



E. LYNN HARRIS

"MOVING AND BOLD, THIS IS A COMPELLING STORY THAT COMMANDS AND HOLDS THE ATTENTION UNTIL THE FINAL PAGE IS TURNED." —ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Invisible Life

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Invisible Life is the story of a young man's coming of age. Law school, girlfriends, and career choices were all part of Raymond Tyler's life, but there were other, more terrifying issues for him to confront. Being black was tough enough, but Raymond was becoming more and more conscious of sexual feelings that he knew weren't "right." He was completely committed to Sela, his longtime girlfriend, but his attraction to Kelvin, whom he had met during his last year in law school, had become more than just a friendship. No matter how much he tried to suppress them, his feelings were deeply sexual.

Fleeing to New York to escape both Sela and Kelvin, Raymond finds himself more confused than ever before. New relationships -- both male and female -- give him enormous pleasure but keep him from finding the inner peace and lasting love he so desperately desires. The horrible illness and death of a friend force Raymond, at last, to face the truth.

Invisible Life Details

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Author : E. Lynn Harris

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From Reader Review Invisible Life for online ebook

Kenneth Wade says

Invisible Life follows the lives of several black men in the 1990s, most of whom are queer and closeted. Because of this, the story deals heavily with homophobia (external and internal), identity struggles, and AIDS. It also discusses the ways that the women in their lives are affected by their actions.

This book is pretty outdated on its ideas of sexuality (and particularly bisexuality) at times, and I couldn't tell if the author was commenting on that or falling victim to it.

The main character, Raymond, is incredibly selfish. He drags people along with no concern for how it might affect them, so long as *he* is happy. He is very inconsistent, acting immaturely on whims and impulses. Again, I couldn't tell if the author was condoning or reprimanding this behavior.

I think this book is very much like a time capsule, representative of how it felt to be a black queer man in the 1990s. However, I'm not sure how much cultural value it holds in 2018 because of its outdated portrayals of sexuality and masculinity.

That being said, I did find it both interesting and entertaining. Watching Raymond's life unfold was something akin to a Shakespearean tragedy. There are two more books in this series, but as of now I have no interest in continuing. Maybe I'll try one of Harris' other books?

3 out of 5 stars

Tamika says

Excerpts from my readers response notebook...

"Could you give up the lifestyle and the life?"

"But what would she disapprove of most? Would her reaction be the same if I were enjoying the same conversation with Quinn? Would she have preferred me to be dating a white woman or dating a black man?"

So I wrote these excerpts when I read this book three years ago. No clue what the context was from the story...or what my thoughts were. Presently, I don't know what would infuriate me more...to find out that my man was with a white woman (or any woman for that matter) or dating a man. If you admit that dating a man would make you more upset does that make you homophobic?? Does this level of deceit...to cheat with a man surpass the deception of cheating with a woman? Is there more pain and anger that comes from finding out that it is a man that he has turned to rather than another woman?? And does the reverse hold true...meaning that men would be more angered about cheating with a woman over a man? :o) For some reason I'm inclined to think they would be more accepting of a lesbian relationship than we would be of a gay relationship.

Still unsure what my answer would be...pray that I never have to experience this.

Coffeeboss says

Having learned of author Harris via his recent death, I was curious about his introductory groundbreaking novel that was one of the first to acknowledge gay and bisexual black men on the "down low" who passed as straight. The idea of the character Ray being simultaneously in love with two perfect people (male Quinn and female Nicole) is intriguing, but the writing was, I have to say, pretty awful. Ex: "Her skin tone was a yellowish brown-waffle color," "Her skin was paper-sack brown," "I could see my black Jockey shorts against my camel-colored skin," and, my favorite, "she moved [my hand:] toward her erected breasts." Wow. I wish I could say nicer things about this book, but I can only hope Harris' writing got better as his career became established.

Erica says

This was the first down low book I ever read and my first book by this author.

The story is developed around two gay male characters...one of which is a flamboyant, out of the closet man....the other is a more conservative, professional man that seems confused and ashamed by his sexuality...Raymond is his name. The two main characters are best friends so we learn two perspectives on gay life for a black man in America.

Needless to say this book was DEEP. A good read and I highly recommend it.

Harris revisits these characters in 2 or 3 later books so I would read this first if you are new to his writings.

Shiloh says

My review has spoilers...

I didn't think this story was bad enough to be filed in my Sucked Shelf, but it was pretty awful. It read like it was written by a ten year old--lots of simple sentences and a shallow protagonist. It was really hard to root for Ray, a gay man living in the 80's who has accepted the fact that he's gay but chooses to string along women to keep the gay part of him a secret. He's very judgmental of others and how they choose to live: Kyle, for example, who becomes an escort to pay the bills... I will say the story was consistent, and the ending with his father coming around to approve (somewhat) of him being gay, AND implying that it's ok to keep lying to women about it really made me angry.

I have to remind myself it was the 80's, but I still think today the young African American male is obsessed with his image and what people think of him, straight or gay. I thought Ray had the emotional range of a 13 year old girl.

Mike says

Where do i begin with this disappointing read?

I truly found this to be INSULTING to Black Women. Cowardly bisexual black men lying and cheating on women is no life for anyone. Although we live in a different time than when this was published, I am still disappointed in its embrace of racist and homophobic stereotypes.

Not only that but the writing was all over the place. There was never truly a central focus for the protagonist while the reader was subjected to frequent info-dumping.

Had this been the first Harris book I read, as it was published, it would have been my last. Luckily, I know of a few more titles way better than this utter garbage.

Abby Brithinee says

I haven't read an LGBTQ novel since I was an undergrad, and at the time, I only read about women, so reading about coming out from the perspective of an African American man was different from most of the things I've read in the past. Ray is a closeted bisexual black man living in what I believe to be the 1980s. He was born and raised (and went to college) in Alabama, but moved to New York for law school and stayed for work and the lifestyle. In *Invisible Life*, he struggles with the decisions he has to make between the way he feels and the life he wants to live.

I've read a lot of positive reviews about this book, and I agree that it does have a lot to say. However, I don't think that having something significant to say is a good enough reason to write (or read) a book. The writing style was so unimaginative that the sentences all started to sound the same, and the more emotional scenes were flat and emotionless, which was kind of sad in itself, because they should have been poignant. Reading this book felt like listening to a man recite the history of his life in a monotone, discussing his greatest joys and lowest sorrows without any difference in inflection. I just couldn't get into the story.

I intend to read more similar books to find something I do enjoy. While I did not enjoy this book, I do still think I would recommend it to people who were interested in books about gay and bisexual African American men. Not everyone has my writing style preferences, and a lot of people have really loved this book.

mina reads™? says

Dnf @ 169

Okay I've had enough, this writing is not good at all.

“Her erected breast” “her vanilla wafer colored skin”

It's just not good, so bad. And the characters??? I hate everyone they're so boring and insubstantial. The main character has the worst view on his own sexuality as a bi man and it makes me so uncomfortable as a bi

woman to read some of the terrible shit he's saying that goes completely uncontested by the narrative. All his relationships and friendships are so boring. Everything about this was just not good for me. Which is so incredibly disappointing because it's a book by a black man about a black bisexual character and his life. I had hoped to love this but it's so....icky.

Cheryl says

Incredible read on bisexuality and masking it. I can see why E. Lynn Harris was so highly praised for this book when this first came out. 'Invisible Life' touches on every heartbeat of how one can understand, accept and cope with their sexuality on top of being a person of color. Smooth, honest, and comfortable storytelling. It's almost serene reading this after so many years of social and political change surrounding LGBT and sexual liberation.

Rating - 4.85/5

Dennis says

The passing of this lovely man will not only leave a big hole in my reading list each year but puts an end to his heartfelt and powerful exploration of these specific lives. Since I read his first four books back to back about a decade ago, I have looked forward to spending at least one weekend each summer with his characters who are in some ways so different from those that populate my caucasian agnostic Angeleno life and in other ways absolutely the same. The heroes of his books are so fundamentally good they've always brought out the best in me and there are wonderful friends in my life today because I first made friends with people like them in his books. He's helped me understand my African-American brothers and sisters, straight and gay, and he's helped me better understand myself.

Teresa B Howell says

Wow. I was not expecting the outcome for Candace. Nor did I see the main character telling truths that would cost him everything. This book had me on edge throughout. I loved how the author captivates the reader from the beginning but then revs up the intensity midway to where you don't want to put it down.

Michael- says

Ground breaking, inspiring and life changing. This book opened many doors for black LGBT authors, yet closed many closet doors tighter.

The story was very dear to me because many of the places in New York City I came out in were mentioned. However, it also changed the black gay community forever. This book is seen as an exposé by some and sent some black men who were straddling the fence running for the hills. It also got black women up in arms and left them with little trust in their counterparts.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed the story.

Christy says

What could have been a timely exploration of sexual confusion and the AIDS epidemic ended up being a Sweet Valley High book for gay dudes.

Rena says

Invisible Life is one of my all-time favorite books, but it's been years since I've visited Raymond Winston Tyler, Jr. After finishing, I feel like there is so much about this book to unpack. *Invisible Life* was groundbreaking when it was published in 1991, which was a completely different era in terms of being gay and being out, and it shows in this book. Some of the sentiments and attitudes still stand, unfortunately. But this book remains firm in how I felt about Raymond, then and now, and his struggle to find his way. Ready to move on to the next book in this three-book series.

DeMon Spencer says

I'm such a huge fan of the late Mr E Lynn Harris. Following the news of his death I wrote a blog about how I came to love his books and about how he touched my life. Here's a copy of that blog:

I was very troubled to hear about the passing of Mr. Harris. To me he was more than just an author. He helped me see that being an out gay black male was possible. The way I first discovered his writing was kind of serendipitous. I was a very unhappy closeted college freshman at East Carolina University. I've always had a passion for reading and used books as a way to escape my life's reality and it's inner-turmoil. I would go to Barnes and Nobel quite often to sip coffee and find new books to read. I was aware that they had a "Gay and Lesbian interest" book section, but I was so deeply closeted that I couldn't even walk toward that aisle even though I wanted to very badly. During one of my days there I walked around a bit and found a couple of books that looked interesting. I went to purchase my coffee and found a comfortable chair to sit in while I went through my books to see which ones I wanted to buy. I sat my things on the coffee table in front of me and I noticed an interesting looking book lying there on the table that someone had left for the employees to re-shelve. I picked it up and read the title "**Invisible Life**". That really peaked my interest because I felt like I was living an invisible life. I started to read and it drew me in instantly...

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