

A Brief History of Seven Killings



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARLON JAMES

Marlon James was born to an upper middle class family in Kingston. His mother was a police officer and detective, and his father a lawyer. He was a child when Bob Marley (“the Singer”) was shot, and remembers the occasion as one of the only times in his life when his parents seemed truly frightened. James graduated with a BA from the University of the West Indies in 1991 and later gained an MFA from Wilkes University in Pennsylvania in 2006. In between this time James immigrated from Jamaica to the United States, partly due to the threat of homophobic violence, and also because of the limited professional and economic opportunities available in his home country. James’ first novel, *John Crow’s Delight*, was published in 2005; his second, *The Book of Night Women*, in 2009. *The Book of Night Women* garnered positive reviews and several awards, but this was dwarfed by the success of *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, which was awarded the 2015 Man Booker prize (alongside other awards) and is set to be adapted for the screen by HBO. James lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he teaches literature and creative writing at Macalester College.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel is set against the background of the Cold War, an extended period of conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union that began at the end of the Second World War and ended with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 (the year in which the novel ends). The US and USSR did not engage in direct conflict during this period, but the Cold War played out through proxy wars in other nations, as well as extended campaigns of espionage and propaganda. Jamaica, which was an ally of the United States, became a site of US attention following the election as Prime Minister of the People’s National Party politician Michael Manley, who self-identified as a socialist. The US expressed concerns that Jamaica might become a communist nation and ally of the Soviet Union like neighboring Cuba, and deployed a number of CIA operatives in the country in order to prevent this from taking place. Other important political events in the novel include the Jamaican general elections of 1976 and 1980, both of which involved a significant amount of turmoil and violence in the country. The 1970s also saw an enormous rise in popularity of reggae music and the Rastafari religion, fueled by Bob Marley (who is referred to in the novel as “the Singer”). Perhaps the single most important historical event in the novel is the shooting at Marley’s house in 1976, a murder attempt that Marley, and everyone else targeted, somewhat miraculously survived.

Marley died of cancer in the toe in 1981, another important event in the novel. Finally, the novel is also set against the background of the explosion of cocaine use beginning in the 1970s, the crack epidemic of the 1980s, and the subsequent War on Drugs. Although the latter does not play a major role in the novel, Josey Wales’ eventual imprisonment at the end of the narrative indicates a shift in the strictness with which drug traffickers were targeted as a result of US anti-drug initiatives.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In choosing to present the novel through multiple different narrative perspectives, James took inspiration from William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, a novel in which 15 different narrators tell the story of a woman’s death. James was also inspired by Gay Talese’s famous essay “Frank Sinatra has a Cold,” a profile that emerged out of Talese’s inability to interview Sinatra himself. Instead, Talese chose to observe and write about the people surrounding Sinatra in order to build a composite image of the singer; James employs a similar technique in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, albeit with the added layer of fictional invention. In representing both characters who are alive and those who haunt and observe the world from the afterlife, *Seven Killings* is similar to novels such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Jesmyn Ward’s *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *A Brief History of Seven Killings*
- **Where Written:** Minneapolis, Minnesota
- **When Published:** 2014
- **Literary Period:** 21st century Caribbean-American Fiction
- **Genre:** Crime epic, with influences of New Journalism
- **Setting:** Mainly Kingston, Jamaica, and New York City, 1976-1991
- **Climax:** The shooting at the Singer’s house
- **Antagonist:** Josey Wales
- **Point of View:** 14 different first-person narrators

EXTRA CREDIT

Fine trimming. The novel originally had another 10,000 words, which—against his editor’s wishes—James insisted on cutting.

Better safe than sorry. Like Alex Pierce, the journalist character who writes a series of essays entitled “A Brief History of Seven Killings,” James did not publish *Seven Killings* until all the major historical figures on which the novel’s characters are

based were dead.



PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator of the first chapter, Artie Jennings, explains that dead people are restless and never stop talking. Jennings was killed by being pushed over the balcony at the Sunset Beach Hotel in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The next chapter is set on December 2, 1976, and is told through the perspective of fourteen-year-old Bam-Bam. Bam-Bam's mother is a prostitute, and the Kingston ghetto where they live, Copenhagen City, is governed by violence and "madness." Bam-Bam witnesses the killing of both his parents by a man named Funnyboy, and only escapes death himself by hiding underneath his mother's dead body.

The next chapter is narrated by an American called Barry Diflorio, who travels between different countries working for "the Company" (the CIA) and is currently stationed in Jamaica. Diflorio mentions an unnamed reggae singer who has become famous across the world. The next chapter is narrated by Nina Burgess, a light-skinned Jamaican woman whose family home is robbed. Nina recalls her relationship with a white American named Danny.

The next chapter returns to the perspective of Bam-Bam, who explains that a Syrian man brings **guns** to the ghetto and teaches him how to use them. Bam-Bam is close with a gangster don named Papa-Lo, who one day viciously beats and almost kills him for robbing a woman at gunpoint. Bam-Bam explains that in the 1960s the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) was in power, followed by the People's National Party (PNP), but now the JLP wants power back. Bam-Bam compares Papa-Lo, who is a meticulous planner, to another top gangster on the same gang, Josey Wales, who behaves in a spontaneous and erratic way. Josey asks Bam-Bam if he is ready to be a man and leads him to a shack where a boy is tied up naked. Josey gives Bam-Bam a gun and Bam-Bam kills the boy.

In the next chapter, Josey expresses his disdain for Rastafarians. Josey is faithful to his girlfriend, Winifred, because he hasn't found anyone more beautiful than her in ten years. He meets up with a man named Louis Johnson from the American embassy, who tells him that the Singer has been giving money to Papa-Lo. Josey knows that the Americans will try to assassinate him, and plans to preemptively "take care of a few people" in order to protect himself. The next chapter is narrated by Nina, who claims that the Singer's song "Midnight Ravers" was written about her. She goes to **the Singer's house** and tells his security guards that she is pregnant with the Singer's child, hoping to get money for an American visa, but they dismiss her. A white American named Alex Pierce, who is a writer for *Rolling Stone*, also tries to see the Singer and fails.

In the next chapter, a young man from the "Jungle"

neighborhood, Demus, describes being approached by Josey, who gives him a gun and **cocaine** in exchange for killing some people. Demus is happy to do so until he hears that Josey wants him to kill the Singer. Papa-Lo sends his men out to knock on doors in the ghetto and pressure people into voting for the JLP in the upcoming election. Bam-Bam explains that the whole country is waiting on **the Smile Jamaica concert** at which the Singer will play, even though people know it's "PNP propaganda."

Nina gets stopped by the police, who scold her for being out past the curfew and force her to get into their car. She is sure they are going to rape her and tells them to get it over with already, but the officers are so shocked by this that they just take her home. Meanwhile Josey meets with a Cuban nicknamed Doctor Love, who blows up two cars in front of him. Doctor Love learned to make explosives from the CIA and tried to assassinate Che Guevara four times. At the same time, Barry Diflorio is preparing to publically revoke the Singer's American visa on suspicion of drug trafficking.

Papa-Lo knows that Josey is planning something that he thinks Papa-Lo doesn't "have the gumption to do," and admits that Josey is right. Soon after, Josey and Doctor Love set off a bomb in Trench Town. Soldiers descend on Copenhagen City and arrest Papa-Lo along with Josey, Weeper (another killer in the same gang), and others, who are kept in jail for three days. While they are locked up, Doctor Love sets off another two bombs in Elysium Gardens.

Alex Pierce is fired by his boss at *Rolling Stone*, and afterward has a drink with Mark Lansing, who offers Alex access to the Singer in exchange for taking a suitcase of documentary footage back to the US for him. Nina's sister Kimmy tells their parents that Nina had sex with the Singer, but Nina doesn't tell them that Kimmy did too. When Nina's father tries to beat her with a leather belt, she grabs the belt from him and beats him instead.

Barry Diflorio follows Louis Johnson into the ghetto, but Johnson causes Diflorio to crash his car. Mark drops Alex at the Singer's house, but when he arrives Alex has a bad feeling and freaks out, noticing that the guards who are supposed to be standing outside are gone. He leaves.

In the ghetto, Demus, Weeper, Bam-Bam, and others wake up and immediately start doing lines of cocaine while Josey opens a box of M16 rifles. On Josey's cue, the men get into two white Datsuns, drive to the Singer's house, and shoot everyone inside. As they are leaving, Bam-Bam sees Nina calmly walking into the house, not realizing that she is walking into "hell."

Afterward, back in Copenhagen City, Demus is shot at by Josey, Tony Pavarotti, and two other men he doesn't recognize. Demus escapes and hears on the radio that the Singer was not killed—he was treated at the hospital and sent home. Demus runs until he finds himself surrounded by eight Rastamen

dressed in white. Bam-Bam is kidnapped and buried alive by Josey, Tony, and Weeper.

The narrative jumps forward to February 15th, 1979, and to the perspective of Kim Clarke (later revealed to be Nina), a Jamaican woman living in Montego Bay with her white American boyfriend, Chuck. Chuck tells her that after 30 years, the CIA is leaving Jamaica. Kim hopes that when Chuck returns to America, he will marry her and take her with him. However, Chuck refuses, saying that he already has a wife. Furious, Kim shuts herself in the bedroom, sets a newspaper on **fire** with a cigarette, and puts it on the bed.

Barry Diflorio and his family are moving to Argentina. Papa-Lo recalls his time in jail, where he was beaten by police in revenge for the violence he perpetrated in the ghetto. He notes that the Singer came back after the events of December 1976, but now sleeps “with one eye open.” Papa-Lo kills several men and as he is driving away is stopped by the police, who shoot him with his own gun.

Alex, who is in a drug-fueled haze in a hotel in New York City, describes a peace treaty that was signed by Papa-Lo, Shotta Sheriff, and others. The peace did not last. There is a strange man in the hotel room, who—unbeknownst to Alex—is Tony Pavarotti. They end up wrestling, and Alex stabs Tony to death with a letter-opener.

Josey warns Peter Nasser (a politician, and the man who killed Artie Jennings) that a new party is being formed, a Rasta party led by the Singer that will eliminate the PNP and JLP. Josey meets with a new American from the CIA, Mr. Clarke, who tells him that Jamaica is at a “crossroads” and risks going communist. Josey feels that the whole country is being taken over by “peace treaty fever” and wants nothing to do with it, insisting: “in the ghetto there is no such thing as peace.” On the phone, Josey tells Weeper that they are headed to New York.

Artie Jennings describes the Singer’s foot cancer. A Jamaican general election is called for October 30, 1980, and “a new party” wins. On May 11, 1981, the Singer dies at a hospital in Miami.

The narrative shifts forward to August 14, 1985, and to New York, where a young Jamaican woman named Dorcas Palmer (who is Nina/Kim) describes her life in the city. In the next chapter, Weeper describes having sex with a man in spite of the threat of “gay cancer” (AIDS). Josey is about to arrive to inspect a crack house in Brooklyn so he can report back to the Colombian Medellín gang. The next chapter is narrated by a Jamaican Rasta called Tristan Phillips, who is locked up in Rikers Island prison and is being interviewed by Alex Pierce. Tristan tells Alex that Papa-Lo was killed by the police in Kingston and Shotta Sheriff was killed in a nightclub in New York.

Josey talks to a highly-educated Jamaican named Eubie who, years before, left Columbia Law School to enter the drug trade.

Eubie has a monopoly on the Bronx and Queens and has been recruiting men from Copenhagen City to work for him since 1977. Weeper has sex with a white man and ignores Josey’s phone call. He wishes Josey would see that he has everything in New York under control and leave him alone. Eubie calls and says he will now pick Josey up from the airport, and that Josey wants to have a look at operations in Bushwick. He tells Weeper to meet them there.

Dorcas brings a wealthy white man named Mr. Ken back to her apartment in the Bronx. Dorcas and Ken drink and dance in her apartment, but then Ken discovers a book in Dorcas’ bathroom called *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found*. In Rikers, Tristan tells Alex that he believes that Josey was behind the police’s murder of Papa-Lo. He says that Josey is landing in New York that day and points out that Alex is doing a poor job concealing his fear at this news. Tristan realizes Josey wants to kill Alex because Alex knows that Josey shot the Singer.

Eubie picks Josey up from the airport and Josey is immediately irritated by Eubie’s jovial, teasing manner. Eubie tells him that Weeper is now hooked on crack, which Eubie stresses is a whole different issue from Weeper’s longstanding addiction to powder cocaine. Meanwhile Ken interrogates Dorcas about the book, and she reveals that she stole the identity of another Jamaican woman named Dorcas Palmer who died in Queens in 1979. She explains that the man she’s running away from (Josey) is still in Jamaica and that she’s not worried he will find her.

Eubie and Josey reach the crack house. Weeper arrives and enters the crack house alongside Josey, who is carrying a gun in each hand. Walking quietly, Josey shoots up the house, killing a large number people including a pregnant woman.

Back at Dorcas’ apartment, Ken has locked himself in the bathroom for an hour, seemingly in shock at Dorcas’s fake identity. Ken’s son and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Colhirst, arrive and explain that Ken suffers from memory loss and doesn’t know where he is.

A killer named John-John has tied up Weeper and pressed a gun to his head. Weeper tries to recruit him to work for Storm Posse, claiming he will pay triple what his current boss, Griselda Blanco, pays him. Unsuccessful, Weeper asks for a last hit of coke before John-John kills him. John-John helps Weeper shoot it up but doesn’t explain that the coke is pure, and Weeper has a seizure and dies.

The final part of the novel jumps ahead to March 22, 1991. Josey is set to be extradited to the United States, so his son, Benjy, has taken over running Copenhagen City. However, having grown up in a state of privilege, Benjy is naïve, and one day he goes out alone on a bike and is shot and killed. Chaotic violence ensues in the aftermath of Benjy’s murder.

Doctor Love visits Josey in prison and tells him that Eubie betrayed him. Meanwhile, Eubie and his men have kidnapped

Alex and forced him to read the piece he has written about them in *The New Yorker* aloud. Eubie tells Alex that he will have to call the magazine and make changes according to Eubie's demands.

In prison, Josey pulls a machete on Doctor Love, who threatens to kill Josey's only living child in return. Josey withdraws, and Doctor Love gives him pills to swallow, revealing that Josey cannot escape his fate. He waits until Josey is out cold and opens the cell door. Meanwhile Alex confesses to Eubie that Josey shot the Singer. Eubie shoots Alex in the foot and warns him never to give him a reason to see him again.

A woman named Millicent Segree (who is Nina/Kim/Dorcas) stops by a Jamaican restaurant and sees a newspaper headline saying that Josey was burned to death in his cell. She throws up. At home, she sits in a daze and then makes a call; the person who answers is Kimmy.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sir Arthur George Jennings – Sir Arthur Jennings, sometimes nicknamed Artie, is a former politician who was murdered by being pushed off a balcony at the Sunset Beach Hotel in Montego Bay. He is already dead at the beginning of the novel, and he narrates the prelude to each of the five sections of the novel from the afterlife, which he describes as boring and frustrating. Sir Arthur is particularly exasperated by the fact that almost everyone who is still living thinks he fell of the balcony, and the man who murdered him—who is eventually revealed to be Peter Nasser—remains free.

The Singer – The Singer, who is described in the Cast of Characters as “the Reggae superstar of the world,” is based on Bob Marley. However, he is only referred to as Bob Marley once in the novel (and one additional time as “Bob”); otherwise, he is simply called “the Singer.” A Rasta, the Singer spreads messages of revolutionary love, peace, and black power through his music. He is a sex symbol, and although the novel features his wife, Rita, it also emphasizes that he sleeps with a large number of women (including Nina and Kimmy). He also works on encouraging unity between warring groups in Jamaica, and helps organize **the Smile Jamaica** concert to counterbalance the conflict in the lead-up to the 1976 election. However, this project of peace is thwarted when Josey Wales and his crew descend on **the Singer's house** and shoot everyone inside. Although the Singer survives and the concert goes ahead, he becomes increasingly cynical and paranoid, and decides to leave Jamaica. In 1981, the Singer is killed by cancer of the toe. Just before his death, he converts to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and his legacy continues to be a source of conflict, with many different characters and groups seeking to claim him as their own.

Peter Nasser – Peter Nasser is a Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) politician who collaborates with Josey Wales in planning the shooting at **the Singer's house**. In the 1980 election, the JLP are victorious and Nasser becomes Prime Minister. Nasser is presented as having the negative qualities associated with politicians: he is corrupt, dishonest, power-obsessed, and—according to Josey—he confuses representing people with “owning” them.

Nina Burgess – Nina is a young woman from Havendale, an affluent neighborhood in Kingston. She is light-skinned and well-educated, yet despite these privileges she feels that she has no future in Jamaica and is desperate to move to the United States. Before the main narrative takes place, Nina has sex with the Singer and hopes to use this as leverage to help her get an American visa, although this does not end up working out. Nina is remarkably single-minded and goes to extreme lengths in order to achieve her goal of moving to America, mostly by using her sexuality. Nina's desire to move to the U.S. becomes more urgent after she accidentally witnesses the shooting at **the Singer's house** and becomes convinced that Josey Wales is going to kill her in retribution. She changes her identity several times, assuming the names Kim Clarke, Dorcas Palmer, and Millicent Segree, and eventually realizes her dream of leaving Jamaica, choosing to move to the Bronx, New York. Nina has a difficult relationship with her parents, who scold her for sleeping with the Singer, and with her sister Kimmy, who tells their parents that Nina did so. However, the novel ends with Nina (now living as Millicent) calling Kimmy on the phone, suggesting that she might be ready to repair their relationship and reconnect with her home country.

Kim-Marie Burgess – Kim-Marie, known as Kimmy, is Nina's sister. The two have a difficult relationship, colored by competitiveness and betrayal. Kimmy begins dating Ras Trent, a Rasta whose father is the Jamaican Minister of Tourism, however Nina indicates that he treats her badly. Later it emerges that Kimmy is a contestant in Miss Jamaica 1979. The novel ends with the hope of possible reconciliation between her and Nina.

Nina's Mother – Nina's and Kimmy's mother is a rather uptight woman who lives in Havendale with her husband. When the novel begins, her house has been robbed and she may have been raped. She is furious when she learns that Nina had sex with the Singer, claiming that Rastas are “dirty.” However, the fact that she doesn't mind Kimmy dating Ras Trent suggests that the real issue is the fact that the Singer comes from a poor family in the ghetto.

Doctor Love (Luis Hernán Rodrigo de las Casas) – Doctor Love is a counterrevolutionary Cuban employed as a CIA consultant. He specializes in explosions, planting bombs on airplanes and in the Kingston ghetto. Aside from his strong opposition to the Cuban regime, Doctor Love is characterized as having no real ideological commitments. Although they are

allies throughout most of the novel, Josey Wales accuses him of answering “to whoever paying the biggest cheque.” In the same scene, Doctor Love kills Josey by setting fire to his prison cell, following orders of the Medellín cartel. However, he also gives Josey a pill to knock him unconscious before, a surprisingly merciful gesture that arguably speaks to Doctor Love’s admiration of Josey.

Alex Pierce – Alex is a white American journalist who at the beginning of the novel is on assignment for *Rolling Stone* magazine, writing an article about Mick Jagger’s exploits in Jamaica. However, Alex quickly becomes convinced that there is a more interesting story to be told in the cultural and political shifts occurring in Jamaica at the time, as shown through the lens of the Singer’s success. Alex is swiftly fired from *Rolling Stone* and has trouble gaining access to the Singer, which leaves him demoralized. He is fixated on the idea that he is not just a tourist and that he knows “the real Jamaica.” By chance, he ends up standing outside **the Singer’s house** just before the shooting, though he walks away just as Josey Wales and his crew arrive—a fact that speaks to his lack of journalistic instinct during this time. However, as time passes Alex becomes more competent and even manages to interview the Singer, alongside Kingston dons like Papa-Lo, Shotta Sherrif, and Josey. Alex compares information from his interviews with the Singer and Josey and realizes that it was Josey who personally shot the Singer, and his knowledge of this fact—while again demonstrating his increased skill as a journalist—puts his life in danger. Josey sends Tony Pavarotti to kill Alex, but acting in self-defense Alex stabs Tony with a letter opener and accidentally kills him. By the end of the novel, Alex’s writing about Jamaica—compiled into an essay series entitled “A Brief History of Seven Killings”—is being published in *The New Yorker*. His obsession with Jamaica has come at the expense of his personal life, although it has been a major boost to his career. At his home in Harlem, he is attacked by Eubie and his crew, who force Alex to make edits to the essays at **gunpoint**.

Louis Johnson – Louis Johnson is a field officer for the CIA hired by Barry Diflorio. Barry notes that Louis and Doctor Love come as a “package deal.” The CIA uses him to “maintain the links with black people,” which includes supplying **guns** to Josey and his gang and teaching them how to use different kinds of weapons. After the events of 1976, Louis is “sent back to Central America” in order to continue fighting communism in the region.

Papa-Lo – Papa-Lo, whose given name is Raymond Clarke, is the don of Copenhagen City when the book begins, having been in this role since 1960. Both feared and beloved by the people, he is credited with transforming Copenhagen City into a more habitable place and eradicating rape from the neighborhood due to his own zero-tolerance attitude toward sexual violence. The opening of the novel sees him troubled by his conscience and hopeful that the violence in Kingston might

one day end. This is partly caused by his close friendship with the Singer, who inspires him to embrace peace. Papa-Lo is also troubled by the actions of Josey, his head enforcer, who he believes is making plans behind his back. At this point, there are rumors circulating that Papa-Lo is “going soft,” and that he is disturbed by having killed a boy who turned out to be a hard-working high school student with lots of potential. However, Papa-Lo himself admits that he is troubled not by his guilt over killing the boy, but by his *lack* of feeling about it. After the shooting at **the Singer’s house**, Papa-Lo is arrested along with his rival, Shotta Sherrif. In prison, the two men agree to draw up a peace treaty in an attempt to end the brutality afflicting Kingston. However, this peace treaty ultimately fails to succeed, and in 1979 Papa-Lo is shot and killed by the police.

Josey Wales – Josey Wales begins the novel as Papa-Lo’s head enforcer, his right-hand man in running Copenhagen City. However, Josey—who is highly intelligent, cynical, and dishonest—is secretly plotting to kill the Singer behind Papa-Lo’s back. Josey’s decision to kill the Singer is based in his belief that peace is not a viable goal and his opposition to the growing power and influence of the Rastafarian movement. Josey collaborates with Doctor Love, Louis Johnson, and Mr. Clark, yet in front of the Americans he pretends to be unintelligent and hides his ability to speak Spanish. Despite this pretense, Josey prides himself on his intelligence. Unusually for a gangster, he is faithful to his girlfriend, Winifred, throughout the novel. Josey shoots the Singer himself but fails to kill him; he is deeply ashamed of this and goes to great lengths to keep it a secret. After the shooting, Josey’s power increases, and once Papa-Lo is killed he takes over as don of Copenhagen City. Before long, he also takes over as leader of the Storm Posse, which traffics and distributes **cocaine** from Colombia via Jamaica to the United States. He works closely with Weeper and theoretically also with Eubie, yet he (presciently) distrusts Eubie. Although so powerful that he becomes “untouchable” within Jamaica, Josey is eventually arrested and ordered to be extradited to the United States on a plethora of charges. He plans to cooperate and provide information to federal law enforcement and is confident this will afford him a light sentence; however, before he being transported to the United States the Medellín cartel orders Doctor Love to kill Josey in order to prevent him from snitching. After Doctor Love gives him a pill to knock him unconscious, Josey burns to death in his prison cell.

Weeper – Weeper is a gang enforcer in Copenhagen City who works with Josey in planning and carrying out the attack on **the Singer’s house**. Highly intelligent and well-educated, Weeper is an atheist who enjoys reading philosophy, particularly Bertrand Russell’s *The History of Western Philosophy*. Before the novel starts, Weeper becomes addicted to **cocaine** and starts having sex with men while in prison, which he excuses on the grounds that there are no women around—however, he secretly falls in

love with a man there and continues writing to him after he gets out. As the book progresses, Weeper's close friendship with Josey means that he accumulates wealth and power, and is eventually assigned to be the head enforcer of the Storm Posse in New York. However, Weeper continues to be plagued by his internalized homophobia. In addition, he begins using crack, which impedes his ability to effectively run the drug operation. Eventually, Eubie sends John-John K to kill Weeper. The two men have a rather friendly conversation, and Weeper manages to persuade John-John to inject him with cocaine (without telling him that the cocaine is pure). Weeper immediately has a seizure and dies in John-John's arms.

Demus – Demus is a young Rastafarian gang member recruited by Josey to assist in the shooting at [the Singer's house](#). He is initially horrified at the prospect of shooting the Singer, convinced that this will get him sent to hell. However, he allows himself to be plied with [cocaine](#) and persuaded that shooting the Singer is actually an important and necessary act. He dies after the attack on the Singer's house, and in the afterlife encounters a group of Rastas dressed in white who lead him through a solemn procession and hang him as punishment for his involvement in shooting the Singer.

Heckle – Heckle is another of the gunmen Josey recruits for the shooting at [the Singer's house](#). He is the only one of these recruits to survive the shooting, and afterward he admits his involvement and begs the Singer's forgiveness. Impressed, the Singer takes him into his inner circle. Heckle is highly intelligent, a fact that impresses Josey.

Bam-Bam – Bam-Bam is a teenager born in the Eight Lanes. When he was a child, Funnyboy and his gang orally raped Bam-Bam's father before killing both of Bam-Bam's parents in front of him. After this point, he was taken in by Josey Wales and Papa-Lo. He shoots a [gun](#) for the first time at the age of ten. Already at this young age he is deeply cynical, convinced that he will never have a chance to get out of the ghetto and that life is worthless. During the attack on [the Singer's house](#), Bam-Bam shoots the Singer's wife, Rita. He flees and sleeps in a park, where he accidentally witnesses [the Smile Jamaica concert](#), an event he finds terrifying. Immediately after, he is buried alive by Josey, Weeper, and Tony Pavarotti.

Tony Pavarotti – Tony Pavarotti is an enforcer and sniper known as the most merciless killer in Jamaica. He is rumored to have been trained at the School of the Americas, an American Defense institute that provides military training to US allies in Latin America. Tony is never shown to speak in the novel, and some characters believe he is mute. Josey sends Tony to kill Alex Pierce, and while defending himself Alex accidentally kills Tony by stabbing him in the neck with a letter opener.

Shotta Sherrif – Shotta Sherrif is the don of the Eight Lanes and Papa-Lo's rival. Like Papa-Lo, he is close friends with the Singer and begins to feel sympathetic to the Singer's project of

unity and peace. While Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherrif are in prison, they call a truce and draw up plans for a peace treaty. Shotta is eventually killed in a nightclub in Brooklyn by members of the Wang Gang, and Tristan notes that afterwards the PNP's New York posses have been "scattered ever since."

Kim Clarke – Kim Clarke is the first of Nina's alter-egos. She lives in Montego Bay with her boyfriend, Chuck, whom she compels herself to love even though he also deeply irritates her. Kim is desperate to move to the United States, and has sex with a man in the visa office in order to secure a visa. When Chuck reveals that he is married and will be returning home to the States, Kim blackmails him by threatening to reveal the affair to his wife.

Chuck – Chuck is a white American from Arkansas, temporarily stationed in Jamaica by the company he works for, Alcorp Bauxite. He lives with Kim in Montego Bay, but is secretly married to a black American woman back in the United States. After he leaves Jamaica and returns to his wife, he is blackmailed by Kim (now living as Dorcas Palmer), who threatens to reveal their affair to his wife.

Eubie – Eubie is the head enforcer of the Storm Posse in New York. Highly intelligent, he grew up in an affluent suburb in Kingston and went to private school. In New York, he even began studying at Columbia Law School before dropping out to devote himself to drug dealing full-time. He is thus distinguished as the one character who is in the drug game simply because he wants to be, not because of a dearth of other options. Eubie has fully assimilated into American culture. Although he is friendly and polite to Josey's face, he secretly plots to take out Josey and become the don of the Storm Posse in New York himself. He also orders John-John K to kill Weeper. At the end of the novel, Eubie and his crew imprison Alex in his own home, shoot him in the foot, and force him to make edits on his essay series for *The New Yorker* at [gunpoint](#). Eubie's paradoxical way of thinking is illuminated by the fact that he berates Alex for representing Monifah Thibodeaux in an unflattering light, when it was Eubie's gang who supplied drugs to Monifah and ultimately killed her.

Tristan Phillips – Tristan is a Rasta imprisoned in Rikers Island prison and interviewed by Alex while serving his sentence. Born in Balaclava, a since-destroyed slum in Kingston, he refers to himself as half-black, half-"coolie" and makes jokes about his mixed-race identity. He is a member of the Ranking Dons, although he laments this because he believes the gang is a mess. Back in Jamaica, Tristan had been recruited by Shotta Sherrif to be the chair of the peace council, and notes that he and a woman named Lucy were the only people involved in the peace council who did not end up dead. After being released from prison, he becomes addicted to crack [cocaine](#).

John-John K – John-John is a professional hitman employed by Eubie (via Griselda Blanco) to kill Weeper. A gay man, John-

John is in love with a man back in Chicago named Rocky, although their relationship is not a happy one. He takes a liking to Weeper and regrets that he has to kill the first man he's met in New York to whom he enjoys talking. As a result of this affection, he embraces Weeper while he is dying.

Griselda Blanco – Griselda is a Colombian drug lord who lives in Miami and transports cocaine for the Medellín cartel. There are rumors that she is a lesbian, and that she has sex with go-go dancers before killing them. At the end of the novel, Doctor Love mentions that Griselda “flew the fuck off the grid.”

Ken Colhirst – Ken Colhirst is a wealthy and handsome older white man who lives in Manhattan. He suffers from amnesia, and his son employs Dorcas Palmer to take care of him. He and Dorcas get along well, as Dorcas is entertained by his fun-loving manner and rude sense of humor. However, shortly after he forgets who Dorcas is and, panicked, locks himself in her bathroom.

Dorcas Palmer – Dorcas Palmer is the second of Nina's false identities. She lives in the Bronx and takes a series of temporary care work positions through the God Bless Employment Agency. She finds Ken attractive, and on his request, she takes him back to her apartment in the Bronx, where she begins to relax and enjoy herself for the first time she can remember.

Millicent Segree – Millicent is the third and final fake identity assumed by Nina. A trainee nurse at Beth Israel hospital, Millicent attempts to conceal the fact that she is Jamaican. However, when a significant number of Ranking Dons come into the hospital with **gunshot** wounds, Millicent is overcome by curiosity and hovers around the emergency ward, hoping to learn information about what happened. After learning that Josey Wales has been imprisoned, Millicent enters a Jamaican restaurant on a whim, where she learns on the news that Josey has been burned to death in a prison cell. In shock, Millicent goes home and calls Kimmy, suggesting that she may be about to reconnect with her homeland, family, and former identity.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Nina's Father – When the novel begins, Nina's father is traumatized by the robbery that took place at his house. After learning that she slept with the Singer he beats Nina, although Nina grabs the belt and begins hitting him instead.

Ras Trent – Ras Trent is a wealthy Rasta whose father is the Jamaican Minister of Tourism. He dates Kimmy and, according to Nina, has a sexist attitude toward women.

Barry Diflorio – Barry is a Yale-educated CIA station chief living in Jamaica with his family. Barry takes pride in his work and is furious when Bill Adler undoes his progress in Jamaica and when his wife, Claire, accuses him of being bad at his job. He is eventually relocated to Argentina.

Claire Diflorio – Claire is Barry's wife. She hates Jamaica and is thrilled when the family is re-stationed to Buenos Aires.

William Adler – William (Bill) Adler is a former field officer for the CIA stationed in Jamaica. Troubled by a guilty conscience, he went rogue in 1969 and wrote a book exposing the operations of the CIA in Latin America.

Mark Lansing – The son of Richard Lansing, the former Director of the CIA, Mark goes to Jamaica in order to make a film about the Singer. Perceived as a clueless rich kid, he is treated as an annoyance by the other characters, particularly Alex.

Mr. Clark – Mr. Clark, another CIA field officer, arrives in Jamaica in 1978, replacing Louis Johnson. Like Louis, he is close with Doctor Love.

Bill Bilson – Bill Bilson is a Jamaican journalist who works for the *Jamaica Gleaner*.

Winifred – Winifred is Josey Wales' girlfriend. Although they never officially get married, Josey remains faithful to her throughout the novel.

Benjy Wales – Benjy is Josey's son. After his father is imprisoned, he takes over as don of Copenhagen City. However, he naively travels through Kingston without protection, and ends up being shot and killed. This provokes an outburst of violence throughout Jamaica and New York.

Bam-Bam's Mother – Bam-Bam's mother is a sex worker. She is killed by Funnyboy, who also kills her husband.

Bam-Bam's Father – Bam-Bam's father is described as “the last good man in the ghetto,” although he beats his wife. When Bam-Bam's mother calls Funnyboy to back her up, Funnyboy orally rapes Bam-Bam's father and then shoots him in the head.

Funky Chicken – Funky Chicken is another one of the gunmen recruited by Josey for the attack on **the Singer's house**. We learn nothing about him except that he is a heroin user.

Leggo Beast – Leggo Beast is captured by Papa-Lo during the time that Papa-Lo is trying to round up all the gunmen involved in the shooting at **the Singer's house**. He admits guilt, but claims he was “brainwashed” by Josey Wales and the CIA. Papa-Lo kills him as punishment.

Priest – Priest is a resident of the Kingston ghetto who works as Alex's informer. He is not taken seriously, as there are rumors that he shot off his own penis with a **gun**.

Junior Soul – Junior Soul is a teenage member of Wang Gang whom Alex interviews, and who tells him about the conflict between Wang Gang and the Jamaican army.

Funnyboy – Funnyboy is the second-in-command of Shotta Sherrif in the Eight Lanes. He is known for forcing men to perform sexual acts on him before killing them, which is what he's done to Bam-Bam's father.

Richard Lansing – Richard is the former Director of the CIA and Mark Lansing's father.

A-Plus – A-Plus is an old friend of Tristan’s who lives in Miami.

Ren-Dog – Ren-Dog is an enforcer for the Storm Posse in New York. He tortures Alex alongside Eubie.

Romeo – Romeo is a young boy employed by the Storm Posse in Bushwick. He initially works as a spotter, but is promoted to runner by Weeper when Weeper realizes that most of the other dealers have disappeared. Josey Wales takes a liking to Romeo, admiring his cheeky courage.

Rocky – Rocky is John-John’s lover. He lives in Chicago.

Mr. Colhirst – Mr. Colhirst is Ken’s son.

Ms. Colhirst – Ms. Colhirst is Ken’s daughter-in-law. She treats Ken dismissively and is rude to Dorcas.

Michael Manley A Jamaican politician and prime minister. He is a democratic socialist.

Aisha A Jamaican woman who sleeps with Alex at one point in the novel.

Rita The Singer’s wife.

The manager The Singer’s manager. He gets shot on the day of the attack at the Singer’s house.

TERMS

Babylon Babylon is a Jamaican patois word that refers to the police, and also more broadly to what is perceived as the corrupt, oppressive system of government, the law, and prison.

Rasta Tam A Rasta tam is a crocheted cap worn by Rastafarians, usually men. The caps often come in the colors red, green, yellow, and black, symbolizing both the Jamaican flag and pan-Africanism/black power.

Coolie Coolie is a pejorative term for people from Asia. There is a significant Asian population in Jamaica due to the legacy of the British empire, which helped transport laborers from Asia to the Caribbean after the abolition of the slave trade.

Duppy Duppy is a patois word meaning ghost or spirit.

opens at a point of crisis in Jamaica, in which, according to the radio, “crime and violence are taking over the country.” The reader witnesses this violence first-hand through the multiple perspectives of characters who live in the Kingston ghetto. In only the first few chapters of the novel, Sir Arthur Jennings describes his assassination, Bam-Bam recalls the gruesome murder of his parents, and Nina notes that her parents have been robbed and her mother has (likely) been raped. The novel emphasizes that this pervasive violence in turn creates more violence, as people seek revenge for the harm done to them and gradually lose a sense of their own humanity, including any hope that the violence might eventually subside. Many of the characters have become so desensitized to violence that they cannot even bring themselves to be horrified by it; this is reflected when both Bam-Bam and Papa-Lo admit that they feel “nothing” when killing people.

The presence of violence in the novel is so pervasive that even efforts to bring about peace often end up simply causing further violence. The most important example of this is **the Smile Jamaica concert**. Although the concert and the Singer (who organizes it) are symbols of the hope for a peaceful country, in reality many of the people behind the concert--and particularly the People’s National Party (PNP)--have ulterior motives that have less to do with creating peace than increasing their own power. Later in the novel, the Singer encourages various gang members in Kingston to sign a peace treaty, but it does not last long before carnage ensues once again. Indeed, underpinning the novel is a general sense of cynicism about the possibility of violence giving way to peace. Almost every character who is directly involved with committing acts of violence--including Josey Wales, Weeper, Bam-Bam, Demus, Papa-Lo, Shotta Sheriff, and Tony Pavarotti--ends up dead by the novel’s end. The frequency of deaths and the title *A Brief History of Seven Killings* further emphasize the seemingly all-consuming power of violence. Violence leads to death, and when certain perpetrators of violence are killed, new perpetrators simply rise up to take their place.

While much of the violence depicted in the novel centers around the gang members in the Kingston ghetto beating, torturing, raping, and murdering others, not all of the novel’s violence plays out on an interpersonal level. The narrative is set against the backdrop of the Cold War, which is itself defined by a tension between violence and peace. The Cold War is distinguished by the fact that its central opposing powers--the United States and the Soviet Union--were involved in very little direct armed conflict. However, although this direct conflict was not taking place, more surreptitious forms of violence still proliferated during the Cold War era. Doctor Love and Tony Pavarotti, for example, were both trained by the CIA to advance American interests through violence in Latin America and the Caribbean; Doctor Love is responsible for



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.



VIOLENCE VS. PEACE

A Brief History of Seven Killings is an extraordinarily violent book, and one of the overarching struggles that defines the narrative is the effort to instill peace in the midst of cyclical, pervasive violence. The book

killing hundreds of people with explosives, whereas Tony Pavarotti is known as the most merciless killer in Jamaica.

The Jamaican government is also portrayed as committing acts of violence in the name of peace and security. The politician Peter Nasser is responsible for murdering Artie Jennings, and he along with other Jamaican Labour Party members and CIA operatives help orchestrate the shooting at **the Singer's house**. Meanwhile, national authorities, such as the police and army, arbitrarily inflict violence on the people, such as when Demus is tortured with electric chords by the police after he is falsely accused of a crime. The association between governmental authorities (Babylon) and violence is so strong that the characters cannot even imagine being treated fairly by the police soldiers. When Nina is picked up by a police car, she is so convinced that the officers are going to rape her she tells them to just get it over with. This illuminates the extent to which the characters in the novel perceive police to be the perpetrators of violence rather than the upholders of peace.

The conflation of authority and violence is presented as one of the most important threats to peace in the novel. While the leaders of rival gangs, Shotta Sherrif and Papa-Lo, eventually decide to end their conflict and draw up a peace treaty together, other figures remain suspicious that such an agreement could actually lead to lasting peace. As Josey Wales points out, even if everyone living in the ghetto decides to put down their weapons, the police and army will continue to commit acts of violence against the people. From this angle, a truce between rival gangs looks more like a surrender to Babylon than the beginning of a more peaceful era. Ultimately, the events of the book support this cynical interpretation of violence vs. peace, particularly through the event of Josey Wales' death. Josey's imprisonment and extradition to the United States may initially appear to herald a new era in which the violent terror he inflicts will finally end. However, when Doctor Love burns him to death in his cell on the order of the Medellín cartel, we are reminded that violence is never caused by just one person and thus cannot be extinguished through the elimination of individual perpetrators.



MASCULINITY, SEXUALITY, AND HOMOPHOBIA

Although there are female characters in the novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is largely populated

by men and is centrally concerned with the theme of masculinity. Where stereotypes about black Caribbean men (and gangsters in particular) indicate that their masculinity is defined by aggressive, promiscuous heterosexuality, the novel challenges such assumptions by featuring, instead, a much more complex and nuanced depiction of maleness and male sexuality. Some of the most mercilessly violent characters in the novel, such as Weeper, are also gay, and descriptions of Weeper's desire for other men shows that masculinity and

homosexuality can operate simultaneously, rather than necessarily opposing one another. At the same time, the novel shows how male characters are forced to suppress feelings and desires that are perceived as feminine in order to conform to a masculine ideal. For example, Weeper threatens to kill Bam-Bam for screaming in fear after the shooting at **the Singer's house**.

Several of the book's main characters have homosexual inclinations, even if far fewer of them identify as gay. One of the most prominent queer characters in the novel is Weeper, whose preference for gay sex and **cocaine** addiction are framed as twin attributes which both developed during his time in prison. Weeper explains that when he was in prison he started using cocaine in order to be able to bring himself to have sex with men. Although the homophobic culture of Jamaica prohibits voluntary sex between men, having sex with men in prison is tolerated because there are no women present and an insatiable sexual appetite is seen as being part of hypermasculine culture. However, Weeper's explanation about his exploits in prison is only partly true; the reality is that Weeper simply prefers having sex with men, and there is even some indication that other characters in the novel accept this as an unspoken fact. For example, Josey points out that Weeper experiences the happiest time of his life in prison, implying that this is because it was the only time he was able to indulge his homosexual desires freely. Toward the end of the novel, Josey admits that he knows he "should" have killed Weeper for being gay, but that instead he turned a blind eye to Weeper's sexuality, letting it exist as something of an open secret.

At the same time, this does not mean that gay sex is openly practiced or accepted within the world of the novel. One of the most frequent insults in the novel is "battyboy" (or "battyman"), Jamaican slang for gay man. Indeed, as Josey's thoughts of killing Weeper indicate, the punishment for being perceived as gay is not simply condemnation or social shunning, but violence and death. Because of the extreme version of masculinity embodied by the characters in the novel, even the most minor deviations into perceived effeminateness or "weakness" are strictly punished. If a gang member so much as flinches while performing or witnessing an act of violence, they are labelled a battyboy or "pussyhole," a term which similarly highlights the way in which femininity is associated with shame. Jamaica is often portrayed as one of the more dangerous places in the world to be a gay person, particularly for men. Although the novel contains several examples of Jamaican men who engage in gay sex, it also affirms the impression that being gay is highly dangerous in Jamaica.

Masculinity is presented as hindering the free and open expression of emotion even within queer contexts. For example, when Weeper is having sex, he stops himself from moaning because he thinks that making sounds turns him into the "woman" in the dynamic. Meanwhile the other major gay

character, John-John, is more open about his sexual preferences than Weeper but berates himself for the attachment he has developed to his lover in Chicago, Rocky. This in turn connects John-John, a white gay American, to the black straight Jamaican men who also face the pressure to be promiscuous in order to live up to a masculine ideal. For example, the other characters find it odd that Josey is in a monogamous relationship with his girlfriend, Winifred, because part of embodying a masculine ideal involves demonstrating sexual aggression and virility. Masculinity is thus presented as a harmful norm to both gay and straight characters, even if gay characters suffer more severely under its demands.



JAMAICAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Jamaica achieved independence from the United Kingdom on August 6, 1962, and thus at the time the novel begins (1976) the country is still very

much in the process of developing an independent national identity. This is presented as a difficult task, in part due to the country's traumatic history of colonialism and slavery, issues which are in turn linked to questions of political power, racism, colorism, religion, class, and respectability. Some Jamaican characters remain triumphant in the post-independence period, embracing the messages of black power embodied by figures such as Marcus Garvey. Others, however, find little hope in the face of the poverty, violence, and corruption that afflicts post-independence Jamaica.

The book begins at a time in which Rastafari is gaining influence, in large part due to the popularity of the Singer (the character based on Bob Marley). The book describes the Singer's worldwide fame, which attracts other stars, such as Mick Jagger, to Jamaica. However, there is a distinct contrast between the embrace of Rasta culture in the world at large and the strong backlash against Rastafari and reggae that takes place in Jamaica itself, particularly in the earlier stage of the Singer's success. On one hand, middle- and upper-class Jamaicans, who were often fervently Christian, dislike Rastafarians because they are not Christian and are seen as undisciplined and dirty. For example, Nina's father beats Nina when he finds out she had sex with the Singer, while her mother exclaims: "Down there not scratching you with all that lice? It not biting you down there? How can you even stand there. Dear Lord, what kind of nasty daughter me have?" On the other hand, men like Josey Wales dislike the Rastafarians' emphasis on peace and the threat that they will take power from the existing political parties and gangs. This is, of course, what leads Josey to attempt to assassinate the Singer and everyone in **his house**. Later in the novel, Josey warns the JLP politician Peter Nasser that there is a new party forming, backed by the singer. He explains: "even if the Singer wasn't going to be the voice of this new party, movement, whatever you want to call it, he was going to be something else far more important: the money."

Although different characters have different motivations for resenting the shift in Jamaican cultural identity caused by the rise of Rastafari and the success of the Singer, many are united in their negative reaction to these changes.

Disagreements over Rastafari point to another issue at the center of the novel's exploration of Jamaican culture and identity: the notion of authenticity. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is characterized by a sense of uncertainty over what it means to be "authentically" Jamaican. Ironically, it is the white Americans living in the country--such as Alex Pierce and Barry Diflorio--who are most confident in their claims to know "the real Jamaica." The Jamaican characters themselves are far less certain, and some of them strive to reject Jamaica altogether. Nina, for example, cannot wait to leave Jamaica; she romanticizes the US and goes to desperate lengths in order to secure an American visa. Similarly, characters like Eubie who have immigrated from Jamaica to the US take on American mannerisms and seem to be fully assimilated into the country.

At the same time, the novel's depiction of Jamaicans living in the US suggests that many Jamaicans retain a strong sense of cultural identity despite living in a new country. The Jamaican drug gangs featured in the narrative, for example, still recruit from Kingston and maintain the same way of doing things as gangs back in Jamaica. The large population of Jamaicans in New York further complicates the idea of authentic Jamaican identity. Josey points to this sense of instability with his remark: "I hate when Jamaicans start to pick up American ways of talking, and when they flip back and forth it put my teeth on edge." Another way in which this issue is explored is through food. When Josey arrives in New York, Weeper suggests taking him to the best Jamaican restaurant in the city, which is located in Flatbush, Brooklyn. However, both Josey and Weeper question why Josey would come all the way to New York to eat food that is probably inferior to what he is used to in Jamaica. The fact that the final major scene of the novel takes place in a Jamaican restaurant is similarly significant. "Millicent," whom readers are led to believe is another one of Nina's alter-egos, is ordering food when she sees a headline stating that Josey Wales has been burned alive in his cell. Despite Millicent/Nina's continued attempts to leave Jamaica behind and reinvent herself as a new person in America, her trip to the Jamaican restaurant reinforces her inevitable tie to her home country. Although the notion of authentic Jamaican cultural identity may be contested and hard to pin down, Jamaican identity is also shown to be powerful and enduring in the face of both global change and shifts in the lives of individual characters.



POLITICS, POWER, AND CORRUPTION

Much of the novel centers around the political history of Jamaica in the post-independence period, and two general elections serve as major climaxes in the plot. The first takes place in 1976, won by the

People's National Party (PNP), and the second in 1980, in which the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) is victorious. Both elections involve a surge in violence, emphasizing that politics is an extremely charged issue in Jamaica. This is in part due to the fact that the neighborhoods in the Kingston ghetto are defined not only by gang affiliation, but support for a particular political party. This makes electoral politics a more personal issue for ordinary Jamaicans than we might assume, and also emphasizes a fundamental similarity between political parties and gangs, which are both shaped by backstabbing, corruption, and a merciless desire for power.

The residents of the Kingston ghetto show a level of loyalty for both gangsters and politicians that can seem surprising, considering they are shown to be ill-served by both. Extreme levels of gang violence mean that life in the Kingston ghetto is very dangerous, and the power of the gangs means that everyone is implicated in this violence, even those who attempt to keep to themselves or escape the ghetto (such as the promising high school student killed by Papa-Lo). Meanwhile, politicians make paltry efforts to court the loyalty of the Kingston poor, such as by distributing packets of Uncle Ben's rice in the lead up to elections. Because the residents of the Kingston ghetto are so impoverished and disenfranchised, even this small gesture is persuasive. However, once they are elected, politicians do not truly work to serve the people. As Josey Wales observes of Peter Nasser, politicians tend to confuse representing people with owning them. On the other hand, the fact that Josey is the one to make this remark is ironic, considering that the same could be said of dons like himself.

The cooperation between the political parties and gangs who effectively co-run the country is a striking example of corruption. While politicians and gang members might seem different on the surface, the novel makes clear that they are in fact united by a main shared characteristic: the desire for authority, control, and power, seemingly at any cost. *Seven Killings* portrays Jamaica as rampantly corrupt, but this corruption is not limited to the realm of politics. Like politicians, the police are also under the control of the gangs that run Kingston. In one of the most disturbing passages of the novel, Josey Wales crashes into a bus, and without realizing who Josey is, the bus driver begins loudly fuming. When a woman screams that the man is Josey Wales, the bus driver speeds off toward a police station, but when Josey arrives, the police refuse to do anything and simply watch as Josey kills the driver at the station's doorstep. This incident reveals the extent of Josey's power, which at this point exceeds the power of the police and government. The government's allegiance to Josey, and the police force's fear of him, mean that they both fail to perform their duty to protect ordinary people from gang violence.

Yet while the novel depicts Jamaican society as being overrun

by corruption, it also makes clear that corruption is hardly confined to the island. Throughout the narrative, the presence of the "the Company," (i.e., the CIA) lingers ominously in the background, evidence of the American effort to steer Jamaica away from socialism after the election of the socialist PNP Prime Minister Michael Manley. Various characters, including Barry Diflorio, Louis Johnson, and Doctor Love, have been sent to Jamaica by the CIA, and it is clear that their actions do not make Jamaica a safer or better place; Louis and Doctor Love supply **guns** to Josey's gang so they can kill the Singer, and Doctor Love sets off bombs in the Eight Lanes.

Similarly, when the setting of the novel shifts to New York City, the pervasive drug-related gang violence suggests that the same problems of corruption plaguing Jamaica exist in the US, and that the American political system is similarly ineffective in bringing about positive change. For example, Tristan mentions to Alex that Josey likely won't kill him because killing a white person would draw the attention of the American authorities, whereas the deaths of black people are largely met with disinterest. Furthermore, when Josey is finally imprisoned and set to be extradited to the United States, he is confident that he will get a light sentence in exchange for giving the American government information that will help them make further arrests. Although it is debatable whether or not such a bargain is justifiable, it highlights the extent to which Josey continues to exercise a kind of power over governmental authorities even after being incarcerated. Indeed, the notion that gangs have more power than the government is further confirmed when Josey is killed by the Medellín cartel, thereby robbing the American government of an informant and overstepping their ability to carry out justice. Ultimately, Josey's death reinforces a sense of similarity between gangs and governmental authorities, emphasizing the corruption and betrayal that characterize all struggles for power.



WITNESS AND STORYTELLING

A Brief History of Seven Killings is a work of historical fiction based on real events, yet in its fictionalization of reality, the novel calls into question whether it is possible to understand history as a single narrative. The book features fourteen narrators, and together they tell different versions of the action taking place over five days. That each section of the novel covers only a single day can be hard to believe, given the amount of activity and detail recorded by the many different narrative perspectives. This rich form of storytelling recreates the busy, chaotic feeling of a city, and particularly of ghettos like those described in the novel, where action unfolds as a result of the constant collision and interaction between many different people, each with their own complex storyline. By recreating the feel of the city through its polyphonic narrative style, *Seven Killings* emphasizes the randomness of history and collapses the distinction

between major historical events and uneventful days in the lives of ordinary people.

The narrative revolves around certain key events, such as the shooting at **the Singer's house**, **the Smile Jamaica concert**, the Jamaican general elections, the death of the Singer, and the death of Josey Wales. However, these events come in and out of focus depending on which character is narrating, and at many points, the main action of the novel is crowded out by other details. These other details become particularly prominent due to the fact that many of the characters narrate in a stream-of-consciousness style; for example, Bam-Bam's narration of the shooting at the Singer's house mixes observations about the actual facts of the shooting with Bam-Bam's own fears, desires, cravings, and daydreams. Thus while the multiple perspectives create a richness and complexity to the overall narrative, the chaotic web of information within each narrative perspective further destabilizes the centrality of any one character, event, or idea to the novel as a whole.

The novel also draws attention to the process of deciding how to construct a story through the character of Alex Pierce, a journalist for *Rolling Stone*. Alex begins the novel as a somewhat hapless figure with the grand ambition of telling the story of Jamaica through a profile of the Singer. He hopes to interview the Singer but struggles to gain access to him, and when he does finally have a chance at conducting the interview, he realizes he doesn't know what to ask and ends up leaving the Singer's house just before the shooting takes place. In this sense, Alex embodies a foolish, failed version of storytelling, in that his idea of the story he wants to tell precedes his actual knowledge of the reality around him.

However, over the course of the novel Alex develops into a far more capable journalist, in part because he decides to draw on the technique developed by the journalist Gay Talese of creating a profile of the Singer through descriptions of the people and climate surrounding the Singer. In this way, Alex contextualizes the Singer, thereby rendering his story more accurate. Of course, this technique is also used in *Seven Killings* itself, and the title of the essay series Alex publishes in *The New Yorker* is also called "A Brief History of Seven Killings." This suggests a connection between Alex and Marlon James, which could be interpreted as a gesture of humility on James' part. Perhaps in evoking an affinity between himself and an initially foolish writer, James seeks to undermine his own authority, reminding readers that the version of events he creates in the novel is inevitably flawed and should not necessarily be interpreted as truth.

The novel emphasizes that witnessing and storytelling are potentially dangerous acts. Both Alex and Nina are forced to flee Jamaica after they come to learn that it was Josey who shot the Singer. Interestingly enough, the reason Josey does not want anyone to know that it was he who shot the Singer is not because he fears being sent to prison, but rather because of

the shame and scandal it would bring to have it discovered that he did not succeed in killing his target. Alex ultimately evades punishment for knowing this information, but ends up being punished for witnessing and storytelling anyway when Eubie gruesomely forces him, under torture, to make changes to his *New Yorker* article about Jamaica. On the other hand, Nina, in disguise as Millicent, ends the novel with the sudden possibility that she will not be punished for what she has witnessed. When she sees a newspaper headline declaring Josey dead, her secret knowledge no longer poses a threat to her life. The fact that Nina comes across this information by chance in a newspaper again emphasizes the randomness of history.

The final moment of the novel occurs when Millicent/Nina is back at home when she calls her sister, Kimmy, and the final word is Nina asking: "Kimmy?:". The fact that the novel ends at the beginning of a conversation is significant. A sense of anticipation emerges from the question mark, making readers aware that although the story being told in *Seven Killings* might be over, another one is beginning. Just as history is constructed through a somewhat arbitrary focus on certain people and events, storytelling is also arbitrary in that it involves imposing beginnings and endings on the infinitely unfolding progression of life.



SYMBOLS

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



THE SINGER'S HOUSE

At the beginning of the novel, the Singer's house--fittingly located at 56 Hope Road--is a symbol of peace, unity, and optimism. Papa-Lo explains that it is the only place in Kingston where people can escape violence, and also the only place where people from opposing political parties mingle together, with gangsters, politicians, aristocrats, musicians, and celebrities all rubbing shoulders together. The house is an oasis of calm and a symbol of hope of what Jamaica could be if it were no longer plagued by conflict and violence. Of course, the optimism encapsulated by the house is closely related to that inspired by the Singer himself. The Singer grew up in the ghetto yet chooses to shun violence, instead focusing on messages of black power, unity, and love. While in this sense he at times seems like a unique individual completely at odds with the rest of the country, his house serves as a reminder that he is not the only Jamaican who wants to unite the country and create positive change. The other characters who show up at the house--even if they are not as committed to peace as the Singer--are at least able to momentarily put aside their differences and envision a better existence.

Yet this optimism is irrevocably tarnished when Josey Wales

and his gang descend on the Singer's house and shoot everyone inside. Suddenly, the Singer's house is no longer a place of peace and neutrality, but just another part of Kingston afflicted by violence and instability. This corresponds to the Singer's new attitude of suspicion and unease in the wake of the shooting. On the other hand, there is something remarkable about the fact that every person in the house survives the shooting, particularly given that Josey and his crew are some of the most infamously lethal gangsters in Jamaica. The shocking survival of the shooting victims suggests that the Singer's house has an almost magical power to repel violence and protect its inhabitants.



THE SMILE JAMAICA CONCERT (A.K.A. THE PEACE CONCERT)

The Smile Jamaica Concert is another symbol of peace and unity associated with the Singer. Organized in response to the chaotic violence that takes place in the lead-up to the 1976 election, the concert aims to unify Jamaicans through their love of the Singer's music. While some dons, such as Papa-Lo, support the concert, others--notably Josey--view it as a threat. The concert purports to be politically neutral, but Josey is convinced that it is actually "PNP propaganda," and others--such as the American CIA operatives--view it as paving the way for a Rastafarian party to emerge and disturb the existing political terrain. Josey's attack on [the Singer's house](#) deliberately takes place only days before the concert as a way of stopping it from taking place. However, after the Singer miraculously survives the shooting, he insists on performing anyway, which symbolizes the resilience of peace efforts even in the face of vicious opposition. The only character to witness the Smile Jamaica concert is Bam-Bam, who is in a delirium and believes the Singer is conveying a plan for revenge aimed directly at him. Through Bam-Bam's narration, the concert ends up being framed as a rather frightening and surreal event, one that encapsulates the problems of Jamaica as much as it promotes a message of peace and love.



GUNS

Guns are ubiquitous in the world of the novel, highlighting the totally pervasive violence of life in the Kingston ghetto (and then, later in the novel, in New York City). As weapons that allow people to be killed quickly and easily, guns encapsulate the casual attitude that many of the characters have toward violence and the sense that, in the ghetto, life is treated as disposable. The fact that characters like Bam-Bam are given guns as young teenagers highlights how easy it is for ordinary people in Kingston, some of whom are still children, to wield the power of taking the life of another. Alongside this, guns are also an important symbol in relation to

the theme of masculinity and sexuality. Guns are often thought of as phallic symbols, meaning that they both resemble penises and have cultural connotations related to male genitalia. The idea of guns as phallic is illustrated through Bam-Bam and Demus's interrelated desires to shoot and kill after getting high on [cocaine](#). Many of the male characters in the novel experience their own desire in a violent way, and the will to shoot someone and the will to have sex sometimes appear as different versions of the same impulse. Finally, supplying guns--like supplying cocaine--is used by some characters as a tool of asserting control over people. For example, Josey gives his crew guns and cocaine in exchange for them killing targets of his choice. These guns are originally supplied by Louis Johnson and Doctor Love, highlighting the fact that Josey himself is under the influence of these figures and thus of the CIA.



COCAINE

The novel is set across the period in which cocaine use became increasingly common in the Americas, beginning in the 1970s and stretching into the 1990s. This growth in popularity vastly increased the wealth and power of gangs like Storm Posse who were involved in transporting cocaine from Colombia and distributing it in the United States. The shady origins of the drug--and of the power and wealth it creates--are alluded to through the many mentions of the cartels in Medellín and Cali (both cities in Colombia), which lurk in the background of the novel without ever being depicted explicitly. Cocaine use is presented as being almost ubiquitous among certain groups of characters, particularly the male residents of the Kingston ghetto and, later, those living in the corresponding "ghetto" of Bushwick, Brooklyn. Cocaine creates feelings of euphoria, and use of the drug by the poor and disenfranchised is thus shown to be a way for these oppressed populations to escape the grim reality of their lives. At the same time, cocaine can also inspire feelings of violent aggression, which is why Josey Wales and Weeper give it to their crew of gunmen in advance of the shooting at [the Singer's house](#). In large amounts, cocaine can also create delirium, particularly when it is freebasing (heated and inhaled) and smoked in the form of crack.

However, perhaps the most important aspect of cocaine in relation to the novel is its addictive quality. Several characters in the novel develop a cocaine dependency, including Bam-Bam, Demus, and--most significantly--Weeper. Addiction to cocaine symbolizes the dangerous side of pleasure and desire. While Weeper spends the novel frightened by his own homosexual desire, ironically it is his desire for cocaine that is far more threatening to his well-being. After Eubie finds out that Weeper is using crack, he warns Josey that this will inhibit Weeper's ability to effectively conduct business, and secretly decides to kill Weeper. In a potent twist, Weeper manages to

trick John-John into injecting him with pure cocaine rather than shooting him dead with a gun. Weeper thus chooses to be killed by a substance he loves and desires, again emphasizing the twinned danger and allure of such desire.



ACKEE AND SALTFISH

Ackee and saltfish is the national dish of Jamaica.

Ackee is a fruit indigenous to West Africa that was taken to Jamaica while the country was a British imperial slave colony. The transportation of ackee thus mirrors the transportation of enslaved Africans, the descendants of whom make up the majority of Jamaica's population at the time the novel is set. There are multiple levels, therefore, on which ackee and saltfish symbolizes Jamaican history, culture, and identity. Several of the white American characters living in Jamaica express a love of ackee and saltfish, including Barry and Chuck. Their love of the dish shows a desire to connect to the "real" Jamaica and experience the culture like a local. However, both Barry and Chuck also refer to ackee and saltfish as being like scrambled eggs, due to the fact that cooked ackee resembles scrambled eggs in appearance and texture. By referring to ackee in this way, Barry and Chuck divulge that--as much as they would like to think otherwise--they do not have a truly authentic connection to Jamaica but inevitably relate to the country through their own slanted, American viewpoint.

Jennings goes on to note that this person embodied everyone's "hopes and dreams," which is a recipe for disappointment. In the sections of the novel narrated by Jennings, there is often an ambiguity about whom or what he is discussing, with the possibility that his statements could be applied to several different people.

The most obvious possibility is that this quotation refers to the Singer, who--as someone who came to represent Jamaican cultural identity--could qualify as "father of a nation." This also explains Jennings' comment about the Singer being a "literary device." *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is in many ways a novel about the Singer, but he becomes a "literary device" due to the fact that none of the chapters are narrated from his perspective and readers almost never hear him speak. In this sense, the novel is about the "hopes and dreams" (and grudges and fears) that people project onto the Singer more than it is about him as a person.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ I remember when that was the only place any man, no matter what side you on, could escape a bullet. The only place in Kingston where the only thing that hit you was music. But the fucking people soil it up with bad vibes, better if they did just go into the studio one morning and shit all over the console, me no going say who.

Related Characters: Papa-Lo (speaker), The Singer

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Papa-Lo has described the division of the Kingston ghetto into separate territories, including the Eight Lanes, which is controlled by Shotta Sherrif and supports the PNP, and Copenhagen City, which supports the JLP and is run by Papa-Lo himself. In this quote, Papa-Lo notes that the Singer's house used to be the only place in Kingston where people were safe from violence; however, sketchy characters have recently been showing up there and are up to no good. The Singer's house is arguably the most important symbol in the novel. As a (former) oasis of peace and unity in the midst of the chaotic violence of Kingston, the house encapsulates people's hope that one day Jamaica may become a more harmonious place.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Riverhead edition of *A Brief History of Seven Killings* published in 2014.

Part 1, Sir Arthur George Jennings Quotes

☝ That's what happens when you personify hopes and dreams in one person. He becomes nothing more than a literary device.

Related Characters: Sir Arthur George Jennings (speaker), The Singer

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Sir Arthur George Jennings, narrating from the afterlife, has explained that his death was officially ruled an accident but that in reality he was murdered. He explains that an unnamed character, whom he describes as "father of a nation," sobbed when hearing about Jennings' death.

As Papa-Lo explains in this quotation, such hope is dashed by those who bring “bad vibes” into the house. His words indicate that it is not necessarily anything that the people do that is the problem, but rather the energy and intention they bring to the house. Indeed, this bad energy foreshadows the shooting which will transform the Singer’s house from a symbol of unity and peace into yet another violent, contested place in the Kingston landscape.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ I hate politics. I hate that just because I live here I'm supposed to live politics. And there's nothing you can do. If you don't live politics, politics will live you.

Related Characters: Nina Burgess (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

After her parents’ home was robbed, Nina has been feeling increasingly frustrated with life in Kingston, which seems to be getting worse by the day. The Prime Minister has publicly stated that anyone who doesn’t like the situation in Jamaica is free to fly out to Miami at any time. In this passage, Nina explains that life in Jamaica is extremely politically charged, and that it is not an option for people to be apolitical. Whereas in other parts of the world people might experience politics as a remote phenomenon, political tensions in Jamaica become part of the fabric of everyday life. This is what Nina means by “politics will live you”—whether or not people in Jamaica choose to be actively involved in politics, it is not possible to ignore or separate themselves from the political climate.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ Gun weight is a different kind of weight. Or maybe it be something else, a feeling that whenever you hold a gun is really the gun holding you.

Related Characters: Bam-Bam (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Josey has given Bam-Bam a gun and asked if he is ready to be a man. He has then led Bam-Bam to a shack where he instructs him to shoot a man who is hogtied on the ground. In this passage, Bam-Bam describes how owning a gun changes him. The significance of gun ownership is literalized through his description of the “weight” of the gun, which weighs heavily on Bam-Bam. Although having a gun supposedly confers power and control, in reality Bam-Bam feels as if he is being controlled by his gun. This is particularly true given the pervasive violence of the Kingston ghetto. It was never an option for Bam-Bam to escape violence, and thus the power he gets from owning a gun is an illusion—he is controlled by violence, rather than controlling violence himself.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ Nobody who kill a police going to hell but is something else to kill the singer. I let Josey Wales tell me that the Singer is a hypocrite, and he playing both sides taking everybody for idiot. I let Josey Wales tell me that he have bigger plans and is high time we done be ghetto stooge for white man who live uptown and don't care about we until election time. I let Josey Wales tell me that the Singer is a PNP stooge who bow for the Prime Minister. I let Josey Wales tell me to shoot up three more line and I won't care who.

Related Characters: Demus (speaker), Michael Manley, The Singer, Josey Wales

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Josey Wales has recruited Demus, giving him a gun, money, and cocaine in exchange for killing people. However, Josey then informs Demus that the person they are going to kill is the Singer, and Demus—who is Rastafarian—freaks out. He worries that he will go to hell for killing the Singer. However, eventually Demus lets Josey persuade him that it is important to kill the Singer, and after shooting up cocaine Demus stops caring about who he kills. This passage illustrates Josey’s impressive powers of manipulation. Josey knows how to play into Demus’ cynicism and paranoia, which tell him that any hope in real political change is an illusion and will only serve to increase the power of those

already in power: the PNP, the Prime Minister, and the “white man who live uptown.”

At the same time, Josey also utilizes cocaine as a tool for breaking down Demus’ willpower. Whatever principles Demus is trying to maintain disintegrate in the face of the euphoria he feels when shooting up cocaine. As long as Josey is supplying the drugs, he exercises an enormous amount of control over his men.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ I didn't want to fuck him, none of that nasty batty boy business, I just wanted to go inside him like a duppy and move when he move and buck when he buck and wind when he wind and feel myself pull out little by little by little and ram back in hard then soft, fast then slow. Then I wanted to be the woman. I just need to fucking breathe.

Related Characters: Bam-Bam (speaker), Weeper

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

One day Bam-Bam sees Weeper walk out the door of a woman’s house completely naked, take a condom from his penis, and begin to wash himself in her backyard. Bam-Bam is surprised to see that Weeper used a condom because, like everyone he knows, Bam-Bam believes condoms were an invention designed to eradicate black people. In this passage, Bam-Bam describes his desire for Weeper, while also insistently disavowing that desire. Bam-Bam’s thoughts reveal the way in which homophobia distorts his understanding of his own desire, such that he is more willing to imagine himself as a duppy supernaturally possessing Weeper than he is able to entertain the thought of simply having sex with him.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ But who win West Kingston win Kingston and who win Kingston, win Jamaica and in 1974, the PNP unleash two beast from out of Jungle, a man called Buntin-Banton and another named Dishrag. PNP was never going win West Kingston, a fact then and a fact now, so they pull a jim-screachy, they create a whole new district and call it Central Kingston, and pile they people in it. Who they have run it? Buntin-Banton and Dishrag. Before them two, war in the ghetto was a war of knife. They gang did number thirty strong cutting through Kingston on red and black motorcycle, buzz buzz buzzing like an army of bees. Then the Buntin-Banton Dishrag gang attack we at a funeral me know right there that the game done have new rule now. People think it way past the time when anybody can remember who start things first, but don’t get the history of the ghetto twist up, decent people. Buntin-Banton and Dishrag start it first. And when PNP win the 1972 election all hell break loose.

Related Characters: Papa-Lo (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 152-153

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly before the 1976 general election, Papa-Lo feels troubled and is unable to sleep. He reflects on the current political situation in Jamaica and how it ended up this way. Papa-Lo’s recollection illuminates the connection between the political establishment and the gangs that control the Kingston ghetto, showing how the political parties helped stoke violence within the ghetto. Not only is most of the violence in the novel rooted in political disputes, but much of it specifically emerges from the tensions between neighborhoods that support different political parties. As Papa-Lo indicates here, this tension was deliberately and arbitrarily created by PNP gerrymandering. While throughout the novel politicians claim that they wish to subdue violence, this passage suggests that politicians in fact see violence as a necessary and useful tool for building their own power.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ Today is the day we revoke the Singer's visa because he's suspected of trafficking drugs into the United States of America. Shouldn't be hard to prove really, just check his back pocket. We're supposed to make a big, public show of it, a sign that we, as a friend of Jamaica, will not sit by and allow lawlessness to take control of our gracious ally. I already wrote the press release, signed off by higher up. We also have proof that he has consorted with known drug traffickers in Miami and New York and has aligned himself with men of questionable character in Jamaica and abroad, including at least two local terrorists. This has already been documented. One of them, calling himself Shotta Sherrif twice tried for murder, is even closely linked to the present government.

Related Characters: Barry Diflorio (speaker), Shotta Sherrif, Papa-Lo, The Singer

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Part 2, Chapter 9, Barry announces that he is at the American embassy, preparing to revoke the Singer's visa. In this quotation, he admits that the charge of trafficking is not exactly truthful, even if the Singer is known to use drugs personally and associate with "local terrorists." Rather, the Americans are keen to charge the Singer with trafficking in order to prevent Jamaica from descending into "lawlessness." Of course, there is an irony to the act of combating "lawlessness" through accusing someone on false charges.

Furthermore, Barry's claim that the United States is a "friend" and "ally" of Jamaica appears to be disingenuous at the least, considering he is taking punitive action against the country's most beloved cultural icon, a man who has made efforts to bring peace and unity to the nation. Is the United States really a "friend" to Jamaica, or are they simply seeking to reassert control over the country? Barry's comment that "Shotta Sherrif is even closely linked to the present government highlights his naïveté and lack of understanding of Jamaican politics. The novel suggests that all politicians in Jamaica are closely tied to gangsters, whose support they court for their own political gain. The fact that Barry does not appear to know this suggests speaks to his ignorance about Jamaica.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ In Jamaica people have a way of saying that if shit didn't go down a certain way, then the truth is probably not far from it. *If it no go so it go near so.*

Related Characters: Alex Pierce (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Alex says that a source told him that the Singer may have been involved in fixing the horse races a few months back. Even though this may not be completely true, it is probably close to the truth, as Alex indicates through his mention of "If it no go so it go near so." This phrase is one of the epigraphs of the novel, and has significance in relation to the themes of witness, storytelling, and Jamaican culture and identity. Because the novel has so many different narrators--many of whom contradict one another in their storytelling--it can be hard to ascertain the "truth" of the narrative. The phrase "If it no go so it go near so" suggests that sometimes the exact truth doesn't matter; a close guess or approximation of events is enough.

Part 2, Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ I can't figure out if I just got a sudden case of the chickenshits or if I am slowly realizing that even though the Singer is the center of the story that it really isn't his story. Like there's a version of this story that's not really about him, but about the people around him, the ones who come and go that might actually provide a bigger picture than me asking him why he smokes ganja. Damn if I'm not fooling myself I'm Gay Talese again.

Related Characters: Alex Pierce (speaker), The Singer

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

Mark Lansing has promised to get Alex access to the Singer. However, when the two of them pull up to the Singer's house, the guard says that only one person can go in, so Lansing leaves Alex waiting outside. While he is standing there, Alex realizes he hasn't prepared any questions to ask the Singer, and now can't come up with any. Alex wonders if his lack of interest in the Singer's own perspective is simply

the result of his own nervousness, or if his story has taken a new direction.

His comment about Gay Talese, a famous journalist who worked for *The New York Times* and *Esquire* during the 1960s, refers to Talese's essay "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold." Assigned to write a profile of Sinatra but unable to interview Sinatra himself, Talese instead followed the star's entourage and built a composite picture of him through those surrounding him. While Alex berates himself for "fooling myself I'm Gay Talese," both he and Marlon James utilize Talese's technique in constructing their narratives. This passage is thus a comment on *A Brief History of Seven Killings* as a novel as much as it is about Alex's own writing process.

Part 3, Chapter 3 Quotes

☛ Plenty woman-killer remember Mother's Day.

Related Characters: Papa-Lo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 340

Explanation and Analysis

Papa-Lo has recalled his time spent in prison after the shooting at the Singer's house. He then describes his mission to punish those involved in the attack on the Singer, one of whom was hidden in Jungle by his mother. He curses the love that wicked men can have for their mothers, emphasizing that this does not make the men any less evil. This short quotation illustrates one of the novel's most powerful points about masculinity. Sexism is endemic to the world of the novel, but this does not mean that every man simply treats every woman badly. Rather, sexism operates through inconsistency, hypocrisy, and disrespect that is at times disguised as love.

Part 3, Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ The second you say peace this and peace that, and let's talk about peace, is the second gunman put down their guns. But guess what, white boy. As soon as you put down your gun the policeman pull out his gun. Dangerous thing, peace. Peace make you stupid. You forget that not everybody sign peace treaty. Good times bad for somebody.

Related Characters: Josey Wales (speaker), Alex Pierce

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 387

Explanation and Analysis

Alex has been interviewing various men in the ghetto about the peace treaty. He has spoken to Shotta Sherrif and Papa-Lo; after his interview with Papa-Lo, men come and escort him to Josey Wales' house. Josey interrogates Alex, and when Alex asks about the peace treaty Josey claims it was a "joke." This quotation reveals the full extent of Josey's cynicism about the peace treaty, which puts him at odds with most other characters in the book. Even those who believe that it is unlikely that peace will come to Kingston at least tend to imagine that peace would be a good thing.

Josey, on the other hand, maintains that peace is "dangerous" and makes people "stupid." This view might at first seem extreme, but Josey's reasoning in fact suggests that his view is more persuasive than we might expect. Contrary to widespread assumptions, Josey suggests that it is actually fairly easy to get "gunman" to put down their weapons and accept a peace treaty. However, this only works if violence originates with these gangsters alone. Instead, Josey points out that violence is as much the work of police and the government as it is that of the Kingston gangs. From this angle, Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherrif's hopes of peace look naïve at best, and "stupid" and "dangerous" at worst.

Part 3, Chapter 5 Quotes

☛ No future for no dark girl in Jamaica, despite black power bullshit. I mean, look who just win Miss World.

Related Characters: Josey Wales (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 423

Explanation and Analysis

Josey is sitting at home, waiting for the phone to ring. He has a brief conversation with his eldest son, followed by his youngest daughter. He notes that the little girl is light-skinned, and that this is a good thing because there is "no future for no dark girl in Jamaica." This is one of several moments in the novel that explores colorism, prejudice based on the shade of a person's skin that takes place within the context of a particular race. Once again Josey reveals his profound cynicism, referring to black power as "bullshit" and implying that efforts to fight colorism in Jamaican society will come to nothing. His comment about there

being “no future” for dark-skinned women in Jamaica reflects his general pessimistic orientation toward the future. The 1979 winner of Miss World was Gina Swainson, a light-skinned Bermudian model, suggests that Josey’s claims—while demoralizing—reflect the reality of the world around him.

Part 4, Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Bad man don’t take no cock. But me not bad, me worse. Bad man don’t make a man know he fucking him good, because then he will realize a man on the top. Better to stand up or bend over so he come from behind and invade. Moan a little, hiss, say work it harder, fucker, like a white girl getting black cock in a blue movie. But you really want to yell and scream and howl, yes I read *Howl*, fucking facety white boy you think just cause me black and from the ghetto me can’t read? But this is not about ignorant white boy, is about you wanting so bad to howl and bawl but you can’t howl and bawl because to howl and bawl is to give it up and you can’t give it up, not to another man, not a white man, not any man, ever. As long as you don’t bawl out you not the girl. You not born for it.

Related Characters: Weeper (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 447

Explanation and Analysis

Weeper has woken up next to a white man in Brooklyn. He recalls a time when another black man on the street called him a “faggot” and beat him up. In this passage, he reflects on his mixed feelings about his own sexual desire. He wants to be penetrated, but has internalized the homophobic message that all gay sex is shameful and that it is particularly abhorrent to bottom (be on the receiving end of penetration). As Weeper elaborates, part of the reason that bottoming is perceived as shameful is because it makes a man “the girl” in the sexual dynamic. This reveals how sexism and homophobia are intertwined, with both sides fueling the other.

Furthermore, Weeper’s thoughts also illustrate that racism has further distorted his relationship to own desire. He mentions reading Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*, a famous poem first published in 1956 that contains descriptions of gay sex and desire. Weeper is aware that the “ignorant white boy” he is with probably presumes he would not have read this poem simply because he is black. The combination of racism, sexism, and homophobia stifles Weeper, putting him at war with himself.

Part 4, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ Even my Rasta brethren laugh 'bout it, saying when the Black Star Liner finally come to take us to Africa, they going have to chop me in half. Man, what you know about the Jamaica runnings? Sometimes I think being a half coolie worse than being a battyman. This brown skin girl look 'pon me one time and say how it sad that after all God go through to give me pretty hair him curse me with that skin. The bitch say to me all my dark skin do is remind her that me forefather was a slave. So me say me have pity for you too. Because all your light skin do is remind me that your great-great-grandmother get rape.

Related Characters: Tristan Phillips (speaker), Alex Pierce

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 453

Explanation and Analysis

In Rikers prison, Alex is interviewing Tristan. Tristan has explained that he was born in 1949 in a ghetto called Balaclava. His parents abandoned him, and he faced further struggles due to the fact that he looked “half-coolie.” This quotation reveals the complicated ways in which racism, colorism, xenophobia, and black pride intersect within Jamaican society. Tristan is teased for looking half-black and half-Asian. His fellow Rastas, who embrace black pride, mock Tristan for not being black enough; the “Black Star Liner” is the ship upon which the Jamaican black nationalist Marcus Garvey helped transport slave-descendent black people in the Americas back to Africa. The joke is that only half of Tristan would be able to join this journey and return to his motherland.

The second half of the quotation, however, serves as a reminder that no black person in Jamaica is purely of African descent and reveals the racism and colorism that has been internalized by black Jamaicans. The light-skinned girl Tristan describes tells him it’s a shame that he has non-black features while having such dark skin, showing the prejudice against black features that exists among black people themselves. Tristan’s response points to the unsettling history behind the phenomenon of pride in being light-skinned. As he points out, most light-skinned black Jamaicans inherited their skin tone from white ancestors who, more likely than not, raped their enslaved black foremothers in the context of the systemic sexual violence that characterized slavery. Colorism is thus disturbing not only because it is a form of prejudice that emerges from racism, but also because it celebrates the results of a legacy of rape.

Part 4, Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ Discernment. I could always look at a man and read him. Like Weeper. Is years now I know the man not only fucking man but is really the one getting

fuck, and no matter what he say, he still sorry to leave prison. Is years now I supposed to kill him for that, but why? It move my brain better to watch him fuck pussy after pussy as if battyman behaviour is something pool up in him sperm and if only he shoot out enough he will finally shoot out the need to put a cock in him battyhole. I don't know much 'bout them things and I don't read Bible. But if there is one thing I do know is when a man fooling himself. Is something to watch though.

Related Characters: Josey Wales (speaker), Weeper

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 466

Explanation and Analysis

Josey has explained that Weeper has been living in New York, and that Josey charged him with maintaining the link between Jamaica and Griselda Blanco in Miami. However, this did not go very well, as Weeper has trouble getting along with women. In this quotation, Josey admits that he has known for years that Weeper has sex with men, and even knows that Weeper is penetrated (“get fuck”). Like most of the characters in the novel, Josey is severely homophobic and even previously resolved to kill Weeper for being gay, yet ended up making an exception and turning a blind eye to Weeper’s sexual exploits.

Josey claims that this is because he found it better to watch Weeper try to “shoot out” his gay desires by having sex with women. However, given the overall portrayal of the relationship between Josey and Weeper, it is arguably more likely that Josey simply likes Weeper and doesn’t want to harm him. In multiple ways, therefore, homophobia prevents both men from expressing their true feelings about other men. Weeper is “fooling himself” about not being gay, whereas Josey cannot admit that his friendship with Weeper ultimately trumps his prejudice about Weeper’s sexuality.

Part 4, Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ - Like how your boy Weeper is a user.

- Weeper sniffing coke from as early as '75, that not nothing new.

- But new it is, Josey. Now him smoking crack and you and me know that crack is not coke. Can a man do good business even when him deh pon coke? Of course. Every man me know in the music biz a lick coke. Hookers and blow them call it, my youth. Back then the biz did even have a sort of class. But crack is different business. Every single dealer who switch from coke to crack mash up. You can't hold a single thought on crack. You can't do no fucking business. Crack is you business.

Related Characters: Josey Wales, Eubie (speaker), Weeper

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 551

Explanation and Analysis

Eubie has gone to pick Josey up from the airport. As they are driving through New York, they discuss business, and Eubie tells Josey that Weeper has been “fucking around.” One of Weeper’s runners has been spying on him and reporting back to Eubie. Eubie warns that Weeper is using crack now and that this threatens to derail their drug operation. Eubie’s explanation of the difference between crack and powder cocaine usefully illuminates one of the major cultural shifts taking place at this point in the novel. In the 1970s, the widespread use of powder cocaine—fueled, as Eubie points out, by club culture and the music industry—greatly increased the wealth of Latin American cartels like those mentioned in the novel as well as drug-dealing gangs. In the 1980s, a “crack epidemic” swept over the United States and Caribbean, causing widespread devastation and provoking the American government’s War on Drugs.

Although dangerous and addictive, powder cocaine does not have the same intense, short-lived, sometimes hallucinatory effect as crack, and crack is far more addictive than the powder equivalent—hence Eubie’s comment that crack users cannot combine the drug with business because “crack is you business.” Furthermore, the crack epidemic was mainly an issue for poor, disenfranchised communities. Eubie’s ominous warnings about crack thus reflect the dark turn of the international drug trade during this period. While the novel shows that drug trafficking by gangs is always violent, dangerous, and brutal, the form of devastation caused by crack emerges as a particularly bleak,

pervasive issue toward the end of the novel.

Part 4, Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ Me don't see Copenhagen City since '79 but me hear 'bout it. Brethren, is like them communist country you see 'pon the news. Poster and mural and painting of Papa-Lo and Josey all over the community. Woman naming them pickney Josey One and Josey Two, even though he not fucking nobody but him wife, no, they not married for real. In him own way, you could call him a classy brother. But still, you want to get Josey you have to mow down the entire Copenhagen City first, and even then. You also have to tear down this government too. What you mean, government? Come, man, Alex Pierce, who you think give this party the 1980 election?

Related Characters: Tristan Phillips (speaker), Alex Pierce, Winifred, Josey Wales, Papa-Lo

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 567

Explanation and Analysis

In Rikers, Tristan discusses the possibility that Josey still wants to murder Alex, considering it's been six years since Alex killed Tony Pavarotti. Tristan emphasizes that Josey is untouchable, so powerful that he has not seen the inside of a prison since 1975. He describes the way in which Josey and Papa-Lo have become beloved figures in Kingston and the intense loyalty people feel toward them. Although the two men (and particularly Josey) are responsible for bringing a large amount of violence to Kingston, people still identify with them because they are some of the very few representatives and advocates of those living in the ghetto. Meanwhile, politicians also remain loyal to the dons, because their support is vital to electoral success. As Tristan's words indicate, those who exercise the most power

in Jamaica are arguably not the official authorities, but the dons living in the ghetto.

☝☝ It is a shit hole. It's hot like hell, traffic is always slow, and the people not all smiling and shit, and nobody waiting to tell you no problem, man. It is shitty, and sexy and dangerous and also really, really, really boring.

Related Characters: Tristan Phillips (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 567-568

Explanation and Analysis

In the midst of their interview, Tristan observes that Alex definitely has the qualities of a reporter; he picks up information easily and knows the right questions to get people talking. Tristan then asks Alex what draws him to Jamaica. Although Alex's answer is not given, the implication from this quotation is that Alex calls Jamaica "a shit hole."

Alex's answer demonstrates how much he has changed over the course of the narrative. At the beginning of the novel, Alex resembled the many other white American men who romanticized Jamaica all while claiming that they knew the "real" side of the country. Now Alex rejects this romanticization, and his view of Jamaica is much more similar to that of actual Jamaicans.

Tristan's elaboration on the idea that Jamaica is a "shit hole" is also significant in terms of the novel's presentation of Jamaican culture and identity. While Tristan admits the country is "sexy," he also emphasizes its many negative qualities. Some of these may seem contradictory, for example "dangerous and also really, really, really boring." Indeed, this apparent paradox is one of the main things that the novel seeks to explore, ultimately suggesting that even extreme violence can come to seem "boring."



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.

PART 1, SIR ARTHUR GEORGE JENNINGS

Sir Arthur George Jennings writes that “dead people never stop talking.” People think that Jennings fell off a balcony at the Beach Hotel in Montego Bay, Jamaica, but in reality he was pushed. The man who killed him is still alive. Living people “wait and see,” but dead people “see and wait.” On hearing of Jennings’ death, “the father of a nation”—who remains unnamed—cried out in sorrow. Jennings observes that it is dangerous to pin everyone’s hopes and dreams on one person. He introduces the narrative as a “story of several killings,” the first of which is the violent death of a boy who is buried alive.

The opening of the novel does not explicitly introduce the major themes of the narrative to come, but it nonetheless hints at them. For example, Jennings immediately establishes that many of the characters will die, and that the dead will not disappear but maintain a presence within the narrative. Furthermore, Jennings’ warning about pinning hopes on one person turns out to be prophetic.



PART 1, CHAPTER 1

Part One of the novel is set on December 2, 1976. Bam-Bam is 14, the son of a “whore” and “the last good man in the ghetto.” He hears on the radio that there is a surge of crime and violence sweeping over Jamaica, but he knows that all he can do in the Eight Lanes, the ghetto where he lives, is “see and wait.” He’d like to get out of the ghetto, but every time he comes close it feels like the whole world is a ghetto. Two men bring **guns** to the ghetto and teach Bam-Bam how to use them.

Within the first few pages of the novel, the phrase “see and wait” has been repeated twice. In this passage, the phrase helps to give a sense of the seemingly unending nature of the ghetto. Just as any hope of leaving the ghetto is dashed by the feeling that the whole world is a ghetto, so too is there no hope of life in the ghetto ever changing.



For Bam-Bam, life in the ghetto is defined by chaos and violence. People rape and kill for minor, irrational reasons: to steal money or food, or simply because a man gave the wrong kind of look or a woman was wearing the latest fashion. Boys who look like Bam-Bam are frequently harassed by police officers, who Bam-Bam refers to as “Babylon.” He notes that getting killed or beaten by the police is a normal occurrence.

The fact that people kill others in order to steal money and food establishes a clear connection between the pervasive violence and extreme poverty that characterize life in the ghetto. However, note that the violence does not always originate with the oppressed population living in the ghetto; it is also instigated by the police.



In 1971, the Singer first appeared on TV. That same year, Bam-Bam shot a **gun** for the first time, at the age of 10. Back then, Bam-Bam’s father ran home one day from his job at the factory and told Bam-Bam that they were going to play a game where you had to crouch on the floor. Bam-Bam stood up, at which point a shower of bullets erupted outside.

Because of the inescapability of violence in the Eight Lanes, Bam-Bam was never able to have a period of innocence in childhood. His father’s attempt to turn dodging bullets into a “game” shows the doomed desperation with which he attempts to give his son a normal, innocent childhood.



Two days later, Bam-Bam's father beats up his mother and rapes her with a broomstick. Bam-Bam thinks he would never see his mother again, but the next day she returns with four men. Bam-Bam hides and watches while one of the men, Funnyboy, forces Bam-Bam's father to give him oral sex at **gunpoint** before killing him. Funnyboy then shoots Bam-Bam's mother, whose body falls on top of her son. The men leave, and Bam-Bam pulls the Clarks off his father's feet, vomits at the sight of his father's face, and runs.

Bam-Bam makes it all the way to Copenhagen City, where he runs into Papa-Lo and his men. They know that Bam-Bam has come from the Eight Lanes, but they let him join them, giving him a **gun** on his 12th birthday and nicknaming him "Bam-Bam." Another man called Josey Wales teaches Bam-Bam how to shoot.

Bam-Bam's mother's decision to call in local men to punish her husband suggests that people in the Eight Lanes do not rely on police and the courts, but rather turn to the vigilante justice of gangs. Note Funnyboy's act of male-on-male sexual assault. The connection between homosexuality, homophobia, and violence will be important throughout the novel.



Copenhagen City is a rival ghetto to the Eight Lanes, and Papa-Lo's decision to accept Bam-Bam may thus appear as a kind gesture of mercy. However, the fact that the men give Bam-Bam a gun suggest that they are perhaps more interested in using him than protecting him.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Barry has been in Jamaica almost a year, and is standing inside a fast food restaurant called King Burger. Unlike other Americans in Jamaica, Barry embraces the national cuisine and loves eating **ackee and saltfish**, although the first time he had jerk chicken he couldn't handle the spice. Barry works for the Company (the CIA) and moves countries with his family every 3-5 years. The son of the former head of the CIA is in Jamaica; he is a filmmaker who is making a film about **the peace concert** being organized by the Singer.

Barry had been assigned to following Bill Adler, a former CIA employee who left in 1969 on account of a guilty conscience, although Barry soon found out Bill was actually following *him*. Bill wrote a book in which he "named names" within the CIA, and gave speeches criticizing its actions. He also gave information about the CIA's activities to Jamaicans themselves, undoing Barry's work, which meant that he then had to "start from scratch."

One recurring theme in the novel is how white visitors to Jamaica--mostly American men--want to think of themselves as embracing the "real" Jamaica and not simply being tourists. Barry's love of ackee and saltfish, Jamaica's national dish, may make it seem as if he is engaged with the authentic Jamaica; however, his bad reaction to jerk chicken is a reminder that he is just another white visitor.



This is one of the first of many examples of witness and storytelling being threatening acts within the world of the novel. The CIA, and indeed the Cold War in general, relied on a massive amount of secrecy and spying. Bill Adler's decision to publish a book about the CIA is thus a massive violation of Cold War normality.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Papa-Lo says he warned the Singer that some of the Singer's friends want to take him down, but the Singer just laughed. Papa-Lo boasts that he runs a massive section of the ghetto, although not the Eight Lanes, because that's People's National Party (PNP) territory. Papa-Lo supports the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), whose color is green, whereas the color of the PNP-supporting Eight Lanes--run by Shotta Sherrif--is orange. Recently, when the Singer was abroad, young men from Jungle, another ghetto, began scheming inside **the Singer's house**. The house used to be the only place of neutrality and peace in Kingston, but that is no longer the case.

The men who went into **the Singer's house** ended up fixing the horse races, but they messed it up and had to ask the Singer for money. When he refused to pay, they drew **guns** on him, although the Singer managed to talk them into putting them away. The Singer told Papa-Lo about this while they were planning **the peace concert**. Many people are wary of the concert, claiming that it will strengthen suspicions that the Singer supports the PNP. Papa-Lo is getting older, and wants to reach an old age for his children and grandchildren. He recently noticed that he's never seen old people in the ghetto. Papa-Lo insists that he would take a bullet for the Singer, but that this may not be enough to protect him.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Nina is at the gate of **the Singer's house**, where she is told by a security guard that nobody can come in except family members and the band. However, Nina sees that other people are able to ignore the guard and walk right in. Security at the house has been tight ever since the announcement of **the Smile Jamaica concert**. Recently three gunmen broke into Nina's parents' house. A city-wide curfew is in effect, even for "decent uptown people" like Nina's family. The gunmen stole the family's possessions, beat Nina's father, and possibly raped Nina's mother. The family called the police immediately, but they didn't show up until the morning.

As Papa-Lo explains here, Kingston is divided into different territories that are strictly defended by those who rule over them. Part of what makes the Singer so unusual is that he is a friend to all different kinds of people in Jamaica--hence why his house was formerly a place of neutrality. However, as this passage indicates, the Singer is perhaps wrong to be so trusting. There may be a fine line between trust and naïveté.



In many ways, the Singer is a symbol of peace in a landscape of pervasive violence. This is demonstrated by his ability to talk the men from Jungle out of shooting him, rather than responding with violence himself. The Singer is able to exist with this policy of nonviolence because people have such immense love and respect for him. However, as Papa-Lo suggests, there may be a limit to this love and respect and the protection it affords the Singer.



Tension and violence may be a pervasive part of life in Kingston, but they are also building to a particular intensity at the time in which the book is set. Although Nina's family are relatively affluent, "decent" people, they are not sheltered from the violence and chaos that exists in the rest of the city. Indeed, given the connection between violence and poverty, it is possible that Nina's family's privilege makes them more likely to be targets of resentment.



Nina's father has been unable to speak since the robbery, and her sister Kimmy has failed to visit their parents since the incident. Nina recalls her relationship with a blond American named Danny, who came to Jamaica to conduct research for his agricultural science degree. Nina is very light-skinned, but still feels uneasy being in large groups of white people. Danny brought her to a party where she met the Singer. After she and Danny broke up, she slept with the Singer, and claims that his song "Midnight Ravers" was written about her. Nina is desperate to move to Miami. She crosses the road to the bus stop outside **the Singer's house**, and has an urge to shout to him, saying she needs his help.

Just as Bam-Bam dreams of getting out of the ghetto, Nina is desperate to leave Jamaica altogether. In both cases, this desire to leave appears to be something of a pipe dream rather than a serious possibility. Indeed, Nina's claim that the Singer's song "Midnight Ravers" was written about her is indicative of her tendency for self-delusion. Although it is of course possible that the song really was written about her, she is only one of countless women who have had a one-night stand with the Singer.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Two men bring luxury food items and **guns** to the ghetto in advance of the election. The Singer visits Copenhagen City, and after greeting a large group of residents he and Papa-Lo go to Papa-Lo's house to talk in private. People are suspicious of the close relationship between the Singer and Papa-Lo, wondering if the Singer is converting Papa-Lo into being a PNP supporter. The JLP was in power in the 1960s, until the PNP won the election in 1972. The JLP will now do anything to seize the country back, and as a result, tensions are running so high in West Kingston that it is as if it is "on fire."

Because the Singer has such enormous symbolic importance, every one of his actions is scrutinized intensely. To a lesser extent, the same is true of Papa-Lo. As the don of Copenhagen City, Papa-Lo is beloved and idolized by the residents of the ghetto. However, Papa-Lo is not infallible; a wrong move could damage his reputation and possibly make way for another don to take his place.



Josey Wales comes to visit Bam-Bam, and gives him a **gun** and asks if he is ready to be a man. Whereas Papa-Lo is a meticulous planner, Josey is spontaneous. Bam-Bam follows Josey down to the south shore of Kingston, to a shack where a man is lying on the ground, hogtied. Josey indicates that Bam-Bam should take the man's clothes, which are lying in a pile on the floor, including his underwear. However, first Bam-Bam needs to shoot the man. Bam-Bam shoots, and feels that "it really was nothing to kill a boy." He doesn't feel pride or satisfaction; he doesn't feel anything.

Josey sets this up as a rite of passage in which Bam-Bam will go from being a boy to a man. There is a perverse irony to the ritual given that Bam-Bam becomes a man by taking away the life of someone else. However, there is also a sense in which the act does not function as a ritual at all. Rather than feeling pride (or even regret) at killing the man, Bam-Bam feels nothing. He has become so numb to violence that life has little meaning—he is less of a "man" now than ever.



PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Waiting for Weeper, Josey muses on his disdain for Rastafarians. Weeper sleeps with all kinds of women, but Josey's personal rule is that he will only have sex with a woman who is prettier than his girlfriend, Winifred, and as a result he has remained monogamous for ten years. Unlike many people in the ghetto, Josey went to high school. When Weeper was in prison, he read Bertrand Russell and this made him an atheist, which Josey doesn't like. Weeper says that Papa-Lo is getting soft, but Josey thinks he's just getting old. Although Papa-Lo is only 39, this is considered old in the ghetto. Josey thinks Papa-Lo is foolish because he is optimistic that "better will come."

In many ways Josey is an unusual character, especially for a gangster. Whereas most gang members have little education and enjoy having sex with many women, Josey is well-educated, intelligent, and monogamous. On the other hand, both Papa-Lo and Weeper also defy the stereotype of gangsters in different ways too; Weeper because he enjoys reading philosophy, and Papa-Lo because he hopes for a more peaceful existence to come.



Weeper says that doing **cocaine** was the only way he could bring himself to have sex in prison, but Josey knows that Weeper still gets letters from the man he used to sleep with there. When Josey speaks to politicians and Americans like Louis Johnson, he pretends to be as stupid as they think he is, and conceals the fact that he can speak Spanish. He pretends to believe Louis when he says that the American government opposes intervening in the politics of sovereign nations. Josey also pretends he doesn't know that the Americans are preparing to take him out, and meanwhile focuses on making schemes of his own.

Secrecy and duplicity are everywhere in the novel. Weeper pretends that he was reluctant to have sex with men while incarcerated, when in reality he seems to have fallen in love with his male lover in prison. Josey pretends to be stupid in front of the Americans, and the Americans pretend that they do not intervene in the politics of other countries. All these secrets are, in their own way, a means of preserving power and the status quo.



PART 1, CHAPTER 7

Nina is still waiting across the road from **the Singer's house**. She wishes Kimmy would visit their parents, and wants to make a plan with her sister about how they can leave Jamaica. Nina knows she should go home, but can't bring herself to do it. Nina was once on a bus that was evacuated by the police. She thinks that every Jamaican is secretly a little happy when a police officer gets shot. Now she sees a fat policeman looking at her, so she goes back to the Singer's house and again asks to see him. She tells the guard that she is pregnant with the Singer's child, but the guard only replies that countless women come to the house saying the exact same thing.

Nina wants to be exceptional, but in reality she is something of an "everywoman." Her struggles and desires are the same as countless other women in Jamaica, and in this sense Nina is less of an individual character and more of a symbol. She represents those people--particularly women--who are intelligent, well-educated, and ambitious, and who dream of escaping Jamaica to lead a better life.



A white man pulls up and introduces himself to the guard as Alex Pierce, a writer for *Rolling Stone*. Alex insists that he was told by a secretary to come and interview the Singer at this time, during rehearsal break, but the guard won't let him in. Alex offers the guard money, but he refuses, and Nina laughs. They talk and Nina teases him. Alex says that he's not "some tourist" and that he knows "the real Jamaica," to which Nina replies that she hasn't found the real Jamaica yet. They both walk to the bus stop, and Alex gets on the first bus that comes. Nina, however, keeps waiting.

One of the themes of the novel is the way in which people with wildly different lives come into contact through their proximity--or desire for proximity--to the Singer. There are many ways in which Nina and Alex are oppositional figures, and the main one lies in their contrasting feelings about Jamaica. Alex is fascinated by Jamaica and claims to know the "real" country, whereas Nina finds her own homeland mystifying and nightmarish.



PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Demus imagines that someday, someone will write a story about what is happening in Jamaica, but thinks that whoever writes this story won't be able to know the reality of what took place. One day, Demus was washing himself outside his house in Jungle, when a "church lady" suddenly arrived with six police officers and accused Demus of raping her. Demus denied it and panicked, knowing that the police would shoot any boy from the ghetto accused of raping a church lady. The police forced Demus, who was still naked, to get on the ground and hump the floor. They then lit a newspaper on fire and put it on Demus' butt.

Demus's thoughts about someone writing the story of what is currently taking place in Jamaica serves as a mischievous wink to the reader. On a more serious level, however, it may also reveal Marlon James's own anxieties about representing this period in Jamaican history. Demus imagines that whoever writes the story won't really understand the truth of what happened. Inevitably this is true to some degree.



Demus was imprisoned for a week, during which time the police beat and tortured him. However, the woman who accused him then changed her mind and said that the man who raped her was actually from Trench Town, and Demus was released. Ever since this incident, Demus has carried a **gun**. Demus was involved with the group that fixed the horse races. He hoped that it would give him a chance to escape poverty and stop having people treat him like “some animal.” He and Heckle kidnapped the champion jockey and forced him to promise that he would purposefully lose the race.

Even though the jockey lost as agreed, the people in charge of collecting the winnings disappeared, and Demus was left with nothing. At this point, Josey gives Demus **cocaine**, a **gun**, and money in exchange for killing people Josey wants dead. Demus thinks this is too good to be true, and then learns that he’s right, as Josey wants him to kill the Singer. Demus is a Rasta and loves the Singer’s music. When he hears Josey’s request, he vomits and is unable to sleep. He has no problem killing police, but believes God will judge him for killing the Singer.

However, Josey gives Demus more cocaine and Demus allows himself to be persuaded that the Singer is actually a “hypocrite” and a “PNP stooge.” The next day, he rises early and, as he walks out of Jungle, notices that the neighborhood feels deserted. He meets Josey, Weeper, and another man who he doesn’t know. Demus ends the chapter by saying that people who claim they have “no choice” are actually just too cowardly to choose. It is 6 pm, and in 24 hours they will go **the Singer’s house**.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9:

Alex is puzzled by the fact that reggae is never played on the radio in Jamaica. He has also been struck by the visibility of black people in Jamaica, unlike in the US, where black people only appear on TV and the radio in very specific contexts. He comments that a white Jamaican won Miss World, and that she says the Singer is her boyfriend. Americans staying at the hotels are given a “Girl Friday,” a personal servant, which reminds Alex of slavery. He notes that race strongly affects the way people behave in Jamaica.

Alex is supposed to be covering the Rolling Stones, but he’s decided to chase a bigger story. He believes the Singer is “up to something and it’s not just **the peace concert**.” A taxi driver told Alex that he saw the Singer at the horse races with Papa-Lo, so Alex does some research, learning about Papa-Lo and Copenhagen City. He then discovers the Singer was seen afterward with Shotta Sherrif, who he knows runs the PNP-voting Eight Lanes. Alex wonders if the Singer is just trying to make peace, or if something else is going on.

Demus is a violent and morally corrupt character, but given his backstory, it is easy to see how he turned out that way. His decision to carry a gun and fix the horseraces are both born out of his mistreatment at the hands of others. Indeed, the fact that the police let Demus go with as little care as they initially arrest him suggests that the police generally treat the lives of people from the ghetto as disposable.



As with Bam-Bam, Josey targets Demus in a moment at which Demus is most hopeless and vulnerable. Although Josey’s gifts of money, cocaine, and a gun may seem generous, in reality they are exploitative. Josey knows that it would be difficult to impossible to say no to these gifts, particularly given that Demus has so little in the world.



Many characters who grow up in the ghetto find that the extreme poverty and violence in which they live forces them to go against any principles they might have. Demus’s identity as a Rasta and his love for the Singer are one of the only ways in which we can find meaning in his life. However, he is persuaded to give them up by the lure of life in Josey’s crew.



Alex’s perceptions about Jamaica are both insightful and inane. For example, it is odd that he should find it surprising that black people are so visible in Jamaica, considering it is a majority-black nation. However, as a foreigner he is able to perceive certain things about Jamaica (such as the legacy of slavery) that may be more difficult for Jamaicans themselves to see.



Alex is not the only character in the novel to be suspicious of the Singer. In Kingston, almost everyone seems to be motivated by a selfish desire for power, and thus it is seen as highly suspect to behave altruistically, with no political end goal. Although it appears as though the Singer really is trying to bring peace to Jamaica, nobody believes that this is actually the case.



Alex came on the same flight as Mark Lansing, a rich kid who is making a film about **the Smile Jamaica concert**. In May, Bill Adler said on TV that there were eleven CIA operatives working in Jamaica, but by June seven had left. **The Singer's house** is being guarded by a posse called the Echo Squad. Alex is 27 and wants to prove that he's not aimless. The general election is in two weeks, and Alex is desperate to break the story of what's going on in Jamaica. He resolves to go back to the Singer's house tomorrow.

Alex has a desire to convey the truth of what is happening in Jamaica, but his reasons for doing so seem a little suspect. Not only is he desperate to prove that he is not a tourist and knows the "real" Jamaica, he also seems largely motivated by his own professional ego and desire to show he is making something of his life.



PART 1, CHAPTER 10

Josey thinks about Weeper's uniqueness. Weeper passed three GCE subjects in school and has always read voraciously. Weeper loves talking about the man he had a relationship with in prison, and can do so openly because he has a reputation for being a merciless killer. When Weeper was young, he was jumped by the police who charged him with robbing a jewelry store. He couldn't afford a lawyer, and so was sentenced to five years in prison. After his sentencing, the police tortured him with a technique called the "Electric Boogie," using an electric cord.

Once again, homosexual desire and violence are shown to be inextricably tied within the world of the novel. Weeper is able to speak openly about his gay relationship because he is so ruthlessly violent, but also because it took place in a broader context of violence: life in prison. The implication is that gay sex is allowed to take place if it is framed as a violent rather than loving act.



Weeper believes in evolution, which provokes arguments between him and Josey. Josey hates when Weeper does **cocaine** while they're "in the middle of business." It makes him paranoid, and as they talk in a bar he tells Josey there's a man outside watching them. Weeper begins telling a story about the Singer that Josey's heard before, but he lets Weeper tell it anyway. Three years into his prison service, Weeper was taken out to chop wood on Port Henderson beach. There, the Singer walked over and told him that he was fighting for Weeper's rights. However, Weeper then realized the Singer was talking to the man next to him, and he has hated the Singer ever since.

Weeper and Josey's friendship is one of the most perplexing relationships in the novel. In many ways they are polar opposites. Weeper is an atheist and Josey is religious; Weeper is a cocaine addict and Josey doesn't do drugs; Weeper is promiscuous (and seemingly gay) while Josey is monogamous, heterosexual, and homophobic. However, they do have one important similarity: both are unusually intelligent and well-educated—and violent.



PART 1, CHAPTER 11

Everyone in Bam-Bam's life has been behaving differently since Bam-Bam got a **gun**. Bam-Bam's girlfriend is newly cautious around him. There are rumors that Papa-Lo went to England to follow the Singer's tour, and that Funnyboy was there too. The white man who brought guns into the ghetto says: "we're fighting for freedom from totalitarianism, terrorism and tyranny," but Bam-Bam does not understand what this means.

Bam-Bam's lack of understanding over what the white American means by "freedom from totalitarianism, terrorism and tyranny" is telling. It conveys how the Americans are exploiting the poor and uneducated population of Jamaica for their own ends.



Weeper tells Bam-Bam that Josey is making them go to Rema, another swing district, because there are rumors that people there have been complaining about the JLP and threatening to join the PNP, thereby turning the “Eight Lanes into Nine Lanes.” Weeper and Bam-Bam freebase **crack** and drive to Rema. In the car Bam-Bam feels euphoric, horny, and violent all at the same time. They jump out of the car and join Josey, and together they shoot up the street while the Rema residents flee screaming. Bam-Bam feels a manic urge to kill someone, but Weeper stops him shooting. Back in the car, Bam-Bam feels miserable and is desperate to get high again.

Back in Copenhagen City, Papa-Lo is furious, asking “who give Josey Wales and Weeper permission” to shoot up Rema. Papa-Lo almost hits Josey, but instead tells him that one day he’ll run out of people to kill. Bam-Bam’s girlfriend looks at him like he is a stranger. Josey and the gang continue to commit frequent acts of violence; Josey does something to a policewoman before killing her that makes Bam-Bam vomit. Bam-Bam doesn’t care what he does as long as Weeper keeps giving him **crack**.

Two weeks before the election, Papa-Lo sends the gang to each house to “remind people how to vote.” When a teenager says he doesn’t take orders from Papa-Lo, Papa-Lo shoots him in the foot and forces him to drink his own urine. Yet when the white men who bring **guns** come to the ghetto, they speak to Josey, not Papa-Lo. The Echo Squad, who guard **the Singer’s house**, are “bad man on PNP payroll.” The Singer thinks he understands the ghetto because he came from there, but Bam-Bam thinks that the Singer doesn’t understand anything anymore.

Bam-Bam sees Weeper naked outside a woman’s house and feels a strong sense of sexual desire for him, but denies that he wants any of “that nasty batty boy business.” Bam-Bam watches **the Singer’s house**. Every night at around 9 pm the Singer takes a break and goes into the kitchen. The Americans have shown Bam-Bam and the rest of the gang pictures that were secretly taken of the Singer in his house. Everyone is waiting for **the Smile Jamaica concert**, even some people from the ghetto, because Papa-Lo said they should go to support “Bob.”

This passage makes the connection between sex, drugs, and violence explicitly clear. Freebasing crack (a particularly intense and addictive form of cocaine) encourages Bam-Bam and his crew to have a desire to kill similar to (and intertwined with) the desire to have sex. Whereas when Bam-Bam first shot someone he felt nothing, cocaine actually makes him want to kill. More than anything, cocaine makes him want more cocaine, thereby making him more dependent on Josey.



Bam-Bam’s engagement with violence and drugs estranges him from those around him, including his girlfriend and even Papa-Lo. However, the intensity of his desire for crack is so strong that it replaces the human desires for intimacy and normalcy, and totally disrupts his sense of morality.



Power in Kingston is not static and stable, but instead always shifting. Despite being the longstanding don of Copenhagen City, it is clear that Papa-Lo’s power is disappearing and that Josey is taking his place. Meanwhile, the Singer may seem universally admired and beloved, but in fact there are some—like Bam-Bam—who feel no qualms about undermining him.



This is one of the only times at which the Singer is named. The fact that Papa-Lo calls him “Bob” where he is otherwise known as “the Singer” emphasizes Papa-Lo’s intimacy with him. It also shows that Papa-Lo has a different kind of relationship with the Singer than the others, particularly Josey and his crew. It is a relationship grounded in genuine trust, admiration, and hope. This is why Papa-Lo could never bring himself to attack the Singer, but Josey can.



PART 1, CHAPTER 12

Alex writes that the West Kingston ghetto is like hell, and that it can't be put into words. He uses melodramatic, sensual language to describe life in the ghetto, and then chastises himself for "sensationalism." There is a blackout, and Kingston is eerily quiet. Alex feels like he is "in over my head." He keeps writing, describing Jamaican musical culture before returning to the "lawless" world of downtown Kingston. He feels that his story needs "a narrative line," a hero, a villain, and a damsel. He is fixated on Bill Adler and what "he knows."

Alex is plagued by confusion about Jamaica. At times it seems as if his desire to know the "real" Jamaica clouds his ability to actually see the country for what it is. Moreover, Alex cannot help but fall into clichés when attempting to tell his story. He describes the ghetto in overly dramatic terms and tries to find a hero, villain, and damsel, when the reality is far more complicated.



PART 1, CHAPTER 13

People in the ghetto are treating Papa-Lo like an "old man." There are rumors that Papa-Lo is turning away from violence, and he admits it's true that two years ago, he shot a boy without realizing he was a high school student and that this had a deep impact in him. The boy's mother came to Papa-Lo's house and shouted that her son had six GCEs and was going to get a scholarship to university, until Josey gun-butted her in the head.

Papa-Lo appears to have a much stronger moral compass in comparison to the other gangsters in the ghetto, so it is easy to forget that he, too, is extremely ruthless and violent. What does it mean to be relatively moral in such an immoral landscape? The book provides no straightforward answer to this question.



Papa-Lo admits that the Singer is friends with both him and Shotta Sherrif, though he interacts with them separately. For three months, Peter Nasser and two white men have been coming to the ghetto to see Josey. Papa-Lo recalls the turmoil of 1966, when a neighborhood called Balaclava fell "so that Copenhagen City could rise." Politicians separated Kingston into districts, drawing artificial boundaries without consulting the residents. Papa-Lo worked on expanding Copenhagen City to twice its original size and eliminated robbery and rape from the neighborhood. However, now it is another election year and there is nothing left but "war and rumour of war."

This passage highlights that violence and immorality do not only originate in the ghetto and move outwards; corruption also happens the other way around. Drawing artificial boundaries between neighborhoods in the Kingston ghetto was clearly in the interests of politicians such as Peter Nasser, who exploited these divisions for their own political gain. The ordinary residents of West Kingston were thus left caught in a "war" not of their own design.



PART 1, CHAPTER 14

Barry puts his children to bed, and immediately after this Bill Adler calls. Bill tells Barry to call off the people tracking him, though Barry denies there are any such people. Bill feels confident that Michael Manley is about to be reelected. He asks why the Singer is on Barry's "radar," but Barry refuses to answer this question. They hang up, and Barry and Barry's wife have another argument about when they are going to leave Jamaica.

One of the novel's most important literary maneuvers is to describe the event from multiple different perspectives. Although Barry could not be more different than the residents of the Kingston ghetto, they are similarly attentive to and invested in the outcome of the election.



PART 1, CHAPTER 15

It is 11:15 pm, over four hours after curfew, and Nina is still at the bus stop. She feels like she has gone mad, waiting outside **the Singer's house** hoping he will help her and her family get American visas. She hadn't planned on sleeping with him, but when she saw him naked on his balcony eating fruit she took off her clothes and joined him. Kimmy is dating Ras Trent, a bass player and son of the Minister of Tourism.

Nina doesn't want to leave Jamaica because of the crime, but rather because she feels like life in Jamaica just involves endless waiting. Across the road, a white Datsun pulls up and a driver gets out, and Nina immediately runs away, breaking one of her high heels. She runs into six policemen, who ask what she is doing out past curfew. They tell her that she should get in the car so they can drive her home. Nina refuses, but the policemen insist, saying otherwise they will put her in jail. They begin driving in the opposite direction of Nina's neighborhood, claiming that they are taking a shortcut.

Throughout the novel, Nina struggles to control her own desires in order to conform to the expectations of how a "respectable" middle-class woman should behave. Sleeping with the Singer and standing outside his house late at night are decidedly not "respectable," but Nina still can't help doing these things.



By this point in the novel, it is clear that running into the police is likely to put Nina in more, rather than less, danger. Nina's flight from the Singer's house and encounter with the police reveal how incredibly vulnerable she is. In a world of extreme violence and corruption, women in particular often end up powerless, left at the mercy of the ruthless men around them.



PART 1, CHAPTER 16:

Demus is inside a house by the sea with Josey Wales, Bam-Bam, Weeper, Heckle, Renton, Funky Chicken, and two men from Jungle whose names he doesn't know. Three nights ago, another man in the crew, Matic, had a seizure while trying to freebase **cocaine** and died. Each of the remaining men has been trained to shoot M16 rifles. They have 21 **guns**, and 840 bullets. Demus pictures himself descending on **the Singer's house**, bringing death with him.

The reckless violence Josey and his crew bring to the lives of others also applies to themselves; the death of Matic is barely given any thought. Once again, the sense that life is disposable perpetuates the cycle of extreme violence in the ghetto.



PART 2, SIR ARTHUR GEORGE JENNINGS

When Jennings' body was found, people claimed he had been sleepwalking. He explains that death is dirty and vulgar. Jennings is inside the house of the man who killed him. The killer is an old man now, and is having sex with his wife, the former runner-up of Miss Jamaica. After they finish, the killer walks into the living room and speaks to another man. His wife shouts his name, Peter, but he tells her to go back to bed. The other man tells Peter that Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherrif have both stopped eating pork. It is revealed that this other man is Josey Wales. A dead fireman is in the room too, a man who Josey killed while he was attempting to tackle a blaze on Orange Street.

Because he is dead, Jennings has insight into all the secret allegiances and deals that take place behind closed doors. He therefore knows the extent to which duplicity and corruption characterize life in Jamaica. Despite this special insight, death is overall not romanticized in the novel. As well as describing death as dirty and vulgar, Jennings emphasizes the frustration of being witness to the secrets of the living but not being able to do anything about it.



PART 2, CHAPTER 1

Part Two is set on December 3, 1976. In the police car, Nina is certain that the two police officers are about to rape her. The waiting is unbearable. The police ask her if she's a Rasta or socialist, but she doesn't answer. They stop the car and the police get out and chat; eventually, Nina tells them that if they are going to rape her, they should get it over with. The police officers are left speechless with shock, and eventually take her home. Four hours later, Nina is still not able to sleep. She hasn't eaten anything since the previous morning. She reflects on the fact that Jamaica is on the edge of anarchy, and "JLP goons" are surely about to kick off a fight that will leave Kingston burned to the ground.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this passage is the lack of relief after Nina is taken home safely by the police. Tension builds to an unbearable degree while she is waiting to be raped; however, after she shocks the police into taking her home, Nina is not even able to feel happy. This seems to be because violence and chaos is so all-encompassing in her world that escaping a single incident does not bring relief. To Nina, the only real escape would be immigrating and leaving Jamaica behind forever.



PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Papa-Lo recalls a rehearsal at **the Singer's house** a few weeks ago, when a white boy appeared "out of nowhere like magic trick." During a break, the white boy chats away to the Singer about racism, God, and music. He advises the Singer to "stop trying to reach mainstream America." Eventually, the Singer simply walks away, but after that point becomes newly suspicious, including of Papa-Lo, as he believes that the white boy is somehow connected to Copenhagen City. Papa-Lo believes this too, assuming the boy is involved with Josey. At the same time, the Singer has so many enemies that this one white boy doesn't trouble him much; when Papa-Lo asks what the boy looked like, the Singer can't remember.

Whereas the Singer was initially presented as being overly trusting to the point of naïveté, this passage implies that this is beginning to change. Clearly the white boy—who is unnamed but is presumably Mark Lansing—represents little threat to the Singer, especially in comparison to the gangsters that otherwise surround him. On the other hand, the white boy represents the secret allegiances, corruption, and duplicity that are very much a threat to the Singer's pursuit of peace.



PART 2, CHAPTER 3

Josey sees Nina across the road from **the Singer's house** and wonders if she is a prostitute, or just another woman in love with the Singer. That night, Josey cannot sleep, and listens to Weeper having sex inside his Datsun. He thinks about Peter Nasser, who he knows has already been plotting to get rid of Josey "when things get too big." Josey thinks that Nasser is beginning to confuse representing a group of people with owning them. After Weeper's girl leaves, he and Josey have an argument about the men they have hired to work with them. Eventually, the argument subsides into laughter, and Weeper falls asleep.

Josey's concern that Peter Nasser confuses representing people with owning them is a little ironic, considering that Josey acts as if he owns people who he has not even been elected to represent. On the other hand, throughout the novel the people of the ghetto show more love and loyalty to the gangsters who "represent" them than the politicians that supposedly do the same. Despite Josey's brutality, he knows what the people want better than Nasser does.



PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Barry drives his older son to school. Barry's wife complains that the previous Christmas was supposed to be the last Christmas they spent in Jamaica. She winds him up, accusing him of being bad at his job, until he threatens to violently kill her if she doesn't shut up. They have been idling in the car outside **the Singer's house**; Barry's wife notices and asks what they are doing there. Eventually they drive away, still fighting and cursing, both of them forgetting that their younger son is still in the car too.

The novel makes clear that violence is hardly confined to Jamaica and Jamaicans. Indeed, the overall implication is that violence is a constitutive part of the social norms of masculinity. While Barry is not represented as being a particularly violent person, a perfectly ordinary argument with his wife quickly escalates into him threatening to kill her.



PART 2, CHAPTER 5

Alex can't sleep, so he asks a taxi driver to take him somewhere that's "still jumping." At first the driver is resistant, reminding Alex that it's past curfew, but eventually he agrees to try and find somewhere. They pull up to the Turntable Club, and Alex ends up sleeping with a Jamaican woman called Aisha. The next day he has a lunch date with Mark Lansing, who has offered to help him get access to the Singer. Alex goes to get coffee, leaving Aisha asleep in his bed.

One recurring motif in the novel is the desire of white American men for black Jamaican women. Although Alex may not be conscious of it, his desire to sleep with Aisha seems related to seem at home in Jamaica and access the "authentic" side of the country.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6

Papa-Lo has only had one hour's sleep; something is troubling his spirit. He feels that Cubans have "infiltrated" Jamaica. Last year, Peter Nasser warned Papa-Lo to tell the community not to eat anything made with flour. Papa-Lo barely paid attention, and within a few weeks over a dozen people were struck with violent vomiting and diarrhea and died. The health minister claimed that the flour imported to Jamaica from Germany had been poisoned with a weed killer called "Mother-in-Law poison," but the people suspected this was not true.

Once again, the Jamaican government is shown to be inept at best--and deeply corrupt at worst. The Jamaican population, made extremely vulnerable by poverty, is left defenseless by corrupt politicians. It is no wonder that there seems to very little trust between the people and their elected officials.



Papa-Lo explains that the PNP have never gone into the ghetto voluntarily, and that it was the JLP who built Copenhagen City in the 1950s, affording the residents the opportunity to wash themselves in private. After that, the PNP built the "piece of shit place they call the Eight Lanes." Both parties know that whoever wins West Kingston wins the general election, and as a result in 1974 the PNP hired two men from Jungle to begin a war in the ghetto. The men even attacked a funeral, at which point it was clear that the way things used to work no longer applied.

It is perhaps ironic that Papa-Lo, who is one of the oldest gangsters in the ghetto and thus remembers the long history of violence that preexisted the current moment, is also one of the most optimistic characters in the novel. Given the extent to which Jamaica's entire history is characterized by chaos, brutality, and neglect, how is it possible for Papa-Lo to feel hope for the future?



The PNP won the 1972 election and immediately drove JLP voters out of their jobs. They began killing ruthlessly, even murdering PNP voters if they were union members. However, they never came to Copenhagen City, and eventually Josey retaliated by burning down Lane Number Six and killing everyone in Lane Number Seven. Papa-Lo and Josey killed the men the PNP had hired to begin the ghetto war. That was a year ago, and now there are many people in Kingston who blame Papa-Lo for destroying their hope for the future. People think Papa-Lo is going soft because of killing the schoolboy, but in fact what is making him “lose it” is that he *should* feel bad about that murder and doesn’t.

People assume that Papa-Lo felt guilt over killing the boy, but this theory does not make much sense given that Papa-Lo has been mercilessly killing people for years. The true reason for Papa-Lo’s change of heart is surprisingly similar to Bam-Bam’s reaction when Josey made him kill for the first time: both are struck by a feeling of emptiness. Josey’s regret seems to come from the fact that it is too late to change his own numbness to violence.



PART 2, CHAPTER 7

Kimmy calls Nina, a rare occurrence ever since Ras told her to cut ties with those still “trapped in the Babylon shitstem.” Ras flies to New York every six weeks, but still hasn’t got Kimmy a visa even though his father is Minister of Tourism. Kimmy asks Nina what she knows about Garveyism, and Nina asks if she’s joking. Kimmy asks if Nina has read a range of radical books, such as Eldrige Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*. Although Nina feels angry at Kimmy, she also has an impulse to protect her.

Nina clearly believes that Kimmy’s commitment to black radicalism is superficial, given that it is inspired by her relationship with Ras rather than her actual political convictions. On the other hand, Nina’s dismissal highlights Nina’s own total lack of political principles, which leaves her aimless and lost.



Nina once went with Kimmy to a “twelve tribes” gathering for Rastas, where all the women were dressed in modest clothing. Back in the present, Kimmy calls Nina a “dutty little hypocrite” for having sex with the Singer—a friend of Kimmy’s saw Nina waiting outside **the Singer’s house** the night before. The conversation quickly descends into an argument, with the sisters hurling insults at each other. Nina feels desperate, furious, and reckless. She wants to keep yelling at her sister, but Kimmy hangs up.

In typical sibling fashion, Nina and Kimmy are driven apart by their competitiveness, but also their similarities to one another. They resent one another for these similarities, suggesting that their irritation with each other is in fact based in their discomfort with themselves.



PART 2, CHAPTER 8

Josey has an appointment with Doctor Love, a Cuban man. Both Peter Nasser and Louis Johnson have tried to control Josey’s access to Doctor Love, but have not succeeded. Josey first met Doctor Love in November 1975, and discovered that Doctor Love tried to kill Che Guevara four times. Doctor Love says that he has learned “tricks” from the CIA, but now works for Medellín.

Doctor Love is a symbol of the international network of political power, violence, and corruption, which connects everything from counterrevolutionary Cubans to Josey Wales to the CIA to the drug cartels of Medellín in Colombia.



Josey met Doctor Love at Kingston Harbor. Doctor Love told Josey to duck, and shortly after a series of cars exploded. Two months earlier, Doctor Love blew up a Cuban plane headed for Jamaica, killing everyone onboard including the Cuban national fencing team.

Doctor Love is something of a cartoon villain, right down to his comically ironic name. He has less depth and complexity than the other characters, instead serving as an instigator of pure chaos in the novel.



Back in the present, Josey picks up the book Weeper is reading: it is Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*. Doctor Love tells Josey that America needs a new "Santa Claus" to take a gift from Bogotá, and says that Josey will need to do something to "impress them." Josey tells Doctor Love to call him in two days, as tomorrow he will be busy.

Here Doctor Love's cartoonishness is further emphasized by his use of the euphemistic language "Santa Claus" and "gift" to describe the movement of cocaine from Colombia to the United States.



PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Barry didn't realize that Doctor Love was in Jamaica. Barry is at the American embassy, in the process of revoking the Singer's visa on the accusation of drug trafficking. All they will have to do to prove this is "check his back pocket." Barry reflects once more on his hatred for Bill Adler, as well as his suspicion of Louis Johnson on account of the fact that Louis comes as a "package deal" with Doctor Love. Barry feels that Jamaica is "swarming with fucking Cubans." He opens Doctor Love's file, mentally going over all the recent explosions in the Caribbean that he believes are Doctor Love's responsibility.

The network of political alliances and antagonisms in the novel is so complex that it can be difficult to track. Barry Diflorio and Louis Johnson both work for the CIA, but Barry distrusts Louis; Doctor Love was trained by the CIA but is not officially affiliated with it, and Bill Adler was officially affiliated but is now an enemy of the Company because of the exposé he wrote, which betrayed Barry and others.



Although Jamaica is overrun with crime, it is mostly conveyed to downtown; when people commit crime uptown they do so to "make a very unsubtle point." Back in the car, Barry's wife had asked what he was doing in Jamaica, accusing the CIA of always being "up to no good." Barry recited the official memo detailing the CIA's reasons for being in Jamaica, but his wife replied that this didn't explain anything.

The secrecy involved in being employed by the CIA infiltrates Barry's family, putting his relationship with his wife under considerable strain. Indeed, this is one of many ways in which working for the CIA keeps Barry from leading a normal life.



PART 2, CHAPTER 10

Papa-Lo still feels restless; he feels that something is especially wrong today. The JLP will do anything to win, and suddenly, Papa-Lo realizes what Josey is planning to do. He is so shocked he drops his glass of juice to the floor and immediately sets off for Josey's house. In January Peter Nasser called Papa-Lo for the last time, telling him the IMF (International Monetary Fund) were coming to decide whether to give Jamaica money. Nasser warned everyone that Michael Manley would turn Jamaica communist, and the country would resemble Doctor Love's stories from Cuba.

The Cold War collapses any sense of scale, making small, local matters seem as if they are of global importance. Although from one angle Papa-Lo and Josey are simply gangsters who control little more than sections of the West Kingston ghetto, due to the Cold War their actions taken on a much broader significance, connected to the international battle between capitalism and communism.



Back in January, Josey went into Trench Town with Doctor Love and one other man. Papa-Lo warned Josey he was crazy to be going in with no backup, but the next day the news reported that two whole tenement yards in Trench Town had been blown up. The violence escalated dramatically from that point. In March, police followed Josey into Copenhagen City, but were then chased out by the residents and had to be rescued by Nasser. At this point, Josey officially became "a man of the people."

As this passage shows, residents of the ghetto have a fierce sense of loyalty toward whoever is the don at the time. As before, this is in part due to the fact that politicians are known to be untrustworthy, and thus the people feel that their only advocates are the gangsters who are at least in touch with what daily life in the ghetto is like.



On May 19, Josey and Doctor Love took Papa-Lo to watch them set off an explosion in the Orange Lane tenement. From May to July there was war in the city. The police found the hospital that had been secretly running in Copenhagen City, and shortly after this 15 soldiers busted down the door of Papa-Lo's house. They locked him up for three days along with Josey, Weeper, and others from Copenhagen City. While they were in jail, two more bombs exploded in Elysium Gardens.

The structure of gangs, much like governments, ensures that even if certain individuals are robbed of their power (for example, by being locked in prison), it makes little difference to how society operates on the day-to-day level. Thus even though Josey is put in prison, the explosions he has been orchestrating with Doctor Love continue to occur.



PART 2, CHAPTER 11

A source tells Alex that the Singer was possibly involved in the horse-racing scam a few months ago. Alex is not sure if he believes this, but knows that there is something fishy going on at **the Singer's house**. Aisha left Alex's room four hours ago, and Alex is left feeling listless. Mark Lansing calls him, acting strangely friendly, and says that yesterday the Singer had a press conference at his house about **the Smile Jamaica concert**. Mark claims a writer from *Rolling Stone* was there, although he doesn't remember the man's name. Alex is furious.

Throughout much of the novel, Alex is shown as being comically inept. His desperation to figure out what is going on and situate himself at the heart of the action makes this ineptitude even more amusing. At the same time, Alex's position as an outsider is similar to that of the reader, whose (likely) lack of familiarity with Jamaican history of this era leaves them in a similar place of confusion.



Immediately after the call with Mark, Alex's boss calls and fires him from *Rolling Stone*. Alex tries to explain that he's working on another story about the current situation in Jamaica, but his boss isn't interested. Half an hour later, Alex is sitting by a hotel pool when Mark arrives, wearing red, green and gold with a Rasta tam on his head. Mark is rude to the Jamaican waiter, who calls him "Mr. Brando." He tells Alex that the other writer from *Rolling Stone* asked the Singer about gangs in Kingston.

Because his father is the former director of the CIA, Mark's embrace of Jamaican culture appears to be a way of rebelling against "respectable," elite, white American culture. On the other hand, Mark's rude behavior to the Jamaican waiter suggests that he has not truly let go of the racist norms with which he grew up.



Mark offers to give Alex a role in his crew, thereby giving him access to the Singer. All he asks in return is that Alex takes a bag of "film stuff" back to New York with him. Alex is suspicious, but Mark insists that he simply doesn't trust a stranger to take the documentary footage back to the United States for him. He asks if Alex wants to come to **the Singer's house** that night, and promises to pick him up at 7 pm.

Due to his desperation to get access to the Singer, Alex is forced into the humiliating position of accepting help from Mark. This is yet another example of an unlikely allegiance born out of a character's own self-interest.



PART 2, CHAPTER 12

Nina is about to leave for **the Singer's house** when her mother calls and says to come to Nina's parents' house immediately. When she arrives, Kimmy opens the door, and Nina asks her mother what's going on. Nina's mother begins yelling at her, calling her a "whore" and accusing her of "debasement with that, that Rasta." Nina protests that Kimmy has a Rasta boyfriend, but her mother replies that at least Kimmy's boyfriend is from a "good family." Nina's mother is so overcome with anger that she falls down and has to be helped into a chair.

Nina's mother's fury at the news that Nina slept with the Singer, compared to her indifference to Kimmy's relationship with Ras Trent, tells us a lot about the real reason why people like Nina's family dislike Rastas. Although in many ways the division is about culture, it is perhaps even more so an issue of class. Not only is the Singer a "dirty" Rasta, but he is from the ghetto.



Kimmy knows that Nina won't point out that Kimmy also slept with the Singer, as this would be too much for their mother to bear. The three women yell at one another and eventually Nina's mother shouts for her husband, Morris. She says that Nina must be infested with lice and exclaims that she doesn't want a "Rasta bastard pickney" in her house. Suddenly, Nina feels a leather strap hit her; her father grabs her by the leg and begins beating her. Nina screams for him to stop and eventually kicks him in the chest, grabs the belt, and beats him in return.

Nina starts to show more unique traits distinguishing her from the "everywoman" figure she first seemed to be. Chief among them is her recklessness, as shown when she seizes the belt and begins beating her father after he beats her. Although at times she seems lost and powerless, at other times Nina is impressively fearless and single-minded.



PART 2, CHAPTER 13

Barry finds Louis Johnson at a bar with Doctor Love. They leave almost immediately, however, and Barry quickly gets in the car to follow them. Louis drives into the ghetto, and Barry begins to get nervous. Then, out of nowhere, Louis crashes his car into Barry's, and Louis gets out, asking why Barry is following him. Louis takes Barry to the hospital, where a doctor gives him stitches in his forehead.

Like Josey, Louis Johnson and Doctor Love appear to always be two steps ahead of the other characters in the novel. Barry thought he was secretly following Louis, but in fact Louis knew Barry was after him all along--which is also exactly what happened when Barry attempted to spy on Bill Adler.



After the stitches are done, the two men discuss Barry's previous work in Ecuador, which sought to undermine communist activities there. Louis emphasizes that Jamaica isn't Ecuador and that Barry doesn't understand what's going on. He tells Barry that there was recently a meeting set up by the PNP in which soldiers drew **guns** on Michael Manley, before backing down. Barry tells Louis to stop getting involved in the domestic matters of the country and "let diplomacy run its course." However, Louis responds that it is too late for that, and adds that he and Barry are "two sides of the same coin."

Much of what Louis says during this conversation rings true, including the fact that Barry does not understand what is happening in Jamaica. Similarly, Louis' statement that he and Barry are "two sides of the same coin" is correct. Barry sticks to the party line and is rather inept, whereas Louis is a renegade who is more deeply connected to those on the ground. However, they both represent the insidious power and presence of the US in foreign politics.



PART 2, CHAPTER 14

Papa-Lo and Josey have stopped talking, and Papa-Lo reflects that it is strange that he now knows what Shotta Sherrif is thinking better than he knows about Josey. He walks to Josey's house and blames himself for turning away from Josey, who is in some ways like a son to him. He knows what Josey is planning and that a lot of people will die by the time it's carried out.

More than any other emotion, Papa-Lo is associated with the feeling of regret. He resembles the literary archetype of the mentor/father-figure who has created a monster that is now out of his control. Although Papa-Lo would like to undo the damage he has done, it is seemingly too late for that.



Just as Papa-Lo is about to get to Josey's house, a spray of bullets cuts across the path in front of him, and police and soldiers jump out of three jeeps. The soldiers point their machine **guns** at Papa-Lo; meanwhile, Josey does not come out of the house. The police begin beating Papa-Lo until someone shouts that they need him alive. He is beaten to unconsciousness and wakes up in a jail cell.

Papa-Lo's decreasing power is further emphasized by his ambush by police and soldiers. As has already been made clear, Josey is now untouchable, more powerful than the police. Papa-Lo, on the other hand, is once again subject to the arbitrary power of the law.



PART 2, CHAPTER 15

Alex is in the car with Mark Lansing, who is a terrible driver. They pull up outside **the Singer's house**, but the guard will not let them inside. He says that they're not letting any cars in except family or band. Lansing parks the car nearby and returns, at which point the guard says that only one person can come in. Lansing tells Alex to wait and goes inside. While he is standing there, Alex realizes he hasn't prepared any questions to ask the Singer, and that he is "all out of things to say."

Alex waits for 45 minutes, until the gate opens and a truck full of men leave. Alex seizes this opportunity to sneak inside. The band is still playing, but the house is otherwise deserted. Alex decides to leave again, thinking: "Fuck this whole place." As he walks away from the house, he sees a blue car turn into the driveway.

Once again, Alex is shown to be comically incompetent. He has been so obsessed with his goal of getting access to the Singer that he has neglected to come up with any questions to ask him. In this sense, Alex is shown to be something of a poser, someone who is more fixated on the idea of being a journalist than he is engaged in the actual work of being one.



The dark comedy of this moment is created by dramatic irony; while Alex obliviously walks away from the Singer's house, the reader knows that a major event is about to take place there—one that any serious journalist would want to witness.



PART 2, CHAPTER 16

It is evening, and Nina has been walking for hours. She thinks about the visa she is desperate to obtain, a ticket out of the apocalyptic place that Jamaica is becoming. She is furious with her father, with Kimmy, and with the Singer. Yet she is walking toward **the Singer's house**, determined to get visas for herself and her family. She feels like she is going crazy. She asks a man for the time, and after he tells her it is 8.30 pm she starts to run. Outside the Singer's house, Nina sees two white cars speed through the gate.

Once again Nina's single-mindedness leads her to engage in dangerous and irrational behavior. On the other hand, it is clear that she is right in assessing Jamaica as apocalyptic, and from this angle her desperation to leave makes a lot of sense. Given the sense of hopelessness that characterizes Nina's life and the lives of so many Jamaicans, her reckless behavior doesn't come as too much of a surprise.



PART 2, CHAPTER 17

Demus has spent the night in a shack with Weeper, Funky Chicken, Heckle, and Bam-Bam. In the morning, everyone in the shack is "going mad and ting." Bam-Bam is screaming, Heckle is searching for **cocaine**, and Funky Chicken is shaking and scratching himself from heroin withdrawal. Demus guesses it is about noon. The room smells bad, and Demus thinks he can smell all the men's fear. The sun goes down, and Demus is so desperate to get out of the shack that he is prepared to kill whoever opens the door. Josey arrives and slaps Bam-Bam to stop him screaming.

The scene inside the shack is hellish, and clearly designed (and, as Demus' thoughts show, successfully so) to push the men into becoming so desperate and disorientated that they will do anything Josey tells them. Crucially, at this stage the men are so dependent on Josey that his imprisoning them in the shack does not turn them against him, but in fact increases his control over them.



Josey then opens one box filled with **guns** and another box filled with **cocaine**, and the men rush to do lines. Demus starts to feel invincible, like he could "kill God and fuck the devil." The men get into two white Datsuns and drive uptown to **the Singer's house**. On the drive, a blue car joins them, going in the same direction.

By alternately giving and withholding cocaine, Josey not only increases the men's dependency on him but controls their emotions, enabling him to push them past their normal range of feeling and preparing them to commit extreme acts of violence that they might otherwise balk at.



PART 2, CHAPTER 18

This chapter is written in verse. As the men drive to **the Singer's house**, Bam-Bam's thoughts are fragmented. He wants to "fuck fuck fuck" and "start shooting." They arrive at the Singer's house and Echo Squad are not standing guard outside. Josey jumps out of the car first and shoots the Singer. The Singer's wife Rita runs past with his children; Bam-Bam shoots Rita in the head and she falls to the ground. He feels angry that he didn't get to shoot the Singer first. Bam-Bam wanted the Singer to look terrified and wet himself, but the Singer remained calm and said: "Selassie I Jah Rastafari."

The men continue to shoot bullets in every direction, and Funky Chicken almost shoots Bam-Bam by accident. As they leave, Bam-Bam sees a girl (Nina) walking in, not realizing that she is "stepping into hell." The men drive away but soon run into police cars. Weeper slams the breaks and tells Bam-Bam to stop screaming.

PART 2, CHAPTER 19

Speaking in a rapid monologue, Demus describes speeding away in the Datsun and feeling himself coming down from the **cocaine**. Heckle begins saying that they are all going to burn in hell, and Weeper forces him out of the car at **gunpoint**. At the gully outside Trench Town Weeper gets out of the car and starts running; no one knows where he is headed. Bam-Bam and then Josey also run off, leaving Demus alone. He starts to cry. He feels convinced that he is being chased by the police and starts running. He hides behind a bush and, for some reason, begins to laugh uncontrollably.

Demus has lost his **gun**. He thinks about the fact that there were no guards outside **the Singer's house**, which seems to indicate that the guards knew the attack was being planned. Demus feels miserable and wants to be with his girlfriend. He realizes he has run into a PNP neighborhood and panics as he doesn't have his gun. He finally arrives at the shack by the sea, but there is another man already in there who tells him to leave. Demus runs and finds himself in a woman's backyard; he realizes it is his girlfriend, who calls him a "madman" and tells him to get out. When Demus protests, his girlfriend says he is dead to her and then begins crying "Rape!" knowing that this will bring Papa-Lo to her rescue.

Josey approaches the house, along with Tony Pavarotti and two others whose names Demus doesn't know. They shoot, and Demus runs away. As he sprints through downtown, he sees newspaper headlines saying that the Singer and Rita are alive, while the Singer's manager is in critical condition.

Unlike Bam-Bam, whose life of horror and extreme deprivation has left him with nothing to believe in, the Singer has a strong sense of his own principles. Bam-Bam wants to see the Singer sink down to his own level of nihilism, but instead the Singer remains calm, confident in his faith. The statement "Selassie I Jah Rastafari" expresses the Singer's worship of God and Haile Selassie, who Rastas view as the returned messiah.



Bam-Bam's recurring screaming reminds us that although he has already committed extreme acts of violence, he is still only 15.



The events at the Singer's house were so intense and traumatizing that the gunmen are now unable to regain control over their emotions. Fueled by both the cocaine high and comedown as well as adrenaline, shock, relief, triumph, and fear, the men scatter in different directions, unable to think about anyone other than themselves.



Kingston has suddenly become a nightmarish maze from which Demus cannot escape. Even his old home and girlfriend are no longer welcoming, and the shack by the sea where Josey had him stay is similarly no longer somewhere Demus can seek shelter. Demus is thus left with the feeling of being cast out in the world, completely alone. Everything that used to afford him comfort, protection, and security is gone.



To most of Kingston, the survival of the Singer and Rita is a miracle. To Demus, however, it means that everything he has given up has been for nothing.



PART 2, CHAPTER 20

Bam-Bam hides in a pile of garbage while Josey and Weeper pass by. They get into a red car and drive away, and Bam-Bam keeps running. On the radio he hears that the Singer was “treated and sent home,” and he realizes that Josey missed. Bam-Bam is desperate for a line of **cocaine**. He goes to the park where **the Smile Jamaica concert** will be held and realizes that the concert will still take place even after everything. He does not know how much time has passed since the night at **the Singer’s house**. He remembers being confused about why Josey was shooting at him after they drove away.

Bam-Bam stays in the park until **the Smile Jamaica concert** takes place. He stares at the Singer, who is too far away for Bam-Bam to see him properly. Still, Bam-Bam feels that the Singer is taunting him, promising to punish Bam-Bam for what he did. Bam-Bam tries to sneak out of the crowd. He is sure that Josey is going to kill him, and feels as if the Singer is following him, haunting him. He imagines the Singer reaching inside his body and seizing his heart. Once the concert is over, Bam-Bam walks away, and as he does so he wets himself. Out of nowhere, Tony Pavarotti appears in front of him and punches him in the face.

Here Bam-Bam comes to the same realization as Demus: that he is now completely lost and alone for no reason, because the Singer is still alive and the Smile Jamaica concert is going ahead as planned. Bam-Bam’s confusion over how much time has passed is disorientating and surreal. It is as if all the events since the shooting—including the Singer’s inexplicable survival—are in some sense not even real.



Bam-Bam has no allies anymore, only enemies, and these enemies are closing in on him, leaving him nowhere to escape. It is ironic that Bam-Bam, the only one of the novel’s many narrators who actually witnesses the Smile Jamaica concert, experiences it not as the symbol of peace and hope that it is supposed to be, but rather a terrifying experience that reminds him that he is doomed and alone.



PART 2, CHAPTER 21

Demus feels like he has been running for days. He gets on a bus, gets off, climbs down to a gully beneath a bridge, and falls asleep. He wakes up to a dirty, toothless woman grabbing his crotch. He threatens to throw a rock at her and she runs away. He can’t remember the last time he ate or bathed, and he is still desperate for **cocaine**. He resolves to flee to another part of Jamaica, and compares himself to a runaway slave. He runs past a burned-out car, then “the skeleton of a boat,” then the wreckage of a crashed plane. Suddenly eight Rastamen dressed in white surround him.

Demus’s comparison of himself to a runaway slave is no coincidence. At some (unspecified) point during this chapter, Demus dies, although he doesn’t realize it yet. The afterlife is, of course, populated by the spirits of the dead, including runaway slaves. Demus’s experience of running into death thus emphasizes the ongoing presence of the painful past through the ghosts that inhabit the afterlife.



PART 2, CHAPTER 22

Bam-Bam tries to scream, but his mouth has been gagged. His hands and feet are bound. Weeper and Tony Pavarotti pick him up and throw him into a grave, face-down. Bam-Bam realizes with horror that they are going to bury him alive and internally begs Weeper to just shoot him. Josey urinates on him and Pavarotti begins filling the grave. As the dirt pours in, Bam-Bam’s thoughts become more nonsensical. He thinks about sex, his parents, and superpowers. He begins to lose the ability to breathe, and in his final moments think of images associated with childhood: toys, lollipops, and nursery rhymes.

Bam-Bam’s death is arguably the most disturbing scene in the whole novel, and its impact is made all the greater by the fact that it is the last chapter in Part Two. It shows the capacity for total cruelty and sadism on Josey and Weeper’s part, as Josey has used Bam-Bam to help him with his dirty work and now murders him in an excruciating and degrading manner. Part of what makes Bam-Bam’s death so haunting is the fact that, in his final moments, he reverts back to a state of childishness. This reminds the reader not only of the innocence that was robbed from Bam-Bam when he was young, but also that he is still a child when he dies.



PART 3, SIR ARTHUR GEORGE JENNINGS

After Bam-Bam dies, he does not at first realize he's dead, and walks to **the Singer's house**. Jennings explains that people who are just about to die can see the dead. This is why Demus did not at first realize he was dead either. Seven "Rasta avengers" dressed in white drag Demus' body through the bush. Demus is panicked and confused; he doesn't understand the meaning of this death march. His thoughts are scattered and nonsensical; he doesn't want to be dead and wants to kill Josey Wales. Eventually, the Rastas drag Demus to a "fortress wall of Rastamen" wearing weapons and stretching as far as the eye can see. The Rastas carry Demus to a tree and slip a noose over his neck. Jennings wonders if the Singer will hear Demus begging for mercy, but then concludes he won't, because "the living, they never listen."

Traditionally the afterlife is often presented as a place of enhanced peace and wisdom, but in the world of the novel this is not the case. In the "Seven Killings" version of the afterlife, dead people are just as troubled, violent, and vengeful as the living—perhaps even more so. Jennings does suggest that the dead have wisdom they want to impart to the living, but part of what is so frustrating about death is that "the living, they never listen." Only those who are about to die can see the dead, and by this time it is of course too late.



PART 3, CHAPTER 1

Part Three is set on February 15, 1979. Every time Kim Clarke gets on a bus, she feels sure it is about to explode. Her boyfriend Chuck tells her not to get on the bus if she hates it so much. When Kim walks home she feels that people look at her funny, as if they are wondering how a black woman can walk into a house like this as if she owns it. She wonders if they think she is a sex worker or a maid. Kim and Chuck met at Mantana's Bar, a spot popular among expats. She promises that today, she will "love his hair." Yesterday she resolved to love how he calls her "miss Kim." Kim doesn't enjoy the sex she and Chuck have, but she likes his enjoyment of it.

Although the opening of this chapter provides some background information on how Kim and Chuck got together, there is still little context given for their relationship, which leaves us with unanswered questions. Why was Kim, a black Jamaican woman, hanging out at a bar for expats? Why is she so determined to commit to this relationship when she doesn't seem to enjoy it, or like Chuck as a person?



Kim concludes that Chuck is "sweet" and "nice." She misses him when he is gone because she hates being left alone with her thoughts. In her mind, Kim calls herself "Kim Clarke" and is surprised, because she used to be called another name. The other day Chuck called her his "sexy little slut," which she hated. But she reasons that he is "not bad looking, even handsome," and that other Jamaican women must be jealous of her. Kim resolves to clean the house even if she and Chuck are leaving at the end of the month. She dreams of having a white Christmas. Chuck is from Arkansas, which Kim at first thought was near Alaska.

Just as Kim doesn't like Chuck as a person very much, Chuck himself seems to have little idea of who Kim actually is and what she likes, but is instead infatuated with an idea of her as a "sexy little slut." By this point, it has become clear that Kim is dating Chuck as a way to move to America with him. She is far more enamored of the prospect that other Jamaican women are jealous or that she might have a white Christmas than she is in love with Chuck.



Chuck frequently rants about the PNP and how Jamaica is supposedly becoming communist. Kim pretends to be stupid around Chuck because she thinks that is what he will prefer. Kim feels confused and guilty because she wants to be with Chuck but also wants to be alone. She promises herself again to love his hair and other small details about him. The previous night, Kim realized that she was capable of killing anyone, even a child, who got in her way. Chuck loves when Kim cooks **ackee**, which he calls "that scrambled egg thing."

Kim's performance of stupidity in front of Chuck recalls a similar move by another character: Josey Wales. In both instances, black Jamaicans (Kim and Josey) decide to play into the racist assumption that black people are unintelligent in order to appease the white people they are talking to. This decision helped build Josey's power--but it's unclear if it's doing the same for Kim.



The house is too quiet but Kim refuses to turn on the radio because she hates hearing the news. All Kim wants is to move to America and start again “as blank a slate can be.” She and Chuck have been dating for sixth months, and Chuck took them out dancing for their sixth month anniversary. The day they met, Kim had been sexually harassed by her boss and felt exhausted by life. She lives in Montego Bay now, not in Kingston. She has been stealing small amounts of money from Chuck and is worried that he is going to find out. Kim thinks about different nationalities of white men and the ways each of them have sex.

Kim envisions Chuck kicking her out and her screaming in protest. Earlier she had sex with a man in order to get a passport and visa, closing her eyes and thinking “of Arkansas.” She asks herself if it was worth it, and concludes that it was and she would do it again. Now she needs to wash the smell of this other man off her before Chuck comes home. She told Chuck she already had a visa and curses herself for not getting pregnant with Chuck’s child already. She wonders if she will one day get bored of life in America. She thinks it is important that she and Chuck get married soon, to ensure that he will take her with him.

Kim wonders if she should pack. She imagines telling Chuck that she wanted to be “proactive.” Chuck once told her that he expected Jamaican women to be more like black American women, and was surprised to find that Jamaicans were “sexually conservative.” Chuck comes home without Kim noticing; he has overheard her talking to herself. Kim starts cooking **ackee** for dinner. Chuck tells her that he got a memo from his company, Alcorp, saying that their work was ending quicker than expected and that he will be flying out next week. At first Kim is excited, talking about what she should pack. However, eventually Chuck says that he is leaving without her.

The **ackee** Kim was cooking burns and the room fills with smoke. Kim begins laughing hysterically, which angers Chuck. He points out that he never took his wedding ring off, and when Kim asks the name of his “white wife,” Chuck replies that she isn’t white. He then adds: “She’s blacker than you.” Kim grabs the newspaper Chuck was reading and goes into the bedroom alone. She tells herself to calm down. Chuck knocks on the door but she tells him not to come in. She looks at the newspaper and sees that Kim-Marie Burgess is a finalist for Miss Jamaica 1979. She glances at an article about Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherrif, all while urging herself not to look.

On one level Kim is a devoted, doting girlfriend, always trying to please Chuck and be the version of herself that he desires. On the other hand, she is blatantly using him as a means to get to America, and is also stealing from him. Both these sides of Kim’s personality are arguably different manifestations of her extreme duplicity. Whether she is being kind or exploitative, she is never being the true, honest version of herself.



At this point, Kim’s single-minded and rather reckless fixation on moving to America is too similar to Nina to ignore. While it is true that many women in Jamaica are desperate to move, there are other clues that there is a link between Nina and Kim—for example, the fact that Kim used to go by a different name, and the fact that she used to live in Kingston. Given the lengths Nina previously went to in order to try and get a visa, and the fact that Nina’s sister’s name is Kimmy, it seems entirely possible she has now assumed a new identity as Kim Clarke.



Chuck’s comment about Kim/Nina being more “sexually conservative” than he expected for a Jamaican woman indicates that he does not really respect her, and foreshadows his abandonment of her by showing that he treats her as generic and replaceable, rather than a unique individual. Chuck’s interest in Kim is clearly rooted in stereotypes about Jamaican women’s sexuality rather than a specific attraction to Kim as a person.



Both Chuck and Kim have been engaging in powerful acts of self-delusion. While Kim ignored Chuck’s wedding ring, Chuck treated his affair with Kim like an official relationship, moving in with her and taking her out to celebrate their six-month anniversary. Both characters feel able to do this because of the possibilities afforded by moving to a different country. Chuck creates a fake life for himself in Jamaica, and Kim does the same so she can move to the US.



Kim has been running for two years but feels she has been found. She sees a picture of the Singer in the newspaper and remembers waiting outside **his house**. She started running on December 3, 1976 and never stopped. In her mind, she almost says the name “Nina,” but then stops, telling herself: “That is a dead name of a dead woman in a dead city.” Kim lights a cigarette and takes a drag. She then stubs the cigarette on the newspaper, lighting it on fire, and throws it on the bed. The bedroom goes up in flames.

Kim/Nina's desire for self-reinvention is symbolized by the act of lighting the newspaper on fire. She sees her previous life as Nina as being “dead,” and now wants to burn her current life into nonexistence in order to recreate herself as a new person, starting with yet another blank slate.



PART 3, CHAPTER 2

According to Barry, “chaos and disorder” are erupting all over the world. He thinks about Lindon Wolfsbricker, the American ambassador to Yugoslavia, who recently threatened to take the CIA “out of business” in Yugoslavia until an order was lifted that mandates CIA business be kept secret from ambassadors. Strangely, Jamaica is now the only place in the world “not going to shit.” Barry and his family are moving to Argentina next week, and his wife Claire is thrilled. Barry’s feelings are mixed; he is looking forward to being in Argentina but reluctantly admits he has fallen in love with Jamaica.

Again Jamaica is shown to wield a special, seductive power over white American men in particular. Jamaica may be violent and chaotic, but there is evidently something about this that Barry finds appealing. Meanwhile, the depth of secrecy that characterizes the actions of the CIA is further emphasized in this passage by the fact that CIA business is even kept secret from American ambassadors.



Louis Johnson is on a mission to end apartheid in South Africa. Barry admits that “communism is more socially progressive than us,” and then berates himself for sounding like he is turning liberal. After the events of 1976, Louis was sent back to Central America. Barry believes that Nixon “fucked up the CIA” and also tried to ruin the FBI, but that now, in 1979, it doesn’t even matter. He mentions Roger Theroux, a highly competent CIA agent who was kidnapped and sentenced to death in Iran. Roger demanded to see a Mullah and pointed out that his sentencing violated the Qur’an. The Iranian government let him go.

This passage serves as a reminder that although Barry has conveyed his thoughts on Jamaica, the Cold War in general, Louis Johnson, Doctor Love, and Bill Adler, we know very little about his personal political views. Obviously he doesn’t want think of himself as a “liberal,” but he does not clarify how he does politically identify. Indeed, his only loyalty seems to be to the CIA.



Doctor Love is back in Jamaica; Barry presumes he is likely trying to “finish what he couldn’t in 1976.” Bill Adler has finally been fired from the CIA. He and Barry speak on the phone, and Barry says he knows Bill has been talking to a reporter called Edgar Anatolyevich Cheporov, who Barry claims is a KGB agent. Bill denies this. Barry tells Bill he is clueless, that his coffeemaker is broken and that the view from his apartment “sucks.” Bill hangs up. Back in Jamaica, Barry sits at his office and thinks: “Fuck this country. Fuck this year already.”

Doctor Love's return to Jamaica indicates that there is about to be a repeat of the violence surrounding the last election year, 1976, as the upcoming election approaches. Barry's sudden willingness to get out of Jamaica suggests that he knows that this chaos will return. At the same time, the carelessness with which Barry dismisses Jamaica reflects an overall carelessness in the CIA's global actions, which often work to destabilize foreign governments and leave only chaos in their wake.



PART 3, CHAPTER 3

Papa-Lo is driving along the coast with Tony Pavarotti. He and Josey no longer talk. Two years ago Papa-Lo was arrested and taken to prison. With Tony's help, he killed the policemen who arrested him. He and Tony now pull up to a fort. They open the trunk and pull out a boy whose hands are tied behind his back. Tony pulls out another man. Both the boy and the man have wet themselves and stink of urine. Papa-Lo is punishing them for having tried to kill the Singer. They deny being involved in the plot, and Papa-Lo thinks it's possible that this is true, but at this point doesn't care.

Tony shoots the man in the head, and Papa-Lo shoots the boy. Recently Shotta Sherrif suggested that he and Papa-Lo kidnap Mick Jagger and hold him for a \$2 million ransom; at first Shotta was joking, but then the plan turned serious. Back when the police arrested Papa-Lo, they also arrested Shotta. People assumed that, once they were locked up together, the two dons would kill each other. At first both of them gathered loyal men and plotted; however, eventually they agreed to talk to one another, on the basis that "when puss and dog kill one another the only one who win is Babylon."

Papa-Lo and Shotta Sherrif began playing dominos together in prison. In January 1978, Papa-Lo was released, followed shortly after by Shotta. They met on the night of January 9, ritualistically put down their **guns**, and promised to end their battle with one another. Jacob Miller memorialized the occasion with a song called "Peace Treaty Special." Only four days before, on January 5, soldiers from the Jamaica Defence Force opened fire on boys from Wang Gang who they had tricked into meeting them in Green Bay.

During Papa-Lo's first days in prison, he was beaten "round the clock." However, Papa-Lo retaliated by targeting the families of the officers who beat him. Back in the present, Papa-Lo and Tony drive back down the coast, and Papa-Lo thinks about the second peace concert, which took place while the Singer was living in England. The Singer eventually came back to Jamaica, but behaved in a newly cautious way. The police do not catch the men involved in the shooting at **the Singer's house**, so Papa-Lo goes after them himself.

When we last heard of Papa-Lo, he was being accused of turning "soft," but it seems that the attack on the Singer's house has hardened him again. He is now engaged in vigilante justice, but doesn't care if this is actually just or not. He is also now distinctly less powerful than Josey, as shown by the fact that Papa-Lo went to prison but Josey has remained free.



For the first time in the novel, it is made explicitly clear that the division between different gangs in the Kingston ghetto increases the power of the state over the masses. Papa-Lo and Shotta Sheriff's hatred of each other is proven to be somewhat arbitrary, and they are actually united by their hatred of Babylon. Significantly, it is only their mutual imprisonment by the police that allows them to reach this conclusion.



The picture of Jamaica created in this chapter is quite different from that evoked by Barry Diflorio. Whereas Barry argued that Jamaica was once again becoming enveloped in a rising tide of violence and chaos, in West Kingston the biggest rivals have decided to abandon their animosity and work together.



As a result of the shooting, the Singer has become disconnected from Jamaica. Although he puts on a second peace concert, he can no longer be a true symbol of peace and unity for Jamaica, because some of his countrymen decided to murder him. Meanwhile, Papa-Lo's revenge on those who shot the Singer doesn't really solve anything, but only increases the violence.



One of the boys, Leggo Beast, was being hidden by his mother; Papa-Lo beat the woman and exiled her from Copenhagen City. He put Leggo Beast in a cell with others involved in the shooting, and burned all of the possessions in the mother's house. Leggo Beast confessed details about the ambush, such as the fact that they were trained by Josey and a white man from the CIA. The white man told them that they were going to "save Jamaica from Chaos." He also explained how Josey gave them **cocaine** and heroin in order to make them want to kill. Papa-Lo is not sure whether to believe the part about the CIA. He doesn't understand why the CIA would care about the Singer enough to want him killed.

Papa-Lo asks Josey Wales for an explanation; Josey responds that Papa-Lo is stupid to believe anything Leggo Beast says, and adds that he was not involved with the attack on the Singer. Josey insists that if he had organized the attack, the Singer would not have come out alive. Papa-Lo is not sure whether to believe him, but either way is disturbed by how arrogant Josey has become.

Papa-Lo and Tony take Leggo Beast and two other men involved in the shooting to the garbage-filled McGregor Gully, which runs beneath the ghetto. The men are tied up and Tony kicks each of them to the ground. At the moment, the Singer and his manager arrive. Papa-Lo says that since the police don't bring about justice, he has set up a court of his own. The Singer's manager says that one of the men was involved in the shooting, but that there are some "crucial fellows" missing. The manager gives a long speech recalling the events of December 3, 1976. He explains that he was shot and lost consciousness, and was presumed dead.

Papa-Lo asks for the Singer's thoughts, but the manager replies that he speaks for the Singer. The manager says that the Singer knows who shot him, and repeats that not all of the culprits are present. Leggo Beast claims that he was brainwashed by Josey Wales and the CIA. He then names the other perpetrators of the attack: Demus, Weeper, Heckle, and Josey. Papa-Lo has brought a woman to serve as a witness and asks her for her testimony. However, Papa-Lo really wants the Singer to talk. He knows it was Josey who personally shot the Singer, but the Singer says nothing. Suddenly, Leggo Beast admits that he was the one who shot Rita, the Singer's wife.

This is a moment at which it becomes clear that Papa-Lo is less intelligent than Josey. Unlike Josey, who has an intimate knowledge and understanding of the CIA's actions and goals in Jamaica, Papa-Lo does not even know if it is plausible that the shooters could have been trained by the CIA. Papa-Lo's ignorance and naïveté have allowed Josey to rise to power and take over as don of Copenhagen City.



Josey does not try particularly hard to convince Papa-Lo that he was not involved in trying to kill the Singer. The effort he does make seems less grounded in a desire to seem innocent than it does in Josey's own pride--he doesn't want Papa-Lo to think that he tried to kill the Singer and failed.



Why the Singer wants to be involved in the kangaroo court remains unclear. He does not seem to be a vengeful person, and shows little interest in the outcome of Papa-Lo's verdict. His manager is far more invested in justice being dealt than the Singer himself.



Leggo Beast's revelation may seem like the breakthrough the court was intended to produce, but Papa-Lo already knows that Josey was behind the attack, and the names of the other shooters mean little considering that most of them are already dead. This passage shows that the real reason Papa-Lo is conducting the court is to get the Singer to admit, in front of witnesses, that it was Josey who personally shot him--and thus who missed.



One of the other tied-up men disagrees, saying it was Bam-Bam who shot Rita. Papa-Lo struggles to concentrate, his mind drifting away. He declares that the court finds the men guilty, and sentences them all to death. Papa-Lo offers his **gun** to the Singer, but the Singer simply turns and walks away. Papa-Lo shoots Leggo Beast, but the Singer doesn't even turn around. After the Singer drives away, a disheveled man approaches Papa-Lo and begins speaking nonsensically, but Papa-Lo shakes his head and the man disappears. Tony puts nooses around the necks of the other two men and hangs them from a tree. The men die slowly.

Papa-Lo keeps seeing a spectral white man present with him. The bodies of the hanged men finally go limp. Papa-Lo becomes increasingly disoriented, unable to tell where he is, what year it is, and what is happening around him. As he and his men drive away from McGregory Gully, police pull them over for a "spot check." The officers tell them to get out of the car so they can search it. They find a .38 revolver on the floor of the car, and suggest it could be the **gun** Papa-Lo and his crew used to fire at the police. Papa-Lo denies this, but immediately after, one of the officers shoots Papa-Lo in the head.

The officers shoot Papa-Lo's men as well, and Papa-Lo's thoughts become increasingly scattered and nonsensical. He has visions of people he knows, including the Singer, as well as figures such as "the angel of death." The officers shoot Papa-Lo again, this time in the heart. He wants to shout: "Cut off the toe."

Part of what makes the Singer seem so powerful is the fact that he almost never speaks, and when he does, the words he says rarely appear explicitly within the narrative. This makes him seem noble as well as mysterious--we can never be sure of what he is thinking. Meanwhile, Papa-Lo seems to be losing his grip on reality. It's still unclear what the reason for this is.



In this passage it emerges that the reason why Papa-Lo is feeling so disorientated and keeps seeing people who aren't really there is because he is about to die. As Jennings explained in the preface to this part of the novel, people who are about to die can see those who are already dead. Although Papa-Lo did not realize that he was about to die, he did experience a foreshadowing of his imminent death.



At the moment of death, Papa-Lo gains new insight into the present and future, and thus is able to see that the Singer will die from cancer of the toe--in part because he refuses to cut his toe off. Yet, as Jennings warned, the living do not listen to the advice of the dead.



PART 3, CHAPTER 4

Alex is freaking out; he wonders if he is tripping, then assures himself he isn't. He is at the Skyline hotel. Eight months ago, back in Brooklyn, a woman named Lynn made him choose between his book about Jamaica and her. Alex accused her of emotional manipulation. Now he regrets not choosing her. He calls Jamaica his "other girl" and thinks he fell for both of them for the same reason: because he knew it wouldn't work out.

There is a man sitting on the left side of the bed in Alex's hotel room. Alex hopes that if he closes his eyes and opens them the man will disappear, but this does not happen. He rehearses things to say to the man in his head and tells himself to get it together. Alex's informer, Priest, recently told him to get a **gun** or at least a knife, but Alex refused. After, Alex heard that no one in the ghetto is afraid of Priest because he accidentally shot off his own penis with a gun.

Once again, Jamaica is characterized as a seductress with whom white American men cannot help falling in love. Clearly, Alex's "relationship" with Jamaica is so intense that it causes him distress, and prevents him from living a normal life.



At this point it might seem as if Alex is also about to die, considering he is seeing an inexplicable figure who may or may not exist in reality. This appears even more likely given that, as Prince warns, Alex is in immediate danger. Alex's decision not to arm himself could be seen as admirable, but perhaps it's simply naïve. Because he is white and American, he assumes he is immune from the kind of violence Jamaicans face, particularly those involved in gang business.



The day before Alex went to interview Shotta Sherrif about the peace treaty, and even though by then he'd spent a lot of time in "deep Kingston," the prospect of walking into the Eight Lanes still made him nervous. He was surprised by how deprived the ghetto looked; he expected the PNP to provide more for their supporters after they were reelected. Alex has spoken to the Singer about the shooting at **his house**; however, when Alex asked who exactly shot him, the Singer smiled and said this was "top secret."

Alex wanted to ask Shotta Sherrif if the peace treaty was still valid after the recent spate of murders between JLP and PNP boys, which originally began over a girl. However, he then adds: "Of course I could never ask a question like that." Alex did find out about Shotta's time in prison with Papa-Lo. At the end of the interview, Shotta told Alex that the treaty simply had to work. A few days before, Alex had interviewed a teenage member of Wang Gang called Junior Soul. Junior Soul told him about a bloody conflict between Wang Gang and the Jamaica Defence Force. After the interview, Alex got more information on the conflict from Bill Bilson, a Jamaican journalist.

The stranger on Alex's bed moves, sitting on Alex's foot. Alex is momentarily terrified that the man is going to shoot him. Alex returns to his investigation of the peace treaty, explaining that it all began when a soldier shot "some kids" early in 1978. Priest explained that the peace treaty involved all parties promising they wouldn't give up information to the police or government anymore. When Alex interviewed Papa-Lo, he was evasive, but admitted that "the peace over." However, he refused to clarify what this meant.

As Alex was leaving Papa-Lo, he walked into two men, who took him to Josey Wales' house. Josey pointed out that Alex had been asking a lot of questions and running his mouth. He said that people like Alex "don't see much" and asked him why he had been in Jamaica so long. Josey mentioned Aisha, which made Alex panic. Josey then told Alex that the peace treaty was a joke, that peace is dangerous, and that peace makes people "careless."

This passage suggests that things have actually changed significantly for Alex since the last part of the novel. Whereas previously he was shown to be fumbling and incompetent, at this point he has spent a lot of time in West Kingston and has even spoken to the Singer. The Singer's smile, meanwhile, makes his decision not to reveal who shot him even more intriguing.



Not only has Alex now gotten access to the Singer, he is drawing on a diversity of sources who have intimate knowledge of what is actually happening in Kingston. In this sense, Alex may be proving wrong Demus's warning that whoever wrote the story of Jamaica in the 1970s would misrepresent the reality because they weren't actually there. Although Alex will always be an outsider, he is drawing on the voices of those on the inside.



In some ways the name "peace treaty" is misleading. The deal is not just an agreement to cease conflict between the rival gangs, but also a promise to act in solidarity against the police and government. This is a decidedly radical act, and shows that peace is not necessarily passive (promising not to do something) but can be a form of action as well.



At this point in the novel, Josey appears to be all-powerful, as shown by the fact that his knowledge about Alex precedes Alex's decision to come and interview him. On the other hand, Josey is arguably wrong about Alex's inability to "see much."



Alex asked Josey how the Singer would “react to all this,” but Josey brushed him off, saying people should leave the Singer alone. Josey said that thanks to Papa-Lo, people are “living fine in the ghetto,” with a proper sewer system. However, Josey went on to note that in prison, everything stops making sense: “black turn into white. Up turn into down. Puss and dog turn friend.” Alex mentioned the fact that the Singer was shot in the chest, and Josey asked how he knew that. Alex dodged the question. Alex knows details about the shooting that no one else does, because he “caught him [the Singer] on a lucky day in London.”

Alex’s foot has gone to sleep underneath the man in his bed. He sees that the man has a **gun** and panics. He begins praying but stops himself. The phone rings; the man jumps and drops his gun. As he reaches to get it, Alex kicks him, and the man grabs Alex’s foot and then his neck. The man chokes him, and Alex desperately reaches for the letter opener lying beside the bed. He stabs the man in the neck, realizing immediately that he’s plunged the letter opener too deep. Blood spurts out. The man stands up, staggers for a moment, and then falls to the ground.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5

Josey believes the Singer shouldn’t have come back to Jamaica. He is distrustful of the peace treaty, which he thinks of as a “stalemate” rather than real peace. Josey has just sent Weeper to Miami to spend time with Doctor Love. Doctor Love has explained that Medellín will want to keep testing Josey, which Josey finds a little tiring.

After the attack on **the Singer’s house**, Peter Nasser called Josey and furiously asked how he could be “the first man in history to shoot somebody in the head and not kill them.” Although he did not say this aloud, Josey reasoned that while he may not have killed the Singer, he at least made him seem mortal again. Josey tells Doctor Love that he is done being tested. After the shooting at the Singer’s house, an informer told Josey that Alex had arrived on the scene just after the attack was over. Josey recalls the Singer’s departure from Jamaica. At 6 am, he and Tony arrived at the airport. Tony had a **gun** poised, ready to shoot the Singer, when Josey told him to stop.

Immediately, Josey’s statement that Alex does not “see much” is disproven. Indeed, Alex is one of the only people apart from Josey and the Singer himself who knows the details of the moment in which the Singer was shot. Immediately, Alex becomes a threat to Josey, if only because Josey is so proud that he will do everything to keep the fact that he shot the Singer a secret.



Up until this moment, Alex was not presented as a particularly tough character and the likelihood of him committing an act of violence—let alone murder—was low. Of course, it is fitting that Alex should commit this murder in a rather hapless manner, without even intending to kill the stranger in his bed.



Josey is nothing if not cynical. He doesn’t believe the peace treaty will last or bring about anything truly positive. He does not even appear to be excited about the prospect of distributing drugs for the Medellín cartel, but simply finds the whole process tiring.



At times Josey’s actions are just as mysterious as the Singer’s. Josey’s reasons for wanting to kill the Singer are never made completely clear. Although he resents the increasing power of the Rastas, the PNP, and the Singer’s efforts to bring about peace, it is unclear whether these are the only reasons why Josey wanted the Singer dead. His decision to stop Tony Pavarotti shooting the Singer makes his reasoning even more opaque. As with the Singer, this opacity makes him appear all the more powerful.



Josey goes to the Lady Pink Go-Go Club with Peter Nasser. The two men discuss the peace treaty and the Singer's imminent return for the second peace concert. Peter asks if the Singer is trying to start a third political party, and Josey confirms this, saying the Singer wants to establish a "Rasta government." He points out that even Papa-Lo was turning Rasta. Peter is furious and starts panicking about the election next year.

When Louis Johnson left for Argentina, a new American called Mr. Clark replaced him. In April 1978 Josey met Mr. Clark and Doctor Love at Morgan's Harbor, "the hotel for white people over in Port Royal." Josey pretended to be stupid, leaving Doctor Love to "translate." Mr. Clark asked Josey if he knew what the Cold War meant, and then explained it to him. He showed Josey a coloring book titled *Democracy is for US!*, which contained illustrations depicting life under capitalism. He suggested that Josey distribute copies of the book in the local school.

Mr. Clark then described the supposed epidemic of late-term abortions in East Germany. He warned Josey that Jamaica was in danger of turning into Cuba or "worse, East Germany" within a couple of years. He emphasized that Jamaica was at "a crossroads" and asked if he could rely on Josey. Josey agreed, and Mr. Clark said that in return for Josey's loyalty, he would ignore Josey's many trips to Miami and Costa Rica. Mr. Clark left, and Doctor Love and Josey discussed a shipment of **guns** that recently arrived.

Papa-Lo comes to Josey's house and pleads with him to take the peace treaty seriously. Josey is shocked to see that Papa-Lo is crying. Josey realizes that Papa-Lo wants to redeem his reputation and be remembered not as a violent gangster, but as the man who "unite the ghetto." People think Josey hates Papa-Lo, but Josey denies this, saying he has "nothing but love for the man." However, he adds that in the ghetto peace cannot exist, only power. Peace can never last when there is still poverty, police, prison, and social inequality.

It seems as if Papa-Lo is trying to do "penance" for the shooting at **the Singer's house**. Knowing this, Josey gave him Leggo Beast so Papa-Lo could "make an example" out of him. When Leggo Beast started screaming about the CIA, Josey wondered if Papa-Lo would believe him, but concluded that Papa-Lo knows as little about the CIA as any other ordinary Jamaican. Josey once again insists that if he was the one who shot the Singer, not one bullet would have missed.

Peter Nasser embodies all the negative stereotypes about politicians: he is duplicitous, selfish, power-hungry, and has little regard for what the people want. Note that no one in this scene stops to consider if a Rasta government may actually benefit the people and bring about peace.



Josey's pretense of stupidity clearly works, because Mr. Clark treats him like a child, even giving him a coloring book. Indeed, this coloring book shows the pervasive and insidious nature of Cold War propaganda. Although it hardly seems likely that Jamaican children will have much of an impact on the Cold War, the CIA keeps all its bases covered. In interviews Marlon James has also noted that "Democracy is for US!" was a real book.



In this passage, Mr. Clark agrees to turn a blind eye to Josey's involvement in transporting drugs to the United States in exchange for him continuing to oppose the PNP, Rastas, and any form of socialism in Jamaica. This supports real-life allegations that the CIA was involved in drug trafficking to the US during this period.



At times Josey's cynicism might seem too extreme, particularly in comparison to Papa-Lo's moving regret at his violent past and optimism for the future. However, Josey's point at the end of this passage, while pessimistic, is also arguably accurate. When so much violence comes from poverty, inequality, and state oppression, surely it is not possible for residents of the ghetto to establish peace without also alleviating those problems.



Papa-Lo may be experienced and have the best interests of the people in heart, but ultimately he is too ignorant to compete with Josey's conniving intelligence. Not only does Josey understand Jamaican politics and the CIA, he also understands Papa-Lo.



Josey is at home waiting for the phone to ring. He chats to his 12-year-old son. After, he thinks about the new Rasta party; even if the Singer isn't the "face" of this party, he will fund it, which is more important. Josey killed some of the men he hired for the attack on **the Singer's house**, and the Rastas took care of the rest. However, Heckle disappeared. If Josey had gotten a chance to speak to him, he would have told Heckle he didn't need to run; Josey admires Heckle's intelligence, and has no interest in killing him.

Then one day Papa-Lo came bursting through Josey's door telling him that the Singer took Heckle on tour with him. Apparently Heckle had gone to **the Singer's house** and begged for forgiveness. The Singer obliged and proceeded to bring Heckle into his "inner circle," which made Heckle "untouchable." Josey's youngest daughter comes into the room and climbs onto his lap. Josey thinks that Jamaicans don't know "good," that it's better for things in the country to stay bad. The phone finally rings and the person on the other end tells Josey: "It is finished."

Josey hangs up and another of his men rings, this time telling Josey that Tristan Phillips, the Rasta Josey ordered him to kill, has disappeared. Josey threatens his man that if he doesn't find Tristan within three days, Josey will kill him. The phone rings once again; this time it's Weeper. Josey tells Weeper he needs to go because he is waiting on a call from Tony, but Weeper points out that if Tony was going to call he would have done so already, and Josey agrees. Josey and Weeper discuss their drug operation. Weeper complains about a Colombian lesbian he is working with in Miami. Josey assures him that Miami is only a "pit stop" to their real destination: New York.

PART 4, SIR ARTHUR GEORGE JENNINGS

Jennings addresses the Singer and his ill-fated toe. The Singer is in Jamaica, recording a new song in the studio. Jennings describes Papa-Lo's death at the hands of the police. The person who killed Jennings pays the Wang Gang to shower two of the Eight Lanes in bullets. In London, a doctor tells the Singer to cut off the toe, but instead the Singer goes to Miami and only has the cancerous section removed. The doctor in Miami says he is cancer-free.

Intelligence is evidently the best way to win Josey's admiration and thus to stay safe around him. This is conveyed not only by Josey's willingness to spare Heckle's life, but also his favoritism of Weeper, despite the fact that Weeper is a gay atheist who Josey would presumably otherwise hate.



Aside from Josey (and perhaps, by extension, Weeper), Heckle is the only member of the crew who shot the Singer who ended up better off after the attack than before. Yet whereas Josey remains in denial about his involvement, Heckle turns the situation around by approaching the Singer with radical honesty and vulnerability.



Part Three ends on a cliffhanger, with Josey and Weeper poised to turn their operation from local to global. Once again, however, Josey does not appear to be showing any signs of excitement. Instead, he remains tense. This may be because he is still worried about someone finding out that he shot—and failed to kill—the Singer. This unfinished business in Jamaica arguably does not bode well for his international endeavors.



As has already been foreshadowed, the Singer does not take Papa-Lo's warning about cutting off his cancerous toe. Aside from this change in the Singer's health, however, little seems to have changed in Jamaica; there is still as much political corruption and violence as ever.



Back in Jamaica, a PNP politician called Tony McFerson is killed in Copenhagen City. The Singer, now in New York, is awoken by intense pain in the middle of the night. In Kingston, gunmen attack a party on Gold Street. The Singer goes jogging around Central Park but finds that he can't move his leg. He falls to the ground and wakes up in a hotel to the sounds and smells of his friends doing drugs, listening to music, and having sex. In Pittsburgh, the Singer collapses, and is sent back to New York for radiation therapy. He travels to Miami and Mexico for more treatment.

On November 4, 1980, Rita arranges for the Singer to be baptized under the name Berhane Selassie in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Jamaican General election is called for October 30, 1980. The Singer travels to Germany for more medical treatment. The JLP win the election, and the man (Peter Nasser) who murdered Jennings is now in power. On May 11, 1981, the Singer dies in Miami.

PART 4, CHAPTER 1

Part Four is set on August 14, 1985. Dorcas Palmer thinks about girls who immigrate to America and still speak like “dutty whore” from Jamaica. Dorcas has been with the God Bless Employment Agency for three years, and often sees these girls when she goes into the agency’s office. She lives in a fifth-floor walk-up, and stays with the agency so she isn’t evicted. She is about to be assigned to a family called the Colthirsts, who are clearly distinguished in some way. Dorcas is sure she will be well-suited to the job, as she is a high-school educated woman who grew up in Havendale St Andrew, a respectable suburb in Kingston.

Dorcas sometimes worries about the fact that she has nothing to worry about. She observes that spending 10 minutes in Times Square makes her miss West Kingston, though she would never go back. When she first came across God Bless Employment Agency, it was obvious it was run by Jamaicans. She was desperate, as she had previously survived by blackmailing her American ex-boyfriend in Arkansas and threatening to tell his wife about their affair.

Although the Singer is world-famous, wealthy, and widely beloved, this is not enough to save him from the ordinary human threat of illness. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that, having survived a shooting by the most fearsome gangster in Jamaica, the Singer is felled by something as trivial as cancer of the toe.



More than anyone else in the novel, the Singer has a strong sense of faith and firmly sticks to his principles. However, behind closed doors even he seems to waver, joining the Ethiopian Orthodox Church at the last possible moment.



Dorcas’s comments about the other girls from Jamaica indicate that this chapter has shifted location and is taking place in the United States. So far, the experience of immigrating to America has been represented in an aspirational way, particularly through Nina/Kim’s dreams of escaping Jamaica in pursuit of a better, more comfortable life. However, the reality of Dorcas’s life so far does not appear to be particularly comfortable.



It is made pretty clear here that Dorcas is the new identity Nina/Kim has assumed by the fact that she is calling and threatening a married ex-boyfriend in Arkansas, who we can safely assume is Chuck. Dorcas has mixed feelings about her new life. She is worried about not being worried, and misses Jamaica but swears she will not return.



The first job Dorcas was assigned through the agency was to take care of an elderly woman who had been left lying in her own feces and urine. However, Dorcas quit when the woman's middle-aged son began exposing himself in front of her. The next job also involved looking after another elderly woman who died two weeks later. The next week Dorcas went to a Jamaican club called Star Track in Brooklyn. A Rasta approached her, saying it looked like she needed a backrub. Dorcas could tell he wasn't "a real Jamaican," although they slept together anyway. He left his number but they never saw each other again.

Dorcas arrives at the Colthirsts' apartment, which is on East 86th Street between Madison and Park. A man opens the door and says: "You must be the new girl they hired to wipe my ass."

Like Alex and Barry, Dorcas now has a sense of what it means to distinguish between an authentic and inauthentic Jamaica. Of course, she needed to move away from her homeland to experience an inauthentic version of it, as it seems safe to assume that every Jamaican living in Jamaica is indeed a "real" Jamaican.



The final scene in this chapter confirms the impression that Dorcas's life in the United States is not as glamorous as she likely hoped it would be.



PART 4, CHAPTER 2

Weeper wakes up in Brooklyn next to a blond man. Three weeks ago they were walking together when a black man on the street remarked: "Scope this ill faggot-ass bullshit." Weeper beat the man and he and the white boy ran away laughing together. When they first had sex, the white boy asked if Weeper was worried about "the gay cancer," and Weeper said he wasn't. Yesterday Weeper went to the Strand looking for books by Bertrand Russell. He told the man "I love you," but then added "I don't mean that." Weeper has mixed feelings about his own sexual desire, and still finds himself holding back from what he really wants. Yet he can't even remember what it feels like to have sex with a woman.

Weeper has to go to the airport; in nine hours Josey is landing on a plane from Jamaica. Josey is coming to see a particular **crack** house in Brooklyn so he can scope out the people selling in it and report back to Medellín. A member of Storm Posse recently caught Weeper up on the latest events in Jamaica. Josey and his men shot up a street in Rema, killing 12 people. There was little action from the police, as "nobody can touch the don." An old friend of Josey's based in the Bronx has been selling drugs in New York since 1977, and is now running an enormous operation.

Weeper is still struggling with his sexuality, but is conducting his life with a greater degree of freedom than he ever did back in Jamaica. He does this despite the threat of AIDS, which he takes less seriously than the judgment of other people. Indeed, Weeper has lived through more trauma than most people can imagine, and committed extreme acts of violence--yet he is still frightened by his own desire.



Once again a significant amount of time has passed, but life in Jamaica remains much the same. On the other hand, the lives of Josey and Weeper have changed significantly, due to the fact that they are now international drug dealers. Josey is now even more untouchable than he was before--at least within Jamaica. There is an atmosphere of suspense surrounding his imminent arrival to the US.



PART 4, CHAPTER 3

Tristan is in prison, talking to Alex Pierce. He tells Alex he has been bribing the guards with smuggled **crack** to let him keep his dreadlocks. Alex is taping their conversation, and asks about 1966. Tristan refuses to talk about this. Instead he tells Alex about the books he has been reading from the Rikers library. Tristan then tells Alex that he will never understand peace, war, or the beginnings of Copenhagen City without knowing about a place called Balaclava. Balaclava was a ghetto that housed 5,000 people and had only two bathrooms and no running water. Sewage and blood from the slaughterhouse flowed in the streets. Tristan was born there in 1949. His parents abandoned him and left him with the difficulty of looking “half coolie.”

Balaclava was eventually bulldozed, and Tristan was imprisoned on a false accusation for five years. He emerged in 1972 to a whole different country. Buntin-Banton and Dishrag were the “top-ranking PNP dons in Kingston, maybe Jamaica,” and anyone who wanted a job had to go through them. However, the police killed the two dons, and Shotta Sherrif took their place. Tristan argues that the PNP was not ambitious enough, and only ever focused on defending their territory from the JLP. Josey Wales, on the other hand, had ambition.

When the peace treaty took place, Shotta Sherrif asked Tristan to be “chairman of the peace council.” Shotta and Papa-Lo went to England to persuade the Singer to put on a second peace concert. Tristan drifts off while talking about Shotta Sherrif, and asks Alex to stop recording. Back in 1978, Tristan realized that someone had shipped **guns** to Kingston disguised as lighting equipment for the concert. Tristan questioned Weeper about it, who replied that they both were in “the peace runnings,” but that they were going about it in a different way. In Rikers, Tristan asks Alex why he can’t go back to Jamaica.

PART 4, CHAPTER 4

John-John is in New York, and “everything is motherfucking ace.” He had to flee Chicago after a particularly “sloppy and messy” shooting. In Miami, John-John went to a club where he saw Donna Summer. There he ran into a man named Baxter who warned him to leave because the club was about to get shot up. The next day John-John returned to New York. As soon as he touched down, he was abducted by four men, three of whom were wearing tropical shirts. John-John told them that if “she” wanted to kill him, she should just let these men do it. The men took him to a street in the suburbs and brought him inside a house, where he could smell bacon and pancakes.

Tristan proves that the problems that plague West Kingston existed long before the turmoil of the 1970s. Indeed, according to Tristan’s description, life in Balaclava was far worse than life in the Eight Lanes or Copenhagen City. This provides a new angle on the impact of gangsters like Shotta Sherrif, Papa-Lo, and Josey on the communities in which they live. Although they commit frequent acts of violence, they also work to improve the infrastructure and resources available in the ghetto.



From a certain perspective, Josey is indeed ambitious. He is ruthlessly power-hungry and, although money is not discussed much explicitly in the novel, presumably also skilled at acquiring wealth. On the other hand, he has no ambitions for the ghetto or Jamaica overall. He is deeply pessimistic, and does not believe Jamaica can—or should—become a peaceful place.



By this point in the novel, we know that the desire for peace is always charged in Jamaica, to the point that peace efforts can perversely lead to even more chaos and violence. Weeper’s claim to be in “the peace runnings” is true if one interprets peace as something that can be instilled from above, by giving those in power absolute control over the people. However, this is not the definition that the peace council is working with.



At this point it is unclear who John-John is and how he is connected to the rest of the narrative. His repeated involvement in shootings suggests that he is implicated in gang activity somehow, although from this passage he does not appear to have any particular affiliation. The multiple references to nightclubs highlight that nightlife is now an important part of the novel because of the increasing prominence of drugs and the drug game.



PART 4, CHAPTER 5

Josey thinks that just because Weeper has “read a few books” doesn’t mean he is really intelligent. Weeper’s job is to maintain communications between Jamaica and Griselda Blanco in Miami. However, this is a problem because Weeper has trouble getting on with women. At the same time, Griselda is hardly a woman, and has no sense of morality. Josey has known for years that Weeper has sex with men and has chosen to ignore it.

Josey no longer cares what happens in Jamaica; his attention is being called elsewhere. Weeper doesn’t understand why Josey works with Eubie, a dapper Bronx-based Jamaican who graduated from “a posh high school” and dropped out of Columbia Law School to start selling drugs. Weeper dislikes Eubie and calls him a “battyman” for getting pedicures, which makes Josey laugh. Josey tells Weeper that Eubie is in fact ruthlessly violent. He says that Weeper will have to learn to work with Eubie because the competition for supplying drugs in New York is stiff. He threatens to send Weeper back to Jamaica if he does not start acting right.

The rival Jamaican gangs in New York—Ranking Dons, Blood Rose, and Hot Steppers—are gunning for Josey’s territory. In 1982 Josey sent Weeper after Tristan Phillips and was told by one of Weeper’s runners that he was killed; however, recently Josey heard that Tristan is in fact alive, imprisoned in Rikers, and has joined the Ranking Dons. In Kingston, Josey talks briefly to his son, who is now 16, before he leaves for the airport.

PART 4, CHAPTER 6

Alex claims to have not been in Jamaica since 1978, but seems suspiciously knowledgeable about the events of 1979. Tristan doesn’t believe that Alex is really writing a book about the Singer, and asks if Alex thinks he’s a “fucking idiot.” However, after Alex apologizes Tristan continues with his story, explaining that the peace council had a real office in **the Singer’s house**. Once, the Singer saw Josey Wales leaving the peace council office, and furiously asked Tristan what he was doing there. The Singer said Josey was there during the shooting and argued that the peace treaty was doomed because of him.

Later, Tristan discovered that a company called Copenhagen City Promotions sold footage of the second peace concert to stations around the world. Tristan called Papa-Lo, who insisted he had no knowledge of this, and warned him: “Pull your leash on Josey Wales or me will do it for you.”

Weeper and Griselda Blanco may not get along, but there is an important similarity between them: they both deviate from the gender and sexual norms assigned to them, alongside norms of morality.



In his own way, Eubie also deviates from gender norms, particularly when it comes to how a gangster is supposed to behave. Unlike Weeper, Eubie is not gay, but simply takes care of his appearance. Eubie’s class privilege, intelligence, and level of educational attainment also make him an unlikely figure in the drug game. On the other hand, the novel continually challenges the stereotype of what a gangster should be.



The more powerful Josey becomes, the more “untouchable” he is. However, it is also true that the more powerful he becomes, the more he has to lose. Whereas before Josey only had to keep track of enemies within Jamaica, he now has to stay on top of threats to his power coming from all over the world.



Tristan’s suspicion that Alex thinks he’s an “idiot” is unsurprising, given the way that white characters in the novel repeatedly treat black characters as if they are unintelligent. However, unlike Josey and Kim, Tristan does not play into this false assumption for his own advancement, but instead becomes fiercely defensive.



The issue of who controls the Singer’s image—and by extension the image of Jamaica in the eyes of the world—is as important to many of the characters as matters of wealth, territory, and money.



Four days later Tristan flew to Miami and met up with an old friend called A-Plus, who looked at him as if he was a duppy. A-Plus explained that Weeper claimed to have killed Tristan in New York. Tristan and A-Plus then drove to the house Weeper was staying in, tackled Weeper and pressed a **gun** to his head. Tristan was about to shoot him when another man who was in the house began crying and begging for Weeper's life, as if Weeper was his child. Tristan left, confident that Weeper would not come after him. Tristan then explains that Shotta Sherrif stole the **cocaine** stash of a man whose brother was in Wang Gang. He was killed by Wang Gang members in a nightclub in New York. Everyone but two people involved in the peace council were now dead.

Ironically, it is Weeper's homosexuality--which he is so desperate to keep secret from others--that ends up saving him from being killed by Tristan. When Weeper's male lover starts begging for his life, Tristan realizes that he does not actually need to kill Weeper. The fact that Tristan has seen the evidence that Weeper is gay will protect him in the future. It is now clear that Weeper purposefully pretended to kill Tristan in order to allow Tristan to escape; the men made an unspoken deal with one another based around the secret of Weeper's sexuality.



PART 4, CHAPTER 7

Dorcas sits in the Colthirsts' apartment, awaiting instructions. The man who let her in simply stares at her as if he too is waiting to be told what to do. He is wearing pink pants, which Dorcas thinks is odd, although she also thinks he is a "hot silver daddy or fox." He sees Dorcas looking at a painting and tells her it's a Pollock, but Dorcas replies that it is actually a de Kooning. He tells her to call him Ken, although Dorcas insists on calling him "Mr. Ken." He tells Dorcas about a previous maid called Consuela, who he claims stole from them, and calls her a "wetback." They briefly discuss Jamaica, which Ken has visited.

Dorcas's initial meeting with Ken is the first time she has admitted her own desire since her description of the time she (as Nina) slept with the Singer. Ken's odd behavior encourages Nina to let her guard down, as she does not care about seeming respectable in front of him. This is reflected in the boldness with which she corrects him about the creator of a painting in his own house.



Ken's daughter-in-law, Ms. Colthirst, enters, and tells Dorcas where to find the cleaning supplies. Dorcas tries to say that she is not a maid, but Ms. Colthirst has already left. Dorcas wonders why she is here; unlike the other elderly people she has been hired to care for, Ken is perfectly able-bodied. She tells him she is not a maid, and he asks her if she knows any games. Ken replies: "That dumb cunt thinks everybody here is the maid," and said it was probably his son who called the agency. Ken then tells a racist joke and laughs. Dorcas responds: "How long does it take white woman to shit? ... Nine months." Ken bursts out laughing. Dorcas goes to leave, but Ken begs her not to. They keep trading jokes, and Dorcas can't help but laugh.

We might expect Dorcas to be horrified by Ken's racist jokes. However, she instead finds his vulgarity and rudeness strangely liberating. Freed from the pressure to behave respectably herself, Dorcas indulges in rude behavior and finds herself enjoying it. Although she is attracted to Ken, there is also a childish innocent quality to their exchange. Ken may be an elderly man, but he conducts himself with the mischievous freedom of a young child.



PART 4, CHAPTER 8

Back in the house in Miami, John-John sees a Latino family--a man, a woman, and their two sons--eating yuca together at a dining table. The woman, Griselda, orders John-John to join them for breakfast, and accuses him of being "the motherfucker who messed up my business." She says that he has lost her a lot of money and wants to know what he is going to do about it. Griselda slaps him, and the men in the tropical shirts run in, pointing their **guns** at him. Griselda says: "This is what you gonna do for me."

Griselda is another paradoxical character. She has been introduced as a lesbian and someone who hardly qualifies as a woman; at the same time, the first time she appears directly in the narrative, she is in a normal domestic scene, presumably with her husband and two children. Yet she then violates that normalcy by threatening John-John at gunpoint.



Back in New York, John-John wakes up next to a greasy-haired man. The man tries to leave and John-John realizes he is trying to steal his wallet. He forces the man to stay and have sex with him again at **gunpoint**. Griselda has instructed him to kill a Jamaican who works with Doctor Love. This man tried to establish Jamaica as the point of connection between Colombia and Miami, working not only with the Medellín cartel but also Cali. Griselda says that someone else wants this Jamaican dead, and that she is just the “messenger.” She advises John-John to set up snipers at the Jamaican’s house.

In the first half of the novel, most of the characters suppressed any queer desires they had or kept them secret. The only time characters indulged in gay sex was in situations of extreme violence (rape or prison). However, in this part of the novel several characters allow themselves to follow their desires, including Weeper, John-John, and Griselda (although Griselda’s sex life is never directly represented in the narrative). And yet it’s also the case that the only characters who are allowed to “get away with” this behavior are those with a certain degree of power and ruthlessness.



PART 4, CHAPTER 9

Josey’s girlfriend Winifred is packing his bag when the phone rings; it’s Eubie. He asks if Josey has ever been to New York before, and Josey replies he hasn’t. During their conversation, Josey gets annoyed, suspecting that Eubie is implying he is ignorant. Eubie began poaching men from Copenhagen City to come work for him in New York in 1977. He is the only person Josey knows who is in the drug game just because he wants to be.

One of the only signs of vulnerability Josey betrays is his paranoia over what people think of him. Whether it is Eubie apparently thinking he is ignorant or people knowing that he missed when he shot the Singer, Josey is obsessed with preserving his reputation as supremely competent, intelligent, and powerful.



Eubie tells Josey that he has not been able to get in touch with Weeper. Eubie is alarmed because six crackheads from Brooklyn showed up in the Bronx looking to buy, saying they “couldn’t deal with Bushwick no more” as prices had doubled. He adds that he knows some of Josey’s dealers have been using **crack** themselves, and warns Josey that this is bad for business. Josey promises Eubie he will sort it out, and that he will call him when he arrives in New York.

Eubie’s attitude to Josey is somewhat patronizing, subtly undermining Josey’s power. For example, he tells Josey it is bad for business if his dealers are using their own supply, which is something that Josey already knows—recall that in earlier in the novel, he would berate Weeper for doing cocaine while they were conducting business.



PART 4, CHAPTER 10

The man in Weeper’s bed asks if he’s going to answer the phone, and Weeper replies no. They begin to have sex again, but when the man calls Weeper beautiful, Weeper tells him to shut up. The man can tell that Weeper is holding in his moans and tells him to let them out. Although they are five floors up, Weeper is still paranoid about someone seeing him be penetrated. The phone rings, and once again Weeper ignores it. He tells himself that when Josey arrives in New York he will see that Weeper is doing such a good job running things that he won’t bother finding out about who he’s been having sex with.

Tension is created by the fact that Weeper believes he is doing an excellent job running things, when in fact Josey is trying to get through to him to ask why he has messed up so much. It is unlike the highly intelligent Weeper not to notice that business has taken a turn for the worse. Perhaps he is so distracted by his drug use and his new exploration of his sexuality that he no longer pays much attention to business.



After Weeper and the man have finished, the phone rings once again and the man answers. Weeper takes it; it’s Eubie. Eubie says the plan has changed and that he will now collect Josey from the airport. In addition, Josey now wants to check out the operation in Bushwick. Eubie tells Weeper to meet them there.

Eubie proves himself to be a skilled manipulator. Although him collecting Josey from the airport (instead of Weeper) may seem like a minor thing, in reality it represents a major shift in the power dynamic between the men.



PART 4, CHAPTER 11

Recently Dorcas went home with a man she met at a bar, but when they got there she realized she didn't want to have sex with him. He choked and threatened her, so she went to retrieve a cutlass from her bathroom and swung it at him, screaming "rape." She chased him out of her house, not even allowing him to collect his clothes.

Back in the present, Dorcas asks Ken which disease he has: diabetes, Alzheimer's, or Parkinson's. He doesn't tell her and goes to leave, even though they have just ordered a pizza. He asks if Dorcas will take him out for dinner in the Bronx, and she soon realizes he isn't joking. In the subway car on the way there, she wonders what other people think about them. She tells him it's not safe to be traveling to 180th Street, even though it's only 5pm.

Dorcas observes that his disease must be giving him a "death wish." Ken says that maybe he just wants "some fucking jerk pork and yam, and rum punch," and Dorcas responds that now everyone in the subway car thinks she's a prostitute. Ken gets up and tells the other passengers that Dorcas is his wife, and Dorcas makes them get off at the next stop. Ken tells her not to worry so much about what other people think. Dorcas suggests that they wait for another train, but Ken insists that they walk.

Dorcas's behavior in this passage is reminiscent of the same erratic ferocity she brought to her life as Nina and Kim, like when she beat her abusive father, or when she set fire to Chuck's apartment.



While Dorcas and Ken were alone in the house, she allowed herself to forget about respectability and indulge in the vulgarity of telling racist jokes. However, now that they are back in public Dorcas once again becomes fixated on what other people think of her.



Although Ken's behavior is outrageous and arguably quite rude, he interacts with Dorcas in a way that none of the men in her life have done before. To the Singer, she was just a one-night stand, and her affair with Chuck was a secret that he kept from his wife. Ken, on the other hand, is perfectly happy for other people to think they are married--even though they actually aren't.



PART 4, CHAPTER 12

Tristan tells Alex that the only other member of the peace council to emerge alive is a woman called Lucy, who is still in Jamaica. He teases Alex for denying that he was a tourist and claiming that he knows "the real Jamaica." After the Singer warned Tristan about Josey Wales, he began to worry. He insists that he was never naïve and always knew that the peace treaty had a tiny chance of success, but even that tiny chance was seductive. When Papa-Lo and others involved in the peace council were killed, Tristan knew that it wasn't the police's idea, as they "don't really get no benefit out of killing nobody." He knew the person behind it was really Josey.

With Shotta Sherrif dead, the path was cleared for Josey to take over crack distribution in New York. Tristan has heard that Josey is even extending his operation to England. Even though Tristan was sure Weeper wouldn't come after him, he felt that Josey might, so he joined the Ranking Dons to stay protected. The Ranking Dons are connected to the Eight Lanes, whereas Josey and Eubie's crew, Storm Posse, represent Copenhagen City.

Notice how many characters, particularly those who come from West Kingston, take pains to emphasize that they are not naïve. In the context of Jamaican politics and society, any hint of optimism can be taken as naïveté. However, the book raises the question of whether it's truly naïve to have a measure of hope that one day the violence, corruption, and chaos that characterize life in Kingston will end.



The gang affiliations of Kingston are so powerful that they have equivalents across the world. On the other hand, Tristan's comment shows that they are also arbitrary. Tristan joined the Ranking Dons not because he had any real desire to, but simply to be protected from Josey.



Tristan laments that the Ranking Dons are messy. He recalls being sent to Philadelphia to steal a stash of weed from a man from Copenhagen City who wasn't being guarded by Storm Posse. Tristan and his men tied the man up only to find that his wife and baby were also in the house. The man would not give up his weed stash, and one of Tristan's men tried to rape the man's wife while Tristan held the baby. Eventually the captive told them where to find the weed, and Tristan and his man had a fight over whether it would still be all right to rape the woman. Tristan managed to get them to leave without raping or killing anyone. At the end of this story, Tristan observes that Alex jumps whenever Tristan mentions Josey Wales' name.

This is another example of the strange matrix of morality that develops in situations of extreme violence. As a gangster involved in robbing and murdering people, Tristan is hardly a moral character by any normal standards. On the other hand, his involvement in the peace treaty proves that he is more moral than characters such as Josey Wales. In this scene, his insistence that members of his crew don't rape the woman shows he is also arguably more moral than the other Ranking Dons.



PART 4, CHAPTER 13

Weeper is in Bushwick. A woman is yelling at him, saying that a nearby "**crack** ho" offered to give her 12-year-old son a blowjob in exchange for his pocket money. Weeper never has any problems with the East Village, but is always having to deal with issues in Bushwick. He speaks to one of the spotters, a young boy called Romeo who tells him that the runners and guards have mostly disappeared to find other work. He adds: "Your dealers ain't dealing." Weeper panics over the fact that Josey is going to be there in a few hours. Meanwhile the mother is still following Weeper around, complaining.

The scene Weeper encounters in Bushwick is totally chaotic. Just as in the story of Bam-Bam, children who grow up in the midst of the crack epidemic in New York are completely robbed of their childhoods. This is true both of the boy who is offered a blowjob by an addict so desperate for drugs that she ignores the fact that he is only 12, and it is also true of Romeo, who enters the drug game at a young age.



Weeper tells one of his men to check out what's happening inside the house. Eventually Weeper slaps the mother who won't stop talking at him. He chokes her and tells her to get lost. Weeper goes inside the house and finds one of his dealers lying on the ground, smoking **crack**. He tells the dealer to get up, and he replies that he won't take orders from a "faggot" with a hickey on his neck. Weeper shoots him in the head. The woman who tried to give the little boy a blowjob enters and tries to take the dead dealer's pipe, but he points his **gun** at her and she flees. Weeper puts the crack rocks and pipe in his pocket and tells his man to find the other dealer, as well as Romeo.

This scene indicates that part of the reason why Weeper has done such a poor job of keeping control of the operation in Bushwick is because he is a cocaine addict himself. Although he may not be on the level of the dealer lying on the floor smoking crack when he is supposed to be working, the fact that Weeper puts the dead man's crack rocks in his pocket demonstrates that Weeper's ability to conduct business has been compromised by his drug dependency.



PART 4, CHAPTER 14

The greasy-haired man in John-John's bed asks for money. John-John gives him \$15 and the man calls him a "cheap faggot" and leaves. John-John thinks about a boy called Rocky he fell for back in Chicago. He uses a payphone to call Rocky, who does not want to talk to him. They exchange irritated words and then hang up. John-John feels unprepared to take out the Jamaican man and feels like it was part of Griselda's plan for them to both end up dead.

There are almost no examples of happy, requited love in the novel. This is true of all the gay characters, but it is also true for the straight ones. Somewhat ironically, the only example of a lasting, stable relationship is that between Josey and Winifred.



John-John berates himself for being a “hitman with daddy issues.” He recalls the time when his father discovered his stack of gay porn magazines and called him “sick” and a “fucking dirty little faggot.” Although John-John was still very young, he pulled a **gun** on his father and taunted him. He left home after that. In the present, John-John finds himself back at the phone booth, leaving a stammering answerphone message for Rocky.

Once again, homosexuality, homophobia, and violence are drawn together. The implication of this passage is that John-John became violent early due to his father’s homophobia, and that this is perhaps what inadvertently led him to take up a career as a hitman.



PART 4, CHAPTER 15

Dorcas and Ken are in Dorcas’s apartment. She wonders if she should offer Ken a drink, but worries that this would seem like an invitation for them to have sex. Ken asks for a drink, and Dorcas says she has vodka and pineapple juice, but tells him to get it himself. Ken advises her to throw out the leftovers in the fridge, and offers to make her a drink as well. Dorcas asks how long it will take until the police come looking for Ken, and he requests to hear some music. Dorcas puts on Prince and they start dancing together. Dorcas sings into a microphone and Ken plays air guitar.

This is the only moment in the novel when we see Dorcas/Nina/Kim truly happy. She knows that the happiness will be fleeting, as indicated when she asks Ken how long it will take for the police to come and find him and bring him home. However, in this moment, in the privacy of her own apartment, Dorcas is able to stop worrying, not care what other people think, and simply enjoy herself.



Dorcas makes them from ramen noodles, and Ken asks where she’s from. She replies that she’s from a Kingston suburb called Havendale. Ken asks why she left, and Dorcas dodges the question. Ken goes to the bathroom, and Dorcas imagines turning on the TV to find a news item about his disappearance. Suddenly, Ken emerges waving something and asking, “What’s this?” It is a book by Doug Richmond called *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found*.

There is a sense of irony in the fact that just as Dorcas starts being honest with Ken—telling him the truth when he asks where she comes from—he discovers that her life is an elaborate lie. This moment suggests that it is never possible to truly “disappear completely,” and that dishonesty will always come back to haunt you.



PART 4, CHAPTER 16

Tristan again questions Alex suspiciously about what he is actually writing. He tells Alex that Josey Wales is arriving in New York that very day, and Alex suddenly goes quiet. Tristan remarks that he can see Alex is trying not to look afraid, and further taunts him by reciting the address of his apartment in Bed-Stuy. Eventually Alex tells Tristan about killing the stranger who he woke up next to in the hotel. Tristan discusses the experience of killing someone, and asks Alex to describe the man he killed. Based on the description, Tristan concludes it sounds like Tony Pavarotti.

This passage reveals that Alex is not simply generally afraid of Josey Wales, but fears direct retribution for having killed the stranger in his hotel room. While Alex began as a peripheral figure haplessly trying to get close to the action, his accidental murder of Tony Pavarotti has thrust him into the very center of Jamaican gang politics.



Tristan never met Pavarotti, but rumors state that he was “cold as ice,” possibly mute, and came out of the mysterious “School for the Americas.” Tristan laughs at the idea that Alex murdered “Jamaica’s number one killing machine.” Alex tells him that it happened in February 1979, and Tristan mulls over his story, reasoning that if Pavarotti was after Alex then, Josey must have sent him. Alex tells Tristan he doesn’t know why Josey would want him dead. Tristan questions him, and eventually figures out the reason: at the time, Alex was the only person who knew that Josey was the one who shot the Singer. Now Tristan knows too. Tristan remarks that they are “the only two man Josey Wales try to kill who still living.”

As with the Singer and Josey, Tony Pavarotti is made to seem more powerful by the fact that he is so mysterious. We might not have even noticed up to this point that Tony has not had any dialogue in the novel. Tristan pointing it out at this late stage thus draws further attention to how little is known about Tony. The “School for the Americas” likely refers to a real institution, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, which provides military training to American allies in Latin American countries.



PART 4, CHAPTER 17

Josey is at JFK airport. At customs, he watches two Jamaicans get taken off to be searched. As Josey walks through to baggage claim, he sees the officers throw one of them, a woman, down onto the ground. Outside, Eubie is waiting, wearing a blue silk suit and holding a sign that says “Josey Wales.” Eubie explains that it’s a joke and Josey replies: “I not laughing.” Josey is irritated by the Americanisms in Eubie’s speech. Eubie suggests they get something to eat, but Josey is impatient to get to Bushwick. Eubie mentions “the old days,” but Josey does not remember knowing Eubie back then.

Josey is clearly unnerved by Eubie, and although he claims this is because Eubie is making unfunny jokes and has adopted too many Americanisms, there seems to be something else afoot. Eubie’s Americanisms don’t just represent a shift away from Jamaican identity—they also show that Eubie is adaptable and familiar with a culture in which Josey is a stranger, yet in which he is trying to establish power. In this country, Eubie already has the upper hand.



Driving through Queens, they go over a pothole, which makes Josey jump. Everyone in the car laughs, and Josey is silently furious. They drive up to Boston Jerk Chicken, even though Josey said earlier that he didn’t come to New York to eat Jamaican food. Eubie warns Josey that Weeper has been “fucking around in more ways than one.” Josey is annoyed to hear that Eubie has a runner spying on Weeper, but Eubie says he’s sure Josey does the same to him. Eubie goes on to say that Weeper has started using **crack**. Josey tells him they need to go to Bushwick immediately, even though their food has not yet arrived.

Eubie’s insistence on taking Josey out to eat may appear like hospitality. In reality, it is part of Eubie’s subtle yet powerful effort at manipulation. By taking Josey out to eat even though Josey said he didn’t want to, Eubie is reminding Josey that he is in control. Furthermore, he is putting on a false display of innocence over the fact that Weeper’s operation in Bushwick is a disaster, pretending it is not a matter of urgency.



PART 4, CHAPTER 18

John-John recalls a time in South Beach, Miami, when a handsome young stranger got into his car and asked John-John to drive him “somewhere nice.” The young man ended up giving John-John a blowjob, but John-John could not stop thinking about Rocky. More memories come back to John-John: when he killed a man on a train track, when we had sex with a male friend at summer camp.

Since leaving his homophobic household, John-John has enjoyed a life of relative sexual freedom. However, this freedom means little to him if he can’t be with Rocky, and does not stop him continuing to lead a life of violence.



John-John has arrived at the house of the Jamaican he is supposed to kill. Griselda gave him keys, and he lets himself in. John-John enters the apartment and fires seven shots in the air. He hears a gasp behind him and turns around to find a white man, who throws mouthwash in his eye. The man chases John-John out of the building and down an alley; John-John keeps shooting at him, but none of the bullets are hitting. Eventually one of the bullets hits, and John-John drags the man's body back into the alley.

Like most of the other killers in the story, John-John often murders people carelessly. It does not matter to him that the man whose apartment he has entered was simply in the wrong place in the wrong time and is clearly not the person he was aiming to target. He kills him anyway.



PART 4, CHAPTER 19

Ken furiously questions Dorcas about the book. Dorcas tells him to calm down and reminds him that she doesn't owe him any explanation. She then claims she "saw it in a bookstore and was curious." Eventually, however, Dorcas reveals that she stole the identity of a Jamaican immigrant to America who died in Queens on June 15, 1979. She explains that it was quite simple to get a copy of Dorcas's birth certificate, that her family are all still in Jamaica, and that they were too poor to come for her funeral. Dorcas then mentions that before becoming Dorcas Palmer, she was known as Kim Clarke.

Ken is the first person with whom Dorcas/Nina/Kim has been completely honest. As before, Ken's totally unguarded nature encourages Dorcas to let her own guard down and simply be herself around him. The fact that she easily assumed the identity of another Jamaican immigrant is also a clever play on the idea of Dorcas as an "everywoman"; her identity is easily replaceable because there are so many like her.



Ken asks if Dorcas is an American citizen, and she replies that she isn't. She has a Jamaican passport, but not under her real name. Ken tells her that her story is "the most exciting thing I've heard since I can't even remember," and asks what she was running away from. He guesses that the person she's fleeing must be in Jamaica, and Dorcas replies that she's been in America since 1979 and he hasn't tracked her down yet. She explains that she chose to live in New York because a big city provides anonymity, there is a lot of work, and when she is not working she goes to the library or MoMA. At the moment, Dorcas is working on building a good credit score.

This passage returns us to the idea of white American men being seduced by the excitement of Jamaica and Jamaicans. It is easy for Ken to be entertained by Dorcas's story because he has never had to suffer the reality of poverty, violence, and hopelessness. Dorcas does not view her own life as exciting; in fact, throughout the novel she is confronted by boredom more than any other emotion.



Dorcas tells Ken that he should go home soon. He goes to the bathroom, and Dorcas finds a note in his pocket that asks anyone who finds it to call a certain number immediately. Dorcas calls, and Mr. Colthirst answers. Dorcas explains that Ken insisted on leaving the house, and gives her address. Dorcas walks over to the bathroom door and tells Ken that she called his son, and that he is coming to collect him. However, Ken now can't remember who Dorcas is. He locks himself in the bathroom and tells her to "get the fuck away."

There is a surprising level of similarity between Ken and Dorcas, considering that in many ways they could not be more different. Just as Dorcas decided halfway through her sexual encounter with a Jamaican man that she no longer wanted to have sex with him and forced him to leave with a cutlass, so has Ken now suddenly decided to push Dorcas away (although this is apparently because he has suddenly lost his memories of Dorcas, not because of a change of whim).



PART 4, CHAPTER 20

Tristan indicates it's unlikely that Josey has flown to New York six years after Tony Pavarotti's death to kill Alex himself. It's possible that Josey's forgotten Alex, although this is also unlikely, as Josey never forgets anything. Tristan explains that Josey and Eubie have been in the drug game together since 1979. He reflects that they are both extremely smart, and thus "too smart to trust each other." Tristan reassures Alex that Josey won't kill him without a reason, especially since Alex is white, meaning his death would interest the feds. However, Tristan warns Alex that if he writes anything else, "nobody can protect you." He adds that Storm Posse will go after Alex's family.

Tristan emphasizes that Josey is too big to go to jail. If anyone wants to get to Josey, they will have to go through the whole of Copenhagen City first. Tristan then observes that Alex is a natural reporter, and asks what it is about Jamaica that fascinates him. Tristan is impressed with Alex's answer, which doesn't romanticize the country.

Tristan tells Alex that he is getting out in March 1986, and the first thing he will do is find somewhere in Brooklyn to eat **ackee and saltfish**. Leaving the Ranking Dons will not be an option. Tristan begins to reconsider his advice about not writing the book. He suggests that it might be important for Alex to write it, saying: "People need to know." He gives permission to use his real name. However, he advises that Alex should wait until everyone is dead before he publishes it.

PART 4, CHAPTER 21

Josey feels that Bushwick is just another ghetto no better than the ghetto in Kingston. Eubie points out that it was smart of Weeper to set up shop there, because nobody wants to step foot in it. Josey is shocked by how desolate it is, especially compared to the vision of America conveyed on TV. Josey spies a young runner and tells Eubie to call him over. He asks the runner, Romeo, how business is going, and then asks about Weeper. Josey is shocked by the casual manner with which the boy speaks about Weeper.

The intelligence of Josey, Weeper, and Eubie is often presented as the reason why they are so successful in the drug game. However, this passage suggests that such intelligence can also be a hindrance. Josey and Eubie are theoretically working together, but in actuality they are both too smart--and paranoid--to form a real allegiance. This creates a power struggle in which it seems likely that only one will emerge alive.



Tristan's opinion of Alex's abilities as a reporter is radically different to that of Josey Wales, who claimed that people like Alex "don't see much." This is testament both to their different personalities and to how much Alex has improved as a writer.



Throughout the novel there are small hints evoking a parallel between Alex Pierce and Marlon James. After all, both of them are writers aiming to convey some version of the "truth" of what happened in Jamaica during this era to the general public. Tristan's advice here is especially telling, then, considering that James himself published the book only after the real equivalent of the characters were dead.



Unlike many of the other Jamaican characters in the novel, Josey does not romanticize the United States. In particular, he is able to see that the parts of the U.S. afflicted with extreme poverty are really no different from Kingston. Josey also has a loyalty to Jamaica that few characters share, as evidenced by his chastising of Eubie for using Americanisms.



Romeo suggests that Weeper has probably gone home because it has been a busy day. Josey asks him how long he's been working as a runner, and Romeo replies: "About five hours." Eubie chimes in to say he would never trust a new recruit to be a runner, and Romeo clarifies that he was previously working as a spotter for two weeks. The runner calls Eubie a pimp because of how he's dressed, and Josey instantly takes a liking to him because of how much it annoys Eubie. Meanwhile, the runner admits that if things had carried on as they were for even one more day, the corner would have been taken over by the Ranking Dons. Romeo concludes by saying that everyone around them has been hired that same day.

Things are looking almost comically bad for Weeper, and this is increased by Romeo's cheeky manner. Indeed, the way Romeo behaves toward Josey and Eubie serves as a reminder that power is always socially constructed. Although as dons Josey and Eubie exercise an enormous amount of power, this is only because the people around them fear them. If everyone refused to do this, as Romeo does, their power would instantly disappear.



Eubie and Josey walk over to the **crack** house, and Eubie excuses himself to pee. While he is gone, a crackhead comes up to Josey and demands money at gunpoint. Josey hands him a few bills, and the man pulls the trigger. It is a water **gun** filled with urine. The man runs off laughing. Weeper arrives and asks what Josey is doing alone, and why he is covered in piss. Eubie returns. Josey takes both of the men's guns and walks into the crack house.

By this point, we know enough about Josey's personality to realize that this moment will have serious consequences. Josey has gone to extreme lengths to suppress the information that he shot the Singer in order to avoid humiliation. How is he going to react to being sprayed with piss by a crackhead?



PART 4, CHAPTER 22

Weeper and Eubie follow Josey into the crack house. They pass one man lying flat on the ground with blood flowing from him, and another sitting on the toilet preparing to shoot up. Josey shoots the second man, followed by another who had been kneeling with a crack pipe. They then find a woman giving a man a blowjob; the woman has a baby on her back. Josey shoots the man. They enter another room filled with people, and when one of the women sees them she starts screaming. Josey sprays the room with bullets and people run screaming before dropping to the floor. He walks through the house and shoots more people, including a pregnant woman.

There is no possible rational reason for Josey shooting up the crack house. As the decidedly abject scenes contained within it make clear, the addicts inside pose no threat to Josey, and killing them won't benefit him in any way. They are already totally powerless, living a nightmarish existence as a result of their poverty and addiction. Given this, it is safe to conclude that the only reason why Josey shoots up the house is because he is humiliated and angry.



Eventually Josey walks out of the house into the nighttime darkness; Weeper and Eubie follow. Josey puts the **gun** to Weeper's head, pauses, and then drops it and walks away. Eubie turns to look at Weeper but it is too dark to see his expression.

Josey's gesture in this passage is a particularly insulting way of turning against Weeper. By dropping the gun, he suggests that Weeper is not significant enough to even be worth killing.



PART 4, CHAPTER 23

Ken has been in the bathroom for about an hour. Dorcas is still trying to figure out what disease he has, and for some reason it hasn't occurred to her "that clearly his problem was not physical." She can hear him trying to climb out of the window, but knows he won't be successful, as there's a grate over it. She is sitting on the couch watching TV, waiting for Mr. Colthirst to arrive. She is puzzled by how "normal" and "dashing" Ken seemed only hours ago, although at the time she struggled "not to think of him that way."

There is a knock on the door; it is Ms. Colthirst, who barges in rudely. Mr. Colthirst comes up behind her and apologizes. Ken barks at Ms. Colthirst, telling her to go away, and she replies that this has all happened because he won't take his pills. Ken doesn't recognize Ms. Colthirst either. Mr. Colthirst explains who his wife is and adds that they are in the Bronx. Eventually Ken comes out, looking disheveled. Ms. Colthirst takes Ken down to the car, leaving Mr. Colthirst alone with Dorcas. He explains that "every day is a new day for Pop," to which Dorcas replies that the same is true for everybody.

Mr. Colthirst clarifies that Ken has amnesia and can't remember anything past April 1980. He adds that the previous woman they hired to take care of him found it too exhausting and quit. Mr. Colthirst says he will phone the agency and tell them it wasn't Dorcas's fault it didn't work out. However, Dorcas tells him not to, because she wants the job.

PART 4, CHAPTER 24

On his second try, John-John has successfully found Weeper and tied him up inside his own apartment. John-John gives them both cigarettes. Weeper remarks that he knows everyone who works for Griselda but doesn't recognize John-John; John-John responds with surprise that Weeper knows Griselda hired him. Weeper recounts how he and Griselda fell out, and adds that she is stupid for trying to kill him, considering what will happen when Josey finds out. He asks John-John what Griselda is paying him and offers to double it. He offers John-John **cocaine**, girls, or boys, depending on what he desires. However, John-John indicates that he's not being paid.

It is curious that Dorcas calls Ken "normal," considering how strange and alarming she found his behavior during their day together. At the same time, she also found this behavior comforting in some way. Now that Ken has turned away from her, she has been forced back into her isolated, lonely existence.



Dorcas's words in this passage highlight a surprising compatibility and similarity between her and Ken. Due to his amnesia, Ken experiences each day as a "blank slate." This is exactly what Dorcas has been trying to achieve with her constant self-reinvention, if on a longer term, rather than day-to-day, level. No wonder Ken and Dorcas got along so well.



This is one of the few relatively happy moments of resolution in the novel. After suffering a lifetime of loneliness, Dorcas has found the perfect person to be around. Even if Ken knows her true identity, it doesn't matter, as he will soon forget it again.



At this point, Weeper still seems to feel pretty invincible. With a supply of cocaine, women, or men to offer John-John as well as Josey's protection, Weeper has not had to fear for his life for most of the novel. However, the fact that John-John is not being paid--as we know, he is being blackmailed--is a bad sign. John-John cannot exactly be persuaded not to kill Weeper when the alternative is being killed himself.



Weeper reveals that Griselda is a lesbian who sleeps with gogo girls and then kills them. John-John explains that he's being blackmailed into killing Weeper. He says he can't wait to get out of New York, and Weeper asks the name of the girl he's going back to. John-John replies that it's Rocky, and Weeper asks if he's cute. They talk some more, before John-John tells Weeper to stop stalling. He adds that it's a shame, because Weeper is "the first man in this fucking city worth talking to."

John-John presses the **gun** to Weeper's head, but before he pulls the trigger Weeper shouts: "Wait!" He asks for one last hit of **cocaine** before he dies, and tells John-John that there is a bag nearby ready to go. John-John prepares him a line, but Weeper can't snort it properly with his hands tied. Weeper starts talking about Griselda again, and John-John notes that he doesn't think the order to kill Weeper came from Griselda herself. He adds that while he was in Miami, Griselda mentioned someone in New York, who he believes the order came from. Weeper is momentarily puzzled, before he realizes that it must have come from Eubie.

Weeper is deflated; he realizes that Josey will assume the Ranking Dons killed him and will never realize that it was actually Eubie. Weeper asks John-John to help him shoot up some **cocaine**, and guides him through the process, as John-John has never done it before. John-John sticks the needle in Weeper's neck just as Weeper explains that the cocaine isn't cut. Weeper falls to the floor and begins to spasm violently, his eyes rolling back. Although he doesn't know why, John-John holds him tightly as he dies.

PART 5, SIR ARTHUR GEORGE JENNINGS

Jennings describes the Singer's funeral, at which there are four priests, an Ethiopian archbishop, and Rastas chanting. The new Prime Minister gives a eulogy, saying: "May his soul find rest in the arms of Jah Rastafari." The Singer is posthumously given the Order of Merit, which is ironic considering he was a "black revolutionary." The man who killed Jennings still won't die, although he is getting old and irrelevant. The drug business is booming, killing many in its wake. Jennings observes that "three killers have outlived the Singer." One--presumably Weeper--dies in New York, while another "sees and waits in Kingston." The third is behind the Iron Curtain, waiting and knowing.

After the isolation and loneliness Weeper has experienced throughout the novel as a result of his sexuality, the conversation between him and John-John is strangely moving. There is a tragic irony to the fact that the two could have been friends or even lovers if John-John had not been charged with killing Weeper.



Once again, the strange morals of gangsters and hitmen emerge through characters choosing the lesser of two evils. Although John-John is going to kill Weeper, he is relatively kind in allowing Weeper to have a last hit of cocaine before he dies. Meanwhile, Josey is proven right in not trusting Eubie. It is clear by this point that Eubie is not actually interested in an allegiance with Josey and likely wants to take him out.



By manipulating John-John, Weeper asserts at least some level of control over his own death. Rather than being shot by John-John, he dies via an overdose of the drug he adores. The fact that John-John holds Weeper while he dies evokes the possibility of intimacy--and particularly queer intimacy--in even the direst of circumstances.



The different attendees and conflicting messages at the Singer's funeral represent the battle over the Singer and how his image relates to Jamaica's cultural and political identity. Just as during the Singer's life, everyone present at the Singer's funeral wants to claim him for themselves and the groups they represent. This leaves the reality of who the Singer was permanently lost, never completely knowable.



PART 5, CHAPTER 1

The final part of the novel is set on March 22, 1991. Unlike the previous chapters, the narrator is not identified in the chapter title. Griselda Blanco has disappeared, and Josey Wales is in prison awaiting extradition to the US on charges of “murder, racketeering, obstructing justice, narcotics et cetera.” His son Benjy took over as don of Copenhagen City, and set about organizing the Papa-Lo Memorial Commemorative Annual Cricket Match.

Benjy may have been Josey’s son, but he grew up in a life of luxury, and thus didn’t take sufficient precautions to protect himself. Cycling alone through Kinston, he was shot. Although the doctors knew there was nothing they could do, there were crowds outside demanding that they save him, and thus they had to perform procedures that they knew wouldn’t work. When the crowd heard that the doctors couldn’t save him, they kicked down the doors of the ER and began beating the doctors and nurses. Starting Sunday night, Copenhagen City took revenge on the Eight Lanes, shooting, raping, and burning down houses. The violence even spread to Miami.

The Jamaican Prime Minister asked the JLP to organize a truce and organized peace marches through the church. 20,000 people attended Benjy’s funeral. Josey tried to leave prison to attend but was not allowed. The narrator remarks that it’s funny that Josey spent so much time going unnoticed by the authorities, and that the American government only paid attention to him after he started selling drugs in New York. Before that, Josey was so untouchable that he once shot a bus driver who’d accidentally yelled at him in a road rage incident right in front of the police station. The police officers simply watched it happen, arresting Josey after the fact but releasing him when they couldn’t find any witnesses.

The Cali cartel determined that Josey was “badass” enough to be given the UK. Last year, Josey’s daughter and her boyfriend were killed by an Eight Lanes crew outside a nightclub. Shortly after, Josey was arrested, and by this point the American government had enough charges to get him into prison. The narrator went to visit him in prison; at the end of the chapter, it is revealed that the narrator is Doctor Love.

As before, things have both changed and, on some fundamental level, stayed the same. Although the fall of Josey Wales is momentous (having previously seemed all but impossible), the fact that Benjy is taking over suggests that the change will be superficial. Josey will surely continue to exercise power through his son.



This passage explores the intensity of the loyalty the people feel for the dons who control the ghetto. Indeed, this loyalty is so powerful that it defies reason, and is expressed in the form of pure, unfiltered emotion. Although Josey and the other dons commit acts of unspeakable violence, they are also the only advocates that the poor residents of Kingston really have--the only powerful people in the world who really understand them.



Throughout the novel, the act of witnessing a crime is a highly charged event. Part of what allows Josey to sustain his operations as a gangster for so long without being caught is that no one will testify against him. This is another example of the way in which power is created by people, and particularly by groups of people making a silent agreement to behave one way or another. Because everyone in Jamaica decides not to snitch on Josey, he becomes--at least for a while--all-powerful.



One seemingly minor but nonetheless powerful representation of sexism in the novel emerges through the fact that when Benjy is killed, a war breaks out. Yet when Josey’s daughter is killed, there are seemingly no consequences.



PART 5, CHAPTER 2

Millicent Segree is picking up prescriptions, including Xanax for her anxiety and Prozac for her depression. She is at a Rite Aid in the Bronx. These days she works at Beth Israel hospital, training to be a nurse. Two weeks ago, several Jamaicans arrived at the hospital with gunshot wounds. Millicent made sure to hide her own Jamaican accent. One of the wounded men explained Benjy Wales was killed and “is armagideon now.” At this point Millicent blacked out and had to leave, telling her colleagues she had a migraine.

Millicent’s motto for herself is “NO MORE DRAMA.” She has been suffering from anxiety attacks with increasing frequency. She insists that she doesn’t miss her father, who as far as she knows could be alive or dead. She also claims she doesn’t miss Jamaica. Last week a young white man heard her accent and asked if she ever met the Singer, and Millicent is shocked by the realization that the answer is yes.

Although there are not yet any clues linking her to Nina/Kim/Dorcas, by this point it is safe to assume that Millicent is Nina’s new identity. This impression is strengthened by Millicent’s desperation to hide her own Jamaican identity and her dramatic reaction to any news relating to Josey Wales.



Nina/Millicent has never been able to take pleasure in the fact that not only did she meet the Singer, she had sex with him—making her the envy of an unimaginable number of women. Instead, what could have been a pleasing memory in Millicent’s life ended up being fraught and distressing.



PART 5, CHAPTER 3

The narrator of this chapter has taken to reading copies of *The New Yorker* over people’s shoulders on the C train. Today he sees a man reading a copy of *Rolling Stone*. It’s revealed that the narrator is Alex Pierce, and he recently handed in part four a seven-part series about Jamaica and the Singer to *The New Yorker*. He also recently purchased a brownstone in Washington Heights. Heading home, he sees four black men sitting on the steps of his house.

Alex finds that his front door is open, and hears that the four men are Jamaican. Inside the house he sees a tall black man wearing a wife beater, and another black man wearing a blue silk suit and shiny red shoes. The man in the suit tells the other man, whose name is Ren-Dog, to make Alex a glass of mango juice using his own juice-maker. The man in the suit asks Ren-Dog if he ever heard of Tony Pavarotti. Ren-Dog responds that he has, addressing the man in the suit as Eubie. Eubie introduces Alex as the man who killed Tony in 1979.

It may not be in the form of a book, but Alex has finally achieved his dream of publishing his story about Jamaica. The fact that he is reading over people’s shoulders on the subway, however, suggests that Alex may be as entrenched in his own ego as ever—he remains fixated on what other people think of him.



It should perhaps not be surprising that Alex is finally facing the consequences of two extraordinarily bold acts. The first was killing Tony Pavarotti; the second, publishing an essay series about the Jamaican gangsters of Kingston and New York. In a world where witnessing is punished, it does not seem likely that Alex will get off lightly for his elaborate exposé.



PART 5, CHAPTER 4

In prison, Doctor Love asks Josey if he ever thinks about the past, and Josey replies: “No. You know I never think about the fucking past.” Josey notes that Peter Nasser is now hoping to be knighted and is thus praying that his past doesn’t come back to haunt him. Josey implies that someone must have sent Doctor Love to visit him, because Doctor Love won’t do anything unless he’s being paid for it. Doctor Love declares that they are “relics” from history, and that no one will ever really know about their past.

Doctor Love tells Josey he is the smartest man he’s ever known. Josey asks if “this family quarrel” has reached him in Miami, but Doctor Love dodges the question. Doctor Love mentions Weeper’s mysterious disappearance in 1985, and Josey responds that it wasn’t mysterious; Weeper simply overdosed. Doctor Love asks why Weeper would inject himself with pure **cocaine**, and Josey suggests it might not have been an accident. However, he won’t develop this idea any further. Doctor Love tells Josey that Benjy’s funeral was “really nice,” but Josey tells him not to mention Benjy.

Once again, Peter Nasser is shown to be a stereotypical slimy politician, only interested in his own reputation, power, and prestige. Doctor Love, on the other hand, remains somewhat mysterious. Josey is convinced that, despite their long history together, Doctor Love could only be visiting because he’s being paid to do it.



Josey’s knowledge of the exact way in which Weeper died--that he overdosed and that it wasn’t an accident--suggests that he may have managed to contact John-John. On the other hand, perhaps he simply had access to the police report or obituary regarding Weeper’s death after the murder itself occurred.



PART 5, CHAPTER 5

At Beth Israel, Millicent sees a Jamaican man whose wife thinks Millicent is his nurse. In reality, Millicent is assigned to the ER and normally doesn’t spend any time in the ICU, but has been coming down just to get a look at the man. Four of the Jamaicans who were brought into Beth Israel with gunshot wounds died, many more were treated and sent home, and the one with the wife is in critical condition. The wife asks if he will improve, but Millicent simply defers to Doctor Stephenson, a handsome blond man who has just walked in.

Doctor Stephenson asks what Millicent is doing in the ICU, and Millicent struggles to answer. However, as she tries to leave, the doctor says he might need her. He tells the wife that they will need to run more tests, and when she responds, he asks Millicent to translate into her “native tongue.” After Millicent explains that the wife is speaking English, the doctor proceeds to update her on the man’s condition.

Millicent’s fascination with the injured Jamaican man is risky, considering she is trying to conceal her true identity and even the fact that she is Jamaican. However, her curiosity over the man is evidently too powerful to be restrained. She cannot help but linger by his bedside even though he has been unconscious since he arrived at the hospital.



Like many of the other white men in the novel, Doctor Stephenson appears to believe that black people (particularly Jamaicans) are ignorant, when in fact he is ignorant about black Jamaican culture. In this instance, he thinks that the wounded man’s wife can’t speak in English, when it is in fact he who cannot understand her.



Once Doctor Stephenson leaves, the wife asks where in Jamaica Millicent is from, saying she sounds like she's from uptown Kingston. Millicent tries not to answer, but this annoys the wife, who asks why she keeps coming in to look at her husband. Millicent tries to say she's just curious, but the woman won't believe her, and asks to hear the truth about her husband's condition. Millicent eventually admits that if he ever talks again he will sound like a four-year-old, and that he might not even be able to "hold a cup again," let alone walk.

Suddenly, Millicent asks if Josey Wales's gang shot the woman's husband. The wife replies that it was Storm Posse who shot up the club, but that Josey Wales is in prison, about to be extradited to America. She explains that this is all the result of Benjy Wales being murdered. She tells Millicent that her husband was a Ranking Don.

The woman's ability to know the exact part of Kingston in which Millicent grew up suggests that Millicent is less skilled at hiding her identity than she would like to think. Millicent's decision to be honest with the woman about her husband's condition suggests that Millicent may be finally ready to end her duplicity and embrace a more honest existence.



This passage indicates that Millicent's interest in the wounded man is all because she is trying to figure out how he is connected to Josey, and—by extension— if there is any chance that Josey is in New York and could find her.



PART 5, CHAPTER 6

Eubie and Ren-Dog tease Alex about his long, scruffy hair. Alex is terrified. He hasn't heard the name "Tony Pavarotti" since he was talking to Tristan in Rikers years ago. Alex manages to say that he killed Tony by stabbing him in the neck. Eubie mentions that he's been reading Alex's essays in *The New Yorker*. Ren-Dog punches Alex in the face, and Alex laments that Jamaicans hold a grudge for a long time. Twelve years later, they've arrived to punish him for killing Tony. He explodes with anger, calling the men "fucking thugs who shoot women and children." He says he doesn't care that the men are intelligent and that they read. Eubie tells Ren-Dog to "deal with this pussyhole."

While Eubie doesn't care that Alex calls him and his crew "fucking thugs who shoot women and children," he does care about the subtleties of how Alex has represented them in print. Alex, meanwhile, has given up on appeasing Eubie—perhaps because he thinks is about to die—and openly voices his negative opinions of the gang. The comment about Eubie being intelligent could be interpreted as a provocation to the reader—do we judge the gangsters less harshly because they are portrayed as intelligent, curious, and learned?



PART 5, CHAPTER 7

Josey is pacing inside his cell, and Doctor Love wonders if he's about to pull out a shank. Josey notes that he's been terrorizing the guards assigned to him in prison, including by killing their families. He asserts: "Everybody fucking owe me. I give the country to that fucking government." Doctor Love reminds him that that government is no longer in power, and nobody owes Josey anything. Doctor Love scolds him for killing a pregnant woman, saying he read about it in *The New Yorker*. Josey tells him that he checks if his food is poisoned by feeding pieces of it to the rats every day and waiting to see if they drop dead. He does this even though he's already bought the loyalty of everyone in the prison kitchen.

This passage reveals the dramatic extent to which Josey has covered all bases in order to preserve his power. Even though he is in prison, he still wields as much as power as possible in order to keep himself safe and in control of his fate. At the same time, his power has reached such heights that he is arguably now somewhat doomed to fail. In ascending to a position of such absolute dominance, Josey has made too many enemies to survive for much longer.



Doctor Love looks around the prison cell and observes that it's falling apart. Josey tells him that Peter Nasser tried to threaten him, worried that Josey is about to snitch on him. Doctor Love calls Josey a "psychopath" and Josey starts hysterically laughing. Josey then warns him that even though it's been years, he remembers everything, including exact dates and names. Doctor Love predicts that he'll sign a deal with the DEA that will get him out of prison. Josey boasts that he owns "every single" person in Kingston and New York. Doctor Love tells him that before Griselda Blanco was killed by the Medellín cartel, a man helped her regain control over Miami, which was being taken over by the Ranking Dons. The man did it in exchange for Griselda organizing the murder of Weeper. The man was Eubie.

After years of punishing people for so much as accidentally witnessing things he didn't want them to see, Josey now plans to give up information on everyone he has known and worked with in order to save himself and get out of prison quicker. Note that there has been a palpable shift in Josey's personality now that he is in prison. Whereas before he was always cautious and somewhat understated in his speech, now he is making grand, over-the-top declarations such as claiming that he owns everyone in Kingston and New York. The scope of Eubie's duplicity and ambition are also fully revealed here.



PART 5, CHAPTER 8

Millicent continues talking to the wounded man's wife, claiming that she's never seen a gunman before, and explaining that she grew up in Havendale. The woman says that Josey Wales is supposedly going to "Yankee prison for a good while," but that she'll believe it when she sees it. The mention of Josey Wales has made Millicent dizzy, and she has to sit down. In her moment of dizziness, Millicent's Jamaican accent comes back, which makes the wife laugh. The woman says that the Ranking Dons don't have a leader like Josey, and tells the story about the bus driver that Josey shot right outside the police station.

Millicent's efforts to maintain control over herself and not give any hint of her true identity are quickly slipping away. Even though she has perfected the performance of pretending to be someone else over the years, when she is forced to confront her own deepest fears--in particular her fear of Josey Wales--she automatically returns to her true identity.



The wife adds that Josey's "wickedness" has come back to him, as both his daughter and Benjy have been killed. The death of the boy is what began the current wave of violence. The woman asks how Millicent knows so much about Josey Wales, considering she doesn't come from the ghetto. At that moment, Millicent has a sudden memory of when, as Nina, she witnessed the shooting at **the Singer's house**. She recalls the sound of the bullets, the men pushing past her, the blood, the screaming, and Josey standing in front of her. Afterward, Millicent/Nina ran home and packed a suitcase. All she could think about was Josey coming to find and kill her. She could still smell him, and can smell him now. She can hear the woman in Beth Israel calling for a nurse.

Throughout the second half of the book, we've known that Kim/Dorcas/Millicent was deathly afraid of Josey and that this was what drove her to flee Kingston and continuously assume new identities. However, it is only now made explicitly clear that this is because Nina walked into the Singer's house during the shooting, and that Josey saw her there. Once again, the issue at hand is the act of witnessing, which has led Millicent to give up her entire life and identity in order to save herself from being killed.



PART 5, CHAPTER 9

Alex's essay series is called "A Brief History of Seven Killings." Part Three of the series describes a drug addict named Monifah Thibodeaux living in New York. The transcription of the essay is interrupted by Eubie and Ren-Dog commenting on it. Eubie asks why the series is called "A Brief History of Seven Killings" considering that eleven people are killed in Part One alone. Alex has been beaten, stripped, and water-tortured, and is now sitting in his underwear being forced to read his essays aloud. He wets himself, and tells his audience that seven is a "good round number." Alex keeps reading, and the men object to her describing Monifah as "so ghetto," asking if she will like reading such an unflattering description of herself.

The men tell Alex to skip to the part where he discusses the **crack** house. Alex reads the description of the house itself, but the men protest that they are bored, and ask Alex to read about the killings. He obeys, narrating murders committed by Storm Posse, which he describes as "a loose alliance of Jamaican thugs bred on Third World violence and Colombian drug money." Eubie asks if Alex has sent in Part Four yet, and Alex replies that he has. Eubie tells him: "You going to call them right now and make a whole heap o' changes."

PART 5, CHAPTER 10

Josey has thrown his mattress at Doctor Love and is now trying to wrench the sink out of the prison cell wall. He grabs Doctor Love and brandishes a machete that is "shiny like it's new." He asks Doctor Love if he wants to be cut above the elbow or below the elbow. Just as Josey is about to start hacking, Doctor Love reminds him that he has another son. Josey presses the machete to Doctor Love's throat, but Doctor Love says he will kill Josey's other son even if Josey kills him in this moment. Josey asks what Eubie wants with his son, but Doctor Love replies that Eubie hasn't sent him, and neither has the CIA. Josey asks if Doctor Love will tell who sent him, and Doctor Love says he won't.

Doctor Love tells Josey not to give up the information he's planning on giving. Josey says his lawyer has told him he will get seven years at most, and adds that as soon as he has served his time he is going to return to Copenhagen City, where he will "remember my friends." Doctor Love indicates that he may have been sent by the Medellín cartel.

There is a comical irony to the fact that Eubie proclaims to be so concerned about the way Monifah is represented, considering he is a member of the gang that caused Monifah (and others like her) to be murdered. The fact that Alex's essay series is called "A Brief History of Seven Killings" also clearly emphasizes the link between Alex and Marlon James. Perhaps the scene of Alex's torture evokes James's own anxieties about publishing the novel.



Part of what makes this scene so amusing is that it plays on stereotypes about the writer's ego, which have already been explored through Alex's character. Alex is certainly a rather self-centered and egotistical writer, hoping to use his journalism to prove himself to the world. The joke of this scene lies in the fact that Alex would likely find any edits to his work painful--yet as it turns out, they are being inflicted with literal pain.



Like Eubie and Josey, Josey and Doctor Love are similar in a way that means only one of them can emerge from their allegiance alive. Both have power that extends beyond their physical presence as people, as evidenced by the fact that they are making threats that neither is capable of actually carrying out in that moment. However, these threats, in order to be powerful, require a certain amount of trust that they can be carried through. Josey's power is slipping away, and Doctor Love does not fear him.



Josey is confident that he will not have to serve a long sentence and that the information he gives up will serve him well. However, it seems that Josey's confidence might at this point be just a form of hubris (fatal pride).



Doctor Love goes to leave, and as he does so he gives Josey some pills. He explains that whoever sent him wanted Josey to suffer, and that he is disobeying orders by giving Josey something that will make him not care that he's dying. Josey takes the pills and lies down on the bed. He tells Doctor Love that he thinks about "him" sometimes, meaning the Singer. Doctor Love asks if Josey regrets trying to kill him, but Josey replies he doesn't. He is only sorry that the Singer suffered, and wishes he could have killed him quickly, with a gun shot. Josey says he wishes it was 1976, or 1978, because "everything" was great then. Josey passes out, and Doctor Love leaves.

As soon as Josey realizes that he is about to die and there is nothing he can do about it, his personality shifts. His boastful arrogance disappears, and he appears to accept his fate. Moreover, he begins to reminisce about the late '70s, romanticizing that period as a time in which "everything" was great. This contradicts his earlier statement to Doctor Love that he never thinks about the past, and provides a new insight into his character as more normal and human than we might assume. Doctor Love also shows a relative amount of compassion, or at least respect, in giving Josey the pills so that he won't suffer.



PART 5, CHAPTER 11

Eubie asks why there isn't a fourth killing in Part Four, and Alex explains that at this point in the series he wanted to "expand the story" and "give it scope." Eubie begins giving corrections, saying that most of what Alex wrote about Storm Posse is false. Alex implied that Funnyboy was in the crew when in fact Funnyboy was from the Eight Lanes. Alex claims he was basing his information from a source, and Eubie responds that he already knows that Alex's source is Tristan Phillips. Eubie tells him that Tristan is a **crack** addict now, and asks why Alex waited so long to publish the story. Alex explains he waited until Josey Wales was in prison. Eubie is surprised that Alex thinks just because Josey is in prison, he's safe.

Eubie is always one step ahead of the other characters, and this scene is no exception. In this sense, despite his sadistic cruelty, Eubie is an ideal editor. He has the kind of comprehensive insight that will help Alex's story most closely resemble the truth. At the same time, this draws into question whether the point of the story was actually to convey the truth, or whether Alex was motivated by other desires, such as the desire to promote himself as a writer or to play into a stereotypical image of what Jamaica is like.



Alex asks if Eubie is going to threaten him into abandoning the story, but Eubie says he wants to know how it turns out. Eubie says Alex can keep all the stuff about Jamaica and Josey Wales, but he should take out all the parts about New York. Eubie doesn't want the DEA or the Feds coming after him. Alex protests that this leaves a "hole in the story," but Eubie doesn't care. Eubie then asks why Josey sent Tony Pavarotti to kill Alex. He adds that "Josey Wales not going touch anybody for a long time, least of all you."

While Eubie is able to see through Alex's egotism, Eubie himself suffers from similar issues. On some level, his concern about the DEA or Feds coming after him is purely pragmatic--yet as we have seen, Eubie is also interested in his reputation and that of the New York branch of Storm Posse more broadly. This section of the novel thus serves as a reminder that everyone is more or less enslaved to their own vanity.



Eventually, Alex reveals that it was Josey who shot the Singer. Alex explains he figured it out because he interviewed Josey and the Singer separately, but they both knew the same detail that the Singer was shot in the heart. The only way Josey could have known was if he was the shooter. Eubie then asks if Alex knew that the Singer forgave one of the boys involved in the attack, and even brought that boy on tour with him. After that the boy disappeared, and nobody knows what happened to him except Eubie. Alex asks where he is, and Eubie replies that he just told him.

This passage contains one of the central unresolved mysteries of the book. The boy to whom Eubie is referring is Heckle, who--as Josey explained--asked for the Singer's forgiveness after the shooting and was then brought into the Singer's inner circle. Is Eubie Heckle? Josey mentioned admiring Heckle's intelligence, which makes the link more plausible.



Eubie shoots Alex in the foot and Alex starts screaming. Eubie says that Josey is “the most psychotic son of a bitch I ever come ‘cross in my life, and I just fucking kill him.” Eubie presses his finger into the bullet in Alex’s foot, and tells Alex never to give him a reason to come back. He tells Alex to call 911 when they leave, and when Alex asks how he is supposed to explain the bullet in his foot, Eubie replies: “Make something up.”

This passage raises the question of whether Eubie is even more “psychotic” than Josey, given that Eubie just had Josey killed. If so, does this mean that each don who replaces the last becomes successively more psychotic than the one before? Is there no limit to this terrifying cycle?



PART 5, CHAPTER 12

Millicent is on her way home, fantasizing about making ramen noodles and watching *America’s Funniest Home Videos*. She wonders if she should up her Xanax prescription. She remembers she doesn’t have any food at home and walks into Boston Jamaica Jerk Chicken. Suddenly, in her mind, Millicent switches to patois. The man behind the counter sees her looking at the cricket game on TV and tells her it is West Indies vs. India. Millicent orders an enormous amount of food and finds it delicious.

Millicent finally seems to be allowing herself to let go of her layers of pretense and return to some version of her true identity. Part of this is giving into her own desire, even if that desire is as simple as eating Jamaican food.



Suddenly a news item comes on the TV screen with the headline: “JOSEY WALES FOUND BURNED TO DEATH IN PRISON CELL.” There is an image of Josey’s burnt body, which looks like it has “melted.” The man behind the counter turns up the volume. A person being interviewed says it took place on the same day as Benjy’s funeral, and that Copenhagen City is now “burning down.” Millicent runs out of the restaurant and vomits onto the sidewalk. Back at home, she watches TV for hours, in a daze. With shaking hands, she picks up the phone and makes a call. A woman on the other end says “Hello?” and Millicent says: “Kimmy?”

The novel ends on a decidedly ambiguous note, refusing to assert whether anything will really change or whether things will continue as normal. Josey Wales is dead, but Eubie—and surely some equivalent don in Jamaica—has risen to take his place. On the other hand, Millicent/Nina/Dorcas’s decision to call her sister represents a real change, even if it takes place only on a minor, personal scale. There is a small glimmer of hope in this moment, confined as it might be to Millicent’s living room.





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