

# **This Is How You Lose Her Study Guide**

**This Is How You Lose Her by Junot Díaz**

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# Plot Summary

"This Is How You Lose Her" is a collection of short stories by Junot Diaz, centrally revolving around the main character, Yunior. Yunior grew up in the Dominican Republic, but moved to America at a young age. The majority of the stories center on his infidelities and the problems that he faces because of prejudice.

The first story, "The Sun, The Moon, The Stars" focuses around Yunior's post college life. Yunior had just broken up with his girlfriend, Magda. Their relationship fell apart when Magda discovered that Yunior had cheated on her with a girl from work, Cassandra. Yunior manages to get back together with Magda, but their relationship is strained. Yunior takes Magda on a vacation to his home of Santo Domingo to try and salvage their relationship.

"Nilda," the second story, takes place when Yunior is just about to enter high school. The story is mostly centered on his brother, Rafa, and Rafa's girlfriend, Nilda. Yunior tries to befriend Nilda because he doesn't want her to end up with his brother. Yunior believes that his brother is a monster and has seen from previous relationships how Rafa treats his women terribly. Things become even more complicated when Yunior finds out that Rafa has cancer.

"Alma" is the third and shortest story in the book and details Yunior's very brief relationship with the titular character of the story, Alma. Yunior cheated on Alma, a fact that she discovered when she read through his journal. She humiliates Yunior, who lies and tries to convince Alma that what she read was just the draft of a story.

"Otravida, Otravez" is the only story in the book that isn't about Yunior. The story focuses on another Dominican immigrant, Yasmin. Yasmin is in a relationship with a married man, Ramón. Ramón is still in communication with his family that he left behind in the Dominican Republic. Yasmin and Ramón end up buying a house together. They both find themselves yearning for more and missing their lives back in the Dominican Republic.

"Flaca" focuses on another one of Yunior's many failed relationships. He met a girl that he nicknamed "Flaca" at school. She initially tries to fight against entering into a relationship, but the two end up getting together. Yunior's friends dislike Flaca because of her race. The relationship ends up falling apart when Yunior wakes up one night and Flaca isn't there. He never hears from her again.

"The Pura Principle" takes place shortly after Rafa discovers that he has cancer. He gets home after spending months in the hospital. He tries to get a legitimate job while Yunior is selling drugs. His cancer returns and he collapses at work. He's helped by a workmate, Pura, an Indian with dreams of marrying someone to get her citizenship. Yunior's mother hates Pura. Despite that, Rafa ends up marrying her. He's kicked out of the house, but their mother continues to support Rafa. Rafa has a child with Pura. He



ends up back in the hospital. Pura never visits and the two separate once a sick Rafa returns home.

"Invierno" is about Rafa and Yuniór first meeting their father, who lived in America. Their father was incredibly strict and didn't let any of the family members leave the house. Their mother struggled with being kept inside the house. During a strong snowstorm she finally goes outside of the house with her two sons and they explore the neighborhood together.

"Miss Lora" is about Yuniór dealing with the death of his brother, Rafa. Yuniór thought that the world was going to end, but the only person that would listen to him was his neighbor, Miss Lora. Yuniór falls for Miss Lora, even though he already has a girlfriend. The two end up dating for several years. Yuniór eventually gets over his fears and goes off to college. He later tries to find Miss Lora, but he doesn't see her again.

The final story, "The Cheater's Guide to Love," details Yuniór's adult life over the course of five years. During the first year his fiancé breaks up with him because he had been cheating on her for the past six years with over fifty women. The next year he spends in depression, with Yuniór trying to get over things with the help of his friend, Elvis. He ends up getting into another relationship, but it ends when the woman he was involved with reads his journal and finds the racist things he was saying. She returns to his life, pregnant with a child. After she has the child, she leaves. During this time, Elvis discovers that his son was fathered by another man. The final years detail Yuniór's attempt to adjust to life in a racist Boston. He eventually decides to write about all of his failed relationships, deciding to call the book "The Cheater's Guide to Love."



# Chapter 1: "The Sun, The Moon, The Stars"

## Summary

Title: "The Sun, The Moon, The Stars"

In the first story, the book begins with the main character, a proud Dominican named Yunior, discussing how he cheated on his girlfriend, Magda, with a work colleague, Cassandra. Yunior shares that he and Magda had a good relationship before Cassandra. It only turned sour when Cassandra wrote a letter to Magda explaining what happened. Yunior shares that he spent weeks trying to win Magda back. The reader sees that all of Magda's friends keep telling her that she should just leave him. Yunior arranges for a vacation to Santo Domingo. He believes that a vacation is exactly what they need to get their relationship back on track.

Yunior wants to stop to see his family, but she insists that they go right to the resort. She seems miserable until they get there, but her spirits are improved at the posh resort. Yunior talks about how their relationship hasn't been the same since they got back together and they barely spend any time together. Magda tells him she feels pressured and thinks they should have time apart from one another. When they go to the beach, she spends her time chatting with other people. Yunior goes out alone that night and makes friends with a diplomat whom he calls the Vice-President. The Vice-President tells him that he should try and make Magda jealous.

The next day Magda wants to be alone again. Yunior is frustrated, and Magda tells him she's going back home the next day. The timeline jumps forward to five months later, where he and Magda have broken up. He gets a letter from her that says she's found someone new, a Dominican like Yunior, but this one loves her. The timeline flips back to the past where they are still on the ill fated vacation. He remembers telling Magda they could make the relationship work, but they just have to keep trying.

## Analysis

The first story sets up Yunior as a protagonist. This is important since Yunior features heavily in all but one of the stories. The author makes a deliberate choice to set up Yunior as an adult. This gives readers a chance to see the type of man that Yunior is. Yunior has many negative traits; most notably the fact that he cheats on his girlfriend and doesn't seem to believe that he's done anything wrong. He expresses sorrow when he is caught, but not because he thought that what he has done was wrong.

Yunior also makes it clear how important it is for him to be in a relationship. In nearly every single story Yunior is either in a relationship or he's trying to get into one. All of these traits are explored in more detail throughout the other stories that focus more on



what Yunior was like as a child and how his parents treated him. The first book almost acts as a prologue for the rest of the stories since those explore who Yunior is and how he became the way he is.

Despite always wanting to be in a relationship, Yunior clearly doesn't value the women that he's with, which is part of why he always cheats. Readers can see right away that he treats Magda more like an object. He's largely focused on the physical part of their relationship. He talks about being disappointed that she isn't getting into bed with him even though he's paid for her vacation and has been trying to do positive things for her, implying that he was only doing these things to get what he wanted.

One of the themes is brought up very early on in this story, that Friends can interfere with a Relationship. Yunior mentions how Magda's friends all hate him after what he did. Her friends are always pushing for them to break up or for Magda just to use him to get away on vacation. Yunior's friends also speak poorly about Magda and they encourage him to find someone else. When Yunior is on vacation, his new friend, the Vice-President, also pushes him to find someone else and not to care about Magda.

Readers are also introduced to Yunior's nationality. Yunior being a Dominican is something that he constantly brings up in all of the stories. The inclusion of Spanish is highlighted in this first story as well, a style which continues throughout all of the other stories.

## Discussion Question 1

What is Yunior's perspective on women?

## Discussion Question 2

What indicates that Magda isn't interested in rekindling the relationship?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Magda's revelation at the end of the story about her new boyfriend reveal about her relationship with Yunior?

## Vocabulary

unscrupulous, hyperventilating, rapprochement, imperceptibly, precarious, latrine, chastened, acquiesce, exasperated, pestilence, commiserate



## Chapter 2: "Nilda"

### Summary

Titled: "Nilda"

In this chapter, written in present tense, the reader finds a very young Yunior is just about to enter high school. His older brother, Rafa, makes friends with a girl named Nilda. Nilda comes from a broken home and goes to Yunior's house to get away from her drunken mother. The other kids write her off as being dumb and often call her trashy. Rafa ends up getting physical with Nilda and the two begin a relationship. Yunior is opposed to it because he thinks that his brother is a monster. Rafa drops out of school and works full time at a carpet factory. He has to quit the job because his legs start to hurt. He goes to the hospital and finds out that he has cancer. Two years pass and Yunior runs into Nilda again. She reveals that Rafa was the nicest person she had ever been with, which surprises Yunior. He feels a strong attraction towards Nilda when they speak, but after that meeting he goes off to college and never sees Nilda again.

### Analysis

"Nilda" introduces readers to Yunior's older brother, Rafa. Rafa ends up being a major character in some of the later stories, and clearly has an influence on the man that Yunior grows up to become. Like the future Yunior, Rafa treats the women in his life very poorly. Yunior realizes that Rafa is a monster, yet he's still influenced by his brother and becomes very similar to him when he becomes an adult. Rafa's relationship with his mother is also foreshadowed in this story, something that is prominently brought up in several of the later stories.

Yunior shows a little more about his views on women in this story. Yunior sees Nilda as being a piece of property. He's interested in her, but he feels he can't pursue her because Rafa has already staked a claim on her. As readers have seen in the previous story, Yunior grows up and continues to treat women in this fashion.

The reader sees the theme of Sexism continued in this story, but it is shown to be something that is a learned behavior. In the previous story a much older Yunior is presented to the reader, while in this chapter the reader is taken back to an earlier time when Yunior was still bothered by sexism and the way his brother treats women. He claims that his brother is a monster in this chapter, and yet the reader knows from the previous chapter that Yunior has succumbed to the same tendencies as his brother, thus making him every bit the monster that his brother was. Nilda discloses to Yunior the unexpected revelation that Rafa was often very kind to her, which shocks Yunior. Apparently, the image Rafa projected to the world was not who he was behind closed doors. This hidden kindness doesn't seem to have been a behavior that Yunior has



adopted in his later years. In many respects, he's more of a monster than his brother ever was.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How and why does Nilda's disclosure about Rafa's true nature shock Yunior?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Compare the older version of Yunior from the first story to Rafa as the reader sees him in this chapter.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why has Yunior turned out like his brother, most likely?

## **Vocabulary**

saunter, striated, defection, leachate, promenading





# Chapter 3: "Alma"

## Summary

Titled: "Alma"

"Alma" is the shortest story in the book and revolves around Yunior who is dating a woman named Alma. He and Alma have a great physical relationship, but they're the opposites in just about every other way. Yunior brags to all his friends about how good Alma is in bed. He ends up cheating on Alma. She discovers it when she reads his journal. She dumps him and demeans him for what he did. Yunior tries to argue that it wasn't his journal and it was something he was writing for a novel, but she doesn't believe him.

## Analysis

One of the main purposes of this chapter titled "Alma" is to set up one of the themes of the book, which is Lying. Yunior lies twice to Alma. His first lie is his infidelity. The second lie comes at the end when he claims that this journal wasn't written from his perspective, but was instead supposed to be a draft of a novel he was working on, something that Alma doesn't believe. This again shows Yunior's general attitude towards women. He doesn't care enough about their feelings to tell them the truth. He instead wants to lie to keep getting what he wants from them. Yunior makes it clear at the start of the story that they're opposites in every way, but he wants to be with her simply because she pleases him physically.

As a character, Yunior emerges as a self centered, ego-centric personality. In a nearly sociopathic way, he objectifies the women in his life, relegating them to servant status. This is why he is so completely confused when the women in his life always leave him. In his mind he's done them no harm. This inability to have empathy, to connect on any deeper level, will come back in later stories.

## Discussion Question 1

If Alma and Yunior are opposites in every way, infer what Alma must be like.

## Discussion Question 2

What is the author's purpose in including this chapter?



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Lying.

## Vocabulary

tenements, pelagic, pathetic, remorseless, pathological



## Chapter 4: "Otravida, Otravez"

### Summary

Titled: "Otravida, Otravez"

Unlike the other chapters thus far, this story is written from the perspective of Yasmin, who is from Samaná. She now lives in the United States and works at a hospital doing laundry. She's very close to her roommate, Ana Iris, who also left her family behind to come to the United States. Yasmin is sleeping with Ramón, who also left his family behind. He has several sons and a wife, Virta, who still constantly writes to him. Yasmin and Ramón are searching for a house. He has been saving up for the last eight years. All the houses he looks at are run down, but he's still determined to get one.

While he's searching, Yasmin hires a new employee, a young girl named Samantha. Samantha is only fifteen years old and working to support her son. Samantha ends up borrowing a great deal of money for her sick mother. Yasmin never sees her again and suspects that she went back home to be with her family.

Yasmin and Ramón are able to finally get a house. They move in together and Yasmin eventually gets pregnant. She calls Ana Iris to tell her about the pregnancy. Ana Iris reveals that she has been calling her sons again. She says it's been so long that she barely recognizes their voice. Yasmin knows Ana Iris is either going to bring her boys to the States, or she'll go back home to be with them. The book ends with Yasmin trying to smile while Ramón reads a letter from his wife.

### Analysis

This story is the only one not to be told from the perspective of Yunior. Despite the change in main characters the story still focuses on a relationship. Yasmin is in a relationship with Ramón, despite the fact that he's married to Virta. In contrast to Yunior's relationships, Yasmin knows that Ramón has a wife. Yasmin has a very mixed relationship with Ramón. She compares the relationship to a flickering light. She knows the relationship is eventually going to end, but she's trying to make the most of it while it lasts.

Despite that, Yasmin's story is centered largely around the theme of Hope. Yasmin helps out Samantha because she's hopeful that Samantha will be able to help her family. Ana Iris shows hope at the end of the story when she finally gets in touch with her children after several years of not speaking to them. When Yasmin lived with her, Ana Iris didn't have anyone else in her life. After getting touch with her family, Ana Iris is determined to meet with them again, whether that means traveling back home, or finding a way to bring them to the United States.



Ramón is consistently showing the theme of Hope with his house hunting. He had been saving up for 8 years just to be able to buy a home of his own, even though all the places that he's looking at are run down. He's optimistic that he'll be able to fix the house up and make it into a perfect place to live. Ramón is hopeful about his family as well. He tries to act like he doesn't care about them, but he continues to write to them and he saves every letter that he gets from Virta. Ramón still has obvious feelings for his wife, and like Ana Iris he's hopeful that he'll one day be able to reunite with his family. Yasmin recognizes this as well, which is why she sees the relationship as a flickering light.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do Yasmin and Ramon stay together?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the theme of Hope as it is presented in this chapter.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe Yasmin's character. What does her relationship with both Ana and Ramon have in common?

## **Vocabulary**

rivets, incinerated, torrent, brazen



# Chapter 5: "Flaca"

## Summary

Titled: "Flaca"

This story is written from the perspective of Yuniar again, framed as a letter to his ex-girlfriend, Veronica, whom he refers to as Flaca. He shares with the reader, through the letter, that they had met in class while at school and at first fought their urge to try and get into a relationship together. They just wanted to have a physical relationship, but it soon evolved into more than that. The boys that Yuniar lived with were against the relationship, but he tried to ignore them. Yuniar shares with the reader how much they were in love, but as time went on they began to fight and their relationship fell apart. One morning when Yuniar woke up, Veronica was gone, and he never saw her again.

## Analysis

The theme of Friends Interfering with a Relationship is demonstrated in this chapter. Flaca originally wants to avoid spending time with Yuniar because she doesn't like the way that Yuniar's friends treat her. Yuniar once again refers to one of his girlfriends with a nickname, using Flaca, instead of Veronica. This is another way that he objectifies women.

Again, in this instance Yuniar says that he's in love. Yuniar does this with many of his relationships, though it becomes clear that he does not have a very good understanding of what that is. As established in the earlier stories, Yuniar does this because he's uncomfortable being alone. Yuniar convinces himself that he's in love with the women he's with, but he doesn't treat them as equals. Once again, the theme of Sexism, is demonstrated in that he begins to treat Veronica badly, due in large part to what he's learned from his brother as well as from the way his roommates are telling him to treat her.

Yuniar's relationship with Flaca is unique in comparison to the other women because unlike with the other stories, Yuniar remains faithful to Flaca. Part of his infidelity in the later stories may be a result of his time with Flaca; breaking up with the women before they have a chance to break up with him. After having her disappear without a word, after being together for two years, had to have been traumatic on him.

## Discussion Question 1

Why repercussions may have resulted from Veronica's departure?



## Discussion Question 2

Why did he have a better chance at making a long and lasting relationship with Veronica?

## Discussion Question 3

What does it tell the reader that he renames Veronica?

## Vocabulary

cenotaphs, calluses, gnash, envelope, callous, amused



# Chapter 6: "The Pura Principle"

## Summary

Titled: "The Pura Principle"

This story takes place in the time right after "Nilda." Having been diagnosed with cancer, Rafa has been in and out of the hospital. Their mother lets him get away with anything because she's always treated him like the favorite child. Rafa goes through chemo and gets to return home. He goes around the city getting into wild fights. He's constantly fooling around with women, as well, whenever he can. He decides to get a job at the Yarn Barn because he doesn't want to be a dealer like Yuniur. While he's there, he meets an Indian woman named Pura. After a few weeks, Rafa collapses and he has to give up on the job.

Rafa and Pura start to date. Pura talks about how great everything will be when she becomes a citizen. Rafa's mother openly despises Pura, something she's never done for any of the other girls that Rafa has dated. One night, Rafa comes home drunk with Pura. The two of them have gotten married. To Yuniur's surprise, his mother kicks them both out. The two end up having a child together. Rafa tries to return home, but he's kicked out. He sneaks in and steals from the family, something that Yuniur later finds out his mother allowed. Yuniur beats up Rafa when he finds him stealing money from the apartment. Their mother simply tells him to let him take it next time.

Yuniur and Rafa are openly hostile to each other on the street. Rafa starts to get sick again, so Yuniur is forced to bring medicine to his new apartment. He has to go back to the hospital and Pura never visits. Rafa returns home and he doesn't speak about Pura again.

During this time, Yuniur is in a relationship with someone named Laura, but he simply refers to her most of the time as "Whitegirl." They eventually break up, but Yuniur isn't torn up about it. Pura stops by later when Rafa is in the hospital to borrow money from Yuniur's mother. The story ends with Rafa throwing a rock at Yuniur's face, revenge from when Yuniur tried to stop him from stealing from their mother.

## Analysis

"The Pura Principle" focuses primarily on the relationship that Yuniur has with his family members. Yuniur has a very strained relationship with his mother, something which contributes to his future problems with women. Yuniur sticks up for her when he thinks Rafa is stealing from her, but he doesn't help out around the house because he doesn't consider that appropriate for a man to do. This behavior later makes sense when readers find out that Yuniur inherited this behavior from his father.



The theme of Sexism is evident in this chapter. One instance is where he constantly refers to his girlfriend at the time as Whitegirl. Yunior seems to care little for her and treats her like she simply exists for his convenience. In the earlier parts of the chapter, Rafa demonstrates the theme of Hope. When Rafa gets out of the hospital he starts looking for a job. Yunior makes fun of him because he wants to do something besides selling drugs, which Yunior was currently doing. Rafa says he wants to make an honest living, and he's very proud of the job he's able to get at the Yard Barn. Unfortunately for Rafa, his cancer wins out and he's unable to hold the job down. This causes Rafa to meet Pura.

Everyone but Rafa can see that Pura is using him. Despite Rafa's mother's love for him, she kicks him out of the house and tells him he can't return while he's with Pura. Yunior is hostile to Pura, which in turn ruins the relationship that he has with Rafa. Yunior witnesses yet another failed relationship between Pura and Yunior. This contributes to Yunior's future jaded views about relationships. In his youth, Yunior never got to see what a healthy relationship looked like. He has internalized that all relationships eventually become combative, or that it is about using more than you are used, yourself.

## Discussion Question 1

What sort of mental and emotional ideas has Yunior internalized as far as relationships are concerned?

## Discussion Question 2

Why didn't Rafa's mother like Pura?

## Discussion Question 3

Compare Rafa to Yunior and the way they treat women.

## Vocabulary

effusive, scrounge, inscrutable, convalescing, monotonous, solicitous





# Chapter 7: "Invierno"

## Summary

Titled: "Invierno"

This story, told in past tense, takes place when Yunior was a child and had just come to America. The readers are given some of Yunior's backstory, much that presently contributes to his ideologies. He never met his father until he showed up to take them away from the island. Yunior has a hard time around his father, who turns out to be very abusive. His mother is miserable too because she can't learn English and she has nobody to speak to. Rafa is clearly the favorite, but even he is having trouble because their father won't let them go outside. The two boys are able to learn English by watching television. Yunior sneaks out a few times to try and play with the other children. He's somewhat successful, although they still can't communicate more than their names to one another.

Yunior's mother starts to go outside in defiance of her husband. During one particularly bad snowstorm the two boys accompany her. The story ends with them all walking through the snowstorm to finally explore more of the neighborhood.

## Analysis

Inveirno gives readers the first look into what it was like for Yunior growing up. This introduces one of the major themes of the book, a Parent's Influence. Yunior's father is incredibly rude, abusive, and treats women like objects. He keeps his family prisoners in their apartment and actively keeps his wife from learning English. He mocks her whenever she talks about going out and points out that she would never be able to get a job.

As a child, Yunior is often bored and lonely. He only has his brother and his mother to interact with. Yunior sneaks out to try and play with the other children. This loneliness obviously had a huge impact on Yunior, and helps to explain why as an adult he's terrified of being alone and constantly tries to throw himself into relationships.

The theme of Hope is touched upon again at the very end of the story. Yunior, Rafa, and his mother all walk out into a blizzard to explore the rest of the neighborhood. To them, the landfill and the ocean represent all the hope and potential that their father spoke about.

## Discussion Question 1

How might Yunior's early childhood have contributed to the development of his adult personality?



## **Discussion Question 2**

Describe Yunior's father and his actions towards his family.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why is Yunior afraid of being alone as an adult?

## **Vocabulary**

sift, denomination, peals, scrupulousness, asthmatic, impervious



# Chapter 8: "Miss Lora"

## Summary

Titled: "Miss Lora"

This story is written in a series of letters told in the second person. Although it is never stated, it's implied that Yunior is writing them to himself. At first, he's talking about how hard it was to lose his brother to cancer. Yunior is now a senior in high school, but doesn't want to go on to college. He's convinced that the world is going to end in nuclear war, a topic he constantly raises with his girlfriend Paloma. Things aren't going well with Paloma because she won't get physical with him.

Yunior starts to flirt and eventually spend time with his neighbor, Miss Lora. The two end up getting into a very physical relationship, but Yunior doesn't tell Paloma about it. Miss Lora starts to see other men, which angers Yunior. Yunior leaves Paloma after they graduate, since she was going to be away for college. Yunior kept seeing Miss Lora for a while, but he eventually went to college as well. He got into a new relationship, which also ended in failure. Years later, he tried to find information about Miss Lora, but he wasn't able to find anything.

## Analysis

Rafa's fate is revealed in this story. Rafa's death is something that has a huge impact on Yunior. He becomes convinced that the world is going to end. Yunior stops caring about anything and he struggles to even finish with high school. He cares little for his girlfriend, Paloma. His negative traits are put on display once again when he comments how upset he is with her simply because she isn't willing to get physical with him. The theme of Abandonment is emphasized heavily in this chapter. The first instance is when Rafa dies and Yunior feels as if he's been left alone without anyone.

Yunior ends up in a relationship with his neighbor, Miss Lora. This means that he is once again cheating since he's with Paloma. He and Miss Lora have a very open relationship, as she spends time with other men. Yunior eventually leaves her and tries to start another relationship, but he isn't able to make it work. He tries to get in touch with Miss Lora again, but he's never able to find her again. The theme of Abandonment is demonstrated again in this chapter as, once again, Yunior is abandoned while he's in a relationship. This continues to influence the trouble that he has in future relationships where he continues to try and surround himself with women so he doesn't feel alone.

What is notable is that while Yunior has no problem being the abandoner, he does everything he can not to be the one abandoned. This is ironic since it is evident that he knows the pain of abandonment, and one would think this would make him loathe to make another person suffer in that way. However, since he lacks the ability to deeply



connect emotionally with anyone, and seems only concerned with himself and his own needs, he can't see that he is more the monster than his brother ever was.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the theme of Abandonment.

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is ironic about Yunior's relationship with Miss Lora?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What collection of past influences and events have combined to cause Yunior to be unable to connect in a meaningful way with anyone?

## **Vocabulary**

fulgurating, untrammeled, forlorn, abrogated, recant



# Chapter 9: "The Cheater's Guide to Love"

## Summary

Titled: "The Cheater's Guide to Love"

This story is written in the second person and covers Yunior's five year period after breaking up with his fiancée. She leaves him when she finds out that he's on her with over 50 women in the last six years. The first year that they are apart, he's devastated and constantly tries to get back with her. His friend, a war veteran named Elvis, tries to help him get through it and encourages him to go out and meet someone new. The next year is spent in a similar way, although he does start to date different women, but nothing serious.

In the third year he's working as a professor at a college and starts to sleep with one of the students. He simply refers to her as "the law student." They fool around but she eventually leaves him for someone younger. While this is happening, Yunior's health is declining and he's unable to work out as much as he used to. This makes him even more depressed. He strikes up a friendship with another teacher named Arlenny. Yunior likes that she listens to him and can carry on an intelligent conversation with him.

The law student returns to his life, pregnant with his child. Yunior writes something very racist about her in his journal. She finds it and hates him for it, but they continue to live together. When she gives birth to the child she doesn't let him into the delivery room, and she leaves him for her ex-boyfriend.

During that time, Elvis reveals that he has a child in the Dominican Republic, but his wife doesn't know about it. Later that year, they take a trip so he can see the child. Yunior realizes the child doesn't belong to Elvis. Elvis doesn't believe it at first, but after a DNA test he realizes the truth. He's furious and cuts off contact with the woman.

In his 5th year, Yunior's teaching career is almost at an end. His students aren't showing up and he's getting in trouble for swearing in class. His depression worsens and he feels like everyone in Boston has been targeting him because of his race. He gets a wedding invitation from the law student, which he guesses was meant to hurt him. By the end of the year he's started to write again and decides to write a book about how cheaters can find love.

## Analysis

Right at the start of the story the theme of Lying is demonstrated. Yunior lies to his fiancée about all of the other women that he was with. As a result, she breaks up with him and he's miserable for the next few years. Yunior's negative traits continue to shine



throughout the rest of the story. Not only did he spend six years being unfaithful, but the moment he gets into a relationship with a student at his college he treats her horribly. He writes racist things in his journal, which pushes her away. The only reason she remains in his life is when she needs a place to stay after she finds out she's pregnant with his child. Yuniore continues to objectify women by only referring to them with simple titles, such as "law student" and "ex-fiancé."

Yuniore does make a major breakthrough, although it's barely highlighted in the story. Yuniore has a female friend, Arlenny. He treats Arlenny with respect and actually tries to listen to the advice that she gives. Yuniore also doesn't try to pursue a relationship with Arlenny. While she might be a positive influence on his life, his other friend, Elvis is not. This touches again on the theme of friends and how their influence can be good or bad. Elvis encourages Yuniore to keep going after other women. Elvis follows this advice himself, despite being married. He starts going to work out at the same places as Yuniore simply because he wants to meet women. However, Arlenny offers a better alternate view of women, and of living.

Despite everything that has happened in the last five years, Yuniore shows the theme of Hope at the very end of the story. He's finally starting to get out of his depression and he's trying to write again. Yuniore wants to write a book about his experiences, the titular "Cheater's Guide to Love." This implies that Yuniore thinks he can find love again, even with all of the trouble he's had being faithful in his previous relationships. What's very telling is that the title itself is a recognition of the fact that what he's engaged in all of his life was a type of "cheating." He would never have called it that ten years previously, as he felt he was doing nothing wrong. Now, simply by acknowledging it as "cheating," it infers that he has gained a perspective and realizes that this type of behavior is a negative thing.

## Discussion Question 1

How is Arlenny different from the other women that Yuniore has known?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the Author implying with the title of Yuniore's book, especially in regards to his views towards women and relationships?

## Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Elvis to Arlenny.

## Vocabulary

tenure, penitent, grievances, lapidary, mendacity



# Characters

## Yunior

Yunior is the main character for the majority of the stories. Yunior comes from the Dominican Republic, a fact that he is very proud of. Yunior considers himself to be a well-educated man. When he grows up, he becomes a teacher and a writer. As a child, Yunior constantly read books. He barely finished school because he was convinced the world would end after he lost his older brother to cancer. Yunior became very fit at a young age, inspired by the way that his brother always worked out.

Yunior is constantly getting into relationships. All of his relationships are doomed to failure because he keeps cheating on his girlfriends. Yunior is consistently shown to treat women poorly. There are many times where he doesn't even refer to the woman he's dating by their name. Yunior is shown to be very paranoid as an adult. He's convinced that everyone hates him because of his race, although his friends insist that it's in his head. Yunior uses very crass and racist language. In his later years he gets hurt while working out. This causes his depression to get worse. He's eventually able to get over it and decides to get back into writing.

What emerges from the novel is a character study of a person whose interior landscape is peopled with fear of abandonment, hopelessness, sexism, and fear. This has rendered him unable to reach out to others in a meaningful and lasting way. However, from each woman he has encountered, the reader sees that he begins a transition, learning and experiencing events and people who influence his perspectives on women. This is evident in the way he treats Magda at the beginning of the novel, to the way he treats Arlenny at the end of the novel. He has focused so much of his attention on extrinsic motivators and images that intrinsically his landscape is barren. However, with each woman he meets, he begins the journey of seeing events through other people's eyes, to objectify less, to fear less, to stop putting all of his faith in the tangible. His friendship with Arlenny is significant in pointing out to the reader that he has begun to make the shift from extrinsic to intrinsic.

## Yunior's Mother

Yunior's Mother worked hard to raise her family. Despite that, both of her sons took advantage of her. Rafa constantly took money from her and Yunior never helped her around the house. She struggled to learn English when she first arrived, but after her husband left she managed to get a job. She was very abused by her former husband, and her sons learned many of their negative habits from their father's treatment of their mother.



## Yunior's Father

Yunior's father only briefly appears in one of the stories. He's very abusive and controlling. He doesn't let his family leave the apartment and yells at his sons whenever they make too much noise. Yunior later reveals that his father had constantly been cheating on his mother, a trait that Yunior inherits.

## Arlenny

Arlenny is one of Yunior's few female friends. He only makes a few passing references to her in the later years of his life. She frequently provides him with good advice, much different from what he hears from his male friends. In Arlenny he finally realizes that his view of women has been all wrong.

## Rafa

Rafa is Yunior's older brother. Like Yunior, he treats women poorly. He tries to get into a serious relationship after he's diagnosed with cancer. The relationship fails as his wife was just looking to become a citizen. Rafa has a very angry disposition, constantly getting into fights around town and even with his family members. He eventually passes away from cancer in some of the later stories.

However, for all of his negative character traits, he is still a better person than his brother, Yunior. While Yunior has no compunction about being a drug dealer, Rafa refuses to do that, claiming that he wants honest work. The reader also finds that he does not treat women as Yunior does. While he seems outwardly to be sexist, behind closed doors the readers learn that he is actually very kind. Nilda shares this with Yunior many years later and it comes as a shock to him.

## Nilda

Nilda is Rafa's girlfriend and one of Yunior's friends. She would always go to Yunior's home to get away from her alcoholic mother. Yunior tried to warn her away from Rafa, but she later revealed to Yunior that Rafa was the best boyfriend she ever had.

## Miss Lora

Miss Lora is Yunior's neighbor and ends up becoming one of his lovers. Like him, she avidly works out. Miss Lora has a relationship with several other men, something that angers Yunior. They end up breaking up, but Yunior tries to find her after college. He's unable to find anything about her. What he learns as a result of his relationship with her is how infidelity feels toward the one who has been cheated on. Before Miss Lora he





didn't understand or believe that there was any harm in what he did. As a result of Miss Lora, he experienced the truth about the pain of infidelity.

## **Cassandra**

Cassandra is the girl that Yuniór cheated with when he was dating Magda. She tells Magda about it in a written letter.

## **Magda**

Magda is one of Yuniór's many girlfriends. She breaks up with him when she finds out that he's cheating on her. They get back together, but Magda is miserable in the relationship. Yuniór tries to make it work, but it becomes apparent she was only with him because she wanted to go on vacation.

## **Alma**

Alma is another of Yuniór's girlfriends who he cheated on. Alma reacted angrily, humiliating Yuniór when she found out the truth. The relationship with Alma was one of the first times that Yuniór actually considered that what he was doing might be wrong, and even hurtful to others. Her gift to him was that she taught him that lying was devastating to a relationship.

## **Yasmin**

Yasmin is the main character of the fourth short story, "Otravida, Otravez." Like Yuniór, she comes from the Dominican Republic. Yasmin is a hard worker. She's very protective of everyone else she works with as well as her friends. Yasmin ends up moving in with Ramón at the end of her story. She's struggling in their relationship, but she's trying to be hopeful about her future. This chapter is about Hope, and this is what Yuniór takes away from witnessing the relationship.

## **Ramón**

Ramón is from the Dominican Republic. He still has a family there that he frequently writes to. Ramón spends the majority of his time in the book saving up to buy a house with Yasmin.

## **Ana Iris**

Ana Iris is Yasmin's former roommate. Like Ramón, she has a family back in the Dominican Republic. She hasn't seen them or spoken with them in several years. At the



end of her story, she gets in touch with her family again. Yasmin thinks she's either bringing her family home, or she'll go back to them.

## **Veronica/Flaca**

Veronica is one of Yuniór's girlfriends. He calls her "Flaca." The two initially tried not to get into a relationship, but ended up together. One evening, she left Yuniór while he was sleeping and he never saw her again. What he internalized from this relationship was that it was better to do the leaving, than to be the one that is left. This shapes Yuniór's failed relationships for many years to come.

## **Pura**

Pura is an illegal immigrant. She marries Rafa because she wants to become a citizen. The two end up having a child together, which causes problems for Rafa and his family. Pura constantly clashes with Rafa's family. Despite that, she takes money from Rafa's family. She eventually runs off after Rafa returns to the hospital because of his cancer. What Yuniór makes of this event is that one must either be used, or be the user.

## **Paloma**

Paloma is one of Yuniór's girlfriends in high school. Yuniór cheats on her because she did not have enough of a physical relationship as he would have liked, and he had fallen for his neighbor, Miss Lora.

## **Elvis**

Elvis is one of Yuniór's friends as an adult. Elvis cheats on his wife, much like Yuniór. He believes that he has a son in the Dominican Republic. When he and Yuniór go down to visit him, Yuniór discovers that his father was someone else. Elvis angrily leaves and refuses to speak with them again. Elvis frequently encourages Yuniór to fool around with other women.

## **Ex-Fiancé**

Yuniór's ex is only referred to by her title. She leaves Yuniór early on in the final story when she discovers that he was cheating on her. Despite his infidelity, Yuniór believes that he was truly in love with her. However, he is still unable to make that deep connection with another person, which is why he continues to have failed relationships.



## Law Student

After his fiancé breaks up with him, Yunion sleeps with a student at the university where he teaches. Her name is never revealed, and he refers to her only as "the law student." She becomes pregnant with his child. Their relationship ends when she reads something racist he wrote in his journal about her. She lives with him until giving birth to the child where she returns to her ex-boyfriend. This woman was a rebound after his fiance left him.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Magda's Clothing

While she was on vacation with Yuniór, Magda made a point of wearing very provocative clothing that showed off her body. This was her way of saying that she wasn't interested in him anymore since she was using the outfits to get attention from other men.

## Comics

In Nilda, whenever Nilda came over and Yuniór's brother wasn't there she would sit with him and talk to him about comics. At the time, the comics represented the relationship and friendship that Yuniór shared with Nilda.

## Virta's Letters

Ramón keeps all of Virta's letters, even though he insists that he's done with the life that he left behind. The fact that he continues to write to her and keeps all the letters shows that he isn't ready to let go of the family he left behind.

## Flickering Lights

During her story, Yasmin observes the flickering lights and comments how it reminds her of her relationship with Ramón. She knows that the lights are eventually going to go out, but she's trying to make the most out of them before they die completely, just like her relationship with Ramón.

## Broken Homes

Ramón says he has spent 8 years trying to find a home. All of the homes that he looks at are very run down and broken. Despite that, he still gets excited about each one that he saw. To him, the homes represent the hope he has for life in America.

## Yuniór's Nicknames for His Girlfriends

When Yuniór was younger he talked about one of the girlfriends he had at the time. He kept referring to her as "Whitegirl," which represents how little she meant to him since he didn't even use a name for her. Yuniór refers to his ex-fiancé simply as his fiancé or his ex. When he gets a student pregnant, he simply refers to her as the law student.



Yunior frequently comes up with simple nicknames for the women who he dates because he doesn't respect them, which is why he keeps cheating.

## **Yarn Barn Job**

When Rafa gets out of the hospital he gets a job at the Yarn Barn, which surprises Yunior. For Rafa, the job at the Yarn Barn represents hope. He's trying to get away from everything that his father did, and he even settles down and gets married with someone who he treats far better than any of his previous relationships.

## **Money for Rafa**

Even though Rafa's mother kicks him out of the house, she allows him to "break in" so he can steal the money that she keeps "hidden" in her room. Yunior finds out from his mother that she does this on purpose. This is her way of saying that she still cares about him and he'll be welcome back home if he wants, but he can't allow him back while he's still with his wife.

## **Hair**

When Yunior is with his father he's upset with how wild his hair always looks. Yunior's father forces him to shave his head, which is his way of further cementing all of the control that he has over Yunior's life.

## **Wedding Invitations**

In the final story, Yunior starts to receive wedding invitations from all the women whom he cheated on. This is their way of trying to hurt him by showing how much better they are without him in their life, and how they've found partners while he's all alone.



# Settings

## Santo Domingo

Santo Domingo is where Yuniór grew up before his father took the family to America. He returns there a few times in some of the other stories, namely when he goes on vacation with Magda and the trip he takes with Elvis. He occasionally makes reference to his original home in the other stories.

## Brooklyn

The majority of stories centered on Yuniór's youth take place in Brooklyn. The primary location is their apartment, but Yuniór occasionally goes out into unspecified parts of the city. Yasmin's story also takes place in the city where she lives and works.

## Paterson

Yuniór mentions in Flaca that the story takes place in Paterson, New Jersey. This is primarily where their relationship begins.

## Spruce Run

Yuniór and Flaca travel to Spruce Run in New Jersey while on vacation together.

## Boston

After Yuniór breaks up with his ex he moves to Boston. Yuniór struggles in Boston because he feels everyone hates him because of his race.



# Themes and Motifs

## Friends Interfering with Relationships

This theme is first shown in the very start of the book during the first story. Yunior talks about how after he cheated with Magda he was able to win her over and start their relationship anew. All of Magda's friends were against the idea of her being with Yunior. They were constantly saying bad things about her and encouraging her to try and date other men. When he proposes going on vacation, they tell her that she should just go with him to enjoy the vacation.

In "Flaca," Yunior's friends take on the role that Magda's friends had. They're always pushing him not to go out with Flaca. This was one of the initial reasons that she didn't want to get in a relationship with him because she had such a hard time putting up with his friends. They did ultimately get together, but it was clear that Yunior wasn't treating her well, in no small part because of the treatment she got from his friends, who were clearly an influence on him.

The theme is shown again in the final story through Yunior and Elvis. When they go to see Elvis's son, Yunior figures out that Elvis can't be the father. Elvis acts surprised at first, but as Yunior continues to talk to Elvis it seems more like Elvis is in denial as opposed to surprised. Yunior keeps pushing and it destroys the relationship that Elvis had with both the boy and his mother. This clearly hurts the family who were relying on help from Elvis.

## Sexism

This theme is shown throughout nearly all of the stories. When Yunior was a child he had little respect for women. This is largely because of the way that he saw his father interacting with his mother. When Yunior begins to date women in high school he treats them with little respect. He often times doesn't even refer to them by name and only cares about whether or not they are getting physical with him. All of Yunior's early relationships end because he treats his girlfriends so poorly.

Yunior's adult relationships continue to suffer because of the way that he treats the women in his life. Yunior doesn't care about his fiancé, once again shown by the fact he never even refers to her by name. He cheats on her consistently during the six years that they were together. Afterwards, he starts a relationship with one of his students. He again doesn't refer to her by name, and shortly after meeting her he writes insulting and demeaning things about her which ultimately bring about the end to the relationship.

Some of the other male characters embody this trait as well. Like Yunior, Elvis disrespects his wife. He cheats on her and even hides the fact that he has a son back home in the Dominican Republic. At the end of the story, both Yunior and Elvis are shown to be miserable. The one person who seems to truly support Yunior in his life is



his female friend, Arlenny. Unlike Elvis, she gives him genuine advice and doesn't just tell him to find new women to sleep with. In return, Yunior treats her like an actual person and a friend because he has no interest in sleeping with her.

## Parental Influence

Many of Yunior's despicable character traits come from the way that he was treated by his father. Yunior's mother clearly cared about both children and treated them with love. Their father treated the whole entire family like property. This behavior especially extended towards women, who he treated as simply being obedient objects that existed to make his life easier. The first thing that he does when he brings his family over to America is lock them up in the apartment. He doesn't help his wife learn English, which limits her ability to engage with her new surroundings.

Yunior only spends a little bit of time with his father. During their few interactions, his father passes on his views of women. He frequently refers to them simply by race and that they are only good for physical acts. This clearly had an impression on both of the brothers. As an adult, Rafa is incredibly cold towards his girlfriends and only cares about his pleasure. Yunior isn't quite as cold, but he still frequently objectifies them, and like his father he usually just refers to them by some name he came up with.

Perhaps the most notable trait that Yunior inherits is that just like his father, he frequently cheats on the women he's involved with. As a youth, Yunior was clearly aware that his father slept around with other women, behavior that he sees as completely normal as an adult. He tries to hide it, but only because he knows it will get him in trouble. He never expresses remorse for what he does, which is why he keeps repeating it time after time.

## Lying

This theme is shown frequently in all of the stories. The very first story involves Yunior and Magda lying to one another for the entirety of the story. Magda lies about wanting to be with Yunior. Yunior was lying about the affair that he had with Cassandra. Even when Magda finds out the truth, he admits that the only reason he didn't try and lie and deny it is because he knew it wouldn't work. Despite that, his friends still pushed for him to lie. Both Magda and Yunior were miserable on their trip because they lied to one another.

Nearly all of Yunior's other relationships end because of lies he told. He frequently lies about being with other women. When they find out he always tries to apologize, but it sounds so insincere that they do not believe him. The fact that he frequently cheats with multiple women just adds to his overall insincerity. Yunior is miserable in the last story because he loses his fiancé after lying to her.

Elvis embodies this trait with the relationship he shares with the woman he had a son with. When he goes to visit his son he finds out that the woman was lying to him the whole time and he wasn't the father. As a result, the relationship immediately ends and





both the woman and her son suffer because they've cut off any possible support they could have gotten from Elvis.

## Hope

This theme is largely shown in "Otravida, Otravez." The line is even spoken by the main character, Yasmin. Throughout the course of the story Yasmin is generally very hopeful. She believes that her hard work will always pay off. Yasmin has faith in her co-workers, as long as they show that they are able to do the work. She gives Samantha money at the end of the story because she's genuinely hopeful that Samantha will be able to use the money to help her family.

Ramón is a very hopeful character as well. He tells Yasmin that he has been working hard and saving up for eight years just so he'll be able to buy a house. Ramón never gives up on that dream. He constantly looks at all of the houses that are for sale, always having good feelings about them. Even though the houses aren't in great shape he still wants to buy them because he knows that he can turn them into his dream home.

Ramón and Ana Iris also embody this theme with the way they treat their family. Both constantly insist that they have given up on their families and moved on. Despite that, Ramón keeps all of the letters that his wife sends. He keeps in touch with her for nearly the entire story. Ana Iris is a little different. She doesn't speak with her family for most of the story, but it's clear she still cares about them. By the end of the story she does get in touch with them and Yasmin can tell she's hopeful she'll either be able to bring her family over or she'll get to go back and be with them.

## Abandonment

Throughout most of the novel Yuniór's actions and motives boil down to his desire to avoid being in a situation where he will be or feel abandoned by anyone. This stems back from his childhood when his father beat them senseless and then they were left to fend for themselves.

Later, with each new love interest, he will only allow the relationship to progress to a certain point before he will do something to sabotage it or simply walks away before the woman has a chance to hurt him like that. In the section titled Miss Lorna, this is the only instance where she openly tells him what she is doing and whom she is doing it with so that Yuniór doesn't feel abandoned as much as insignificant. He's never had to deal with someone deliberately doing the same thing to him as he's done to others. Through this he begins to develop a slight amount of empathy for the women he's mistreated over his lifetime.

The theme of Abandonment is also touched upon by the death of Yuniór's brother, Rafa. Though Rafa didn't intend to become critically ill, he did, and in the end, leaves Yuniór alone. Yuniór feels abandoned and he realizes after Rafa's death that it has been his brother who had always offered a sort of moral compass for him to guide himself with.

When Rafa dies, this moral compass is destroyed making Yuniór, for a while, even worse than he was before in his desire to avoid being left at any cost.

At the end of the novel, the reader sees Yuniór trying to rationalize, or maybe even self-medicate, through the writing of the book, *The Cheater's Guide*. It is self-aggrandizing at its best, but it also offers insight into how he has begun to recognize that his actions were questionable, dishonorable, and that perhaps he could have gone about things in a different way. The reader understands that he's undergoing a transformation in the way he responds to and treats Arlenny, one of his colleagues, who is also a woman.



# Styles

## Point of View

Because the book is a series of short stories, the point of view frequently changes. For the most part, all of the stories are told from the point of view of Yunior. The only exception is the fourth story which features Yasmin as the main character. Some of the stories are told directly from the first person perspective and are set in the present. Others are framed in the second person, with Yunior speaking to himself about what happened. These events are implied to be journal entries. Miss Lora is especially framed this way as each part of the story is numbered, implying they are being written down and listed in a journal.

## Language and Meaning

The language used throughout the book is very strong and crass. As a protagonist, Yunior is constantly swearing and using sexist terms to refer to the people around him. This reflects the type of upbringing that Yunior had which becomes even more evident in the later stories that focus on his youth.

Yunior is very proud of the fact that he comes from the Dominican Republic. This is a huge part of his life and it's reflected in the way that the book is written. Spanish phrases are frequently used throughout the book. Yunior especially likes to use them when he's making nicknames for people. Yunior frequently comes up with other names or titles for people, especially the women that he's dating. This shows how disposable they are to him and highlights the way he objectifies them.

## Structure

At first glance, the stories appear to mostly be standalone. Only a few of the stories directly tie into one another, such as the ones that follow after Rafa gets cancer. The stories are arranged in a way to tell different parts of Yunior's life. The book starts out with Yunior as an adult, but the following stories focus on how Yunior was as a child. This lets the reader understand how Yunior became the man he was in the earlier stories. The final story takes place in Yunior's future, after the readers understand how he was shaped into the man he is during that story.

During the actual stories time constantly shifts around. The writer has a habit of summarizing events through Yunior writing to himself or narrating to the audience depending on the perspective. For important events he'll focus more on the action, like when Yunior confronts Rafa after he tries to break into the house.



## Quotes

She considers me a typical Dominican man: a sucio, an asshole. See, many months ago, when Magda was still my girl, when I didn't have to be careful about almost anything, I cheated on her with this chick who had tons of eighties freestyle hair. Didn't tell Magda about it, either.

-- Yunior (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The first paragraph highlights many character traits that are constantly shown through Yunior. Yunior cheats on the majority of the women that he enters into a relationship with. Yunior also mentions his Dominican roots, which comes up constantly throughout this and all of the other stories.

She wasn't the only one with counsel. My boys were like, Fuck her, don't sweat that bitch, but every time I tried I couldn't pull it off. I was into Magda for real. I started working overtime on her again, but nothing seemed to pan out. Every movie we went to, every night drive we took, every time she did sleep over seemed to confirm something negative about me. I felt like I was dying by degrees, but when I brought it up she told me that I was being paranoid.

-- Yunior (Chapter 1 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** The theme of friends interfering with relationships is touched upon in this quote. Yunior's behavior of blaming other people for his problems is mentioned as well, but the main focus is all of the trouble that Yunior is having with Magda. These troubles define the rest of the story.

We'd sit together until it got dark and then her beeper would fire up and she'd peer into its display and say, I have to go. Sometimes I could grab her and pull her back on the couch, and we'd stay there a long time, me waiting for her to fall in love with me, her waiting for whatever, but other times she'd be serious. I have to go see my man, she'd say.

-- Yunior (Chapter 2 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** In his youth, Yunior was desperate for a relationship, a trait which carries onto the later books. This passage shows how eager he is to get into a relationship, as well as establishing the feelings he has for Nilda.

I wanted to warn her, tell her he was a monster, but she was already headed for him at the speed of light.

-- Yunior (Chapter 2 paragraph 16)

**Importance:** This passage highlights exactly how Rafa acts towards women, and is another reminder that Yunior clearly cares for and wants to protect Nilda. It also serves as a base for the irony that comes as the reader learns that Yunior is worse towards women than Rafa ever was.



In another universe I probably came out OK, ended up with mad novias and jobs and a sea of love in which to swim, but in this world I had a brother who was dying of cancer and a long dark patch of life like a mile of black ice waiting for me up ahead.

-- Yuniór (Chapter 2 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This chapter foreshadows the future problems that Yuniór faces in the other stories, and shows how hurt he is that Rafa is sick.

Instead of lowering your head and copping to it like a man, you pick up the journal as one might hold a baby's beshatted diaper, as one might pinch a recently benutted condom. You glance at the offending passages. Then you look at her and smile a smile your dissembling face will remember until the day you die. Baby, you say, baby, this is part of my novel. This is how you lose her.

-- Yuniór (Chapter 3 paragraph 13)

**Importance:** This passage highlights another one of the themes, the dangers associated with lying. Yuniór loses Alma because he tried to cover up the truth and make up a lie about what was in his journal.

The truth is I am lucky to have a friend like Ana Iris. She's like my sister. Most of the people I know in the States have no friends here; they're crowded together in apartments. They're cold, they're lonely, they're worn. I've seen the lines at the phone places, the men who sell stolen card numbers, the cuarto they carry in their pockets.

-- Yasmin (Chapter 4 paragraph 52)

**Importance:** The friendship that Yasmin has with Ana Iris is a huge part of her story. This passage also summarizes exactly how hard it can be for immigrants in the United States.

Three nights a week we look at houses. The houses are in terrible condition; they are homes for ghosts and for cockroaches and for us, los hispanos. Even so, few people will sell to us. They treat us well enough in person but in the end we never hear from them, and the next time Ramón drives by other people are living there, usually blanquitos, tending the lawn that should have been ours, scaring crows out of our mulberry trees.

-- Yasmin (Chapter 4 paragraph 65)

**Importance:** Ramón's hopeful nature is shown while he and Yasmin are trying to find a house. No matter what happens, he keeps trying and doesn't lose faith that he will be able to find a house of his own.

Ana Iris once asked me if I loved him and I told her about the lights in my old home in the capital, how they flickered and you never knew if they would go out or not. You put down your things and you waited and couldn't do anything really until the lights decided. This, I told her, is how I feel.

-- Yasmin (Chapter 4 paragraph 103)



**Importance:** Yasmin's metaphor perfectly sums up how she feels about her relationship with Ramón.

I'd say yes and while I waited for you I'd tell the boys it's just sex, you know, nothing at all. And you'd come, with a change of clothes and a pan so you could make us breakfast, maybe cookies you baked for your class. The boys would find you in the kitchen the next morning, in one of my shirts and at first they didn't complain, because they guessed you would just go away. And by the time they started saying something, it was late, wasn't it?

-- Yunior (Chapter 5 paragraph 16)

**Importance:** The theme of friends interfering with relationships is brought up once again through the way that Yunior's friends talk about Flaca. Yunior's general view towards women is highlighted as well with the way he only went to Flaca when he wasn't able to find anyone else at the clubs. The theme of Lying is also very briefly touched upon in the passage.

Rafa stomped in with Pura in tow. He was clearly drunk, and Pura was dressed as if they'd just been at a club. Welcome home, Mami said quietly. Check it out, Rafa said, holding out both his and Pura's hands. They had rings on. We got married!

-- Yunior (Chapter 6 paragraph 63)

**Importance:** Rafa marrying Pura is the main source of conflict throughout the story. It also marks the end of Rafa and Yunior's brotherly relationship.

Why go to all the trouble to get into Harvard just to get knocked up? You could have stayed on the block and done that shit.

-- Yunior (Chapter 9 paragraph 178)

**Importance:** This passage shows off practically all of the negative traits that Yunior has. He's being hateful, sexist, and racist, all of which have been problems throughout the stories. Because of these traits, Yunior constantly ruins his relationships, which causes him a great deal of stress. This particular passage is also important because it shows why things didn't work out with the Law Student which is one of the major conflicts during this story.

What did I tell you? How many times have I told you to keep it quiet? He was free with his smacks and we spent whole afternoons on Punishment Row—our bedroom—where we had to lay on our beds and not get off, because if he burst in and caught us at the window, staring out at the beautiful snow, he would pull our ears and smack us, and then we would have to kneel in the corner for a few hours.

-- Yunior (Chapter 7 paragraph 62)

**Importance:** This passage shows off the abusive nature of Yunior's father.

But it wounded you, that stubborn silence. His last fucking days and he wouldn't say a word. You'd ask him something straight up, How are you feeling today, and Rafa would



just turn his head.

-- Yuniar (Chapter 8 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Rafa's death and the way he acted in the final few months had a huge impact on Yuniar.