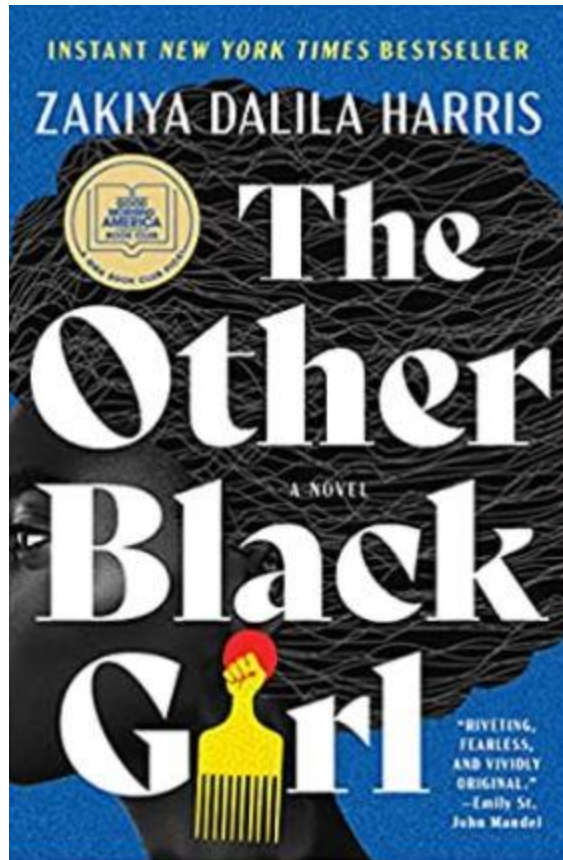


So many of us know the feeling of finding that one other person — in the school lunchroom, in a college dorm, at our office — who understands us, who knows what we're going through, who wants to be our friend and who may make our daily path just a bit easier, with shared looks and laughs and messages.



Nella Rogers wants that one other person in her work life, with an added layer: Nella is Black in the all-white Wagner Books office in (where else?) Manhattan. She longs for another Black woman as colleague, someone with whom she can share the pressures Black people face overall in corporate America, and particularly in industries like publishing that have long functioned as de facto country clubs, rife with class privilege, nepotism and deeply ingrained bigotry.

One day, Nella's nose twitches: She's detected the unmistakable scent of "her favorite brand of hair grease" in the air near her cubicle. "This meant one of two things: One of her white colleagues had started using Brown Buttah. Or — more likely, since she was pretty sure none of them had accidentally stumbled into the natural hair care aisle — there was another Black girl on the thirteenth floor."

Nella is delighted to learn that the scent means Hazel-May McCall has been hired as a new editorial assistant. At last, she'll have a co-worker she can lean on when it comes to the pressures she's felt, someone to take coffee breaks with and maybe even learn and get promoted with, a true equal.

You might be able to guess what happens next. Hazel-May doesn't share Nella's yearning for a close, supportive office pal. Hazel (as she becomes known) is in it to win it, all by her fabulous self (her look, Nella thinks, "was all very Erykah-meets-Issa"), and before Nella can say "cocoa butter," Hazel has scooped her on a manuscript and is spending long closed-door sessions with their shared editor boss.

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Meanwhile, occasional chapters seem to rise out of nowhere, but they are actual plot thickeners, devices that will ultimately take *The Other Black Girl* out of the realm of "office novel" and into another genre entirely, and finally toward a kind of sad and wholly earned brilliance. Some reviews have discussed the device that connects Nella and Hazel with their older counterparts Kendra and Diana, Kendra having been her best friend Diana's editor on a novel titled *Burning Heart* that catapulted those two women to fame but also created a deep schism between them.

But leaving that device unnamed, here, does not mean its effects can't be discussed. As Nella and Hazel's paths diverge, those paths might as well be clearly marked, not necessarily respectively, "Success" and "Authenticity." If you choose the first path, as a young Black woman, you may find yourself sublimating your true self — not just style and taste, but the very ideas and principles at your core. If you choose the second path, as a young Black woman, you'll own your identity, but you'll never sit in the corner office — you'll cause too much friction along the way.