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Black Boy/Nothing But A Man

In life, all people have dealings with women, whether they be respectful or not, restrictive or opposite; in Black Boy by Richard Wright and Nothing But A Man starring Duff Anderson, both protagonists have dealings with women which are not what they seem. While both Richard and Duff try to be respectful towards women, circumstances arise which deter the two from their respectful moods. Judging a book by its cover is a mistake; Duff and Richard discover, through their troubles, that women are not what they seem.

Richard and Duff begin to realize that the relationships that each begin with womenfolk are very rushed and poorly prepared for. Both Richard and Duff initially are not looking for trouble. Richard, as a young child, is simply looking to survive his childhood while Duff is uninterested in women in general. Duff, at first, buys the prostitute a drink, but soon steps out, showing his indifference for her. Similarly, Richard pays little attention to his aunt and grandmother, regarding them as harmless. He leaves them both alone, until they both attempt to mistreat him in some way. His aunt repeatedly tries to beat him after discovering he had lied about shells to protect his classmate; his grandmother is continually disappointed in him for not wanting to go to church. Discovering both his grandmother and aunt’s true nature, his distrust and hatred for them soon strengthen deeply. The numerous attempts led by his grandma to convert him to Catholicism and repeated beatings by his aunt quickly give him strong incentive not to trust them. Duff, finding out that he was blacklisted by the sawmill boss and cannot truly provide for Josie, begins treating Josie poorly and hating her as well. Her sympathy only fuels his hatred for her, as she cannot understand him through her ‘sheltered life under her father’s roof.’ Josie, who grew up with everything provided for her by her father, cannot possibly understand Duff, because he grew up working for everything he had. When he is unable to work, he feels useless. Both quickly learn that becoming affiliated with women was not a good choice for their lives, even though it was forced on Richard. The two were not adequately prepared for all the troubles women would inflict upon their lives, and see it as an extra burden or trouble to their already difficult lives. Richard is quickly limited by the substitute matriarchal figures after his mother gets sick, and is further shunned by his family for not obeying the wishes of those same figures. Duff finds Josie’s pity both frustrating and unneeded, as that isn’t what he needs nor wants. Neither protagonist received what they expected from the women in their lives, not even remotely close.

Through their struggles through hard times, both Duff and Richard learn that there are good supportive women who will never give up on them, no matter how terrible life may seem. Different circumstances put Duff and Richard into their respective problematic situations; Duff took the initiative and asked Josie on a date when they first meet at a church and even proposed to her while Richard is forced into his situation. When problems arise with Duff, such as getting blacklisted and being unable to work, he realizes his home life with Josie is also a burden. He was wrong to mistreat his wife. Richard, on the other hand, had a sick mother; his father had deserted his family, and Richard was incapable of taking care of both himself and his brother. He had no choice but to turn to his immediate family for help, even though they are unsupportive of him and very closed off to new suggestions, such as Richard’s obstinacy to stay atheist. Duff is partly to blame for his hastiness in marrying Josie before getting to truly know her; Richard is forced into the situation, and does nothing wrong, yet is punished almost immediately for protecting his classmate. He is beaten, threatened, and ignored repeatedly by his family for not accepting Catholicism and conforming to his aunt and grandmother. In the same way, Duff is threatened by the loss of his job, and the looming fear that he may be unable to be accepted into another one. However, he has friends who support him, like his friends from the sawmill job, and his father’s girlfriend. Richard, when he is shunned by his family and community, is alone save his mother, who still loves him and is proud of him for standing up to his family. Richard still had one woman whose love and respect for him never wavered. He is very appreciative of his mother and returns the same love. Likewise, Duff also has a woman like that, who even sympathizes with him. Josie is treated terribly by Duff and his bad temper, but her love for him never wavers. Instead, it is Duff who does not make the best of a bad situation, and even runs away from her. Granted, he does return, but only after having talked to his father’s girlfriend does he realize what’s important. Richard, on the other hand, leaves temporarily, but sends for his mother and brother right away as soon as possible. Both his mind and purpose were focused. Both realize in some form or the other, that while women dish out significant troubles in their lives, they also look out and mean well for them.

While both Richard and Duff initially see the troubles women can bring, they later realize that they meant for their best. Although their worldly troubles make them cynical at first, the individuals grow and learn to recognize the support that their special womenfolk give them. The original desires were not far off the mark; they did receive what they wanted, even though they didn’t realize it: love. What you first see in a person should never be what you judge them by, just as you never judge a book by its cover.