



Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black: And Other Stories

Nadine Gordimer

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"You're not responsible for your ancestry, are you . . . But if that's so, why have marched under banned slogans, got yourself beaten up by the police, arrested a couple of times; plastered walls with subversive posters . . . The past is valid only in relation to whether the present recognizes it."

In this collection of new stories Nadine Gordimer crosses the frontiers of politics, memory, sexuality, and love with the fearless insight that is the hallmark of her writing. In the title story a middle-aged academic who had been an anti-apartheid activist embarks on an unadmitted pursuit of the possibilities for his own racial identity in his great-grandfather's fortune-hunting interlude of living rough on diamond diggings in South Africa, his young wife far away in London. "Dreaming of the Dead" conjures up a lunch in a New York Chinese restaurant where Susan Sontag and Edward Said return in surprising new avatars as guests in the dream of a loving friend. The historian in "History" is a parrot who confronts people with the scandalizing voice reproduction of quarrels and clandestine love-talk on which it has eavesdropped. "Alternative Endings" considers the way writers make arbitrary choices in how to end stories—and offers three, each relating the same situation, but with a different resolution, arrived at by the three senses: sight, sound, and smell.

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