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Why I Like Country Music summary

The narrator is from South Carolina, and he is living with his wife, Gloria, who is from Brooklyn. Gloria cannot fathom the fact that her husband actually enjoys country music. The narrator explains to Gloria that, most of all, he likes the square dancing. Then, quietly and mostly to himself, he tells a story of his childhood back in the South, in the 4th grade. The time when he learned to square dance and fell in love. The narrator fell in love with a Gweneth Lawson from Brooklyn, New York. He could recall the many details of her braids and the colors she wore, and all the things he did to get closer to her. Even though a peanut brown boy with curly hair, going by the name of Leon Pugh, often stole the show and his woman, his determination would never falter. Eventually, during the school square dance competition, the opportunity arose to partner with Gweneth, and he took it. He doesn't remember the finer details of the dance, but he knows they were both laughing for an eternity. The leanness of her and the loving of her pressed deep into the saving places of his private self. (McPherson 21) He still affirms the truth of why he likes country music, but mostly quietly and to himself.

Question

What is at stake for the narrator? What does Gloria's warning (on the first page) mean? Why should Gloria care about what kind of music her husband listens to? Why should this be a problem for the narrator at all? You might want to consider when this story takes place.

A childhood crush is only a part of the narrator's story. It also touches upon themes of cultural divide within the black community. Sometime around the 1950s, during the height of the civil rights movement, is when the narrator and his wife both grew up. However, they were raised in very different cultural environments. His wife Gloria grew up in New York, while he grew up in South Carolina. Gloria, being a third-generation northern born, struggles to understand a lot of what her husband does as a result of being raised in the South. For her being raised in New York, liking country music as a black person would be a heavy contradiction.. However, the narrator had a much different perception of Southern culture. To him, that was his heritage. Early on, he mentions what he likes about country music. He explains to Gloria, " I do not like all country stuff, just pieces that make the right connections. I like the banjo because sometimes I hear ancestors in the strumming..." (McPherson 3-4) The narrator grows up in an environment where his own ancestral heritage is much more engrained in his culture. Whereas Gloria feels much more detached and likely only perceives many aspects of Southern culture to be for white people. The narrator especially likes square dancing. From his youth, he goes on to recall the one time he was able to learn how to square dance with his childhood crush. It turned out to be one of the happiest moments of his life, that he remembers quite fondly and quite often. Which in a time of intense racial tensions, he likes to keep it to himself but still reaffirms his love for it.

In this particular time in their childhood, segregation and racial divide were still very much present. Not until 1964 was segregation outlawed by the Civil Rights Act.

Gloria remembers this and is still aware of the dangers that they still face as black people in America. She gives the narrator a warning outright to not associate with Southern white culture out in public. It is also interesting to question which part of the public she didn't want to know. Was it the black community or the white? Maybe equally both. Nonetheless, the narrator is aware of this as well. He agrees with her and often likes to keep his reasoning quiet and to himself.