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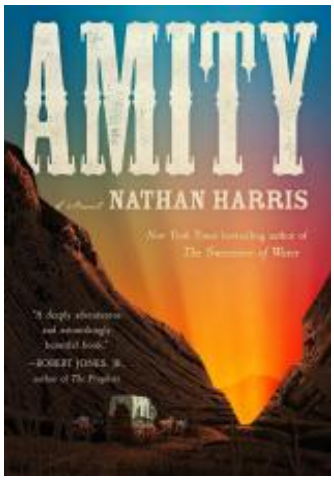
Amity

by Nathan Harris



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE SWEETNESS OF WATER comes a gripping story about a brother and sister, emancipated from slavery but still searching for true freedom, and their odyssey across the deserts of Mexico to escape a former master still intent on their bondage.

New Orleans, 1866. The Civil War might be over, but formerly enslaved Coleman and June have yet to find the freedom they?ve been promised. Two years ago, the siblings were separated when their old master, Mr. Harper, took June away to Mexico, where he hoped to escape the new reality of the postbellum South. Coleman stayed behind in Louisiana to serve the Harper family, clinging to the hope that one day June would return.

When an unexpected letter from Mr. Harper arrives, summoning Coleman to Mexico, Coleman thinks that finally his prayers have been answered. What Coleman cannot know is the tangled truth of June?s tribulations under Mr. Harper out on the frontier. And when disaster strikes Coleman?s journey, he is forced on the run with Mr. Harper's daughter, Florence. Together, they venture into the Mexican desert to find June, all the while evading two crooked brothers who will stop at nothing to capture Coleman and Florence and collect the money they're owed. As Coleman and June separately navigate a perilous, parched landscape, the siblings learn quickly that freedom isn't always given --- sometimes, it must be taken by force.

As in his *New York Times* bestselling debut, THE SWEETNESS OF WATER, Nathan Harris delves into the critical years of the Civil War?s aftermath to deliver an intimate and epic tale of what freedom means in a society still determined to return its Black citizens to bondage. Populated with unforgettable characters, AMITY is a vital addition to the literature of emancipation.

Discussion Guide

1. When AMITY begins, the Harper family holds sway over Coleman?s life in almost every way. Yet in Mexico, the power dynamic is vastly different, with a newfound current of equality between Coleman and Florence in particular. How do they both grapple with it, and with what result?

2. So much of Coleman?s life is decided by others, whether that be the Harpers, or even Amos Turlow attempting to dictate his decisions upon landing in Mexico, as though Coleman is nothing more than his pawn. Does Coleman finally find control of his own life? Can we track his transformation?

3. At times it seems that June and Coleman could not be more different, both in the way they express themselves and the choices they make. What did you make of their relationship? Did their unique dynamic as siblings resonate with you?

4. June embarks on her own journey in the desert, finding a new community and new love with Isaac. How is her role in their community defined? Do you think she has found a sense of fulfillment by the novel?s end?

5. Isaac, in many ways, is caught between cultures and worlds --- a Black Seminole living in Mexico. In June, he meets a woman who has been subjected to slavery and a more traditional strand of oppression that has defined her life since birth. How do both of them navigate this clash of identities as their relationship is forged? In what ways do they share commonalities, and in what ways do they struggle to understand the other?s way of life?

6. Isaac is a free man but is still subject to the whims of the Mexican rebels and the French government, as well as his allied interests with the Seminoles. Danger presents itself all around him in the work he does for his people and the land he protects. Is the cost of this particular kind of freedom worth the pressures brought about by the lifestyle he leads? Are he and June right to think they must leave Amity, and by doing so leave behind his kin and tribe that have sustained him?

7. June and Coleman finally find some sense of solace in Texas by the novel?s conclusion. There is an idyllic quality to the home they share with Isaac and their general way of life. Yet the 1860s was also a decade marked by incredible hardship, especially for formerly enslaved Black people. In a time of adversity and oppression, is it possible to feel truly free? Do you see parallels from June and Coleman?s experience to other moments in history?

8. Whether it be due to the Civil War, the French-Mexican War, or general unrest, nearly every character in AMITY is the victim of some form of displacement. How do we see the consequences of this phenomenon in the novel? How do characters navigate this issue or process it through their actions and emotions on the page?

9. By the end of the novel, Florence has returned to New Orleans to begin a new life for herself. Her journey in Mexico was an arduous one, rife with loss, grief, violence and, by the end, a sense of agency she did not have when she set out to find her father. What do you make of the way her relationship to Coleman and June changes? Are June, Coleman and Florence ?closer? by the end of the novel, having been through so much together?

10. Coleman, struggling to survive and adapt at every turn while preserving his dignity and livelihood, can sometimes be difficult to read. But by the end, one thing is certain: he wants his story to be documented and sets out to write it. He makes it clear that his primary goal is to share his story with his sister. But might his motivations extend beyond that? He mentions other slave narratives to Ignacio, which could suggest as much. What, perhaps, are the true reasons behind

Coleman writing his story in this way? Is it merely a means of reaching out to June, or does Coleman have greater aspirations?

Author Bio

Nathan Harris is the author of AMITY and the *New York Times* bestseller THE SWEETNESS OF WATER, which was an Oprah?s Book Club pick, the winner of the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, and longlisted for the Booker Prize, the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, and the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize. He holds an MFA from the Michener Center at the University of Texas, and lives in Chicago.

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Publication Date: September 1, 2026
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Little, Brown Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0316456357
ISBN-13: 9780316456357