Noughts and Crosses

Malorie Blackman

About the author

Malorie Blackman was born in London in 1962. She wanted to become an English teacher but studied computer science instead. She worked in computers until she started writing when she was twenty-eight, and apart from books she also writes scripts for television programmes. She lists playing the piano and writing poems as her hobbies and she lives in Kent with her husband.

Summary

Chapters 1–2: Meggie McGregor and her employer, Mrs Hadley, are watching two children playing in the garden. Callum is Meggie's son and Sephy is Mrs Hadley's daughter. Mrs Hadley's husband, Kamal, arrives and hits his wife after discovering, with the innocent help of Meggie, she had lied to him. Later, Meggie is told that Mrs Hadley no longer wants her to work for her. When they are sitting on a beach Callum kisses Sephy and then begins to explain his worries about school. He has been admitted to Sephy's school, which is an elite school for people like Sephy who are from a social group called the Crosses. Callum is from an inferior group called the noughts. Sephy is sad that Callum feels inferior and that the two groups are not allowed to mix. Callum returns to his parent's small house and is asked where he has been. His older brother Jude says he has been with a Cross girl but Callum denies this. He looks at his sister, Lynette, and recalls the day three years previously when she had lost her mind following an accident. Three years ago too, Sephy's mother had changed and had become unhappy and started drinking. One night, Sephy hears her father refer to the noughts as 'blankers', a terrible name for them. He is talking to a man who has infiltrated a group called the Freedom Fighters. He wants the man to discover the name of their leader because he is worried this group might destroy his plans to gain an important government position. She is surprised to see the man her father is talking to is a nought. Back in Callum's house, Callum's sister thinks she is a Cross because she believes she has dark skin, when in fact it is white like the rest of the family.

Chapters 3–4: When Sephy arrives at school she sees a crowd of Cross people shouting that they didn't want blankers in their school. She tries to calm the situation and inappropriately refers to the crowd as blankers. Later, she apologises to Callum for the use of the word but it has clearly hurt him more than she realised. He tells her to keep away from him at school for her own sake. When Callum returns home he sees a news story about the trouble at the school and sees Sephy saying the terrible word again on the TV. Also on the news is Sephy's father threatening the Freedom Fighters with death. He goes to bed thinking that perhaps it isn't a good idea to associate with Crosses. The next day, Sephy sits down to eat her lunch with Callum and some other noughts, but her teacher drags her back to her own table. The following day, Sephy is badly beaten up by some Cross girls and is confined to bed. Callum goes to visit her everyday but is turned away by Mrs Hadley's secretary. In Callum's house a fight breaks out between Jude and his sister Lynette because she insists she is a Cross. Callum's father breaks up the fight and explains the reasons for Lynette's behaviour. Three years previously, she and her Cross boyfriend, Jed, had been attacked by a group of nought men and the beating had seriously affected her brain.

Chapters 5–6: Sephy overhears an argument between her mother and father. He accuses her of being a drunk and of not having allowed his son (by another woman) into the family and she accuses him of having an affair. Later in the evening they find their mother unconscious after drinking an overdose of medicine. There are problems too in Callum's house. Lynette walks out after a fight with Jude. Three hours later two policemen arrive with the news that she has died in an accident with a bus. That night, Callum finds her suicide note in his bed. Several months later, Callum suspects his father and Jude are in someway linked to the Freedom Fighters. One day he arranges to see Sephy at a shopping centre but Jude forbids him to go there on that particular afternoon.

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