

Aquarian Dawn

Ebele Chizea

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An African teenager comes of age between countries and cultures in Ebele Chizea's engrossing young adult novel *Aquarian Dawn*.

In the 1960s, Ada moves to Pennsylvania from Nabuka, a country riven by civil war and genocide. Her mother, a doctor who is strict with her, is separated from her stepfather and acts distant because of her worries. Ada, whose sense of alienation turns her toward poetry and depression, finds refuge with Sal, a bright classmate who stirs feelings of love, and countercultural Stacey, who encourages Ada to experiment.

Ada's transition is developed in episodic terms. She is restless, and she yearns for independence and to feel a sense of purpose. Her sorrow regarding her home country permeates every day, and she experiences friction with her mother over their differing expectations about her future. And Ada faces racism: some of her peers regard her as queenlike, while others revile her.

Ada's friendships help her to grow, though. She becomes a passionate young woman who is driven by her impulses. She enrolls in a women's college, and though her departure from her new home interrupts her burgeoning relationships, there's hope that those connections might be renewed later on. A tragedy inspires Ada's third-act flight back to Nabuka in the 1970s, where she finds her confidence and her footing. Multiple concerns are addressed in the course of Ada's search for the truth about her family's roots, and through her involvement in aiding local survivors. Her changing circumstances make her more empathetic to her mother—and reinvigorate her sense of hope.

Fusing war, politics, love, and confusion in a touching exploration of young womanhood on the brink of national changes, *Aquarian Dawn* is a memorable novel.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2022)

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