

What Start Bad a Mornin'

Carol Mitchell

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Carol Mitchell's novel *What Start Bad a Mornin'* moves between the United States and Caribbean islands in search of buried memories.

Amaya has vague memories of her life in Jamaica before she moved to Trinidad and met her husband, Brian. Further burying her past, she chose to raise her son, Taiwo, in the United States. There, Amaya forms friendships and takes care of her son and her aging Aunt Marjorie while assisting at Brian's law firm. Scenery and people help her to settle into this life; there are also reminders of her past, always just out of reach. However, after an encounter with a woman who claims to be her sister and an onslaught of repressed memories, Amaya's life is upended.

After a slow start, the novel unfolds via precise details from Amaya's life. With so much of her past forgotten, these details ground her. She observes a multitude of gardens; the shelter she and Taiwo serve food at; and the neighborhoods they traverse. These intricate details hold the story together as Amaya debates who to share her recalled memories with; information is also shared about her friends and herself, so that both the world and those who inhabit it are deep.

The dialogue is peppered with Jamaican patois; Amaya's background is thus centered even when she can't remember it. This language is spoken at home and around Aunt Marjorie, whose dementia leaves her confused in Virginia, so far from Jamaica. Still, Marjorie mistakes others for people Amaya can't recall, leading her toward what she's forgotten. Indeed, colloquialisms fill in the gaps that Amaya cannot.

The novel *What Start Bad a Mornin'* illustrates the far-reaching power—and damage—of forgetting.

ADDISSYN HOUSE (September / October 2023)

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