Tsotsi

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ATHOL FUGARD

Athol Fugard was born in 1932 in Middelburg, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. His father was an Englishman, while his mother was an Afrikaner, a member of South Africa's white minority population whose mostly Dutch ancestors colonized the country in the 18th century. After attending but not graduating from the University of Cape Town, he worked outside South Africa in 1953 and 1954, during which time he began writing. After returning to South Africa, Fugard worked as a clerk in a Native Commissioners' Court—a court where white judges passed judgments on Black South Africans—and came to realize how racist South Africa's laws and society were. Fugard married the actress Sheila Meiring in 1956 and in 1957, they settled in Johannesburg. In the late 1950s, Fugard wrote several plays that took South African racism as a theme and worked with Black South African actors to produce them. From 1960 to 1962, while also writing his famous early play *The Blood Knot* (1961), Fugard drafted the novel that would become *Tsotsi*. He did not try to publish it, however, and after ceasing work on it, he refocused on his playwriting. In 1973, the National English Literary Museum (NELM)—a museum for South African literature in Grahamstown, South Africa—began collecting Fugard's manuscripts and papers. NELM's Fugard collection ultimately included the unpublished drafts of *Tsotsi*. In the late 1970s, a South African English professor named Stephen Gray found *Tsotsi* in NELM and persuaded Fugard to let him revise it for publication. *Tsotsi* was finally published in 1980. Although *Tsotsi* is Fugard's only novel, Fugard has continued writing plays continuously from the late 1950s through the present day.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Athol Fugard wrote *Tsotsi* while South Africa was still under apartheid, a set of racist laws active between the late 1940s and early 1990s that divided the population into four racial groups (white; Indian; Coloured, meaning mixed race; and African/Black), enforced racial segregation, and limited the rights of non-white South Africans. *Tsotsi* makes repeated reference to horrifying events that occurred under apartheid. For example, Black South Africans had to carry passes when they entered "white" areas. Otherwise, they could be arrested and incarcerated. Although the novel never states exactly where or when the action occurs, several historical references suggest it takes place in the late 1950s in Johannesburg. The protagonist Tsotsi hides the baby he adopts in the ruins of a demolished Black neighborhood, which may be a reference to the destruction of Sophiatown, a predominantly Black suburb of Johannesburg. Police forced the population of Sophiatown to move in 1955 and subsequently destroyed the suburb, because they thought it was too close to a white neighborhood. The character Miriam's husband disappears while taking part in a bus boycott, which may be a reference to the famous 1957 Alexandra bus boycott, in which Black workers in Alexandra—a segregated Black neighborhood of Johannesburg—were protesting increased bus fares that would disproportionately affect poor Black workers. Finally, a newspaper salesman in the novel mentions that "they" have "shot a hole in the moon," which may be a reference to the first time a man-made object landed on the moon—the USSR's Luna 2, which hit the moon in September 1959.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Athol Fugard is more famous as a playwright than as a novelist—he has written dozens of plays but only one novel, *Tsotsi*. Like *Tsotsi*, many of Fugard's plays criticize South African apartheid, a social system operating from the late 1940s to early 1990s that legally enforced racial segregation and discrimination against non-white South Africans. For example, his early play *The Blood Knot* (1961), which he wrote while he was also drafting *Tsotsi*, shows how racism and colorism under apartheid harm two South African half-brothers, one who has dark skin and one who can pass for white. Another famous white South African author whose works criticize anti-Black racism under apartheid is Nadine Gordimer, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991. Like *Tsotsi*, her novel *Burger's Daughter* (1979) represents how apartheid harms and destroys South African families. Meanwhile, a novel with similar themes to Tsotsi in a different cultural context is the African American novelist Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940). Just as *Tsotsi* shows how South African apartheid forces some Black South Africans into crime, so *Native Son* represents how anti-Black racism in the 1930s United States compels its protagonist Bigger Thomas to commit acts of violence.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Tsotsi
- **When Written:** 1960–1962
- **Where Written:** England, South Africa
- **When Published:** 1980
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Novel, Realism
- **Setting:** South Africa
- **Climax:** Tsotsi dies trying to save the baby he has adopted.

- **Antagonist:** Apartheid
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Winning Adaptation: In 2005, South African director Gavin Hood adapted *Tsotsi* into a movie, which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Religious Outtake: Athol Fugard's original notes for *Tsotsi* include plans for a dramatic scene in which Tsotsi enters a church, threatens a priest, and defiles a cross. This scene did not make it into the published version of the novel.

PLOT SUMMARY

Four Black South African gang members—Tsotsi, Boston, Butcher, and Die Aap—are sitting in Tsotsi's room, waiting for night, when Tsotsi suggests they kill a man on the train. Sadistic Butcher and stupid Die Aap agree. Intellectual, cowardly Boston resists for a moment but eventually submits. The men murder a worker, Gumboot Dhlamini, who left his wife behind to work in the city and had almost earned enough to return to her.

After the murder, Boston vomits. The gang goes to a shebeen where they and a drunk woman are the only customers. Tsotsi thinks how he hates Boston, because Boston asks questions about his past that Tsotsi doesn't know the answers to—Tsotsi has no memories of childhood. Butcher and Die Aap take the drunk woman outside and rape her. Alone with Tsotsi, Boston asks him whether he feels sympathy for the gang's victims, asks about Tsotsi's past, and, finally, whispers that Tsotsi must have a soul. Tsotsi attacks him. Butcher and Die Aap reenter the shebeen and pull Tsotsi off Boston. Tsotsi leaves.

Boston's words echo in Tsotsi's mind. To distract himself, he runs until he's exhausted and stops under some bluegum trees to rest. He spies a young Black woman carrying a shoebox approaching the bluegums. As she passes, he pins her against a tree and shoves a knee between her legs, but a noise from the shoebox shocks him into stepping back. The woman shoves the shoebox at Tsotsi and runs. Inside the shoebox is a baby.

The next day, Saturday, Tsotsi goes to buy milk for the baby. Terrified of Tsotsi, the store owner Cassim tricks him into buying condensed milk to get him to go away. Tsotsi goes back to his room and feeds the baby. Worried Butcher or Die Aap will catch him taking care of a baby, Tsotsi hides the baby in the ruins near the white neighborhood. There, Tsotsi remembers that the night before, the baby triggered a memory of a **yellow dog**. He realizes he's hoping the baby will trigger more memories.

When Tsotsi returns to his room, Butcher and Die Aap are waiting for him in the street. Butcher and Die Aap bother Tsotsi about the gang's plan for the night until he tells them they'll go to the city. In the city, Tsotsi identifies a target, a beggar named Morris Tshabalala who lost his legs in a mining accident and moves around on his hands. While stalking Morris, however, Tsotsi realizes he feels sympathy for his victim. Instead of killing Morris, he has a long conversation with him. When Morris asks Tsotsi why Tsotsi has to kill him, Tsotsi realizes he doesn't have to and spares Morris's life.

On Sunday morning, Tsotsi goes to check on the baby in the ruins. Ants have swarmed the opened condensed milk tin and the baby's shoebox. Tsotsi kills the ants on the baby's face, bundles the baby up, and leaves.

Down the street from Tsotsi's room, people are filling buckets at a communal water tap. Among them is a young mother, Miriam Ngidi, and her baby. After Miriam returns to her room, she hears a knock on the door. When she opens it, Tsotsi forces his way inside and threatens to kill her baby if she doesn't cooperate with him. He brings her to his room and demands she breastfeed the baby he has adopted. After Miriam cleans and breastfeeds the baby, she asks where his mother is. When Tsotsi doesn't answer, Miriam says that "a bitch in a backyard would look after its puppies better" and leaves.

This incident triggers a flashback in Tsotsi. In the flashback, Tsotsi is a 10-year-old named David, living with his mother and a yellow dog pregnant with puppies. His mother tells him that after a long absence, his father will be returning the next day. That night, David wakes up to policemen raiding the neighborhood. They break down his family's door. One policeman demands his mother's pass and calls her a slur. Before she can answer, the police drag her outside and put her in a van. When the vans are full, the police drive away. The next morning, David falls asleep and wakes to someone pounding on the door and yelling the name "Tondi." David runs and hides in the back yard. He hears the intruder come into the yard. The yellow dog snarls at the intruder, and the intruder kicks her. After a neighbor tells the intruder the police took Tondi, the intruder leaves. David sees the intruder has broken the yellow dog's back legs. She crawls toward David, gives birth to dead puppies, and dies.

David runs away from home. He is wandering the streets when a gang of orphans finds him and invites him to join them. One orphan, Petah, asks David's name. David tells him but says that David is "dead" now. Later, while scavenging for food with the orphan gang, David hears a shopkeeper call him a "*tsotsi*." He chooses Tsotsi as his new name.

On Monday, Tsotsi wakes to Die Aap knocking on his door. Tsotsi hides the baby and asks Die Aap what he wants. Die Aap tells Tsotsi that Butcher is angry with Tsotsi and has joined a different gang. Die Aap suggests he and Tsotsi form a new gang. Tsotsi refuses and tells Die Aap to leave.

Tsotsi finds Miriam and brings her back to his room. When Miriam asks the baby's name, Tsotsi tells her it's David. When Miriam asks whether Tsotsi is the child's father, he tells her David didn't know his father. Miriam tells Tsotsi the baby is sick and asks to adopt and care for him. Tsotsi refuses, saying the baby belongs to him.

Tsotsi hides the baby in the ruins and goes looking for Boston. Tsotsi finds Boston unconscious in a shebeen. He carries Boston back to his room and goes to buy food. When Boston wakes up in Tsotsi's bed, Tsotsi explains to Boston about caring for the baby and sparing Morris's life. He demands that Boston tell him what is happening to him. Boston tells Tsotsi that he's changing. When Tsotsi asks what has changed him, Boston tells Tsotsi he's now asking about God. Boston sleeps in Tsotsi's bed that night, and the next morning, even though Tsotsi wants him to stay, he leaves.

The next day, Tsotsi is sitting on a sidewalk outside a church when the church gardener, Isaiah, offers him some tea. Tsotsi asks Isaiah about the church and about God. Isaiah explains as best he can. He then invites Tsotsi to come to church that evening. Later, Tsotsi carries baby David to Miriam's and tells her the baby vomited up the milk she left. Miriam gets medicine for the baby. She restates her desire to care for the baby. Tsotsi begs her not to take the baby from him. He leaves the baby with her when he hears church bells ringing—presumably to attend the service Isaiah invited him to—but comes back, takes the baby, and hides it again overnight.

The next morning, Tsotsi wakes up thinking he needs to tell Miriam his real name, David Madondo. He is walking through town when he hears bulldozers. White people have been complaining about Black people moving back into the ruins, so bulldozers have come to raze the ruins again. Tsotsi runs to save the baby, but a bulldozer knocks a wall on top of Tsotsi and kills him. When his body is dragged from the wreckage, there is a "beautiful" smile on his face.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tsotsi (David) – Tsotsi, *Tsotsi*'s protagonist, is a young Black man in South Africa under apartheid. He leads a gang, whose other members are Boston, Butcher, and Die Aap. At the novel's beginning, Tsotsi has no memories of his past and identifies with the stereotype *tsotsi*, meaning gang member or "thug." When Boston asks too many questions about Tsotsi's past, Tsotsi violently beats him. Afterward, Tsotsi encounters a terrified young Black woman, who gives him a baby in a shoebox and runs away. The baby triggers in Tsotsi the memory of a **yellow dog**. Tsotsi decides to care for the baby, hoping to regain more memories. Caring for the baby changes Tsotsi. Though he plans to rob and kill Morris Tshabalala, a crippled beggar, he finds himself overcome with sympathy and spares Morris's life. Later, he coerces a young mother, Miriam Ngidi, into breastfeeding the baby, and a chance comment from her triggers the rest of his memories: when he was 10, he was named David and lived with his mother and a yellow dog. One night, the police arrested his mother because she didn't have a pass that apartheid laws required Black South Africans to carry. After her arrest, David became homeless, lost his memories due to trauma, and joined a child gang. His experiences in gangs led him to swear off sympathy for other human beings. After regaining his memories, Tsotsi seeks out Boston and asks what is happening to him. When Boston tells Tsotsi he is asking about God, Tsotsi goes to a church, where he discusses religion with the church gardener, Isaiah. At the same time, Tsotsi continues to seek help from Miriam in caring for the baby. When Miriam asks to adopt the baby, Tsotsi refuses and hides the baby in the ruins of a demolished township. The next morning, he wakes up intending to tell Miriam his real name, when he sees bulldozers approaching the ruins—the white population has complained about Black people resettling in the ruins, and now the ruins are being destroyed. Tsotsi sacrifices his life trying to rescue the baby.

The Baby – The baby is a Black male infant. His frightened, desperate mother hides the baby in a shoebox, shoves the shoebox at Tsotsi, and runs away after Tsotsi waylays her—seemingly with the intent of raping her—in a grove of bluegum trees. The baby triggers a lost memory in Tsotsi of a **yellow dog**, so Tsotsi brings the baby back to his room in hopes of regaining more memories. Inside the box, Tsotsi discovers the baby is wrapped in "a torn petticoat and an old pair of blue bloomers." This detail—that the baby was wrapped in a woman's castoff clothes—suggests that the baby's mother was very poor and may have abandoned him because she could not support him financially, which further suggests that the baby is, like Tsotsi, a victim of Black families' legal and economic oppression and destruction under apartheid. Caring for the baby alienates Tsotsi from the other members of his gang, Butcher and Die Aap, and Tsotsi ultimately decides to give up gang life. Tsotsi coerces a young mother, Miriam Ngidi, into breastfeeding and caring for the baby. Though initially the dirty, sickly baby repulses Miriam, she begins to care for him and offers to adopt him. Tsotsi, who has given the baby his childhood name—David—and come to associate him with his childhood self, refuses and hides the baby in the demolished ruins of a Black township. When a nearby white township demands that the ruins be razed again, Tsotsi sacrifices his life trying to save the baby, but—although the novel does not say so explicitly—it seems likely the baby dies, too.

Boston – Boston—whose full name is Walter "Boston" Nguza—is a member of Tsotsi's gang, which also includes Butcher and Die Aap. As a child and young man, Boston was small and studious with glasses. While attending a teachers'

training college on scholarship, he repeatedly came in first in his class but was expelled before graduation because he tried to rape a female student. Unwilling to tell his "very proud," hardworking mother about his expulsion, Boston wrote her that he had graduated early and was looking for a job in Johannesburg. While seeking work, Boston encountered Johnboy Lethetwa, in danger of being arrested under apartheid law after already having been jailed once for unemployment. Boston forged an employer's signature in Johnboy's passbook, after which Johnboy convinced Boston to go into business with him forging the passes and permits that apartheid demanded Black people carry—a detail illustrating how apartheid's unjust laws force *Tsotsi*'s Black characters toward crime. Boston becomes involved in shebeen subculture, develops a drinking problem, and has a brief, failed romance with a shebeen proprietress, Marty. After the police arrest Johnboy, Boston's intelligence wins him a place in gang life despite his reputation for being a cowardly alcoholic. As the novel opens, he is trying and failing to resist Tsotsi's plan that the gang rob and murder a man on the train. After the gang murders Gumboot Dhlamini, Boston vomits. Later, he asks Tsotsi whether he knows what decency is and poses a series of questions about Tsotsi's life, spurring Tsotsi to beat Boston unconscious. After Tsotsi adopts the baby and spares Morris's life, however, he finds Boston recuperating in Marty's shebeen, takes Boston back to his own room, and questions him about the experiences he is undergoing. Boston tells Tsotsi that Tsotsi is changing and that, by asking questions about it, he is asking questions about God—a conversation that seems to motivate Tsotsi to learn more about religion. Though seeming to reconcile with Tsotsi, Boston refuses to stay with him. Instead, he leaves Tsotsi's room the next morning. Tsotsi never sees him again.

Miriam Ngidi – Miriam Ngidi is an 18-year-old mother of an infant son who gets her water from a public tap down the street from Tsotsi's room. During her pregnancy, her husband Simon, who was participating in a bus boycott, vanished while walking to work one morning. Because, during apartheid, bus boycotts were associated with Black South Africans' protest against their political oppression and economic exploitation, the novel may be implying that white supremacists—perhaps policemen—killed Simon for participating. In that case, Miriam's family is another example of apartheid destroying Black families and taking Black parents away from their children. After her husband's disappearance, Miriam becomes antisocial and stingy, caring only for her own child. Tsotsi coerces Miriam into cleaning and breastfeeding the baby he has adopted by threatening her infant son. At this point, her chance comment (that a dog would treat its puppies better than this baby's mother treated him) triggers Tsotsi to regain his memories. Though at first Tsotsi's sickly, dirty adoptive son repulses Miriam, she has a change of heart after praying and hearing a voice ask why it should grant her prayer if she won't feed babies—an episode suggesting that Miriam's new generosity and sympathy are religiously motivated. After hearing the voice, Miriam offers to adopt and care for Tsotsi's baby. Although Tsotsi may be developing feelings for Miriam—toward the novel's end, he resolves to tell her his birth name, David Madondo—he fears she will take the baby and so hides him in the ruins, an untrusting decision that ultimately leads to his own death and likely the baby's as well.

Morris Tshabalala – Morris Tshabalala is a beggar who plies his trade around a street intersection called Terminal Place. He lost his legs in a gold mining accident, for which he blames white South Africans, who under apartheid reap the economic benefits of Black labor. Now he walks around on his hands, which are hardened and have little sensation left. When Tsotsi comes to Terminal Place looking for a victim to rob and kill, he steps on one of Morris's hands. Morris curses and calls Tsotsi a "whelp of a yellow bitch"—a chance choice of words that reminds Tsotsi of the mysterious **yellow dog** in his memory. Deciding to kill Morris, Tsotsi stalks and terrifies him over the course of an evening. Although Morris eludes Tsotsi by following two white men pushing a stalled car and later hides in a restaurant, he has to emerge when the restaurant closes, at which point Tsotsi corners him down a dark street. Yet, having observed Morris for many hours, Tsotsi has begun to sympathize with him—the first time Tsotsi can remember sympathizing with one of the targets of his violence. Instead of killing Morris, Tsotsi engages him in a long conversation about Morris's life, his disability, and his desire to live. When Morris asks Tsotsi why Tsotsi has to kill him, Tsotsi realizes he doesn't have to—he has a choice whether to commit acts of violence. He decides to spare Morris's life, a decision that decisively alienates him from his old, stereotyped identity of violent gang member and motivates him to discover more about who he truly is.

Die Aap – Die Aap is a member of Tsotsi's gang, which also includes Boston and Butcher. "Die Aap" means "monkey" in Afrikaans (the language of South Africa's white minority Afrikaner population), a stereotyped and offensive nickname for a Black man that supposedly derives from Die Aap's "long arms." That Die Aap chooses to go by this nickname suggests he has internalized white South African racism under apartheid. Tsotsi recruited Die Aap for his gang to exploit Die Aap's physical strength. Die Aap tends to agree with Tsotsi and follow him unquestioningly. He participates in Gumboot Dhlamini's murder by pinning Gumboot's arms while Butcher stabs him. After Tsotsi comes into possession of the baby, Die Aap and Butcher lobby Tsotsi to do another job with them, which leads to Tsotsi stalking but eventually sparing Morris Tshabalala. When Tsotsi begins to drift away from the gang, Die Aap is confused and worried. Eventually, Die Aap visits Tsotsi's room and tells him Butcher has joined another man's gang. He suggests that he and Tsotsi recruit a new gang. Tsotsi refuses and tells Die Aap to leave, a decision that marks Tsotsi's

definitive break with gang life.

Butcher – Butcher is a member of Tsotsi's gang, which also includes Boston and Die Aap. Tsotsi recruited Butcher for his gang because of Butcher's skill at violence, for which Butcher is nicknamed. Toward the novel's beginning, he is the one who actually kills Gumboot Dhlamini, by stabbing him in the heart with a sharpened bicycle spoke while Die Aap pins Gumboot's arms. Along with Die Aap, he encourages Tsotsi to pick another job for them after Tsotsi finds the baby, which leads to Tsotsi stalking but then sparing the life of Morris Tshabalala. Believing that Tsotsi killed Morris without him and Die Aap, Butcher becomes dissatisfied with Tsotsi's leadership and, after several failed attempts to meet up with Tsotsi, eventually joins another gang.

Isaiah – Isaiah, an elderly Black man, takes care of the church garden and rings the church bells for the Church of Christ the Redeemer in the Black township. His immediate supervisor is the racist, condescending Miss Marriot, while his ultimate supervisor is the Rev. Henry Ransome. Tsotsi, after discussing God with Boston, sits on the sidewalk outside the church, where Isaiah sees him and offers him tea. When Tsotsi asks questions about the church, God, and Jesus Christ, Isaiah gives him a somewhat confused account of Christianity and invites Tsotsi to come to the evening service when he hears Isaiah ringing the bells. Although the novel does not explicitly state this, it implies that Tsotsi takes Isaiah up on his invitation the night before Tsotsi's death.

David's Mother (Tondi) – Tondi is the mother of David (i.e., Tsotsi when he is 10 years old). She is a comforting presence who likes to hum and sing. She takes care of David and shares the family's food with an elderly woman who is economically and socially dependent on her. All David's life, his mother has been telling him about his absent father and promising him that his father would return. The night before David's father returns, however, white police raid David's neighborhood, arrest his mother for not having a pass required of her by apartheid law, and take her away in a van. Her arrest precipitates David's homelessness, memory loss, and eventual membership in a child gang, which leads to David becoming Tsotsi.

Elderly Woman – The elderly woman lives with David and David's mother (Tondi), though she does not seem to be related to them. David esteems the elderly woman because he notices that adults esteem her and because she seems to perceive him accurately. At the same time, he's afraid of her because one time, she caught him misbehaving and pinched him until he cried. After David's mother is arrested, the elderly woman finds David and puts him to bed. The next morning, she tells David to wait at the house for his father while she goes to look for David's mother and tries to bring her home. While the elderly woman is gone, David's father arrives at the house without explaining who he is and scares David so badly that David runs away, eventually becoming Tsotsi.

Gumboot Dhlamini – Gumboot Dhlamini works in the mines near Johannesburg and lives in one of its townships. He came to Johannesburg from far away in South Africa, where he lived with his pregnant wife, to make some money. After a year working in the mines and writing letters to his wife at home, he has almost saved enough money that he feels he can return to her. Then Tsotsi, searching for someone his gang can rob and kill on the trains, spots Gumboot because of his bright smile, colorful tie, and full pay packet. On the train, Die Aap pins Gumboot's arms while Butcher stabs him with a bicycle spoke, Boston steals his money, and Tsotsi insults him as he's dying. The Rev. Henry Ransome, presiding over Gumboot's funeral at the township's dilapidated cemetery, finds himself disturbed that he doesn't even know the dead man's name. Gumboot's short life, violent death, and anonymous burial point to the cruelty of life for poor non-white workers under apartheid.

Rev. Henry Ransome – Rev. Henry Ransome is a white priest who presides over a church in the Black township, the Church of Christ the Redeemer. Early in the novel, he serves at Gumboot Dhlamini's funeral but is disturbed that he doesn't even know the murdered man's name. The Sunday after the funeral, he finds himself getting angry at parishioners filing into the church, thinking that his services are "no good," and recalling once again that he didn't know Gumboot's name. Nevertheless, he prays for help and goes to the church to do his job. Though Rev. Henry Ransome is somewhat condescending toward the Black church gardener Isaiah, Isaiah likes him because he showed Isaiah how to ring the church bell and then left him to the task without further interference—unlike the other white church employee, Miss Marriot, who constantly interferes with Isaiah's work.

Marty – Marty runs the shebeen where Boston drank when he first began his criminal career with Johnboy Lethetwa. Marty liked that Boston had manners, and they became romantically involved. Their relationship ended, however, after Boston's first gang job where the gang murdered someone. Boston, horrified at the murder, took out his self-hatred on Marty, and so she ended their romance. After Tsotsi beats Boston unconscious for asking too many personal questions, Boston finds his way to Marty's shebeen, where—still badly injured—he drinks and sleeps. Marty is on the verge of kicking Boston out of her establishment when Tsotsi comes looking for him to ask about the personal changes he, Tsotsi, is undergoing. Marty at first harshly criticizes Tsotsi for beating Boston but, when Tsotsi says he just wants to talk to Boston, allows Tsotsi to take Boston away.

Soekie – Soekie is a 50-something woman who runs a shebeen that Tsotsi and his gang frequent. Though she is "coloured"—that is, mixed race, which was its own legal classification under apartheid—she lives in the Black township. Rumor has it that she was born in one of the city's white

neighborhoods but her mother, presumably a white woman, rejected her mixed-race daughter. Soekie has repeatedly tried to contact her mother but has received no reply, not even information she has requested about her date of birth. Soekie's background serves to emphasize how white supremacy and apartheid tear families apart.

Petah – Petah is a member of the homeless child gang that David joins after his mother's arrest. Petah invites David to sleep in the same pipe as him, discourages David from leaving the gang when David remembers his mother told him to stay at home and wait for her, and encourages David's plan to pick a new name. Much later, after David has chosen the name Tsotsi and lost his childhood memories due to trauma, he sees Petah, beaten up, being dragged along by a policeman. Petah calls out to him, but Tsotsi no longer remembers who Petah is and, determined to repress his lost past, refuses to respond.

Miss Marriot – Miss Marriot is Isaiah the church gardener's racist white supervisor. Her condescension and disrespect toward Isaiah—for example, she calls him a "naughty boy" even though he is elderly—indicate that while apartheid harms Black South Africans' lives even when they are not experiencing direct interpersonal racism, direct interpersonal racism also characterizes Black-white social relations in the novel.

Cassim – Cassim is an Indian shopkeeper whose shop Tsotsi enters hoping to buy milk for the baby. Cassim, suspecting Tsotsi is a gang member, is terrified. He tricks Tsotsi into leaving the store by giving him a tin of condensed milk, whose label Tsotsi can't read, and telling him it's milk for babies.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Johnboy Lethetwa – Johnboy Lethetwa was Boston's partner in a pass and permit forgery business until the police arrested him, at which point Boston joined another gang. The pass and permit forgery business illustrates how unjust, prejudicial apartheid laws drive Black South Africans to commit crimes.

TERMS

Apartheid – In South Africa, apartheid was a white supremacist social structure, enforced by various laws, which persisted from roughly 1948 to 1993. Under apartheid, South Africans were divided into four racial groups: white, Indian, Coloured (meaning people of mixed race), and Black/African. For most of apartheid, it was illegal for a white person to marry or have a sexual relationship with a non-white person. The law also forced people to live in racially segregated areas—relocating large swathes of the population to areas that had been legally designated for their race. Additionally, it was only legal for Black people to work in "white" parts of South Africa if they had a special pass. If the police found a Black person in a "white" area without a pass, they would arrest that person, who could then be incarcerated and/or deported back to a "Black/African" area. After decades of protest against apartheid by Black-led political organizations such as the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress, various South African political groups negotiated the dismantling of the apartheid system between 1990 and 1993. In 1994, South Africa held its first election in which people of all races were allowed to vote, and famous anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela became president.

Shebeen – A shebeen is a bar where alcohol is sold illegally, without the required license. In South African under apartheid, shebeens were often located in Black townships and run by women, like the *Tsotsi* characters **Soekie** and **Marty**. At various points in South Africa under apartheid, shebeens were associated with criminal gang activity but also with political activist meetings and Black/African cultural expression.

Township – In South Africa under apartheid, the term "township" usually meant a city neighborhood or suburb where non-white people—Black/African, Indian, or Coloured—lived close to but segregated from "white" areas of the city. Technically, however, the term "township" could also refer to an all-white area.

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.

APARTHEID AND RACISM

Tsotsi represents South African apartheid (a system of legally enforced segregation and discrimination) as a racist structure that destroys Black South Africans' lives—even when they aren't experiencing direct, interpersonal racism. Many of the Black characters' lives are destroyed by racist apartheid laws despite having little direct contact with racist white people. For example, the Black South African protagonist, Tsotsi, lost his mother in childhood because white police rounded up Black people, including her, whom they suspected of living or working in white areas without the required pass. While one of the policemen did display clear racist attitudes—he called Tsotsi's mother "kaffir," a South African racial slur—it was the law, not his individual beliefs, that empowered him to destroy Tsotsi's family. Tsotsi's mother's abduction propelled Tsotsi into homelessness and gang membership. In this sense, though Tsotsi rarely interacts with white people, the racist and white supremacist structure of apartheid changed the direction of his whole life.

Other Black characters similarly suffer from the racist

economic and legal structures of apartheid, whether or not they come into regular contact with racist white people: the beggar Morris Tshabalala is crippled in a mining accident as a Black worker in an industry where the profits and gold go to white people. The young mother Miriam Ngidi experiences the disappearance of her husband during his participation in a bus boycott—and although the novel does not explicitly state this fact, major bus boycotts in apartheid South Africa were often protests by the Black population against segregation and economic exploitation of Black workers, which exposed protesters like Miriam's husband to retaliatory racial violence. And Tsotsi's fellow gang member Boston becomes a criminal after he forges an employment history for an acquaintance who will go to jail due to racist apartheid laws unless he can prove he has a previous employer. Thus, *Tsotsi* represents how a racist legal and economic structure like apartheid can harm oppressed people independent of and in addition to the interpersonal prejudice they experience.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Tsotsi suggests that the inhumanity of South African apartheid (a period of enforced racial segregation) is clearest in how it separates parents from children. The novel represents family as fundamental to human fellow feeling and moral development. At the novel's beginning, the gang-leader protagonist, Tsotsi, cannot remember his childhood or anything about his family. He begins to remember his past and thus his own humanity when he starts taking care of—acting as a father toward—an abandoned baby. As Tsotsi remembers more of his childhood, especially his mother, he develops newfound sympathy toward other people, realizing, "Every single person in the world had a mother." Thus, throughout the story, the novel portrays an awareness of family ties—biological or adopted—as essential to fellow feeling.

Throughout the story, South African apartheid destroys Black families. As a child, Tsotsi loses his mother to a police raid whose purpose is to prevent Black people without special passes from living or working in white areas. Miriam Ngidi loses her husband, and her young baby loses his father, when her husband disappears while participating in a bus boycott—and bus boycotts in apartheid South Africa were usually protests by Black workers against apartheid and its economic exploitation of Black people, which exposed the protesting workers to violence by the white supremacist state. Finally, the demolition of Black homes at the urging of the white township leads to Tsotsi's death and—it is implied—the death of his adopted baby, as Tsotsi has hidden the baby in an abandoned home and, when the bulldozers come, he is killed trying to save the baby. This pattern throughout the story—in which family is fundamental to humanity, and apartheid destroys families—implies that one of the greatest evils of apartheid lies in its depriving Black children of their parents.

IDENTITY AND MEMORY

In *Tsotsi*, characters have three kinds of identity, one false and two true: the false identity of stereotype, and the true identities of individual history and of universal human belonging. Memory is necessary to reject a false, stereotyped identity in favor of true individual and group identities. In the novel, these different identities, false and true, play out in the protagonist's, Tsotsi's, life. Tsotsi's real name is David, but after a traumatic experience in his childhood, in which policemen abducted his mother and he ended up homeless, he lost most of his memories and rejected his true identity. When he joined a group of homeless children who scavenged and stole their food, a shopkeeper called him a *tsotsi*—a word meaning "gangster" or "thug"—and he took this stereotyped identity as his name. When he is Tsotsi, a stereotype without a memory or history, people do not recognize him as a human individual. As a gang leader, his potential victims—for example, the shopkeeper Cassim and the beggar Morris Tshabalala—find him so frightening that they literally cannot see or remember his face. Their inability to see Tsotsi's face represents how his stereotyped identity strips him of his true identity.

Once Tsotsi begins to remember his past and sympathize with other people, however, he gradually recognizes himself as a member of humanity: he sees himself dimly reflected in a shop window and realizes his reflection could represent not only himself but his fellow gang members Boston and Butcher, or even his potential victim Morris Tshabalala. By connecting his own image with those of other human beings, Tsotsi is coming to realize one of his true identities—as a human being like other human beings. Finally, when Tsotsi fully regains his memories and decides, counter to the *tsotsi* stereotype, to become an adoptive father to a baby, he reclaims his full name and individual identity: David Madondo. Thus, *Tsotsi* suggests that to reject the false identities that stereotypes impose on us, we need to remember our individual histories and embrace our group identity as human beings.

HATRED, SYMPATHY, AND GOD

Tsotsi suggests that hatred and sympathy are two essential ways that people can relate to one another: hatred rejects human connection, while sympathy embraces human connection. At first, the gang-leader protagonist, Tsotsi, hates people who try to connect with him or otherwise remind him of his own humanity. For example, Tsotsi feels "cold hate, utterly merciless" for fellow gang member Boston when Boston asks him about his feelings and his past trauma. Tsotsi senses that Boston is trying to bring "light" to the darkness of his interior life, and he rejects this attempt by physically attacking Boston. By contrast, when Tsotsi begins to feel sympathy for the crippled beggar Morris Tshabalala, he images his sympathy as a lighted candle that

allows him to really see Morris—and also to really see Boston, the gang's former victim Gumboot Dhlamini, and the baby Tsotsi has adopted. In this way, the novel suggests that hatred and sympathy are equal and opposite tendencies in human relationships: hatred is the dark rejection of connection, whereas sympathy is the bright embrace of connection.

Throughout, the novel subtly connects sympathy to the idea of God, and toward the novel's end the connection becomes explicit. Tsotsi attacks Boston after Boston insists Tsotsi has a soul—suggesting that Tsotsi's hatred leads him to reject both sympathy and religious ideas like "soul" as a package deal. After Tsotsi beats Boston, Boston tells him that one day, he'll have feelings, and "God help you that day." These words about God resonate with Tsotsi: after leaving the bar where he beat Boston, he passes a church, which leads him to panic and sprint away. Later, when Tsotsi has begun to remember his past and feel sympathy for others, he finds Boston and demands Boston explain why this change is occurring in him. Boston tells Tsotsi that Tsotsi is asking about God. Tsotsi then questions a church gardener named Isaiah about God and (the novel implies) accepts his invitation to attend church. Finally, Tsotsi dies sacrificing his life attempting to save the baby he has adopted—reminiscent of Jesus Christ's sacrificing his life on the cross. Thus, *Tsotsi* not only suggests hatred and sympathy are essential human behaviors but also suggests human sympathy is mysteriously connected to God.

HABIT VS. CHOICE

In *Tsotsi*, characters become stuck in habits, or patterns of behavior, because they do not recognize they have choices. Only once characters recognize their power to change are they able to take some control over their lives. At the novel's beginning, the gang-leader protagonist, Tsotsi, accepts his own criminal behavior and other people's fear of him as an immutable, natural fact, "feeling in this the way other men feel when they see the sun in the morning." It is only when he begins to care for an abandoned baby, an action that doesn't "fit into the pattern of his life," that he begins to realize he has agency over his behavior. Caring for the baby leads him to realize, in turn, that even though killing people is "as natural in the pattern of his life as waking and sleeping," he doesn't actually have to commit acts of violence. This realization allows Tsotsi to spare the life of the beggar Morris Tshabalala, whom he thought he had to kill. By contrast, other members of Tsotsi's gang, Butcher and Die Aap, never realize their own power to choose. When Tsotsi, their leader, abandons them, they try to maintain their gang-life habits as best they can: Butcher joins another gang, while Die Aap tries to convince Tsotsi to form a new gang with him. Thus, *Tsotsi* suggests that people do have the power to choose and change—but only if, like the character Tsotsi, they consciously recognize that they have such power.

SYMBOLS

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

TSOTSI'S KNIFE

In *Tsotsi*, the protagonist Tsotsi's knife symbolizes his false, stereotyped identity as a *tsotsi*—that is, a "thug" or gang member. Near the novel's beginning, the reader learns that Tsotsi carries the knife everywhere and sleeps with it under his pillow. To remind himself of his unswerving commitment to violence and gang membership, Tsotsi takes out the knife every morning as soon as he wakes up, tests its sharpness, and either sharpens it or plays with it. At this point, the knife reinforces Tsotsi's false, stereotyped identity as a mindlessly violent young man. Once Tsotsi adopts an abandoned baby boy and cares for him, however, Tsotsi's relationship to the knife changes. Feeding the baby for the first time, Tsotsi buys a tin of condensed milk and uses his knife to poke holes in the tin. The inappropriateness of using a knife to open a milk tin for a baby symbolizes the clash between Tsotsi's old, stereotyped gang identity and the true identity he is trying to reclaim—that of caring human being and family member. Finally, toward the novel's end, Tsotsi wakes up to knocking on his door, reaches for his knife—and then, instead of going through with his usual knife-sharpening ritual, checks on the baby instead. When the knocking resumes, Tsotsi grabs the knife, but it no longer has the mind-blanking effect it used to have on him. Instead, it triggers memories of his life before gang membership and makes him think about how he arrived at his present reality. Tsotsi's preference for the baby over the knife and the knife's failure to erase his memories of his true history and identity, at this late point in the novel, show how Tsotsi has outgrown his false, stereotyped identity as merely a violent gang member.

YELLOW DOG

In *Tsotsi*, the yellow dog represents Black families' destruction by South African apartheid. The novel's protagonist Tsotsi, a gang member who remembers nothing about his past, has his first flashback to the yellow dog after a desperate young Black woman gives him a baby in a shoebox and runs away. That an abandoned baby triggers the flashback clearly associates the dog with family separation. Later, when Tsotsi steps on the hand of Morris Tshabalala, a former mine worker who lost his legs in a tunnel collapse, Morris calls him "whelp of a yellow bitch." Immediately, Tsotsi has another flashback to the yellow dog, who is female (literally a "bitch"). By having Morris call Tsotsi a yellow dog's "whelp," the novel mysteriously connects the yellow dog to Tsotsi's own mother, whom Tsotsi cannot remember. When Miriam Ngidi, a young

mother whom Tsotsi coerces into breastfeeding his adopted baby, criticizes the woman who abandoned the baby, saying, "a bitch in a backyard would look after its puppies better," Tsotsi finally remembers his childhood. When he was 10 years old, his father was scheduled to return to him and his mother the next day after a long absence. The yellow dog was Tsotsi's family pet, pregnant with puppies. The night before his father's return, white police raided his neighborhood and arrested his mother for not having the pass required of Black people under apartheid law. The next day, his father knocked on the door, but Tsotsi, terrified, hid in the backyard. When his father came into the backyard, the yellow dog snarled at him, so the father kicked her, breaking her back legs. After his father left, Tsotsi saw the dog give birth to dead puppies and then die from her injuries. Thus, late in the novel, it is revealed that the yellow dog haunting Tsotsi's memories symbolizes how apartheid destroyed Tsotsi's family—stealing his mother and alienating him from his father.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *Tsotsi* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

[Tsotsi's] knowledge was without any edge of enjoyment. It was simply the way it should be, feeling in this the way other men feel when they see the sun in the morning. The big men, the brave ones, stood down because of him, the fear was of him, the hate was for him. It was all there because of him. He knew he *was*. He knew he was there, at that moment, leading the others to take one on the trains.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), Boston, Die Aap, Butcher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi is leading the other members of his gang—Boston, Die Aap, and Butcher—through the township (a segregated non-white neighborhood or suburb) at nightfall. They are going to the train station to "take one on the trains," that is, to rob and kill a commuter going home.

Tsotsi knows that people in the township "fear" and "hate" him because they see him as a *tsotsi*, a South African term meaning a gang member or "thug." Interestingly, he neither dislikes nor feels "enjoyment" at their reaction. Instead, he feels "the way other men feel when they see the sun in the morning." Sunrise is a natural process that human beings cannot control. The comparison between sunrise and the township's fearful hatred of Tsotsi, then, implies that Tsotsi has no choice in his actions, and so the township has no choice in its reactions. Both parties are stuck in their patterns or habits.

Although Tsotsi seems to believe he cannot influence the township's reaction to him any more than he can change the sunrise, he nevertheless derives a sense of identity from it: because of the township's fear and hate, "he knew he *was*"—in other words, he gains a sense of his own existence. This quotation implies that, despite not enjoying the township's fear and hatred, Tsotsi is motivated to provoke their hatred because it gives him a solid sense of identity which he'd otherwise lack.

Chapter 2 Quotes

[Tsotsi's] own eyes in front of a mirror had not been able to put together the eyes, and the nose, and the mouth and the chin, and make a man with meaning. His own features in his own eyes had been as meaningless as a handful of stones picked up at random in the street outside his room. He allowed himself no thought of himself, he remembered no yesterdays, and tomorrow existed only when it was the present, living moment. He was as old as that moment, and his name was the name, in a way, of all men.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), Boston, Die Aap, Butcher, Soekie, Gumboot Dhlamini

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20-21

Explanation and Analysis

After murdering Gumboot Dhlamini on the train, Tsotsi, Boston, Die Aap, and Butcher have gone to Soekie's shebeen (illegal drinking establishment). Boston, humiliated because the murder made him vomit, is drinking heavily and begins to ask Tsotsi about himself, despite knowing that Tsotsi hates being asked about himself. Immediately before this quotation occurs, the novel reveals that Tsotsi hates these questions because he doesn't know the answers: he has no memories of his early life.

Without memories, Tsotsi cannot "make a man with meaning" out of his own face in the mirror. In other words, he doesn't see himself as an individual with a coherent identity. In fact, he barely sees himself as human: the parts

of his face might as well be inanimate objects, "a handful of stones picked up at random." Tsotsi's nonexistent sense of self implies that a working memory is essential to individual identity. It also helps explain why he clings to the stereotyped identity "tsotsi" (i.e. gang member)—the stereotype, at least, provides an identity for him.

Yet the claim that Tsotsi's name is "the name, in a way, of all men" hints that even while lacking a memory, Tsotsi *does* have another identity he could assume: the identity of human being. In acting out the "tsotsi" stereotype and being violent toward others, then, Tsotsi is not taking the only path available but actively choosing one path over another—he could, instead, embrace the identity of "all men," of humankind, and act in solidarity with others. At this point in the novel, he is choosing violence over solidarity and hatred over sympathy, even if he is not aware of making a choice.

> They stayed that way until the street cried, then laughter, and Soekie started her song again at the beginning, staying like that, Boston still, Tsotsi seemingly the same as always, the one in disbelief, the other at the explosive moment of action, and this moment precipitated when Boston whispered: 'You must have a soul Tsotsi. Everybody's got a soul. Every living human being has got a soul!'

Related Characters: Boston (speaker), Tsotsi (David), Soekie, Butcher, Die Aap

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Butcher and Die Aap have taken the one other patron at Soekie's shebeen, a drunk woman, outside to rape her—leaving Tsotsi and Boston alone. Boston has been pestering Tsotsi about his feelings and family history, questions that fill Tsotsi with hatred. This quotation occurs after Boston has lapsed into silence for a time, shocked by Tsotsi's lack of visible reactions. Although Tsotsi has been poised "at the explosive moment of action" for a while, what finally "precipitate[s]" Tsotsi to act is Boston's claim that Tsotsi has a soul. Immediately afterward, Tsotsi violently beats Boston.

Boston's claim that everyone has a soul has two major implications. First, it implies that every human being has something in common—or, in other words, that there is a real group identity, humankind, to which everyone including Tsotsi belongs. Yet Tsotsi has constructed his identity around a stereotype, "tsotsi" (gang member or "thug"), which he and the people around him view as inhuman or subhuman. By insisting that Tsotsi is a human being, Boston is threatening Tsotsi's stereotyped sense of himself—which helps explain why Tsotsi finally attacks Boston at this moment.

Second, Boston's claim implies a religious worldview—likely a Christian worldview, since South Africa is a predominantly Christian country. In Christianity, people have immortal souls created and judged by God. Since the Christian God disapproves of robbery and murder—the activities in which Boston and Tsotsi have just been engaged—Boston's affirmation of the existence of souls (and, by implication, God) suggests that he is passing judgment on his own and Tsotsi's way of life. Tsotsi may also feel threatened by Boston's religious judgment, another reason Tsotsi finally attacks Boston here.

Chapter 3 Quotes

> The knife was not only his weapon, but also a fetish, a talisman that conjured away bad spirits and established him securely in his life.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), Boston

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

After Tsotsi finishes beating Boston and leaves the shebeen, Boston's words haunt him. He runs until his mind is empty and stops under bluegum trees to rest. There he begins thinking again, and the novel informs readers of the life rules Tsotsi usually follows to avoid disturbing thoughts. His first rule is, as soon as he wakes up, to reach for the knife under his pillow and sharpen or play with it. Thus, Tsotsi uses the knife—a "weapon," a tool for violence—to reinforce his stereotyped identity as a violent gang member and to repress or ignore memories and emotions that evoke his forgotten self, the person he was before he joined the gang.

This quotation uses language to describe Tsotsi's knife that European colonizers might use to describe traditional African religions. For example, European colonizers coined the term "fetish" to describe objects used in African religious practices. Like a fetish, a "talisman" is an object

believed to possess religious or magical properties. The quotation says that the knife, a fetish/talisman, "conjure[s] away bad spirits": the term conjuration can describe the summoning or dismissal of spirits in a variety of religious practices globally, including some traditional African religions.

That the knife is clearly a negative symbol, associated with violence, has disturbing implications. Whereas the novel associates Christianity (brought to South Africa by white colonizers) with sympathy and universal human solidarity, it is associating traditional African religions here with weapons, violence, and gang membership. Thus, although the novel critiques apartheid's white supremacy and has anti-racist intentions, at least in this instance, it reinforces a negative stereotype about African culture.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ He didn't see the man, he saw the type.

Related Characters: Cassim, Tsotsi (David), The Baby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

The morning after a terrified woman gives Tsotsi a shoebox with a baby in it, Tsotsi enters the store of a shopkeeper named Cassim to buy milk for the baby. When Cassim looks at Tsotsi, he sees not a "man," an individual worthy of respect, but a "type"—that is, a *tsotsi* ("gangster" or "thug") stereotype.

Cassim is Indian. Like other non-white racial groups under apartheid, Indians had fewer rights than white people. This quotation shows how apartheid's culture not only put white people at the top of a racial hierarchy but also sowed anti-Black prejudice among non-white people. Although Cassim and Tsotsi are both members of discriminated classes, Cassim does not feel solidarity with Tsotsi and recognize their common humanity. Instead, he looks at Tsotsi, a young Black man, and sees the violent, no-good "type." It is especially ironic that he has that reaction to Tsotsi now, when Tsotsi is not trying to do anything criminal but trying to care for an abandoned baby.

With Cassim's reaction to Tsotsi, this quotation suggests that while Tsotsi embraces the *tsotsi* stereotype to gain a sense of self, other people also impose this stereotype on him—other people's fear and hatred of him, their lack of sympathy for him, isn't something he can completely control.

❝ This was man. This small, almost ancient, very useless and abandoned thing was the beginning of a man.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), The Baby, Cassim, Boston

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi has returned to his room, where he has hidden the baby, after buying some condensed milk for the baby to drink at Cassim's store. Although the baby smells, Tsotsi is too shocked to notice: he looks at the baby and sees "man." The quotation doesn't mean that Tsotsi recognizes the baby is male—he won't realize that until he unwraps and cleans the baby later in the chapter. Rather, it means that Tsotsi recognizes the baby as the "type" of man—an example of a group identity, humankind. This may explain why Tsotsi describes the baby as "ancient," although by definition a baby has to be young: the baby represents an "ancient" species.

Up to this point in the novel, Tsotsi has reacted to others with hatred and violence. Now he is breaking that pattern by experiencing nebulous positive feelings toward the baby. That Tsotsi's care for the baby coincides with his recognition of the baby's humanity suggests two things. First—contrary to his violent reaction to Boston's invocation of common humanity—Tsotsi may, deep down, believe that merely being human entitles someone to sympathy and care. Second, Tsotsi cannot remember his family—but now, caring for a baby and thus confronted with a parental role, he begins to act more ethically, which suggests that family relationships (biological or otherwise) may be particularly important to maintaining solidarity with humanity at large.

Tsotsi knew one thing very definitely now. Starting last night, and maybe even before that, because sitting there with a quiet mind to the events of the past hours it seemed almost as if there might have been a beginning before the bluegum trees, but regardless of where or when, he had started doing things that did not fit into the pattern of his life. There was no doubt about this. The pattern was too simple, too clear, woven as it had been by his own hands, using his knife like a shuttle to carry the red thread of death and interlace it with others stained in equally sombre hues. The baby did not belong and certainly none of the actions that had been forced on him as a result of its presence, like buying baby milk, or feeding it or cleaning it or hiding it with more cunning and secrecy than other people hid what they had from him.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), The Baby, Butcher, Die Aap

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 55-56

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi doesn't want his fellow gang members Butcher and Die Aap to find a baby in his room, so he decides to hide the baby in the ruins of a Black township demolished by the apartheid government (presumably to more strictly enforce residential segregation). Having hidden the baby in a shady place in the ruins, Tsotsi sits down and thinks about his actions.

Tsotsi, engaging in self-reflection, is coming to realize that he is changing "the pattern of his life." In an extended metaphor, he imagines the pattern of his life as a piece of cloth, "woven" by him. His knife—which represents his stereotyped identity as a violent *tsotsi*—is a "shuttle," a traditional tool used in weaving, while death itself is the "red thread" that provides the basic material. Translated into simpler language, Tsotsi's metaphor suggests that before the baby, his life was all about violence, crime, and death.

The quotation is of interest not only because it reveals that Tsotsi's identity is changing—instead of acting as a gang member, he is acting as a parental figure to an abandoned baby—but also because it shows Tsotsi thinking about himself. In the past, Tsotsi has tried to avoid thinking about himself, using his knife and other forms of violence as a distraction. The quotation thus illustrates that the changes taking place in Tsotsi's identity are causing him to become more self-aware.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Gumboot had been allocated a plot near the centre. He was buried by the Reverend Henry Ransome of the Church of Christ the Redeemer in the township. The minister went through the ritual with uncertainty. He was disturbed, and he knew it and that made it worse. If only he had known the name of the man he was burying. This man, O Lord! What man? This one, fashioned in your likeness.

Related Characters: Gumboot Dhlamini, Rev. Henry Ransome, Boston

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60-61

Explanation and Analysis

Rev. Henry Ransome, the white reverend who presides over a Christian church in the Black township, is performing Gumboot Dhlamini's funeral at the township's dilapidated cemetery. Earlier in the novel, Boston made an implicit religious argument for all human beings having a common group identity by claiming that all human beings have at least one thing in common—everyone has a soul. Here, Rev. Henry Ransome makes another implicit religious argument for all human beings having a common group identity: according to Christian theology, all human beings, regardless of their race, are "fashioned in [God's] likeness."

Yet while Rev. Henry Ransome may believe in theory that human beings of every race are "fashioned in [God's] likeness," in practice he lives in a white supremacist society, apartheid South Africa, which divides humankind into stereotyped groups by race. Rev. Henry Ransome laments that he doesn't know Gumboot Dhlamini's name—which suggests that, as a reverend in the township where Gumboot lived, he *should* have known Gumboot's name but didn't. This failure on Rev. Henry Ransome's part, which makes him "disturbed," suggests that he may not be as familiar with the Black community in which he works as he should be.

In other words, Rev. Henry Ransome's individual religious ideals have failed to overpower the social forces of segregation and racial division that keep him from knowing a poor Black worker like Gumboot. Thus, this quotation suggests that while religion may inspire individuals to hold good beliefs or have good intentions, it cannot solve a social evil like apartheid.

It was the awareness of alternatives that disturbed Tsotsi and seemed to paralyse his will. Up to that moment he had lived his life as the victim of dark impulses. They had been ready, rising to his moments of need all through his life. Where they came from he never knew, and their reasons for coming he had never questioned. What he realized now was that something had tampered with the mechanism that had governed his life, inhibiting its function.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), Die Aap, Butcher

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Butcher and Die Aap have come to Tsotsi's room, as they usually do, expecting him to tell them what acts of violence the gang will perform that night. Unexpectedly, Tsotsi finds it difficult to decide what to tell them. This difficulty reveals two things about Tsotsi.

First, although Tsotsi often inflicts violence on others, he sees himself as a "victim" because, before he became aware that he had choices, "dark impulses" that he did not understand controlled his behavior. He uses figurative language to describe this control: a mysterious machine "governed" his life, but then the machine's "mechanism"—the part of a machine that turns inputs into outputs—broke down. This figurative language suggests that so long as Tsotsi had no self-awareness about his own free will, so long as he did not believe he had choices, he passively accepted and acted according to the *tsotsi* ("gang member" or "thug") stereotype imposed on him by others. In that sense, he was a "victim" of stereotype.

Second, Tsotsi is gaining the freedom to choose merely by realizing that he *has* choices. Since adopting a baby, Tsotsi has developed an "awareness of alternatives": he realizes that he can act out other roles than the stereotyped *tsotsi* identity. For instance, he can take on the role of parent to an abandoned baby. At this point in the novel, Tsotsi still finds his newfound freedom disturbing—but his realization of freedom is essential to his character development.

Chapter 6 Quotes

[Morris] looked at the street and the big cars with their white passengers warm inside like wonderful presents in bright boxes, and the carefree, ugly crowds of the pavement, seeing them all with baleful feelings.

It is for your gold that I had to dig. That is what destroyed me. You are walking on stolen legs. All of you.

Even in this there was no satisfaction. As if knowing his thoughts, they stretched their thin, unsightly lips into bigger smiles while the crude sounds of their language and laughter seemed even louder. A few of them, after buying a newspaper, dropped pennies in front of him. He looked the other way when he pocketed them.

Related Characters: Morris Tshabalala

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Morris Tshabalala, a disabled Black beggar, is resting by a newspaper stand and watching white crowds go by. Morris used to work as a gold miner. In apartheid South Africa, Black men did the dangerous physical labor of gold mining while white people reaped almost all the profits. Morris lost his legs in a mining accident and was not able to find work afterwards, which is why he now begs.

This quotation illustrates how, in the novel, racist structures harm Black characters and privilege white characters, whether or not the Black characters experience interpersonal racism from white people. When Morris thinks that the white people he sees are "walking on stolen legs," his thought is pointing out how economic systems in apartheid South Africa enrich white people while keeping Black people poor and putting them in physical danger—the white people who controlled the gold mines got rich off Morris's labor, while he suffered catastrophic injuries and became unemployed.

This social dynamic exists regardless of whether the white people Morris is viewing are individually racist. Although other white characters in the book do engage in interpersonal racism, this particular crowd does not—all they are doing is driving cars or walking, smiling, laughing, and occasionally giving Morris money. Nevertheless, the racist structures of apartheid South Africa make them the indirect beneficiaries of Morris's suffering.

Are his hands soft? he would ask himself, and then shake his head in anger and desperation at the futility of the question. But no sooner did he stop asking it than another would occur. Has he got a mother? This question was persistent. Hasn't he got a mother? Didn't she love him? Didn't she sing him songs? He was really asking how do men come to be what they become. For all he knew others might have asked the same question about himself. There were times when he didn't feel human. He knew he didn't look it.

Related Characters: Morris Tshabalala , Tsotsi (David), David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

Morris Tshabalala has realized that a dangerous-looking young man (Tsotsi) is stalking him and may intend to kill him. Morris, terrified, is wondering who Tsotsi is and what motivates him.

This quotation is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how some people are capable of sympathizing with others, even when those others threaten them. Morris himself has calloused hands because, lacking legs, he uses his hands to get around. By asking whether Tsotsi's hands are "soft," then, Morris is wondering whether Tsotsi is dissimilar or similar to him. By noticing that "other people might have asked" about Morris what Morris is asking about Tsotsi, meanwhile, Morris is noticing possible similarities between Tsotsi and himself. Morris's sympathetic thoughts about Tsotsi—even though he fears Tsotsi may kill him—suggests that sympathy is a common, essential way that people relate to and understand each other.

Second, Morris's thoughts foreshadow an important revelation later in the novel. Morris repeatedly wonders about Tsotsi's mother. Although neither the reader nor Tsotsi yet knows this, Tsotsi's separation from his mother started the chain of events that led to Tsotsi losing his childhood memories and becoming a gang member. Morris wonders "how do men come to be what they become"—and his thoughts in this quotation are subtly laying the groundwork for the revelation that Tsotsi became what he became because white policemen enforcing unjust apartheid laws took his mother away.

Chapter 7 Quotes

What is sympathy? If you had asked Tsotsi this, telling him that it was his new experience, he would have answered: like light, meaning that it revealed. Pressed further, he might have thought of darkness and lighting a candle, and holding it up to find Morris Tshabalala within the halo of its radiance. He was *seeing* him for the first time, in a way that he hadn't seen him before, or with a second sort of sight, or maybe just more clearly. […]

But that wasn't all. The same light fell on the baby, and somehow on Boston too, and wasn't that the last face of Gumboot Dhlamini there, almost where the light ended and things weren't so clear anymore. And beyond that still, what? A sense of space, of an infinity stretching away so vast that the whole world, the crooked trees, the township streets, the crowded, wheezing rooms, might have been waiting there for a brighter, intense revelation.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), Morris Tshabalala , The Baby, Boston, Gumboot Dhlamini

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 106-107

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi has been stalking Morris Tshabalala with the intent of killing him. Yet as he stalks Morris, he begins to have an unusual experience, an emotion toward a potential victim he does not remember ever feeling before. Although Tsotsi has not realized it, the emotion he is feeling is "sympathy."

Although the novel has previously suggested that sympathy is important, this passage reveals what sympathy *is*, according to the novel. Sympathy is not just a subjective emotion; instead, it is "like light" in that "it reveal[s]." In other words, sympathy is a means of understanding a truth. When the passage says that sympathy allows Tsotsi to see Morris "for the first time" or "maybe just more clearly," it is implying that sympathy helps Tsotsi understand the truth that Morris is a fellow human being. Tsotsi's new understanding of Morris's humanity then extends outward to his other victims (Boston, Gumboot Dhlamini) as well as to the baby for whom he's been caring.

This passage also mysteriously suggests that Tsotsi's sympathy for Morris may have a divine source. In religion, the word "revelation" refers to knowledge that God, gods, or supernatural spirits give to human beings. The passage's suggestion that sympathy could extend to "infinity" and that a "brighter, intense" revelation is awaiting the world, then, implies that humans' sympathy for one another has its

source in an infinite God's sympathy for all of humankind. The passage's coded religious imagery also foreshadows Tsotsi's religious experiences later in the novel.

> I must give him something, he thought. I must give this strange and terrible night something back for all it has given me. With the instinct of his kind, he turned to beauty and gave back the most beautiful thing he knew.
>
> 'Mothers love their children. I know. I remember. They sing us songs when we are small. I'm telling you, tsotsi. Mothers love their children.'
>
> After this there was silence for the words to register and make their meaning, for Tsotsi to stand up and say in reply: 'They don't. I'm telling you, I know they don't,' and then he walked away.

Related Characters: Morris Tshabalala , Tsotsi (David), David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi has finished stalking Morris Tshabalala and closed in on him. Due to his newfound sympathy for Morris, however, Tsotsi does not kill him immediately—instead, they begin talking. When Morris demands to know why Tsotsi must kill him, Tsotsi realizes he has the choice to spare Morris's life—and takes it. Morris, in gratitude, decides to tell Tsotsi "the most beautiful thing" he knows: mothers love their children and sing to them. This claim of Morris's foreshadows a later event in the novel—Tsotsi regaining his memories and realizing that his mother did indeed love him and sing to him.

That the most beautiful thing Morris knows is mothers' love for their children emphasizes family's importance—and mothers' importance in particular—to the novel. Yet Morris only knows a mother's love because he "remember[s]." At this point, Tsotsi cannot remember his childhood and so cannot remember his mother's love. Given how sympathetic Morris is to Tsotsi—a man who nearly killed him—the novel may be implying that a mother's love supports children's capacity for sympathy: Morris, who remembers his mother, easily sympathizes with other people, whereas Tsotsi, who does not, is only just regaining his capacity to sympathize.

Curiously, even though Tsotsi cannot remember his mother at this point, he insists he "know[s]" that mothers do not love their children or sing to them. His strange insistence hints at the pain and bitterness he may feel at not having memories of his mother—pain and bitterness of which he does not seem consciously aware.

Chapter 8 Quotes

> So she carried on, outwardly adjusting the pattern of her life as best she could, like taking in washing, doing odd cleaning jobs in the nearby white suburb. Inwardly she had fallen into something like a possessive sleep where the same dream is dreamt over and over again. She seldom smiled now, kept to herself and her baby, asked no favours and gave none, hoarding as it were the moments and things in her life.

Related Characters: Miriam Ngidi, Tsotsi (David), David's Mother (Tondi), The Baby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

Miriam Ngidi lost her husband while she was eight months pregnant; he vanished while walking to work during a bus boycott. Although the novel never reveals what happened to him, bus boycotts in apartheid South Africa were a major way that Black workers expressed political opposition to apartheid and its economic oppression of Black people—and Black boycotters sometimes suffered racist violence as a result. Thus, the novel hints that Miriam lost her husband due to the racist social context of apartheid. In this passage, the novel is describing how Miriam "adjust[ed]" after losing her husband.

This passage suggests subtle parallels between Miriam and Tsotsi. As Tsotsi later remembers, he lost a beloved family member, his mother, due to apartheid—just as Miriam lost her husband. Tsotsi reacted to this trauma by falling into gang life and violent habits. The novel uses almost the same phrase ("the pattern of her life") to describe Miriam's routine as it previously used to describe Tsotsi's ("the pattern of his life"). The repetition hints that Miriam, too, has reacted to her trauma by falling into negative, antisocial (though not violent) habits: "hoarding" her life and avoiding other people. The parallels between Miriam and Tsotsi foreshadow the unlikely alliance they will form to take care of Tsotsi's adopted baby.

Chapter 9 Quotes

On she came, until a foot or so away the chain stopped her, and although she pulled at this with her teeth until her breathing was tense and rattled she could go no further, so she lay down there, twisting her body so that the hindquarters fell apart and, like that, fighting all the time, her ribs heaving, she gave birth to the stillborn litter, and then died beside them.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), The Baby, David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi has a flashback to a yellow dog—female, moving strangely—when he first encounters the abandoned baby. He keeps having flashbacks to the dog until he regains his memories, which reveal that the dog was his childhood pet. The day before his father—whom he had never met—was supposed to return after years of absence, police arrested his mother in a raid enforcing apartheid pass laws and took her away. When his father returned, Tsotsi hid from him in the backyard. The dog attacked his father—and his father gave the dog a fatal kick and left.

This passage resolves the mystery of Tsotsi's flashbacks. He first remembers the dog upon receiving the abandoned baby because the baby was losing his mother. Tsotsi associates the dog with the traumatic loss of his own mother (and the destruction of his childhood) because he witnessed the dog's death the day after the police took his mother away.

The dog also symbolizes apartheid's destruction of Black families. Pet dogs are popularly associated with ideal families. Yet Tsotsi's childhood dog dies due to apartheid: because his mother, having been arrested for violating a racist and unjust apartheid law, is not present to welcome his father home, the dog reacts to his father as an intruding stranger. The dog's defensive reaction leads to the violent altercation in which his father kills the dog. Seeing the dog die, Tsotsi literally witnesses the death of a family, since the kick that kills her also kills her puppies. Using the dog as a symbol, then, the novel underscores how hostile apartheid South Africa was to Black family life.

Petah turned to David. 'Willie no good. You not Willie. What is your name? Talk! Trust me, man. I help you.'

David's eyes grew round and vacant, stared at the darkness. A tiny sound, a thin squeaking voice, struggled out: 'David…' it said, 'David! But no more! He dead! He dead too, like Willie, like Joji.'

Related Characters: Petah, Tsotsi (David) (speaker), David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166-167

Explanation and Analysis

Having run away from home after his mother's arrest, David (that is, Tsotsi as a child) has met a group of homeless, orphaned children and gone with them to sleep in pipes near the river. Because David will not tell the other children his name, they decide to call him Willie, after a former member of their group who recently died of malnutrition.

Petah, the friendliest of the orphan gang, treats David with real sympathy: he sees that David is his own individual, not simply a replacement for the dead Willie, and offers to help David. Petah's kindness toward David shows that sympathy is a common component in human interactions and can spring up even in miserable circumstances.

David's response to Petah shows how his mother's arrest due to racist apartheid laws has stripped him of his former identity. Having lost his mother and his home, David declares his former self "dead"—a declaration suggesting that children's identities fundamentally depend on their relationship to their parents. When a child loses his parents, he is not only in danger of neglect and physical death—Willie and Joji, other children in the gang who lost their parents, have both literally died—but also of a figurative death, a loss of personal identity. This loss makes David vulnerable to later accepting the stereotyped identity *tsotsi*.

So he went out with them the next day and scavenged. The same day an Indian chased him away from his shop door, shouting and calling him a tsotsi. When they went back to the river that night, they started again, trying names on him: Sam, Willie, and now Simon, until he stopped them.

'My name,' he said, 'is Tsotsi.'

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David) (speaker), Boston

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Prior to this point, David has slept in the pipes with the other orphaned children but has not joined in their "scaveng[ing]." Once he becomes hungry enough, however, he does joins them—which leads to him choosing the name (and identity) Tsotsi.

As previously mentioned, the word *tsotsi* is South African slang means "gang member" or "thug." In the novel's beginning, Tsotsi seems to embrace this stereotyped identity: he is leading a gang and committing violent crimes. He even reacts violently when fellow gang member Boston tries to suggest that there is more to him than the *tsotsi* stereotype—beating Boston for asking about his family and for claiming he must have a soul. By introducing Tsotsi in this way, the novel leads readers to believe that the *tsotsi* identity is something Tsotsi has freely chosen.

This passage complicates readers' assumptions that Tsotsi chose to embrace the *tsotsi* stereotype. The day someone first calls him a *tsotsi*, he is a starving 10-year-old "scaveng[ing]" for food—not a violent criminal, but a vulnerable child effectively orphaned by the racist laws of South African apartheid. That an adult would impose the stereotype of *tsotsi* ("gang member" or "thug") on a 10-year-old shows that adult's virulent anti-Black racism—his assumption that all Black males, even children, are inherently criminal and dangerous. In this passage, then, the reader learns that a racist society imposed the *tsotsi* stereotype on the child David—only after society had already called him a *tsotsi* did he take the name for himself.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"The baby and David, himself that is, at first confused, had now merged into one and the same person. The police raid, the river, and Petah, the spider spinning his web, the grey day and the smell of damp newspapers were a future awaiting the baby. It was outside itself. He could sympathize with it in its defencelessness against the terrible events awaiting it.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), The Baby, David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

The morning after Tsotsi regains his memories, he takes the baby from beneath his bed and contemplates him. That Tsotsi "at first confused" his childhood self, David, with the baby, explains why Tsotsi began having flashbacks to his past as soon as he saw the baby—the baby's abandonment by his mother reminded him of his own childhood separation from his mother. In other words, he sympathized with the baby. Now that Tsotsi has regained his memories, his sympathy for the baby has become something more: identification. For him, his childhood self and the baby are "one and the same person." He even imagines that the "terrible events" he suffered in childhood are the "future awaiting the baby."

By suggesting that the baby will suffer what Tsotsi has suffered, this passage suggests two things to the reader. First, David suffered because he was a Black child in a racist society, apartheid South Africa. Because the baby is also a Black child in the same racist society, this passage is foreshadowing to the reader that the baby, too, may suffer "terrible events" because of apartheid.

Second, the passage suggests that Tsotsi has a new motive to care for the baby. Previously, he was caring for the baby because the baby had triggered memories in him and he hoped to regain more. Now that he has regained his memories, however, he may still continue caring for the baby—because he identifies with the baby's "defencelessness," he may try to protect the baby from the "terrible events awaiting it" and thus, in a sense, compensate for his own destroyed childhood.

"'Last night I was sad and I bent on my knees and did pray for something and a voice said, "Why should I give you what you ask me for, when you got no milk for babies." Please give him to me.'

Related Characters: Miriam Ngidi (speaker), Tsotsi (David), The Baby, David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi has found Miriam again and led her back to his room to feed the baby. This time she comes willingly. Upon learning Tsotsi is not the baby's father, Miriam tells Tsotsi the baby is sick and asks to adopt him. In this quotation, she

implies she wants to adopt him because she believes God disapproved of her initial unwillingness to help the baby.

There is no way to determine the truth of Miriam's claim that a voice spoke in response to her prayer, because the novel never represents that scene directly. The reader only receives Miriam's account of it. Moreover, Miriam never states explicitly that she thinks God was speaking to her. She only says that "a voice" spoke to her, which could refer to an inner voice—Miriam's own thoughts accusing her of ungenerosity—as well as the voice of God. That Miriam heard this voice in the context of prayer, however, suggests that the voice's words have a religious meaning.

That a religious experience increases Miriam's sympathy toward and willingness to help the baby underlines something the novel has already implied—namely, that while religion may not be powerful enough to change a racist society like apartheid South Africa, it can encourage individuals to recognize others' humanity and human value.

That the voice Miriam hears specifically chides Miriam for having "no milk for babies"—not just milk for her own baby—implies that in particular, adults should be sympathetic toward children and recognize their humanity, even going so far as to treat all children like their own. This attitude contrasts starkly with how apartheid South Africa actually treated Black children: as readers know, Tsotsi was left homeless when white police arrested his mother for violating an unjust, racist law.

'What are you going to do with him?'

'Keep him.'

'Why?'

He threw back his head, and she saw the shine of desperation on his forehead as he struggled with that mighty word. Why, why was he? No more revenge. No more hate. The riddle of the yellow bitch was solved—all of this in a few days and in as short a time the hold on his life by the blind, black, minute hands had grown tighter. Why?

'Because I must find out,' he said.

Related Characters: Miriam Ngidi, Tsotsi (David) (speaker), The Baby, Boston, David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi is refusing Miriam's requests to adopt the abandoned baby for whom he has been caring, and he has decided to keep the baby himself. Interestingly, when Miriam asks him to explain his decision, he has difficulty explaining it to himself. As the narrator puts it, "the riddle of the yellow bitch was solved"—in other words, Tsotsi initially kept the baby because the baby triggered a flashback to a (female) yellow dog and he was hoping, by keeping the baby around, to trigger more; now that he has regained his memories and solved the "riddle," that motive no longer applies.

Yet as Tsotsi also notes, since regaining his memories the baby's emotional "hold on his life" has only "grown tighter"—he wants to keep the baby more, now, than he did when the yellow dog was still a mystery. Tsotsi claims that he wants to keep the baby because he "must find out." He does not explain what it is he must find out, but his thoughts offer two clues.

First, he thinks: "No more revenge. No more hate." Before Tsotsi encountered the baby, his knee-jerk reaction to anyone's attempt to connect with him was hatred. He even violently beat his fellow gang member Boston for asking questions about his life and suggesting that he had a soul. Since adopting the baby, Tsotsi has rediscovered sympathy and care for others. Yet, at this point, he does not understand the process—*how*, exactly, the baby has transformed him from a hateful to a sympathetic person. The nature of the change he has undergone may be one thing he "must find out."

Second, Tsotsi thinks that "the riddle of the yellow bitch was solved." What Tsotsi has learned from fully remembering the yellow dog is that unjust apartheid laws led to his mother's arrest, destroying his family and his childhood. He has already identified his childhood self with the baby and expressed fears that the baby will suffer as he has. By acting as a parent to the baby, he may be hoping to change the baby's fate. The other thing he "must find out" may be what would have happened to him if he had had a parent throughout his entire childhood.

Chapter 11 Quotes

'Why Boston? What did do it?'

A sudden elation lit up Boston's face; he tried to smile, but his lips wouldn't move, and his nose started throbbing, but despite the pain he whispered back at Tsotsi: 'You are asking me about God.'

'God.'

'You are asking me about God, Tsotsi. About God, about God.'

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), Boston (speaker), The Baby, Miriam Ngidi, Morris Tshabalala , Rev. Henry Ransome

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi seeks out Boston, his most educated acquaintance, to ask him what has caused the changes in behavior and identity (taking care of the baby, sparing Morris Tshabalala) he has undergone throughout the book. By insisting that Tsotsi, in asking about these changes, is really asking about God, Boston is implying two things.

First, Boston is implying that God is real and active in human lives—an argument for religion's relevance to all humankind, including Tsotsi. This implication that God is relevant to Tsotsi's life will lead Tsotsi to seek out religious experiences later in the novel.

Second, Boston is implying that human sympathy, which partially motivated Tsotsi to care for the baby and spare Morris's life, ultimately comes from God. The novel has implied this more subtly in Tsotsi's earlier vision of sympathy as a light that might lead to an ultimate, religiously coded revelation. Now, however, Boston is making the connection between God and sympathy more explicit.

It is difficult to evaluate how seriously the novel wants the reader to take Boston's claims here. On the one hand, the Rev. Henry Ransome has experienced several moments of religious despair in the novel, implicitly because God is not adequately addressing racism, segregation, and poverty in apartheid South Africa. On the other hand, Miriam's religious experience during prayer has directly changed her attitudes and behavior, making her more sympathetic toward an abandoned baby—which does suggest that God and religion are practically relevant to her. So, though the novel is somewhat ambivalent about the relevance of religion and Christianity in particular to human lives, this quote prompts the reader to expect that it holds unexpected meaning for Tsotsi himself.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ To an incredible extent a peaceful existence was dependent upon knowing just when to say no or yes to the white man.

Related Characters: Isaiah, Miss Marriot, Morris Tshabalala , David's Mother (Tondi), Tsotsi (David)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

A churchyard gardener, an elderly Black man named Isaiah, has been planting flowers when his condescending and racist white supervisor, Miss Marriot, criticizes his work and insists on demonstrating how to plant correctly. Despite her rude questions, Isaiah gives her polite yes/no answers.

Up to this point, white characters have mainly appeared in the novel as nameless agents of apartheid's structural racism: for example, the white crowds whom Morris Tshabalala blames for the loss of his legs or the white police who arrest David's mother. By focusing on Black characters, their histories, and their interactions, the novel has demonstrated how apartheid and white supremacy shape these characters' lives even in the absence of much direct interaction with racist white people.

The interactions between Isaiah and Miss Marriot constitute one of the first times that the novel represents an extended interaction between a Black and a white person. Here, the novel adds an important caveat to its representation of racism as a primarily structural, impersonal phenomenon: interpersonal racism as well as structural racism affects those Black characters, like Isaiah, who must interact with white people. During those interactions, in this white supremacist society, all the power resides with the white people, and the Black people must cater to white people's prejudices and preferences in order to maintain "a peaceful existence."

❝ 'Come man and join in the singing.'

'Me!'

'I'm telling you anybody can come. It's the House of God. I ring His bell. Will you come?'

'Yes.'

'Listen tonight, you hear. Listen for me. I will call you to believe in God.'

Related Characters: Isaiah, Tsotsi (David) (speaker), Boston, The Baby, Morris Tshabalala

Related Themes:

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

Tsotsi has stopped outside the Church of Christ the Redeemer, where Isaiah gardens. When Isaiah offers Tsotsi tea, Tsotsi begins asking questions about the church, Christianity, and God. Eventually, Isaiah invites Tsotsi to come to the church's evening service. This passage implicitly suggests two reasons why Tsotsi, who seems to have no religious background, might find himself interested in Christianity after his brief, earlier conversation with Boston about God.

First, during the novel, Tsotsi has changed from someone who rejects human connection—for example, violently beating Boston when Boston tries to understand him—to sympathizing with others, caring for a baby and sparing Morris Tshabalala's life. Tsotsi's sympathy for others leads him to believe in common humanity, a group identity that all people share. When Isaiah asks Tsotsi to "join in the singing," it represents an invitation for Tsotsi to join a larger human community. When Isaiah says "anybody can come" to the church, he is telling Tsotsi that the church is a potentially universal community. Because Tsotsi has been discovering universal humanity over the course of the novel, such an inclusive community may particularly appeal to him.

Second, Tsotsi may be interested in the Christian focus on redemption. When Isaiah first invites Tsotsi to church, Tsotsi exclaims, "Me!" His shock at the invitation suggests he does not believe himself—a person whom others regularly identify as a *tsotsi*, a "gang member" or "thug"—worthy to enter a church. Yet Isaiah suggests that everyone who hears "His bell" is potentially worthy to enter the community of believers. Their conversation thus contains an implicit belief in redemption: anyone, including Tsotsi, can be redeemed by God and change their life. Since Tsotsi has undergone significant personal changes for the better during the novel, he may be attracted to Christianity for affirming the possibility of this sort of change.

❝ It was a new day and what he had thought out last night was still there, inside him. Only one thing was important to him now. 'Come back,' the woman had said. 'Come back, Tsotsi.'

I must correct her, he thought. 'My name is David Madondo.'

He said it aloud in the almost empty street, and laughed. The man delivering milk heard him, and looking up said, 'Peace my brother.'

'Peace be with you', David Madondo replied and carried on his way.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David) (speaker), The Baby, Miriam Ngidi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 224-225

Explanation and Analysis

The night before this passage occurs, Tsotsi has gone to church for the first time. He has also hidden the baby in the demolished township ruins again, because he fears Miriam may take the baby from him. The next morning when he wakes up, however, "what he had thought out last night" is on his mind.

The novel does not explicitly represent what Tsotsi has thought out, but this passage hints at his thoughts' content. He remembers "the woman"—that is, Miriam—asking him to come back and thinks that "only one thing" was important now. Drawing attention to Miriam's womanhood and her request that Tsotsi return to her, the novel is implying a possible romantic relationship between them. Since both Miriam and Tsotsi have babies—hers biological, his adopted—their romantic pairing would lead to the formation of a new family, a replacement for the families Miriam and Tsotsi have lost due to apartheid. This new family is likely the "only one thing [that] was important to him now."

The prospect of a new family leads to a final, decisive change in Tsotsi: he rejects once and for all the *tsotsi* ("gang member" or "thug") stereotype and reclaims his full name, David Madondo. After this point, the novel's narration itself refers to the character as "David Madondo" or "David" rather than "Tsotsi"—a sign that the novel endorses David's belief that he has undergone a real identity transformation. That David and the milkman wish each other peace—a traditional religious greeting—highlights that religion has played a role in David's transformation. Additionally, that the milkman does not react to David with fear, as characters have previously done upon seeing him, suggests that his transformation from Tsotsi to David is somehow physically apparent to others.

❝ The slum clearance had entered a second and decisive stage. The white township had grown impatient. The ruins, they said, were being built up again and as many were still coming in as they carried off in lorries to the new locations or in vans to the jails. So they had sent in the bulldozers to raze the buildings completely to the ground.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), The Baby, Miriam Ngidi, David's Mother (Tondi)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

David has hidden the baby in the demolished ruins of the Black township. Now, the white township—in this passage, the word simply means "neighborhood" or "suburb"—is demanding that the ruins be demolished again, which will surely kill the baby if David cannot rescue him in time.

This passage represents in figurative language the ongoing threat that apartheid and white supremacy pose to Black South African families. New Black settlers have "built up" the "ruins" of a Black neighborhood, destroyed to enforce apartheid's segregation laws. This fact symbolizes how, after apartheid destroyed David's family by arresting David's mother, he has finally begun to build up a new family with Miriam and their babies from the ruins of his old life.

Yet despite David's individual triumphs—regaining his memories, learning to sympathize with others, finding a new family—he is still a Black person in a violently racist, white supremacist society. This plot twist, that David's baby is under physical threat due to apartheid's segregation laws, illustrates how, no matter the positive transformations individual Black characters undergo, the racist society in which they find themselves can at any moment destroy their lives.

> They unearthed him minutes later. All agreed that his smile was beautiful, and strange for a tsotsi, and that when he lay there on his back in the sun, before someone had fetched a blanket, they agreed that it was hard to believe what the back of his head looked like when you saw the smile.

Related Characters: Tsotsi (David), The Baby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

David dies trying to save the baby from the bulldozers re-razing the demolished Black township to enforce apartheid segregation laws. Although the novel does not explicitly state what happens to the baby, it seems likely that the same wall that fell on David also killed the baby. By ending with David's and the baby's deaths due to apartheid—after all the positive individual change that David has undergone—the novel is clearly illustrating that South African apartheid is a great evil, hostile to Black life and Black families.

The novel is also illustrating that individual transformation, no matter how heroic, cannot lead to a permanent triumph over an evil society. Just when the reader believes that David has rejected the *tsotsi* ("gang member" or "thug") stereotype and gained a new family to replace the family apartheid took from him, apartheid destroys his second family too. Importantly, the people who unearth David's body still see him as a "tsotsi," reducing his identity to a stereotype. The white supremacist society of apartheid cannot recognize David's individual humanity or his growth.

Though largely pessimistic, the novel's ending does contain an ambiguous element, David's "beautiful" smile in death. Previous scenes in the novel, such as David/Tsotsi's conversation with Isaiah about Jesus Christ, have in retrospect foreshadowed that, like Christ, David would sacrifice his life for another. The earlier scene in which David/Tsotsi imagined human sympathy as connected to a larger, implicitly religious "revelation," meanwhile, hints at a possible reason for David's smile—by sacrificing his life in a Christlike way trying to save the baby's, he has actually experienced a religious revelation in the moment of death. The novel may even be suggesting an afterlife that compensates for David's life of suffering.

Yet, clearly, religion has not saved David or the baby on earth—so the novel may intend the "beautiful" smile ironically, to show that religion has beneficial elements but is not powerful enough to change evil systems like apartheid.

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

Four people are sitting in silence as they drink, listen to an old woman speak in the backyard, and examine the shadows outside in the street to check their growth. Then, "as always happened at about the same time," the youngest of the four, Tsotsi, sits forward and clasps his hands "in the manner of prayer."

By implying that these four people do the same thing "at about the same time" every day, the novel suggests they are stuck in habits or patterns of behavior. Meanwhile, "tsotsi" is a South African slang term meaning "gangster" or "thug." That Tsotsi uses this slang term as his name suggests he has embraced a stereotype—the stereotype of a violent criminal—as his identity. Finally, it may be ironic that the novel describes Tsotsi, who identifies with violent criminality, clasping his hands "in the manner of prayer"—yet, at the same time, this detail may be foreshadowing the importance of religion in the novel.

Before the silence, another of the four, Boston, was telling a story. Boston habitually tells stories to the other four when they gather in Tsotsi's room, drink, and wait for nightfall and for Tsotsi to inform them of the night's plan. The other two—Die Aap, nicknamed for his "long arms," and Butcher—listen to Boston. Whereas Die Aap listens hard, Butcher finds Boston's stories too long and only listens to pass the time.

This passage confirms that the four men always gather in Tsotsi's room in the same way and wait for him to tell them what to do, which suggests that they act out of habit, not exercising their full capacity for choice. None of the characters seems to go by his given name. As already mentioned, "tsotsi" is a slang term meaning "gangster." "Die Aap" means "monkey" in Afrikaans, a white minority language in South Africa—a racist nickname for a Black man in a white supremacist society. Although the novel does not explicitly state here that "Boston" and "Butcher" are nicknames, they do not sound like real, given names. The use of such nicknames suggests that as Black men in apartheid South Africa, they aren't able to express their full, non-stereotyped individual identities.

Die Aap interrupts Boston's story to ask "why." Boston laughs, says it was because of a woman, and finishes the story. Silence falls. Tsotsi clasps his hands, and Boston, Die Aap, and Butcher look at him—Boston smiling, Die Aap emotionless, and Butcher full of "impatience and hate." Tsotsi notes their reactions. He thinks that while he can trust Die Aap, he cannot trust Butcher. He also thinks that Boston is afraid of him.

This passage suggests that the characters spend time together out of habit, not because they are genuine friends—although Die Aap is loyal to Tsotsi, Butcher and Boston may not be. The passage thus foreshadows conflict within the group.

Boston asks Tsotsi what's going on. He meets Tsotsi's eyes but then drops his own. Tsotsi states that it's Friday and suggests they "take one on the trains." Butcher agrees. Boston, sweating and not looking at Tsotsi, asks why. Tsotsi asks why not. Boston tries to fake a yawn, can't pull it off, and points out that sometimes the ones Tsotsi picks don't have anything. Tsotsi denies he ever makes mistakes. Die Aap agrees with Tsotsi, and Butcher demands they leave. Tsotsi continues to stare at Boston, who eventually agrees. Butcher retrieves a bicycle spoke from a box, which is "the reason for his name. He had never missed." The four men leave.

Although the novel does not clarify what "take one on the trains" means, it sounds ominous. Boston's fearful reaction, sweating and refusing to look at Tsotsi, strengthens the reader's sense of foreboding. That Tsotsi, Butcher, and Die Aap all agree to "take one on the trains" implies that this activity is in line with the group's usual habits—Boston is the only one who suggests a change. Toward the passage's end, the novel reveals that "Butcher" is indeed a stereotyping nickname, one that implies Butcher is going to butcher—that is, kill—someone with his bicycle spoke.

Tsotsi leads the other men down an unkempt street. It's dusk. As the four men walk through the township, they end a moment of "reckoning" in which various people in the township note new demolitions, inadequate money, and other hardships. When the men pass, the township population fears them and hides inside. Tsotsi is aware of this phenomenon and accepts it as natural.

This passage gestures toward the racial and political context in which Tsotsi finds himself. First, he lives in a township, that is, a segregated non-white neighborhood or suburb in apartheid South Africa. Most of the township population is poor and worried that the government may demolish their homes and relocate them as part of a larger apartheid policy of enforcing strict racial segregation. By giving this racial and political context, the novel hints that while Tsotsi habitually accepts his stereotyped criminal identity and others' fear or hatred of him as natural, these phenomena may in fact derive from his political context: apartheid, which is not natural but man-made.

At the train station, the four men select a man named Gumboot Dhlamini as their target. Gumboot is a hopeful man with a sense of humor. He left his pregnant wife and walked a thousand miles to the "Golden City" to find work. When he arrived, he lived in a township and worked in a mine for a year. In a week, he plans to return home to his wife with the money he has made.

Under apartheid, non-white people's travel was restricted. They were forbidden from entering "white" areas unless they had a pass showing they were employed in those areas. Gumboot has to leave his wife and unborn child behind while he works in the "Golden City"—that is, Johannesburg—due to these white supremacist apartheid laws, which illustrates how apartheid broke up non-white families.

After work, Gumboot is at the train station planning to take the train back to the township, but he makes "three mistakes." First, he smiles because he's anticipating the weekend, having written to his wife that he is coming home—and Tsotsi notices his bright smile. Second, he is wearing a red and silver tie, which he bought to impress his wife. The tie helps Tsotsi track him in the crowd. Third, Gumboot opens his pay packet to buy his ticket—showing people he has money—and rushes to the platform.

As a criminal in a Black township, Tsotsi illustrates how the economic oppression and deprivation of Black people under apartheid's white supremacist legal system has forced some young Black men into crime—at which point they harm other young Black men like Gumboot Dhlamini, whose very joy at the thought of his family makes him a target. Thus this passage shows how apartheid destroys Black families and Black people's joy.

Tsotsi follows Gumboot onto the train. Gumboot notices that his tie got messed up amid the crowd and tries to fix it, but he can't use his arms because Die Aap has grabbed hold of them. As Butcher stabs Gumboot with the bicycle spoke, Tsotsi murmurs something offensive about Gumboot's mother into Gumboot's ear—Tsotsi has realized he can fix a hateful expression on his victims' faces by insulting them as they die. The four men keep Gumboot upright, and Boston, though sickened, steals his money. At the next station, embarking passengers find Gumboot's corpse.

This passage reveals what the ominous phrase "take one on the trains" means—it means to rob and kill a passenger, using the commuter crowd as cover. That Tsotsi insults Gumboot's mother while Gumboot is dying suggests that Tsotsi's motives for the murder aren't merely economic. For some reason, Tsotsi wants to elicit hatred from his victim.

CHAPTER 2

Boston demands to know what it proves that he was sick when they killed and robbed Gumboot. Butcher laughs and tells him he was "sick like a dog." Boston again demands to know what that proves. They are drinking at Soekie's, a shebeen (that is, illegal drinking establishment) in the township. The police often close down shebeens in the township, prompting new ones to open. Soekie's has one table, a few chairs, empty walls, and a "rotten" floor. Soekie lives there in a back room.

The sparse furnishings and "rotten" floor in Soekie's drinking establishment show the poverty of Black township life under apartheid. Boston demanding to know what it proves that he was sick—it seems he vomited at some point after he helped murder Gumboot—implies that he unwillingly sympathized with Gumboot but doesn't want to admit it to other members of the gang. Butcher's laughter and claim that Boston was "sick like a dog," meanwhile, both indicate that Butcher doesn't share Boston's sympathy toward Gumboot and hint that dog imagery may be important later in the novel.

Tsotsi, Die Aap, and Butcher sit at the table while Boston stands. An incoherent woman sits in the corner. Boston again demands to know what his sickness proves. The woman shouts, "Come here Johnny," but the men ignore her. The woman asks for Johnny to kiss her, prompting Boston to hit her twice in the face. Butcher laughs and tells Boston not to go too far. Boston wanders the room. Butcher, his drink finished, calls for another and eyeballs the woman in the corner. Soekie responds from the other room but doesn't appear. Butcher yells her name, and she yells back.

That Boston hits the incoherent woman in the face shows that he is emotionally volatile and violent, despite his sympathy for Gumboot. By hitting her, he may be trying to prove to the other members of his gang that despite getting sick after the murder, he is still capable of violence. The squalid surroundings—only four customers, a terribly drunk woman, casual violence, bad service—again emphasize the economic oppression of Black townships under apartheid.

Tsotsi notes that Boston, wandering the room, is searching for an explanation for his vomiting and tears after they killed Gumboot. Tsotsi, on the way to Soekie's, resolved to keep exactly to his usual behavior, in part because something feels different to him. Tsotsi blames Boston for this feeling. His hatred of Boston motivated his decision to kill someone on the train. Tsotsi believes Boston has changed the feeling of things since he joined the gang six months ago, because Boston asks questions.

Here the novel makes explicit that Boston vomited and cried after helping murder Gumboot. Tsotsi's decision to behave exactly as usual, and his hatred of Boston for introducing changing feelings into his life, reveal how psychologically dependent Tsotsi is on his habits. Tsotsi's hatred for Boston, together with his earlier desire that Gumboot hate him, hint that hatred is Tsotsi's main way of relating to other people.

After Boston joined the gang, he asked what Tsotsi's real name was, and Tsotsi walked away instead of responding. Die Aap explained to Boston that Tsotsi "hated questions about himself," and that he is a mystery. Boston stopped asking questions, but Tsotsi perceives questions in Boston's eyes when Boston drinks. Tsotsi thinks letting Boston ask questions with his eyes is a mistake and picking gang jobs that disturb Boston is an even bigger mistake. Boston has realized Tsotsi is picking jobs to disturb him, which has prompted him to ask questions aloud again.

By turning Tsotsi's background into a mystery, this passage prompts the reader to wonder what Tsotsi's true identity is and why he hates questions about himself. The passage also emphasizes once again that, at this point, the main emotion motivating Tsotsi is hatred: he hates questions about himself, and he picks jobs to disturb Boston because he hates Boston.

Soekie, a "coloured woman in her fifties," brings more alcohol to the men's table. Though born in a European area of the city, she lives in the township because her mother didn't want her. She writes to her mother asking to know her birthday but receives no reply. On her way back from the table, Soekie tells the woman in the corner, Rosie, that she needs to leave. The woman starts crying, and Soekie returns to the back room.

In apartheid South Africa, "coloured" was a legally enforced racial classification referring to people of mixed race. Since Soekie was born in a European—that is, white—neighborhood, her mother was probably white. The novel implies that Soekie's white mother had a romantic relationship with a Black man, became pregnant, and then rejected their child, either due to her own racism or to protect herself from legal repercussions (it was illegal under apartheid for a white person to have a sexual relationship with a non-white person). With Soekie's background, then, the novel is giving the reader another example of racism and apartheid destroying families and separating children from their parents.

Boston braces his hands on the table and says "decency." Butcher asks Boston what he's talking about, and Boston claims that decency made him sick. Butcher asks what decency is, and Boston replies that it's what Butcher isn't. He then sits beside Tsotsi and asks whether he knows what decency means. Tsotsi thinks Boston wants to wound him and inwardly expresses contempt for "books and words." He denies knowing about "decency" and asks Boston what it is. Boston says it's why he was sick, and Tsotsi asks whether it's a sickness. Boston laughs and says yes—it made him sick and it killed their victim. Tsotsi tells Boston to go to the doctor.

Boston knows what the word "decency" means, while Butcher and Tsotsi do not (or claim they don't). On one level, this detail hints that Boston may have had some education, which Butcher and Tsotsi were denied due to their poverty. Tsotsi's inward contempt for "books and words" while fighting with Boston also suggests that Tsotsi thinks Boston is more educated than he is. On another level, that Boston knows what "decency" means, while Butcher and Tsotsi don't, suggests that knowing what "decency" means symbolizes feeling sympathy for other people—Boston feels sympathy for Gumboot, while Butcher and Tsotsi do not.

Butcher keeps calling for Soekie. Boston leans closer to Tsotsi, says he wants to have a conversation, and asks Tsotsi's age. Tsotsi loathes Boston's questions because he can't answer them. He has few memories—fragments of children "scavenging," the police, and loneliness. Tsotsi doesn't think about himself, the past, or the future. He lives in the present and "his name was the name, in a way, of all men."

This passage hints that Tsotsi may have accepted the stereotyped identity of "tsotsi"—gangster—because he has lost his memories and thus his true identity. At the same time, by claiming that Tsotsi's name is "the name, in a way, of all men," the passage suggests that anyone in Tsotsi's situation might commit similar crimes.

Tsotsi asks Boston why he cares. Boston says he's older than Tsotsi, so Tsotsi should listen to him. At Tsotsi's age, he wanted to be a teacher and wore a tie like the one the man they murdered was wearing because of "decency." Tsotsi again tells Boston to go see a doctor. Boston begins to say something about Jesus Christ with "no blasphemy."

By saying he used to wear a tie like Gumboot's, Boston shows that he can see himself in the gang's victim—in other words, he is able to personally empathize with the victim. That Boston says the name Jesus Christ with "no blasphemy," meanwhile, suggests that he isn't just swearing but trying to talk to Tsotsi about religion—which hints that Boston's ability to feel sympathy for others may have something to do with his religious beliefs.

Soekie refills the men's drinks, gives Butcher a "dagga" cigarette, and again tells Rosie to leave. Butcher demands Soekie stop trying to move Rosie. Soekie notes Rosie used to be her friend and tells Butcher "no rough stuff." She returns to the back room.

In the South African context, "dagga" means cannabis. That Soekie tells Butcher "no rough stuff" suggests she thinks he might hurt Rosie. By leaving the situation instead of trying to protect Rosie from Butcher, Soekie reveals that she is so used to brutality that she does not believe she has the power or the choice to protect anyone, even a former friend.

Butcher and Die Aap smoke the cigarette while Butcher walks to Rosie and reaches under her dress's skirt. She begs him, "not in here," so he begins pushing her outside. Die Aap calls to Butcher, and Butcher invites him to join, so all three of them go outside. Tsotsi, alone with Boston, wants to flee but acts "outwardly the same, as always." He and Boston hear a yell from outside, and Boston asks where the others went. Tsotsi glances at Rosie's empty chair. As they hear another scream, Boston swears. Tsotsi asks whether he's feeling sick again, and Boston replies, "One's enough." Tsotsi denies the comparison between Rosie and Gumboot. When Boston asks why, Tsotsi points out Rosie won't be murdered.

This passage suggests, without stating explicitly, that Butcher and Die Aap take Rosie outside to rape her. Later, her screams are further evidence that she's being violently assaulted. Once again, Boston expresses sympathy for a victim of the gang—in this case, Rosie—without, however, doing anything to help the victim, which suggests that he lacks the courage or believes he lacks the power to intervene. Tsotsi, meanwhile, clings to his habits, acting "outwardly the same, as always," because he is psychologically dependent on his routines and afraid that Boston's sympathies and questions will somehow disrupt his life.

Boston asks Tsotsi whether he feels nothing for Gumboot or Rosie. Tsotsi asks what he means. Boston takes out a knife, slices his arm, and says that when they killed Gumboot, he felt like that inside. He asks whether anything makes Tsotsi feel like that. Tsotsi thinks he hates Boston more than ever, and knowing he's going to "do something about it" is what allows him to meet Boston's eyes. He reflects that Boston is trying to illuminate Tsotsi's inner world, where nobody—including Tsotsi himself—ever goes.

In this passage, Boston is not only expressing sympathy for the gang's victims, Gumboot and Rosie, but trying to sympathize with Tsotsi—to understand his psychology. Tsotsi, having embraced a stereotyped "gangster" identity, does not want to be understood as a unique, psychologically complex individual. So, he falls back on his habitual emotional reaction—hatred—in response to Boston's attempts to connect with him.

Boston asks whether a woman ever hurt Tsotsi and about Tsotsi's parents, sister, and dog. Tsotsi doesn't respond. Boston whispers that Tsotsi must have a soul—everyone does. Tsotsi punches Boston, who falls. Tsotsi hits him more. Slurring, Boston tells Tsotsi that eventually he'll experience feelings and won't know how to react: "God help you on that day." Tsotsi begins kicking Boston, and Soekie comes out of the back room to try to stop him. Butcher and Die Aap reenter the room and pull Tsotsi away, and then Tsotsi leaves.

Boston's questions about Tsotsi's parents and dog foreshadow the importance these figures may have in Tsotsi's mysterious, forgotten past. Tsotsi's violent response to Boston's questions about his past, meanwhile, suggests both that the past is important to an individual's identity and that Tsotsi has rejected his genuine identity in favor of a stereotyped one. Finally, since Boston claims religious concepts like "soul" and "God" are relevant to Tsotsi, the novel hints that religion will be important to Tsotsi's character development going forward.

CHAPTER 3

Leaving Soekie's, Tsotsi passes Rosie but ignores her. Boston's words keep playing in his mind. Tsotsi watches a house party across the street and sees two girls run from the house chased by a drunk man. He almost manages to focus on the moment when the drunk man falls in a way that reminds him of Boston on the floor. Walking along, Tsotsi passes a church and begins to run "like a man possessed" out of the township toward the white suburb.

Tsotsi ignoring Rosie—when he knows Butcher and Die Aap have just raped her—emphasizes once again his lack of sympathy for his gang's victims. Yet Boston's argument for sympathy and his religious language have clearly affected Tsotsi: when he sees a church, he runs away "like a man possessed," a figure of speech that refers to demonic possession and suggests that Tsotsi is in some sense opposed to or afraid of God.

Tsotsi runs until his mind goes blank and then stops under a lamppost. Seeing headlights, he realizes it may be police—they prowl the white suburb—so he slips into the darkness. Walking aimlessly, he sees a stand of bluegum trees and decides to rest there. As soon as he sits under a tree, he remembers Boston again. Just as he recruited Die Aap for his strength and Butcher for his violence, Tsotsi recruited Boston for his intelligence, which helps the gang elude capture. Tsotsi wonders why the arrangement stopped working. He concludes that it's because Boston asked questions Tsotsi didn't know the answers to.

By mentioning that police prowl the white suburb—presumably to keep out non-white people—the novel reminds the reader that in apartheid South Africa, the law served primarily not to uphold justice or protect all citizens, but to enforce segregation and oppress young Black men like Tsotsi. Tsotsi's conclusion that the gang is failing because Boston asked too many questions about Tsotsi's forgotten past, meanwhile, reveals how frightened Tsotsi is of his own true identity.

Tsotsi imagines his inner life as "darkness." When he sleeps, he doesn't dream, and both his outer and inner worlds are dark. To keep this from bothering him, he rigidly follows a few rules. First, every morning when he wakes up remembering nothing, he immediately checks his **knife**. He tests its sharpness and sharpens it if it's dull. Otherwise, he plays with it. It makes him feel better: "The knife was not only his weapon, but also a fetish, a talisman that conjured away bad spirits and established him securely in his life."

Tsotsi's knife, a violent weapon, represents his stereotyped identity as a "gangster." He uses his daily ritual surrounding the knife to reinforce his "gangster" identity and to distract himself from his own inner life. By comparing the knife to a "fetish"—a magical object associated by European colonizers with indigenous African religions—that protects Tsotsi from "bad spirits," the novel seems to be associating indigenous African religious beliefs with violence, in contrast with Christianity, which it has so far associated with sympathy. Despite the novel's critique of apartheid and white supremacy, then, it may be implicitly reinforcing racist assumptions about indigenous African religions here.

Second, Tsotsi refuses to think about himself or try to remember his own past. He finds this rule difficult to follow, because sometimes the external world elicits vague memories from him. For example, "the smell of wet newspaper" is suggestive to him. One time, he was playing dice on the street when a policeman walked by, and Tsotsi thought he recognized the beaten young man (later revealed to be Petah) in his custody. When the young man saw Tsotsi, he looked excited and smiled. When Tsotsi didn't acknowledge him, the young man called Tsotsi "David," identified himself as "Petah," and asked for help. Tsotsi, ignoring him, continued to play dice.

In this passage, interestingly, Tsotsi's refusal to remember his past and his true identity coincides with his refusal to sympathize: Tsotsi ignores Petah's requests for help both because he doesn't want to remember Petah and because he doesn't sympathize with Petah's distress. Thus, the passage suggests that memory is necessary to maintain a true, individual identity—and a true, individual identity is necessary to be able to sympathize with others.

Third, Tsotsi won't allow people to ask questions about him, because questions make him aware of "the vast depths of his darkness." These empty depths threaten him with a "nothingness," which he fears. Tsotsi believes that hiding beneath external reality, including "men's prayers," is nothingness. Violence allows Tsotsi to assert himself against this terrifying nothingness.

This passage includes the novel's first account of Tsotsi's religious beliefs. In contrast with Boston's implied Christianity, Tsotsi believes in a "nothingness" that is more real than "men's prayers"—in other words, Tsotsi does not seem to believe in God or in any ultimate meaning to life.

Tsotsi, tired of thinking, stands to leave when he hears footsteps. Hiding behind a bluegum tree, he sees a young Black woman carrying something and glancing behind her. As she approaches, Tsotsi sees she's carrying a shoebox. Heartbeat quickening, Tsotsi moves through the trees to intercept her. As she enters the trees, he grabs her, puts a hand over her mouth to muffle her scream, and shoves her against a tree.

Just as Butcher and Die Aap raped Rosie seemingly as a matter of habit, without thinking much about their actions, so Tsotsi reacts in a stereotyped "gangster" fashion to the appearance of a woman alone—he moves to assault her.

Tsotsi puts his knee between her legs and, while she struggles and holds tighter to the shoebox, examines her. She pulls her mouth free and screams again. Something about the shoebox catches his attention, and he moves away. She looks at the shoebox "with a horror deeper than her fear of him." She pushes the shoebox at him and, when he takes it, runs away. The shoebox lid falls off, and Tsotsi sees a baby inside. He recognizes that what made him move away from the woman was the sound of a baby crying.

That the woman looks at the shoebox containing her baby "with a horror deeper than her fear of" Tsotsi—and that she subsequently abandons her baby to Tsotsi, a strange man who seemed about to sexually assault her—suggests that something has gone terribly wrong in the relationship between mother and child here. This wrongness foreshadows the importance of failed and destroyed parent-child relationships in the rest of the novel.

CHAPTER 4

Cassim is trying to sell a woman fabric in his shop when a young man (Tsotsi) walks in. Cassim checks who else is in the shop, counts eight people, and judges it "enough." He looks at Tsotsi and sees a bad "type." He sells fabric to the woman, looks again, and sees Tsotsi is gone. When he asks his wife whether she saw him, his wife replies, "God forgive us." Tsotsi comes back half an hour later. Cassim, scared, gives an older male customer extra tobacco and tells the customer frenetically about his mother back in India and about Indian history. Again, Tsotsi leaves. Cassim wonders aloud to his wife what Tsotsi wanted.

As soon as Tsotsi walks into Cassim's shop, Cassim is looking around to make sure there are "enough" people to protect him from Tsotsi. Cassim and his wife look at Tsotsi and see a "type," not an individual. This detail suggests that while Tsotsi has chosen to embrace his stereotyped "gangster" identity, other people also impose that stereotype on him. It also suggests that apartheid's white supremacist ideology affects not only how white people see non-white people, but also how non-white people see each other. Although Cassim is Indian, another legally oppressed racial class under South African apartheid, he seems to have absorbed racist stereotypes about young Black men.

Tsotsi comes back when there are no other customers. Cassim's wife and children hide in a back room. Tsotsi demands milk, but Cassim thinks he must have misheard. Tsotsi again demands milk. Cassim, so afraid he cannot see Tsotsi's face, asks what kind. Tsotsi says, "Baby milk." Cassim runs to the door behind which his family is hiding and says, "Baby milk!" His family starts crying because they think Tsotsi has stabbed Cassim. Their tears remind Cassim of something. He runs to Tsotsi, tells him he wants condensed milk, and grabs a tin. Tsotsi examines the tin. Cassim, realizing Tsotsi can't read the label, tells Tsotsi it's excellent baby milk. Tsotsi pays Cassim and leaves.

Cassim simply cannot believe that Tsotsi is trying to find milk for a baby. His disbelief reveals that due to his stereotypes about poor young Black men like Tsotsi, he cannot imagine Tsotsi in the role of parent or caretaker. By revealing that Tsotsi cannot read, meanwhile, the novel hints at the poverty and lack of education from which Tsotsi has suffered in his mysterious past.

Tsotsi, leaving Cassim's store, makes himself stop while holding the tin to show himself he doesn't care whether anyone is watching him, even though it doesn't seem "right" to him to buy baby milk.

Tsotsi, like Cassim, has embraced negative stereotypes about himself and does not feel "right" taking on the positive role of parent or caretaker—yet, curiously, he takes on the role anyway.

It's Saturday. On Saturdays, people are happy because the work week is over, they've been paid, and the next day is Sunday, also not a workday. Tsotsi ignores this Saturday behavior because he recognizes it. He rushes home, reinforces the door with a chair, blocks a hole in the wall with some wood, and removes the shoebox from under his bed. Although the baby smells, Tsotsi is too shocked by its being to notice: "This was man. This small, almost ancient, very useless and abandoned thing was the beginning of a man."

By describing what people habitually do on Saturdays, the novel reminds us that most people, not just Tsotsi, follow habits or patterns of behavior. Tsotsi's secretiveness when he gets back to his room reminds the reader that he, by contrast, is doing something unusual and strange for him: assuming a caretaking, parental role. Tsotsi's association of the baby with "man"—that is, with all mankind—suggests that in addition to having stereotyped identities and real, individual identities, people can also have true group identities like "human." By attributing the group identity of "man" to the baby—an identity that Tsotsi, of course, also shares—Tsotsi may be starting to identify with and thus sympathize with the baby.

Tsotsi, becoming aware of the smell, lays a coat on his table, removes the baby from the box, and puts it on the coat. He feels "proud" for using the coat but then "frown[s] at himself." Deducing the bad smell is coming from the baby, not the box, Tsotsi tries to figure out what to do. He decides to take off the baby's "rags" and replace them with his own clothes.

This passage reveals Tsotsi's ambivalent feelings about taking on a parental or caretaking role. On the one hand, he is "proud" of caring for the baby, but on the other hand, he "frown[s]" at his own pride—which implies that he thinks pride in caretaking is incompatible with the stereotyped "gangster" identity he has cultivated.

Tsotsi fetches a shirt from the cardboard box he uses as a dresser. Unwrapping the baby, he notices its rags used to be "a torn petticoat and an old pair of blue bloomers." The baby cries, which disconcerts Tsotsi. When he has unwrapped the baby, he realizes with surprise that the baby is male. Lifting him out of the rags, Tsotsi sees that the baby has been lying in feces. He cleans the baby with some of the rags, rewraps him in his shirt, and returns him to the shoebox.

That the baby has been wrapped in "a torn petticoat and an old pair of blue bloomers"—that is, women's underclothes—hints that his mother did want to care for him (she took the trouble to wrap him) but lacked the necessary resources (she couldn't afford baby clothes). Given the poverty in which apartheid keeps the novel's Black characters, this detail may be implying that a lack of economic opportunity in a white supremacist society prevented the woman from being able to provide for her child and thus made her desperate enough to abandon him.

Tsotsi looks at the tin, whose label he recognizes but can't read. He remembers trying to feed the baby bread and water that morning. He knows condensed milk and baby's milk aren't the same, but Cassim told him the tin's label said baby's milk. The baby keeps crying. Tsotsi wishes Boston was here, but he cuts off that thought because it's "too late." He tells the baby that it'll drink the condensed milk the same way he does.

Tsotsi wishes for his one educated acquaintance, Boston, to help him with the baby, despite having violently attacked Boston the last time they talked—which suggests both how seriously Tsotsi takes caring for the baby and how out of his depth he feels in assuming a parental role.

Tsotsi pokes holes in the tin with his **knife**, tries the milk, and pours some onto a spoon. He gives some to the baby, who stops crying. After feeding the baby 10 spoonsful, Tsotsi stops and looks out the window. He worries that Butcher and Die Aap may visit soon and discover him taking care of the baby. Tsotsi decides he needs to take the baby elsewhere. He considers taking him to Soekie but imagines her asking where and why he obtained a baby. Then, he asks himself why he took the baby but quickly dismisses that question in favor of the more practical question: where.

Previously, Tsotsi's knife reinforced his stereotyped "gangster" identity. Now, he is using it, rather awkwardly and inappropriately, to open a milk tin for a baby—a use that represents Tsotsi's shift away from his "gangster" identity and toward a parental role. Yet Tsotsi still identifies somewhat with the mindless gangster stereotype: he doesn't want the other gang members to know about the baby, and he refuses to explore his own inner world by thinking about his motives for accepting the baby.

Out the window, Tsotsi sees "one of the demolition squads," men whose job it is to destroy the township piece by piece. He decides to stash the baby in one of the deserted, demolished areas, near the white suburb. Tsotsi packs up the milk and spoon, puts the lid over the baby in the shoebox, and leaves his room.

Under apartheid law, people had to live in racially segregated neighborhoods. To enforce segregation, the government would order demolished any non-white neighborhoods they thought were too close to white neighborhoods and force the non-white residents to move elsewhere. The "demolition squads" that Tsotsi sees have the job of destroying the non-white neighborhoods near the white suburb.

Walking through the ruins, Tsotsi does not think about why the demolitions occurred. The ruins are deserted. The only people who used to visit them were children who "scavenge[d]" or played there, but even the children have now deserted this place. Tsotsi decides to put the baby in the ruin that used to be a woman named MaRhabatse's house. The men demolishing the house had to remove the door to her room because she was so large she couldn't get through. Her exit foreshadowed the destruction of the whole township. Tsotsi decides on her house's ruin because part of its roof is still in place, and he wants the baby to have shade.

The anecdote about MaRhabatse illustrates how apartheid's destruction of non-white neighborhoods to enforce segregation cruelly uprooted non-white individuals who had been living in the same community for a long time. That Tsotsi doesn't think about the reasons for the demolitions implies that he ignores not only his individual past and identity but his group identity as a member of a historically oppressed class, Black South Africans.

Tsotsi opens the shoebox to check on the baby, puts it in the shadowed corner, and thinks. He has realized that taking and caring for the baby doesn't "fit into the pattern of his life." Tsotsi asks himself why he's cared for the baby, when usually he kills. He wonders whether he plans to kill the baby in some special way. Although Tsotsi wishes that were the case, he realizes that he is "chancing his hand at a game he [has] never dared play and the baby [is] the dice."

Before encountering the baby, Tsotsi clung tightly to his stereotyped "gangster" activity and violent habits. When he compares taking care of the baby to playing dice, he is acknowledging that in taking on a parental role, he is gambling with—and may lose—his whole previous identity and "the pattern of his life."

Tsotsi recalls the details of the night before: the baby's cry, the woman giving him the shoebox, the lid coming off and revealing the baby. All of a sudden, Tsotsi had a memory of a "yellow bitch"—that is, a **yellow dog**, which is female—"crawling" at him and "whimper[ing]." Tsotsi came back from the memory kneeling and saw the baby on the ground. The baby had summoned a memory of Tsotsi's, which made him curious—and terrified him, because he'd never wanted to know about his past before. He now realizes that he kept the baby because the baby inspired a memory, and he wanted it to happen again. Tsotsi leaves the baby in the demolished ruins but resolves to come back to feed him the following day.

Tsotsi experiences his flashback to the yellow dog immediately after the desperate woman abandons her baby with him—thus, the novel clearly connects the yellow dog to the idea of failed or destroyed families. Yet the dog remains mysterious. For example, the reader does not know why it was "crawling" or "whimper[ing]" or in what context Tsotsi saw it. This mystery hints at revelations yet to come. Meanwhile, Tsotsi's realization that he wants to remember his past is a major turning point for the character: he is moving further from his stereotyped "gangster" identity and beginning to seek his true, individual identity.

CHAPTER 5

The same Saturday Tsotsi takes the baby to the ruins and thinks though his behavior, Gumboot Dhlamini's funeral occurs, and Boston regains consciousness. The funeral occurs at a plot of ground where people were already burying their loved ones and where the authorities, after the fact, put up a fence and planted some trees. Termites ate the fence, and the trees mostly died. The "Reverend Henry Ransome of the Church of Christ the Redeemer in the township" performs the funeral. The gravedigger, Big Jacob, asks the Reverend who Gumboot is, but the Reverend doesn't know. He walks back to his church in distress.

The authorities' half-hearted and unsuccessful attempts to decorate the Black township's cemetery shows how the South African government under apartheid neglected and oppressed its Black citizens. That the Rev. Henry Ransome doesn't know Gumboot Dhlamini's name, meanwhile, suggests that while the Reverend may have good intentions, religious ministry is not enough to overcome racism and segregation under apartheid: although the novel has not explicitly stated this, it is implied that Gumboot was Black while the Reverend is white, and it seems the white Reverend does not know his Black potential congregants very well.

Boston wakes up to see a boy, playing with a bicycle-wheel rim, watching him. Die Aap and Butcher have deposited Boston in a back alley. This is the third time Boston has woken since Tsotsi beat him. The previous times, he passed out again from the pain. This time, he sits up and notices someone has stolen his pants. He sees "a badly torn khaki pair" in the alley. Boston tries to say something, can't, and waves at the khakis. The boy runs away. Boston creeps to the trousers, but movement causes him pain, and he ends up weeping. The boy returns to stare at Boston. Boston exits the alley without knowing his destination, noting what Tsotsi did to him and thinking, "It's all finished now."

Various details in this passage—that a child is using a bicycle-wheel rim as a toy, that someone has stolen Boston's pants, and so forth—illustrate the poverty in which the Black township lives under apartheid. Boston's thought, "It's all finished now," hints that while he disliked the gang's violence, he may have derived his identity from membership in the gang and feels that his life has ended since Tsotsi, the gang's leader, has rejected him.

Butcher and Die Aap are waiting on the street outside Tsotsi's room, arguing about whether Tsotsi will show up. Neither knows whether Tsotsi beating Boston means the gang has broken up. Butcher and Die Aap really began worrying about the gang the day after the beating, when they didn't have Tsotsi to tell them what to do. They wandered around all day until they arrived outside Tsotsi's. They've just resolved to leave when they spot Tsotsi walking up the street.

This passage reveals how Butcher and Die Aap are trapped in habits and appear to lack control over their own lives. When an unexpected event like Tsotsi beating Boston interrupts the gang's habits, they do not know what to do. Rather than making choices for themselves, they feel they need someone else, Tsotsi, to make choices for them.

Tsotsi walks past Butcher and Die Aap without speaking because he hasn't decided what to do about them. When a woman with a baby walks past, Butcher yells at her to feed the baby next to him. The woman spits and hurries away. Tsotsi comes to his door to watch what's going on. Butcher yells an obscene suggestion after the woman. Tsotsi, seeing the woman with the baby, has a thought.

Once again, members of the gang—in this case, Butcher—seem to have a habitual reaction upon encountering a woman who is alone: automatically, without thinking about it, they assault or harass the woman. Although the novel does not tell us what Tsotsi thinks when he sees the woman with the baby, it seems to be something different from what Butcher is thinking—which illustrates that Tsotsi, unlike Butcher, is breaking with the gang's habits.

Butcher asks Tsotsi whether they should "find one and play." Tsotsi shakes his head but invites Butcher and Die Aap inside. Inside, Butcher asks about the smell. Tsotsi, without replying, throws the baby's old rags into the backyard. Butcher tries to tell stories like Boston used to, but all his stories are very short. Tsotsi asks Butcher and Die Aap where Boston is. Butcher says he doesn't know. Trying to maintain conversation, he adds that Boston could be at Soekie's, and that he and Die Aap left Boston in the back alley behind it.

Since Butcher has just been sexually harassing a woman on the street, his ominous phrase "find one and play" seems to indicate that he wants the gang to find another woman and sexually assault her. By refusing, Tsotsi breaks further with the gang's old habits. Now that Tsotsi is breaking with the gang's habits and with his old "gangster" identity, the members of the gang don't know how to relate to one another—they can't even keep up a regular conversation.

Tsotsi stops thinking about Boston because he has started thinking about milk, the baby, and his memory of the **yellow dog**. He realizes he can't control his thoughts. He's also become aware of Butcher and Die Aap as individuals, and he doesn't know what he's supposed to tell them to do. Tsotsi has become conscious of making choices, which disturbs him and prevents him from choosing. Agitated, Tsotsi walks to the door. Butcher asks him what they're going to do, and Tsotsi blurts that they're going to the city. Even though that could mean anything, Butcher and Die Aap follow Tsotsi. On the way out, Butcher asks Die Aap whether he smelled the odor in Tsotsi's room.

When Tsotsi was acting out the stereotypical role of "gangster," he didn't feel conscious of making choices—he just did what a "gangster" would naturally do. Now that his relationship to the baby and his memories are making him aware of himself as an individual, not a stereotype, he realizes that he is making choices—in fact, he has been making choices all along. Meanwhile, the yellow dog once again comes to Tsotsi's mind while he is thinking about the baby, suggesting the dog has something to do with parenthood.

CHAPTER 6

By "city," Tsotsi means Terminal Place, a street junction near the gasworks where people shop from stores and carts. At Terminal Place, the buses make journeys between the city and the townships. Terminal Place becomes active in the morning, when workers start taking buses. By dawn, commercial activity starts. Activity dies down by nightfall, because "night is never safe." Tsotsi arrives at Terminal Place in the evening on a bus. He leaves without Butcher or Die Aap 15 minutes after he arrives, having found a prospective target.

People have to take buses between the city and the townships because of racist apartheid laws: non-white people are allowed to work for white people in the city if they have the required pass, but they are not allowed to live in "white" areas due to apartheid's segregation laws. So, people have to pay to commute from the non-white townships. The reminder that "night is never safe," meanwhile, suggests that poverty and oppression under apartheid have increased crime and made the areas near the townships dangerous.

The target is Morris Tshabalala, who still considers himself a man despite losing his legs in an accident and lacking hope. When a foot steps on Morris's hand, he cries out, "Whelp of a yellow bitch!"—in other words, puppy of a female **yellow dog**. He cries out not because of the pain but because he dislikes being seen. Whereas usually people apologize when they step on Morris, this man (Tsotsi) doesn't reply. Morris, disturbed by Tsotsi's eyes, grunts and moves away.

Morris Tshabalala curses Tsotsi by calling him the "whelp of a yellow bitch"—literally, Morris is saying that Tsotsi is the puppy of a female yellow dog. Thus Morris's curse mysteriously associates the yellow dog Tsotsi has begun to remember with Tsotsi's mother, whom he can't remember.

Morris doesn't move away from Tsotsi because he is afraid. Morris doesn't consider anything fear that fails to measure up to the "terror" of the mining collapse he experienced. The mine was a dark world where time was measured differently and men sang about their estrangement from the sun, the moon, and their wives. When the shaft collapsed, the workers panicked. Morris Tshabalala's legs were crushed under a beam. Wondering whether he is getting old, Morris calls Tsotsi a "Tsotsi shit" and a "yellow bitch shit."

South Africa contains a number of gold mines. Before and during apartheid, Black men did the dangerous work of mining the gold for little pay while white men reaped the major profits. This economic structure led to Morris losing his legs—which shows how racist structures like apartheid seriously harm people, even when no one individual is intending the harm. When Morris calls Tsotsi a "tsotsi," meanwhile, it reminds the reader that Tsotsi has not only embraced this stereotyped identity in the past—other people also impose it on him.

Crowds impede Morris's progress as he drags himself toward his usual eating house. He is happy when he reaches an empty street and feels the warmth that the "paving stones" have absorbed from the sun. He thinks how he likes warmth because his legs were cold during the accident, so "cold is the touch of death." He wonders how much longer he will feel warmth. His hands are laboring too much, carrying him for six years, and they have trouble catching sensations now.

In contrast with Tsotsi, Morris has clear memories of his past and acts in response to them, which shows how memory shapes present behavior and identity. For example, because of how cold he felt during his accident, Morris associates cold with "the touch of death," loves being warm, and seeks out warmth.

Morris stops to check his hands and looks behind him. He sees a man sitting by a store and, beyond him, the dwindling crowds. Morris, starting to move again, wonders why he continues living and what he has to live for. He stops to rest. It's getting dark. Morris sees the same man sitting by a different store, closer by. He notices it's the man who stepped on his hand earlier—that is, Tsotsi. Morris, heading back toward the crowds, thinks that he was correct in hating money because Tsotsi may kill him for it.

When Morris wonders what he has to live for, it shows how the profoundly apartheid economic structures that led to his mining accident have harmed him. That he hates money, meanwhile, suggests he knows that white greed for money led to his accident—which in turn shows that Morris, unlike Tsotsi, is consciously aware of how white supremacy and apartheid have shaped his life.

Morris wonders how he could survive without money. He recalls begging an old woman who called him "John my poor boy" and "Johnny poor boy" to employ him as her gardener. Instead, she gave him a penny and shut the door on him. Morris threw out the penny and kept seeking employment. People dropped change to him in the street, and he threw it out, until one day he was too exhausted. Although he hated the money, which he hadn't earned, he couldn't throw out the amount he had been given without drawing notice.

Although the novel does not explicitly state the race of the old woman who refused to employ Morris, she called him "boy" although he was a grown man, which implies that she was white and engaged in condescending interpersonal racism. That people kept giving Morris charity when he wanted work suggests a mismatch between how he identified himself and how other people identified him: he identified as a worker, but because he was disabled, other people stereotyped him as a beggar and failed to treat him with dignity.

After that day, Morris began begging. He learned begging spots and tricks until he could obtain enough money for food, but his pride never recovered. After six years of begging, he's become bitter. He yells at people to "go to hell," but they don't hear him.

This passage illustrates how people internalize and come to identify with the stereotypes, like "beggar" or "tsotsi," that other people impose on them.

In the present, Morris approaches a newspaper salesman who sells to white people. By the salesman's stand, Morris looks through the crowd for Tsotsi but can't see him. The salesman tells Morris that "they" have "shot a hole in the moon." Watching the salesman's customers, Morris thinks that if he were a real man he would have killed Tsotsi, and that he lost his legs for these crowds to have gold. "It is for your gold I had to dig. That is what destroyed me. You are walking on stolen legs." He looks with contempt at the customers' "thin, unsightly lips" and thinks their language "crude." Some drop change for him. When he takes the money, he doesn't look at it.

The salesman's claim that some unidentified "they" have "shot a hole in the moon" may be an allusion to the first time a rocket—the USSR's Luna 2—landed on the moon, in which case the novel is set in late 1959. Morris's claim that the salesman's white customers are "walking on stolen legs" makes clear that he knows white supremacist economic systems led to his crippling accident. This knowledge leads him to feel contempt for stereotypically white facial features ("thin, unsightly lips") and the language the white South Africans speak (probably Afrikaans). That Morris is aware of how apartheid has harmed him, while Tsotsi is not, suggests that individual memory is necessary to correctly diagnose social problems.

Morris catches sight of Tsotsi watching him and curses. He resolves that despite being crippled, he is man enough to face down Tsotsi. Morris starts moving. The salesman calls after him about a penny he's left behind, but Morris ignores him. Then the salesman throws the penny at Morris, but Morris doesn't pick it up. Instead, Morris is thinking that the crowds and lights will protect him from Tsotsi. He hopes a policeman will stop Tsotsi to demand his pass.

Under apartheid law, Black people were required to carry passes and could be arrested if they didn't have one. Given Morris's awareness of apartheid's evils, it is ironic that he's hoping a white policeman enforcing apartheid laws will stop Tsotsi and thereby save Morris from him.

Watching Tsotsi, Morris wonders whether his hands are "soft," whether he has a mother, and what his relationship with her was like. But he's "really asking how do men come to be what they become." He considers that other people might think about him the way he's thinking about Tsotsi.

Morris shows his ability to sympathize with Tsotsi, despite the threat Tsotsi poses to him, when he wonders about Tsotsi's hands and realizes that other people may see him the way he sees Tsotsi. When Morris wonders about Tsotsi's mother, and the novel connects this to the question of "how do men come to be what they become," the novel implicitly suggests that a person's parents are centrally important to their individual identities—which may explain why Tsotsi, who cannot remember his parents, has until recently embraced a stereotyped identity and rejected his individual identity.

Morris reaches a dark side street that leads to a restaurant. He's tired and worried Tsotsi will kill him if he goes down the dark street. Morris considers leaving his money somewhere visible. Then a car stalls nearby. Two men get out to push it, while women stay inside the car and laugh at them. The two men sit on the bumper and smoke a cigarette. One of them points out Morris, calling him a "poor kaffir." Then the two men start pushing the car again. Morris follows them down the side street onto another, larger street that's not as well-lit as the main street but still busy.

In South Africa, the word "kaffir" is an anti-Black racial slur. That even white people who seem to be sympathizing with Morris casually call him this slur suggests how deeply ingrained anti-Black racism was in apartheid South African society. Morris's clever use of the stalled car to elude Tsotsi, meanwhile, shows how much he wants to live despite the harms that apartheid has inflicted on him.

Morris orders soup and bread at the Bantu Eating House. The owner, who usually banters with Morris, is too exhausted today. The eating house is poor, the food cheap. On the walls are only an advertisement for "lotion for straightening curly hair" and a sign in Shangaan saying the restaurant won't take credit.

"Bantu" is a large, internally diverse group of African peoples who speak the same family of languages. In South Africa, "Shangaan" refers to a particular Bantu tribe. The restaurant's name, "Bantu Eating House," suggests that it serves African food, while the sign in Shangaan suggests that the patrons are Black people who speak an indigenous African language. The dilapidation of the restaurant and the advertisement for "lotion for straightening curly hair"—an advertisement, in other words, for white supremacist beauty standards—illustrate once again the economic and cultural oppression of Black South Africans under apartheid.

Morris eats, orders more food, and checks the street for Tsotsi. Although he sees people who look like Tsotsi, he doesn't see the man himself. He orders some coffee and, drinking it, admits internally that he was frightened. He realizes he wants to live.

Morris's self-reflection about his desire to live contrasts with Tsotsi's relative lack of self-reflection—another detail betraying how important memory is to understanding oneself and one's identity.

A voice tells Morris that he didn't hear him. It's the newspaper salesman, giving Morris back the penny Morris left behind. The salesman lectures Morris briefly on the value of a penny, telling him people will commit murder over a penny. Morris takes the penny and tells the salesman about Tsotsi following him. The salesman calls people like Tsotsi "mad dogs" who "bite their own people," and Morris says that if he were a real man, he would have killed Tsotsi. The salesman says that then the authorities would have executed Morris. Morris asks what a man is supposed to do. The salesman replies that he should go home, thank God, and deny responsibility. He leaves.

By comparing Tsotsi to a dog, the salesman reminds the reader of the mysterious connection between the yellow dog and Tsotsi's mother. Meanwhile, by saying that men like Tsotsi "bite their own people," the salesman is suggesting that apartheid not only harms Black South Africans by depriving them of economic opportunity, but also encourages them to harm each other by making violent crime one of their only opportunities to earn money. Finally, by urging Morris to go home and thank God, the salesman seems to suggest that religion is not a powerful force in people's lives but rather a consolation they indulge in when they are powerless to act.

Morris drinks his coffee and checks the street but doesn't see Tsotsi. The restaurant owner tells Morris he's closing. Though afraid, Morris decides to go home—that is, to the abandoned hut where he squats. On the way, he realizes Tsotsi is following him. Morris's hands are bleeding, and he is holding back tears. He raises his money high so Tsotsi can see it and leaves it under a streetlamp. Pausing at the next streetlamp, Morris sees Tsotsi kick the money.

In this chapter, the novel has been giving the reader Morris's perspective on his interactions with Tsotsi while withholding Tsotsi's perspective. When Tsotsi kicks Morris's money, it's another break with Tsotsi's habits—the last time Tsotsi's gang murdered a man, Gumboot Dhlamini, they also took his money. Thus the novel is foreshadowing a potential change in Tsotsi's character while withholding from the reader exactly what it is.

Tsotsi continues pursuing Morris, who throws stones at him. Although Morris throws hard, he doesn't hit Tsotsi. Tsotsi vanishes from Morris's sight, and Morris begins swearing. He enters the darkness and anticipates this is "the moment and the place for which the young one had waited so patiently the whole night."

Morris believes that he has entered "the place for which the young one had waited so patiently the whole night"—in other words, that Tsotsi is going to act according to his stereotyped "gangster" identity and kill Morris now that they're alone in a dark place. Yet the reader knows that Tsotsi has already broken with his old "gangster" habits by rejecting Morris's money. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, in which the reader does not know whether Tsotsi will act according to his stereotyped "gangster" identity and kill Morris or break with his old habits and make a different choice.

CHAPTER 7

Later, Tsotsi will realize that he should have killed Morris before Morris reached the main street. By not killing him then, Tsotsi will experience unexpected consequences, as he did under the bluegum trees. When Tsotsi steps on Morris's hand—not on purpose—he's been thinking about his memory of the **yellow dog**. Morris calling him "whelp of a yellow bitch" at that moment startles and terrifies Tsotsi. Tsotsi, filled with "burning hate" for Morris, decides to kill him, as is "natural in the pattern of his life."

Chapter 7 goes back in time to retell the events of Chapter 6 while giving the reader access to Tsotsi's perspective. By connecting Tsotsi's interactions with Morris to his experience under the bluegum trees—where Tsotsi accepted the abandoned baby—the novel hints that in his interactions with Morris, Tsotsi will somehow break with his old habits and his stereotyped "gangster" identity, just as he did when he began caring for the baby. Yet initially, Tsotsi's reaction to Morris is in keeping with his stereotyped identity—feeling threatened by Morris's mention of the mysterious yellow dog, he reacts with kneejerk "hate," and decides to kill Morris because it fits "the pattern of his life," or in other words, his "gangster" habits.

In economic terms, Morris is not a good target for Tsotsi, because beggars don't make much money. Nevertheless, Tsotsi follows Morris, engrossed by his disability. Eventually he realizes Morris carries himself like the **yellow dog** of Tsotsi's memory, which leads Tsotsi to realize that the yellow dog's back legs were "useless." Tsotsi becomes fascinated by Morris and so misses opportunities to kill him. Without knowing where his certainty comes from, Tsotsi is certain that Morris's disability and ostracism from society represent "the final reality to life."

Just as Tsotsi became invested in the baby when the baby helped him regain a memory, so he becomes strangely invested in Morris when Morris's disability helps him understand that memory better—something had harmed the yellow dog's legs. Tsotsi's feeling that Morris's disability and oppression represent "the final reality to life," meanwhile, may hint that Tsotsi is becoming more aware of how apartheid (the ultimate cause of Morris's accident) has shaped not only Morris's existence but his own and those of everyone around him.

Tsotsi has felt this certainty before, though less forcefully. It reminds him of the time Petah, while being escorted by a policeman, called out to Tsotsi while he was playing dice and referred to Tsotsi as David. That incident made Tsotsi realize the "world [is] an ugly place," an ugliness manifested in Butcher's hands, Gumboot Dhlamini's corpse, and the "stunted" trees in the township cemetery. Although this certainty has recurred in Tsotsi's mind several times, he feels that it's intensified and embodied in Morris.

Tsotsi does not make explicit what links all the different "ugly" things and incidents he remembers here. While the incident with Petah involved the arrest (and probable beating) of a young Black man by white police, the murder of Gumboot Dhlamini involved an exploited Black mine worker murdered by another socially marginalized Black man (Butcher), and the "stunted" trees in the township cemetery represent the half-hearted, failed attempts of the white-run government to care about the living conditions of Black South Africans. The novel thus implies that Tsotsi is realizing more fully the ugliness of white supremacy and Black oppression under apartheid.

Tsotsi only identifies that he's made a mistake in letting Morris reach the main street when he observes Morris stop at the newspaper stand. Morris looks back, seems relieved when he can't find Tsotsi, and gets scared when he eventually sees Tsotsi again. Tsotsi begins to have a feeling for Morris that is neither hatred nor disgust. Tsotsi recognizes the feeling but cannot identify it. Although aware he is undergoing some strange experience, Tsotsi isn't sure what it is.

Up to this point, Tsotsi's habitual, knee-jerk feeling toward other people has been hatred. That he is beginning to feel something other than hatred toward Morris shows that he is breaking with his old habits.


When Morris stops before the dimly lit side street, Tsotsi thinks he has the looks and mannerisms of a dog. Tsotsi keeps insisting to himself that he doesn't know or care about Morris in order to hold off the feeling he can't identify, which makes him wish Morris wouldn't move into the side street. When Morris escapes behind the stalled car the two men are pushing, Tsotsi feels "relief." He realizes that for the first time, he is sympathizing with a person he intends to kill.

This passage includes a major turning point for Tsotsi's character. Earlier in the novel, when Boston asked whether Tsotsi ever sympathized with the gang's victims, Tsotsi seemed to deny it—but Boston predicted that one day, Tsotsi would have such feelings and wouldn't know what to do with them. Now Boston's prediction about Tsotsi is coming true.

Tsotsi spies on Morris as he goes into the Bantu Eating House. He buys food from an Indian shop across the street and waits, considering his sympathy for Morris. He concludes that the issue is really Morris's feeling, not his own—Tsotsi is "realizing something of what the other man felt." He links his sympathy with Morris to Boston being sick after they killed Gumboot. Though Tsotsi doesn't fully understand sympathy, he compares it to a sudden illumination that allows him to see Morris. The light of sympathy also allows Tsotsi to see the baby, Boston, and Gumboot. Beyond them, Tsotsi senses "an infinity" and "a brighter, intense revelation."

Tsotsi thinks of sympathy not only as a feeling, but also as a kind of knowledge that allows him to understand what other people feel and to see them more clearly. His sense of "revelation" and "infinity" in his sympathy nebulously connects sympathy to God, since the word "revelation" has religious connotations—it can refer to knowledge that God bestows directly on human beings—and since "infinity," or limitlessness, is associated with God in the major monotheistic religions.

Tsotsi drops the food he has bought and goes searching for his reflection, thinking his appearance must have changed after his internal experiences. He sees his reflection in a store window, but it vanishes when he gets close. When he moves further away, what appears is "the shape of a man," which could be Tsotsi, Boston, Butcher, or Morris with legs. Tsotsi finds this thought oddly reassuring.

Previously, when looking at the baby, Tsotsi associated the baby with generic "man"—that is, with the group identity "human." After beginning to sympathize with Morris, he looks at himself in a store window and also sees a generic "shape of a man." This passage hints that Tsotsi is coming to embrace a true group identity—human—as he begins to reject his old, stereotyped identity of "gangster." It also hints that sympathizing with others is helping Tsotsi to rediscover his humanity.

Tsotsi sees the Bantu Eating House's lights go out and runs around looking for Morris. He laughs when he catches sight of Morris and thinks he has no choice but to continue stalking Morris, despite his "new-found sympathy." Tsotsi, finding it painful that Morris doesn't know Tsotsi is still stalking him, starts coughing, whistling, and coming nearer.

Clearly, Tsotsi is confused and conflicted: although he is becoming more aware of his own capacity for choice, he still feels that he has no choice but to act out his "gangster" habits or patterns of behavior and murder Morris. Yet, at the same time, his sympathy for Morris prompts him to try to alert his victim with unnecessary noise.

After Morris sees Tsotsi, events move faster. When Morris puts the money down, Tsotsi feels that it is a "belittlement" of what has occurred between them—hardly a price that could "buy life"—and so he kicks it. Then Morris starts throwing stones at Tsotsi. Tsotsi longs to call out, "I understand." Instead, while Morris throws stones, yells curses, and cries, Tsotsi moves ahead of him and waits for him in the darkness.

To "belittle" something is to trivialize it or downplay its value. Ironically, although Tsotsi still plans to murder Morris, his sympathy with Morris makes him feel that Morris's life is worth much more than money—so much more that Morris's attempt to "buy" his safety with money actually trivializes or downplays his life's value. Once again, Tsotsi associates sympathy with understanding: he believes he has come to understand Morris as a result of sympathizing with him.

When Morris meets Tsotsi in the dark, they wait with a feeling of intense "intimacy." When Tsotsi asks Morris what he's feeling, Morris says he feels nothing. Tsotsi asks what he used to feel, and Morris admits that death scared him. Tsotsi asks whether he's scared anymore. Morris says he has learned from his hands not to be, explaining that before his accident, his hands used to feel life in sexual encounters with women. After his accident, he used his hands like feet, and they stopped feeling. Then, after feeling so much fear while Tsotsi was stalking him, his heart stopped feeling. He concludes: "You have heard a big man cry. It is enough."

Tsotsi breaks dramatically with his previous habits and his stereotyped "gangster" identity by displaying curiosity about his victim Morris's life rather than simply killing Morris. Meanwhile, Morris's statement—"You have heard a big man cry. It is enough"—implies that his crying violates gender stereotypes because it is not something a "big man" should do. Just as Tsotsi is reevaluating his stereotyped "gangster" identity, so Morris suggests that his emotional behavior doesn't fit a stereotyped masculine identity.

Tsotsi says the crying "was the worst" of their encounter. Morris asks what else Tsotsi noticed, and Tsotsi tells him he "grunt[s]" and "look[s]" like a dog. He admits he sympathizes with Morris and asks him how he urinates and defecates and whether he has women. Morris explains how he urinates and defecates and says he never has women anymore because they laugh at him. Tsotsi asks Morris what he knows and admits, again, to sympathy. Morris says he would have killed Tsotsi with sticks if he weren't crippled. Tsotsi mentions that he uses a **knife**, not sticks, as his weapon of choice.

In this passage, Tsotsi repeatedly tells Morris that he sympathizes with him—the repetition implies that Tsotsi's own sympathy shocks him and suggests that, perhaps, he wants Morris to explain to him *how sympathy arose between them. Although Tsotsi's comparison of Morris to a dog may seem insulting, the importance of the yellow dog to Tsotsi's psychology suggests Tsotsi doesn't mean the comparison (or the personal questions he asks) as an insult. Finally, Tsotsi's off-hand mention of his knife—which represents his stereotyped "gangster" identity—suggests that while he is outgrowing the gangster stereotype, he still unreflectively identifies with it.*

Morris asks what he ever did to Tsotsi and why Tsotsi is pursuing him after he surrendered his money. Tsotsi says he didn't want the money and states a third time that he sympathized with Morris. Morris asks why Tsotsi is targeting him, and Tsotsi tells Morris that he's ugly and asks whether that's "all." Morris thinks for a while and says he wants to live. When Tsotsi claims he knows that, Morris tells him that he doesn't know—that Morris, after many years of despair, is speaking about his desire to live to his own "hard hands," "ugly face," and "no legs." Tsotsi, moved by Morris's emotion, asks him to explain. Morris says he wants to sense warmth from the pavement, rain, wind, trees, colors, and birdsong. He asks whether Tsotsi understands, and Tsotsi says yes.

Morris rejects Tsotsi's too-quick claim to understand him by insisting on his life's unique aspects, including his disabled body. In this passage, then, Morris's "hard hands," "ugly face," and "no legs" represent what is particular to him as an individual—what Tsotsi needs to know if he is really going to understand and sympathize with Morris. Thus, this passage suggests that to genuinely sympathize with someone, you can't just have vague good feelings toward them—you have to engage imaginatively with the particulars of their experience and their unique individual identity.

Morris asks why Tsotsi needs to kill him. After a pause, Tsotsi says he doesn't need to. He repeats it and declares he'll let Morris live. Morris asks Tsotsi's age. Tsotsi says he doesn't know but plans to figure it out. Morris, looking at Tsotsi, can only see "the shape of a man" and can't remember what Tsotsi looked like under the streetlights due to his own fear. Wanting to give Tsotsi a gift, Morris decides to tell him something special: he says that mothers love their children and sing them songs. Tsotsi denies that mothers do this and walks away. Glancing back, he sees Morris gathering the money Tsotsi kicked.

By deciding not to kill Morris, Tsotsi once again breaks with his old habits and stereotyped "gangster" identity. In so doing, he recognizes his own capacity for choice. After this decision, he tells Morris he plans to find out his own age—which shows how, in rejecting his stereotyped identity, he is becoming more interested in his true, individual identity. When Morris looks at Tsotsi and sees "the shape of a man," it recalls the earlier scene where Tsotsi looked at his own reflection in a window and could see only a generic human shape—suggesting that Tsotsi, in sparing Morris's life, is embracing the group identity of "human"—or, in other words, recovering his humanity. The strange exchange between Tsotsi and Morris about mothers, in which Tsotsi denies that mothers love their children, may foreshadow some later revelation about Tsotsi's own mother, whom he cannot remember.

Tsotsi walks to the township. He keeps trying to stop and think, but his thoughts move so fast—from Boston cutting himself, to the baby, the **yellow dog**, Morris urinating, and so on—that he can't make sense of them. Only when he passes out of "an extensive factory area" between the city and the township that looks like a "labyrinth" is he able to think. He sees the moon, thinks it looks the same as last night, and recalls that he received the baby under the bluegum trees only the night before. He tries to order in his mind the events between his receiving the baby and sparing Morris's life. He wonders whether the past day is an anomaly and whether he will go back to gang life with Butcher, Die Aap, and even Boston.

The very layout of the segregated city—the "labyrinth" of the "extensive factory area"—makes it difficult for Tsotsi to think. This detail suggests that apartheid, the man-made social system represented physically in the segregated city, inhibits people's ability to think clearly about their lives. It is only when Tsotsi focuses on the natural world, represented by the moon, that he can order his thoughts. When he questions whether he will go back to gang life, he is essentially asking himself whether his habits will overpower his newly discovered capacity for choice.

Tsotsi concludes the day is not an anomaly but a new beginning—though of what, he isn't sure. He will continue to care for the baby and try to uncover his memories, starting with the **yellow dog**. Perhaps most importantly, he has realized that he has the choice to break with the old patterns of his life. Specifically, he has the choice whether or not to kill. He wonders, forcefully, when he first made the choice to kill. Then, he crumples to the ground and sleeps.

This passage marks another major turning point for Tsotsi. Here, he explicitly asserts his power to reject his old, violent habits. He is also deciding to pursue an identity distinct from his former stereotyped "gangster" identity—an identity as a parental stand-in for the baby and as someone with a unique past, here represented by his memory of the yellow dog.

CHAPTER 8

On Sunday, the Church of Christ the Redeemer rings its bell. People throughout the township hear it—including Boston, lying somewhere unknown staring at his own arm without recognizing it. Meanwhile, the Reverend Ransome glances out his window at congregants filing into the church. He becomes suddenly, helplessly enraged, thinking, "Go home. It's no good. I didn't know his name." Yet he hurriedly leaves for church and prays to God for aid.

In this passage, religion brings people together, in that everyone in the township hears the church bells at the same time. Yet the white Reverend—whom the reader would expect to feel positively about religion—casts doubt on the ability of religion to unite people across racial groups when he remembers that he even didn't know the poor Black worker Gumboot Dhlamini's name, despite presiding over his funeral. Thus, the passage implies both that religion can unify people and that it still isn't powerful enough to overcome South African segregation and racism.

Tsotsi walks into the ruins and sees an "uncertain line" on the wall, the shoebox, and the corner. It reminds him of a day when he was playing with Boston's pencil in his room, drawing on the table, until he glanced at Boston, got angry at his expression, and broke the pencil. He says aloud, "Jesus. Ants"—the condensed milk has attracted ants to the room. When Tsotsi opens the shoebox, he finds ants around the baby's mouth. Though his first impulse is to get rid of the baby, Tsotsi cleans the baby's face and puts the shoebox in a shaded corner without ants. He kills the ants on the wall and in the corner.

Tsotsi doesn't really know how to care for a baby, despite his decision to take on a parental role: he got the wrong food for the baby, which attracted ants, which in turn harmed the baby. That Tsotsi continues to care for the baby despite his first impulse to flee from his mistakes shows that he is continuing to exercise his free choice to take on a new role and identity, even when it is difficult.

Tsotsi realizes the baby needs food and clean clothes. He examines the baby, feels sympathy, and remembers Morris. He considers buying more condensed milk but rejects the idea. Killing more ants, he remembers Butcher harassing the woman with a baby. Tsotsi concocts a plan. He takes the baby from the box, bundles it in his coat, and leaves.

Tsotsi associates the baby with Morris because he feels sympathy for both. This association suggests that the more people you sympathize with, the easier it becomes to recognize and sympathize with the common humanity in everyone.

Tsotsi's room is down the street from a "communal tap" called Waterworks Square. Day and night, people come there to collect water. Because the line is long, people talk while waiting, and the tap is "rooted in their lives." The church even uses its water to baptize infants who will soon have to wait in line for water themselves. On Sunday, an 18-year-old mother named Miriam Ngidi is waiting in the line while carrying her baby. She looks at her baby Simon, he waves to her, and she feels intensely proud of him.

That people in the township must wait in long lines for a necessity like water shows the poverty in which non-white people lived under apartheid. In mentioning that the water baptizes infants who will soon enough be waiting in the line, the novel suggests both religion's social importance in the township and its inability to improve the material conditions of the township. Miriam and her son Simon, meanwhile, are noteworthy in that they are the first positive mother-child relationship represented in the novel—in contrast with Tsotsi, who cannot remember his mother, and with the woman who abandoned her baby to Tsotsi's care.

Miriam moves forward in line, feels her baby falling asleep on her back, and wonders where her husband, also named Simon, has gone. She wonders how a man in love, who's gotten a woman pregnant, can just vanish on his way to work. When he vanished, Miriam was eight months pregnant. She walked Simon's six-mile route to his factory job looking for him. The workers were all walking to their jobs at this time due to a bus boycott.

In apartheid South Africa, bus boycotts were one way that Black workers protested their legal and economic oppression. As Miriam's husband vanished during a bus boycott, the novel may be implying that he was imprisoned or killed for his political activities.

A voice tells Miriam that if she falls asleep, the others will cut her in line. Miriam moves forward with the line, looks back toward the voice, and sees an elderly man. He asks Miriam about herself. After hesitating about whether to ask him the questions she asks all strangers, she tells him that her husband vanished on his way to work. The elderly man says that happened to many people. Miriam asks whether the man has seen Simon and tells him Simon's name, address, and description, but she stops talking when she sees the look in the man's eyes.

The elderly man's claim that many people vanished on their way to work strengthens the implication that Black workers walking to their jobs during the bus boycott suffered racist violence in retaliation. Miriam's hopelessness upon seeing the look in the man's eyes, meanwhile, shows her fear that apartheid's white supremacist culture has permanently taken her husband away from her and their son.

Miriam fills the elderly man's tin, fills her own, and walks back to her room. There, she reflects that the elderly man told the truth—a lot of people did vanish on their way to work during the boycott. Yet most of them returned after time in jail, whereas Simon didn't. Miriam asks aloud the question she only asks in this room she used to share with Simon: "Are you dead?"

That many of the boycotting workers spent time in jail reveals that it was primarily the white police who retaliated against them. This fact suggests that the police may have harmed Miriam's husband as well and tightens the connection between the apartheid government and the destruction of Miriam's family.

Miriam finds it easier to believe that Simon is alive when she's out in the world, where she might run into him. At home, she thinks it's likely he's dead. Despite her grief, she has "carried on" with the new "pattern of her life" by getting jobs washing clothes and cleaning for white people. Yet she doesn't socialize, trade favors, or share herself with others.

Due to the trauma that apartheid has caused her and her family, Miriam has gotten stuck in a "pattern" or set of habits and begun avoiding positive, sympathetic connections with other people—somewhat like Tsotsi at the beginning of the novel.

Someone knocks on Miriam's door. She hopes it's Simon, though he wouldn't knock on his own door. When she opens it, she sees "just another young man" and asks him what he wants. The man (Tsotsi) checks behind him that no one else is around. Before Miriam can close the door, he covers her mouth, barrels into the room, and tells her he'll kill the baby if she tries to escape or makes noise. He lets her go, examines the baby, and tells her to come with him. When she won't move, he again threatens to kill her baby and tells her what he wants "won't take long." She flinches. He says, "It's not that." When she asks whether she can get someone to take care of the baby, he insists it won't take long.

Earlier in the novel, characters such as Cassim and Morris have looked at Tsotsi and immediately identified him as a stereotype, a "gangster." By contrast, Miriam looks at him and sees "just another young man." This contrast illustrates Miriam's disconnection from the social world, yet it may also foreshadow Miriam seeing Tsotsi more clearly as an individual than other characters have been able to do. Nevertheless, this passage does show Tsotsi falling back on his old, violent habits. Rather than asking for Miriam's help, he coerces her, threatening her child and accidentally making her believe he plans to rape her.

Tsotsi walks to his room with Miriam following. He makes her enter ahead of him. He pulls her to the bed, where she sees a baby. He demands she feed the baby. When she doesn't react, he rips open her shirt and repeats his demand. Miriam hides her breasts and retreats, disgusted by the strange baby with the bad smell. The situation has elicited her ungenerous, antisocial instincts. She tells Tsotsi the baby is too filthy to feed, so Tsotsi demands she clean and then feed the baby. He takes out his **knife** and, again, threatens to kill Miriam's baby if she doesn't do what he says.

Although Miriam is mother to a young child herself, she at first feels no sympathy for the neglected baby that Tsotsi wants her to help. Miriam's lack of generosity here suggests that under conditions of threat and stress, people are less likely to react sympathetically to others. Similarly, Tsotsi regresses because he is worried about the baby: he falls back on his old, violent habits and brandishes the knife that represents his stereotyped "gangster" identity.

Miriam cleans the baby and dresses him in Tsotsi's rags. Once cleaned, the baby no longer disgusts her. She shuts her eyes and feeds him, which triggers "a sudden wave of erotic feeling in her." She would not have resisted much if Tsotsi had raped her then. When the baby finishes feeding, Miriam is exhausted. She puts him on the bed, feels the wounds around his mouth, and glances at Tsotsi. Tsotsi twice tells her that ants did it, but she doesn't seem to grasp his meaning.

This strange and arguably sexist passage seems to imply that women so instinctively identify as mothers that they find breastfeeding "erotic," which in turn makes women in caretaking roles vulnerable to men's sexual advances.

Miriam fixes her clothes, walks to the door, and asks where the baby's mother is. Tsotsi shrugs. Miriam says: "a bitch in a backyard would look after its puppies better." Tsotsi, for some reason scared, tells her no. Miriam, mishearing it as "go," leaves.

Just as Morris frightened Tsotsi by calling him "whelp of a yellow bitch"—in other words, puppy of a yellow female dog—so Miriam frightens Tsotsi by talking about female dogs and puppies. Tsotsi's strange fear underlines the importance of the yellow dog to his psychology and heightens the mystery surrounding it.

Sunday night arrives. People gather and speak "dispiritedly" about their exhaustion and work the next day. Eventually, they go to bed. Tsotsi stays awake. He's carried the baby when it cried, put it in his bed, and sat. He's trying not to dislodge a memory that has come to him, which he replays over and over.

This passage contrasts people's habitual actions—the things they do every Sunday—with Tsotsi's sudden, singular revelation of a new memory. This contrast suggests that the memory will be very important for Tsotsi's development.

CHAPTER 9

In a flashback, a child (David) listens to his mother hum with "warm security." An elderly woman says his mother seems happy. His mother agrees and sings more loudly. David is on the floor in a little room listening to his mother and watching a fly hit the window. He recognizes everything in his world and feels "comforted."

This family scene, with its "security" and comfort, contrasts with the impoverished, dangerous situations that Black characters living under apartheid have suffered throughout the novel. Because this chapter comes directly after Tsotsi has gained a new memory, the reader may suspect that this chapter contains Tsotsi's childhood memories. The singing mother reminds the reader of Morris's claim that mothers sing to their children. Since Tsotsi denied that mothers sing to their children, this connection may foreshadow that something will happen to stop David from hearing his mother's singing.

The elderly woman asks, "What time tomorrow, my child?" The mother says, "He says to be here all day." The elderly woman suggests that this is typical male behavior. The mother asks whether, after years, one more day of waiting matters.

The novel has not yet made clear who "he" is. Yet given the frequency with which family separations occur in the novel—a mother abandoning her child to Tsotsi, Tsotsi forgetting his parents, Miriam losing her husband while pregnant with his child—the reader may suspect that "he" is a lost family member who is finally returning.

The mother asks David to bring the salt. While he's fetching it, he hears the elderly woman ask whether he knows. His mother says yes, and the elderly woman asks what he says about it. His mother says that he's too young to remember. David runs to his mother with the salt, and she hugs him. Looking at the old woman, he thinks about his fear and respect for her: fear, since she pinched him hard when he misbehaved, and respect, because adults respect her and because she really sees him and doesn't laugh at him.

It seems that the mother and the elderly woman have ceased talking about the unidentified "he" and have started talking about the child David, since the mother mentions that "he" is too young to remember. Although the passage leaves unstated what David doesn't remember, the reader may guess that David can't remember the lost "he" who has been absent for years. David's thoughts about the elderly woman suggest that she has taken on a quasi-parental role with respect to him: she punishes him when he misbehaves, but she also sees him, understands him, and takes him seriously—in other words, sympathizes with him.

The elderly woman asks whether David looks like him. David's mother says yes. The elderly woman calls David, but David hesitates until his mother tells him to go. The elderly woman asks his age. After his mother encourages him, he tells the old woman he's 10. The old woman says 10 is very young—David hasn't yet "been born to the troubles of this world." David's mother says he will be. They lapse into silence.

The elderly woman's question about whether David looks like the unidentified "him" implies that "he" is an older male relative—most likely David's father, since the novel has made no mention of a father being present in the house. The mother's comment that David will soon be "born to the troubles of this world," meanwhile, ominously suggests that apartheid South Africa threatens Black children's wellbeing and innocence and foreshadows trouble for David.


David goes into the yard and stops a "safe distance" from the **yellow dog**. David and the dog once played together, but now she snarls if he comes near to where she's tied up. David edges close to her and prepares to edge closer before running away. His mother comes out and tells him to stop it. When he complains that the dog won't play with him anymore, his mother says he'll have "other playmates soon enough."

The yellow dog's appearance may strengthen the reader's suspicion that this chapter represents Tsotsi's childhood memories. The mother's comment that David will have "other playmates soon enough" implies that the yellow dog is pregnant with puppies—a fact that partially explains why Tsotsi associates the yellow dog with babies and mothers but does not reveal why the memory has so much traumatic weight for him.


The mother sends David to fetch a mat. He gets it out. She gives him food to bring to the elderly lady, who pretends not to notice she's taking it, because she lacks a family and would starve without David's mother. David, his mother, and the elderly woman eat dinner. At the meal's end, David's mother tells him his father will arrive the next day. For a long time, David's mother has been saying his father would come back, and now the time has come.

This passage reveals that the elderly woman is not related to David and his mother and makes explicit that the man David's mother is expecting is David's father. In tandem, these two facts suggests that the elderly woman has taken on a quasi-parental role toward David, not because of any biological obligation, but because his father—for reasons not yet explained—has been absent.

Because David's mother told David his father is warm, laughing, and soft, David imagines his father "glowing," laughing constantly, and covered in feathers. He imagines his father flying home. After dinner, David and his mother go to bed. In bed, David's mother talks more about David's father and the past. David falls into a dream about himself and his mother riding on his flying, feathered father's back. Out of nowhere, a storm comes and begins driving them out of the air.

Although David's home seems secure and comforting in contrast with most other settings in the novel, this passage reveals the sadness of David's family situation: he was deprived of his father for unknown reasons when he was too young to know his father or fully understand what was happening. The storm attacking David's reunited family in his dream foreshadows trouble for them.

David wakes. He hears stones on lamp-posts—a signal that the police are about to raid the neighborhood. Policemen break down the door to David's house and come with flashlights into the room where he and his mother are sleeping. He begins to cry out, but his mother grabs him and tells him not to, so he stops.

That the people in David's neighborhood have a signal to alert their neighbors of a police raid implies raids are both common and threatening—hinting at how the apartheid government uses the police to regulate and oppress Black people and how Black people resist this oppression.

From the street David hears voices, police vans, people being moved, and people hiding. The police look to him like "enormous khaki-coated shadows." He hears one say, "Pas kaffir." His mother tries to say something. They grab her out of bed and take her away without letting her put other clothes on. She yells back at David not to cry. Then he sees the police shove her into one of their vans and shut the door.

By noting that the police look to David like "enormous khaki-coated shadows," the novel emphasizes how young David is and how frightening this situation is for him. One policeman, demanding David's mother's pass, calls her a "kaffir"—an anti-Black racial slur—which suggests that the policeman is personally racist as well as an enforcer of racist laws (apartheid law required Black people to carry passes and regulated where they could live or travel). Here, the reader sees how apartheid law can destroy Black families by separating parents from children—just as apartheid South Africa's economically oppressive white supremacist society seems to have separated Gumboot Dhlamini from his pregnant wife, motivated the young mother to abandon her baby to Tsotsi, and taken Miriam's husband from her and their son.

Once the police have crammed the vans with people, they leave. The people in the vans call out instructions about money, courts, police, and what to bring them, but it's difficult to hear full sentences. The vans leave, and eventually the neighborhood sinks into quiet. The people in the neighborhood feel the destructiveness of the police raid less in the physical damage than in the emotional injury it leaves behind. After they have cleaned up a bit, they go to bed because they have no other options.

The people the police have arrested are calling out instructions to those left behind, which suggests that such arrests are common and that people believe they know what to do in response. Yet the novel makes clear that those left behind can't hear the arrested people well, implying that their instructions may be fruitless. The sense of powerlessness that haunts the neighborhood after the police leave underscores the lack of legal rights Black people had under apartheid: those left behind do not believe the law will treat their loved ones fairly.

David stays in bed without moving. His mother has promised him many times that if someone takes her away, he should wait in their room, and she will come back. He listens for noise indicating she's coming. He hears the **yellow dog** outside but not his mother. He begins to call out for her.

This passage reveals that David's mother has explained to him what to do if she is arrested, which shows that their Black neighborhood is constantly under threat from white police enforcing racist apartheid laws. Since David hears the yellow dog after his mother's arrest, the reader may begin to understand why Tsotsi associates the dog with children separated from their mothers.

The elderly woman calls back to ask what's the matter, comes into the room, and examines it. She asks where David's mother is. When he doesn't reply, she asks whether it was the police. He wails for his mother and makes for the door. The elderly woman catches him, waits for him to finish struggling and yelling, and puts him back in bed. He cries until he falls asleep.

The elderly woman guesses right away that the police have taken David's mother, which underlines once again how regularly the police raid David's neighborhood. Here, she steps into a quasi-parental role, caring for David in his mother's absence.

David wakes up in the morning and, for a moment, doesn't remember the police have taken his mother. When the elderly woman offers him coffee, the memory comes back. He demands to know where his mother is. The elderly woman replies, "Where is God in Heaven?" When David begins to cry, the elderly woman asks what kind of man he'll be when he grows up. David stops crying, drinks some coffee, and reassures himself that his mother will come back.

The elderly woman's strange rhetorical question in response to David asking about his mother shows, once again, religion's powerlessness to protect Black South Africans against white supremacist oppression: the elderly woman seems to be implying that God is absent from their lives, just as David's mother is now absent.

The elderly woman dresses and tells David she's going to search for his mother. David says his mother promised to return. The elderly woman says she'll take David's mother her dress and help her come back. David asks to accompany the elderly woman, but she tells him to wait for his father to arrive.

The elderly woman is trying to help David's family by finding his mother, but she's also leaving a young child alone. That she has to choose between finding David's mother and supervising David shows the impossible situations in which apartheid puts Black adults trying to fulfill parental roles.

When the elderly woman leaves, David is terrified of meeting his father without his mother. He waits in bed and falls asleep around noon. Someone wakes him up by knocking on the door and calling, "Tondi." David flees into the back yard and hides in a chicken coop. He hears footsteps and a voice continuing to call for "Tondi." Another voice calls out that Tondi is gone—the police took her.

From context, the reader can assume that "Tondi" is David's mother's name and that the person searching for her is David's father, now returned. Yet without a supervising adult, David has no one to introduce him to his father, whom he's never met. He's naturally afraid of an unknown intruder in his house.

The voice keeps crying Tondi's name. David hears "wild breaking noise" from the house. Footsteps travel into the yard. The **yellow dog** snarls, and then David hears her yell in pain. The footsteps move away, the voice cries, "Tondi! I'm come back," and then David can only hear the dog's pained noises.

The "wild breaking noise" from the house implies that David's father is so upset by his wife's arrest—the day before their family was supposed to reunite—that he destroys something. The yellow dog snarling and then yelling in pain, meanwhile, implies that she warns off or attempts to attack David's father, who responds by hurting her.

David looks at the **yellow dog**. Someone has kicked her and broken her back legs. She crawls toward the coop with her front legs until she hits the end of her chain. She lies down, births dead puppies, and dies. All day David watches flies collect around the bodies. Then he runs away from the coop.

In his anger at Tondi's arrest, David's father has fatally harmed the yellow dog. That the yellow dog and her puppies die the day after David's mother is arrested (and as an indirect result of her arrest) suggests that the yellow dog represents how apartheid destroys families and separates parents from children. It is now clear why a baby abandoned by his mother triggered the memory of the yellow dog in Tsotsi—it reminded him of his own childhood separation from his mother.

At night, David is cold, hungry, and unsure what day it is when a group of children approach him. They ask who he is, where he came from, and whether he has a mother or father. When he doesn't answer, they decide David is one of them and invite him to join them. They take him to the river, where they sleep in pipes, and offer him water, bread, and orange peels.

The existence of these homeless, parentless children implies that poverty and oppression under apartheid have destroyed many more families than just David's.

The group's youngest boy, Simon, won't eat. The others examine his swollen belly and say he's "going like Willie." When David asks who Willie is, someone replies that they "put him away." The group decides to give David—whose name they haven't learned—Willie's name. They decide the day was a failure because they got so little food and agree to "try somewhere else" the next day. David asks what they mean, but they don't seem to understand the question.

Simon's swollen belly is a symptom of malnutrition. This fact, together with the children's discussion of Willie—who seems to have died and been "put away," that is, buried or dumped, by the other children—reveals that these parentless children never have enough to eat and sometimes starve. This fact highlights how dysfunctional and oppressive apartheid South Africa is.

A boy called Petah says he'll show David where to sleep, tells him they'll get him a better name than the "dead" Willie, says they'll be friends, and demands David say something. Then he leads David into a pipe, where Petah falls asleep. David realizes the pipes are warm and tries to remember where else was warm. He remembers singing and a voice telling him not to move. Realizing there's somewhere he ought to be, he climbs out of the pipe.

The reader will remember that Tsotsi encounters Petah after he has lost his memory and that Petah calls him "David." Petah's appearance here is more evidence that David is Tsotsi as a child. At this point, David can only confusedly remember his mother's singing and that he was supposed to wait for her, which reveals that the trauma of her disappearance has already caused him to start losing his memory.

Petah wakes up and asks where David's going. David is trying to climb the steep riverbank when Petah catches him and tells him to stop. The other children emerge from their pipes and hold David on the ground. Someone asks David what he was doing, and he shakes his head because his reason is "gone." When Petah suggests the problem was "home," the other children disperse.

Already, David has lost coherent memories of his past: his reason for leaving the other children comes to him but is soon "gone." When the other children get David on the ground and hold him there because he's trying to leave, the novel may be hinting that David has entered a new, more violent way of life.

Petah says David shouldn't go home at night. One child in the group, Sam, reunited with his mother during the day—but another, Joji, went back to his old home at night and was killed by the new inhabitants. Petah suggests that David, whom he calls Willie, try for home the next day—and then says the name Willie won't work and asks for David's real name. David tells Petah his name was David, but David is "dead." Petah agrees that David should pick a new name when he's "ready." They return to the pipe. Petah goes to sleep, and David watches the sky all night.

Petah's story about Joji, murdered trying to find his family, shows how dangerous the parentless children's lives are. In losing his mother and his memories, David is also losing his identity: he declares his old self "dead." This declaration shows how important family and memories are to keeping a sense of oneself under difficult conditions like poverty and oppression.

The next morning, the other children try to get David to scavenge with them, but he refuses and sits in the pipe all day. It rains and gets the papers they stuff into the pipes wet, which makes David associate the "scent of damp paper" with "mournful" emotions. Already, his only memory is of the other children, and their absence makes him lonely. He's also terribly hungry.

Earlier in the novel, the reader learned that Tsotsi had emotional associations with the smell of wet newspaper. The novel now reveals that his traumatic experience sleeping in a pipe as a homeless child encoded these associations in his mind.

When the other children come back to the pipes that evening, Petah tells him that if David scavenges with them the next day, he'll get bread. David agrees. When he asks where Simon is, no one answers. While scavenging that day, a shopkeeper runs him off and yells "tsotsi" at him. Later, when the group is trying to pick a name for David, he tells them he's "Tsotsi."

In this passage, the novel finally makes explicit that David is Tsotsi as a child. Although the adult Tsotsi embraced the "tsotsi" stereotype—his "gangster" identity—the reader now learns that he did not originally choose this stereotype for himself: a shopkeeper imposed it on him when he was a starving, homeless child. Thus, the novel suggests that Tsotsi became how he is due to apartheid law's destruction of his family and the subsequent cruelty that his racist society showed him.

Eventually the police disperse the children by the river. Tsotsi joins other gangs, but he always remembers how he learned to survive. He gives up "sympathy and compassion" and spurns memory, which in any case he doesn't have.

The police break up the group of homeless children apparently without trying to find their families or otherwise aid them, which shows that the police's job in apartheid South African society is to control Black people, not help them. Here the reader learns that Tsotsi rejected "sympathy," which he has only recently rediscovered in the novel's present timeline, due to his separation from his mother, his ensuing homelessness, and the gang life that homelessness introduced him to. The novel seems to be suggesting, then, that oppression and cruelty can destroy sympathy and breed hatred.

CHAPTER 10

Tsotsi wakes to knocking on his door and "instinctively" reaches for his **knife**. Without grabbing it, he has another idea and checks for the baby at the foot of the bed. He hears knocking again and thinks perhaps Miriam has come back—but wonders why she would. He grabs his knife, and instead of comforting him, it triggers memories of the children by the river, Petah, and his mother.

Earlier in the novel, the reader learned that Tsotsi always grabs his knife and tests its sharpness as soon as he wakes up, as a way of clearing his mind and maintaining his stereotyped "gangster" identity. Here, Tsotsi breaks that habit: rather than picking up the knife, he checks on the baby first, which suggests that his parental role is becoming more important to him that his stereotyped "gangster" identity. When he does eventually grab the knife, meanwhile, it no longer clears his mind. Instead, it makes him remember the events that led to him becoming "Tsotsi." By reclaiming his memories, Tsotsi is moving further from the "tsotsi" stereotype and becoming more aware of himself as a unique individual with a particular past.

The knocking continues, so Tsotsi asks who it is. Die Aap calls out, asking for Tsotsi. Tsotsi puts the baby under the bed, opens the door, and asks what time it is. Die Aap tells him it's morning. Tsotsi asks what he wants, and Die Aap points out he always shows up at Tsotsi's. Tsotsi tells him not to and shuts the door.

Whereas Tsotsi is breaking with old habits, Die Aap is sticking to them: he shows up at Tsotsi's just because he always does. In telling Die Aap to go away, Tsotsi is rejecting Die Aap's way of living according to habit.

Through the window, Die Aap asks why. Tsotsi thinks about his memories, especially his mother, whom he considers "the beginning of himself." He says "my mother" out loud. Die Aap, surprised at the idea of Tsotsi's mother, mentions his own mother is dead. Tsotsi is struck that every person, including Boston, Die Aap, and Butcher, has a mother. He asks where Butcher is, and Die Aap replies that Butcher isn't coming. Tsotsi ponders what this means. If the gang is over, will Tsotsi join another one, as he has since childhood?

Tsotsi considers his mother "the beginning of himself," which illustrates both how important parents are to their children's identities and how traumatic losing his mother was for Tsotsi specifically—it led to him embracing the "tsotsi" identity that he's now struggling to discard. Much like Tsotsi's earlier recognition that his reflection could be that of any man, his revelation here that every person has a mother shows he's coming to appreciate the common humanity of all individuals. Yet he and Die Aap are both surprised at the idea that the other had a mother—hinting that up to this point, neither one has fully perceived the other's humanity. Finally, when Tsotsi wonders whether he'll join another gang, it suggests that while he is breaking with his old "gangster" habits, he does not yet feel fully free of them.

Die Aap explains Butcher is angry that Tsotsi had "done a job alone" and, though he and Die Aap came back to Tsotsi's room twice after that, once Tsotsi wasn't there and once he was with a woman. Tsotsi asks, "So what?" Die Aap says Butcher has joined another gang led by a man named Buster, and Tsotsi asks why Die Aap didn't join too. Die Aap points out that he's been in a gang with Tsotsi for two years. Tsotsi is baffled that Die Aap has been following him for that long.

Butcher is angry that Tsotsi "done a job alone"—in other words, he believes that Tsotsi killed Morris Tshabalala when the gang went to the city and resents that he didn't get to participate in the murder. This detail reveals Butcher's sadism. By contrast, Die Aap's return to Tsotsi reveals Die Aap's loyalty but also his tendency to get stuck in habits.

Die Aap begins to suggest that he and Tsotsi reform the gang with new members when the baby under the bed begins to cry. When Die Aap notices Tsotsi isn't reacting to the noise, Die Aap pretends not to hear it. Meanwhile, Tsotsi is thinking: "start again, since the river…but what about the river?" The baby stops crying. Tsotsi tells Die Aap they aren't going to reform the gang, which is "finished." Die Aap asks Tsotsi what he should do. Tsotsi tells him to leave. They stare at each other, and then Die Aap exits.

At this moment, Tsotsi both recalls the beginning of his career in gangs—which has been his lifestyle "since the river"—and decides that career is "finished." Since Tsotsi remembering how he became a gang member and deciding to stop being a gang member coincide, the novel suggests that to change one's habits or pattern of life, a person has to remember and understand how they got to where they are.

From the window, Tsotsi watches Die Aap leave. He wonders what he himself meant by saying the gang was "finished" and thinks disjointed thoughts about Boston and his own life before the river. When the baby resumes crying, Tsotsi fetches him from under the bed and feels his "reality," in contrast with his own memories' unreality. He has begun to associate the baby with David—that is, with himself as a child—and feels sorry for the baby because he believes the baby will experience the terrible events that he himself did. He thinks that if the baby dies, he'll have to shoulder the burden of his memories by himself. He calls the baby "David" and says he's going to fetch "mother's milk" for him.

This passage reveals more of Tsotsi's confused motives for taking care of the baby. The baby's abandonment by his mother reminded Tsotsi of his childhood separation from his own mother. This connection makes Tsotsi think of his adopted baby as an extension of himself; he not only sympathizes with the baby but identifies with him. Yet the baby possesses "reality," whereas Tsotsi's former self, David, no longer exists. Tsotsi may be caring for the baby, then, to make up for the care that he himself didn't receive as a child.

Tsotsi looks through his window for Miriam, who has gotten in line for the water tap. He sees her glance toward his room and speculates that it will be easier to persuade her to come with him this time, since she doesn't seem scared. She gets water and begins walking away. Tsotsi notes her looks and posture in a way he didn't before. He leaves his room and waits outside so she'll spot him. Tsotsi tries to communicate through eye contact that he wants her help feeding the baby. She follows him back toward his room.

Instead of coercing Miriam to help him, Tsotsi appeals to her with his eyes. He also observes her more closely than he did previously. This close observation may suggest sexual attraction, but together with his more respectful treatment of Miriam, it also suggests that he is getting better at recognizing her as an individual with value—sympathizing with her, in other words.

Once inside, Tsotsi demands Miriam feed the baby. She balks in the doorway but then enters. When Miriam produces ointment for the baby's mouth, new clothes, and baby powder, Tsotsi realizes she was planning to come back. She begins to breastfeed the baby, which at first drinks milk but then refuses. Miriam tries to coax the baby to drink, asks his name, and suggests calling him Peter. Tsotsi says the baby is called "David." Miriam asks whether Tsotsi is the father, but Tsotsi tells her David "never saw his father."

Miriam's decision to care for the baby above and beyond what Tsotsi has demanded of her hints that she regrets her earlier disgust with the baby and sympathizes with the baby's situation. Although Tsotsi has been acting in a parental role toward the baby, he is not ready to claim the identity of "father." His statement that David "never saw his father" betrays how closely he is currently identifying the baby with his memories of himself as a child.

The baby begins to breastfeed properly. Miriam asks Tsotsi to give her the baby so she can care for him. She offers to let Tsotsi visit and says the baby can play with her son. Tsotsi's first impulse is to murder Miriam. He points out to himself that he bought the baby milk and killed the ants. Then he thinks about the river and how he used to play with other children in a derelict car.

That Tsotsi wants to kill Miriam when she offers to adopt the baby shows both how emotionally invested he is in the baby and how, when feeling threatened, he is still in danger of reverting to his old, violent patterns of behavior. When he reviews what he has done for the baby (buying the milk, killing the ants), he seems to be reassuring himself that he's an adequate parental stand-in. His intrusive memories of childhood imply that his identification of the baby with his childhood self, David, is motivating his behavior: he wants to care for the baby to compensate for the neglect and homelessness he experienced after his mother's arrest.

Miriam tells Tsotsi that the baby is deathly ill. She wants to care for him because she shouldn't have tried to refuse him milk before, and caring for him pleases her. Tsotsi thinks that the baby's mother gave him to Tsotsi, and so the baby belongs to Tsotsi. Miriam tells Tsotsi that the previous night she was praying when a voice asked her why her prayer should be answered if she had "no milk for babies." Tsotsi says aloud that the baby belongs to him. Miriam points out he isn't the father. Tsotsi repeats that the baby belongs to him, and Miriam asks how he came to have the baby. He says the mother, without crying, put the baby in a box, gave the box to Tsotsi, and ran away into the night.

In previous moments, the novel has implied that religion is powerless to help the oppressed. In this passage, however, Miriam's story suggests that religion can increase religious people's sympathy for others. Before praying, Miriam wanted to reject the baby Tsotsi forced her to feed; due to her prayer—which a voice, which she presumably believes to be God's, answered—she comes to sympathize with the baby and desires to save his life. The voice's implication that being good means having "milk for babies" suggests that caring for children, regardless of one's biological relationship with them, is the sign of a moral, sympathetic person.

Miriam demands the whole story, so Tsotsi tells her. She asks how long ago it happened. He tells her three days and explains some of what has happened since. She asks what Tsotsi plans to do with the baby, and Tsotsi says he's going to keep him. She asks why. Tsotsi considers the question, thinking of the **yellow dog** and the connection he feels to the baby, and says he "must find out." Miriam, unable to think clearly about this response, puts a milk bottle on the table, tells Tsotsi to feed the baby the next day, and announces she'll come by. Then she leaves.

The novel doesn't clarify what Tsotsi means when he says he "must find out," but this passage does provide a clue. Immediately before he says it, he's thinking about the yellow dog—which represents the destruction of families by apartheid, in particular his own family's destruction and his ensuing homelessness and gang involvement. He's also thinking about the baby, whom he identifies with David, his childhood self. By caring for the baby, Tsotsi may be trying to find out what would have happened in his own childhood if he hadn't been abandoned.

Tsotsi, periodically looking around to make sure Miriam isn't tailing him, goes to hide the baby in the demolished ruins. Then he walks to the pipes down by the river. He finds the derelict car and takes it as proof that his memories are correct. Afterward, he runs back home and enters a shebeen to ask after Boston.

Despite Tsotsi's sympathy for the baby, his identification with the baby and desire to keep the baby for himself make him act selfishly: after all, even if Tsotsi is now afraid Miriam will take the baby from him, the baby would be safer under Miriam's supervision than alone among ruins. Tsotsi's behavior here implies that identification is not always a positive force—it can also lead to questionable behavior.

CHAPTER 11

Boston has been lying unconscious or drinking in a shebeen run by a woman, Marty, since Tsotsi beat him up. When Tsotsi locates Boston there, Marty is trying to rouse Boston and kick him out because he's urinated on the floor. Tsotsi tells Marty to leave Boston alone. Marty asks what Tsotsi wants, and Tsotsi says he wants Boston. Marty, putting herself between the men, says she wouldn't treat "a mad dog" the way Tsotsi treated Boston and asks Tsotsi what he has to say for himself. Tsotsi says he wants to talk to Boston. Marty lights a cigarette, shrugs, and agrees to let Tsotsi take him.

Marty's claim that she wouldn't treat even "a mad dog," let alone a human, the way Tsotsi treated Boston implies that people should treat each other with some minimum standard of care just because of their shared group identity—their common humanity. Yet she lets Tsotsi take Boston away relatively quickly, which indicates that she doesn't necessarily want to display that care toward Boston herself.

Tsotsi tries to wake Boston up but can't. He picks Boston up and begins carrying him "like a baby" back to his room. On the way, Boston wakes, struggles out of Tsotsi's grip, and runs. Tsotsi follows Boston until he collapses near a fence with a sign on it that says, "WE WON'T MOVE." Tsotsi puts Boston on his feet and walks him toward Tsotsi's room. When Boston collapses, Tsotsi carries him the rest of the way.

When Tsotsi carries Boston "like a baby," the novel suggests that Tsotsi's new parental identity is making him gentler and more sympathetic toward someone he has previously harmed. The "WE WON'T MOVE" sign, meanwhile, is an allusion to Black protests against the government's relocation of non-white populations to enforce racial segregation. It reminds the reader that the novel is taking place against a larger context in which the government is demolishing Black neighborhoods—foreshadowing that this context may become important later.

In the room, Tsotsi puts Boston to bed, removes his soiled clothes, and throws them away. Seeing Boston naked, Tsotsi realizes Boston is extremely thin, his eye swollen, his nose broken, and his mouth sliced up. Tsotsi feels like vomiting. He checks how much money he has and goes out to buy food. When he returns with bread and sourmilk, Boston is still immobile on the bed. Tsotsi eats and watches him.

Once again, Tsotsi is caring for Boston as he has previously cared for the baby: throwing out his soiled clothes, putting him to bed, and so forth. That he cares for Boston—and that he wants to vomit when he sees the physical damage he's inflicted on Boston—shows how much his character has changed since the novel's beginning, when he felt only hatred for Boston.

Boston was born Walter Nguza in Umtata to a "humble, tired old woman." He went to St. John's College, to St. Peter's High School in Johannesburg, and finally to a teacher's college. His first two years in college, he came first in his class. Though he was a small, bespectacled man who couldn't get women, his mother was "very proud" of him. Then, the year he would have graduated, the school expelled him "for trying to rape a fellow student."

Umtata (now called Mthatha) is a small city almost 375 miles south of Johannesburg. That Boston was able to travel so far for high school, and did so well in college, suggests that despite his "humble, tired" family and oppressed social position within apartheid South Africa, he was somewhat upwardly mobile before his expulsion for attempted rape. The repeated mentions of his mother, meanwhile, foreshadow that she may be important to the rest of his story.

In a flashback, it's revealed that Boston wrote the preceding account of his life some time after his expulsion. He likes it because, without excess emotion or drama, it tells how his life progressed until it "broke." One time, when he reads it aloud to members of his gang, they ask him what happened afterward. He tells them nothing did: after the rape accusation, everything was "finished." They ask him about the girl, but he can't tell them.

Earlier in the novel, Tsotsi used the word "finished" to end his criminal career when Die Aap suggested they form a new gang. Boston uses the same word, "finished," to describe how his old life "broke." The repetition suggests that the novel uses the word "finished" to mark major changes in identity. Just as Tsotsi definitively "finished" being a gang member and has to become something new, so Boston moved in the other direction—he "finished" being a student and became a gang member after he attempted to rape someone.

Boston does tell the story once. He says he was going for a walk at night when he met a fellow student, female, by the tennis courts. Girls frightened Boston, and he wanted to flee, but she struck up a conversation with him. She began the physical contact with him, but she "just wanted to play." Not realizing this, he tried to go further. She began screaming and crying, and Boston was discovered with her like that.

Boston's story suggests that he tried to rape the girl because he didn't understand her—in other words, he didn't adequately sympathize with her perspective. He was unable to grasp that she "just wanted to play"—that is, to have some romantic contact but not sex—and so ended up attacking her. The story, then, strengthens the connection the novel has previously drawn between a lack of sympathy for others and violent behavior.

Boston wonders who, if anyone, is to blame—himself, the girl, those who discovered them, or even Boston's mother—but decides it's all the same, because regardless, it ends with his expulsion. This event makes Boston think about mistakes. When he is 24 and drunk, he declares everything a mistake: "The whole bloody thing, from beginning to end, from Adam to Walter Boston Nguza is one big mistake."

By "Adam," Boston means the first man God created in the Bible. Rather than take individual responsibility for his attempted rape of the other student, Boston decides that mistakes like his are inherent to human identity and that humanity is therefore "one big mistake."

After his expulsion, Boston goes to the railway station for a late train. Waiting at the station, he pictures his "proud" mother greeting him and realizes he can't bear to go home. Instead he writes his mother a letter saying he finished teacher's college early, is going to look for a job, and will send her a new address soon.

By lying to and avoiding his mother, Boston continues the novel's pattern of children separated from their parents. Unlike the separation of Tsotsi from his mother or of Miriam's husband from his baby, however, this separation occurs due to Boston's desire to protect his mother's pride, not due to the social context of apartheid.

After spending a week homeless in the city, Boston meets Johnboy Lethetwa at the Pass Office. Boston goes to the Pass Office because he has a relative there he plans to ask for help. When he arrives, he waits outside and thinks. He's worried the relative will tell his mother and unsure what he should ask for. Johnboy sits beside him and asks Boston to read a piece of paper for him. Boston tells him the paper says, "you can't work at Natty Outfitters because your last employer did not sign your book." Johnboy says, "They'll pick me up." Boston asks why the employer didn't sign the book, and Johnboy explains he was in jail because he didn't have a previous employer.

As previously mentioned, Black South Africans under apartheid were required to carry passes (or "pass books") that determined where they were allowed to go. If Black people didn't have all the right entries in their pass book—including the signature of a white employer—they could be arrested and put in jail. Johnboy's story highlights the illogic and cruelty of apartheid pass laws: to get an employer—and stay out of jail—Black people needed to have had an employer already.

Boston asks to see Johnboy's pass, fills it out and signs it, and tells Johnboy he now has a previous employer. Johnboy takes the pass and leaves. Boston is about to go inside to speak with his relative when Johnboy returns, hands Boston four more passbooks, and asks for previous employers. When Boston balks, Johnboy gives Boston two 10-shilling notes. Boston signs the passbooks. Johnboy brings back more.

In this passage, the reader sees a new side to Boston's character. Whereas previously he has been drunk, cowardly, and violent, here he uses his education generously to help a man in danger of being jailed due to an unjust, racist law. Ironically, this generous act begins a criminal career in forgery—which shows how unjust apartheid laws drive many of the novel's characters to criminal behavior.

By lunchtime, Boston has earned four pounds. Johnboy suggests they "specialize in previous employers" and asks Boston where he lives. When Boston admits he's homeless, Johnboy offers to share his hostel room. Boston writes his mother a letter, with a pound note in it, telling her he's doing well.

Johnboy's suggestion that he and Boston "specialize in previous employers" reveals a demand for forgeries to protect Black South Africans from unjust, racist pass laws—which again shows how unjust apartheid laws drive crime. That Boston sends money to his mother as soon as he's earned anything, meanwhile, implies how important she is to him and how badly he wants to conceal his difficult circumstances from her.

Boston and Johnboy begin forging various permits as well as employers' signatures. Boston keeps sending his mother money. Boston realizes he and Johnboy are not similar people, but that doesn't bother him. Boston goes to shebeens to think and drink until, without realizing it, he's developed a drinking problem.

The expansion of Boston's forgeries from passbooks to other required permits suggests how many different ways bureaucracy under apartheid oppressed Black South Africans. Boston's drinking problem, meanwhile, illustrates how bad behavior can develop into a habit, difficult to break.

At Marty's shebeen, Boston meets another gang. One day, after Johnboy is arrested for the passbook business, Boston overhears the gang talking about a problem. Boston suggests an obvious answer. The gang offers him part of their haul, and eventually he becomes a member. Meanwhile, he is receiving letters from his mother begging him to visit. One day, he dresses up himself and Butcher, has their photograph taken, and sends it home with a letter claiming he is working as a teacher and Boston is his coworker.

Boston's transition from Johnboy's non-violent forgery business to Tsotsi's violent gang hints that once you are in the habit of criminal activity, you are more likely to graduate to more serious crimes. Boston's deceitful correspondence with his mother shows both how much he cares about her pride and how ashamed he is of his situation.

In the shebeen subculture, Boston gains a reputation as an intelligent but timid person who abuses alcohol "after a rough job." Yet his good manners endear him to Marty. They strike up a friendship and then a romance, but their romance ends the first time Boston does a job where someone is murdered. Afterwards, he takes his misery out on Marty and "drag[s] her down as low as his words." Marty doesn't retaliate, but their relationship—the sole romance of Boston's life—ends. Boston regrets his cruelty to her. Because the police are searching for Boston's gang, they disperse, and Boston avoids Marty's. He approaches her later, but she treats him like a stranger. Then, two years later, he comes to her the night Tsotsi beats him up.

Boston's reliance on alcohol to deal with "a rough job"—the violence that occasionally comes with gang activity—shows how bad habits (in this case, alcohol abuse and violence) can be mutually reinforcing. His cruel treatment of Marty due to his own guilt hints that people who hate themselves—who do not have a positive individual identity—are more likely to be hateful toward others.

Back in the present, Boston wakes up in the dark and asks where he is. Tsotsi lights a candle, and they stare at each other. At first, Boston is scared, but then he remembers how totally Tsotsi destroyed him and his "manhood" and he stops being scared. He closes his eyes and asks why Tsotsi brought him to his room. Tsotsi says he wants to talk. Boston doesn't care, though this event would once have delighted him. Boston draws Tsotsi's attention to the physical damage he's done, and Tsotsi replies, "I felt you." Boston is curious what Tsotsi means, but the curiosity passes.

Like Morris Tshabalala, who seemed to think that crying made him less of a man, Boston seems to think that being physically beaten destroys his masculine identity, his "manhood." In Boston's case, his failure to live up to masculine stereotypes makes him passive and uninterested in what's going on around him. Tsotsi, by contrast, is trying to reach out to Boston and express sympathy with him by saying, "I felt you."

Boston says, "My youth," because he has been thinking about it since Tsotsi beat him. Tsotsi says he needs to know and demands that Boston, who used to be a teacher, tell him. Boston thinks he sees a light in Tsotsi's eyes that wasn't there before. He denies knowing anything. Tsotsi, thinking Boston means something else, tells him about the baby. Boston ponders the story's meaning, loses concentration, and blurts out, "The fields of my youth."

Tsotsi's memories of childhood motivate him to try to understand and change his present life. By contrast, Boston's memories of his "youth"—before he derailed his life with the attempted rape—leave him unmotivated and pessimistic. This contrast suggests that while remembering the past is necessary to understanding and taking control of your life, memory alone isn't sufficient—you also need to believe in your own power to change. Notably, Tsotsi has already changed a great deal by this point in the novel: whereas at the novel's beginning he beat Boston for asking him too many questions, now he is volunteering information about his relationship with the baby that Boston hasn't asked for.

Tsotsi doesn't understand what Boston means, reflects on his own ignorance, and starts sweating. He tells Boston about stalking Morris and sparing his life. Boston listens but loses his train of thought thinking about mercy and the fields of his youth. He tries to catch the thread of Tsotsi's story, hears something about a **yellow dog** and Tsotsi's mother, and is surprised by Tsotsi having a mother. He recalls his own mother and wonders whether she's still waiting for him to come home.

Again, the novel associates the yellow dog with Tsotsi's mother, emphasizing that the yellow dog represents Tsotsi's separation from his mother—and, by implication, apartheid's destruction of Black families more generally. As Die Aap was surprised in an earlier chapter that Tsotsi has a mother, so Boston is surprised here, a repetition that underlines how the other gang members don't see Tsotsi as fully human (after all, as Tsotsi has realized, every human being has a mother).

Tsotsi explains that he only started remembering his childhood the day before. Sitting by the bed, he points out that Boston has read books and asks him what the story means. Boston says everyone is sick from life. Tsotsi's head falls, and Boston feels intense sympathy for his pain. He touches Tsotsi and tells him that he, Boston, is totally ignorant, but that Tsotsi is "different" because he's changing. He urges Tsotsi not to be scared. Tsotsi asks what changed him, and Boston replies that Tsotsi is now talking about God.

Boston's claim that everyone is sick from life indicates his pessimism and hopelessness. Yet his sympathy for Tsotsi's pain motivates him to recognize that while he, Boston, may not be able to break free from his destructive habits or his criminal identity, Tsotsi can. His explicit association of Tsotsi's transformation with God, here, suggests that human sympathy has a religious source.

Tsotsi sits quietly through the night. Boston sings part of a hymn, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Dawn comes. Boston speaks again about the fields of his youth and begins to leave. Tsotsi holds him back, but Boston tells him he needs to leave and insists that the fields of his youth were green. Tsotsi gives Boston clothing and offers him food, which Boston refuses. He watches Boston flee down the street.

The hymn "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" includes lyrics referring to the singer's childhood and Jesus's own childhood, as well as a prayer that the singer be more like Jesus. The allusion to the hymn here thus reinforces the importance of childhood to both Boston and Tsotsi's lives and foreshadows that someone in the novel may imitate Christ in some way. By offering clothing and food to Boston, whom he recently beat, , Tsotsi demonstrates his rejection of his old "gangster" identity and his violent habits.

CHAPTER 12

Isaiah is trying to plant a row of seedlings straight but fears he has planted them crooked, despite Miss Marriot's demonstrations. From the office window, Miss Marriot asks whether everything is fine. Pretending he can't hear her due to old age, Isaiah measures the rows with his hand to demonstrate he's planting correctly. Yet he hears her coming. Miss Marriot asks him what he's done. He sneaks a look at her "white, powdery face and thin lips" and sees her smiling. She calls him a "naughty boy" and reminds him to plant one hand apart.

Up to this point the novel has mostly represented racism as a structural force, impacting the Black characters' lives not through their encounters with individual racists, but through their oppression by racist laws. Here, however, the novel foregrounds interpersonal racism in South African society. Although Isaiah (who is Black) is elderly, his white employer Miss Marriot calls him a "naughty boy" and condescends to him as if he were stupid or a child.

Isaiah replies, "Yes, Miss Marry." Miss Marriot corrects his pronunciation of her name and says he has to replant the seedlings. He agrees dutifully. They pause in silence, and he notices he finds her "white, powdery" odor "repellent." She tells him to start working.

Here, the novel jokingly reverses an anti-Black racist stereotype about Black people smelling bad by having a Black character find the "white" smell of his employer "repellent"—that is, disgusting.

Isaiah starts replanting. He wishes Miss Marriot would leave him alone. When he works by himself, his memory helps the time pass quickly. When she watches him work, the time passes painfully slowly. But Miss Marriot stays to watch and criticize, insisting on showing him how to treat roots gently. He hates her being near him demonstrating things, because once he saw her "flat, white breasts" down the front of her collar and once she farted. She insists on him watching and asks whether he was doing it the way she is. He says no and reflects, "To an incredible extent a peaceful existence was dependent upon knowing just when to say no or yes to the white man."

Again, the novel is reversing a racist stereotype. Under apartheid, the South African government outlawed marriage and sexual relationships between non-white and white people. One law had harsher penalties for non-white women who "seduced" white men—the racist assumption apparently being that non-white people would particularly want to have sex with white people, who are somehow more desirable. In the novel, on the other hand, the only extended contact between a Black person (Isaiah) and a white person (Miss Marriot) involves him being physically disgusted by her. Isaiah's comment that "peaceful existence" requires him to come up with the right responses for "the white man" shows how, in Black-white interactions in apartheid South Africa, all the power resided with the white person.

Miss Marriot accuses Isaiah of wanting the plants to die. She calls him a "naughty boy" again, claims to have completed all his work, and reminds him that he's "planting on holy ground, because it [is] church ground." After that, she leaves.

This passage makes clear that—despite Boston's argument that God and religion increase sympathy between people—religiosity can coexist with racism, as demonstrated by church lady Miss Marriot.


Isaiah plants seedlings and thinks about white people—specifically, the great difference between the two white people for whom he works, Miss Marriot and Rev. Ransome. He reflects that while Miss Marriot tries to teach him to plant, Rev. Ransome has taught him how to ring the church bell.

Although Isaiah recognizes that the same white-supremacist power dynamics are at play in all his interactions with white people, he does not assume that all white individuals are the same—he sees differences between his two white employers.


Shortly after Isaiah began working for the church, Rev. Ransome approached him and asked his name. When he said Isaiah, Rev. Ransome sked whether he was Christian. He said yes. Rev. Ransome asked whether he wanted to ring the bell and offered to show him how. Before the evening service that day, Rev. Ransome showed Isaiah how to tug the bell rope and asked whether he believed in God. Isaiah said he did. Rev. Ransome told him that the bell serves to summon believers, including those who "are lazy and don't want to hear." That encounter was all Rev. Ransome told Isaiah about the bell, in contrast with Miss Marriot constantly bothering him.

Rev. Ransome assumes Isaiah is Christian because the name "Isaiah" also belongs to an Old Testament prophet in the Bible whom Christians believed prophesied the coming of Jesus Christ, making Isaiah a logical name for Christians to give their son. Rev. Ransome's comment that some believers are "lazy and don't want to hear" suggests that it isn't enough to believe—you also have to be motivated and break with bad habits to be a good Christian. Isaiah's preference for Rev. Ransome suggests he likes how Rev. Ransome treats him as a competent worker who doesn't need constant supervision—whereas Miss Marriot, due to her racism, supervises him like he's a child.

When Isaiah sits under a bluegum in the churchyard to drink his tea, he sees a man (Tsotsi) sitting on the sidewalk looking exhausted. His exhaustion reminds Isaiah of when he worked as a farm laborer. It strikes Isaiah as strange that a "tsotsi-type," who doesn't work hard, would be so exhausted. Though Isaiah knows other people would tell him to avoid Tsotsi, he derives meaning from life based on "what he [can] recognize or remember, what he knew or what he had been through himself." He goes and offers Tsotsi some tea.

Like Cassim and Morris, Isaiah at a glance recognizes Tsotsi as a "tsotsi-type," a gang member. Unlike Cassim and Morris, however, Isaiah immediately sympathizes with Tsotsi's exhaustion because he can remember being that exhausted. Isaiah's memory and his tendency to act based on "what he had been through himself" allow him to extend kindness to Tsotsi in a way other characters haven't.

Tsotsi takes the tea and looks at the church thoughtfully. Isaiah says, "The Church of Christ the Dreamer." Tsotsi states, haltingly, that God is inside the church. Isaiah affirms it and tells Tsotsi he rings the church bell. Tsotsi asks why. Isaiah says it's to call believers, including the lazy ones who "don't want to hear." Tsotsi seems struck by this answer.

Isaiah gets the name of the church wrong (it's Church of Christ the Redeemer), which implies that he may not have had a very good religious education—casting a negative light on the white people who run the church. When Tsotsi responds strongly to Isaiah's claim that some people "don't want to hear" God's call, it hints that Tsotsi himself is ambivalent about his possibly religious experiences.

Miss Marriot calls to Isaiah, asks him whether he's finished planting marigolds, and tells him they don't allow "strangers" in the church yard. Then she asks Tsotsi's name. He leaves without answering. She asks Isaiah who Tsotsi is, but Isaiah says he doesn't know. Miss Marriot tells Isaiah to tell Tsotsi that the church yard isn't a park, but that they do want him to pray. Then she tells Isaiah to come when he's done planting and returns to her office.

Miss Marriot's obvious desire to drive Tsotsi, a young Black man she doesn't know, away from the church suggests she's suspicious of him due to racism. Her attempt to cloak her suspicion and hostility by claiming she wants Tsotsi to pray suggests that her religious feelings are only skin-deep, whereas her racism is entrenched.

Tsotsi comes back to the church fence while Isaiah is planting and asks whether Isaiah has been inside the church. Isaiah says yes. Tsotsi asks what's inside, so Isaiah lists things, including "Jesus Cries on a cross." Tsotsi asks what Jesus does, and Isaiah explains that people killed him on a cross after his father, God, sent him. Tsotsi asks about God. In response, Isaiah asks Tsotsi why he has so many questions and why he's so tired.

When Isaiah misnames Jesus Christ as "Jesus Cries," the novel once again suggests that apartheid has prevented many Black people from getting an education in general and religious education specifically. Isaiah's discussion of the crucifixion may foreshadow an act of self-sacrifice later in the novel.

Tsotsi says he wants to know about God because "He's got something to do with me." Isaiah tells Tsotsi God created everything. God saved the world from a flood by putting everything in a boat built by Moses, who sailed it "into a promised land," after which "Maria and Joseph gave birth to Jesus." When Tsotsi asks whether there's anything else, Isaiah explains that Rev. Ransome tells part of the story each Sunday and hasn't finished yet.

Tsotsi's comment that God's "got something to do with" him suggests that he believes Boston's claims about God without fully understanding them. Isaiah's inaccurate rendering of the Bible (Noah built the ark, not Moses; Moses never reached the promised land; Joseph was not Jesus's biological father) yet again suggests a lack of religious education for poor Black people in apartheid society; yet Isaiah also grasps a very rough outline of the biblical narrative, which suggests his interest in and devotion to Christianity is sincere.

Isaiah realizes that—distracted by talking with Tsotsi—he has started planting crookedly again. He returns to the place in the row where he began making mistakes. Tsotsi, tailing him, asks where God is and what he wants. Isaiah says God is everywhere and that he wants people to be good and to stop "stealing, and killing and robbing," because these things are sins. Tsotsi asks what happens if you sin, and Isaiah replies that Jesus will punish you with hell. Tsotsi asks whether punishment means killing. Isaiah replies, "Maybe."

Isaiah makes several accurate theological claims here: according to Christian belief, God is everywhere and does want people to be good. Notably, if Tsotsi becomes a Christian, he must stop "stealing, and killing and robbing"—permanently break with gang life and give up his old, violent habits. Here, the novel may be suggesting that God has somehow, mysteriously, called Tsotsi to change his life. Yet when Isaiah entertains Tsotsi's suggestion that maybe Jesus punishes sinners by killing them (which is not an orthodox Christian belief), it leaves open a more cynical interpretation: that God is just another, bigger gang boss who answers violence with more violence.

Tsotsi leaves for a time but returns to ask Isaiah when they sing. Isaiah says that evening and invites Tsotsi to join. Tsotsi is shocked. Isaiah tells him that everyone is welcome: "It's the House of God. I ring His bell. Will you come?" Tsotsi agrees.

This passage highlights the importance of forgiveness and redemption in Christianity: even Tsotsi, who has murdered people, is welcome in "the House of God" if he is willing to listen to God's "bell"—that is, God's demand that sinners change their evil habits.

Tsotsi, feeling weightless, walks down the street holding the baby in his coat. Miriam, who's in the yard doing washing, spots him. When he walks up to her, she leads him into her room, takes the baby, and puts it on the bed. Tsotsi claims the baby wasn't hungry, but Miriam asks whether Tsotsi gave it the milk she left. Tsotsi says the baby vomited it up. Miriam asks whether he has money, and he says no. Miriam leaves to buy medicine, returns, and feeds some to the baby. Then she gives him milk. She looks at Tsotsi, asks what's wrong, and offers him food.

That Tsotsi feels weightless and that Miriam asks him what's wrong, implying that he looks disturbed, may indicate that he's having an intense reaction to his religious conversation with Isaiah, that he's very worried about the sick baby, or perhaps both.

While he eats, Miriam tells him that when she first realized Tsotsi wanted her to feed the baby, "it was worse than if…" Rather than completing the thought, she says Tsotsi knows what she means. She says she thought it was worse because her baby has a father, Simon, who vanished—but she was wrong, because mother's milk should be used. Then she admits that she believes her husband Simon is dead.

Miriam seems to be implying that at first, she felt that breastfeeding a strange baby would be worse than Tsotsi raping her. Her later decision that she should give her mother's milk to the baby, on the other hand, suggests she has come to believe that due to individuals' common humanity, all adults should be willing to act as parents to children in need. This decision is freeing for her: it allows her to break with her old, antisocial habits and come to terms with her husband's probable death.

Miriam concludes that she, her baby, baby David, and Tsotsi all have to live: "That's all it is. Tomorrow comes and you got to live." Tsotsi thinks of his own history and silently agrees. Miriam offers to let him rest at her house, and she goes outside to finish the washing. Tsotsi watches the baby. When Miriam comes back inside, he says he knows she wants the baby and asks her please not to take him. Miriam asks Tsotsi when he'll be back and asks whether he's going. The church bell rings. Later, Tsotsi returns, takes the baby, and hides it again in the ruins because he doesn't trust Miriam enough.

Miriam's claim—"Tomorrow comes and you got to live"—is a hopeful one. It suggests that as long as people are alive, they have the capacity to break with their old, destructive habits and make new choices. Tsotsi agrees and, to an extent, acts according to his agreement: by having the church bell ring as Tsotsi is leaving, the novel implies that Tsotsi has accepted Isaiah's invitation to go to church, a repudiation of his old "gangster" identity. Yet Tsotsi is still too possessive of the baby, with whom he identifies, to trust the baby with Miriam, which suggests that his transformation is not yet complete.

Tsotsi wakes up. He remembers that Miriam told him, "Come back, Tsotsi." He thinks he needs to tell her his real name. In the street he says out loud, "My name is David Madondo," and laughs. The milkman overhears him and wishes him peace.

In this passage, the reader learns Tsotsi's real, full name—"David Madondo"—for the first time. That he decides to tell Miriam his whole name shows that he is fully rejecting his old identity as a gang member and embracing his true individual identity. Notably, the milkman wishes Tsotsi peace rather than immediately reacting to him with fear, as previous characters such as Cassim and Morris Tshabalala have done. The milkman's reaction suggests that Tsotsi's transformation is visible to others; mysteriously, he no longer looks like a gang member. That the two characters wish each other peace—a religious greeting—suggests that Tsotsi's transformation is somehow religious in nature.

David wishes the milkman peace and begins walking when he hears the noise of bulldozers. Evidently, people in the white township have complained that people are reclaiming the ruins, so they have sent the bulldozers in to destroy them a second time. David starts running and yelling at the bulldozers to stop. A few people, hearing him, start yelling "Stop" as well. He runs into the ruins without any of the workers seeing him. He has just reached the baby when a bulldozer knocks down a wall on top of him. Shortly afterward, he is pulled out of the wreckage, dead, but wearing a "beautiful" smile.

At this point, the novel stops calling Tsotsi "Tsotsi" and starts calling him "David," indicating that he has completed his transformation, freeing himself from the gang member stereotype and reclaiming his individual identity. That the white township has insisted on re-razing the ruins where David has hidden his baby, however, indicates that the white supremacist social structure is once again threatening to destroy David's family. David dies in a Christlike, self-sacrificing manner trying to save the baby—which fulfills the foreshadowing implicit in Boston singing "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" and in Isaiah's discussion of the Crucifixion. Yet, although the novel does not explicitly state that the baby dies, it seems likely that the wall that killed David also crushed the baby. Thus, the novel's ending suggests that while religion can cause positive individual transformations, it cannot cure structural evils like apartheid or white supremacy. David's "beautiful" smile after death, then, may be a sincere sign of his redemption or an ironic comment on his powerlessness.

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