
SOME PLACES MORE THAN OTHERS
APOLLO
STORE
HARLEM
GROCERY
Renée Watson
BLOOMSBURY

BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS and the Diana logo
are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in the United States of America in 2019 by Bloomsbury Children's Books
First published in Great Britain in 2019 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Renée Watson, 2019
Interior art copyright © Shadra Strickland, 2019
Endpapers by David Dean

Renée Watson has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988,
to be identified as Author of this work

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any
form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording,
or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission
in writing from the publishers

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-5266-1368-4; eBook: 978-1-5266-1370-7

Typeset by Westchester Publishing Services

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters



1

New York City is no place for a little girl," Mom says. "I don't think Amara is ready to visit." She takes plates from the cabinet, getting ready for the dinner Dad is cooking.

I am sitting at the kitchen island, reading, sort of . . . I have been on the same page for the past fifteen minutes because instead of reading I am listening to Mom and Dad's conversation.

I am irritated for a couple of reasons. One, because the "little girl" she is referring to is me—except I am *not* a little girl. Exactly two weeks and one day from today, I will be twelve years old. And besides, it's not like there aren't

hundreds, actually thousands—maybe even hundreds of thousands—of kids who live in New York City. I asked if I could go for my birthday to visit Dad's family, and it set off this long "discussion."

Mom says, "Kids who are born and raised in New York City is one thing. Kids from Oregon visiting is another." She keeps listing reasons why letting me visit New York is a bad idea. She says to Dad, "We don't even let Amara walk to school alone. How is she going to navigate a big city? Amara doesn't know anything about a place like New York. She's lived in the suburbs her whole life."

As if Dad doesn't know where I was born, where I live.

We live in Beaverton, Oregon, just a thirty-minute drive from Portland. Less than that if Dad is driving. Mom always says she loves Beaverton over Portland because no matter where you are, a park is just a short walk away. There are hiking trails and bike paths tucked throughout the city. When it's not too rainy, the three of us ride our bikes and explore new routes on weekends. I like living here. It's the only place I've ever called home. But I want to see other places. Go somewhere with more people, with more things to do.

I try to catch Dad's eyes. See if he will speak up for me and convince Mom to let me go to New York. But he is focused on cooking. He opens the sliding door and steps outside on the patio to check the food he's grilling. He grills even when it's cold outside. He says the covered deck is why he bought this house. I think it's his favorite place to be.

I watch him take the salmon off the grill, put the fillets on a plate, and squeeze lemon on each piece. As soon as he comes back inside, I try again. "Mom, you act like Dad isn't going to be there with me. It's not like I'd be going by myself," I remind her. "Plus, I'll finally get to meet my cousins and spend time with Aunt Tracey—"

"Sweetheart, you're not going. Okay?" She puts the plates in front of me and looks at Dad like she is trying to get him to back her up.

Dad puts another dirty dish into the sink. I know Mom will fuss about that later. Dad is the best cook ever, but he uses just about every bowl, plate, knife, spoon, and fork in the kitchen by the time the meal is prepared. He cooks a big family meal once a month because most of the time he is traveling for his job or too busy to come

home early enough for dinner. And tomorrow morning Dad is leaving for LA, which means Mom and I will be eating takeout for the next few days.

Mom eyes all the dirty dishes in the sink. "Babe, you're going to have to wash those. You can't leave this mess for Hannah to clean."

"Don't we pay Hannah to clean the house?" Dad asks.

Mom lets out a sigh, and I know this means she has had enough with both me and Dad. I get up and take the plates over to set the table, the one in the kitchen. We mostly eat in here instead of the formal dining room. We only eat there on Thanksgiving or when guests are joining us. Right now, it's an extension of Mom's workroom. Her sketches, along with fashion magazines and swatches of fabric, are spread across the table. Mom designs dresses and sells them at her boutique in downtown Portland's Pearl District. It's called Amara's Closet, which I know sounds amazing to most people—especially my friends—I mean, none of them have a whole clothing line and store named after them, but since there's nothing in that boutique I'd actually wear, it's not that big a deal to me.

I'd much rather wear the clothes Dad gets for me. He's the vice president of sports marketing at Nike and oversees

branding and special events like the annual All-Star basketball games and the launching of new shoes. Sometimes Dad brings me shoes that aren't even in stores yet. But mostly, I just rotate my Air Jordan Retro collection. I have one through twelve, but my favorite is the AJ4. I get those every time they come out.

As Dad takes the pan of roasted potatoes out of the oven and brings it to the table, Mom says, "I just don't want her going to New York yet."

Here's another thing that's irritating about this conversation. Mom is talking about me like I'm not in the kitchen. Like she didn't just walk past me—her actual daughter—who can hear everything she's saying.

"Maybe when she's older," she says.

I clear my throat. "Like twelve?" I ask. "You've been asking what I want for my birthday—well, this is what I want. A trip to New York. Dad is going for the All-Star Game. Why can't I go with him?"

"He's going for work, Amara," Mom says.

Before I can object, Dad gives me a look telling me to let it go. He sprinkles a little salt into the bowl of broccoli and says, "Dinner's ready." We sit at the table, and Dad prays over the food. "We thank you, God, not only for this

food, but for this family. Bless us, and keep us, and please—"

"Let me go to New York with Dad to meet Dad's side of the family," I blurt out.

Dad opens one eye, Mom opens both. We all say, "Amen."

Dad passes the plate of salmon first, then the potatoes, then the broccoli. I reach for the basket of homemade dinner rolls and pass it. I swallow my first bite and take a deep breath just as Mom says, "We're not going to talk about this all night, Amara."

How did she know I was going to say something else? I put down my fork. "Can I just say one more thing?" I ask.

Both Mom and Dad answer at the same time, Dad saying *yes*, Mom saying *no*. Mom gives in. "Go ahead."

"I just want to meet the family I've only seen in pictures," I say. "And you both keep saying that once the baby comes Dad won't be traveling as much, so I think I should go now."

At the mention of the baby, Mom touches her belly. Dad and Mom give each other a look.

I knew I'd get them with that. Bringing up the new addition to our family always gets them. Just about every

other sentence out of their mouths begins with, "Well, you know, once the baby comes we're not going to be able to . . ." and usually what they're not going to be able to do is something I love to do, so I'm thinking this little baby is already messing up my life and she is not even born yet.

Mom says, "Amara, the answer is no. You are not going to New York for your birthday, so you need to come up with something else you want to do." She drinks from her glass of water and then says, "And you can stop asking, okay?" She rubs her belly again, and I wonder about the little life inside her.

I haven't told anyone this, but I don't want Mom and Dad to have another baby. I feel bad for admitting it, especially after all the babies Mom was pregnant with and then lost. When I was younger, I really, *really* wanted a little brother or sister, but after so many times of wishing and hoping only to have no little brother or sister, I just stopped wanting one. But then, Mom and Dad told me they were expecting (again). I just said okay and walked away, and I didn't wish or hope, or think of names, or talk to Mom's belly at all. But this time, the little baby inside Mom kept growing and growing, and in a month Mom is supposed to have my baby sister. Mom takes the last bite of her

dinner roll and pushes her plate back. "Babe, that was so good. Nothing like fresh baked bread."

"Thanks. My mother's recipe," Dad says.

Grandma Grace died before I could meet her. I love it when Dad cooks from her recipes. Makes me feel like she is here with us, that she is giving us love. Thinking about her makes me think of New York again and how if I could just go to Harlem, I could learn more about Grandma Grace. If I could see the home my dad grew up in, I could stand in her kitchen. I eat another bite and then say, "Mom, what if we *all* go to New York? Maybe not for my birthday . . . but what about after the baby is born?"

Dad laughs. "You have my persistence, that's for sure."

Mom shakes her head. "And you say that like it's a good thing."

"Now, let's not knock persistence. It got me a yes from *you*," Dad says. He kisses Mom on her cheek and smiles at me. "Your mom was not feeling me at all when we first met."

"Why not?"

"It wasn't him that I wasn't feeling. It was his city," Mom says. "New York is dirty, crowded, either too hot or too cold, and ridiculously expensive."

"Hey, you're talking about my hometown."

"Sorry, honey, but you know I'm telling the truth." Mom turns to me, says, "Besides, Amara, I only went to New York for college, and I knew once I graduated I'd be coming back to Oregon. I didn't want to get involved with someone who was going to try to make me stay."

"But little did she know I was ready for a change and wanted to leave the city," Dad says. "Plus my dream job was to work at Nike, so I had already looked into moving to Beaverton. Once I told her that, I had her attention. But I still had to convince her to go on a date with me."

Mom smiles. "He tried hard, too, Amara. Reciting me poems and everything."

"Poems? Dad reciting poems?"

Dad gets up from the table. "Okay, all right. Enough about me."

I take that to mean we can go back to talking about my trip to New York. I look at Mom and ask, "So is this your way of telling me that if I stay persistent and recite you a poem, then you'll let me go?"

Mom gives me that look, the one that says she's had enough and I better get myself together before I regret it. I don't get the look often. A few times she's given it to me

when she's already told me two or three times to turn the TV off and get my homework done.

I let it go.

I get up, put my plate in the dishwasher, and excuse myself to my room. As I walk away Mom says, "Homework first."

"I know," I tell her.

On the way to my bedroom, I hear Mom say to Dad, "You love making me be the bad guy, huh? Now why you got that girl thinking she can go to Harlem with you? You haven't seen or talked to your father in about twelve years. You really think it's appropriate for Amara to be there when you finally do see him?"

My hand is on the doorknob, but I don't open the door. I stand real still so they don't know I'm in the hallway listening.

Dad says, "Going to Harlem doesn't mean I have to see my dad. I've been to New York several times in the past few years. They don't need to know when I'm back in the city."

"But I think for Amara the whole point is to meet your—"

"Leslie, not now. Please."

I go into my room, sit on my bed.

My father hasn't talked with Grandpa Earl in twelve years?

He's actually been in New York City and didn't go home? I know he's been for work, but still. How do you not talk to your father, and why didn't I know this?

Dad hasn't talked with Grandpa Earl, but I have. I talk to Grandpa Earl every Father's Day and on Thanksgiving and Christmas and on my birthday and his birthday. I've never really thought about it before, but now that I am remembering, every time I talk to Grandpa Earl it's Mom who calls me to the phone. When I am finished, I give the phone back to Mom. I think and think, but I can't remember a time when I saw or heard Dad on the phone with Grandpa Earl. He talks with Aunt Tracey a lot. She's been here, to Beaverton, to visit us a few times. Sometimes Dad sends shoes to my cousins, Nina and Ava, but he doesn't speak with Grandpa Earl.

I think maybe I've had it all wrong. Mom is not the one I need to convince about me taking a trip to Harlem. Dad is.