



Harriet's Daughter

M. NourbeSe Philip

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Margaret - a second generation West Indian immigrant - and Zulma - fresh from Tobago - become friends in this novel that challenges stereotypical notions of strong, matriarchal black mothers and poor, abused, powerless white women.

Harriet's Daughter Details

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Author : M. NourbeSe Philip

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From Reader Review Harriet's Daughter for online ebook

M.A. Brown says

I read this book in high school lit. Thanks to this book I learnt about the Underground Railroad and who Harriet Tubman was. Today she is on the twenty dollar bill. The author of this book should be proud that she taught Caribbean children all about the Underground Railroad.

Anya says

http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m6m...

I dunno why but I can't upload the gif itself... My copy/paste obviously hates me... So here is the link.

Joti says

I liked this story for the big themes it brings up; identity and names, and feminism, and controlling children, and the power that adults hold over them with their "i know best" bullshit attitude. Come on. That is total fucking bullshit. And I hated Margaret's father trying to control her and being a dumb fucking unreasonable asshole. And Mr. Clarke, who the hell does he think he is, abusing his wife and child? (He should've been punished)

But all in all, I'm glad Margaret and Zulma got to go to Tobago to see Zulma's grandmother over the summer - and how the secret was revealed at the end of their trip was great - the tension!! And I just loved the part where Margaret's mom finally stood up to her dad and gave her him a piece of her mind. YES! YES FINALLY!!

STANLEY E V FRANCIS says

This book is some thing like me wow

Taneeshia Grant says

This book introduces its' readers to the life of immigrant families. Issues such as identity and the patriarchal family arises from this book as well as Mothering.

Brittany says

How I Came To Read This Book: My prof picked it for our Fiction for Children course.

The Plot: Margaret is a 14-year-old black girl living in Toronto, and best friends with a girl named Zulma from the West Indies who wants nothing more to escape Canada and return to Tobago to live with her grandma. Margaret is frustrated with her overall lack of autonomy and finds inspiration through Underground Railway heroine Harriet Tubman – determined to both make changes in her own life and assist Zulma in her quest, the book develops as a coming of age story.

The Good & The Bad: This book is what I would call, important. It's so different than most young adult fiction, and most Canadian young adult fiction, in that it's about young black women, immigrants at that, straining the lines between their old culture and their new one. Margaret represents generations of first generation Canadians from the time this book is set to present day, wondering what parts of their lives should take priority. That being said, the book is also kind of boring. It takes too much work to read, and this is coming from someone who read it as an adult. The book doesn't make things relatable enough – so while it's an important read, it fails to connect with the reader because it's trying too hard to be 'important'.

The Bottom Line: A valuable book that could have been written better.

Anything Memorable: In a class where we studied some more common works – Nancy Drew, The Chocolate War, etc. – we also studied some quite uncommon, Canadian works as well. The objective in this instance was to show us a piece of fiction that focused on a very Canadian experience – the cultural mosaic – but also to force the publisher to continue printing this book. It was first published in the late 80s, and the only way it'll stay in print is if professors like ours choose to have 45 students buy a book that isn't readily available in any other way.

50-Book Challenge?: Nein.

Antoinette Lewis says

loved it

Sydney says

This is the best literature book I have ever read at school, this book is full of humor and love and adventure.

Stasha says

Read this at school when I was 13 - another coming of age story about an adolescent girl of West Indian descent, growing up in Toronto, Canada while trying to figure out who she is in the midst of "good West Indian discipline" and the culture of the dominant society. Very enjoyable!

Jesima says

it's interesting

Three O'Clock Press says

"Harriet Tubman was brave and strong, and she was black like me. I think it was the first time I thought of wanting to be called Harriet - I wanted to be Harriet. " Margaret is determined to be someone, to be cool, with style and class and have a blacker skin. More than anything she wants to help her best friend, Zulma, escape from Canada and fly back to Tobago to live with her grandmother. She compiles a list: "Things I want changed in my life" and set about achieving her objectives. But at fourteen, coming to terms with growing up, relationships, and responsibilities is not quite so straightforward, and the parental threat of "Good West Indian Discipline" is never far removed. In this charming, humorous, and perceptive tale of adolescence, Marlene Nourbese Philip explores the friendship of two young black girls and throws into sharp relief the wider issues of culture and identity so relevant to teenagers of all races and colours.

Noirfifre says

Glimpsing into a life of a girl who is trying to understand life. I identified with her at that of my life. Freedom!

Courtney Greene says

Set in Toronto, Canada, this novel follows the journey of young Harriet as she learns to feel proud of the heritage behind her name. She learns of many Harriets, including Harriet Tubman, which is part of the inspiration behind the Underground Railroad game the children begin to play. The novel does not shy away from the realities of being a young black teenager, and pays particular attention to what that means for young black girls. Highly recommended.

Steven Buechler says

Harriet's Daughter is an interesting story about fourteen-year-old Margaret. She is trying had to be someone with 'style and class.' But the more she tries to come to terms with growing-up, relationships and responsibilities, the more things become confusing and her father's threat of 'Good West Indian Discipline' seems to be always at hand. But no matter what Margaret's insights continue to be profound.

<http://inkwellbook.blogspot.ca/2013/10/review-harriets-daughter-by-m-nourbese.html>

Wolfkin says

Harriet's Daughter is a short but very good book. M. Nourbese Philip has crafted a YA novel here that really does give insight to the authentic first generation Caribbean-Canadian experience at least the female perspective.

Margaret "Harriet" Cruickshank is everything you could want in a female protagonist. She's plucky, she's fairly brave, and she has an eye for excitement. Her new friend the "fresh off the boat" Zulma is equally interesting to follow. Her desire to return to Tobago is so intense it's manifested in a way that is heart wrenching to read. It's only obvious that Margaret would want to help her and it's a testament to her strength of character that she remains focused on this goal. Margaret like many children in stories is basically ignorant and naive (quite frankly I would go ahead and say stupid) when it comes to adult matters. This is a trait she shares with numerous fictional children but it does make it all the more impressive that though she does have other concerns, and dreams throughout the narrative she managed to maintain a steady desire to help her dear friend.

In terms of characterization there were only two characters who didn't get particularly humanized. Ti-Cush was the first one. As Margaret's best friend before the arrival of Zuma. Ti-Cush initially shows a jealousy towards the new girl that was a not very subtle pettiness. And yet I would have liked to see her explored. Margaret and Zulma see her as petty and depressive and yet from her perspective it must have been frustrating to have what appears to be one of her only friends latch on to someone else and to become a third wheel. Ti-Cush is the character who becomes in charge of the Hunters and Dogs during the Underground Railroad games. It was a role she didn't want and it might be easy to see why. While the other two teams were working together to escape. Ti-Cush is effectively isolated leading a team by herself. Eventually (view spoiler)

The other missing character is Jonathan Cruickshank aka "Rib Roast Prime Minister". After reading the book it's easily possible that most readers wouldn't even remember his name. Whereas Margaret eventually comes to terms with her sister Jo-Ann and even comes to appreciate her father Cuthbert. Her brother is functionally dismissed. When reading the book I was often under the assumption that the elder brother was college aged and thus not a part of the daily family routine. As a female oriented book it's understandable that men would play a lesser role than they traditionally do but Jonathan reads like he was an idea that was never completed. (view spoiler)

Beyond that the characterizations the book is laid out in three distinct acts. The first act either alienating or aligning depending on whether or not the reader is West Indian. In addition to establishing the characters it serves to introduce the reader to the realities of West Indians newly arrived in Canada. The language of their culture, and the various dysfunctions. Through the eyes of a child are seen the struggle for these newcomers to fit into the local culture and maintain their own. While they aren't portrayed with much sympathy (especially the men) the adults struggle to maintain their sense of identity between what they should be and what they are.

There are subtexts of sexuality and suppression thereof that make an interesting case for shedding the sometimes oppressive lifestyles of the West Indies and yet pride is valued as well as respect. The adults demand respect from children though there is evidence that they don't get it from other adults.

Narratively the biggest flaw is that the book is very sectioned into it's triads. Rather than interweaving emotional relevance into the social texts of the first third they're almost non-existent. It could easily be

frustrating to some readers. Those who are not part of a West Indian identity might have difficulty with the first third as even understanding the ethnic expressions of "Tobago-talk". Those who enjoyed the adventuring and imagination of *the game* might find the more saccharine section that ends the book to be too much or an ill-fit with the rest of the book.

While the book does a better job of being a relatable device for the West Indian community, it does a commendable job of being accessible to those outside of it. The West Indian syntax structure is preserved but the language isn't presented as phonetic morphemes and is thus a lot easier for a western audience to understand.
