



## **Bitter Chocolate**

*Lesley Lokko*

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Laure, beautiful and already abandoned twice in her young life. Amelie, caught in a world where she's neither servant or mistress. Melanie, the rock star's daughter who has everything money can buy, except the love she craves. Three girls in search of a missing piece of their lives; three girls who will change their worlds to find it.

## **Bitter Chocolate Details**

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Author : Lesley Lokko

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Genre : Fiction, Romance, Contemporary, Womens, Relationships, Western Africa, Ghana

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## From Reader Review Bitter Chocolate for online ebook

### RainbowWriter says

The protagonist is a rich and dark Haitian teenager girl called Laure St Lazare. The second sideline tells the story of white British celebrity's teen-age daughter Melanie Miller. Somehow both of them will land in the USA. The third sideline tells the story of Laure's former twenty-something reste-avec Ameline and her survival in Haiti and England. The first part of the book is very flirtatious, syrupy and extravagant and that's why I found it for a while boring, even foolish. I thought this would be just another "girl book" from romance section. Luckily, the story will get more nuanced come the second part because then the Haitian girls are facing personal and social conflict and it brings welcome excitement to the story beside the sex scenes. Racism and colour remains a theme throughout the book. I like the glimpses of Haitian culture and traditions in the novel but I unfortunately came to conclusion that this novel has little to do with reality in that sense. It could have went deeper into the culture and real Haitian life: the novel describes voodoo as a violent religion which is ignorance created by popular culture. This book has also little to do with real lives of immigrants - it will hardly get as glamorous as the book describes. Unfortunately I came to conclusion that this book is very controversial with common theme of teen-age girls falling for older men. There's literally sex, drugs, smoking, drinking, partying. The story is quite cliché and predictable at times (Las Vegas wedding and Paris honeymoon). I also found the story more or less unrealistic, superficial and extravagant throughout the book because it focuses on lives of the rich and privileged. The book is simply fantasy. These are the main reasons that I find this book worth 3 stars and Lesley Lokko an author worth watching nevertheless. She may not be a new favorite but her work draws comparison to my current favorite Zadie Smith and not the least because both of the writers are from United Kingdom and write novels about social minorities and immigration.

pages read: 265.

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### Helene says

Great read. Was recommended by a friend and was difficult to find but this author writes with a style I enjoy and has well developed characters. A story about 3 young women with formidable challenges in different parts of the world, primarily centred around Haiti and the UK. Topical considering the recent disaster and Haiti and quite an intimate look at the social structure/class system in parts of the country. Will look for other books by this author.

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### Roberta says

Ambientato ad Haiti, negli Stati Uniti, in Europa e in Africa dagli anni Ottanta fino a praticamente i giorni nostri, Cioccolato amaro racconta le vicissitudini di tre ragazze: Laure, Ameline e Melanie. Laure è la rampolla di una ricca famiglia di Haiti decaduta economicamente e anche un po' in disgrazia a livello sociale. Laure è infatti il risultato della relazione della madre, Belle, con uno stalliere di colore molto scuro, una grande onta ad Haiti. Belle ora vive in America a Chicago e Laure sogna solo di andarsene dall'atmosfera stagnante della casa in cui vive con la rigida nonna. Ameline è la reste-avec di Laure (una reste-avec è una specie di dama di compagnia proveniente dai ceti sociali più bassi), quasi una sorella in realtà. Melanie è la

figlia di una famosa rock star che però non è mai stata un padre per lei. Anche la madre - con cui vive a Londra - non le è particolarmente vicina e per questo Melanie comincia a comportarsi in modo sempre più "cattivo" allo scopo di attirare l'attenzione dei genitori, un modello di comportamento che porterà avanti anche nelle sue relazioni amorose. Le varie peripezie delle tre donne vengono seguite con grande precisione attraverso continenti, decenni e guerre e calamità varie e assortite, fino al gran finale che tanto grande non è, anzi, l'ho trovato un po' moscio.

Inizialmente ho fatto molta fatica ad affezionarmi alle protagoniste. Le loro scelte e le loro avventure sono incredibili (nel senso che proprio non ci si crede) e i loro rovesci di fortuna sono sempre condizionati dalla comparsa sulla scena di un uomo o di un'eredità. Nel caso di Melanie poi non si capisce davvero quale sia il senso della sua parabola narrativa. Ma se da un certo punto in poi il pathos prende il sopravvento (e la curiosità di sapere se e come e quando queste Laure e Ameline si sarebbero reincontrate e in che modo la loro storia si intreccerà a quella di Melanie) il finale mi ha lasciato davvero perplessa. Va bene seguire il cuore eccetera eccetera, ma abbiamo veramente bisogno di un libro che - pur nell'ambito della lettura ricreativa che è il suo scopo - ci dice che in fin dei conti tradire - e fondamentalmente raccontar balle tutto il tempo - è cosa giusta e buona perchè alla fine troveremo il fess- ehm, l'uomo della propria vita - che non baderà al nostro passato e ci accetterà per quello che siamo, anche se lui non sa chi siamo? Bah. Aggiungo una nota di colore: per tutto il tempo mi sono immaginata la piagnosa Amelie come Sharon di Lost e il suo marito come il gran bel Sayd (ma i personaggi di Lost sono di gran lunga migliori)

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## **Zaynāb Book Minimalist says**

This book was amazing.

I enjoyed the stories of Ameline and Laure, it was beautiful, unique and special.

This book centers on the story of Ameline, Laure and Melanie.

Ameline is a "reste-avec" which means a "Stay-with" who grew up as a slave without a past and a family. she grew up as simply ameline, no heritage, no surname, no family. Ameline works for laure privileged family, not only as a slave but she came to be Laure's best friend and sister.

Laure St Lazare however, is the 16 year old daughter of a runaway mother, she lives with her widowed, loveless grandmother in a rambling mansion in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. she loves her reste avec who she has come to fondly refer to as a sister. After she got pregnant, she had to leave to stay with her mother in the United State with nothing to her name except a few dollars.

Melanie Miller is a rock star's daughter who has everything clothes, shoes, bags everything money can buy except love and affection. Her father has constantly neglected her and at the start of the novel he fails to show for her 18th birthday.

The stories of these three women was remarkable and i love how the author took time out to develop their characters. Ameline making a way for herself despite all odds, Laure finding love and peace with herself after a horrible past and Melanie well nothing special from her except her love for extravagant parties.

While i love the author's narrative, i think she spent a lot of pages on mundane descriptions. I wish she has expunge the melanie character from the story and the book altogether. she was of no use to the plot and i did

not learn anything from her. from the start to the end of the book i kept seeing her as a spoiled brat seeking for attention. Despite the fact that she has a good husband and was happy. she cheated on her husband, lied to him and she got away with it not once but twice. i think that part of the book was annoying.

Other than that, i love the book and i wish the author had not placed too much emphasis on the fact that they all need Love and men to feel complete and successful after all they went through.

I would be reading more of her books definitely if they are not more than 300 pages. Bitter Chocolate was too big, i struggled through it.

However, you never can tell i can tolerate the size of a book, if the stories are worthy of my time.

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### **Amanda says**

This book tells 3 different stories within the one novel.

I didn't finish this book because it did not capture my interest. Even after 50 pages or so it felt as if nothing at all had happened. I believe the problem is the way the book is set out. The three stories are told consecutively and you jump around from story to story with very little notice. This made it very difficult to follow the story and therefore almost impossible to enjoy the story.

I wish the author had decided to tell just one of the stories. If she felt the need to tell all three stories she should have separated them into different novels. This would have made the books much easier to read and they still would have been around 200 pages in length.

I can't recommend this book, however fans of the author may enjoy the story if they are used to the writing style.

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### **Tracy Terry says**

Incorporating what is essentially three stories into the one book, Bitter Chocolate just did not work for me. The tale of three young women, Laure, Ameline and, Melanie, in my personal opinion that the author would have been better sticking to the story of one, at a push, two of the characters rather than this somewhat epic tale that just did not flow.

A considerable read of 577 pages, because of the way in which it was written I'd find myself forgetting what had happened to say Ameline by the time the author had devoted several chapters to the other two women before returning to her story. Not that I was particularly interested in the adventures of any of the three women who I didn't think were well developed by the author.

The other characters faring little better, on the whole I found them stereotypical and largely forgettable.

As for the plot ..... Largely contrived. For such a lengthy book there seemed to many things left unsaid, too many loose ends left untied, and an ending that I quite frankly found abrupt.

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### **Kathryn says**

Loved, loved, loved this book! Although it's a chunky read, I would have liked it to be even longer! It was predictable in a couple of places, but was beautifully written and I now want to read others by the same author.

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### **Jenny Dawid says**

Wypo?yczna ca?kiem w ciemno, a okaza?a si? naprawd? fajn? lektur?.

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### **Perry Whitford says**

Two rich, idle young women, abandoned by glamorous, thoughtless parents, go in search for love and self-respect across three continents in Lokko's jet-setting "blockbuster" of a novel.

Laure St Lazare is the 16 year old daughter of a runaway mother who lives with her widowed, loveless grandmother in a rambling mansion in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Despite her good family, she has dark, "*bitter chocolate*" skin, which is undesirable in her native land.

Melanie Miller is the 18 year old daughter of a rock star father, divorced from her mother who is now married to a wealthy, prize-winning architect and lives in London. Her father has constantly neglected her and at the start of the novel he fails to show for her 18th birthday.

I bought this book on a whim from ebay, the description proclaiming the novel to be from "the author who brought brains to the blockbuster". I don't usually read this type of book, for good reason, but I like to try something different once in a while.

On reflection, I might have to go back to my comfort zone for a while again after this vapid experience!

The heroines, though supposedly adults and empowering female figures, get "*butterflies*" or become "*weak at the knees*" when they see men that they tend to fall in love with after just one or two empty conversations.

They do achieve things during the course of the story, but for the most part they only get on by doing "glamour" work, dating rich boyfriends - even if they happen to be an obvious asshole - or just by being beautiful and therefore finding men to indulge them. How empowering is that?

Their fortunes never fluctuate before clumsy forewarnings, their thoughts and emotions are expressed in a litany of air-headed triteness as they constantly muse like teenagers over questions that the author has already answered for the reader.

In addition, the one narrative secret that Lokko holds onto, one supposed to enthrall some kind of mystery and joy to the proceedings, is blatantly signposted right from the start, then amounts to nothing much when it is finally revealed.

I almost stopped reading at page 24 when the stultifyingly moronic Melanie, dancing topless and singing in front of her mirror, becomes aware that her stepfather is watching her from the opening in the door and reflects:

*"He'd been unable to take his eyes off her. Norbert Kreizer, the forty-something world-famous architect, her mother's husband... he'd been unable to look away. She had made him look at her, he who barely registered her presence. And the most remarkable thing of all? She hadn't said a word." - oh dear.*

The comments on the back cover also play up just how "intelligent" the novel is in comparison to the usual fare in the genre, but I failed to notice any. What I did notice though was that it was considerably less crass than these type of books generally are, which is something of a commendation I suppose.

Reading *Bitter Chocolate* only led me to ask myself the question: Why read trash?

After all, reading requires attention and effort. If you want trash why not just watch TV? You actually get to see the beautiful people then, the clothes, the locations, not just read about them.

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## **Jayne says**

This was an accidental read - I mistook it for another book of the same title. Imagine my surprise when I opened a book I supposed to be about fair trade chocolate and instead found myself reading a novel! I read a few chapters and was unimpressed, but for some reason I pressed on. The book is 500 pages so I wasn't sure if I would actually finish it.

A few more chapters in, though, I fell in love with the main characters. The novel explores the interconnected lives of three women. Laure and Ameline grow up in turbulent Haiti. Laure is the granddaughter of the grand matron of an old family. Ameline is her 'reste-avec,' a servant child chosen to grow up in the household with Laure. Privileged Melanie is the daughter of an aging rock star based in London, England.

Laure goes to United States to live with her estranged mother. When the government of Haiti is overthrown by a military junta, Ameline is rescued by an Englishman and taken to England. Melanie moves to LA and remains as pampered as she was in England. For the next 13 years, the women struggle to find their way, each drawing on her unique inner resources to survive.

That's the greatest strength of this novel - the journeys of Laure and Ameline. The author is familiar with Haiti and the experiences of immigrants. She conveys their struggles skillfully and without judgement.

I absolutely fell in love with the two Haitian characters, Laure and Ameline. Half-way through the book, they felt like dear old friends and as I read the last hundred pages, it saddened me to know that I would soon need to say good-bye to them. I so admired Laure that when she fell upon hard times later in the novel, I was absolutely \*certain\* she would land on her feet (But I worried about her until the next turn of the plot).

Melanie, on the other hand, was a confusing and chaotic character who I could have done without. To be

honest, much of plot involving her character seemed contrived. I also found the male characters to be weakly developed and not very believable.

Although the first 400 pages were absorbing, I did not like the ending of this book. It felt like the author was on a really good roll but suddenly needed to wrap things up too quickly. The last few chapters were awkward and stilted. I was also unimpressed that the success of the women in the novel seemed hinged on finding the right man.

Overall, this was an excellent, absorbing read - a page turner. I will definitely seek out other titles by Lesly Lokko.

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### **Sanna says**

Olipa yllättävän hyvä ja koukuttava, vaikka paikoitellen vähän siirappinen ja hömppä olikin ;)

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### **Irene Quinn-hawtin says**

Three stories of three women. It would have worked better if the Author stayed with just one story. There was enough in the book to achieve this end. Or just stay with Laure and Ameline. Melanie could have been a totally different book. The stories of these women were twists and turns at many opportunities. At times I had to really concentrate on who was who. Most of the book was meaty and strong. Yet parts were weak and trivial. However, I was still drawn to continue reading, so there was always a 'hook'.

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### **Keris says**

Previous Trashionista editors Gemma and Jenni loved Lesley Lokko's first two books, Sundowners and Saffron Skies, so I was keen to read her third, Bitter Chocolate, although slightly concerned because it's over 500 pages long!

Spanning decades and continents, it's the story of three women: Ameline, Laure and Melanie. Laure and Ameline have grown up together in Haiti, while Melanie was raised in London, the financially spoiled but emotionally neglected daughter of an aging rock star.

Ameline was taken into Laure's family as a "reste avec" - literally "stay with" - a poor child kept by a rich family as a companion to their own child (i.e. Laure). Now the girls are grown up, Ameline is little better than a servant to Laure's grandmother, but she and Laure love each other like sisters. Laure's mother, Belle, is living in Chicago, apparently in disgrace after giving birth to the dark-skinned Laure (skin shade being

To read the rest of this review, please visit Trashionista

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## **Cora Tea Party Princess says**

Another perfectly indulgent offering from Lesley Lokko. This would suit perfectly well as a New Adult and when I classify books as New Adult it's Lesley Lokko's work I generally use as a guide.

If you need something to get invested in, something to make you think, something to make you feel every emotion under the sun and something to stay in your head, then look no further.

Bitter Chocolate reminded me a little of Sundowners. They have some similar elements such as the different lives and people converging and a very artistic/designer character. There is a mix of poverty and wealth and the struggles of going between them - and best of all it feels so REAL. There is romance and hardship and love and hate. And there are three very confused young ladies, unsure of how their life is going to pan out and whether they're making the right (or more often wrong) decision.

It's best to set aside some time for Lesley Lokko because once you start you'll be hooked and won't be able to read anything else until you finish the book. Then you'll want to pick up another.

This book is a book for all seasons. It's great for summer when you want to chill, winter for when you need something comforting, autumn for those lengthening nights and spring for the freshness of the world. AWESOME.

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## **Deanna L says**

It's an interesting story of three different women and how their lives develop. the interesting part about Haiti and Baby doc could have been explored better than just a lucky escape. Most Haitians couldn't escape. the story of the rock-star's daughter Melanie - quite superfluous and shallow. I think the author wants to illustrate that sometimes having everything is a curse in disguise because nothing makes you happy but still, I can't help but think it doesn't fit as nicely as the Laure/Amelie story and their family secrets that eventually come to light, their return to their homeland and their home and their ascent to a better life, to a more secure future, to building success with their own hands.

While I do like the story, it's at most a fluffy vacation read. The language and the style is quite simple, the story is interesting but sometimes redundant at other times drawn out and usually quite obvious.

I put it on my average-not-exceptional shelf. I did not dislike the book but also would not recommend it.

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