

The book cover features a close-up, high-contrast photograph of a Black woman's face, looking down with her eyes closed. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting her features against a dark background. The title 'Kindred' is printed in a large, elegant serif font across the middle of the cover. Below the title, a quote from Harlan Ellison is included. At the bottom, a sepia-toned illustration depicts a row of small, wooden, one-story houses, likely representing the plantation setting of the novel. The overall design is artistic and evocative.

OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

Kindred

"Octavia Butler is a writer who will be with us for a long, long time, and *Kindred* is that rare magical artifact . . . the novel one returns to, again and again." —HARLAN ELLISON

KINDRED

Octavia E. Butler

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*To Victoria Rose,
friend and goad*

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Prologue

I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm.

And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone. When the police released Kevin, he came to the hospital and stayed with me so that I would know I hadn't lost him too.

But before he could come to me, I had to convince the police that he did not belong in jail. That took time. The police were shadows who appeared intermittently at my bedside to ask me questions I had to struggle to understand.

"How did you hurt your arm?" they asked. "Who hurt you?" My attention was captured by the word they used: Hurt. As though I'd scratched my arm. Didn't they think I knew it was gone?

"Accident," I heard myself whisper. "It was an accident."

They began asking me about Kevin. Their words seemed to blur together at first, and I paid little attention. After a while, though, I replayed them and suddenly realized that these men were trying to blame Kevin for "hurting" my arm.

"No." I shook my head weakly against the pillow. "Not Kevin. Is he here? Can I see him?"

"Who then?" they persisted.

I tried to think through the drugs, through the distant pain, but there was no honest explanation I could give them—none they would believe.

"An accident," I repeated. "My fault, not Kevin's. Please let me see him."

I said this over and over until the vague police shapes let me alone, until I awoke to find Kevin sitting, dozing beside my bed. I wondered briefly how long he had been there, but it didn't matter. The important thing was that he was there. I slept again, relieved.

Finally, I awoke feeling able to talk to him coherently and understand what he said. I was almost comfortable except for the strange throbbing of my arm. Of where my arm had been. I moved my head, tried to look at the empty place ... the stump.

Then Kevin was standing over me, his hands on my face turning my head toward him.

He didn't say anything. After a moment, he sat down again, took my hand, and held it.

I felt as though I could have lifted my other hand and touched him. I felt as though I had another hand. I tried again to look, and this time he let me. Somehow, I had to see to be able to accept what I knew was so.

After a moment, I lay back against the pillow and closed my eyes. "Above the elbow," I said.

"They had to."

"I know. I'm just trying to get used to it." I opened my eyes and looked at him. Then I remembered my earlier visitors. "Have I gotten you into trouble?"

"Me?"

"The police were here. They thought you had done this to me."

"Oh, that. They were sheriff's deputies. The neighbors called them when you started to scream. They questioned me, detained me for a while—that's what they call it!—but you convinced them that they might as well let me go."

"Good. I told them it was an accident. My fault."

"There's no way a thing like that could be your fault."

"That's debatable. But it certainly wasn't your fault. Are you still in trouble?"

"I don't think so. They're sure I did it, but there were no witnesses, and you won't co-operate. Also, I don't think they can figure out how I could have hurt you ... in the way you were hurt."

I closed my eyes again remembering the way I had been hurt—remembering the pain.

"Are you all right?" Kevin asked.

"Yes. Tell me what you told the police."

"The truth." He toyed with my hand for a moment silently. I looked at him, found him watching me.

"If you told those deputies the truth," I said softly, "you'd still be locked up—in a mental hospital."

He smiled. "I told as much of the truth as I could. I said I was in the bedroom when I heard you scream. I ran to the living room to see what was wrong, and I found you struggling to free your arm from what seemed to be a hole in the wall. I went to help you. That was when I realized your arm wasn't just stuck, but that, somehow, it had been crushed right into the wall."

"Not exactly crushed."

"I know. But that seemed to be a good word to use on them—to show my ignorance. It wasn't all that inaccurate either. Then they wanted me to tell them how such a thing could happen. I said I didn't know ... kept telling them I didn't know. And heaven help me, Dana, I don't know."

"Neither do I," I whispered. "Neither do I."

The River

The trouble began long before June 9, 1976, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember. It was my twenty-sixth birthday. It was also the day I met Rufus—the day he called me to him for the first time.

Kevin and I had not planned to do anything to celebrate my birthday. We were both too tired for that. On the day before, we had moved from our apartment in Los Angeles to a house of our own a few miles away in Altadena. The moving was celebration enough for me. We were still unpacking—or rather, I was still unpacking. Kevin had stopped when he got his office in order. Now he was closeted there either loafing or thinking because I didn't hear his typewriter. Finally, he came out to the living room where I was sorting books into one of the big bookcases. Fiction only. We had so many books, we had to try to keep them in some kind of order.

“What's the matter?” I asked him.

“Nothing.” He sat down on the floor near where I was working. “Just struggling with my own perversity. You know, I had half-a-dozen ideas for that Christmas story yesterday during the moving.”

“And none now when there's time to write them down.”

“Not a one.” He picked up a book, opened it, and turned a few pages. I picked up another book and tapped him on the shoulder with it. When he looked up, surprised, I put a stack of nonfiction down in front of him. He stared at it unhappily.

“Hell, why'd I come out here?”