The Dew Breaker

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDWIDGE DANTICAT

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, and while she was still a young child her parents immigrated to the US—first her mother and then her father, two years later. Danticat and her brother remained in Haiti and were raised by their grandparents. As a child, Danticat described feeling a sense of "awe" when she heard people telling stories, and at nine, she started writing herself. At 12, she moved to Brooklyn to join her parents. They lived in the Haitian diasporic community in which *The Dew Breaker* is set. Danticat attended Clara Barton High School, a Brooklyn high school dedicated to training students in nursing or related health professions, and then Barnard College, where she majored in French literature. In 1993, she earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Brown University, and her thesis became her first published novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (2004). She has since written over a dozen books, received numerous prizes, including the National Book Critics Circle Award and the MacArthur "Genius" grant, and taught creative writing in New York and Miami. She has also worked on several documentaries. In 2014, she received an honorary doctorate from Brooklyn College. She is married, with two children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Dew Breaker revolves around the brutal dictatorship of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. Yet while some of the stories are set during the Duvalier regime, most deal with the regime's aftereffects. Because the dictatorship was so oppressive, with the *Tonton Macouts* (a government militia) imprisoning, torturing, and murdering so many members of the civilian population, many Haitians fled the country during this era. Indeed, *The Dew Breaker* portrays the lives of the thousands of Haitians who moved to the U.S. during or after the dictatorship, focusing on those living in the diasporic community in Brooklyn, New York. Yet the book also illustrates the oppression that Haitian Americans experienced from the U.S. government. It mentions the beating and rape of Abner Louima by police, as well as the police murder of Patrick Dorismond, two real events that helped galvanize the Haitian American community in opposing police brutality.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many of Danticat's other books address the same themes as *The Dew Breaker*, including *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; *Claire of the Sea Light*; and her memoir *Brother, I'm Dying*. Other works of fiction that address the Duvalier regime and its aftereffects include Graham Greene's *The Comedians*, René Depestre's *The Festival of the Greasy Pole*, Kettly Mars' *Savage Seasons*, and Fabienne Josaphat's *Dancing in the Baron's Shadow*. A powerful account of political oppression and resistance at an earlier point in Haitian history can be found in Jacques Stephen Alexis' novel, *General Sun, My Brother* (Alexis was killed by the Duvalier regime and is briefly mentioned in *The Dew Breaker*).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Dew Breaker
- **When Published:** 2004
- **Literary Period:** 20th century literary fiction
- **Genre:** Linked Short Stories
- **Setting:** Haiti and the Haitian diasporic community of Brooklyn, New York
- **Climax:** When the preacher maims Papa's face with the broken chair leg, leaving him with a lifelong scar
- **Antagonist:** Papa
- **Point of View:** Mostly third person, although some of the stories are written in the first person

EXTRA CREDIT

Bearing witness. *The Dew Breaker* could be read as an example of multi-person *testimonio*, a critical term emerging from Latin American literature that describes testimony by marginalized members of society transformed into literary narrative.

Between fiction and reality. Although the material in *The Dew Breaker* is invented, Danticat has emphasized that it is all realistically plausible, to the point that she describes the narrative as "a collage of real events."

PLOT SUMMARY

Ka Bienaimé and her father, Papa, are traveling through Florida when Papa goes missing. Both Ka's parents are from Haiti, but she was born in Brooklyn and has never visited the country. They are delivering a **sculpture** Ka made that depicts Papa during the year he spent in prison in Haiti. A police officer, Officer Bo, asks to see a picture of Papa, but Ka doesn't have any: Papa hates having his picture taken and always covers his face to hide the prominent **scar** on his cheek. Ka is delivering the sculpture to Gabrielle Fonteneau, a famous Haitian-American actress who is currently staying at her parents' house

in Florida.

At sunset, Papa reappears and drives Ka to a lake in which he has thrown the sculpture, destroying it. Ka is angry and bewildered. Papa eventually explains that he was actually a *perpetrator* of violence back in Haiti, not a victim. Ka suddenly realizes that this is why Papa and her mother, Anne, have no friends and never discuss their life back in Haiti. Papa insists that he never wanted to hurt people and would never commit violence now. Ka calls Anne, who tells her that Papa has been wanting to tell her the truth for a long time.

Ka and Papa go to the Fonteneaus' house to tell Gabrielle in person that the sculpture is gone. Mr. and Mrs. Fonteneau greet them warmly, and at lunch they discuss their love of Haiti. Yet when Ka tells Gabrielle that the sculpture is gone, Gabrielle reacts coldly. Ka and Papa drive away and Ka thinks about what she and Anne mean to Papa, how they have become "masks against his own face."

The next story is about an unnamed man and his wife, who are about to see each other for the first time in seven years. The man works as a night janitor at Medgar Evers College and a day janitor at King's County Hospital. The couple parted after only one day of marriage, when the husband moved to New York. Neither had any idea it would be seven years before the immigration system would allow them to reunite again.

After they are reunited, the wife spends her days writing letters home and listening to the Haitian radio station while her husband is at work. One evening, she cooks a big dinner for her husband and their roommates, two young men named Michel and Dany. She wants to tell her husband about the long affair she had with a neighbor back in Haiti, knowing it will thwart their relationship if she doesn't. However, she can't bring herself to do it. The man comes to feel that there is a silence between them that will never be broken.

In the next story, Nadine gets a letter from her parents, which she doesn't answer. Nadine is a nurse at an Ear, Nose and Throat ward. She has a voicemail from her ex-boyfriend, Eric, who is the father of a child she recently aborted (it is strongly hinted that Eric is the unnamed husband from the previous story). She doesn't answer this either, but places the voicemail cassette tape on a shrine to her lost baby. At the hospital, Nadine tends to a patient named Ms. Hinds who has emerged from surgery horrified to find that she can't speak. Nadine eventually brings herself to call her parents, but the conversation upsets her. Ms. Hinds' parents come to pick her up from hospital, and Nadine bids her farewell. She looks at herself in the mirror and can't recognize herself.

The next story returns to the Bienaimé family, who are driving to Christmas Eve Mass (this story takes chronologically prior to the opening one). They drive past a cemetery, and Anne holds her breath. Every time she passes a cemetery she does this and thinks about her younger brother, who drowned back in Haiti when he was three years old. Lately Anne has been regretting her and Papa's decision not to make any friends in the U.S. She thinks it was perhaps not necessary for them to isolate themselves so completely in order to conceal the truth of Papa's past.

At church, Ka thinks she seems Emmanuel Constant, a militiaman who raped and murdered hundreds of people but escaped going to prison in Haiti by fleeing to the U.S. Anne checks and realizes that it is not actually Constant, but she feels filled with panic that someone might recognize Papa one day, and wonders if she will need to stop attending Midnight Mass.

Dany has returned to the rural Haitian village where his Aunt Estina lives, having moved to New York from Haiti 10 years ago. 15 years before that, Dany's parents were killed by the government, and Estina raised him instead. A villager named Old Zo takes Dany to Estina, who is blind. Dany tells her that he has found the man (Papa) who killed his parents, and that he is actually renting a room in this man's house in Brooklyn. However, their conversation is interrupted by Old Zo, his daughter Ti Famn, and other villagers bringing them food. Later, Estina introduces Dany to Claude, a young Haitian American man who was deported back to Haiti after killing his father.

In a dream, Dany discusses with Estina his parents' murder and his interactions with Papa. When he wakes up they talk briefly, but Estina says she is too tired to talk and goes back to sleep. When Dany wakes up again, she is dead. The funeral takes place, and Claude attempts to comfort Dany, who pushes him away. Later, Dany apologizes to Claude, and Claude tells the story of how he killed his father when he was 14 and addicted to crack. Claude admits he considers himself lucky because, after committing such a horrible crime, he had a chance to turn his life around.

In the next story, a young journalism intern at the *Haitian American Weekly* named Aline Cajuste comes to interview Beatrice Saint Fort, a bridal seamstress, about her upcoming retirement. Over coffee, Aline asks questions about Beatrice's age and marital status that she refuses to answer. Instead, Beatrice takes Aline outside and tells her about her neighbors. She explains that there is a Haitian prison guard living on her street, eventually adding that back in Haiti, he tortured her after she refused his advances. She says that she has moved many times in order to lose him, but that he has always followed her. She hopes that by retiring she will finally be free of him. At first Aline dismisses Beatrice to her editor, Marjorie Voltaire, as "a bit nutty." However, she then comes to develop more sympathy for and interest in Beatrice and others like her.

The next story is set the day after Francois "Baby Doc" Duvalier has gone into exile, marking the end of the Duvalier dictatorship. Michel (who is 12 at the time) and his mother are hiding from the chaotic, vengeful violence taking place outside. Michel is thinking about his friend Romain, whose father,

Regulus, was a Tonton Macoute (a militiaman who carried out violence on behalf on the government). Now the Macoutes are being tortured and killed in brutal ways by those desiring revenge.

The water station in Michel's neighborhood, which belongs to Monsieur Christophe, has been dismantled, and Michel's mother orders him to go and help Christophe fix it. Michel helps for a short time before running off to find Romain. Romain announces that he wants to "escape," and he and Michel take a taxi to a hotel. There, Romain reveals he was hoping to find Michel's father there—who, it is revealed here, is actually Christophe. Michel cries because he doesn't fully understand what it means for him to be Christophe's illegitimate son, although he knows it is shameful. Romain and Michel part ways, and Romain announces he's leaving the country. The next day, Michel learns that Regulus shot himself to avoid being captured and tortured. Michel never sees Romain again, but—speaking from the future as a 30-year-old married man expecting his first child—he says he will name is unborn son after him.

Rézia, Mariselle, and Freda are all Haitian immigrants taking a GED class together in New York. Back in Haiti, Freda was a professional funeral singer. The three women go to Rézia's Haitian restaurant together and drink. Freda explains that her father was a fisherman who was arrested by the government and later died; her mother told her to leave Haiti after she refused an invitation to sing at the national palace. Back in Haiti, Mariselle's husband was killed for painting an unflattering portrait of the president, forcing her to flee, too. Rézia was raised by an aunt who ran a brothel and who allowed a government agent to rape Rézia when she was a child after he threatened to put the aunt in prison.

The first time Freda sang in public was at her own father's funeral. She sang a song he taught her, "Brother Timonie," and after that she became a professional funeral singer. The women take their GED exam. Although they don't yet know if they passed, they go to drink in Rézia's restaurant together anyway. Mariselle suggests that Freda sing her own funeral song. Freda sings "Brother Timonie," and the two women join in.

Papa waits in his car outside a church in Bel Air, a poor neighborhood in Port-au-Prince. He has been assigned to kill the preacher, who has been broadcasting politically subversive sermons on the radio. Six months ago, the preacher's wife died by poisoning. Papa wants to leave Haiti and move to the U.S., but he needs to prove his loyalty by murdering the preacher first. He was born in Léogâne, the son of peasants who lost their land at the beginning of the Duvalier regime. Papa joined the Volunteers for National Security at 19, and grew powerful as a result. He has gained a reputation for being a particularly skillful, merciless torturer.

The preacher, meanwhile, knows that he will likely soon be killed for his subversive activities. At his Sunday evening church service, he talks about his dead wife and begs her forgiveness for the responsibility he bears for her death. His stepsister Anne walks in to the service, but on hearing that he is talking about his wife, walks out again. After she has left, Papa and his men burst in and arrests the preacher. In a truck, they take him to Casernes, where he is placed in a cell that smells of "rotting flesh." Meanwhile, Anne has an epileptic fit and a vision that her brother is in danger.

Papa gets an order that the preacher's execution has been cancelled because the government is worried about turning him into a martyr. He brings the preacher into his office, preparing to let him go. The preacher accidentally falls from the wooden chair he is sitting on, breaking it, and he uses a broken leg to maim Papa's face. Papa shoots him in response.

Papa knows he may be punished and even killed for this, and he walks out of Casernes in a daze. He collides with Anne, who ran there after hearing that this was where her brother had been taken. Anne mistakes him for a victim of the regime, and Papa lets her believe this, telling her he is finally "free." Anne cares for his wound, and the next day Papa buys them flights to New York, where he starts introducing her as his wife. It is not until Ka is born that Papa reveals the truth about himself, although he doesn't ever tell her the full story. The official version of the preacher's death is that he killed himself in Casernes by setting himself on fire, "leaving no trace of himself at all."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ka Bienaimé –Ka is the adult daughter of Papa and Anne. She was born in Brooklyn and has never been back to Haiti, her parents' home country. As a result, she is somewhat disconnected from Haiti, which is amplified by the fact that her parents never discuss their life there. Ka is a sculptor and high school art teacher, but she describes herself as not having the career she wants. Danticat provides fairly little information about her personal life, including whether she has a partner, who her friends are, and whom she lives with. The reader does learn that Ka is college-educated, and that she announced to her family that she was an atheist in college. Indeed, Ka's atheism and dismissive attitude toward her mother's Catholic faith at times make her seem slightly cynical, although she is also shown to be someone with strong moral principles. In some ways, Ka is a rather isolated figure; an only child, she describes her parents as "a society of two," indicating that she is therefore a society of one. This sense of isolation increases when Ka learns that her parents have been lying to her for her whole life, and that back in Haiti Papa was actually a "dew breaker," a government agent who tortured and killed many people. This information is especially difficult for Ka to deal with because she previously idolized her father and feel great

sympathy for the time she believes he spent as a prisoner (shown by the fact that he is her only artistic subject, including in the **sculpture** that she attempts to sell to Gabrielle Fonteneau). Ka is shocked and hurt by this revelation, to the point that she puts off dealing with it. At the end of the book it remains unclear whether she will be able to forgive her parents.

Papa –Born to landowning peasants in rural Haiti, Papa joins the Volunteers for National Security (Tonton Macouts) as a young man. He is disturbingly skilled at the torture and executions required as part of this job, and he thus earns a fearsome reputation. A greedy and selfish man, he enjoys the perks that come with his position of power, growing fat from eating decadently and taking many female lovers. At a certain point, he dreams of leaving Haiti and immigrating to the US, although it is not clear whether this is because he is morally troubled by his work as a Volunteer, or if he plans to continue working for the regime by thwarting revolutionary activities abroad. As an older man, Papa claims that he never wanted to hurt anyone, but the book raises doubts about how reluctant he really was. After killing the preacher, Papa meets Anne and lets her believe that he was a victim of the Duvalier regime, not a perpetrator. He and Anne escape to New York together, and this begins the second, radically different stage of Papa's existence. In Brooklyn, he lives a quiet life, running a barbershop and being a loving husband and father. He is obsessed with the Ancient Egyptians, particularly their grieving rituals, which is perhaps a way for him to process his own past. Although Papa is totally transformed into a nonviolent, peaceful man, he never truly reckons with his past because he keeps it hidden. Yet the **scar** that runs across his face is always a reminder of the violence he enacted upon others.

Anne Bienaimé/Landlady – Anne is Papa's wife and Ka's mother. Born in Haiti, she is epileptic, and when she was young her three-year-old brother drowned in the sea while she was having a fit (and thus she could not save him). This incident haunts her for the rest of her life, leading her to have a superstitious relationship with cemeteries. Her other brother, the preacher (technically her stepbrother) is killed by Papa after being taken to prison for this politically subversive sermons. A devout Catholic, Anne struggles to reconcile her faith with her relationship with Papa (although the fact that Papa initially lied to her and pretended to be a victim of the dictatorship arguably means she has diminished responsibility for choosing to be with him). A beautician, Anne has no friends in New York, and thus her life revolves around Papa and Ka. Over time, Anne comes to regret the extreme isolation and secrecy that have characterized her life in New York, and considers becoming more open and social. However, soon her paranoia over people discovering Papa's identity returns, and she worries that she might even have to give up attending Midnight Mass (her favorite tradition) in order to keep it secret. She rents out rooms in her house to Eric, Michel, and Dany, and in some stories she is known simply as "the landlady."

Man/Husband/Eric – Eric is first introduced as an unnamed man/husband in the story "Seven." Although he is the main character in the story, neither he nor his wife are ever named. He is a Haitian immigrant to the U.S. who lives in Brooklyn and who is separated from his wife for seven years by the American immigration system. He has two jobs, one as a day janitor and one as a night janitor at Medgar Evers College, and this detail alerts the reader to the fact that he is Eric, Nadine's ex-boyfriend and the father of her aborted child. Indeed, in "Seven" Danticat notes that Eric had several affairs with other women while separated from his wife, but that none of these meant much to him. However, in "Water Child," he calls Nadine every month after they break up, leaving a short but kind message on her answering machine. Eric is a hard-working man who is overjoyed when he is finally reunited with his wife. However, he becomes increasingly despondent over the seemingly irreparable damage wreaked by the seven years they spent apart.

Woman/Wife – Eric's wife is a woman who is separated from her husband when he moves to New York from Haiti the day after they marry. Unknown to either of them at the time, it will be seven years before they are able to see each other again. In the meantime, the woman completes a secretarial course and has a longstanding affair with her neighbor. When she finally reunites with Eric in New York, she appears to have mixed feelings. At times, she shows significant affection toward her husband and cooks a big meal for him and his roommates, Michel and Dany. Yet she is also somewhat cold, and seems preoccupied with thoughts of those she left behind in Haiti, including the neighbor.

Michel – Michel is a man who grew up in Port-au-Prince and moves to the US when he is 19. He is depicted at three different stages of his life in the book: once when he is 12 years old (on the day the Duvalier regime ended), once when he is in his 20s and living with Eric and Dany in Papa and Anne's house in Brooklyn, and once when he is 30, married, and expecting a child. As a child, Michel is troubled by the fact that he is the illegitimate son of Monsieur Christophe, a man in his neighborhood who is powerful due to the fact that he runs a water station. He forms attachments easily; he idolizes Romain, his 18-year-old best and "only" friend, and is in love with several people, including Romain's aunt Vesta and his own distant cousin, Rosie. Michel's friendship with Romain ends when Romain disappears on the day the dictatorship ends. He never sees Romain again or knows if he is alive, but he plans to name his son after him.

Dany – Dany is a young man whose parents were killed by the Duvalier regime. He is raised in Haiti by his aunt Estina, who eventually compels him to leave the country and immigrate to the US in order to get away from the people who murdered his parents. Ironically, while living in Brooklyn, he ends up a tenant

of the very man (Papa) he believes killed them. He returns to Haiti to visit Estina and tell her this, and during this time Estina dies, leaving Dany profoundly stricken by grief.

The Preacher – The preacher is the minister of a large church in Bel Air, a poor neighborhood in Port-au-Prince. He is Anne's stepbrother, though he left the family home at 14 years old. He broadcasts sermons over the radio in which he tells stories from the Bible about people who stood up against tyrants—a thinly-veiled message to Haitians about the importance of resisting the Duvalier regime. The preacher's activities lead to his wife being killed by poisoning, which fills the preacher with guilt, although he remains unsure if he regrets his principled opposition to the regime. The preacher himself becomes a target, and Papa is assigned to kill him. However, once Papa arrests the preacher and brings him to Casernes (a military barrack serving as a prison), the government becomes worried about turning the preacher into a martyr, and thus they order him to set the preacher free. Papa intends to do so, but the preacher ends up maiming Papa with a broken chair leg, leaving him with a **scar** that reminds him of his violent past for the rest of his life. In retaliation, Papa shoots the preacher. Despite the torture he endures and the position of utter powerlessness he is placed in before he dies, the preacher feels a sense of hope at the end of his life, based in the continued existence of kindness shown by people like Léon and the other prisoners at Casernes.

Nadine Osnac – Nadine is a young Haitian American nurse living in Canarsie, Brooklyn. An extremely isolated person, she seems to be struggling to cope with a recent abortion and breakup with her ex-boyfriend, Eric. She has a strained relationship with her parents, who sold their house in Port-au-Prince in order to pay for her nursing degree. Although she faithfully sends them over half her paycheck every month, she doesn't call them or reply to the letters they regularly send.

Emmanuel Constant – Emmanuel Constant led a militia in Haiti that brutally oppressed supporters of Haiti's first democratically-elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was in exile. Constant escaped to New York, although he was tried in absentia in Haiti and given a life sentence. Residents of the Haitian diasporic neighborhood in Brooklyn put up "Wanted" posters of Constant, and in the book Ka thinks she seems him at Midnight Mass. However, after Anne gets a closer looks, she determines the man is not actually Constant.

Estina Estème – Estina is Dany's aunt, who raises him in Haiti after his parents are killed. A blind woman and midwife, she is a highly respected and adored member of her village community. Like Dany, she sleep talks. After Dany moves to the U.S., Estina also informally adopts Claude, a young Haitian American man deported back to Haiti after killing his father. Estina dies during Dany's visit back to Haiti, leading the villagers to believe that she "called" him back to see him before she passed.

Claude – Claude is a young Haitian American man who was deported back to Haiti after murdering his father. Claude was 14 and living in New York when the incident took place. He was addicted to crack and was also selling drugs, and when his father seized his stash and refused to give it back, Claude shot him. Despite being deported and spending three months in prison in Haiti, Claude considers himself "the luckiest fucker alive." This is because he received the chance to profoundly transform his life at a young age. Indeed, the friendly, kind, and understanding way he behaves indicates that he has indeed transformed into a much better person.

Beatrice Saint Fort – Beatrice Saint Fort is a reclusive Haitian American bridal seamstress who lives in Queens. Back in Haiti, she was tortured by a Tonton Macoute after she rejected his advances, and she remains profoundly traumatized by this incident. This trauma results in paranoia that the man follows her everywhere she goes, always moving into abandoned houses in her neighborhood. She even decides to retire from her wedding dress business because she believes this is the only way the man will stop following her. Despite her intense trauma and mental instability, Beatrice is a talented woman with a thriving business. She credits her success to her practice of taking her time over everything she does.

Aline Cajuste – Aline Cajuste is a young Haitian American woman who is a recent college graduate and journalism intern at the *Haitian American Weekly*. Reeling from her recent breakup with a much older girlfriend who was a professor, Aline goes to interview Beatrice about her business and retirement. Born in Somerville, Massachusetts, Danticat notes that Aline has had quite a sheltered life. At first Aline dismisses Beatrice as "a bit nutty," but over the course of their interview she develops a deeper and more sympathetic interest in her and decides she wants to learn more about profoundly traumatized people like her.

Romain – Romain is Michel's best and "only" friend. The book depicts him at 18 years old. He is a kind, protective, older brother figure to Michel. He is very intelligent and somewhat rebellious, deeply troubled by the burden of being Regulus' son. When the Duvalier regime ends, he disappears, and Michel never sees him again.

Rézia – Rézia is a Haitian woman who, after immigrating to the U.S., runs a Haitian restaurant in Manhattan. She meets Mariselle and Freda in a GED class, and the three become close friends. Rézia eventually tells the story of how she was raised by an aunt who ran a brothel in Haiti, and how her aunt once allowed a government agent to rape her after he threatened to put the aunt in prison.

Mariselle – Mariselle is a Haitian immigrant and member of the same GED class as Rézia and Freda. Back in Haiti, her husband was killed for painting an unflattering portrait of the president, forcing Mariselle to flee to the U.S. She eventually gets a job in a gallery in New York, where she sells some of her husband's

paintings.

Freda – Freda is a young Haitian immigrant who befriends Rézia and Mariselle in her GED class. Back in Haiti, Freda was a funeral singer, an occupation she began after singing at her own father's funeral. Freda feels great sadness over her father's death and the political situation in Haiti, but she finds optimism via her new friends in New York.

Léon – Léon is a shoeshine man who performs small acts of political resistance, such as pouring slop on the heads of Volunteers. He finds it difficult to reconcile his opposition to the Duvalier regime with the fact that his own son is a Volunteer. He is a close friend of the preacher, and informs Anne when he is arrested.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Regulus – Regulus is Romain's father and a Tonton Macoute. He beat and abandoned Romain and Romain's mother, and killed some of their family members. When the Duvalier regime ends, Regulus shoots himself in order to avoid being captured and tortured by those seeking revenge on government forces.

Freda's Father – Freda's father was a fisherman who was arrested and presumably tortured by government forces in Haiti. Following this incident, he sailed out to sea and never returned, in what could have been suicide.

Freda's Mother – Freda's mother lives in Haiti. When Freda was young, she used to tell her that her dead father was in the sky eating coconut with God.

Rosalie – Rosalie is Papa's superior, one of the few women with such a position of power within the government.

Flavio Salinas – Flavio Salinas is the manager of the hotel in Florida where Papa and Ka stay.

Officer Bo – Officer Bo tries to help Ka find Papa after he goes missing in Florida.

Gabrielle Fonteneau – Gabrielle Fonteneau is a famous Haitian American actress who buys the **sculpture** Ka made of Papa. After learning that Ka doesn't have the sculpture, she treats her coldly.

Mrs. Fonteneau – Mrs. Fonteneau is Gabrielle's mother. When Ka and Papa go to have lunch with the Fonteneaus at their home in Florida, Mr. Fonteneau and Mrs. Fonteneau greet them warmly, sharing fond memories of Haiti.

Mr. Fonteneau – Mr. Fonteneau is Gabrielle's father. Like Mrs. Fonteneau, he is a Haitian immigrant to the U.S. who maintains a strong bond to his homeland.

Nadine's Father – Nadine's father still lives in Haiti. He suffers from a number of health problems.

Nadine's Mother – Nadine's mother frequently writes to her daughter, begging her to resume their "routine" of regular phone conversations. However, she also fails to understand the forms of emotional support Nadine craves, thereby inadvertently pushing her further away.

Josette – Josette is a friendly young Haitian American nurse who also works in the Ear, Nose, and Throat hospital ward with Nadine. She continually tries to reach out to Nadine, but is always rebuffed.

Ms. Hinds – Ms. Hinds is a patient Nadine cares for after a surgery that left her unable to talk. Ms. Hinds is immensely distressed by this, even though Nadine assures her that she can learn to talk again via an artificial larynx.

Old Zo – Old Zo is a man who lives in the same village as Estina.

Ti Famn (Denise Auguste) – Ti Famn (a nickname that means "little woman") is Old Zo's daughter. Dany takes a liking to her and requests to know her real name, which is Denise Auguste.

Marjorie Voltaire – Aline's boss Marjorie Voltaire is the editor of *The Haitian American Weekly*. Beatrice Saint Fort made her wedding dress.

Michel's Mother – Michel's mother is a poor woman who Michel believes suffers deeply from her unreciprocated love for Monsieur Christophe, the father of her son. She dies from a stroke when Michel is a teenager.

Vaval – Vaval is Michel's cousin.

Rosie – Rosie is Michel's distant cousin. At 12, he is in love with her and wants to marry her when he is older.

Monsieur Christophe – Monsieur Christophe is a powerful man in Michel's neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, who runs a water station. Although he doesn't acknowledge it, he is Michel's father.

Tobin – Tobin is Monsieur Christophe's (legitimate) son, and thus Michel's half-brother.

Vesta – Vesta is Romain's aunt. Michel is in love with her.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

GRIEF, MEMORY, AND ERASURE

Through a set of linked stories about Haitians during and after the oppressive Duvalier regime, *The Dew Breaker* considers how people respond to traumatic memories from the past, particularly violence and death. Some of the characters, such as Papa and Claude, feel grief over acts of violence they have committed, whereas many others, including Anne, Dany, Beatrice, Rézia, Mariselle, and Freda, grieve over losing loved ones to violence or being

subject to violence themselves. Meanwhile, almost all the characters are united by a collective grief over the immensely destructive impact that the dictatorship had on Haiti. The book suggests that grieving is vitally necessary in the aftermath of trauma, but that not everyone knows how to grieve. Indeed, the different stories in the book indicate that one must learn how to grieve, particularly in response to the temptation to erase or repress memories.

Attempting to erase the past is most prominently explored through Papa's attempt to erase his own past of being a "dew breaker," a torturer and killer working for the Duvalier regime. The many ways in which Papa attempts to erase the true story of his life include escaping Haiti to being a new life in the U.S., lying about where in Haiti he's from, lying about how he got the scar on his face, and not making any friends outside his barbershop business. Indeed, his daughter Ka notes that both Papa and her mother, Anne, do not have any friends and do everything possible to avoid drawing attention to themselves, including refusing to join the neighborhood tradition of putting up elaborate decorative lights for Christmas.

The development of Papa's character ultimately shows that attempting to erase the past never really works. Ka notes that her parents' decision not to befriend anyone leaves them feeling lonely and restless. Anne is isolated by the fact that she is "nurturing a great pain that she could never speak about." Erasing a person's identity—whether one's own or someone else's—is an act of violence, as shown by the reference to "face scalping," which the militia leader Emmanuel Constant did to stop victims from being identified. Erasure is confirmed to be unsustainable when Papa is eventually forced to tell Ka the truth about his crimes, and even ends up as the landlord of Dany, the son of two people he killed. Although the book does not reveal if there is ever a confrontation between Dany and Papa, the fact that they end up in such close proximity (and Dany figures out Papa's identity) shows that it is impossible to actually erase the past.

Yet even as Papa attempts to erase the truth, it is clear that he dreams of being able to properly grieve and atone. Indeed, the book shows that the desire and need to grieve is an important part of being human. This partially explains Papa's obsession with the Ancient Egyptians, who he claims were similar to Haitians because "they knew how to grieve." This statement arguably emerges from a place of envy, as many of the Haitians depicted in the book actually struggle to know how to grieve. This struggle is reflected in Dany's observation about Claude, a young Haitian-American man who killed his father: "Perhaps Claude too had never learned how to grieve or help others grieve."

The book provides different examples of acts of commemoration and grief to show that grieving is both highly important and difficult to get right. The **sculpture** Ka makes of her father comes from grief, and is designed to memorialize the period she believes he spent in prison. Papa's first reaction is to erase the sculpture, just as he erased the truth of his past, by throwing it into the sea. However, the sculpture eventually ends up bringing the truth to the surface, as it forces Papa to finally admit that he was a perpetrator and not a victim of state violence.

The other displays of grief depicted in the novel highlight the great variety among different forms of grieving, suggesting that grief is an experiment, and that there is no single right way of doing it. One such expression is singing: Freda becomes a funeral singer after singing at her own father's funeral. While out drinking with her girlfriends, she decides to sing her own funeral song. This suggests that certain forms of grieving can be a way of accepting our own deaths, and that grieving can take place in anticipation of an event like death, not just after it.

Another example of a different kind of grief is the mock funeral that takes place in Haiti when Baby Doc and his wife go into exile. As Michel and Romaine describe witnessing the funeral, it becomes clear that the event is not a straightforward process of mourning the ousted dictator, but rather an attempt to deal with the enormous amount of trauma that built up over the Duvalier era and the radical uncertainty of life in Haiti once the regime suddenly comes to an end.

The novel does show that erasure is the ultimate fate of all human life. This is explicitly illuminated when Freda mentions that her mother says people have three deaths: physical deaths, burial, and the "the [death] that will erase us completely and no one will remember us at all." However, while permanent erasure awaits everyone, in the meantime it is important to honor the past through grief rather than repressing or effacing it. While grief might not be a simple or easy process, the need to cope with loss is universal to all humanity. Finding ways to grieve is thus an essential part of human existence.

VICTIMS VS. PERPETRATORS

The Dew Breaker explores how life under a dictatorship and its aftermath unsettles clear distinctions between victims and perpetrators. While the book at no point suggests that perpetrators of violence should be excused for their actions, it also highlights how the Haitian Duvalier regime compelled many people to commit violence who might not otherwise have done so. Furthermore, it shows how the regime forced people to make difficult or impossible choices, which often placed them in the role of both victim *and* perpetrator. Instead of suggesting that the regime made personal ethics irrelevant or impossible, it highlights the necessity of critically reflecting on the ethical decisions people make in the highly complicated context of a dictatorship.

Papa was one of the many people tasked with enacting state violence on the civilian population. Yet after fleeing Haiti and

making a new life in the U.S., he not only covers up his role as a perpetrator, but in fact pretends that he was a *victim* of the regime. Clearly, this doubles down on his already horrifying crimes. For his daughter, Ka, realizing that her father was not the victim she had always thought but in fact a perpetrator of violence is deeply disturbing and effectively turns her world upside down.

Over the course of the book, the details about Papa's past life working for the regime emerge, inviting the question of whether he was also a victim as well as a perpetrator. After revealing that he was "the hunter… not the prey," Papa tells Ka: "I did not want to hurt anyone." This seems plausible, as the regime placed a great deal of pressure on people to hurt others (often under the threat of death); moreover, after leaving Haiti Papa commits no further violence. Although on one hand Papa is explaining that he would never have tortured and killed people if it hadn't been for the pressure of the state, he also seems to still be in denial about the fact that he *did* commit evil. As other parts of the book show, while the dictatorship placed people into extremely difficult ethical situations, everyone has the choice not to comply with the pressure to enact harm, though this often means risking death.

Another way in which the regime pressured people to become complicit in violence emerges through Rézia's story about her childhood. In the U.S., Rézia tells her friends that back in Haiti she was raised by her aunt, who ran a brothel. One night a man in uniform raped Rézia, who was still a child, having demanded access to Rézia from her aunt under threat of death. Again, although this does not excuse the actions of Rézia's aunt, it highlights how life under the dictatorship placed normal people into extremely difficult situations. Rézia's aunt was undoubtedly complicit in violence by allowing the man access to the child under her care, yet was also a victim of the murderous violence the regime, which prevented her from protecting Rézia in the way she otherwise would have.

The book also explores how the binary of victim and perpetrator becomes mixed up through the interconnection of friends, family, and community members who have different relationships to state violence. Perhaps the most obvious example is Anne, who unwittingly marries the man (Papa) who killed her brother, the preacher, but remains married to him and helps keep his secret after learning the truth. Anne is clearly a victim of the violence that took the life of her brother, yet she is perhaps also complicit in choosing to remain married to Papa.

Another example is Anne's brother himself, the preacher whom Papa kills. Before this murder, the preacher's wife is killed by the state, and he feels a that "He could never shake from his thoughts the notion that his wife's death had been his fault." In one sense the preacher's wife's death is absolutely not his fault. The preacher cannot be blamed for the fact that they live under a repressive dictatorship where his sermons are unreasonably branded as heretical. At the same time, it is understandable why he would feel guilt over the fact that his actions led state authorities to persecute his wife.

Overall, *The Dew Breaker* illustrates the many ways in which the victim versus perpetrator binary is complicated, but it is also careful not to use this to exonerate the perpetrators. The most important way in which the novel achieves this is through representing the stories of those who refused to be complicit in state violence, even if this meant facing death. For example, Freda fled because she refused to sing at the National Palace, a choice that would have endangered her life. While the threat of death is (understandably) enough to make many people feel that they are forced to become complicit in violence, Freda took a stand: "I made a choice that I'd rather stop singing altogether than sing for the type of people who'd killed my father." Freda's use of the word "choice" serves as reminder that, while the dictatorship blurred the boundaries of victims and perpetrators, this does not mean that the choices of those living under it should escape ethical scrutiny. Danticat ultimately argues, then, that although the line between victims and perpetrators of violence is often a blurry one in particularly dire circumstances, the individual always has some level of agency in deciding which side of this binary they fall toward.

LOVE, HOPE, AND REDEMPTION

The Dew Breaker is a book filled with violence, suffering, and death, but it is not without hope. For many of the characters, hope and redemption emerge from their relationships with others—particularly parent-child relationships, but also romantic partnerships, friendships, and even connections between strangers. Yet the book also interrogates the limits of the hope and redemption that can be found through such relationships. Although connection to others can provide comfort, solidarity, and a sense of possibility, it cannot negate violence and trauma.

For Papa and Anne, having Ka provides a profound sense of hope against the backdrop of the horrors they escaped (and, in Papa's case, perpetrated) back in Haiti. They both mention the fact that her name, Ka, which means "good angel," symbolizes the hope they have invested in her. Papa tells her, "When you born, look at your face, I think, here is my ka, my good angel." Meanwhile, Anne emphasizes that she believes Papa has been redeemed from the violence he committed in Haiti by his connection to his family. She tells Ka, "You and me, we save him." Later in the novel, it emerges that Anne and Papa were only able to discuss the fact that Papa killed the preacher (Anne's brother) after Ka was born. Again, this emphasizes that the love Ka's parents have for her has a transformative impact on her them, allowing them to honestly communicate about the past—the first step toward redemption.

Hope and redemption through parent-child relationships is also explored through the concept of sacrifice. In the story about

Nadine, it is noted that Nadine's parents made enormous sacrifices in order to send her to nursing school, including selling their house and moving to the edge of a slum in Port-au-Prince. Thanks to these sacrifices, Nadine is able to move to the U.S. and work as a nurse, which in turn allows her to send money back to her parents. She interprets this as "the chance to parent them rather than have them parent her." This reversal of care and sacrifice is another way in which redemption can happen through parent-child relationships. Indeed, the particularly hopeful thing about this example is that sacrifice isn't monodirectional. Nadine's parents' sacrifice allows her to have a more prosperous future, and she in turn makes sacrifices that improve her parents' lives, as well.

It is not just the love between parents and children that provides hope and redemption, however. In the story about Freda, she and her girlfriends—who have been severely traumatized by the violence of the Duvalier regime and the new challenges of life in the US—find healing and comfort in their friendships with each other. Freda's friend Mariselle remarks that Haiti "is not a lost cause yet [...] because it made us." Not only have the women each managed to escape the oppression of the dictatorship in order to make new lives in the U.S., but they have found love and solidarity with each other, and this provides a particularly strong foundation of redemption and hope.

Similarly, the solidarity that the preacher encounters in prison gives him hope even in what is perhaps the darkest moment of his life. He notices that the men in his prison cell are from all walks of life, that some of them have evidently been imprisoned for a long time, and that most of them likely have no hope of getting out. Yet despite this desperate situation, they band together and care for one another, and when it seems as if the preacher is being released, they are happy for him. The preacher's connection to the other prisoners, however brief, reminds him of the goodness of the human spirit at a time when he is otherwise surrounded by ruthlessness and cruelty.

At the same time, *The Dew Breaker* also recognizes the limits of hope and redemption forged through love. When Baby Doc goes into exile, Michel is left wondering what will happen to all the people who participated in carrying out state violence. He thinks in particular of a character called Regulus, wondering if he will repent and ask for his children's forgiveness, "both for what he'd done to them and for what he had done to the country." Rather than seeking repentance, Regulus shoots himself.

The task facing Papa is very similar to that facing Regulus, and for a long time Papa likewise chooses to avoid confronting the reality of what he has done. Once his lies are exposed and Ka knows the truth about him, she struggles to deal with this. Papa may have found hope and redemption through his love for her, but she is not sure that she can feel the same way about him. Indeed, the book ends on an ambiguous note regarding Ka's relationship to her father—a reminder that remaining hopeful and redeeming one's mistakes are sometimes impossible, and that certain acts can permanently destroy a loving relationship.

VIOLENCE VS. CARE

The Dew Breaker contains harrowing depictions of violence, but also many descriptions of care. In a sense, violence and care represent the process of destruction versus reconstruction, on both personal and societal levels. Through violence, the Duvalier regime was a powerfully destructive force, and in its aftermath the book's characters are left trying to rebuild themselves, their lives, and their country. Yet Danticat also shows how violence and care, despite being opposites, have a very close relationship with one another. This is particularly emphasized via the fact that so much of the violence in the novel is *intimate*—not just in the sense that much of it is committed within intimate relationships (such as Claude killing his father), but in the sense that all violence involves a sort of perverse physical intimacy.

The connection between violence and care emerges early in the book through the juxtaposition of Papa and Nadine's stories. The description of Papa's career as a torturer includes the claim that he was "just one of hundreds who had done their jobs so well that their victims were never able to speak of them again." Nadine, meanwhile, is a nurse who works in an Ear, Nose, and Throat ward, and is often caring for patients who wake up from surgery to realize that they can no longer speak. Although in some sense the description of Papa's victims uses speaking as a euphemism (as most of his victims end up dead), this parallel nonetheless illustrates a significant connection between these two very different types of work. Papa takes away people's ability to speak as a method of political oppression, whereas Nadine cares for people whose loss of speech is a necessary side effect of medical treatment. In caring for people, Nadine allows them to keep living, helping them to thrive. In this sense, although Papa and Nadine both "silence" people, the work they do has two completely oppositional effects.

At the same time, the descriptions of Nadine's work highlight that many of her patients experience the care they receive at the hospital as a kind of violence. Most are frightened and horrified to realize that they can no longer speak (as is true of Ms. Hinds, the patient featured in the story). They feel violated by the procedures they undergo, and are left in both physical and psychic pain afterward. While there is of course no real equivalent between torture and medical procedures, it is significant that medical patients can feel violated and harmed as if they had been inflicted with violence.

The connection between violence and care is further illuminated by one of the torture victim's descriptions of why Papa was so cruel: "He'd wound you, then try to soothe you with words, then he'd wound you again. He thought he was

God." This quotation shows that Papa weaved care into his torture procedure in order to enact even *more* cruelty. This highlights how, in certain contexts, care can actually be a means to enact violence. The implication of this is disturbing, because it suggests that the kindness and care Papa shows after his life as a torturer ends (to Anne, Ka, and his barbershop clients) may not be as far removed from his practice as a torturer as the reader might at first assume.

The connection between violence and care is also revealed to work in the other direction, wherein what might initially seem like violence is actually a form of care. The best example of this comes in the description of the preacher's brief time in prison. After being taken from the church and brutally beaten, the preacher passes out in his prison cell. He wakes up to the feeling of warm water on his face and goes to drink, only to realize it is urine. At first it seems that this is an act of the prison guards, further torturing and degrading the preacher by urinating on him. However, afterward he realizes that it is actually his fellow prisoners, who believe that urinating on wounds can serve as a healing, "ritual cure." Once again, the close proximity between violence and care emerges through the fact that they both involve physical intimacy. Certain acts can only be understood as either violence or care once the context in which they are taking place is made clear.

Violence and care are also linked due to the fact that so much of the violence depicted in the book takes place in an intimate context. Many of the perpetrators of violence have some kind of intimate connection to their victim. For example, Claude kills his father, and the preacher Papa kills ends up becoming his brother-in-law. As the book notes, the power of the regime operates through the fact that those who serve it must be ready to kill their own family members in order to demonstrate their loyalty. In other words, the violence of the regime is intensified by the fact that it colonizes every aspect of a person's life—even their intimate relationships.

Meanwhile, because of the pervasive nature of the violence of the Duvalier regime, many nonviolent characters have to negotiate their intimate proximity to violent people. This is obviously true of Anne and is also true of Léon, the shoeshine man whose son works for the Duvalier regime. Léon reasons that although he deplores what his son does, "he still had to let the boy come home now and then for the boy's mother's sake and still had to acknowledge that maybe it was because of his boy that he'd not yet been arrested." The moral challenge of having a violent son becomes even more complicated by the fact that Léon's proximity to his son may be saving his life. In this sense, the violence that Léon's son enacts on others becomes a perverse sort of care for his father, protecting Léon from violence. Once again, the pervasive nature of violence under Duvalier and the strange overlap between violence and care mean that neither violence nor care can be totally extricated from one another.

DIASPORA, INTERCONNECTION, AND HAUNTING

Although some of *The Dew Breaker* is set in Haiti and some takes place during the Duvalier regime (1957-1986), most of the stories in the book are set in the U.S. after the regime has ended. In this sense, the book explores how members of the Haitian diaspora remain connected to one another and are haunted by the terrible past of the Duvalier years. Indeed, interconnection is shown to be both a positive and negative force in the novel. On one hand, it allows the characters to create diasporic communities and remain connected to Haiti even once they move to the U.S. Yet at the same time, it also highlights the inescapability of the past. Perhaps the one thing that unites all the characters is their inability to leave Haiti behind, no matter how much they try to reinvent themselves or how far they go to escape.

The primary way in which the book explores the theme of diaspora and the sense of shared pain associated with being part of a displaced community is through its structure and form. As a book of linked narratives connected by one broad arc (the story of Papa and Ka), *The Dew Breaker* is both a novel *and* a set of short stories. In some stories, it is obvious how the characters, setting, and plot relate to other parts of the book, whereas in others it is less clear. Each story has a different narrator, and each is set in a different time period, such that reading the book involves moving non-chronologically through history.

The effect of this stylistic choice is to show how seemingly disparate people and narratives are far more interwoven than they might at first appear. Indeed, in several places the connection between characters is only revealed toward the end of the book, or is so subtle that the reader could almost miss it. For example, the first hint given that the preacher Papa killed was Anne's brother lies in the fact that, like Anne, the preacher had a brother who drowned when he was three years old. This does not yet provide incontrovertible proof that the preacher and Anne are related, only establishes a hint that they might be. In a sense, the book is like a puzzle in which the full story is revealed through many disparate strands.

As a puzzle made of seemingly disconnected parts, then, the structure of the novel serves as a metaphor for diaspora. Many of the characters come to the U.S. alone, some of them hoping to get away from everything they left behind in Haiti. Yet they find themselves drawn back together, either by accident or on purpose. Much of the novel is set in the parts of Brooklyn in which Haitian immigrants are most concentrated, namely Flatbush, East Flatbush, and Crown Heights, and especially Nostrand Avenue. This part of Brooklyn becomes a Haitian community all of its own—one haunted by the same connections that existed back in Haiti itself.

The haunting and interconnection that take place via diasporic

community is best illustrated by the character of Dany, the son of parents whom Papa killed. Following his parents' deaths, Dany did not want to leave Haiti, but his aunt Estina encouraged him to do so in order to get away from the people who murdered his parents. Ironically, Dany ends up becoming the tenant of Papa—the exact person who murdered his parents. Through the interconnection of diaspora, home cannot be escaped, but is rather a constant, haunting presence.

Dany's story echoes that of Beatrice, the wedding dressmaker who is convinced that the prison guard who tortured her back in Haiti (who could be Papa) is constantly following her around, always moving to the same neighborhood as her. It is unclear whether Beatrice's fears are based in reality or are just paranoia, but in a way it doesn't matter. Beatrice is so haunted by the man and memories that she hoped to leave behind that they put her life on a standstill, compelling her to give up dressmaking as she believes this is the only way she will be able to truly "disappear" and the lose the man for good.

Yet while many of the characters desperately try to escape the haunting and interconnection that characterize life in the diaspora, others crave it. This idea is explored through Claude, the young man who was born in Haiti, moved to the U.S. as a child, and then moved back to Haiti after killing his father. When Dany meets Claude, Claude is still struggling to fit in back in Haiti, partly because he doesn't speak Creole. He admits to Dany: "I wish I'd stayed in touch more with my people, you know, then it wouldn't be so weird showing up here like I did." His words imply that maintaining a connection to home is important, particularly because one might need it. Claude elaborates on how this is true by explaining that even though he barely knew his family members in Haiti, they took him in despite "what I did" (killing his father). While Claude is haunted by the terrible act of violence he committed, he also relies on the connection to his family and home in his hour of need.

Overall, the book shows that the interconnection of different people through the diaspora can be both comforting and terrifying, painful and necessary. Haitians living in the diaspora may indeed feel haunted by an inescapable past and connection to their country, but this is never purely a bad thing. It can in fact be a vital lifeline in a difficult, brutal, and hostile world.

SYMBOLS

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

PAPA'S SCAR

One of the very first things readers learn about Papa is that he has a scar across his face, which Ka says is from the year he spent in prison in Haiti. By the end of the book, it is revealed that the scar was actually caused by the preacher slashing Papa's face with a broken chair leg after Papa arrested him and brought him to prison. So while the story Papa tells Ka about getting the scar in prison is *technically* true, it is misleading. It implies that Papa was the victim of persecution when in fact, he was the perpetrator. In this sense, the scar symbolizes how violence cannot be easily understood outside of the context in which it occurs. While the scar makes Papa look like a victim—and while it is technically true that in the moment of being struck with chair leg, he was a victim of violence—the overall context of the preacher's arrest shows that Papa was the perpetrator.

The scar also highlights important points about the themes of memory, erasure, and haunting. When Papa kills the preacher, the preacher feels vindicated by the fact that he managed to scar Papa's face. He knows that this means that for the rest of Papa's life, Papa will be unable to avoid the memory of the brutality he inflicted on others. Ka's descriptions of how her father hates having pictures taken of himself and always hides his scar proves this to be right. Although Papa lies about the scar's origin, he cannot escape the its power as a reminder of the past. Indeed, just as the preacher predicted, the fact that Papa has to lie about the scar makes him even more inescapably aware of the truth. By inflicting the scar on Papa's face (rather than another part of his body), the preacher ensures that Papa cannot cover it up. The scar becomes part of who Papa is—a core element of his identity. In a sense, this is the opposite of the "face scalping" practiced by Emmanuel Constant's militia. While face scalping involved removing the skin from the face of a corpse in order to make it unidentifiable, the scar makes visible the reality of who Papa is—a dew breaker, someone who tortured and killed people for a living.

THE SCULPTURE

The sculpture is the wooden statue Ka carves of Papa and sells to Gabrielle Fonteneau, a well-known Haitian American actress. It depicts Papa as Ka imagines him in prison, and thus represents the image of Papa has in her mind—an image that is soon revealed to be false. The sculpted version of Papa depicts him on his knees, with a "downcast" look. It conveys what Ka believes was Papa's suffering in prison, but also his dignity and inner strength. In reality, Papa was a torturer, not a prisoner. The reality of what he actually looked like inside prison would thus be aggressive, frightening, powerful, and distinctly undignified. Another important aspect of the sculpture is that Ka leaves the imperfections in the wood, without smoothing them over. This contrasts with Papa's attitude toward his own life. Rather than accepting his imperfections, Papa attempts to smooth them over with untruths.

Gabrielle Fonteneau wants to buy the sculpture because it reminds her of her own father. In depicting the man Ka believes

Papa was, she has managed to create a true image of *a* father—just not her own. The sculpture ends up being the reason why Papa finally reveals to Ka that he has been lying about his past throughout her life. Crucially, he doesn't tell her straight away, but rather steals the sculpture and submerges it in a lake first, ruining it forever. This act highlights the extreme lengths to which Papa is willing to go in order to bury and conceal the past—even harming Ka's career in the process. At the same time, although the sculpture remains at the bottom of the lake, its power transcends this fate. Even submerged, it still forces Papa to tell Ka the truth. As a result, the sculpture represents the way in which the truth will force itself out into the open, even if it takes many years.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Dew Breaker* published in 2005.

The Book of the Dead Quotes

I was born and raised in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and have never even been to my parents' birthplace. Still, I answer "Haiti" because it is one more thing I've always longed to have in common with my parents.

Related Characters: Ka Bienaimé (speaker), Anne Bienaimé/Landlady, Papa

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Ka and her father, Papa, are on a trip to Florida when Papa goes missing. A police officer named Officer Bo asks Ka where she and her father are from, and in this quotation she explains why she tells him "Haiti," even though she's never been there. Ka both is and isn't connected to Haiti: as emerges later in the book, her parents almost never talk about their life there, and as Ka mentions here, she has never visited. At the same time, the neighborhood of East Flatbush is the heart of the Haitian diaspora in New York. Because of this, Ka experiences a version of her homeland through the diasporic community in which she grows up.

Ka's admission that she longs to have something "in common with [her] parents" shows that she feels isolated and cut off from them somehow. As an only child, she is left out of her parents' close but secretive relationship. This will become important when the first twist of the book is revealed later in this story.

My father has never liked having his picture taken. We have only a few of him at home, some awkward shots at my different school graduations, with him standing between my mother and me, his hand covering his scar. I had hoped to take some pictures of him on this trip, but he hadn't let me. At one of the rest stops I bought a disposable camera and pointed it at him anyway. As usual, he protested, covering his face with both hands like a little boy protecting his cheeks from a slap. He didn't want any more pictures taken of him for the rest of his life, he said, he was feeling too ugly.

Related Characters: Ka Bienaimé (speaker), Anne Bienaimé/Landlady, Papa

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Ka and her father, Papa, are traveling through Florida to deliver a sculpture Ka has made of him. When Papa goes missing, Ka speaks to a police officer, who asks if she has any photos of him. Here Ka explains why practically zero pictures of her father exist. The scar that she believes he got while in prison in Haiti makes Papa feel embarrassed. Not only does he try to cover it up with his hands, but it makes him not want to have any pictures taken of him at all. This passage portrays Papa in a deeply sympathetic light, positioning him as a victim of violence and its ensuing legacy of shame and trauma.

Ka's insistence on taking pictures of her father even when he doesn't want to is founded in her love for him and belief that he is not "ugly." In this sense, Ka's relationship with her father supports the idea that love—and particularly the connection between parents and children—can be a redemptive, healing force in the aftermath of violence. Yet as will soon become clear, Papa's shame about his scar and his unwillingness to be photographed are actually grounded in a very different reason than Ka assumes.

I'd used a piece of mahogany that was naturally flawed, with a few superficial cracks along what was now the back. I'd thought these cracks beautiful and had made no effort to sand or polish them away, as they seemed like the wood's own scars, like the one my father had on his face. But I was also a little worried about the cracks. Would they seem amateurish and unintentional, like a mistake? Could the wood come apart with simple movements or with age? Would the client be satisfied?

Related Characters: Ka Bienaimé (speaker), Papa

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Here Ka describes the sculpture she made of Papa, the reason for their trip to Florida. She explains that she made an artistic decision to preserve the "cracks" and "flaws" in the wood, although she worries that this may mean that the sculpture is not taken seriously as an artwork or that the cracks will ultimately cause it to come apart. Ka's decision to maintain the cracks in the artwork is a metaphor for how she chooses to accept imperfections, mistakes, and other difficult aspects of life. This is a contrast to her parents, who—as Danticat will soon show—attempt to "smooth over" and conceal such issues.

At the same time, Ka's uncertainty in this passage shows that the decision to accept imperfections and flaws is not easy. In fact, it is hard to feel totally assured of such a position, and impossible to know if it will have negative consequences in the future.

Water Child Quotes

❝ This was what they'd sacrificed everything for. But she always knew that she would repay them. And she had, with half her salary every month, and sometimes more. In return, what she got was the chance to parent them rather than have them parent her. Calling them, however, on the rare occasions that she actually called rather than received their calls, always made her wish to be the one guarded, rather than the guardian, to be reassured now and then that some wounds could heal, that some decisions would not haunt her forever.

Related Characters: Nadine's Father, Nadine's Mother, Nadine Osnac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Nadine is a nurse who lives in Brooklyn. Her parents, who live back in Haiti, sold their house and moved to a neighborhood bordering a slum in order to pay for her nursing school. Every month they write her a letter pleading her to call them, but although she reads the letters over and over, she cannot bring herself to do it. Here, the narrator reflects on the mutual sacrifice that characterizes Nadine's relationship with her parents. Her parents made an enormous sacrifice for her, but—at least in Nadine's mind—this sacrifice came with an expectation or even guarantee that she would return the favor by supporting them.

Nadine's relationship with her parents thus helps illustrate the theme of love and redemption. The reciprocal sacrifices they make show how love makes sacrifice and struggle worth it. At the same time, Nadine's relationship with her parents is far from straightforward, as this quotation shows. While she is eager for the opportunity to swap roles in the parent/child dynamic through *financially* supporting them, she craves being the "one guarded" in an emotional sense. Nadine seems to feel that her financial success makes her parents believe that she is not emotionally vulnerable. In reality, she is isolated, lonely, and "haunt[ed]" by (what is indicated to have been) a recent abortion.

The Book of Miracles Quotes

❝ Anne had closed her eyes without realizing it. Her daughter knew she reacted strongly to cemeteries, but Anne bad never told her why, since her daughter had already concluded early in life that this, like many unexplained aspects of her parents' life, was connected to "some event that happened in Haiti."

Related Characters: Papa , Ka Bienaimé, Anne Bienaimé/ Landlady

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Anne, Papa, and Ka are driving to Christmas Eve Mass, and on the way, they pass a cemetery. Anne always closes her eyes when they drive through a cemetery. This is because, when she was a child, her three-year-old brother drowned in the ocean in Haiti, and she imagines that his spirit still wanders the earth looking for his own grave. Here the narrator explains that, like so much about Ka's parents' lives, Anne's strong reaction to cemeteries remains a mystery to Ka. The quote indicates that there is an extent to which Ka has accepted this and learned not to inquire further about it. To Ka, her parents' previous lives in Haiti constitute a void: the opposite of memory or a sense of home.

Besides, soon after her husband had opened his barbershop, he'd discovered that since he'd lost eighty pounds, changed his name, and given as his place of birth a village deep in the mountains of Leogane, no one asked about him anymore, thinking he was just a peasant who'd made good in New York. He hadn't been a famous "dew breaker," or torturer, anyway, just one of hundreds who had done their jobs so well that their victims were never able to speak of them again.

Related Characters: Papa , Anne Bienaimé/Landlady

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76-77

Explanation and Analysis

Anne, Papa, and Ka have arrived at Christmas Eve Mass. Anne loves this tradition, as it is the only time that Papa and Ka come to church services with her. As she sits in the pew, Anne begins to regret the self-imposed isolation that has characterized her and Papa's life in the U.S. In this passage, she reflects that the isolation might not even have been necessary in the first place; people happily accept Papa's invented story about his past, and no one suspects that he was actually a "dew breaker." This quotation indicates that it may be possible to erase the past, a sentiment that the rest of the book proves to be false.

The narrator's words here demonstrate how immigrating to a new country fosters the possibility of self-reinvention, theoretically allowing someone to erase the past. People's willingness to accept the idea that Papa is "a peasant who'd made good in New York" shows the power and prevalence of this kind of narrative. In reality, however, such narratives obscure a more complicated reality. Papa was *not* actually a poor peasant in Haiti, but rather someone who wielded power and perpetrated violence. Yet the narratives of upward social mobility and self-reinvention are powerful enough that no one suspects this truth. The final sentence of this quotation connects Papa's past life with Nadine's job in the hospital. Although they occur in very different contexts, both Papa and Nadine's jobs involve people losing their ability to speak.

What if it were Constant? What would she do? Would she spit in his face or embrace him, acknowledging a kinship of shame and guilt that she'd inherited by marrying her husband? How would she even know whether Constant felt any guilt or shame? What if he'd come to this Mass to flaunt his freedom? To taunt those who'd been affected by his crimes? What if he didn't even see it that way? What if he considered himself innocent? Innocent enough to go anywhere he pleased? What right did she have to judge him? As a devout Catholic and the wife of a man like her husband, she didn't have the same freedom to condemn as her daughter did.

Related Characters: Ka Bienaimé, Papa , Anne Bienaimé/Landlady, Emmanuel Constant

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

At Christmas Eve Mass, Ka thinks she sees Emmanuel Constant, a militia leader who fled Haiti, escaping punishment for the thousands of violent crimes he committed. "Wanted" flyers have been put up in the Bienaimés' neighborhood demanding that Constant be brought to justice. When Anne goes to take Holy Communion, she tries to get a better look to see if the man Ka sees really is Constant. However, in this passage, she wonders what she would even do if it really were him. Anne's mixed feelings about Constant reflect her own guilt about marrying Papa and helping to erase the record of his crimes. She acknowledges that there is an inescapable similarity between Constant and Papa, both of whom have tried to erase the truth that they were perpetrators of violence.

This passage contains key reflections on the subjective dimension of innocence and guilt. While it is widely acknowledged that Constant is responsible for brutally raping and murdering thousands of people, Anne realizes that it is still possible that he "consider[s] himself innocent." Her thoughts highlight the frightening, unjust reality that even after committing heinous crimes, a person can still decide to live a life free of guilt, regret, or shame. Of course, as a Catholic, Anne believes that human behavior will be judged and rewarded or punished by God, but as she notes here, this means that she actually feels less able to make moral judgments of others herself. At the same time, her words indicate that she may use the forgiveness commanded by her religion as a shield for properly facing up to the reality of her own choices.

Night Talkers Quotes

In spite of his huge muscles and oversized tattoos, Claude seemed oddly defenseless, like a refugee lost at sea, or a child looking for his parents in a supermarket aisle. Or maybe that's just how Dany wanted to see him, to make him seem more normal, less frightening.

Related Characters: Dany , Claude

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Dany has gone back to the rural Haitian village where he grew up in order to tell his aunt Estina that he found the man who killed his parents (Papa). However, soon after Dany arrives Estina dies. Another young man in the village, Claude, has been sent back to Haiti after reportedly killing his father in New York. Here, after Estina's funeral, Dany and Claude talk. This passage describes Dany's ability—or perhaps willingness—to see Claude more as a victim than a perpetrator. He has been wary of Claude since learning about how he killed his father, yet now sees him in a different light. Indeed, much of the way Claude appears in the book is more vulnerable than aggressive. He arrived in Haiti knowing no one, and ended up spending three months in prison in Port-au-Prince because he had nowhere else to go. He has had to struggle to acclimate to his new life, and he still doesn't speak Creole fluently.

Dany's mixed feelings about Claude reflect the often thin, subjective nature of the line between victim and perpetrator. If the story about Claude killing his father is true (Claude will soon confirm that it is), then Claude has committed a monstrous act. At the same time, the details around the case are, at this point, still mysterious, and thus it is unclear if Claude was acting in self-defense. In this light, Claude could either be a victim or a perpetrator. Furthermore, Dany's impression of him reveals that, despite his outwardly tough and menacing look, Claude is still vulnerable and childlike. Indeed, this suggests that inside every perpetrator of violence lies a victim, a vulnerable child who feels lost and alone.

Monkey Tails: February 7, 1986 / February 7, 2004 Quotes

I was twelve years old and, according to my mother, three months before my birth I had lost my father to something my mother would only vaguely describe as "political," making me part of a generation of mostly fatherless boys, though some of our fathers were still living, even if somewhere else—in the provinces in another country, or across the ally not acknowledging us. A great many of our fathers had also died in the dictatorship's prisons, and others had abandoned us altogether to serve the regime.

Related Characters: Michel (speaker), Monsieur Christophe, Michel's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Michel is recalling his memories of the day after Haiti's dictator, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, went into exile. On this day, a gang of people came through his neighborhood, looking for "macoutes"—those who'd served the regime. His best friend Romaine's father, Regulus, was a macoute. Here Michel explains that he "lost" his own father before he was even born, although he doesn't know much of the details. Indeed, it is unclear whether Michel's father died or disappeared from his life in another way. In this quotation, Michel explains how many other children he knew growing up had fathers who were missing in one way or another. Indeed, he highlights how the regime made fathers disappear, both by imprisoning or killing them *and* by recruiting them.

These words imply that serving the regime could be tantamount to cutting off one's ties with one's own family. This quotation thus highlights some of the many different kinds of victims of the regime. It shows that not all of the regime's victims were directly harmed or killed, but "lost" and harmed in many other ways, including in a secondary, indirect manner.

The Funeral Singer Quotes

My mother used to say that we'll all have three deaths: the one when our breath leaves our bodies to rejoin the air, the one when we are put back in the earth, and the one that will erase us completely and no one will remember us at all.

Related Characters: Freda (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Freda has befriended the two other Haitian women in her GED course, Mariselle and Rézia. The women have compared their harrowing stories of why they were forced to leave Haiti. To lighten the mood, Mariselle has just told a story about when she met Jackie Kennedy on her visit to Haiti. Here, Freda reflects on something her mother used to say about death, memory, and erasure. This quotation indicates that death is not a single event, but rather a process with different stages. It also shifts the focus of death to be not just about the individual who dies, but about the people they leave behind.

Recall that Freda's father died by sailing out to sea and never coming back. In this sense, he has had only one of the deaths that Freda's mother describes, the first one. Not only was his body presumably never buried, but he is still present for Freda and her mother; in this sense, he both is and isn't dead. Thinking about the broader context of the novel, this quotation helps illuminate how Haiti is portrayed as a country filled by the *presence* of dead people. While the regime caused the deaths of many thousands of Haitians, these people did not disappear from the minds of the people who knew them. In this sense, they have an important form of presence, despite being dead.

The Dew Breaker (Circa 1967) Quotes

He'd wound you, then try to soothe you with words, then he'd wound you again. He thought he was God.

Related Characters: Papa

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has described Papa's trajectory from being born to landowning peasants to joining the Miliciens (Volunteers for National Security). Papa lived an extravagant life as a Milicien, and he was exceptionally skilled at his job of torturing people. Here, one of his victims—an unnamed woman now in her 80s—describes why Papa's torture techniques were so horrifying. Her words illuminate the intertwining of violence and care, a major theme in the book.

While other parts of the book show that violence and care can be the antithesis of each other, the torture victim's words highlight how they can actually be combined to make torture even worse. In the context of torture, care can be even more painful than the infliction of violence. According to the woman, the fact that Papa felt entitled to inflict both care and violence on his victims highlights his megalomania.

But he could never shake from his thoughts the notion that his wife's death had been his fault, that she'd been killed to punish him for the things he said on his radio program or from the pulpit of his church.

Related Characters: The Preacher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

The preacher has delivered his Sunday evening church service; in the sermon, he tells the story of how his wife was killed by poisoning. Meanwhile, Papa waits in a car outside the church, ready to kill him. This passage notes that the preacher felt an unshakeable sense of guilt over his wife's death, even after her killer was caught and punished. His belief that he is responsible for her murder highlights the complicated reality of the divide between victims and perpetrators under a dictatorship. On one level, the preacher can hardly be blamed for delivering sermons that (indirectly) criticize the government and encourage revolt, particularly considering the Duvalier regime is so brutal and unjust.

At the same time, the preacher's guilt is understandable. From an objective perspective, it is likely that he *did* cause his wife's death, although the question of whether or not this was justified—and whether the preacher should actually be considered *responsible*—is, of course, more complicated. Once again, it becomes clear that life under a dictatorship makes any sort of straightforward moral assessment impossible.

Léon, the shoeshine man, wiped a tear from his eye, remembering his own son who was one of those men who roamed the night in denim uniforms and carried people away to their deaths. His son might have been one of those he'd emptied the slop jars on and who had shot in his direction in return, for a good Volunteer, it was said, should be able to kill his mother and father for the regime.

Even though Léon hated what his son did, he still had to let his boy come home now and then for the boy's mother's sake and still had to acknowledge that maybe it was because of his boy that he'd not yet been arrested.

Related Characters: Léon

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 208-209

Explanation and Analysis

At the Sunday evening service, the preacher gives a sermon about the death of his wife. He considers that his wife may have been killed in retaliation against his own political acts, and begs for her forgiveness. Hearing this, Léon, the shoeshine man who rebelled by throwing buckets of slop on a group of Volunteers, becomes emotional. Like many people in the novel, he is an opponent of the regime who is nonetheless very close to one of the perpetrators of the dictatorship's brutal violence. In one sense, this passage shows how families were torn apart by the dictatorship, with fathers and sons estranged from each other.

Yet in another light, the most difficult point raised by this quotation is the proximity that remains between the opponents and perpetrators of the regime's brutal violence. Léon and his son remain in physical proximity to each other, such that it could easily have been the case that Léon dumped slop on his own son's head and that Léon's son shot at his father. Not only that, but there are moments when Léon attempts to put political differences aside in order to welcome his son home for his wife's sake. The idea that father and son could have hurt and even tried to kill each other one day only to sit together at home the next highlights the surreal nature of life under the dictatorship, where violence and care exist in tight, uneasy juxtaposition.

He had been counting on a quick death, not one where he would disappear in stages of prolonged suffering interrupted by a few seconds of relief. He had never thought he'd have reason to hope that maybe his life might be spared. He hadn't expected the kindness of his cellmates, men of different skin tones and social classes all thrown together in this living hell and helping one another survive it.

Related Characters: The Preacher

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 224-225

Explanation and Analysis

Papa has arrested the preacher at church and taken him to Casernes, the military barracks. The preacher is in a terrible state after having been beaten and dragged along the concrete pavement, but his cellmates have tried to heal his wounds by urinating on them. Papa has now taken the preacher into his office and said that he simply wants the preacher to stop what he has been doing (broadcasting politically-charged sermons). Yet the preacher remains convinced that he is still going to be executed. In this passage, the narrator reflects that the preacher's fear is being caused by the uncertain hope he now has that he might survive. He had considered himself prepared for death, but was not expecting the horror of having a glimmer of hope of survival.

This quotation illustrates the way that hope—like care—can, under particular circumstances, be a method of intensifying torture. Being straightforwardly tortured and killed while knowing that one is going to die, is of course unbearable—but in a way, this at least relieves the profound psychic horror caused by hope and uncertainty. The kindness of the preacher's cellmates thus emerges in a complicated light. On one hand, it is reassuring to remember that even in the most abject, horrifying circumstances human kindness, selflessness, and care still exists. At the same time, this makes the situation at the barracks and the fate of the prisoners even more painful to imagine. Hope is uplifting, but it can also be unbearable.

Maybe be shouldn't have preached those "sermons to the beast," as he liked to think of them. But someone needed to stir the flock out of their stupor, the comfort that religion allowed them, that it was okay to have wretched lives here on earth so long as Heaven was glowing ahead. Maybe his death would do just that, move his people to revolt, to demand justice for themselves while requesting it for him. Or maybe his death would have no relevance at all. He would simply join a long list of martyrs and his name would vanish from his countrymen's lips as soon as his body was placed in the ground.

Related Characters: The Preacher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

Papa has told the preacher to stop broadcasting his sermons, implying that he will be released from prison. Leaning away from Papa, the preacher falls from his chair and breaks it, and using one of the broken wooden legs, he slashes Papa's face. In return, Papa throws him to the ground and shoots him. When Papa shoots the gun, the preacher thinks about the sermon he would give if he were to survive. Here, he reflects on whether he regrets his actions, and concludes that he doesn't. The preacher's mixed feelings reflect some of the most difficult questions raised in the book. The preacher knows that he has done the right thing, and as a religious man, he has confidence that he has been following the guidance of his faith.

At the same time, the preacher cannot know whether his actions and his death will ultimately have a positive impact on the world. This highlights the profound difficulty of choosing to resist a dictatorship. There is no guarantee that one's resistance will lead to anything good—in fact, it is statistically more likely that, by resisting, a person will disappear (note how Papa thinking about his name "vanish[ing] from his countrymen's lips as soon as his body was placed in the ground" reflects Freda's mother's idea about the three deaths). Fighting against the dictatorship thus takes profound courage, all the more so because it is a leap into a terrifying unknown.

And yet he had not been completely defeated. The wound on the fat man's face wasn't what he had hoped, he hadn't blinded him or removed some of his teeth, but at least he'd left a mark on him, a brand that he would carry the rest of his life. Every time he looked in the mirror, he would have to confront this mark and remember him. Whenever people asked what happened to his face, he would have to tell a lie, a lie that would further remind him of the truth.

Related Characters: Papa , The Preacher

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 227-228

Explanation and Analysis

After the preacher slashes Papa's face with the broken chair leg, Papa shoots him. As the preacher lies dying, he thinks about whether or not he regrets his actions, and reflects that he cannot know whether his death will have any positive impact, or whether he will simply be forgotten. This passage shows that the preacher has at least one victory over Papa, one last assurance of redemption. The fact that the preacher injures Papa is not the point—Papa will heal from the injury, whereas the preacher has been shot and killed. However, even from his position of absolute powerlessness, the preacher has forced Papa to confront the reality of his crimes for the rest of his life.

This is all the more true because the scar the preacher leaves is on Papa's face. It cannot be hidden, and indeed becomes an essential part of Papa's identity. Readers know from earlier in the book (though later in the chronological time of the story) that Papa is indeed deeply ashamed of his scar, and is forced to lie about it. The fact that he pretends that he received it while being tortured in prison is somewhat shocking, revealing how shamelessly Papa switches the roles of victim and perpetrator in the narrative of his life. At the same time, the preacher's prediction that Papa's lies about the scar will "further remind him of the truth" shows that Papa will not be able to escape the curse of his scar by lying. As is made clear throughout the book, a person can spend their lives trying to erase their own history or identity, but it will never fully work.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

Ka Bienaimé's father, Papa, is missing. She is sitting next to two men: the manager of the hotel where she and Papa are staying, Flavio Salinas, and a police officer, Officer Bo. Ka is Haitian, but was born in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and has never been to Haiti. She explains to Officer Bo that she and Papa are in Florida on their way to Tampa to deliver a **sculpture**. Ka is not an artist "in the way [she'd] like to be," but has created many wooden sculptures of her father. She describes her father as 6'5", with "thinning salt-and-pepper hair" and a **scar** across his cheek, which he got during the year he spent in prison in Haiti.

The opening of the book resembles something from a thriller or crime novel. The fact that the story begins with Papa already missing heightens the sense of mystery for the reader. There are clues in this passage that Papa will be a central (if not the central) character in the book. The fact that Ka has chosen to make a sculpture of him highlights his significance, and the scar he got as a prisoner prompts intrigue about his background.

Ever since Papa fell off his bed and knocked out his teeth while having one of his "prison nightmares," he has had to wear dentures. Officer Bo asks if he has any mental illnesses, and Ka responds that he doesn't. She doesn't have pictures to give the officer because Papa dislikes having his pictures taken, always putting his hands in front of his face to hide the **scar**. Officer Bo asks if there is any reason why Papa might have run away, inquiring if he and Ka had a fight. Ka reflects on the fact that the **sculpture** she made of Papa depicts him kneeling and looking down, as she imagined he would have looked in prison.

The time Papa spent in prison has clearly had a great impact on his life. It colors both his physical appearance and his behavior, making him ashamed of having his photo taken due to his scar. It is obvious that Papa is haunted by his time in prison, and that this haunting extends to Ka, as well. This is seemingly why she is so fixated on using her father as a subject in her sculpture practice.

The previous night, before Papa disappeared, he commented that their hotel room was "like paradise." The **sculpture** Ka made has cracks along its surface, which she chose not to polish down because she thinks they are "beautiful […] like the wood's own scars." Now she worries that they make the sculpture look poorly made. She is going to deliver it to Gabrielle Fonteneau, a well-known Haitian-American actress. Ka's friend, whom she knows from the school where she is a substitute art teacher, showed Gabrielle a picture of Ka's sculpture and convinced her to buy it.

The sculpture Ka made obviously comes from a deeply personal place, and reflects her own intimate, private feelings about her father. At the same time, the fact that Gabrielle Fonteneau is interested in buying it indicates that the sculpture is also significant for Haitians more generally. Through the sculpture, Ka has memorialized not only a moment in her father's life, but a moment in Haitian history.

Gabrielle is currently visiting her parents in Tampa. Ka imagined that Papa would enjoy meeting Gabrielle because he watches lots of television. Yet now Papa has disappeared, along with Ka's rental car. Ka chain-smokes while waiting for news of him in the hotel room. She lies in Papa's unmade bed, which still smells like him. When the Spanish-speaking maid enters and then quickly exits, Ka is reminded of the overly deferential way her mother, Anne, treats non-Haitian clients in her beauty salon.

It is obvious from this passage that Ka feels protective of both her parents. She may be their daughter, but she is aware of their vulnerabilities and the struggles they perhaps face as Haitian immigrants to the US.

Around midday Ka calls the salon, but an employee tells her that Anne is still at Mass. She calls her parents' house and leaves a voicemail asking Anne to call her back urgently. A few hours later Anne does so, sounding panicked. Ka explains that when she woke up that morning, Papa had disappeared. Anne assures Ka that Papa will come back. Ka then calls Gabrielle, who thanks her for travelling to deliver the **sculpture**. She adds that she loves it because the figure looks "regal and humble," like her own father. Gabrielle invites Ka and Papa to lunch the next day, and Ka promises that they will be there.

Ka and Gabrielle have never met before and seemingly live quite different lives (considering that Gabrielle is a famous actress and Ka is an artist who is, in some sense, struggling with her career). At the same time, they are connected by their Haitian heritage and the particular similarities between their fathers. This passage could indicate that Gabrielle's father also spent time in prison.

Papa loves museums, and whenever he has time off from his barbershop he goes to the Brooklyn Museum. He particularly adores the Ancient Egyptian rooms, claiming that Ancient Egyptians are like Haitians because "they know how to grieve." These trips to the museum are when Papa seems most alive.

Papa seems like a gentle person, but perhaps also a troubled one. His obsession with Ancient Egyptians appears to emerge from his own grief and unresolved issues with the past.

Papa reappears at sunset and immediately complains about the smoke in the hotel room. Ka notices that the **sculpture** is missing, and Papa says he needs to talk to her about it, because he has "objections." When Ka demands to know where the sculpture is, Papa says he will take her to it. As they get in the car, Ka thinks that Papa must be suffering from a mental illness. She remembers being a child and realizing for the first time that Papa could die.

Although earlier Papa appeared to be aware of and addressing her parents' vulnerabilities, here this is less the case. She is so stunned by Papa's behavior that she assumes he must have developed a mental illness, reminding her of the world-altering moment when she first became aware of his mortality.

Papa stops the car on the side of a highway, right next to a man-made lake. He sits on a bench in front of the lake and Ka joins him. Papa confirms that the **sculpture** is in the lake, and although Ka tries to remain composed, she panics as she realizes that it has probably broken apart in the water. Ordinarily Ka thinks that anger is a "wasted emotion." As a child, her parents never got angry with her. However, now she feels intensely angry at Papa. He says that he wants to tell her why he named her Ka, a story she has heard many times before.

Perhaps what prevents Ka from exploding with anger at Papa is the fact that he clearly has an important reason why he objected to the sculpture. As the artwork's subject, he has a claim on it that no one else does. At the same time, the manner in which he stole and destroyed it without Ka's knowledge is clearly deeply hurtful.

Papa explains that in Ancient Egypt, a *ka* is "a double of the body," which accompanies the body as a guide in the afterlife. Papa compares a *ka* to the soul. When Ka was born, Papa felt that she was his "good angel," and thus chose this name. Switching from English to Haitian Creole, Papa explains that when he first saw Ka's **sculpture**, he wanted to be buried with it and take it with him to the afterlife. He asks if Ka remembers when they read *The Book of the Dead* together. Ka has trouble remembering because she found the book boring.

Ka and Papa are obviously very close, but they also have significant differences. Ka does not seem to share Papa's interest in the Ancient Egyptians, and is somewhat resentful that he is telling the story about why he chose her name yet again. Ka seems to have a less spiritual view of the world—and this may be related to the fact that she has not experienced the same kind of grief as her father.

Suddenly worried, Ka asks if Papa has brought her here because he is dying. She immediately thinks about how she would change her life if she found out her father was terminally ill. Papa doesn't answer directly, but instead asks if Ka remembers the description of how dead people are judged in *The Book of the Dead*. The person's heart is placed on a scale, and if it's too heavy they cannot enter the next world. He then says: "I don't deserve a statue." He recalls that when they would go to the Brooklyn Museum during Ka's childhood, she would always notice the pieces missing from the Ancient Egyptian statues. He says he is like those statues, and Ka laughs at the idea that he is comparing himself to an Ancient Egyptian.

Ka's feelings about her father's strange behavior alternate between deep concern and dismissive laughter. This reveals how totally clueless she is about what is motivating him to act this way. Her thoughts about how she would change her life if she knew Papa was dying highlight how profoundly death affects people's approach to life. Whereas at moments Ka feels scornful toward her father, she would likely be more patient and forgiving if she knew he was dying.

Ka waves her arms when she laughs, and now Papa aggressively grabs her wrist, hurting her. When he sees her expression, he apologizes and says he didn't mean to hurt her, adding: "I did not want to hurt anyone." He then repeats that he doesn't deserve a **sculpture**, saying: "Your father was the hunter, he was not the prey." Ka asks what he means, and then suddenly realizes that his answer is going to explain why he and Anne have no friends and never discuss Haiti. She thinks this also has something to do with her mother's religious devotion.

The Dew Breaker *is a book full of twists, and arguably this is the most important one. Although Papa has revealed that he was, in some sense, a perpetrator rather than a victim, the details of what this actually means remain very unclear. In a sense, the mystery surrounding Papa's confession reflects Ka's inability—or unwillingness—to fully process what it means.*

Papa says that he wasn't sent to prison; rather, he *worked* in the prison, and it was one of the prisoners who gave him his scar. He says that he killed the man who gave it to him, along with many others. Ka wonders if Anne was also a perpetrator of violence, and then wonders if every time she goes to Mass, Anne is praying for Papa. She remembers a ritual from *The Book of the Dead* called "The Negative Confession," in which the dead have a chance to claim that they only did good deeds.

Ka's reflection about the "negative confession" highlights an important aspect of Papa's moral wrongdoing illuminated here. Not only did he commit murder multiple times, but he gave a false negative confession, implying that he was a good person—and a victim—rather than a perpetrator.

Ka asks about Papa's nightmares, and he replies that they are traumatic dreams about what he did to other people. She asks if Anne knows, and Papa says that she does. He told her the truth after Ka was born. Ka drives them back to the hotel, and when they get there Papa assures her that he is still her father, still Anne's husband, and that he "would never do these things now." After calling Officer Bo and Salinas to explain that Papa has been found, Ka calls her mother and asks how she can love him. Anne realizes that Papa has told Ka the truth, and tells her that Papa had been wanting to tell her for a very long time.

Ka has not only been rocked by this dramatic revelation, but she is now facing the reality that both f her parents conspired to keep such an enormous secret from her throughout her whole life. This is the kind of revelation that completely upends a person's sense of themselves and the world. It is difficult to imagine Ka being able to trust other people again after being misled by the people who supposedly love her most.

Ka thinks about how similar her parents are, how they are a "society of two." Anne tells her that she and Ka "save" Papa, and that meeting Anne made him want to stop being violent. Ka feels a loss of control similar to what happens when she is sculpting. She hangs up and decides she will need to continue the conversation later, perhaps in months or even years. The next morning, Ka tells Papa that she thinks they should go to lunch with Gabrielle and tell her in person that the **sculpture** is gone.

Although Ka is horrified by her parents' actions, here she behaves in a way that is actually similar to them. She refuses to deal with the revelation about Papa immediately, and decides to put the conversation off. At the same time, her desire to tell Gabrielle about the sculpture in person suggests she is better at confronting the truth than her parents.

Ka and Papa are silent during the drive to Gabrielle's house. As they pull up, Papa says that now Ka understands why he and Anne never went back to Haiti. Gabrielle's mother, Mrs. Fonteneau, answers the door and greets them warmly. The house is covered with Haitian paintings, along with a large portrait of Gabrielle. Mr. and Mrs. Fonteneau lead Ka and Papa out to the back terrace, where the table is laid. Mr. Fonteneau asks where Papa is from in Haiti; Papa always gives a different answer when people ask this, which Ka now realizes is to avoid people identifying him. When Papa greets Gabrielle, who is wearing a striking dress, he says: "You are one of the most splendid flowers of Haiti."

The Fonteneaus' house represents a stark contrast to the relationship the Bienaimé family have with Haiti. In this house, there are reminders of the family's homeland everywhere: in a sense, the house resembles a loving shrine to the country. Meanwhile, the Bienaimés have a much more difficult, strained relationship to Haiti. They do not visit, do not appear to celebrate their national identity in any way, and Papa even lies about where he actually comes from.

During lunch, Mr. Fonteneau asks Papa how long he has spent away from Haiti; Papa replies that it's been 37 years, and that he has not had "the opportunity" to go back. Mrs. Fonteneau says that they go often, effusively describing how much she loves being back. Ka reflects that, for Papa, returning would be like a nightmare. After lunch, Mr. and Mrs. Fonteneau show Papa around the garden, and Ka tells Gabrielle that the **sculpture** is gone. Gabrielle frowns and says that she's "very disappointed," as she wanted to give it to her father. She seems to suspect that Ka was never going to bring the sculpture in the first place.

On top of having to deal with Papa's horrifying revelation herself, Ka must now absorb Gabrielle's anger and disappointment without being able to explain that it's not her fault. This is but one of what are assumedly infinite negative ripple effects from Papa's former life and his attempt to erase the truth of this life.

Gabrielle curtly excuses herself, and Ka watches Mr. Fonteneau and Mrs. Fonteneau hand Papa a bag of lemongrass from the garden. She thinks about a chapter from *The Book of the Dead* that Papa would read to her to stop her being scared of monsters. She waves to Papa, indicating that it's time to go. As he walks toward her, he rubs the **scar** on his face. She imagines that the last person Papa hurt may have foretold (or cursed) that for the rest of his life, Papa would hide or lie about his scar in shame.

Although Papa has attempted to erase his past, the scar on his face is a permanent, unavoidable reminder of it. This reminder might not be legible to other people (who believe Papa's lie about where it came from), but thanks to the scar, Papa himself is inescapably haunted by truth.

Papa and Ka wave goodbye to Mr. Fonteneau and Mrs. Fonteneau, who may not have understood why they came in the first place. When Papa smiles, his **scar** almost disappears; as a child, Ka used to wish he would smile always. As they drive away, Ka feels full of dread and regret. She senses that Papa knows that "confessions do not lighten living hearts." She had always imagined that the difficulties of Papa's life lay in the fact that he'd moved somewhere so different from his homeland. However, now she realizes that the alien land of the US may have actually brought him relief. He sought refuge in the Ancient Egyptians as well as in Ka and Anne, who became "masks against his own face."

This passage contains important reflections on the nature of identity, using the face as a metaphor for the truth of who a person is. Once again, Papa's scar is presented as a haunting reminder of his past. At the same time, it is not one that is always prominent. Papa's attempt to use Ka and Anne as "masks against his own face" suggests that he has the possibility of redemption through his love for them, and through the happiness that momentarily causes his scar (and terrible history) to vanish.

SEVEN

It has been seven years since the man last saw his wife. He marks the passing of time in sevens; he is now 37 years old, and it is seven hours until his wife will land at JFK airport, unless her flight from Port-au-Prince is delayed or cancelled. The man shares an apartment with two other men, Michel and Dany. His landlady has said she has no problem with his wife coming as long as she is "clean." She asked if his wife would be uncomfortable living with two other men, and although he wants to tell her this is none of her business, instead he gives a polite, deferential reply. Walking away, he feels annoyed with himself.

Thus far, there is no indication that this story is linked to the first one in the book. Yet notice that the man is 37 years old, the exact number of years since Papa left Haiti. This could be a clue that, although these two stories appear unconnected, there could be some thread running through both of them.

After speaking to the landlady, the man goes to talk to Michel and Dany, indicating that he wants to make sure his wife feels comfortable. Michel plans to buy robes for him and Dany to wear out of politeness. He is the youngest, and has told the man to decorate the room a little with silk roses and vanilla incense. The three of them used to go out together, sometimes to a club that used to be called the Rendez Vous and was now named Cenegal. They stopped going after a Haitian man named Abner Louima was arrested there and beaten and raped by the police. The man tells Dany not to mention their nights out.

The story of Abner Louima is real. His brutal beating and rape caused widespread outcry in the New York City Haitian community. It brought attention to how both antiblack and specifically anti-Haitian racism could make life unbearably difficult for Haitian immigrants.

The man works two jobs; he is a night janitor at Medgar Evers College and a day janitor at King's County Hospital. He has had occasional one-night stands with women, but they "never meant much to him." Michel is now a lay minster at a Baptist church. While waiting for his wife at JFK, the man finally feels excited. He searches the crowd for women that look like the latest photos of his wife, which he has framed and hung on his bedroom walls.

The man and his wife may be married, but by spending so long apart they have become strangers to each other. In a sense, the role that man's wife has played in his life has been akin to a ghost. Her existence has lingered in the background of his life, but only as a kind of phantom. In a way, he has to re-learn that she is real.

The customs officials search the woman's suitcase. She had been advised to gift-wrap everything so it wouldn't be opened by customs, but now the official is ripping up all the paper while aggressively questioning her in bad Creole. He unwraps all the gifts she has brought for her husband, including mangoes, avocados, sugarcane, candy, and coffee beans. He throws everything away apart from a packet of chicken feathers which the man likes to twirl in his ear. Having briefly scrutinized these, he throws them away, as well. The woman walks away with her suitcase practically empty. It is only when her husband embraces her that she feels she has truly arrived in another country.

Throughout the opening of the story, Danticat has explored different ways in which the US immigration experience can be a brutal, dehumanizing process. It separates married couples, brings people into contact with racist brutality, and—as we see here—leads to callous, degrading treatment. The woman's love for her husband is transformed into something suspicious and unwelcome. She is treated like a criminal simply for trying to bring gifts for her husband.

Driving them home, the man speeds, almost crashing the car. His wife updates him on the wellbeing of their family and friends. She has gained weight during their time apart, and he can tell that she has had her hair done by a hairdresser. He cannot wait to be alone with her at home. He thinks about their honeymoon, a single night they spent at a hotel in Haiti. He moved to New York the next day, totally unaware that it would be seven years before they were reunited. It had ended up taking that long for him to get a green card. Now, at home, he points to the photographs of her he has hung on the wall and promises her: "I never forgot you for an instant."

There is a romantic, almost fairy-tale aspect to the story of the man and his wife. The fact that they only spent a single night together—their honeymoon—before being apart for seven years has a mythic quality to it. At the same time, the story is also tragically mundane. For many immigrants to the US, long periods of separation from spouses and family members is simply to be expected.

The man has bought a range of fruit juices for his wife, but she tells him she just wants water. He thinks it's a shame that the Creole word for love, *remnen*, is the same as "like," which means that he has to invent ways to emphasize how much he loves her. When they have sex, he notices that she is more confident than she was on their honeymoon. On her way to the bathroom, she passes two men wearing matching pink satin robes.

Here are the first real signs of tension between the man and his wife. His desperation to show her exactly how much he loves her indicates that he feels unable to communicate with her in the way he wants. There are palpable silences about their time apart, creating a wedge between them. Her sexual confidence may indicate that she has had sexual experience during their time apart.

Before the man leaves for work the next day, he gives his wife a set of keys and shows her how to work the stove and radio. The night before, after laughing at Michel and Dany's robes, they had sex seven more times (according to the man; she counted fewer). He didn't want to leave her, but his boss wouldn't allow him to take the day off. They will have to use the weekends for having fun and looking for an apartment together. He calls her at midday, asking what she is doing. Lying, she tells him that she is cooking, and assures him that she is not bored.

As a working-class immigrant, the man faces the same difficult, degrading conditions as his wife did when she had her gifts seized at customs. His simple desire to take some shifts off in order to spend time with his wife is callously denied. It might seem like a small thing, but it robs the man of dignity, agency, and some of the joy of being reunited with his wife.

The woman turns on the radio to the Creole-language station her husband showed her. The callers are furiously discussing a Haitian American man named Patrick Dorismond who was killed by police in Manhattan. The man comes home to find that his wife has made a large dinner for the two of them, plus Michel and Dany. This makes the men happy, as if they are "part of a family" for the first time in years. They talk enthusiastically during the meal, and afterwards they volunteer to do the dishes.

Here Danticat illustrates yet another way in which the immigration experience can be challenging. Moving to the US alone (as many immigrants are forced to do) leaves them disconnected from their families, friends, and communities, which leads to isolation and loneliness.

Once they are alone again, the man tells his wife that he works two jobs in part to distract himself from missing her, but also because he wanted to support both of them and save up to buy a house. The woman says she wants to work and that she completed a secretarial course in Haiti. However, her husband notes that until she learns English, she will only be able to find work in a Haitian restaurant or clothing factory. He falls asleep and his wife wakes him up at 9pm, when he is already supposed to be at work. His manager reprimands him for being late.

Both the man and his wife have dreams of what their life together in the US could be like. This hope has propelled them forward over the past seven years, encouraging them to work hard and helping them to endure their separation. However, the challenges they face as poor immigrants mean that it is unclear whether they will be able to make any of their dreams come true.

The woman spends the rest of the week inside the apartment, worried about getting lost if she goes outside. She hears more news about Dorismond's death on the radio. It attracts lots of attention because Dorismond is the son of a famous singer. The woman chants "No justice, no peace" while she cooks. She writes letters to friends, family, and acquaintances back in Haiti. She also writes to her neighbor from Haiti, a man who came to check on her after her husband left and she locked herself inside the house. She fell into his arms and he cared for her, putting a cold compress on her head and giving her water to drink.

The woman is gradually adjusting to life in the US, developing a daily routine and an interest in the events happening in the Haitian American diasporic community. Yet there is also a sense in which she has left her heart in Haiti—particularly considering her relationship with the neighbor back home that is revealed in this passage.

The woman wants to tell her husband about the neighbor and the long affair they had, knowing that telling him is necessary for making their future together feel "true." She and her husband met during carnival in Jacmel. During the finale each year, the day before Ash Wednesday, a crowd burns their carnival outfits, pretending to cry. The woman had been one of the "official weepers," and had given an enthusiastic, convincing performance. The man felt that the intensity of her fake grief indicated that she would be a passionate lover. However, later she told him that she didn't actually fake her tears, but rather made herself think about all the people who had hurt her.

Here Danticat explores yet another method of experiencing grief. Recall that Papa said that Haitians and Ancient Egyptians were similar because they both knew how to grieve. Perhaps the Haitian ability to grieve emerges from the fact that grieving rituals are a part of Haitian culture. The woman's words indicate that, even if such rituals are forced, performed, and seemingly fake, they can also be a way of processing genuine emotion.

One day, the man comes home from work and finds his wife sitting on his bed, staring at the pictures of herself on his wall. She doesn't respond when he kisses her, so he lays down next to her silently, not wanting to disturb her but wanting to "extinguish the carnivals burning in her head." On Saturday, the woman rises early and eagerly waits for her husband to wake up. She tells him she wants to walk around outside and eat something in the sun. They pass the landlady on the way out and the woman greets her politely before moving on.

There is a lot of mystery in this story. The narrative is just as much about what is not said than what the characters communicate. (Consider how this relates to the mystery created by the fact that neither of the main characters are named.) Like her husband, the reader is left guessing about what is going through the wife's head here.

The couple get on a bus with no particular destination in mind. They get off at Prospect Park and walk around. The woman never expected somewhere like that to exist in New York. The man notices that at 5:11 P.M. his wife takes his hand, and when they leave the park two hours later she is still holding it. He thinks about his favorite moment in the carnival back in Jacmel, when a man and a woman in wedding outfits ask attendees if they would marry them. They keep asking and asking, but those who look closely can see that the "man" is actually a woman dressed as a man, and vice versa.

The carnival ritual described here seems to be related to ideas about the gap between superficial reality and the truth. The man wants to be able to trust signs, such as the fact that his wife holds his hand for an extended period of time. Yet, like the "trick" performed at the carnival, such outward appearances can be deceiving. The man remains unaware of what is really going through his wife's head.

On the bus home the man sits across from his wife so he can look at her. She is thinking about the carnival as well, and how when they had participated in the bride and groom tradition, they had dressed as the appropriate gender, "forgoing the traditional puzzle." They could do the tradition in New York, but since the woman doesn't know English, it would have to be silent. The silence between them now seems permanent.

The story ends with a return to ideas about the impossibility of communication. The silence that has settled between the couple may not be literally permanent—they will surely speak to each other again—but on a metaphorical level, they have reached an impasse wherein they will always remain opaque to each other.

WATER CHILD

On the first day of every month, Nadine Osnac gets a letter from her mother asking her to call her parents. This month the letter updates her on her father's "unreliable" health and stresses how much they long to hear their daughter's voice. Three weeks later, Nadine still hasn't called, although she reads the letter every day while eating lunch in the hospital cafeteria. In re-reading it over and over, she hopes to find a note of "sympathy," but she cannot. Her colleague Josette comes over and greets her warmly.

Nadine's parents appear to be extending a gesture of love toward her, but her reaction indicates that it is not the way she wants to be loved. She is clearly in some way troubled or even tormented by the gesture, which is why she repeatedly reads the letter without responding.

Josette tells Nadine that Ms. Hinds is back from the ICU, and is so distressed that she had to be sedated. Both women work in the Ear, Nose, and Throat ward, and often encounter patients who wake up from surgery horrified by the fact that they can't speak. Like Nadine, Josette is Haitian. She came to the US as an infant. Nadine lives in a one-bedroom apartment in Canarsie, where she keeps the TV on all day because she likes having "voices in […] her life that required neither reaction nor response." She has given up on other activities that require a substantial amount of social interaction.

Nadine is clearly very lonely, which—as Danticat has already illustrated—can be a common part of the immigration experience. Compared to Nadine, Josette is cheerful and friendly. Perhaps she feels more at home in the US because she immigrated when she was very young. Meanwhile, Nadine's loneliness and isolation encourages her to shun social interaction.

Nadine has a voicemail from her ex-boyfriend Eric, the father of her "nearly born child." He speaks English with a strong Haitian accent, and says only a few words of greeting before hanging up. He has been calling her every month since they broke up; every time she removes the voicemail tape and puts it on an altar she has erected to their unborn child. She now has seven tapes, but has never called him back. Tonight, she almost calls her parents, dialing most of the digits of their phone number before hanging up and bursting into tears.

Here a possible reason for Nadine's self-imposed isolation and torment appears. She seems to have recently experienced a miscarriage or abortion, and in addition to memorializing the life of her unborn child, she is also mourning the end of her relationship with its father. Note that the shrine is yet another example of a grieving ritual.

A week later Nadine gets another letter from her parents. This one is "meticulously typed." In it, her mother thanks her for sending extra money, and tells her that her father has been to see a doctor about his inflamed prostate. She says that every Sunday they wait for Nadine's phone call, hoping that she will return to their "beautiful routine." The next day Nadine reads this letter at lunch, unable to eat. The other nurses have long known to leave her alone, but Josette invites her to join them for a trip into the city after work. Nadine declines and leaves the cafeteria.

Nadine seems to be concerned about her father, but this concern does not allow her to overcome her resistance to reaching out and speaking to him and her mother. Indeed, she seems to be existing in a state of paralysis, trapped between grief for her child and relationship and the torment of disconnection with her parents and other people.

Ms. Hinds, a 25-year-old patient, has been throwing things in her room. Nadine arrives to find her being held down by several nurses, including Josette. Ms. Hinds' body is completely hairless and her arms are covered in IV marks. Nadine tells the other nurses to let go of her, saying: "Let me be alone with her." They leave, and Nadine asks if Ms. Hinds wants anything. Ms. Hinds can't speak, so Nadine gets her a notepad and pen. Nadine struggles to read Ms. Hinds' handwriting, but manages to see that she has written that she can't speak. Ms. Hinds adds that she is a teacher, and then writes: "WHY SEND ME HOME LIKE THIS?"

This passage provides an important point of connection with the other stories in the book so far. Many of them have been preoccupied with the question of the inability to speak, whether in a metaphorical or (here) literal sense. Papa and Anne forbid themselves from speaking about their past, the unnamed husband and wife struggle to communicate with each other, Nadine won't speak to her parents, and Ms. Hinds has been surgically rendered mute.

Nadine explains that Ms. Hinds will now get an artificial larynx and work with a speech therapist to help her speak again. Ms. Hinds writes that she feels like a basenji, a breed of dog that doesn't bark. At home that night, Nadine calls Eric, who is probably at home resting before going to his second job as a night janitor at Medgar Evers College. She panics as she thinks of something to say to him, but then hears through the phone that his number no longer works. She dials again and the same thing happens.

Perhaps by witnessing Ms. Hinds' frustration at being physically unable to communicate, Nadine gains insight or courage into her own situation, finally allowing her to call Eric. Yet she then discovers that she, like Ms. Hinds, is physically hindered from speaking to him, too. It is heavily hinted here that Eric is the unnamed man from the previous story.

Ten years before, Nadine's parents sold their house and moved to the edge of a slum in Port-au-Prince so that they could pay for Nadine's nursing school. Now she sends them half of her salary every month. She is happy to financially support them in this way, but craves their emotional protection. She finally calls her parents. Her mother answers the phone and says that Nadine sounds sad. She promises that she and Nadine's father will come to visit as soon as his health improves. On the phone they always discuss practical matters, never anything painful. Nadine's mother asks if she has a boyfriend, urging her to find someone so she doesn't end up "old and alone." Nadine ends the call quickly.

Nadine and her parents have established a relationship that is, from a practical standpoint, beneficial to both of them, but the same is not true of their emotional connection. Nadine's mother does appear to sincerely love her, but she doesn't understand how her daughter wants to be loved. This puts a strain on their relationship, alienating them from one another.

The next day, Ms. Hinds, while waiting for her parents to pick her up from the hospital, changes into a dress that her mother bought her. Nadine wants to warn Ms. Hinds that the horror of having lost her voice will only intensify, but she says nothing as she knows that Ms. Hinds will soon learn this herself. Later, during Nadine's lunch hour, Josette comes to get her to say that Ms. Hinds wants to say goodbye. Reluctantly Nadine goes to Ms. Hinds' room, where she meets her parents, who both seem overcome with worry. Ms. Hinds' father thanks Nadine and asks her to pass on their gratitude to the other nurses and doctors.

Ms. Hinds' parents treat her in a similar way to the (unwelcome) treatment Nadine receives from her parents. In both cases, an abundance of worry prohibits the parents from being a strong, reliable source of emotional support. In a sense, this illuminates how worry can be paradoxically selfish, even though it is an emotion that comes out of empathy.

Ms. Hinds's parents push her out in the wheelchair, and Nadine is left alone. She thinks about the fetus she aborted, which, if she'd carried it to term, might have been born that day. Then she thinks about her parents and Eric, and then of her own reflection in the elevator doors, which she considers "unrecognizable."

Nadine is so alienated from everyone around her—including her colleagues, her ex-boyfriend, and her family—that she has become alienated from herself. This is why she cannot recognize herself.

THE BOOK OF MIRACLES

Anne, Papa, and Ka are driving to Christmas Eve Mass, and Anne is talking about miracles. Ka announces that she was an atheist while in college, and this, combined with Papa's obsession with the Ancient Egyptians, makes Anne feel as if she is "outnumbered by pagans." They pass a cemetery and Anne holds her breath. When she was a child, Anne's three-year-old brother drowned in the ocean back in Haiti. Anne often has visions of her brother's spirit wandering through cemeteries, looking for a tombstone that belongs to him. She thinks it's strange and disrespectful to have built a busy road right through the middle of a cemetery.

The first story illustrated some of the ways in which Papa was haunted by his past, but here readers see that Anne is haunted by the past as well—for entirely different reasons. Anne's habit of holding her breath while passing cemeteries could be read as another kind of grieving ritual. It may not obviously resemble one on the surface, but it constitutes a way for Anne to deal with the pain and horror of losing her younger brother.

Every time Anne passes a cemetery she also closes her eyes. Ka vaguely knows that her mother's intense relationship to cemeteries has something to do with her life back in Haiti. Ka asks Anne to tell them about another miracle, and Anne wants to mention the miracle of Papa's transformation from someone who hurt people while working in a prison in Haiti to the calm husband and father driving them to Mass today. However, instead she tells a story about a young Filipino man who saw the Virgin Mary in a rose petal. The family discusses how foreigners have more religious faith than Americans, who prefer rational explanations.

This passage proves that Ka's intuition was right: there is a connection between Anne's intense religiosity and Papa's past as a perpetrator of violence in Haiti. In choosing to interpret Papa's transformation from a violent man to a loving father as a miracle, Anne indicates that God is on the side of Papa and the rest of the family. Yet of course, a serious question remains of whether Anne's faith can encompass forgiveness of Papa's crimes.

When Ka was little, all the families in the neighborhood would compete to put up the most extravagant Christmas light display. Anne and Papa never did this, fearing the attention it would draw. In reality, "it was their lack of participation that made them stand out." Ka was never very interested in Christmas, though she enjoyed the ritual of touring the neighborhood light displays and critiquing each one. When they get to the church, Ka smokes a cigarette outside before going in. Anne tried to persuade Ka to wear a dress or skirt, but instead she is wearing her usual "paint-stained blue jeans."

This passage contains an important point that the book illustrates through its portrayal of people who attempt to erase the past. Such attempts are doomed to fail in part because, in trying to conceal or erase the reality of yourself, you can actually end up drawing more *attention to yourself. Acts of self-erasure are therefore inherently unsustainable.*

Recently Anne has been regretting her and Papa's decision not to make any friends. She established her beauty shop on Nostrand Avenue, the heart of Brooklyn's Haitian community, because she thought it would attract clients. They avoided making friends to avoid having Papa's story discredited, but it has become clear that everyone believes Papa's story about his past anyway; no one realizes that he was actually a "dew breaker," a torturer.

Notably, Anne does not regret her and Papa's self-imposed isolation because it is unsustainable, but actually because it was so successful. She realizes that there was no real need to be as careful as they were, and that their lives have suffered immensely as a result.

When the clock strikes midnight and the priest walks in, Anne feels as if the whole world is suspended in the same enchanted moment. Anne prays that the Virgin Mary welcomed her little brother into heaven. Meanwhile, Ka whispers to Papa, pointing at someone sitting nearby. Papa explains that Ka thinks she has seen Emmanuel Constant. Pictures of Constant have been circling around the community accompanied by the words: "WANTED FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE HAITIAN PEOPLE." These flyers claim that Constant tortured, raped, and murdered 5,000 people as part of a militia called the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti.

This passage seems to contradict Anne's impression of how easy it is to conceal one's identity. Whereas Papa was able to hide in plain sight and not raise suspicions about his background, the Haitian community is aggressively attempting to bring Emmanuel Constant to justice. Of course, Constant was a more politically prominent figure than Papa—but there is no great difference between their crimes.

Anne and Papa have both noticed the flyers, though they haven't discussed it. By now the flyers are faded, and people have scribbled horns and curses on the them, such that they now have "as many additions as erasures." Before seeing them, Anne was already familiar with Constant, who formed his militia after a military coup exiled the Haitian president. The militia violently suppressed support for the president and engaged in "facial scalping," which involved removing the skin from corpses' faces to stop them from being identified. When the president returned, Constant escaped a life sentence in Haiti by fleeing to New York.

Just as Constant erased the identities of his victims via face scalping, so too was he able to erase himself by disappearing to New York before he could be brought to justice in Haiti. Of course, this attempt was not entirely successful, considering that there are posters of his face all over the Haitian community. Even if these posters do not lead to Constant being captured, they achieve their purpose by refusing to allow him to escape into anonymity.

Despite feeling no sympathy for Constant, Anne dreams of pulling down the flyers because they make her scared people will find out about Papa's past, too. Now, in church, she asks Papa if the man near them could really be Constant. Ka seems furious, which makes Anne proud, but also terrified of the possibility of Ka learning the truth about her own father. When Anne gets up to take Holy Communion, she scrutinizes the man to see if it is really Constant. Yet she also isn't sure what to do if it *is* him. She feels connected to him and unable to judge him, due to her faith and the fact that she is married to a former torturer herself.

This passage shows how Anne isn't able to enact her own principles due to the compromised moral position she inhabits as Papa's wife. She is proud that Ka has a fierce sense of justice and feels furious about Constant. At the same time, this pride is automatically undercut by fear. Not only would it be hypocritical for Anne to judge Constant too harshly, but if Ka knew the truth about her father she might not feel able to take such a strong stand, either.

As Anne gets closer, she realizes that the man is certainly not Constant. She tells Ka and Papa this. As the choir sing her favorite hymn, "Silent Night," Anne panics that she may not be able to come to Christmas Eve Mass ever again, as the risk of someone recognizing Papa is too great. She sees Papa mouthing the words in order to make her happy. As they leave church, Ka tries to reach out to the man they thought was Constant, but Papa stops her. Ka insists she was just going to ask his name.

Anne's brief consideration of the possibility that she and Papa could stop being so closed off and secretive abruptly comes to an end thanks to the near-sighting of Emmanuel Constant. For a second she wondered if she could open up, but now she is considering giving up her favorite ritual in order to avoid the risk of Papa being exposed.

Outside, Anne says hello to the priest and other members of the congregation while Ka and Papa wait, eager to go. Anne nervously asks Ka if she enjoyed the mass, but Ka replies with an apology for "overreact[ing]" to the man they thought was Constant. Anne feels a swell of relief; it is a "small miracle" that almost feels like a "resurrection."

Again, Anne reads the ordinary events of her life in religious terms, and this provides her comfort. The extreme conditions of her life mean that she considers even ordinary moments of peace and relief to be miraculous.

NIGHT TALKERS

Dany has been walking up a mountain in rural Haiti for two hours and he is in pain. His roommate back in New York, Michel, recently had an operation to remove his appendix; Dany now panics that he might get appendicitis here and die. He is traveling to see his Aunt Estina. It has been a decade since he moved to New York, and 25 years since his parents were killed by government forces. In the period between these events, Estina raised Dany in Port-au-Prince, but she has now moved back to her familial village in the mountains. He wants to surprise her by visiting her there.

As someone who was orphaned by the dictatorship, Dany is a victim in a very straightforward sense. His parents were taken from him when he was at a very young, totally innocent age. He thus has a profoundly different relationship to the past and to Haiti than the Bienaimés, for example.

Dany eventually finds a village, where a little girl is sitting with a pestle and mortar. He greets her in Haitian Creole, asking for water. An older girl brings him some, and he drinks eagerly. At this point a large group of children have gathered to watch him. A man (Old Zo) walks by, and Dany accidentally insults him by implying that he is the little girl's grandfather, when he is actually her father. He says he is on the way to visit his aunt, Estina Estème. Old Zo asks who Dany's father was, then reveals that he knows about how Dany's father died in a fire with his wife. Only their son survived. Now, Dany confirms that he is that son.

Like the husband and wife who were separated for seven years, there is also a mythic quality to Dany's return to the village where his Aunt Estina lives. The respect and interest with which the villagers greet him makes him appear important, almost like a hero returning from an expedition or war. Yet he is also a tragic figure; the story of how he was orphaned is obviously well known in the area, and this partly explains people's interest in him.

Old Zo takes Dany to Estina. Dany recognizes her house as they approach. Although Estina is not in, there is a group of men, women, and children there who know Dany and ask if he remembers them. He greets them, and they tell him Estina is on her way. Some of the people complain that he didn't write to them or send them money from New York. Then Estina appears, being led by two men. Dany had almost forgotten that she was blind.

Even without really knowing him, the villagers have a complicated relationship to Dany. They are fascinated by him and treat him with deference, but also chastise him for forgetting about them while he was in New York.

Estina takes Dany inside her house so they speak privately. For a number of years, Dany has been paying his childhood friend to come and check on Estina, sending him money to buy anything that Estina needed and asking that he report back to Dany. Now, she asks him if he has been sent back from the U.S. She explains that there are a few boys in the village who have been sent back, some of whom no longer speak Creole. She also explains that when Dany arrived earlier, she was assisting a midwife during a birth.

Estina's words serve as an important reminder that immigration is not unidirectional. Yes, there is a far greater flow of people from Haiti to the US than the other way around, but these immigrants still retain important connections to their homeland, and some of them even end up coming back. At the same time, Estina hints that they don't choose *to return.*

Dany tells Estina that he came back because he wanted to tell her that he has found the man who killed his parents. At this inopportune moment, Old Zo walks in, and announces that people are going to bring food for them to eat. Many people follow him, bearing dishes. The visitors stay until it is dark, and Estina is tired. She falls asleep straight away, and talks elaborately in her sleep. Dany is a sleep talker as well, and sometimes narrates his dreams aloud.

Dany and Estina clearly need some time alone to catch up, but they can't interrupt the hospitality ritual of the villagers. Even though Dany has come to see Estina, it is the whole village who welcomes him back, highlighting the collective mentality that comes from village life.

When Dany wakes up, Estina and Old Zo's daughter, nicknamed Ti Famn (little woman) have breakfast waiting for him. He has a cold shower in a stream, and wonders if his father washed there when he was alive. Back inside Estina's house, Dany finds a tattooed teenager there. Estina introduces him as Claude, "one of the boys who was sent back." Estina says that Claude is learning Creole but doesn't have anyone with whom he can speak English. Claude explains that he is grateful for Estina taking care of him. Without her, he might be homeless in Port-au-Prince. He said that he spent the first three months in prison in the city "because [he] had no place to go." Then his mother introduced him to some family members.

Through being deported back to Haiti, Claude ends up as a kind of orphan figure (even if he is not literally an orphan). He is separated from his family and left to fend for himself in a country where he knows no one and cannot speak the language. Estina's informal adoption of Claude suggests that she makes a habit of gathering such "orphans" and caring for them.

Claude comments that it's "real big" that Dany has come back to see Estina, and that he hasn't forgotten his family back in Haiti. He laments that he had become totally disconnected from his family members there. Nonetheless, they welcomed him "after what [he] did," because they knew he was family. He says that he now feels like a "puzzle" which his family members are slowly putting back together. He admits that he would have looked down on the people he lives among now as "backward-ass peasants." However, now he feels that he has turned his life around after being in prison and deported, and enjoys living in Haiti.

Although Danticat has not yet revealed what Claude has done, it is clear that he—like Papa—has committed some kind of crime, act of violence, or other violation. Yet unlike Papa, he has not tried to (or not been able to) cover up the evidence of his crime, and thus he is in a position of comparable vulnerability, seeking forgiveness from those around him.

Dany feels irritated by Claude. When Claude offers to show him around, Dany turns him down. After Claude leaves, Ti Famn takes Dany's coffee cup and he wonders if she is actually an adult in her 20s, even though she looks about 12 years old. Estina explains that "his people say" that Claude killed his own father. That night, Dany dreams about the conversation he plans to have with Estina about his parents' death. Dany was 6 years old when his parents were killed. He remembers hearing an explosion at night, then going out to the wooden porch of his house to see his parents' dead bodies lying on the ground. A man demanded that he stay silent, or else he would shoot Dany too.

This passage establishes a parallel between Dany and Claude, although it would perhaps be more accurate to say that they are inversions of each other. Both are young Haitian American men who immigrated to New York, lost one or both parents, and have been informally adopted or raised by Estina. Yet whereas Ddany was purely a victim of the violence that killed his parents, Claude was a perpetrator. Again, Danticat shows victims and perpetrators existing in close proximity.

In the dream, Dany tells Estina that the man who murdered his parents (Papa) now has a barbershop in New York. He met Papa when he heard that he was renting out a room in his house. When Dany moved into the room, he spent months unable to sleep. He would go to get his haircut in Papa's barbershop, and Papa would hardly speak to him, only asking in a quiet, gentle voice how much he would like him to cut and offering a shave. One day, when Anne was out of town, Dany climbed up the stairs of the house and into Papa's bedroom. He watched Papa sleep and imagined strangling or suffocating him to death, or perhaps just asking him: "Why?"

This passage establishes a clear and intimate connection between all of the stories thus far. Dany, Michel, and the unnamed husband and wife are all tenants of Papa and Anne in Brooklyn. Meanwhile, Danticat has strongly hinted that the unnamed husband is Eric, Nadine's ex-boyfriend. This highlights the intense interconnection that exists within the Haitian diasporic community—which, as Dany's story shows, can have explosive consequences.

As Dany watched Papa sleep he realized that he didn't want to kill him, because then he would never get the answer of why Papa killed his parents. Dany suddenly wakes up, and Estina asks him if he was dreaming about his parents, saying that he was "calling their names." Dany asks if his parents were involved in politics, and Estina replies, "No more than any of us." She explains that they did nothing wrong and may have been confused with someone else. Dany tries to question her further, but she says that she is too tired to keep talking, and that they can speak again in the morning. However, when Dany wakes up the next day, he realizes that she is dead.

This passage contains meditations on the nature of justice. Does justice take the form of vengeful violence, as Dany momentarily thinks? His answer is no, because in killing Papa he would deny himself the justice of knowing why his parents were killed. At the same time, as Estina points out, there is no real answer to this question, and thus answers cannot deliver justice. Under the Duvalier dictatorship, countless innocent people were killed for no reason at all.

Ti Famn wails loud enough that everyone in the surrounding area learns of Estina's death. Dany is crippled by sharp stomach pain. Local women mill around him, commenting on his condition and trying to find ways to help. Old Zo suggests that Estina knew she was about to die and "call[ed]" Dany to come back before she did. They are all talking about him as if he doesn't speak Creole himself. He wants to wrap his arms around Estina's body, feeling like he is in a strange dream where everyone can speak except the two of them.

Dany's dream about talking to Estina was highly mundane and realistic, whereas his waking reality takes the form of a strange dream or nightmare. He actually has more agency in his dreams than he does in reality, and is able to communicate better within them, as well. Note the return of the motif of voicelessness in this passage.

A few days later, Dany helps Old Zo make the funeral arrangements, while Ti Famn and the other women prepare Estina's body for burial. They dress her in a blue dress Dany sent her from New York, which had remained in its giftwrap, never worn. They cut away pieces of the dress, and tell Estina not to let anyone in the afterlife take the dress from her. As is traditional, Dany is given a few pieces of the dress to carry around with him for the rest of his life.

Here is an example of yet another grieving ritual. Through cutting away pieces of Estina's dress, Dany will be able to feel connected to her across different worlds (the mortal world and the afterlife). This shows that death does not always have to be thought of wholly as absence, but can be seen as a kind of connection to somewhere else, too.

Dany always found it strange that Haitian funerals were half festive and half mournful, but he loves the part of the ceremony where attendees share memories of the deceased. Many of those in attendance say that Estina helped birth them. Dany thinks of all the things he would say if he spoke, including the fact that he never wanted to leave Estina but that she insisted that he get as far away from his parents' murderer as possible. Toward the end of the wake, Claude arrives and expresses his condolences. He tries to hug Dany, but Dany shrinks away.

The interconnection caused by diaspora means that while Estina hoped that Dany would be far removed from the person who murdered his parents (Papa), she inadvertently sent him to Papa's city, neighborhood, and even house.

Dany wonders if it's true that Estina somehow called him back, and if Papa isn't actually his parents' killer, but rather just a "phantom" that helped bring him back to Haiti. He asks Ti Famn her real name, feeling that her nickname implies that she is generic. She tells him that her name is Denise Auguste, and that she is 20 years old. Estina's death has broken the ice between them, making them seem more like "equals." Dany goes outside and wipes down the mausoleum where Estina will be buried. Other men cleaned it earlier, but Dany wants to make sure it is "spotless." He sees Claude and apologizes for his behavior earlier, and Claude says he completely understands.

It is obvious from this passage that Dany is struggling to make sense of the world in the wake of Estina's death. His reason for coming back to Haiti has disappeared, and he has lost hope of gaining Estina's insight into what he should do regarding Papa. At the same time, the character of Claude shows that death can cause positive transformations in people. In the wake of possibly killing his father, Claude has become a gentle, caring person.

Although Claude's outward tattooed appearance is menacing, Dany can't help but feel that he looks innocent and vulnerable, like a child. He says he has heard that Claude killed his father, then quickly apologizes, saying it isn't his business. Yet Claude immediately confirms that it's true. He says he wishes he could tell Dany that it was an accident or done in self-defense. In reality, he was 14 years old and addicted to drugs, while also selling them. His father found his supply and took it; Claude threatened him with a gun, and when his father didn't give the drugs back, he shot him.

The stark reality of Claude's crime is horrifying, particularly considering that Claude does not attempt to excuse himself or soften the truth of what happened. (Of course, this serves as an important contrast with other characters in the book, notably Papa.) At only 14, Claude should have been innocent, but he ended up perpetrating one of the absolute worst forms of violence imaginable.

Claude's voice is neutral, but a tear falls from his eyes. He says that he is "the luckiest fucker alive," because committing such an awful act so young gave him the chance to turn his life around. He has also received other kinds of luck, such as the fact that he was released from prison in Port-au-Prince after three months because of overcrowding. As Claude keeps talking, Dany observes that he is also a "night talker" someone who speaks their nightmares aloud at night.

This reference to the title of the story again illuminates the motif of speaking—and being unable to speak. As sleep talkers, Estina and Dany were able to express things in their sleep that they might not be able to in the day, and this is true for Claude as well, even though he doesn't need to be asleep to do so.

THE BRIDAL SEAMSTRESS

While Beatrice Saint Fort is napping, a journalism intern arrives at her house in Far Rockaway, Queens. The intern is a young Haitian American girl with dreadlocks and a nose ring, who introduces herself as Aline Cajuste. Beatrice, a bridal seamstress, is a small woman, but has a loud voice. She invites Aline in and then leaves her for half an hour to get ready, donning a purple dress, makeup, and a wig. Although Aline is eager to begin, Beatrice makes coffee first, which takes another 20 minutes.

Beatrice and Aline represent a generational divide between Haitian American immigrants. Beatrice has a traditionally feminine occupation, takes time with things, and ensures that she is perfectly made up to greet visitors. Aline, meanwhile, seems to be in a more bourgeois class position and has a more contemporary, alternative appearance.

Aline has a girlfriend who's 30 years older than her, a psychology professor at Florida International University. The girlfriend gave her an espresso maker for a graduation gift, but Aline has not been able to make coffee that tastes as good as Beatrice's. Beatrice says that the secret to her coffee is time, explaining, "I always take time, whether it's getting dressed, making coffee, or sewing wedding gowns." Aline asks if she can start recording, reminding Beatrice that the interview is for *Haitian American Weekly*. Beatrice once made a wedding dress for the paper's editor, Marjorie Voltaire.

This passage further illustrates the differences between Beatrice and Aline. Aline is queer, with a glamorous older partner—again, a contrast to Beatrice's seemingly traditional occupation of making wedding dresses. At the same time, both appear to remain entrenched in the Haitian diasporic community, Aline through her journalism, and Beatrice through her wedding dress business.

When Marjorie heard that Beatrice was retiring, she sent Aline to profile her. Beatrice comments that if only Aline had written the paper before she retired, she could have attracted more clients and been able to retire earlier. Aline asks how old Beatrice is, but Beatrice doesn't really answer. Aline asks about Beatrice's desire to retire earlier, but Beatrice says things always happen in their own time. She explains that she has been making wedding dresses since she lived in Haiti. She says that she asks her customers to call her Mother as a sign of respect, and says that she has to explain to them that the dresses they have seen advertised on tall, skinny models will not suit them.

Here Beatrice's relationship to her clients resembles the moment when the unnamed wife from the story "Seven" cooked dinner for her husband, Michel, and Dany, making them feel like a family. Although Beatrice says she wants her customers to call her Mother out of respect, it also obviously establishes a sense of kinship between them, such that their relationship is less transactional and more familial.

Beatrice expresses pride at the fact that the dress is always the center of attention at every wedding. Aline asks if Beatrice has ever been married, and Beatrice replies that it is rude to ask that question to a woman her age. Aline writes in her notepad, "Never married." Beatrice then suggests they take a walk around her neighborhood. Though Aline is not enthusiastic, Beatrice insists. She takes Aline outside and points to each of her neighbors' houses, telling Aline their professions (baker, policewoman, dentist, social worker, teacher) and national identity (Italian, Guyanaian, Dominican, Jamaican.

As a young intern, Aline is still learning the practice of journalism and struggles to ask the right questions in order to gain insight into Beatrice's life. Her lack of interest in Beatrice's neighbors indicates that Aline does not see the kind of multicultural middle-class neighborhood Beatrice lives in to be intriguing or notable.

When Beatrice points to the house of a Haitian prison guard, Aline asks where he works, thinking about the fact that there are no prisons nearby. Beatrice says she knew the guard back in Haiti, but when Aline asks if they were friends, Beatrice sucks her teeth in disgust. Back at her house, Beatrice serves the rest of the coffee and asks about Aline's studies. Aline explains she majored in French. She took the internship after her girlfriend dumped her, hoping to impress her and also to impress Aline's parents, who live in Somerville, Massachusetts. She knows that she shouldn't be letting Beatrice ask her questions, but she enjoys Beatrice's interest.

Beatrice is a commanding woman with an ability to maintain control of a situation—hence why she flips the interview around and interrogates Aline. Perhaps her decision to do so is rooted in Aline's reaction to her story about the Haitian prison guard. Aline did not seem able to understand what Beatrice was implying about the guard, and this made Beatrice give up the story.

Aline asks Beatrice what she will do after retirement, and Beatrice says she plans to move again. When Aline asks why, Beatrice explains that her neighbor, the guard, is a *choukèt lawoze*, a dew breaker. Back in Haiti, the guard asked her to go dancing with him and, because she had a boyfriend, she turned him down. He arrested and tortured her by whipping the soles of her feet, then left her to walk home on a tar road in the sun. When Aline hesitantly asks if Beatrice is sure it's the same man, Beatrice angrily replies that she "would know him anywhere."

Although Beatrice does provide the full story here, Aline's reaction shows that she is not equipped to fully understand and process the story. The nature of trauma is such that it almost doesn't matter whether the guard living near Beatrice is actually the same man. In feeling haunted and pursued by him, Beatrice is really feeling trapped by the trauma of her past.

After the interview, Aline calls Marjorie and tells her Beatrice seems "a bit nutty." Sitting in her car, Aline notices that guard's mailbox is overflowing. She looks through its contents, most of which consists of flyers or letters addressed to the "occupant." Aline walks around the house, peeking through the window, and hiding when a group of teenagers pass. The rooms of the house look empty, the walls freshly-painted. A car pulls up and a man—presumably the Jamaican teacher Beatrice mentioned—asks if Aline is a "friend of Dolly's." Aline said she thought a man was living there, but the teacher replies that the last person to live there was a Colombian woman named Dolly, who has been trying to sell the house for years.

While this passage indicates that it's true that Beatrice may be suffering from paranoid anxiety and delusions, Aline's phrase "a bit nutty" is dismissive. Again, this indicates that Aline struggles to truly understand what people like Beatrice went through while living under the Duvalier dictatorship. At the same time, her investigation into the house suggests that she is at least becoming a better reporter.

When Aline returns to Beatrice's house, she finds Beatrice unbraiding her cornrows. Aline says that the house was empty, and Beatrice replies that the guard lives inside empty houses. She explains that he has to be in hiding, otherwise he would be sent to prison himself. She adds that she believes he finds her wherever she moves because she always sends notes to her customers, explaining where to find her. She concludes that this time, she will lose him forever. Aline's "sheltered" youth makes her unaware of people like Beatrice, whose lives are dominated by "tremendous agonies." She wants to write about more people like Beatrice, and also imagines perhaps going home to tell her parents the truth about herself.

The story ends on a note of redemption—if not for Beatrice, than at least for Aline. Beatrice is convinced that by retiring she will finally be able to escape the phantom presence of the guard, but considering that his proximity seems to be a product of her paranoia, it does not appear likely that this will actually happen. Aline, on the other hand, has gained new insight and maturity from interviewing Beatrice. Her hopes for the future suggest that she might help others living with trauma.

MONKEY TAILS: FEBRUARY 7, 1986 / FEBRUARY 7, 2004

Michel and his mother are cowering inside their own home, while outside, members of the Volunteers for National Security Militia shout, "Come out, macoutes!" The previous night, Haiti's dictator (Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier) and his wife went into exile. In disbelief, Michel stared at the TV broadcast of the two of them driving away in their BMW to the airport where they boarded a plane to France. Baby Doc had been in power for 15 years, since inheriting the position from his late father, Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, when he was 19 years old.

While the stories thus far have dealt with the ripple effects of the Duvalier regime, this story takes place at one of the most climactic moments in Haitian history: the day the dictatorship ended. While the end of the Duvaliers' brutal control is certainly a long-awaited cause for celebration, ordinary people like Michel and his mother cannot celebrate yet. For now, the country is just as violent and even more chaotic than before.

With Baby Doc gone, the people of Haiti were eager to seek revenge on the "macoutes," the militiamen who'd been loyal to the regime. Michel's cousin Vaval witnessed a group of people tie a macoute to a lamppost, force him to drink gasoline, and set him on fire. Now, the people outside Michel's house are probably looking for Regulus, who is Michel's neighbor and the father of Michel's "hero" and best friend, 18-year-old Romain. Michel himself is only 12. He lost his own father before he was born in an incident his mother says was "political," although she has given no details.

Like Dany, Michel appears to have lost a parent to the Duvalier regime, although it is not yet clear whether Michel's father was killed like Dany's parents or whether something else happened to him. Meanwhile, it seems likely that Romain too is about to lose a parent. However, this time the threat is not coming from the government forces themselves, but from those aiming to seek revenge on them.

Now, seeing the group of people pass the house, Michel's mother crosses herself in relief. Calming down, she complains that Michel's distant cousin, Rosie, has not been doing a very good job cleaning the house. Michel is in love with Rosie and hopes to marry her one day. Before abandoning them, Regulus beat Romain and Romain's mother, stole from them, and killed many of their relatives. Michel and Romain met when Michel was eight, at the same time their mothers became friends. Romain didn't mind that Michel was younger. At one point their mothers had a fight, and the boys didn't see each other as much.

In contrast to the backdrop of violent brutality against which this story is set, Michel and Romain's friendship is a source of hope, redemption, and (somewhat unlikely) companionship. Despite their age difference and even while their mothers are fighting, the boys always remain close.

Michel and Romain were both only children, and Romain would defend Michel from other kids in the neighborhood. Romain was not only Michel's best friend, but his only friend. Now, Michel and his mother walk outside the house, finding Rosie and Vaval there. Rosie points out that Monsieur Christophe's nearby tap station has been dismantled, and everyone is collecting the free-flowing water. Michel's mother tells Rosie and Vaval to collect as much as they can. Losing money fast, Monsieur Christophe desperately tries to turn off the main valve, and beckons Michel to come and help.

The fact that Monsieur Christophe (Mr. Christophe) is referred to in this way indicates that he is a respected figure in the neighborhood. Perhaps this is due to age; it could also be because running the water station endows him with authority. At the same time, now that the station has been dismantled, the residents' need and desire for free water overcomes whatever respect for Monsieur Christophe they might have.

Thinking about the hopeful change currently sweeping the country, Michel is reluctant to help, but walks over anyway. He reasons that no matter what happens in politics, people like Monsieur Christophe will always hold power in the neighborhood. He thinks that if the water was allowed to flow, it could be a "cleansing offering to the gods" on behalf of all the dead and dying on both sides of the political divide. However, he then explains that these are his thoughts in 2004, as a 30-year-old man, while his pregnant wife is lying by his side.

By mentioning that he is narrating retroactively, recalling as a 30 year old the events that happened when he was 12, Michel demonstrates that he survived the tumultuous events of the end of the dictatorship. The fact that he is married and expecting a child also indicates that everything has turned out quite well for him.

As Michel helps the men, he sees his mother looking at him, knowing that she is proud that he is participating in "men's work." As soon as she looks away, going to help Rosie and Vaval collect water, Michel hands his screwdriver to Monsieur Christophe's son, Tobin, and runs away. There is an elated mood in the neighborhood, with people shouting: "We are free." The cathedral bells are ringing and drivers are honking their horns. Graffiti denouncing the dictatorship, presidency, and "suffering" is everywhere. Apparently the presidential palace has been looted.

Haiti is a country with an especially important history of striving for freedom. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the enslaved population of Haiti staged a revolution, freeing themselves from slavery and colonial rule; in 1804, Haiti became the first black republic in the Atlantic world. The excitement and joy of once again seizing freedom at the end of the dictatorship echoes this historical precedent.

Romain's mother is away on a business trip and his aunt Vesta, whom Michel also loves, lets him in. She asks if Regulus has been caught, and Michel replies that he doesn't think so. On the radio, they hear Baby Doc announce that he is going to hand over the country to the military, and Vesta comments that everything is going to stay the same. Romain then beckons Michel through the curtain into his room. Back in 2004, Michel addresses his unborn baby directly, and says that his wife has sleepily asked if he is still speaking to his cassette recorder.

While many in Haiti are optimistic and excited about the end of the dictatorship, some people—like Vesta—cannot help but be cynical about the possibilities that will come after the fall of the regime. Perhaps Vesta is unable to feel hopeful because the Duvalier regime lasted so long that it has become hard to imagine anything else.

Whenever Romain eats something sweet, he comments, "That's the price of their eating sugar in Europe." After dropping out of school, he continued to study independently. Now he tells Michel that the sentence about sugar is from Voltaire. Romain then says that, unlike Vesta, he has been avoiding the news. Michel comments that he could see the "news" just by walking out into the street. Romain admits that he's worried about Regulus, because he knows the horrors currently being inflicted on men like him. Michel notes that Regulus has many female lovers, and that surely one of them will be able to hide him. Suddenly, he realizes that his mother is probably worried about where he has gone.

Romain appears to be a wise autodidact and something of a rebellious person (as indicated by the fact that he dropped out of school). His complicated feelings toward his father illustrate the immense pressure and distortion the dictatorship placed on familial relationships. While Regulus harmed Romain and Romain's mother in horrific ways, Romain is still troubled by the idea of Regulus being brutally tortured and murdered—an understandable, if agonizing perspective to have.

Romain tells Michel that they are both going to "escape" like Regulus. They sneak out, and when Michel asks where they are going, Romain implies that this is not the point of escaping. On the street, the boys pass a mock funeral where people are pretending to mourn Baby Doc and his wife. They get into a taxi, and Romain asks the driver to take them to La Sensation Hotel. It takes a long time, because the streets are filled with people. Romain plans to ask his old classmate, a porter at the hotel, to get them a room. Michel grows increasingly worried about his mother. Romain can't find his classmate, but suggests they have a drink there before going home. They sit by a pool and both order Cokes.

Michel idolizes Romain as someone older and wiser than him, but it is also obvious from this passage that Romain is still somewhat young and naïve. His dream of escaping at this particularly dangerous and chaotic moment in Haitian history seems more akin to a child's game than a real plan. At 18 years old, Romain has the ability to pull off his plan. Yet the fact that he immediately abandons it when they get to the hotel suggests he might not have been taking it seriously in the first place.

While they are drinking, a young, tense-looking man walks over and sits with them. Romain says to him, "It must be rough, camarade." He then asks the man, who appears to be his old classmate, "is he here?" The man replies that "he" is not. Romain explains that they are actually looking for Michel's father, Monsieur Christophe, not Regulus. Sometimes Christophe would bring women to the hotel, and Romain would follow him. Michel has known for a while that Christophe is his father, though there is much about the situation that he doesn't understand, including why his mother doesn't ask Christophe for money when she is struggling financially.

This is a major twist to the story. The fact that Michel failed to mention that Monsieur Christophe is his father reflects the confusion that his 12-year-old self feels about the whole thing. Children tend to be more able and willing to suppress information that they don't understand than adults. It seems as if Michel knows that Christophe is his father but doesn't quite believe it.

Michel begins to cry, not out of shock, but because he is ashamed of the "dishonorable secret" that Christophe is his father. Romain tries to comfort him, but Michel pushes him away. Romain tells Michel that there is a taxi waiting outside to bring him home, then adds that he is leaving the country. In this moment, Michel realizes the enormous weight that being Regulus' son has placed on Romain all his life. Michel gets in the taxi and doesn't look back. At home, his mother is angry but doesn't punish him. Michel wants her to admit that he is Christophe's son, but then decides to "let [her] keep her secret."

Here it becomes clear that Romain and Michel face the same issue: their fathers have abandoned them and use the power they wield to engage in an immoral way of life. This leaves both boys unable to actually grieve (in the way they could if their fathers had died). Instead, they are haunted and disturbed by their physical proximity to their fathers and estrangement from them. Romaine appears to feel that the only solution is to flee.

The next morning, Vaval tells Michel that in the night, a young man had spotted Regulus trying to get back into his home to gather his belongings. Regulus shot himself to avoid being captured. Michel remembers that before Baby Doc left, he denied rumors that he was going into exile, asserting that he was as "unyielding as a monkey's tail." Michel and Romain had laughed about this together. People had felt it was impossible that Baby Doc would give up power, but Michel had also thought it impossible that Romain would vanish, too.

At this extremely tumultuous moment in history, people are forced to confront the reality that nothing stays the same forever. Even people who appear to wield absolute authority eventually lose it or die, causing shifts in the way that society operates. At the same time, a cynical perspective might point out that while individual actors change, hierarchies of power exist forever.

Michel's mother eventually died of a heart attack, and Michel suspects this was actually the result of her unrequited love for Christophe. Soon after, at 20 years old, Michel left Haiti. He never saw Romain again and doesn't even know if he's alive. Through Rosie and Vaval, Michel knows that Christophe is still alive, although he's retired and handed over his water business to Tobin. Michel tells others the same "myth" about his father that his mother told. When his own son is born, Michel will name him Romain, "after my first true friend."

The story ends on both a tragic and uplifting note. Romain's disappearance is yet another example of the profound loss and grief that the characters in the novel are forced to endure. Yet there is also a redemptive note here, as Michel's love for Romain endures even after they never see each other again. The fact that he plans to call his son Romain is a reminder of the hope produced by new life.

THE FUNERAL SINGER

Rézia owns a Haitian restaurant on the Upper West Side called Ambiance Créole. She is in a classroom, reading aloud from a manual. Mariselle gets up and states her name. Freda wishes she could sing to introduce herself. Given the chance, she would sing "Brother Timonie," a song she learned from her father, who was a fisherman. Freda explains to the class that she doesn't have a job yet; at 22 years old, she's been "expelled" from Haiti, which is why she is taking the class. The teacher tells the class that if they work hard, they will earn their GEDs in no time, which to Freda sounds like a ridiculous promise.

Whereas the last story portrayed children and teenagers forced to deal with "adult" situations, this story depicts three women who, despite being fully grown, are pushed back into an earlier stage of development by the process of immigrating. Freda's explanation of how she was "expelled" from Haiti is a reminder that many people do not want to immigrate, but are forced to do so by extreme circumstances in their country.

Rézia nicknames the teacher "Flat Tit," Mariselle "Mother Mary," and Freda "the baby funeral singer," because Freda used to be "one of the few professional funeral singers of [her] generation." Freda grew up in Léogâne. Her mother used to tell her that her father was watching them from heaven while eating coconut with God. She said that he made clouds out of coconut meat. Freda used to wear black clothes so she would fit in with the mourners at the funerals, but now she wears bright colors and a red headband. Réziza suggests that she, Mariselle, and Freda go to Ambiance Créole after class, reasoning that because they are the only Haitians, they might be able to study better together.

Like many of the other characters in the novel, Freda's life is colored by the particular tragedy of losing a parent. Her occupation (and the fact that the story is named after it) connects her to Beatrice, who made wedding dresses. Both Freda and Beatrice perform crucial roles in what are the two most significant life rituals in most cultures: weddings and funerals. Of course, it is also significant that Freda's job amounts to being a professional mourner, which connects to the book's focus on grief.

At the restaurant, the women drink wine or rum. Freda was the first to tell the others about her life, saying that she was once asked to sing at the presidential palace. Before Freda's father was arrested, the president of Haiti would drive through Freda's town on New Year's Eve and throw money out of his window. He would then hand out essential supplies like rice or cooking oil in an effort to win the people's "loyalty forever."

There are no obvious clues to the year in which this story is set, so it is not clear whether the "president" Freda is referring to is Papa Doc or Baby Doc. In a sense, it doesn't matter. The oppression and brutality people like Freda experienced under the dictatorship was consistent across the regimes of father and son.

After several weeks on the course, Freda, Mariselle, and Rézia cook a meal together, each taking care of a different dish. Mariselle came to the US because her husband painted an unflattering portrait of the president and was shot leaving the gallery where it was hung. Freda's mother told her to leave after she turned down the invitation to sing at the national palace. Freda's father had been arrested and tortured by the regime and, following this ordeal, presumably killed himself. Rézia, meanwhile, grew up with her aunt, who ran a brothel. One night, a man in uniform raped her. On her deathbed, her aunt explained that the man had threatened to imprison her if she didn't give him access to Rézia.

In contrast to the light-hearted, enjoyable time they spend together in New York, all three women have incredibly traumatic histories. All were affected by the violence of the Duvalier regime, whether directly (in Rézia's case) or indirectly, through losing family members. The horrifying story of Rézia being raped as a child highlights the profound and pervasive violence that the dictatorship enabled; her aunt's act also shows how difficult morality became in this context.

Mariselle brings Haitian newspapers for the women to read. She finds the name of a childhood friend among a list of people being taken to be interrogated at the army barracks in Port-au-Prince. Rézia is the only one of the three women to pass her practice test. Later, they get drunk and stay late at the restaurant. Marisella asks Freda how someone becomes a funeral singer, and Freda explains that her first public performance was at her father's funeral. She sang "Brother Timonie," and from that very moment became a funeral singer. Rézia insists that they stop discussing sad things.

All three women are clearly trying to move on from the profound trauma of their past and create happy lives for themselves in New York, but this passage shows how intensely difficult this is. Even just reading Haitian newspapers means confronting the awful reality that their friends and family back home continue to be tortured and killed by government forces.

Mariselle mentions that she met Jackie Kennedy when she visited Haiti. She observes that despite all the tragedy in her life, she is a beautiful woman, commenting, "She made sadness beautiful." When Jackie visited, her first husband had already been dead for ten years. Her second husband, a Greek billionaire, was friends with Baby Doc. Mariselle's husband painted a portrait of her. When Freda was a little girl, she would crowd the pages of her notebook with tiny figures. These scared her mother, who bought her a rag doll to comfort her. After Freda's father died, she would twist the rag doll's neck at night, and kept drawing the little figures "to keep [her] company in case [her] mother disappeared."

This passage explores how people deal with trauma in unexpected or creative ways. Mariselle's admiration of Jackie Kennedy's sad beauty betrays Mariselle's hope that she can find beauty in her own life despite the great tragedies that have befallen her. Meanwhile, Freda consistently uses creative ways (whether drawing or singing) to deal with her own sadness. Yet it is clear that these methods do not entirely heal her, as indicated by her violent wringing of the doll's neck.

Freda is not particularly religious, but she agrees to light candles and pray to Saint Jude, the patron of lost causes, with Mariselle and Rézia in order to help them pass their exam. They also pray for Haiti, though Mariselle notes Haiti isn't "a lost cause yet [...] because it made us." Rézia asks why Freda turned down the invite to sing at the national palace, and Freda replies that she would never sing for "the type of people who'd killed" her father.

Mariselle's comment about Haiti not being a lost cause reveals important ideas of how hope can be carried by the diaspora. The dictatorship may have made life unbearable for the three women depicted in the story, but they now have a chance to have an entirely different kind of life, while remaining close to Haiti through each other.

The women take the test, though don't know yet if they've passed. Mariselle has gotten a job at a gallery, and will sell her husband's paintings there. Freda announces that she's going back to Haiti to join a militia, and the others burst into laughter. Rézia asks who will sing at Freda's funeral if she dies. Mariselle suggests that Freda sing her own funeral song right there. Freda sings "Brother Timonie," and the others join in. They keep singing, and toast to the pain of the past and the uncertainty of the future.

Freda's singing of her own funeral song is yet another example of a grieving ritual. From one perspective, it is quite a morbid moment, but the fact that she does it in the context of a happy evening with her friends—who join in—also makes it hopeful and redemptive.

THE DEW BREAKER (CIRCA 1967)

Papa arrives at the evening church service two hours early, because he is planning to kill the preacher. He parks his car by some street merchants, ensuring that he has a clear view of the entrance to the church. It has long been known that the preacher "ha[s] enemies in high places." He presides over a Baptist church in Bel Air, a slum in Port-au-Prince. The preacher broadcasts his sermons on a radio show that airs early on Sunday mornings. In these sermons, the preacher praises Biblical figures "who'd fought tyrants and nearly died." Six months ago, his wife died. Meanwhile, Papa Doc has rewritten the Lord's Prayer to make it about himself.

The fact that the preacher is being targeted to be murdered shows how morally distorted life under the Duvalier regime has become. The preacher's "crime" is sharing Biblical teachings about resisting oppression. For a country like Haiti, with such an important freedom movement, such ideas are (even aside from particular religious traditions) intimately treasured. Yet the dictatorship has made them deadly.

Some of the congregation at the preacher's church cite his sermons while being tortured in prison. However, others say they hope he ceases his political messages, for his own sake and theirs. The preacher lives near the church, and there are currently four agents outside his house. Papa finds it hard to believe that the preacher would be scared of his own death, and wonders if he is also "falling for the religious propaganda." The dew breakers use different tactics in order to be able to bring themselves to do the work they do. Some only target strangers from neighborhoods they don't know, while others take revenge on people they *do* know and don't like.

In the context of the dictatorship, it can seem as if the government forces have ultimate authority and power, while those who resist are in a position of absolute vulnerability. Yet as this passage shows, those working for the government are actually affected by the efforts of those who fight against them—even if they work hard not to show it. Indeed, it is actually very challenging to carry out the kind of work that the dew breakers do.

Papa tries to tell himself that, as a Catholic, he should hate the preacher for being Protestant. He tries to persuade himself that he is "liberating" the people of Bel-Air by killing the preacher. The night before, Papa Doc announced that 19 members of the palace guard had been executed for treachery. Six months ago, the preacher's wife was poisoned by the daughter of a rival preacher, who had been bribed to commit the act. Papa has been dreaming of leaving Haiti and moving to a Haitian diasporic community in Florida or New York. He could "infiltrate" the communities of exiles who are planning a revolution. However, he knows he won't be able to leave before he "prove[s] his loyalty" by killing the preacher.

The question about why Papa wants to flee Haiti and what he plans to do in the US is left deliberately ambiguous. It could be that he plans to leave Haiti in order to prevent revolutions being planned from abroad—this is certainly implied by the use of the word "infiltrate." At the same time, if Papa was still entirely loyal to the government, why would he want to leave Haiti in the first place? It is possible that part of him dreams of rebelling as well. Perhaps Papa himself does not even know where his loyalties truly lie.

Now, Papa asks a nearby boy to buy him a pack of cigarettes. He is a heavy smoker of cigarettes and cigars, and loves drinking five-star Barbancourt rum. Sometimes Papa plays games of hazard with the people he tortures, convincing them that if they win he will let them live. Last night, he dreamed that he escaped Haiti dressed as a nun. He wants to leave, but knows he needs to kill the preacher first. When the boy comes back, Papa pays him for the cigarettes and for an old history book the boy has tucked under his arm. Papa is from Léogâne. He is the son of peasants who lost all their land when Papa Doc came to power in 1957. As a result, his father became insane and his mother vanished, perhaps fleeing to Jamaica with a neighbor she loved.

Throughout the book, there are echoes of other, seemingly unrelated narratives embedded within the stories. Here, the detail about Papa's mother possibly fleeing to Jamaica with a lover who was also her neighbor recalls the unnamed wife who also had an affair with her neighbor. The timeline means that it is impossible that the unnamed wife is the same person as Papa's mother, but this connection nonetheless highlights how similar stories repeat across different particular, local contexts.

Papa himself joined the Miliciens (Volunteers for National Security) at 19. He had gone to a Flag Day parade and watched the president speak. Mesmerized, he decided that he would never go back home and live the rural life of a peasant. Back in the present, the boy Papa offered money to hasn't moved. Papa wishes he could buy a future for him and all Haitian children. He asks what the boy studies, and after he replies that he studies history, Papa makes him recite a lesson. The boy does so, nervously. Papa gives the boy some more money and tells him to leave. The boy buys food from a vendor and shares it with his friends.

Papa's feelings about the boy indicate that he is not a totally morally corrupt person, and that he retains feelings of love and hope for his country and its people. Of course, the reality is that Papa's actions have hardened him in such a way that he struggles to interact with others in a normal, kind manner. This is evidenced when his sympathetic thoughts about the boy turn into a demand that the boy recite a history lesson.

Alone in his car, Papa smokes and tries not to think about the boy. When he was 19, after he saw the president speak, he joined the Miliciens and was given an ID card, a denim uniform, a gun, and "the privilege of marching all the national holiday parades." Papa didn't like the uniform, and thus took to wearing plain clothes. As a Milicien, Papa received the best treatment from everyone. He grew fat from eating decadently, and had countless lovers. He returned to Léogâne, where his father paraded the streets, naked. He told the officials who'd bought his parents' land that he was a powerful man now, and they should watch out. Through this threat, he managed to get his father's house back.

This passage explores the reasons why ordinary people might be encouraged to join the Miliciens (and in doing so commit horrific crimes against humanity). Throughout its history, Haiti has been one of the poorest countries in the world, largely due to international sanctions. As a result, most of its residents are desperately impoverished. Although this does not excuse Papa's decision, it helps explain why gaining power and wealth through joining the Miliciens was appealing to him.

Papa earned a reputation for being a particularly skilled and intimidating torturer. The problem was that for him, it was "becoming like any other job." One of his victims testified in old age that Papa was remarkably clear-headed; he knew exactly what he was doing. The preacher, meanwhile, is eating supper, wearing his "best cream jacket" which he saves for Sundays. He is an elegant man, with long limbs. He is sitting with three of his deacons. The deacons are nervous for him, and they suggest hosting the service inside the house. In truth, the preacher has already made a deal with God to sacrifice his life for his country.

In some ways, this passage serves as a counterbalance to the previous one. Whereas before Danticat encouraged the reader to consider the difficult situation that encouraged Papa to join the Miliciens, in this passage she emphasizes that Papa committed the evils required by his job with disturbing willingness.

The preacher has dreamed about his own death many times and doesn't fear it. Sometimes he dreams that he is killed in brutal, horrifying ways, but in the dreams he is always resurrected. He tells the deacons that it's time for the evening service, and that he will walk to the church alone. Reluctantly, the deacons step aside and let him pass, then follow him out the door. On the walk to church, the preacher greets everyone in the neighborhood. Everyone knows him and says hello back. He passes a shoeshine man, Léon, who poured slop on the heads of Volunteers after they arrested a group of philosophy students performing in a production of *Waiting for Godot*.

Léon and the preacher demonstrate two different forms of resistance against an oppressive dictatorship. The preacher is a respected man, someone who holds power that in itself threatens the regime. He chooses to use this power in order to further undermine the government, thereby putting himself at risk. Meanwhile, as a shoeshine man, Léon is very poor and has almost no power. Yet he still chooses to risk death in order to perform whatever act of resistance he can.

Léon asks the preacher if he wants his shoes shined; when the preacher declines but suggests the next day, both the Léon and the deacons smile, hopeful at the mention of the next day. The preacher then spots a ten-year-old boy who is a member of the congregation. The boy is smoking a cigarette, but when he sees the preacher he throws it away and runs off. At the church, many in the congregation are missing. The service runs a little longer than usual. The preacher passionately delivers a sermon about the day his wife was killed. He says that after she was poisoned, he could tell from her eyes that she was going to die.

This passage both reveals the respect and adoration the preacher has in his community and highlights the increasing fear of the congregation, which causes them to abandon him. It is clear that, without the dictatorship, the preacher would be a hugely popular and influential figure in Bel Air. Yet while many people still admire him, he is losing support as people realize that they are risking their lives by attending his services.

The preacher recalls that in his rush to get his wife to the hospital, he forgot to pray. The preacher was gratified when he learned that the young woman who poisoned his wife was sent to prison, but nonetheless his guilt remained, feeling that it was his fault that his wife was killed. He begs for his wife's forgiveness in front of the congregation, hoping that she can hear him from heaven. The deacons and other people listening feel worried. A few members of the congregation walk out, inspiring others to do the same. Léon starts to cry, thinking about his son, who is a Volunteer. Despite Léon's bitter opposition to his son's choices, he still lets him come home sometimes, for the sake of his wife—but also to protect himself.

Again, this passage highlights the profound moral difficulties created by life under the dictatorship. The preacher feels conflicted about the responsibility he bears for the death of his wife. While perhaps not regretting his vocal opposition to the government, he still feels intense guilt over the idea that he is the reason his wife is dead. Similarly, Léon is a principled opposer of the government, but nonetheless sometimes welcomes back his son, a Volunteer.

The preacher fondly recalls his wife's appearance, saying that he fell in love with her at first sight. Her family had taken him in when he was 14; he converted to Catholicism so he could be with her, and became a preacher in order to impress her parents. At this moment, the preacher's stepsister Anne briefly walks into the congregation, before leaving again. Anne is in cosmetology school, and the preacher can tell from the look on her face that she has no idea about the threats facing him today. His father and her mother always insisted that the two of them call each other brother and sister, without the "step."

This passage contains the second enormous twist of the novel. It reveals that Anne not only married a murderer, but someone who intended to kill her brother (it is not yet clear whether he will succeed, although the power wielded by Papa and other Miliciens implies that he will). Anne's marriage was not only a compromise of her moral principles, but of her familial loyalty.

Up until a few days ago, Anne had been living in their hometown. She resents the preacher for abandoning the family after their little brother drowned. Now, she goes to his house, intending to wait to speak to him after he finishes the service. The preacher continues his sermon, and at this moment Papa and his men burst through the doors. Papa strangles the preacher to stop him from speaking, and he and his men drag him out of the church. Outside, the streets are empty. The preacher is pushed into a truck. The Miliciens beat him and extinguish their cigarettes in his hair. They put a blindfold over his eyes.

The awful climax of this story—and, arguably, the book as a whole—is made all the more dramatic by the fact that it has just been revealed that Anne is the preacher's sister. Because of the non-chronological structure of the book, the reader has insight into the fact that Anne ultimately ends up marrying the person who committed this terrible act against her brother—a heart-wrenching realization.

If a prisoner is taken to the military barracks, Casernes, there is a small chance of escape; no such chance exists from the prison, Fort Dimanche. Listening to the men, the preacher believes he is being taken to Casernes. He can hear a woman calling the name Jean. He hears a shot being fired, and is then dragged out of the truck by his legs so that his head is whacked against the concrete pavement. As he is dragged along, his skin as scraped off, and he feels that it is his actual humanity being peeled away.

This passage vividly evokes the absolute terror and degradation involved in being taken to prison. The preacher hasn't even officially been tortured yet, but the experience of simply being arrested and brought to prison is so traumatic that he feels as if his humanity has been stripped away.

Semi-conscious and dizzy, the preacher finds himself in a cell, surrounded by the smell of "rotting flesh." He loses consciousness, but wakes up to the feeling of a trickle of water on his face. He tries to drink it, then finds out it is urine.

The preacher's torment has truly reached a hell-like level of intensity. It seems impossible that anyone in his position would be left with any hope or energy to survive.

Back at the preacher's house, Anne feels an epileptic fit coming and lies down on the floor. Visions of her life pass by, including the day her little brother drowned and the day the preacher left their village. She feels bad about leaving the church earlier, but she didn't want to hear her brother talk about his dead wife anymore. She feels that her death was certainly his fault, that it was foolishly risky to preach on the radio as he did. She wants to tell him this, but in the grip of her fit she feels like she is either "dying again or possessed again." In the midst of the fit she feels certain that her brother is also dying and that she may never see him again.

In a way, Anne's fit recalls the vivid dreams and sleep talking that both Dany and Estina experienced. In her state of semi-consciousness, Anne has a heightened insight into her own life and the world around her. Yet this insight also has an unreal quality to it, and is compromised by the fact that she feels like she is dying.

Papa gets an order from the presidential palace to release the preacher. His superior, Rosalie, scolds him for botching the arrest, which was supposed to happen quietly. Rosalie is one of very few high-ranking women at Casernes. She asks why Papa didn't shoot the preacher outside church as he was supposed to, and Papa explained that he couldn't get a clear shot. However, Rosalie replies, "You wanted him to suffer." The palace is worried about the preacher becoming a martyr, and Rosalie says that they must ensure he doesn't die at Casernes.

It is important to understand that the order for the preacher's life to be spared is not coming out of a place of mercy or compassion. Brutal dictatorships like the Duvalier regime left no room for such human displays of emotion. Instead, the decision is entirely strategic. The government has realized that turning the preacher into a martyr could ultimately increase his power.

Papa summons the preacher, planning on simply telling him to stop his sermons before sending him home. The preacher, meanwhile, is still in his cell with the handful of other prisoners who urinated on him. These prisoners are speaking now, and he realizes that the urine was supposed to be some kind of ritual cure to heal his wounds. Now, a voice instructs the other prisoners to bring the preacher over to him. Laughing, the voice tells the preacher that he is a "lucky man." As the voice forces the preacher to walk, he can't tell if he is actually moving or if the blood- and shit-stained walls around him are moving.

This passage explores how within the horrifying, surreal context of Casernes, it becomes difficult to tell the difference between violence and care. Being urinated on seemed like an obvious act of violence, but in fact it was care. Meanwhile, the voice promising that the preacher is "lucky" is deeply sinister, and seems more likely to be sarcastic than sincere.

The preacher thinks about his wife and sister. He knows that Anne will stay strong, in part thanks to the strength of her Catholic faith. She can sell his house, and after finishing her cosmetology course she can find work as a beautician. He worries about her epilepsy. When their brother drowned, Anne was having a seizure and thus couldn't go into the water to save him. Forcing himself to walk, the preacher sees light in the distance and realizes that he can see a little better than before. He reasons that perhaps the urine helped. He hears his cellmates whisper "Bonne chance" (good luck). Even though they don't know whether he is being released or killed, they think he is lucky because either way he will be free.

This passage introduces an important connection between Anne and the preacher. Both of them bear a superficial kind of responsibility for the deaths of people they loved: the preacher's wife and their younger brother. Of course, neither Anne nor the preacher are actually to blame for these deaths. Yet it is obvious that they would end up feeling responsible anyway, because of the inescapable knowledge that if they had somehow acted differently, their loved ones would still be alive.

Anne is obsessed with miracles, and she considers each time that she recovers from an epileptic seizure to be a miracle. Now, she awakes to find Léon standing over her, holding a kerosene lamp. He helps her up and tells her he has bad news: the preacher has been arrested and taken to Casernes. Immediately, Anne says she has to go. She runs off and looks back at him; holding the kerosene lamp, he looks like "both the angel of life and the angel of death."

In a way, Léon's news that the preacher has been taken to Casernes does not come as a total surprise to Anne. Through her epileptic fit, she experienced a kind of prophetic intuition that her brother was in mortal danger. It turns out this intuition was correct.

The "death chamber" is not what the preacher imagined. He had been picturing gruesome torture instruments and corpses, but instead it is just a musty office, which stinks of tobacco. Papa tells the preacher that the only thing he has to say is that "you must stop what you've been doing." The preacher doesn't believe him, and expects to soon be returned to his cell and then executed. He thinks that Papa is trying to make him feel relieved simply in order to torture him further. He begins to shake with fear. He thinks about his cellmates, moved by their kindness but also horrified by their abject condition. He is determined not to rot away in a cell before he dies.

Recall that at the very beginning of the novel, after Papa returned from his disappearance in Florida, he complained about the smell that resulted from Ka chain-smoking in their hotel room. This passage explains why Papa was so negatively affected by this smell. It reminded him of his former life as a chain-smoking torturer who spent time inside a musty office that, for all its superficial neutrality, was in reality a "death chamber."

Papa moves closer and closer to the preacher, and as the preacher backs away the wooden chair he is sitting on breaks. Papa smiles. While the preacher leans back to steady himself, he touches one of the chair's broken legs. Seizing it, he aims for Papa's eyes, but instead plunges the broken wood into Papa's cheek, ripping the skin down to his jawline. Papa grabs the preacher and slams him against the ground. He pulls out his gun and shoots him. Just before dying, the preacher thinks about the sermon he would give if he survived that day. He would talk about having seen hell, but also encountering "man-angels who saw in his survival hope for their own."

Like many other moments in the novel, the preacher's death is both profoundly heart-wrenching and strangely hopeful. The fact that the preacher was one of an extremely small margin of prisoners whose lives were supposed to be spared makes his death even more tragic. At the same time, the act of vengeance he manages to perform against Papa—along with his final thoughts about the kindness of the prisoners—creates a sense of redemption.

Papa suggests that the preacher must now regret his actions, and the preacher considers this. He is not sure if he regrets them, even though he also has no idea if his death will have a positive impact on the country. It may inspire people to revolt, or he may just be forgotten. He sees the wound on Papa's face as a kind of victory, because he knows that at least Papa will have to wear that **scar** for the rest of his life.

Here, the book circles back to the same symbol (the scar) and themes with which it began. Although it has moved backward in time, the non-chronological narrative arc of the novel provides a sense of closure as readers realize that the preacher's prediction about Papa's scar comes true.

Anne, meanwhile, is still running, spurred on by some mysterious energy. She is going so fast that everything around her is a blur. She finally reaches Casernes, where the streets are totally empty. She feels like the only person alive in the whole city. Meanwhile, inside Casernes, Rosalie barges into Papa's office in a fury. Papa explains that the preacher attacked him, but Rosalie doesn't seem to care. Papa walks out of the office and through the barracks, with Rosalie following him. Right by the front gate, he vomits. Rosalie tells him he should go home because he is not well, and promises that she will think of an explanation. Papa knows that she will just "do what [is] best for her."

Surprisingly, the act of killing the preacher when he wasn't supposed to turns Papa from a perpetrator into a potential victim of government violence—or, more accurately, into both a perpetrator and a potential victim. Under a dictatorship, even the most powerful government authorities are always at risk of being persecuted, particularly if they are seen to disobey the ultimate authority of the president. Indeed, the more powerful one gets, the greater the risk of this.

Walking out of Casernes, Papa feels like he is about to be shot at any minute. However, he is able to walk away freely. He touches the raw flesh on his face and knows he needs to go to the hospital, but he is also aware that this might be too risky. Suddenly, a woman (Anne) runs into him. She is only wearing a nightgown, and Papa guesses that she is insane. Papa hopes that she isn't someone he's hurt before, because he desperately wants her sympathy. As they collide, they both say "*Tanpri*" (please) at the same time. His mother used to say that if two people say a word at the same time it means they will die on the same day. Papa hopes he isn't shortening this woman's life, and he wonders who she is.

Here Danticat finally reveals how Papa and Anne met: their lives literally collided, although neither of them were aware of the true way in which they were personally connected (via the preacher). Here, it becomes clear that the fact that Papa was put in a vulnerable position by (perhaps inadvertently) betraying government orders was the beginning of his false posturing as a victim. In a sense, his collision with Anne—for all the confusion it causes—seems almost fated.

Papa falls into her arms and Anne manages to hold him, despite his enormous size. Sobbing, she says she needs to go into Casernes, but Papa replies: "People who go in there [...] don't come out." He leads them away, toward his house. When they pass the cemetery she holds her breath. At home, Papa falls asleep straight away. At dawn, Anne can see that Papa's face has stopped bleeding. She watches a funeral procession outside. She pokes around Papa's bare house in order to find materials with which to clean his face. Finding nothing, she goes outside to buy things instead.

The funeral procession outside is one of the final instances of the many grieving rituals portrayed in the novel. It highlights the pervasiveness of death and mourning in Haiti during the era (and perhaps also in life more generally). From one perspective, it can be difficult to witness Anne being almost tricked into caring for the person who just murdered her brother. Yet on the other hand, there is arguably something hopeful about the care she shows.

Outside, Anne tries to avoid the cemetery. Talking to a vendor, she realizes that she must look like a "madwoman," and that he may think she is a healer. Papa, meanwhile, is dreaming about his childhood in Léogâne. He and his mother are working in the garden, and she teaches him how to touch a shame plant. He wakes up suddenly from the sound of his door opening, and goes to grab his gun. It isn't there, and he realizes he left it at Casernes. He suddenly remembers everything that happened the night before, and at this moment sees Anne standing in front of him, wearing a nightgown and covered in dirt and blood.

The dream Papa has about his past serves as a reminder that however monstrous he has become in the present, he was once an innocent child whose sources of joy included the love of his family and spending time in nature. It is difficult to reconcile this image with the man Papa has become, yet at the same time the fact that readers know he eventually becomes a gentle, loving person again is arguably a source of hope.

Anne is holding honey, ginger, and a sprig of yerba Buena, which Papa knows can be mixed as a way to heal his wounds. He can't quite remember who she is, and doesn't want to ask her name because he is worried he will recognize it. Eventually she asks, "What did they do to *you*?" and Papa only says, "I'm free [...] I finally escaped." Papa thinks that in years to come, he will try to explain why he said this. He is not sure why he is so confident that they will have a future together. He can tell that she feels he was put in his path to "save" and "heal" him.

Papa's certainty that he and Anne will have a future together emphasizes the idea that their entrance into each other's lives was fated. Anne's question to him shows how it was she who initially assumed he was a victim rather than a perpetrator. At the same time, this passage makes clear that Papa actively chose to misconstrue the truth—even though his claim to finally be free is actually not a lie.

What happens next would be impossible for Anne to explain to anyone, including Ka. Part of her felt that Papa was her drowned brother, or was connected to him somehow; part of her was thinking of the saints who achieved miracles via self-sacrifice. It was both all and none of these things that made her choose to be with Papa. The doctor sews up Papa's face, telling him that if he moves or smokes cigarettes while it's healing he will end up looking like a "monster." When Anne hears that the preacher died, she momentarily "slip[s] out of her own body." The same thing happens when Ka calls and says she's learned the truth about Papa all those years later.

This passage shows that Anne's decision to be with Papa was ultimately irrational, and produced by the profound trauma she was experiencing at the time. Of course, Danticat has made clear that Anne had no idea who Papa really was. Yet it is also the case that Anne made no effort to learn about Papa's background (something quite necessary in a context where so many people were working for the murderous Duvalier regime).

Anne tells Ka that Papa had been wanting to tell her the truth for a long time. In her head, Anne thinks of it as a miracle that Papa bought them flights to New York the day after they met, and that he never killed anyone again after that. In New York, Papa introduced her as his wife, and she didn't object. Over time, they grew to love each other; not a passionate, romantic love, but a "strained kind of attachment." The beginning of their relationship was characterized by mutual silence, but after Ka was born Papa opened up. They managed to talk about the preacher, but only in "coded" words.

This passage contains another surprising twist to the story of Papa and Anne's relationship. They never actually married; rather, their marriage was just one of the many fictions produced during their reinvention in the US. Perhaps it is necessary that Anne never had to actively make the decision to be with Papa, but simply went along with the momentum of the new life they ended up making together.

The official version of the story is that the preacher killed himself, which is what Papa claims is true. Anne, meanwhile, says she believes that Papa arrested the preacher but someone else killed him. In reality, neither of them believe themselves or the other. Anne has been speaking incoherently to Ka, and only now realizes that her daughter has hung up. Anne feels lonely; she wishes she had been able to say something loving to Ka before they hung up. She is reminded of the fact that everyone close to her might disappear at any moment. The spirits that used to run through her body left the moment she heard the radio broadcast announcing that her brother had set himself on fire in Casernes, leaving "no trace of himself at all."

The book ends on a fittingly ambiguous note. On one hand, Danticat reminds readers of the "miracle" that Papa and Anne managed to have create a loving family despite how much violence and trauma lies in their past. At the same time, many of the book's greatest tragedies remain resolved. There is no assurance that Ka is going to forgive her parents; their relationship may be ruined forever. Furthermore, the preacher—like thousands of other Haitians killed by the dictatorship—will never receive justice.

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