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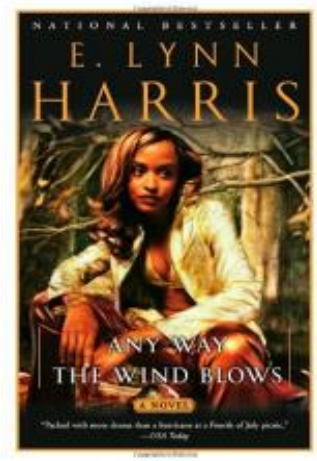
Any Way the Wind Blows: A Novel

by E. Lynn Harris



About the Book

Basil Henderson, the good-looking, bisexual sports agent who left his wife-to-be at the altar in Harris?s previous book, Not a Day Goes By, is back and "ripe for another ride on the rough-and-ready freeway of love" [p. 15]. He?s on the lookout for sexy ladies and handsome hunks who understand his rules of the road?passionate pleasures with no strings attached. But when Basil seduces Bart Dunbar, a buff young model who appears in a promotion for Basil?s company, things start to go off course. Bart has some down-and-dirty moves of his own?and the good luck to find a ready partner in Ava, the mother of Basil?s jilted bride, Yancey Harrington Braxton.

After the fiasco of her would-be wedding day in New York, Yancey has staged a comeback any diva would envy. Severing ties with her ex-financé and her manipulative mother and leaving her blossoming career on Broadway behind, she moved to LaLa Land, transformed herself into Yancey B, pop singer fabulosa, and cut a CD for Motown Records. She?s about to make a video showcasing a dynamite song written especially for her. A beautiful ballad with highly controversial lyrics about a young woman whose groom leaves her at the altar for another man, "Any Way the Blows" is destined to stir up a storm?not only on the Billboard charts but in the lives of Yancey and Basil as well.

Any Way the Wind Blows is narrated in turns by Yancey, Basil, and Bart, and their stories ring with the bravado of outsized egos trying desperately to hide the pains of the past. With just the right mix of sex, suspense, humor, and compassion, E. Lynn Harris adds another winner to his long list of smash hits.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with each of the three main characters giving a quick sketch of themselves. Is there a particular sentence or section in each description that conveys the essence of each person?s character?

2. Bart says, "At twenty-one, I believed in love lasting forever. At twenty-eight, I know nothing lasts forever . . . except

maybe revenge" [p. 11]. Is this a common point of view? What examples can you give from your own experiences, your observations of the world, or literature that support it? Do you think Yancey?s reasons for wanting revenge [p. 73] are more understandable and more justifiable than Bart?s?

3. Basil and Rosa talk about having a child together, even though neither of them wants to get married [p. 14]. In your opinion, is either of them ready to take on the responsibilities of parenthood, given the nature of their relationship and the way they handle the revelation of Rosa?s pregnancy?

4. In talking about his friend Wylie, Bart says, "I remember a time when intelligence was considered hot in a man. . . . Today it?s beauty, sex . . . or wealth" [p. 35]. Is this "dumbing down" unique to the gay black community or is it prevalent in American society in general? Do you agree with Bart that heterosexuals have more opportunities for real love than gay men do [p. 37]?

5. Windsor plans to keep her baby whether Wardell decides to marry her or not [p. 71]. Do you think this is the right decision? Is it better, as she says, "to be a product of a broken home than to live in one" [p. 71]? If you have read about the recent, controversial studies of children of divorce and other kids raised in single parent homes, discuss how you feel about the findings and how they relate to Windsor?s decision.

6. Do you think Basil represents the majority of bisexual men? To what extent do the unspoken rules of society contribute to his insistence on hiding his sexual orientation? Do you think that he is serious about his quest to find a mother for his children, or is this simply part of his cover-up? How does the way he talks about women support your viewpoint?

7. Basil cockily declares, "With all the talk of brothers who swung both ways, women still hadn?t learned all the games" [p. 136] and "Men, even gay men, knew how to separate love and sex, even if women couldn?t" [p. 156]. Are women as naive as Basil believes? Is there a difference between men who date more than one woman and men who "swing both ways"?

8. What is your reaction to Yancey and Basil?s reunion [pp. 171?175]? Does it fit your expectations or were you surprised by either Basil?s or Yancey?s behavior? Which character appears in a more sympathetic light? Why do you think Harris chooses Yancey to describe the meeting?

9. Two secrets?Basil?s sexuality and the existence of Yancey?s child?and the threat that they will be revealed lie at the heart of the novel. Which do you think is the more damaging secret? Is the media (embodied in the character of the gossip columnist LaVonya) overeager to feed the public?s fascination with scandal without considering its effect on the individuals concerned?

10. What incidents or relationships show that both Basil and Yancey have a softer, more human side behind their tough exteriors? Do you think that Yancey?s new romance and the birth of Basil?s child will bring about permanent changes in their personalities?

11. What roles do Wylie, Windsor, and Raymond play in the novel? To what extent do they act as moral consciences for the main characters? Are they realistically portrayed, or are they a bit too perfect? How does Harris?s depiction of them compare to his depiction of Bart and Ava, the villains in the novel?

12. If you are familiar with current television programs that feature gay men [p. 37], discuss how well they depict the reality of gay life in America. Do the creators of shows such as Queer As Folk and Will & Grace and other forms of popular culture have a responsibility to instruct as well as entertain? How do you think E. Lynn Harris would answer the question?

13. How do Harris?s other books compare to **Any Way the Wind Blows**? Does this novel represent a change in Harris?s style or in the nature of the themes he explores? What do you think the basic message of the book is?=

14. The same characters appear in many of Harris?s novels, sometimes in leading roles, sometimes in cameos. Which of the characters in **Any Way the Wind Blows** would you like see in his next novel and why?

Author Bio

E. Lynn Harris's next novel, **Not a Day Goes By**, will be published in Summer 2000 by Doubleday. He is the author of four other highly acclaimed novels, all available from Anchor. Mr. Harris lives in Chicago and New York.

Critical Praise

"Drop-dead gorgeous characters caught in a web of deception and sexual intrigue. . . . Quite tasty."

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Publication Date: July 9, 2002
Paperback: 368 pages
Publisher: Anchor
ISBN-10: 0385721188
ISBN-13: 9780385721189