

I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This Study Guide

I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This by Jacqueline Woodson

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Plot Summary

"I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This" by Jacqueline Woodson is the story of twelve-year-old Marie, a black girl who lives in Chauncey, Ohio, with her father who is a college professor. Chauncey, Ohio, had been a mining community until the mines dried up. After that, the miners - many of whom were poor and white - moved to Athens to work in the factories there. But the factories began to shut down and many of the families who had once worked in the mines in Chauncey returned. Many of these returning families built shacks along the Hocking River which was known to rise and flood the lowlands.

Marie is best friends with the most popular girl in school who is named Sherry. Marie emulated Sherry's style - her clothing and hair-dos - and both were considered the best-dressed students in their class. There were not many white kids at school and those who were there were poor - often called poor white trash by some of the black students. When a new poor white girl showed up at school and was introduced to the class, Marie hoped that the girl wouldn't be seated anywhere near her. The girl looked dirty, was wearing worn clothes and had oily hair. But Ms. Cory, the classroom teacher, selected Marie to show the new girl, Lena, around.

Marie, of course, was not thrilled with the task but took on the responsibility of familiarizing Lena with the school. Sherry made comments about Lena being white trash and that Marie was being an Uncle Tom for spending time with her. Almost immediately, Marie saw something different in Lena - different in a good way. Marie was drawn to the girl even though she tried to resist forming a friendship with her. Lena was direct about her wish for them to be friends and they became very close friends with a good deal in common. Eventually, Marie came to see both Lena's strength and her vulnerability and came to admire her new friend whose depth far out-distanced stylish clothes and chic hair-dos.

Marie's mother, Diane, had left the family two years before. Marie missed her mother terribly and suffered from abandonment and guilt. She had to deal with her father who was crushed by his wife's departure and the new family of two that had become their new reality. Marie's father had marched for desegregation and had some serious scrapes with white opponents. It was natural that he had acquired some wariness about white people and was at first against Marie's friendship with Lena. But eventually, he saw that it was a positive relationship and even came to like Lena himself.

But Lena was dealing with very adult problems, problems that a twelve-year-old should never be forced to tackle. She eventually told her best friend, Marie, that her father was sexually abusing her. It had been going on since her mother died several years before. Lena's main concern was not allowing the same thing to happen to her younger sister, Dion. Although Marie encouraged her to go to the authorities, Lena refused knowing that if social services was alerted that she and her sister would be separated and placed in different foster homes.

Through her friendship with Lena, Marie is able to have a deeper understanding of her own mother's actions. The resolution about her mother helps prepare her for Lena's ultimate departure. She realizes that everyone - Lena, her mother and even Marie herself - must find that sweet green silence where peace and happiness awaits them.



Preface and Chapters 1 and 2

Preface and Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Preface

The Hocking River runs through Chauncey, Ohio. It was in the middle of the city that Marie would meet Lena on the white side. When it rains, the Hocking River rises and sometimes even floods. When it floods, debris is carried down the on the swift currents. Chauncey was a poor mining community. Marie's father always said that the poor people were on welfare. Her mother said they were on state aid - sounded nicer. Her father was practical and she became more practical, too, after her mother left.

A lot of the miners contracted black lung and took government handouts until they died. When the mines were depleted of their ore, there was no work in Chauncey and the people were moved to low income housing in Athens, a few miles south, and given factory jobs. Chauncey was virtually abandoned. The city planners decided to turn the town into a suburb of Athens with new affordable housing. But the project began to fail when the factories slowed down and people went back on welfare. The people returned to find their houses gone. They built shacks along the river or rented cheap apartments.

The few whites who were at school kept to themselves. Marie's father called them "trash" but her mother called them "poor white people."

Chapter 1

Marie's mother, Diane, would always write her notes with smiley faces at the end of each sentence. Her parents would play gin rummy with the Martins. Terrace Martin would make eyes at her mother. Her mother would share the town gossip with Marie when her father was out of the room. Her mother told her that sometimes people just take off like they're going to fly.

Chapter 2

Marie used to dream of flying over Randolph Park. It reminded her of when her mother used to put her in the swing when she was a toddler and push her higher and higher. Marie dreamed about Lena one night. Lena was leading her to one of the big swings. Marie was afraid that Lena was going too high but Lena wanted to kiss the sky. Suddenly, Lena took off and flew. Marie called after her but she kept going, growing tinier and tinier in the sky.

Preface and Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Preface



Marie lives in the small community of Chauncey, Ohio. Even though it is a poor town, it is racially segregated. She has become friends with a white girl. Marie has to contend with her mother's absence who left her and her father. Her father is referred to as practical. He appears to be prejudiced against white people because he calls them "trash." Her mother was a kinder person and refers to them as just poor.

Chapter 1

Marie makes a point to say that her mother repeats the town gossip to her which some would consider unusual between a mother and her young daughter. It seems that her mother needs someone to talk to, and doesn't find that person in her husband.

Chapter 2

Marie's dream of flying shows that she is afraid of losing Lena as a friend. Perhaps she has a premonition about Lena - that she will leave her like her mother did.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3

Lena told Marie a secret that she hadn't meant to tell her. She made her swear not to tell anyone. They were in Marie's room and Dion, Lena's little sister, was there, too. Marie looked like she was ready to cry but didn't. That was a long time ago. As soon as she woke from her dream about Lena, Marie knew she would have told Lena's secret after all. She sensed that Lena would think it was okay to tell now.

Chapter 4

Marie first met Lena when Lena was introduced by Ms. Cory, her teacher, on the third day after summer break. Lena wore strange clothes and her shoes were worn down. Marie prayed that the new white girl wouldn't sit anywhere near her. But Ms. Cory told Marie to hold her hand up and she directed the new girl to sit next to her. She told Marie to help Lena get acquainted. Up close, Marie saw that the girl's hair was oily and that she didn't appear to be clean. Lena smiled at Marie but Marie did not return the smile.

The lesson that day was on the civil rights movement. Marie's father had marched on Washington for desegregation. She recalled the stories of the brutality he suffered during that chaotic time. He was also arrested once for no reason other than that he was black and walking through a white neighborhood. Lena opened a package of cupcakes up under her desk and offered Marie one. Marie told her she wasn't supposed to eat in class. Lena just looked at her and stuffed a whole cupcake in her mouth.

Lena ate both cupcakes and then opened her beat-up notebook and started taking notes from the board. She turned and to Marie and introduced herself as Elena Cecelia Bright but that everyone calls her Lena. Marie and a black girl, Sherry, weren't very nice and responded with a "Who cares?!" Lena turned back to her work and said that she did - she cared who she was. Sherry and Marie had been friends for a long time. Their mothers had been friends. Sherry's mother, Thelma, came over to console Marie and her father when Marie's mother left them.

Lena followed Marie and Sherry to their lunch table. Marie could see that Lena was admiring their clothes. Marie and Lena had both been voted best dressed two years in a row. Sherry wanted to know where Lena had come from. Her answer was strange: "From wherever. Chauncey ain't far from nowhere." For some reason Lena's answer got to Marie. She looked at the strange new white girl and felt a strange sensation as though Lena was drifting away from her. Something made her want to remove the sad broken look from Lena's eyes.



Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Chapter 3

There is more evidence of secret-keeping in this chapter. Although it is not revealed what Lena was upset about and what she told Marie, it is something that is very upsetting. When Marie wakes from her dream, she knows that she must tell someone about Lena's secret. Has Lena disappeared like she did in the dream when she flew away from Marie?

Chapter 4

Recalling when she first met Lena, Marie reveals that she had a special feeling for the strange new white girl who sat by her at school. There was something forlorn about Lena - something that Marie felt she needed to fix. Maybe she saw herself in the girl who was sad and abandoned. She wanted to fix Lena but she also wanted to heal the hurt she still felt inside over her mother leaving her and her father.

When Sherry calls Lena "white trash" Lena repeats it several times as if she'd heard it before and perhaps agreed with it. Although Lena seems like a broken child, she eagerly takes notes from the board in a notebook that is described as worn, which indicates that she has used it a lot. Apparently Lena wants to learn and improve her circumstances. Perhaps there's a bright girl under all that hurt.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter 5

Sherry told Marie she was being an Uncle Tom when she told her that she had to show Lena around after lunch. As they walked down the hall, Marie asked Lena where she lived. Without hesitation, Lena responded that she lived over by the dump. Marie stopped in front of a classroom and told Lena her next class was in the room. Lena smiled when Marie told her that they would have last hour together.

Chapter 6

When Marie was very young she had never questioned happiness. But that was before her mother left. She had thought that all adults were happy. They had a lot of things and could do what they wanted. But as she grew older, she realized that her mother wasn't happy. She'd hear her crying and sobbing in the bathroom. When Marie was ten, she watched her mother walk away. It was raining that day. Her mother carried two suitcases and had no umbrella. Marie thought she'd be back in an hour or so but it has been two years.

Marie gets postcards from her mother from all over the world - Paris, Spain, Bermuda. There's never a return address but always a drawing of what her mother was doing that day: buying oranges at the market, sitting alone by a stream, sitting in an outside cafe. Her father told Marie that her mother had always wanted to be an artist. When her parents died, Marie's mother inherited a good deal of money. There would be an inheritance for Marie when she turns twenty-one. Her father hopes she won't go away, too. She promises not to but she will and her first stop will be Paris. She'll find her mother and send for her father. They'll be a family again.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Chapter 5

Sherry is very standoffish to Lena but Lena doesn't seem to notice or doesn't let it bother her. She immediately has taken to Marie and shows a sign of relief when she realizes that they will have their last class together. Lena is a lonely girl who's apparently had a rough time. A little kindness will go a long way with her.

Chapter 6

Marie reveals that she is broken-hearted that her mother left. She admires her mother for pursuing her dream of being an artist. Marie shows her immaturity in her inability to understand that her family will never be a family again. Her mother has flown away like

Lena did in her dream. Lena eventually becomes an important person in Marie's life. When she dreams of Lena flying away he shows her fear of abandonment and the pain she feels over her mother leaving her.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Chapter 7

After her mother left, Marie could hear her father crying in the bathroom as he ran bath and sink water so she wouldn't hear. Marie learned to cry at night when her father couldn't hear her. After a year, her father started to come out of it although something had vanished from his eyes forever. He started cooking, helping her pick out her school clothes and even calling ladies he knew and asking them out on dates. But her father found it hard to leave Marie so his dates were few and far between.

Marie told her father about Lena, the new white girl at school. He showed his surprise to hear she was white and said that she must be trash. She told him that Ms. Cory asked her to show Lena around. Her father and Donna Cory had gone to graduate school together. Her father played hoops with Marie in the backyard and encouraged her to try out for the basketball team.

Marie told her father that she heard that white trash are the N-words of white people. Marie said the word out loud and it disturbed her father. She asked him why it was okay to call white people trash. He stammered and finally said it gave them something to hate. He backed off—the word "hate" was too harsh. Neither one of the names was right he finally admitted. She felt that white trash were just as disenfranchised as black people. He recognized "disenfranchised" as a Ms. Cory word.

Her father told Marie that they were lucky. His voice broke when he spoke of her mother. He was glad she was gone he said but neither father or daughter believed it. But life was not easy - Marie was motherless, he was a single father and they were black in a white world. He told Marie not to get too close to the white girl. They don't stay around Chauncey very long. But something about Lena stayed with Marie.

Chapter 8

Marie hated a TV commercial that showed a father hugging his daughter. The girl was Marie's age. She thought that fathers stopped touching their daughters when they began to mature. She found that especially true when her mother left home. She wondered what was wrong with kissing your daughter's cheek or hugging her.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Chapter 7

Since Marie's mother left home, life has been one sad affair for her. She used to listen to her mother cry then when she left it was her father who was crying. They both hid in the



bathroom when they cried. She learned that she had to hide her sadness only cried when it was late at night and she was alone in bed.

Her father's harsh reaction to the new white girl at school baffles Marie. Even though he always made disparaging remarks about white people, she had never asked why he felt so much bitterness toward them. But as she matured, her curiosity led her to ask him about it. He was stunned and she tore down his fragile exterior quite easily. His only explanation was that he had someone to hate. As soon as he said it, both father and daughter realized how absurd it was.

Marie's father has no luck dating again. Donna Cory and he went to graduate school together. She teaches the kids about civil rights and people behind disenfranchised. Perhaps she could help Marie's father understand racism and race relations better. Ms. Cory has done a good job with Marie who understands that a person doesn't have to be black to be disenfranchised.

Chapter 8

Marie's father is hurting and has withdrawn after his wife left. And Marie is hurting from a lack of affection. Her father seems reluctant to show her any affection. Is it because she's maturing and he's afraid to touch her? Afraid that he'd be accused of something?



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Chapter 9

Sometimes when she looked at Lena, how broken she seemed to be disturbed her. She wanted to poke her so she'd stand up straight and look up from the floor. Other times, Lena walked around as though she was proud. There was a lot of fear in Marie's house when her mother was still there. Her father would just try to touch her and she would recoil as though he were a snake. She'd get upset and wail at him all the while his hands trembled as he tried to calm her. She recalled hearing that the medicine chest was filled with antidepressants.

Lena never did strike up any relationships with the other white kids and Sherry made sure she didn't make any headway with the black kids. All she had was Marie who hated to see her walking alone and solemn in the school hallways. Sherry's harsh treatment of Lena began to get on Marie's nerves. Marie began to realize that she was afraid of Sherry and that she wanted to be her friend because she was popular and cool. Marie even copied her style. But as Sherry continued to taunt her about Lena, she stormed off. Everyone laughed - even Lena who was sitting at the end of the table by herself.

Chapter 10

Lena assured Marie that she was not laughing at her like the others were. Lena had followed Marie to the girls' room. She averted her eyes from Lena so she couldn't see that she'd been crying. Lena explained that it was a nervous laugh. Her father told her that her mother used to have a nervous laugh, too. When things went crazy, her mother would laugh. Her mother died of cancer. Marie told Lena that her mother left them. It was time to go to class but Lena had a question. Was Marie's father nice? Did he do things with her? Did she have her own room? Marie said her father was a good father and he played basketball with her.

Lena was full of questions. Was Marie's father perfect? Marie was becoming frustrated. No one's perfect she told Lena. How about Lena's father? Was he perfect? Her father was very biased against black people and didn't think the races should mix. Marie confessed that her father didn't take to whites very well. Lena stared at Marie and told her that she knew she was different the minute she saw her. She wished she could love her father the way Marie loves hers. Her father loved her but loved her too much.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Chapter 9



Lena continues to draw Marie to her. Marie sees Lena as an injured bird, perhaps even an abused bird who can't fly. She sees herself in Lena. In her mind, Marie connects the departure of her mother with Lena. She was aware of her mother's terrible suffering. She apparently was under much stress and suffered from depression. Her father has guilt over her mother leaving but perhaps her condition precluded anything he could have done for her.

Marie realizes that she relates more closely with Lena than she does with Sherry who is harsh and one-dimensional. There is so much more about Lena. She is a fascinating person of extremes - one day she seems weak and retiring and the next she appears strong and proud. Marie probably has similar mood swings based on the emotional chaos she has suffered through.

Chapter 10

Lena makes sure she makes it clear that she wasn't laughing at her - she has a nervous laugh. Lena wants Marie for a friend and doesn't want her to get the wrong idea. The two girls have much in common. One very tragic thing they share is that they both lost their mothers - one to disease and one through abandonment. Lena's many questions about Marie's father implies that Lena is being abused by her father. When she makes the statement that her father loves her too much, it becomes more evident. Marie has no idea that Lena might have a terrible problem at home. Lena is reaching out to Marie. She needs help and doesn't know how to get it. The girls also learn that both their fathers have racist tendencies. The girls are beginning developing a deep bond.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Chapter 11

Marie got a postcard from her mother. She wrote a poetic message about the rain and spring coming without warning.

Chapter 12

Marie's father swore he didn't hate her mother for leaving. But Marie didn't totally buy that. She caught him ripping up their wedding photos and sending the clothes she left behind to the Salvation Army. He had Marie help put her clothes in boxes which she found quite difficult. She asked her father where her mother went. He didn't know. Sometimes people just have to get away, he told her. She was trying to find a place where she'd feel happy, he explained trying to comfort Marie. After Diane's parents died, she was afraid she'd die before she had a chance to live.

Marie wanted her mother. She needed her. Her father assured her that they'd be all right.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Chapter 11

In her own way, Marie's mother tells her to stay safe and warm in a poem she writes in a post card she sent from Amsterdam.

Chapter 12

The emotional strain on the young Marie is almost more than the ten-year-old could bear. Not only was she abandoned by her mother, she was abandoned by her father who was so caught up in his own misery that he has neglected his daughter emotionally. But her father is a good person and after he gets through the shock of his wife's departure, he tries to comfort his daughter. There is light at the end of the tunnel for a positive relationship to develop between them.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Chapter 13

Marie felt like she and Lena were soul mates. Sherry was bothered about Marie's relationship with Lena. She was incredulous asking her if she was really going to be friends with Lena. Marie said Lena was fine once you got to know her. But Marie protested. Lena's dirty; her hair is oily; her clothes worn. Marie tried to defend her new friend. She doesn't have a mother, she told Sherry who pointed out that she didn't either but she didn't look like Lena. Marie began to feel a little angry toward Lena. It wasn't necessary for her to look like such a mess. Marie told Sherry she wouldn't be hanging around with Lena very much. She even looked over at Lena who was nearby and referred to her as white trash. Sherry had avoided mentioning Marie's mother, Diane, after she left. Marie wanted someone to ask about her mother so she could vent what was inside of her.

Chapter 14

Marie and Lena walked home from school in silence until Lena asked Marie why she was so quiet. Marie was angry with Lena for looking so poor and pathetic. She told Lena to look at herself. Lena responded that she knew she looked like poor white trash. That's what everyone called white people who didn't look rich and beautiful. Marie told her she could care about her appearance a little more. But Lena had no money to buy nice clothes or get her hair fixed. But she could wash her clothes and shampoo her hair. Lena began to get upset. Her voice grew hoarse. She didn't have time to focus on her appearance. She tried to get her and her little sister out of the house in the morning as quickly as she could.

Finally, it was dawning on Marie what Lena was trying to infer but she didn't want to believe it. Lena claimed that she was being sexually abused by her father, and it had been going on ever since her mother died. Marie didn't want to hear it. Lena was probably lying. But Lena continued through the stream of tears that rolled down her face. It made her feel ugly and dirty she told Marie. Lena asked Marie not to tell anyone. Marie said she didn't repeat lies. Lena was undeterred. She wanted Marie to be her friend. They had a big thing in common. Neither one had a mother. The color of their skin shouldn't matter, Lena told Marie. But Marie responded that it did matter in Chauncey.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Chapter 13



Marie feel a connection with Lena and needs someone to talk to. Although she's been best friends with Sherry, Sherry never mentions Marie's mother. Even though Marie is beginning to realize that Sherry is a shallow, self-centered person and not a good friend, Marie begins to cave to the popular girl who has nothing but harsh words for Lena.

Chapter 14

The harsh words that Sherry had for Lena are impacting the relationship that was beginning to build between Marie and Lena. Marie is critical of Lena's physical appearance. When Lena begins to reveal that her father is sexually abusing her, Marie doesn't want to believe it or even hear it. But Marie is a not a shallow person like Sherry is. Lena's words and her obviously damaged emotional state is touching Marie. She tries to run away from Lena's words but they stay with her and linger in her thoughts. Lena is reaching out. She needs someone and senses that Marie is a sensitive and caring person who would be a good friend.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Chapter 15

Marie worried about Lena and why she hadn't been in school. She found herself walking in Lena's neighborhood to see if she could figure out where she lived and if one of the pale-faced men she passed by was her father. One weekend, she ran right into Lena and her little sister, Dion, who didn't know that Lena's new friend was black. She saw right away that Lena looked cleaner. Marie asked Lena why she hadn't been at school. Dion had been sick and she had to take care of her. It was freezing out and Marie invited the girls over for hot chocolate. They couldn't believe how beautiful Marie's house was. Her father had renovated the kitchen and it looked like something out of House & Gardens. Her father came in and was very pleasant. He teased the girls and asked why he hadn't been invited to the party. After he left, Dion said that he'll probably beat Marie later. Marie and Lena both told Dion to shut up.

Chapter 16

Marie got a postcard from her mother who was in the South of France. Diane wrote another poem to Marie. The poem focused on how fast life was.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Chapter 15

As much as she tried to push her away, Lena is staying on Marie's mind. She's worried about her when she's not at school because deep down she knows that what Lena told her about being abused is true. She feels guilty that she tried to brush Lena off when she was pouring her heart out to her which is why she goes in search of her in her neighborhood. Dion only knows violence so when Marie's father comes into the kitchen when the girls are having hot chocolate, she figures that he'll beat her later for having her friends over.

Chapter 16

In a poem that Diane sends to Marie, she warns her daughter that life goes by quickly and not to let it pass her by.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Chapter 17

After Lena and Dion left, Marie's father came to talk to her. He wondered what happened to Sherry. Marie told him that Sherry was always trying to boss her around. Her father didn't like the looks of Lena and Dion - their clothes, the look in their eyes. Was it race, Marie asked. That was part of it but there was more than that. But Marie liked her. She wanted Lena for her friend. Her father asked her if she remembered all the struggles that blacks had had with whites over the years. She remembered, she told him, but they were living in the 1990s. He reminded her that their neighborhoods were still segregated. She understood that blacks had to stick together. Lena might befriend her then turn on her. Marie blurted out that Lena's mother had died. It softened him a bit. She was old enough to choose her own friends but he told her to be careful.

Chapter 18

Diane sent another poem, this time from Bali, Indonesia. Her poem said she wanted so to grab life while she could.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Chapter 17

Marie's father is wary of Lena and Dion. He doesn't think they'll be good friends for his daughter. One of the main reasons is the lack of trust he himself has for white people. He warns Marie that Lena will befriend her then dump her. He was probably relating his daughter's friendship with Lena to something he experienced himself. He knows how hurt Marie was over her mother leaving. He is trying to shield her from more hurt. He is softened when he realizes that Lena lost her mother. He understands that the two girls have something very profound in common.

Chapter 18

Diane sends another message that repeats the sentiment of the last. She tells her to grab life when she can. Her constant urging for a twelve-year-old to grab life isn't particularly wise. It could urge Marie to run away from home. Diane has emotional problems. Perhaps she's not thinking right.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Chapter 19

Lena became a permanent fixture at Marie's house. Her father began to like her and told Marie that Lena and Dion were nice girls. Marie didn't know what changed his mind. She was tempted to tell him the secret but she bit her tongue. He might not let her see Lena any more.

Lena told her that her mother wasn't under a doctor's care when she had been sick. She heard that if they found the cancer in time, that they could save a person. But they didn't have any money for a doctor. It made Marie think of her mother. Was living at home with her and her father like a cancer for her mother? Lena said that maybe one day she and Dion would just up and leave. She took off all the time - at least in her mind. Whenever her father touched her she'd be gone to Thailand, Colorado and the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Marie asked Lena why she didn't tell the cops or somebody who could help them. But her and her sister would be split up. It already happened. When she told a social worker, they placed Dion in one house and Lena in another. Lena found out where Dion was. She ran away and got Dion and went back to their father so they could be together. She made Marie swear that she wouldn't tell anyone about it.

Lena had to love her father because if something would happen to Dion, she'd have no one. She'd just be stupid white trash all by herself. Marie told Lena that she wasn't white trash. Marie asked Lena if she was afraid she'd get pregnant but Lena said he didn't do that to her. Marie wanted to ask what he did do but didn't.

Chapter 20

Marie's basketball team lost their first game but she had a personal high. Lena and Dion were there with a man who Marie later found out was their father. Suddenly, anger overcame Marie. "I'd like to kill him, Lena." (81) But Lena asked what would happen to her and Dion if he was dead. Marie told Lena she should kill him. How could she let that go on, she demanded to know. Does Lena like it? The girls became angry with one another until they realized that their anger wasn't at each other it was at Lena's father.

Sherry and some other girls walked by and called them "U.T" and "W.T." which stood for Uncle Tom and White Trash but they just kind of ignored it. Lena said she might go for a walk later. Marie made her promise not to hitchhike.



Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

Chapter 19

Lena is finally winning Marie's father over. Perhaps Marie seems happier having Lena around. It gives him comfort because he's always concerned about his daughter's welfare. Even though her father could be an ally for Lena in her horrible predicament, Marie is reluctant to tell him about Lena's father sexually abusing her. He might forbid Marie to see her and she doesn't want to lose a friend. She realizes that she's being selfish but a good friend is hard to find and she doesn't want to lose Lena's friendship. Lena fantasizes about going off to some exotic locale when her father abuses her. There is another link between Lena and Diane. Lena dreams of getting away and Diane has already escaped.

Chapter 20

The anger that Marie feels is complex. She feels anger at Lena's father for abusing Lena. She feels anger at Lena for allowing it to happen. But there is also a rage within her that she hasn't fully dealt with after her mother left her. Losing Lena has become a worry for Marie.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Chapter 21

When Thanksgiving was drawing near, Lena talked about walking away more than ever. She told Marie that if she did, Marie should know that she'll always be thinking about her. She never got a chance to say goodbye to her mother. She gives Dion a big hug and kiss when she takes her to school. You never know when it will be the last time to see someone. She began singing a Jimi Hendrix song with the lyrics, "S'cuse me while I kiss the sky." (87)

Lena had something for Marie. She handed her a flat package wrapped in brown paper. Inside was a drawing of a lake with a cluster of weeping willows hanging over it. It was beautiful. Marie was surprised to learn that Lena drew it. Lena stole some colored pencils from the store so she could draw. When she draws, she feels like she's in another world. She'd like to be an artist.

Chapter 22

That fall, Lena and Marie walked a lot, especially in Randolph Park which was quite a distance from both of their homes. But Marie liked the walking. She could feel her legs getting stronger. A boy took a photo of them one day with a Polaroid. Marie liked the expression on both their faces. They didn't smile but they looked resolved and determined. Snow covered the ground that winter. A steady stream of postcards continued to come from Diane from all kinds of exotic places. The postcards eventually seemed like they were coming from some distant relative that they may or may not see again. Her father's divorce papers came through that winter. There were a few women he met and had his eye on. Lena told her that at first she would wake up crying every morning after her mother died. Things got better but she didn't think she'd ever feel like she did before her mother's death.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Chapter 21

Lena is trying to brace Marie for her departure. Lena senses that Marie has come to depend on her friendship and doesn't want to cause more pain for her friend. But the situation must be getting worse at home and protecting her little sister from their father will be come more difficult as Dion matures. Lena has adult-sized problems for a girl who isn't even a teenager yet. Another factor emerges that links Lena with Diane. They are both artists and for both Lena and Diane, their artistry is a form of escapism.

Chapter 22



The friendship between Lena and Marie is making each of them stronger because they met at a time when they needed each other. The intensity of her mother is fading and Marie is putting her in the proper perspective. She may never see her again. But it's not Marie's fault - it was her mother's choice.



Chapters 23 and 24

Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

Chapter 23

Marie and Lena performed similarly as students. One test up and the next test down. Marie's father told her she had to do better in order to get into a good college. Marie tried to urge Lena to do better so she could go to art school. But Lena had a hard time concentrating enough to study. Her mind was all over the place.

Becoming friends with Lena showed Marie a lot about herself. Her father was a college professor and she never had to worry about money. And, when she turned twenty-one, she had an inheritance waiting for her. Marie offered Lena some of her clothes but Lena was offended. She had her own clothes. Marie was hurt. She could have answered more nicely. She hadn't meant to insult her.

Chapter 24

Diane sent another postcard from Phoenix. She wrote about the sunset and the feeling that someone or something was gone. Diane always signed her postcards, "Love, Me." Was she saying "love me, Marie" or was she saying "Love, Mother?" Marie worried about whether her mother was happy and whether she was still taking her medicine. Did her mother miss her and what would she think of Lena?

One night when Marie's father was on a date with the librarian, Lena and Dion came over to spend the night. They both enjoyed taking long bubble baths in Marie's tub. While Lena soaked in her bubble bath, Marie read to her from a book entitled, "The Cancer Journals." It was written by a woman who had survived breast cancer. The woman wrote about fishing on the Missisquoi River and "tasting the green silence." Lena wondered where the Missisquoi River was. She wanted to fish there and taste the sweet green silence, too.

Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

Chapter 23

Her friendship with Lena has made Marie realize just how lucky she was. She is hurt when Lena rejects her offer of some of her clothes. Lena may be poor but she is proud. She doesn't want to feel like she's taking a handout.

Chapter 24

Diane is chasing the sunset but is beginning to realize that something is missing. Perhaps she's having some regrets about abandoning her daughter to become a world



traveler. Lena wants to find peace somewhere far away. Diane always signs her letters, "Love, me." Why doesn't she sign, "Love, Mother"? Marie feels confused about her sign-off. Is she telling her daughter to love her without offering her love in return? One of Diane's problem may be that she's self-centered.



Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

Chapter 25

Lena changed. She stopped waiting to walk with Marie at school. She and Dion didn't come for their Saturday sleepover for two weeks in a row. Lena had things on her mind. She had to figure out how she and Dion could go taste the sweet green silence. Marie begged her not to leave. One day, Sherry came over and was actually friendly to Lena. It made Marie think that anything was possible.

Chapter 26

One day Marie and Lena were swinging on the big swings. Lena had nice new clothes on. Marie asked her about them but all Lena would say was "secrets." She reminded Marie to keep her secret and wanted to know a secret from Marie that she had never told anyone. Her secret was that she wrote letters to her mother. But she didn't have her address, Lena said. She wrote her mother letters but didn't send them. She kept them in a box in her closet. She had finally understood that her mother was never coming back.

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Chapter 25

Lena is preparing to leave. As a sign that things can work out, she is heartened to see Sherry be kind to Lena. If Lena leaves, perhaps Sherry will become her friend again but be kinder and gentler.

Chapter 26

Marie is able to respond to her mother by writing letters that she never sends. It was unfair of Diane to write to Marie and not allow her to answer. But Marie found a way around it. She may not have a continuing need to keep responding to her mother because she's resolved herself to the fact that her mother is never coming back.



Chapters 27 and 28

Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

Chapter 27

Lena began missing school. Marie walked by her house but at first was afraid to go in. She got her nerve up and knocked on the door. Dion came to the door. Lena wasn't home. She went out with their father and Dion was home alone. She told Dion to have Lena call her. Lena called that evening. Her father had started touching Dion. She begged him to touch her instead of Dion. She told Marie that they were leaving. Marie wanted to call the cops but Lena just kept repeating that they were leaving. She told Lena she would write when they got to where they were going. Lena hung up. Marie wanted her mother.

Chapter 28

Marie passes by the house where Lena and Dion lived. There's a big "for rent" sign on it now. Marie expects to see their faces on a milk carton someday. Marie's father is worried about her but she feels that sweet green silence inside of her. Lena and Dion are free and Marie has to wait until they get far enough away. Her mother still sends her notes about grabbing life but Marie writes back and tells her that if a person is strong enough they'll get through anything. Then she crawls to the back of her closet and puts the letter in the box. Marie and Sherry are friends again. Someday it'll feel like Lena never was.

Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

Chapter 27

Things have come to a critical point for Lena. Her father has begun to molest Dion. She will not allow that to happen and must leave. The void that she knows Lena will leave makes Marie want her mother.

Chapter 28

Although Marie misses her friend, she feels happy that they got away. When she says that she must give them time to get away she is indicating that she will involved the authorities and report Lena's father. She answers her mother's letter about facing life by writing that if one is strong enough, a person can get through anything. Just like her mother is beginning to fade in her thoughts, she knows that Lena will fade as well. Marie is returning to life before Lena and after her mother. She'll never be the same but she's become a stronger person because of both experiences.



Characters

Marie

Marie is a twelve-year-old black girl who lives in Chauncey, Ohio, with her father who is a college professor. Her mother, Diane, had suffered from depression and had not been happy at home and abandoned her family when Marie was just ten-years old. Both Marie and her father are devastated by Diane's departure and struggle to adjust to their new reality. Marie sees how distraught her father is and learns to cry in the dark in her room at night when he can't hear her.

Marie is best friends with the popular and stylish, Sherry, another black girl in her class. They both were voted best-dressed in their class. Marie is annoyed when her teacher, Ms. Cory, assigns her to get a new girl in class acquainted with the school. The new girl is Lena, a white girl who epitomizes the phrase that the black kids throw around - poor white trash.

But Marie is almost immediately taken with the strange new girl. She is strong yet vulnerable and there is a mystique about her that Marie wants to learn more about. Despite a rocky start and the taunting of Sherry and other kids, the two become best friends. Through her relationship with Lena, Marie develops a deeper understanding of human nature and is able to achieve resolution about her mother's abandonment of her.

Marie rejects the prejudice that her friends and even her own father has about white people. She tells her father that anyone from any race can be disenfranchised. The twelve-year-old showed that she had a richer depth of understanding about the evils of racism than her own college professor father had.

Lena

Lena is the twelve-year-old best friend of protagonist Marie in "I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This." Lena is a poor white girl who moves to the small town of Chauncey, Ohio, with her father and younger sister, Dion. Lena comes to school as a new student on the third day of the new year after summer break. Most of the kids are black and Lena is not particularly welcomed by the other students. Not only is Lena white, she looks dirty, has oily hair, old clothes and worn shoes. Sherry immediately calls her "poor white trash." Ms. Cory, the teacher, asks Marie to show Lena around. Marie is not thrilled with the task but she takes on the responsibility. Even though Marie is off-putting to Lena's advances to become friends, Lena persists. She sees something special in Marie and eventually convinces her to let down her guard and become friends.

Their friendship blossoms at just the right time for both girls. Marie's mother had abandoned her. Lena's mother had died of cancer a short time before. Lena's trust in Marie grows and she shares a very dark secret with her. Lena's father is sexually



abusing her and has been since her mother died. Lena is most concerned with protecting her younger sister, Dion, from the same fate.

Lena knows that she and Dion will soon have to run away from home because her father will start abusing Dion. She knows that Marie has grown emotionally dependent on her and doesn't want to inflict more pain on her so she prepares her for her eventual departure. She tells Marie that she must find a new and safe life for her and her sister. She must find that sweet green silence.

Marie's Father

Marie's father was a college professor and a single father. His wife, Diane left him and Marie. He struggled with his new reality but in the end was a good father to his daughter.

Diane

Diane was Marie's mother. She suffered from emotional distress and depression. She wasn't happy at home and decided she had to find her happiness elsewhere and left her husband and daughter.

Sherry

Sherry was Marie's best friend at school. She was popular and stylish and always the best dressed. She was resentful of Marie's friendship with Lena.

Dion

Dion was Lena's little sister. Lena was extremely protective of Dion. She protected her against their father who was sexually abusing Lena.

Thelma

Thelma was Sherry's mother. She came to Marie's house and comforted Marie and her father after Diane left them.

Ms. Cory

Ms. Cory was Marie's school teacher. She taught the kids about civil rights and what it meant to be disenfranchised. She attended the same graduate school with Marie's father.



Lena's Father

Lena's father sexually abused his daughter, Lena. Since she didn't want the same thing to happen to her little sister, Dion, Lena protected her little sister against the abuse and made plans for the two of them to run away.

Lena's Mother

Lena's mother had died of cancer some time before they moved to Chauncey, Ohio. They were too poor to have the medical treatment for her mother than could have saved her life.



Objects/Places

Chauncey, Ohio

The story of "I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This" takes place in Chauncey, Ohio, a small town outside of Athens, Ohio.

Hocking River

The Hocking River runs through Chauncey, Ohio. Some of the returning miners who lost their factory jobs built shacks along the river because they had no other housing available to them.

Athens, Ohio

After the mines were depleted of their ore, many of the miners moved to Athens, Ohio, where they worked in factories.

Marie's House

Marie lives in Chauncey with her father who is a college professor. She has a very nice house. Lena and Dion were so impressed with her house that they said it looked like something from House & Gardens.

Lena's House

Lena lives on the poor side of town. Her and her father and sister rent an apartment in a blighted, rundown area.

Marie's School

Marie is in Ms. Cory's classroom at school. Lena is introduced as the new girl on the third day of the new year after summer break.

Randolph Park

Marie and Lena like to walk to Randolph Park and swing on the big swings there. They swing so high they feel they can kiss the sky.



Diane's Postcards

Diane is Marie's mother. She left her husband and daughter and sends frequent postcards to her daughter from places all over the globe.

Marie's Letters to Her Motherless

Although her mother's postcards have no return address, Marie responds to her mother's postcards by writing letters. She can't send them so she keeps them in a box in her closet.

Sweet Green Silence

When Lena plans to run away from home and take her sister with her she tells Marie that they must be free to find their sweet green silence - the place where they can have peace and be happy.



Themes

Racism

Racism is an issue that is front and center in the book, "I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This," by Jacqueline Woodson. The first hint that the small community of Chauncey, Ohio, has racial issues is found in a brief description of its history. Chauncey had been a mining town in prior years but the mines dried up and the miners - many of whom were poor and white - moved to Athens, Ohio, where they went to work in factories. In the mean time, Chauncey had become heavily populated with middle-class black families and when the factories shut down and white families returned to Chauncey, the stage was set for a segregated town with deep-seated resentment on both sides.

The protagonist of the story is twelve-year-old Marie, who is black. Marie's father is a college professor and her mother had inherited wealth from her family. Marie's father had marched for desegregation and had been unfairly arrested in the past for just walking through a white neighborhood. He had some left-over bitterness from that time and often referred to whites as "white trash."

Marie was best friends with another black girl at school, Sherry, who was popular and stylish. When Lena, a poor white girl, comes on the scene neither girl wants anything to do with her. If there was such a thing, Lena was the epitome of poor white trash - she has oily hair, is dirty, her clothes are old and faded and her shoes are worn. Although Marie at first resisted forming a friendship with Lena, there was something about the new girl that drew her to the girl. It was her combination of strength and vulnerability that gave Lena a mystique and a dimension that Marie wanted to learn more about. What she sensed about Lena went beyond the bounds of color and class.

Marie's father was not thrilled with his daughter's new white friend. But Marie reminded him that it was the 1990s not the 1960s. She also told him that blacks are not the only people who can be "disenfranchised." Marie's father was impressed with Marie's magnanimous approach to racism and attributed it to her teacher, Ms. Cory, who had been his classmate in graduate school. Ms. Cory was an advocate of civil rights and taught the kids the history of rights for all and about how people of all races and classes can be disenfranchised. It was a lesson that Marie retained and illustrates how a teacher can be instrumental in impacting a young person and helping to bring down racial biases and barriers.

Marie and Lena became close and dear friends. They ignored taunts from Sherry and other kids who called them names like "poor white trash" and "Uncle Tom." Marie and Lena rose above the name-calling and prejudice and forged a friendship that brought great benefit and growth to each girl.



Abandonment

Twelve-year-old Marie must deal with being a motherless child. When Marie was just ten-years-old, her mother, Diane, left her and her father. She was suffering from some emotional issues and had bouts of depression. She was just not happy in the place where she found herself. As a result, she left the family. While Marie used to hear her mother crying in the bathroom, she now had to contend with hearing her father crying in the bathroom - running water in the tub and sink to try to conceal the sound of his sobbing from his daughter. Not wanting to upset her father any further, Marie learned to cry at night in her bed at the dark in the dark so her father wouldn't know she was crying.

It was obvious that Marie was abandoned by her mother. She watched her walk away on a rainy day carrying a suitcase in each hand. Marie received postcards from her mother with no return address. The postcards would have Diane's original drawings and poems. However, since Marie had no way to reply to her cards, Marie had been abandoned once again by a mother who did not allow her daughter to respond back with her thoughts and feelings. She shut her off.

Marie's father also abandoned his daughter. She became his caretaker, worrying so much about upsetting him that she hid her own tears. She longed for her father to hug her but he became withdrawn and remote. She not only lost her mother but she lost her father as well since he was so damaged by his wife leaving him that he vacated his role as parent. He did come out of his depression eventually and returned to a fuller parental role.

Lena was abandoned by her mother who died of cancer. Although her mother did not abandon her intentionally as Marie's mother had, Lena was none the less left without a mother. Unfortunately, Lena's father abandoned her as a parent as well. He began to sexually abuse her after her mother died and therefore left Lena and her little sister without any real parent. Lena's number one priority was to protect her little sister from her father and in a sense became her parent by keeping her from being abused.

Abuse

There are all types of abuse and several of them are elements in "I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This." The most obvious form of abuse that is a subplot in this story is the sexual abuse of Lena by her own father. He has been abusing her since her mother died some time ago. She is not specific about exactly what he does but she tells Marie that he doesn't do the thing that would make her pregnant. But that is probably just a temporary condition.

Marie urges Lena to tell someone who could help her. But she'd already tried that and it created another problem. When the abuse was reported, a social worker stepped in and took Lena and her younger sister, Dion, out of the house. They were placed in separate foster homes many miles apart. Lena was so miserable without her sister - her only real



family - that she ran away from the foster home, found her sister and returned to their father.

Lena's choice was to return to abuse or be without her sister who she loved dearly. All this misery that the twelve-year-old endured was brought about by abuse. When the father began to abuse Dion, Lena made plans to run away again to keep her sister safe. The abuse of a child steals away their childhood and gives them adult problems which they don't have the maturity or experience to cope with. Lena has enough trust in Marie that she feels safe telling her about the abuse but makes her swear not to say a word to anyone. Abuse of this nature creates a world of secret-keeping and shame that is difficult to escape from.

Abusive behavior is that which breaks the spirit and peace of another. There are other forms of abuse touched upon by the story. One form of abuse is the mental abuse that comes about from the physical and emotional abandonment that a parent inflicts on his or her child. The students who taunt Lena and Marie with racial slurs is another form of mental and emotional abuse.



Style

Point of View

"I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This" by Jacqueline Woodson is written in the first person narrative from the point of view of the protagonist, Marie, a twelve-year-old black girl. The reader learns of the pain and misery that the young girl faces when her mother leaves her and her father. After her mother's departure, her father is an emotional basket-case and Marie has to tread softly to keep him from being more upset.

Marie's mother, Diane, sends her daughter postcards from many exotic locales around the world. Since she is an African American, she can speak to the prejudices and conflicts that exist between the races in that community. The reader learns of Marie's frustration in not having a mother and not being able to reply to her postcards which do not have return addresses. But Marie is innovative. She vents her frustration in not being able to communicate with her mother to tell her how she feels by writing letters in response to her mother's postcards. Of course she can't mail them and keeps them in a box. But at least she is able to express her feelings by use of the written word.

The author Jacqueline Woodson was born in Ohio and therefore is familiar with the culture there. Woodson is a renowned author having written the trilogy about best friends Margaret and Maizon: *Last Summer with Maizon*, *Maizon at Blue Hill* and *Between Madison and Palmetto*. She has written other novels for young adults and is a fellow at the MacDowell Colony and at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA. She is the recipient of the Kenyon Review Award for Literary Excellence in Fiction.

Setting

The story of "I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This," by Jacqueline Woodson takes place in the small town of Chauncey, Ohio. The Hocking River runs through the town. Years before the story takes place, the town had been a mining town. But once the mines were stripped of all their ores, the workers, many of whom were poor whites, moved to Athens, Ohio, where they went to work for factories. The city planners developed new, affordable housing tracts in the town where many black families bought homes.

When the factories shut down, a number of the former mine workers and their families returned to Chauncey. Of course, their homes were gone and taken over by the new sub-divisions. The workers were poor and some built shacks along the river. After the return of the white families, Chauncey became a largely segregated community.

The protagonist, Marie, lives in a comfortable home with her college professor father. When Lena and Dion come to visit her, they are amazed by Marie's beautiful house. They tell her it looks like something out of a magazine. Marie and Lena attend the same school which has a large black population. They are in the same home room, Ms. Cory's class.



Lena and Dion lived with their father on the poor side of town. On one occasion, Marie went looking for Lena because she hadn't been at school. The area was blighted and when she knocked on Lena's door, Dion answered. Marie peeked inside and saw that the house was in disarray. Lena and Marie enjoyed walking and one place they like to walk to is Randolph Park where they have big swings. They swing so high they felt they could kiss the sky.

Language and Meaning

"I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This" by Jacqueline Woodson is written in a straight-forward manner with clear and concise language. There are elements of racism in the story and therefore there are some racial slurs that are used in the story to add realism. There is not an overuse of such language, but just enough to establish the environment of the small town of Chauncey, Ohio, which was largely a segregated community.

While many stories relate the bias that white people have for blacks, this story emphasizes the bias that blacks have for white people. This element of the story is used in a positive way in that it shines light on a subject and then exposes the absurd nature of prejudice. The protagonist is twelve-year-old Marie a black girl who lives with her father who is a college professor. Ironically, Marie's well-educated father throws the "white trash" slur around and is questioned by his daughter about its use. Why, she asks him, is it okay for him to call white people "white trash" and it's not okay for anyone to call black people the N-word. In the book, Marie says the actual N-word but it is the only instance of the use of the word in the entire story. But Marie makes her point by using the word. It makes her father admit that the use of neither slur is okay.

Marie's father had a background in civil rights activism. He marched for desegregation and was arrested for some of these actions. Ms. Cory, Marie's teacher, teaches her class about civil rights and about disenfranchised people. Marie tells her father that blacks aren't the only people who can be disenfranchised.

When Lena, a new white student, comes to class, the "white trash" name is used in reference to her by some students. When Marie and Lena become best friends, some of the kids taunt them with some not-so-nice names like "white trash" and "Uncle Tom."

When Lena leaves, she tells Marie that she is looking for her "sweet green silence." Marie realizes that everyone must find his own "sweet green silence" which is a term that symbolizes the place where a person can find his own personal brand of peace and happiness.

Structure

"I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This" by Jacqueline Woodson is comprised of twenty-eight short to medium-length chapters. There is a preface that establishes the backdrop and environment of the story. The first three chapters sets the premise of the story and a new reality after Marie's new friend, Lena, had virtually come and gone from her life.



Within these first chapters, Marie makes a symbolic connection between her mother, Diane, who left her family, and Lena who had to leave her for very profound and adult reasons.

Beginning with Chapter 4, the story of the friendship between Marie and Lena is told. In the early chapters, Marie, who is black, resists the friendship of the new white girl, Lena, who is introduced to Marie's class. Marie, who has already lost her mother who left home to find herself, is drawn to the strange, obviously poor white girl. In the subsequent chapters, Marie comes to see both the fragility and strength in Lena and is touched by the young girl who has unimaginable problems with which she must deal.

The final chapters of the book deal with the inevitable loss that Marie will suffer from the loss of her new friend. Throughout this emotional ordeal, Marie is able to find many similarities between her mother and her new friend. Through the time she spends with Lena she comes to understand the dual nature of a person and how an individual can endure some pain but must escape from other misery that is simply unbearable. From these realizations, Marie is able to find resolution about being abandoned by her mother.



Quotes

"Sometimes I feel like Alice in Wonderland whirling through the darkness until the other side of my world is illumined. And this is about Chauncey's other side, the white side, and that middle place where Lena and I met and came together." (Preface, page 1)

"Come back, Lena' I screamed. But Lena just pursed her lips toward the sky, her body growing tinier and tinier. Then she was gone." (Chapter 1, page 11)

My father said that when he was a kid, he thought people were just people no matter what color they were. But once he grew he said, he started seeing things in black and white." (Chapter 4, page 16)

"Anyone who made eye contact with me would probably be able to see what a coward I was. Skittish, Daddy called it. 'Like a mouse a light's been shined on.'" (Chapter 5, page 21)

"I wanted to learn how to grieve and how to walk through the world feeling whole when half of me had walked away." (Chapter 7, page 25)

"I had seen my mother shake my daddy's hand off of her like it was a snake, snap back away from him as though his touch burned, then let go of spit and screams and send tears and snot flying." (Chapter 9, page 33)

"Before my mother left, I heard her say, 'The worst parts of my life are over,' and now Lena's look reminded me of that line—like she had already lived a pretty hard life even though she wasn't old." (Chapter 10, page 41)

"In case it rains. In case spring comes without warning to find you sitting in a warm drizzle in a wood coat." (Chapter 11, page 44)

"I put my head down on the table and swallowed, picturing my mother in an airplane flying off to Cuba. What would she see there? Would she find another little girl she could dress in the morning?" (Chapter 12, page 48)

"I introduced them, and Dion and Lena stuttered hellos, looking frightened. I felt my own heart beating in my chest, realizing this was the first time I had ever had white people over to our house." (Chapter 15, page 64)

"I don't know what changed his mind, but I didn't dare question it. Maybe he saw how happy Len and I were together. Maybe he was beginning to see other colors besides black and white." (Chapter 19, page 76)

"I can't keep my mind in one place. It goes off and does what it feels like." (Chapter 23, page 95)

Topics for Discussion

How did Marie's father feel about white people? What experiences did he have that made him feel the way he did? How did Marie's mother feel about white people?

Why did Marie's mother leave home? What impact did her departure have on Marie and her father and their relationship?

What drew Marie to Lena? Why did Sherry resent their relationship?

What connection did Marie make between her mother and Lena? What things did Lena and Diane have in common?

Why was it unfair for Diane to write letters to her daughter that Marie could not answer? How did Marie manage to respond? Why was it healthy for her to reply to her mother's letters?

Why was Marie's father initially against a friendship between Marie and Lena? What softened him to the idea?

Why didn't Lena call the police or some authority and report her father's abuse? What did the idea of a sweet green silence mean to Lena? What did he mean to Marie?