapter 28: Almost Home paragraph 7)

Importance: Here, Darlene explains her new attitudes towards both the present and the past.

Darlene absorbed all of this information from him but could find no hope in it whatsoever. Why, she asked, if all these small things we do, all this work that gets dumped on us day after day, if all our love and our attachments mean absolutely nothing and everything will eventually get incinerated, why do we bother to do anything? Is there any reason to keep on living? Is that why it's better to smoke our lives away, why oblivion and death seem to call to us continually, like they're summoning us home? How do we do it? How do we go on?

-- Narrator (Chapter 29: Daydreaming paragraph 19)

Importance: The narrator describes Darlene's thought process towards Sirius' view on the universe. It is clear that Sirius' view is much more secular than Darlene's.

A story might help you get through your life, he said, but it doesn't literally keep you alive --- if anything most often people who have power turn their story into a brick wall keeping out somebody else's truth so that they can continue the life they believe themselves to be leading, trying somehow to preserve the idea that they're good people in their small lives, despite their involvement, however indirect, with bigger evils.

-- Narrator (quoting Sirius) (Chapter 29: Daydreaming paragraph 23)

Importance: Sirius attempts to explain that stories are not useful for survival and their actual use in life.