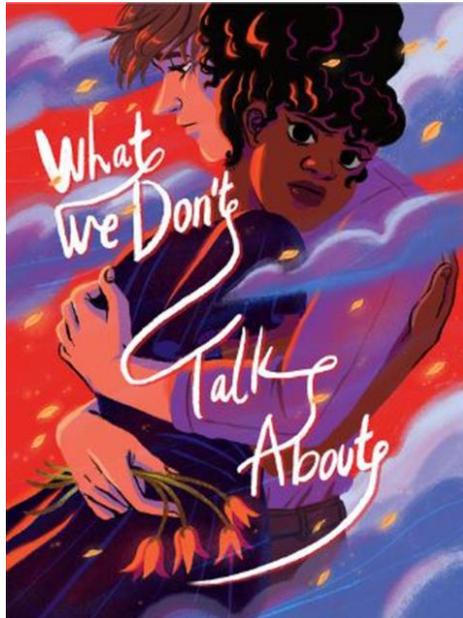




What We Don't Talk About by Charlot Kristensen

[Young Adult]



“I think it’s important to be true to yourself.
“If something feels wrong you should speak up.”

With the lushest of lines, form and colour, Kristensen has created something deceptively complex with extraordinary economy that will give you much to ponder upon. It’s time to meet Farai and Adam.

“I really want to get along with Adam’s family... Our relationship means a lot to me... But I also want him to be there for me. Is that too much to ask?”

No, it’s called love and loyalty. But what happens when your boyfriend’s parents turn out to be nightmares, you find yourself trapped in their affluent home and therefore beholden to their hospitality, then it transpires that said boyfriend... Well, that’s “nurture” for you. After two years of not-so-subtle stalling, Adam has finally invited Farai to meet his parents. Farai is excited! Adam is angry. Farai’s tardiness almost made them miss their train. But it didn’t; they haven’t. So why is Adam so angry?





Farai is a positive young artist, secure in her identity. Adam is a musician. He's very pretty: lanky with a disarming flop of hair. Farai is full-on beautiful with large, pool-deep eyes and a casually tied-up bunch of black hair threaded through with blue and purple highlights. They're a very attractive couple. But for Adam's mother, Martha, Farai is a new toy to play with, a sick power trip to take pleasure in, and a goal to be achieved. Can you guess what it is yet? Hegemony must be maintained at all costs.

Adam's constantly angling mother is an appallingly real, domineering bully. She's all charm and smarm on the surface, but there's a constant sneer on her mouth and disdain in her eyes. She's smug and supercilious, while her husband has been whittled away into the most monosyllabic and compliant co-combatant that any garrulous general could hope for. And make no mistake: Martha's vile, targeted racism is far from casual or accidental. She bides her time then pounces before pulling tactically back, wounded blood drawn, strategically leaving Farai with little room to manoeuvre by speaking out or conferring with Adam whose default setting is defensive, especially of his parents: "Ah, maybe you're reading too much into it." That's always a favourite of mine.



Deliciously, defiantly, Kristensen's art is an exuberant, life-affirming, joy with expressions so subtle and telling. Flare-ups of anger are projected with jagged, barb-edged speech balloons and angular gesticulations. But predominantly there is a celebration of truly juicy light, of fabrics and foliage, with beams and streams of sunshine cascading in through windows; and out on Lake Windermere there is an awe-inspiring beauty in the wide-open, bright sky above and dazzling, tiny white diamonds dancing on deeper blue waters, entirely immune to the self-satisfied shadows cast in between.



I leave you with Martha fishing for what she loves most – a reaction – this time feeling no need to find any sort of emollient whatsoever to what she erroneously considers will be her *coup de grace*:

“Oh that’s interesting, Farai. That... thing on your head.”

“Oh! You mean my headwrap.”

“Is that what it’s called? I didn’t know you were a Muslim.”

“Ahh I think you’ve misunderstood... This is a very common head attire in my culture. And there are many people from across the world who wear head coverings for different reasons.”

“Oh, so you’re not a Muslim?”

“No I’m not...”

“Oh thank god! I thought I was going to have a heart attack.”

Martha delights in playing cat and mouse games but this time she’s misjudged her victim. For Farai – however calm and reasonable – is no mouse. That would be Martha’s long-dominated son.

