

Scattered Pieces

Flora Season

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Scattered Pieces opens with a bang, as Flora Season cleverly pulls the reader into a scene of breathtaking violence on the book's second page. After playfully refusing to kiss her father in the opening paragraph, four-year-old Flora witnesses him brutally attack her mother moments later. "You didn't want to give your daddy a hug. Look what I'm doing to your mommy," he says.

Everything changed after that day, she tells us, and one is compelled to believe her. Season writes from the perspective of someone who profoundly understands domestic and sexual violence, dysfunctional families, and the African American experience. She has an excellent grasp of family and societal dynamics, appears very well read, and is without guile in her honesty.

Having grown up in Philadelphia and Delaware in the late 1980s and '90s, Season recounts what feels like all the details of her tumultuous childhood. Some of it is tedious, but for a full picture of this young woman's life, the minutia is forgiven. She is no victim, and her many stories about fighting back against sexual advances, bullies, and injustice are wonderful.

The first third of the book is action-packed, and moves from one emotionally charged event to the next. While learning to ride a bicycle at age five, Flora deflects the first of many attempted sexual encounters by older boys and men. A few months later, life with her father becomes untenable, and her mother escapes to a domestic violence shelter with Flora and her younger brother. Her shelter experience is fascinating and well described.

Life appears to improve after the shelter, but Flora is no happier. Her mother works two jobs, and she is cared for by her great-grandmother, who has her own set of issues. Within a couple years, the family is forced to move in with grandparents in Delaware and Flora is thrown into a mostly white, suburban school. Three displaced young cousins arrive and Flora finds herself caring for them, as well as doing much of the housework. Unsurprisingly, she begins to withdraw and suffer academically until she returns to Philadelphia and a more stable situation.

Once she gets into middle school and discovers boys, the book begins to resemble a young adult novel. Teenagers would likely enjoy her myriad tales of dates, near-dates, cat-fights, sexual experimentation, and epic extrapolation of the all-important reputation. Flora's obsession with boys carries on into college, where she joins a sorority, does some modeling and gets her degree in education.

In school, she meets Martin, falls in love, gets pregnant, they marry, and the last few chapters are depressing in their predictability. The marriage is fraught with problems; her husband joins the military, Flora struggles with motherhood and, in the process, gains a new appreciation for her own family.

In the final chapter, Flora becomes a Christian and her life miraculously becomes happy and fulfilled. Her husband also becomes a Christian, and she ends the book giddy with excitement about the future.

Though *Scattered Pieces* is too long in places, it is decently written and has sociological and cultural merit. It would

appeal to teenage readers and is also appropriate for the high school classroom.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (July 22, 2010)

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