***Blackout* by Dhonielle Clayton, Tiffany D Jackson, Nic Stone, Angie Thomas, Ashley Woodfolk, and Nicola Yoon**

It's a normal summer day in New York City. Everyone has some place to be, and nothing distracts them from their routines. Nothing, except a city-wide blackout…

Long Walk: Tammi is determined to get this internship at the Apollo Theatre to earn the money she needs to afford an accelerated college program. That is, until her ex boyfriend Kareem arrives, competing for the same job. When the Blackout hits, these two former partners have to face a decision: stay out all night, without their phones, as the city gets dark around them or face the long walk home through New York with the person they least want to see?

Mask Off: Meanwhile, JJ is trapped underground in a stopped subway train with the only man who makes his heart flutter, Tremaine. Adding to JJ's worries is the knowledge that Tremaine is severely claustrophobic. As the minutes stretch, will JJ step up and help Tremaine get out of his worst nightmare, or will the fear of his feelings keep them both stuck in the dark?

All the Great Love Stories… and Dust: Athletic, funny, handsome, and kind, Tristan is the boy high school girls dream of, and his best friend Lana is no exception. With Senior Year and college looming, Lana has decided it's time to confess her feelings to her childhood friend, but doing so is easier said than done. Stuck in the Library during the Blackout, surrounded by the best love stories of all time, she gathers all her strength to confess, but has she just ruined her friendship?

Made to Fit: Nella's grandparents have the perfect love story. They met during the last Blackout when grandpa insisted on not letting his new neighbor walk home alone in the dark. Nella always loved how both grandparents would say they "fit together". Now Nella's figuring out her love story. Having never dated a girl, she's thrown for a loop when Joss, the perfect and beautiful handler of a therapy dog visits the nursing home. There must be something magic about blackouts because soon enough Nella and Joss decide they " fit together" too.

No Sleep 'Till Brooklyn: Their class trip to New York City was going already poorly before the whole city was plunged into darkness, trapping the students and their overbearing teacher on a double-decker bus. Things only get worse for Kayla as she realizes her feelings for intriguing Micah, may be greater than her feelings for her loyal boyfriend Tre'Shawn. With temperature and boredom on the rise, the class

has nothing to do but talk as secrets are exposed, truths are re-evaluated, and foundations are rocked. Kayla must make a decision: Micah or Tre'shawn?

Seymour and Grace: Grace wants her ex boyfriend back. That's why she's out on a Friday night, in her best outfit, hair and makeup done perfectly. That's also why it's incredibly inconvenient that she's currently stuck in a taxi cab, in stand-still traffic, with a driver who Won't. Stop. Talking! When Seymour, the unfortunate taxi driver, runs out of gas, he chivalrously offers to walk Grace the last few blocks to her destination. Turns out walking is better than driving and the two end up philosophizing about how time can change things for the better. By the time they reach the party, Grace doesn't want her ex back. In fact, suddenly Seymour has stolen her heart.

If even one of these stories piques your interest, you should pick up *Blackout*. These 6 short stories interconnect without relying on knowledge of the other works. I loved the way the authors used the stories to build out the world beyond what is usually possible in short stories. Furthermore, the idea of different friends, cousins, and acquaintances across the city all simultaneously experiencing love stories creates a wider sense of community. The reading experience was like if *Love Actually* was set in New York City.

Each love story felt unique and adorable. I was rooting for each couple along the way as they navigated coming-of-age romance. The authors did a good job utilizing tropes like 'Friends to Dating', 'Love Triangle', or 'Strangers to Dating' without the tropes turning gimmicky. Each story felt modern and realistic, perfectly capturing those complicated feelings of young love.

I also greatly enjoyed the authors' use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the way some characters spoke. Not only does AAVE match the characters' identities as people of color, but it is authentic to the neighborhoods they are living in. As someone who primarily reads books by white authors about white presenting characters (something I'm working on diversifying), it is rare to encounter AAVE being used well rather than as a prop or stereotype. I think it's important to read this dialect of English when it's written by authors who have experience speaking it, instead of allowing our exposure to AAVE be permeated by caricatures and inaccuracies from those who have no experience with the dialect.

If you are like me, looking to diversify your reading with black authors, POC characters, and diverse romantic stories, you should read *Blackout*. If you love realistic fiction or short stories, you should read *Blackout*. If you are looking for clean, young adult

romance stories (the characters only kiss), you should read *Blackout*. I thoroughly enjoyed this work, and will be looking for the novels of each author for my next reads.