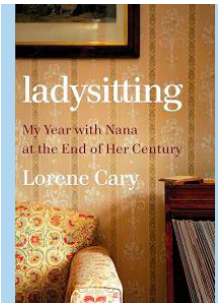
Discussion Guide



Ladysitting
Lorene Cary

W W Norton & Company
2019
256 pages
ISBN: 978-0393635881

Eldercare

Summary

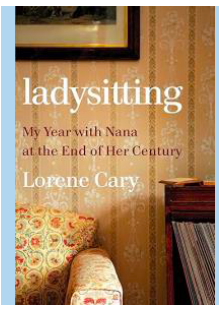
A story of the author's relationship with her remarkable grandmother, describing the latter's youth in the Jim Crow South, devotion to black causes, and management of her own business until age one hundred. Facing the inevitable end raises tensions, with Cary drawing on her spirituality and Nana consoling herself with late-night sweets and the loyalty of caregivers.
When Nana doubts Cary's dedication, Cary must go deeper into understanding this complicated woman.

Questions

1. What does Cary mean when she says she and her siblings were "brought up by hand" (p. 7)? Why was this important? How were Cary's weekends with Nana different?
2. Before Cary marries, she tells her white husband-to-be that "being black…mattered urgently" to her, and that her family "had lots of shades and varieties of black experience to live with" (p. 24). In what ways does Cary's marriage contribute to her family's racial heritage?
3. Years before, when Cary divorced her first husband, she felt she had followed the family's generations-long pattern of divorce. How does this common thread affect her adult relationship with Nana?
4. Cary's great-great grandfather was a successful, but illiterate, landowner who raised cotton on some land and rented out the rest. His well-educated sons became politically active "race men," each serving as secretary to Congressman George Henry White, the last African American to serve from North Carolina in more than ninety years. Why was it important to include their stories and Reconstruction-era politics in a book about caretaking in contemporary America?
5. On page 46, this is how Cary describes the South from which Nana's father would soon move his family: "…in a sustained campaign that historian Jan Carew calls 'total war,' the Jim Crow Democrats and their supporters clawed back control, using laws, voter suppression, books and songs depicting black inferiority, and a campaign of terror." How does the history of America's cultural depiction of black inferiority affect Cary's book-length consideration of her own family's pride and shame?
6. Cary finds stashes of cash in Nana's home because Nana distrusts banks to keep her money safe. Is being African American a factor? Or the depression? Or Pop-Pop's end-of-life finances? How did Nana think of race and money?

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7. In Chapter 4, Cary recalls times with other relatives and in-laws at the ends of their lives. What do those people's lives and deaths have to do with Nana? How does Cary's experience of death and dying deepen over time?
8. How does Nana's selling the last of her rental properties affect her fierce sense of independence?
9. Cary tells and then retells Nana's childhood story of her mother sending her into the field to collect cotton for her first doll. Why does Cary come back to the story and challenge it? What is this memoir saying about memory itself?
10. Later Cary starts, forgets, and then revisits with Nana a folktale Nana used to read to her and that they referred to as Cary grew up. What is it that makes this the one story, out of many others, that she tells and that Nana enjoys?
11. Nana often seems cool toward religious practice but enjoys many benefits of living in a religious community. What is her relationship to the parish of Good Shepherd and its activities? How does the text, with its many references to Christianity, speak of spirituality more generally?
12. *Ladysitting* is very much about intergenerational relationships. How does caring for Nana influence Zoë? How does their relationship evolve during that time? Older sister Laura does not live at home; what is her involvement in the family's lady sitting, and how does it affect her young adult life?
13. As Nana's time grows short, she becomes paranoid about those around her, eventually turning on Cary. What does she mean when she talks about "the fix I'm in" (p. 205)?
14. When Cary's sister and her family come to visit, Cary quotes her sister's "signature laugh line, 'Why are we like this? What did they do to us?'" Which shared qualities is she referring to? What answers does *Ladysitting* suggest?
15. On page 215, Nana asks if Cary "want[s] her dead." Before she answers, the chapter stops time to give an extended meditation on what Cary was feeling and thinking. What do we learn from this about the experience of caretaking?
16. Cary and her daughter feel "stunned" when Nana dies (p 234). In what ways does this illustrate the deep meaning and emotion in caring for Nana at the end of her life? Why do you think Cary didn't write *Ladysitting* until ten years after Nana's death?

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