



Preying Mantis: The Story of Tarissa

Lyn Thomas

Lyn Thomas-Ogbuji (Jul 10, 2015)

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This smoothly flowing story explores the power of all-consuming love.

Lyn Thomas's *Preying Mantis: The Story of Tarissa* is a character-driven novel that explores the concept of all-consuming love and the way it invades every aspect of a person's life. The narrative flows seamlessly through one man's memories as he recounts the story of the great love of his life.

The novel begins with Lennox Obi mourning the end of his love affair with Tarissa "Trish" Adoja, his mistress of fifteen years. Spurned for another man, Len is forced to reflect on his relationship and acknowledge that the intense, ardent love he had for Trish wasn't reciprocated and never had been. In a final act of despair, Len decides to take his own life, and overdoses on sleeping medication. As he waits to die, he chooses to remember his time with Trish—both the soaring highs and the aching lows.

Len's inner monologue is rich with the details of his life and his strong personal opinions. His commentary addresses a variety of topics ranging from the mundane to the extreme; equal time is given to how he takes his coffee and to the racist political climate of academia. However, while Len's character is complex, other characters aren't given the same treatment. This is most evident in Trish's characterization. Although she is a prominent and vital character, her personality is merely described rather than shown. Len labels her as vibrant, witty, and charming, but these elements read as reports, and reduce her to a flat and shallow character.

Nigerian culture also features in the novel. Both Trish and Len, as well as the majority of the supporting characters, are Nigerian immigrants. Because Trish and Len live in Ohio, they are both subjected to the effects of diaspora—a longing for home and a sense of displacement. At several points Len believes that his setbacks are caused by anti-immigrant and racist sentiment, such as when he isn't able to get a promotion at NASA or land a job at Kent State University.

While Len praises Nigerian culture, he also makes harsh generalizations about Nigerian women, accusing them of being clingy and incapable of independent thought. This attitude is later aimed at Trish after he discovers her affair. He uses pejorative terms to describe her and believes that she is no better than a common thief.

The language fluctuates between the verbose and the colloquial, from words like "connivance," "exculpate," and "punctilious" to phrases like "mucho bucks" and "not by a long shot." There are strong examples of imagery, like the grandiose description of the Vatican, but this is offset by the overuse of cliché Len employs to express his love for Trish. The inconsistency of the novel's language leads to an overall impression of discord.

Preying Mantis: The Story of Tarissa is introspective and explores the many facets of romantic love. Len's journey is brought to life by the character-driven plot.

CLARISSA GOLDSMITH (July 20, 2015)

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