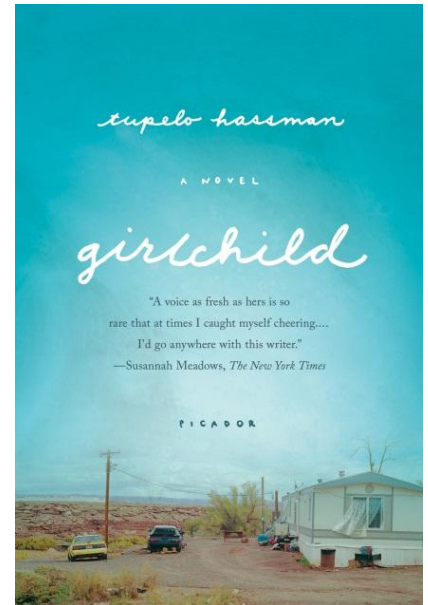


Reading Group Gold

girlchild

by Tupelo Hassman

1. *girlchild* is set in a “town just north of Reno and just south of nowhere.” If the story were set elsewhere, how would the challenges Rory Dawn faces change? Or would they? What direct impact does geography have on Rory’s life? What about where the story is located in time? Could *girlchild* be set in the 1970s? In the 2010s?
2. *girlchild* is told in short, and sometimes extremely short, chapters. How does this method serve to impact the story? How would it feel to stay with any of these scenes longer than we do? How would that change the overall impact of the novel?
3. There are many stories about Rory Dawn and the Hendrix family that combine in *girlchild*, including the social service report on the Hendrix family, Shirley Rose’s hopes for Rory’s future, Jo’s fears for Rory, the government’s position on Rory’s culture, and Roscoe Elementary and Junior High schools’ opinions of Rory’s academic gifts and adventures. Rory Dawn takes each of these for a spin. Why might she do this? What does she gain? Lose?
4. Vivian Buck is, perhaps, Rory Dawn’s only friend. Is Vivian real? Historical? Imaginary? All of the above? Do we have any reason to think that Vivian exists for other Calle residents? What does it say about Rory Dawn if Vivian doesn’t exist for others? Does it matter whether Vivian actually exists in real time on the Calle?
5. Dennis is a regular at the Truck Stop and he is one of the few nonvillainous Calle men whose life we see in detail, in the chapter “The Great Strain of Being.” What is the importance of Dennis for Rory Dawn? How does he reflect the trajectory of many of the Calle men; for example, Timmy, or Rory’s neighbor Marc?
6. Rory Dawn and Timmy have history together on the Calle brought by riding the shifting tide of babysitters. When it is announced that Rory Dawn is advancing to the next level in the spelling bee, she loses her temper with Timmy, throwing his toy truck over the school fence. What other circumstances surround this act of Rory’s, and what part of it leads her to turn against Timmy?
7. Jo, Rory Dawn’s mother, is a bartender, but this career wasn’t always her goal. What do we learn about Jo’s early aspirations and why they changed? Does she deserve a second chance? If she were given one, would she take it?
8. Rory Dawn is academically gifted, but instead of this being a boon, it increases her isolation, both from her peers and her mother. Does she find any refuge in this gift? What is the significance of Rory Dawn’s throwing the final round of the spelling bee? What does her choice in the misspelling of the word “outlier” (she spells it “outliar”) reveal about her feelings with regard to the stratification of her culture? What does it reveal about her place in it?



About the Author

Tupelo Hassman graduated from Columbia's MFA program. Her writing has been published in the *Portland Review Literary Journal*, *Paper Street Press*, *Tantalum*, *We Still Like*, and *Zyzzyva*, and by 100 Word Story, Five Chapters.com, and Invisible City Audio Tours.



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