

The Girl Who Smiled Beads



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CLEMANTINE WAMARIYA

Clemantine Wamariya was born in Kigali, Rwanda in 1988 to a Tutsi family. When she was six years old, the Rwandan Genocide broke out when the Hutu people attempted to exterminate the Tutsis. Wamariya was forced to flee Rwanda with her sister Claire. They migrated through seven African countries, staying with family and in refugee camps and suffering starvation, violence, and degradation. When Wamariya was 12, she and Claire immigrated to the United States. Wamariya stayed with a host family in Chicago, Illinois while she attended high school. During this time, she wrote an essay on Elie Wiesel's book [Night](#), which won an Oprah essay award. To recognize this achievement, Oprah welcomed Wamariya and Claire on the Oprah Winfrey Show and surprised them by reuniting them with their estranged family. Wamariya eventually went on to attend Hotchkiss School in Connecticut and went on to receive a BA in comparative literature from Yale University. Having become internationally famous after her appearance on Oprah, Wamariya went on to pursue a career as a public speaker and human rights activist. She gave a TED Talk titled "War and What Comes After" and spoke on the behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, of which she was appointed a board member by Barack Obama. After graduating Yale, Wamariya met Elizabeth Weil, and the two co-authored *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, publishing it in 2018. Wamariya currently lives in San Francisco. Wamariya's coauthor, Elizabeth Weil, also attended Yale University. After graduating, Weil moved to New York City and wrote for *The New York Times*. Along with the *Times*, she is also a frequent contributor to *Outside* and *Vogue* magazine. She wrote two nonfiction books, *No Cheating, No Dying* and *They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus*, before co-authoring *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* with Wamariya. She has received various awards for her travel writing, feature reporting, and coverage of LGBTQ issues. Her work has also been recognized for its excellence in writing about trauma. She and her husband have two daughters and live in San Francisco.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Girl Who Smiled Beads is set largely during the Rwandan Genocide, a horrific period of mass killing that lasted for 100 days between April 7 and July 15, 1994. The Rwandan Genocide, in which the Hutu-led government and various militias tried to exterminate the Tutsi minority ethnic group (as well as some Hutu and Twa people), deeply scarred Rwanda. Wamariya's memoir grapples with the short- and long-term

effects of such a horrific tragedy. The memoir gives a historical account of how Belgian colonizers brought eugenics to Rwanda and a firsthand account of how Rwandans struggled to achieve peace and reconcile with the neighbors who'd killed their families. Most significantly, Wamariya's memoir explores how refugees of the genocide struggled with their sense of belonging, not only while they were refugees but also for the rest of their lives. She describes the loss of belonging, cohesion, identity, and faith that the genocide and her experience as a refugee dealt her. The disrupted normalcy that Wamariya describes can be compared to that of survivors of other major historical traumas, such as the Holocaust.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Clemantine Wamariya's memoir chronicles her deeply traumatic experience as a refugee, a survivor of the Rwandan Genocide, and an immigrant to the United States. She was inspired to write this memoir by Elie Wiesel's [Night](#), a memoir of Wiesel's experience surviving the Holocaust. As a student at Yale University, Wamariya studied the works of W.G. Sebald, including *On the Natural History of Destruction* and *Austerlitz*, in which Sebald explores the Holocaust and the themes of trauma and history. The open-ended and non-linear structure of *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* was inspired by Sebald's idea that the past is recalled through instincts, habits, and triggers that come to a person at random. Wamariya also references Toni Morrison's writing throughout her memoir. Toni Morrison's novels, such as [Sula](#) and [The Bluest Eye](#), describe Black American people's experiences. In her memoir, Wamariya tries to understand her own experience as part of both the Black American and African communities. Lastly, [The Diary of Anne Frank](#) is another first-person account written during a violent and deeply traumatic event (the Holocaust).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Girl Who Smiled Beads
- **When Written:** 2018
- **Where Written:** San Francisco, California
- **When Published:** April 24, 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** Africa and the United States
- **Antagonist:** The Rwandan Genocide, Rob
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Serendipity. Although Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil are both Yale alumna, they only met by coincidence after they'd both graduated and were living in San Francisco. Wamariya told Weil of her experiences, and the two began writing a feature article about them. This article lengthened into *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*.

Curious Clemantine. When Clemantine was a girl in Kigali, Rwanda, her family nicknamed her *Cassette* because Clemantine asked lots of questions and repeated everything she heard.



PLOT SUMMARY

Alternating between Rwanda and the United States, Clemantine Wamariya's memoir traces her journey from being a refugee during the Rwandan Genocide to being an immigrant in the United States. The story opens with Clemantine and her sister Claire appearing on the Oprah Winfrey Show because Clemantine has won Oprah's essay contest on Elie Wiesel's book *Night*. Oprah surprises Clemantine and Claire by flying out their parents and siblings—whom they haven't seen in 12 years—from Rwanda to attend the show. Clemantine and Claire are happy to see them, but visiting with their estranged family is painfully awkward.

Back before the Rwandan Genocide, when Clemantine is six years old, she lives in Kigali, Rwanda. She plays in a mango tree with her older brother Pudi, helps her mother tend the flowers in her garden, and plies her father for sips of his beer. Clemantine's nanny Mukamana tells Clemantine stories, such as one about a girl who wandered the earth and smiled **beads**. Clemantine's life is normal until strange things start to happen: Mukamana disappears, grenades explode in neighbors' houses, and her parents speak in whispers. Clemantine's mother sends Clemantine and Claire to their grandmother's house where they hide until their grandmother tells them to flee.

Clemantine and Claire travel with a group of wounded refugees. They stay in abandoned schools and farmers' shacks and eventually in a refugee camp in Burundi. They live in the camp for a year, eating rock-hard corn and trying not to get sick. Clemantine feels that her identity is slipping away. A refugee aid worker, Rob, convinces Claire to marry him, and Clemantine and Claire go to Uvira, Zaire to live with his family. Rob's family is nice to Clemantine, and she starts to feel at home again. Claire gives birth to her and Rob's first child, Mariette. Soon, conflict starts to escalate in Uvira, so Clemantine, Claire, and Rob's family flee to Kazimia. From there, they flee with 50 others to Tanzania on a boat that nearly sinks before they make it.

From Tanzania, Clemantine and Claire move around, settling in various refugee camps in Mozambique and South Africa. One

night, after walking all day, Clemantine leaves her **Mickey Mouse backpack**—her prized possession—on a crowded bus, and Rob and Claire refuse to go back for it. Wherever they live, Clemantine takes care of Mariette while Claire makes money bartering with other refugees. Whenever Clemantine starts to feel comfortable, Claire decides to move on. When Claire gets pregnant again, Rob—who has started to abuse Claire—tells her to leave. Clemantine and Claire go back to Kazimia to stay with Rob's family. They cower in the house with nothing to eat while war breaks out around them. Claire gives birth to Freddy, and Clemantine nearly dies from malaria and malnutrition.

Claire, Clemantine, Mariette and Freddy then flee to Zambia. They stay on couches until Rob suddenly shows up, and the family then moves to Chibolya, a filthy slum in Lusaka. Claire sells goods in the Lusaka market while Clemantine takes care of the kids and tries to avoid being raped. Rob continues to beat Claire and have affairs. Finally, Claire seeks help with an organization that assists refugees in immigrating to the United States, and the family gets a flight to Chicago.

In Chicago, Clemantine, Claire, and Rob stay with the Beasleys until they move into a tiny apartment. The Beasleys help Clemantine enroll in a private school, and she goes to stay with the Thomases during the week to attend school. Clemantine is given everything she needs, but she feels out of place with normal teenagers. She and Claire get in contact with their parents through an uncle and find out that Pudi is sick. Shortly after, Pudi dies.

While in high school, Clemantine reads *Night* and wins the Oprah contest. She attends Hotchkiss School in Connecticut and then starts college at Yale University. Meanwhile, Claire arranges for her and Clemantine's parents to immigrate to the United States. Clemantine stays away from Claire's apartment because it is too painful to be around her estranged parents. She focuses on her classes, asserting her experiences boldly and contentiously in every class and assignment. At one point, she goes to Kenya on a summer trip to learn Swahili. To her frustration, people there treat her like a servant instead of an intelligent Yale student.

After she graduates from Yale, Clemantine moves to San Francisco with her boyfriend Ryan. She likes Ryan but is still too traumatized to be vulnerable with anyone. When she comes back from a trip to Rwanda, Ryan has moved out. After this, Clemantine travels around telling her story and giving human rights talks. She goes to Rwanda again with the Holocaust Memorial Museum and witnesses the season in Rwanda dedicated to grieving the Rwandan Genocide.

Clemantine still feels out of place wherever she goes. She feels like *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* from Mukamana's story but, just like that story, she feels that her life has no set plot. She wants to string together a coherent narrative of her life, but her identity always feels fragmented. Once, she lies soaking up the

sun in a friend's garden in Rwanda and feels peaceful and whole for the first time in her life.

Clemantine never stops yearning for a mother, and she plans a mother-daughter trip to Europe to give her and her mother a second chance to reconnect. While in Europe, she pampers her mother and tries to curate good experiences, but they are still distant. Clemantine wants to face the harsh truth of what happened in Rwanda, whereas her mother relies on religious faith to maintain a contented, optimistic outlook. Similarly, Claire believes in forgiving the atrocities of the genocide. When Clemantine's mother gets on her plane back to Chicago, Clemantine opens her notebook and starts writing her story.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Clemantine Wamariya – Clemantine Wamariya is the author and protagonist of *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*. Before the Rwandan Genocide breaks out, Clemantine has a happy childhood. She plays with her brother Pudi, imitates her sister Claire, and learns about the flowers in her mother's garden. When she is six and the genocide begins, Clemantine and Claire flee out the back door of their grandmother's house. They spend six years as refugees, migrating through seven African countries. Clemantine tries to hold onto her identity throughout everything, repeating her name to herself and making an effort to remember her own traits. She also tries to keep track of her past, collecting rocks from the places she passes through in a treasured **Mickie Mouse backpack**. When she loses this backpack on a crowded bus, she feels she's lost her life story. She pours herself into caring for Mariette, Claire's baby, centering herself with domestic duties and motherly pride. When Clemantine and Claire immigrate to the United States, Clemantine continues her obsession with piecing together a narrative of her life. Although she and Claire lose their bag of possessions on the flight to Chicago, Clemantine starts collecting *katunda*—"stuff." She attends high school and goes on to Yale University, but she never feels like she fits in completely. She feels that her identity is jumbled. However, she becomes adamant about sharing her experiences and confronting her trauma, no matter how shocking and painful. Unlike her mother and Claire, Clemantine can't comfort herself with forgiveness or religious faith. Clemantine feels permanently distant from her mother and also from Claire; she and Claire have had the same painful experiences, but their ways of processing them divide the sisters. Clemantine becomes a successful human rights speaker after she appears on the Oprah Winfrey Show, and she moves to San Francisco. However, she still yearns for a cohesive narrative of her life. She decides that she is like *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* in the story that her nanny Mukamana told her as a child—but, as with this story, she feels that her life still has no plot. Clemantine's

open-ended memoir shows how the disruption that refugees experience can make it difficult for them to give structure and meaning to their identities and lives.

Claire – Claire is Clemantine's older sister and is 14 when the book opens in Rwanda, before the Rwandan Genocide breaks out. As a teenager, Claire is confident and enterprising, and she dreams of going to college overseas in Canada. Clemantine follows Claire around, wanting to be like her, and Claire finds Clemantine's constant questions irritating. When they become refugees during the genocide, Clemantine depends on Claire to look after her, but she is also afraid of her. Claire won't answer any of Clemantine's questions, and many times Clemantine is afraid that Claire wants to leave her behind. Claire marries Rob, a refugee aid worker, to get her and Clemantine out of poverty, and they move to Zaire to live with his family. Claire and Rob have three kids together: Mariette, Freddy, and Michele. When they become refugees again, Claire barter with other refugees and townspeople to try and make money. Any time they start to settle in somewhere, Claire gets restless and wants to move on. She learns the language wherever she and Clemantine happen to be so she can greet everyone and get them to buy things from her. Rob abuses Claire, but she stays with him until they immigrate to the United States, where his treatment of her doesn't get any better. In the United States, Claire rents a tiny apartment and works multiple jobs as a hotel maid to support her family and her parents who eventually immigrate from Rwanda. Claire is generous and selfless, flying to Rwanda every New Year's Eve to cook dinner for orphans of the Rwandan Genocide. Although she and Clemantine share their experience as refugees, they have a complicated relationship even after they've reached safety. Claire believes that survivors of the genocide should forgive so they can find peace. Clemantine, on the other hand, believes that it is unreasonable to ask the survivors of the genocide to forgive, and she wants to confront her painful memories. Even though Clemantine feels she owes Claire her life, she continues to feel that Claire ignores her. And indeed, Claire eventually admits that she felt alone even while she and Clemantine were refugees together.

Rob – Rob is Claire's husband and Mariette, Freddy, and Michele's father. He's an aid worker at the refugee camp in Burundi where Clemantine and Claire first stay after leaving Rwanda. He is young, handsome and well-dressed. He takes a liking to Claire and starts following her around, asking her to marry him. Although Claire doesn't want to get married and have children at 16, she sees marrying Rob as a way out of poverty, and so she accepts his offer. After Claire marries Rob, she and Clemantine move to Zaire to live with his family. At first, Rob is a hard-working and devoted husband. But when the conflict escalates in Zaire and he becomes a refugee with Clemantine and Claire, he becomes surly and violent. He starts bossing Claire around and beating her. When he finds out Claire is pregnant with their second child, he sends her and

Clemantine back to Rwanda alone to find their parents. He reconnects with them later in South Africa, but he continues to beat Claire and openly have extramarital affairs. When Claire hears of the opportunity for the family to immigrate to the United States, she signs Rob up too, hoping he'll be better when times aren't so hard. However, Rob continues to mistreat Claire in the United States until she finally leaves him.

Pudi – Pudi is Clemantine and Claire's brother, older than Clemantine and younger than Claire. When they are kids in Rwanda, Clemantine and Pudi play together in the mango tree in the yard, pretending it is a jostling bus. When the war gets worse in Kigali, Pudi makes up stories that explain in a whimsical way why Clemantine has to hide indoors. Later, while she is a Rwandan Genocide refugee, Clemantine collects marbles in her **Mickey Mouse backpack** to give Pudi if she ever sees him again. However, as her homelessness drags on, Clemantine starts to forget what Pudi looks like. Later, when Clemantine and Claire have arrived in the United States and contacted their parents by phone, Clemantine and Claire hear that Pudi has meningitis. Clemantine wires money to send Pudi medicine, but he soon dies. Clemantine weeps, feeling that, although she's lost so many people, Pudi is the first person whose death she truly mourns.

Clemantine's Mother – Clemantine, Claire, and Pudi's mother is modest, religious, and regal-looking. In the backyard of their house in Kigali, Rwanda, Clemantine's mother has a big garden that is her pride and joy. She divides her time between going to church and tending to her garden. When Clemantine is six and the Rwandan Genocide begins, her mother sends her and Claire to their grandmother's house in Butare, and they don't see her again until their reunion on the Oprah Winfrey Show years later, when Clemantine is a teenager. After this, Claire brings her mother and father to the United States. Although she has fond memories of her mother, Clemantine and her mother are unable to connect when they are reunited. Clemantine plans a mother-daughter trip to Europe, but she is frustrated by her mother's stubborn religious faith. Clemantine feels that the horrors that separated her family are inexcusable, while her mother only thanks God for bringing the family back together. Despite their disagreement, Clemantine refers to many of her mother's teachings in her humanitarian philosophy. For instance, Clemantine's mother used to tell her and her siblings to share an orange instead of each picking their own. Clemantine wants people to follow this teaching in life—sharing instead of either giving or receiving.

Clemantine's Father – Clemantine, Claire, and Pudi's father is a big man with a broad smile. In Kigali, Rwanda, he started his own car service that grew into a large commercial car rental business. He works a lot, and Clemantine only sees him at night when she brings him his slippers and he lets her have a sip of his beer. After Clemantine and Claire are separated from him during the Rwandan Genocide, they don't see him again until he

appears on the Oprah Winfrey Show. Then, Claire flies back to Rwanda and brings her parents to the United States.

Clemantine's Grandmother – Clemantine's grandmother lives in Butare, Rwanda, in a small farmhouse in a field of sunflowers. When the conflict in Rwanda escalates, Clemantine's mother sends Clemantine and Claire to stay with their grandmother. Clemantine and Claire are only there a few days before their grandmother tells them to run out the back door of her house. From that point on, Clemantine and Claire are refugees, and they never see their grandmother again.

Mukamana – Mukamana is Clemantine's nanny when she is a young girl in Rwanda. Clemantine always asks Mukamana to tell her stories that explain how the world works. Often, Mukamana tells Clemantine the story of a magical girl who wandered the earth and smiled a trail of **beads**. She always let Clemantine choose the ending to this open-ended story. One day, Mukamana mysteriously disappears. When Clemantine asks her mother, her mother says Mukamana's disappearance was because of the conflict in Rwanda. Much later, Clemantine returns to Mukamana's story of the girl who smiled beads to make sense of her own life.

Mariette – Mariette is Claire and Rob's first child and Freddy and Michele's sister. She is born at Rob's family's house in Uvira, Zaire, but Clemantine and Claire become refugees again shortly after her birth. While Claire spends her time trying to make money however she can, Clemantine cares for Mariette. Clemantine adores Mariette and is extremely protective of her. Caring for Mariette gives Clemantine a sense of purpose. Mariette is almost four by the time Clemantine and Claire immigrate to the United States.

Mama Nepele – Mama Nepele is Rob's mother. She lives with Mama Dina and the rest of Rob's family in Uvira, Zaire. She is gentle and attentive, always making sure that Clemantine has what she needs. She joins Clemantine and Claire in Kazimia when they leave Uvira. When Clemantine gets very sick in Kazimia, Mama Nepele carries her on her back to the hospital and reads the Bible to her until she is better.

Mrs. Thomas – Mrs. Thomas is the woman with whom Clemantine stays during the week to attend a nice school in the United States. Mrs. Thomas has a beautiful suburban house. Clemantine calls Mrs. Thomas her American mother. Mrs. Thomas encourages Clemantine to write the essay that wins Oprah's essay contest and helps her get into Yale. Mrs. Thomas gives Clemantine many objects – a heart-shaped locket, a collection of **beads** – that make Clemantine feel loved and at home.

Ryan – Ryan is Clemantine's boyfriend whom she lives with in San Francisco after she graduates from Yale. Although Clemantine depends on Ryan, she pushes him away because she still feels traumatized by her past and doesn't believe in marriage. When Clemantine returns from one of her trips to

Rwanda, Ryan has moved out of their apartment, making Clemantine's worst fear—abandonment—come true.

Oprah Winfrey –Oprah Winfrey is a talk show host and philanthropist. She was the host of the Oprah Winfrey Show, a daytime talk show in which she covered popular culture, world events, and self-help. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* opens with Clemantine and Claire appearing on the second episode of a two-segment Oprah special. In the first episode, Oprah had toured Auschwitz with the writer and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. She then hosted an essay contest for essays written about Elie Wiesel's book [Night](#) and greets the winners in the second episode. Clemantine Wamariya wins this essay contest and appears on the Oprah Winfrey Show in Chicago with Claire. Oprah questions Clemantine and Claire about their experience as refugees and genocide survivors and then surprises them with the news that she's brought their parents from Rwanda to be on the show. In this way, Oprah orchestrates Claire and Clemantine's first reunion with their estranged family.

Elie Wiesel –Elie Wiesel is a Holocaust survivor and the author of [Night](#), a memoir about his experience in Auschwitz. When she is in high school in the United States, Clemantine reads [Night](#) and identifies with the alienation and distrustfulness that Wiesel developed as a result of being a refugee and genocide survivor. Clemantine writes an essay connecting her and Wiesel's experience and it wins an Oprah essay contest. Clemantine and Claire then appear on the Oprah Winfrey Show, where Elie Wiesel is a guest.

Susan – Susan is a popular girl at Clemantine's school in the United States. Susan bullies a girl from Eastern Europe and doesn't invite her to her pool party. Clemantine corners Susan in the bathroom and threatens to make Susan pay if she continues to be mean to the girl from Eastern Europe.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Pascazia –Pascazia is Clemantine's second nanny in Rwanda. She joins the family after Clemantine's first nanny, Mukamana, mysteriously disappears. Pascazia upsets Clemantine's mother one day by walking Clemantine home from kindergarten past a group of people celebrating someone being stoned. Shortly after this incident, Pascazia disappears too.

Mucyechuru –Mucyechuru ("grandmother") is a woman Clemantine meets in a refugee camp in Burundi. She tells Clemantine stories and teaches her how to forage for food.

Musaza –Musaza ("grandfather") is Mucyechuru's husband. He tells Clemantine stories and teaches her to forage. Mucyechuru and Musaza make Clemantine feel protected and cared for.

Mama Dina –Mama Dina is Rob's aunt. She lives in Uvira, Zaire. She is decisive and commanding and talks to God very casually in her prayers. As the conflict escalates and the family is displaced from Uvira, Mama Dina's prayers become more

direct and casual.

Mwasiti –Mwasiti is Rob's cousin. Mwasiti lives in Uvira, Zaire on Lake Tanganyika where Clemantine and Claire stay after Claire marries Rob.

Dina –Dina is Rob's cousin. Dina lives in Uvira with Mama Nepele, Mama Dina, and Mwasiti.

The Beasleys –The Beasleys are the family with whom Claire, Clemantine and Rob first stay when they immigrate to the United States. The Beasleys provide them with lots of resources and eventually enroll Clemantine in a better school, arranging for her to stay with Mrs. Thomas during the week.

Mr. Thomas –Mr. Thomas is a lawyer and Mrs. Thomas's husband. He takes Clemantine to the Secretary of State office so she can finally get official identification as a United States citizen.

Freddy –Freddy is Claire and Rob's third child and Mariette and Michele's brother. He's born while Claire is a refugee in Africa.

Michele –Michele is Claire and Rob's third child and Mariette and Freddy's sister. She's born in the United States.

The Beckers –The Beckers are the couple who greet Clemantine, Claire, Rob, Mariette and Freddy when they land in Chicago.

Sarah – Sarah is the Beasley's daughter. Sarah is nice to Clemantine, but Clemantine doesn't understand Sarah's teenage behavior.

Caulay –Caulay is Mrs. Thomas's teenage daughter.

Mrs. Kline – Mrs. Kline is a friend of Mrs. Thomas's who takes Clemantine shopping for clothes. She buys Clemantine her eighth-grade graduation dress and makes Clemantine realize that she needs to learn to love her body.

Linda –Linda is a white woman whom Clemantine and Claire meet at church in South Africa. Linda gives them food and clothes and enrolls Clemantine in school. Clemantine wants Linda to be her mother.

Luisa – Luisa is Clemantine's one friend at Yale.

Rhoda – Rhoda is Clemantine's friend and the daughter of the landlady of Chibolya, the slum in Zambia where Clemantine, Claire, Rob, Mariette and Freddy live for a while. Although Rhoda lives in a slum, her mother makes sure she believes her life is perfect.

Zach –Zach is Clemantine's boyfriend while she is a student at Yale. Zach is a Black American from Atlanta, Georgia. He goes with Clemantine on her class trip to Kenya to study Swahili.

Carol Jacobs –Carol Jacobs is one of Clemantine's professors at Yale who teaches a class on the W. G. Sebald, an author and historian. Sebald's works teach Clemantine to retrieve her past by trusting her jumbled instincts, memories, and habits to reveal it to her.

Uncle –Uncle is Clemantine’s close friend in Rwanda with whom she stays when she visits as an adult. Uncle has a beautiful house and garden where Clemantine feels as peace for the first time in her life.

Vicki –Vicki is Claire’s childhood friend in Rwanda. When Clemantine visits Rwanda after immigrating to the United States, she and Vicki watch the sunset over Kigali.

TERMS

The Rwandan Genocide – The Rwandan Genocide, which took place during the Rwandan Civil War in 1994, was the mass killing of members of the Tutsi minority ethnic group (as well as some Hutu and Twa people) in Rwanda. The Hutu-led Rwandan government and various armed militias carried out the genocide. It’s estimated that over 1 million people were killed in the Rwandan Genocide.



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.



TRAUMA AND FAITH

Set largely during the Rwandan Genocide, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* depicts a trauma that tragically altered the way people conceive of the world.

Clemantine is six years old when the Rwanda Genocide breaks out and she suddenly becomes a refugee. At such a young age, the horrors she witnesses—hunger, degrading comments, bombs exploding, dead bodies floating in a river—seem to her like illogical, evil acts that she can’t wrap her head around. When Clemantine later learns the complete history of the Rwanda Genocide from a textbook, it is no more logical than was her experience of it as a young girl. She cannot comprehend the idea that a group of human beings could kill another group of human beings—it is categorically wrong. The Rwanda Genocide—both her firsthand experience and secondhand knowledge of it—ruins Clemantine’s faith. Not only does she no longer believe in God as she once did, but she can barely find cause to view the world as a kind, just, and peaceful place. In this way, the memoir shows how trauma can fundamentally change people’s beliefs and worldviews, even long after the traumatic event occurred.

Although some survivors of the genocide maintain their faith in various ways, these outlooks now seem naïve and irrational to Clemantine. For instance, when she visits Rwanda after the genocide has ended, she is appalled that, to achieve peace,

Rwandan citizens are uniting with the very neighbors who killed and raped their families as if nothing happened. Along these lines, Clemantine’s sister Claire maintains that people should forgive the crimes of the genocide aggressors so as to achieve their own personal peace. Clemantine strongly disagrees, believing that it is impossible to ask people to forgive when they’ve experienced such fundamental wrongs. Similarly, Clemantine opposes her mother’s stubborn religious outlook that refuses to question why such bad things happened in a good world. In this way, the Rwandan Genocide disrupts Clemantine’s conceptions of the world so radically that her ability to forgive and her faith in the world are permanently compromised.



NARRATIVE, MEMORY, AND FRAGMENTATION

As a refugee of the Rwandan Genocide, Clemantine Wamariya—the author of *The Girl Who Smiled*

Beads—longs for a coherent narrative of her own life. When she’s forced to suddenly leave her home in Rwanda and spend the next six years as a refugee, her life ceases to follow a linear path. She tries to combat the loss of time, place, and memories by collecting keepsakes: rocks from each place she and her sister Claire pass through, her favorite articles of clothing, and presents for her brother Pudi. Clemantine keeps these objects in a **Mickey Mouse backpack**—her one possession—until she disastrously leaves it on a crowded bus. For Clemantine, the loss of this backpack is the loss of her life story. Much later, when she has immigrated to the United States, she continues to collect objects, which she calls her *katunda*, or “stuff.” From these objects—pictures, ticket stubs, gifts—she hopes she can one day piece together an all-encompassing and logical narrative of her life.

As inspiration, Clemantine returns to a story her nanny Mukamana used to tell her about a girl who wanders the earth and smiles a trail of **beads**. When Mukamana told this story, she allowed Clemantine to choose the plot. In the present, Clemantine feels that *she* is the girl who smiles beads: her life, although fragmented, is beautiful. However, despite this justification, Clemantine continues to yearn for a plot and an ending to her story, craving some sort of lens that will unify or—to a certain extent—make sense of everything that has happened to her. In this way, the memoir itself is the product of Wamariya’s attempt to recount her fragmented story. Alternating back and forth between her experience in 1990s Rwanda and her experience in the present-day United States, the book tells a jumbled, wide-reaching story of the refugee experience. Though it remains unclear whether or not writing the memoir gives Wamariya the closure she seeks, the very *lack* of a conclusive ending illustrates just how hard it is to create a coherent narrative out of deeply traumatic experiences.

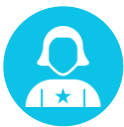


DISPLACEMENT AND IDENTITY

Throughout *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, Rwandan Genocide survivor and former refugee Clemantine Wamariya struggles to hold onto her identity.

When Clemantine first flees her home in Rwanda and lives in various refugee camps in other African countries, she is preoccupied with remembering the bits of information that define her, like that she covets her sister Claire's bathrobe and that she often plays in a specific mango tree with her brother Pudi. Most significantly, she repeats her name to herself and other refugees even though no one listens to her. As she grows up, though, she loses parts of her past: her baby teeth fall out, her shoes from Rwanda no longer fit, and she can barely remember what Pudi looks like. She also loses her sense of identity as she learns how to survive as a refugee. As a means of survival, she learns to become whatever people want her to be in a given situation, realizing that this is the best way to make sure people give her what she needs.

This survival technique carries over when she immigrates to the United States six years after fleeing Rwanda. In the United States, she studies how to fit into her suburban host's family, and she goes through the motions of getting into Yale. By throwing herself into this new American life, though, she feels lost and out of place, as if her identity has been divided into disparate parts. Because her identity at the beginning of her life was so tied to domestic details like her sister's bathrobe and the mango tree that she and Pudi used to play in, the further she gets from these memories, the further she feels from her original sense of self. The displacement she has undergone as a refugee therefore not only impacts her sense of belonging in the world but also refigures how she conceives of her own identity. In turn, it becomes clear that the forced displacement inherent to the refugee experience does a lot more than simply make people feel estranged from their homes—it can also undermine and complicate their sense of self for the rest of their lives.



WOMEN, WAR, AND SURVIVAL

The Girl Who Smiled Beads is a story about war, but it specifically focuses on what it's like to experience and escape such violent trauma as a woman. From

the moment that Clemantine and her older sister Claire flee Rwanda, they are alone as refugees for six years. Both women learn to survive starvation, homelessness, and degradation. Claire makes money however she can, dressing well and learning the local language so she can barter with other refugees and in city markets. Clemantine, on the other hand, survives in a different way: she is concerned with dignity, keeping herself and Claire's kids, Mariette and Freddy, neat and clean so they can walk around proudly. In their different ways, both women survive harsh circumstances and maintain a sense of self.

However, much later, when she has immigrated to the United States, Clemantine reflects on the unique devastation that war brings to women: while men endure death at the hands of war, women endure the long-term effects of rape, whether literal or figurative. Clemantine explains that, for women, the Rwandan Genocide was “men...seeking to destroy [their] bod[ies] and demolish [their] future[s].” Although Clemantine survived death, she struggles to find her body beautiful again after years of degrading treatment and neglect. She believes that “silence accommodates hate” and is therefore intent on expressing her pain in order to overcome it. On the other hand, Claire focuses on moving past her trauma once she is in the United States. Similarly, Clemantine and Claire's estranged mother—who later joins them in the United States—takes refuge in religion to ease the pain of what she's experienced. Consequently, the solidarity between Clemantine, Claire, and their mother is undermined by the horrors they've faced and the tactics they've used to survive them. Although they share the experience, they never talk about it with one another. This shows that war uniquely disempowers women by causing them to draw on remarkable strengths to survive—strengths that, in turn, painfully alienate them from one another.



CHARITY VS. SHARING

Throughout *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, Clemantine Wamariya critiques society's charity toward refugees and survivors. When Clemantine arrives

in the United States after years of being a refugee in war-torn Africa, she is appalled by the extent to which most American families live in excess. While gawking at her host family's well-stocked fridge, she wonders how it is possible that one part of the world has so little while another part has so much. As she settles into American society, people with resources are eager to help her as a refugee and war survivor with less than them. However, Clemantine observes that their desire to give her resources is mostly selfish, and that their charity creates a hierarchy between the fortunate and the less fortunate: people who give charity often think of themselves as superior to the people in need. Moreover, charitable people, whether consciously or unconsciously, often expect some kind of repayment or debt of gratitude from the people they've helped.

Even as Clemantine becomes a famous humanitarian and achieves an affluent lifestyle (flying on private jets and staying in fancy hotels), she maintains her belief that no one, no matter how much or little they have, is any better or worse off than anyone else. As she tells her story to the public, she tires of people imposing their lifestyle on her through their charity instead of seeing that they, too, can learn from her story. This leads Clemantine to develop a philosophy of sharing in which everyone has something—whether it is resources or perspective—that the other needs. In her philosophy, collaboration is the only way to truly rectify a refugee's

shattered life. Sharing will create a society in which people who have less are no longer viewed as inferior. In describing her experience as a former refugee and Rwandan immigrant, Clemantine Wamariya thus calls on readers to share with the people around them and, in doing so, create a more equal society.



SYMBOLS

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



BEADS

Throughout *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, beads symbolize the fragmented personal narrative and sense of self that is unique to the refugee experience. When Clemantine Wamariya is a girl in Rwanda, her nanny Mukamana tells her a story about a magical girl who wandered the earth and smiled a trail of beads. In the story, no one ever sees the girl—her presence is only known by the trail of beads she leaves behind. As Clemantine grows up and becomes a refugee of the Rwandan Genocide, traveling through six African countries and eventually immigrating to the United States, she uses this story to give meaning to her life. She feels that although places, memories and her sense of self lie in fragments, these pieces are beautiful like a trail of beads.

Clemantine wants to string together the narrative of her life as one would string together beads, so she starts collecting odds and ends that represent memories or places she has been. She hopes to one day line these pieces up in a coherent order. Later on, Clemantine literally strings together something beautiful from jumbled pieces by making bracelets from a collection of beads that her American host family gives her. Throughout the memoir, beads represent Clemantine's fragmented life. However, in calling these fragments of her life beads, Clemantine asserts that her life is nonetheless beautiful. Therefore, beads also represent her desire to appreciate her life for what it is and string her story together into a coherent narrative.



MICKY MOUSE BACKPACK

Clemantine's Mickey Mouse backpack—and specifically the loss of it—represents her sense of unbelonging as a refugee. Rob's family in Uvira, Zaire initially gives her the backpack. While living with the family in Zaire, Clemantine felt special and loved for the first time since leaving her parents and her childhood home in Rwanda during the Rwandan Genocide. When Clemantine and Claire leave Uvira and become refugees again, Clemantine holds onto the Mickey Mouse backpack as her most valued possession. She fills it with

rocks from every place she and Claire pass through, trying to hold onto landmarks that will cement and memorialize her transitory life. She also collects marbles for her brother Pudi in the backpack, wanting to have something to give him when she gets home.

When Clemantine accidentally leaves her Mickey Mouse backpack on a crowded bus, she is devastated. The loss of the backpack symbolizes the loss of her life story, since it contained everything that captured her fractured life since becoming a refugee. Clemantine starts to lose hope that she'll ever belong anywhere, or that she'll ever get back home. The tragic loss of the backpack is repeated when Claire and Clemantine arrive in the United States, and the airline loses their bag. The loss of this bag—which held the few items they had painstakingly collected before leaving Africa—is once again the loss of the past. Throughout the novel, the loss of possessions—particularly the loss of the Mickey Mouse backpack—represents the refugee experience. The loss of the backpack is the loss of childhood, home, continuity, and possession—everything that makes a person feel they belong.



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Crown edition of *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* published in 2018.

Prologue Quotes

☹️ Often, still, my own life story feels fragmented, like beads unstrung. Each time I scoop up my memories, the assortment is slightly different. I worry, at times, that I'll always be lost inside. I worry that I'll be forever confused.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Oprah Winfrey

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in the Prologue, when Clemantine describes the time she and Claire appeared on the Oprah show. In this quote, Clemantine explains how her life story lacks sequence and cohesion, like “beads unstrung.” This phrase suggests that Clemantine feels like her life story was once cohesive and sequential—like strung beads—but now feels as if everything has been disordered and “unstrung.”


She once felt that all the fragments of her identity and all her memories were contained in one object, like the beads that are part of a beaded bracelet. Now however, she feels that the bracelet has been undone and that her memories are scattered everywhere, part of no whole.


In the second sentence of this quote, Clemantine explains that when she reminisces, she has to “scoop” up her memories. This brings to mind the image a person dipping their hand into a big vat of odds and ends and pulling out a random handful. This kind of reminiscing means that Clemantine’s life story is always missing parts, and that it is never the same each time she tells it. It is a very different kind of reminiscing that Clemantine longs for: she longs to reminisce along a linear timeline of memories as if they are written out in chronological order in a book. She explains that, because she can’t reminisce this way, she always feels lost and confused. Without a linear order, her life story is jumbled, making it hard for her to fully know where her past is leading her.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞☞ My life does not feel logical, sequential, or inevitable. There’s no sense of action, reaction; no consequence, repercussion; no plot. It’s just fragments, floating.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Claire

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Clemantine describes how she felt when she and Claire first arrived in the United States. She explains that her life does not feel “logical, sequential, or inevitable.” Firstly, she feels that her life lacks logic—that it doesn’t make sense. Logic suggests that there are certain rules and formulas that govern life and that make it somewhat understandable. Furthermore, a “sequential” life is one that flows from one point to the next, with everything done in the right order. For instance, people with such a life would mature gradually through the various stages of development. They would feel the right consequences follow after a certain amount of directed effort. What’s more, if a person’s life is logical and sequential, it is also inevitable: it follows certain patterns such that it is

somewhat predictable.

Instead of having her life ordered in these ways, though, Clemantine feels like her life is “fragments, floating.” She doesn’t experience the rule of action and reaction, she doesn’t feel the natural consequences of her actions, and her life has no plot. Logic, sequence, and inevitability are all ways of understanding the passage of time. Clemantine feels as though she’s floating—as though she exists outside of normal time frameworks. Her initial displacement from her childhood caused a rupture that permanently affected the way she moves through life and gets older.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞☞ I thought if I stated my name enough times, my identity would fall back into place [...] But a name is a cover, a placeholder, not the whole story. A name is a basin with a leak that you need to constantly fill up. If you don’t, it drains and it’s just there, a husk, dry and empty.

I lost myself anyway. Every little thing. I had always loved the fancy soaps at my aunts’ houses. I loved the ones that smelled like geranium and lilac best of all.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Claire

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Claire and Clemantine have settled in their first refugee camp in Burundi and Clemantine fears that she’s losing her identity. Clemantine explains that she initially thought remembering her name would save her identity. When people asks themselves what defines them, they likely think of their name first—the unique thing that singles them out from others. However, Clemantine explains that names aren’t necessarily what define people, but all the things about their character that their name merely holds in one place. The name is like a vessel that gathers all the details that constitute a person’s identity.


This quote illustrates that holding onto one’s identity when one is away from their home and family is extremely challenging. Since a person’s name is a “basin with a leak,” it requires constant, tireless filling up. If one doesn’t want to lose their identity through trying times, they must at all times be gathering the memories that define who they are to fill the “basin” of their name. If they forget any of the memories for even a moment, the basin won’t be full.

The second part of this quote shows that truly resonate with Clemantine—the things that have stayed with her for so long—are related to home and domesticity: she loves the nice smelling soaps at her aunt’s house, for example. But she loses touch with all of these details because of how incompatible they are with her current living situation. This is a way in which the basin of a person’s name is leaky: unless they are currently around the things that define them, these identifiers slip away, become memories, and the basin slowly empties.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ I needed to see the world in front of me clearly so I could perform my part well. I needed to crack the code. So many times, in my former life, I’d had to become someone else in order to stay out of a refugee camp or out of jail, to stay alive. I had played a mother. I had played a yes ma’am younger sister. I had made myself a nobody, invisible. Now I had to become this strange creature: an American teenager.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Clemantine retells her early experiences in the United States after she starts attending high school. Clemantine describes the skill she learned as a refugee of playing the part of whatever character she needed to be in a given moment. From this explanation, it is clear that, while a refugee and even after, Clemantine never feels like she’s playing *herself*. When she “played” a mother or a “yes ma’am younger sister,” she didn’t feel that these were expressions of herself but rather roles that concealed what she really was. At one point, she even played the role of a “nobody,” making herself invisible. This suggests that, for years and perhaps permanently, Clemantine’s character was a creation and not a self-expression.

In the beginning of this quote, Clemantine explains that this strategy of acting out different roles required her shrewd observation of the world around her. She studied her surroundings like a code she needed to crack. This is a significant observation that Clemantine makes about herself: she realizes here that she’s always studied the outside world in order to determine how to belong in it. While she was a refugee, the world was a scary, confusing place—a code. She will realize later that she’s never felt safe

enough to examine herself and consider how the world can serve *her*. This strategy of character-acting eventually fails Clemantine, and she sets out on the difficult and painful journey of expressing who she really is.

☝ I work every day now to erase [the] language of ruin, to destroy it and replace it with language of my own. With *konona* (rape, ruin), you’re told, there is no antidote, no cleansing agent. [...] You’re polluted, you’re worthless—that’s it. My body is destroyed and my body is sacred. I will not live in that story of ruin and shame.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Kline

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Mrs. Thomas’s friend Mrs. Kline takes Clemantine shopping for an 8th-grade graduation dress. Clemantine realizes that she has a difficult time loving herself and her body. Clemantine explains that in Rwanda, *konona*—which means “rape” in Kinyarwanda—damages a woman permanently. In this culture, rape puts a woman in a state that is described with very ominous language: a state of ruination, pollution, and worthlessness. This quote points out that, in Rwanda, the word for rape is synonymous with the damaged state that it brings on a woman. *Konona* thus connotes both the act of rape *and* the evil that it brings. In other words, the word combines the horrible action that is done to a woman against her will *and* the state that befalls her afterwards, as if it is logical that a woman is punished for her entire life for a violent transgression against her that was not her fault.

Clemantine wants to rewrite this language that lumps the violent action of an aggressor in with the ruination of the victim. She wants a language in which words like sacred and destroyed can describe the same thing. In some ways, it seems that, by saying this, Clemantine asserts that she wants a more ambiguous, vague language. However, she sees that a new language like this is necessary in a world in which so much violence and destruction exists. Though she wasn’t technically raped, she was damaged against her will in the Rwandan Genocide, and if she adhered to the black and white language of *konona*, she would have to accept that, at no fault of her own, she now has no antidote to cure her. Clemantine wants to transform language so as to do

away with victim shaming, point blame where blame is due, and allow for resurrection.


seems to suggest that refugees are the true victims of war because, while the fighters can choose to cease fighting, refugees have no agency in their lives whatsoever.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ That's life in a refugee camp: You're not moving toward anything. You're just in a horrible groove. You learn skills that you wish you did not know: how to make a fire, how to cook maize, how to do laundry in the river and burn the lice on rocks. You wait, [...]

But nothing gets better. There is no path for improvement—no effort you can make, nothing you can do, and nothing anybody else can do either, short of the killers in your country laying down their arms and stopping their war so that you can move home.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Claire, Rob

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 73-4



Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs just before Claire consents to marry Rob. Clemantine describes how life in a refugee camp drives a person to do whatever it takes to get out. In this quote, Clemantine explains how a person's sense of time gets warped when they are in a refugee camp. Because there's nothing to move towards, the refugee gets stuck in a groove in which it feels as though time isn't moving at all. In other words, without the momentum caused by working towards goals and a future, the refugee is confined to a narrow space in which time moves but nothing changes. Clemantine also explains that the skills a refugee learns—cooking corn and keeping lice off their clothes—confine them further in this groove. These are inhumane tasks that no person would wish to perform. Since the refugee isn't engaging in tasks that direct them towards the future they want, they are confined in a way of life that has no momentum and no joy. The refugee is required to live a surreal, inhumane, and stagnant life, far removed from the life they want.

In the second part of this passage, Clemantine explains that life in a refugee camp is made worse by the fact that the refugee is the victim of external circumstances. The refugee feels particularly hopeless because there is no path for improvement. This suggests that people feel fulfilled when they can actively change their own lives and that they feel utterly powerless and stagnant when they can't. This quote

☞ I now felt I'd made a mistake in Uvira. I'd let my guard down. I'd allowed myself to feel I belonged. But there was no real belonging—not anymore. There was only coming and going and coming and going and dying. There was no point in letting anybody get close.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Claire, Rob

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

When conflict in Zaire has escalated, Clemantine, Claire, and Rob are forced to evacuate Uvira. Clemantine explains that, after being torn away from Uvira, where she'd started to feel at home, she determined never to allow herself to feel at home or get close to people again. In this quote, Clemantine contrasts the state of belonging with a state of coming, going, and dying. A state of belonging is a state of being in place, stable, and at rest. It is also a state in which people have a spot they fit into, and someone or something that owns and protects them. In contrast to this state of belonging, the state of coming, going, and dying is a state of restlessness and decay. These two states are two different conceptions of the meaning of human life. To believe that people only come, go, and die is to believe that life has no meaning and that human beings are just wanderers who rest nowhere and eventually pass away. The belief that belonging is possible is the belief that human beings have a purpose—that they belong—even in a world that contains so much meaningless and dying away.

In the first part of this quote, Clemantine says that she made a mistake in Uvira. By this she means that it was a mistake to believe that human beings can belong. She blames herself and not the war for this mistake: she should have been smart enough to realize that the feeling of belonging she felt in Uvira was temporary and only an illusion. In this way, the war affects the way Clemantine conceives of the world, causing her to believe that coming, going, and dying is the law that governs the world.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ I resent and revile [the word *genocide*]. The word is tidy and efficient. It holds no true emotion. It is impersonal when it needs to be intimate, cool and sterile when it needs to be gruesome. The word is hollow, true but disingenuous, a performance, the worst kind of lie.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 93


Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Clemantine's high school teacher puts the word "genocide" on a vocabulary list. In this quote, Clemantine expresses her frustration that the word genocide is far too small to contain everything that it claims to mean. She feels that the word genocide is "tidy and efficient"—that it is too succinct and easy to convey the true extent and horror of what the horror it describes. She would prefer the word to be intimate instead of impersonal, since the word itself can't possibly capture each individual's experience with genocide. She also wants the word to be gruesome, perhaps wanting it to sound harsh to the ear and look explosive upon the page. All in all, she feels that the word genocide holds no true emotion as only a noun and a signifier.

Clemantine resents and reviles the word genocide because it reveals how limited language is. She discovers that language is incapable of capturing experience. Because language is one of the only ways people can share their experiences, Clemantine feels that the word genocide simply perpetuates "the worst kind of lie"—a simplification of a deep, personal, and complicated tragedy. It is a huge umbrella term that claims to contain but really ignores a mountain of experience underneath it.

☝ I wanted to piece [the] world back together, but the idea of one group of people killing another group of people—people they lived with, people they knew—that chunk of knowledge could never fit itself in my mind. It was categorically, dimensionally, fundamentally wrong. It was like trying to store a tornado in a chest of drawers. That was not how the universe worked.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Clemantine studies the history of the Rwandan Genocide in high school in the United States. Although she lived through the Rwandan Genocide, this is the first time she has read the textbook version of its history. In this quote, Clemantine explains how the history of the Rwandan Genocide posed a problem in her conception of the world. Trying to make sense of her new chunk of knowledge—that the Hutus killed the Tutsis, their very own neighbors—is like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole; or, as she explains, like trying to stuff a tornado in a chest of drawers. Her conception of the world does not accommodate this new, gruesome piece of knowledge. The new knowledge disagrees with her universe "categorically, dimensionally, or fundamentally." In other words, this new chunk of knowledge doesn't agree with her world's fundamental principles of existence. Throughout her memoir, she tries to regain the sense of *logic* in her life story. Unfortunately, the fact that something categorically wrong undeniably happened makes the world seem absurd and incomprehensible to her.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ To be a refugee was to be a victim—it was tautological. And not just a victim due to external forces like politics or war. You were a victim due to some inherent, irrevocable weakness in you. You were a victim because you were less worthy, less good, and less strong than all the non-victims of the world.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Claire

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs shortly after Clemantine and Claire settle in another refugee camp after leaving Uvira, and Clemantine reflects on how refugees are treated by the camp workers. In this quote, Clemantine points out that the refugees in Africa during this time are in fact only victims because of external forces—the Rwandan Genocide in Rwanda and violence sweeping over other large regions. Therefore, the lifestyle of the refugees that resembles a life of the worst poverty is not their fault but rather a life they are forced into against their will. However, this quote goes on to explain that the refugee camp workers try to make



sense of this situation by claiming that the refugees are refugees because of who they are as people. They insist on believing that refugees are victims for a reason. Their own power and the refugees' predicament make more sense to them when they believe that the refugees are naturally weaker and less worthy. In this way, the refugee workers can justify their position of power over the refugees, exalting themselves as a group of non-victims who will never experience such misfortune.

This hierarchy that the refugee camp workers maintain perpetuates the kind of thinking that initially drove the refugees from their homes. The belief that the world is naturally divided into groups—like victims and non-victims, the worthy and the unworthy—is the logic behind the science of eugenics, which effectively laid the groundwork for the Rwandan Genocide.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ It felt surreal and awful. I'd lost track of who I was and who we were to each other. None of us were the same people who'd lived together in that house in Kigali. Those people had died. We had all died.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Clemantine's Mother, Clemantine's Father, Pudi, Claire

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs shortly after Clemantine and Claire discover that their family is alive in Rwanda and call them on the phone. In this quote, Clemantine describes her painful realization that the people whose voices she hears on the phone are practically strangers. To illustrate this, the quote makes an acute separation between Clemantine's family in the past and Clemantine's family in the present. Although Clemantine and Claire miraculously survived the Rwandan Genocide and are amazed to discover that their family also survived, Clemantine now realizes that a different kind of death occurred to them all. Their old selves and what they meant to each other have passed away, leaving them all strangers to each other. Clemantine describes the phone conversation as "surreal." It is eerie to acknowledge her own and her family's strange death—to realize that, although they escaped their killers, they died at the hands of time and separation.


This quote also points out the moment—the phone

call—when the death Clemantine describes became real. Before the phone conversation, Clemantine could pretend she was still the person she used to be and that her family members were still the way they were in her memory. However, the phone call reveals that these people are only memories—ghosts. While separated, Clemantine and her family could live frozen in their past of togetherness, but now that they've reunited, their old selves die before each other's eyes. Therefore, this quote reveals that reuniting with an estranged family can be just as devastating as being torn from them in the first place.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ I understand that forgiveness is utilitarian, that it is likely even the missing piece in my life, the keystone that will allow me to balance and stabilize and keep the bricks of my life from tumbling down. But I can't do it. To me it feels false.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Claire

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs long after Claire and Clemantine have immigrated to the United States, and they sit in a park in San Francisco and argue about forgiveness. In this quote, Clemantine explains her attitude towards forgiveness and asserts her priorities when it comes to confronting her past. Clemantine sees forgiveness as a kind of stabilizer, a piece that would cohere all the other scattered bricks of her life. Many times before, Clemantine has described her life and memories as an assortment of fragments that she wishes she could arrange into a sequential, cohesive whole. In this quote, she describes forgiveness as the action that would accomplish this goal.

However, Clemantine also explains that she can't consent to forgiveness. She describes it as utilitarian—something that is useful to accomplish something else. Implied in this is the suggestion that forgiveness is not inherently useful or valuable. At the end of this quote, Clemantine asserts that she thinks forgiveness is fake—a disingenuous action. Generally, forgiveness allows people to forget the pain they've endured, do away with their anger and resentment towards their aggressors, and move forward with their life. In all these results, forgiveness has absolved the victims suffering, but hasn't absolved the problem of the actual wrongs that were done to them. This is why Clemantine


thinks that forgiveness is fake—it is a means to an end that chooses to ignore the painful truth. Forgiveness pretends that what happened wasn't unforgivable. In this way, Clemantine declares her priorities when it comes to working through her past: she wants the truth and is unwilling to sacrifice the truth even for the peace it might bring her.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☛☛ Boxing ourselves into tiny cubbies based on class, race, ethnicity, religion—anything, really—comes from a poverty of mind, a poverty of imagination. The world is dull and cruel when we isolate ourselves.

Survival, true survival of the body and soul, requires creativity, freedom of thought, collaboration. You might have time and I might have land. You might have ideas and I might have strength. You might have a tomato and I might have a knife. We need each other.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Clemantine immigrates to the United States and critiques the attitude of charity that most people have towards her. In this quote, Clemantine proposes another method of world healing that is based on collaboration and equality. In the first paragraph of this quote, Clemantine describes a world in which everyone lives in cubicles boxed apart from each other. In this system, collaboration is impossible because everyone believes that their way of life is right and another's wrong. In Clemantine's opinion, this way of thinking is unintelligent and unimaginative; when people box themselves into a narrow space, they neglect to stretch their minds and imaginations to grasp other ways of life. She also explains that this is self-destructive because it isolates a person.



In the second paragraph of this passage, Clemantine explains how the above system is not a system of true survival. Whereas the above system of division was caused by a lack of imagination and intellect, true survival requires creativity and thought, both of which naturally lead to collaboration. In this system of collaboration, everyone benefits. In Clemantine's list of beneficial collaborations, all kinds of assets are provided by the collaborators: time, ideas, land, strength, food. These contributions are all

different but of equal value. Significantly, however, these contributions are useless unless they are paired with what the other person contributes; for instance, ideas are useless if one has no strength to carry them out, and vice versa. All in all, this quote establishes Clemantine's philosophy of sharing as a more equitable and beneficial alternative to charity.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☛☛ My hustle was getting through the day. How to claim dignity. How to keep the kids clean [...] How to “shine” the house, which was really just dousing the floor with petrol to keep out the bugs. How to wash my loud, floral, short-sleeved Hawaiian shirt, which I loved and which I wore with my jean skirt, tied at the waist. How to make the kids cute, and thus make them lovable and seen.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Freddy, Mariette

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Clemantine and her family are living in Chibolya in Zambia and Clemantine develops various strategies to get through the day. From this quote, it is evident that domestic chores were extremely centering for Clemantine during her time as a refugee. Her efforts to keep herself, the kids, and their little house as clean as possible under the circumstances were in an effort to “claim dignity.” Cleaning helps a person feel as though they aren't a victim to the surrounding circumstances—circumstances that might be degrading and even dehumanizing. A person who is unclean is not just someone living in a dirty place but someone who has given up and allowed the dirty circumstances to overtake them. Clemantine, in keeping her house and her kids clean, ensures that the filth around her remains only a part of her circumstances and not a part of her character. She “claims dignity” by maintaining control over her body and her house. If she let these fall into filth, she'd have nothing to be proud of.



This quote also makes clear how important appearance is for Clemantine during her time as a refugee. She obsessively washes her favorite outfit and can even recall exactly what the outfit looked like. This outfit distinguishes her as an individual and helps her stand out from the mass of refugees she lives with. In the same way, she makes the

kids “lovable and seen.” This suggests that her obsession with cleanliness is in an effort to create the state of being loved. Even though she has no parents, she feels that through dignity, proper appearance, and cuteness, she can manifest the state of being loved.

●● For that one hour, I felt proud. Not just dignified but certain, impermeable, a rock. The sun that turned the window glass into a mirror had confirmed my existence. But I needed to see my body—I needed to own it.

Almost every other minute of my existence, I felt the pain of being nobody’s child, the sting of the assumptions people make when you don’t have a mother and you don’t have a father. People assume you’re adrift, at play. They assume that you are vulnerable. They assume your needs are lesser, that your will is broken, that your body can be bent to theirs.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears when Clemantine and her family are living in Chibolya, a slum in Zambia. A kind woman has recently bought Clemantine a pretty dress, and Clemantine wears it for an hour every day and feels happy. This quote explains that Clemantine’s feeling when she wears her new dress and walks around the block surpasses pride and dignity. Clemantine feels real strength when she wears the dress, as if nothing can harm her when she has it on. Seeing her face in the mirror was validating but walking around in her new dress gives her a physical sense of her own power and ownership.



In the second paragraph of this quote, Clemantine explains what it’s like to be a person with no parents. She highlights the assumptions other people make about people who are unaccompanied by some kind of parental guardian, suggesting that moving through life as a child without a caretaker can be an especially difficult—and even dangerous—thing to do. This, it seems, is one of the many challenges that the Rwandan Genocide settled Clemantine with when she was a young girl.


Chapter 16 Quotes

●● The plot provided by the universe was filled with starvation, war, and rape. I would not—could not—live in that tale.

Instead, I would be the girl who smiled beads, my version of the girl who smiled beads, one who had power and agency over her life, one who did not get caught.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Mukamana

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Clemantine returns to Rwanda and is reminded of the story her nanny Mukamana used to tell her about the girl who smiled beads. Recalled after years of forgetting it, this story helps Clemantine process her trauma. This quote explains that Clemantine views life as an interaction between characters and plots. Fortunately, Mukamana’s story about the girl who smiled beads provided only a character who could interact with any given plot and still be who she was. This separation between character and plot helps Clemantine resist being defined by the plot of her life: one that involves starvation, war, and rape. In the second paragraph of the quote, Clemantine decides that she will understand herself as the girl who smiled beads. No matter the plot that this character lived in, she was always in charge of her life. In fact, the plot was never strong or evil enough to catch her. In this way, Clemantine is able to understand herself as more powerful than the plot her life provided for her; her story, like Mukamana’s story, is governed by character, not a plot.


This quote outlines Clemantine’s decision to approach her life like a storyteller: she refuses to live in the plot of starvation, war, and rape and so declares the right to take control of her own story. Deciding that she is the girl who smiled beads also makes Clemantine’s life and identity beautiful, even though they were shattered by what happened to her during the Rwandan Genocide. Before she remembers Mukamana’s story, she refers to the pieces of her identity and her memories as fragments, like broken glass. With this quote, she redefines these fragments as beads—beautiful, unbroken pieces of a whole.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☞ I need more than the artifacts stuffed into a suitcase. I need to comprehend my history, a deep history. I know the facts about the genocide [...] But that is not enough. The past, that story, cannot fill me. I need a longer, broader, more fully human backstory, a history not all soaked in blood. I need clarity, perspective, joy, beauty, originality, intelligence, a wide-angle view.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs long after Clemantine has immigrated to the United States and is considering the proper way to heal from her past. In this quote, Clemantine makes a distinction between two kinds of histories: a history of facts and a human history. The Rwandan Genocide's factual history—how it started, how long it lasted, how many people died—isn't expansive enough to fill all of Clemantine. In other words, she feels that she is a lot more than all the gruesome facts of the genocide. The alternative history she describes—the “fully human backstory”—seems to transcend this history of facts. It is a “human history”—a more universal history—that takes into account more about humanity than one tragic event of bloodshed. Factually, Clemantine's history was “soaked in blood,” but, through intellect and imagination, she can access a human history that is much more complete. She explains that in finding this history she will also find “clarity, perspective, joy, beauty, originality, intelligence, a wide-angle view”—all things that come from standing back and seeing the full range of humanity. Instead of the specific and limiting history of the Rwandan Genocide, Clemantine wants the history of her humanity: the history that contains, in a “wide-angle” view, humanity's entire history.

In the beginning of this quote, Clemantine also explains how the artifacts she keeps stuffed in a suitcase aren't enough to heal her. Like the Rwandan Genocide, the odds and ends that Clemantine collects to keep track of her past only tell of a limited and traumatic history. If Clemantine were to document her history with those artifacts alone, she would never achieve a history that was not soaked in blood. In other words, Clemantine needs to get away from the specifics of the Rwandan Genocide and focus instead on her larger human story: the story in which she is neither broken

nor whole.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☞ [Rwandans] needed to find a way to tolerate an intolerable truth. We needed to acknowledge facts that are incompatible with a stable faith in humanity, incompatible even with any sane definition of God.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

When Clemantine returns to Rwanda for the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide, she observes how the country has struggled to recover from its history. In this quote, Clemantine uses an oxymoron to point out the difficult place Rwandans are in following the genocide. In order to move on, Rwandans need to “tolerate an intolerable truth.” After the genocide has ended, Rwandans want to bring peace back to their country. To do this, they have to “tolerate” a truth that is fundamentally “intolerable”: that the genocide happened, and that Rwanda's people killed and raped their own neighbors. This oxymoron—tolerating an intolerable truth—illustrates the absurdity of the decision for peace. Rwandans must engage in self-refutation, commanding themselves to forgive and tolerate something they know is utterly unforgivable. In this way, Rwandans must go against their better judgement in order to achieve peace—a state of peace that surely feels artificial.

The second part of this quote explains how the intolerable truth is enough to shake a person of their faith in humanity and even of their faith in God. The desire for peace requires faith, whether it is in humanity or in a God who stands for peace and justice. To tolerate a truth that is incompatible with one's faith means that one has to maintain their faith stubbornly or artificially so as to reestablish peace anyway. In this way, Rwandans find themselves facing a conundrum that shatters their core beliefs and tests their ability to keep these beliefs, even against all reason.

Chapter 19 Quotes

●● The transaction that resulted from sharing my story often bothered me. Some wanted to help me and could not stand the idea that I was not defeated. Panic flashed across their faces when I suggested to those who considered themselves more powerful than me that the transaction could go both ways. That I could help them too.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis


This quote occurs when Clemantine becomes a famous humanitarian speaker and observes the way people respond to her story. This quote points out how charity and help are often given with the assumption that the person being helped is “defeated.” In this way, charity establishes a hierarchy between the giver and the receiver in which the receiver is helpless, and the giver is not. In Clemantine’s terms, her listeners think they are more powerful than her because they have certain things that she lacks. In the beginning of this quote, Clemantine explains that this hierarchical transaction comes from her telling her story of surviving the Rwandan Genocide and living as a refugee all over Africa. Most of Clemantine’s listeners see her story as evidence that she is in need. They believe this because her story does not match the criteria for health and happiness that their own does. As a consequence, they think she needs their help but that they don’t need hers.

This quote explains that people feel panicked when Clemantine suggests that her story could help them too. In suggesting this, Clemantine indicates that, in certain ways, she is no less in need of help than people who are wealthy and powerful. She makes this implication as a way of showing that, although she perhaps had fewer resources than most children, she knows things that other people don’t. When people have a story to tell, they have something of value. Clemantine suggests that her listeners could benefit from the meaning she’s gleaned from her life and could realize that everyone has things to learn from one another. This quote gives another example of Clemantine’s philosophy of sharing, in this case in the form of stories.

Chapter 20 Quotes

●● My body itself remained alien, a burden. I’d had to carry this thing around with me—this body with its dark skin [...] this body, with its liabilities, this body that had been vandalized, stolen. This was the hardest thing in the world: to remember the ravagement and still believe my body was magic, to remember the shattering and still believe my body was spectacular, holy, and capable of creation.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 245


Explanation and Analysis

Clemantine explains the difficulty she has with romantic relationships due to her past. This quote describes the long term affect the Rwandan Genocide had on Clemantine’s attitude towards her body. In general, Clemantine views her body only as something that can compromise her. She talks about her body like she’s describing an object that is separate from her. In the present, she feels like her body has liabilities: that it is a vulnerability she carries around that can threaten her life if it is harmed. She also talks about her body’s dark skin, a quality that causes many people to make racist assumptions about her or treat her poorly. In all these ways, Clemantine feels distant from her body, and she also feels resentment towards it.

Moreover, Clemantine’s body has sustained trauma in the past that she feels she can’t erase. Although Clemantine wasn’t literally raped, her experience in the Rwandan genocide was akin to rape because her body felt like it wasn’t hers—she was “vandalized, shattered, and ravaged” by hunger, violence, and degradation. Whether Clemantine is referring to physical abuse, starvation, or violence, these states of physical pain and alienation are nearly impossible to feel recovered from because they permanently alter the way she feels towards her body. In this way, the past violation of Clemantine’s body prevents her from believing that she’s holy and spectacular. She even has a hard time remembering that she’s capable of creation because her experience of her body has always been of its destruction. Therefore, to believe her body is holy—pure and untouched—requires Clemantine to believe that one thing can be in two states at once.

●● Rape is the story of women and war, girls and war, hundreds of thousands of mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, cousins, and aunts in my country alone, hundreds of millions across the world. So many men were murdered in the massacre. So many women later died of HIV. Rape, ruin—corporeal, psychological, social—lingered in even the most polished, sophisticated, private spaces decades after the war.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs long after Clemantine has immigrated to the United States and is reflecting on the unique affect war has on women. This quote points out that women have a different relationship with war than men have. Although men are often the ones who face war directly, women are equally as targeted by it. However, the way they are targeted is much different. While a man's relationship with war is overt and direct, a woman's relationship with war is concealed and yet interminable. Rape can kill women years after the violence has actually ended by infecting them with HIV. In this way, Clemantine seems to suggest that women have been uniquely victimized by the reverberations of the Rwandan Genocide.

Clemantine explains that the rape women experience at the hands of war can be either literal or figurative: it can be "corporeal, psychological, social." The most important thing is that the effects of this rape linger long after it has actually occurred, even in places that seem to have no trace of lingering trauma. In other words, the rape that affects women during a war is whatever violates them and what is important to them. For instance, a psychological rape might involve verbal and emotional abuse that alters a woman's conception of the world and her sense of self. Alternatively, a social rape might involve actions that disrupt female solidarity. All in all, a woman's relationship with war is sinister because it can go on long after the conflict has technically ended: like rape, war leaves women with invisible yet permanent scars.

●● The sun felt rejuvenating. Some ants worked on a ledge in the shade, dismantling a fallen mango. [...] I felt, at last [...] like I'd finally exhaled. I was wearing a floral top, black with huge yellow and green flowers, and a bright yellow skirt. I stood out and I fit in, and I felt taken care of in a way that I felt taken care of nowhere else in the world. It had been so long since I felt like that—like a child, like someone else's ward.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Clemantine's Mother

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Clemantine is visiting Rwanda and relaxing in the garden of a close friend. After years of living on edge, Clemantine finally feels at home. This passage is similar to the early passages of Clemantine's memoir, in which she describes her early childhood in Kigali. Many of the same things that brought Clemantine joy then also bring her joy now. She is surrounded by many of the same flowers that populated her mother's beloved garden in the backyard of her childhood home, and there is a mango tree nearby that recalls the mango tree she and her brother Pudi used to play in as kids. She enjoys feeling that this yard belongs to someone else because it makes her feel protected, like a child. All this evidence suggests that Clemantine longs for the unbothered safety of childhood—a kind of safety she only got to enjoy for the first six years of her life. Her identity and her happiness have been frozen in time in Kigali, before she became a refugee, and so she has always wanted to return home to that childhood state.

Chapter 21 Quotes

●● Every time I need to summon my toughest, most self-actualized persona, I channel [Claire]. [...] But [...] my most generous feelings [towards Claire] are clouded by my own need to be recognized.

[...]

These days, when I'm with Claire, we have so much love and so much fear, and we want to kill each other.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Claire

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 260-1



Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Clemantine reflects on how much her trauma has challenged her interpersonal relationships. Clemantine's feelings towards Claire are complicated and paradoxical; whenever she and Claire are together, they feel a mixture of love and hatred towards each other. The first part of the quote explains how this complicated feeling came to be. Clemantine's love and appreciation for Claire is diminished by her own needs—her own desire to be recognized. When Clemantine and Claire were refugees, Clemantine hated that she was reduced to being identical with every other refugee. She wanted to stand out and to be unique. The first part of this quote shows that the drive to stand out is a competing drive that came between Clemantine and her older sister, as Clemantine felt that even Claire was oppressing her identity.

The second part of this quote explains that Clemantine and Claire love and fear one another and want to kill each other. In other words, Clemantine and Claire feel towards each other some of what they felt towards their enemies while they were refugees. The same extreme survival mindset—the readiness to kill an aggressor—has worked its way between them as well. This quote shows the extent of the damage that the genocide dealt to Clemantine and Claire's relationship. They love each other fiercely because they survived together, but they also want to kill each other because they associate each other with the trauma of their past.

●● Insist on knowing the backstory to your gifts and your pain. Ask yourself how you came to have all the things you carry; your privilege, your philosophy, your nightmares, your faith, your sense of order and peace in the world.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Clemantine's Mother

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis



This passage occurs when Clemantine is in Europe with her mother and considers how people can accept each other and their differences. Clemantine explains that attitudes, such as one's philosophy or their faith, are like physical


objects; they were picked up somewhere along one's life, and one now carries them through life. Many people might consider their philosophy or their sense of order and peace in the world as given—as intrinsic to their character. However, in describing these feelings and beliefs as objects, Clemantine shows that they shouldn't be taken for granted and that they come from a person's lived experience. Moreover, in designating these beliefs and fears as objects, Clemantine reveals that they are all equal; the belief that the world is not peaceful came from an experience just like the belief that the world *is* peaceful. In this way, no one can claim that their belief is more truthful than another person's belief.

Clemantine requests that everyone ask themselves where they picked up these objects and why they still carry them today. As someone who lost everything she ever owned, including her faith, Clemantine understands that a person's beliefs and fears are conditional; they come from somewhere, and they could easily be dropped. Clemantine wants people to know how they came to carry all the things they believe. This, she thinks, will help people form their own narratives, which in turn will give them a better perspective on their own lives.

●● I had only a character, a rubric. The girl who smiled beads gave me a way to go through the world [...] but I was still looking for a narrative that felt coherent and complete. [...] I still, *still*, after everything [...] longed for Mukamana. I wanted her to sit on the side of my bed, talk to me, and make my world feel not just magnificent but logical and whole.

Related Characters: Clemantine Wamariya (speaker), Mukamana, Clemantine's Mother

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

This passage concludes the second to last chapter of Clemantine's memoir just before she realizes that she needs to write her story herself. Clemantine feels that she has come part of the way towards ordering her past and validating her identity. She explains that the girl who smiled beads is a character and a rubric: she is a set of guidelines for going through life and feeling purposeful and justified. With the girl who smiled beads, Clemantine can understand

her own actions and personality. Most importantly, she can understand her fragmented sense of self as beautiful: she interprets the fragments of her identity as beads, and therefore transforms them from shattered pieces into beautiful parts of a potential whole. However, Clemantine still yearns for a complete and coherent narrative. This means that she still yearns for the world around her to make sense, not just herself. She feels now like a person with agency in a world that is illogical, non-linear, and incomplete. This quote occurs just after Clemantine has attempted to reconnect with her mother in Europe. After saying goodbye

to her mother after the trip, Clemantine expresses her desire for Mukamana in this quote. This suggests that, more than a mother, Clemantine yearns for a storyteller. Her life lacks motherly love, but, more painfully, it lacks sense, meaning, and plot. Finally, Clemantine explains that the character of the girl who smiled beads makes her life magnificent, but only a plot given to her by a storyteller would make it logical and whole. This shows that beauty is much easier to restore to a life shattered by trauma than a sense of order and completeness.



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.

PROLOGUE

Clemantine Wamariya meets her sister Claire at her apartment in 2006 the night before they appear on the Oprah show. Claire lives outside of Chicago with her kids, Mariette, Freddy, and Michele. Clemantine is a junior in High School and lives during the week with the Thomas family in a wealthy suburb. She is a normal teenager who plays sports and goes to church. Claire, who was older when they arrived in the United States from Africa, works full-time as a hotel maid.

A limo arrives and takes Claire and Clemantine to a fancy hotel in downtown Chicago. Clemantine is excited. The Oprah show tomorrow night is the follow-up to an episode in which Oprah and Elie Wiesel visit Auschwitz. Mrs. Thomas had encouraged Clemantine to write an essay on Elie Wiesel's book [Night](#)—about surviving the Holocaust—for Oprah's essay contest. Clemantine wrote about the Rwandan Genocide and was one of 50 winners.

In the limo, Clemantine and Claire try to talk about what happened to them, but they've tried so hard to forget that they don't know how. At the hotel, they order room service, and wake at four a.m. to get dressed. The next day, they sit in front of Oprah and Elie Wiesel. They watch a video of Oprah and Elie walking through Auschwitz, then Oprah congratulates all the essay winners except Clemantine. Privately, Clemantine remembers when she spent Christmas in a refugee camp in Burundi playing with pencils she'd hidden.

Oprah asks Clemantine if she found her parents before leaving Africa. Clemantine explains that she hasn't seen them since 1994, when she was six. Oprah says she has a letter from her parents and invites Clemantine and Claire on stage. Claire's face is stern. Even though she's had a hard life, she never believes anyone is better than her. Clemantine feels that her past is only fragments, and wonders if she'll ever not feel lost inside. Oprah hands Clemantine a letter. Before she can open it, Oprah stops her and says that she doesn't have to read it because her family is here.

The Prologue sets the stage in contemporary American society. Clemantine Wamariya—the author of [The Girl Who Smiled Beads](#)—first introduces herself as the character she is in American society: a refugee and survivor of the Rwandan Genocide. Her memoir will go on to expand and give the true story behind this somewhat simplistic view of who she is.



Elie Wiesel's book [Night](#)—about his experience in the Holocaust—is one of Clemantine's inspirations. She first begins writing about her experience in the Rwandan Genocide when she reads [Night](#) and identifies with Wiesel's experience as a refugee and victim of genocide.



Although Oprah acknowledges Clemantine's experience, Clemantine still feels unrecognized and somewhat silenced in American society. She and Claire are unable to talk about their past, and Clemantine is constantly plagued with her memories of loneliness. This shows that, although she has been a refugee for years, Clemantine's trauma has instilled seemingly ineradicable feelings in her.



This scene on the Oprah stage juxtaposes the external motions of life with Clemantine's inner state. Clemantine acts out normalcy, but inside she feels shattered. Moreover, she feels that she is alone in being broken inside, even beside Claire. She sees that Claire has an unbreakable strength but that she herself always feels fragmented. What Clemantine wants most of all is to feel whole.



The doors open and Clemantine's mother, father, brother, and two sisters walk out. Clemantine last saw her sister Claudette when Claudette was 2. She's never met her other siblings. Clemantine dreamed of this moment for years. She remembers writing her name in the dust in Malawi hoping her mother would see it. She also remembers collecting marbles in Tanzania for her brother Pudi, who is dead. She hugs her family. She forgets she's on TV but is aware that the audience is crying.

The reunion of Clemantine's family brings the audience to tears. It is an emotional scene of an estranged family finding their way back to each other. Like the audience, Clemantine herself is caught up in this magical fulfillment of her greatest wish, but her family is not the same family she left when she was six: she has siblings she's never met before, and her brother Pudi is gone.



After the show, Clemantine and her family take a limo to Claire's apartment. Nobody talks. Clemantine's mother fidgets restlessly, and her father smiles like he's still on camera. Clemantine feels that her siblings are a fictional representation of the perfect life she could've had. That weekend, the family goes to the Botanical Garden and the Navy Pier. Clemantine's parents are like ghosts, and everything is awkward. Clemantine feels grateful but also like she's the victim of a horrible experiment. On Monday, her family flies back to Rwanda, and Mrs. Thomas takes Clemantine to school as usual.

Once the Oprah show is over, the magical glow that surrounded the estranged family's reunion disappears. To Clemantine, her family members seem like ghosts. Her family as she knew it died long ago when she left Rwanda. She also feels that the child she used to be to her parents has been erased by her new siblings. The awkward reality of the estranged family's reunion shows that the family's traumatic separation can never fully be undone.



CHAPTER 1

The narrative flashes back to when Clemantine is a child and living in Kigali, Rwanda. Her family nicknames her Cassette because she asks lots of questions and imitates her sister Claire, who is 14 and confident. When Clemantine's mother sends Claire on errands, Claire saves most of the money by making deals with the vendors. Clemantine's family lives in a stucco house with a red roof. In the backyard is Clemantine's mother's garden. In the front yard is a mango tree that Clemantine and her brother Pudi climb and pretend is a bus taking them to Canada.

After the disappointing family reunion on Oprah, Clemantine goes back and reconstructs her lost childhood. The life that she had as a little girl in Kigali was simple, pleasant, and not out of the ordinary. She had a nickname, imitated her older sister, played with her older brother, and lived in a pretty house. In reconstructing her childhood, Clemantine fixates on domestic and familial details that were taken from her at a very young age.



Clemantine's mother is regal-looking with beautiful gaps between her white teeth. She goes to church in the morning and spends the afternoon in her garden—her favorite place—where she teaches Clemantine the names of flowers and fruit trees. On Saturdays, she brings Clemantine, Pudi, and Claire to clean the homes of elderly people. Girls from the country often stay with the family to learn about city life before marrying, and Clemantine and her siblings do chores with them. Claire hates housework and dreams of studying *iburayi*—"abroad." Clemantine dreams of eating ice cream and growing into Claire's clothes.

As a child, Clemantine looks up to her mother and Claire, wanting to be like these two women in her life. In this way, her identity is tied to her family. By contrast, Claire dreams of studying abroad. "Abroad" sounds exciting, but it also foreshadows the perverse "abroad" she and Clemantine will later experience as refugees. The "abroad" that both girls eventually experience by immigrating to America will also not be what either of them imagined as children.



Clemantine's mother dresses modestly. Catholic-Rwandan tradition instructs people, especially girls, to be invisible. Clemantine struggles with being proper and quiet, and she's curious about her Muslim and Zairean neighbors who are more exuberant. When she visits them, she looks for the secrets to their lifestyle. Clemantine's mother tells her not to be so curious.

One day, a friend of Clemantine's mother dies. Clemantine's mother cries, which is unusual because adults in Rwanda aren't supposed to cry. Clemantine and her mother walk through Rwanda's hills to the funeral. Clemantine tries to see if God is talking to anybody, but the people are composed during the service. She wants to know the truth about death, but no one will tell her. Her mother says death is God welcoming a person home. Clemantine wonders if a person can refuse God's invitation home.

Clemantine grew up with the concerns of any young child. She wants to dress like Claire or like Pudi, who loves Puma and Adidas. She nags her nanny, Mukamana, for stories that explain the world. Clemantine's favorite story is about a magical girl who wanders the earth smiling **beads**. The story is open-ended, and Mukamana always concludes it however Clemantine wants her to. Clemantine wants to be like Mukamana when she grows up, telling stories and dancing.

Clemantine's father runs a commercial car service. He is a big man with a broad smile. He works hard to provide a middle-class life for his family. Clemantine likes to bring him his slippers in the evening in exchange for a sip of his beer. When he comes home to nap in the afternoons, Clemantine is supposed to be quiet, but one time she forgets. Clemantine's mother usually disciplines the kids—punishing them until they confess—but this time, her father slaps her across the face. It's the most cruelty Clemantine has ever experienced.

When Clemantine is five, she gets a baby sister and starts Kindergarten. Neither Claire nor Pudi went to kindergarten because their parents didn't have enough money at the time. Therefore, Clemantine now feels very special. Once, on a rainy day, Mukamana picks her up and lets her wear Claire's green raincoat and umbrella. Clemantine wants to walk the long way home to show it off, but Mukamana says no. Soon after, Mukamana disappears. When Clemantine asks her mother why, her mother says "*intambara*"—the conflict.

Clemantine's childhood was pleasant, but Rwandan tradition also placed some oppressive restrictions on women. Women were instructed to be silent and modest, a position that could make processing potential trauma very difficult.



From an early age, Clemantine is skeptical of religious faith. She looks for explicit signs of God but can't recognize any. Because she doesn't unquestioningly believe in God, she won't rely on faith in the future to help her spiritually survive demoralizing experiences. Clemantine is more curious than she is faithful; she wants to understand harsh truths rather than unquestioningly believe everything is good.



Clemantine wants the world to be explained to her. In Mukamana's story of the girl who smiled beads, Clemantine is responsible for choosing the plot. This allows her to make use of her imagination, but it also leaves her without a concrete narrative to apply to the world around her. Mukamana's story defines a character but doesn't give the explanation of the world that Clemantine seeks.



Until Clemantine's father slaps her, Clemantine hasn't experienced any violence. Her mother's punishments manipulate her conscience, making her feel guilt and shame, but they never make use of outright violence. This shows that the imminent violence of the Rwandan Genocide will come as a shock to her. Violence is so unusual for Clemantine that she won't understand where its coming from.



When Clemantine is a child, she feels she has a special identity that separates her from others. She wants to show off her green raincoat and umbrella, and she wants to feel distinguished and proud of herself. Mukamana's disappearance is the first sign that something is wrong, but no one explains to Clemantine what happened. The vagueness of the word "conflict" heightens the confusion and ambiguity that Clemantine experiences as the Rwandan Genocide begins.



Clemantine gets another nanny, Pascazia. One day, Pascazia picks Clemantine up from school and they pass a group dancing and waving green, gold and red flags. Clemantine wants to join the festivities, but Pascazia refuses. The next week, they pass a group waving more flags. They are stoning someone for stealing. Clemantine wonders if these are the angry men from the hills Mukamana once told her a story about. At home, Clemantine's mother is angry that they walked that way. A few days later, Pascazia disappears and Clemantine stops going to school.

Instead of expanding, Clemantine's life shrinks. She is forbidden to play outside or to play with her best friend, Neglita. The radio is always on. Around this time, Clemantine watches *Rambo* at a neighbor's house. All the neighborhood kids start dressing like *Rambo* and playing with fake weapons. Houses are robbed but no one explains why. The robbers leave grenades behind that blow up the houses.

A security guard starts standing in Clemantine's yard. The curtains are always closed, and a drumming noise comes from far away. Clemantine's mother stops going to church, her father stops going to work, and no one goes to the market. The electricity flickers, and Clemantine's parents tell her to hush. When she turns six, a grenade blows up her neighbor's house.

Soon after, Clemantine's uncle dies. When Clemantine asks, her mother says he wasn't answering God's invitation home. Clemantine's parents talk about "them." The family sits in the house with the lights off. No one talks or plays. Pudi tries to explain that Clemantine can't go outside because an evil bird will eat her, and thunder will get her. It thunders all the time. Pudi tells her to hide between the ceiling and roof if anything happens. Another neighbor's house is burned. The robbers leave Clemantine's parents a note saying they'll return for their girls.

One day, Clemantine's mother tells Clemantine and Claire to pack things to go to their grandmother's in Butare—a fairy tale house with sunflowers around it. The next morning, a man comes in a van. Clemantine wants to take a mug she made to show her grandmother, but her mother puts her in the van with Claire and tells her not to talk. On the way to Butare, they pick up other girls. Clemantine's cousins are at her grandmother's. Her grandmother won't tell her when her parents and Pudi are coming. A few nights later, her grandmother takes everyone to another house. The next night, they hide in a pit in the yard while explosions go off around them.

The memoir relays the beginnings of the Rwandan Genocide from a child's perspective. Clemantine, not even six years old, doesn't understand why everyone is suddenly afraid, nor does she understand where all the strange activity around her is coming from. She tries to explain everyone's behavior with Mukamana's stories—her only way, so far, of understanding the world around her.



Clemantine explains how, at this point in her childhood, her life began to look like something no six-year-old should ever have to experience. Her life steadily lost everything instead of accumulating more. In this way, Clemantine's sense of progression is disrupted—something that will have lasting consequences on her experience of time.



Because the beginning of the Rwandan Genocide is told from Clemantine's innocent perspective, even the reader has a hard time grasping what's happening to the world. All Clemantine knows is that dangers lurk outside that drive her family indoors.



When Clemantine's uncle dies and her mother says he wasn't answering God's invitation, it becomes clear that he has been murdered. This suggests that murder is something that cannot be explained away or made more pleasant by means of religious faith. When Clemantine's parents get a note saying the robbers will come back for their girls, it is clear that—like murder—rape is another very real threat.



Clemantine wants to take a certain mug to her grandmother, and when her mother tells her she can't, she experiences her first sense of material loss. Beyond losing her family without knowing why, Clemantine also loses all the things she owns that ground her in a certain place and in a certain stage of her life. On her and Claire's way to their grandmother's home, they pick up other passengers, all of them girls. Although Clemantine doesn't know why, it is clear that these girls are all trying to escape the threat of rape.



One day, there is a knock on the door. Clemantine's grandmother gestures for Clemantine and Claire to run. They crawl on the bellies through the sunflowers, Clemantine dragging a rainbow towel. In the trees, they find people with bloody wounds. Clemantine can't understand how these huge wounds were made, but Claire won't talk. They start walking, listening to horrible laughs, screams, and cries. They cover themselves with dirt and leaves for camouflage. Clemantine's thoughts are a jumble of pain and fear.

Clemantine and Claire hide whenever they hear sounds. Clemantine is too afraid of Claire's expression to look her in the eyes. Clemantine says she wants to go home, but Claire says they must go. A woman offers them food, but they are too afraid to take it. Then they follow a man who says he can lead them to safety. They see dead bodies floating in a river, but Clemantine thinks they are sleeping. Night falls and it pours rain. Clemantine thinks this is hell, but not the hell her mother had told her about—a fire lit by sins. They hide in a dilapidated shack. Clemantine's toenails fall out, and she doesn't know how old she is.

Clemantine and Claire find an abandoned school. The windows are broken, and frightened people hide inside. They stay until night falls and then start walking. Clemantine isn't sure if it's days or weeks later that they hear children playing in a cornfield. They crouch in the cornfield and eat corn kernels. Claire finds a woman and explains that they came over the hill, and their family is following soon. The woman says they can stay till their family comes. Some farmers give them water and sugarcane. Claire whispers to Clemantine not to tell anyone anything.

Clemantine and Claire stay in the woman's hut where she, her husband, and her four children sleep on a straw mattress. Clemantine wakes up with itchy welts from lice. She and Claire work in the fields and are fed boiled corn and potatoes. Every evening they look for their family coming up the road. Clemantine cries, wanting to be found. One day, thousands of refugees walk by. Claire decides she and Clemantine should go with them, even if they are going nowhere.

When Clemantine sees the wounded refugees, she doesn't understand what caused the wounds. At six years old, she is so unfamiliar with violence that she can't comprehend the fear and pain that suddenly surrounds her. Having no knowledge of anything that's happening, she feels pain and fear herself but in a jumbled, overwhelming way. This gives her first experience of the genocide an unreal feeling.



Clemantine sees death for the first time when she sees the bodies floating in the river. She is confused because everything she is witnessing is contrary to the religious lessons her mother taught her. She wants to understand her horrible situation as hell, but it is too grotesque and illogical to be the hell her mother told her of—a punishment for sins. As she sees it, she is being horribly punished for having committed no sins. She also has no idea how old she is. Displacement thus makes her feel that time is warped and that the world is irrational.



Clemantine completely loses her sense of time. She has no idea how long she and Claire have been refugees. Claire's instruction that Clemantine not tell anyone anything shows the division in Rwanda in which half the population lives in fear of the other half. The Rwandan Genocide was a violent civil conflict, meaning that it was a war between fellow citizens. This naturally led everyone to distrust their own neighbors.



Clemantine keeps thinking that she'll go home or that her family will come for her. She gets through each day by believing that she'll soon return to her normal life. Claire, on the other hand, shows herself to be restless and afraid of settling down. She gets through each day by setting her mind on the next step, wanting to move on to better situations.



Clemantine goes from being a person away from home to a person without a home—a refugee. She and Claire walk with the group through the hills. Children cry for their mothers, and mothers ask if anyone’s seen their children. They all create a clearing between a farm and a river with the intention of staying there for a while. They ask the farmers for food, though sometimes they just take it. People cry, get sick, and start dying. Clemantine stops asking questions. She’s glad she doesn’t have a mirror so she can’t see how much her face has changed. Time stops moving.

One night, Clemantine wakes up and walks through the sleeping bodies to pee. When she comes back, she can’t find Claire among the bodies. She wakes a woman and asks her to help find her sister. If she doesn’t find Claire, she will be lost, and no one will know who she is. The woman sits with Clemantine all night. In the morning, Claire finds Clemantine and screams at her to never leave her side again.

CHAPTER 2

Years later, when Clemantine and Claire immigrate to the United States, they arrive in Chicago with nothing. Over the years, they’ve managed to accrue a small pile of things: clothes for Claire’s kids, an outfit for Clemantine, and a photo album, but the airline lost their bag. In the album there was a photo of Clemantine, Claire, Claire’s husband, Rob (a former refugee aid), and Mariette at a water park in South Africa, all of them looking like a happy family. The bright lights of America blur Clemantine’s past. She feels that her life has no plot and is nothing but scattered pieces.

To this day, Clemantine collects “katundu”—stuff. She wishes she had the mug she wanted to take when she first left her house in Rwanda. Instead, she cherishes the heart-shaped locket Mrs. Thomas gave her. When Mrs. Thomas gave it to her, Clemantine felt for the first time like she belonged somewhere. She has a mirror her mother gave her on her 25th birthday, photocopies of pictures she’s in from the albums of host families, and other treasures. Clemantine hopes she can string all these “beads” into a narrative of her life that is beautiful and logical.

Clemantine describes the moment when she actually becomes a refugee. This moment is when her transitory situation ceases to be temporary and becomes her life. The things that used to define home—stability, shelter, family—are replaced with instability and homelessness as the conditions of her existence. Clemantine doesn’t want to confirm her identity in a mirror because she doesn’t want to see that she’s not the same person she used to be.



Clemantine is particularly afraid to lose Claire because, if she loses her, no one will exist who remembers where Clemantine came from and who she is. Without Claire, Clemantine might as well have no identity, because her identity is now contained in memories that only she and Claire share.



Arriving in the United States with no possessions makes Clemantine feel that she has no story or past. The possessions she and Claire have accrued—particularly the photo—have given Clemantine a story to tell and a distinct identity. Losing her possessions and entering an unfamiliar new country thus makes Clemantine feel like she comes from nowhere.



Clemantine tries to reestablish a narrative to replace the one she lost when she became a refugee, leaving her whole life and identity behind. “Stuff”—keepsakes from various times and places—gives Clemantine the tangible feeling of her own existence, essentially documenting where she has been and what she has done. She wants to use these concrete bits to put together a timeline of her life. She views this “stuff” as “beads”—many different pieces she can hopefully assemble into a coherent whole.



Clemantine is 12 and Claire is 21 when they arrive in the United States. A couple—the Beckers—holding “welcome to America” signs give them balloons and gift cards. The United States is the eighth country Clemantine and Claire have been in since leaving Rwanda, and Clemantine doesn’t trust kindness. They get in the couple’s car. Clemantine feels like she’s drifting. Thirty hours earlier, they lived in a slum in Zambia. When Clemantine visits this slum 17 years later, it is still poor; she tries to give some Zambian kids gum, but they look at her suspiciously. When she lived there, she wouldn’t have taken charity from a seemingly wealthy Black woman either.

Clemantine and Claire are happy to be in “America the Gleaming,” which they’ve heard so much about. Claire had heard Chicago was cold, so she got puffy jackets for the family in the Zambian market. In the August heat, they all start sweating. The couple drops them at the Beasleys’ house. The Beasleys are their sponsors and have made beds for them in the basement and loaded their table with food. The family is nice and hugs a lot, but Clemantine doesn’t understand why. She shows her love for her family by being afraid to lose them.

Clemantine and her family stay at the Beasleys’ house for three months. Claire is pregnant again. The Beasleys’ daughter Sarah is nice to Clemantine, but Clemantine doesn’t understand her. Sarah and Julia—the Beckers’ daughter—laugh a lot, are casual with adults, and buy makeup. Julia invites Sarah and Clemantine to a sleepover, but Clemantine feels contempt for them. One night, Clemantine opens the Beasleys’ fridge and is amazed by how much food there is. How could there be so much poverty in some places and so much excess in others?

Clemantine and Claire can’t relax. They’ve spent their whole lives trying to survive and find money, and now they have nothing to do. Clemantine is 12, but she feels simultaneously three and 50 years old. She tries to fit in with other girls, but she isn’t carefree like them. She is angry and envious. One day, while sitting on the lawn, she notices that Mrs. Becker’s garage is full of disorganized junk. She goes over and organizes it while Mrs. Becker tries to stop her.

One day, Mrs. Beasley asks Clemantine to color an outline of a house to look like her old house in Rwanda. Clemantine refuses. She thinks nostalgia is uselessly painful. She and Claire never talk about their lost past. Claire’s only sentimentality is for *ugali*, the porridge they survived on for so many years. Claire says that *ugali* isn’t memory but sustenance and power: until a person has eaten *ugali*, they haven’t really eaten.

Clemantine and Claire are disoriented by how different the United States is from the slum they just left in Zambia. Suddenly, they are in a land of safety and plenty. However, they are so used to being refugees that they can’t shake their refugee instincts. To that end, they don’t trust anyone, nor do they trust that they are actually safe. Clemantine describes her feeling as one of drifting. She hasn’t felt at home in six years and can’t automatically feel at home now.



Everything about the United States is unfamiliar to Claire and Clemantine. They aren’t used to beds, having access to so much food, or the excess of affection. Right away, there is a disconnect between their host family’s generosity and Clemantine’s deep feeling of mistrust and alienation. She appreciates the resources she is given, but she doesn’t feel close to anyone.



Clemantine is baffled by American teenagers. Although they’re her age, Sarah and Julia seem like foreign creatures. Clemantine became a teenager in a state of fear and unease. Therefore, she has trouble comprehending the ease with which Sarah and Julia interact and express themselves. Along with confusion, Clemantine feels contempt for the ease with which others live when so many people are suffering elsewhere.



Over their years as refugees, Clemantine and Claire’s survival instincts have impacted their identities. When they are told to relax by their hosts, they don’t know what to do with themselves. Clemantine didn’t necessarily experience the typical stages of being a child, so she feels like she’s multiple ages at once.



*Although they share their good and bad memories, Claire and Clemantine do not reminisce. This memoir is evidence that Clemantine ultimately does return to her past to confront it and understand it, but Claire focuses firmly on the future. She makes *ugali* not to reminisce but to remember what it means to survive.*



CHAPTER 3

The narrative jumps back to a day in Burundi, when a Red Cross truck arrives. Clemantine, Claire, and the other refugees follow the truck on foot. After a day, they arrive at Ngozi—two hills covered with tents. Clemantine calls for Pudi, but the Red Cross men make her stand in line. When Clemantine and Claire reach the front of the line, a woman dyes their hands to count them. She gives them a tent, two blankets, and a pot. They are told where to pitch their tent, where to stand in line for beans and corn, and where to use the bathroom—by the ditch dug for dead bodies. Clemantine is excited by the prospect of finding her parents here, but when she looks around at the hundreds of bodies, she loses hope.

Clemantine loses her sense of self. She becomes only what she needs—a deep yearning for water, food, and a place to sleep. She tries hard to remember her unit number and her name. She starts telling people her name, not wanting to become invisible. But she loses herself anyway. The refugees aren't given toilet paper because dignity isn't a necessity. But Clemantine collects eucalyptus leaves, remembering the soaps she loved at her aunt's house.

Clemantine's hair and clothes crawl with lice. She feels that not even her body is hers. One day, Claire takes Clemantine to a refugee who has a razor, and he shaves her head. Clemantine cries because she wants to be different, but now she's bald like everyone else. Every inch of her body becomes a battleground on which she fights to remain a person. Bugs burrow into her feet. She and Claire try to keep their feet clean, but it is impossible. They gouge the bugs from their feet with pins; if they leave any behind, the bugs might tunnel into their skin and cause them to come down with a deadly fever.

It is hard work to survive. Clemantine waits in line for hours for food. Then, she looks for smoke from another stove to light her kindling. Clemantine watches the pot of corn on the cinderblock stove for hours so it doesn't burn. No one has plates or spoons. When the corn is hot, it burns their fingers; when it's cold, it is too hard to chew.

Clemantine makes a list of things to cry about as a way of maintaining her identity. She still believes she is going back home. Many of the refugees are poor farmers who know they aren't going home. They look down on Clemantine and Claire as rich city kids who had parents, a TV, and dreams of studying abroad. Clemantine watches the road for her parents and Pudi, whose appearance she barely remembers. She makes other kids watch with her, making them empty promises of candy and balloons.

Ngozi is the first refugee camp that Claire and Clemantine stay in. Although they now have food and shelter, the refugee camp offers its own set of demoralizing conditions. Clemantine has held onto the hope that she will find her parents and Pudi—that she is still different from all the hundreds of people around her. Here in the refugee camp, however, she is a number in a series of numbers—one body among hundreds. The refugee camp makes Clemantine feel not like the special child she once was but like one of many.



Before Clemantine became a refugee, her identity consisted of many things beyond her basic physical needs: she enjoyed clothes and playing games. Now that she is a refugee, though, she comes to see her body as a burden because it is constantly in need.



In the refugee camp, Clemantine feels like her body is being violated by filth and vermin. She feels that her body is no longer hers and that she must fight to maintain her sense of being a person against all the forces working to humiliate her. In this way, the refugee experience bears resemblance to the experience of rape, since Clemantine feels as though her body has been violated by the poor conditions of the camp.



Although only six, Clemantine learns to cook and handle fire. She learns this out of necessity but also because she develops, more so than Claire does, the desire to maintain a sense of domestic order and dignity as a refugee.



Clemantine makes a point of crying about all the things she has lost. In this way, she attaches her identity to these things. She has become who she is because of her parents, her house, and her brother Pudi, and now that she doesn't have these things, her identity starts to slip away, too. In this way, her identity is frozen in time as the girl she was before she turned six.



Clemantine becomes tough. When she walks to collect water, she stares down older women who try to bully her out of her spot in line. She imagines she's older and stronger than everyone. She is contemptuous of the dirty refugee children who don't know what it's like to be taken care of. One day, UNHCR brings clothes and Clemantine tries to bathe and dress the naked kids. She rebukes their parents for neglecting them. Soon, everyone hates Clemantine. Clemantine's biggest fear is falling in the latrine pit. Once, a kid falls in and has to be dug out.

When the food trucks come, everyone runs to meet them. But the corn is so hard that it is impossible to cook or eat. Someone walks outside the camp and finds a miller who grinds the corn into flour. Clemantine makes dough and paste wrapped in banana leaves. UNHCR realizes the kids are undernourished, so once a month they give each of them half a vitamin and a biscuit.

Clemantine tries to stay clean and remember who she is. She pretends the bugs and grime don't humiliate her. She tells herself she's valuable, but she has trouble believing herself. At night, she sings a song her mother taught her about turning to God when one feels hurt.

CHAPTER 4

The night before she starts school in the United States, Clemantine lies awake rehearsing what she'll say to everyone. Clemantine and Claire have just moved into a one-bedroom apartment in north Chicago. Clemantine shares the daybed in the living room with Mariette, but she feels like it's all hers. She wakes up at five a.m. and is ready by seven, when Claire walks her down to the school. Her teacher pronounces her name correctly, but she feels like she has no idea what's happening.

On Sundays, Clemantine is tutored in English by a girl from the church. Clemantine colors in the pictures on the vocabulary notecards. People ask Clemantine if she's happy, but she doesn't know what that means. She feels like jumping off the roof and floating away. She and Claire spend Thanksgiving and Christmas at the Beckers', where they are appalled by the excess food. Clemantine is used to becoming someone she's not in order to survive, so she tries to be grateful and behave like an American teenager. But she feels like a person without parents.

Clemantine becomes obsessed with cleanliness and dignity. She takes it upon herself to clean and dress other refugee children because, to her, this at least maintains the semblance of dignity and normalcy. She also tries to care for these children. When she lived at home, she felt proud and cared for, so she tries to mimic this in the refugee camp.



Clemantine is happy when she is able to make a new recipe out of the practically inedible ingredients the refugees are given. This shows that she survives spiritually by trying to create some beauty and sense of home, even out of the barest of resources.



Clemantine tries both to give herself validation and to seek it in God. However, neither method is sustainable for her. She thus starts to lose the inherent belief that she is special, and that life is worth living.



Clemantine intersperses her experience in Ngozi with her experience starting high school in the United States. This juxtaposition of experiences suggests that, fundamentally, there is nothing different about the way Clemantine felt entering high school and navigating life at the refugee camp: she feels a lack of identity in both places.



Clemantine is very good at acting like she fits in, but she never actually feels that she fits in. Her chameleon ability is a survival technique that helped her adapt to the countless places she and Claire moved to as refugees. However, whether she is at a refugee camp, migrating on foot through Africa, or attending high school in the United States, she feels the same inner sense of detachment.



Mrs. Becker decides Clemantine needs to go to a better school. A year after Clemantine arrives in the United States, Mrs. Becker and Mrs. Beasley enroll her in the Christian Heritage Academy and arrange for her to stay with Mrs. Thomas, whom Clemantine eventually calls her American mother. Clemantine packs a small backpack, and Mrs. Thomas and her daughter Caulay pick her up. This is the first time she's ever moved without Claire.

On the way, Mrs. Thomas points out landmarks in Chicago. When they arrive at Mrs. Thomas's green house, Caulay shows Clemantine to her new bedroom. It has two beds, a desk, books, and its own bathroom. Clemantine can't believe it's all hers. She also can't believe that the Thomases treat their two dogs like people; in Rwanda, she feared dogs because they ate the dead bodies. Clemantine imitates what Caulay does; she wants to be a good boarder so that she'll be allowed to stay all year. This is a skill she learned as a refugee: if she became whatever people wanted her to be, they would give her more resources.

Mrs. Beasley has the idea that Clemantine should go by Tina at school because it is easier to pronounce. Mrs. Thomas picks Clemantine up in the same spot every day, seeming to understand her fear of being forgotten. On the weekends, Clemantine goes back to Claire's. She always jumps out of the car before Mrs. Thomas can hug her. Clemantine's life at the Thomases is peaceful, but Claire's life is still chaotic; her marriage is falling apart, and she works two jobs while raising her three kids. Clemantine helps her clean and take care of the kids, and she doesn't mention the pretty soaps in Mrs. Thomas's house.

One day at school, everyone is panicking. The principal dismisses school early. At Mrs. Thomas's, Clemantine watches the Twin Towers fall on TV. Mrs. Thomas anxiously calls her son who lives in New York. Clemantine feels nothing. She tells Mrs. Thomas scornfully that this happens to people everywhere. Mrs. Thomas is shocked. Then, Clemantine dreams that she's trapped in a room with terrified people. She wonders why no one is fleeing. She looks at obituaries in the paper, contemptuous that these dead people get mentions.

Clemantine is used to external factors forcing her to move to a new location. She's accustomed to suddenly packing to move because of some danger. Now, Mrs. Becker and Mrs. Beasley arrange Clemantine's newest move, and she goes along. Without Claire this time, however, Clemantine might have the chance to start a new life with a blank slate.



Clemantine's new life at the Thomases' house contrasts starkly with her old life as a refugee. Whereas she used to have no bed at all, she now has two, and lots of possessions. Although this confuses her, she understands that if she plays the part, this world and all its benefits can be hers. However, she still can't look beyond this strategy to feel any actual sense of comfort or safety. This suggests that the lack of belonging she felt as a refugee is a feeling that painfully remains.



At Claire's, everything is chaotic, and Clemantine likely feels that she's still in the midst of a great struggle for survival when she's there. At the Thomases' house, Clemantine experiences a new set of domestic comforts. The pretty soaps in Mrs. Thomas's bathroom are reminiscent of the nice soaps in Clemantine's aunt's houses in Rwanda—the ones that Clemantine remembers and feels are an essential part of her identity. Mrs. Thomas's house seems to provide her with what she yearned for as a refugee: beauty and domesticity.



Clemantine is relatively unmoved by the tragedy of 9/11 because she knows that such tragedies happen to tons of people all over the world. She even feels envious of the people who died in 9/11 and their families, since all these people had obituaries in the paper. This shows that another horrible aspect of the Rwandan Genocide was the invisibility of its victims and their suffering.



Everyone pities Clemantine and wants to pamper her. Clemantine is contemptuous because she knows they only want to make themselves feel better. There are only two other Black students at her school, and everyone stares at her. One day, Mrs. Kline—a friend of Mrs. Thomas—takes Clemantine shopping at a mall. Mrs. Kline is an expert at shopping and navigates the overwhelming space confidently. As a refugee, Clemantine was always navigating complicated places this way. She still asks calculating questions whenever she enters a new place. Mrs. Kline has Clemantine try on lots of clothes and gives her opinion on everything. Clemantine is used to protecting her body and views it as a vulnerability; Mrs. Kline can see that she needs help loving herself.

Clemantine tries to look down on Mrs. Kline's vanity, but she actually aspires to her confidence. Claire never talked to Clemantine about her body. Clemantine watched girls in refugee camps get their periods, so she knows how her body works, but not how to love it. In Rwanda, women are seen as valuable only if they are virgins when married. If a woman is *konona*—raped—then she is “ruined” permanently: the evil that is done to her becomes part of her being. Clemantine works hard to forget this “language of ruin.” Although her body has been “ruined,” it is still sacred.

Mrs. Kline buys Clemantine her eighth grade graduation dress. Clemantine loves that Mrs. Kline sees beyond her to something beautiful. The dress is black satin with blue panels on the side. Clemantine thinks her narrow feet are ugly and weak; she remembers when bugs lived in them. But when she wears the sandals Mrs. Kline picks out for her, she decides they look good.

In order to fit in and not be expelled, Clemantine hides the fierce side of herself. One day, however, a popular girl named Susan invites everyone to her pool party except Jane, a quiet girl from Eastern Europe. Later, Clemantine follows Susan into the bathroom and locks the door behind her. She watches Susan put on her lipstick then greets her in an aggressive, protective voice. She tells Susan not to be mean to Jane again or she'll pay for it. She enjoys watching Susan struggle frantically with the locked door. Then Clemantine unlatches it and walks out.

Clemantine joins the cheerleading squad. She thinks that learning to smile for no reason is a good skill to have in the United States. The physical challenge takes her out of her body and her bad thoughts. The other cheerleaders invite her everywhere, but Clemantine doesn't want to bond. She feels that all relationships, even if they start out cute and loving, end with the person trying to kill her.

Clemantine doesn't recognize clothes shopping as a kind of survival. For six years, she had to focus solely on the physical needs of her body, such as whether she was hungry or cold or in danger. Her refugee life was not a life in which she could think about how she looked or appreciate her physical attributes. In fact, she was even thankful she had no mirror as a refugee because she didn't want to see how transfigured her face was by hunger and grime. She now can't view her body as anything other than a burden.



Clemantine was not literally raped, but the experience of starving and being homeless made Clemantine feel violated and robbed of her bodily autonomy. If she doesn't want to feel ruined and worthless for the rest of her life, she recognizes that she has to change her language—that is, she has to change the way she views beauty and her body. Her goal is to be able to see that the same thing can be both ruined and beautiful at the same time. Her memoir also seems to have this goal: to find the beauty in a shattered life.



Clemantine knows her feet only as part of the “battleground” that her body became as a refugee, the battleground on which she fought to stave off everything that tried to overtake her. Now, with a pair of pretty sandals, she can finally see beauty in her body.



Clemantine tries to act like an American teenager so that she can have an easy life, but deep down, she identifies with those who are outcasts like herself. Her act breaks when Susan bullies Jane. As a refugee, she was treated like she was lesser and was outcasted from normal life. Now, in the United States, she stands up for people who are treated, even in small ways, like she was treated.



Clemantine goes through the motions of being an American teenager, but none of these acts erase her inner alienation. She's good at adapting but not good at connecting, suggesting that the trauma of the refugee experience can make it hard for people to open up to others.



CHAPTER 5

In the refugee camp in Burundi, Claire teaches Clemantine to never accept gifts. Claire doesn't want to be indebted to anyone, so she trades with the nearby poor Burundians for their food. She sings an English song she knows called "Home Again," hoping to impress the camp managers. One of them finally hears and gives her a job organizing games for the camp orphans. Claire realizes that to maintain her identity, she needs to hold onto it from within. She also realizes she needs money.

To do laundry, Clemantine walks two hours to the river. She soaks the clothes with crushed pine needles and then pounds them on rocks. Sometimes she swims in the river. The heat in the valley looks like waves. She wants to pretend it is the ocean, but no one wants to play with her. She dries the clothes on the hot rocks, hoping to burn out the lice. At night, she listens to the adults talk. Their raunchy stories make her feel unprotected. In her dreams, she collects odds and ends around the camp and makes a rickety ladder up to heaven to visit her parents.

Clemantine becomes close with an elderly couple in the camp. She calls them Mucyechuru and Musaza—Grandmother and Grandfather. To avoid going to the fearful latrine, she lingers by their tent and asks them for stories. Musaza tells her a story about an unbreakable pot full of enough soup to feed the world. Clemantine adores them because no one—not even Claire—treats her gently. They bring Clemantine foraging in the woods. As they search for mushrooms and green tomatoes, they teach Clemantine to respect the plants; they teach her to eat grasshoppers, but only the ones that fly straight into her hand. They steal from nearby farms, but they always leave a vine or a seed to make up for what they've taken.

Around Christmas, Claire gets dysentery. Clemantine has seen what happens to other refugees who get dysentery: they get a fever, their bowels explode, and they scream. Most who come down with it die, and their bodies are placed by the latrine. When Claire gets sick, Mucyechuru makes her drink a concoction made with charcoal. For three days, Claire writhes with fever. Clemantine prays she won't die. At last, her fever breaks.

After Claire's illness, Clemantine fears the latrine even more. She stays by Mucyechuru and Musaza's tent. They tell her a story about a beautiful girl who was pushed into a hole by her evil stepmother. They tell her that you can lift up the ocean when the sun goes down and see what's under it; and, at moonlight, you can hike in the landscape of the past, where you can ride majestic animals.

Clemantine tries to maintain her identity by reminding herself of all the things that characterized her former life. She also copes with the refugee camp by maintaining domestic order. Claire, on the other hand, hopes to survive the refugee camp by becoming successful and earning money. In this way, she maintains her identity through confidence rather than through specific details about herself.



Clemantine is only six years old, but the refugee camp life forces her to act like an adult and exposes her to unseemly realities. Before she became a refugee, her life consisted mostly of imaginative games and stories. Now, she learns menial tasks and listens to the crude talk of adults in the camp. Far too early, her childhood loses its magic and leisure.



Clemantine loves Mucyechuru and Musaza because they care for her the way her mother and Mukamana cared for her when she was a little girl in Rwanda. Mukamana used to tell Clemantine stories and Clemantine's mother used to teach her the names of fruits and flowers in her garden. Therefore, Clemantine seeks refuge in the storytelling and teachings that Mucyechuru and Musaza provide her. They make her feel like a child again—someone who is being taught the ways of the world.



When Claire gets dysentery in the refugee camp, no one except the other refugees take care of her. The refugee camp's conditions cause Claire to get sick, and the camp provides no medicine. This shows that, although there are camp workers around, they largely neglect the refugees.



Clemantine is comforted by Mucyechuru and Musaza's imaginative stories. Their stories make her feel like the world is more than it appears. Under the ocean, for example, seems like a magical realm—a realm into which she can escape her grotesque circumstances and continue to believe in a world of beauty.



After Clemantine and Claire have been at the camp a few months, a Zairean camp worker named Rob tells Claire he's in love with her. Rob is 25 and very put together, but Claire tells him she's too young at 16 to have a baby. Rob follows Claire around, begging her to marry him and move to Zaire where his family lives. Claire and Clemantine have learned the skills to survive the camp, but nothing will get better unless the war ends. Rob tempts Claire with citizenship papers and the promise that she can go back to school. Claire finally accepts Rob's proposal, and they get married at the camp.

After the wedding, Rob takes Claire to Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, to get marriage papers. Afterwards, the plan is for Claire to go to Uvira to meet Rob's family, at which point Rob will come back to the camp for Clemantine. Clemantine waits for three days, terrified that no one will come for her. Eventually, Rob returns. Clemantine doesn't say goodbye to Mucyechuru and Musaza, but she leaves them all her possessions. Rob takes her to his truck, where he has a new dress and some candy for her. She falls asleep on the ride and wakes up panicking. She knows she should feel relieved, but she only feels lost.

That evening, Clemantine and Rob arrive at the house of some of Rob's friends in Bujumbura. A huge family sits in the courtyard. A beautiful woman Claire's age hugs Clemantine. A bunch of other children crowd her, and someone hands her a cup of tea. Clemantine is unused to kindness and to simple pleasures. She is used to thinking only about survival. The next day, the young woman Claire's age takes Clemantine to the market. The woman buys Clemantine a pretty yellow dress.

Clemantine and Rob stay with his friends for two days and then take a bus to Uvira on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. Clemantine falls asleep and wakes to see palm trees and cacti. At the border, an officer checks their papers. When they get to the lake, Clemantine plans to lift it up at sunset and visit the universe underneath. Clemantine and Rob ride up the hill on a motorcycle to a red-brick house. Inside, Claire is there, looking unfamiliar in a bright dress. The house smells like good food. Clemantine cries on the couch. That night, she sleeps with Mwasiti and Dina—Rob's cousins. Claire sleeps down the hall with Rob.

Clemantine tries to act like a "regular child," confident, playful, and carefree. She moves slowly, used to killing time in a detached way in the refugee camp. Mwasiti and Dina laugh affectionately at her slowness and treat her like a wounded bird. Every morning, Rob's aunt, Mama Dina, wakes early to pray for the war to end. Unlike Clemantine's mother, she speaks casually to God.

Rob promises Claire good things, but his behavior isn't comforting. He follows Claire around the camp and won't listen to her initial refusals, giving the impression that he might become violent if she continues to refuse. Claire eventually marries Rob partly because she sees that there is no other way out of the refugee life. However, it also seems likely that she marries Rob because she's afraid of him.



When Claire and Rob leave Clemantine at the camp, Clemantine is afraid they won't come back for her. Her fear of being left behind never goes away, even when she later immigrates to the United States. The constant moving from one place to the next makes Claire feel better, but it increases Clemantine's feeling of displacement. Wherever she and Claire go, Clemantine tries to create a home.



Clemantine suddenly finds herself back in a place of kindness and warmth, but she is too stunned to appreciate it. The instinct for survival has completely consumed the parts of her that might allow her to enjoy simple pleasures or respond to affection. This shows that, when people have to struggle intensely to survive, they often find it difficult to readjust to a normal, nonthreatening lifestyle.



Ever since Rob came back for Clemantine, she has been taken care of and shuttled towards a better life. However, when she arrives in a safe place and is reunited with Claire, she can't stop crying. All the moving—by car, bus, motorcycle—has made Clemantine lose track of where she came from, making her feel even farther away from her home in Rwanda. Everything has changed. Even Claire—Clemantine's only remaining family—looks unfamiliar.



Living with Rob's family in Uvira, Clemantine first starts practicing the chameleon strategy of fitting into her surroundings. Because she hasn't felt fully at home since leaving Rwanda, she has to fabricate her feeling of belonging. She later uses this same strategy in high school in the United States.



Rob's mother, Mama Nepele, is gentler than Mama Dina. She holds Clemantine's hand whenever she speaks to her. After Clemantine stops crying every day, Mama Nepele enrolls her in school. The school is a strict Christian academy that uses French and Swahili, neither of which Clemantine is fluent in. The teacher whips Clemantine's hands whenever she mispronounces a word. She cries to Mama Nepele to let her quit, but Mama Nepele refuses. Rob buys her cool sneakers, and Claire gets her a cute outfit, but she still doesn't want to go.

For breakfast, Clemantine eats bread and chai tea with the family. She doesn't like the chai but tries to drink it. After school, she plays outside with other kids. The neighborhood women take her under their wing, combing and braiding her growing wild hair, giving her clothes, and painting her nails. She feels special in this place where everyone is unique. The town eats fish all week, and everyone brags about how much they have.

On the weekends, everyone celebrates. Unlike Rwandans who dress to conceal themselves, Zairean people dress extravagantly in a mix of African and European styles. Rwanda is Catholic, but Zaire is a vibrant mix of cultures and religions. Claire takes to the fancy clothes and starts a business selling purses. On Friday, everyone lines up in town to get their hair done. On Saturday and Sunday, the streets are filled with music and dancing.

After a while, Clemantine starts to forget the refugee camp and forget Rwanda. Every night, the family eats dinner together around a shared pot. Because Clemantine eats slowly, Mama Nepele always puts aside a plate for her so that she doesn't miss out on seconds. This makes Clemantine feel protected and loved. Clemantine slowly learns more Swahili and becomes friends with Mwasiti and Dina. She starts to feel that maybe this is her real life, and her life in Rwanda was only a dream.

Claire feels trapped in Uvira. She wants to go to school, but she can't because she's pregnant. She tells Clemantine they will go home soon, but Clemantine doesn't believe her; she can barely remember Rwanda. All her baby teeth have been replaced with new ones. Rob buys a plot of land up the hill to build a house for Claire, Clemantine, and the baby. The townspeople start calling Claire "sister" in Swahili; this frightens Clemantine because her grandmother had once warned her that a person disappears when they lose their language. Shortly after she turns eight, Clemantine is given a **Mickey Mouse backpack**. She loves it and fills it with the marbles she's collected for Pudi.

When Clemantine was a girl in Rwanda, she loved attending school. It made her feel special and proud. But after losing her home and her family, she finds school a terrifying place. Not only did she lose her home and family, then, but she also lost her confidence and sense of importance in the world. Even cute clothes—reminiscent of the green raincoat she loved to wear—don't make her feel confident enough.



Slowly, Clemantine starts to feel special and loved again. In the refugee camp in Burundi, it came as a huge blow to Clemantine that Claire shaved her head, since this meant that she didn't stand out from anyone else. Now, though, her hair is growing back, and she starts to be recognized for her own unique attributes again.



In Rwanda, Clemantine's mother forbade her to ask questions about her neighbors, many of whom were Zairian and had different lifestyles and beliefs. This prohibition hinted at a certain tension between neighbors, which was most likely informed by the mounting social and political tension in the area. In Zaire (which is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo), however, many cultures blend happily together, suggesting that the Rwandan conflict is—for now—absent from Zairian society.



Clemantine starts to feel at home in Uvira when she gets close with Mama Nepele, Mwasiti and Dina. This shows that food and shelter are not the only things that make a home. Rather, Uvira—a place of food and shelter—feels just as unwelcoming as the refugee camp to Clemantine; until, that is, she feels like she has a family.



Clemantine feels soothed and happy in Uvira because she starts to recognize it as home. However, she is also very frightened that her past is fading. She realizes that hardly anything remains of her old life in Rwanda. To combat this loss of time and place, Clemantine starts the collection in her Mickey Mouse backpack: she collects gifts for Pudi and later will collect rocks from all the places she and Claire have been. This collecting is an effort to keep track of the past.



In March, Claire gives birth to Mariette in a hospital like a “regular person.” The town showers her with gifts. Mama Nepele teaches Clemantine and other young girls how to take care of the new baby. Clemantine loves Mariette and doesn’t want anyone else to touch her. Claire also loves Mariette, but she doesn’t love her own life.

Often, Clemantine swims in the lake with the other kids. They tease her. Although she doesn’t know how to tease back, she recognizes it as affection. Two cousins, Mado and Patrick, arrive from the south because their parents can’t feed them anymore. Sometimes, the electricity shuts off and the neighborhood kids play games in the dark. Once, Clemantine’s impresses her school crush, Serge, by winning a game; Serge says he wants Clemantine on his team next time. Clemantine learns a lovely word in Swahili—*nishauri*—that means collaboration and peace.

A few months later, the spell breaks. People crowd into Uvira begging for food. Fighting is breaking out in the north. Mama Dina cooks extra food and prays more than ever. Soon, however, they run out of food. Schools shuts down, and the electricity and water is shut off. For the second time, Clemantine’s life shrinks. Police and soldiers are everywhere, and at night there’s the sound of gunfire.

Without asking Clemantine, Claire decides to leave. She gathers some things to sell, and she, Rob, Clemantine, and the baby take a boat to Kazimia to stay with Rob’s extended family. At the border, they pay 20 dollars and show their papers. Kazimia is very beautiful, and Rob’s family is nice, but Clemantine can’t open herself up a second time. She feels she made a mistake in Uvira by believing she belonged there.

Claire, who dislikes her role as mother and wife, is gone all day. Clemantine focuses all her attention on Mariette. She becomes obsessed with keeping Mariette clean so that she won’t get sick. Sometimes, Rob’s cousin helps out by looking after Mariette. Clemantine resents the girl’s confidence and wants Mariette to herself. She misses Pudi and can barely remember what he looks like. She doesn’t expect affection from Claire; even before they became refugees, they didn’t get along. Clemantine once lost Claire’s watch, and Claire never forgave her. When Mama Nepele joins them, Clemantine is happy.

Caring for Mariette becomes a huge part of Clemantine’s identity while she is a refugee. It seems that Mariette reminds Clemantine of her own innocence, which she feels she lost when she became a refugee. She now seeks to protect this innocence by taking care of Mariette.



In Uvira, Clemantine gets to have the experiences that a girl her age should have. When she was in the refugee camp in Burundi, she essentially had to become an adult at just six years old by cooking, doing laundry, and listening to grown-ups tell crude stories. Now, in Uvira, she is able to play with kids her age and have a crush on a classmate. The juxtaposition between her life in Uvira and her life in the refugee camp adds to her eventual feeling that she’s both a child and an adult.



What happens in Uvira is a horrible repeat of what happened to Clemantine in Kigali. Two times, Clemantine’s childhood is shattered by the presence of violence. She now likely feels that nothing in life is ever stable or lasting.



In Uvira, Clemantine started to feel truly at home, not just like she was pretending to be at home. Now she decides there’s no point in opening up again because nothing ever lasts. Claire doesn’t treat Clemantine like she has feelings and doesn’t value Clemantine’s need for stability. This causes resentment between the sisters later on.



Even though Clemantine and Claire protect one another, they aren’t close. Before they became refugees, Claire felt that Clemantine always got in her way, and now they have different ways of coping with their new life. Claire wants to make money and expand her horizons while Clemantine wants a sense of home and a loving family. For this reason, Clemantine becomes obsessed with caring for Mariette. She becomes the mother to Mariette that Clemantine herself lacks.



Then, Kazimia starts to shut down. To flee, Clemantine and her family cross Lake Tanganyika in a boat with 50 people. The boat is so overloaded that it starts to collect water. People toss their family photographs and china overboard to lighten the load. Everyone is terrified, but no one screams. Clemantine prays. She doesn't want to die in the water where she'll leave no trail, and she can't bear to think that Mariette might die. Clemantine tries to make herself as light as air as the water in the boat creeps up to her waist.

More than death itself, Clemantine fears leaving no trace. The refugees on the boat toss overboard everything that defines them—photographs and family heirlooms. Clemantine wants to have an identity, and, in the event of her death, she wants to be remembered. Later, she resents those who died in 9/11 because they were given obituaries. If she died on this boat crossing, no obituary would be written about her.



CHAPTER 6

Clemantine's teacher at the Christian Heritage Academy puts the word genocide on a vocabulary list. Clemantine hates this word because it is insufficient; it is impersonal and sterile when it should be personal and gruesome. It doesn't describe the pain of each person included in the whole tragedy. She feels that it doesn't help the victims, but only helps the politicians who sit in their offices and discuss it impersonally. She hates that the word genocide lumps the Rwandan Genocide in with the Holocaust or other horrific instances of ethnic cleansing. Each atrocity is a "different, specific, personal tragedy" that a single word cannot describe.

Clemantine is particularly upset that the word genocide doesn't capture the unique tragedy of every genocide and of every individual victim. As a refugee and survivor of genocide, one of Clemantine's greatest losses was the loss of her individuality and her unique identity. She was treated as one of millions, and, if she had died, her death wouldn't have been recognized. Therefore, it stings Clemantine that the word genocide glosses over the individual's experience.



When she is 16, Clemantine starts reading Elie Wiesel's book *Night*. Even though Elie Wiesel was a white Jewish man, Clemantine identifies with his disembodied feeling and with his love and resentment towards family. To this day, Clemantine doesn't know Rwanda's political history; she only knows that the Rwandan president was shot down in his plane when she was six. Then, all she knows is that bad people stole from her family. From then on, no one wanted to answer Clemantine's questions; it was better to be like Claire—stoic—than to talk about it. Clemantine wants to piece together the narrative from her fragments of knowledge. However, she cannot comprehend the idea of one group of people killing another; it is fundamentally wrong.

When Clemantine experienced the Rwandan Genocide as a little girl, it was an incomprehensible threat of violence and evil in her eyes. However, even when she learns the full history of the Rwandan Genocide, the evil that she experienced still makes no sense to her. She can't piece together why one group of people would kill another group. Since this incomprehensible and fundamentally wrong thing did take place, though, it's impossible for Clemantine to have faith in the world as a sane and good place.



Now, living in the United States, Clemantine learns about her own history. The Rwandan Genocide began on April 8, 1994, and lasted 100 days. A group called the Hutus killed their neighbors—a group called the Tutsis. Hutu Power, a radical fascist group, spread the opinion via radio that the Tutsi's were subhuman cockroaches. Hutu Power required every Hutu to participate in killing and raping the Tutsi's or else they themselves would be killed and raped. They claimed that killing the Tutsi's was necessary and legitimate. In a book by Philip Gourevitch, Clemantine reads how Hutu Power armed everyone with machetes to make the Tutsi deaths as painful and grotesque as possible.

The facts about the Rwandan Genocide are terrifying and reinforce Clemantine's inability to have faith in the world as a good, logical place. It can be very difficult to maintain a positive view of humanity while also acknowledging that some people are so violent and heartless.



Clemantine discovers that this cruel science of eugenics was brought to Rwanda by Belgian colonizers. When the Belgians arrived, they measured Rwandans' skulls and noses and divided them into three groups: the Hutus, the Tutsi's, and the Twas. The Belgians then created social policies that antagonized the groups against each other. They told the Tutsis they were European and intelligent while they told the Hutus they were stupid and childish. The Belgians left Rwanda in 1962, but their eugenics had poisoned the country. The Rwandan president was shot. Then, the UN peacekeepers left Rwanda, as the countries who won World War II and swore to never let another Holocaust happen abandoned the country.

Today, the killers in Rwanda are being put on trial in small village courts. Rwanda's goal is to convict but also to heal, unreasonably expecting their people to coexist with others who killed and raped their families. When American newspapers publish the facts and announce that 800,000 people were killed, everyone looks at Clemantine in alarm. Clemantine feels tired and dizzy.

In *Night*, Clemantine reads how Elie Wiesel lost his own name and all sense of himself. She is fascinated by Wiesel's questioning of God. Everyone in Clemantine's life—even Claire—praises God. But Wiesel asks how God can possibly exist. His only answer is that God is cruel and chose for his people to be killed. Wiesel describes that love is a burden in a cruel world and that he felt relief when his father died from dysentery beside him.

Clemantine finishes *Night* in two days and then reads it a second and third time. Reading *Night* gives her a language for describing the atrocities that happened to her. She remembers people disparaging each other, calling each other cockroaches, crying voices asking for their loved ones. Her mother had just said it was *intambra*—the conflict, but there is never only one word.

Clemantine's eighth grade class is going to Washington, D.C. to learn about the Civil and Vietnam Wars, so Clemantine needs official identification. She has gone to the DMV twice to get an Illinois State ID, but she has been denied both times. Mr. Thomas, who is a lawyer, decides to take Clemantine to the secretary of state office. They stand at the counter, and Mr. Thomas tells Clemantine's story: how she fled being killed in the Rwandan Genocide and lived in refugee camps for six years before coming to Chicago. The clerk sends for her supervisor, and Mr. Thomas tells the story all over again. The clerk tells Clemantine she has an interesting story, and issues her an ID.

Rwanda's history shows that colonizers had an initial impact on the country—an impact that ultimately laid the groundwork for the horrible genocide. Clemantine also points out that the rest of the world abandoned Rwanda when the genocide broke out.



Rwanda's attempt to heal is as illogical as the evil that initially destroyed it. In Clemantine's view, it is as irrational to expect a person to forgive a person who killed and raped their family as it is to kill and rape one's neighbors in the first place. After what she's lived through, the world is irrational to Clemantine.



Clemantine identifies with Elie Wiesel's loss of faith. Even as a girl, Clemantine was too curious to unquestioningly believe in the vague and contradictory explanations of God that her mother gave her. After the genocide, she doesn't believe in God because the world contains so much evil and suffering.



Clemantine wants to write about her experiences, but she feels that her language is too limited. She struggles with words such as "conflict" and "genocide" because they seem too limited to fully capture what she wants to say. Slowly, she tries to piece together her memories as a way of more accurately representing the history these words attempt to describe.



Clemantine obtains an official ID by appealing to the state with her story. But the challenge of simply obtaining an ID drives home her permanent feeling of displacement. Although she has technically made it out of harm's way, her feeling of belonging nowhere persists.



Clemantine stands on the Antietam battlefield. She learns that 23,000 people died there in one day. However, there are no crying children or signs of blood. The next day, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Clemantine observes that there are no memorials dedicated to the Vietnamese civilians. She feels jealous of those who are named. She sobs while her classmates take pictures.

At the Holocaust Museum, Clemantine reads about Jacob Unger, a man who was gassed in an extermination camp. Later that semester, a Holocaust survivor visits Clemantine's class and shows the number tattooed on her arm. Clemantine wants a language, a way of ordering her shattered history. Claire, for instance, orders her life by believing that God has a plan. But no one Clemantine knows of—except Elie Wiesel—acknowledges the awful fact that people destroy each other.

When the movie *Hotel Rwanda* comes out, everyone asks Clemantine questions. Clemantine finds their questions violating; no one has a right to her pain. Clemantine is asked to speak at youth groups and Catholic charities. She agrees to speak to a high school class and pretends she's unimportant. She points to the map, showing where she was born, and narrates her life like an adventure. The class reacts without pity and thinks Clemantine is cool. Everyone finds Clemantine's story exotic, but she feels like she's disappearing. She dreams of retreating to a fictional time of innocence.

CHAPTER 7

The boat arrives in Tanzania. Clemantine and the exhausted refugees sleep on the beach. In the morning, immigration police round them up and take them to a nearby school. Clemantine puts Mariette in a suitcase to keep her warm. The next day, they ride in a white truck to a refugee camp in Kigoma. There were no tents or bathrooms, and police guard the fence. One day, Claire gets a message from Rob to be at the gate at 10 p.m. He will pay off a guard to drive them away. That night, a man comes, and Claire climbs the fence. Clemantine is too slow, and they leave her, saying they'll come back for her the next night. Clemantine's fear of abandonment has come true. But later that night, a guard comes and brings her to Claire, who's waiting in a taxi.

When Clemantine visits the DC war memorials, all she can see is how unfair history is to all the victims involved in tragedy. In her country's tragedy—the Rwandan Genocide—she was one of the many victims who was made invisible and robbed of her individuality. She is jealous of victims who get the respect of memorials in history.



Clemantine is caught between the feelings of wanting to talk about her past and also being unable to grasp the horrible, illogical truth of what happened. She finds it impossible to turn to God to soothe her confusion and pain but also is unwilling to move forward, forgetting her life and things that happened to her that made her who she is.



When Clemantine first starts speaking publicly about her experiences, she can't speak candidly. Similar to the way she puts on an act in order to adapt to her surroundings, she now puts on the act of a cool teenager so she can tell her story. Eventually, she will become a powerful public speaker and will write this memoir, but at this point, she feels that no one has a right to her pain because it is the only possession that's truly hers.



While much of Claire and Clemantine's constant moving around is the fault of external forces beyond their control, Claire also wills much of her family's restlessness. Clemantine doesn't like refugee camps, but more than anything, she wants to be able to settle into one place, learn how to survive in it, and find small habits for making it feel like home. Claire, who always dreamed of studying abroad, wants to move on to bigger and better things, so she constantly uproots the small victories Clemantine makes in creating home out of nothing.



Clemantine and Claire join Rob's extended family in a compound in Kigoma. There is no food, so everyone drinks tea. One day, Mama Nepele prepares a pot of tea with used leaves and tells Claire to serve it to the men. After she serves the tea, Rob yells at Claire for serving weak tea, asking her what kind of woman she is. Mama Nepele tells Rob to stop humiliating his wife. Since Rob has become a refugee too, he no longer looks Clemantine in the eyes.

A week later, the immigration police start rounding up more people, and Claire tells Rob they must go. They dress in all their clothing, and Claire sews her money into her waistband. She has heard of a better refugee camp in Malawi that has tents. They take a safari bus that has televisions and bathrooms. Clemantine ignores Claire, angry at her for making them leave again. Clemantine watches the landscape change. She feels beyond lost, like a drifting feather. She tries to remember where she has just come from, but she only remembers people screaming.

Clemantine still has her **Mickey Mouse backpack**. Inside, she carries her favorite sweater and rocks from every place they've been—Lake Tanganyika, Tanzania. Neither Rob nor Claire has papers to enter Malawi, so they get off the bus before the border. Claire assumes that no one will harass Clemantine and Mariette because they are only kids. A while later, Claire and Rob return. Claire can hardly move. Her expression is impenetrable, but she finally tells Clemantine what happened: she and Rob were caught by the immigration police who beat them with an iron rod. Claire pleaded with them and showed them her leaking breast to prove she had a baby. The soldiers continued to beat them until Claire paid them.

Clemantine, Claire, Rob, and Mariette arrive at the Malawi refugee camp, Dzaleka. They sleep with 20 refugees in one of the brick huts. They eat rice and peanut butter. Clemantine spends all day with Mariette, watching the road for her parents and Pudi. A nice woman helps Clemantine navigate the showers, where depraved men prey on girls. Every morning Rob dresses in a nice outfit and tries to get a job in camp management. Eventually, he gives up. He lies on the floor all day yelling at anyone who bothers him.

Claire is restless and doesn't want to settle. At a refugee camp, the workers oppress the refugees and believe that they're victims because of some inherent weakness. Claire combats this sense of powerlessness by making money. She starts selling the family's few possessions. One day, she notices a woman selling goat meat and decides she could do better, since she speaks four languages. She starts asking where she can get a goat. Meanwhile, Clemantine learns how to care for Mariette.

This scene is the first clear sign that Rob will become an abusive husband. To a certain extent, Rob used to make a show of being kind to refugees back when he wasn't a refugee himself. However, becoming a refugee seems to have humiliated him, and he responds to this humiliation by debasing Claire.



Claire thinks that moving on will lead her family to something better. By contrast, the more they move, the more Clemantine feels lost. She wants to remember where she came from, but their constant moving erases her past and jumbles her life's timeline. She feels like a drifting feather because she doesn't remember where she came from and doesn't know where she's going.



The incident Claire and Rob have with the soldiers shows the full extent of the danger that Clemantine's family faces. The soldiers beat Claire with an iron rod, showing her no mercy even when she proves that she has a baby who needs her. This shows that, in the region during this time, refugees were often treated as less than human beings. The only thing that keeps the soldiers from killing Claire and Rob is money, proving Claire's point that money is the only thing that can improve their lives.



Both Rob and Clemantine live under the delusion that their lives will go back to normal. Clemantine thinks that her family will find her any day now. Rob thinks that if he continues to dress in respectable outfits, people will treat him with respect, like they did before he became a refugee. Both Clemantine and Rob slowly realize that their refugee status isn't temporary.



Clemantine explains that refugees are treated as though they are inherently lesser than non-refugees. Both Clemantine and Claire defend themselves against this debasement but in different ways. Claire seeks freedom through making money, whereas Clemantine seeks dignity and a sense of home through caring for Mariette.



Claire dresses like a Malawi woman. Most of the refugees are Muslim, so she barter with a man to kill the goat in the mosque. The next morning, she bribes a guard to let her leave the camp. She walks out into the farm fields and finds someone willing to sell her a goat. She walks the goat back to camp, has it butchered, and sells the meat to the refugees. Every week, she buys another goat. This primitive commerce gives her a sense of power.

Four months after arriving in Dzaleka, Clemantine goes to see a movie about Jesus. The movie is screened on a bedsheet in the center of camp, and the workers provide chocolate. Clemantine enjoys watching Jesus preach to his flock and multiply food. When she gets home, Claire has packed their possessions. Without asking Clemantine, Claire and Rob have decided to leave. Clemantine hates them. She packs her **Mickey Mouse backpack**.

All night, Clemantine, Claire, Rob, and Mariette walk. Clemantine fumes; she had just learned how to survive in Dzaleka. Claire carries Mariette clumsily on her back and doesn't speak to Clemantine. She walks aggressively, not caring how Clemantine feels or that she's terrified of Rob. Clemantine can feel that Claire is afraid of Rob too; he hits her and only cares about himself. At dawn, Rob says they are in Mozambique. Clemantine scans the landscape for some difference that marks the new country, but it looks the same: bleak and empty. She fantasizes about finding her mother in a market and buying her a present. They walk over bullet shells until they reach the main road.

Clemantine and her group reach a bus stop. They sit down in the shade and wait. Clemantine's stomach aches with hunger, but she gives the rest of the porridge to Mariette. Hours later, a military bus arrives, and they board. Clemantine curls into a ball on the floor and falls asleep. Claire wakes her when they get to the town of Tete, where they get off the bus. Suddenly, Clemantine realizes she left her **Mickey Mouse backpack** on the bus. She asks Rob and Claire to go back for it, but they refuse. She starts back for it herself, but Rob grabs her arm violently and tells her no one cares.

In Rwanda as a teenager, Claire had a knack for business and saving money. Now, she puts this skill to use in the refugee camp. Rob is crushed by his lifestyle, and Claire takes his place as the provider for the family by strategizing ways to make money. In this way, she rises above this environment, even as the environment itself threatens to disempower and violate women.



When Clemantine goes to see the movie at the refugee camp, she enjoys herself and starts to feel slightly at home. She is therefore furious when she finds out that Claire is uprooting her yet again. She makes sure to pack her Mickey Mouse backpack—the one thing that she always has, even while she's migrating.



Clemantine feels that Mozambique looks the same as everything else: bleak and empty. She can no longer tell the difference between all the places she's been, and this contributes to her sense of displacement and loss. Since the landscape terrifies her and Claire gives her no affection, Clemantine resorts to her imagination to keep her company. She imagines buying her mother a present as if to be the affectionate, caring mother that she herself lacks in life.



The loss of Clemantine's Mickey Mouse backpack is devastating because it is the one possession that remained constant in all the upheaval since she left Uvira. In the backpack, Clemantine kept a roadmap of her restless life in the form of rocks from each place she passed through. She was also collecting presents for Pudi. Therefore, when she loses her backpack, she loses her past and her hope of returning to it.



CHAPTER 8

In the United States, Clemantine is given an assignment for her 11th grade improv class: introduce herself using two objects. Out of pity, Clemantine's teachers cast her in lots of plays, but her acting is flat and mechanical. When she walks on stage with her objects, she doesn't know what to do. Who is she? Inside her backpack, she has a picture of Mariette and Freddy standing in front of their first apartment in Chicago, their eyes empty, and a lavender sachet pillow that Mrs. Thomas gave her to help her sleep. She lies down on the prop bed with her head on the pillow, looking at the picture.

Suddenly, Clemantine's anger erupts. She rips the sheets off the bed and dials Rob on her cellphone. She leaves him a message, screaming that he was supposed to protect her family from terror but didn't. She screams that she can forgive him, but she'll never trust another person again. She sobs until she's escorted offstage. Afterwards, her classmates avoid her.

By the time Clemantine writes her essay for Oprah's contest, she knows her parents are alive. One day, at World Relief (the organization that brought Clemantine and Claire to the United States), Claire meets a woman who knew her and Clemantine's uncle. Claire gets the phone number of their uncle, who's now a priest in Rwanda. When Claire calls and tells him who she is, he doesn't believe her at first. He thought she and Clemantine had died. He tells Claire that their parents are still in Kigali with Pudi, but they've lost their money and have no phone. He arranges for an aunt to visit the family with a phone the next day so Clemantine and Claire can call.

The next day, Clemantine skips school and goes to Claire's. She hates Claire's apartment because Rob is there. Rob cheats on Claire, beats her, and makes her feel worthless. Claire calls her mother. Clemantine walks out of the room, unable to bear hearing Claire and her mother talk like strangers. Claire lies that she's married a nice man. With horror, Clemantine feels she's lost what her family meant to her. They are all as good as dead. She decides she'll never tell her mother anything.

CHAPTER 9

Back in Africa, Clemantine imagines every night how she'll fight if a man attacks her. She plans to use her whole body as a weapon, physically, emotionally, and verbally. She never accepts help, especially from a man, because accepting help allows the other person to demand repayment.

Clemantine's backpack of important objects for the improv class is reminiscent of the Mickey Mouse backpack she lost on the bus in Mozambique. When she lost that backpack, she lost the few objects that defined who she was and where she came from. Now, years later, she can't think of any objects that truly define her; she doesn't know who she is. This shows that the loss of the Mickey Mouse backpack signifies the broader loss of her sense of self.



Clemantine's explosion reveals that Rob is a huge part of why she feels incapable of trusting other people. When Clemantine was very young, Rob was one of her elders. He scared her and abused Claire in front of her, leading Clemantine to fear the very people who are supposed to protect her.



Clemantine and Claire traveled through six countries before immigrating to the United States, and Clemantine looked for her family in every town they stopped in. Suddenly, after making one small connection, she and Claire finally have the chance to talk to their parents. There is something surreal about the sudden discovery that they can call their parents. Their parents also believed that Clemantine and Claire had died, suggesting that the phone call will feel like a conversation between ghosts.



Clemantine wishes that reuniting with her family had remained a dream. When it was only a dream, Clemantine could pretend that she and her family were the same people they had been when they were separated. Now, she realizes that they've all changed irrevocably, which is why they end up speaking to each other as if they're strangers.



One of the main things that Clemantine fears is being attacked or raped by a man. She is therefore hesitant to accept help from men, fearing that they might expect something from her in return for their good deeds—a good illustration of how her traumatic past has impacted the way she moves through the world in the present.



Clemantine's rage at losing her **Mickey Mouse backpack** consumes everything. The men walk into Tete to find help while the women wait. Clemantine tries to sleep, wanting to escape the world. Suddenly, women emerge in nun's habits and offer them food. A little later, more women arrive and tell them that the immigration police arrested three of the men, including Rob. Clemantine and the group follow the nuns to an old soldiers' camp, where they are given more food and baby supplies.

In the morning, the nuns walk the women to the prison. They wait on a bench, attacked by mosquitoes, until a guard comes and locks them in a small windowless room. Claire screams at the guards that they should be ashamed of themselves. Clemantine joins in. She is still furious about her backpack, but relieved to be away from Rob. However, Clemantine and Claire need Rob: he is their shield against other men. Finally, a guard who speaks Swahili unlocks the door and gives them money to take a bus to a camp in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. That night, they sleep again with the nuns, and the next day the men are released.

Clemantine knows that Rob hates her and wants to leave her behind. When the family arrives in Maputo, immigration guards take them to a surprisingly nice camp run like a hostel. There are cots to sleep on, they are treated like people, and they are given plenty of food. On Fridays, the Italian owners give them pasta. However, children still cry for their mothers at night.

Many people in the Maputo camp have lived there for 20 years. Claire asks one of these old-timers to bring her into Maputo. In town, Claire asks a general store owner if he'll pay her for pasta from Italy. She shows the store owner a sample, and he offers her a price. Back at camp that evening, Claire pays the refugees for their pasta. She returns to Maputo the next day, sells the pasta, and purchases soap and milk. She then has Clemantine sell these goods at the camp, starting a small black-market economy. Claire gives Rob some money to go to South Africa to get a job. Clemantine starts to feel happy and safe, but Claire is afraid of getting too comfortable.

CHAPTER 10

In the United States, Clemantine survives by shutting out her family and working hard at school. When she needs support, she reads Toni Morrison. She feels the same existential isolation that Morrison's characters feel. Like them, she feels that only her loneliness belongs only to her.

Without her Mickey Mouse backpack, Clemantine doesn't want to exist anymore. She tries to go to sleep because she can't bear the life that she has. The contents of her backpack represented her old self, and now that it is gone, her hope that she'll one day resume her life as a child with a home and a family goes away too.



Like the immigration police who beat Claire and Rob, the guards at the prison have no mercy for refugees or for the unique plights of women. During this time, all the women are particularly in danger of heartless men and the threat of rape. Rob, who has also shown himself as a heartless and cruel man, is Clemantine and Claire's only shield against other men. In this way, women fight a unique war as refugees in which they are always at men's mercy.



Right away, Clemantine thinks that the Maputo refugee camp is more fit to be a home than any other she has seen. However, no matter how good the living conditions are, children still long for their parental figures. This shows that food and shelter are not the only thing people need in life.



Claire starts her own successful business at the refugee camp. The nice living conditions of the camp and the money that Claire's business brings in make Clemantine feel happy; to her, this feels like enough. To Claire, however, settling down makes them vulnerable and stagnant. In this way, she wills the refugee and migrant life upon herself and her family. Her goal isn't to find a home but to move on to bigger and better things—a never-ending mission.



Because everything she owned was always taken from her, Clemantine's only possessions are her unique experiences. She cherishes her loneliness and pain as possessions even though these are possessions no one wants to have.



One day, when Clemantine is shopping with Mrs. Thomas, Claire calls to say Pudi has meningitis. Right away, Clemantine wires her babysitting money to Rwanda to pay for Pudi's medicine. The next day, she goes to Claire's empty apartment (Claire has just left Rob) and they wait to get a call from their mother. Finally, their mother calls and says that Pudi is dead. He was 22 when he died, but Clemantine didn't know him as an adult. There was so much she wanted to tell him, and yet nothing to say. She'd been too terrified to talk to him on the phone. She weeps on Claire's mattress.

Three months after the Oprah show, Claire flies back to Rwanda. She finds her parents living in a shack outside Kigali. Her father is suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes. In Kigali, Claire is treated like a star because of the Oprah show. A genocide museum has been built that contains a mass grave of 250,000 people. In one exhibit, a video plays in which several traumatized Rwandans talk about the necessity of forgiveness.

Years later, Clemantine and Claire sit in a park in San Francisco and argue about forgiveness. Claire believes that people must forgive. Clemantine asks how all the people who suffered and were robbed of their humanity can be expected to forgive. Clemantine says that people need to know that killing their neighbors and families is unforgivable. Claire says that forgiveness is worth it because it brings peace: Rwanda is only peaceful now because people have forgiven their killers. Clemantine understands that forgiveness is practical, and that it is the piece missing from her healing. But she feels that a line was crossed and that everyone must be held responsible for what happened. Claire changes the subject.

When Claire visits her parents in Rwanda, she obtains visas for her mother and sister. However, she doesn't have enough money yet to buy them plane tickets. Claire has had a hard time getting on her feet in the United States; Rob takes her paychecks and spends them on other women. He also beats her and constantly tears her down. Claire goes back to Rwanda a second time, but she still doesn't have money for her mother's ticket. She calls Clemantine and asks her to borrow the money from her boyfriend Troy's father, who once offered to help bring Clemantine's parents to the United States.

Clemantine feels as though there was so much she wanted to tell Pudi, even if she doesn't know exactly what she would have said. She has this contradictory feeling with every member of her estranged family. In some ways, her family knows her better than anyone; they know who she was and what she wanted to be. However, none of them know what she has become. Because Clemantine's life and identity were disrupted and severed, her relationship with her family is both a deep bond and a mere acquaintance.



Claire is intent on bringing the whole family from Rwanda so they can all be together in the United States. Clemantine stays out of this decision. She doesn't want to see her family because of how close and yet painfully estranged they are from one another. She no longer dreams of reviving the past.



Clemantine's conception of the world has been so altered by her experiences that she can no longer view forgiveness and peace as the right actions to take. In her view, the violence that tore Rwanda apart was so fundamentally wrong that any sense of forgiveness feels completely false to her. In this way, Clemantine has lost her faith in the world.



Even though Claire has made it out of Africa and her life as a refugee, she is still caught in a constant struggle for survival. Much of what she dealt with as a refugee she still deals with in the United States: Rob is still abusive, and no matter how hard she works, she can never get ahead. This shows that a person's life isn't magically better once they are no longer a refugee. The struggles they have as refugees are surprisingly similar to many of the struggles they will face for the rest of their lives.



Clemantine doesn't want to ask Troy's father for money. Even at 19, she doesn't want charity. She resents the outsiders who try to revive Africa, believing themselves to be great saviors. She doesn't think this postcolonial generosity makes up for the sins these people originally committed. She wants people to really examine their biases so that their minds don't slowly get possessed by ideas that eventually lead to systemic killing, like what happened with the Holocaust. However, Claire convinces Clemantine to ask Troy's father. Troy's father arranges a flight for Clemantine's mother. When her mother asks Claire where she got the money, Claire says from God.

Clemantine despises charity because she feels like it is an easy way for people to feel like they are helping. People can give charity without really listening to the experience of the person they are helping and without examining their own biases. Clemantine believes that everyone is responsible for the tragedies that occur in the world. She believes that to truly help a person who's suffered, one must have full knowledge of this person's suffering and the part they may have played in inflicting it so as to prevent history repeating itself.



After Clemantine's mother moves in with Claire in Chicago, Clemantine avoids the apartment. Her mother tries to help Claire with the chores and the kids, but she is disoriented and doesn't speak any English. She hovers over Claire, treating her like a child and criticizing her actions. Often, Claire leaves the apartment for fresh air. A few months later, Claire returns to Rwanda for her father and other siblings. Her parents are excited to immigrate to the United States, but they have a hard time settling in. They never talk about the past. Claire and Clemantine feel permanently alienated from them. Clemantine's father is often in the hospital for his diabetes. Claire has eight people living in her apartment and struggles to feed everyone.

Claire's mother micromanages Claire like she is still a child, suggesting that Clemantine's family members have views of one another that are frozen in time before they were all separated. Furthermore, no one talks about what happened even though they all experienced the same kinds of pain. This silence may come partly from Rwanda's old tradition of modesty, but also from the fact that they all suffered in isolation. No matter how alike their suffering, they all feel like lonely strangers.



Once, Clemantine starts to ask her mother about what happened after she and Claire left. Her mother's hands tremble, and Clemantine realizes she shouldn't have asked. One night, Clemantine and her mother study together at Claire's kitchen table, Clemantine studying for the SAT's and her mother studying English. They haven't been this close in years, but they don't speak. Her mother looks different from what Clemantine remembered; only her high cheekbones and her white rosary necklace are the same. Clemantine runs to the bathroom and cries.

When Clemantine studies opposite her mother in silence, she sees a woman who barely resembles the mother she had in Rwanda. Because she left her at such a young age, Clemantine's image of her mother is frozen in time years ago. This suggests that separation and displacement estrange people from one another in ways that are hard to remedy.



CHAPTER 11

Back in Mozambique, Claire and Clemantine drive in a car packed with people. They drive fast, fleeing Mozambique to South Africa where there are jobs. The driver stops near some trees and hands out food. The group walks miles through a nature preserve, avoiding snakes. Claire carries Mariette, and Clemantine misses the baby's weight. Finally, they come to a barbed wire fence and crawl through a hole in its base. A truck picks them up and they drive towards twinkling lights. Clemantine asks Claire when they are going home, but Claire glares at her. Clemantine is afraid Claire will leave her behind.

Claire has evidently decided to leave Maputo, the nice refugee camp where she started the pasta business. Clemantine asks Claire when they are going home, still hoping that this moving from place to place is only a horrible vacation. From Clemantine's young perspective, she has no idea who is picking them up, driving them around, and handing out food. Her ignorance of how their journey to South Africa is orchestrated makes their flight seem crazy and purposeless.



South Africa is beautiful. The first night, Clemantine and Claire sleep in an abandoned office with other refugees. A woman down the hall gives them ugali and a blanket. The next day, Claire finds Rob rooming with a group of families and working as a barber. They go to the Department of Home Affairs and get six-month visas. They don't fear arrest. South Africa, under Nelson Mandela's presidency, is peaceful and lively. The family settles in Durban, a coastal city with many money-making opportunities.

Claire believes that nobody deserves more or less than anyone else. Even as a refugee, she has kept one nice outfit so she can look like a confident, enterprising young woman wherever she goes. In Durban, she puts on her best outfit and finds an interpreter. She then knocks on doors and finds someone who hires her to wash clothes. Meanwhile, Clemantine spends time with Mariette. She is bullied by the neighborhood kids.

Claire reads newspapers in Zulu on the bus and has the family attend Baptist church to fit in. She's moved by the hymns even though she can't understand them. One day at church, a white Afrikaans woman comes up to them and asks if they are refugees. Claire answers yes in English, and they follow the woman, Linda, to her house three blocks away. The woman feeds them fish, pork, and ice cream. The following week, they go to Linda's house again and she gives them clothes. Linda helps them find a tiny apartment across from a brothel. Once, one of the sex workers offers to teach Clemantine how to kiss, but Clemantine says she'll never kiss anyone.

In South Africa, Clemantine's life feels safe and easy. Rob gets a job making textiles outside of town and is gone for weeks at a time. Claire gets a job watching over cars at a fancy hotel. Clemantine learns a few words in Zulu from her neighbors. One day, Claire comes home and throws money on the bed, declaring that they are rich. She buys new clothes and a roast chicken and gizzards. In Africa, only men are allowed the chicken gizzards. But Claire fries them and feels like she's eating power.

Mariette is Clemantine's world. Clemantine pampers and protects her. One day, Linda registers Clemantine for school. She goes to the doctor for a check-up and finds out she has tuberculosis. She is quarantined in the hospital where she can see the ocean and eat custard. Linda brings her flowers and a backpack full pencils and paper. Clemantine wants Linda to be her mother.

South Africa is the first country where Clemantine and her family can truly make a home. They obtain visas, meaning that they are now considered citizens instead of refugees. South Africa is also pleasant, peaceful, and profitable, meaning that they finally have the opportunity to thrive and become a part of society.



Claire has managed not to feel degraded even after all the degrading treatment she endured as a refugee. Her belief—that no person is more or less important than another—becomes a big part of Clemantine's later philosophy of life. Clemantine wants all of humanity to share—something that ultimately requires equality.



As many times as Clemantine and Claire encounter cruel people, they also encounter kind, generous people. Linda, like Mucyechuru and Musaza, is one of these people. Linda's kindness is as unprecedented as the violence, making Claire and Clemantine's journey a mixture of light and dark. However, Clemantine's decision that she'll never kiss anyone shows that her trust has been ruined at a very young age. The only example she has of love is Claire and Rob, and it is not a good one.



Claire initially married Rob in order to get herself out of poverty and homelessness. She shows afterwards, however, that she neither needs nor wants a man. She is able to make money and support her family on her own. Her act of frying and eating the chicken gizzards shows that she believes that women, like men, are powerful and worthy of reverence.



Clemantine is obsessed with mothers. She longs for a mother in Linda, and she also acts out the role of mother towards Mariette. She loves being in the hospital because it makes her feel cared for, and she loves looking out for Mariette because it makes her feel a caretaker herself.



After Clemantine leaves the hospital, she and Claire move closer to the textile factory where Rob works. The street where they live is festive and prideful. Clemantine has to watch Mariette in this neighborhood, so she doesn't start school. Every day, she ties Mariette to her back and watches a man who looks like her father come home from work. Clemantine rehearses her Zulu and one day goes up to the man's daughter and says that her father looks like Clemantine's father. The girl gets offended and walks away. Clemantine realizes she misspoke.

Claire loses her job watching cars and starts buying and reselling clothes. She also continues to work as a maid, and Clemantine and Mariette often go with her. They clean the living room and watch Oprah. Clemantine is fascinated by Oprah. Claire likes Oprah but doesn't idolize her. Claire's confidence comes from within, but Clemantine's self-worth is based on praise. Clemantine feels she is far outside of what she wants to be.

Claire gets pregnant again. Rob tells her to go back to Rwanda with Clemantine to find their parents while he stays in South Africa. Clemantine hates the idea of going back to Rwanda; they are finally safe. What is more, she knows her parents are dead. Claire doesn't want to go either but, even though she's headstrong, she is only 17 and has been raised to obey her husband. So Clemantine and Claire ride north and climb back through the barbed wire border fence.

CHAPTER 12

One Sunday back in Chicago, Clemantine does Mariette's hair while her mother cooks. Mariette accuses Clemantine of hurting her. Clemantine thinks that Mariette doesn't know what real pain is. Clemantine feels cold and asks Michele to bring her a blanket. Michele looks up from the TV and says she wants to be like Eloise, a spoiled cartoon character. Mariette says that Michele will never be like Eloise because she is stuck here, and Michele cries.

When Clemantine was a little girl in Rwanda, she loved going to school. Now, however, she doesn't have time to pursue an education. Instead, she focuses on caring for Mariette and thinking about her own parents. She attempts to connect with the girl her age over the similarity of their fathers, but a language barrier prevents her from forging a bond with her. This is a sad example of how Clemantine's years as a refugee have prevented her from connecting with others.



Oprah, as one of the most successful Black women in the United States, inspires Claire and Clemantine long before they meet her. Oprah makes Clemantine aspire to higher heights while she empowers Claire to feel that, even in her hard life, she is as worthy and important as Oprah.



Although marrying Rob initially helped Claire and Clemantine out of harsh circumstances, he now causes them more harm. Humiliated that he himself is a refugee, he turns Claire out to go back to her family, as if to insult her for being a refugee with no connections. Here, Rwanda's strict traditions oppress Claire: she's been taught to obey men.



In this scene, two generations and three levels of experience clash. Clemantine feels that she knows real pain more than Mariette, who was a baby when they were refugees in Africa. In contrast to Clemantine and Mariette, Michele is spoiled. Mariette then accuses Michele of not knowing how hard life is. In turn, it becomes clear that Clemantine's many experiences of hardship and pain have made her somewhat resentful of people who are capable of going through life in a state of ignorant bliss.



Clemantine finds it hard to navigate the line between the African and African American communities. Clemantine is African and lives in the United States, but she doesn't have any history with white Americans. On the other hand, Mariette, Freddy, and Michele live in public housing and pick up African American slang. Even Claire moves back and forth between African American and traditional African trends. She sympathizes with African Americans whose families have been dehumanized by white Americans for generations. But Clemantine lives with the Thomases, and she feels like her identity is fragmented.

Clemantine feels privileged now. She no longer worries about basic needs and has time to think and create. She signs up for modeling classes that teach girls how to use makeup, walk a runway, and prepare for a photoshoot. She wants to command a space and get paid to be looked at. In the class, Clemantine is told to measure herself every month so as not to lie on her resume about her size. At the end of the class, she dresses up and goes to a photoshoot. She feels glamorous until she realizes her photos will cost \$100 each. She leaves feeling cheated.

When it is time, Clemantine applies to Princeton, Yale, and Georgetown. Her high school advisor thinks she's reaching too high and convinces her to apply to several less competitive schools as well as the others. Clemantine is desperate to leave Chicago and her family. Even around Claire, she feels ignored. She wants to run away and hide from the pain of her past. So far, nowhere feels like home. That fall, she marches in the Thanksgiving Day Parade. She can't find dark enough nude tights, so she has to dye them herself.

That spring, Clemantine is waitlisted at Yale. She flies out to New Haven and attends several interviews with Yale, telling her story. She tells the dean of admissions that she belongs at Yale; she knows what needs to be fixed to make the world a better place. A week later, the dean calls and tells her that she's been accepted, but that they want her to take preliminary classes at Hotchkiss—a preparatory school in Connecticut—to improve her English. At first, Clemantine feels set back, but she reminds herself that deferring and taking extra classes is a privileged hardship.

Not only was Clemantine's personal identity shattered by her experiences, but her cultural identity was as well. When she immigrates to the United States, she arrives in a country in which Black people have a long history of pain and oppression. Although she also has a history of pain and oppression, it is different from this American one. She feels that she has no history in the United States, a fact that makes her feel less at home.



Now that Clemantine doesn't have to worry about her basic needs, she focuses on her appearance and on loving her body. When she was a refugee, her body was only a burden that caused her to constantly suffer because it was in need. She was never comfortable enough to focus on her beauty. In the States, though, she finds it possible to pay attention to such matters.



Clemantine wants to go far away to college—not out of confidence and ambition but out of the desire to escape. Even though she is no longer a refugee and is safe in the United States, she still feels like a refugee in the sense that she never feels at home. She has this feeling with the Thomases and even with her reunited family, suggesting that she'll struggle to feel at home wherever she goes.



Although Clemantine feels lost inside, she has an impressive outward confidence. She struggles with her internal feeling that she belongs nowhere, but she flies out to Yale and asserts to the dean of admissions that she belongs there. She learned this skill as a refugee: to pretend to be other than how she feels in order to get what she wants. Even in the United States, this skill gets her far in life.



CHAPTER 13

On the way to the Mozambique border, Clemantine sees a father drinking soda with his daughter. She wishes she was on a trip with her parents, but she no longer imagines that she'll reunite with them in Kigali. Everything has changed, including her own body. Claire, who is five months pregnant, sits up front by the driver, tired of Clemantine's whining. Clemantine sits in the back with Mariette. Clemantine is happy that they will be passing through Zaire; Zaire was the only place that felt like home in the three years since they left Rwanda.

However, Kazimia is destroyed when they arrive. Rob's family huddles in their house and eats sweet potato leaves. The electricity has been cut off and most of the water pumps are dry. It is too dangerous to fish in the lake, and no one is allowed to leave their homes after five p.m. Zaire is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a battlefield of violence: dead people lie in the streets and bombs go off everywhere. When there is an explosion, the family crawls under the beds. When one of the kids cries and asks if they will die, his sister says God is sending angels. Clemantine doesn't believe in angels.

One day, Mama Nepele sends Clemantine, Dina, Mwasiti and the other kids to fetch water. They walk 20 minutes, each carrying two 20-liter containers. When they arrive, a guard has closed the pump. They walk an hour over a hill to a large house with running water. A guard, who is building a stone house, demands boulders in exchange for water. They comb the shore for large rocks. Mwasiti ties a huge one to her dress; she is now 13 and very proud. The guard fills their jugs, and they start home, carrying the jugs on their heads. The sun sets and Clemantine is afraid; after dark, no one is safe. She has overheard the older women say that all young girls will be raped eventually.

A white priest lives next door to Rob's family in Kazimia. People line up at his door, screaming and crying, hoping he'll chase away the evil. Mama Nepele wakes early and waits in line at the mill, trying to beat the rush. When the rest wake up, they join her. Clemantine wants to leave her body; she hates it for having needs.

Because of her young age, Clemantine's experience as a refugee is unique. Her sense of shattered identity that came from her initial displacement is exacerbated by her changing body. It has been three years since she and Claire left Kigali. Clemantine has grown significantly since then, becoming a person she no longer recognizes, since she still attaches her identity to her six-year-old self in Kigali.



During this time in 1996, a revolt broke out in Zaire against its dictator, Mobuto, who robbed from his citizens and abused human rights. A rebel group supported by many other African countries, including Rwandan refugees, rallied and drove out dictator Mobuto, changing Zaire's name to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This caused the conflict and poverty that Clemantine and Claire find back in Zaire.



Dangers of all kinds threaten Clemantine's life. She and her family are starving and must undertake exhausting journeys just to get water. Furthermore, no one in town is trustworthy; many of the guards manipulate the starving people. Clemantine also fears the dark because it brings a whole new set of dangers. Rape is seen not as a possibility but as an inevitability: it is a constant and ever-looming threat for women, and this makes many women feel as though they are already violated.



During these hardships, many people turn to religion as the only hope that things will get better. Clemantine, however, seems to have lost her faith. She wants to escape her body, suggesting that she has no hope for a good life anymore.



Back home after waiting in line, the family spends the day under the bed. Claire's belly is huge, and when she falls asleep, she has nightmares about people turning into animals. She remembers when, a few months earlier, rebels broke in and nailed a crocodile skin to the wall. Clemantine watches military trucks go by, filled with little boys and girls with guns. The family pushes the beds to the middle of the room, but Clemantine still feels like she's on an island surrounded by violence. Everyone shakes with fear, but no one cries.

Clemantine gets sick with malaria and malnutrition. She can't eat and is too weak to walk. Mama Nepele ties Clemantine's skinny 10-year-old body to her back and takes her to the hospital. The war is everywhere and has no logic or meaning. At the hospital, doctors pray over Clemantine, but they have no medicine. Back at home, Mama Nepele lays Clemantine under the trees and reads the Bible, sending her off to her death. Everyone believes Clemantine will die. Clemantine feels that her sickness was her way of mourning her old life.

Clemantine recovers quickly, and then the family leaves for Uvira. But Uvira is no better than Kazimia. Mama Nepele sends the kids over the hill to look for sweet potato leaves, but the vines have been stripped bare. Clemantine starts dreaming that everyone around her is asleep and she has to wake them up so they can hear God. She starts praying in churches and dressing like a nun. However, she soon starts to doubt her faith. Priests tell refugees that they are sinners and refugee camps are hell. They instruct refugees to pray to end their punishment. But Clemantine doesn't think she and the refugees are sinners; they are being killed by hateful men. She sees no reason why they are being punished.

In August, Claire goes to the hospital and gives birth to Freddy. The nurses are cruel and rebuke her for getting pregnant and for screaming from the pain of giving birth. Five hours after Freddy is born, the hospital is burned. Claire walks Freddy home wrapped in a hospital sheet.

One day, there is shooting that lasts for days. Mama Nepele sneaks out for water and mixes it with sugar to give to Claire. The next day, she begs the neighbors for a banana to give Claire so that her milk won't dry up. Everyone prays that Freddy won't cry. The adults whisper about fleeing, but they don't know where to go. All they can do is pray for tomorrow and make dark jokes about who will watch who while they use the bathroom outside. When the shooting stops, they hear boots and men laughing.

The crocodile skin that gets nailed to the family's door gives a grotesque and illogical feeling to the conflict. After all, a crocodile skin feels like a purposeless and barbaric expression of violence. This ultimately contributes to Clemantine's disillusioned sense that the evil around her is irrational and needlessly outlandish.



Clemantine nearly dies while she is in Zaire, but she seems almost thankful for her illness because it represents her mourning and finally breaks her ties with her past. She had been so ready to escape her body many times, and this illness answers that wish for a brief period. Clemantine's appreciation of her near-death experience shows how awful existence is during this time.



Clemantine tries to explain what is happening, but she can't find any logic in it. Religion offers the explanation that her suffering is punishment for sins. However, this makes no sense to her because she hasn't sinned. Instead, she only sees the illogical hatred of the violent people around her who want to hurt her. In this way, life lacks both religion and logic for Clemantine. Later, when she tries to write her memoir in the United States, Clemantine strives to find the missing logic and beauty in her life story.



The nurses are harsh to Claire because they seem to think that the pain of childbirth is nothing compared to the pain of being alive through this war. In their view, having a child during this time is not a joyful thing.



For three years, Claire and Clemantine have escaped danger by fleeing to the next place. Now, fleeing isn't even an option because there is nowhere to go. Life becomes crude, and the only humor around Clemantine is dark and disturbing—something that likely upsets her, since she has tried to maintain a sense of resilience and optimism even in the most devastating circumstances.



On days with no shooting, the adults still don't let the children outside; they don't want them to be corrupted by the evil men. The Congolese army (the enemy) is filled with orphans Clemantine's age who were promised food and shelter by the soldiers. Clemantine doesn't know who is evil—the starving orphans or the soldiers who offer them comfort. If she was offered release from her misery, she'd take it too.

Clemantine's family doesn't talk about normal things; they talk about bombs and machine guns. Mama Dina wakes in the morning and prays for the kids to be saved. Clemantine has seen destruction so many times, but this is the first time she is aware of the cruel and terrible people who are causing it. Life is shattering and everyone is in pain, and no one tries to trace it back to its source.

Clemantine starts having a recurring dream. She is on a big boat in the middle of the ocean. She has Mariette, and everyone on board is happy. Suddenly, the electricity goes off and everyone around her falls asleep. Clemantine runs around trying to find the captain. Then a voice whispers to her to get her backpack. Inside the backpack she finds a Bible. The Bible grows into a bigger Bible. Then, suddenly, the ship starts sinking. Clemantine finds Claire and tries to wake her. The letters start peeling off the pages of the Bible. But then the lights come back on, the ship steadies, and everyone wakes up. None of the passengers have any idea what happened.

CHAPTER 14

Clemantine's mother used to test her kids by cutting an orange into pieces. Sometimes there were not enough pieces to share evenly. Although the tree outside was full of oranges, the answer to the test was not to get another orange but to cut the orange into more pieces. This was to teach her kids that nothing belongs to them alone.

Clemantine thinks about this test when she tries to bridge the gap between people who have too much and people who have too little. She believes that life is dull and meaningless when people isolate themselves by their differences. Everyone always has something another person needs. She has experienced being very rich and being very poor. She knows that both people with everything and people with nothing can do remarkable things. Also, both people with everything and people with nothing can become monsters. The way to equality is not through the kind of charity that makes the giver feel superior to the taker; it is through sharing.

Clemantine feels that even the lines of morality have become blurred. There is no clear enemy, since she can identify with both sides of the conflict. Everyone is suffering so much that both the victims and the enemy are justified in their actions. This blurry morality makes the world seem even more irrational.



Clemantine is only just becoming aware that the violence around her is coming from actual people. Instead of clearing up the conflict's blurriness, however, this only makes Clemantine even more skeptical of human nature and less faithful in the world.



Clemantine's dream seems to be about her searching for the answer to the problems of the world. When life first starts crumbling (when the ship starts sinking) she first looks for the captain—the human responsible for the sinking and the one who can make it right. When she can't find this person, she is given a Bible, but it dissolves in the air. This dream suggests that both logic (that the captain can right the ship) and religion (that the Bible will help) fail in the face of true hardship.



Clemantine's mother's test taught her kids that excess is not the answer to equality. Equality doesn't mean getting each person an orange but figuring out how to divide one orange into enough pieces for everyone.



Here, Clemantine makes an important distinction between charity and sharing. She sees charity as the act of people who think they're superior to whomever they're giving to. Clemantine wants people to see that everyone, no matter how many resources they have, is abundant in some way—that everyone is equally important.



Clemantine tries to sort out her memories and emotions the way her mother sorted herbs from her garden. She realizes now that the emotion she felt when she arrived at Hotchkiss was anger. Mrs. Thomas flies Clemantine out to Hartford, Connecticut. Clemantine memorizes the new landmarks. Mrs. Thomas is proud of Clemantine's success in school, but she hadn't foreseen her going to boarding school. When Clemantine's parents moved to Chicago, Clemantine's life actually got worse.

Clemantine and Mrs. Thomas set up her single dorm room on the third floor. Clemantine has brought pictures of her family with Oprah and Elie Wiesel. She has moved countless times, but this is her first time living alone. She and Mrs. Thomas cry when they part ways. Clemantine approaches her new school humbly, asking her teachers for help. However, she is panicking inside. She wakes early every morning and dances aggressively for hours before class. Still, she feels like she's nothing.

Clemantine spends a terrible Christmas in Chicago. Claire's apartment has become a war zone between Clemantine's parents and their kids, and Claire and her kids. Clemantine doesn't belong on either side. She worries it is selfish of her to go away to school. Claire forces everyone to dress up for a Christmas family photo. Mariette is rude to her grandmother; she refuses to obey her, saying she doesn't even know her.

When Clemantine returns to Hotchkiss, she falls apart. She has the skills to succeed at school, but nothing protects her from her tormented inner life. She has no idea who she is. One day, in her philosophy class, a professor gives the students several survival scenarios and asks them what they would do. Clemantine loses her temper and shouts at her classmates that they have no idea what it's really like to survive and watch people die. She tells them they don't have the right to speak. She runs out of class. Later, the professor calls her into his office and tells her she needs to be less emotional. Clemantine feels that her professor is protecting his own comfort and ignoring hers. She drops the seminar.

After that, Clemantine inserts her story into every class and every essay she writes. She insists that her teachers recognize not her intellectual grasp of the material but her personal experience. The professor whose seminar she dropped instructs her not to repress her emotions but to channel them. But Clemantine doesn't want to conform to the ideals of people who haven't experienced what she's experienced.

When Clemantine suddenly became a refugee, many emotions—anger, sadness, fear—were likely jumbled in her mind. This jumbling made it so that she couldn't sort out which emotions were which. In the same way that she wants to line up her jumbled katunda—her “stuff”—to discover the timeline of her life, she wants to sort out her jumbled emotions.



Now that Clemantine suddenly finds herself alone in her own world, she realizes she doesn't know who she is. She decides to approach school in a certain way and discovers that dance is a coping mechanism for her feelings, but she still feels like “nothing.” This shows that, beyond survival techniques, Clemantine's identity is a blank slate.



Clemantine's estranged family—the people she has yearned to be reunited with—are at odds with one another. Clemantine identified herself with her few memories of being a girl with a happy family, but now she finds that these memories are only dreams, since her family isn't even happy to begin with.



Clemantine doesn't fit in at Hotchkiss because her experience in life has been much different than the experience most of her classmates have had. She has experienced the kind of scenarios that are mere thought experiments for the average private school student. In her opinion, her experience makes her the only person who has the right to entertain such scenarios, since she has firsthand knowledge of such things. However, her professor tells her to be less emotional, perversely wanting her to learn abstractly and remove herself from her own lived experience.



Clemantine wants to learn not through her intellect but through her experience. For the first time, she stops trying to adapt to her surroundings. She realizes that her unique experiences make her different, and she sets out to express herself. The first expression of her true self is angry and confrontational.



Mrs. Thomas and Claire try to call Clemantine, but she doesn't want to talk to them. She has one friend, a girl named Luisa, but Clemantine doesn't share much with her. Clemantine continues having nightmares. She has spent her whole life trying to figure out how to survive, but now her strategy has failed; she has no filter and says whatever she wants. She wishes she had a single person to direct her anger at. Instead, her world is torn, and she has no way of healing it.

When Clemantine can't sleep, she makes bracelets. She had started making bracelets when Mrs. Thomas' mother moved into a retirement community and gave Clemantine her large collection of buttons and **beads**. She made two bracelets for herself and then started making them to give to people who suffer to remind them they are loved. With each bracelet she gives away, she gives up something painful in herself. For instance, she stops hating her legs which are scarred from barbed wire fences and disease.

A professor's wife invites Clemantine over sometimes, sensing she is isolated. The woman sews clothes on a sewing machine. Clemantine decides to make a dress as an art project. She makes the dress out of white canvas from the art room. When she is finished, it looks too pure. Clemantine mixes red paint, takes the dress outside, and splatters it. It looks like a massacred corpse covered in blood. She titles the dress "Drop Dead Gorgeous" and enters it in the school art show. Everyone says it is a beautiful dress.

CHAPTER 15

Back in Africa, Clemantine sits with Mariette and Freddy in a market in Lusaka, Zambia. People pass them, sneering or looking away. It rained heavily the day before, and the gutters are full of trash, excrement, and dead fish. When Claire, Clemantine, Mariette, and Freddy left Zaire, they tried to return to Rwanda through Burundi, but it was too dangerous, so they backtracked to Zambia. Claire left Clemantine, Mariette, and Freddy at the market while she went to find shelter and food—she doesn't want to live in another refugee camp.

Clemantine, Mariette, and Freddy wait for hours beside the market stalls crammed with cheap goods. By noon, the market is crowded with people bargaining and shouting. Children stand on the edges of the market and beg for food. Freddy sleeps through the noise, though Clemantine can't imagine how. Clemantine daydreams about food. She is scared to be alone with two kids but hides her fear. Mariette, now three years old, is crying. Clemantine can't comfort her because they have nothing.

Clemantine's refugee strategy of conforming to her surroundings falls away completely. She is finally being herself, but this self is raw and full of undirected anger. She starts feeling how much she is torn but doesn't know where to go from there. However, acknowledging her pain is the first step in her goal of creating a coherent sense of self.



The beaded bracelets that Clemantine makes are a literal representation of her desire to string together two disparate pieces of her life and identity. She wants to create cohesion, a linear story, a sequence, and a beautiful product out of her shattered life. Making bracelets acts out this desire, creating a beautiful and wearable piece of jewelry out of odds and ends.



Besides making bracelets, Clemantine expresses herself through the dress she makes. Before, she has explained that she has to change her language so that she can view herself as both damaged and beautiful. Her red-splattered dress acts out this desire. She makes a gorgeous gown that looks like it is splattered with blood, combining beauty and destruction in one form.



Clemantine, Claire, Mariette, and Freddy have evidently left Rob's family in Zaire to try and make it back to Rwanda. Claire believes that refugee camps are the lowest form of life. In a refugee camp, the refugees are treated as less than human beings. She avoids them now at all costs, even though it means leaving a toddler and an infant on the street alone. She fears degradation more than danger.



This is one of the situations in which Clemantine has to pretend she's something other than what she feels inside. Although she's scared, she hides her fear and pretends that she's older and more confident than she is. This skill carries over when she goes to private school in the United States, pretending that she is more together than she feels.



A woman comes up to Clemantine and hands her two plastic sacks of water. Clemantine and Mariette drink thirstily. The woman then invites them to wait at her stall. They sit at the woman's stall in the shade until Claire returns with the address of a pastor's house. They walk down packed streets until they reach the pastor's house. They knock, and the pastor's wife lets them in. Two days later, the pastor buys them bus tickets to Mozambique. They ride on the bus for 12 hours, but when they get to the border, immigration doesn't let them through. They ride the bus all the way back to Lusaka, where the pastor's wife reluctantly lets them back in to sleep. She allows them to stay for two weeks but then tells them to move out.

Clemantine and Claire start walking, Mariette and Freddy tied to their backs. Two men catcall Claire in Kinyarwanda, Rwanda's native language. Claire stops and tells them her name and that she's from Rwanda. One of them starts crying because his sister's name was Claire, and she died in the Rwandan Genocide. Claire apologizes for his loss and asks if they can stay at his apartment. One of the other guys breaks down and says he remembers Claire from a church dance.

Clemantine and Claire move in with the man whose sister's name was Claire. Claire scrambles to make money to help pay for what they eat. She learns more languages and greets everyone confidently, refusing to be broken. She never resorts to selling her body to survive, as so many other women have. Clemantine and Claire's mother taught them to never trade with sex, telling them that as soon as a woman has been with a man, she can't get her whole self back.

A few weeks later, Rob shows up. He has no money to help them. Claire doesn't want their Rwandan hosts to see how badly Rob treats her, so they move into a slum called Chibolya. In Chibolya, children run with no shoes through filthy gutters and open trash dumps. The family rents a very small room in a row of crumbling cinder block houses. The room feels like a one-way passage into death. It faces a courtyard where the landlady's daughter sits and guards the shower in the communal bathroom, which costs extra to use. They have a tiny electric stove with exposed wires. When Clemantine cooks, she fears getting electrocuted.

Clemantine and Claire encounter some kindness as refugees, but it also seems that many people are becoming wary of generosity. It seems as though the pastor and his wife have housed many refugees before them and have helped many others try to make it into Mozambique. At this point, the pastor's wife is desensitized to suffering people because of how many she has seen. She is tired of helping yet another family. This shows the painful fact that, as times of suffering run on, help becomes more and more difficult to find.



Clemantine and Claire experience a rare form of camaraderie or kinship in this scene, as they connect with fellow Rwandans who—like them—have been forced out of their country under the threat of violence.



During the Rwandan Genocide, it was very common for women to turn to sex work in order to survive. Even when a woman didn't resort to this, she was under constant threat of rape or abuse. Claire experiences abuse at the hands of her own husband, showing that even marriage doesn't protect a woman from men during this time.



Although Chibolya is not a refugee camp—and yet, its conditions are worse than any refugee camp Clemantine and Claire have stayed in since leaving Rwanda. When Clemantine and Claire were in Burundi, they were doled out food and had no opportunities to make their own money. In Chibolya, though, at least their possessions are their own and they pay for the small space they live in. There is, then, a small amount of pride associated with living outside refugee camps, even if the conditions are no better (or perhaps worse) than they might be in a camp.



Claire befriends a woman with a stall in the market. Claire stands with her and helps bring in business, and the woman gives Claire a cut of the profits. Then, merchants start giving Claire goods to sell, and she keeps the profits. Clemantine gets through the day by caring for the children, cleaning the house, and washing her favorite outfit. When she stands in line for water, she hears the women talk about their cheating husbands. The men feel emasculated by poverty and make themselves feel better by taking advantage of their wives and other women. Clemantine is now 11, and her body is changing. She doesn't dare stand in the water line after four p.m. for fear of being raped. She doesn't trust anyone.

Clemantine makes one friend in Chibolya, a girl named Rhoda. Rhoda is the older sister of Joy, the landlady's daughter who guards the shower. Rhoda and her family are envied because they are well-fed and have multiple rooms. Rhoda is lazy and relaxed. She is certain that life will take care of itself. Even though she lives in Chibolya, her life is perfect: she goes on trips and attends school.

For thirty minutes every day, sunlight hits the window in Clemantine's room and turns it into a mirror. Clemantine looks at herself, fascinated and disgusted. She looks like her mother, but also nothing like her. A 15-year-old boy starts hanging around, bringing candy for Mariette. Also, Rob's girlfriend comes around. Whenever Claire protests, Rob shouts at her to go back to Rwanda.

Six months after arriving in Zambia, Claire stops going to the market for fear of getting arrested for having no papers. Rob goes to see his girlfriend and is caught by immigration police and put in jail. Claire considers leaving him, but a friend who also has an abusive husband tells her Rob will shape up when his kids are older. So, Claire visits the jail and lies to the police that Rob is the breadwinner of the family. Rob is released.

When Rob gets out of jail, his behavior is worse than ever. One night, he comes home angry and beats up Claire. He screams at her to take her kids and leave. Chibolya is dangerous after dark, but Claire gathers her kids and Clemantine and they hide in the bushes in the courtyard. Claire comforts Clemantine as if she's a child. Clemantine wants to kill Rob. She is also angry at Claire for never consulting anything with her. Clemantine tells Claire that she is strong for earning money and protecting her family. She says that she and Claire need to take care of their beautiful kids. They sneak out of Chibolya and find an old woman who lets them into her house.

Both Claire and Clemantine maintain their pride while living in Chibolya. Claire does so by making money in the markets. Clemantine does so by maintaining dignity and cleanliness in the home. Even though everything around her is so grimy that she could easily see no point in trying to keep clean, Clemantine's small cleaning rituals make her feel a measure of pride. However, the fact that she's growing up frightens her; that she's becoming a woman isn't exciting but instead puts her in greater danger of rapists.



Clemantine envies that Rhoda doesn't have to worry about how life will go. Most children who haven't experienced much hardship believe that no matter what, all will be okay. Although Clemantine is Rhoda's age, she has the opposite feeling.



Clemantine hasn't looked in a mirror since before she left Rwanda. In fact, while in the refugee camp in Burundi, she was actually thankful she had no mirror so she couldn't see how much she changed. Now, looking at herself she confirms her existence as a strange combination of her old self and an unrecognizable self.



Rwandan cultural practices dictate that Claire shouldn't leave Rob, no matter how abusive he is, because she has given her life to him. In this way, Rwanda's female standards further put women at the mercy of men's threats.



Clemantine feels a strange combination of hatred for both Rob and Claire after Rob kicks them out. She is obviously furious with Rob for hurting Claire, but she is also angry with Claire for treating her like a child and always moving them around from place to place. Her complicated feelings of love and resentment towards Claire shows that Clemantine's most important relationships have suffered from the blurring of her most intense emotions.



A week later, Clemantine, Claire, and the kids move in with a woman in Lusaka. The woman left Rwanda generations ago. Clemantine sits in the kitchen while the woman cooks, admiring the henna on her hands. The woman braids Clemantine's hair and takes her shopping for a new dress. Clemantine's body is filling out. Claire goes to the Belgian consulate and charms the official into using his fax machine to reach her parents. She then sends faxes for other refugees, charging money. She returns to selling clothes in the market when it is safe again.

When Claire has saved a little money, she, Clemantine, and the kids move back to Chibolya with Rob. Every day at four, Clemantine puts on her new dress and walks out with the kids, feeling clean and tidy. She wants to be noticed. For an hour, she feels like somebody. She feels proud and beautiful. When she gets home, she takes off her dress and goes back to feeling like she is nobody.

One day, Claire comes home and says a friend told her the UN has a program that helps Rwandan refugees obtain entry to the United States. Claire thinks of America as a place of freedom where a person can start a business and get rich. The next day, she walks to the UN office and fills out the forms. She lists all her family members, including Rob. Even though Rob cheats right in front of Claire, she hopes he'll change when they get to the United States.

Three months later, Claire is called into the UN for an interview. Claire tells Rob, and he jeers at her for being a refugee and an immigrant. Nonetheless, he dresses with the family the next day, and they all go into the office. They wait in line at the fancy embassy, and then Claire tells a clerk their story. On the way out, the clerk whispers to Claire that she passed.

Clemantine is excited to go to America. Claire says that as soon as they arrive, they will be given whatever they need and will become instantly rich. She buys the family new outfits and puffy jackets. They ride the bus to the airport. Clemantine cries all the way to Chicago. Now, her family will never find her.

When Clemantine and Claire move away from Rob and into a woman's house, their life becomes instantly better. The woman takes Clemantine shopping for a dress that fits her changing body, and Claire is able to save the money she earns at the market. This all suggests that women feel safe in solidarity with each other. In the company of other women, Claire and Clemantine find the most kindness.



Clemantine likes to walk in her new dress because she wants to feel like a unique person. She doesn't want to blend in with all the other poor children in Chibolya. She loves washing her favorite outfit and cleaning the house because these are ways of respecting and valuing oneself.



When Claire hears about the opportunity to go to the United States, she decides that this is a better plan than eventually going home to Rwanda. At this point, she assumes her parents are dead. Also, danger lurks everywhere they go in Africa. Claire has always dreamed of going "abroad" and so she sees this as the fulfillment of her childhood fantasy.



Claire obtains her family passage to the United States by appealing to the UN officials with her story. This is similar to how Clemantine appealed to Illinois state officials to get her state ID. This shows that, as refugees, all Clemantine and Claire have to appeal for citizenship and rights is their powerful story.



Clemantine is both excited and sad to go to the United States. She is excited because she has heard how wonderful the States are, but she is sad because leaving Africa means leaving her past and her hopes of returning to her childhood behind forever.



CHAPTER 16

Years after the Oprah show, which taped when Clemantine was 23, Oprah invites her and Claire to South Africa to an event at her new Academy for Girls. In the lobby of the fancy school, Clemantine notices a display of beaded dolls with red **bead** eyes. The dolls are familiar to Clemantine, and she asks Claire if she had a doll with bead eyes. Exasperated, Claire says that Clemantine is thinking of Mukamana's story, which Clemantine always asked Claire to repeat: "once there was a girl who smiled beads."

The Rwandan fable opens with a barren mother who's desperate for a baby. One day, the woman prays for a child, and it starts to thunder. The thunder tells the woman to stop crying. The woman tells the thunder she'll stop crying if the thunder will give her a baby. Months later, the woman gives birth to the most beautiful girl in the world. When the girl smiles, a trail of **beads** flows from her mouth. The mother is proud and jealous and locks the girl in the house so she won't be stolen. One day, the girl escapes. Her mother asks everyone, but no one has seen her, they've only seen her trail of beads. The thunder, looking for his daughter, finds the girl who smiles beads and takes her back to live in the sky.

When Mukamana told Clemantine this story, she gave her the character and let Clemantine fill in the plot. In this way, the girl who smiled **beads** became the answer to whatever problem Clemantine provided. Clemantine imagines that the girl who smiled beads is always safe and special but always gone. In a world where she is never home, Clemantine decides *she* is the girl who smiled beads. She wanders and leaves her beads—time, objects, memories—behind in her wake.

Clemantine's roommate at Yale arrives with furniture and potted plants and takes the top bunk. Clemantine arrives with mismatched things. A week before, she attended an orientation camping trip that was fun, but the cabins were dingy. Clemantine buys a Yale sweatshirt. She studies during the week and goes to parties on the weekends. She is distracting herself; she wants none of the African culture Claire fills her apartment with.

Clemantine forgets Mukamana's story about the girl who smiled beads for a long time. If she hadn't gone back to South Africa and seen the beaded dolls, she never would've remembered the fable she used to love. Returning to this story now, much later in her life, will give her the opportunity to make sense of the experiences she has had as a refugee.



The girl in Mukamana's story doesn't want to be kept at home. She wants to be free and refuses to be possessed. When people try to find this girl, all they can find are the beads that trail from her mouth—beautiful fragments but not the girl herself. This character bears resemblance to Clemantine's own life. Clemantine was homeless against her own will, and she hates the fragmented nature of her identity that came about as a result of her displacement. But the girl who smiled beads helps her see that her wandering and her fragmented identity are beautiful rather than tragic.



Identifying with the girl who smiled beads helps Clemantine see herself as magical and beautiful. However, she still has no plot for her life; Mukamana always left the plot up to Clemantine, which now makes her feel like she has no story to turn to for guidance.



Clemantine leans into life at Yale as a way of erasing her memories of the past. Instead of celebrating her culture, she decides to dress and act like her fellow students. She feels that her roommate's dorm decorations are cohesive, whereas hers are jumbled—she still hasn't put her "katundu" in order.



The summer after her freshman year, Clemantine decides to go to Kenya to study Swahili. Her boyfriend, Zach, who's a Black American from Atlanta, is going too. That year, he learned Kinyarwanda just to speak to Clemantine. Clemantine imagines that they will have a lovely time in Kenya where she will be accepted by her people. Yale tells the girls to dress modestly to respect Kenyan traditions. Clemantine doesn't want to obey; she feels she is special, a native daughter returning to her homeland.

The spring before going to Kenya, Clemantine and Zach spend time at the Afro-American Cultural Center. Clemantine meets amazing Black people from all over the world. She feels out of touch with Black beauty. She likes the art of Black Americans who escaped slavery, but she doesn't share their story. The Black men Clemantine has known throughout her life have been crushed and devastated by the Rwandan Genocide.

Clemantine wants to be able to speak about her past with coherence. She starts lecturing her classmates about the ugliness of African culture: how women are subservient to men, and children are beaten. Her classmates say this is a white person's view of Africa. Clemantine denies this and says that people killing each other is real.

When Clemantine's class lands in Mombasa, Kenya, she hates it immediately. The students stay next door to Fort Jesus, a shack where Africans were kept before being brought to America on slave ships. Mombasa feels menacing; everyone thinks Clemantine is either the Yale students' employee or a sex worker they've hired. Her rage over this only makes the locals think she's sexy. Everywhere, old white men walk around with young Kenyan girls.

Clemantine rebels, wearing tank tops and short skirts and walking out alone at night. She is afraid the person she created in America will be lost. She is afraid of being raped, sold, killed, or left behind. She realizes now that she was broadcasting her fears so that they came true. She is groped and catcalled wherever she goes in Mombasa. Clemantine wants to feel inviolable, but she only feels lost and degraded. She leaves Mombasa early.

Clemantine spends the rest of the summer in Chicago at the Thomases' house. She tries to forget her fears about her body. One day, she goes to pick up a prescription with messy clothes, and the pharmacist denies her insurance. But when Clemantine changes to look like a "respectable" suburban person, the pharmacist accepts it.

Clemantine imagines that her school trip to Africa will be like the perfect homecoming she's been dreaming of since she left Rwanda at six years old. In this way, Clemantine still clings to the myth that she can return to who she was and the home she had before the genocide. She seeks this homecoming as an opportunity to feel unique—something she's desired ever since being a refugee made her invisible.



Clemantine realizes that she doesn't know where in the Black community she fits. She doesn't share the story that Black Americans have, but she also doesn't feel comfortable around those who do share her story: most of the survivors of the genocide that she's met are ashamed and crushed rather than proud.



Clemantine finds the pride in African culture false, and her skepticism in this regard is similar to her hesitancy to embrace religion; she wants to confront the ugly truth of things instead of glossing over it with illogical or false explanations.



In Mombasa, Clemantine finds that the locals have such a low opinion of themselves that they can't view her—a fellow African—as the intelligent, successful student that she is. There is, then, a sense of internalized racism at play, which ultimately complicates Clemantine's return to her home continent, making it that much harder for her to feel a rewarding feeling of homecoming.



In Mombasa, Clemantine makes her worst fears come true. She wants to push the boundaries as far as she can and still feel like she hasn't been violated. She wants to prove that no matter what happens, she is inherently resilient. In this way, she makes another attempt to erase the language of ruin she grew up with, hoping to prove that she can be beautiful and strong even after her harrowing past.



Clemantine realizes that one's appearance affects the way they are treated by others. Once she realizes this, she becomes aware of the prejudices connected to her appearance as a Black woman.



CHAPTER 17

Clemantine imagines a bird hitting a window while two friends are talking. One thinks the bird is a bomb going off while the other thinks it is just a bird. If the former person doesn't explain their trauma, the friends are alienated; unspoken fears make them magnets that repel each other. Rwanda and much of the world has this problem. Clemantine thinks that, in many ways, a traumatized person's identity is broken. To continue to exist, traumatized people need to create a new identity with unbroken pieces. Clemantine needs to comprehend her history; but she also needs to reach across the space between her and others to share joy and pain.

During her sophomore year at Yale, Clemantine's photography professor organizes a field trip to the Prudence Crandall School for Negro Girls in Connecticut. This school was for white girls only until the president admitted one Black girl, at which point all the other white girls dropped out. The school then admitted only Black girls until it was attacked, and it closed for good. The professor instructs the students to walk around the school and construct a story from details and feelings. For the first time, Clemantine is told that history—her own and others'—is in the lingering details in front of her. When she wanders the school, she remembers the abandoned school in Burundi where she and Claire slept.

Clemantine signs up for a class on W.G. Sebald's work with a comparative literature professor named Carol Jacobs. Jacobs talks about Sebald's thoughts and about how he presents time, images, and space. Jacobs tells the students to expect to be confused, because Sebald creates a disorienting map of his interior world. The jumble of images and thoughts in his work recreate the amnesia that fell over Germany after World War II.

Sebald's *Austerlitz* is about a Jewish boy who was sent to Britain at the outset of World War II to escape the Nazis. He grows up and spends his life searching for his dislocated past. Sebald pieces the story together through the character's non-linear obsessions and memories. Before this class, Clemantine felt that her intense and jumbled reactions and memories were misleading. Reading Sebald convinces her that she lives in all times and places at once; her past is always with her and is liable to rise to the surface at any moment because of various triggers.

Earlier, Clemantine explained her philosophy of sharing when it comes to resources. Now, her scenario of the bird hitting the window describes her philosophy of sharing when it comes to experiences and life stories. When the two friends who experience the bird hitting the window differently decide not to share their different experiences, they create a sort of impasse, making it impossible for either of them to understand the other's perspective.



Clemantine wants to examine her past, but she feels like she can't because it is a scattered trail; her past is missing parts and details, and she has no record of the places she lived or what she did. The experiment her photography tries at the museum gives her an alternative method for finding her history. The method tells her that her history is contained in the sensations and reactions she has to details around her. This method opens up a possibility for Clemantine to unlock her history.



Reading Sebald validates Clemantine's interior feeling of confusion and disarray. Sebald uses this feeling in his writing to create an accurate account of a very traumatic world event, and this gives Clemantine the idea that she could use her own complicated feelings to rediscover her traumatic history, too.



For a long time, Clemantine has yearned for a cohesive identity and a logical, linear narrative of her past. Until reading Sebald, though, she thought it would be impossible to find coherence in her fragmented memories. However, she now realizes that the fragmented nature of her identity and past is what will lead her to her true history. She accepts that her story isn't linear, but rather appears through jumbled associations. She writes her memoir in a way that captures this kind of history.



Clemantine makes a practice of walking every day by Annette, a woman who sells flowers in front of Yale. This woman reminds Clemantine of Claire selling goods in Africa to improve their lives. Clemantine has always observed things in order to be a chameleon and adapt to wherever she is. Now, she tries to scrutinize herself. She tried therapy before, but it felt too invasive. Reading Sebald convinces Clemantine that she can examine and solve her problems herself. Sebald says that if a person goes deep enough into their memory, a narrative will appear. All Clemantine has to do is ask questions about herself and she'll have her history.

The following summer, Clemantine interns in the diversity department at Google. One day, the program director surprises the staff with a trip to Disneyland. On the flight to Los Angeles, Clemantine tells a coworker about her **Mickey Mouse backpack**—the treasure she lost that still makes her cry. Clemantine loves Disneyland; it is proof that a person can assemble a new world and identity with the imagination alone.

While a refugee, Clemantine always looked beyond herself to learn how to survive. She escaped herself and her feelings so as to be more adaptable. She now turns her gaze on herself, examining her own peculiar reactions and habits. This shows that being a refugee often requires people to focus solely on survival and then, when it's safe to do so, reconnect with themselves and the other aspects of life that they've been forced to neglect.



Clemantine loves Disneyland because of how imaginative it is. Throughout her time as a refugee, she relied hugely on her imagination to transport her out of a harsh world. She still mourns the loss of her Mickey Mouse backpack—the one tangible vessel of her identity. Having lost that, she knows she must create a new identity from imagination.



CHAPTER 18

When Clemantine is a sophomore, she is asked to go to Rwanda with a Yale group that fundraised to buy water tanks for a Rwandan youth orphans' community. On the plane, Clemantine panics while Zach tells her everything will be alright. Clemantine determines to sit with her pain while in Rwanda instead of hiding it.

When Clemantine returns to the United States, she introduces Elie Wiesel at an event at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. President Obama then appoints her to the board of directors. In 2014, she flies to Kigali with the museum board for the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide. She is the emissary chosen to tell the story of the genocide to future generations. When she arrives, she still scans rooms for exits and studies people to figure out how to act. Kigali is clean and no one is begging. Although the presence of its history is oppressive, Rwanda has done its best to conceal signs of its terrible past. However, young men with guns stand guard everywhere. Clemantine eats dinner at the hotel where *Hotel Rwanda* took place, and where her uncle, now dead, used to take her for ice cream.

As Clemantine explained once to Claire, faith and forgiveness are unacceptable to her—they are false. Without using faith to explain away her trauma, she is left with no other choice but to confront the painful truth of her past.



Twenty years after the Rwandan Genocide, the signs of its long-term effects remain. Clemantine still harbors her refugee instincts, and Kigali is under martial law. Clemantine is tasked with telling the story of the genocide to future generations—a difficult task because of how gruesome it was and how personally it affected Rwandans. The people who killed and raped half of Rwanda's citizens are still living in Rwanda, right next door to those they attacked. Clemantine wonders how she can tell a history that is still so raw and personal.



On her second day in Rwanda, Clemantine goes with the museum board to a luncheon at the Rwandan First Lady's house. The First Lady is elegant and kind. Rwanda now has a narrative for its country: the Hutus and Tutsis live in peace, the Belgians come and infect everyone with the idea that some people have less humanity than others, the Hutus and Tutsis kill each other, and Rwanda self-destructs.

On the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide, Clemantine goes with the museum board to the Gatwaro Stadium where, 20 years earlier, government officials were gathered and shot. People arrive at the stadium from all over. Before this time for grieving was made official in Rwanda, the grieving was constant and devastating. None of these Rwandans know Clemantine. She tries to hide in her scarf. Everyone starts screaming in a reenactment of Rwanda's history, with white colonizers turning into refugee camp workers on stage and actors pantomiming murder and death. Clemantine thinks the staging is over the top, but she doesn't know how else Rwanda can gather to remember its tragic history.

Rwanda's president, Kigame, takes the stage and says that Rwandans need to heal and unite. The genocide was the fault of colonization, not of Rwandans. Rwandans must "tolerate an intolerable truth"—that they were driven by the Belgians to kill each other—and heal, he says. The crying and screaming continues. Clemantine is humiliated. She doesn't want to tell this story to future generations. She flies home and stays in bed for a week.

Years later, Clemantine travels to Israel with the Carter Center to learn about the Palestinian refugees in the Aida Refugee Camp. Clemantine visits the barrier fence that separates Israel and Palestine. Passing through security makes her feel dehumanized. The guards interrogate Clemantine about her black army-style boots and force her to take them off. Clemantine wonders what the boots mean to them and their history. The guards shamelessly search her personal items. She cries the whole time. She is thankful she can return to the United States.

Rwanda reminds itself that the belief in eugenics that turned half their people against the other half originated not in their own country, but in Belgium. In this way, Rwanda attempts to absolve itself from blame and shame. Rwandan heals by remembering that colonization is the real evil that befell Rwanda.



In the reenactment of the genocide, the white colonizers turn into the refugee camp workers as if to show that these two groups were the evil people who caused the genocide and exacerbated its effects. Colonizers originally brought the mindset of eugenics to Rwanda, and the refugee workers maintained the idea that certain people were lower than others. In this way, the reenactment shows that extreme degradation was the evil that tore Rwanda apart.



In her own attempts to process and heal from the Rwandan Genocide, Clemantine has been unwilling to "tolerate the intolerable truth" and either forgive or have faith. She sees forgiveness and faith as false and illogical attitudes. She would rather confront the intolerable truth—that people kill each other—head on and reveal just how intolerable it is.



The treatment that Clemantine receives at the Israel-Palestine border reminds her painfully of being a refugee in Africa. When she was a refugee, no one cared about her belongings or respected her body. She was always treated with suspicion and as if she were less than human. What was worse, she never had a home to escape to—as she does now—after this dehumanizing treatment.



CHAPTER 19

Clemantine flies to the Palm Beach Day Academy to give a humanitarian talk. She wears intimidating high heels. The children look at her with innocent eyes. After her talk, a little girl approaches Clemantine but gets scared and hides behind a teacher's leg. Clemantine is struck by how safe this girl feels with her teacher. Clemantine herself is not a motherly type. Her way of caring for Claire's kids is to prepare them for the worst. Once, Clemantine entered Claire's apartment and found Freddy and his friends watching TV. She screamed at them to study and do the dishes. When Clemantine returns from Palm Beach, she is determined to get Claire's kids away from her and Claire. She enrolls them in private schools.

The narrative jumps back to Clemantine's graduation from Yale. Having finished college, she doesn't know where to go. The Thomases have given her everything, but she feels she has to move on. She also doesn't want to live with Claire or her parents. She has invitations to travel to fancy places, but she feels that new experiences aren't filling the void in her. She needs stability, so she and her new boyfriend, Ryan, move to San Francisco. The Berkeley hills remind her of the hills in Rwanda.

In public, Clemantine feels like she's playing a part. She hopes her story will inspire people to be humbler. She wants others to think about how they came to be the way they are. Clemantine feels that she is privileged to have the safety to make a coherent story out of her experiences. Her experience is her messy past, but her story is how she makes her life meaningful. On stage, she dresses to look alarming and unique. Many people offer to help her and then panic when she suggests that she can help them too. Some people ask her if she feels guilty for surviving, and she asks if they feel guilty they weren't in the Twin Towers on 9/11.

A year after she moves to San Francisco, Clemantine sits on a panel of thought leaders for an international nonprofit. The panel claims to want to hear her story so they can solve the refugee crisis. At this time, refugees are dying in the Mediterranean. A picture of a drowned baby on a beach blows up on social media. Clemantine thinks this interest is better than disregard, but the compassion is selfish. She wants to keep in mind all the individual people suffering but knows this is impossible.

In the wake of her traumatic upbringing, Clemantine has learned how to embody power and self-sufficiency. She's a successful humanitarian and a public speaker in high demand, suggesting that she has focused on becoming successful while also spreading vital information about things like the Rwandan Genocide. In some ways, the power and cultural capital she has cultivated might be a direct response to all the hardship she has faced—after all, she has needed to remain strong throughout her life because of the many difficulties she has encountered. In turn, she has perhaps focused more on embodying power and resilience than establishing a motherly presence (which makes sense, since she doesn't even have children of her own). And though the book doesn't necessarily suggest that power and motherliness are mutually exclusive, the implication here is that Clemantine's traumatic past has inspired her to focus on success and survival over all else.



Even after years in the United States, Clemantine still doesn't feel she has a home. Rather than continue to live with her family (whom she feels are ghosts of her past) or with the Thomases (whom she doesn't fully identify with), she seeks to create a new sense of stability. She'll never cure her original feeling of displacement but still hopes to find a sense of belonging.



When Clemantine starts public speaking, she employs her philosophy of sharing. She doesn't want to feel like she—the one with trauma—is the only person who should examine how she came to be who she is. She believes that everyone—even those who've led comfortable lives—should consider their pasts and ask themselves how they got where they are now. What's more, she believes that everyone stands to gain from learning about other people and their experiences.



Clemantine finds many problems with charity. She thinks it's voyeuristic for charitable people to pore over a picture of a dead baby, and she knows that people only help because it makes them feel good. She also hates that charity lumps each sufferer's experience in with others. She knows that each person suffers a particular, personal tragedy.



The panel discusses the Red Cross and what it can do to help refugees. One panel member thinks it's funny that, in a situation of survival, refugees have been asking for ways to store photos. Clemantine understands this; when she was a refugee, she wished for photos to preserve her sense of self and her memories. After the meeting, some billionaire asks Clemantine how it feels to be one of them. Clemantine recoils; is this man asking her what it's like to be one of the privileged? One of the white, rich people? Clemantine tells him to instead ask for her story, to ask about what he surely doesn't know. The billionaire gets uncomfortable and says to email him and set up a time to have this talk. Clemantine emails, but the billionaire never responds.

CHAPTER 20

Clemantine is a hard person to love. She wants to be loved but not needed. She doesn't like to get comfortable, and she always maintains the right to disappear. Her body is a burden she carries around with her. It is hard for her to remember her body's suffering and still find it beautiful. A woman's experience with war is rape, whether it's physical, psychological, or social. Thousands of men are murdered during war, but women die later from HIV and the effects of rape. Clemantine tries to compose herself so that she no longer fears men; the first time Ryan says he loves her, she feels he is trying to dominate and possess her.

Ryan is patient and gentle. He is white and "jocky," a stereotypical American male. He and Clemantine are together for five years, and she depends on him. Once, Clemantine goes to Burning Man and Ryan stays home. When she wakes up in the tent, her brain snaps into survival mode; she wonders where food is and studies the campsite map. She feels lost and disoriented and looks at pictures of Claire's kids on her phone to remind herself she has a family.

Clemantine finds Rwanda beautiful, but everyone there feels they deserve pain. On her most recent trip to Kigali, she stays in the lovely home of a man she calls Uncle. When Clemantine is not at Uncle's house, she spends her time on the top floor of the public library, drinking lattes and looking out over the green hills of Kigali. She notices a huge new development of white apartment buildings. They are sterile and cold, seeming to say that those who live there don't deserve beauty.

In Rwanda, the last Saturday of every month is dedicated to cleaning up the country physically and emotionally. Clemantine joins a group that is clearing an overgrown field with machetes. Rwandans have gotten used to machetes again, but they bring back horrible memories for Clemantine.

Clemantine understands why refugees want to store photos. Clemantine's act of collecting rocks and favorite outfits in her Mickey Mouse backpack was an attempt to accomplish what a photo does: it memorializes something. She feels that, because she was a refugee, her life story has holes and her identity is fractured. The only time she didn't feel like this was when she saw herself in the mirror at Chibolya and walked around in her new dress. Clemantine understands that refugees want photos to confirm their own existences.



Clemantine uses her struggles with love to illustrate how a woman's experience with war is like rape, both literally and figuratively. During the genocide, thousands of women and girls were raped; those who weren't lived under the constant threat that they eventually would be. Wherever women went, men sought to dominate and violate them. This rape, unlike murder—the threat men face—has long-term effects, whether it's leaving a woman with HIV or with the inability to trust and love men.



Whenever Clemantine is in a new place, her refugee instincts kick in; she becomes terrified and forgets she has a home and family. This shows that the average person's ease with changing place is a privilege. A person with a history of displacement and trauma doesn't necessarily have an inherent feeling of belonging and safety.



The book suggests that the new buildings Rwanda has put up reveal that Rwandans, deep down, don't feel they deserve good things. This implies that their conception of the world and of themselves has been so altered by the genocide that they still can't shake their shame and grief—even after many years.



When Clemantine sees the machetes in Rwanda, she has horrible memories of the machetes the Hutus used to brutally murder the Tutsis. She views this weapon as a permanent symbol of genocide.



One afternoon, Clemantine lies on a blanket in Uncle's garden enjoying the warm sun. For the first time since she was six, she feels relaxed. She is wearing bright, floral clothes. She feels like a child again. Before Clemantine leaves Rwanda, she and Vicki—a childhood friend of Claire's—drive up the hill to watch the sunset. Clemantine knows it's beautiful even if she can't feel it. On the way back, they drive close to Clemantine's childhood neighborhood. They buy warm chapati. Eating it reminds Clemantine of the bathrobe she had as a child.

Before Clemantine went to Rwanda, she and Ryan talked about getting married. Clemantine doesn't want to get married; she thinks marriage is possession. Ryan loves Clemantine more than she loves herself, and so she pushes him away. When she returns from Rwanda, Ryan has moved out of their apartment. He knew her deepest fear was being abandoned, but he'd taken his stuff and gone. All Clemantine's fears come rushing back. She stands in her empty apartment and tries to breathe.

CHAPTER 21

Clemantine yearns for a mother. She struggles to make her relationship with her mother work, so she invites her on a trip to Europe. She wants to restage their reunion. Clemantine flies to London ahead of her mother to plan a wonderful reception for her. In London, she buys nice groceries, arranges roses in a vase, and sets a new nightgown and a robe on her mother's bed. She wants her mother to feel special when she walks in the room.

Clemantine's mother gets lost in the London airport. Except for immigrating to America, she has never traveled before. Her mother finally arrives with freshly painted nails and new clothes. Clemantine's mother is in awe of the fancy black car that picks them up. She loves the flowers and the robe Clemantine got her. She is surprised that a Black family owns the house they are staying in and that they have a white housekeeper.

Clemantine has mapped out an itinerary for her and her mother. At Westminster Abbey, her mother is in awe of the religious effigies. Clemantine tells the guard how important this moment with her mother is to her. Meanwhile, her mother touches everything in the garden, embarrassing Clemantine. They tour cathedrals and go shopping. After dinner, Clemantine's mother insists on washing the dishes. Clemantine feels overwhelmed to be alone with her mother. She wants her to know everything that happened to her, but she also doesn't want to tell her. Neither she nor Claire have ever told her their story.

Clemantine feels at home for the first time when she rests in the sun in a garden in Kigali and when she is reminded of her childhood bathrobe. This shows that Clemantine feels at home only when she feels like a child again. Her only memories of feeling at home are from before she was six years old. Her true self is trapped there in the years before she was six—that is, when she was happy.



Clemantine pushes Ryan away because she can't trust anyone to actually protect and love her: she has opened herself up many times before and has been hurt as a result. Ryan's way of breaking up with Clemantine makes her worst fear come true. This all shows that the lack of trust a person with trauma develops can ultimately threaten their relationships and make their worst fears come true.



Clemantine wants to make her mother feel special and cared for. It is as if Clemantine wants to support her mother in a way that her mother was never able to support her (because of the genocide). Similarly, Clemantine cared for Mariette while a refugee as a way of acting out the mother-daughter relationship that she herself was missing.



Clemantine's mother hasn't seen as much of the world as Clemantine has. Although they were both victims of the Rwandan Genocide, Clemantine was a refugee, whereas her mother stayed in Rwanda until immigrating to the States. Therefore, Clemantine's mother isn't as accustomed to navigating new places as Clemantine is.



Although everything on their trip goes to plan, there is a disconnect between Clemantine and her mother. After all these years, they clearly move through the world in much different ways. Therefore, Clemantine has a hard time bonding with her mother, who seems to take a completely different approach to life than she does.



Clemantine and her mother visit Paris. Clemantine buys her mother croissants, strawberries, and a beautiful brocade coat. They attend a fancy lunch at Clemantine's friend's house. Clemantine's itinerary is going to plan, but she feels disassociated and lost. In the Tuileries Garden, Clemantine asks her mother if she misses her own garden. Her mother goes pale and doesn't answer.

Clemantine and her mother go to the Louvre. Clemantine's mother loves the religious artworks. Clemantine wishes her mother wouldn't pray to Jesus's innocent face but to the faces of the Nigerian and Senegalese men selling goods in the street. They pass the *Mona Lisa* and come to *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, a painting of Jesus, the apostles, kings, and emperors. Clemantine points out that there is a Black boy under the table with a dog, but her mother repeats that the painting looks like heaven. Clemantine screams with fury that her mother doesn't notice the degradation of the Black boy.

Clemantine and her mother fly to Rome. Clemantine can't stand the trip anymore. She thought she and her mother would become different people on this trip; she'd tried to be the mother that her mother never was for her. However, she now knows that when you lose a mother at age six, part of you always remains a child. Clemantine tries to get her mother to notice her effort, but her mother only thanks God for the wonderful trip in Europe.

Clemantine and her mother don't connect in Europe. Clemantine has a similar relationship with Claire. She owes Claire her life and admires Claire's strength and pride, but she still feels unrecognized when her sister talks about their experiences as refugees. When Clemantine confronts Claire about this, Claire says she felt alone when they were refugees. When the sisters are together now, they feel both love and hatred for each other.

Claire focuses on feeding and supporting her whole community. She holds to her mother's philosophy of sharing, flying to Rwanda every January and cooking a big New Year's Eve meal for orphans. Afterwards, she puts on a fancy dress and has someone take pictures of her. Claire would rather do this than be stuck in grief. Clemantine knows that all she can do is let others live on their own terms; all she can do is examine the origin of her own habits and values and pain.

Clemantine tries to ask her mother about her old beloved garden, hoping to share their pain over what they have lost. She feels that her mother's "forgive and forget" philosophy—like Claire's—prevents their ability to have a deep and truthful relationship.



Clemantine is irritated that her mother ignores the racism and the mistreatment of the Black boy in the painting of Jesus. This painting illustrates how Clemantine feels about religion: namely, that religion ignores and enables the violence and abuse that goes on in the world. Clemantine and her mother are thus at odds with each other because her mother thinks turning to religion will make the world a peaceful place.



Clemantine acknowledges that when she was originally displaced at six years old, part of her was frozen in that time. She sees that her Europe trip was an effort for her mother to notice her, just like a child. In the same way that she wants people to notice that humans are responsible for evil, she wants her mother to see that Clemantine, not God, is responsible for good.



Although Clemantine and Claire survived the genocide together, there's a permanent sense of distance between them. They had different ways of coping with the harsh circumstances, and Claire, as the older girl responsible for protecting the younger, felt she was alone. This shows that trauma and war painfully estrange even those who undergo many of the same experiences.



Whereas Clemantine heals from her trauma by examining her past and trying to express herself, Claire heals by supporting her community. Clemantine thinks that this is an escape mechanism for grief, and she would rather try to look her grief in the face. However, she acknowledges that everyone will cope with their pain differently.



Clemantine and her mother tour the Basilica of Saint Paul in Rome. Clemantine wanders off to analyze the architecture and calm herself down. When she returns, she finds her mother looking for Saint Brigid, the saint of children. When they find Saint Brigid, Clemantine's mother kneels down in front of the statue, holding her rosary. She tells some nearby nuns that her girls were gone for years but that her prayers were answered and now her girls have returned. Clemantine's mother looks content and peaceful—Clemantine envies her faith.

The next day, Clemantine and her mother take a train to the airport. They wait together for their separate flights. Clemantine's mother has a story that helps her survive; Clemantine only has "a character, a rubric." The "girl who smiled **beads**" helps her feel like she has agency, but she still longs for a coherent narrative of her life. Clemantine wants Mukamana to tell her the plot, but she knows she must write it herself. She gets on her plane, opens her notebook, and starts writing her story.

CHAPTER 22

Clemantine writes her story: once, there lived two girls in a land of hills. The girls play in their mother's garden and wear bright dresses. One day, they see fear on their parent's faces. They visit their grandmother, but her face is also afraid. Their grandmother tells them to run. The girls travel by foot, bus, and boat for seven years. Soon, they are no longer children. Then they fly on a plane to a land far away. The younger sister tries to be a child again. She finds new parents and has new experiences. Wherever she goes, people think she's magic. They give her back her original parents; they give her money and status.

One day, the younger sister dresses like she dressed as a child and poses for photos in a garden. She sits among flowers like the flowers her mother used to grow. The sunshine makes her feel whole. She tries on dresses of every color. Every day, she looks at these pictures. She tries to believe that she is beautiful, strong, brave, and hurt all at once. She tries to keep her memories ordered in time. She wants to tell a true story, but her history makes no ending ever feel right.

When Clemantine witnesses the full extent of her mother's faith, she stops feeling annoyed and just feels envious. She seems to realize that her life would be easier if she could forgive her past and have faith that God has a plan. This shows that Clemantine's rejection of faith isn't necessarily voluntary. Her trauma is such that she simply can't bring herself to believe that a good, just God exists.



Clemantine has come to terms with the fact that her identity is like a collection of scattered beads. However, she will always long for a logical story. Ultimately, what she misses most from her lost life is her storyteller—Mukamana—the woman who used to make sense of the world for her. She thus starts writing this memoir in an effort to find meaning and coherence in her own story.



This fable of Clemantine's story highlights its main points. Clemantine seems to see the biggest tragedy of her story as the loss of her childhood. The fable explains how the constant traveling by foot, bus, and boat cause her to grow up long before her time. She also explains how the world gave her back everything she lost but that somehow this isn't enough to restore her childhood. Nothing can make up for lost time.



Clemantine's character in her fable feels whole and at home when she dresses like she's a child again. In order to describe herself, she needs to use a language where "hurt" and "beautiful" can describe the same person. Her memoir, in its non-linear form, proves that Clemantine still hasn't found the logical, sequential story that she yearns for.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Clark, Cora. "The Girl Who Smiled Beads." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 6 Apr 2022. Web. 6 Apr 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Clark, Cora. "The Girl Who Smiled Beads." LitCharts LLC, April 6, 2022. Retrieved April 6, 2022. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-girl-who-smiled-beads>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Wamariya, Clemantine. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*. Crown. 2018.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Wamariya, Clemantine. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*. New York: Crown. 2018.