

From there, Jean and Malcolm go to the La-Marr-Cheri, one of his regular hangouts. As he is very high on cocaine and booze, Jean soon goes home. Malcolm sits with his back to the door, and so he doesn't see West Indian Archie come in. Archie proceeds to threaten and humiliate Malcolm publicly, until some of Archie's friends manage to quietly drag him out and defuse the situation. Malcolm walks outside and waits, but when Archie doesn't emerge to confront him, he leaves.

At this point, Malcolm decides the best course of action is to get unbelievably high. He first smokes some opium, then takes Benezdrine tablets to perk up. He then smokes some marijuana with his neighbor, who helps him roll a hundred reefers. Malcolm then goes to Sammy's, where they do cocaine. He arrives at his lesbian friend's apartment to deliver them fifty reefers, and then proceeds to pass out for the rest of the day. Malcolm stays high for the next couple of days, and nothing happens—his would-be shootout with Archie never occurs.

After a slight scuffle in a bar one day, Malcolm can sense the police coming. He gives his gun away just in time, as the police come into the bar and pat him down. They recommend that he leave town. With the narcotics squad, West Indian Archie, and the Italian mob all looking for him, Malcolm feels very trapped.

Sammy calls Shorty in Boston and asks him to come get Malcolm, as he needs to get out of town. Shorty arrives, and Malcolm gratefully packs up the car and they leave town. Malcolm writes that he's always been grateful to Sammy for making that call.

## CHAPTER 9: CAUGHT

Ella cannot believe how profane Malcolm has become in both his speech and in his general outlook. Shorty, likewise, is a little overwhelmed by how predatory Malcolm is, like a dangerous animal. At first, Malcolm just sleeps and smokes reefers for two weeks at Shorty's house. Once he starts going out and finds some cocaine, though, he begins to want to talk and make plans for the future. Malcolm talks with Sophia in the evening and with Shorty all night.

Sophia's husband works now as a traveling salesman, giving her more ability to come see Malcolm. Malcolm has always exploited Sophia for money, but she's never complained about it. He also occasionally would hit her, but she always came back. Now, his demands for money and her beatings have gotten worse, but he never worries that she will stop coming.

*Malcolm has lost control of himself and the situation by leaving himself exposed to a surprise attack. But the fact that nothing serious happens is telling; perhaps neither Malcolm nor West Indian Archie want to hurt each other, but are nonetheless obliged to put on a public show of masculinity and confidence.*



*In a way, Malcolm's drug use is a quasi-religious escape from a reality that is full of violence and hatred. In his haze, he completely checks out of his difficulties and simply waits for fate to unfold itself. Of course, drugs are much more harmful for one's health than praying, but a similar attitude can be observed in the Nation of Islam's hands-off approach to contemporary political issues.*



*Malcolm remarks early in the autobiography that his mother and his siblings have always had an intuition for impending danger; here, the reader sees that intuition in action.*



*One of the greatest things that any friend ever did for Malcolm was to essentially offer him an escape route. Soon, Reginald will offer him a similar "escape."*



*Malcolm the narrator marks the time lapse since his last time in Boston by his changed attitude, which shocks his friends and family. This attitude, which he describes as predatory, is completely goal-focused: looking forward only to the next high, the next score, the next hustle.*



*Malcolm the narrator reflects that this level of extortion and abuse was out of hand. However, he seems to imply that a certain level of extortion and abuse is normal and acceptable – a potentially shocking claim to a contemporary reader.*



Malcolm notes again Shorty's love for white women, and he goes crazy for Sophia's younger sister, who likewise goes crazy for him as a black musician. Malcolm takes the girls to Shorty's shows, where other black men gather to drool over the two beautiful white women.

Malcolm decides to begin a new hustle, but first he needs funds. So he takes what money he can from Sophia and gambles at John Hughes' gambling house. One day, Malcolm manages to win a huge pot and John's respect as a gambler, and John welcomes Malcolm to come back whenever he wants.

John Hughes requires his guests to check their guns at the door. Malcolm usually checks two guns—but one day, when another gambler tries to cheat, Malcolm pulls a third gun on him, earning himself a reputation as trigger happy and crazy. And in reflection, Malcolm believes that he probably was a little insane during that time.

Reginald comes to visit in Roxbury, after having returned to Harlem and discovering all the mess Malcolm left behind. As always, Malcolm is very happy to see his closest brother. Malcolm also says that while Ella still disapproved of his lifestyle, he believes she secretly admired his rebellious ways, as she herself is very independent and brave.

While he could take up gambling as a regular hustle, Malcolm wants to do something that will allow him to make enough money to support Shorty as well, who is living as a starving musician. He proposes they get into house burglary, and to his surprise, Shorty agrees. Shorty also brings in his friend Rudy.

Rudy is a mixed-race, good-looking guy. He works as a waiter, but also has a side hustle satisfying the desires of an elderly white man. Rudy would undress them both, carry the man to his bed, and then sprinkle him in talcum powder, causing him to orgasm. Naturally, Malcolm and Rudy swap stories about the things they've seen.

Having learned from the best, Malcolm insists that the group take their time and carefully plan their jobs. He insists they find an area to work in and stick to it, and that they only work at night, as Malcolm's light skin and tall stature are quite conspicuous. Realizing that they need someone to scout out good targets in rich neighborhoods, Malcolm decides they should bring in Sophia and Sophia's sister, who instantly agree. Then they decide to rent a place in Harvard Square that can act as their base of operations. Meanwhile, Malcolm finds a "fence" (someone who will buy their stolen merchandise) for their goods.

*Shorty and Sofia's sister represent for Malcolm a sort of match made in hell, both completely obsessed with the image of the other, rather than with the other's true nature.*



*Malcolm displays his diverse hustler's skill set, which is a product of a sharp intelligence and careful study from the older hustlers in Harlem and Small's Palace.*



*As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Malcolm saw his outlook as that of a predatory animal. His quick recourse to threats demonstrates how few qualms he had about violence.*



*Malcolm's two closest siblings both admire him for his resourcefulness and independence, which are two qualities that he also sees and admires in them.*



*Malcolm may see himself as a predator, but if so, he's more of a lion king than a lone wolf. His sense of responsibility for Shorty is quite touching and shows how much he values their friendship.*



*While Malcolm tells several stories of strange sexual fetishes, this is certainly one of the strangest. Its racial overtones, however, make it for Malcolm not only strange, but unacceptable.*



*Malcolm's organizational skills tell the reader two things. First, they attest to his thorough experience with burglary and other criminal operations from his time in Harlem. Second, they offer a glimpse of how effective Malcolm will be as a leader in the Nation of Islam, when he will be orchestrating the spreading of the faith throughout multiple cities.*



At their first meeting, they devise a plan. Sophia and Sophia's sister will pose as saleswomen or college students, and they'll look around the home once invited inside. Malcolm, Rudy, and Shorty will handle the actual burglaries, with two inside and one waiting in the getaway car.

In order to establish himself as the boss of the crew, Malcolm puts on a show for the others. He removes the bullets from his revolver, then puts one back. He twirls the cylinder, places the gun to his temple, and pulls the trigger. He does this three times in all to show that he is fearless and they should never cross him—and they never do. (Malcolm later reveals that he had palmed the bullet.)

The group's first target is the old man Rudy works for. Everything goes as smooth as clockwork, and the old man later tells Rudy that the cops suspect a gang which had been in Boston for a year. Their next jobs continue to go smoothly, as the girls are freely shown into people's houses. The families are often home when the burglars enter, but Malcolm assures the reader that it is much simpler than it sounds. And while they are making good money, especially on Oriental rugs, they are still aware that their "fence" is surely making much more profit than they are.

Their only close brush with the police occurs as they make their getaway one night, and a police car flashes behind them. As he did once before, Malcolm gets out and asks for directions to Roxbury, and the police give him directions and drive off. Malcolm remarks that white men never believe a black man would be bold enough or smart enough to try and trick them.

Everything is going well for the crew. Sophia and Sophia's sister still go with Malcolm to see Shorty and his shows, and then they all smoke reefers back at Malcolm or Shorty's apartment. Malcolm notes how Shorty is so obsessed with his girlfriend and her white skin that even if the lights are out, he opens the window shade to see her skin by the streetlight.

Malcolm spends a lot of his time before and after jobs in the Savoy club, so that people questioned will always be able to say they saw him in there around the time of the crime. One day while there, he receives a call from Sophia, but Turner, a black detective who hates Malcolm, answers it instead. Malcolm and Turner then exchange veiled threats and Turner backs down.

*Their roles not only reflect their varying skill sets, but the ways the crew members are seen in society. Only Sophia and her sister could be welcomed into nice neighborhoods without suspicion.*



*When working on the train, Malcolm and the crew had played into racial stereotypes to earn bigger tips. Now, Malcolm plays into his image as a "crazy animal" to display his dominance and assure control over the group.*



*In Harlem, most of the businesses were owned by white owners who then hired black managers to act as the face of the business. In burglary and in the numbers business, the people making most of the money are the bankers and fences, usually white people, while the black hustlers in Harlem and Roxbury take most of the risks.*



*Malcolm's contempt for the police and their presumptions is very noticeable. It might be fair to say that he can barely imagine a white man whom he couldn't fool.*



*The way Malcolm describes it, Shorty seems to be obsessed with the white color of Sophia's sister's skin. For Malcolm, this obsession is rooted in years of conditioning by society which tells us that white is inherently more beautiful than black.*



*Malcolm's interaction with Turner recalls his interaction with Archie. Both know that the other is very dangerous, but neither is willing to make the first move. Instead, they simply content themselves with threats, perhaps secretly hoping to avoid violence.*



Malcolm begins to use drugs with so much frequency and quantity that it starts to cloud his judgment. One night, Sophia and Sophia's sister unwillingly come to a bar with the best friend of Sophia's husband, who wanted to see the black ghetto. Malcolm, high, barges up to their table, making it obvious they know each other and ousting Sophia.

Later that night, the friend shows up at their Harvard Square hideout, and Malcolm hides under the bed as he comes in. The man finds Malcolm, and they talk a little. While nothing happens, Malcolm's relationship with Sophia is obvious. Malcolm is concerned by how thoughtless he was in hiding under a bed, and without his gun, no less.

Two days later, Malcolm goes to pick up a stolen watch he had taken for a repair. As the repairman knew the watch was stolen, the police were alerted and a trap was set for Malcolm. After Malcolm pays, an officer emerges from the back. Then another black man walks into the store, and the officer briefly turns his back on Malcolm—but rather than reaching for his gun, Malcolm freely tells the cop to take it from him. Unbeknownst to him, two other cops had him covered the whole time, so his decision not only earned him the cops' respect, but saved his life.

If the cops hadn't picked Malcolm up for the watch, then he may have died that day. While he was being taken to the station, Sophia's husband had come to the apartment with a gun, looking to kill Malcolm.

The girls were soon picked up after the cops got Malcolm's address from some of his papers, and Shorty was then arrested while performing. They tried to get Rudy, but he managed to get out of Boston in time, an escape that has always marveled Malcolm.

All in all, burglary was not a very serious crime, with the average sentence for first time offenders being only two years. The police and the social workers were mostly concerned that Sophia and Sophia's sister, two well-to-do white women, were sexually involved with two black men. Even Malcolm's own court-appointed lawyers were outraged by this.

*As with the days right before his escape to Boston from Harlem, Malcolm's drug use is an attempt to block out his surrounding situation, and it works so well that he has trouble functioning in the world.*



*When compared to how much precaution Malcolm took in avoiding police detection while selling reefers, it's telling that his mind is no longer sharp enough to protect him in a possibly violent situation.*



*Reflecting on this moment, Malcolm believes that only Allah saved him from death. Given the amount of drugs he was taking and the "predatory" state he had fallen into, it was truly a miracle that he didn't reach for his gun to try and kill the officer.*



*Of every threat on his life so far, this day's double threat may have been the most dangerous thus far – and the threats will only grow larger.*



*Malcolm's writing style here reflects that of a crime-beat journalist, reporting the facts in a matter-of-fact way.*



*After Malcolm has reaped the benefits from his relationship with Sophia for so long, and Shorty has enjoyed his own interracial romance, they are now both forced to pay the price for those socially taboo relationships. The racist and sexist mentality of whites at the time is still very preoccupied with "protecting" white women from black men.*



Malcolm addresses the reader, saying that he has not shared these details of his life to excite or entertain anyone. On the contrary, he sees it strictly as necessary to understanding who he is as a person today to see where he has come from. The main point of the narrative until now is to show that he had fallen to the lowest point possible in society.

*The reader should take this passage seriously, as Malcolm the narrator's chief mission in life is to preach and spread the truth of black oppression. However, certain passages above also may show that Malcolm has a certain nostalgia for those days.*



## CHAPTER 10: SATAN

In February, 1946, the gang appears in court to receive their sentences. Shorty receives his sentence first, eight to ten years for each count, sentences which are to be served concurrently. However, Shorty doesn't know the word *concurrently*, and he collapses at the thought of serving those sentences *consecutively*. Sophia and Sophia's sister are given one to five years. At the age of twenty-one, Malcolm is sentenced to ten years in prison.

*The opening scene of the chapter presents an example of gallows humor, where a very dark scene is told in a cynically funny way. Shorty's collapse at the thought of a life in prison may be unnecessary, but it doesn't negate the fact that they will all spend several years in prison.*



Malcolm reflects that he no longer remembers his prison number. This surprises him, as it was such an integral part of prison life. However, neither he nor any other ex-con he's ever talked to has been able to forget the prison bars. The bars are burned into his memory and never let him forget his time there.

*Malcolm's inability to remember his prison number is not a simple lapse in memory, but rather highlights the traumatic experience of being locked up.*



Malcolm's time at Charlestown State Prison starts terribly. The prison is old and the cells are tiny, with no indoor plumbing, just a pail. Malcolm's withdrawal from drugs makes him extremely irritable, especially to the prison psychologist, prison chaplain, and Malcolm's religious brother Philbert, who has written him a letter. Ella comes to visit, but they have very little to say, especially under the watch of the visitor room guards.

*While in Harlem and making money, Malcolm felt entirely free, despite the pressures of the hustling life. His early time in prison is marked not only by a radical loss of freedom, but by an imposition of additional hardships, which causes him to reject his family's empathy.*



Malcolm doesn't remember much of his first year in prison. He spends most of his time getting high on nutmeg or smuggled pills and weed, then intentionally getting in trouble to be put in solitary. His rants and curses against God and the Bible earn him a nickname: Satan.

*Malcolm continues to live in his "predatory" mentality of simply trying to stay high and reject his surroundings. This new nickname of "Satan" represents an ultimate low point for him, particularly in light of his later religious fervor.*



The first person to make an impression on Malcolm is Bimbi, and old burglar who commands tremendous respect in the prison through his public discussions on educated topics. His language attracts Malcolm, and Bimbi eventually tells Malcolm to start taking advantage of the library and the prison correspondence courses. As his command of written and formal English has fallen to an abysmal level, and as he has the time on his hands, Malcolm decides to follow Bimbi's advice. After a year he can write a decent letter, and he has even begun a course in Latin.

*Bimbi can connect with Malcolm because they are both criminals and because Malcolm still values education and learning. After watching someone that he admires, Malcolm sets himself to imitate Bimbi and starts to pursue his studies again.*



Meanwhile, Malcolm begins a new circle of hustles. He first wins packs of cigarettes through dominoes games, and he then takes sports bets (paid in cigarettes). When Jackie Robinson joins the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, Malcolm follows him obsessively, listening to every game and tracking his batting average.

In 1948, Malcolm has been transferred to Concord Prison, when Philbert writes to him about a new religion he's found, the "natural religion for the black man." Reginald sends him a separate letter, telling him that if he stops smoking cigarettes and doesn't eat pork, he'll help Malcolm get out of prison. While Malcolm curses Philbert, he listens to Reginald, who he assumes is organizing some kind of legal maneuver for early release. He nearly effortlessly quits smoking, and then a few days later, refuses the pork platter at the mess hall. The news that "Satan" didn't eat pork causes quite a stir, which makes him inexplicably proud.

Ella has been working to get Malcolm transferred to the Norfolk Prison Colony, and she succeeds in late 1948. Upon arriving, Malcolm is struck by its progressive model. With no bars and every inmate having their own room, he feels like he's in heaven. The prison has regular group debates and lectures from visiting Harvard and Boston University professors, and the library has thousands of books the prisoners are free to browse, mostly dealing with history and religion.

After having seen his nasty reply to Philbert, his siblings (all new converts) have decided to send Reginald to talk with Malcolm. Reginald comes to see Malcolm, looking very well-groomed and discussing the family. Malcolm, meanwhile, is itching to know the answer to the "no smoke and pork" riddle. Reginald takes his time before finally declaring that there is someone who knows everything, who has 360 degrees of knowledge, and his name is Allah.

Allah, Reginald says, came to America and revealed himself to a man named Elijah. But there was also a devil, and this devil only had 33 degrees of knowledge, known as Masonry, which he used to trick people, especially black people. Reginald, while explaining all this, then gestures to the white guards, saying, "The white man is the devil." Malcolm mentions their old friend Hymie, but Reginald counters that Hymie only ever used Malcolm to make a profit, anyway.

*In his obsession with Jackie Robinson's stats, the reader sees how Malcolm's new life of studying intersects with his old hustling life—both involved a voracious curiosity and resourcefulness. Robinson's career represents a significant victory for African Americans in sports.*



*Malcolm has not yet been exposed to the teachings of the Nation of Islam. Therefore, he can only assume that Reginald's advice is connected to a new "hustle" to get him out of prison early. Nonetheless, he experiences a lot of pride in holding himself to a higher standard than his peers, which elevates him beyond the level of a "predator" trying to survive.*



*This better prison environment allows Malcolm the space to completely exit his "predator" mentality. Now that the psychological stress of being in a prison of bars has been removed, Malcolm is better able to pursue his studies. Eventually, this calmer environment will also facilitate his conversion to Islam.*



*Malcolm's siblings work as a team to teach him about Islam. As when they were children looking out for each other when the Welfare Agency tried to break up their family, they now look out for their brother who is under government lock and key.*



*Freemasonry is a fraternal organization of freethinkers without specific religious beliefs, originally founded in Europe. Reginald and the Nation decry the Masons as symbolic of the secular beliefs of European white society.*



After Reginald leaves, Malcolm thinks through every white person he's ever known: the state welfare people, the judges, Mr. Swerlin and Mrs. Swerlin, Mr. Ostrowski, the white people at Roseland's dances, the railroad people, the people he took to brothels, the prison guards, and Sophia. He concludes that they were indeed all using him or treating him inhumanely.

To test Reginald's statement about Masons, Malcolm approaches a Mason in the prison. He draws him a circle and asks how many degrees are in it. When he responds with 360 degrees, Malcolm asks why the Masonic hierarchy only has 33 degrees of knowledge. When the man can give him no good answer, Malcolm becomes convinced that Reginald has spoken the truth.

Reginald comes to visit again, and he finds a very attentive Malcolm waiting for him. Reginald then talks to him for two hours about how black men have been oppressed, but says that they are rising up across the world. Black people in America may have been cut off from their history, their own names and language, but they are now rising to overthrow their white oppressors. Malcolm struggles to take in all of this information, which has always been around him but he's never seen before.

After this Malcolm begins to receive letters from all his siblings—they have all converted to the Nation of Islam. They urge him to accept the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, who is described as a wise, gentle man—and a black man just like Malcolm. Reginald also explains that as a sign of submission to Allah, Muslims do not eat pork, and they do not use tobacco, alcohol, or drugs.

Malcolm's knowledge of the truth—as maintained by the Nation of Islam—comes to him slowly. He learns that white men have been oppressing black people for hundreds of years, and that they rewrote history to make it impossible for modern black men to know the truth. Great civilizations and cultures had existed in Africa, but white men have portrayed Africa as full of uncultured barbarians and savages. Slaves, who were stolen from their homelands, were then not allowed to use their own names, languages, or cultural practices. Completely cut off from their own identity, black people were not only physically but psychologically enslaved to white people, seeing them as somehow superior to them.

*Malcolm goes through a long list of all the white characters who have appeared in the first half of the book. His current position in prison stands as an indictment against all of them, as if they are all in some way responsible for his misfortune.*



*Malcolm's connection between the number of degrees in Masonry and God's total knowledge seems quite strange to the contemporary reader, but this was a central teaching of the Nation of Islam. (It also perhaps recalls Malcolm's later-revealed tendency of assigning precise percentages to how much he trusts certain people.)*



*Reginald's first goal was to show Malcolm that there is more knowledge out there than society has so far given him. His second step is to teach him some of this knowledge about racial oppression. And even though lots of Reginald's points seem true, Malcolm's mind resists them, as if even his ability to reason has been oppressed and shaped by white society.*



*Now that Malcolm is open to hearing them, his siblings begin to pour more information into his open ears.*



*At the time, the fields of archeology, history, and anthropology knew relatively little about African civilizations, and American society had repressed what knowledge was available to sustain the racist belief that people of African descent were in some way inferior to Europeans. Malcolm's education consists of learning both about this history and of how it has been repressed.*



This enslavement, according to the Nation of Islam, found its greatest example in Christianity. Black people were forced to convert to their masters' religion, in which they would worship a blonde, blue-eyed savior as a God, who they soon equated with all whiteness. Meanwhile, Christianity indoctrinated in black people a morality of "turn the other cheek," which acted as a further way to keep them from rebelling against the injustices done to them while waiting for justice in heaven.

Looking back on his reception of all this knowledge, Malcolm believes that his very sinful previous life actually prepared him for such a full conversion to the truth. By having so much guilt, and admitting it, he could make room inside of himself for the truth to take hold. While Malcolm denies any likeness to the Apostle Paul, he claims to understand Paul's experience of being struck dumb by the truth.

But before that reckoning moment comes, Malcolm first spends weeks in contemplation, hardly eating. The other prisoners, the guards, and the prison doctor all try to figure what is wrong with him, but there is nothing to be done. He is coming to terms with the reality of oppression around him.

Malcolm's siblings gather their funds to send his older sister Hilda to come and visit him. She urges Malcolm to write to Elijah Muhammad, who understands the hardships of prisoners, as he himself just finished a five-year sentence for draft evasion. She then begins a tale, as taught by the Nation of Islam, of how black and white men came to be on the Earth, known as "Yacub's History."

In the beginning, Hilda says, there were only black people, who founded the Holy City of Mecca. Then, around sixty-six hundred years ago, a dissatisfied and extremely intelligent scientist called Mr. Yacub learned the secrets to eugenics (breeding races). After Yacub began to gain a significant following, he and his followers were exiled to the island of Patmos. As revenge against those who exiled him, he decided to use his knowledge to create a "devil race" of white men to plague the black men.

*In most classical representations of Jesus Christ, he is portrayed as having European features and skin tone. According to the Nation of Islam, this was not simply an artistic choice, but an ideological one which equated white Europeans with being more divine, while blacks were seen as savages.*



*In Arabic, the word Islam means submission, which also means to admit one's own faults. By having so many faults, Malcolm has the potential to submit more and thus receive more of the truth. The Apostle Paul was famously struck blind by a vision of Jesus that suddenly converted him.*



*Malcolm's time spent reflecting on his own sins and on the world around him is similar to a religious ritual, in which one cleanses themselves through contemplation, repentance, and fasting.*



*Hilda's trip is very symbolic of the ethics of the Nation of Islam in general. The whole community (his family) sacrifices to send a wise "prophet" to go and spread the truth to a potential convert.*



*While "Yacub's History" may not be factually true, some of its points are interesting because they describe the Nation of Islam's powerful ideology. For example, by saying that in the beginning all men were black, Yacub's History teaches that black men are not inferior, but actually superior to white men.*



After six hundred years of careful eugenic breeding, the island was finally filled with white, blue-eyed savages. These men eventually returned to their homeland, where they sowed discord and misery among the black people. However, they were finally exiled to Europe. Allah then showed mercy on them by raising up Moses to lead them, and his first followers were the people known as Jews. The white race would then rule for the next six thousand years and bring black people as slaves to America. But then, a mighty race of black people in America would rise against the evils of the white man and lead the oppressed people of the world to overthrow him. The original founder of this movement is Master W. D. Fard, the mixed-race founder of the Nation of Islam, who then left Elijah Muhammad in charge of leading it.

While this tale stuns Malcolm and he is speechless as Hilda leaves, later in life he will disavow this story and other parts of the Nation of Islam's doctrine. These tales are not supported by orthodox Islam, and infuriate its followers. However, Malcolm partially blames them for allowing such "religious fakers" to pretend to represent Islam.

## CHAPTER 11: SAVED

After many drafts and attempts to express himself, Malcolm manages to write a short letter to Elijah Muhammad. He receives a very gracious typed response in which Elijah tells him to have courage—and also gives him five dollars. Elijah also tells Malcolm that black prisoners symbolize the oppression white men enact on all black people in America.

The hardest thing Malcolm ever has to do in his life is to repent and submit himself to Allah, or in other words, to pray. He has to continuously try to force himself down to his knees, and continuously force himself to try and reckon with his past sins. Finally he manages to kneel, but then has no idea what to say.

Almost instantly, Malcolm's old life falls away, and he dives head first into his new faith. He writes two letters a day, one to Elijah and one to one of his siblings. Meanwhile, he also writes letters to all the people he once knew in New York and Boston, like Sammy the Pimp, letters which he's sure gained him a reputation as insane. He writes further letters to politicians, but receives no replies.

*From the very beginning, according to Yacub's History, white men have been a plague towards virtuous black men. However, there is hope. Even though white men have ruled the world for thousands of years, Allah has foreseen this—and also foresaw that their rule would be overthrown and people of color all over the world would be liberated. Finally, the weight of this entire prophetic overthrow rests on the shoulders of Elijah Muhammad, which makes him an extremely powerful and divine figure in the Nation's theology.*



*Malcolm the narrator's tone in this entire section has been very impartial, simply telling the story as he heard it. By waiting until the very end to call it false, he gives his criticism even more force (and shows how much his views have changed since then).*



*Elijah Muhammad's response is very empathetic to Malcolm's situation, but it is also very strategic. By supporting prisoners and calling them a symbol of the movement, he virtually ensures their support for the Nation.*



*This is an extremely intimate moment in Malcolm's life – as he says, it's the hardest thing he's done. But he also says relatively very little about it, perhaps because he wants to keep it private.*



*This scene resembles Pentecost in the Christian tradition, when the apostles were so caught up in their religious fervor that they immediately went out preaching to every community. In Malcolm's case, he "preaches" to his old hustler friends.*



Malcolm grows increasingly frustrated that he cannot express himself more articulately and can only construct his thoughts in slang. And while he “reads,” he often skips the words he doesn’t know, and so acquires no knowledge. Finally, he resolves to remedy this by studying and copying out the entire dictionary. He starts by copying the entire first page, and marvels that he remembers those words the next day. He continues like that every day until he completes the entire dictionary.

Armed with his new vocabulary, a whole new world of knowledge opens to him in the books he reads. From then on, Malcolm spends nearly all of his time reading or else writing his letters and dictionary entries, either in the library or in his bunk. He prefers the solitude of his room, however, where he can truly focus. The only thing that holds him back is the 10 PM lights out, but then he reads by the light coming from the crack under his door.

Elijah Muhammad’s teachings about the “whitening” of history really struck a chord with Malcolm and thousands of other black people who could remember there being no mention of black people in their history books as children, other than as racist caricatures. Therefore, Malcolm resolves to focus particular attention on history books that explore the history of black people in Africa and in America. These include Carter G. Woodson’s *Negro History*, *The Outline of History* by H. G. Wells, and [The Souls of Black Folk](#) by W. E. B. Du Bois. Malcolm is also drawn to genetics, and reads Gregor Mendel’s *Findings in Genetics*, which reinforce Malcolm’s belief in Elijah Muhammad’s teachings.

Malcolm is particularly horrified by the history of slavery and the atrocities done to black people. He reads about these in books like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and in pamphlets distributed by abolitionists before the Civil War. He also reads about Nat Turner’s rebellion, in which Turner led slaves to rebel against and kill their masters, before he was finally captured and hung.

Other authors such as Herodotus, Will Durant, and Mahatma Gandhi teach Malcolm about the horrors of colonialism and empire that have been perpetrated for millennia by white Europeans against people around the world. While always coming masked as Christian missionaries, these European conquerors plundered Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Two examples Malcolm gives are: the British control of India and the carnage that followed the 1857 Rebellion against colonial rule; and the First Opium War in China, in which the Chinese objected to the British distributing opium in the country.

*Throughout his life, Malcolm has always thought very logically. It’s important to understand the basics, and then move on from there. His decision to study the dictionary is then like a radical example of that principle.*



*Malcolm’s newfound passion literally knows no bounds. Not only does he study all day, but he pushes himself to study and learn even when he can barely see. This follows a pattern of Malcolm becoming convinced of new ideas or a new lifestyle, and then immediately devoting all his energy and brainpower to that worldview.*



*From now on, the most important thing in Malcolm’s life will be his faith. All his studies can therefore be seen not as a separate pursuit, but as an attempt to support his religious beliefs with facts and arguments. This fusion of academics and religious belief will make Malcolm a very persuasive and effective preacher and debater.*



*To the contemporary reader, it may be easy to assume that everyone in American history has always been aware of the horrors of slavery. However, Malcolm’s surprise and disgust prove how much of this history had been forgotten or actively repressed.*



*Later in life, Malcolm will take a more international perspective on the struggle of people of color against white colonizers. However, his early education in Gandhi’s writings and world history shows that he already was gaining an awareness that African Americans were not the only oppressed group in the world.*



In assessing the damage done by white men throughout the world, Malcolm concludes that now (in the early 1960s) the ex-colonial nations are joining in alliances together against Europe and America. While some complain that this kind of alliance is a “skin game,” Malcolm sees that as hypocritical, given that Western imperialism has always involved racism.

Malcolm’s studying is always aimed at helping him to better understand the oppression of black men and how to defend the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Rather than seeking a degree or some kind of recognition, his studying is meant to serve others and to satisfy his own lifelong “craving to be mentally alive.” Even today, he says, whenever he has even fifteen minutes to himself he will constantly be reading and learning whatever he can.

In at least one way, Malcolm appreciates the time he spent in prison. Where else, he asks, would he have the opportunity to study with so few distractions and with such intensity? He would never have learned as much in a university, he asserts.

Malcolm’s philosophical readings include Kant, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, whom he sees as mostly debating useless issues, rather than ones that can actually make the world a better place. In fact, he holds most of Western philosophy in contempt as being too entangled with Western history and racism.

Meanwhile, Malcolm points to the discoveries that are being made in modern-day archeological digs in Africa, discovering priceless artifacts and pieces of art. These pieces attest to the great civilizations which were destroyed by conquerors or intentionally erased by white historians. Even many black scholars don’t know about this history. One example is the discovery of ancient human remains in Africa, which proves that Africa is the birthplace of humanity.

After having spent so much time studying and learning about how ignorant he had been made of black history, Malcolm sets about teaching his fellow prisoners this history. He tries to go slowly, as people cannot easily have their entire worldview turned upside down.

*Malcolm’s argument is similar to the argument against “reverse racism.” It’s hypocritical to say people of color are playing a “skin game” by simply acknowledging that they’ve been the victims of racism for centuries.*



*Malcolm connects his current studies to his time in prison. This is worth thinking about: while in prison, he was completely immersed in his studies and felt “completely free” (despite his physical incarceration). Even in his present life, then, Malcolm makes sure to find moments to return to this space of intellectual freedom and exploration.*



*For Malcolm, his time in prison studying was not a punishment, but a liberating experience, which is a very hopeful message for all those who feel trapped.*



*Western philosophy up until Malcolm’s time rarely dealt with issues of race. According to Malcolm, philosophers thus made themselves complicit in their racist societies by ignoring the issue or even justifying racist actions.*



*As was seen before, Malcolm actively tries to “uncover” the facts that prove the Nation of Islam’s faith is the true faith—in his religious zeal he works backward from a conclusion, rather than drawing a conclusion after reviewing the evidence. He sees the fact that humanity was born in Africa as proving that Yacub’s History is indeed true.*



*This is one of Malcolm’s first attempts to preach, but it is not his first time to spread knowledge: don’t forget his time spent “schooling” Reginald.*



If one of his pupils seems to be wavering and about to report Malcolm to the guards, he tells them, "The white man is the devil," which shocks them and gets them thinking about it until they come back around. Malcolm says that criminals, since they have been forced to do terrible things to survive, are the most ready to believe that the system has been rigged against them from the start. They have received the worst treatment from society their whole lives, and now sit behind bars, caged up. How could they not believe their captors/masters to be evil?

Malcolm also begins to debate with the other well-read prisoners in weekly public debates. Once he gets a taste of it, he falls in love with the intellectual rigor of debating. And always, if he can, he includes what he's learned about history and the oppression of black people. These debates cover many topics, including the need for compulsory military service, the existence of Homer, and the identity of Shakespeare (Malcolm's theory is that King James used "William Shakespeare" as his pen name).

When Reginald comes to visit Malcolm, Malcolm tries to share some of his studying and learning with his brother. But Reginald is uninterested, and in fact begins to speak poorly of Elijah Muhammad. Then Malcolm learns that Reginald has been expelled from the Nation of Islam for maintaining an improper sexual relationship. Malcolm writes a letter to Elijah, pleading on his brother's behalf.

The night after he mails the letter, while praying vigorously, Malcolm receives a vision of a man sitting in his cell with him, a brown-skinned man in a dark suit. Malcolm can't place his ethnicity, other than to say he is non-white. Then, just as suddenly, the mysterious man disappears. Later, Malcolm believes this to be Master W. D. Fard.

Elijah responds to Malcolm's letter, asking why he does not trust in the truth. He knows his brother's conduct was in the wrong; so why question that? At the time, Malcolm cannot know that Elijah will one day be accused of the same sins. But at the time, his letter sways Malcolm, and Malcolm no longer lets Reginald influence him in any way.

Reginald continues to visit him, but Malcolm pays little heed to his conversation. Reginald's appearance grows shabbier, and he goes back to Detroit. Then Ella comes to visit, and tells Malcolm that Reginald showed up at her door in Boston, saying he walked from Detroit. At the time, Malcolm firmly believed that this was Allah working his revenge upon Reginald's senses for having attacked his Prophet and teachings.

*Malcolm's argument runs like this: if all black people in America are oppressed, then surely the most oppressed are those in prison for crimes they had to commit just to survive. So, if he wants to teach someone to see how black people are oppressed, then the most oppressed are the most likely to agree.*



*These debates illustrate that Malcolm's knowledge went way beyond the teachings of the Nation of Islam and extended into many areas. This reflects Malcolm's personal passion for learning and knowledge of every kind, which shows him to be more than a religious fanatic, as some would have the reader believe.*



*Malcolm's first instinct is to protect his younger brother and advocate on his behalf. Even though he knows that sexual relations outside of marriage are not allowed in the Nation, he cannot bear the thought of losing his brother.*



*One possible interpretation of how Malcolm thinks about this vision is to see it as a visit from his new family. If he loses Reginald, it's okay, because W. D. Fard and the Nation will still be with him, and can be his new family.*



*As soon as he receives and reads Elijah's letter, Malcolm disavows Reginald and entirely devotes himself to the Nation. This may be a result of his vision, or it may simply be a result of his immense faith in Elijah as a kind of personal savior.*



*Malcolm and his siblings steadily reject Reginald more and more as he deteriorates mentally and physically. However, Malcolm connects his state to a divine punishment, rather than to social or personal causes.*



Reginald later begins to hallucinate and then say strange things, like how he is the Prophet, or how he is greater than Allah. Eventually he is institutionalized. In later years, Malcolm no longer sees this as divine retribution, but the result of his entire family turning their backs on him in favor of Elijah's teachings.

*Malcolm's belief in the social and psychological causes of Reginald's breakdown is not a repudiation of his faith. Rather, his faith has matured so that he no longer believes Allah would punish his brother in that way.*



Malcolm then returns to the subject of his mysterious visitor. He believes that he had a pre-vision (a vision of someone one has never met) of Master W. D. Fard, the original founder of the Nation of Islam.

*It seems plausible that the figure of W. D. Fard is connected to Malcolm's brother Reginald, as the loss of one signals the "arrival" of the other.*



After Malcolm has spent so much time spreading the word of Islam, the authorities at Norfolk grow concerned and have him transferred to Charlestown prison. Here he has much less mobility, but decides to attend the Bible class, where he can perhaps spread his own beliefs.

*Malcolm's assertion that the Nation of Islam attracts lots of prisoners seems to be backed up by evidence, since the prison officials are especially concerned about his evangelism.*



Malcolm acknowledges that the young seminary student from Harvard leading the class really knows his Bible. Nevertheless, Malcolm finds a way to upset him and provoke discussion. Malcolm asks if it's true that Paul was black, and the seminarian says yes. Malcolm then asks what color Jesus was. The seminarian says brown, and Malcolm lets the issue rest there. Malcolm's fame in the prison spreads, giving him leverage to start spreading Elijah Muhammad's teachings.

*Malcolm's description of the young seminarian is quite interesting, as he generally describes his adversaries so negatively. Instead, he respects the man's knowledge of the Bible and relative honesty about Jesus' ethnic history. This reflects how even at this point in his faith he can never see all white men as "devils," but always operates within some kind of spectrum.*



## CHAPTER 12: SAVIOR

In the spring of 1952, Malcolm is informed that he has been recommended for parole. Hilda and Wilfred insist that he come to Detroit to live with them, as he still has much to learn about Elijah Muhammad's teachings. Wilfred secures Malcolm a job at the furniture store he manages, ticking Malcolm's last box for release. In August, with a little cash and a cheap suit, he is released from prison.

*While Malcolm's trials in prison may be coming to a close, his siblings make it clear that his journey with the Nation of Islam is just beginning.*



After staying a night with Ella (who also believes he should go to Detroit, but does not share his religious beliefs), Malcolm goes out to buy three things: **a pair of eyeglasses, a suitcase, and a watch**. Malcolm has reflected many times that not only are these perhaps his only personal possessions, but they have been symbolic of his life since prison. His life has been dominated by constantly reading, keeping appointments, and traveling in service of the Nation of Islam.

*After being released from prison, this is the only time Malcolm mentions buying anything, which stands in stark contrast to his colorful descriptions of buying zoot suits and getting conks as a younger man. These simple purchases reflect his new and more ascetic, un-materialistic life—and these will be the only three principle possessions he always has with him in the future.*



After arriving in Detroit by bus, Malcolm goes to work at the furniture store. But he is utterly ashamed at how overpriced all their goods are for such poor quality and how the advertising and financing schemes are directly intended to dupe and rob poor black people (as the store is in a black neighborhood). Furthermore, since the store is not owned by a black businessman, the profits are not going back into the local economy, but are instead being extracted to enrich others.

Wilfred invites Malcolm to move in with him, an offer Malcolm gratefully accepts. Wilfred and his family teach Malcolm about how a Muslim family conducts itself daily, from the morning ablution (washing ritual) to the morning prayers and greetings to family members. Wilfred, as the head of the family, leads the rest of the family in their prayers facing towards Mecca as the sun is at the horizon. At the time, Malcolm said the prayers in English, but now he says them with his family in Arabic. Then, after a light breakfast, the family goes to work and school.

Malcolm goes to Temple with Wilfred's family on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, and he is amazed at the quiet, dignified conduct of the other Muslims in the Temple. Despite their Temple's humble location across the street from a hog slaughterhouse, they carry themselves with pride and show love and respect to their fellow members.

At the front of the Temple's worship space is a blackboard. On one side of the blackboard is painted the United States flag, a Cross, and a picture of a black man hanging, along with the words, "Slavery, Suffering, and Death." On the other side is the Nation of Islam flag with its crescent moon and star, the words, "Islam: Freedom, Justice, Equality", and then the longer phrase, "Which One Will Survive the War of Armageddon?"

Malcolm, rapt with attention at the sermon given by the minister, is also enflamed by the fact that there are empty seats. With so many black people suffering from poverty and without direction in Detroit as in Harlem, he feels they should be more proactive in their recruiting efforts. Wilfred and the Temple, meanwhile, advise that he be patient.

"With an eagerness never since duplicated," Malcolm anxiously awaits their Temple's caravan trip to Chicago, where they will go to hear Elijah Muhammad himself speak in Temple Number Two. Never again has Malcolm felt such warmth and excitement as he did in that small crowd waiting for Elijah. Then Elijah appears onstage, flanked by the Fruit of Islam (the Nation's security and paramilitary force) - a small, fragile man in a dark suit, bowtie, and gold-embroidered fez.

*Malcolm's years as a hustler inform his views of business. Even if it's legal, he still considers it a "hustle" if it takes advantage of other people by selling them bad goods with deceptive financing schemes. And like the numbers racket in Harlem, the ones making the profit are not local businessmen, but white owners and bankers.*



*Malcolm tries to impress on the reader that being a Muslim is a full-time experience. The Muslim family's day begins in prayer and then proceeds from that state of mind. Additionally, its patriarchal structure probably appeals to Malcolm, given some of his stated beliefs about women being weak and men being more suited to be leaders.*



*Muslims are forbidden from eating pork. The Temple's location across from a slaughterhouse thus emphasizes the hardships and indignities the community is willing to endure to celebrate their faith.*



*In stark imagery and language, the temple describes the religious clash between white Christian society and African/Middle-Eastern Muslim society as it is seen by the Nation of Islam. Furthermore, the Nation's ideology firmly connects violence against black men with white Christian America.*



*Malcolm has never been one for waiting around; he prefers to take action. In one way, this could be seen as a residue of his "predatory" lifestyle, which was always goal-focused.*



*The Nation of Islam's small number of members makes the environment more intimate and family-like. And if this is indeed Malcolm's new family, then Elijah Muhammad is the new patriarch, who appears like a father coming home to his waiting children.*



Elijah speaks to the crowd about his devotion to spreading the word of God to them, even throughout his own imprisonment for draft evasion. He speaks of how the black man in America has been brainwashed by the “devil white man,” who wishes to keep him oppressed, but through learning, he will rise up. Then Elijah calls upon Malcolm by name, asking him to stand and telling the crowd of Malcolm’s daily letters and strength in prison. Elijah wonders if Malcolm will avoid his old life and stay faithful now that he is out of prison, and he predicts that he will.

Malcolm assures us that he has indeed been faithful to his faith ever since, and he was always faithful to Elijah Muhammad, even when a “crisis” arose between them. According to Malcolm, jealousy has driven the two men apart, but he assures us their split was not from a lack of loyalty or faith.

After the meeting, Mr. Muhammad invites Malcolm’s entire family to come to his house for dinner, and he is a very gracious host to them all. As they talk during dinner, Malcolm asks for Elijah’s advice on the recruitment of new members. When Elijah tells him to go for the youth and to recruit “thousands,” Malcolm resolves to do just that.

Malcolm, with Minister Lemuel Hassan’s blessing, immediately goes to work back in Detroit, “fishing” in the local bars, poolrooms, and on the street corners for new members, using his familiarity with lower class slang to pull people in. While he works hard, it is several months before the Temple’s numbers begin to grow significantly. Elijah continues to praise Malcolm’s good work, and Malcolm in turn “worships him.” Meanwhile, Malcolm is granted the “X” at the end of his name, symbolizing his original African name that he will never know and marking him as a member of the Nation of Islam.

At his dinner table, Elijah begins to speak often about his need for enthusiastic young ministers to spread his word farther and faster than its current pace. Shortly thereafter, Malcolm’s Temple minister asks him to address the congregation, and then to give a lecture. Nervous and humble, Malcolm agrees hesitantly, mostly speaking on slavery and Christianity, the topics he knows well. Then, in the summer of 1953, he is named Assistant Minister.

*Elijah has clearly been impressed by Malcolm’s devotion to his studies and to his letter-writing during his time in prison. By acknowledging him publicly, he both wishes to encourage him in his faith journey and to hold him up as an example to the others. Malcolm could not feel more touched if his own father were to return and praise him.*



*Several times throughout the book, Malcolm will attempt to convince the reader that he never lacked in faith or loyalty, looking forward to his break with Elijah and trying to defend himself against the many accusations that he was indeed disloyal or unfaithful.*



*Malcolm has been unsatisfied with the more hands-off approach of the Detroit leaders, so he goes around their authority by directly asking for Elijah’s permission to pursue more aggressive recruiting.*



*The “X” last name of the Nation’s members signals an original African family name which they will never know, thanks to slavery’s destruction of families and heritage—but it also connects them to illiterate slaves, who would often sign their names with an X, and it further connects them with each other, as all the members of the Nation would then share one common family name: X.*



*Malcolm first draws his topics from his experiences in prison, when he would discuss slavery and his other historical readings with other inmates. His public speaking background comes from his time spent in the prison debate group. These trainings did in fact serve him well.*



Malcolm, after days spent “fishing” for converts with no success, would dream of what he would say in his next address. In his talks, he would talk about how black people had been made blind to the riches and control exercised by white people over them, and how they should be proud of their beautiful, black bodies and nappy hair, alluding to his own hatred of his white grandfather whose complexion was still visible in Malcolm’s fair skin. Like Malcolm’s grandfather, thousands of white slave owners had raped their female slaves, while their husbands and sons could do nothing to stop it. Thinking of this, Malcolm takes long walks at night, choked up with anger and sorrow.

One day, at his new job at the Gar Wood factory (manufacturing garbage trucks), the F.B.I. comes in and ask Malcolm to come to their office. After asking why he hasn’t registered for the draft, he says he didn’t think ex-cons were supposed to register. They believe him, and tell him he must go register immediately. When he does, he marks the “conscientious objector” box, which gets him an audience before a review panel. After a fairly condescending interview, they tell him his case is pending, after which he hears nothing for seven years. Then he receives a Class 5-A draft card in the mail, “whatever that means.”

Malcolm, overcome with enthusiasm and vigor, always loses his voice after addressing the Detroit Temple. He speaks passionately about why whites hate blacks out of guilt for their past crimes. Malcolm also changes jobs once again, now working for a Ford assembly line.

Malcolm loves to travel to Chicago, where he hears Mr. Muhammad speak and stays at his house. There, he talks for hours with Elijah and his mother, Mother Marie. Then Elijah and Malcolm drive to visit the Muslim-owned stores in Chicago, which are supposed to act as examples of how the black community can help itself. Mr. Muhammad always shows the greatest humility, often sweeping the shop floors as they speak.

Back at the house, Mother Marie tells Malcolm all about her son’s childhood. She once had a vision that Elijah would become a great man; and though he was quiet and not the oldest, he was the leader of all his siblings. While he had to quit school after the fourth grade to work, he would spend hours poring over the Bible, tears in his eyes for want of understanding. Furthermore, he showed an uncommonly high level of love for his race.

*The reader experiences a double vision of sadness and frustration in this scene. First, there is the horrific history of rape and mutilation described by Malcolm and perpetrated against black slaves. Then, there is the melancholic image of Malcolm treading through the streets, reflecting on this history and wanting to share his pain and his anger with other African Americans who may not even be aware of it.*



*The Nation of Islam objects to its followers participating in wars that support white imperialism over other oppressed people of color. The most prominent case of a Muslim conscientious objector in the US is Muhammad Ali, who will object to participating in the Vietnam War after Malcolm X’s death. A Class 5-A designation means the individual in question is now too old to be drafted.*



*Malcolm’s efforts to preach the truth take everything out of him; he confronts the violence done to black bodies by giving his entire body and voice to the fight against oppression.*



*Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad clearly have a very intimate relationship. Malcolm looks up to Elijah like a father and Mother Marie like a grandmother figure. In their visits, Malcolm appears almost child-like, riding in the car with Elijah and listening to Mother Marie tell stories.*



*Like Malcolm’s mother, Mother Marie has a sort of sixth sense for the future of her children. However, unlike Malcolm’s family, which was decimated by tragedy, Elijah and his family now live comfortably as the leaders of a movement.*



Elijah Muhammad could never stand to be degraded or cursed at by his employers, and he told them as much—but his work was so good that he was usually put into a leadership role. After he married his wife, Sister Clara, he was cursed at by an employer, prompting him to move the family to Detroit. There, in 1931, he meets W. D. Fard, “a brother from the East” who began to hold small meetings where he would teach the Bible and the Quran.

W. D. Fard taught that God’s true name was Allah, his religion was Islam, and his followers Muslims. He taught that black people in America were a lost tribe Muslims whom he had been sent to redeem. In fact, as God’s children, black people were Gods themselves, and Mr. Fard was the Mahdi, the Savior the world had been waiting for. Fard then set up the first University of Islam in Detroit. Elijah Poole, renamed Elijah Muhammad, was named head minister over all the other ministers, causing great jealousy. In 1934, Fard and Elijah went to start the Temples in Chicago and Milwaukee, when Fard suddenly disappeared without a trace.

The other ministers then began to make attempts on Elijah’s life, forcing him to flee for Washington, D.C., where he founded Temple Four. With “hypocrites” still after him, Elijah went on the run for the next seven years, never staying long anywhere. Then, in 1942, he was arrested for draft dodging, and was released in 1946 after three and a half years.

Malcolm, looking back, reflects on how many times he gave speeches detailing this history without any kind of critical eye or skepticism. He accepted all that had been told to him point blank. That lack of independence will cause him a serious spiritual crisis, he says, when later he no longer believes in Elijah Muhammad’s integrity.

## CHAPTER 13: MINISTER MALCOLM X

After realizing that Elijah Muhammad needs more help in spreading the faith, Malcolm quits his job at Ford and goes to Chicago, where he moves in with Elijah and becomes his disciple for several months. He studies harder than ever before to learn the proper rituals, procedures, and interpretations of the Quran and the Bible. Malcolm envisions Elijah as the Lamb from the Bible with a two-edged sword in its mouth; Elijah’s sword is his liberating teachings. Malcolm adores him as if he had “the power of the sun.”

*Elijah’s sensitivity to being cursed at reflects a deep sense of self-worth and a discomfort with the racist standards of his time. Whereas white employers may simply take it as natural to curse at their black employees, he sees it as unacceptably degrading.*



*Fard is an extremely interesting character. He is technically the founder of the Nation and the Mahdi, or Savior (and his disappearance is still an unsolved mystery), yet after he disappeared Elijah Muhammad clearly took over the spotlight as the center of the Nation, while conveniently blaming the other ministers of being “jealous” of his chosen position.*



*Elijah’s history serves as an origin story of persecution. Like the Jews who wandered the desert for forty years and suffered many injustices, Elijah and his followers finally arrived at the “Promised Land.”*



*Many points in Elijah’s history could be debated—if attempts were really made on his life, or if Mr. Fard really appointed him head minister, or if Master Fard really could be a Divine figure—but Malcolm never critically considered these issues.*



*Malcolm’s commitment to the Nation reaches a new fervor as he enters under Elijah’s tutelage to become his closest disciple. The closer Malcolm gets to Elijah, the harder it becomes for him to see Elijah as just a man. Instead, he takes on a divine nature in Malcolm’s imagination—and thus becomes immune to criticism.*

