

“Octavia’s Parables, Mind of My Mind - Chapter 12 [September 12, 2022]

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{introduction music playing}

adrienne: (00:49)

Hello, hello, hello, beloved ones. We are back for Octavius Parables, our podcast, where we are reading Octavia Butler's classic text one chapter at a time. And we are co-hosted by myself, adrienne maree brown, and my beloved...

Toshi:

Toshi Reagon.

adrienne:

And we are in the final chapter and epilogue. Chapter Twelve and Epilogue of Mind of My Mind, which is Book Two of the Patternist series of Octavia's incredible, incredible books. And yeah, I'm really excited to get into this chapter. So what we're gonna do is Toshi is give a summary of both the chapter and the epilogue, and then we'll do questions for the whole thing. And I think you'll be pretty wowed. {laughs} so let's get into it.

Toshi:

Let's get into it. I mean, I wanna start with this last sentence from Chapter Eleven, "God knows what he'd do if he realized his cattle had finally gotten the nerve to plot against him." This is all about Doro and about what's about to come his way. So we start Chapter Twelve. Mary is not in good shape. Uh, she really needs to get with some new Pattern members. She's shaking. Her hands are shaking and she is very vulnerable. She's just not even bothering to hide it. And Karl is very concerned. He's hoping that he can help. And she opens up to him just so he can see he can't help. He stayed with her several seconds, sharing her need, her hunger, her starvation, sharing it, but not diminishing it in any way. "And finally, he withdrew and stood staring at me bleakly." And she was, you know, I'm very happy that Karl and Mary have like, gotten into this very beautiful team of...

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

...of, um, working together and all of the conversations that they've had, even when they were disagreeing has led them to this moment. So Karl is like, he's offering himself, like just takes strength from me and she's resting on him physically, but she's just like, you know, you think, I

haven't thought about that. He's like, but you wouldn't have to take much. Like he thinks he thinks it's like, just as simple as her, like being with somebody and pulling from them a little bit. But she's like, no, it's, it's about the Pattern. And it's about all of the people. {laughs} It's about the continuous flow of new energy to the Pattern. And she's just like, I'm not vampire and I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna do that. So she's making a conscious decision.

adrienne:
Yes.

Toshi:
It might be helpful for her to pull from people, but surely she would just end up killing them. I mean, I don't think she would.

adrienne:
Mm-hm.

Toshi:
Which would make her, you know, very much like Douro.

adrienne:
Mm-hm.

Toshi:
And so she goes to see August. She spent some time strengthening Evelyn's programming. That's the person who's been caring for August, "...seeing to it, that she would go on being a good mother to him...", even if Karl and Mary weren't around. And she planted some instructions that she wouldn't need, or remember until August shows signs of approaching transition. She didn't want her, her to panic and you know, do weird things or take to a hospital or to her doctor. And this was really interesting. I, you know, it's a side issue for me, but like, they can get very specific with their instructions. Like they're like...

adrienne:
Exactly.

Toshi:
...here's something you're gonna need in 10 years. {laughs} and when this happens, I want you to do this. I mean, if you could just like {laughs} it's not good to think about these things.

adrienne:
Yup.

Toshi:

But like...

adrienne:

It's too deep.

Toshi:

It's very deep. So she basically is preparing that she is gonna have to fight do, and she doesn't see herself necessarily, necessarily winning.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

So Karl and her go to the heads of the houses and, and check in on people. And they're just starting to pull the group together and have to do it. She's giving us also information about when they didn't have good people who were heads of houses.

adrienne:

Yes.

Toshi:

Like when they got some strange people who made it through their transition and were like so horrible that Mary had to kill them. So she passed her two new heads of houses, but I told them not to do anything toward beginning their house for a week. {adrienne laughs} So just slowing down their processes. Then she went with Jesse to see the houses he was opening up in Santa Elena. He asked for her to go and she didn't have to see them, but she only checked on the families now and then. And when I did, she says I could never find much to complain about. They cared about what we were building. They always did a good job. So I'm still amazed by, uh, this First Family of, of people in the Pattern and how, and who they've become.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

And then in the car, Jesse said, listen, you know, we're all behind you, don't you, you, so they're hyped. They're even Jesse, who she almost had to kill at the beginning, is hyped and ready to stand with her and ready to do anything. They're all behind her. They believe in her. All she needs to do is ask. So it's they go to nighttime, they're just taking care of things. It's like, you

know, if this was a movie, the music would start changing and we would just know that something's about to happen.

adrienne:

Yes.

Toshi:

So Karl came up about two hours later and found her, looking out her window at nothing and waiting for him. And he's like, you know, he wants to talk to her. And these are like the last ditch, like, what we gonna do? You know, how we gonna do it? They had a meeting today, just the family. "I told them what kind of trouble you're in, told them you were going to fight. And I told them they could run if they wanted to." And you know, they're not gonna run. It's like, I know that. I just wanted them to know. I, I wanted to put in the words, I wanna say it out loud. "Everyone's committed. Every Patternist in the section. And all those who don't know it are about to find out." And so he is like, what are you gonna do? She's like first, you know, this is basically Mary's plan. Like, get everybody away. So first I'm gonna clear this section. And Karl is like, what are you talking about? And she's like, including the family, if they'll go, they won't be de, they won't be deserting me. I can use them just as effectively if they're like a couple of states away. And so y'all know why she's doing this.

adrienne:

Yes.

Toshi:

Because if she dies, she is pretty sure Doro will just go on and on and try to try to get to all of the other people inside of the, um, Pattern. So she wants them very far away from her. After everyone has had time to get out, I want them to spread out scatter as widely as possible, just in case. This is what Mary wants and she doesn't want them to get, um, trapped. But I want you all to remember that, you know, none of these people like being away from each other, so it's pretty much impossible what she's asking them to do. She's asking them to split up and go in separate directions. But even at the beginning, when the First Family could not...

adrienne:

Exactly.

Toshi:

...stand Mary, when they were just like, I hate this woman. They tried to leave. They all came back. Even when they had their own houses, like when they, they were in the neighborhood and each of them split up and this couple went off and Jan went off by the, by herself. They couldn't deal with it. And they all came back. So it's very unlikely that that would even work for them

again. And he also says, you know, if you're, if you start sending people away, Doro's just gonna think you're sending people away for searchers. And he's gonna get threatened and you're still gonna have to fight. So, you know, they have, they have gone through the planning that they could go through. There's, you know, it's an inevitable situation.

adrienne:

Yes.

Toshi:

So...

adrienne:

I feel like the whole time I'm like, Ooooo-oooo-doo-doo-doo. Like, it just feels like {laughter} music is playing. Okay. Go. {laughter}

Toshi:

The, the music is, the music is definitely coming that like, you know, that like tick tock clock in the distance. That like weird, you know, analog synth sound, you know? Getting you ready.

Um...

adrienne:

I can feel it.

Toshi:

So she's, she's getting in bed, she's laying down. It was the best for her to be completely relaxed when she used the Pattern. And she's getting ready to talk to the Pattern. And so she, she jerks the Pattern. And I just always wonder what that feels like, but she jerks the Pattern...

adrienne:

Mmmmmm.

Toshi:

...shattering their calm. It didn't hurt them or me, but it startled them to attention. And she felt Karl jumped beside her and he had been expecting it. So she, uh, she says, "I could feel their attention on me as though I had walked onto the stage of a crowded auditorium. It was as easy to reach all 1,538 of them as it had been to reach just the family two years before. And there was no need for me to identify myself. Nobody else could have reached them through the pattern as I did." And she says, "The Pattern is in danger." She says it bluntly. "It may be destroyed." She could feel the alarm. She could feel everybody going like, oh no, oh no, oh no. And she says, "The Pattern may be destroyed." She repeated, "If it is, and if you're together when it happens,

you will be in danger." And she gave them a short history lesson, uh, "A lesson they had already been exposed to once in orientation classes or through learning blocks. That, before the Pattern, active telepaths had not been able to survive together in groups. That they could not tolerate each other, could not accept the mental blending that occurred automatically without the control of the Pattern." She's basically sending them out on their own basically to the lives that they had before the Pattern. And for some of 'em, they will not know what that is because they only transition because of the Pattern.

adrienne: (11:04)

Yeah.

Toshi:

So she's giving them a very vulnerable situation. And I love this part. She's like, "It might not be true any longer...but it has been true for thousands of years. For safety's sake, we have to assume that it's still true. So you are all to get up tonight, now, and leave the section. Separate. Scatter." They're like, you know, going bananas.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

They don't... nobody's.... I, I imagine it just sounded like a bunch of yelling and static in her, on the Pattern. And she says, "Be still!" And I guess she hit them when she did that.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

Mentally hit them. And she says, "Be still!" She says, "I'm sending you away to save your lives, and you will go." Um, many were upset.

adrienne:

Mm.

Toshi:

They are complaining. And she's like, "You are all powerful people... You will have no trouble making your ways alone. And if the Pattern survives, you know that I'll call you all back. I want you here as much as you want to be here. We're one people. But now, for your own sake, you must go. Leave tonight so that I can be sure you're safe." She let them feel the emotion that she felt. "Now was the time. I wanted them to see how important their safety was to me."

adrienne:

Mm.

Toshi:

"I wanted them to know that I meant every word I gave them. But the words that I didn't give them were the ones they were concerned with. Most of the questions they threw at me were drowned in the confusion of their mental voices."

adrienne:

Hmm.

Toshi:

She could have sorted it out. She could have made sense of it, but she just didn't bother. She couldn't miss reading it, but, "I could ignore it. My people knew Doro from classes and blocks. Most of them had no personal contact with him at all." So interesting.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

I think I even like really missed that. You know, we are so...

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

...Doro everywhere type of person. And there's just this whole group of people who never had any experience with him.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

So she's giving further instructions. "You who are heads of houses - you know, your responsibilities to your families. See that the members of your families get out, and get out tonight. Help them get out. Take care of them." And then she broke her contact. And she opened her eyes and knew at once something was wrong. And she turned her head and saw Karl standing beside the bed and, "...his back to me, his body tense." And beyond the door was Doro. So, you know, they, they tried to distract Doro from their planning.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

And you know, unfortunately they used, uh, Vivian. And y'all know that like Vivian, who used to like...

adrienne:

Mm-hm.

Toshi:

...probably at the beginning of this had like maybe three quarters of her life.

adrienne:

Mm-hm.

Toshi:

Then like one half of her life. And then like a quarter of her life. {laughs} And now she has none of her life. So she's, she's a mute that's completely controlled by Karl. And they, and she used to be a lover of Doro's, but Doro obviously could tell the difference when she, she came to him.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

So here she is trying to get everybody to go away and then there's Doro at the door. And so she says, "Everybody stop what you're doing. Be still." And then she opens up so they could see what she could see. And her eyes are open now. And her mind was open to them. And, "They could see Doro watching me past Karl. And they could know that Doro was the danger. It was too late for them to make suicidal mistakes." And they have to work together.

adrienne:

Mmm!

Toshi:

All of them. So she says, "Sit down, or lie down. Do nothing. I'm gonna need you." And, "Doro started toward Karl." And she sat up and, "scrambled over close to Karl and laid a hand on his shoulder. It's okay." She warned Karl. I don't know what Karl thought he was gonna do other than be dead...

adrienne: (14:57)

I know! I'm like, baby!

Toshi:

...and make her have to fight Doro in Karl's body. You know? {laughs} Bless these brothers!

adrienne:

It's hard out here!

Toshi:

It's hard out here!

adrienne:

{deep voice} I'll protect you. {laughs}

Toshi:

No, baby. {laughs} You're just gonna make me have to fight somebody that looks like, kill somebody that looks like you.

adrienne:

Yeah. Don't do that.

Toshi:

Um, so she was really like, you know, you need to go sit down. I think. {Laughter} And like, like, like let the grown folks fight basically. So, she starts to, to go through her process of gathering strength. Doro, I just like, this is it they ask, like, what did you do with Vivian? He's like nothing at, at all after I thought about it. He said, "Faithful, little pet that she is now, Vivian hasn't looked at me for well over a year. Karl's women get like that when he stops trying to preserve their individuality - when he takes them over completely. He smiled." At Carl's mute woman. I mean, "So, when Vivian, who no longer had initiative enough to go looking for lovers other than Karl, suddenly came to me, I realized that she had almost certainly been sent. Why was she sent? ...Doro gave her a smile. 'No, not really.' {laughs} In his shadowy way, Doro was aware of a great deal of psionic activity going on around her." So, you know, he can't, he can't like be in the Pattern or anything.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

But he still Doro. And he can still tell when something is something.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

So, "He felt himself drawn her as she had been two years before, when she took Jesse and Rachel. Now, he guessed, she would be taking a great many of her people. As many as he gave her time to take. She remained still as Doro sat down beside her. And she looked at Karl who sat on her other side." And she says to Karl, "Move away from us." And she says it quietly. So Karl gets up and moves. He understands now.

adrienne:

Mm-hm.

Toshi:

So I'm gonna read this because...

adrienne:

Just have to read it.

Toshi:

I can't tell you better than I...

adrienne:

Just have to read it.

Toshi:

Just have to read. I just have to read it. {laughter} So, "Without a word, Karl got up and went to sit in the chair by the window. The instant he reached the chair, he collapsed, seemed to pass out. Mary had finally taken him. An instant later Doro took her. At once Doro was housed with her in her body. But she was no quick, easy kill. She would take a few moments. She was power, strength concentrated as Doro had never felt it before - the strength of dozens, perhaps hundreds of Patternists. For a moment Doro was intoxicated with it. It filled him, blotted out all thought. The fiery threads of her Pattern surrounded him. And before him... before him was a slightly smaller replica of himself as he had perceived himself through the fading sense of his thousands of victims over the years. Before him, where all the threads of fire met in a wild tangle of brilliance was a small sun. Mary. She was like a living creature of fire. Not human. No more human than he was. He had lied to her about that once - lied to calm her - when she was a child. And had major weakness, her vulnerable, irreplaceable human body had made the lie seem true.

But that body, like his own series of bodies was only a mask, a shell. He saw her now as she really was, and she might have been his twin. But no, she was not his twin. She was a smaller, much younger being. A complete version of him, a mistake that he would not make again. But ironically, her very completeness would help to destroy her. She was a symbiont, a being living in partnership with her people. She gave them unity, they fed her, and both thrived. She was not a parasite though. He had encouraged her to think of herself as one. And though she had great power, she was not naturally instinctively a killer. He was. When he had had his look at her, he embraced her, enveloped her. On the physical level, the gesture would have seemed affectionate - until it was exposed as a stranglehold. When Mary struggled to free herself, he drank in the strength she spent, consumed it ecstatically. Never had one person given him so much. Alarmed, Mary struck at him, struggled harder, fed him more of herself. She fed him until her own strength and her own borrowed strength were gone. Finally, he tasted the familiar terror in her mind. She knew she was about to die. She had nothing left, no time to draw strength from more of her people. She felt herself dying. Doro felt her dying. Then he heard her voice. No, he sensed it, disembodied, cursing. She was so much a part of him already that her thoughts were reaching him. He moved to finish her, consume the final fragments of her. But the final fragments were the Pattern. She was still alive because she was still connected to all those people. The strength that Doro took now, the tiny amounts of strength that she had left, were replaced instantly. She could not die. New life flowed into her continually. Furiously, Doro swept her into himself, where she should have died. For the fifth time, she did not die. She seemed to slither away from him, regaining substance apart from him as no victim of his should have been able to. She was doing nothing on her own. Now she was weak and exhausted. Her Pattern was doing its work automatically. Apparently it would go on doing that work as long as there was Patternists alive to support it. Then Mary began to realize that Doro was having trouble. She began to wonder why she was still alive. Her thoughts came to him clearly. And apparently his thoughts reached her. 'You can't kill me,' she sent. 'After all that, you can't kill me. You may as well let me go!' He was surprised at first that she was still aware enough to communicate with him. Then he was angry. She was helpless. She should have been his long ago, yet she would not die. If he could manage to leave her body - a thing he had never done before without finishing his kill - he would only have to try again. He couldn't possibly let her live to collect more of his latents, to search until she found a way to kill him. He would jump to Karl, and perhaps from Karl to someone else. Karl would already be more dead than alive now that she had taken strength from him. Doro would move on, find himself an able body and come back to her in it. Then he would simply cut her throat - decapitate her if necessary. Not even a healer could survive that. She might be mentally strong, but physically she was still only a small woman. She would be easy prey. Mary seemed to clutch at him. She was trying to hold him as he had held her, but she had neither the technique nor the strength. She had learned a little, but it was too late. She was barely an annoyance. Doro focused on Karl. Abruptly Mary became more than annoyance. She tore strength from the rest of her people. Not one at a time now. This time she took them all at once. The way Rachel had used to take from her congregations. But Mary stripped her Patternists as

Rachel had never stripped her mutes. Then, desperately, Mary tried again to grasp Doro. For a moment she seemed not to realize that she was strong again - that her act of desperation had gained her second chance. Then her new strength brought her to life. It became impossible for Doro to focus on anyone but her. Her power drew him. Abruptly, she stopped clutching at him and threw herself on him. She embraced him. Startled, Doro tried to shake her off. For a moment, his struggles fed her as hers had fed him earlier. She was a leech, riding, feeding orgiastically." Mmm! Come on, Octavia. {laughter} Doro caught himself, ceased his struggles. He smiled to himself grimly. Mary was learning, but there was still much that she didn't know. Now he taught her how difficult it was to get strength from an opponent who not only refused to give it away by struggling, but who actively resisted her efforts to take it. And there was only one way to resist. As she sought to consume him, he countered by trying to consume her." Ooooooh! "They neutralized each other. Disgusted, Doro tried again to focus on Karl. Best to get away from Mary mentally and get back to her physically. And Mary, let him go. Startled, Doro brought his attention back to her. For a moment, he could not focus on her. There was a roar of something like radio static in his mind - 'noise' so intense that he tried to twist away from it. It cleared slowly. Then he noticed that he had not drawn away from Mary completely. He was still joined to her. Joined by a single strand of fire. She had used her mental closeness with him to draw him into her web. Her pattern. He panicked. He was a member of the Pattern. A Patternist. Property. Mary's property. He strained against the seemingly fragile thread. It stretched easily. Then he realized that he was straining against himself. The thread was a part of him. A mental limb. A limb he could find no way to sever. The Patternists had told him how it felt at first - the feeling of being trapped, of being on a leash. They had lived to get over that their feelings they had lived because Mary had wanted them to live. Doro himself had helped Mary understand how thoroughly their lives were in her hands. Doro fought desperately, uselessly. He could feel Mary's amusement now. He had nearly killed her, had been about to kill the man she had attached herself to so firmly. Now she took her revenge. She consumed him slowly, drinking in his terror and his life, drawing out her own pleasure and laughing through his soundless screams.

Speaker 5: (26:27)

{music starts playing}

adrienne: (26:45)

Oooof.

Toshi:

Honey.

adrienne:

Honey. She killed him. {laughs}.

Toshi:

She was like enough of you!

adrienne:

Oooh! Lord have mercy!

Toshi:

Enough of you. Enough of you. Enough of you. Enough of you. Yes, y'all. Take a deep breath, cuz I'm gonna go right into this epilogue, which is very, very short.

adrienne:

It's so short.

Toshi:

Um...

adrienne:

But that victory just, I mean, just feel that you know, like she's just feel for a moment everything that this is a victory over.

Toshi:

I mean...

adrienne:

Think about everything we've watched Doro do. Everyone we've seen him hurt. Everything we've seen him consume. All the ways he wanted to consume everything. And just take that in.

Toshi:

Think about the thousands and thousands of years. The many opportunities to use his power for something other than a breeding program and selfishness.

adrienne:

Mmmm!

Toshi:

He's gone!

adrienne:

She literally swallows slavery. She swallows patriarchy. She swallows it.

Toshi:
She does.

adrienne:
She swallows it.

Toshi:
She absolutely does.

adrienne:
Mm.

Toshi:
Yes. Yes.

adrienne: (27:54)
Okay. Okay. Take us there.

Toshi:
Yes. We are here with this exhausted Pattern. "They cremated Doro's last body before I was able to get out of bed. I was in bed for two days. A lot of others were there even longer. The few who were on their feet, ran things with the help of the mute servants. One hundred and fifty-four Patternists never got up again at all. They were my weakest, those least able to take the strain I put on them. They died because it took me so long to learn how to kill Doro. By the time Doro was dead and I began to try to give back the strength I had taken from my people, the one hundred and fifty-four were already dead. I had never tried to give back strength before, but I had never taken so much before, either. I managed it, and probably saved the lives of others who would have died. So that I only had to get used to the idea that I killed the 154... Emma died. The day Rachel told her about Doro, she decided to die. It was just as well. Karl lived. The family lived. If I had killed them, Emma's way out could have started to look good to me. Not that I would have taken it. I wouldn't have the freedom to consider a thing like that for about twenty years, no matter what happened. But that was all right. It wasn't a freedom I wanted. I had already won the only freedom I cared about. Doro was dead. Finally, thoroughly dead. Now we were free to grow again - we his children."

adrienne:
Woo. All right. I'm just like pour one out for the homie.

Toshi:
Yeah.

adrienne:

Mary.

Toshi:

Mary, Mary, Mary.

adrienne:

Mary, Mary, Mary, in the Pattern.

(29:50) {music playing}

adrienne: (30:41)

Okay. So I have questions {laughs} for all of this. And I, I mean, I said, you know, when we started reading this book, I think it's one of the most brilliant books and one that we need. Like, it it's necessary for us to get this under our belt because what she's, what Octavia is trying to tell us about strategy here, what Mary does. I think we have to find a way to do, and it's not easy. So at the very beginning of this, this chapter and half, Mary says, you know, she's talking to Karl and she says, "God, I've got ethics now." And um, I think that, that it's a small little line. It could almost be a toss away line, but it actually feels like the difference, the main difference between her and do. And so the question I would ask you all is where do Mary's ethics come from?

Toshi:

Mm-hmm.

adrienne:

Right? If you, as you followed this story, what are the moments where Mary's, Mary had to make a choice about what she believed and who she protected? Who she cared about. Who she was gonna fight for. What freedom was gonna mean to her. Right? Really reflect on that. How do you develop an ethics of care and community centrism in people? How do you do that?

Toshi:

Mm-hmm.

adrienne:

Yeah. And then something I don't wanna overlook something that feels very important, especially as we continue into the Patternist series is, how do you navigate the tension between Mary's liberating approach for her Pattern versus the instructive, total control enslavement, still of those who are not in the Pattern?

Toshi:

Yeah.

adrienne:

Right? So we watch her go and give instructions to the person who's gonna take care of her kid. And we know that Vivian right, is being sent to handle Doro. And that these are people who don't have agency over their minds. Right?

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

So how do we sit with that contradiction? Who gets freedom and who doesn't, who matters? Who doesn't just hold that. Don't let that go. Even as we feel victorious about what Mary's able to pull off. And then, you know, Mary's in this planning process with Karl and with the First Family, do you feel like Mary is being humble in her preparations? Do you feel that Mary truly thinks that she could lose? And is there a reason that you think she thinks she could lose? And what would that reason be? And do you think that Mary is considering that she could win? And why, why does she think she might be able to win against Doro?

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

Right? Really hold that because what's happening inside of Mary and between Mary and the First Family is a power analysis. Right?

Toshi:

Yes.

adrienne:

They are really assessing what is the power that Doro has? What is the power that we have? What are the ways we know how to wield our power? How does he wield his power? What does he actually want? What is his goal? What is our goal? Right? What is his weakness? What is our weakness?

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

Okay. All of that is power analysis and she's trying to protect her people. Can she actually protect any of her people? If she loses?

Toshi:
Mm-hm.

adrienne:
Right? Can we have actually protect any of our people if we don't win?

Toshi:
Mm-hmm.

adrienne:
Okay. {laughs} Right? History says no! Okay. So Toshi made this point as you're reading it, we all know, even as we're watching her, try to make this move, go away from each other, that that's not even a viable option. She's trying our best to, to give something. But it's like, her only option is actually to win. As is ours.

Toshi:
Mm-hm.

adrienne:
Right? There's not an option where we survive on earth as a species if we don't win. Okay. So then how does it feel for you as a reader, having watched Mary, and actually going all the way back to the beginning of Wild Seed, having watched Anyanwu and then having watched Mary, how does it feel to witness Mary reaching the whole Pattern at once?

Toshi:
Mm-hmm.

adrienne:
Realizing all of that power and understanding that she has kept most of them from Doro. The thing that Anyansu was never able to do. Mary has done.

Toshi:
Yes.

adrienne:
Right? There's a lot of these people who've never experienced the oppressive force of Doro directly. Yeah. So just how does it feel to notice that? Witness that? And then do you grasp the

strategy of her sharing the reality of the threat? Cause Mary could have made a lot of choices in it. In this moment she could have said, it's all gonna be okay guys. {laughs}, you know? I've gotta handle something, but I got this. It's all gonna be fine. Instead she chooses to be very realistic with them. It could not be fine. I could lose. We could lose the Pattern. We have to be aware of what that's gonna mean. What do you think is, is driving that choice? That way of moving, right? And really, you know, I love this moment where Karl sort of steps up like, merr, you know, like I'm gonna protect you. And then she's basically like stand down, you know? Like stand down, this isn't your fight. And actually it's not gonna be helpful for me. There's a moment in that where basically what happens is very quickly, almost seamlessly she's able to get Karl out of the pattern of oppression, into the pattern of how true power is is happening in this moment. Right? He has to let go of his old idea that as the man in the situation, whatever he's gonna protect her. He has to submit. She holds the Pattern.

Toshi:

Hmm.

adrienne:

So the question, how do we organize ourselves out of these patterns of oppression to see where true power lies? And to see what formations actually unleash our truest power? And for us, you know, I think I see this happening in our movements. When I see us taking the leadership from the disability justice movement.

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

I think I see this happening in our movements when we are centering the leadership of those who have intersectional oppression. Right?

Toshi:

That's right.

adrienne:

But it's not easy that tendency is still there to slip back into these old patterns. How do we organize ourselves? Yeah.

Toshi:

Mmm.

adrienne:

And then I think one of the deepest choices that Octavia E Butler ever made in her writing was to have this fight happen within Mary's body.

Toshi:

Hmm.

adrienne:

So for all of those of us who have survived attacks on our body, attacks in our body violations of our body, this allegory of having someone enter your body and having the battle happen there, and then being able to win. Being able to actually consume and destroy that person. {laughs}

Toshi:

Yes.

adrienne:

There's something so, for me, I, it always moves me to tears when I get to this part, cuz it, for me, it was like, it's deeply healing to be like, oh, like what if it wasn't that they took away my dignity and my sense of safety? But actually that it was just like, no, that doesn't get to continue. Everything that drove you into this violation is gone.

Toshi:

Mm-hmm

adrienne:

I just think it's so powerful. And I think it's so incredible that that do sees her and that she's a sun. Right?

Toshi:

Yes. Yes.

adrienne:

That's why I asked you to think about the Pattern because it's like, she's the sun of a solar system. {laughs}.

Toshi:

Yes.

adrienne:

It's so beautiful to see Mary in her wholeness. To truly see her. Okay.

Toshi:
Mm-hm.

adrienne:
And then there's this moment here where Mary says, you know, we're basically, it's like, he's assessing that Mary is not instinctively a killer, but Doro is, and I wanna just...

Toshi:
Mm-hm.

adrienne:
...just slightly interrogate that is Doro instinctively a killer. And does he ever truly know? Right?

Toshi:
Mm.

adrienne:
Because of the way his power, his power came in reaction to a violation. And I always wonder, was there another way that his power could have been harnessed, you know?

Toshi:
That's right. Yeah.

adrienne:
And the way that, you know, some indigenous communities have still that practice of like, oh, if we're gonna take the life of a creature that we're gonna eat or consume, there's a respectful offering, there's a ritual, there's a ceremony to it. And there's a way to do it.

Toshi:
Mm-hm.

adrienne: (39:16)
I'm like, oh, maybe there was some other way that Doro was supposed to live forever. And the way that it happened was inspired by trauma and he wasn't able to do that. Right? But anyway, I just wanna always interrogate that a little bit. That like Doro's self identity as, as a killer. Right? And what would happen if he wasn't stuck in that story?

Toshi:
Yeah.

adrienne:

Cuz she's inviting him into something else.

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

Mm-hm. Okay. What would it take for us in our movement spaces to have a Pattern that automatically continued to do the work and the fight beyond reliance on any one person?

Toshi:

Ooh!

adrienne:

This feels like the, maybe most important question that I'll ask ever. {laughter} Right? So I'm gonna ask it again. What would it take in our movements, in our social justice work, to have a Pattern that could continue to do the work ,could continue our fight beyond reliance on any one person? How would we have to build? How would we have to educate? How would we have to organize? How much faith would we have to have in each other?

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

Who would be the house leaders? Who would be the people that we trusted to make these calls quickly?

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

Right? What structures? Think about this.

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

This is maybe the most important question of our, our species.

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

How? And then do you know the experience of learning how to fight while in the battle?

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

Right? Have you had that? Where you're up against someone and you realize that the strategy they're using against you is one you can also use? Right? And how do you do that? And keep your ethics intact? Mary's doing that. She's like, here's what Doro does. Here's how I do it. But I'm still in this huge pattern. Right? So I'm gonna use his strategy. And then she also goes beyond his strategy. She's like, but my strategy still wins. {laughs}.

Toshi:

Yeah.

adrienne:

Right?

Toshi:

Yup.

adrienne:

Have you met someone like a sun? Like do you know, sun people? People who have an irresistible pull into a Pattern, right? That feels like it could be a safe place. It could hold this much power.

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

And then this, if you're reading this, especially in groups or with, with folks you organize with, spend a lot of time on, what is the actual strategy of victory?

Toshi:

Mm-hm.

adrienne:

Right?

Toshi:

Yes.

adrienne:

And let it make you very uncomfortable. The strategy of victory, because I'm just gonna break it down the way I see it, right. Is that she brings her greatest opponent, her enemy into her Pattern. And then drains him of the part that is unable to be a part of the Pattern. Right? Because Doro at this point is just this entity of consumption that is moving from body to body. So she's like, great, come on in, you're in the Pattern now and now I will take you. What does that mean? Like what would that look like for us? Could we imagine bringing our opposition into our Pattern? Right? What would it look like to actually consume the parts that are no longer functional? That no longer can participate in the Pattern? White supremacy cake? {laughs} @hat is it? You know, how does it, how does that look for us? Because the move, like the first move is always send everyone away, get everyone as far from each other as possible. But here it's like actually everyone has to be on deck and everyone has to be engaged. And everyone has to be present. And then we have to be able to bring the opposition into that and trust the strength of the Pattern. So just get into that. {laughs} Think about it. Let it mess you up. Think about what your strategies are currently. And do they align with that at all? Or are you still trying to push the opposition as far away as possible? Do you trust the strength of our Pattern?

Toshi: (43:27)

Mm. Mm. Mm.

adrienne:

Okay. Last couple of questions. What dies with Doro? And what parts of Doro live on in Mary and live on in the Pattern? And then did Emma's choice make sense to you? Anyanwu's choice. Emma's choice. That Doro is dead and that she lets go as well. What do you make of that as a decision? I'll say to you Toshi and you alone. {laughs} I always feel like she rushed that. I always feel like Octavia rushed that and I think there was a lot to it, you know?

Toshi:

Hm-hm.

adrienne:

I think there could have been a lot to it. I think Emma/Anyanwu deserved a little paragraph there.

Toshi:

Yeah.

adrienne:

Like a little bit more space there because you know, I'm like, did she, did she let go? Because she was like, my work is done. You know, I needed to see that he was gone. Now he's gone I can go. Was there some broken heart in it? Was that, you know, like that is the companion that she had known the longest. What is the, you know, I, I just, I wanna know that I wanna know what y'all think about that as our listeners.

Toshi:

Yeah.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

I, I don't know. I think I told you about this before. Cause when I read it, that was the part that was most upsetting to me.

adrienne:

Yep. I always get angry! {laughs} I'm like no!

Toshi:

About them. Yeah.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

I was really upset about it. And I also was upset, you know, because I, I didn't love Emma's storyline. But you know, my mom was like, this is this story, isn't about Emma. It's about Mary and Doro.

adrienne:

Yes.

Toshi:

And so she was like, we just didn't get to see it on the page so much. Uh, what was her transformation?

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

What turned her? I think in the, in the, the chapter before the one before that maybe it was ten.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

We were like, what does it mean for Emma to have started her journey, trying to protect her people and is now, you know, hanging out with this guy as a, you know, making herself young, whenever he's around.

adrienne:

Exactly.

Toshi:

And her people are everywhere around her in horrible shape.

adrienne:

Exactly.

Toshi:

And so kind of just what happened to her? Like how did she, how did she just go, okay I'll just live in a community full of latents in terrible shape and be mad at the baby...

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

...who's figuring out how to heal them.

adrienne:

Yeah.

Toshi:

I, it just, I don't know. I just was like, I felt like she deserved a little bit more attention.

adrienne:

I felt like given who Anyanwu was and how she moved...

Toshi:
Mm-hm.

adrienne:
I felt like, yeah. This, it remains my, my, one of my biggest critiques with Octavia. And almost always my critiques of Octavia are about the last, like they're in the last 10 sentences of a book. {laughter} I'm like, why is that called the Christopher Columbus ship? No! {laughter} You know, and like this, I was like, no, no, no. It feels like Doro from beyond the grave, snatched Emma away from us.

Toshi: (46:27)
Yes.

adrienne:
And I would've loved to see a different handling of her in this. I would've loved to see her more explicitly ally with Mary. I would've loved to see her take this moment and be like, great I'm gonna go be a dolphin now. Or just something else.

Toshi:
Yeah.

adrienne:
Right? {laughs}

Toshi:
That's what I was saying. I think, but she has choices. It felt like she just was stuck on the land. And I was like, in Wild Seed when she started to get like in this kind of a, a place.

adrienne:
Yeah.

Toshi:
You know, her people would remind her, like, you can go go, you know, maybe you should go on a trip.

adrienne:
Yes.

Toshi:
And I was like, no, you could just go on a trip.

adrienne:

Exactly!

Toshi:

I, you know, I could see her not wanting to tolerate being a mute for Mary. But I was like, you, you tolerated Doro? Like, like...

adrienne:

Yeah. And I wonder if that's a part of a big part of it was just, she's like, look, I'm not whatever this is. I'm not a part of it. And yeah, I can't feel my way into it. But I also think there was a freedom possible for her that, you know, but it also, now that, that you've just said that, you know, that also reminds me of like, she just didn't have her people now. Right? So she didn't have like her people.

Toshi:

Yeah.

adrienne:

That were healthy and great and could say, go on a trip. Cause she's wanted to kill herself before.

Toshi:

Yeah.

adrienne:

But she had people who were, who were like, yo chill.

Toshi:

Yeah.

adrienne:

Like, so maybe that's what it was, but I just wanna name it.

Toshi:

Yes. Yes.

adrienne:

Because I think sometimes you realize, oh, I put it Octavia on this pedestal and I don't critique her and I'm like, no, I do. And this is one of them. So yeah.

Toshi:
Yeah.

adrienne:
And then the last, last question I have, which I always want people to ask themselves every day in the mirror, what is the cost of freedom?

Toshi:
Mm.

adrienne:
What is the cost of freedom? Here we have seen, we see sort of the end of a multi-generational fight where tons of people had to lock their power in. Where lives were lost. Where all kinds of relationships had to shift and change. And people's idea of themselves had to shift and change for the victory that was collective. So what is the cost of freedom? And Ooh, we have to keep reading this series because freedom isn't free if there's still people who are called mutes and who are being treated this way.

Toshi:
So there you go!

adrienne:
Right! There we are!

Toshi:
Onward!

adrienne:
Oh my goodness. My loves! Toshi, thank you for this. Thank you for doing this...

Toshi:
Thank you.

adrienne:
...work with me. {laughs}

Toshi: (48:49)
I love it. I love it.

adrienne:

So, um, we are done y'all we are done. So Octavius Parables is hosted by myself, adrienne maree brown and Toshi Reagon. This season, we are reading and discussing Mind of My Mind. We have just finished it. And Book Three, just so y'all know of this series is called Clay's Ark. Clay's Ark. So if you wanna get the jump on where we're heading next, you can go and get that book and get to reading. Our incredible tireless producer, who I hope is on vacation right now in France....

Toshi:
Yeah.

adrienne:
Um, our incredible producer is Kat Aaron. Our show art is from Krista Franklin. We're transcribed by Jess Pinkham and Sarah Rubbins-Breen. You can find us on Twitter and Instagram @oparables. And you can support this incredible work at patreon.com/oparables. Transcriptions for every episode, we do live at readingoctavia.com.

Toshi:
Music for Octavia's Parables is You Don't Know the Time written and performed by Toshi Reagon. Sower written by Bernice Johnson Reagon and performed by the cast of Octavia E Butler's Parable of the Sower at Memorial Hall. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. And Wrong Way You Run To written and performed by Toshi Reagon.

adrienne:
All right. So I love you. {laughter}

Toshi:
Season Five coming up!

adrienne:
See y'all soon!

Toshi:
Yeah.

adrienne:
Bye!

Toshi:
Bye!

(39:44) Closing music begins to play