July's People

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NADINE GORDIMER

Nadine Gordimer was born near Springs (now part of the City of Ekurhuleni), a mining town outside Johannesburg. Her father was a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant, and her mother was from London. Gordimer's parents influenced her interest in inequality in South Africa—her father was a refugee from Tsarist Russia, and her mother was sympathetic to the discrimination against Black people in South Africa. Gordimer attended college at the University of Witwatersrand but did not finish her degree. She moved to Johannesburg in 1948 and began publishing her work in local South African magazines. In 1951, the *New Yorker* published her short story "A Watcher of the Dead," which garnered her wider recognition and marked the beginning of her longstanding relationship with the magazine. Most of Gordimer's works grapple with political issues and racial inequality in South Africa. Gordimer's first novel, *The Lying Days*, was published in 1953. Other notable works include *The Conservationist* (1974), for which Gordimer won the 1974 Booker prize, *Burger's Daughter* (1979), and *July's People* (1981). Gordimer's involvement in anti-apartheid activism began in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre. She became active in South African politics and helped Nelson Mandela edit his famous "I Am Prepared to Die" speech, which he delivered at his trial in 1964. Gordimer lived in Johannesburg in the 1960s and 1970s, leaving for short intervals to teach at universities throughout the United States. She died of natural causes on July 13, 2014, at 90 years old.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Apartheid, which means "apartness" or "separateness" in Afrikaans, was a system of racial oppression enforced in South Africa that began with the all-white National Party's rise to power in 1948. The National Party campaigned on an election platform that promised to protect white employment and advance white domination in a culture where post-war economic development and Black urbanization had incited racial animosity. The National Party's rise to power created a system of legislation that enforced existing segregation policies and expanded segregation to extend to most aspects of daily life. The Population Registration Act of 1950 established three categories to classify all South African residents according to race: Bantu (Black Africans), Coloured (mixed race), and white. The government later added a fourth category, Asian, to encompass Indian and Pakistani residents. Under apartheid, contact between white and non-white South Africans became severely limited. The passage of subsequent Land Acts awarded exclusive land rights to the country's white minority. The passage of "Pass laws" required all non-white South Africans to carry specific documents that authorized their presence in areas restricted to white citizens only. The government created separate public spaces for white and non-white South Africans, and non-white citizens were barred from participating in national government. Marriage and sexual relations between Black and white South Africans were prohibited. Apartheid received regular resistance over the years, and many anti-apartheid activists received lengthy prison terms or were executed. Nelson Mandela, who helped found Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation"), the ANC's military wing, was imprisoned from 1963 to 1990. Apartheid-era legislation was gradually phased out beginning in the late 1980s. In 1989, Pieter Botha was forced to resign as State President of South Africa. Botha was replaced by F.W. de Klerk, whose administration saw the 1994 passage of a new constitution, which enfranchised Black and other non-white citizens.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Most of Nadine Gordimer's works involve the politics and social issues of South Africa. Her earlier works largely deal with the anti-apartheid movement. Gordimer's first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953) is a semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman (coming-of-age novel) about a young white South African woman's growing political and social consciousness. *Occasion for Loving* (1963) follows the romantic relationship of a white South African woman and a Black South African man during apartheid, when interracial relationships were forbidden. *The Conservationist* (1974), for which Gordimer received the Booker prize, also takes place in South Africa under apartheid and explores Zulu culture through the perspective of the novel's antihero, a white South African businessman. *Burger's Daughter* (1979), a novel, is set in the 1970s and follows the life of a South African woman, Rosa Burger, as she grapples with her relationship with her late father, an anti-apartheid activist. Other South African authors who write in English include J. M. Coetzee, whose notable works include *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), a novel about a man named Michael K who travels from Cape Town to visit his mother's rural birthplace during a fictitious civil war during the apartheid era. Alex La Guma is an important Black literary figure of 20th-century South Africa. *And a Threefold Cord* (1964), La Guma's second novel, explores class conflict through the story of a mixed-race family living in the shanties of the Cape Flats. *Amandla* (1980) is Miriam Tlali's second novel; she was the first Black South African woman to publish a novel. *Amandla* follows a group of student revolutionaries in Soweto during and after the 1976 Soweto

Uprising. Finally, *Fools And Other Stories* (1983) by Njabulo Ndebele is a collection of stories focused on the experience of growing up in Johannesburg during the apartheid era.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** July's People
- **When Written:** Early 1980s
- **Where Written:** South Africa
- **When Published:** 1981
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel; Speculative Fiction; Alternate History
- **Setting:** South Africa
- **Climax:** The Smales family discover that Bam's gun is missing from its hiding place in their hut's thatched roof. Maureen confronts July and accuses him of stealing the gun.
- **Antagonist:** There is no clear-cut antagonist.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Bountiful Bans. *July's People* was first banned under apartheid. In 2001, it was temporarily banned from schools in Guateng Province, South Africa. Critics argued that the book's language was "not acceptable" and "does not encourage good grammatical practices." They also claimed that "the story comes across as being deeply racist, superior and patronising." These accusations are ironic, given the book's anti-racist themes and Gordimer's extensive history of fighting for racial equality in South Africa.

Novel Nobel. In 1991, Gordimer received the Nobel Prize for literature, making her the first South African person to win the award.

PLOT SUMMARY

July's People imagines an alternate history in which a Black liberation movement forcefully overturns apartheid rule, embroiling the nation in a violent civil war that endangers the lives of the country's minority white population. These circumstances force the Smaleses, an affluent, white South African family, to flee their suburban Johannesburg home. When rebel takeover of ports and airports makes escaping the country impossible, the Smaleses gratefully accept their Black servant, July's, offer to seek refuge in his rural village. Forced to abandon their old life with no notice, the Smaleses arrive at July's village with the clothes on their backs and little else. The Smaleses are well aware that they are lucky to be alive. However, life in July's village is a huge culture shock for the family, who previously enjoyed a comfortable, privileged lifestyle in town. In July's village, the family resides in a small, earthen hut. With no access to modern amenities, they learn to bathe in the river and cook over an open fire. Bam hunts for warthogs with the other villagers, and Maureen helps the women unearth root vegetables and gather grass for thatching.

While the children—Gina, Victor, and Royce—quickly adapt to life in July's village, their parents have more difficulty accepting their present situation. Maureen and Bam are a liberal couple who proudly condemn apartheid. However, at July's village, they obsessively tune in to the **radio**, anxiously listening for news that fighting has ceased and order has been restored. Although such thinking radically undermines their progressive political views, the reality is that Smaleses long to return to the privileged, comfortable life in Johannesburg that the oppressive system of apartheid—and July's services—have allowed them to enjoy. Maureen considers the fantasies she used to have about taking a family trip to July's village to teach her children how to experience and appreciate a life and culture so radically different from their own. With no choice but to experience that culture firsthand and wholly reliant on July for food, shelter, and protection, Maureen regards her earlier attitude as idealistic and misguided. She and Bam grow increasingly resentful of having to answer to July and begin to question his loyalty to their family.

One major source of doubt for the Smaleses is that July has the keys to their **bakkie**, or pickup truck. The Smaleses' suspicions that July is disloyal come to a head when July and a friend drive the Smaleses' bakkie into town without asking permission or saying where they are going or when they plan to return. As Bam and Maureen anxiously await July's return, they argue over July's motivations for helping their family and whether or not they can trust him. While Bam believes that July is helping them out of genuine love and concern for the family's wellbeing, Maureen is more skeptical. Eventually, July returns to the village. When Bam and Maureen confront him about taking the bakkie without their permission, their attempt to reassert control over the vehicle backfires. July explains that he only drove the vehicle to the shops to pick up food and other supplies, including batteries for the Smaleses' radio. July's explanation implicitly reminds the Smaleses that their survival is dependent on his willingness to provide for them, effectively putting them in their place while reaffirming his authority.

Tensions continue to rise. July's mother and his wife, Martha, express their concern and disapproval of July's decision to house a white family in the village. The Smaleses' presence poses a significant risk to everyone. Word travels fast, and if rebel forces receive information that the village is sheltering a white family, they might choose to attack. Eventually, the chief finds out that the Smaleses have been staying in the village and demands to meet them in person. When July relays the chief's message to Maureen and Bam, they assume that the chief will banish them from the village. The family is immensely relieved,

then, when the chief allows them to remain in the village. Much of their meeting with the chief involves a discussion of the ongoing civil war. The chief opposes the fighting, arguing that the Black liberation movement attracts outside tribes that may jeopardize the chief's control over his land. The growing threat of violence makes the chief want to defend his land against rebel forces. Somehow, the chief learns that Bam owns a **shotgun**, and he requests that Bam give him a shooting lesson. The chief's position horrifies Bam, who can't imagine how the chief could want to shoot his own people.

Sometime later, a man carrying a red box wanders into the town. The man is the village's equivalent of "travelling entertainment." He removes a record player and amplifier from his box and engages the village in a raucous celebration called "gumba-gumba," which consists of music, dancing, and drinking. The Smaleses are in no mood to celebrate and head back to their hut. Upon their return, Bam realizes that his shotgun is missing. After the family's frantic search fails to produce the missing weapon, Bam collapses onto the bed in despair.

Maureen leaves the hut and finds July in his usual spot at the bakkie's hiding place outside the main settlement. She accuses him of stealing the gun but quickly realizes that he has no idea what she's talking about. Maureen remembers that July's friend Daniel wasn't at the *gumba-gumba* with the rest of the village and identifies him as the probable thief. July informs Maureen that Daniel left the village a few days ago. However, July also insists that the missing gun isn't his problem and refuses to tell Maureen where Daniel went. He tells Maureen that her family's presence in the village is causing him too many problems, insinuating that it won't be long before he orders them to leave. July's obstinance enrages Maureen. Throughout her stay at July's village, Maureen has witnessed numerous villagers using objects she recognizes from her family's house in Johannesburg. Now, she accuses July of stealing from her family and betraying their trust. July proceeds to yell at Maureen in his language. Although Maureen can't understand his words, his message is abundantly clear: Maureen's repeated attempts to dignify July have had the opposite effect. Throughout July's 15 years of service, Maureen's patronizing attitude and controlling demeanor have only dehumanized and alienated him. Finally, July switches to English to tell Maureen that Daniel has run away to join the rebel fighters. Maureen escalates the situation further, accusing July of being opportunistic and big-headed. She claims that July is a coward who has no qualms about staying behind, driving around in the stolen bakkie, and pretending to be a "big man" while others, like Daniel, fight on behalf of his people.

The next day, Maureen is sewing in her family's hut when she sees a helicopter fly over the village before landing somewhere in the distant bushland. Maureen can't see any markings to determine whether the aircraft carries an ally or an enemy. Nevertheless, she drops her sewing, exits the hut, and walks away from the village. Maureen picks up speed as she nears the river and then crosses it. Ignoring her family's calls, Maureen runs forward into the bushland to meet the helicopter and her uncertain fate.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Maureen Smales – The main protagonist of *July's People*, Maureen is married to Bam Smales, a white, affluent South African architect. The couple has three children: Victor, Gina, and Royce. The Smaleses pride themselves on their progressive, anti-apartheid views and always gone to great lengths to treat their Black house servant, July, with dignity and respect. Maureen's father, "the shift boss," made a fortune in the mining industry under apartheid, exploiting and mistreating his Black workers for profit. Maureen is ashamed of her family's complicity in the oppression of South Africa's Black population and tries desperately to distance herself from her past. However, while Maureen outwardly supports Black liberation, her latent racism becomes increasingly evident once the racial hierarchy of post-apartheid society robs the Smaleses of the status and privilege they enjoyed—if reluctantly—under apartheid. The Smaleses rely on July for food, shelter, and protection in July's rural village, and Maureen struggles to accept this new power dynamic. While she acknowledges that her family owes their lives to July, she resents being beholden to him and begins to question his loyalty. Maureen's doubt about July grows after she sees villagers using items from the Smaleses' home in Johannesburg, which July presumably stole over his many years of service. Maureen repeatedly confronts July about his abuses of power, such as when he and a friend leave the village in the Smales' **bakkie** without asking for permission. July's rebuttals to Maureen's increasingly hostile confrontations also shed light on the many ways that Maureen has unintentionally insulted and dehumanized July over his years of service. While Maureen never overtly confronts her latent racism, the culture shock and powerlessness she experiences while living in July's village gives her a new perspective on how alienated and oppressed July must have felt working for them in Johannesburg. In the final scene, Maureen abandons July's village and her family to chase down a helicopter that has just landed in the distant bushland, though she doesn't know whether the helicopter carries ally or enemy forces. Simultaneously too ashamed to confront or reject her internalized racism and other demons, Maureen abandons her old life in pursuit of the unknown.

Bam Smales – Bam Smales is Maureen Smales's husband and one of the book's central protagonists. He is an affluent, white South African architect. Bam prides himself on his progressive, anti-apartheid views and strives to treat his family's Black house servant, July, as an equal. These views are put to the test,

however when the Smaleses flee their suburban home in war-torn Johannesburg for the safety of July's rural village. In July's village, the Smales no longer possess the racial and social privilege they benefited from under apartheid, and they're suddenly forced to rely on July for food, shelter, and protection. As such, the new situation radically transforms the power dynamic between July and the Smaleses. However, while Maureen immediately resents having to answer to July, Bam trust in July is unwavering—at least, at first. Like Maureen, Bam's latent racism becomes increasingly apparent the longer he resides in July's village. While Bam appears outwardly supportive of Black liberation, he constantly tunes in to the **radio** for news of an end to fighting and a return to the white-controlled status quo. He also underestimates the Black villagers, as evidenced by his completely illogical assumption that nobody in the village is aware of the **shotgun** he keeps hidden in the thatched roof of his family's hut. Additionally, Bam and Maureen both resent July's insistence on keeping the keys to the **bakkie**, the Smaleses' pickup truck. They panic when he and a friend drive the vehicle into town without asking the couple for permission. Bam grows increasingly distant from Maureen as they both struggle to accept the reality that their desire to return to their old life under apartheid contradicts their outward espousal of liberalism and racial equality.

July – July is a Black man who has worked as a house servant for the Smales family, who are affluent, white South Africans, for 15 years. When a Black uprising overthrows apartheid rule in South Africa and puts the country's minority white population in danger, the Smaleses accept July's offer to shelter them in his rural village. While Maureen and Bam Smales are grateful to July for saving their lives, the move drastically alters their relationship with him. Suddenly, they must rely on their former servant for food, shelter, and protection. In apartheid-era Johannesburg, in contrast, July was at the mercy of the Smaleses. While Maureen and Bam always made a point to treat July with more respect than most wealthy, white South Africans treated their Black staff, July's existence as a Black man was more oppressive and stifling than they could appreciate. The Smales might believe that they have a good relationship with July, but the racial and social superiority that apartheid afforded them has always prevented them from interacting with him as equals. When the Black uprising ends apartheid and renders white people powerless, the power dynamics in July's relationship with his employers shift, and the Smaleses begin to question July's loyalty and honesty. One early source of conflict is July's decision to keep the keys to the Smaleses' **bakkie**. July's control of their vehicle effectively severs the Smaleses' last remaining connection to their old life and reaffirms how beholden they are to him. July has a wife, Martha, to whom he sends letters and a portion of his salary. The couple isn't very close, however, since July only returns to the village once every two years. Martha and July's mother disapprove of his decision to house the Smaleses. Both women criticize July's decision to continue to serve the Smaleses, reminding him of the consequences he could face if people outside of his village discover that he is helping a white family. July, too, struggles to reconcile his allegiance to the Smaleses with his loyalty to his people. Nevertheless, July continues to protect and provide for the Smaleses, even as they grow increasingly resentful of the new power that he holds over them.

Martha – Martha is July's wife and the mother of his children. Because July can only return to his village once every two years, Martha and July don't have a very close relationship. Prior to the violent situation in Johannesburg forcing July and the Smaleses to abandon the city, Martha's contact with her husband was limited to letters and the regular paychecks he would send home to support his family. Martha opposes July's decision to house the Smales family. She struggles to understand July's loyalty to the Smaleses and what compels him to continue to serve white people who no longer have the means to pay him. Like July's mother, Martha has had minimal contact with white people and generally distrusts them. She urges July to convince the Smaleses to seek shelter outside of July's village. While Martha never becomes friendly with the Smaleses, she respects July's loyalty to the family by helping them out herself. For instance, she gives Maureen an herbal medicine to help with the children's coughs. She also chastises July's mother for being judgmental of Maureen's ignorance about the region's native plants.

July's Mother – July's mother is an elderly woman who lives in the village with the rest of July's extended family. She agrees to give up her hut to house the Smales family when violent riots force them to flee their home in Johannesburg. Like Martha, July's mother is skeptical of the Smales and white people in general. She complains about the Smaleses' extended stay in the village but goes along with her son's requests. July's mother has difficulty understanding her son's loyalty to the Smaleses. Unlike July, she has never served white people and is vehemently opposed to taking orders from them. While July's mother is not openly hostile toward the Smaleses, she regards them skeptically. She believes that all white people are trouble—even those as desperate and powerless as the Smales family.

Daniel – Daniel is a young Black man who lives in July's village and is friends with July. He teaches July to drive the **bakkie**, and the two of them spend their days working on or hanging around the vehicle in its hiding place outside of the main settlement. Bam teaches Daniel to shoot after Daniel expresses interest in the **gun**, foreshadowing Daniel's later decision to steal the gun from its hiding place in the thatched roof of the Smales' hut. Unlike July, whose loyalty to the Smales family somewhat contradicts his allegiance to his people and Black identity, Daniel is steadfast in his support of Black liberation. At the end of the book, after stealing Bam's shotgun, Daniel runs

away to join the Black fighters.

The Chief – The chief has authority over settlements in July's region. After word spreads that July is housing a white family in his village, the chief orders the Smales family to see him. He will allow them to remain in July's village—but only if they ask for permission in person. That the Smaleses must appeal to a Black authority figure to be in a Black-dominated space illustrates how radically the end of apartheid has upended the racial hierarchy. During the Smaleses' meeting with the chief, the chief asks Bam many questions about the ongoing civil war and expresses interest in learning to shoot Bam's **gun**. Bam is shocked to hear the chief claim that he would prefer to shoot Black rebels than cede his land to outside tribes that have joined forces with the South African fighters. The chief condemns Black liberation and the ongoing war. He wants the white apartheid government to take back control of South Africa, since their system protects his land from being invaded by Black people from outside tribes.

Ellen – Ellen is July's "town woman," a Black office cleaner with whom July had a romantic relationship while working for the Smaleses in Johannesburg. July loses touch with Ellen when he and the Smaleses flee Johannesburg for July's rural village. Maureen uses Ellen as leverage against July. She condemns July's ignorance about what became of Ellen after he and the Smaleses left Johannesburg and judges him for having an extramarital affair in the first place. When July orders Maureen not to work in the fields with the other village women, Maureen assumes that July is afraid that she will tell Martha (July's wife) about Ellen.

Lydia – Lydia was an older Black woman whom Maureen's wealthy family employed as a servant when Maureen was a child growing up in a mining town. She would regularly walk Maureen home from school. Lydia sometimes scolded Maureen, but other times they were "conspirators," laughing and trading gossip together as friends. Maureen remembers one scene from her childhood when a photographer stopped her and Lydia on the street to take their photograph. In the photograph, which Maureen only stumbles upon years later, Lydia carries Maureen's backpack balanced atop her head. When Maureen reflects on the photograph as an adult, she can't believe how unaware she had been of the power dynamics between herself, her family, and Lydia. In retrospect, the backpack balanced on Lydia's head is a glaring symbol of Lydia's subservience to Maureen. Maureen reflects on this memory of Lydia during her stay in July's village, implicitly drawing a connection between her former ignorance about the nature of her and Lydia's relationship and her present inability to make sense of her relationship with July.

Gina – Gina is the Smaleses' young daughter. Like her siblings, Gina adapts to the culture of July's rural village and doesn't seem to miss her family's old life in Johannesburg all that much. She quickly becomes friends with Nyiko, one of the village girls. The ease with which the girls form a close bond highlights how readily the Smales children accept the culture of July's people compared to Maureen and Bam.

The Shift Boss – "The shift boss" is the title Maureen uses to refer to her father, a wealthy mining boss who exploited and underpaid his Black workers. Maureen reflects shamefully on her privileged upbringing throughout the book. She prides herself on the progressive, anti-apartheid views she adopted as an adult and resents her inherited complicity in the oppression of South Africa's Black population. Maureen's habit of invoking the impersonal title "shift boss" illustrates her desire to distance herself from her family and past.

The Man with the Red Box – The man with the red box is something of a wandering beggar and the rural region's equivalent of "travelling entertainment." He travels to villages throughout the area with a red box containing a record player and amplifier to project music. When the man wanders into July's village toward the end of the book, the community comes together for a celebration called "*gumba-gumba*," which involves music, drinking, and dancing.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Victor – Victor is the older of the Smaleses' two young sons. He's frequently rowdy and mischievous. For instance, he manages to sneak his electric race car toy onto the **bakkie** before the Smaleses flee their suburban home. Like his siblings, Victor readily adapts to life in July's rural village.

Royce – Royce is the younger of the Smaleses' two young sons. Like his siblings, Royce readily adapts to life in July's rural village.

The Photographer – When Maureen was a child growing up in a mining town, a photographer took a photograph of Maureen and Lydia, an older Black woman who Maureen's family employed as a servant, as Maureen walked home from school. In the photograph, Lydia carries Maureen's backpack balanced atop her head.

Nyiko – Nyiko is a young village girl who becomes friends with Gina. The ease with which the girls become close friends underscores how easily the Smales children adapt to life in July's village compared to Maureen and Bam.

The Chief's Headman – Daniel refers to the chief's assistant as his "headman." The headman walks with a "formal" gait and wears a mismatched suit. The Smaleses meet him when they go to the chief to ask for permission to stay in July's village.

Nora/Nomvula – Nora/Nomvula was the Smaleses' cook-nanny who ran away sometime before the Smaleses fled Johannesburg for July's rural village.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACIAL HIERARCHY AND APARTHEID

July's People was published in 1981, a decade before the end of the apartheid era in South Africa. Apartheid, an Afrikaans word meaning "apartness," was a system of racial oppression enforced in South Africa after the all-white National Party gained power in 1948, until around 1991, when the administration of President F.W. de Klerk began to repeal much of the era's core legislation. The legislation of the apartheid era enforced racial segregation, limited contact between the country's white and non-white populations, and disenfranchised non-white citizens. *July's People* turns the racial hierarchy upheld under apartheid on its head, imagining a world where apartheid ends when a Black liberation movement propels the country into a bloody civil war that removes the minority white ruling class from power and puts all of the country's white residents in danger. This social and political upheaval forces the Smaleses, an affluent, white South African family, to flee their home in Johannesburg to seek refuge in the rural village that July, their Black house servant, is from. Upon arriving in July's village, the Smaleses once more find themselves the minority white population of a majority Black community. However, the racial hierarchy of this new society renders them powerless and wholly unable to control their destiny. At the same time, July and other Black characters, who were second-class citizens under apartheid, are now the "big men" in town. For example, the Smales must receive permission from the regional chief, a Black man, to remain in July's village. This is a symbolic and practical reversal of the Pass Laws that were in effect under apartheid. Pass Laws required non-white South Africans to obtain special documents that authorized their presence in spaces restricted for usage by white South Africans only. *July's People* creates an alternate history that subverts South Africa's racial hierarchy under apartheid. In so doing, the book draws attention to and challenges the white supremacist ideologies that formed the basis of apartheid-era legislation and social attitudes.

GRATITUDE AND RESENTMENT

Maureen and Bam Smales are well aware that they owe their lives to July for helping them flee the violence of Johannesburg and providing them with food, shelter, and protection in his rural village. Yet, despite this awareness, they struggle to reconcile their gratitude for July's generosity with their growing feelings of resentment toward him for leveraging their indebtedness against them. In Johannesburg, July was the Smaleses' servant, and their feelings toward him were unanimously positive because they were the ones dictating the terms of the relationship. However, July's gracious act of sheltering the Smaleses upsets this relationship, and the Smaleses suddenly find themselves at the mercy of a man over whom they once had the upper hand.

Immediately upon their arrival at the village, July begins to act in ways that emphasize the Smaleses' indebtedness to him and test the limits of their gratitude. An early example of this is July's insistence on keeping the keys to the **bakkie**, the Smaleses' vehicle. July frames the decision as a practical matter: the Smaleses cannot safely drive the bakkie, since doing so would put them at risk of being apprehended and killed by Black rebel soldiers. It's essential, too, that the bakkie remain hidden from view, since the presence of a white family's vehicle could easily catch the attention of authorities, placing the Smaleses and July in danger. July's familiarity with the geography of his homeland means that he's better equipped to hide the vehicle than the Smaleses are. July's reasoning tracks, yet the Smaleses can't help but feel resentful toward him for taking advantage of their helplessness. Their resentment magnifies when July increasingly uses the bakkie less out of necessity and more to raise his social status in the village. *July's People* suggests that when people lack the ability to control their circumstances, gratitude becomes indebtedness, which invariably leads to resentment.

WHITE LIBERALISM AND HYPOCRISY

Bam Smales, a wealthy, white South African architect, and his wife, Maureen, consider themselves fundamentally different from white South Africans who support apartheid. They preach the progressive ideals of racial equality and human rights and pride themselves on treating their Black house servant, July, with dignity and respect. Yet, many of the Smaleses' actions contradict the liberal ideologies to which they subscribe. Their progressivism is disingenuous and performative, and they are ignorant about the ways their thoughts and behaviors reinforce the oppressive ideologies that they claim to reject. While living as displaced refugees in July's rural village, Maureen and Bam constantly listen to the **radio**, waiting to receive word of the white victory that would allow for their safe return to Johannesburg and restore the safety and privilege they enjoyed under apartheid rule. While the Smaleses take pride in their anti-apartheid politics, they take no issue with the oppressive policies of the era the minute their own comfort and power come under attack. Moreover, though the Smaleses might claim to see July as equal, they feel threatened whenever July oversteps a boundary or goes against their wishes in a way that emphasizes the reality that, in this new, post-apartheid

social order, they no longer have power over him. Many of the Smaleses' comments and behaviors suggest their internalized belief in the superiority of western, Euro-centric culture. For instance, Maureen establishes a clear distinction between the Black children who "belong" in the rural conditions of July's village and her own children, who belong in society. *July's People* emphasizes discrepancies between the Smaleses' progressive political ideals and their prejudiced attitudes and behaviors, thus revealing deep-seated hypocrisy in modern white liberalism.

POWER

July's People explores the power dynamics at play in a society that enforces a racial hierarchy. Power dynamics influence every aspect of life in the fictionalized post-apartheid South Africa of the novel, from the political and systemic forces that shape legislation to the interpersonal relationships and everyday interactions between characters. When July smuggles the Smaleses into his rural village to help them escape the dangerous conditions of war-torn Johannesburg, the Smaleses' new status as powerless refugees drastically alters their relationship with July. In town, July had been the Smaleses' house servant. He was also a Black man in a society that afforded preferential treatment to white citizens while oppressing non-white citizens. Life in July's village alters the power dynamic between the Smaleses and July, as the Smaleses no longer hold the power of employment or social hierarchy over him. July's empowerment gives him more freedom to dictate the terms of his relationship with the Smaleses. The Smaleses, in turn, realize that their reliance on July for food, shelter, and community acceptance drastically alters the way they interact with him. For instance, they become more cautious and deferential—just as July had been when he worked for them in town.

This subversion of power forces the Smaleses to see their former relationship with July in a new light. Maureen, in particular, realizes how significantly uneven power dynamics destabilize and delegitimize what she had formerly considered to be a loving friendship between herself and the man who used to be her servant. *July's People* presents human life as a complex, interconnected system of power dynamics in which every decision or action that increases or preserves the power of one person or group comes at the direct expense of another. In explicit and nuanced ways, the characters in *July's People* repeatedly assess situations and make decisions based on who is empowered, who is oppressed, and what they must do to preserve or improve their own status.

CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT

One of the biggest challenges that life in July's rural village poses for the Smales family is learning to adjust to a culture that is drastically different from their own. The Smaleses are an affluent, white South African family. Their old life in Johannesburg, which Maureen and Bam refer to as "back there," was defined by the ease, comfort, and material pleasures that their race, class, and social status afforded them. When civil war necessitates that they flee to July's village, the move forces them to give up the social and cultural frameworks that not only occupied their time but formed the basis of their identities and gave their lives meaning. "Back there," the Smaleses lived in a spacious, suburban home outfitted with countless material comforts and the freedom of privacy. In July's village, the family of five inhabits a small, earthen hut. Privacy is nonexistent, and their material possessions consist of a **radio** that rarely works, the clothes on their backs, and very little else. Instead of their newfound lack of distractions drawing the family closer, the opposite occurs. Stripped of the familiar cultural customs and social norms that used to dictate their thoughts and interactions, the Smaleses become strangers to themselves and each other. Maureen stops referring to Bam and her children by their names, relying instead on impersonal signifiers like "the blond man" and "the children." Bam and Maureen become estranged from each other, too. Their desire for physical intimacy disappears, and their conversations are increasingly limited to superficial small talk. *July's People* suggests that culture and identity are deeply intertwined. When a person experiences cultural displacement, they lose the cultural and social reference points that gave their lives comfort, structure, and meaning.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE BAKKIE

Bam's yellow bakkie (pickup truck) symbolizes the shifting power dynamics in the Smales family's relationship with July. It also symbolizes the cultural displacement the Smales experience during their time in July's village. Almost immediately upon their arrival at July's village, the Smaleses begin to resent how the ongoing civil war and their new status as refugees render them beholden to July. If the Smaleses leave July's village, they risk being apprehended and killed by rebel forces. These circumstances force the Smaleses to rely on July to bring them the food and supplies they need to survive. However, the family struggles to adapt to their new subservience to July. Maureen, in particular, grows resentful of July's new authority and begins to question his loyalty to her family.

July's control of the bakkie is one of the significant points of conflict between July and the Smaleses. Even though Maureen

and Bam know they can't safely leave July's village, the loss of agency they feel when July assumes control of the bakkie's keys and operates the vehicle without their permission symbolically reaffirms all that the Smales have lost. If the bakkie symbolizes freedom—the freedom of mobility, choice, and agency over one's own destiny—then July's newly assumed control over the vehicle symbolizes the shift in power dynamics that has occurred due to the change in cultural surroundings and the social and political landscape of the war-torn nation. In this new, post-apartheid social order, the Smaleses' race and class no longer grant them the privilege that had formerly allowed them to purchase the bakkie. This is why Maureen and Bam are so bothered by July taking off in the bakkie without their permission: it reaffirms their new status at the bottom of the racial hierarchy and July's rise to the top. This is a tough pill for Maureen and Bam to swallow, since it forces the outwardly progressive couple to confront their new powerlessness and a latent racial prejudice they didn't know they had.

THE RADIO

The radio symbolizes the Smaleses' white liberal hypocrisy. It also symbolizes the cultural displacement they experience when the country's ongoing civil war forces them to abandon their old life in Johannesburg for July's rural village. The Smaleses constantly tune in to the radio to receive news updates about the conflict in Johannesburg. While the Smaleses take pride in their progressive, anti-apartheid politics, their fixation with the news reveals a contradiction between their progressive politics and their desire for a political situation that favors their race and social status. Presumably, the Smaleses are listening to the radio with the hope that a news broadcast will announce the defeat of the Black rebel fighters, an end of the civil war, and a return to the apartheid-era social order that existed before the conflict began. In other words, the Smaleses long for the reinstatement of an oppressive regime that they have long condemned. This contradiction between the Smaleses' theoretical political views and their practical hopes for the future illustrates the limitations of white liberalism. While the Smaleses support equality ideologically, their constant radio monitoring suggests that they are not entirely willing to embrace a new social order that robs them of the many privileges they used to enjoy. They might support racial equality and oppose apartheid—but only so long as these social changes don't negatively impact their quality of life. As the couple obsessively tunes in to the radio to listen for news of an end to the fighting and a return to the status quo, they find it increasingly hard to ignore the fact that their desire to return to their old life directly contradicts their supposedly progressive, anti-apartheid views. Maureen and Bam claim to support Black liberation, yet they also desire the privileges that Black oppression affords them.

BAM'S SHOTGUN

The gun symbolizes the Smaleses' loss of freedom and agency. It also symbolizes the hypocrisy that underlies the Smaleses' liberalism. Bam's shotgun is one of the few items from the Smales family's old life in Johannesburg that they manage to take with them as they hurriedly flee the violent atmosphere of the city for the safety of July's rural village. Bam didn't use his shotgun for much in his former life—only to shoot game-birds. While a more powerful type of gun might summon forth ideas of authority and protection, Bam's shotgun is little more than a symbol of the nostalgia he feels for the freedom, privilege, and ease that he and his family enjoyed in their former life in Johannesburg. He doesn't bring the gun to protect himself and his family against enemy forces—Bam's gun is woefully ill-equipped for such a task. Instead, he brings the gun to remember the life he left behind: a life made possible by the oppressive system of apartheid that Bam claims to condemn. Bringing the gun as a memento of his former apartheid-era life reflects Bam's hypocrisy. His decision to pack and meticulously covet a weapon that is useless aside from its sentimental value reveals how desperately, if unwittingly, Bam clings to a social order that disenfranchised Black South African people like July while affording white people like Bam and his family the freedom of leisure. When Bam returns to his hut to discover that the gun is missing, he doesn't grieve his lost ability to protect his family—he grieves the loss of the former, more unrestrained way of life he left behind.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *July's People* published in 1982.

Chapter 2 Quotes

He would no sooner shoot a buck than a man; and he did not keep any revolver under his pillow to defend his wife, his children or his property in their suburban house.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen ruminates on the shotgun Bam brought with them

to July's village when the family fled their home in Johannesburg. This passage sets up the shotgun as one of the book's recurrent symbols, not only to the reader, but also to the Smales family. One of the gun's key characteristics is its uselessness. Maureen implicitly questions what possible motives Bam could have for bringing the gun to July's village since he's never used the gun for self-defense in the past. "He would no sooner shoot a buck than a man," she observes, establishing Bam as a passive man with no interest in killing. Bam has only used the gun for casual bird hunting in the first place. It's not a weapon: it's a piece of equipment he uses to practice a hobby in his free time.

If Bam is too passive to kill, why does he bring the gun? Like other members of the Smales family, Bam packs an object that reminds him of the life he is leaving behind in Johannesburg, even if that object doesn't have a purpose in the family's new life in July's village. For Bam, the shotgun symbolizes the freedom he enjoyed before civil war forced him and his family to flee their home and dismantled the system of apartheid that granted them those freedoms in the first place. In this way, not only is the gun a symbol of freedom, but it's also a symbol of Bam's liberal hypocrisy. While he condemns the color divide, he's complicit in taking advantage of and enjoying the freedoms that apartheid gave his family due to their race.

The decently-paid and contented male servant, living in their yard since they had married, clothed by them in two sets of uniforms, khaki pants for rough housework, white drill for waiting at table, given Wednesdays and alternate Sundays free, allowed to have his friends visit him and his town woman sleep with him in his room—he turned out to be the chosen one in whose hands their lives were to be held[.]

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen sits in the earthen hut July has provided for the Smales family to live in during their time in his village. She considers her present circumstances and the unthinkable reality that her family's longtime house servant, July, has "turned out to be the chosen one in whose hands [her family's] lives were to be held." This passage provides initial background information on the power dynamics at play in Maureen's relationship with July, her family's Black servant.

The Smales family takes pride in their liberal politics and opposition to apartheid, and they try to put those beliefs into practice by treating their Black servant well. Maureen goes into great detail to list the many privileges she has afforded July. She describes the "two sets of uniforms," the "alternate Sundays free," and the liberty to socialize with friends and his "town woman," or lover. What she fails to grasp is that giving July a relatively basic set of privileges is hardly an admirable act of humanitarianism—in fact, it's really the least she could do. Maureen believes that treating July well relative to other white people who employ Black servants is good enough. She and Bam claim to condemn the system of apartheid, yet they are comfortable operating within its social constraints, so long as there are people who behave worse than them.

The seats from the vehicle no longer belonged to it; they had become the furniture of the hut. Outside in an afternoon cooled by a rippled covering of grey luminous clouds, she sat on the ground as others did. Over the valley beyond the kraal of euphorbia and dead thorn where the goats were kept: she knew the vehicle was there. A ship that had docked in a far country. Anchored in the khakiweed, it would rust and be stripped to hulk, unless it made the journey back, soon.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen sits inside her family's hut and looks at the car seats from the bakkie, which they have removed from the vehicle and repurposed as makeshift beds for the children. Looking at the bakkie's seats makes Maureen realize that they "no longer belong[] to it" and that they've now "become the furniture of the hut." The bakkie symbolizes the shift in power that occurs after a Black-led rebellion dismantles the apartheid system and robs the Smales family of the privileges their race afforded them. When Maureen suggests that the bakkie's seats have "become the furniture of the hut," she's alluding to the fact that power has changed hands. Now July's people—the people who inhabit these huts—can claim their fair share of power at the expense of families like Maureen's, who have benefited for too long

from Black exploitation and oppression.

Maureen and Bam view the bakkie as a symbol of the past life they left behind in Johannesburg. Bam originally bought the bakkie as a second vehicle—one he and the family could use to traverse rugged roads on vacations and hunting trips. That the Smales family could purchase a vehicle to be used solely for leisure emphasizes the privileged life they enjoyed in Johannesburg. When Maureen remarks that the bakkie's seats "no longer belong to [the vehicle]," she's implicitly suggesting that her family's old life of privilege no longer belongs to them but to July's people.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Her son, who had seen the white woman and the three children cowered on the floor of their vehicle, led the white face behind the wheel in his footsteps, his way the only one in a wilderness, was suddenly aware of something he had not known. —They can't do anything. Nothing to us any more.—

Related Characters: July (speaker), Martha, July's Mother, Maureen Smales

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

This passage offers a brief glimpse into July's mother's perspective. July hangs around the kitchen with his mother, his wife, and some of the other village women. Everybody is very curious about the village's newest residents. July's mother and wife are mostly skeptical, but July assures them that the Smales family—and white people, in general—won't create problems for them anymore.

July's mother's observation marks the moment that July realizes the shift in power that the civil war has created between himself and his former employers. "They can't do anything. Nothing to us any more," July tells his mother. Seeing how Maureen and her children "cowered on the floor of their vehicle," hidden beneath a tarp in the bakkie's cab to avoid being spotted by authorities, makes July realize how powerless the people who formerly dictated his actions have become. The tables have turned: instead of July relying on the Smales family for food, shelter, and money, now the Smales' survival is in his hands.

It's also important to note July's ambiguous use of pronouns. "They" can refer to the Smales family, specifically, or white people in general. July's ambiguous language suggests his understanding not just of his changed relationship with the Smales family, but also of his changed position within South African society. The end of apartheid ends white people's ability to dictate the terms of July's life.

Finally, it's significant that seeing Maureen and the children hiding in the bakkie is what triggers July's realization about the altered power dynamics between himself and the Smales family. In this way, the bakkie symbolizes July's newly empowered life and the power and privilege that the Smales family no longer has.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ She was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination. They had nothing.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen sits down to read the only book she brought from home and realizes that she no longer has a desire or need for fiction. This passage emphasizes the sense of displacement and alienation Maureen feels being in July's village. This passage reveals the aspect of her family's new life that is most unsettling and unbelievable for Maureen: that her family "ha[s] nothing." Maureen and Bam claim to believe in equality and support an end to apartheid. However, this passage reveals that Maureen also believes that she is entitled to all the privileges that apartheid-era legislation has afforded her white family. Even if Maureen supports Black liberation, she is complicit in a system that affords privileges and empowerment to people like herself at the top of the racial hierarchy, at the expense of people like July. That Maureen finds suddenly being stripped of these privileges impossible to fathom illustrates how she has internalized and accepted the elements of apartheid that benefit her. While she claims to support Black liberation, she is still complicit in the oppression of Black people.

Maureen's observation that she "was already not what she was" illustrates how fundamentally her privilege defines her. Maureen can claim progressive politics all she wants, but

she is nevertheless defined fundamentally by the privileges she has gained through the apartheid system.

❝ Did the photographer know what he saw, when they crossed the road like that, together? Did the book, placing the pair in its context, give the reason she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know?

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Lydia, The Photographer

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen has just reflected on a moment from her childhood in which a photographer took a photograph of Maureen and her family's servant, Lydia, an older Black woman who would often walk Maureen home from school. The photographer's image depicts Lydia carrying Maureen's backpack balanced atop her head. Maureen implies that viewing the photograph later in life made Maureen realize the uneven power dynamic between herself and Lydia. However, she failed to see this asymmetry as a child and can recognize it only in retrospect, with her new socially conscious, progressive attitude toward racial inequality under apartheid rule.

However, these reflections also reveal blind spots that Maureen continues to have about her privilege. When she wonders whether "she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know" about the inequality at the center of her relationship, she implies that Lydia was just as unobservant as Maureen was. This is, of course, ridiculous: Lydia was an oppressed Black woman at the bottom of a racial hierarchy that forced her to serve and take orders from Maureen, a literal child. It seems unlikely that Lydia could have been unaware of how the power dynamics legally sanctioned by apartheid impacted her relationship with Maureen.

Maureen is persistently ashamed of her childhood growing up the daughter of a wealthy mining boss and tries to distance herself from her past. Yet, she continues to be unaware of the benefits her race and social class have afforded her throughout life. She wants to sympathize with Black people but misunderstands their plight completely.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ There was nowhere to run to. Nothing to get away in. All he could say to Maureen was that it was July. July.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen and Bam see their bakkie disappear into the distance. Bam gave July the keys the day before, and the couple can't find July anywhere around the village, so they realize it must be July who took the vehicle. This brief passage illustrates how severely the bakkie's absence affects Bam and Maureen's state of mind.

The shock that the missing vehicle generates in the Smales family comes through in their sparse use of language: they're effectively stunned into silence. Implicit in their shock, as well, is the sense of betrayal they feel at July leaving the village without telling them where he was going or when he would return. July's initial explanation for why he should keep the keys was that he would be better suited to hide the vehicle from authorities flying overhead in airplanes and from snooping villagers. He'd never mentioned to the Smales family that he intended to use the vehicle for his own purposes. That July should go behind their backs and use their property without asking them first is a blatant illustration of how radically their relationship has changed since moving to the village. While the Smales are well aware that they've fallen on hard times, they have yet to appreciate the full extent of their powerlessness. For the Smales family, July's decision to take the bakkie is hard evidence that he's no longer beholden to them.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ —Here, I bring for you— He tossed up in his palm and presented to her two small radio batteries.
—Oh how marvellous. How clever to remember.— He had heard her say it all when friends brought her flowers or chocolates.
He grinned and swayed a little, as they did. —Now you listen nice again.— It was the small flourish of his exit.

Related Characters: July, Maureen Smales (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

July returns to Maureen and Bam's hut after taking the bakkie into town without telling them first. When they try to confront July about the incident, he brushes aside their concerns, focusing on the food and supplies he picked up for them on his trip to implicitly remind them that it's not he who needs to apologize to them, but they who owe *him* an apology. July's response to the Smales' confrontation puts them in their place, forcing them to acknowledge the shifting of power dynamics that began when the Smales family accepted July's offer to seek refuge in his village. July no longer needs their permission—or any white person's permission—to act.

Before leaving the hut, July throws Maureen and Bam some batteries so they can "listen nice again" to their radio. He then departs with a "small flourish," a gesture that Maureen seems to interpret as July subtly gloating about his new agency. This passage addresses the resentment and bitterness that slowly develops in Bam and Maureen as they try to reconcile July's old role as their servant with his new role as their savior. While Maureen claims to want to be friends with July, this scene shows that she and Bam don't fully understand how to navigate the power dynamics of this new relationship.

Chapter 8 Quotes

There was the moment to ask him for the keys. But it was let pass.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Bam and Maureen confront July about taking the bakkie without their permission. July brushes aside their concerns, refuses to apologize for overstepping a boundary, and asserts his dominance over the Smales family by implicitly reminding them that their survival depends on his willingness to help them. The Smales cannot criticize July for taking their bakkie, since there's no other way for them to obtain the supplies they need without July's help.

This passage is important because it denotes the Smales' new awareness of the shifting power dynamics in their relationship with July. The panic they experienced as they watched their vehicle disappear—their last connection to the outside world, and their only way out of the village—reinforced their powerlessness. July's uncooperative response to their concerns about him taking the vehicle without their permission signals to the Smales that July has realized that he is the person in charge of the vehicle and their fate—not them. The moment that July realizes he no longer has to answer to the Smales is the moment things really shift in their relationship: it's the moment they "let pass," guaranteeing that they will never again regain possession of the keys.

Submission to the elements was something forgotten, back there.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen stands outside under the blaring sun and considers the differences between her old life in Johannesburg, "back there," and her new life in July's village. In a literal sense, Maureen is commenting on how living in July's rural village necessitates one's "submission to the elements," since July's people live without many of the modern amenities that the Smales took for granted in town.

Maureen's observation resonates figuratively as well. In the Smales' old life, their privilege allowed them to buy material goods to shelter them from pain and discomfort. While their lives might not have been perfect, their position at the top of apartheid-era South Africa's racial hierarchy gave them a life free of a wide scale of discomforts. Life in July's village affords them no such protections, leaving them more attuned to the "submission to the elements" required in daily life.

Finally, this passage invokes the idea of "back there," a recurring phrase the Smales use to refer to the life they left

behind to flee to July's village. The vagueness of the phrase reflects the Smales' guilt over wanting their old lives back. One of Maureen's defining traits is the guilt she feels about her complicity in the oppression of Black people. While she and Bam long to return to their comparatively comfortable life, they realize that doing so necessitates the restoration of a racially discriminatory system that offers them comfort and protection at the expense of others. The vagueness of "back there" conveys how ashamed they are to admit they want their old lives back.

> The bakkie? You know I'm tell them. I get it from you in town. The bakkie it's mine. Well, what can they say?—

Only a colourless texturing like combings from raw wool across the top of his head from ear to ear remained to Bam— he had begun to go bald in his twenties. The high dome reddened under the transparent nap. His eyes were blue as Gina's shining out of dirt. —Is it yours, July?—

All three laughed in agitation.

Related Characters: Bam Smales, July (speaker), Maureen Smales, Gina

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 59-60

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen and Bam confront July about taking the bakkie to the shops without their permission. July has innocent and logical explanations for why he took the bakkie and why he is telling people it belongs to him. After all, the ongoing civil war makes it too dangerous for Maureen and Bam, as white people, to venture outside July's village to fetch their own supplies. Furthermore, July needs to pretend that the Smales family gave him the bakkie, or curious outsiders might suspect that July is sheltering the vehicle's white owners in this village, which would put everybody's life in danger.

However, Maureen and Bam's discomfort with July's new sense of entitlement causes them to project ulterior meanings onto July's words. They detect a deceptive, gloating tone in the way July excitedly explains his cover story that this bakkie is his. Bam's anger is palpable as the formerly "colourless" bald patch at the top of his head "redden[s]" with emotion. "Is it yours, July?" he asks. Bam's question is simultaneously joking and deadly serious.

On the one hand, Bam is poking fun at the fact that July clearly enjoys using the vehicle and impressing people by claiming that it's his, even if it's only a cover story. But Bam's joke is also an accusation. He's implicitly warning July that he has overstepped a boundary by taking the vehicle without asking permission. When Bam, July, and Maureen "laugh[] in agitation" in response to Bam's question, all three acknowledge the profound anger embedded in Bam's joke. Bam's anger reflects his and Maureen's discomfort that they no longer have the upper hand in their relationship with July.

Chapter 9 Quotes

> Abstractions hardened into the concrete: even death is a purchase. One of Bam's senior partners could afford his at the cost of a private plane—in which he crashed. July's old mother (was she not perhaps his grandmother?) would crawl, as Maureen was watching her now, coming home with wood, and grass for her brooms on her head, bent lower and lower towards the earth until finally she sank to it—the only death she could afford.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, July, July's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen considers the differences between the lives of July's people and the lives of the privileged. She concludes that "even death is a purchase," emphasizing how social, racial, and economic privilege determine every facet of one's life. Specifically, she compares the fate of one of Bam's senior partners, who "could afford his [death] at the cost of a private plane" to the probable fate of July's mother, who can only afford to "crawl" her way toward death after an exhausting life of endless work and suffering.

Maureen's observation portrays death as an equalizing force—everyone will die one day, whether they are wealthy enough to afford to die in a private jet or too poor to have much say in the circumstances of their death. However, Maureen's observation also illuminates the lack of personal agency of disadvantaged people like July's mother. Before a person arrives at the only "death" they can afford, they go

through a lifetime shaped by what they can and cannot afford. Therefore, Maureen's meditation on death becomes an indirect meditation on the role that privilege and power play in choice and agency.

Maureen is a frustrating character. Moments like these show that she is attuned to how privilege and power affect a person's life. Nevertheless, she remains unable or unwilling to turn her thoughtful gaze inward and realize how her privileges blind her to the suffering of others.

❝ —*The master.* Bam's not your master. Why do you pretend? Nobody's ever thought of you as anything but a grown man. My god, I can't believe you can talk about me like that… Bam's had damn all to do with you, in fifteen years. That's it. You played around with things together in the tool shed. You worked for me every day. I got on your nerves. So what. You got on mine. That's how people are.— She flowered into temper. —But we're not talking about that. That's got nothing to do with now. That's over—

Related Characters: Maureen Smales (speaker), Bam Smales, July

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

During a heated altercation between July and Maureen, July accuses Maureen of demeaning him. When July refers to Bam as his "master," Maureen becomes enraged and defensive.

"Bam's not your master," Maureen protests, speaking the word "master" aloud twice to emphasize her disbelief that July would use it in the first place. Maureen insinuates that July has a persecution complex and is wrongfully accusing the Smales of offenses they haven't committed and prejudices they don't have. "Why do you pretend?" she asks him. Maureen assumes that July is feigning persecution to antagonize her. It never occurs to her that she and her husband could insult and humiliate July without realizing it.

Maureen characterizes her relationship with July as mutually annoying at times, but her argument is misguided. Her description of her and July's occasionally terse relationship positions them as equals—as though they are friends, family members, or coworkers who occasionally butt heads. In so doing, she ignores the complex power dynamics inherent in their relationship that prevents them from communicating as equals. The political backdrop of apartheid-era South Africa, where July's status as a Black man renders him legally and socially inferior to Maureen, makes it impossible for July to relate to Maureen as an equal, even if she considers herself one of the "good" white people who sees him as "a grown man."

❝ He put the keys in his pocket and walked away. His head moved from side to side like a foreman's inspecting his workshop or a farmer's noting work to be done on the lands. He yelled out an instruction to a woman, here, questioned a man mending a bicycle tyre, there, hallooed across the valley to the young man approaching who was his driving instructor, and who was almost always with him, now, in a city youth's jeans, silent as a bodyguard, with a string of beads resting girlishly round the base of his slender neck.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, July, Daniel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

July walks away from a heated altercation with Maureen, slipping the "[bakkie] keys in[to] his pocket" in a gesture that, to Maureen, is a clear power move. She seems to take the gesture as a personal affront: a message from July that he can and will continue to do what he wants, regardless of whether or not the Smales approve.

As Maureen watches July walk away, she fixates on his body language, emphasizing the power he exerts over the other villagers, like a foreman or farmer. Maureen seems to think that July's new power has given him a big head and a sense of entitlement. Maureen's emphasis on July's domineering attitude toward the other villagers paints the portrait of a man corrupted by power. The presence of Daniel walking beside July, "silent as a bodyguard," reinforces Maureen's construction of July as the "big man" in town—a title she will employ to insult him in a later confrontation.

Of course, one has to wonder how accurate Maureen's perceptions are and how much they are merely a projection on Maureen's end. Her latest altercation with July has put her on the defensive. Maureen now understands that July will make decisions for himself and is no longer at her mercy, and she's uncomfortable with the new arrangement. Her discomfort reflects an inner belief that July does not

deserve to be her equal. This realization, in turn, forces Maureen to confront the possibility that she harbors prejudices against Black people that she hadn't known existed.

Chapter 10 Quotes

He understood, for the first time, that he was a killer. A butcher like any other in rubber boots among the slush of guts, urine and blood at the abattoir, although July and his kin would do the skinning and quartering. The acceptance was a kind of relief he didn't want to communicate or discuss.

Related Characters: Daniel, July, Bam Smales, Maureen Smales

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Bam goes hunting with Daniel and strikes two piglets with his shotgun. One of them struggles to die, so Bam shoots it in the head to put it out of its misery. Seeing the carnage up close unsettles Bam and makes him "underst[and], for the first time, that he [is] a killer."

This passage shows how living in July's village has changed Bam. In Chapter Two, Maureen reflects on how pointless it was for Bam to bring his shotgun, since he's incapable of shooting anything besides the occasional game bird. The situation changes once the Smales' access to food is mainly limited to what they receive from July and what they can hunt, fish, or forage. One of the book's central themes is how the drive to preserve or gain power compels people to act in ways that don't conform to their values.

This passage demonstrates how Bam's diminished capacity to decide where, when, and how he procures his food affects his willingness to kill. However, despite this diminished power, Bam is still comfortable letting Black people do work for him that he doesn't want to do himself. Bam's entitlement allows him to leave the dirty work of butchering and processing the piglet to July and the other villagers, thereby alleviating the uncomfortable sensation of feeling like "a killer."

Chapter 11 Quotes

—They will bring trouble. I don't mind those people—what do they matter to me? But white people bring trouble.—

Related Characters: Martha (speaker), July, July's Mother

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

July and his family are eating a meal together. Lately, July's mother and his wife Martha have grown more vocal in their disapproval of July's decision to let the Smales family stay in the village. Martha issues her husband a vague warning that the Smales family "will bring trouble." Martha's warning distinguishes between "those people," or the Smales family, specifically, and "white people" as a broader demographic. While Martha doesn't have anything against Bam, Maureen, and their children personally, she's wary of the trouble that their whiteness will bring to the village.

Martha's differentiation between the Smales family and white people as a whole illustrates the difference between people as individuals and people as they exist within a broader system, such as the racial hierarchy of apartheid in South Africa. She's suggesting that people cannot exist or interact with each other outside of the system. In other words, the power dynamics that an oppressive system like apartheid creates affects people personally, whether they like it or not. So while Martha might not have an issue with the Smales family as individuals, all of their interactions with each other are grounded in systemic inequality, which invariably "will bring trouble."

Chapter 12 Quotes

It was as if she grimaced at him, ugly; and yet she was his 'poor thing', dishevelled by living like this, obliged to turn her hand to all sorts of unpleasant things. —Why didn't you get one of them to do it?—

Related Characters: Bam Smales (speaker), Maureen Smales

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen tells Bam that she's just drowned the kittens her children brought home in a bucket of water. While

Maureen's admission initially horrifies Bam, his disgust transforms into pity for his "poor thing" of a wife who has become brutal and "dishevelled by living like this." Bam sees his wife as a fundamentally gentle and sensitive woman who shouldn't have to do the "ugly" and "unpleasant" things required of village people.

When Bam asks Maureen why she couldn't "get one of them to do it," he's implicitly stating that there is a fundamental difference between the degree of ugliness that should enter the life of a white, privileged woman like Maureen and that of a rural Black person. While Bam and Maureen like to think that they support Black liberation and racial equality, small comments like this suggest an ingrained sense of racial difference and internalized prejudice against Black people. The phrase "one of them" has a prejudiced connotation, glibly categorizing all of the Black villagers into a single group as though there is something fundamentally different about them that makes them better suited to violence and ugliness than Maureen.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ —But you don't mean the way it was, you don't mean that. Do you? You don't mean that.—

Related Characters: Maureen Smales (speaker), July

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen makes small talk with July about the ongoing civil war and is shocked when July expresses his wish for things to return to the way they were before the revolution began. Maureen can't comprehend how July could support the reinstatement of apartheid, a system that actively disenfranchises him and his people. This passage explores how a person's privilege affects their ability to advocate on their own behalf and on behalf of others.

Maureen's interest in Black liberation is theoretical: it aligns with her liberal views and ensures that she is on the right side of history, as she sees it. However, Black liberation is quite a different thing for July. It impacts him directly—in good ways and in bad. What Maureen fails to recognize in July's seeming indifference to the end of apartheid is that, for July, returning to the way things were is simply more stable, predictable, and reliable. July has spent 15 years working for the Smales family. He's established a relationship with them, he knows them to be well-meaning people despite their flaws, and he can rely on them to give him the money he needs to support his family. All of this stability would be up in the air if the freedom fighters were to dismantle apartheid and usher in a new social order. An end to apartheid could certainly bring positive change to July's life. However, these changes would come with uncertainties that somebody in a disadvantaged position like July does not have the liberty or resources to navigate. Maureen's privilege shields her from adequately understanding the disadvantaged people she wants to support.

❝ How was she to have known, until she came here, that the special consideration she had shown for his dignity as a man, while he was by definition a servant, would become his humiliation itself, the one thing there was to say between them that had any meaning.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, July

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

July and Maureen get into a tense confrontation in which July reveals to Maureen how insulted he has been by her attempts to make him feel humanized and respected. The accusation floors Maureen. While she initially feels bad about it, her feelings soon shift to resentment. She deflects responsibility for insulting July, insinuating that there was no way for her "to have known" that her attempts to dignify July come off as condescension. Maureen renders herself a victim, suggesting that July should have told her she offended him instead of keeping it inside all these years and weaponizing it against her now.

This passage also offers a glimpse into Maureen's flawed attitude toward July. She considers showing him respect a "special consideration," or an action by which she goes above and beyond what a just society would expect of her. In truth, treating July like a person is little more than common decency.

Furthermore, Maureen believes that it's a "special consideration" on her part to treat July "as a man, while he was by definition a servant." Her perspective dehumanizes servants, implying that they are worth less than men and undeserving of respect. Maureen's perspective reveals the disingenuousness of the supposed "dignity" she has tried to

show July. Ultimately, Maureen responds defensively to July's accusation because he's spot on: Maureen has condescended to July for years.

Chapter 14 Quotes

The chief wanted them to move on; the three children running in and out the hut with their childish sensationalism, their plaints, their brief ecstasies, his wife knocking a nail into her sandal with a stone, and he, shaving outside where there was light. Would tell them to go. What business of the chief's to tell them where? He had not asked them to come here. A wide arc of the hand: plenty place to go. And this was not *their* custom, but the civilized one; when a white farmer sold up, or died, the next owner would simply say to the black labourers living and working on the land, born there: go.

Related Characters: Bam Smales, The Chief, July, Daniel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrative briefly shifts to the perspective of Bam Smales as he, his family, July, and Daniel are on their way to see the chief to ask permission for the Smales to remain in July's village. Bam is confident that the chief will order them to leave and spends the drive thinking about the possible outcomes of their meeting with the chief and silently coming to terms with his family's fate. He ultimately accepts his fate when he realizes that his family—and Afrikaners (white South Africans)—have been banishing Black South Africans from their land since their Dutch ancestors arrived on the continent in the 17th century.

"What business of the chief's to tell them where [to go]? He had not asked them to come here," Bam reflects. Bam recognizes that he and his family came to the village of their own free will without establishing that they had the chief's permission. "And this was not *their* custom," Bam muses, "but the civilized one." Bam challenges the racist understanding that European culture is "civilized" and rural African culture is barbaric by pointing to European settlers' documented history of treating Black South Africans unjustly. It's the supposedly "civilized" people who commit the worst brutalities, kicking "black labourers" off the only land they have ever known at a moment's notice and not caring about the moral implications of such an action for a moment more. Bam's observation underscores how this new, post-apartheid society has upended the old racial hierarchy, forcing onto white people the same injustices that they have forced onto non-white South Africans for years.

Chapter 15 Quotes

The chief had the sharp, impatient, sceptical voice of a man quicker than the people he keeps around him, but knew no white man's language. Why should he? It was not for him to work as a servant or go down the mines.

Related Characters: Bam Smales, The Chief, Daniel, July, Maureen Smales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

July and Daniel escort the Smales family to a meeting with the chief to ask the chief for permission for the family to remain in July's village. July must translate for Bam and Maureen, for the chief "kn[ows] no white man's language." Bam realizes that it doesn't matter that the chief doesn't know English or Afrikaans (an official language of South Africa derived from the Dutch spoken by 17th-century settlers), since he doesn't have "to work as a servant or go down the mines." Bam's observation speaks to the place of Black people within white society. He asserts that only Black South African people who work as servants in white people's houses or in mines run by white people need to know English. This is because the only place for Black people under apartheid is as servants of white people. Because the chief exists outside of white society, he has no reason to be able to communicate with white people. Bam's observation isn't a reflection of his personal views toward Black people so much as it is a criticism of South African society.

It was she who smiled at July, said what had to be said. —We owe him everything.—

Related Characters: Maureen Smales (speaker), July, Bam Smales, The Chief

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of their meeting with the chief, the chief asks the Smales family if they are comfortable at July's village. Maureen responds, stating affirmatively, "We owe him everything." The Smales' indebtedness to July is constantly on their minds, and Maureen means what she says.

However, Maureen's response to the chief's question is more than an affirmation of July's protection and an expression of sincere gratitude. It's also her effort to pay her due to July to ensure that he continues to help them. Maureen turns to July and smiles before she speaks. In so doing, she ensures that he looks good in front of the chief and shows that she is conscious of the conditional nature of July's arrangement with her and her family.

Bam Smales believes that July is helping the Smales family out of love or affection. Maureen, however, is more skeptical of July's motives. She also understands that July's help will end if he decides that keeping the Smales family around is no longer worth risking the safety of his village and his people.

Chapter 16 Quotes

—What do the blacks think? What will the freedom fighters think? Did he join the people from Soweto? He took his whites and ran. You make me laugh. You talk as if we weren't hiding, we weren't scared to go farther than the river?—

Related Characters: Maureen Smales (speaker), Bam Smales, The Chief, July

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen and Bam return from their meeting with the chief. Bam brings up July's harsh criticism of the chief, who voiced his opposition to the ongoing civil war and his condemnation of the Black freedom fighters during the meeting.

Maureen argues that July's criticism of the chief is really a projection of his internalized shame about not actively supporting Black liberation. By asking Bam what other Black South Africans would think, Maureen argues that any Black South African would consider July a traitor to his people. She references the 1976 Soweto uprising to compare July's passivity to the sacrifices of Black schoolchildren in Soweto, South Africa, who led demonstrations to protest the implementation of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in local schools. At least 176 people died in the uprising.

July, in contrast, has not laid his life on the line. Instead, "he took his whites and ran." July has not only refused to join the Black freedom fighters in their struggle to secure Black liberation, but he has actively chosen to protect a white family instead. By opting to protect the Smales family in his village instead of joining the ranks to fight for an end to apartheid, July symbolically protects the interests of his people's oppressors at the expense of his own people.

This passage further unpacks July's complex relationship to Black liberation. It also denotes a pivotal point in the story's plot. If Maureen's suspicion that July's anger at the chief is really a projection of self-hatred for helping white people instead of his own people, it's possible that he may no longer be willing to protect the Smales family. Maureen's apprehension reinvigorates her and Bam's desire to flee July's village and find shelter elsewhere, though they have no means of transportation and nowhere to go.

Chapter 19 Quotes

She saw that he wouldn't answer the child; but he was back there: if he couldn't pick up the phone and call the police whom he and she had despised for their brutality and thuggery in the life lived back there, he did not know what else to do.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, Bam Smales, Victor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

The Smales have just returned to their hut to find that Bam's gun is missing from its hiding place in the thatched roof. Bam panics, compelling Victor to tell him not to worry, since they can just call the police to report the stolen gun. Victor's innocent but misguided remark forces Bam to appreciate the full extent of his helplessness: he *can't* call the police, since Black rebel forces have rendered the apartheid government obsolete. Bam's shock prevents him from responding to Victor, so Maureen speculates about the thoughts that must be running through Bam's head.

Not only does Bam come to terms with his helplessness, but he also recognizes the blind spots and even the hypocrisy of his progressive views. Bam recognizes how his condemnation of the apartheid system ends the minute he

needs to use his racial privilege to call the authorities for help. Until now, Bam's progressive views have been theoretical and untested. However, the crisis of the missing gun forces Bam to face the unsettling truth that he would abandon his principles in a moment if doing so meant the police could help him find his gun and reinstate the comfortable life he had before rebels overthrew the government and rendered his privilege obsolete. Bam mourns the loss of his gun. But, more importantly, he mourns the loss of his principles.

> She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. But for himself—to be intelligent, honest, dignified for her was nothing; his measure as a man was taken elsewhere and by others. She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people.

Related Characters: Maureen Smales, July

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

Maureen finds July to accuse him of stealing Bam's missing shotgun, and a heated confrontation ensues. Even after she realizes that Daniel is the likely thief, not July, Maureen continues to antagonize July out of pent-up resentment and spite. July reaches his limit and yells at Maureen in his own language. Although she can't understand his words, the message he intends to convey is clear, and Maureen finally understands how her condescending behavior has affected him over the years.

One of the book's main questions is defining who July's people are: to whom he is loyal, to whom he is obligated, and with whom he can be himself. As July unleashes years of pent-up rage, Maureen realizes that she and her family are not July's people. "She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people," concludes Maureen. July's rage comes as a shock to Maureen, who has tried for years to treat July with respect and ensure that he knows she thinks he is "intelligent, honest, [and] dignified." The problem is that Maureen's efforts to praise and validate July are condescending. Her praise assumes that July *needs* the approval of a white woman like Maureen to feel valued: that his own people's acceptance pales in comparison to hers.

In Maureen's efforts to treat July well, she discounts July as the person he is. Instead, she builds him up "to be her idea of him," which is that of a disadvantaged person who needs and longs for the approval of a privileged yet kindly and sympathetic person like herself.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

July appears in the doorway, a tea tray in his arms. The doorway isn't so much of a doorway as an opening carved into mud walls. July offers his employers two glass cups of tea and a can of condensed milk with a spoon in it. This is how "his kind has always done for their kind." July, a Black man, shifts his gaze to the three children sleeping beside his employers. The woman assures July that the children are fine. She thanks July for the tea as he exits the room.

This opening scene depicts a Black servant tending to white employers. There's some dissonance between this action and the scene's setting, however. If the woman is wealthy enough to have a servant, then why is she sleeping in a hut made of mud? The woman might be out of her element—in a place or situation that is unfamiliar to what she's used to. That the woman observes this behavior to be "what his kind has always done for their kind" suggests that her society enforces a racial hierarchy that places Black people beneath white people.

This isn't the first time the woman has slept in a mud hut. She recalls taking family trips to Kruger Park while her father, a shift boss, was on leave. Bam's family, too, had built rondavels inspired by "the huts of the blacks." The rondavels had red, polished concrete floors. The hut she's in now, in contrast, has a floor made of mud and dung, and cobwebs hang from the walls above. The man and woman are Bam and Maureen Smales, of Bamford Smales, Smales, Caprano & Partners and Western Areas Gold Mines, respectively. As Maureen lies in the hut, she recalls the sensation of trying to sleep during the three previous days she spent hidden on the floor of the car.

Maureen's choice to refer to her father as a "shift boss" suggests a distanced, perhaps estranged, relationship to him. This scene reveals that Bam and Maureen both come from wealthy backgrounds. Maureen's father was a shift boss for a mining company, a booming industry in South Africa when the novel takes place, and Bam is a partner at some kind of firm. This doesn't quite fit with the way Maureen describes spending the past few days: sleeping hidden on the floor of a car or in a hut made of mud and dung. It's clear that something extreme has happened to Maureen and Bam's family to put them in this precarious situation.

Maureen compares the harrowing journey to the fever that brings delirium. She remembers its sensations in waves, recalling the scent of the children's carsickness and the sound of metal jangling. Now, sitting in the tribal hut, Maureen thinks back to her room at shift boss's house at the mine that she'd had to herself after her older sister left for boarding school. Alone in the room, she would peruse her personal belongings arranged on the bookshelf: a brass coffee-pot, a ceramic bulldog with the Union Jack painted on its back, a velvet embroidered bag. There were also her school shoes, polished by "Our Jim," the house servant. Our Jim was the name her mother coined to distinguish between the house servant and the shift boss, whom she called "My Jim."

Maureen's impulse to compare the past few days of suffering to a fever dream emphasizes how removed suffering and hardship are from her everyday reality. Her generational wealth means that she's only ever lived a life of privilege, where boarding school and an abundance of material goods are the norm and, perhaps, a distraction from the bigger problems life can throw at a person. Also, Maureen has never known a life without servants there to tend to her every need. Maureen's mother's habit of referring to the house servant as "Our Jim" serves the practical purpose of distinguishing between servant-Jim and father-Jim, but the title also has a connotation of ownership: it implies that the servant belongs to the family rather than simply working for them.

Back in the present, Maureen watches as pigs pass by the doorway. She hears somebody speaking in an unfamiliar language. Maureen can sense that Bam has awoken beside her. She asks him where the **bakkie** is. Bam tells her that he was instructed to hide it in the bush. Maureen remains silent as she scans her surroundings. Flies buzz around the mouths of her children. While the children are dirty and smell of vomit, they are, at least, "sleeping, safe."

The striking contrast between Maureen's memory of a privileged childhood with the image of pigs passing by the open doorway of the mud hut she's in now emphasizes how out of her element Maureen is in this relatively primitive environment. Her gratitude for her "sleeping, safe" children suggests that something has just happened to the family to put their lives in danger. Readers meet the main characters of the book at a point of crisis in their lives.

CHAPTER 2

The vehicle the Smales traveled in is a yellow **bakkie**, or small truck. It's a rugged, economical car for Afrikaners and "coloureds" who can't afford much else. For wealthy, white South Africans, a bakkie is typically a second car reserved for use in sporting activities. Bam Smales bought the bakkie for himself on his 40th birthday to use on trap-shooting trips, though he is by nature too non-violent a man to shoot much of anything. Before the children were born, Bam would take Maureen on trips to Botswana or Mozambique.

That the Smales can afford international travel and a second car just for sporting activities reaffirms their economic privilege. "Afrikaner" refers to an Afrikaans-speaking person from South Africa. Afrikaans is the Dutch-derived language passed down from the Dutch settlers who colonized South Africa in the 17th century. That the Smales belong to this social group gives more context about what kind of life they're used to. Under apartheid, Afrikaners were considered the superior racial class and received better treatment than the country's non-white population. "Coloureds" refers to a legal racial classification enforced under apartheid in South Africa. The term encompasses multiracial people with ancestry from a number of ethnic groups of the region. Under apartheid, white people held the highest status, followed by Indians and Coloureds, then Black African people.

Bam had bought the **bakkie** for pleasure. Although Maureen was displeased when she saw him arrive home in the vehicle for the first time, she joined her children in crowding around to admire Bam's new purchase. In the present, Maureen considers how "Nothing made them so happy as buying things."

Bam and Maureen's wealth allows them to make purchases for pleasure rather than out of necessity for survival. Establishing what a central role "buying things" once played for the family makes it all the more jarring that they are now, for reasons that remain unknown, residing in a mud hut.

Maureen recounts the political circumstances that led to this point in time. It was 1980, and the strikes continued. The government continued to negotiate disingenuous deals with the Black trade unions. There were riots, general civil unrest, and the occupation of international corporations. The government censored practically all media forms, and people relied on rumors to know what was going on with the uprisings. Fifteen thousand Black people organized a march on Johannesburg. The authorities halted the march at the city center, but there were many casualties, Black and white.

This scene offers some context to explain how the Smales have ended up in their present situation. July's People *is a work of speculative fiction that offers an alternate history of South Africa where apartheid ends with a violent civil war after Black rebels overturn the oppressive, white-led regime. Gordimer is South African and uses the book to predict one way apartheid could feasibly end.*

A bank accountant for whom Bam had designed a house tipped Bam off to the fact that if unrest in the city continued, banks would issue a moratorium. In response to this information, Bam and Maureen covertly withdrew thousands of dollars from the bank. However, the banks didn't close. Citizens subdued the blacks, due in large part to the participation of white Rhodesian immigrants, some of whom were former Selous Scouts, and white mercenaries who arrived from Bangui, Zaïre, and Uganda. The children stayed home from school. The liquor store resumed delivering wine and beer orders. Things seemed to have returned to normal, which had been the pattern of things "since Sharpville, since Soweto '76, since Elsie's River 1980."

This passage provides more background information about Bam's profession—he's an architect. While the Smales seem to have become the victims of a violent political uprising, their position of privilege allowed them to have advance notice of the bank moratorium, putting them in a better position than people without their degree of wealth and connections. The uprising that ends apartheid in this book is fictional, but Gordimer references actual historical events as well. The Sharpeville Massacre and Soweto Uprising of 1976 were real events where South African police attacked and killed citizens protesting the apartheid system. Refencing these other episodes of violence in South Africa's history lends credibility to the alternate history Gordimer presents in the novel.

The Smales wondered when the time would come when things didn't return to normal. They wished their time spent living as "white pariah dogs in a black continent" would come to an end and joined political organizations and community groups to make up for the privilege that other white people tried "to guard with Mirages and tanks." They considered moving to another country but couldn't bring themselves to leave the place they considered home. The real reason—though they had trouble admitting it—was that they couldn't retrieve their money and investments, like the De Beers shares Maureen had inherited from her maternal grandfather, from the banks. Now, as order returned to the city once again, the Smales had begun to feel silly for hiding their money in the house.

The Smales set themselves apart from white South Africans who accept the privilege the apartheid system gives them without question. They feel guilty about being "white pariah dogs in a black continent" and join organizations to try to atone for their privilege. One has to wonder, though, whether these actions reflect a genuine desire for change and racial equality or are simply a means for the Smales to continue being complicit in an oppressive system without feeling guilty.

But then, everything changed. The yellow **bakkie** that Bam had bought for pleasure became their only vehicle. They used it to drive away from gunned-down shopping malls and burning houses. Nora, their cook and nanny, ran away. And July, the male servant they'd employed for years, and to whom they'd given a long list of privileges, such as decent pay, clothes, the liberty to entertain friends and town women, became their "frog prince" and "saviour."

Suddenly, an unstable political climate unleashes violence onto the entire city, imbuing the Smales' mostly comfortable (if occasionally guilt-ridden) existence with uncertainty and suffering. Maureen's description of July as their "frog prince" suggests a reversal of the former social order as well. Before, July was at the mercy of his white, wealthy employers. In this new environment, suddenly he has the power to be their "saviour."

Back in the present, July brings in a zinc bath to bathe the children. Maureen washes the children first, then herself in the dirty water. Bam risks catching bilharzia and bathes in the river. Afterward, July returns with porridge and fruit. He wears a faded T-shirt and trousers instead of his usual uniform, though he holds himself the same as he had in all his years serving the Smales family. Maureen insists that they can cook their own food, and July brings wood for Bam to make a fire.

July continues to serve the Smales despite the fact that they can no longer claim the esteemed social position they had in Johannesburg. It's unclear if he's doing this as an act of personal kindness or because they're paying him. Either way, the dynamic is odd. He's accustomed to waiting on white people, and they're accustomed to Black people waiting on them, even though their context has dramatically changed.

July returns later that night, apparently not trusting the family to take care of themselves. He's accompanied by a little Black boy—his third-born child, he explains. The white children look at the boy "as at an imposter." July gestures toward a can of goat milk he's brought with him. He advises Maureen to boil it if she likes—goat milk is very different from the sterilized, refrigerated bottles of milk he'd served the family in their home.

It's ironic that the Smales children look on the Black child "as an imposter," when the boy is July's actual child, not them—if anything, they're the "imposters." Implicitly, the children are used to feeling in command of their environments. Even as children, they possess a degree of entitlement.

A few days ago, July sat in the Smales' living room—something he never did—and offered to shelter the family at his home. So, they loaded the children into the **bakkie**, covered them and Maureen with a tarp, and drove into the night. Because they were too afraid to use roads, the 600-kilometer journey took three days. July knew the way, however, having walked it many years ago when he'd first come to Johannesburg to look for work.

Maureen and Bam claim not to support apartheid, yet they employ a Black man who doesn't feel comfortable sitting in their living room (or isn't allowed to). Even if they don't intend to be oppressive, the atmosphere in which they live establishes a foundation of inequality that impacts their relationship with July. July sitting on the couch symbolizes the changing power dynamics in their relationship that the latest uprising has inspired. July feels emboldened by the uprising and deserving of the same privileges as his white employers. Finally, this passage gives context for where the Smales family is at the opening of the story and how they got there: they're in a rural African village outside of Johannesburg, a major South African city.

July's home is a settlement of mud huts inhabited by his extended family. Last night, when Maureen expressed her fear that the sight of the **bakkie** would alert outsiders to the fact that July was hiding white people in his home, July burst into laughter at her ignorance of his foresight. He explained to her that he'd already thought of this—as a cover story, he'd told everybody that the Smales gifted him the car. Bam laughed, wondering who would believe this lie. July assured them that everybody knows what's currently happening to white people in Johannesburg, which would make them believe July's lie.

Already, the novel has mentioned the Smales' yellow bakkie many times. It's an important object: it served the practical function of transporting the family from the violence of the city to the safety of July's village. It's also a source of conflict, though: if people see a bakkie—an object associated with white people and very out of place and unusual in July's rural setting—it could alert outsiders to the presence of white people in the area, putting the Smales' lives in danger if rebel forces find them in July's village.

Everybody struggles to adapt to their new surroundings. Victor asks Maureen if he can play with the electric racing-car track that he managed to sneak aboard the **bakkie** during the chaos of the family's departure. He wants to show it to the Black children in July's village, but he asks Maureen to tell them that they can't touch it. Meanwhile, Royce, the youngest child, won't stop asking for a Coca-Cola. When Maureen boils river water on the stove, Bam tells her not to bother—the children have been drinking fresh river water anyway. Exasperated, Maureen asks Bam what they'll do if the children get sick. Bam says nothing. The message contained in the silence that passes between them is clear: they should be glad just to be alive.

The Smales children aren't accustomed to the rustic conditions of July's village. Like Maureen before them, they take for granted that they can have material objects and leisure activities to dull the hardships of life and fill their time with distractions. July's village will be a huge change for them. They're faced with no choice but to weather the elements and no longer have a way to distract themselves. While the narrative reaffirms how grateful the Smales are to be alive, there's enough mention of their unhappiness scattered throughout these opening chapters to suggest that the Smales' rescue won't be a story of redemption alone, and that conflict and tension are lurking beneath the surface.

CHAPTER 3

July introduces Maureen to his wife, Martha, who has a "black-black, closed face." Martha sits on the floor next to an older woman and bottle feeds a young child. There are other young women and girls in the kitchen as well. Martha makes quiet murmuring sounds. July translates, insisting that his wife is happy to finally meet the Smales, though Maureen notes that the woman hasn't actually spoken and doesn't seem all that happy. Maureen thinks the older woman must be July's mother or July's wife's mother. The old woman alternates between "growling" questions at July and looking at Maureen.

Maureen emphasizes Martha's otherness by describing her face as "black-black." She sees Martha as her opposite. While readers learned in the previous chapter that the Smales are involved in anti-apartheid organizations, it's clear that Maureen has a pattern of regarding Black people as "other." She seems to have some latent, unexamined racism in her thinking. This racism also comes across in Maureen's perception of the old woman's speech as dehumanized "growling."

Maureen watches the baby, July's youngest, who was conceived during one of his home-leaves and born when he was back at the Smales residence. Maureen would send July home with gifts for his wife and the new baby after each birth. He'd return with a woven basket his wife had made for Maureen. July also had a "town woman" who worked as an office cleaner. She was a respectable woman who would chat with Maureen about using her earnings to put her son through school in Soweto. She spoke "black, city English."

The kind of relationship July has with the Smales has been unclear thus far—it can't have been purely transactional if he's willing to risk his safety to shelter the white family in the midst of a violent civil war. Yet this scene provides more background information to suggest that it's not as personal as readers might think. The Smales still don't allow July to return home more than once every two years. The woven baskets his wife sends to Maureen seem less like personal gifts than strategic methods of keeping July's employers happy to incentivize them to continue giving him work. Finally, Maureen's remark about July's "town woman" speaking "black, city English" suggests that Maureen respects the woman's sophisticated speech, but looks down on the rural dialect that people in July's village speak. Whether or not she feels it consciously, Maureen has a bias in favor of white culture.

Although it's morning, the women in the hut seem "dreamy" and exhausted. Maureen wonders whether they've been out working in the fields since first light. As Maureen watches the women mill about the hut, she feels disoriented by a life so different than "the order of a day as she had always known it."

Maureen feels out of place in July's village, where unfamiliar local customs create an atmosphere that differs radically from "the order of a day as she had always known it." Culturally displaced, she can no longer intuitively make sense of herself relative to her surroundings.

CHAPTER 4

July's wife asks him why he had to bring the white people to their home. In preparation for the Smales' arrival, July's wife gave up the second bed and borrowed a Primus for them. July's mother gave up her own hut. July tries to reason with his wife, insisting that they have nowhere else to go. July's wife rebuts this, though. She knows how white people live from the stories July has told her—that they have different rooms for sleeping, sitting, eating, and reading. With so many different spaces to choose from, how could they have *nowhere* to go? July describes the burning houses and murdered white people in town, but his wife and mother remain unsympathetic. His wife claims that white people can—and do—use their money to go anywhere they please. July promises her that what's happening in Johannesburg is happening everywhere.

As the novel switches to July's family's point of view, July's mother and wife disagree with his decision to house a white family in their village, yet they go along with it, nonetheless. This suggests the extent to which their decisions are influenced by wealth and power. They've needed the money July sends home from working for the Smales in Johannesburg and are therefore powerless to object to July's decision to put everybody's life at risk by housing them in the village. Their skepticism is understandable, particularly July's wife's sentiment that white people should be able to use their money to buy their way out of any situation, because, historically, this has been the case. The current political situation is unprecedented.

July continues, recounting how, at the airport the other day, Black forces shot down a plane of white people trying to flee. In Mozambique, Black people have a special type of bomb or gun powerful enough to strike down a plane. In short, July concludes, there's nothing that white people can do to harm them anymore. July's mother cautions him that he "will never come to the end of the things [white people] can do."

July's mother's warning that he "will never come to the end of things [white people] can do" illustrates the extent to which white colonizers have impacted the social and political atmosphere of South Africa. July's mother takes for granted white people's ability to oppress and control.

One of the young girls in the hut asks July if it's really true that he had his own room for bathing when he worked in town. July assures her that he did. The girls laugh as July describes the white china fixtures in his bathing room. July's mother realizes the chicken that July killed has eggs in its belly and yells at him for killing the wrong one.

The questions July's relatives ask about the Smales are all impersonal and focused on their material wealth—how big their house is, what kind of fixtures it contains. It seems that all July has thought to mention of his employers is that they are wealthy—he hasn't spoken of them in personal, affectionate terms or disclosed anything of their personalities. We get the sense that the Smales and July aren't as close as Maureen's earlier gratitude toward July would imply.

July's wife criticizes the white people's appearances. They look disheveled and dirty—not at all as she had expected. July says they looked different at home. Here, they have nothing—just like July and his family. July's wife responds only to lament the monthly payments they'll no longer receive now that July is no longer employed. July ruminates on the lost payments "from his other life," which provided for his family and put his wife through school.

The Smales' disheveled appearances reaffirm the radical degree to which their lives have changed since Black forces overthrew the government. They no longer enjoy a privileged position at the top of the racial hierarchy, and their dirty, uncomfortable appearance reflects this as well. If July stops receiving payments from the Smales, it's possible he will have less incentive to continue to house them in his village. Whether or not July remains loyal to the Smales without the promise of payment will say something about the nature of their relationship: if it's completely shaped by power dynamics and money and therefore transactional, or if they are friends outside of the power dynamics.

CHAPTER 5

Bam helps July repair the villagers' run-down farming equipment. He talks eagerly about using cement to build the foundation for a system of pipes the village can use to collect rainwater during the wet season. This way, the women won't have to go to the river to get water. The men continue to work—just as they had back home, where Bam expected July to help him. Maureen sits to the side as the men work. Bam keeps the **radio** on, and he and Maureen listen to the English-speaking reporter for news of further developments in the situation in town. The U.S. government is considering sending in an airlift for U.S. nationals, though it's not clear where this would take place, since the airports in Cape Town, Durban, and Port Elizabeth are all closed.

It's unclear who is helping whom here: is July continuing to help Bam as Bam had come to expect him to do in town, or is Bam accepting his new indebtedness to July and taking on July's old role? Everyone seems uncertain about how their relationship has changed or stayed the same since fleeing Johannesburg. The Smales family listens to the radio to receive news from the outside world that the conflict has stabilized and they can go home. They seem torn between espousing anti-apartheid views and desiring the return of that same, oppressive social order. At the same time, the news on the radio of closed airports in major urban areas throughout the country suggests that this order is far from being restored.

Maureen contemplates the savannah bush that extends for as far as the eye can see. Her family is only the latest group to use the tracks, which have been traversed since the ancient migrations. Royce asks her if they can see a movie later. Gina and Victor are old enough to understand that there won't be any movie theaters in their near future, but they sulk and argue, nonetheless.

In their early days at the settlement, the Smales family is overwhelmed by a sense of cultural displacement. They must learn to exist without the cultural reference points and leisure activities that had formerly given their lives meaning and structure.

July enters the huts to fetch the family's clothes for washing. Maureen insists that she can do it herself. July pauses. Maureen asks if July's wife will do the washing, then, and offers to pay her. July accepts Maureen's cash. Maureen asks him about soap, daydreaming about having a big cake of it to use for the clothes.

Maureen is uncertain about what her role should be in this new place. Her impulse not to make July's wife wash their clothes suggests her awareness that July is no longer indebted to them in the way he was in town. She sees the need to carry the weight more than she did in her former life.

Unable to work or remain idle, Maureen considers starting a book, Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*), that she snatched from home as they left Johannesburg. She'd refrained from starting it until now, fearing what she'd do once she finished it and had nothing left to read. Suddenly, Maureen is seized with a superstitious fear that her family will be here forever if she puts off reading the book any longer. She sits down and attempts to read, but the sense of being "within another time, place and life" is too distracting. She remembers that her family has nothing and realizes that her life is more fantastical than fiction.

Manzoni's The Betrothed *is an important and widely read work of Italian literature. It's no coincidence that this is the novel the author has Maureen to bring to the village, since its themes resonate with* July's People*'s themes. The novel uses the story of doomed lovers to explore the complicated relationship between love, class, and power. These same issues are at play in* July's People*, with Maureen and Bam trying to determine if they can be friends with July outside of the oppressive social system of apartheid. Can July be helping them simply because he's a good person, or must he have some incentive for doing so that's related to power and coercion? Can people relate to others without being influenced by social norms and laws?*

Maureen daydreams about her childhood in the mining town. In the memory, Maureen is on her way home from school when she encounters Lydia, the older Black woman who works for her family. Lydia breaks up her housework with frequent visits into town to run errands and socialize with the other Black people who are out on similar errands. Whenever Maureen runs into Lydia, they walk together leisurely, sharing a Coke and trading bits of gossip. Lydia takes Maureen's bookbag and carries it balanced on her head. Sometimes, they "are in cahoots." For instance, Lydia refrains from telling Maureen's parents when she spots Maureen riding on the back of a boy's bicycle. Other times, Lydia is in a critical mood, like when she yells at Maureen and her friends for dirtying their pillows outside, since it undoubtedly will be Lydia who takes the fall for the mess.

Maureen's recollection of her relationship with Lydia portrays them as friends and equals, evidenced by her thinking they were "in cahoots" with each other and capable of associating as confidants. She ignores the complex racial and social dynamics that gave Maureen—a literal child—the upper hand in their interactions. The real dynamics of their situation come through in the off-handed remark about Maureen's mother blaming Lydia for the children's messes. Lydia is subject to consequences that Maureen is not, making it fundamentally impossible for them to interact as equals. Lydia had an obligation to be friendly to Maureen that Maureen didn't recognize as a child.

One day, a photographer takes a picture of Maureen and Lydia while they are out at the shops. He asks them if they mind. Lydia says it's fine if he promises to send them the photograph. The photographer agrees, but Maureen later realizes the man failed to write down the address they gave him. Years later, Maureen finds the photograph in a *Life* book about South Africa's policies, and the attitudes and lives of white *herrenvolk*. In the photo, Lydia carries Maureen's book bag balanced on her head. Maureen wonders why Lydia had to do this and whether the photographer had known what he was capturing, and if "the book, placing the pair in its context, g[a]ve the reason she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know[.]"

"Herrenvolk" refers to the ethnic group allowed to participate in government. Under the apartheid system, Black people like Lydia were disenfranchised, and only the country's minority white population held any power. Maureen's remark about the book placing "the pair in its context" refers to the way the book reframes Maureen and Lydia's relationship within a sociological discussion of life in South Africa under apartheid. This context primes the viewer of the photograph to see how Maureen and Lydia's different racial and economic backgrounds influence their relationship. Thus, the image of Lydia carrying Maureen's backpack on her head becomes evidence of an oppressed Black woman being forced to defer to a privileged white child. It's understandable that Maureen wouldn't have caught on to the power dynamics at play in her relationship with Lydia. However, her retrospective comment about Lydia sharing in this "affection and ignorance" illustrates her continued ignorance. She's suggesting that Lydia, an adult woman who has been disenfranchised by a discriminatory regime, is somehow ignorant about her position within that society, which couldn't possibly be the case.

CHAPTER 6

Bam spends his days working or resting. The third category of activity, "leisure," is a "suburban invention" that doesn't exist in the village. On the Smales' second weekend in the village, July invites Bam to participate in the beer-drinking, talking, and singing that happens over the course of the weekend. He offers Bam a mug to drink out of while the rest pass around a clay pot. The other men tease Bam as he drinks their liquor. Bam stays long enough to be polite—he hasn't understood a word the others are saying, and the maize brew is awful—before returning to his family's hut.

The Smales family has only been in July's village for a brief period of time, and already July has extended more hospitality and good will toward them than they have in the 15 years he's worked for them. As far as readers can tell, they treated July well but kept their personal lives separate from his. It's also striking how July's people are so generous with their food, drink, and shelter despite having so little, while in contrast, the Smales, who had considerably more wealth, provided July with only basic necessities.

Lately, the many jobs Bam has had to do and the constant presence of the children have kept Bam and Maureen from talking seriously about their situation. Tonight, however, the children are gone, fixated on a pair of young men banging on drums outside. Bam sits down on the iron bed beside Maureen, who says that she saw Royce wiping his bottom with a stone earlier in the day. Amused, Bam asks how long she thinks the toilet paper rolls that she packed will last. Maureen doesn't respond. Instead, she thinks about the villagers she's observed using items she recognizes from her house. The other day, she noticed July holding a pair of her scissors. While Maureen had always thought July to be "perfectly honest," it's clear that he has stolen these items over the years. Maureen decides that honesty is really only "how much you know about anybody."

Lack of privacy is a major cultural adjustment for the Smales. Their home in Johannesburg had many rooms for the family to spread out in. The disparity in space and privacy is a metaphor for the main difference between the Smales' old life and life in July's village: wealth. It's not so much privacy that strains the Smales' marriage, but a lack of resources that limits how and when they spend time together. They feel suffocated not just by a lack of space but by a lack of choice. These middle chapters ramp up the tension that has been bubbling beneath the surface until now. When Maureen sees villagers using objects she recognizes from her house, it's evidence that July has been stealing from her all these years and isn't as "perfectly honest" as she'd once thought he was. Maureen's remark about honesty being about "how much you know about anybody" reframes honesty as less of a personality trait and more about the way others perceive a person. Honesty thus becomes superficial: about appearing honest instead of being honest.

Leaving their home has strained Bam and Maureen's relationship. Most of their conversations are about decisions they don't want to make on their own. Now, Bam wonders aloud if they should be saving the malaria pills that they brought with them for the kids. Maureen reasons that they should take the pills, since the children would be helpless if the two of them were to die from the disease. A silence passes between them, which is common these days. Finally, Bam argues that July's people would look after the children if something should happen to the two of them. Inwardly, Maureen thinks Bam is "wearily, boredly trusting."

Bam and Maureen's new environment strains their relationship because they're suddenly forced to contend with life-or-death issues like malaria, a mosquito-borne illness that can result in death in severe cases, on a daily basis. Their problems seem to have been more superficial back home. Another new source of conflict is how to navigate their new relationship with July. Maureen is almost immediately suspicious about July's people and seems to question July's loyalty to her family. For this reason, she finds Bam's faith in July to be "wearily, boredly trusting" and naïve.

The **radio** station that Bam and Maureen turn to for news had been off the air for 24 hours, but it's back on now. There's been no word about what caused the outage, but it's likely that there would have been some celebratory message if the Black people had won. Maureen sits in one of the car seats the children have been using as beds, picking under her fingernails with a stray wire. She used to think it would be fun to visit here and see how July lived, she tells Bam. She'd imagined the trip as a mini vacation: they'd go while the children were out of school, bring all their camping gear and a portable fridge. Now, she scoffs at her fantasies about waltzing into the village bearing gifts for all, proudly showing the children "how [July] lives," and then returning home to brag to their friends about driving out to the bundu to see "a friend."

It's unclear which message Bam and Maureen are waiting—or wanting—to hear. Are they rooting for the apartheid government to take back control of the country, thereby enabling them to resume their life the way it was before the civil war, or are they holding out hope for Black victory, which aligns with their purportedly progressive views? Maureen's remarks about how misguided she had been to think that it would be a fun, culturally enriching experience to visit July's village suggests that she's already becoming disillusioned by her former idealism. It was also easier for her to consider July "a friend" when the confines of their relationship were dictated according to their clearly defined roles as employer and employee. In this village, where their roles are less defined and July is less obligated to obey the Smales without question, Maureen starts to doubt their friendship.

The last thing Bam sees before falling asleep is her frowning face before him. Suddenly, Bam awakens to the sound of the revving **bakkie**. Maureen runs out of the hut just in time to see the vehicle disappearing into the distance, two Black heads visible in the front seats.

It's unclear who took the bakkie, and, given the demographics of the village, the Black heads that Maureen spies in the front seat doesn't narrow the pool of possible suspects.

Bam leaves the hut to try to find out where July is but only receives vague, unhelpful replies. He returns and tells Maureen that it was likely July who took the **bakkie**. Bam had given July the keys the other day. This had seemed the logical option: it was July's village, after all, and he must know what's best. The other day, for instance, July advised them to keep the vehicle locked with the tools inside, since his relatives would likely borrow them, and he wasn't confident they'd return them. As Bam explains July's reasoning to Maureen, a palpable tension begins to build between them. Bam thinks about the **gun** he brought from home and hid in the hut's thatched roof. He wonders if killing would give them more leverage in the village, should something happen to July.

The possibility that July has taken the Smales' bakkie without asking permission forces the Smales to rethink which behaviors are allowed in their new relationship with July. July's decision to take the bakkie forces Bam and Maureen to consider if they really want July to be their friend, or if they want him to be an obedient servant. While the Smales have purported to see July as a friend, they've never been put in a situation where July has not acted as a servant to them: he's never gone against their wishes. The Smales family is clearly discomforted by the personal agency that July exercises by taking the bakkie, suggesting that they're not as comfortable treating him as an equal as they'd once thought they were.

The boys wander back into the hut. Maureen opens a can of pork sausages for dinner. She calls for Gina, who enters carrying a baby tied to her back. Maureen orders Gina to return the baby to its mother. The atmosphere in the hut is tense. Suddenly, a child appears in the doorway, "Nyiko," according to the children. Nyiko retrieves the baby from Gina. As a peace-offering, Maureen stabs a sausage with Bam's penknife and offers it to the child. The child holds her palms together as though accepting communion and takes the sausage from Maureen. Maureen returns the knife to Bam and remarks how great it would be if their children would "pick up the good manners along with the habit of blowing their noses in their fingers and relieving themselves where they feel like it." There is hostility in her voice.

Nyiko accepting the sausage from Maureen conjures images of the well-off helping the needy. Maureen wants to see herself as a savior to the less fortunate. She does not yet recognize that she is the less fortunate whom this girl's people have saved. More of Maureen's latent racism emerges in the visible disgust she exhibits toward the girl, using a penknife to give the girl a sausage in order to limit physical contact and making a disparaging remark about the village people's hygiene. Maureen's purported desire to be friends with July is complicated by the reality that she is disgusted by his people and their culture and sees herself as superior to them.

After dinner, the children antagonize one another in the hut. Maureen and Bam sit in silence and agonize over July's absence. Bam closes his eyes and sees the snow of Canada. If they'd fled there as they intended to five years ago, they could be settled into a new life already. Inwardly, Bam blames Maureen for wanting to stay in South Africa, though he also can't remember what he'd wanted to do.

This scene presents a discrepancy between Bam's genuine feelings about their situation and what he shares with Maureen. Bam is clearly unhappy and resentful about having to live as refugees in the primitive atmosphere of July's village, evidenced by the image of snowy, westernized Canada—the polar opposite of the rural African village that has become their home—that haunts his daydreams.

Maureen sits with her back to Bam and adjusts the **radio**, unable to get a signal. Bam snaps at her about wasting the battery. Maureen thinks about the conflict back home and wonders aloud why the white people who can speak the Black languages are never good white people like themselves, but white people convinced that they are racially superior. If only they could speak with July's people and defend themselves, she laments. Bam urges Maureen not to "go fishing. Not at this stage." He begins to ramble on about how knowing an African language simply used to be a job requirement for white people working in the pass offices, for instance. Maureen observes that Bam is speaking about their lives in town in the past tense, though he doesn't appear to realize it.

Bam is on edge about wasting the radio's battery because, now that the bakkie is gone, the radio is the Smales' last remaining connection to the outside world. The distinction that Maureen establishes between "good" white people like themselves and apartheid-supporting white people reveals her ignorance about her own latent racism, especially given the disparaging remark she made about Nyiko only hours before. Bam's advice to Maureen not to "go fishing" means that Maureen shouldn't question July's people's loyalty to them. He's implying that Maureen is being irrationally paranoid. This isn't quite fair, because readers can tell from Bam's inner thoughts (which he does not share with Maureen) that he, too, is unhappy and uncertain about their future in July's village. Maureen and Bam seem to be engaged in a silent competition to out-do each other's tolerance for cultural difference and suffering. Nobody wants to be the first to say that they have issues with living here.

Maureen's father had spoken "the bastard black lingua franca," though his vocabulary was limited to giving orders to and receiving orders from Black people. When Maureen married Bam, "her liberal young husband," she'd told him this story with shame. Now, she feels ashamed about that earlier shame. Tension builds as the couple struggles to decide who is to blame for their current situation. Maureen claims that Bam would have thought they were "run[ning] away" if they'd left five years ago. Bam denies the accusation, but Maureen won't let it go. She accuses him of constantly putting on fronts to impress people.

This scene presents additional insight into the central conflicts of Maureen and Bam's relationship. Maureen felt an extra pressure to appear open-minded in front of "her liberal young husband" because she was brought up by a racist father who exploited Black workers and is ashamed of her past. At the same time, she questions her supposedly "liberal" husband's integrity, arguing that Bam is more concerned about appearing good than with actually being a good person.

Bam accuses Maureen argue some more. Finally, Bam puts his hands up in exasperation. "I know I gave him the fucking keys—" he begins, ascertaining that this is the source of their ongoing argument. Maureen demands that Bam at least admit that it was a stupid idea to come here.

The keys are a sore point for the Smales because they symbolize their loss of control and freedom of mobility. Even if it would be unsafe for them to leave the village without July's protection, having the bakkie there gave the Smales the illusion that they still had some control over their life. On the other hand, July's decision to take the bakkie without their permission symbolizes July's corresponding increase of power and control. In a reversal of the way things were under apartheid, where the Smales gained comfort and security through exploiting July, now it's July who gains freedom and personal agency at the direct expense of Maureen and Bam.

This goes on for some time, with neither husband nor wife willing to admit that it was both of their faults for not fleeing the country while they had the chance. The children eventually fall asleep in their car seats. Outside, rain beats against the old, thatched roof. Water slowly trickles down into the hut. The humidity brings swarms of bugs. Maureen and Bam carry the children to the bed to keep them off the wet floor

Faced with a crisis of uncertainty, the Smales' idealistic, ethical reasons for staying in South Africa (not wanting to run away and abandon their support of Black liberation, or a nostalgic attachment to their homeland, perhaps) suddenly seem naïve.

Bam drifts in and out of sleep. Maureen steadies herself against the wet wall of the hut and removes her clothing, letting water stream down her naked body as though she were under a showerhead. Suddenly, she spots headlights cutting through the darkness. The **bakkie** pulls into the settlement. Were it not for the pouring rain outside, Maureen knows she'd be able to hear July's voice, for she knows him to be a "talkative man, liking to run through small events again, to savour his activity." Maureen returns to the hut and falls asleep on a car seat.

Maureen's description of July as a "talkative man, liking to run through small events again, to savour his activity" disparages him for being happy. She's offended by the casual manner in which he took the bakkie, an action that caused herself and Bam undue stress and existential anguish. Again, readers see that Maureen's talk of wanting to be friends with July is all talk: she is uncomfortable and unhappy with July as a person and enjoys his company only when she has a hand in controlling him. When he does things on his own terms, she resents him for it.

CHAPTER 7

The next morning, Maureen wakes up to the sound of her children coughing in their sleep. Bam pours boiling water onto tea-leaves and listens to the **radio**, which is reporting news of missiles falling on the city last night. Maureen can sense that Bam wants her to ask what they should do if white control were restored—if they should return to Johannesburg "in the name of ideals they didn't share in a destroyed white society they didn't believe in." But Maureen remains silent. When she gets out of bed, Bam gives her half-naked body an incredulous look. As Maureen hastily dresses, they hear July's voice at the doorway.

The Smales weigh their options: they can stay here in July's village and uphold their progressive values at the cost of personal comfort and certainty, or they can return to the comforts of home and defend their own life "in the name of ideals they didn't share," thereby abandoning their values. Neither option satisfies them.

The couple tells July to come in. He enters, carrying firewood. Bam cautiously asks July where he took the **bakkie** yesterday. Maureen adds that they were "worried." July mentions something about going "to the shops." His flippant tone unsettles Bam and Maureen: "the shops" are 40 kilometers away, not to mention the fact that there's a police post there. July explains that his friend, a good driver, drove them. He also mentions that he went to the shops to retrieve food and supplies for the Smales. Maureen pays July for the provisions and asks if there was any fighting in town. July says he heard about trouble at the mine. Before leaving, he orders the couple to come when he sends for them once the rain clears. He grins as he tosses them some batteries for their **radio**.

Maureen's attempt to frame the anger she feels toward July for breaking their trust and taking the bakkie as them being "worried" is disingenuous. They're not worried about July's safety. In reality, they're worried for themselves. More than this, even, they're upset that he's done something of his own accord without first gaining their approval. When July describes the provisions he picked up in town, he's implicitly reminding the Smales that they are in no position to condemn him, since he's held up his end of the bargain by taking care of them. The lightheartedness with which July tosses the Smales batteries for the radio can be interpreted a number of ways. On the one hand, he can simply be happy to be doing the Smales a favor by giving them something they need. On the other hand, his glib attitude does suggest that he's making a point about how he controls which supplies the Smales can and cannot access. He's relishing his newfound freedom and putting the Smales in their place.

July leaves. Maureen begins to cook porridge for breakfast. As Maureen cooks, she contemplates July's concerningly careless behavior. What would happen if somebody in town noticed him driving the yellow **bakkie** and became suspicious about where he got it? At the same time, Maureen reminds herself, "he did bring things."

Maureen remains conflicted about the bakkie debacle. She fixates on the perceived danger of July being seen in the bakkie—a vehicle that anybody would guess belongs to a white person—in an attempt to reframe her anger about the ordeal as concern rather than bitterness toward July for overstepping a boundary. She's trying to put herself in the right so she can avoid acknowledging how uncomfortable she is with July being beyond her ability to control.

CHAPTER 8

The Smales watch July's friend teaching him to drive the **bakkie** and realize that they've missed their opportunity to reclaim their keys. "He's always been so *correct*," observes Bam, puzzled about what has compelled July to take the bakkie and overstep a critical boundary. The couple knows that they owe July their lives for taking them in, but they can't help but feel betrayed and suspicious of his recent actions. Maureen fears that July will only help them as long as their money lasts.

Watching July learn to drive shows Bam and Maureen that July has realized that he can act of his own accord now that he's no longer working under the Smales' roof. This is what they mean when they claim that they've missed the opportunity to regain possession of the keys: now that July is aware of the altered power dynamics in their relationship, he has no reason to do things just because they tell him to do them. Bam's observation about July being "so correct" gets to the heart of why the Smales are having such a hard time getting along with July in his village: they're still judging him as a servant rather than an equal. They believe it's out of line for him to do things without their consent, and they see his empowerment as a threat to their well-being and a symptom that his loyalty to them has waned.

July ends his driving lesson and approaches the Smales, gloating about his progress. Bam carefully remarks that July never expressed interest in learning to drive when he was working for them. He also warns July that it could be very bad for them all if authorities catch him driving without a license. July laughs. Who would catch him? The Black soldiers have run the white policemen out of town. Plus, he has a cover story: the Smales gave him the **bakkie**. Maureen and Bam start to suspect that July might really believe the bakkie is his.

The Smales' paranoia about July's shifting loyalties causes them to read into his words and actions and see malice where there is none. Suddenly, July's confidence in his ability to protect the Smales becomes big-headedness. July's attempts to reassure the Smales, too, come off as gloating about society's subverted power dynamics, where the white policemen now must answer to the Black soldiers. The Smales see July's use of the bakkie as an extension of this revised racial hierarchy. They think he feels entitled to what is not rightfully his.

Maureen changes the subject. She mentions that Martha gave her some medicine for the children's coughs. This information agitates July, who insists that the medicine isn't good "for white people." Royce's cough has become increasingly severe, and Maureen mentions wanting to place a rubber floormat from the **bakkie** underneath his bed to keep the dampness at bay. Bam interjects, cautiously mentioning that they haven't been able to get the rubber mat out of the **bakkie** because July has the keys. July becomes defensive and reminds the couple that he has used their keys to bring them the things they need. He promises to get medicine for Royce tomorrow.

July clarifies two things about the nature of his relationship with the Smales family: he's not enthusiastic about Maureen inserting herself into his culture, which isn't "for white people," and he's no longer obligated to answer to Bam and Maureen if he doesn't want to. July seems to sense the couple's wariness about him operating the bakkie and purposefully avoids addressing it directly. When July reminds the couple about the supplies he picked up in town, it's his way of putting them in their place.

Victor and some other boys come running toward Maureen and Bam. With alarm in his voice, Victor announces that people have discovered the water running from the tap Bam set up the other day. "It's ours!" exclaims Victor. Bam tells Victor that he installed the tank for everybody to use. Maureen tells him that nobody "owns the rain." July playfully remarks to Victor how "very, very clever" his father was to install the tank.

This scene with Victor parallels the interaction that just occurred between Bam, Maureen, and July. Victor, like his parents before him, tries to claim ownership of the tap Bam installed the other day. His parents—newly humbled by July—remind him that the water tap is for everybody, and that nobody "owns the rain." Bam and Maureen instruct Victor to be less entitled, a lesson they hadn't fully internalized prior to their tense confrontation with July. July's improved mood when he praises Victor's "very, very clever" father signals to Bam and Maureen that everything is okay again, now that they all understand one another. In short, July has implicitly reminded Maureen and Bam that while he will continue to protect them because it's the right thing to do, he will no longer answer to them as he had when he was their servant.

CHAPTER 9

Maureen reflects on July's personality. Back home, she had humored his moods, too afraid to offend him and lose the comforts his service provided them. Maureen wonders if July loves his town woman, Ellen. She also ruminates on how everything comes at a cost, "even death." One of Bam's business partners bought his death aboard a private plane; July's mother, in contrast, could only afford to "crawl" to her death.

Maureen insinuates that yesterday's terse encounter with July is just the latest episode in which she's had to be at the mercy of his volatile mood swings. The idea that she has always been afraid to offend July seems unlikely: as a white person of financial means, and as July's employer, Maureen would have had the upper hand in their relationship. Her attempt to frame herself as a victim of July's erratic moods seems to be a defensive response to July taking offense to her and Bam's concerns the night before. She's uncomfortable with him conversing with them as an equal rather than a servant.

Maureen still has the **bakkie** keys from when she retrieved the rubber mat last night. She waits for July to emerge from his hut to give them back to him, feeling that it would be inappropriate for her, as a white woman, to enter his hut alone. She hadn't entered his living quarters in their home in Johannesburg, either. Maureen sits down, uncomfortable. She's menstruating for the first time since arriving in July's village two weeks ago. She hadn't thought to pack sanitary supplies and has to use rags that she washes in the river, just like the other village women.

Maureen's apprehension about not committing a faux pas by entering July's hut reflects her inner turmoil over how to navigate the constraints of their relationship outside of an employer-employee context. Having to wash rags in the river with the other women is another example of navigating a cultural difference that makes adjusting to life in July's village a challenge.

Eventually, July emerges from his hut. Maureen stands up and hands him the keys. July says nothing at first. Bam has gone hunting warthogs with some others, and July appears to sense that he can't avoid Maureen's scrutiny now that it's just the two of them. He confronts her about disapproving of him holding the **bakkie** keys. Maureen tries to laugh off the uncomfortable moment, but July continues. For 15 years, he reminds Maureen, he has worked for her family. In town, he was her "boy," and she trusted him to manage the entire household. Maureen can see that July is using the word "boy" as a weapon against her, but she can't remember ever calling him this. Maureen's father might have infantilized the Black men who worked in his mine, but Maureen is different from him.

Bam and Maureen both felt that it was a breach of trust for July to take the Bakkie without asking them. However, while Bam seems to dismiss the incident as an out-of-character lapse of judgment on July's part, Maureen is more resolute in her paranoia about July's wavering loyalty to her family and trustworthiness. Maureen's understanding of the power dynamics that influenced her and July's relationship is superficial. She's offended that July would imply that she or Bam would ever infantilize him by calling him "boy," yet she fails to recognize the myriad of other, more subtle ways she and Bam might have offended or talked down to July over the years.

July continues to air his grievances against Maureen, claiming that she has never trusted him and never took her eyes off of him when they lived in town. While the family would come back from vacations with nice gifts for July, Maureen would still inspect the house thoroughly upon their return to make sure nothing was missing or out of place. July also accuses Maureen of being afraid he wasn't working hard enough, citing a time she asked him to dust all the books while they were away. Maureen counters that July should have said something if he felt Maureen was mistreating him. July accuses Bam, whom he calls "the master," of "think[ing] for" him. This infuriates Maureen, who says that Bam has never been July's "master," nor has the family "ever thought of [him] as anything but a grown man."

July's grievances against Maureen confirm that she has indeed infantilized and insulted him over the years, even if she hasn't done so in such an explicit manner as calling him "boy." When July refers to Bam as his "master," he infuriates Maureen. Once more, Maureen demonstrates a superficial understanding of power dynamics. The term "master" triggers her because it explicitly *suggests that a master-slave/superior-subordinate dynamic exists between July and his employers. Maureen seems to believe that if her and Bam's relationship with July is* superficially *just and equitable, there is no danger of her offending or demeaning him in other, more nuanced ways. Because her family has never "thought of [him] as anything but a grown man," she assumes that July, in turn, has never been made to feel "as anything but a grown man." July's complaints in this scene, however, paint a different picture and suggest that Maureen has slighted him in more ways than she knows.*

Anyway, Maureen adds, this is all in the past, since July doesn't work for them anymore. Maureen's comments surprise July, who asks whether she intends to pay him for this month. Maureen is incredulous. She tries to back up and reason with him, apologizing for anything she has said or done over the years that may have offended him. However, Maureen contends, their relationship is different now. July isn't taking their keys as a servant—he's taking their keys as a friend. And friends are supposed to ask permission before they borrow things. July offers Maureen the keys but continues to lecture Maureen about how he has worked hard for years, all to support his wife and children.

Maureen and July continue to butt heads. This suggests that neither has a clear idea of how to navigate the power dynamics of their new relationship and determine what they are to each other. July is no longer their servant, of course, but isn't he still working for them by providing them food, shelter, and protection? On the other hand, they've been in each other's lives for nearly two decades, so is it possible that he's helping them as a favor rather than a service?

Maureen fights back. If July cares so much about his wife and children, she asks, then how does Ellen fit into the picture? Is she taken care of now? And does July's wife know about her? July is silent, and Maureen knows she has won the argument—for now. July pockets the keys and turns to leave, barking orders to various villagers as he walks away.

It's unclear why Maureen brings Ellen into the argument, as she's never appeared to have any moral qualms about July having an extramarital affair before now. More likely, Maureen mentions Ellen to antagonize July and gain the upper hand in their argument. By bringing July's infidelity into the argument, Maureen discredits July's claim about being a responsible, principled servant, husband, and father.

CHAPTER 10

Bam watches the warthogs walk through the grasses. Earlier in the day, one of July's friends, Daniel, asked to hold Bam's **gun**. Bam taught Daniel to aim at a target. Now, Bam waits in the reeds with Daniel, watching the family of warthogs and waiting for the opportune moment to shoot. He shoots two piglets. One struggles to die, and Bam shoots it through the head to put it out of its misery. The piglet's injury is gruesome. Before, Bam had only hunted game-birds, which "had no faces, really," and he feels like "a killer" for the first time in his life.

Bam is more upset about feeling like a killer than by the act of killing itself. This is why killing birds, which "ha[ve] no faces, really," doesn't bother him. His stance on killing shares similarities with his and Maureen's position on racial equality as well. They will accept a certain degree of complicity in the oppression of Black people, so long as it's not readily apparent. For instance, they're fine paying July a minimal salary to run their household but will draw the line when July refers to Bam as his master, which too obviously evokes the racial inequality and history of oppression inherent in their relationship.

When Bam returns to the village with his kill, Maureen intercepts him. She reminds him to give the villagers the bigger piglet before whispering in his ear that the smaller one will be juicer. Bam constructs a spit to roast the piglet. Later, the family relishes the pleasure of eating meat for the first time in two weeks, feeling almost intoxicated by the nourishment.

It's ironic that Maureen is so suspicious of July's loyalty to her family when she's the one who's being calculating in each of her interactions with him and the other villagers. Here, she subtly ensures that her family has the best cut of meat.

Later that night, surrounded by their sleeping children, Maureen and Bam make love for the first time since their arrival in July's village. Until now, lack of privacy and the overwhelming anxiety of their situation left them with little desire for intimacy. When Bam wakes up the following morning, he is horrified to find blood on his penis, initially thinking it came from the pig. After a moment, he realizes the blood is his wife's, not the pig's.

Bam's initial thought that he is covered in the pig's blood shows that he is still bothered by the thought of being a killer. He sees this as indicative of a broader shortcoming he hadn't known he had: the ability to be corrupted and go against his morals.

CHAPTER 11

As July and his family eat their meat, July's mother complains about the white family that is still living in her house. July promises to build her a new house. Martha scrubs an enamel pot and warns him that they'll be in trouble if anyone finds out that they're housing a white family. July reminds her that he has the final say. Refusing to back down, Martha asks July if he ever took orders from "the white woman" in town. Inwardly, she muses about how indifferent she has grown to her husband's presence ever since she got used to him living in town. Like many women in her position, Martha has never seen the city in which her husband worked.

Tensions continue to mount in the middle section of the book. July's family is more vocal about their disapproval of the Smales' presence in the village, when they were only mildly critical when the Smales first arrived. This section also attaches a philosophical stance to Martha's disapproval: not only is she skeptical of white people, but she's also bothered by what she sees as her husband allowing himself to take orders from white people when he no longer needs to. What neither Martha nor the Smales consider is that July could be helping the Smales for no reason other than the fact that he thinks it's the right thing to do.

July and Martha continue to bicker back and forth. Martha interrogates July about Nomvula/Nora, the Xhosa woman who worked as the Smales family cook. When July mentions that Nomvula's husband died, Martha asks if Nomvula was with a man during July's time working with her. July pauses before mentioning Bongani, a Zulu, who sometimes stayed in Nomvula's room. Martha asks what happened to Nomvula, and July shrugs. Martha can't tell what the shrug means, but July's answer about the Zulu is good enough for her.

Martha's reasons for interrogating July about Nomvula/Nora are unclear. It's possible that she's jealous and suspects that July has been unfaithful to her. More puzzling is July's silence, which seems to indicate an internal conflict that he chooses not to discuss with his wife. Has Martha's probing about Nomvula made him think about Ellen? Is he bothered by not knowing what became of her? Much of the novel has focused on the Smales' plight, but this passage shows how the uprisings have affected July on a personal level as well, putting him out of touch with people he cares about and bringing uncertainty into his personal life.

CHAPTER 12

The Smales family is in their hut. Gina and Victor use a plastic sack to store litter for the stray cat and kittens they've brought home. Maureen recognizes the sack as the kind that people sell oranges in, "back there." Just then, a sullen-looking man appears at the door. Maureen and Bam intuit that the children have stolen the man's sack. The children insist that they thought the bag was garbage. Furthermore, suggests Gina, they'd brought a sack of oranges into the village, so one of the sacks is rightfully theirs. Being accused of theft causes Victor to become "angry with a white man's anger." Bam hands the man a two-rand note as a peace-offering. The man leaves, and the parents calmly explain to the children that the man uses the sacks to make rope. Victor starts whimpering about how "horrible" some of the Black villagers are compared to July.

Once more, Maureen evokes "back there," the phrase she and Bam have created as shorthand for their old life in Johannesburg. The children's argument about which property is rightfully theirs shows that even they have been corrupted by their exposure to the apartheid system. Thus far, the book has seemed to emphasize how readily the children assimilate to life in the village as compared to their parents, suggesting that children aren't born prejudiced but learn to be so as they grow older. Here, we see how early prejudicial attitudes can be absorbed. Although Victor is a young child, he's already honed a sense of entitlement and learned to be "angry with a white man's anger." He's also learned to scapegoat people who are different than him, deeming many of the Black villagers "horrible" to deflect the embarrassment he feels at being called out for stealing the orange sack.

Later, Bam goes to fish in the river. He and his family won't eat barbel, but he knows the other villagers will appreciate it. When Bam returns to the hut to catch the 4:00 news, he finds Maureen asleep on the bed. Bam watches his sleeping wife and envisions himself as a prisoner. He hasn't been able to sleep for days, too occupied with thoughts of getting out of this place and away from his family.

Barbel is a carp-like freshwater fish. Bam's revelation that he is a prisoner reflects the claustrophobic, defamiliarizing sensation of cultural displacement. Bam doesn't know how to make sense of his family without the framework of a familiar social structure to guide him.

Bam and Maureen turn on the **radio**, but the reception is too poor to hear anything. It's become too difficult to talk about the fighting going on "back there," so they resort to superficial small talk instead. Bam asks Maureen what happened to the kittens. Maureen tells him that she drowned them in a bucket of water. Bam is horrified and disgusted when he realizes that Maureen isn't joking. He investigates his wife's body, noting the hairs sprouted across the once-smooth calves. When Maureen removes her shirt so scratch at her ribs, "the baring of breasts [is] not an intimacy but a castration of his sexuality and hers." Although his wife disgusts him, Bam calls her "poor thing" and asks why she couldn't just "get one of them to" drown the kittens.

Little by little, Bam and Maureen have lost their connection to their old way of life. First, July took control of the bakkie, symbolically robbing them of the freedom of mobility and leisure. The dysfunctional radio deals another blow, cutting off their communication with the outside world. Bam's response to Maureen's gruesome admission offers another glimpse into his latent racism. Calling Maureen his "poor thing," he expresses remorse that she has to commit a gruesome act that is so unnatural to someone as delicate and gentle as her. He sees Maureen as fundamentally different than the village people. This is why he asks why she couldn't "get one of them to" drown the kittens: he implies Maureen is too refined for the ugly elements of life. Finally, Bam's disgust at seeing Maureen's naked body reinforces their increasingly distant relationship.

CHAPTER 13

Maureen gathers vegetables with the other women in the field. The afternoon sun beats down on them. Maureen rolls up her jeans, revealing pale calves marked with bruises, hair, and varicose veins. Martha laughs openly at Maureen's legs, and Maureen laughs back at July's wife's thick legs.

Martha's ridicule is aimed at Maureen's appearance, specifically the whiteness of her legs. This is another example of how being in July's village upends the racial hierarchy. Under apartheid, Maureen's whiteness was an asset. Here, her pale legs are the target of ridicule.

Maureen and Bam try to listen to the news later that day, but they still can't get a signal. Maureen leaves the hut and spots July and Daniel fixing the **bakkie**. July emerges from beneath the vehicle and offers a vague explanation of what's wrong with it. He and Maureen talk back and forth impersonally, as though following a script. When the subject of the war comes up, July mentions his hope that things "will come back all right." Maureen thinks she's misheard him and asks him to clarify—does he really want things to go back to how they were before? July motions for Daniel to leave so he can speak with Maureen alone.

July's hope that everything "will come back all right" reflects his desire for the government to subdue the Black freedom fighters and reinstate apartheid. This shocks Maureen, since it implies that July is actively siding against an outcome that would be in his best interest. Her failure to understand what would compel July to side against his people reflects the degree to which her privilege blinds her to the complexities of the disadvantaged communities for whom she wants to be an advocate.

After Daniel leaves, July asks Maureen if her family is hungry—he saw her gathering vegetables with the other women earlier and assumed her family didn't have enough to eat. Maureen insists that she only gathered vegetables because she wanted to pass the time, but July won't back down. He tells her it's not her place to work with them, insisting that it's "no good" without elaborating further. Maureen asks July if he's "afraid [Maureen is] going to tell [Martha] something." July doesn't offer much of a response, but he's visibly angry. For the first time in her life, Maureen feels afraid of a man.

Maureen brought up Ellen during her confrontation with July the other day and witnessed firsthand how much it upset July. Maureen's cryptic accusation that July is worried that Maureen will "tell [Martha] something" seems to refer to Ellen. Again, it's unclear why Maureen is so fixated on Ellen. One plausible interpretation is that Maureen is trying to show July that she has leverage against him (knowledge of July's affair, which she can disclose to Martha) and is therefore not as indebted to him as he would like to think.

Maureen walks away and July resumes working on the **bakkie**. Even from far away, Maureen can tell that July is using the improper tools and has no idea what he's doing. She approaches him and insists that he let Bam complete the job. July is silent. Something is still bothering him. After a pause, he tells Maureen that the chief has asked about the white people that July is keeping in the village. He's agreed to let them stay, but they have to meet with him in person and ask permission first. Maureen, equal parts concerned and annoyed, points out that July made it sound like he has the final say about what goes on in the village when he invited them to stay here. July ignores this and tells Maureen that he will bring the entire Smales family to see the chief tomorrow.

Insisting that July let Bam repair the bakkie is another attempt on Maureen's part to antagonize and belittle July, putting him in his place after he made her feel uncomfortable and powerless. Ultimately, however, July wins the power play by telling Maureen about the chief's request to meet the Smales family, effectively letting Maureen know that her future at the village is in jeopardy. Finally, that the Smales family needs the chief, a Black man, to authorize their continued presence in the village presents another example of how life in July's village subverts the racial hierarchy as it existed under apartheid.

Maureen turns to leave but walks back and faces July. In a quiet voice, she tells him that he doesn't need to worry: "He won't steal it from you."

Maureen simultaneously acknowledges that July has been acting as though he owns the bakkie and criticizes his entitlement. She's telling him that it's okay to let Bam take over the mechanical repair job, since Bam is a principled man (unlike July) who wouldn't dream of taking something that belongs to someone else. She says this purely out of spite. However, her observation is ironic, since Maureen and Bam are the descendants of European settlers who, indirectly, have stolen (land) from July and his people.

CHAPTER 14

Maureen returns to the hut and tells Bam about July's news regarding the chief. She also mentions her suspicion about July being afraid that Maureen might tell Martha about the town woman. Bam doesn't appear to share Maureen's concerns and goes outside to relieve himself. Maureen smells his lingering body odor after he leaves the hut and realizes it's unfamiliar to her. "Back there," frequent access to showers and baths had kept both of them unaware of "the possibility of knowing in this kind of way."

Bam continues to trust July and the other villagers. Meanwhile, Maureen's apprehension persists. Her observation about not appreciating "the possibility of knowing in this kind of way" alludes to the idea that cultural displacement drastically alters how one relates to others and to oneself. "Back there," Bam and Maureen's relationship was sanitized and regimented. They had the freedom to curate the version of themselves they wanted the other to know. The unfamiliar culture of July's village exposes them to themselves and to each other, and not necessarily in a good way. As their time there draws on, they become strangers to each other.

The next morning, the Smales family, July, and Daniel leave the village to meet with the chief. Maureen chatters affectionately with Bam and the children, as though the family is taking a fun daytrip. Meanwhile, Bam mentally prepares for the chief to order them to move on, though he doesn't voice these fears to Maureen. Since their arrival at July's village, Maureen has become a total stranger to Bam. The cheerful woman in the **bakkie** this morning might "appear as 'their mother', and 'his wife,'" but Bam doesn't feel like confiding in the person Maureen is most of the time. The bakkie gets a lot of curious looks as it passes by other settlements, which bothers Maureen and Bam. July seems not to care. Eventually, they arrive at the chief's settlement.

Bam's decision to withhold his fears about the meeting with the chief from Maureen is further evidence that their time in the village has driven a wedge between them. Bam's instinct to refer to Maureen as "their mother" and "his wife" is similar to the way Maureen refers to her father as the "shift boss." In other words, Bam refuses to call Maureen by her name to distance himself from her. It's possible that he's doing this for the same reason that Maureen refused to name her father: he's ashamed of her prejudices and doesn't want to associate with her or them.

CHAPTER 15

The Smales wait outside a brick, church-like building while July runs ahead to announce their arrival. Bam asks Daniel where they are. Daniel tells him they've arrived at the *hubeyni*, a place people gather. Eventually, July returns, accompanied by a man wearing a mismatched suit. When July gives no indication that he plans to speak, Bam takes the initiative and introduces himself, Maureen, and the children to the man. The man asks where they came from, even though Bam assumes that he, like everyone else, must already know about them. Bam talks about the fighting in Johannesburg until July interrupts to say that it's time to go to the chief's house.

The brick, church-like building is a far cry from the earthen huts of July's village. It evokes the western-influenced culture of Bam and Maureen and the other white South Africans more than it does the culture of July's village. July's refusal to introduce Bam and Maureen to the man in the mismatched suit is odd and could, perhaps, be another power play on July's part, ensuring that they feel defamiliarized and unsure of themselves. Then again, July's poor communication isn't necessarily nefarious. He might not appreciate how unfamiliar and disorienting the customs of his culture are to Maureen and Bam.

The party returns to the **bakkie** to travel to the chief's house. Bam tries to ask July for information about the man they just met, and July laughs, seemingly taking pleasure in Bam's confusion. He explains that the man is the chief's "headman." Bam turns to address Maureen privately, expressing his regret that they haven't brought the chief a gift. Maureen scoffs: what were they supposed to bring him? They have nothing to their name.

Again, Bam detects an ulterior motive to July's poor communication and assumes that July is keeping the Smales family in the dark to sabotage their meeting with the chief or for his personal amusement. Increasingly, Bam seems to adopt Maureen's paranoia. In reality, July's unhelpful explanations aren't outwardly malicious; he genuinely seems not to understand that Maureen and Bam aren't knowledgeable about the titles of authority, customs, and etiquette of his culture.

The party reaches their destination. After waiting outside for some time, the chief emerges, prompting Daniel and July to drop to their knees. A woman appears with plastic chairs, and everyone sits down. Small groups of people assemble in the distance to eavesdrop. The chief seems smart and discerning but doesn't speak the Smales' language. Bam realizes that the chief has no need for the "white man's language" because he "doesn't work as a servant or go down the mines." July translates as the chief asks the Smales a series of questions about who they are, where they came from, and why they've come to July's village. He's especially interested to know about the situation in Johannesburg. Bam explains that it's not just the Soweto but everyone else who's engaged in the fighting.

Daniel and July don't inform the Smales family ahead of time that it is custom to kneel before the chief as a sign of respect. Either July is intentionally leaving them in the dark, or his culture is so ingrained into him that he innocently fails to realize that Maureen and Bam don't instinctively understand the protocol to follow in specific social situations. Bam's remark about the chief not needing the "white man's language" because he "doesn't work as a servant or go down the mines" is a critique of white South African society. He's saying that the only way for Black South Africans to participate in white society under apartheid is by serving white people.

The chief wants to know why the police don't just arrest people the way they did in 1976 or 1980. Bam explains that the Black people in law enforcement have joined the fighting and refuse to jail their own people. In general, Black people are better armed than they have been in years past. The chief can't believe that white people aren't fighting back, since they have so many men and weapons. After some back and forth, Bam realizes the chief is really trying to figure out who is "us" and who is "them" in the conflict.

The chief is referencing the 1976 Soweto uprising and the labor strikes of 1980, episodes of civic unrest that were met with fierce opposition from law enforcement. The Soweto uprising, headed by schoolchildren to protest the implementation of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in schools, resulted in at least 176 casualties. When Bam realizes that the chief is trying to determine who is "us" and who is "them," he means that the chief is trying to determine whether Bam is loyal to the white apartheid government or the Black freedom fighters.

Suddenly, in English, the chief says, "And they want to kill you." Maureen laughs involuntarily and then immediately blushes deeply, mortified by her reaction. Bam, who takes the chief's comment as gloating, says nothing. July won't look at him. In the silence, a few of the onlookers walk away.

This is a tense situation. The chief's declaration, "And they want to kill you," is bold, but vague. It's impossible to tell whether he sympathizes with or delights in the Smales family's plight. July avoids eye contact with them to avoid taking a side, perhaps.

Finally, the chief speaks again, this time in his own language. He asks about the goals of the fighters. Bam explains that Black people want to reclaim land the white people stole from them. The chief asks if Bam, too, has had his house stolen. Bam admits that this might be the case. The chief speaks in English again, criticizing the people from Soweto, Russia, and Mozambique who are trying to enter his nation and take his land. The chief wants to take up arms and kill these people, and he asks Bam to teach him how to shoot.

The chief opposes revolution in South Africa because it's in his immediate best interest to protect his land, and he knows he can accomplish this under the existing system of apartheid. Having lost land to European settlement already, the chief likely is wary of the uncertainty that a new system of government could bring, even if it is headed by Black people: would he lose additional land to people from other countries?

The chief's words shock Bam. He argues that the chief can't possibly wish to shoot his own people: "You wouldn't kill blacks, Mandela's people, Sobukwe's people," Bam protests. He pleads with the chief not to let the government persuade him to turn on other Black South Africans. The chief pauses, shifting a match between opposite corners of his mouth. He asks how many guns Bam has at "Mwawate's place," referring to July. Bam and Maureen realize that they haven't known July's real name for all 15 years they've known him. Bam tells the chief that he only has one **gun**, a shot-gun, and that he doesn't "shoot people." Bam's self-righteous response prompts the chief to snort in disgust.

The chief's position complicates Bam's own thoughts about Black liberation. Not only does the chief's support for the apartheid system contradict Bam's, but it also undermines the chief's own people. Bam is put in the difficult position of being obligated to help somebody inflict harm on others who, he assumes, should be on the chief's side. While the chief's pro-apartheid views are antithetical to Black liberation, Bam's inability to understand why the chief feels this way is indicative of his own privilege. Bam has never been in a position where oppression has diminished his capacity to make decisions that are in his best interest. A history of colonization in South Africa has made the chief wary about losing more land to outsiders, so he accepts the current situation under apartheid to minimize the possibility of incurring additional loss of land.

The meeting comes to an abrupt end. Before the Smales, Daniel, and July return to the **bakkie**, the chief asks Maureen if her family has been taken care of at July's village. Maureen turns to July and smiles as she says, "We owe him everything."

It's significant that Maureen turns to July when she claims that they "owe him everything." She's implicitly paying her due to July, singing his praises in front of the chief to show him that she understands that his continued help is conditional: something she must earn.

CHAPTER 16

July criticizes the chief on the ride back to his village, accusing the man of being all talk. Although the chief claims to want to fight, he's a poor man with no money, resources, or weapons. He "doesn't fight [against the white people] when the white people tell him he must do what they want," yet he claims he'll fight any Black soldiers who try to take his land.

This is the most insight readers have gotten into July's thoughts on the conflict. His criticism of the chief might be a projection of his own shame: just as the chief bends to white people to preserve his own interests, so, too, does July continue to serve the Smales rather than join the fight for Black liberation. He seems conflicted between feeling obligated to help the Smales because it's the morally right thing to do and being obligated to help his own people.

July drops off Bam and Maureen in front of their hut. Gina, Victor, and Royce remain in the **bakkie** as July picks up some other kids. Daniel moves to the front to sit next to July. Once inside their hut, Bam turns on the **radio**. Neither Bam nor Maureen can get a signal, and the sound of the static is like "chaos." For a moment, Maureen wonders where the children are, but then she remembers that "they kn[o]w how to look after themselves, like the black children."

The static is "chaos" to Bam and Maureen because it reaffirms how isolated they are from the rest of the world and from their old lives under apartheid. It's unclear whether Maureen makes the observation that her children "kn[o]w how to look after themselves, like the black children" with shame or with pride. Is she happy about her children's new self-sufficiency, or is she apprehensive about her children becoming "like the black children" and abandoning their European ancestry?

Bam paces around the hut and mentions a report from a few years ago, about the U.S. sending an aircraft in to rescue American citizens and citizens from other European countries. Maureen tells him she hadn't heard that one. She knows she doesn't need to remind Bam that they are not Americans or Europeans—just as he needn't tell her that they missed their chance to flee to Europe or Canada years ago. Inwardly, Maureen poses a question: "If all whites became the same enemies, to blacks, all whites might become 'Europeans' for the Americans?"

Even though the chief has authorized the Smales family to stay at July's village, Maureen and Bam remain apprehensive about their future there. Maureen's question about "all whites bec[oming] the same enemies, to blacks," and the same allies to each other, expresses her frustration at her family's current helplessness. She's discouraged by how the institutionalized racism of apartheid has led the Black freedom fighters to make the generalization that all white people are enemies, which discounts her family's liberal, anti-apartheid views. If they have the right to pass judgement on her family based on the color of their skin alone, shouldn't their whiteness be enough to qualify as white "Europeans" worthy of rescue by the Americans?

Maureen pauses before asking Bam about the chief's interest in the **gun**. Bam squats beside her and smiles, finally telling her about his earlier—and, now, unnecessary—fear that the chief was going to make them leave the village. Bam scoffs at the chief's request. He imagines himself throwing grenades "to protect some reactionary poor devil of a petty chief against the liberation of his own people." But Maureen doesn't shake things off quite so easily. She asks Bam what he'll do if the chief follows up on his request for a shooting lesson. While Bam is confident that the chief is all talk, Maureen remains apprehensive.

Bam mocks the chief's opposition to the war. It's absurd to him that a Black man should position himself "against the liberation of his own people." Bam's inability to understand the chief's desire to reinstitute apartheid mirrors Maureen's conversation with July in Chapter Thirteen, where she, too, could not fathom why July would want things to return to the way they were instead of wanting freedom.

Bam changes the subject to complain about July's earlier remark about "let[ting]" Bam drive. "A treat for me," Bam remarks wryly, observing that July has gotten a big head lately. Maureen pauses before suggesting that July might have been talking about himself when he criticized the chief. Bam is confused. Maureen explains how July has dedicated his adult life to appeasing white people—and that includes bringing them here. Maureen thinks that July's decision to shelter them in his village is itself a symptom of his continued servitude to his white oppressors. "He didn't murder us in our beds and he won't be a warrior for his tribe, either," states Maureen. Bam guffaws at Maureen's suggestion that July "was a sell-out" for saving the Smales family.

Maureen and Bam are both beginning to feel unwelcome in July's village. So far, Maureen has been more openly spiteful toward July for acting as though he's entitled to the bakkie. Bam taking offense to July "let[ting] him drive" his own vehicle shows that Bam, too, has begun to question July's loyalties. Maureen's speculation about the true meaning of July's criticism of the chief also doesn't bode well for the couple. Maureen is proposing that the chief's brutal condemnation of the civil war resonated with July and made him rethink his own failure to support the freedom fighters. If July has had a change of heart about where his allegiances lie—if he feels that helping the Smales family has made him "a sell-out"—will he continue to protect them, or will he turn on them?

Maureen refuses to back down. July didn't join the Soweto people, she claims. When he brought the Smales to his village, he effectively "took his whites and ran." Bam disagrees. He believes that July is hiding them out of his genuine love for the family. After all, July could be killed for helping them—though Bam admits that he's not sure if July realizes the possible consequences of his actions. "Then we'd better go," replies Maureen, plainly. Maureen and Bam stare at each other. The sound of their children returning to the hut brings their conversation to an end, but the couple remains at odds with each other.

Maureen references the 1976 Soweto uprising, a demonstration led by schoolchildren in Soweto, a township of Johannesburg, to protest the implementation of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in local schools. The demonstrations resulted in at least 176 (though likely more) casualties. Compared to those who lost their lives in the Soweto uprising, July is a coward who "took his whites and ran." Although Maureen's analysis of July is compelling, Bam seems unwilling to admit the possibility that July would turn on them. His realization that July might not be aware of the consequences of sheltering a white family seems to plant some doubt in his mind, though. Even if July has no intentions to turn on them, it's morally wrong to take advantage of July's ignorance of the consequences of helping them. Regardless of how Maureen and Bam have arrived at their decision, both of them are more resolute that they need to leave the camp as soon as possible. Yet, they know all too well that they have no means of transportation nor anywhere else to go, and their shared feeling of helplessness intensifies.

CHAPTER 17

The women are working in the field. Martha carries a baby strapped to her back. She observes that "the white woman" doesn't grasp that they're going to the field to cut grass, not gather food. July's mother watches as her daughter-in-law tries to explain the different types of plants to the clueless white woman. She takes the opportunity to observe the white woman's behavior. Normally, the woman tries too hard to communicate with the gestures of respect that she believes are customary among Black people. July has repeatedly defended the woman, arguing that she "was different at home." Unlike July, July's mother has never worked for white people.

"The white woman" to whom Martha and July's mother refer is, of course, Maureen. Their choice to refer to her as "the white woman" rather than her name reflects their practically nonexistent relationship. Unlike July, Martha and July's mother are steadfast in their skepticism about the white newcomers, and they don't understand July's motivations for bringing them here. They believe that the only capacity for white and Black people to have a relationship in their existing society is through Black servitude, and they cannot grasp that July might help these people out of a moral obligation to treat others well, apart from the coercive system of apartheid. Finally, July's mother's wry observation about Maureen's desperate but misguided attempts to communicate through gestures of respect shows how Maureen's efforts to appear culturally sensitive end up getting in the way of her actually *being culturally sensitive.*

It's the perfect weather to collect grasses for thatching, and July's mother is excited to check out a spot near the river that she's been eyeing for weeks. She points at the white woman. Maureen smiles back, pretending to laugh at a joke that she does not understand. Martha interferes. Speaking in their language, she tells July's mother that the woman doesn't understand that the grass is for thatching. July's mother is still annoyed that the white family is living in her hut. She complains that they have money and should go to their own relatives if they need help.

July's mother's criticism isn't unwarranted. While she is unaware of the extent to which civil uprising has made exiting the country a virtual possibility, the Smales family does have a wealth of money and privilege to their name. July's mother's criticism of her son's decision to help the white family poses the question of who "July's people" are—that is, with whom his allegiances lie. His mother and Martha seem to believe that making the Smales family his people—sympathizing with white people—diminishes his ability to remain loyal to his people and his Black identity. In helping white people, then, July is complicit in his own oppression, as they see it. The question thus becomes: can people who exist in an oppressive regime relate to one another outside of the social, racial, and economic limitations that system imposes onto them? Can people relate to other people without power dynamics muddling the waters?

Later, Martha and July are in their hut. July is eating a meal Martha has prepared for him. It's been several days since the visit to the chief, and July tells Martha about the successful visit. Martha considers how strange it is to have her husband spend so much time around home. She suggests that the chief can give the family a hut in his village now that he's met and approved them. Her remark makes July uncomfortable. They argue back and forth. July won't entertain Martha's efforts to make the Smales leave the village.

Martha is increasingly vocal about her disapproval of the Smales. She seems not to understand July's reasons for bringing them there. Martha's knowledge of the Smales is limited to the superficial information July has revealed in his letters to her, such as the size of the Smales' house. She doesn't have any knowledge of the dynamics of July's relationship with his employers and how this might motivate him to help them.

Martha tells July that he has "forgotten some things." When July doesn't understand what she's talking about, Martha gets angry. Up until now, July has come home every two years, impregnated her, and then gone back to the city before the birth. The white family's arrival has postponed July's return to the city, but not Martha's pregnancy—she hasn't bled in weeks. Still not understanding why his wife is upset, July eagerly offers to bring Martha and the children back to the city with him once the war is over. Martha tells July that she would never fit in there.

Providing additional insight into July's marital troubles with Martha shows what working for the Smales family has cost July. Only being able to visit his home once every two years makes Martha a relative stranger to July, and he to her. He's been uninvolved in his children's lives outside of the money he sends Martha to raise them.

Martha suggests an alternative: July can stay here after the fighting is over. They can get more land and grow more crops, since they'll no longer have to pay taxes to white people. Or now that July knows how to drive, he can make money driving a lorry. July is silent. After a pause, he tells Martha about not being able to retrieve his money from the bank after fighting broke out in town. He reflects inwardly on the things his white people have taught him. Many years ago, they taught him about investing, "how money could be earned without working for it, the system whites had invented for themselves." These people "saved him, when first he came to them, from his country ignorance."

Martha wants July to come back to his roots and his people. She declines his offer to take her to the city because not only does she refuse to serve white people, but she refuses to participate in their culture as well. This passage also provides additional insight into July's relationship to the Smales and his willingness to negotiate with white people in a broader sense. He recognizes the small ways in which they "saved him" by teaching him about financial literacy in a capitalist system, which is itself a sort of protection.

Martha interrupts July's ruminations to ask him how much money he lost. "More than a hundred pounds," he tells her. Since leaving town, July has driven around in the **bakkie** without his pass-book. He believes it is "finished" but wants somebody to tell him to "burn it, let it swell in the river, their signatures washing away."

July's stance on the war and Black liberation is complicated. On the one hand, he recognizes the protection the Smales have offered him and feels a kinship to them, regardless of the ways they have condescended to him and failed to understand him over the years. On the other hand, they are actively complicit in the apartheid system that has deprived July of his rights and compromised his quality of life and worth as a human in countless ways. When he dwells on these latter issues, he becomes more revolutionary, possessing an urge to completely dismantle the old system, part ways with the Smales family, and fully dedicate himself to his people. The image of July riding in the bakkie—a white man's car—without his pass-book (official documents required of non-white citizens to be in places designated only for white people under apartheid) reflects this obligation to personal freedom and his people.

CHAPTER 18

Maureen spots a man walking toward the settlement carrying a red box on his head. She no longer has the patience to watch "the blond man fiddle[] with the **radio**." Her children are with her. She watches them gleefully play on the rocks at the riverbank "with children who belong[] here." Their time here is changing everyone. Victor is forgetting how to read. She can no longer make sense of *I Promessi Sposi*. She has a hard time reconciling her old life with her new life.

Maureen demonstrates her inability to reconcile her old life with her new life through the impersonal way she refers to her family, calling Bam "the blond man" and symbolically disowning her children by grouping them together "with children who belong[] here," or the village children. If Maureen cannot relate to Bam's obsession with listening to news from "back there," nor to the children's assimilation into village culture, then where does she belong? In this scene, she rejects both her new life and her old life.

The man with the red trunk passes by Maureen and announces his arrival to the village. Maureen hears "a deafening, fading and lurching bellow through the air," which, according to her children, is the sound of "the *gumba-gumba* being tried out." The *gumba-gumba* is the village's version of "travelling entertainment," brought there by the man in his red box. The Smales children excitedly drag their disinterested parents to join in the festivities. There, they meet July. He explains to them, with "the city man's good-natured amusement at country people's diversions," that the *gumba-gumba* wasn't for any particular occasion; sometimes, his people had parties for no particular reason.

Maureen and Bam's blatant disinterest in the gumba-gumba *festivities is a far cry from their overenthusiastic attempts to ingratiate themselves with the community at the beginning of their time in the village. Their bitterness toward July's reclaimed independence diminishes their capacity to be grateful to him for saving them. In fact, they resent his new independence, as Maureen demonstrates in her observation of July's "city man's good-natured amusement at country people's diversions." The description has a mocking, condescending connotation to it, as though it's precious to watch July attempt to appear worldly and cultured.*

The man projects music from an amplifier kept in the box, and the villagers pass around beer. "July's white people" leave the festivities prematurely. "The father" doesn't want to drink the ill-tasting beer, and "the mother" is offended by the sight of mothers getting drunk with babies strapped to their backs. When they return to the hut, they find that their **gun** is missing.

By referring to the Smales as "July's white people" rather than their names, the book distances them from the rest of the community, emphasizing their otherness, much of which is self-imposed through their refusal to see themselves and the villagers as equals. The missing gun is a major development in the plot. Since their arrival in July's village, the Smales have lost control of the bakkie and have been unable to find a signal on the radio. The gun is such a major loss to them because it was the Smales' last remaining link to their old life.

CHAPTER 19

Upon closer investigation, the Smales discover that their boxes of cartridges are missing, too. Maureen pretends not to notice that Bam's hands are shaking. The family searches every corner of the hut, but the **gun** is nowhere to be found. Bam asks the boys if they took it, since "no one else knew it was there." Neither boy tells their father the truth: that the whole village knows about the gun. Royce reminds his father that he "cn'n tell the police." Bam doesn't respond. Maureen silently considers that Bam must realize that he doesn't know what else to do besides call the police, whom they had both condemned "back there" in Johannesburg.

Losing his gun forces Bam to confront both his powerlessness and the limitations of his progressive views. Bam realizes that his condemnation of the police has been purely theoretical until now, when a crisis is upon him. The moment he encounters a situation where he needs help, his beliefs no longer serve him.

Maureen looks at her husband, "who ha[s] nothing, now" and sets off toward the *gumba-gumba* to confront July—Mwawate—about the missing **gun**. When she doesn't find him there, she goes to the women's hut. Martha and July's mother are there. Martha is struggling to bathe her resistant baby boy. She indicates that July isn't around. Maureen thinks she could help Martha bathe the child but immediately decides against it.

Maureen's observation that Bam "ha[s] nothing, now" refers not only to Bam's lost gun, but to his lost beliefs and connection to the past as well. When she refers to July by his non-anglicized name, Mwawate, she symbolically juxtaposes the power that her husband has lost with the power that July has gained. Maureen seems to believe it was July who took the gun, a conclusion she's arrived at after watching July increasingly make decisions about how to protect the Smales on his own terms, rather than theirs. Calling him by his real name is a symbolic gesture that acknowledges that July is no longer beholden to them: he's his own person.

Maureen leaves the hut and walks toward the river, but July isn't there, either. As she walks, she suffers from the distinct sense "of not being there," the same feeling she'd had upon watching the man with the red box approach the village. Suddenly, the only person she can be is "Maureen Hetherington on her points to applause in the Mine Recreation Hall."

Just as July becomes Mwawate to signal his empowerment, Maureen Smales becomes "Maureen Hetherington […] in the Mine Recreation Hall." By reclaiming her pre-marriage name, she signals her transformation from the likeminded wife of progressive Bam Smales to the girl whose family has profited off the exploitation of Black workers. Reclaiming her old name is the closest Maureen has come to confronting her internalized prejudice.

Maureen makes her way to the **bakkie**'s hiding place—July and Daniel's "retreat." She thinks back to when she and Bam had entertained the idea of converting their garage into a space where July could hang out with his friends. They'd ultimately decided against it, reasoning that it would attract too many other Black servants who didn't have as many privileges as July and become too noisy and unruly.

Maureen's claims about treating July with dignity don't align with her actions: she and Bam regard July as a child whose privileges can be earned and taken away as they see fit. Here, she also makes a generalized claim about July's Black servant friends, suggesting that they're universally noisy and unrefined.

Maureen finds July sitting on a stool beside the **bakkie**. She demands that he return the **gun**. July's response signals to Maureen that she is mistaken: he has no idea what she's talking about. They argue back and forth as Maureen describes returning to the hut and finding the gun missing from its hiding place. July suggests that one of the Smales boys took it. The accusation angers Maureen. Suddenly, she realizes that Daniel wasn't at the *gumba-gumba* with everyone else and demands to see him. July tells Maureen that Daniel left the village a few days ago and claims not to know where he went.

Maureen is quick to accuse July of stealing the gun. Yet her suspicions are largely unfounded, based almost exclusively on her resentment about him interacting with her and her family on his own terms. This is why she's so enraged by his suggestion that one of her sons took the gun and by his unwillingness to say where Daniel might have gone: she sees both of these actions as affronts to her authority.

Maureen tells July that he has to get the **gun** back from Daniel. July can smell the familiar "cold cat-smell" of Maureen's sweat. July angrily tells Maureen the gun is her and Bam's problem—not his. Maureen suspects that Daniel took the gun to sell to the chief. She insists that July is lying about not knowing where Daniel is since they're always hanging out around the **bakkie** together.

July's ability to detect Maureen's "cold cat-smell" resonates with the earlier scene when Bam exits the hut and Maureen realizes she's just now smelling his natural scent. The couple has used society and culture as distractions from knowing each other, yet July is attuned to the Smales' true characters and understands them at a deeper level by virtue of his status as an outsider.

Enraged by July's seeming unwillingness to cooperate, Maureen accuses him of stealing from their house. She mentions the crane scissors she saw him using when they first arrived at his village. July claims that Maureen gave him all the things he supposedly stole. Maureen says she gave him some things, "but not those." July accuses her of unloading "rubbish" onto him. Maureen tells him he didn't need to "take rubbish," then.

Once more, Maureen redirects blame away from herself, suggesting that July is the one in the wrong for taking the "rubbish" she offered him and therefore allowing himself to be offended. She's embarrassed by July calling her out on humiliating him and retaliating defensively by claiming he played a role in his own humiliation. She obstinately refuses to see how July's underprivileged social and economic position would have led him to accept anything that anybody offered him—even if it was demeaning to do so.

July is furious. He speaks animatedly in his own language. Maureen might not understand the words, but July's meaning is clear: all these years, he has adapted to fit into her world. Meanwhile, her attempts to make him feel dignified, respected, and humanized were really patronizing. Maureen's approval means nothing to him: "She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people." July ends his speech in English to tell Maureen that Daniel has gone to join the fighters in town.

Maureen's efforts to make July feel respected and dignified assume that her approval is worth something to July. In reality her behavior was more for her than for July: a way for her to reconcile the optics of exploiting Black labor with her progressive views. In reality, her efforts would have been better spent toward, say, paying July more. Maureen's misunderstanding reveals more of her prejudiced attitude: she assumes that her approval is worth something to July by virtue of her higher social and racial status. She thinks her whiteness and affluence give her clout with him.

Maureen is suddenly seized with a fierce anger, and "she t[ells] him the truth, which is always disloyal." She claims that July is happy to stay behind and "profit by the others' fighting." She accuses him stealing the **bakkie** "to drive around in like a gangster" and make himself feel like "a *big man*." If July is such a big man, Maureen asks, then why doesn't he know or care what became of Ellen? Furthermore, the bakkie is useless to him, since he has no money or means to buy petrol for it. Soon, the bakkie will become just one more "bit of rubbish." Maureen lunges forward and positions herself on the vehicle's hood, mirroring the provocative position of a show girl at a motor show. She laughs when July, predictably, does not understand the cultural reference.

Maureen's anger is defensive. Being called out for her condescension humiliates her, so she tries to redirect blame back toward July, arguing that his ethical shortcomings invalidate his opinions. She's not challenging any accusations July has made about her: she's saying that July's thoughts are worthless because he doesn't have any credibility. Her criticisms of July don't hold up under scrutiny, either. She's happy to condemn his decision to stay behind and "profit by the others' fighting," yet if July had joined the fight, her family would not have had the option to seek shelter in his village. She calls him a "big man," suggesting that he parades around in the bakkie to give off the appearance of wealth and power that are only surface-deep, yet she is guilty of flaunting her liberal politics in the same superficial way, making a big show of granting July privileges, and respecting him to appear like a good person while really harboring racial bias against him.

Maureen returns to the hut. Bam and the children are eating mealie-meal. Maureen ignores them and locates the water bottle, which she drains in one go. Her family doesn't comment on her disturbed behavior. The *gumba-gumba* begins again. They can hear records playing in the distance. If there are freedom fighters nearby, they'll be able to hear it. When Maureen lies down in bed, Bam remarks on how dirty her feet are. She cleans them with the river water July brought them, which they keep in an oil-drum that belongs to July. Maureen wonders aloud if this is how July must have felt at their home: perpetually in a house where nothing belonged to him. Bam interjects, insisting that they treated July well. Maureen tries to tell Bam that it was Daniel who took the **gun**, but she can't speak.

Maureen finally understands the claustrophobia and alienation July felt living in her house in Johannesburg. She finally understands that adequate treatment and the approval of his employers is not enough to counteract the disempowering sensation of being removed from one's familiar culture, existing on a fundamentally lower level on the social hierarchy, and having no other option but to continue existing there because an oppressive system has limited his agency over his life. When she uses the water July provided—despite just getting into a heated altercation with him—she realizes why July accepted the so-called rubbish he was insulted to have been offered: because his disempowered situation left him no other choice but to accept what help he was offered.

CHAPTER 20

The air is misty. Nyiko appears in the doorway of the Smales' hut to fetch her friend Gina. They smile but don't talk, since "their friendship is too deep and secret" to be spoiled by sharing it with others. The boys scrape the remaining bits of mealie-meal from the pot and form it into balls, which they stab with hooks. They run to July and ask him for string. He returns with real fishing-line.

As young children, Gina and Nyiko form a close bond that exists outside of the racial, social, and economic power dynamics that govern adult relationships. When the book describes their bond as "too deep and secret" to be spoiled by sharing it with others, it suggests that society spoils pure human contact and compromises our ability to relate to others in an unbiased, genuine way. Once external issues of class, race, and power enter the picture, all hopes of equality go out the door.

Around mid-day, Maureen Smales is by herself in the hut, repairing a pair of her son's shorts. The shorts are practical and "hard-wearing," from Woolworths; the Smales had never bought the frivolous, "American-style leisure clothes" of wealthy people. Suddenly, she sees a helicopter descending on the village. All the women in the village shriek in excitement: they've never seen a helicopter up close before. Maureen can't see any markings on the helicopter to tell whether it carries ally or enemy forces.

The "hard-wearing" shorts from Woolworths carry a certain cultural currency. They say that the Smales are a more ethical type of wealthy family, who don't let wealth corrupt their priorities and entitle them to a life of frivolity. Once more, we see that the Smales' progressive views are mostly superficial. Lastly, the helicopter can be either good or bad news for the Smales: if it carries government allies, they could be removed from the village and returned to the safety of someplace where their race and money are assets to them, as they once had been in apartheid-era Johannesburg. On the other hand, if the helicopter carries freedom fighters, the Smales (and the villagers who housed them) could be in grave danger.

Maureen sets aside the half-finished shorts and calmly exits the hut, walking gradually faster as she makes her way through the village, past piles of thatch and caged fowl. Suddenly, she's running toward the river. Maureen hears the voices of a man and children speaking English nearby, but she ignores them. She reaches the riverbank and leaps from boulder to boulder. When there are no more rocks, she removes her shoes and wades into the water and crosses the river. She can hear the helicopter idling somewhere ahead of her. She reaches the other side of the river and puts her shoes back on. Then, she continues running toward the helicopter.

The man and children speaking English to Maureen are Bam and her children. She refers to them impersonally, though, not thinking of their names. This illustrates how distanced she's become from her family. Being in July's village has destroyed Maureen's ability to make sense of herself, her relationships to others, and the role she is meant to play in society. Her decision to abandon them reinforces this attitude. The ending of the book is ambiguous and leaves readers to question Maureen's motives for running away when she can't know for certain whether the helicopter will save or doom her. In the moment, this uncertainty is preferable to what she would have to deal with if she stayed behind in the village: a family she can no longer relate to, latent racism she's too ashamed to confront directly, and being at the mercy of a man she feels is beneath her (and hating that she feels that way, too).

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Charles, Carly. "*July's People*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 9 Jun 2022. Web. 9 Jun 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Charles, Carly. "*July's People*." LitCharts LLC, June 9, 2022. Retrieved June 9, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/july-s-people.

To cite any of the quotes from *July's People* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Gordimer, Nadine. July's People. Penguin. 1982.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Gordimer, Nadine. July's People. New York: Penguin. 1982.