CHAPTER III

*Linden Hills* (1995), Gloria Naylor’s second novel uses a confined geographic setting to construct a tale about the interconnected lives of a group of black characters. It is, however, a much more ambitious work in which realism is subordinated to allegory. Although flawed, “...it tackles a controversial subject with boldness and originality.”

In *Linden Hills*, “like Amiri Baraka in *The Systems of Dante’s Hell* (1965), Naylor had adapted Dante’s Inferno to her own fictional purposes – in this instance a tale of lost black souls trapped in the American dream.” At the bottom of Linden Hills where the most opulent homes are (Naylor plays on the black idiomatic sense of ‘down’), “…the seat of the successive generations of the dark skinned “satanic” Luther Nedeed.” The original Luther was freedman, who having bought the land in the 1820s, rented shacks to blacks who were too poor to farm. The latter Luther Nedeed is prosperous, follows in the patriarch’s footsteps–each acquires an, ‘Octoroon bride’ to bear the next generation and presides over the increasingly wealthy Linden Hills of his particular day. The setting is Linden Hills and an upper middle–class black community built on a huge plot of land owned by the mysterious Nedeed family. Luther Nedeed, who founded Linden Hills and its community, has a frightening history. After the first Luther Nedeed, each subsequent generation has son named Luther who looks exactly like his father. Likewise, each generation marries a light skinned woman
who is immediately absorbed into the identity of Mrs. Nedeed. However, these wives are not allowed to mix freely with other families and, “...it reflects the life of all the residents of Linden Hills.”

The novel starts from a dispute, which still exits since long years over the exact location of Linden Hills. Linden Hills is always surrounded with certain affairs and discords but there remains one fact, never disputed by anyone is that the Nedeeds have always lived there. Luther’s double great-grandfather buys the entire northern area of the plateau and obtains the hilly land, Tupelo Drive. Luther Nedeed does not try to farm Linden Hills. He only builds a two–room cabin at the bottom of the slope and after the cabin is finished, everyone could see him sitting in front of it for an hour or every day for exactly seven days, “Guess he’s trying to think a living out of that land.”

Luther evermore stares at the sun and during the sun–staring; he plans about the foundation of Linden Hills because he wants his community to be powerful through materialistic achievements, not through the collective efforts of his people. Throughout his life, he never believes in the unity of people, he believes only on himself. The outside world perceives Linden Hills as a symbol of black achievement and is, “…precariously kept in place by the machinations of a wealthy black patriarchal family.” Now, Nedeed builds wooden huts up on the hill for local blacks who are too poor to farm or earn only hand to mouth. He rents out these huts or shacks and alone he wants to rent out Tupelo Drive which is cemetery land but no one is interested to reside in the cemetery land, so they loudly refuse. In 1837, Luther goes away and brings back an octoroon wife. She is almost twenty years old and Nedeed had
owned Linden Hills for almost seventeen years by then. She gives birth a son, who is, “...short, squat, dark, and with an immobile face, even from birth” (4).

Luther for the sake of his only child leaves the land as well as business and sends him in one of the fancy boarding schools. But the son comes back and holds his father’s business and property on his back. When old Luther dies in 1879, he does not die at all because his son too brings an octoroon woman as a wife, Willa, who gives birth to another Luther Nedeed. Nedeed’s two generations have come up and big frog after little frog just go through the hills to take rent every first of the month. Old Luther’s son is finally ready to rent shacks along Tupelo Drive. The tenants are not ready before and still now, they are hesitant to accept the offer as they are surrounded by a cemetery land. The inmates of down Linden Hills are immensely poor but Nedeed does not care how they would be able to pay their rent. Nevertheless, he starts to collect the high charges of huts on the first of the month. Finding no alternative, poor dwellers start to reside in this place and keep paying him rent for that particular place which they hate and let him bury their dead on that cemetery place against their will. Slowly, the mould of the hill starts to alter and the old town turns to be a modern and young city. Nedeed observes the progress of the place and sitting on his porch watches the sun more and thinks, “… it always had over his world” (6).

Linden Hills is outermost useful place because its location makes confiscation for the purpose of a bridge, tunnel or some other public welfare ludicrous. Finally, Nedeed goes throughout the hill with his son and starts with ‘First Crescent Drive’ to ‘Fifth Crescent Drive’ to sell the land to the blacks
who are shacking there. He gives them a thousand year and a day lease. He makes clear if they want to sell it, they can sell it to another black family only or the rights would otherwise, turn back to the Nedeeds. He also gives the same proposal to the tenants who rent along Tupelo Drive. Linden Hills is perplexed over Nedeed’s behavior and, “The government and real estate developers, other than Luther himself, of course, were clearly seen as the white enemy.”

The third Luther plays the role of a conjunction, connecting his grandfather and father to his son, the fourth Luther, who deals with the ‘Great Depression.’ This Luther knows the world is heading white and for him, Linden Hills takes on a new dimension, “…a beautiful, black wad of spit right in the white eye of America”(9). It becomes the job of the fourth Luther to correct the second Luther’s giving away of land. Luther’s grandfather’s dream is still possible and Linden Hills has to be a showcase. It has to turn into a jewel, ‘an ebony jewel’ that would reflect the soul of Wayne County as well as the pride of blacks. The coming generation dreams and feels proud of a true black power which spreads beyond the Nedeed. In the meantime, Nedeed gets rid of the unwanted tenants by either buying or tricking them out of their leases. He finally manages to clear out most of the upper slope but as he reaches ‘First Crescent Drive’, he comes into a trouble with Grandmother Tilson, who is one of the stern guardians of traditional values. Grandmother utterly rejects his proposal because she used to fish with his father in this particular pond and he had given this land to her and, so she is not interested to give it back. Grandmother Tilson outrageously states, “So take your frog–eyed self and
your frog–eyed son out of here” (12). Nedeed takes his son’s hand and leaves Grandmother Mamie Tilson’s yard. Nedeed does not live longer but he visualized the outlines of his place crystallize into a zoned district of eight circular drives that held some of the finest homes, which would ultimately be occupied by the richest black families in the county. Linden Hills is such a place where people work hard, fight hard and save hard for the privileges to rest in the soft shadows of those heart shaped trees.

In the meantime, this Luther too gets married and within a year he becomes a father of a white son. The child for the first five years of his life went unnamed and eschewed by his father. Luther, being shocked tries to explore the reasons and such clues which have entered into his home in the form of white Nedeed, through his wife Mrs. Nedeed. He takes out the journals, charts and through the astrology as well as astronomy, he concludes about his white son that, “There must be five days of penetration at the appearance of Aries, and the son is born when the sun has died”(19). Luther is still confused about his white son, so he wants to take the last opinion of Doctor, who after examining everything, concludes that nothing is abnormal with his reproductive organs. The medical reports opine positive result and holding the written evidence, he feels, “…there was no way that this child could be his son”(19). Mrs. Nedeed feels irritated by Luther’s suspicion. Luther wants to divorce his better half. Mrs. Nedeed leisurely understands that she was brought to Tupelo Drive only for child bearing. Luther does not believe in his wife and is ready to take retribution with Mrs. Nedeed. So, in this process, he first locks her into the basement merely on the doubt that his son
is not his as he does not look like him. While the son dies due to the suffocation at the hands of his mother, helpless Willa Nedeed sustains herself long enough to discover about former Nedeed women. Willa learns, “...a lot about the history of these socially highly respected Nedeed men.... Almost all the Nedeed women died in exile or in seclusion unseen and unheard by the neighbours.”

Moreover, in a cold and chilly weekend, White Willie alias Willie and Shit alias Lester begin their journey down Linden Hills. White Willie is black boy who grew up in the Putney Wayne, neighboring place of Linden Hills and, on the other hand, Shit has the color of a baby’s shit, born and raised in Linden Hills. Willie and Lester approach each other on the side of the school yard and they both like each other. After junior high school and almost after a long time, they again meet each other. Lester has graduated to Spring Vale High school and, on the other hand, Willie does not go to college due to some family problems and pass his life on the streets writing poems. Both rising their nicknames want to be poets. Willie is semi–literate because he had left school after the ninth grade. Lester goes up to high school and then takes a graduation degree only because of his mother’s efforts. Lester’s mother always wants to send him in University but in spite of the mother’s efforts, he does not go to the university. Lester dislikes going in university and mostly gives his mother the reference of Kiswana, who also could not accomplished her college due to revolutionary works. He also discloses that Kiswana’s father never pressurized her for anything and they have the best house on ‘First Crescent Drive.’ Lester’s mother too knows the background of Kiswana and comments, “That Browne
girl was mentally disturbed—everybody knew that—putting holes in her nose, taking some heathen name, and going to live in the slums of Brewster Place” (28). Lester’s mother knows very well that her son wants to be a great poet but in spite of it, she tells him to join the university. Mrs. Tilson believes that Lester’s grandmother Mrs. Mamie Tilson has corrupted his brain, as she corrupted his father Mr. Nedeed’s brain and therefore, Mrs. Tilson wishes that grandmother Mamie Tilson should die soon. Mrs. Tilson has a profound ambition for a better life, “... but they are not shown as coming together out of a fellow-feeling and creating a genuine community. Like many of the men, they are out for themselves and their own families.” Mrs. Tilson is very proud to take her son all over around in Linden Hills.

Willie and Lester support themselves with odd jobs because they are not able to make a livelihood from their work. Willie’s mind is so creative that he can create stanzas continuously and eventually, “... had a repertoire in the hundreds” (29). Willie’s aim is to be like the great slave poet, Jupiter Hammon, who memorized thousands of verses because he could not read. Hammon published nine pieces of prose, verse and in each of them he indicated that he was “... a Negro Man belonging to Mr. Joseph Lloyd.” Willie, although has the great fondness of poetry writing yet somewhere, he is also serious about his future, so he seeks out even fewer or lowest jobs for living. He regularly starts to live in Wayne County renting a room and has started drinking wine and smoking with other young black colleagues, who are also too tired of looking for the job. He is now twenty years old. He being a laborer carries a cereal box out someone’s car and:
With jobs like that, he saw himself frozen in time, never becoming a man, just a very gray-haired boy. He’d think about Linden Hills and all that it offered, and wonder if perhaps there might have been another way (30).

In the meantime, Willie and Lester both meet their old friends and couple, Norman and Ruth. Ruth and Norman, “…an exemplary model of a happily married couple; it is significant that they make their home outside of Linden Hills.” Later on, they cross Linden Road and enter one of the apartment buildings. It is Norman Anderson’s apartment. Norman is sick from some mental problem. He seldom goes to the hospital and mostly comes out after three months. Norman could never or can never stick a job for more than a year. Ruth as a wife feels the longing for children but soon she comes to realize after the fourth summer that Norman can not fulfill her wish. Norman always needs the help of a psychiatrist. Ruth is completely fatigued due to the pressure betwixt her hate and love for Norman. She has lost the hope of children, thinking that one spring definitely Norman would kill her in the fits of insanity. But she once again gives a chance to their married life and lastly Norman and Ruth decide to adopt a baby. Norman wants to own a house in Linden Hills but Ruth dislikes this proposal because she hates to live there and also hates the folks of Linden Hills. Lester and his mother live in Linden Hills, so Ruth apologizes to Lester that she is not anyway trying to talk about his mother. Lester also dislikes the dwellers of Linden Hills and calls them ‘a bunch of the saddest niggers’ and comments that they only eat, sleep and breathe for one thing. Lester directly comments over Xavier Donnell, who is one of the dwellers of Linden Hills and falls in love with Roxanne Tilson, sister of Lester. Meanwhile, Willie, who is passing from an economic crisis,
becomes ready to go for work in Linden Hills. Willie and Lester reach the marble banister near Lester’s house and Lester makes stay Willie at his house that night. Mother Tilson feels glad because she sees Willie after a long time. Willie greets her but somewhere feels some awkward because of his dark black color in front of the delicate, yellow woman. Mrs. Tilson is a consummately broken lady who takes immense care of her son and divulges:

If you listen to him, you’d think it was a crime for me to want a better life for my children that I had.’ …Life wasn’t easy with Mr. Tilson. I never went to college because I got married early and started having children. And then I felt it was my place to be at home and help them to become decent human beings. I only wanted them to have things – to be able to make it in the world alone. You know how hard it is for black people, Willie, and especially black men – everyone wants to hold them down. I didn’t want that to happen to my son. Is that so wrong?(50-51).

Mrs. Tilson also belongs to black community hence, she knows very well about the hardships and atrocities meted out by whites towards blacks. Though Mrs. Tilson moves back but her light voice pecks at Willie’s ears evermore. He concentrates on the words of Mrs. Tilson and thinks loudly that she is living in Linden Hills for the noble cause of other people. She reveals that her husband never wanted anything good or nice and her house is not better rather than homes across Wayne Avenue.

During this conversation, Mrs. Tilson says that she is sustaining her life for the sake of her children. Willie mumbles that he wants to be a poet. Mrs. Tilson first of all notes and then explains that some of the best men of their race are poets but somewhere, she is insecure about Lester’s future that someday Lester will get his poems published. She, time and again, feels:
And what’s to happen twenty, thirty years from now when
I’m dead and gone? Can he ever hope to support a family
from reading in coffeehouse? I know what will happen.
He’ll let my home run down and then sell it for anything to
just about anybody. My grandchildren will be ragged and
homeless. You have a mother, Willie. Does she want that
for you? Is that the way you get this black pride that
Lester’s always writing about? (51-52).

Meanwhile, Roxanne enters, who is, “…the representative for everything
desired by the younger generations of African–American women.”¹² She is
impressed with her black culture and is so enthusiastic that she pays her dues
to the Civil Right Movement and enrolls herself in black history courses in
college. Roxanne wants to marry Xavier but Lester hates him, so there is no
day when both do not argue on this matter. Roxanne lacks patience and being
irritated says to Lester that Xavier is the vice-president of Minority Marketing
at General Motors, whereas, he is nothing in front of Xavier. Lester feels
insulted and instantly tells her that he has also done plenty of works and is
finally working for ‘immortality’. Listening about ‘immortality’ Roxanne
comments that this is not a real job, she knows that he is a poet and
sarcastically says that she has read his ‘junk’. Willie reveals to Lester about
his family that he grew up with five brothers and sisters in three small rooms.
His mother always got beaten up every night after payday by a man, who
could not bring home a paycheck large enough to support three people. Willie
is quite frustrated by his family’s pathetic condition and wishes that no one in
Linden Hills should sustain their lives like his family. Lester, who listens
everything attentively, calms down Willie and says, “You’re right, Willie. I’ve
never had to live that way and I wouldn’t want it now” (58).
Later on, the clock on the mortuary wall ticks for the sixtieth time past midnight and Willa, the wife of last Luther Nedeed, sits at the edge of the cot with her son’s head resting on her shoulder. She has decided that she would not scream and so, “…she closed her eyes and let her mind swing with each movement of the clock’s rusty gears…Sec-onds…Sec-onds…She knew how to die” (65). She knows very well that the days are gone when anybody can rescue her kid’s life. But still she waits for the basement's door to open. Luther prepares to join the funeral ceremony of Parker in two days and then he has to act as an usher at Winston Alcott’s wedding next day mornings. Winston Alcott from Second Crescent Drive and a homosexual resident of Linden Hills ends his eight year old relationship with his lover David just to beat the rumor to get married and to continue his legal career which is under a cloud. He marries and enters, “…a doomed married life.”13 Luther Nedeed grants him a lease on the exclusive Tupelo Drive area. Lester then makes clear that this marriage is going to be one of the classy as well as catered affairs and they need only white waiters for that. Lester and Willie are colored people and, so they know their limitations and restrictions very well. In the meantime, Winston Alcott’s best man David comes to join the marriage ceremony. David says to Winston that, “I won’t be your whore” (75). Though David is not happy with this Winston’s marriage but finally he accepts the reality and once again they commit themselves that they will remain friends and help each other from time to time.

Thus, Winston and Cassandra freeze their images for the wedding album. Willie and Lester, being waiters, join the marriage ceremony and feel surprised to look this big party. Willie secretly feels a bit proud that a black can afford all this.
In Linden Hills, this is the one of the most important marriages, in which besides blacks, the whites too have come. In the meantime, Xavier joins the marriage ceremony and looking at him, Lester becomes exasperated and notices his activities during the ceremony. Xavier Donnell is thirty-one and with a mixture of patience, hard work and premeditated luck, he has managed to move up in a place like General Motors. There is not a moment of his life that Xavier forgets his duties. He falls in love with a black woman, named Roxanne. He is thoroughly entangled in the sensational beauty of Roxanne. Xavier is ambitious person but in the case of Roxanne, he is confused for his choice, so he takes advice to his friend Maxwell. One of the dwellers, Maxwell Smyth, is the highest ranking black executive at General Motors. Maxwell is too ambitious and, so Xavier admires Maxwell’s total control of any situation. Xavier sits near a young blonde and playfully offers her a bit of cheese and whispers in her ear they both laugh. Looking their drama, Lester feels disgusted and decides to talk about him with Roxanne, who is taking interest in Xavier. Lester furiously decides:

‘It is my business’… ‘He came slobbering over my sister just last night, but she’s not good enough to come here with him when it’s broad daylight. I just wanna go out there and let him see me. Then he’ll know his game is up’ (85).

As Lester tries to go in front of Xavier, abruptly Willie stops him. Though Willie succeeds to stop Lester but somewhere he is distressed to look at Xavier’s obscene activities and wants to take revenge against him.

On the other side, Willa in the downstairs blames her inability for the child’s death and initially tries her best to save her kid’s life but failing to save her ‘bastard’ she then tries to rescue herself. Luther decides to give one more
chance to Willa. He goes to the water valves under the kitchen sink and, “…turned them on. Then he clicked on the intercom: ‘Mrs. Nedeed, I'm giving you some water now. There will be no more food. Please catch as much as you can quickly because it won't be on all night’”(69). She has been totally broken away and imagines, “Would this torture never end?”(70). She is horrified but she thinks that in basement there was no need of water, light, food and in spite of it, it does not matter to her. She is determined, “Any possibility of salvation lay withered in her arms. She would have to die down here now. And she would die in her own way”(71). When Willa wakes up, she finally concludes that she should mourn her child. The death of her only child gives strength to take revenge from Luther. She is so depressed that slowly she begins to smile and finding complete silence, she starts to laugh, to cough up phlegm and blood. She is injured but however, she does not stop and again she laughs and spite. Here, Naylor very impressively shows every notion of human beings and tries to display the black women’s marginalized condition in the black community. She, through the character of Willa shows the brutality of blacks towards their wives and children. Still smiling, Mrs. Luther reaches upstairs to wipe the tears away and seems that:

Yes, it would kill her. Her breathing was still deep but evenly spaced as she wiped the mucus from her nose with her sweater sleeve. Always taking the easy way out. Always. You're a coward even up to the end, aren't you?(91).

She sighs and pulling the child’s body toward her, she at once recalls her son’s words, “Daddy doesn’t like me…. doesn't play with me. He doesn't talk to me”(92). Mrs. Luther always made him to understand that his father loved
him. As a good mother, she always tries to change the feelings of her son towards Luther. Finally, she prepares herself for her destiny:

The wetness from the tears that couldn't fall through her clenched eyes helped to smolder the burning fires in her head. She sat down on the other cot trembling. I'm so sorry but I can't mourn you. It hurts too much to die that way (92).

When Willa searches out the cloth to cover her dead son, that time she finds a Bible book including her predecessors i.e. Nedeed women, who too undergo the same angst and anguish at the hands of their men i.e. Nedeed men. In this series, first of all, she discovers Luwana's letters, the story of the woman who is her ancestor-in-law, unfolds slowly and reads them on a literal surface level, stunned by a distant story of loneliness that matches her own, “The optimism of the ancient slaves parallels the hopes of those people held in slavery during the early years of United States history, as the years in the wilderness reflect what Luwana, upon this writing, had yet to discover.” Willa stares down at the Bible in her lap and trembling she goes back to reread the entry between the books of Genesis and Exodus. Willa comes to know about Luwana’s two marriages and is confused about Luwana’s past. Willa now has the key to Luwana Packerville’s buried memories, “The rules about housekeeping are placed in Leviticus, a book devoted to delivering the proper procedures for ritual sacrifices and ritual purity.” Luwana’s sadness about not knowing her own mother is another way of saying that she was sold from her before she could remember her. Willa reads and knows this Bible very well. Willa touches her son’s body and finally begins to cry.

Willa Nedeed is surrounded by piles of dusty and yellowing cookbooks. Searching further about Luwana, she finds another predecessor, Evelyn
Creton Nedeed, who was the wife of third Luther Nedeed. As Evelyn’s story unfolds for Willa, she sees a person obsessed with cooking, one who “...baked continually and in equally huge amounts” (140). Whenever Willa becomes confused or goes in dilemma, that time she always hears her great-aunt Mama (Miranda) Day. Naylor’s inclusion of the central character of her third novel, Mama Day appears at this point and only in Willa’s memory of her own more youthful days. Willa has been continuously staring at Evelyn Creton’s last page for hours and she is not aware of the time and days spent in the basement. She recalls her loving life as well as her loving seasons, her home, her husband and her only child. But her dreams break away, when she feels the breaths of those women who have come before her as Luwana Packervilles, Evelyn Cretons and some others who else through the book. She is injured, so blood from the open scars drips down behind her eyes as she looks around the basement in futile bewilderment.

Willie and Lester turns into ‘Fourth Crescent Drive’, reach at the Parkers home, where his wife Lycentia Parker’s funeral would be done 22nd December, when Willie hears a strange sound, “Willie, eat it...Eat it...”(145). In his sleep Willie dreams and hears an echoing sound of Willa, “Will he eat it?”(147) He runs down the dark corridor, he is terrified with the ghostly fingers, bloody snakes and crumbling brown sweets that seem to stretch a head of him into eternity. He, time and again, thinks about Luther and his words that his wife baked it. Willie does not believe in Luther and also knows that the cake which brought by Luther is different and, “…he had almost missed tasting her absence”(147). In fact, he is confused as to why Luther lied
that his wife baked it. Through this sequence, Naylor indirectly articulates Willa’s revelation that she is absconding for the last one week and nobody is worried on this issue. Through Willie’s dream Willa points out that somebody should search her and her son. But all her efforts go in vain.

Later on, Willie and Lester meet Rev. Hollis and Willie really feels glad to meet him. Willie asks Hollis about the wife of Luther whether he has seen her or not. First of all, Hollis reacts badly but Willie makes him understand that he thinks that their homes are so close, so he just wants to know how she looks like. Hollis replies that he never seen her. He explains frankly about Luther that he sets a bad example for the rest. He never brings his boy to Sunday school while the child must be four or five by now. After describing Luther, Hollis says to Willie that, “So how can you expect the rest to do any better when he has an attitude like that?” (171). The Youngman is impressed with Hollis but at this time, “The young man had taught him one thing this morning: there are many subtle ways with which you can make one strong point”(174).

Meanwhile, Willie and Lester have left ‘Fifth Crescent Drive’ after funeral and go to Tupelo Drive. As they reach the entrance to Tupelo Drive, a police car rolls up silently behind them. Before they can speak, one of the policemen runs over and pushes them against the brick pillars, while the other keeps his gun point at them. Willie is horrified and Lester being outrageous shouts upon them, “I want to know what the hell is going on!’… ‘Somebody is gonna answer for this’”(195). One of the policemen divulges that they have been chasing them for the last ten minutes and wonder as to why they have
done nothing but only stand there. Lester confidently explains to them that he lives in Linden Hills and he is the legal owner of the property at ‘One Hundred First Crescent Drive’. The policemen are the security in-charge of Tupelo Drive, so they make them understand that they are standing inside the entrance to Tupelo Drive, which is a privately owned road that runs past through the privately owned property. Willie very smartly replies that they have been working in this place all the week. They have done jobs for the Donnells and the Parkers, and they just left a truck up on ‘Fifth Crescent Drive’ at Reverend Hollis’s place, and when they are released they are about to go down on the next street and start working there. The policemen do not believe them and warn them to leave the place immediately. Meanwhile, Norman Anderson comes down Linden Road and asks about the problem amongst them. Norman tells Willie and Lester that Mrs. Dumont, another dweller, is waiting for them at her house over an hour back. The policemen explain that these clowns never said they are going to the D.A.’s house i.e. Mr. Howard Dumont, the district attorney and husband of Laurel Dumont. As Norman tries to pacify the situation, the policeman interrupts; he is going to check this story out with Mrs. Dumont. Finally, they all reach at the Dumont’s house but the policeman does not insist for more inquiry and leaves them on the surety that they will never loiter around down anymore.

Willie and Lester have started their new job of shoveling the snow from Mrs. Dumont’s house. During the shoveling, Willie’s smile abruptly vanished, when he looks at Luther Nedeed coming toward them. Lester and Willie know about Luther’s work, so, they do not tend to react and continue their job. While
Luther moves, he urges them to help him trim up his Christmas tree at evening and Willie accepts it. They both again start to complete their remaining work and at once, they hear twice a woman’s voice calling ‘Laurel.’ Willie and Lester both are astonished and see same questions reflected in each other’s faces. As they look up, they see an old woman, named Roberta Johnson, grandmother of Laurel, and follow the direction of the woman’s voice. Suddenly, they find that it is a tall, slender body in a silver bathing suit crushed into the bottom of the empty pool, named Laurel. Laurel Dumont commits suicide by choosing a final dive during the coldest time of the year. Willie is the first to discover Laurel’s body; he is summoned to the back yard by the sound of an impatient voice that could easily be, “… the cry of an old woman, calling a little girl home” (216). Naylor links each of the plaintive repetitious calls of Laurel’s grandmother with memories which prepare the reader for retrospective trip through Laurel’s early days, “…the connection with Roberta in her Georgia backwoods country home and Laurel’s early obsessions with water and music.”

Laurel’s name suggests her status. At 722 Tupelo Drive, various members of the Dumont family remained residents for nearly sixty years; Laurel has been there for near about ten years. She has been a winner during all her life. Laurel’s mother died when she was quite young. When her father remarries, Laurel feels alienated from her stepmother. As a result, the girl begins spending summers in rural Georgia with her grandmother, Roberta Johnson. Her tragic story is the most developed among the minor women character of Linden Hills. As she grows up, she graduates Phi Beta Kappa from Berkeley and works her way into a top executive position at IBM and marries a man believed to become the next
State’s Attorney. However, she remains emotionally far removed from her husband and even from her deepest sense of herself. In fact, she destroys her essential spirit in order to be successful and free. When her husband decides to divorce her, “… she faces not just the emptiness of her life, but the emptiness of herself.” At the end, a confrontation with Luther Nedeed makes her realize that there is no inner core to her person but only a frightening void. Luther Nedeed wants to vacate his house from Laurel Dumont because he gets the information from Mr. Howard Dumont, that he is leaving his wife Laurel and the house too. The land was only leased to the Dumonts in 1903 and subsequently the Tupelo Realty Corporation underwrote the mortgage for the house that was built on it. Now, that gave Dumont’s the right to live at this place for a thousand years and a day. Luther further explains to Laurel, if Dumont no longer wishes to reside here and as there are no children to inherit the lease, the property reverts back to the original owner that is Luther himself. Being outraged, Laurel warns him to see in court and not come in her house again. Laurel becomes insane and being insane; she smiles, kisses the wrinkled forehead of her grandmother and gently closes the door. She wears her bathing suit over her lean body and dives off the high board into an empty pool, “But once she got down, there would be nothing to fear. Once she got down, she’d be free”(248). As she kills herself by diving off the high board into an empty pool, her mutilated and faceless body symbolizes, “…her spiritual condition.”

Willie is shocked on Laurel’s death. Meanwhile, an old man desires to know much more about Laurel’s death and, so he stares at Willie with some hope. He tells him that his name is Daniel Braithwaite and he lives in one
street down from Tupelo Drive. Willie still ignoring the old man waits for Lester and as Lester comes to Willie at once Braithwaite too joins them. Throughout the week, Daniel Braithwaite has been watching Willie and Lester. When Laurel Dumont takes her fatal plunge, he comes instantly there to offer warmth and wisdom to Willie and Lester. He is a retired history professor, whose life’s work has been chronicling the history of Linden Hills. Lester thinks that she was crazy but Braithwaite emphasizes that:

‘She was not insane.’… ‘True insanity, as frightening as it might be, gives a sort of obliviousness to the chaos in a life. People who commit suicide are struggling to order their existence, and when they see it’s a losing battle, they will finalize it rather than have it wrenched from them…. Laurel Dumont died as deliberately as she lived, believe me. And I could tell she was on that path months ago’(256).

Lester tells the old man that he should have tried to stop this unfortunate incident. Mournful Braithwaite says, “How do you suggest that a mere outsider would have been any more effective?”(256). Braithwaite is suspicious about Laurel’s death and he is of the view that somebody might have killed her. Willie and Lester want to know about the suspected murderer and Braithwaite draws their attention toward Luther Nedeed.

Moreover, after discovery of Evelyn Creton Nedeed, Willa explores another horrible incident about Nedeed woman. She is still with the album of Priscilla McGuire in her lap and also knows that she is no more. Willa’s discovery of the pictures leads to her third and final Mrs. Nedeed, who happens to be her mother-in-law, the fifth Luther’s mother and her child’s grandmother. Priscilla’s absence in the family culminates in the last
photograph where only an empty hole exists in her place and, “...in lilac-colored ink was the word me”(249). She is disturbed with her husband’s misbehavior and punishment given by rude Luther Nedeed. Her condition is so pathetic that she can not even sit or stand properly. Naylor has primarily chosen to describe the plight of females in African–American society, since birth to death, so in this process she clearly depicts the miserable and critical conditions of a black woman, whose only guilt is that she delivered a white son. For this purpose, she is perpetually bearing the torture and vexation from her husband. She is injured and in a painful condition but in spite of it, she is surviving and sustaining her life. In the small space, she passes the ghosts from every spectrum of human emotion and finally she has released in that room. Though she starts to cry but for the first time, she feels relieved and accepts the reality and tranquil calm. For whatever it is worth, she can rebuild her life once again. Naylor, through Willa’s character not only shows the critical life of a black woman but also tries to show the torment, male domination and the black male chauvinism. After depicting such miserable conditions of black female, Naylor further portrays the struggle and profound protest of black females towards male bigotry. At the same time, she tries to raise her females to resist and revolt against male torment and gives them inspiration for re-shaping their life.

After bearing a long torment, Willa mournfully recalls her flashback as well as her family background. Her name is Willa Prescott Nedeed. She is thirty-year old. She does not know the real intention behind her name but as she recalls the reason of her name, she gets that, “…she just liked the
rhythm; it was lyrical and delicate”(277). She is educated from a well-to-do college. The name ‘Prescott’ comes from her father because it belongs to his father. Willa Prescott Nedeed is alive and she has made herself that. She imports the ‘white satin pumps’ that takes Willa Prescott down the aisle six years back and brings her back up as Willa P. Nedeed. She married to Luther Nedeed according to her choice. But there are few queries always remain, “…How did she come to be exactly where she was? She pushed away what had happened or why it happened? If there was any hope for her at all, it rested solely on the how: How did she get down in that basement?”(278) and after a year of marriage, she becomes a mother of a son. Remembering about the son she losses her self-control but then, she takes a profound breath. As the child grew up; he had toys, alphabet books, because he was just learning to read. She gave him her all attention and whole time, so he could learn to speak. While, she was nurturing her son, she did not forget that she is a good wife also who is quite careful not to bring petty domestic problems before her husband that may overburden him more than he already is. She accepted a separate bedroom without any complaint and even she spent all those nights alone, “…that he could be distant and distracted at times, that so much of his life just couldn’t include her”(279). Willa is alive and now she has to be extremely careful in future. Willa Nedeed is a good mother as well as wife. For the last six years, she can claim her identity without any reservations. Willa has been annihilated and in loneliness sits on a cot in a basement because she is now no longer anyone’s mother as well as wife. But still, a question remains, “So how did that happen?”(279). Willa can no longer blame Luther.
She now gains a sense of power from this possession. As she goes in flashback of her dead son, she finds him replaying each moment spent there through this new and awesome reality. Finally, Willa struggles and comes upstairs. Though she has left her identity that is rightfully hers but she has to work hard to achieve it back. Many women would not have chosen it or compel to suicide but she proved herself a strong woman. Her act of self-affirmation instantly becomes an act of revenge. Willa’s journey from innocence to self discovery is a dead end but she has also brought to an end the Nedeed’s dynasty. She restored briefly to a meaningful life through her recognition of a common bond with these other women. The power she achieves is fierce. From a survey of these stories, it should be clear that the males often mistreat females and the fact sisterhood is often a reaction against males. Naylor finally succeeds to change the tracks and again she portrays the character according to her desire. After enduring sufficient agony, Willa wakes up with determination. Willa has been passing her life in utter torment for the last six years and however, she owes no damned apologies from anyone. Willa is filthy, cold and hungry and has walked down twelve concrete steps in a basement she is determined to walk back up for a fresh lease of life.

Everywhere the preparations of Christmas Eve are going on. Luther is somewhere confused and thinks, “Did she know what she had given up?” (287). Luther’s blood warms rapidly. He repents and feels that it is an error of verdict, one that his father would never have committed but unfortunately he has done. He ponders over that it is not irretrievable; it is just
that the child has died. Though he feels uncomfortable with this incident but this compounded feeling of futility is new to him as he wavers between self-pity and anger. But lastly anger wins out. He always has every reason in the world to act as he does and under the circumstances, he has been more than just. The two days are remaining for Christmas and within these two days; Luther intends to bring her out of the basement on Christmas day.

On Christmas Eve, Willie and Lester come to the house of Luther Nedeed. They all try to decorate the Christmas tree and Luther suggests to Willie to use the candles on tree. Although placing candles on tree could be harmful yet Luther tells them to do it. On the other side, Willa Prescott Nedeed meticulously packs away the torn books, clothes and mostly Priscilla McGuire’s album on the box and then she goes over to her child and lifts him up. She is sad because the child barely had a chance to live. He was just learning to write his name. She recalls Luther’s attitude towards his son that, “His father had said that he didn’t care what she called him, so she had taught him to spell Sinclair”(294). Willa heads for the concrete steps and after it the kitchen is next and then the distance between couple will be vanished. In Nedeed’s house, Luther is placing the last candle and on the other way, Willa begins to climb up closer to the door. She holds the child tightly as each step taken farther above the stale air of the basement. After reaching the door, she shifts the child in her arms and pushes the door. As she opens the door, Willie becomes shocked to find her six and seven condition. Entering in the room she says, “‘Luther’… ‘your son is dead’”(299). Her presence startles Luther and he all of sudden wants to get Lester and Willie out of his house to deal
with the dead child. Willie and Lester’s face become bewildered and, “They neither touched nor spoke as the wind shrieked between them, carrying the silent questions behind their widening eyes” (299). Luther reaches near the child and the moment his fingers touch the covered body, making a fraction of space betwixt it and Willa. The whole episode takes place in front of Willie and Lester. Willie tells Lester to call the cops but Lester tells him, who would believe them. But Willie finally decides to complain against Luther to kill his own son. As they cross the lake of Tupelo Drive, at once they find that Luther’s house is on fire. The Neeede’s home becomes a pile of charred wood. Willie and Lester really feel sad. After this gruesome incident, they walk out of the Tupelo Drive. Willa at last gets her physical end in the fire, since, she was mentally sick prior to her brutal death. Having depicted Willa’s miserable condition, Gloria Naylor has two choices concerning Willa’s fate: Willa can either die or otherwise she can succumb to the overwhelming pressure brought out by her husband and suffer the same agony as former Neeede wives. Willa Neeede, despite the humiliating plights at the hands of Luther Neeede, tries to come out of the agony but, “Willa expects the life of a good black woman, but, she fails in getting such a satisfactory life.”20 As a result, she prepares to disobey every rule, which was responsible to refuse her the humanity and womanhood. She destroys the plan of Luther Neeede by emerging out of basement and displays her ‘strength’ and ‘power’ in front of every man. By coming out of basement and subsequently by grappling Luther Neeede and Jumping into the fire along with her dead son, Willa Neeede not only punished herself for choosing a wrong person as husband but also
punished Luther for his misdeeds and barbarity against innocent person i.e. his wife Willa.

As we peruse the novel, *Linden Hills*, it becomes clear that the problems prevalent in Brewster Place do not disappear just because some women have made it to an upper middle-class neighborhood. The predicament of Willa Prescott Nedeed, exemplifies the circumstances under which all the Nedeed wives met with their end. Willa Nedeed is a symbol of sufferings at the hands of her husband. Like other preceding Nedeed women, Willa’s story ends in, “progressive depersonalization.” Willa has been put into the basement by her husband, Luther, who is the last in a long line of Nedeed men. Willa’s offense is merely that she bore a child with light–skin. In presenting the Nedeed dynasty, Naylor has presented another extreme case of male oppression and as in the case of women in Brewster Place, one can understand the limits, Nedeed women bear the pain for their own plights. It is Willa herself, who wanted to be a Nedeed woman. Her husband’s distant ancestor was the founder of Linden Hills and the Nedeeds have always wielded considerable power. Although she has been relegated to the basement, the will to emerge out of it, still remains in Willa’s hands. She was ‘manipulated’ down into that hole:
And she owed no damned apologies to anyone for the last six years of her life. She was sitting there now, filthy, cold, and hungry, because she, Willa Prescott Nedeed, had walked down twelve concrete steps. And since that was the truth – the pure, irreducible truth – whenever she was good and ready, she could walk back up (280).

Through Willa’s endeavor to overcome the pressure and humiliation, Naylor depicts that even under such horrible conditions; one can overcome the pressure with sustained endeavor and willpower. Naylor also presents a case of sustaining struggle between good and the evil. Although Willa is consciously disintegrated and after facing such humiliation at the hands of her husband yet she asserts herself and struggles against diabolic mal–activities of her husband, Luther Nedeed. Willa’s past is prosperous because she belongs to well–to–do family. In spite of being physically weak and helpless, she is compelled to live up for the sake of her dead son because she wants to provide him proper funeral. What happened in the basement with Willa and her child was inhuman injustice. Although Willa has been forced to forego her rights as a mother as well as a wife yet she wants to fight against the injustice matted out to her by Luther Nedeed. When she was abandoned in the basement and was likely to die, she any how regained her will power and comes up to face Luther. She clasps Luther in a strong death grip and the three–Willa, Luther and the child–burn in the Christmas tree fire. Willa, throughout her life lived as she wishes but after marriage, she chooses her death at the hands of Luther Nedeed. This self-consciousness has been appropriately stated by Naylor in a conversation with Toni Morrison:

After she had dug up the remnants of the other Nedeed woman, I created a way for her to see her own reflection in a pan of water...And when she realized that she had a
Willa’s story begins with her reactions over her predicament. She via her will-power defeats the plan of her husband and gains her loosing identity and self-dignity. She immediately ponders over her life span so far her wrong decision of marriage with a wrong person and finally the awful death of her son. She takes a grave decision to ruin her own life and at the same time to eliminate Luther, who is an evil to the society by throwing herself along with Luther and dead son in the fire of Christmas tree. At last Willa’s decision, by choosing death instead of life, for saving her identity and self dignity, clearly indicates that a self respected black woman, even can choose death to preserve her existence and honor. Justifying her character Naylor further opines:

But when this character who had lived within me now for two years finally discovered her face in that pan of water, she decided that she liked being what she was. She liked being a wife and a mother and she was going upstairs to claim that identity. And I said, “Oh, Lord, woman, don’t you know what the end of this book has got to be?” You’ve gotta tear that whole house down to the ground or my book won’t make any sense. Obviously, she didn’t care... But then again that was her life and her decision. So the ball was thrown back into my lap — my job was to figure out a way for this woman to live her life and for me to end that book the way I wanted to.23

Throughout the novel *Linden Hills* there are apparently two major phases, one is relating to Luther Nedeed and his integrity toward the black community and other one is relating to Willa Prescott Nedeed, wife of Luther Nedeed, who bears extreme anguish and agony. Luther’s philosophy of life established the rule for the generations that followed. Men are important and
they control life as well as death. Women are not important because they are owned, bred and then forgotten. As financially strong man Luther never saw women as human beings. Willa is a pale-skinned ‘octoroon’ woman completely dominated by his dark-skinned husband. After delivering a white son, she faces unbearable torment as well as atrocities and remain languish few days in basement as prisoner. Willa as a wife endures her husband’s fury and rage but in spite of it, she resists the agony and torments and then, she comes out the basement with new determination. At the end of the novel, Willa Nedeed succeeds not only by gaining a new strength but also in giving miraculously a new birth to herself with a revolutionary intention:

…the amber germ of truth she went to sleep with [the truth that she does exist, that she has her own name, and that she can walk up out of the basement] conceived and reconceived itself, splitting and multiplying to take over every atom attached to her being (289).

Her son is already dead and she too dies at the end of the novel. Willa Nedeed’s story of resistance and rebirth resonates, “…not only with classical and later western accounts of the successful effacement of women but also with feminist critiques of and resistance to such effacement.”

During the discourse with Toni Morrison, Naylor reveals that Willa’s end is the appropriate climax of the novel and through the end of Willa’s character; she i.e. [Willa] gains the appreciation as well as sympathy and consolation from everyone. From the starting of the novel, Willa is only one black woman, belonging to Nedeed family, who does not care about the rules and percepts of this family and after facing enough awesome problems, she
presents her real existence. In the climax of the novel, Willie and Lester, residents of Linden Hills, observe each and every incident and come to the conclusion about Willa that she was a venturesome spirit. People just watch the burning of the Nedeed house and do not attempt to help them out. In this series we can see another example of Laurel Dumont. She has been a winner all her life, "To attain the present level, she has to cultivate her natural and physical talents though she starved emotionally." Lauearl too throughout the life faces such adversities which are given by her father as well as her husband. When she was quite young, her mother dies and her father remarries and as a result, she feels alienated by her stepmother. With the passage of time, she grows up and after graduation; she works and finally marries Huward Dumont. But the harmony between the couple breaks soon and she remains emotionally separated from her husband. As a result, Mr. Dumont decides to divorce her, which makes her enraged. Laurel Dumont too is the victim of torment and exile. Although she does not bear physical violence yet she suffers from mental agony. She gradually becomes mentally disturbed and as she meets Mr. Nedeed, he makes her realize that, "...there is no inner core to her person but only a frightening void." She initially tries to resist such male humiliations but ultimately comes under the pressure of suffocating atmosphere; she commits suicide by diving off the high board into an empty pool. By choosing death in place of tolerating male chauvinism, Laurel Dumont amply exhibited her resistance under the circumstances. In fact, there are varieties of women or men characters in the novel, who bear violence and exile in the same way. One such character is Grandmother
Tilson, who is also the prey of violence and exile. She bravely confronts Luther Nedeed. Although she is no more alive yet she had fought Luther Nedeed as the lone-fighter against his upward-striving black community. She had provided the catfish heads that Luther Nedeed used to make the female corpses seem alive as if passing on some principle of female vitality. But her all efforts go in vain when she finds negative response from middle-class residents. She resists the mal-tactics of Luther Nedeed and confronts him at herself giving her rebirth of strength and power.

Another character Cassandra who is rarely mentioned in the novel, is made the victim of another, “spurious marriage” with the homosexual Winston Alcott, who betrays himself and his male lover David for respectability as an attorney. Cassandra faces deceive and torments by her husband. Despite being a homosexual, Winston deliberately marries with Cassandra deceiving her about his homosexuality. Cassandra as a dutiful wife does not cross her limitation but after bearing a lot of pressure, she finally recognizes her identity and decides to confront her husband boldly. There are some male characters in the novel, who bear the same conditions and after much resistance, they too come up by giving rebirth to their identity and dignity. In this connection, the first two characters come in the mind are: Willie and Lester, who are good friends. They have faced adversity as well as ill-will in the society. Willie is so black that he is called ‘White’ and, on the other hand, Lester has the color of a baby’s stool, so he is called ‘Shit’. The ancestors of both the boys have faced violence as well as exile and, so both are grown up in gloomy atmosphere. Though they are free from slavery but somewhere
they are in pressure by Luther Nedeed. When Luther’s wife Willa emerges out of basement, Willie and Lester were present in the Luther’s house. Willa grips Luther and along with her dead son, jumps over the Christmas tree in front of the shocking eyes of both the boys. Although Willie and Lester were prepared to complain against Luther Nedeed’s ill behavior in the society yet seeing the brutal end of his life they consider it an end of an evil person. Thus, one can find that each and every character of the novel face and bear the torment, humiliation and exile in the society either in one form or the other but every character at the end, resists such evil tactics and makes rebirth of their lost identity and dignity.

Through five generations of Nedeeds, Linden Hills eventually grew and prospered comprising a wealthy, middle-class black community. The V-shaped land i.e. Linden Hills is the black space par excellence and simultaneously the realization of Luther Nedeed’s vision of what a black space should be. As the land value of Linden Hills increased, old Luther Nedeed’s son decided to protect the community from the encroachment of white community by offering a thousand-year-and-a-day lease to the poor blacks living there. He provided that they passed the plots on to their children or to another black family and failing this, it will have back to the Nedeed family itself. The integrity of the blackness of Linden Hills clearly proclaims that Nedeed has scattered a showcase – black community against white community. To show up the white racists who had attempted to force the blacks out of Linden Hills, Nedeed had to create a jewel–an ebony jewel that reflected the soul of Wayne County. Nedeed thus finds the Tupelo Realty
Corporation and begins financing and building private developments in Linden Hills as well as carefully selecting those, who would live in them. Luther chooses only those, who were willing to forget the ‘black’ past of slavery, failure and is ready to buy into the vision of a ‘black’ material progress that could be a part of Linden Hills; everyone else was either forced out by Nedeed or denied a mortgage by the Tupelo Realty Corporation. Through the extreme efforts of Luther, Linden Hills thus, becomes a model of black success story. Linden Hills now appears to be a stable, highly demarcated, black space with respect both to the internal division of space and prestige among its black inhabitants and to the surrounding ‘white’ Wayne County. Throughout Linden Hills, Luther Nedeed and his ancestors very effectively use the terms of racism and politics and by exploiting these terms to their advantage establish their own position, where only Nedeeds would command like monarchs. As Willa sees the threads of her own life woven into the full tapestry of Luwana’s story of isolation and deprivation, she knows how dangerously she is trapped by Luther Nedeed. Naylor makes clear that Luwana had no community that awaits a word from her, so the placement of her loneliness in Acts and Romans is appropriate. Further, Naylor’s placement of Luwana’s story in this location, highlights the increasing awareness of this character, as to how women’s way in the world is subjected to the on going control of men; passing from one to another, is a line that moves through hundreds of years. Willa finds the story of second Nedeed woman, named Evelyn Nedeed, Evelyn was fond of cooking and since Evelyn cooked so much, Willa determines she must have been immensely built but then notices
that laxatives in enormous quantities make their way to her lists. Abandoning hope of affecting Luther in either way, Evelyn determines to torture herself through intake of these purgatives. Finally, she takes her life, most likely mixed in the vanilla ice cream that the delivery boy brings on Christmas Eve.

After reading about Evelyn, Willa’s discovery about Nedeed women leads to her third and final Mrs. Nedeed, Priscilla McGuire, who happens to be her mother-in-law, the fifth Luther’s mother, her child’s grandmother. Priscilla’s face has disappeared through the annual family portraits over the years and Willa comments over it that, “Her face was gone” (249). In the last photos, Priscilla has cut or blotched out her face and in the empty space has written, “me” (249). Priscilla’s absence in the family, culminates in the last photograph where only an empty hole exists in her place and in, “lilac-colored ink was the word me” (249). Priscilla died without any existence because the third Luther and his son gradually swallowed this spirited woman’s selfhood until she began removing her face from all the pictures. She affirmed her own identity, freedom and sense of responsibility for her own life. So, this was another chronicle of a Nedeed wife wasted, destroyed and gone. First Luwana Packerville, then Evelyn Creton and then Priscilla McGuire are erased from their existence. Now, it is the turn of Willa, who is also the prey of her husband’s torments and faces the calamities in the world of racism and politics. Nedeed considers her white-skinned child a bastard, and to punish his wife he locks her and the seven-year-old boy in the morgue – basement of his home with a limited supply of cereal and water. As a prisoner in the basement, she understands her own predicament. Her future is nonetheless
different from her predecessors. It is in her forced stay in the basement that she learns the history of all previous Nedeed’s women, such as Luwana Packerville Nedeed, Evelyn Creton Nedeed and Priscilla McGuire Nedeed etc. Confinement in the basement forces Willa to, “…confront the truth about her life.” After going through the album of photographs, Willa gradually becomes aware of her own situation. This self-consciousness compels Willa to protest against her husband. The final stage of her attaining consciousness is the rediscovery of her first name and the realization of what she had become, a good wife and a mother in limited circumstances. Having examined the life story of previous Nedeed women, Willa evaluates her own position as Nedeed’s wife and comes to conclusion that her life is not worthless and she has no honorable place in Nedeed’s world. She finally takes a bold step and to take revenge against Luther comes out of basement. She clasps Luther in a strong death grip and Willa, along with Luther, and the dead child–Jumps into the Christmas tree fire. By choosing death instead of a miserable and dishonorable life, she achieves self-respect and justice with a new strength derived from recognizing the accumulated sufferings of the Nedeed women. Thus, Willa very effectively protests against male dominating society and gives message to other black women about ‘strength’ and ‘power’ which she used against Luther. Although Willa is no more yet her invisible presence tries to motivate other black women to survive with dignity and honor.

*Linden Hills* also contains the elements of racism and politics. Linden Hills is the story of a black patriarch who fights against racism and politics thinking that he is a, “demi-god” who can rule the life of other inferior African
– Americans. Each Nedeed, first to fifth, always neglects, sidetracks and tortures their women, believing they have no role to play except bearing children. And once they deliver a child to help their husband, their role in this world is considered over. Finally, they are tormented under his robust patriarchal power. Black women for him are child producing machines. Moreover, each Nedeed woman has neither women friend nor do they have access to any knowledge of how other couples live. Willa, the last Mrs. Nedeed, bears enough agony and reading about previous Nedeed women, she comments, “It seems so unjust that I am barred from having friends among the white wives because of my husband’s color and among the colored because of his wealth” (120). Willa though is permitted to perform social functions befitting Luther’s wife but she has no opportunity to develop friendship or communication with other community women. The blacks are against the white domination and the black monarch like Nedeeds try their best to strengthen their community against the whites. This sense of racism gives them immense strength to stand against the whites. But, on the other way, they are not generous enough to provide a dignified life with equal rights to their women. The agony and torments meted out to Nedeed women for generations, amply exhibits that the black women have to fight their own battle for honor and dignity all alone. Sometimes this battle is with husbands and sometimes with their family members. Hence, the male dominated black society remains under control of black males either to fight the racism against whites or to play power-politics within their community whereas the black women remain engaged to fight their battles against sexism and racism.
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