

White Chocolate

Henrietta Elmore-Smith

Author's Synopsis

PONTIA DELEON is a college coed at Langston Hughes College in the state of Louisiana. She is quite excited about moving up to the rank of lead majorette in her Junior Year. Her college love, Dominique Charles, is a star quarterback and sprinter at Langston Hughes College, NFL bound, and is very desirous of making Pontia Mrs. Dominique Charles. Xavier DeLeon is her elder brother and is attending medical school at Columbia University in New York City. He is very bright and talented like his sister. As loyal siblings they frequently exchange their views of how they plan to conduct their lives, careers and loves.

Pontia believes she has her goals in place. After she earns her bachelor's degree she intends to enter graduate school majoring in Journalism and Broadcasting. She loves Dominique very much but is not yet ready to hear her wedding bells ringing.

Uncertain of how to handle the romantic developments of her relationship Pontia suddenly discovers that she has a secret admirer. She is puzzled by the mysterious multitude of red roses that appear at her doorstep. In time this secret turns public and even though the laws of attraction appear quite normal, family and friends have one particular concern: she and he do not share the same skin tone.

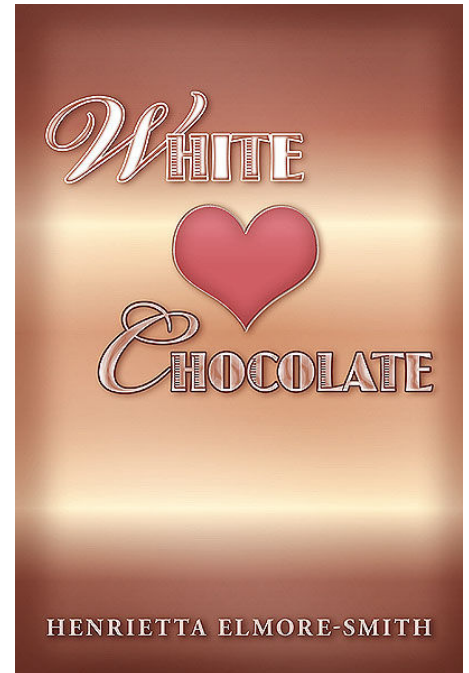
Now Pontia must choose who will be the love of her life; by happenstance she finds herself in a delicious, *White Chocolate* situation.

Book Review

It's a glimpse into a world that very few Canadians can participate in. It is a Black world where cheerleading, football, and romance take center stage, a world where young Black African Americans take immense satisfaction in an all Black college. During the first part of the book, I found the youthfulness, and debate around sex before marriage wearisome. *White Chocolate* by Henrietta Elmore-Smith picks up when the plot moves toward an inter-racial relationship.

The author wrote the book in script format. Initially, I thought her intention was to encourage this book for a theatrical production. Then I realized there was no other format to present dialogue between 20-21 year olds. The exchanges consist of nappy one-liners that would make the quote system of he said, she said very stilted. The dialogues detailed the slight nuances between girlfriends, and the fierce female competition for male attentions. Through these talks, I could understand the core belief systems of two college girls in Louisiana, United States. The main character Pontia stayed with me because I had eavesdropped on her daily thoughts and dialogues making her so real.

Pontia struggles in a relationship with a black football player drafted for the next NFL season. The relationship is pushed forward by Dominique's desperate need to complete the sexual act. This is not an easy task for Pontia's code of honor dictates to only "do it" on her wedding night. In college life, sexual encounters are the norm. Elmore-Smith writes these scenes tastefully from a female perspective.



Conversations between Pontia and her jock boyfriend, Dominique, are cut before real communication can begin. For example, her boyfriend questions her loyalty to her girlfriend. The conversation could have explored Pontia, her values, and therefore a basis of the couple's relationship. When she starts to explain, he pins her with "S'cuse me, I know this really nice restaurant and we have reservation there and I want to show you off." Instead of her boyfriend being interested in who she is and her personal values, he is more interested in showing her off. The couple never explores each other's characters in contrast with Dominique's focused desire to explore her body. Elmore-Smith skillfully illustrates how her main character is valued for her body.

When a secret admirer enters her life, Pontia's life takes a spin towards opportunities. He turns out to be a man who listens, a man who has actual conversations with her, a man who tries to do what she would like to do. Every person has a lesson to learn in life. I think Pontia's lesson is to make herself heard and valued by her loved ones. Dominique does not hear her, although he does value her appearance. The secret admirer listens to her. Their emails, telephone calls, and three dates probably compile more character exploration of each other than her "lengthy" relationship with Dominique.

Toward the beginning of the book after a fight with Dominique, Pontia says, "I don't know if a sweet little voice can come out of my mouth right now." Her mother warned her that "jocks like unlimited female attention." She felt these early warnings, but her immaturity blinded her skill level to interpret such warnings. For a college setting, Elmore-Smith gets the attitude right, the naiveté, the sex exploration, small tiffs, misunderstandings, and stiff competition for the opposite sex. It is a life where looks and physical performance matter. It is also a sports world where becoming a doctor who specializes in sports medicine is impressive.

Pontia thinks she is controlling herself and her destiny. However, her trade-off to hold off with sex pulls her into a relationship that is purely about sex, financial security, and a priority towards a black relationship. She heeds not her own warning at the beginning of the book, "think long you can think wrong." Pontia never asks to see Dominique's parents, nor does he offer. He finally meets her parents on New Year's Eve, 18 hours before one of the major "bowl" football games on New Year's Day. He puts her on the spot by proposing in front of her family, obviously he is worried about rejection. Her family is thrilled that he is black. Her brother who plans to specialize in sports medicine sees opportunity for his future. I found the whole development of Pontia's relationship with Dominique painful. When he pins her with a marriage proposal, does she say no, embarrass him, and ruin his mental state for the football game just hours away?

The main character is more focused on style than substance. When Dominique finally expresses his views of Blacks' progression in society, Pontia thinks to herself about *how* he expressed his views. It was not about what he said; her admiration came from *how* he said. For Pontia, it is about style, not substance. Then for a 20-21 year old, Elmore-Smith has her character at the proper maturity level.

There is some preaching in this book like Black achievements in the United States. Pontia's mother tells her that in the Black Americans' search for equality, black women never thought that equality would mean white women dating black men. This "unforeseen" equality was quite an adjustment for black women. Elmore-Smith purposely leaves out the equality development of black women dating white men. However, the author pulls the concept into play at another time. Pontiac's brother states that he has never dated a white woman, but then concludes that black women are different from the norm. I am not a fan of judging before experiencing. Reminds me of people who slam the Harry Potter series for Christian reasons without reading any of the books!

I am unhappy with the ending, although I hope Pontia will re-think what is best for her. Her name is from a class of butterflies sought after by collectors. By not doing what is best for herself, I feel she is being pinned to a butterfly frame, collected for her body rather than for her soul.