Cry, the Beloved Country

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ALAN PATON

Alan Paton was born and raised in South Africa. After he completed Natal University, Alan Paton taught school in the village of Ixopo. He began to explore religion, and converted to Anglicanism in 1930. In 1935, he became principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory for delinquent black boys, where he made many successful, progressive reforms to the institution. During a visit of European and American prisons and reformatories, he began to write Cry, the Beloved Country. It was an immediate success upon publication, and sold over 15 million copies during Paton's lifetime. After the rise of the National Party, Paton became an anti-apartheid activist. He was president of the Liberal Party from 1953 until it was disbanded in 1968 because of new laws directed against interracial political parties. Paton was considered an enemy of the state: the government took his passport away in 1960, and did not restore it for a decade. He died in 1988, before the end of apartheid.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the same year after the publication of Cry, the Beloved Country, the National Party rose to power in South Africa and implemented racial apartheid, an extreme form of segregation between the wealthy white minority and the poorer, oppressed black majority.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

There are many books in the South African canon that deal with apartheid and its effects: July's People (1981), by Nobel Prize for Literature Laureate Nadine Gordimer, predicted how the system would fall and was banned by the government. *Tsotsi* (1980) by Athol Fugard, follows a young criminal with no family struggling amidst crushing poverty. Another novel by Alan Paton, Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful (1983), is set during the 1950s and follows a fictional version of his own political activism.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Cry, The Beloved Country*
- **When Written:** 1946
- **Where Written:** Norway and the United States
- **When Published:** 1948
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Johannesburg & Ndotsheni, South Africa
- **Climax:** When Absalom is found guilty of murder and sentenced to death.
- **Antagonist:** The State
- **Point of View:** Some sections are from the third-person POV of Stephen Kumalo, some from the third-person POV of James Jarvis, and still others from a nameless narrator.

EXTRA CREDIT

Film Adaptations. Two famous films have been adapted from Cry, the Beloved Country: the first, in 1951, was written by Paton, and starred Sidney Poitier and Canada Lee. The second, in 1995, starred James Earl Jones.

Political Prediction. Cry, the Beloved Country was very politically prescient: it described a country descending into apartheid and was published in 1948, just before apartheid was enacted into law.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Ndotsheni, South Africa, Stephen Kumalo, a church parson, receives a letter from a minister in Johannesburg, Theophilus Msimangu, telling him that Stephen's sister Gertrude is ill. Stephen decides to take his money, once saved to send his son Absalom to attend school, and go to **Johannesburg** to retrieve her. Additionally, he decides to seek out Absalom, who also left for Johannesburg and has not returned or written.

Stephen journeys to Johannesburg for the first time, and he is overwhelmed by the experience. He eventually connects with Msimangu and other men of the cloth, where they assure him they will take him to his sister. The next morning, they seek out Gertrude and find her. She agrees to come back with Stephen.

Stephen locates his brother John, who has become something of a corrupt bigwig, in order to find out where his son has gone. His brother gives Stephen information about the location of Absalom. From there, they trace his path across Johannesburg. Stephen finds Absalom's girlfriend, who is pregnant with his child, and learns he's been missing for days.

There is a headline in the newspaper: a local white man, Arthur Jarvis, has been shot and killed in a home invasion. As Stephen continues to look for his son, he is panicked to learn the police are also searching for Absalom, and are tracing the same steps Stephen had taken to try to locate him. Soon, Stephen learns the police have arrested Absalom for the murder of Arthur Jarvis. He goes and visits his son in jail, and is frustrated by the lack of answers. Father Vincent instructs Stephen to pray and

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rest.

The next day, Stephen seeks out the young girl who is pregnant with Absalom's child. Stephen offers to take her back with him when he leaves Johannesburg. He then visits Absalom in prison, looking for answers still, but gets none. Father Vincent brings a lawyer, Mr. Carmichael, to meet with Stephen. Mr. Carmichael agrees to take on the case *pro deo* (for God).

Meanwhile, back in Ndotsheni, James Jarvis and his wife receive news of their son's murder. The distraught couple flies to Johannesburg. Like Stephen with Absalom, James struggles with the fact that he never really knew his son, and his son's life and work was a mystery to him. When he goes through his son's office, James is struck by his son's activism and beliefs, and his deep sympathies with the native population. Arthur believed that the native people's way of life had been destroyed by white men, leading to the current epidemic of violence and fear.

Soon thereafter, Absalom's trial begins. The two men arrested with Absalom, including John's son, claim they were not at the scene of the murder. Absalom admits to his presence, but denies he planned to kill Arthur. During the trial, Stephen comes to the doorstep of where James is staying quite by accident, seeking out another missing woman from his hometown. Stephen recognizes James, but James does not know Stephen, and is concerned when the man appears ill and distressed. Finally, Stephen reveals it was his son who killed James's son Arthur. James assures Stephen he feels no anger toward him. The trial concludes. Absalom is found guilty of murder and is sentenced to death. His accomplices are found innocent and set free.

The girl and Absalom are married after the trial. Stephen tells Absalom he has to return home. He, the Jarvis family, Gertrude and her child, and his son's now-wife all return home.

Meanwhile, the late Arthur's son is visiting his grandfather James, and happens upon Stephen. They speak, and the boy discovers the people are poor and have no milk. Later, a man comes by from Jarvis' farm with milk for the children. Then a storm destroys the small church. Jarvis sends a man to help the people of Stephen's community build a dam and improve their way of life. Soon after, Jarvis' wife dies. Stephen sends a note of condolence to James. James writes back, thanking him, and tells him they are going to build a new church.

The day before his son's execution, Stephen visits James, and then goes into the mountains. There, he waits and prays until dawn, when he knows his son has been killed.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Stephen Kumalo – A black parson, and one of the novel's protagonists. Stephen is a religious man who has spent his entire life in his rural community, for which he cares very deeply. He is humble, devout, and on a journey of understanding. His visit to **Johannesburg** – the first in his life – is overwhelming, but with the help of those around his, he makes his way through every step. Stephen suffers when he faces questions to which he cannot learn the answer, and finds his faith tested after his son's crime, trial, and death sentence. In the end, Stephen comes to peace with his son's fate and his own disquiet as he prays on the mountainside during his son's execution.

James Jarvis – A white farmer, and the novel's other protagonist. James is the father of Arthur, murdered by Stephen Kumalo's son Absalom. He struggles with the fact that, like Stephen, he does not understand his son. Jarvis's politics are centrist, but his understanding of and sympathy with the plight of South Africa's blacks grows as he reads Arthur's writings. Jarvis is a good man who grants forgiveness to Stephen, and uses his wealth to provide help to Stephen's community as they suffer from drought, poverty, and hunger. After his wife's death, he decides to move to **Johannesburg**.

Absalom Kumalo – Stephen Kumalo's son. Absalom is led astray by **Johannesburg** and the people with whom he associated, leading to his accidental murder of Arthur Jarvis during a botched robbery. Absalom is found guilty of the crime and sentenced to death. He is afraid, but eventually comes to a kind of peace before his death. He also faces up to his responsibilities as a father by marrying his pregnant girlfriend, and providing all he can for his unborn child before his execution.

Arthur Jarvis – The man murdered by Absalom Kumalo. The novel never shows Arthur while he is alive, but portrays his character through his many papers and correspondences read by Arthur's father, James. He was an activist who believed that white men had done the black population a great disservice by tearing apart their communities and giving them an unfairly paltry amount of land, leading to the epidemic of violence and fear that now plague South Africa.

MINOR CHARACTERS

John Kumalo – Stephen Kumalo's brother. Since coming to **Johannesburg**, he has become a powerful but slightly corrupt political leader and activist for the blacks of Johannesburg. He has also shunned his Christian faith and its moral trappings, distressing Stephen greatly.

Theophilus Msimangu – The minister who invited Stephen Kumalo to Mission House, and who aids Stephen at every turn.

Father Vincent – Another minister at Mission House. Like Msimangu, Father Vincent helps Stephen greatly, encouraging him to pray and rest after the devastating news about Absalom's crime.

Gertrude Kumalo – Stephen Kumalo's sister. Gertrude is

flighty, and like her nephew Absalom was easily corrupted by **Johannesburg**. She is only able to find peace once she runs away to become a nun.

Absalom's girlfriend – Absalom's pregnant girlfriend. She eagerly comes and lives with Stephen and his wife after they leave **Johannesburg**, and is overjoyed to have a new family to call her "daughter." She marries Absalom prior to his execution.

Arthur's son – A young boy with a "brightness" in him, Arthur Jarvis's son (also the son of Mary Jarvis) visits Stephen Kumalo to learn Zulu. He is kind and passes along information about the community's needs to his grandfather, James Jarvis.

Mrs. Lithebe – A member of Msimangu's church, in whose home Stephen (and later Gertrude, her son, and Absalom's girlfriend) stay during their time in **Johannesburg**. She is a stern, kind, and deeply proper woman.

Mr. Harrison – Mary Jarvis's father. He rails on and on about how the country's ills are the fault of the "natives."

John Harrison – Mary Jarvis's brother, James Jarvis's son-in-law. More progressive than his father, John is a good friend to James.

Napoleon Letsitsi – A young man sent by James Jarvis to help Stephen's community build a dam and improve their agriculture. He admires James, but also talks to Stephen about the unfairness of how South Africa's land has been divided among whites and blacks.

Margaret Jarvis – James Jarvis's wife. She is devastated by her son's death. Already sickly, she dies after returning from **Johannesburg**.

Stephen's wife – Stephen Kumalo's wife. She is a patient and loving woman who suffers greatly, but stoically.

Mr. Carmichael – The lawyer who takes on Absalom Kumalo's case. He does so free of charge.

Matthew Kumalo – John Kumalo's son and Absalom's cousin. He is one the accomplices with Absalom when Arthur Jarvis is shot and killed. He lies about his presence at the murder scene and is acquitted.

Mary Jarvis – The late Arthur Jarvis's wife, and James Jarvis's daughter-in-law. She takes in her father-in-law after her mother-in-law, Margaret Jarvis, passes away.

Gertrude's son – Gertrude's young son, who listens to Stephen's stories.

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.

THE LAND AND THE TRIBE

In *Cry, The Beloved Country*, the **land** of South Africa and the original Zulu inhabitants of that land, often called "the tribe," depend upon each other, in a cycle of support and care. Without one, the other is broken, weakened, and dying. Many characters, including Gertrude and Absalom Kumalo, suffer greatly when they leave their village in the country for **Johannesburg**. The city brings death and corruption: its inhabitants, at worst, are run over by buses, shot during crimes, or die slowly of disease and poverty. At best, like Stephen's brother John, they seek power and money for its own sake, become liquor-runners and pimps and crooked politicians, and bring harm to others. Either way, they turn away from their families, the land, the place they were born, and their faith. In losing their connection to the land they lose themselves.

In turn, the land itself is a victim. In the past, the Zulus tended the land and the land provided crops, game, and good water in return. But now the people exploit the land, they overuse it, the whites claim parts of it just for themselves, and people literally rip up the land in search of gold and profit. And as the people lose their connection to the land, the land dies. Without the cycle of supporting the land and being supported by the land, the people and the earth both come to harm. It's no accident the torn-up earth is described as "bleeding" throughout the book. Conversely, the novel suggests that a return to the land—and leaving behind the city—can bring about healing. The suffering brought about by Absalom's crime and Arthur's death is only healed when James Jarvis and Stephen return to their homes in the land, bringing what they can of their families with them, and in so doing re-establish their connection and commitment to their faith and their families.

RACISM AND APARTHEID

Cry, The Beloved Country takes place during the historical period of growing racial tension and strife that led to the political policy of apartheid in South Africa, a policy in which the ruling whites enforced a system of strict racial segregation. In the time when the book is set, this policy has not yet been officially enacted, but the novel shows how economic inequality along racial lines sows the seeds of resentment, mistrust, and fear that leads to an idea like apartheid coming to seem like the only possible corrective (even though in reality it only continues the cycle of violence, crime, incarceration, and death).

The novel shows the rise of shantytowns. Nonwhites are pushed to the fringes of their own city, where housing is almost impossible to come by, and so they are forced to erect temporary camps that quickly become permanent. The shantytowns are full of crime and sickness, only worsening the poverty of their inhabitants. Children die, desperate people

commit crimes to try to escape poverty, men are thrown in jail, men are killed, increasing the resentment, fear, and poverty—the vicious cycle continues. The novel captures this vicious cycle through the story of Arthur and Absalom: Arthur is a white man dedicated to trying to solve the problems of South Africa, to try to break the cycle. But his work is cut short—quite literally, he is killed while working on his manuscript, in the middle of a sentence—by a young man, Absalom, caught up in the very system that Arthur was seeking to dismantle. There appears to be no way out of this cycle that corrupts everyone and everything it touches, except to leave the city and reconnect the broken tribe.

THE CITY VS. NATURE

The city of **Johannesburg** is portrayed as a place to which people are inevitably drawn, and from which they never return, regardless of race. What keeps them there varies from person to person – sometimes they are killed, or put in prison, or descend into poverty or crime – but the constant is that they never return to their homes or families. Arthur Jarvis leaves his father and goes into Johannesburg, but dies before he can return home. Absalom Kumalo leaves home and becomes tangled up with bad people, accidentally kills a man in a robbery that goes wrong, and is sentenced to die. Gertrude Kumalo loses her husband and then gets drawn into the liquor trade. John Kumalo goes to the city, becomes a corrupt and powerful man, and is lost to Stephen.

All of these people are taken from the land – from nature – and turned into something terrible inside the borders of Johannesburg. The city consistently breaks apart families, corrupting the social unit that stabilizes communities, and brings about death. Children die of illness in the shantytowns. People are run over by buses. Death comes to Arthur and Absalom. The city ensnares those who come to it with the promise of **money**, then buries them in poverty. Absalom is caught in just such a trap, and in trying to escape it becomes unrecognizable to his father.

Throughout the novel, nature and the city are at odds with one another. When Johannesburg becomes too full, her population spills out into shantytowns in which disease and poverty run rampant. Its citizens are constantly wondering what will happen when it rains, or when the winter comes. Nature becomes something to fear rather than something that sustains. And, meanwhile, the thirst for wealth that the city imbues in all its residents drives a mining industry that rips up the earth, further destroying the contract between the land and her people.

CHRISTIAN FAITH

Despite the fact that it was the white British and Dutch colonizers who introduced the Christian faith to South Africa through colonization, this faith is the bedrock for most of the protagonists' lives, black or white. Many of the characters are either men of the church (Stephen Kumalo, Father Vincent, Theophilus Msimangu), or are people of faith. Gertrude Kumalo even turns to the nunhood at the end of the book in order to escape the darkness that the city has visited upon her. The way that Christianity plays into these characters' lives is illustrated most clearly when Stephen, at his darkest moment—having just discovered that his son has killed a white man and will likely be put to death—is commanded by Father Vincent to pray. The book concludes with Stephen's vigil – standing and praying on the mountainside at the hour he knows his son is being executed – and it is only this (nature and faith) that gives him peace.

Throughout the novel, Christianity brings stability and tranquility to the lives of its followers, while secularism and atheism are connected to power and corruption. This dichotomy is most clearly illustrated between the two brothers: Stephen is good, and a man of faith. Despite his troubles, he ultimately finds peace. John Kumalo, on the other hand, rejects Christianity. Msimangu tells Stephen that his brother "has no use for the Church any more. He says that what God has not done for South Africa, man must do." And John selfishly ensures that Absalom will die so that his own son can be saved. The novel ties secularism to the corruption of Johannesburg, a city where the "peace of god escapes" its residents. Faith, in contrast, is portrayed as a force, like the land, that stabilizes the tribe. In fact, the novel implies that the salvation for all of South Africa lies in the eventual uniting force of Christianity. There is a repeated mantra of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, or "God Save Africa." And the ground itself, the novel states multiple times, comes directly from The Creator.

FATHERS, SONS, AND FAMILIES

When the land and tribe are corrupted, and the city and the country are pitted against one another, it follows that families will break apart. Throughout the novel, families are torn to pieces, particularly fathers and sons. In particular, the novel explores two significant father/son relationships: that of Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom Kumalo, and that of James Jarvis, and his son Arthur Jarvis. Both sons vanish to Johannesburg, and their fathers come to find them only after something terrible has happened – Arthur is shot dead in a house invasion, and Absalom is his killer. Both fathers, then, seek to understand something about their sons and their sons' circumstances. Stephen struggles to come to terms with his child killing another person, and, by extension, what has happened to his country and the brutal cycle in which they are all trapped. James attempts to get to know his son through his son's papers and library, things he did not know about him before his death. Both fathers grieve, and their losses are only truly reconciled when James helps Stephen

rebuild his church, and Stephen befriends the late Arthur's young son. The city of Johannesburg tore both of their families apart, but outside of the city's borders, broken families can heal.

UNDERSTANDING/KNOWLEDGE VS. IGNORANCE/NAIVETÉ

The city of Johannesburg can turn the most learned men into metaphorical children. Its nuances require a new and different kind of understanding. Without that understanding, Stephen—the most knowledgeable man in his community—is robbed within minutes of arriving in the city. But knowledge has a special kind of power: you can pass it on to others. Stephen feels revived when he plays with Gertrude's son. Stephen tells him stories about where he came from, and feels satisfied giving this understanding and history to his nephew. And when Stephen returns home from the city, he is also able to pass what he knows to James Jarvis' grandson, the late Arthur's son, and also will be able to do the same to his unborn grandchild, in the future. The establishment or re-establishment of these lines of knowledge are important because they reinforce the tribe, and families. One of the reasons that Johannesburg is so toxic is that it disrupts families and disrupts these lines of understanding, history, and knowledge. In one of his manuscripts, Arthur writes that if you know nothing of South Africa, you cannot truly love it, because without understanding, there is no love.

Ultimately, the future of the country of South Africa is unknown to both the characters of the novel, and to Alan Paton its author. The novel was written at the very beginning of apartheid. Paton did not know what his country would look like decades later. The final line of the novel explicitly addresses this lack of knowledge: "But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret." And so the characters of the novel have to be satisfied with a limited knowledge, and the ability to pass that knowledge one from the other, and to build the families and communities strong enough to reach that unknown day.

SYMBOLS

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

JOHANNESBURG

Throughout the text, Johannesburg serves as shorthand for a corrupting, magnetic force that draws in people and destroys them. Some people, notably the devoutly Christian, manage to avoid these effects, but everyone else suffers when they fall into its borders: Absalom Kumalo commits murder, Gertrude Kumalo falls in with a bad crowd, Arthur Jarvis is killed, John Kumalo becomes a corrupted politician. In the city, people are unable to find housing and so shantytowns spring up, there are not enough jobs or **money**, crime is rampant—each truth of Johannesburg, in turn, begets more suffering. Given that the origins of Johannesburg are that of colonization (invading Dutch forces conquering an already-settled **land**), this force is explicable. When Johannesburg emerges in the text, both in presence and in name, watch for the slow-creeping presence of metaphorical rot.

MONEY/GOLD

Money is a common manifestation of the corruption of **Johannesburg**. Sometimes, there is not enough of it, driving crime, poverty, disease, suffering, and death. Other times—like when gold is discovered at Odendaalsrust—there is too much of it, unevenly distributed in the wrong hands. The forces controlling the mining throw up temporary communities around the mines and do not pay their men enough. These miners are removed from their families and homes, forced to dig up and ruin the **earth** for the profit of their white overlords, and ultimately the tribe and the land it used to live on is destroyed, leading to more crime, poverty, disease, suffering, and death. Also, the presence of gold drives up speculation, threatening downfall at any moment. Money in *Cry, The Beloved Country* is unstable, misappropriated, and, ultimately, insufficient.

EARTH/LAND

The earth/land of South Africa is the stabilizing force for her inhabitants. Where she (the earth is often referred to as a kind of mother) is respected and loved, she is nourishing, healthy, and able to support her people. Where she is destroyed—through urbanization (**Johannesburg**), through mining (the search for **gold**)—there is corruption, decay, drought, and a resulting poverty, starvation and thirst, etc. The most elemental of these symbols, she is also the most consistent. When her land is stripped and drought is followed by heavy rain, the earth is rightly described as "bleeding." She is her people, and her people are her, and destruction of one begins a cycle of destruction for the other. Where the earth/land is referenced in *Cry, The Beloved Country*, look at her treatment by her citizens—if she's being hurt, they will be hurt. If she is being supported, good things will follow.

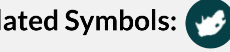
QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scribner edition of *Cry, the Beloved Country* published in 2003.

Book I, Chapter 1 Quotes

There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa… The grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. It holds the rain and the mist, and they seep into the ground, feeding the streams in every kloof. It is well-tended, and not too many cattle feed upon it; not too many fires burn it, laying bare the soil. Stand unshod upon it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

The novel opens with a description of the natural landscape around Ixopo. The unnamed narrator speaks of the "grass-covered and rolling" hills in reverent terms, emphasizing the fact that the area's natural beauty is undisturbed and needs to be protected. Toward the end of this passage, the narrator uses Christian language to describe the duty to preserve the land, and warns: "Destroy it and man is destroyed." This paragraph establishes several of the novel's key themes. Rural South Africa is presented as a "rich," precious, benevolent landscape––sacred because it was created by God for the good of mankind.

Indeed, though humanity is present within the passage, it plays a limited role in this scene of natural glory. The landscape is "lovely beyond any singing of it," implying that the land is beautiful in its own right, not because of its aesthetic or instrumental value to people. Similarly, the ground "is well-tended, and not too many cattle feed upon it; not too many fires burn it." This suggests that the native people of South Africa took good care of the land before colonization and industrialization, and still do in rural areas. However, the warning at the end of the paragraph hints at the exploitation of the land that has arisen as a result of colonization, industrial farming, and mining. The narrator's words imply that these activities will ultimately destroy all people, regardless of race.

Where you stand the grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. But the rich green hills break down. They fall to the valley below, and falling, change their nature. For they grow red and bare; they cannot hold the rain and mist, and the streams are dry in the kloofs. Too many cattle feed upon the grass, and too many fires have burned it. Stand shod upon it, for it is coarse and sharp, and the stones cut under the feet. It is not kept, or guarded, or cared for, it no longer keeps men, guards men, cares for men. The titihoya does not cry here any more.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 23-24

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has described the lush natural landscape of rural South Africa: beautiful, fertile, and peaceful. This part of the country has been left relatively untouched by human activities, and flourishes as a result. However, in this passage the narrator introduces (in almost identical language) a contrasting landscape––one that has been damaged and exploited. Just as humanity has not "kept," "guarded," and "cared for" this land, so has it ceased to protect and sustain humanity. Although not stated explicitly, it is clear that the land has been over-farmed and abused as a result of European colonization. The fact that the land was once rich and undisturbed is demonstrated by the final sentence, which states that the titihoya (a native South African bird with a distinctive call) "does not cry here *any more*"––implying that it once did.

Down in the valleys women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly reaches the height of a man. They are valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children. The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them any more.

Related Themes:

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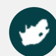
Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has described two contrasting landscapes: grassy hills that are lush and pleasant, and valleys that are "coarse," barren, and dangerous. The valleys have been damaged and exhausted by industrialization, over-farming, and mining. In this passage, the narrator mentions that all the young people in the valleys have left, as the land is not fertile enough to sustain them. Although it is not mentioned explicitly, the young people are forced to go to the cities to earn money there, as this represents the only hope of survival. This dilemma is of central importance within the narrative. Like the young people in this paragraph, Stephen's son, Absalom, moves to the city, only to be driven to crime. Disconnected from the land, people are vulnerable to corruption.

Book I, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ All roads lead to Johannesburg.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Stephen has received a letter from the Rev. Theophilus Msimangu in Johannesburg telling him that his sister, Gertrude, is ill. Stephen resolves to use the money he had been saving for the education of his son, Absalom, to bring Gertrude back from Johannesburg. Stephen prepares to leave the next day, and the narrator comments that "all roads lead to Johannesburg." This statement is an adaptation of the Roman proverb, "All roads lead to Rome." The meaning of the proverb is that many different paths or approaches can lead to the same result. In this context, the statement refers to the inevitability of being drawn to Johannesburg. Stephen's brother, sister, and son have all gone there, and now Stephen himself must finally also make the journey. Even though the city is presented as an almost entirely negative place, still everyone finds themselves drawn there for one reason or another.

Book I, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ The journey had begun. And now the fear back again, the fear of the unknown, the fear of the great city where boys were killed crossing the street, the fear of Gertrude's sickness. Deep down the fear for his son. Deep down the fear of a man who lives in a world not made for him, whose own world is slipping away, dying, being destroyed, beyond any recall.

Related Characters: Absalom Kumalo, Gertrude Kumalo, Stephen Kumalo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has described the train journey to Johannesburg; the train goes through the hills, and beautiful plants grow along the side of the tracks. Stephen has arrived for the train an hour early, feeling anxious about the trip. In this passage, the narrator describes Stephen's fears about Johannesburg, Gertrude, and Absalom. To some extent, these fears are concrete, based on the knowledge that Gertrude is sick, and that in the city traffic is so dangerous people are killed simply by crossing the street. However, Stephen's anxiety is also more fundamental and abstract. At this stage, he doesn't know what has become of Absalom, but (correctly) assumes that all is not well.

Meanwhile, the narrator's comment that Stephen is "a man who lives in a world not made for him, whose own world is slipping away" highlights the fact that his worries pertain to something deeper than this specific trip to Johannesburg. Colonization and modernization have ushered in a new South Africa, one that is hostile to Stephen and, ultimately, to black South Africans in general. The narrator's words foreshadow the coming apartheid regime, which––although it has not yet been established––seems to be contained under the surface of the existing landscape of the country.

Book I, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ The tragedy is not that things are broken. The tragedy is that they are not mended again... It suited the white man to break the tribe... but it has not suited him to build something in the place of what is broken.

Related Characters: Theophilus Msimangu (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Theophilus Msimangu has taken Stephen to the room where he'll be staying, and the two men have spoken about Stephen's family members who are in Johannesburg. Msimangu has explained that Stephen's brother John is a famous politician who has abandoned God, and hints that Stephen's sister Gertrude is now a prostitute. Msimangu then reflects on the "broken" nature of South African society, echoing the point made by the narrator that the country is suffering as a result of native South Africans being cut off from the land and the tribe. However, where the narrator's descriptions of the ruined natural landscape suggest that the problem lies within ruthless colonial industrialization itself, Msimangu's point is subtly different.

Msimangu acknowledges that "the white man" has destroyed the tribe, but says that "the tragedy is not that things are broken." This implies that on some level it may have been inevitable that tribal life should come to an end, considering the global turn toward modern, urban, industrial life. However, Msimangu goes on to emphasize that when something is broken, it is necessary for it to be mended or replaced. According to this logic, the end of tribal life should have been replaced by new ways of living that similarly facilitated the familial, communal, and spiritual support originally provided by the tribe. However, this has not been the case, and instead black South Africans have been left impoverished and uprooted, disconnected from their roots and from one another.

Book I, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ I see only one hope for our country, and that is when white men and black men, desiring neither power nor money, but desiring only the good of their country, come together to work for it.

Related Characters: Theophilus Msimangu (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Stephen and Msimangu have gone to see Stephen's brother John at his carpentry shop. There, John has spoken at length about his life and political work, including mentioning that he is no longer married to his wife, Esther, and also no longer attends church. As Stephen and Msimangu go to leave, Msimangu tells John that he sees "only one hope for our country," which is white and black men working together "desiring neither power nor money." This comment is clearly an indirect criticism of John's political motives and activities. Although John seems to have some well-grounded critiques of the racism that dominates South African society, this critique is undermined by John's own desire for money and power, as well as his desire to speak English instead of Zulu.

Overall, the novel leaves unresolved the question of whether it is possible for South Africa to be saved by men who desire "neither money nor power." Although there are examples of good men who are white as well as black, it is also clear that these men have limited power against the forces of greed, corruption, and poverty surrounding them. In this instance, Msimangu's speech has little effect on John, who is too blinded by his desire for money and power to truly care about the good of the country.

Book I, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ All roads lead to Johannesburg. If you are white or if you are black they lead to Johannesburg. If the crops fail, there is work in Johannesburg. If there are taxes to be paid, there is work in Johannesburg. If the farm is too small to be divided further, some must go to Johannesburg. If there is a child to be born that must be delivered in secret, it can be delivered in Johannesburg.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Stephen has learned that Absalom is living in a shanty town, and he and Msimangu have set off to find him. Meanwhile, a second voice has joined the primary narrator, and in this passage the narration returns to the earlier statement that "all roads lead to Johannesburg," expanding on the many reasons why people are drawn to the city. In contrast to more optimistic narratives that portray urbanization as an opportunity for multiculturalism, social mobility, and innovation, this passage presents the appeal of Johannesburg in rather negative terms. The narrator shows

that people are *forced* to go to Johannesburg as a result of desperation caused by failed crops, poverty, or unwanted pregnancies. Rather than being a city of opportunity, Johannesburg is the inevitable destination of those who are poor, oppressed, or otherwise unlucky.

Book I, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ There is not much talking now. A silence falls upon them all. This is no time to talk of hedges and fields, or the beauties of any country. Sadness and fear and hate, how they well up in the heart and mind, whenever one opens pages of these messengers of doom. Cry for the broken tribe, for the law and the custom that is gone. Aye, and cry aloud for the man who is dead, for the woman and children bereaved. Cry, the beloved country, these things are not yet at an end. The sun pours down on the earth, on the lovely land that man cannot enjoy. He knows only the fear of his heart.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Stephen has still not found Absalom, but has discovered that Arthur Jarvis has been murdered during a home invasion. Stephen and the priests learn that Jarvis was working on a manuscript when he was killed, and that he was known for his support of the black community. In this passage, the narrator laments the state of the South African nation, which is dominated by "sadness and fear and hate." The narrator emphasizes that the country's natural beauty remains, but that people are not able to enjoy it because they are so consumed by the death and suffering around them ("the fear of [one's] heart").

This passage contains the title of the novel, which takes the form of a demand to mourn what has become of South Africa. The phrasing of the sentence "Cry, the beloved country" also suggests that it is South Africa itself that is crying. This coheres with other instances in the novel in which the land is represented as bleeding or hurting in the same way as a living organism.

❝ There are times, no doubt, when God seems no more to be about the world.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Stephen and the priests have learned about the murder of Arthur Jarvis, which they all find deeply disturbing. Stephen is particularly upset, as he knew Jarvis' parents, and when Msimangu suggests that they pray together, Stephen refuses. The narrator observes that this is an occasion "when God seems no more to be about the world." This observation reveals the extent of how bleak and hopeless South African society seems to be at this point. Usually, Stephen and other characters in the novel find solace and strength in religion, but this moment suggests that there are occasions that are so terrible that even faith cannot provide consolation. The way this statement is worded does not suggest that God doesn't exist, but rather that He has abandoned the people of South Africa.

Book I, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Some cry for the cutting up of South Africa without delay into separate areas, where white can live without black, and black without white, where black can farm their own land and mine their own minerals and administer their own laws. And others cry away with the compound system, that brings men to the towns without their wives and children, and breaks up the tribe and the house and the man, and they ask for the establishment of villages for the labourers in mines and industry.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 99-

Explanation and Analysis

A town hall has been held at which the murder of Arthur Jarvis is discussed, alongside other concerns about crime, social welfare, and race relations. The crowd has debated education, with some proposing that enrollment of black children in school should increase; others oppose this idea. Eventually, the crowd begins to discuss the possibility of apartheid––"the cutting up of South Africa... into separate areas, where white can live without black." The introduction of this suggestion into the context of the town hall reveals the way in which apartheid was framed as a "solution" to the

problems of poverty and crime. The implication was that South Africa's problems were a result of racial mixing.

Using this logic, it is possible to make apartheid seem like an attractive and fair solution (as "separate but equal" segregation was for many whites in the American South). The narrator's explanation that black South Africans could "farm their own land and administer their own laws" makes it seem as if apartheid would benefit black people, affording them more freedom and self-determination. However, this masks the reality of what the separation of the races really entailed. Because of colonization, whites were far wealthier and possessed control over land, resources, and power––even though these entities originally belonged to native black South Africans. Overall, this passage makes clear how easy it can be to disguise oppressive policies as beneficial to those they are designed to exploit.

❝ We do not know, we do not know. We shall live from day to day, and put more locks on the doors, and get a fine fierce dog when the fine fierce bitch next door has pups, and hold on to our handbags more tenaciously; and the beauty of the trees by night, and the raptures of lovers under the stars, these things we shall forego. We shall forego the coming home drunken through the midnight streets, and the evening walk over the star-lit veld. We shall be careful, and knock this off our lives, and knock that off our lives, and hedge ourselves about with safety and precaution. And our lives will shrink, but they shall be the lives of superior beings; and we shall live with fear, but at least it will not be a fear of the unknown.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 100-101

Explanation and Analysis

Following the murder of Arthur Jarvis, a town hall meeting is taking place to discuss the problem of crime. Among the courses of action proposed is the apartheid system, in which white and black people live and work separately. The narrator raises the question of what would happen given the fact that there are more black South Africans than white, yet whites hold the majority of money and power. In this passage, a chorus of voices responds "we don't know." At the same time, the chorus suggests that what will happen is that white people will become more fearful, increasing the security apparatus in their homes and avoiding going out at night.

Although the chorus speaks with an anonymous "we," it is clear the voices are those of white South Africans, due to clues such as the use of the Afrikaans word "veld" (meaning "field"). This passage illustrates how a culture of fear negatively impacts everyone in society, no matter how wealthy and powerful. As the chorus states, "our lives will shrink, but they shall be the lives of superior beings." What this sentence demonstrates is the subtle, contradictory logic of white supremacy––although white people are negatively impacted by racism, they also benefit in many ways, as racist structures secure their position of power in monetary, social, political, and even psychological terms.

❝ Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

A town hall has been held to discuss the problem of crime, during which time some people have suggested implementing an apartheid system. The narrator, speaking in the voice of a (white) chorus, has hinted at the likely repercussions of apartheid: white people living in a constant state of pre-emptive aggression and fear, cutting themselves off from the country while simultaneously further establishing themselves as the superior race. In this passage, the chorus refers to an unborn child whom it wishes will not "love the earth too deeply," because "fear will rob him of all." The chorus repeats the novel's title, "Cry, the beloved country," linking this passage back to earlier lamentations about the state of South Africa.

The chorus's words refer to an abstract child, who––given the way this passage links to previous discussions of the fear of white South Africans––is presumably white. Although the child is unnamed, the chorus could also be referring to a specific character in the novel: Arthur Jarvis. The chorus's plea that the child not "love" or "be moved" by

the land perhaps connects to Jarvis's concern about native South Africans. Indeed, the fact that it was Jarvis who was accidentally murdered is framed as all the more tragic, due to the fact that he represented hope for South African race relations.

Book I, Chapter 13 Quotes

❝❝ What broke in a man when he could bring himself to kill another? What broke when he could bring himself to thrust down the knife into the warm flesh, to bring down the axe on the living head, to cleave down between the seeing eyes, to shoot the gun that would drive death into the beating heart?

Related Characters: Stephen Kumalo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Stephen and Msimangu have gone to a home for the blind, and while Msimangu attends to his duties there, Stephen contemplates the news about Absalom. To Stephen, it is inconceivable that Absalom was able to murder another man. His rhetorical question of "what broke in a man when he could bring himself to kill another?" reflects earlier passages in which Msimangu describes the tribe as "broken." This connects Absalom's actions to the destruction of the tribe by colonialism.

Note that Stephen is preoccupied less with the moral disposition that could lead a man to commit murder than with the physical action of killing someone––"to bring down the axe on the living head, to cleave down between the seeing eyes." This visceral description highlights how personally implicated Stephen feels in the murder, a result of the fact that it was committed by his own son. It also suggests that Stephen is not considering the question from the perspective of religious faith, but in a more practical, tangible way. Indeed, Msimangu will soon criticize Stephen for sinking into a "sinful" despair.

Book I, Chapter 15 Quotes

❝❝ Sorrow is better than fear… Fear is a journey, a terrible journey, but sorrow is at least an arriving.

Related Characters: Father Vincent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

The young man from the reform school has advised Stephen to get a lawyer, in order to emphasize to the judge that Absalom did not intend to shoot Arthur Jarvis. The two go to see Father Vincent, who agrees with the young man's advice. Stephen confesses to Father Vincent that he is in a state of shock about what has happened; he expresses immense sorrow at the fact that so many young men lose themselves in Johannesburg. Father Vincent replies that "sorrow is better than fear." These words of wisdom cohere with other parts of the novel that describe the destructive potential of fear. Within the world of the novel, fear leads to disastrous consequences because of its relationship to the unknown.

Indeed, by presenting fear as "a journey," Father Vincent implies that nothing good can ever come of fear by itself, but that people experiencing fear must reach "an arriving" that allows them to be at peace with their feelings and put them to productive use. This conflicts with the advice of Msimangu, who warns Stephen that despair is sinful. On the other hand, it is also possible that there is an important distinction between sorrow and hopeless despair.

Book II, Chapter 20 Quotes

❝❝ The old tribal system was, for all its violence and savagery, for all its superstition and witchcraft, a moral system. Our natives today produce criminals and prostitutes and drunkards, not because it is their nature to do so, but because their simple system of order and tradition and convention has been destroyed. It was destroyed by the impact of our own civilization. Our civilization has therefore an inescapable duty to set up another system of order and tradition and convention. It is true that we hoped to preserve the tribal system by a policy of segregation. That was permissible. But we never did it thoroughly or honestly. We set aside one-tenth of the land for four-fifths of the people. Thus we made it inevitable, and some say we did it knowingly, that labour would come to the towns. We are caught in the toils of our own selfishness.

Related Characters: Arthur Jarvis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

James Jarvis has gone to Arthur's house and has looked through his books and papers, noting many books on Abraham Lincoln and documents indicating Arthur was President of the African Boys' Club. James also discovers a manuscript that Arthur was working on when he died. In this passage from the manuscript, Arthur describes the way in which European colonization "destroyed" the tribal communities of South Africa. From a contemporary perspective, Arthur seems rather forgiving of the white colonizers––he labels the policy of segregation "permissible," and describes the tribal system in typically racist terms, calling it full of "violence and savagery." However, for a white South African to be writing such a passage at the time would have been highly unusual.

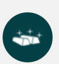
Arthur's critiques of the destructive legacy of European colonialism cohere with observations made throughout the novel, particular his statement that black South Africans remain stuck in a cycle of violence because "their simple system of order and tradition and convention has been destroyed." Furthermore, Arthur presciently identifies the fact that segregation was enacted in a dishonest way. He argues that the highly inequitable division of land forced people to come to the towns for work; as the rest of the novel shows, this mass influx of people has created further poverty, violence, and crime.

Book II, Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ For mines are for men, not for money. And money is not something to go mad about, and throw your hat into the air for. Money is for food and clothes and comfort, and a visit to the pictures. Money is to make happy the lives of children. Money is for security, and for dreams, and for hopes, and for purposes. Money is for buying the fruits of the earth, of the land where you were born.

Related Characters: Arthur Jarvis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

James Jarvis has gone to Arthur's house and has been reading from Arthur's unfinished manuscript about the socioeconomic problems plaguing South Africa. Arthur has described how European colonialism destroyed the indigenous tribal system of South Africa, thereby leaving native South Africans without a community through which to structure their lives. In this passage, Arthur turns his focus to the mines, arguing that the riches of the mines should be "for men, not for money." This distinction alludes to the problem of pursuing money for its own sake. As Arthur explains, money has many necessary uses––"food and clothes and comfort," "security," and "buying the fruits of the earth." In one sense, this passage emphasizes the importance of money, implying that without sufficient income, people will suffer.

On the other hand, this passage also serves as a warning against greed. As Arthur argues, money is not valuable in itself; rather, it is only valuable because of the good things it can bring to people. The implication of this statement is that it is very possible to have too much money. Arthur's statement that money should be used for "purposes" sounds vague; however, it takes on a deeper meaning within the context of global imperialism. Many people today observe that the driving force behind colonization was greed––European colonizers identified an opportunity to grow rich through the exploitation of natural resources and the labor of indigenous populations, and developed colonial systems and racial philosophies accordingly.

Book II, Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ One can read, as I read when I was a boy, the brochures about lovely South Africa, that land of sun and beauty sheltered from the storms of the world, and feel pride in it and love for it, and yet know nothing about it at all. It is only as one grows up that one learns that there are other things here than sun and gold and oranges. It is only then that one learns of the hates and fears of our country. It is only then that one's love grows deep and passionate, as a man may love a woman who is true, false, cold, loving, cruel and afraid.

Related Characters: Arthur Jarvis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

James has returned to Arthur's house to read again from the manuscript his son was writing when he was killed. He has reread the exact passage Arthur was composing when he was shot, before turning to another essay Arthur had

previously written. In this essay, Arthur describes his childhood naïveté about South Africa. He writes that children are shown only a very narrow view of the country, one that emphasizes its natural beauty but ignores the social strife and other problems that plague the nation. Somewhat surprisingly, Arthur then argues that it is only after discovering these harsh facts about South Africa that is possible to truly love the country.

This passage suggests that Arthur is the kind of person who Msimangu described as representing hope for South Africa's future––someone who is not motivated by the desire for money or power, but rather by a deep, honest love for the country. On the other hand, Arthur's description of his love of South Africa does seem particular to a white South African experience. Stephen's love of his country, for example, does seem to dwell much more in the natural landscape and tribal system that existed before European colonization. Unlike in Arthur's case, this love does not emerge from childhood naïveté, but from the fact that this is the version of South Africa with which Stephen and his ancestors are familiar.

Book II, Chapter 28 Quotes

The Judge rises, and the people rise. But not all is silent. The guilty one falls to the floor, crying and sobbing. And there is a woman wailing, and an old man crying Tixo, Tixo. No one calls for silence, though the Judge is not quite gone. For who can stop the heart from breaking?

Related Characters: Absalom Kumalo, Stephen Kumalo, Absalom's girlfriend

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226-227

Explanation and Analysis

Absalom's trial has taken place, and the two other men accused of being accomplices to the murder have been acquitted. Although the judge acknowledges Absalom's honest confession and display of remorse, he concludes that he must still find Absalom guilty, and sentences him to death. In this passage, the narrator describes the reaction to the sentencing within the courtroom. On one level, the atmosphere is calm and disciplined––"the Judge rises, and the people rise"––representing the triumph of law and order. At the same time, there is emotional chaos: Absalom falls to the ground, his girlfriend wails, and an old man (presumably Stephen) cries "Tixo, Tixo," the Xhosa word for "God." Once again, the narrator returns to the theme of brokenness––the country, tribe, land, and now "the heart" are all broken.

Book II, Chapter 29 Quotes

He had come to tell his brother that power corrupts, that a man who fights for justice must himself be cleansed and purified, that love is greater than force. And none of these things had he done... He turned to the door, but it was locked and bolted. Brother had shut out brother, from the same womb had they come.

Related Characters: Stephen Kumalo, John Kumalo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

Absalom has been married to his girlfriend in prison. Afterward, Stephen stays to speak with Absalom, and promises to take care of his unborn child. Stephen then goes to see John at his carpentry shop, and advises him to be careful about both his son and his political actions. However, John reacts defensively to Stephen's warnings, and violently forces his brother to leave, even locking him out. This interaction suggests that some people are not able to escape corruption. Unlike Absalom, who shows remorse for his crime and reforms himself before death, John is committed to a life of greed and dishonesty, and refuses to hear any contradictory advice about this from his brother. The narrator emphasizes the power of corruption by mentioning that John and Stephen came "from the same womb," but John has now shut Stephen out of his life completely.

... he prayed for his son. Tomorrow they would all go home, all except his son. And he would stay in the place where they would put him, in the great prison in Pretoria, in the barred and solitary cell; and mercy failing, would stay there till he was hanged. Aye, but the hand that had murdered once pressed the mother's breast into the thirsting mouth, had stolen into the father's hand when they went out in the dark. Aye, but the murderer afraid of death had once been a child afraid of the night.

Related Characters: Stephen Kumalo, Absalom Kumalo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

There has been a going-away party for Stephen, who will be returning to Ixopo and taking Gertrude and Absalom's wife with him. Meanwhile, Msimangu has given up all of his money and possessions to help repay what Stephen has spent in Johannesburg. Alone, Stephen counts the money, thinks regretfully about his fight with his brother, and prays for his son. He recalls Absalom as an innocent baby, reflecting on the astounding fact that the little boy he remembers grew up to commit murder. Once again, this passage focuses on the theme of corruption, and the way in which Johannesburg so drastically altered the course of Absalom's life. Note also that Stephen describes Absalom's childhood fear of the dark, a detail that emphasizes the destructive force of fear.

Book III, Chapter 36 Quotes

❝❝ The great valley of the Umzimkulu is still in darkness, but the light will come there. Ndotsheni is still in darkness, but the light will come there also. For it is the dawn that has come, as it has come for a thousand centuries, never failing. But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

The day before Absalom is due to be executed, Stephen decides to go up the mountain. He has done this three times before, all at moments of crisis, when he was in need of spiritual guidance and strength. Having arrived at his destination, Stephen confesses his sins and gives thanks before falling asleep. He awakes just before dawn, and in this passage the narrator describes the natural landscape at the hour just before it is illuminated by the sunrise. The narrator emphasizes the contrast between the predictable cycle of sunlight that has been the same "for a thousand centuries" and the unknowability of the future. This refers both to the specific fate of Absalom, as well as to the broader fate of South Africa as a whole.

The passage contains a clear sense of hope that this metaphorical dawn will come (just as the literal dawn eventually comes even to valleys that are "still in darkness"), bringing the "emancipation" of the people from "the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear." This last phrase represents the two oppressive states of existence experienced by black and white South Africans, respectively. The black community, who have suffered from colonialism, exploitation, racism, and poverty, live under "the fear of bondage"; meanwhile, Afrikaners are paralyzed by "the bondage of fear," which inhibits their empathy for black people and leads them to perpetuate racist violence. The hope for change within the passage is strong, but also tentative. The narrator seems sure that the "dawn will come," but how long it will take remains completely unknown.

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.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 1

An unnamed narrator describes the beauty of the South African veld: the hills and grass, the sound of the birds, the mountains, and the road that leads into them. Cattle graze on the ground, but not enough to overgraze and the land. The **ground** holds moisture and life, and feeds the streams that flow down into the valley.

The narrator describes the country of South Africa as beautiful, full of life, and as life-giving, but only to a point: it supports cattle, as long as they do not overuse it. Up here in the hills, the necessary balance between land and people still exists.

The narrator states that you should stand barefoot upon this **earth**, because it's sacred, and from God. The narrator instructs you to take care of the land, because it takes care of men. If it is destroyed, so is man.

The narrator describes a cycle of care between the land and mankind—. To stand barefoot upon the earth is a symbol of connection to the earth, and support of that cycle. Note the connection also of the land to God.

As the hills descend into the valley, the grass disappears, destroyed by farming, overgrazing of cattle, and misuse. The narrator tells you that if you stand on *this* **ground** barefoot, you will cut your feet. Man did not take care of it, and now it no longer takes care of man. When it rains, the exposed red soil bleeds.

The closer the land gets to human civilization, the more ravaged it is. Here, the cycle of care is broken. If you stand on this ground, the symbolism is clear: because mankind has not cared for it, it can't care for man and, in fact, will harm man.

The **earth** is torn apart, and it can no longer hold its young people. Only the elderly and parents of small children, and the children themselves, remain.

With the land destroyed, the communities that depend on it also fall apart. The adults who work and make the land and community thrive and grow are gone.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 2

A child brings a letter to Rev. Stephen Kumalo. She appears hungry, so Stephen sends her to his wife for some food. He then examines the letter and observes that it is from **Johannesburg**. It is dirty, and has passed through many hands. He muses on how many people he has known who have gone to Johannesburg and vanished, including his son Absalom, brother John, and sister Gertrude. None of them have written in a long time.

The child who brings Stephen the letter is hungry because the community is suffering—the cycle of care between man and land is broken. Stephen gives the child food—he still fights against that breakdown. The letter and Stephen's musings show how Johannesburg has swallowed up so many people—not just their bodies, but their words too—those who leave seem to disappear.

Stephen hesitates to open the letter, and shows it to his wife. They ponder who might have sent the letter: though Absalom didn't send it, it might concern him, or it might be from John. They comment how strange it is that they've wanted a letter like this for so long, and yet are now afraid to open it. Finally, Stephen's wife opens the letter. It is from Rev. Theophilus Msimangu of **Johannesburg**. He implores Stephen to come to Johannesburg, because Gertrude is very sick.

Stephen and Stephen's wife's instincts are spot on: nothing good comes from Johannesburg. So naturally they're afraid of the letter's contents, especially in regards to their son. Ironically, they're right to be afraid for their son, but the letter does not reveal that he is in trouble—that realization will only come later.

After sending the child away, Stephen asks his wife to get the "St. Chad's" **money**, so that he may go and fetch his sister. But once he has the money in his hand, he can't bring himself to actually use it because the money was meant to send his son Absalom to school. Stephen's wife insists, however, that the money is no longer necessary because Absalom has gone to **Johannesburg** and won't be returning, because no one returns from Johannesburg. He doesn't even write. Stephen, upset, accuses his wife of "opening the door" of the idea that their son might not return. She says that the door has been open for a long time; he just refused to see it.

In using the money that had been set aside for their son's future, Stephen and his wife are giving up on that future. The city has taken away opportunity from Absalom, in more ways than one. The fact that Stephen only now seems to recognize the fact that the money will not be needed for Absalom's schooling, when it seems that his wife recognized it long ago, shows that Stephen has been in denial about what is obviously true.

Stephen reminds his wife that unlike most Zulus, they only have one son. His wife accuses him of tormenting himself. He says that he is not tormenting *himself*—it is the people who have vanished to Johannesburg and do not write that torment him. He sarcastically suggests that perhaps the white man has something to do with the missing letters, or perhaps the letters have been blown away by the wind. His wife accuses him of tormenting her, too.

The disappearance of family members to Johannesburg has a corrosive effect on those left behind, who must watch their communities disintegrate. Stephen's comment about the white man is notable for two reasons. First because it indicates that there is some racial tension between white and blacks. But second, that Stephen himself doesn't share that view: he doesn't blame the white man; he blames his family that does not write.

When Stephen realizes how his anger is hurting his wife, he calms himself and gives in to what he knows is true, and they count out the **money**. Worried that he will not have enough for the journey, Stephen's wife gives Stephen some more money that she had been saving for a stove and for his clothes. He makes plans to leave by train the next day, and then apologizes to his wife for being unkind. He goes and prays for forgiveness while his wife suffers silently, as she has for many years.

This sacrifice of the needed money is just the beginning of what Johannesburg will demand of Stephen. The city is like a black hole into which everything—people, money, tradition—falls and is consumed. Stephen's nature is revealed when he humbly apologizes to his wife—he is a good man, troubled by how the world has changed.

The roads and trains all lead toward **Johannesburg**. The narrator tells you to be grateful if you can sleep through the ride.

Everything leads toward Johannesburg. The narrator implies that it's better to sleep through the journey in order to avoid seeing the ravaged earth along the way.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 3

The narrator describes the path of the train, which crawls into the hills. The narrator insists that you can even get out and look down at the valley from which you have come, for it is unlikely that the train would leave you behind. But if there's mist, you won't see anything. The narrator describes the beautiful plants that grow alongside the train tracks.

The earth, despite its troubles, is beautiful when viewed from a distance. Under certain circumstances, however, the beauty of the earth is obscured. But if you stay on the train, that machine bringing you to the city, you will have difficulty seeing it at all.

People who are familiar with taking the train can tell when it will arrive. Stephen, however, arrives an hour early and is anxious about the upcoming journey – how difficult it will be, how much **money** it will cost at every turn. He also recalls how dangerous the streets of **Johannesburg** are, and a story about a woman he knew who went there and saw her twelve-year-old son crushed to death by a truck. Beneath these concerns, there is another one – where is Absalom, and why haven't they heard from him in so long?

Stephen's unfamiliarity with travel is marked by his anxiety and early arrival to the train station. He hasn't arrived in Johannesburg yet, or even been there once, but he is aware ever now of the danger it contains. Beneath the more superficial worries the real question about Absalom lurks. His anxiety for the welfare of his son is well-founded, though he doesn't realize this yet.

As the train finally approaches, Stephen thanks the man who accompanied him to the station for his help. The man asks him a favor – if he would inquire after the missing daughter of Sibeko, who was also swallowed up by **Johannesburg**. Stephen promises to do what he can, though he seems uncertain if it's possible. As he boards, Stephen observes that the train is full of black travellers, because Europeans in this area ride in their own motor cars. The women in the car are mostly dressed primitively, though not the men. The people on the train see Stephen's clerical collar and make room for him.

The daughter of Sibeko is yet another soul sucked up into the corrupting, vanishing force that is Johannesburg—another person from the growing list of the lost of Ixopo. When he boards the train, Stephen can observe the effects of racial politics even here. Blacks must all gather on trains together, while whites are wealthy enough to have their own private vehicles. The people of the train have much respect for Stephen, because of his job.

Through the window, Stephen speaks to his companion. He asks him why Sibeko did not come and ask for Stephen's help on his own. The companion says it is because Sibeko is not of their church. Stephen says that Sibeko is part of their people, even if he is not of their church. He repeats, loudly enough for the train to hear, that he shall inquire after the daughter in **Johannesburg**, even though he'll be very busy. The train begins to move, and Stephen needs to sit down. The other people in the train, having overheard the conversation, are looking at him with even more respect, thinking that he the sort of important man who goes to Johannesburg often.

Stephen indulges in a rare moment of weakness by showing off to the train that he is going to Johannesburg. He doesn't seem to realize that this is redundant—people already respect him because he is a parson. Stephen is likely hiding his anxiety and uncertainty about the upcoming trip by pretending to be so worldly.

Once the journey has begun, all of Stephen's fears begin to rise up inside of him – fear for his sister, fear for Absalom, fear that his whole world is crumbling. He feels ill from the false impression he created in front of the people of the train. He reaches into his pocket and begins to read his Bible, his only comfort.

But all of his blustering cannot hide his fear. When Stephen immediately regrets his personal failings, he turns to his faith for comfort.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 4

The train passes through many towns and communities – some magnificent, some broken and sick. Then, Stephen changes trains and soon the names of the towns they are passing through become unfamiliar because they're in Afrikaans, a language that he has never heard spoken. Around him, people talk about the mines. Stephen sees the **gold** mines, in the distance, and asks the other passengers about them. They explain how the mines work, and Stephen is thrilled by the newness of it. He asks if this is **Johannesburg**. The passengers laugh, and begin to describe the hugeness of Johannesburg. Stephen insists that this must be Johannesburg, as more and more building and vehicles and machines rush by the train. Then, one of the men points and shows Stephen Johannesburg. He sees buildings and glittering, confusing advertisements, and is filled with fear.

Through the train, the many states of the South African land are visible. Stephen is being transported into a whole new world, once with gold mines and a new language. Stephen's ignorance of what he is looking at is betrayed quickly to the other passengers, but as they are not the people with whom he boarded, his deception is unnoticed. Stephen is overwhelmed by the glitz and bustle of this new place.

The train stops at the station, full of thousands of people. There is so much noise. Stephen sees a street full of cars, but remembering the child run over by the car, is afraid to cross it. He tries to cross, is almost hit by a bus, and retreats to a wall to pretend as if he's waiting for someone. He feels like a child. He prays as he stands.

Stephen exits the trains and becomes one of many on the street. He is afraid and feels like a child—he doesn't even know where to begin. He turns to God for guidance.

Suddenly, a young man approaches Stephen. The young man speaks to him in a language Stephen does not recognize. Then the young man switches to Stephen's language, Zulu, and asks him where he wants to go. When Stephen tells him, the young man offers to buy Stephen a ticket from the ticket office while he waits in line. Stephen gives him some **money** and waits. After a while, he realized he doesn't see the young man anymore. When he asks an older man where the ticket office is, the man explains that there is no ticket office, and that Stephen has been cheated. The man helps Stephen get to Mission House on the bus, where he arrives exhausted but grateful to be secure and safe.

Stephen puts his trust in the first person who appears and speaks to him, even though this person ends up cheating him out of money, reemphasizing how little he knows about this place. His prayer, however, is answered—he happens upon a kind person who shows him how to get exactly where he needs to go.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 5

Msimangu tells Stephen that he will be staying with Mrs. Lithebe, who is part of the church. Stephen washes up before supper, and marvels over the modern bathroom, the likes of which he never seen before. Then Stephen and all the priests eat together, and talk about how the land and people of Ixopo are suffering, and the general "sickness of the **land**," resulting in broken families and crime. One of the priests shows Stephen a newspaper with a headline about black men being arrested for beating and robbing an elderly couple, and tells him that this happens every day.

Stephen is now safe among good people, but the world around them—the people, the land—is falling apart. The newspaper article that they show Stephen foreshadows the destruction coming to Absalom.

Msimangu takes Stephen to his room, and asks him some questions about his sister Gertrude—why she had come to **Johannesburg**, if she had ever been married. Stephen says that she came there with her child to look for her missing husband. Msimangu then reveals that Gertrude no longer has any husband, and implies that she has become a prostitute, and that she is involved in the making and selling of "bad" liquor, and that she has been to prison multiple times. Stephen asks if the child is still there, and Msimangu confirms this, saying that if Gertrude herself cannot be saved, at least her child can be. He tells Stephen he will take him there tomorrow.

Stephen gets his first taste of what can happen to a person who leaves home and comes to Johannesburg—he learns how far his sister has fallen, even though she arrived with very good intentions.

Then, Stephen tells Msimangu that he is nursing a deeper sorrow. After struggling to get it out, he reveals that he is very worried about Absalom, and how his son has not been heard from for so long. Msimangu assures him they can look for Absalom, too. Then, Stephen also admits that he also would like to find his brother, John. Msimangu smiles and assures Stephen that unlike the others, he is fine and his fate is known: he is currently a celebrated and respected politician. Though Msimangu admits, regretfully, that John has turned away from the Church, saying that "what God has not done for South Africa, man must do."

The news about John is a mixed blessing for Stephen. Unlike Gertrude, John has not come and turned to crime, but he has become corrupt, and hungers for power, and has turned from God. These are subtler forms of evil, but evil nonetheless.

Msimangu talks about the true tragedy of how the land and the tribe have been separated – not that it happened, but that the white men in charge have not seen the damage and tried to mend it. This, Msimangu insists, is why crime and poverty are so prevalent. But, he insists, there are some good white men who would sacrifice themselves to fix this problem.

Again, more foreshadowing regarding the upcoming tragedy. The good white men of which Msimangu speak include Arthur Jarvis, whom Absalom will accidentally murder in a matter of days.

After they are finished speaking, Msimangu brings Stephen to see Mrs. Lithebe, and they make plans to meet tomorrow morning. Stephen marvels at how recently he was in Ixopo, how long he had traveled to this new and unknown place.

The great distance that Stephen has travelled is both literal and metaphorical—he is very, very far from Ixopo, his home. This separation will result in knowledge, and suffering.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 6

The next morning, Msimangu and Stephen head into **Johannesburg** to find Gertrude. Msimangu admits that though he is not for segregation, the downside to having blacks and whites packed so tightly together is that it brews confrontation between each group's young hooligans. He also points out the *Bantu Press*, a local newspaper, and the roving, truant children, and a woman who sells liquor and is said to be one of the richest black person in Johannesburg.

The political situation of Johannesburg in a nutshell: separating the races causes trouble, but putting them close together also causes trouble. The only way that blacks are able to have a lot of money in Johannesburg is through crime—unlike whites, who are able to earn large amounts of money in (sometimes) legitimate ways.

They arrive at Gertrude's house. Msimangu tells Stephen that he'll be visiting a parishioner next door, and to come find him when he is ready. Before he even knocks, Stephen can hear "bad" laughter on the other side of the door. Then he knocks, and she answers. She looks afraid. She turns around and says something unintelligible to someone that Stephen cannot see. There is a flurry of activity in the house, and then silence. Only then does she invite him inside. She shakes his hand, and it is limp and icy.

When Stephen shakes his sister's hand, he can feel that the life has almost literally gone out of her body—her separation from the lifeblood of her home has left her suspicious, cold, afraid.

When they sit down and begin to speak, Gertrude is reluctant to give her brother a lot of information. She admits that her husband is still missing, that she did not write. She confirms that she has been to prison but denies that it was her who committed the crime, and blames it on a woman that she had been living with. She also seems uncertain about the location of her child. Her voice is no longer kind, but full of an unpleasantness that reminds Stephen of the "bad" laughter he heard outside the house.

Gertrude has the trappings of decency, but all of them are corrupted: a husband long missing the city, a child who she cannot locate, laughter that is undeniably "wrong" in a way that Stephen cannot quite identify.

Gertrude tells Stephen she has sent for her child. Stephen provokes her by asking her where he can sleep for the night, and when she looks fearful, he explodes in anger, telling her that she has shamed the family with her liquor and her prostitution and not keeping track of her child. She begins weeping, and says that **Johannesburg** has made her sick and she does not want to be there anymore, though she doesn't deserve it. Stephen says that God forgives everyone, and so she can be forgiven. They kneel down and pray.

In one of his rare moments of temper, Stephen is outrages by the sins of his sister. At this display, she breaks down, admitting that Johannesburg is terrible and has done bad things to her, and saying that she wants to go. Stephen prays with her, and they are both restored by this act.

After they are finished praying, Stephen asks if Gertrude knows where Absalom is. She says she is not sure, but their brother John will know. Stephen says that he will ask if Mrs. Lithebe has room for Gertrude and the child. The missing nephew finally appears, and Stephen tells Gertrude how much better for the boy things will be in Ixopo. Stephen leaves.

In the moments after prayer, it seems as if everything is coming together: the child arrives and is no longer missing, Gertrude agrees to go back with Stephen, and she has information about John and where to find Absalom.

That afternoon, Stephen goes with a truck and fetches them. He is glad when the task is done. At Mrs. Lithebe's, Gertrude and the boy are given a room. Stephen feels overjoyed and accomplished, that after only a single day of being in **Johannesburg**, he is putting right what is broken.

Stephen feels as if he has accomplished a great thing in just one day, already putting the broken people back together. This initial success only serves to deepen the horror of the catastrophe that befalls his own son.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 7

Stephen buys Gertrude some new, respectable clothes for herself and her child. He inwardly mulls about the expenses of things, and worries about his own of **money**. He wonders how Gertrude was able to save so little, given her recent profession.

Money is a constant concern in Johannesburg. Everything is expensive; you must always be buying things. The poor have no way to save their way out of poverty.

It's a beautiful day, and Stephen is writing a letter to his wife about his adventures in **Johannesburg**, and how successful the endeavor has been so far. He tells her that this day, the day he is writing, is the day when he will look for his son. He pauses as Msimangu comes to collect him for their search.

Stephen's telling his wife that he has been very successful so far only underlines how painful it will be when Stephen understands what will happen to Absalom.

The two men locate John's carpentry shop. Though he is fatter than when they last saw each other, Stephen recognizes his brother, though not the men with him. John does not recognize Stephen at first, but after Stephen reveals his identity, John welcomes him and Msimangu and offers them some tea.

John's failure to recognize Stephen does not just attest to the years they are apart. It is also a signal of the way that John has turned away from the church, of which Stephen is a part.

Stephen inquires after John's wife Esther, but John says that he hasn't been married to Esther for ten years. Stephen soon learns that John has a relationship with a woman to whom he is not properly married. Stephen asks John why he didn't write a letter to tell him about any of this, and John says that Stephen and his community do not understand how life is in **Johannesburg**, and to write with such details would bring about "unnecessary trouble." When Stephen presses him to explain how things are different here, John asks to switch to English, and Stephen obliges.

Like Gertrude, John appears to be decent (a woman in his home, a politician), but it quickly becomes clear that not all is as it seems. His wife has left him, his job is corrupt, and he felt no need to let his old community know any of these things.

In English, John begins to explain that in Ixopo, things are run by the chief, who knows nothing about anything. But in Johannesburg, he says, he can advance himself, make a great deal of **money**, and have some power and influence. It's not perfect, and there are other masters, but at least the chief does not control him. The breaking apart of the tribes in inevitable, but Johannesburg is a new and different kind of tribe. Then, he compares the Church to the ignorant chief—not evil, but not making anything better.

John admits that he has swapped one false master (the chief) for another (his own power and influence). He equates Johannesburg with a new and better kind of tribe like the one that has been broken apart in Ixopo and elsewhere, and has no use for the church, which he considers as much of a problem as the chief.

John raises his voice, and seems to be addressing a crowd that is not there. He tells Msimangu and Stephen that the mines are where all of the **money** is coming from, but the black men who dig it up are paid too little money, have to leave their families to do so, and become sick. And the more gold that is found, the more the mine's white owners receive, not the men who dig. South Africa is not built on the mines, he concludes, but *their* people's backs and labor. Then he falls quiet. Stephen and Msimangu feel compelled to also be quiet, and Stephen hardly recognizes this man before him. John says, finally, that the Church is part of the problem, too – the white priests receive more money, and the bishop is very wealthy. He concludes that hypocrisy is why he no longer attends church.

John is very caught up in his own importance, performing for an audience that is not there. He expresses his outrage for the mining companies and their refusal to compensate black miners fairly, and the racial hypocrisy of the church. His points are valid, but are marred by his self-importance and corruption.

Stephen asks John why his wife left. John is vague about the reason, but Msimangu interprets it as her wishing for faithfulness, and him being unwilling to provide it. Because they are still speaking in English, John does not understand the word. He does seem to understand the implication, though, and begins to get angry. Stephen intervenes. They switch back to Zulu as the tea comes.

It becomes clear that John has done some troubling things, and also does not like it when these shortcomings are pointed out to him, which would also account for his dislike of the church.

Stephen explains that he has come to fetch Gertrude and to take her back with him to Ixopo. John agrees that **Johannesburg** is not a good place for a single woman, and that this is a wise idea. Then, Stephen asks if John knows where Absalom might be. John says that Absalom and his own son were friendly with one another, and both went off to get work together at a factory. He goes to the telephone book to find the name of the place, and Stephen feels a twinge of pride to know someone with a telephone. John gets him the information for a textile factory. As they leave, Msimangu gives John a small lecture about how it is better to seek love than power.

Again, John is half-right, and half-blinded by his own arrogance: Johannesburg isn't a good place for a single woman, but it isn't a good place for him or his son either, as he will learn after the murder of Arthur Jarvis. Msimangu's lecture is well-meaning, but falls on willingly deaf ears, as it will when Stephen tries to give the same speech to John toward the end of the book.

They are unsuccessful locating Absalom at the factory, and trace him to a house in Sophiatown. He is not there, but a woman gives them a forwarding address for Absalom. After Stephen has stepped outside, the woman reveals to Msimangu that Absalom was running with a bad crowd. Msimangu does not tell this to Stephen, and they head home.

As they search for Absalom, success evades them at every turn. Each new location is a new hope ultimately tainted with disappointment and, in this case, a warning that things will not end well for Absalom.

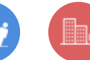
BOOK I, CHAPTER 8

The next day, Stephen and Msimangu continue to search for Absalom. They catch a bus after Msimangu assures Stephen that they cannot catch a wrong one, for they all go into **Johannesburg**. Then they try to catch a bus to the neighborhood of Alexandra, which is where they believe Absalom to be.

The fact that every bus leads to the city reinforces the idea of Johannesburg as an inevitable force, into which all are drawn and destroyed.

A man approaches Stephen and asks him and Msimangu to reconsider taking the bus, because they are trying to do a strike to bring the bus fare back down. After some discussion, the men agree not to take the bus. After he leaves, Msimangu reveals that he is a friend of John's, and an organizer of these types of political actions—also a man who has rejected the church. They begin to walk to Alexandra. After a while, a white man stops and offers them a ride, which they take. He takes them to where they need to go, drops them off, and leaves.

The political situation of Johannesburg becomes clearer and clearer. Though the men who fight against injustice are well-intentioned (John, the man who encourages them not to take the bus), they are still trapped in the same corrupting system.



As they walk through Alexandra, Msimangu tells Stephen about it, and how it is a place where black men can own property, but it has no services, and harbors a lot of crime, some of it very dangerous. He regales Stephen with stories of people robbed, beaten, assaulted. He says that people from neighboring communities, horrified by the crime, petitioned to destroy the whole place, but that other white people intervened, saying that it was important for black men to be able to own a home, and have a say in a community.

The whites of South Africa have created an untenable situation: they removed blacks from their land, become upset when suffering blacks seek money and security or express their rage, discuss dismantling even this artificial community that cannot exist anywhere else, but then decide that it must be allowed to exist because the community is stabilizing—even though whites dismantled the real community in the first place.

They finally arrive at the house. The woman inside reluctantly lets them in. She says that Absalom and his cousin have been gone for a while. She is reluctant to answer questions, insists that nothing is wrong, and is obviously afraid. The men leave. Outside, Msimangu suggests that both of them may have been too many to question her, making her nervous. He leads Stephen away, and then returns to the house.

The situation is so bad in Johannesburg that people don't even trust two parsons. These people have been so broken that they cannot put faith in the church or in their own people.

Msimangu assures the woman that he is not from the police. He presses her for more information, telling her that Stephen is an old man who is suffering, and that they are only seeking Stephen's son. The woman still refuses to talk. Finally, Msimangu agrees to swear on a Bible that they are only looking for Absalom, and will not bring misfortune down upon her head. After this, she reveals that the boys had lived there, and dealt in likely stolen goods, though she never noticed any blood. She repeats that they have been gone for a long time and she doesn't know where they are, but that they knew a taxi driver. She tells them how to find the taxi driver.

Msimangu learns more details about how far Absalom has fallen, and how much danger he is in. Again, he knows more than Stephen—but, living in Johannesburg, he understands the situation more clearly than Stephen can, at least for now.

They seek out the taxi driver and ask him about Absalom. The driver seems very afraid. After Msimangu explains why they are seeking out Absalom, the man tells them that he is in a shantytown. They thank him, and take his cab back to **Johannesburg**.

The trail of Absalom has only led in a downward spiral: respectable district, crime-ridden district, and now to a shantytown.

On the road, they see the people boycotting the buses making the long walk. Police officers try to dissuade white people from giving the black people rides, which some do. As they drive, Stephen thinks about the kindness of these white people and smiles. Msimangu is also taken with it, but more fiercely.

Stephen and Msimangu's conflicting views on the kindness of white people reveals that the motivations are similarly complicated. What does it mean when people who have done a great, overarching evil do a small thing of kindness? What kind of repayment is that?

BOOK I, CHAPTER 9

The nameless narrator is joined by other voices in a kind of Greek chorus. They tell of how the brokenness of the **land** and people leads directly into **Johannesburg**. People go there in droves, and they are constantly in search of a room in which to stay.

Again, Johannesburg is a magnetic, inevitable force, pulling people in and launching them into the unbreakable cycle.

A nameless room-seeker asks a nameless woman if they would be able to rent a room. She initially refuses, saying that there is already no privacy in the house and no amount of **money** can dissuade her, but after listing off the family's many expenses as compared to their income, and haggling a higher rent, she agrees.

We see the beginning of the unbreakable cycle that leads to the shantytowns. In need of money, homeowners take on lodgers, who have nowhere else to go.

The house is full. These unhappy, nameless people do not like their landladies, their lodgers. Roving eyes cause great discomfort. The house is full, the family who owns it wishes to throw the lodgers out, they beg to stay until they can find a house, but to get a house they must get off a list, and they have no **money** to bribe the authorities. People are given one week, then thrown out. There are no rooms, people are seduced, people have bad experiences, but there are so many expenses. There is no place for anyone to live. They decide to put up their own temporary houses made of found materials, a shantytown. Others call this foolish, because what will happen when rain comes? Or winter? But the list is so full, thousands of names. A woman wants to bribe an authority to put her higher on the list, but she doesn't have enough **money**. They need a house, but they cannot afford the bribe.

Everyone is waiting for a house, but there aren't enough, and there's a long list, and to get off the list you must have money for a bribe, which no one does. Lodgers are miserable, the homeowners are miserable, but no one has any real choice. The shantytowns are the natural result of this—they are something like homes but not quiet, but they cost nothing, which is what people need when there is nowhere else to go.

The woman decides to move to the shantytown. It goes up overnight, and since there is no rent, it fills with people. One of the woman's children is sick. As she gets sicker and sicker, her mother sings to her, reminisces of the natural beauty of the **land** where they came from, turning into cries of fear. The child is dying. A man assures the mother that the doctor will come in the morning. Outside, people sing "God Save Africa."

A woman with no other choice moves to the shantytown. Cold and wet, her child falls ill. She tries to comfort the child with stories about the beautiful land from which they had come. The people sing "God Save Africa," but this seems cruel in light of the situation.

The sick child dies. The shantytowns grow and grow, puzzling and then angering the white population. The chorus asks again: what will happen in the rain and winter?

The shantytowns are deadly and dangerous, but inevitable, fed with people, they continue to grow. Whites, having created this situation, still react with confusion and rage.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 10

Before they go to the shantytown to find Absalom, Stephen spends some time with Gertrude's son. Stephen plays with the little boy, telling him stories about Ixopo. Sometimes, Gertrude listens to these stories, too. But as he does this, Stephen thinks very suddenly of his son, and is filled with pain. He begins to pray, but is interrupted by Msimangu, who says that it's time to go.

For the first time since arriving at Johannesburg, Stephen is the knowledgeable one, passing on stories about Ixopo to Gertrude's child. Stephen's son keeps emerging in his mind—his worry is growing more intense.

They visit the shantytown. Stephen is struck by how normal it appears, though he, too, worries about the rain and the winter. They find a nurse, and ask her about Absalom. She confirms that he was here, once, but is no longer. She sends them to a woman with whom he had once stayed, and she says that he was taken away to the reformatory. At the reformatory, a man tells Stephen that Absalom told them he had no family. In any case, he left a month ago – partially because he was doing very well, but also because his girlfriend was pregnant, and he wished to marry her. The man offers to give them a ride to Pimville, where they are living.

Again, a downward spiral: from shantytown to reformatory. Absalom is not there at the reformatory, of course, but they are getting closer: Stephen learns that he is to be a grandfather, but that his son has denied having a father. Johannesburg has broken at least what Absalom sees is the familial link between them, even if he has done so out of shame.

In Pimville, they locate the girl. She seems wretched and miserable. She tells Stephen that Absalom has been missing for days. Msimangu flies into a rage, telling Stephen to abandon this fruitless search. The man from the reformatory says that sometimes boys are put in the hospital and their families are not informed, so all hope is not lost. Msimangu is ashamed of his earlier outburst, and asks for Stephen's forgiveness. Stephen asks Msimangu to take him again to see the girl, and Msimangu agrees.

Msimangu believes that Stephen should give up, but Stephen still has faith, and refuses. The girl, though, is giving Stephen a more accurate glimpse of where his son is going to land.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 11

Msimangu tells Stephen that he should rest for the next few days, while he and the man from the reformatory do some work in locating Absalom. Stephen agrees. That evening, as all of the priests are conversing, a priest comes in with a newspaper bearing the headline "MURDER IN PARKWOLD. WELL KNOWN CITY ENGINEER SHOT DEAD. ASSAILANTS THOUGHT TO BE NATIVES."

Foreshadowing: though Stephen doesn't realize it, this headline spells out Absalom's downfall. Stephen will have no time to rest.

The priests who knew the deceased, Arthur Jarvis, openly mourn his loss. They say that he was a good man. Father Vincent suggests to Stephen that he may know the dead man's parents, for they live in Carisbrooke, near Ixopo. Stephen knows the parents, and has vague memories of their young, "bright" son. The article reports that Arthur Jarvis's family was away on a brief vacation when thieves broke into the house, not realizing that someone was home. Arthur Jarvis, in the middle of working on his manuscript, was shot once and killed. He left behind a wife – Mary Jarvis – and two children. At the end of the article, his interest in the well-being of the black community is noted.

Stephen recognizes the name and memory of the dead man, and knows of his family. His senseless death is tragic regardless of the details, but the details are going to cause Stephen much suffering. The brokenness of the land and tribe has taken the life of someone who wanted to mend it—this is the cycle of violence in action.

As he walks back to Mrs. Lithebe's, Stephen confesses to Msimangu that he is still full of fear. Msimangu offers to pray with Stephen, but Stephen says he does not feel like praying. As he walks away, Msimangu muses that sometimes it really does feel like God is not around.

Stephen senses that there is something to be afraid of, but is not certain what it is. The awfulness of Johannesburg has shaken even his faith.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 12

A town hall meeting is underway. Citizens lament how their taxes have not gone to keeping them safe, that the death of Arthur Jarvis is the second murder in six months. A voice asks a citizen to read a resolution. The citizen announces that the black population, because of their lack of structure, has turned to crime, and until the white population decides whether or not they want an organized black population or a lawless one, they must increase police protection for themselves.

Most of these voices throughout this chapter firmly and repeatedly miss the point. Unwilling to shoulder the blame or responsibility, the white citizens talk about increased police protection. They mention the lack of structure, but conveniently forget that it was them who destroyed the black's original society.

Another conversation: the chorus brings up the question of education. Some ask how many black children attend school. The numbers are low, and even those who attend only go so far. When asked who will pay the **money** for increased education, the chorus debates that also—some say whites should pay, because if they do not, they will "pay more heavily in other ways." Others argue that school just makes smarter lawbreakers. A couple argue over the presence of black people at the zoo and other recreational places. They don't want to mix with them, but there's nowhere else for them to go.

Again, the voices approach a point, but shy away from it too soon. The voices dramatize the fears and threats that lead in a spiral toward apartheid.

The chorus cries out for apartheid, to separate the white people from the black people, and let them go their separate ways and govern their own affairs. But then what will happen when the blacks so outnumber the whites, but the whites do not want to give up their power or dominance? No one knows the answer. And so they give up wonderful things, like walks at night, and accept the way the world is, even with these losses. And people meet everywhere, crying out for different means for dealing with "native" crime, including a symposium on the issue, at which the late Arthur Jarvis was to be a speaker.

Because they fail to understand the root of the problem, the solution is also deeply flawed: segregate the population. And so everyone gives up living safely because they refuse to address the true issue, because they would rather suffer than admit mistakes. It is ironic that the symposium meant to discuss these problems was to be headlined by the murdered activist.

A woman comes to Msimangu, telling him the police were looking for Absalom. Msimangu tries to deal with this without telling Stephen, but Stephen sees him going out. Msimangu hesitates, but then tells Stephen what he knows. They decide to re-trace the previous path they used to search for Absalom. Msimangu insists on paying for the cab. At each location, they learn that the police have been there, until they reach the home of Absalom's pregnant girlfriend. There, they learn that the police believe that the trail has ended. Back in the cab, Stephen is shivering, and insists that he is cold. Msimangu offers to take him back to Mission House to warm him up.

Stephen's fears are becoming confirmed. They retrace their prior steps, which are made more threatening now that they know they are also retracing the steps of the police. Stephen knows deep down that something terrible is about to happen, but he doesn't admit this to Msimangu.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 13

Stephen goes with Msimangu to a home for the blind. As Stephen waits for Msimangu to complete his duties there, Stephen sits in the sun and meditates on Absalom, Absalom's girlfriend, and their unborn child. Stephen wonders what he and his wife had done to create such a son, but then considers that that is the power of **Johannesburg**.

Stephen himself sees Johannesburg as a symbol—a symbol of all the ways that his society has gone wrong.

As he thinks, Stephen comes to the realization that the tribe truly is broken, and cannot be fixed. When Msimangu returns, Stephen confesses that he is full of "fear and pain." Msimangu says that if he keeps thinking that way, not only will be go crazy, but he will be sinning, because despair is a sin.

Christianity is shown here as the one thing that can withstand the awful degradation of society. It is only through faith that Stephen and Msimangu are able to face the unsolvable, unfixable problems they see.

Stephen spends the rest of the afternoon with the blind patients. He listens to Msimangu's service to them. The words of God are comforting to Stephen, and after the service, he lets him know that his words touched him, deeply, and gave him relief. Msimangu is pleased, and tells Stephen to give thanks, because he had been worried that it was going to be impossible to reach him.

Stephen's faith, despite its flaws, can be restored with the words of other men of God.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 14

Gertrude's last possessions are sold off. After this is finished, Msimangu and a young white man approach Stephen and ask if they might speak to him. Inside, the bad news is revealed: it was Absalom who shot and killed Arthur Jarvis, and his cousin, John's son, was one of the accomplices. The white man says that this will be bad news for the reformatory, who will be blamed for releasing him too early. Msimangu offers to take him to the prison. Stephen agrees, but wishes to visit his brother first.

Absalom was, indeed, the person who shot Arthur Jarvis. Stephen's fears are confirmed. The white man's concerns about the fate of the reformatory seem trivial in light of Stephen's pain. It is cruelly ironic that Absalom's crime was committed as Stephen searched for him.

Stephen goes to visit John. John jokes around with Stephen before he hears the news. He is immediately subdued, and then, remembering that Absalom and his own son are friends, becomes afraid. Stephen confirms what John fears—that his son was there as well. Stephen asks if John would like to come with him to the prison, and John says that he would.

John's joviality is sobered by the realization that his own son is caught up in this same problem. His arrogance has been penetrated: even he can be affected.

When they arrive at the prison, Stephen and John are separated, and each son is brought to them. Stephen tells Absalom that he has been searching for him everywhere, but he is too late. Stephen takes his hand, but he senses that he is still separated from his son. He asks Absalom why he has done this thing, and Absalom does not know. He asks him why he had a gun with him, and Absalom does not respond. Stephen asks his son whether or not the police know it was him, and Absalom says that he confessed. He says that he was startled by Arthur, and shot him by accident. Stephen continues to press him, and the man from the reformatory presses him, but there are no good answers to any of these questions.

Good district, to bad district, to shantytown, to reformatory, to prison: this is the path of Absalom Kumalo. There are no good answers to any of Stephen's questions, and this is the tragedy of Johannesburg: that these things are truths, but their causes are too complex to immediately understand or reform.

Finally, Stephen asks his son why he chose to do these things. Absalom blames it on his "bad companions." When Stephen repeats the question, Absalom blames the devil, but in a lackluster way that distresses Stephen. Absalom says that he still wants to marry his girlfriend.

Absalom's unwillingness to take blame—or inability to articulate its true causes—frustrates Stephen as a man of God.

As he is leaving the prison, Stephen finds John. John says that he is going to hire a lawyer for his own son, because there is no evidence that his son was in the house with Absalom. Stephen is struck by this cruelty. The young man from the reformatory says that Stephen will have to deal with a lawyer on his own, seems angry, and leaves. Distressed, Stephen decides to seek out Father Vincent.

John betrays Stephen by insinuating that he is going to make sure that his own son escapes punishment for this crime, even though it is clear that he was also there. Stephen follows the way of truth. John, the politician, follows the way of the law. Brother turns against brother, as in the Bible.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 15

When Stephen arrives back at Mrs. Lithebe's, the young man from the reform school is waiting for him. The man apologizes for his earlier anger, and insists that Stephen get a lawyer for two reasons: because he does not trust John regarding the story involving his own son, and also because a lawyer could help the court understand that though Absalom fired the fatal shot, he did not mean to murder. They go to Father Vincent, who agrees that they should indeed get a lawyer, and says that he knows just the man – a man who could also arrange to marry Absalom and his girlfriend. Father Vincent tells Stephen to have hope—the outcome may be terrible for Absalom, but possibly not the most severe.

The man from the reformatory is right: if there is any hope for Absalom, it lies with a white lawyer who understands the broken system in which Absalom will be tried.

Stephen confesses to Father Vincent the range of emotions he is experiencing – a small amount of relief, but also shock that the one thing he feared has come to pass, that he and his wife could have been going about their lives when this terrible event was advancing toward them. He marvels at how so many boys get lost and go astray in **Johannesburg**—why their son, in this particular way, when there are thousands of others? Father Vincent tells him that his sorrow resulting from this knowledge is better than the terror of the unknown, and that his son is not lost.

Stephen's emotions, though they veer away from the stoic faith he believes he should have at all times, are valid: horror that this tragedy was coming at them all along (and was, presumably, known by God), and shock at the cruelty that there are so many black men in Johannesburg, so why, of all of them, was it his son who committed the crime? Father Vincent is trying to make best of the situation by reminding Stephen that at least he has knowledge, and his son's situation is not unknown anymore.

Stephen responds to this bitterly—how could his son not be lost? Father Vincent reminds him that there was a robber hung next to the crucified Christ. Stephen replies that his son is not a robber, he is a murderer. Again, Father Vincent reminds him that all men can repent. They continue in this vein, with Stephen growing more and more distressed, until finally Father Vincent commands Stephen to go and pray and rest and keep his faith.

Father Vincent's position is unshakably Christian: even souls who have done the worst thing can be saved. Stephen's inability to recognize this shows Father Vincent how despairing Stephen has become in light of these events, and he reacts as Msimangu had before to this scenario by telling Stephen to go and reconnect with his faith.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 16

The next day, Stephen goes to visit his son's pregnant girlfriend. He finds her, and breaks the news of Absalom's crime and arrest. She is devastated, but says that she still wants to marry him. Stephen does not appear to believe her, and says that he cannot let her marry his son if she doesn't want to be in his family. Obviously hungry for family, she fervently repeats that she does want to be in his family.

This girl is another example of how the brokenness can manifest: mistreated, abandoned by her family, she is hungry for any family, any kind of tribe.

Stephen asks the girl about her parents. As she regales him with the sad story of abandonment and loss, he discovers that she has been with three men, including his son, since leaving home. Stephen is angry with this, and testing her, asks if he can be another one of her "husbands." She is confused and upset, but reluctantly agrees, and then bursts into tears. Stephen immediately feels terrible about what he has done, apologizes, and speaks kindly to her. He asks her how old she is, and she says that she thinks she is sixteen. He asks if she would desire to leave **Johannesburg** to come and live with him and his wife, in a quiet place. Again, she excitedly says that she would desire that. He is pleased, but makes her promise that if she changes her mind, she should just tell him, and not run away.

Stephen's weakness shows yet again, when he baits the girl into admitting that she would sleep with him if she had to. This reveals the utter depths of her hunger, and Stephen regrets this test because he is a good man, and understands why she acts this way. She has no way to get anything except by using her body—she's desperate. When he realizes this, though, he does the Christian thing and makes the generous offer of bringing her into his family, which she accepts.

She promises. Stephen says that he will find her a place to live, not in this place. The girl seems excited and pleased about this arrangement. He leaves feeling a little lighter.

Even if Stephen's son has been broken by this place, the girl is a small piece of the tribe that Stephen can restore.

BOOK I, CHAPTER 17

This chapter briefly veers into the point of view of Mrs. Lithebe. She is a good woman who had a good husband who built her a good house with many rooms, but they never had any children and so the rooms were empty. She is happy to have Stephen there, because he is a good man, and to have Gertrude and the child there, because they are Stephen's and he is taking care of them. But she does not let rooms to strangers, because she does not need the **money**. She is a little troubled by Gertrude's loose manner, and is worried about her young child.

Because Mrs. Lithebe does not need money, she is uncorrupted by Johannesburg. Her views about Gertrude may seem strict and moralistic, but she understands what must be done to survive Johannesburg, and understands that Gertrude does not have the discipline to achieve it.

Stephen asks Mrs. Lithebe if she would also be willing to take in Absalom's pregnant girlfriend. He says that he will eventually bring her back with him, but until he leaves **Johannesburg**, he wants her out of the other house. Mrs. Lithebe agrees, though there isn't a bed for the girl. Stephen says that it's better for her to be in a good house among good people and on the floor, than in a place like she is now. He goes to fetch her, and observes that his **money** is running low.

As Mrs. Lithebe's house fills up, so the tribe is being slowly restored. Her home is a kind of Ixopo-away-from-Ixopo.

Stephen brings the girl to Mrs. Lithebe's. Mrs. Lithebe is pleased with the girl's manner, and her gratefulness for being there. Gertrude is pleased because a new woman around will help alleviate her boredom. There is a moment where Mrs. Lithebe overhears the girl making "careless laughter," for which she scolds her. The girl agrees not to do it again, and is true to her word, and Mrs. Lithebe is content.

Mrs. Lithebe decides to deal with the problem of "carelessness" as soon as she sees it in the girl. The issue is not laughter, it is "careless" laughter. Laughter that does not respect the dignity of others or oneself. The girl's willing response to Mrs. Lithebe's criticism is a good sign.

Stephen returns to prison to visit Absalom. Stephen asks after his health, and then asks him, again, if he indeed wishes to marry the girl. Absalom says that he does, and Stephen assures him that it will be arranged. He also mentions that he has found a lawyer. Absalom is happy about this. Stephen asks if Absalom has continued to stick to his story about the other boys being there, and he says that he has, though the boys, once his friends, are furious about it, and continue to lie. Stephen baits him, asking when, exactly, he realized that these untrustworthy friends are so untrustworthy. Absalom resists these questions. Stephen pushes and pushes until he realizes that he will receive no satisfactory answer. He tells Absalom that the lawyer will come soon, Father Vincent will come to take his confession, the marriage will be arranged, and the girl and her child will come back to live with Stephen and his wife.

Stephen desperately wants answers—why did his son do what he did? Why was he spending time with such a bad crowd? But even Absalom can't provide those answers. Even he doesn't know. Stephen is searching for answers that he will eventually come to understand, but that cannot be simply answered by one individual. Meanwhile, Absalom comes off not as a cruel murderer but as a confused young man who made a dreadful mistake. His willingness to marry his girlfriend shows the good in him.

Mr. Carmichael, the lawyer, arrives at Mission House. He talks to Stephen about the trial, and offers to take it *pro deo*, for God—that is, for no **money**. He talks to Stephen about the information that he needs to defend Absalom. After he leaves, Stephen marvels that a man would take such a case for nothing.

Again, when money is shunted to the side, good people are involved. Mr. Carmichael is a good man, helping because he understands that Stephen needs help, and it is the right thing to do.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 18

The nameless narrator returns to the hills above Ixopo, repeating the same praises and description of the **earth** as in Chapter 1. But instead of looking down, the narrator shows High Place, the farm of James Jarvis.

A different view of the valley, from a different person's life—that of a white farmer, who lives high in the hills rather than down near the village, and who has money and land.

James observes the plowing of his fields. There is a drought, and the **earth** is dry and hard. As he walks, he worries about the people in the valley below, their inability to farm well, especially given the drought. He muses about how the weather and the economy are really stacked against them. As he looks at the gorgeous view, he notices a police car approaching the house.

The drought is a physical manifestation of the problems plaguing the land—not a direct cause, but a metaphor. We as the reader know why that police car is approaching even though Jarvis doesn't, building dramatic tension in the scene.

When he arrives home, the policeman is there. He gives James the bad news—his son Arthur has been murdered that very afternoon, shot dead in **Johannesburg** by a burglar. Stupefied by this news, James sits down and tries to process what to do next. The officer offers to help get James and his wife, Margaret, to Johannesburg. James realizes that Margaret doesn't know about their son's death yet, but is likely watching this interaction and realizing that something is wrong. He asks if the man responsible has been caught, but the officer tells him "Not yet." James goes inside to tell his wife the bad news while the officer uses the phone. In the next room, Margaret begins to weep.

Margaret's weeping, which comes immediately after learning about the loss of her son, is an interesting contrast to the actions of Stephen's wife when she also learns that her son is lost. Stephen's wife, having accepted a lifetime of suffering, is full of sorrow but stoic. Margaret, presumably less understanding of this reality, is less hardened.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 19

James's daughter-in-law's brother, John Harrison, meets James and Margaret when they arrive in **Johannesburg**. John updates them on Mary and the children as they drive to his home. At Margaret's insistence, James heads right to the mortuary. While driving, Harrison brings up the paper Arthur had been writing when he died—"The Truth About Native Crime." James admits that he and his son did not agree on the issue of South Africa's blacks, but Harrison assures him that no one considered the issue more thoroughly than Arthur.

The nature and depth of Arthur's work—and his devotion to it—is beginning to take shape in the understanding of his father. That James and Arthur did not agree sets up the possibility for Arthur, through his writing, to change his father's mind. And in so doing for his father to come to know him better.

When they return from the mortuary, James stays up with Mr. Harrison, John's father, to talk. Mr. Harrison regales James with tales of Arthur's many accomplishments and projects, and his commitment to the plight of the South African black population. James marvels that this is like talking about a stranger. Mr. Harrison asks if James would like to change the topic, but James insists that the talk is good for him. Mr. Harrison goes on, saying that he himself didn't share the same opinion—he is as terrified of crime as the next man—but that he respected Arthur's conviction. James marvels that it is a strange thing for Arthur, out of everyone, to have been killed by a black man.

James' astonishment at the irony of Arthur being killed by the people he wishes to help mirrors Stephen's lament that, of all the astray men in Johannesburg, why was it his son who committed the murder?

When they are done talking, James goes to bed. Upstairs, Margaret is awake. James recounts her with Mr. Harrison's stories about Arthur. He seems pained by the fact that he knew so little about his son, but glad that he was a good man.

Like Stephen, James's son was, and will continue to be, something of a mystery to him.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 20

The next day, the police take James to his son Arthur's house. There, he begins to go through his many papers and books. He marvels at the many invitations his son received, the fullness of his library shelves. He notices that Arthur had owned many books by Abraham Lincoln. He finds a letter indicating that Arthur was the many-time president of the African Boys' Club.

The reference to Abraham Lincoln—the liberator of American slaves during the Civil War—shows Arthur's influences and gives a picture of his feelings regarding race in South Africa.

James discovers a few pages of a manuscript that Arthur was working on, in which he decried the mining practices so typical in South Africa, the exploitation of laborers and the destruction of their families, leading directly to the corruption of the black population's structure and the creation of criminals. He also points out that setting aside not enough **land** for a majority of the population is a dishonest way to go about solving the problem.

This manuscript foreshadows the discovery of more gold in the near future. Arthur also foresees problems with the current mining model, and understands completely where the blame for South Africa's problems lies—with the original destruction of native Zulu society by the colonizing whites.

After he is finished, James meditates on the text for a while, before getting up and looking at the books again. He picks up a book and reads through Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and then takes the book with him. As he is leaving, he accidently goes through the corridor where Arthur was killed.

James is trying his best to learn about his son, having now lost him. Seeing the stain on the floor reminds James that despite these efforts, his son is lost forever.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 21

Arthur's funeral is held a few days later. The church is filled with people from every walk of life, every race. This is the first time that James and Margaret have been in the same church as such people. The service is beautiful, and many wonderful things are said about Arthur. James again thinks of his son as a stranger—a stranger of whom he is proud. After the funeral is over, James and his wife shake hands with everyone, and it is the first time they've ever done so with black people.

That James could live his entire life in South Africa and never shake hands with a black person hits home just how segregated the country already is. James is coming to know his son in death in a way he never did in life.

Back at the house later that evening, Mr. Harrison sits with James. They smoke and have a drink and continue discussing the crime situation in **Johannesburg**. Mr. Harrison expresses firm, conservative views on the issues surrounding the black population. He expresses exasperation that they would ask for higher wages in the mines, because if they were paid more **money**, then the mines would close. He goes on like this for a moment before John Harrison comes in, and continues until James insists that he has to go up to bed, to be with Margaret. Mr. Harrison seems embarrassed that he had been ranting on so, but James assures him that it was good to talk to him. Mr. Harrison reiterates that though he didn't agree with Arthur, he respected him deeply.

Mr. Harrison demonstrates one version of white attitudes in South Africa, a conservative one that is sympathetic with the injured whites and the companies, without real consideration for the plights of or crimes committed against the blacks. Mr. Harrison's repeated comment that despite disagreeing with Arthur he respected him indicates that, beyond Arthur's politics, he was also a good and decent man, who could make his points to those who disagreed with him in ways that did not create anger.

The next day, James awakes to the news that the servant who had been knocked unconscious at Arthur's home was awake and had identified some details about the killer that was leading them on the path toward his identity. Mr. Harrison also gives James the manuscript that Arthur had been working on when he died. James sits down and reads it. It discusses how white men make many "Christian" excuses for oppressing the black population. Arthur insists that this is deeply hypocritical, that the nation is not made up of Christians but rather of cowards.

Soon after learning that his son's killer is being tracked, James begins to see the many problems with the model of race relations that he has always taken for granted in the country. As the police track Arthur's killer, it is almost as if James is tracking Arthur himself through his writing.

Mid-sentence, the manuscript ends. James ponders the ideas that Arthur had written there, and feels like he is beginning to understand him better. Then, James realizes, Arthur had gotten up to investigate the noise and been killed at the middle of that very sentence, and he is seized with grief. He is interrupted by Margaret coming in to make sure he's all right. He tells her that he has been reading their son's work and thinking, and encourages her to read it, too.

The more James reads, the better he understands his son. The tragedy of Arthur's particular life being cut short, in relation to the importance of his work, is emphasized by the fact that he was literally killed mid-sentence.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 22

The relationship of South Africa with her judges is established—the judge is honored and revered above all, by everyone regardless of race. And since he doesn't make the laws, but enforces them, even his enforcement of an unjust law is justice.

The convoluted, twisted cycle of South African race and politics is highlighted by this description of the judges. The white leaders free themselves from blame for the unjustness of their society by claiming that they themselves did not make it unjust, and so they follow the law rather than addressing the problem or being merciful.

The murder trial of Absalom Kumalo begins. The charges of murder are laid before the court and the accused. Absalom pleads guilty to culpable homicide, but not murder. That is, he committed the act, but did not intend to murder. The other two men, including his cousin, plead not guilty.

Further underlining the problems with the system is the fact that Absalom's honesty will not serve him at all, but his co-conspirators' lies will help them to wriggle out of punishment.

Absalom and the prosecutor have a long exchange about the details of the day of the murder. He asks Absalom why that day was chosen, what events transpired. Absalom answers the questions straightforwardly, repeatedly implicating the other two men as co-conspirators. He describes how they had been told that no one would be in the house, how startled they'd been when they'd realized that the servant was home, and how they had to knock him unconscious. And then how Arthur came downstairs, and how, in fear, Absalom had shot him.

Again, the straightforwardness of Absalom's testimony seems like it will be a boon, but it will not help him at any point.

After talking about Arthur's death and Absalom and his accomplices' subsequent flight, the judge interrupts the prosecutor and asks Absalom why he was carrying a gun in the first place. Absalom says that he was told that **Johannesburg** was a dangerous place, and bought the gun for protection. The judge leads Absalom through a line of questioning about what he had planned to do with the revolver. Was it just meant to frighten? Did it have bullets in it? Did he know it had bullets in it? So he planned on shooting someone? Would he have shot at a cop? Why did he shoot this decent man? Absalom reveals that the gun had originally held two bullets, but that he'd shot one into a tree for target practice.

The judge's line of questioning seems to lead Absalom to admitting what appears to be greater culpability than he has. It has already been established that the judge is not truly impartial, since he is the righteous enforcer of an unjust system.

When the prosecutor resumes questioning, Absalom continues to insist that the other two men were with him. He also tells the court that after the murder, he buried the revolver in the **ground**, and then prayed for forgiveness. Afterwards, when the police came searching for one of his co-conspirators, Absalom confessed to having shot Arthur, since he had repented for his sin and had sworn to not do evil again.

Ironically, the police were not even looking for Absalom when they found him. It was only Absalom's honesty, and resolution to sin no more, that led to his confession and arrest.

Court is adjourned for the day, and after the judge leaves, the whites and backs file out separate doors. Stephen notices that James, the father of the man Absalom killed, is there in the court. Stephen looks away, because he cannot bear to see him.

The customs of this broken land have been repeatedly enforced throughout the trial, and continue to be.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 23

While Absalom's trial is going on, new **gold** is discovered in South Africa, and everyone's attention becomes focused on Odendaalsrust. There is a great deal of excitement and speculation, and the area explodes with activity. The share prices of gold go up and up, and those buying the shares are becoming fabulously wealthy. Everyone is deeply excited about South Africa's new lease on wealth.

The only thing that can distract white men from the trial of the black murderer is the discovery of more gold, the potential for more money, which of course comes hand in hand with further destroying the land. Note how it is only those with money who benefit from this newfound wealth. The system is rigged.

There are some people, however, who are wet blankets about the **gold**. They suggest that the money earned in the shares should go toward the poor, or organizations that support the people, or even the black men who mine the gold. This is foolishness, however—even though the men who make money from the inflation of the stock prices didn't physically labor for it, they still worked for it mentally, and when they become wealthy, their wealth may trickle down into good causes, into those clubs and organizations and the arts and nature. And if the wealth in this new place proves to be as much as it promises, perhaps a second **Johannesburg** will spring up around it.

Those who suggest that the money could be put to better uses than making the rich even richer are scoffed at—by the rich. It will reach those who need it eventually, they argue. The rich either do not understand how the cycle works or deliberately ignore the fact that such a thing will never happen.

Those wet blankets, though, definitely don't want a second **Johannesburg**. Sir Ernest Oppenheimer has suggested that this would be a good place to test a new model of mining, a settlement where the families of the miners can come and live with them instead of being split apart and living in a compound. And some people laud this idea, because the **money** from the mines should lead to food and shelter and stability and little pleasures, not mad speculation and inflating stock market prices. Please, no second Johannesburg.

Some people understand that there are better paths, better directions for the mines (and South Africa) to go in. But will their voices be heard?

BOOK II, CHAPTER 24

James returns to Arthur's house. He goes through the passage again, the one where Arthur had been killed, with the traces of blood still on the ground. He goes back to the study, and past the bookshelves and material that he had browsed before. He digs through his son's articles and essays and locates one that Arthur had written about how one can grow up and have no real understanding of his country—of black men or Afrikaners or anyone. He talks about how one must learn about South Africa – about the *true* South Africa – in order to really love her. He then condemns his parents for having taught him many virtues, but never having shown him the true face of South Africa.

From beyond the grave, Arthur proves to his father that the only way for James to be able to love South Africa is to understand how its society truly works.

James is deeply wounded by this accusation. He prepares to leave, but then returns to the study and papers and finishes reading them. In the papers, Arthur asserts that he is compelled by rightness to do good by his country, compelled by the "conflict in [his] deepest soul." He prays that his children will follow in his and his wife Mary's examples. James thinks about this for a while, and then leaves the house not by the passage with the bloodstain, but the front door.

James is obviously upset by the implication that he and his wife are part of this system of suffering, but by leaving by the front door instead of sneaking out the back he indicates that he understands and accepts the truth of this fact, and accepts his son's ideas and will try to keep them alive.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 25

On a day when court is not in session, Margaret Jarvis and her niece go into town, leaving James behind at the house. He reads about the **gold** rush at Odendaalsrust, and how the money and speculation around the gold may prove disastrous in the end, and how there has been some minor black-on-white crime, but nothing horrible.

Just as Stephen read about James' son's death in the paper, so James reads about the trouble surrounding the new gold in the newspaper. Both tragedies, reduced to black-and-white words on a page, give information but never really getting at the source of the problem.

As he is reading, there is a knock on the door. Outside is an elderly black minister—Stephen. James does not recognize Stephen, but Stephen recognizes James, and immediately begins to shake. They greet each other, and then Stephen sits down on the steps, trembling. James tries to offer Stephen some food or drink, but Stephen refuses. Eventually, haltingly, he manages to stand and explain that he is here seeking the daughter of Sibeko, who was hired by the mistress of the house. The servant responds that he has heard of her: she was fired before he began working at the house. James tells Stephen that he can wait for the mistress to return, and she may be able to tell him where she went.

From James's point of view, the reader can see how much of a toll the events of the novel have had on Stephen. Note how, even in his difficult circumstances, Stephen has come seeking another lost lamb, to restore her to the tribe.

After the servant departs James presses Stephen, insisting that there must be something else between them, based on Stephen's reaction on seeing him. Stephen hesitates, and finally reveals that it was his son, Absalom, who murdered Arthur. James leaves for a moment, walks into the garden for a long moment, and then returns. He assures Stephen that he is not angry with him. He says that he gets it—Stephen had not realized that he, James, would be here at the house. Stephen confirms this, saying that he recognizes him from Ndotsheni.

Because Stephen has found James after James has read so many of Arthur's writings, and because Stephen is so frail and obviously broken by the tragedy, James is able to tell Stephen that he is not angry with him—in a way, telling him that he does not blame him, because he knows where the true blame lies.

The mistress returns. James explains to her that Stephen is looking for the daughter of Sibeko. The mistress says that she had indeed come to **Johannesburg** and lived there, but she had gone bad and started doing illegal things, and was in jail, and had to be dismissed. James translates all of this for Stephen. When James asks her if she knows where the woman has gone, the mistress says that she doesn't know, and doesn't care. James only translates the first part of this for Stephen, not wanting him to know that she doesn't care. When she leaves, James follows Stephen out the back gate and says goodbye.

Like Absalom, Sibeko's daughter is someone who Stephen will not draw back into the tribe, and is lost forever. James's effort to protect Stephen from the cruel words of the mistress indicate further his newfound compassion for the blacks of South Africa

BOOK II, CHAPTER 26

John Kumalo is leading a protest in **Johannesburg**. His voice electrifies the crowd, makes the policemen uneasy. The protest is about the recently discovered **gold**. John tells the crowd that they, black men, are just asking for their share of the gold, to be paid a fair wage for their labor.

John's political positions are not wrong. And at this moment it can seem unclear in what way he has become "corrupt", as Stephen and Msimangu describe him.

John asks the crowd why the mining industry should be allowed to survive, when it is only their continued low wages and poverty that permits it to survive? Why so little **money** for their hard work? He suggests that there is a kind of conspiracy, to keep black men poor and the others – the shareholders – rich. The policemen grumble amongst themselves, suggesting that John is a dangerous man, and that he should be silenced, or killed. John continues to address the crowd, saying that they are only asking for a fair wage, nothing more, because the mining industry would not run without their presence in it. He then suggests a mining strike. The meeting stays orderly, even at this suggestion, because John Kumalo knows he would not benefit from being hauled off to jail, where there is no audience, even if his cause would. He repeats that all men should be able to "sell his labour for what it is worth." He then suggests that a great change is coming to Africa.

Again, there doesn't seem to be anything blameworthy in John's ideas. But the nature of his corruption begins to be clear. John places himself above his ideas. In fact, his ideas seem to exist largely in service to making himself powerful and popular. He's like a preacher who likes the attention of preaching but doesn't actually believe in God. He does not truly give himself to the mission he defines in his speech. His goal is to be rich and powerful, not to actually create change in Africa. The status quo, in which things are bad and he gets to be a powerful oppositional figure, suits him just fine.

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In the back, Stephen and Msimangu have been listening to John. Stephen is impressed with his brother's words, telling Msimangu that he had felt swept up with them right alongside the rest of the crowd. They discuss how unfortunate it is that John is corrupt, and seeks out so much power, because with the right intentions, his oration could be a great tool for good. Meanwhile, James Jarvis is also in the crowd with John Harrison, also having just heard the speech. James says that he didn't like such talk, but when they get in the car, surprises John by admitting that this is the next logical step. Inside, the police officers discuss John's speech, impressed how he pushes the crowd to the brink of violence and then pulls back. They admire him, but also think that he's very dangerous, and insist that they have to keep an eye on him.

Stephen understands how his brother has squandered his gift for oration, and James understands that though this talk is unpleasant, it is the next logical step in this cycle of suffering. Meanwhile, that cycle of distrust is on display as the police officers ramp up their surveillance of John.

There is discussion about the strike, what would happen if it actually began, how it could spread from the mines to other places, or the whole black population could simply stop working, which would be disastrous for them but, the white people realize, for themselves as well. They work themselves into a bit of a panic about it, actually, because they realize how dependent they are upon the black population.

The idea of a strike causes a temporary rift in the power structure of whites and blacks— the idea of the impact of the blacks ceasing to work reminds everyone, blacks and whites, how many more blacks than whites there are in South Africa, an empowering idea to blacks and a terrifying one to the whites.

The strike comes and goes, and is confined to the **gold** mines. Some black men are killed. Church leaders suggest that a union should be organized, to minimize bloodshed. But some say that black miners are too "simple" to be permitted to organize in a meaningful way, that they could be easily mislead as a group, and anyway, the mines would not survive the presence of a union. The question is too complicated, and leads to too many questions, so it's best to ignore it completely.

The power of the strike is undermined by force, and eventually, condescension and dismissal. The novel suggests that South Africa is unable and unwilling to try to comprehend the complexity of the issue. The implicit point being made is that the South African leadership will therefore look for a simple answer, even if it doesn't solve the problem, and the simplest answer is total segregation—apartheid.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 27

Mrs. Lithebe is fed up with Gertrude's tendency to revert back to her old ways, and to associate with unscrupulous people from her former life. When Gertrude insists that she cannot tell when someone is bad, Mrs. Lithebe is exasperated. Can't she tell from the way they speak? Doesn't she want to be rid of her old life? Gertrude says she does not wish to be so weak, that she wants to do right by Stephen. She says that she hates **Johannesburg** and understands it to be toxic, and wants to leave.

Mrs. Lithebe is concerned about Gertrude backsliding into corruption. Gertrude understands the nature of Johannesburg, but feels powerless to resist it. She understands that for her, the only solution is to physically remove herself from the corrupting effects of Johannesburg.

A woman comes by the house with a newspaper. There has been another murder, another white man shot by a black intruder. The woman, who has been accompanying Mrs. Lithebe to Absalom's trial, suggests that this does not bode well for Absalom, and Mrs. Lithebe agrees. Msimangu and Stephen return home, and Mrs. Lithebe hides the newspaper from him. When Stephen is in his room, Msimangu and the others devise a plan to keep Stephen from seeing the paper until after the trail is over.

It is inevitable, given the cycle of violence in Johannesburg, that another crime would happen that mirrors Absalom's own. The cycle remains unbroken, no matter how many lives it claims. And with each revolution the distrust and anger between white and blacks becomes worse.

Later that day, Gertrude mentions to Mrs. Lithebe that she has a plan: she wishes to become a nun. Mrs. Lithebe is pleased with this plan, but she asks what will be done with Gertrude's son. Gertrude says that she thinks Stephen's wife can raise him better than she can, but that she is praying about the issue. Mrs. Lithebe says that she will pray, too. When she goes to her room, Gertrude also confides this plan to Absalom's girlfriend. The girl promises that if Gertrude indeed does this, she will help care for the boy as if he's her own.

Stephen and others who can resist Johannesburg's corruption have a support in the form of their Christian faith. Gertrude seeks the same for herself. Her solution is more extreme—she wants to join a nunnery and completely separate herself from the world—but perhaps that is necessary for her given the depths to which she had sunk and her seeming inability to withstand the temptations of Johannesburg on her own.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 28

The day of the court's judgment of Absalom arrives. The judge begins with the issue of the other two men in question, Absalom's cousin and the other accomplice. Despite the fact that Arthur's struck-down servant identified one of them, the judge maintains that this evidence is not conclusive, nor the evidence that the three of them met afterwards at Baby Mkize's house. He says that while these men clearly have criminal associations, there is no evidence that they participated in this crime, and so the charges against them are dismissed.

The judge appears to desire to follow the strictest letter of the law, and says that the state has not conclusively proved that the other men were with Absalom at all. And so, his adherence to the law causes guilty men to walk free. The Judge allows the law to guide him to not listen to the only truth-teller—Absalom—and to be manipulated by those who lie.

The judge continues on the issue of Absalom. He admits that Absalom has confessed to, in a very straightforward manner, the crime that he committed, and shows deep remorse. He talks about how Mr. Carmichael is trying to make an argument for a simple boy mislead by **Johannesburg**. But the judge argues, society has created laws, and if those laws are broken, then society must fix itself and fix the laws—but until then, such laws are just. In other words, judges cannot do anything but enforce the law, even if it's is broken in a way that reflects society's brokenness.

The judge hand-waves towards the fact that perhaps there is something wrong with their society, but acknowledges that it is his job to enforce the existing laws, not change them.

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But, he continues, the issue at the heart of the case is whether or not Absalom intended to kill. Though he insists that he did not, the evidence of him bringing a loaded revolver to the crime scene suggests otherwise. While he may not have intended to murder, he brought along a means to hurt someone very badly. Thus, he must be found guilty of murder. On the issue of mercy, the judge claims that he finds no extenuating circumstances, and thus cannot recommend mercy. He sentences Absalom to death. Absalom falls to the ground, weeping. Msimangu and the young white man from the reformatory lead a weak Stephen from the courtroom, breaking the custom of whites and blacks leaving separately.

It is tragic, then, that the same adherence to the law, with no considerations for age or social forces or honesty, remorse, or confession, leads to the guilty conviction and death sentence for Absalom. The custom of racial separation in the courtroom is broken when a white man and black man must help Stephen stand—only the depths of this tragedy can disrupt the cycle of harmful, artificial separation of the races.

BOOK II, CHAPTER 29

Father Vincent, Stephen, Gertrude, Msimangu, and Absalom's girlfriend go to see him in prison. Absalom seems to believe, for a moment, that they have come to tell him some good news, but Stephen gently tells him they are there to perform the wedding. He looks upset, but then holds her hands. They inquire after each other's health and fall silent. Stephen notices that Gertrude looks like she's about to burst into tears, and he sternly reminds her that this is a wedding, and if she's going to do that, she has to leave.

The act of marrying Absalom and the girl is in some sense a formality for her sake and the child's—they will never touch each other again, nor will they grow old together, nor will the child know his or her father. And yet it is also a form of faith—a marriage in this life will live on in the eyes of God—and a way to legitimately bring the girlfriend into Stephen's family.

They go to the prison chapel. Father Vincent performs the marriage. After it is over, the others leave, and Stephen and Absalom have a talk. Stephen assures Absalom that he will take care of the unborn child. Stephen also tells Absalom that he will be returning home tomorrow, and he will tell his wife that their son is keeping her in his thoughts. Absalom says that he has some **money** for his own wife and child. He also asks that the child be named Peter, if he is a boy. Absalom breaks down, falls to the ground, and begins sobbing in fear for his own death. Stephen holds him, and tells him to have courage. After some of this, Stephen tells Absalom that he must go, and repeats that he will care for Absalom's wife and unborn child. Absalom clutches at Stephen's legs and begs him not to go. Two guards come and have to pry Absalom off Stephen, and Stephen leaves him screaming and sobbing. Outside, the girl says to Stephen that she is his daughter now. He agrees, but is too distracted by his grief to think about it any more.

Absalom finally understands his duties as a man, husband, and father: he has money for the child and his wife, despite the fact that it is the last that he will ever provide for them. His stoic demeanor, however, is eventually broken, and Stephen is reminded that Absalom is still very much a child, afraid of death.

After they leave the prison, Stephen goes to visit his brother at his carpenter shop. John agrees that it is good that Stephen is bringing Gertrude, her child, and Absalom's wife with him to Ixopo. Stephen says that there is an issue they need to discuss, and John immediately becomes defensive, insisting that the case was out of his hands. Stephen interrupts him, saying that wasn't what he was going to talk about. Stephen tells John that he should be careful for his own son, lest he be consumed by **Johannesburg** like Absalom. He also cautions John to be careful with his politics, and when pressed, lies and says he had heard that a person who had come to hear John speak may be a traitor. John is angry upon hearing this, but when Stephen suggests that John's son was a similar traitor to Absalom, John becomes outraged and violently ousts Stephen from the shop. Stephen returns to Mission House, full of sorrow that he wasn't able to reach his brother.

John is naturally defensive about the lies his son told to get off scot-free. He put himself and his family above Stephens', just as he puts his own status above the fates of those he leads. Stephen makes up the lie to try to convince his brother to give up his quest for power over goodness, but when he cannot resist pointing out that this betrayal is like John's son's betrayal of Absalom, John's rage drives them apart for good. John believes in man doing what he can, while Stephen puts his faith in God, and the two viewpoints don't mix (though the novel clearly indicates that it supports Stephen's view of things).

Meanwhile, James and Margaret are also preparing to leave **Johannesburg**. James leaves a large sum of **money** to John Harrison to start a club, possibly in Arthur Jarvis's name.

The only way money is ever good in this novel is when it is not needed, or is passed freely from one person to another as a gift or offering.

That night, there is a going-away party for Stephen. Stephen is distracted, but gives a small speech. Msimangu tells Stephen that he has given up all of his possessions, and gives Stephen all of his money, to help repay what Stephen has spent in **Johannesburg**. After he is gone, Stephen counts the money, repents of the fight with his brother and the lie that he told him, and prays for his son. He sleeps, and when he wakes, prays for Msimangu. He wakes up Absalom's wife, and when he goes to wake Gertrude, he finds her child, but she is missing.

Gertrude has disappeared, presumably to become a nun, and Stephen will never learn where she went. In this case, his unknowing is not concealing something dark, but something light: she has gone to find comfort in faith.

BOOK III, CHAPTER 30

Stephen, Gertrude's son, and Absalom's wife return home. Gertrude's son inquires after his mother, but Stephen tells him that she is gone, and he doesn't ask again. When they arrive home, Stephen greets his wife. He tells her that their son is going to die and Gertrude went missing, but he doesn't want to discuss it right then. She understands. His wife greets the young boy and Absalom's wife. They all go walking outside.

The tribe, or some of it, is drawn back together again, though it is permanently missing some members. Absalom's wife is strong and stoic, and though she suffers, so does so silently, and she does what she can to help bring together the family that they do have.

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As they walk, people see Stephen and begin to cry out in happiness that he has returned, that he has been missed. They tell Stephen about the drought that has been parching the **land**. When Stephen asks how they have been finding water, they tell him that they draw water from the river that comes from James Jarvis's place. When Stephen asks about him, they say that he has just returned from Johannesburg, and his wife Margaret is very ill. More and more people run up to tell Stephen how they have missed him.

As in the beginning of Book II, the drought is a physical manifestation of the problems with the land. The people have become reliant on James Jarvis' water because they have none of their own, mirroring how white men's actions have left blacks dependent upon them. Notice how the people of Ixopo greet each other, and have a real community. It is a start contrast from Johannesburg, where everyone seems to out only for themselves.

Stephen goes to the church, where many parishioners are waiting for him. He begins to pray with them, praying for Gertrude's son and Gertrude and Absalom's wife, and for Absalom. Afterwards, he turns to his friend and confesses that Gertrude is missing and his son is to be hanged. He says to him that these are not facts to be hidden. But then he says that he thinks he should leave this place. The friend says of course not, can't he see that everyone loves him and wants him here? The friend then asks about Sibeko's daughter, and Stephen tells him that she is gone and no one knows where she is.

Stephen feels that, because of his failures, he cannot continue as a man of influence in the town. The friend's point, of course, is that the issue is not one of success, it is about love. The community loves him and has faith in him, and so he must return that faith and stay with the community and do the best he can. It is a way of thinking that does not exist in Johannesburg.

Stephen returns home and talks to his wife. He shows her the **money** from Msimangu. She is overwhelmed with the gift. Stephen then prepares to tell her about the events that took place in **Johannesburg**.

Money as something that is stolen, or ripped from the earth, or otherwise prized as more important than other human beings is portrayed as a corruption in the novel. Money that is given as a gift, that is used to help other people, is seen in a much more positive light.

BOOK III, CHAPTER 31

Stephen knows that Ndotsheni needs help. He prays, but he knows that it's not enough, so he goes to the chief. He feels wise enough from his experiences in **Johannesburg** to advise the chief on this issue. As he walks to see the chief, he observes how the drought has brutalized the **land**.

Stephen attempts to go to some of the authority figures in the community to try and solve some of its problems. He seems to feel more urgency based on the degradation he saw in Johannesburg.

When Stephen speaks with the chief, Stephen explains that he thinks it would be best for their community if they found a way to retain their working people, by teaching people how to care for the **earth**. The chief assures Stephen that such things are already being taught in school, in a way that suggests this is the final word on the matter. Stephen resists, and points out that everywhere, people are dying. The chief says that he will discuss the issue with the magistrate, but it is clear that he has little authority, and one has little power when ruling over a "broken tribe."

The destruction of the tribe means that the power of the chief is limited. The chief himself also seems to feel, much like the people in Johannesburg, that the problems of Ixopo are too big for him to fix. And so he does nothing.

Next, Stephen visits the school's headmaster. The headmaster politely gives Stephen a perfunctory lecture about why people do not stay in Ndotsheni, and explains there was nothing he or the school can do. Stephen leaves feeling dejected. He returns home and prays for Ndotsheni.

Similarly, the school's leader doesn't have any good solutions. Stephen turns to prayer.

Stephen hears the sound of a horse, and when he goes outside, he sees a small boy riding a horse. The boy is polite and begins to speak to Stephen. He asks if he can see the inside of Stephen's house. Stephen invites him inside. Stephen knows who the boy is—he recognizes the son of Arthur Jarvis, grandson of James Jarvis. The boy asks for ice-cold milk, and when Stephen explains that they have neither milk nor fridges, the boy asks for water. The boy begins to ask Stephen what certain words are in Zulu, and Stephen gives him a small lesson. The boy asks why there is no milk there, and Stephen explains that the community is poor, and there has been a drought. The boy says that he understands, and rides home.

Though he does not realize it yet, Stephen's prayer has been answered as James Jarvis's grandson approaches. After he speaks with Stephen, the boy understands some of the problems plaguing the community, and leaves to inform his grandfather, and presumably beg him to make it right. There is a suggestion here that the solutions to the complex problems of South Africa can only come about through faith—faith in God but also faith in each other, across racial lines. Segregation, the enforced separation of the races, it should be noted, is the opposite of faith. It is the abandonment of faith.

That night, as they're eating dinner, a man comes by with milk for the children, sent by James Jarvis. Stephen is beside himself with astonishment and happiness.

Though it is a superficial solution to the larger problem, it is an immediate solution to the immediate problem of the drought and lack of milk. The bond forged between James and Stephen, a white man and a black man bound by both a murder but also mutual care and understanding, can solve problems, re-knit what had been ripped and broken.

BOOK III, CHAPTER 32

Letters arrive in Ixopo for Stephen. One of them is from Mr. Carmichael. It explains that there was to be no mercy, and Absalom would be executed in just over two weeks. Stephen shows the letter to his wife. She looks heartbroken as she reads the letter, but then tells Stephen that he should try and keep his mind busy by going about his duties for the day. Stephen then reads another letter, from his son. Absalom repeats that there has been no mercy, but that they are kind to him in the prison. As Stephen reads these letters, dark clouds roll through the sky—soon, they will have rain.

Stephen learns that there will be no mercy for his son. His wife's stoic strength emerges yet again. The presence of rain clouds that will break the drought suggests that some of the problems of the land are going to be fixed, soon.

When Stephen goes outside, he sees a strange scene—the magistrate, James Jarvis, and other white men are arranging sticks in the **ground** near the church. The storm clouds grow fiercer and fiercer, and the storm comes up so quickly that James has to take shelter inside the church with Stephen. Inside, the roof leaks heavily from the rain. They spend some time there, waiting for the storm to stop. James asks Stephen if there has been mercy for Absalom, and Stephen shows him the letter. James tells Stephen that he will think of Absalom when that day comes. The rain stops, and James leaves. Stephen is so preoccupied with his thoughts that he does not thank James for the milk, or say anything else to him.

The storm that breaks the drought is efficient, but also causes a lot of damage, suggesting that fixing a broken system takes painful loss. This is reiterated as the father of the man who lost his son, and the father of the man who is about to lose his son, stand under the leaking roof of the church, that symbol of religious faith which seems to be losing its power in South Africa.

That night, the community is puzzled about the nature of the sticks in the **ground**. The children play games around them. The man with the milk makes his delivery, and asks Stephen what they are for, but Stephen says that he does not know.

The people of Ixopo don't understand how this new thing will help them, but soon, they will learn, and be able to take part in their own revival.

BOOK III, CHAPTER 33

The sticks stay in the ground, and are rumored to be for a dam. Absalom's wife is doing well, and takes good care of Gertrude's son. James has been gone from Ndotsheni for some time. One day, the young boy comes riding by Stephen's home again. He tells Stephen that soon he will be going to live in Johannesburg. Stephen tells him that when this happens, "something bright will go out of Ndotsheni." The two of them have another Zulu lesson.

As Stephen's family seems to be successfully rebuilding itself, Stephen is also building a relationship with Arthur's son. The young boy's interest in the language of Zulu suggests that he will continue in his father's footsteps, looking for ways to connect the races as opposed to separate them.

After the boy sees his grandfather's car and heads back to the farm, Stephen notices a young man by the church. He is the new agricultural demonstrator, Napoleon Letsitsi. He was hired by James to help teach farming and care of the **earth** to the people of Ndotsheni. Stephen asks Napoleon if he would like to stay with him, and Napoleon says he would. He gives Stephen a rundown of the techniques that he would like to teach the people of Ndotsheni, and talks about the dam that is to be built. With each new description, Stephen gets even more excited. Napoleon tells Stephen that he is very excited, but he must see the chief before anything else is done.

Napoleon has come to help the people of Ixopo relearn the ways of the land, so that they may thrive and flourish and not have to leave for Johannesburg. He wants to help rebuild both the land and the people who tend it, to rebuild the virtuous cycle of care.

Stephen hears the sound of the horse outside. The boy is outside again. He has ridden back to say goodbye to Stephen because he is returning to **Johannesburg** tomorrow. He promises that he is returning for the holidays, and then rides away. As Stephen watches him go, Napoleon tells him that this **land** and valley can be again what it was in the past. Stephen says that he hopes it happens before his own death.

Stephen is obviously sad that the boy is leaving, perhaps because it is underlining the loss of his own son. When Napoleon excitedly tells him that this place will once be back to its former self, Stephen expresses that he hopes it happen before he dies, revealing a sense of sadness inside of him, but also an excitement about what might be possible.

BOOK III, CHAPTER 34

Stephen learns from the man who brings the milk that James Jarvis' wife has just died. Stephen wishes to go pay his and the community's respects at James's home, but knows that this is not "according to custom." He decides to send a note instead. After he writes the note, however, he wrestles with the fact that James's wife probably died of the sorrow of losing her son, and that would make his note to James cruel. He debates this for a while, then decides that it is the right thing to do, and sends it with a young boy.

So many of South Africa's problems stem from the country's adherence to "custom." Stephen ultimately decides to ignore custom, and instead to truly express compassion. He chooses care for others, for a white man, over allowing "custom" to separate him from another man based on the color of his skin and the facts of their past.

That same day, a storm starts during the religious service, and as the children are confirmed, rain pours through the roof. After it's over, everyone goes to Stephen's house to eat the communal meal. Afterwards, the bishop tells Stephen that he has heard about his many troubles, and thinks that perhaps, for his own well-being, Stephen should leave Ndotsheni. He says that Stephen is not well enough to deal with the state of the community, nor the state of the broken church. As he is talking to him, the young boy whom Stephen had sent with the message returns with a note from James. The note thanks Stephen for his kindness, and says that it was Margaret's will to build them a new church. He also says that his wife was sick before their son's death.

The bishop—like Stephen himself—sees Stephen's failures as making him unfit to deal with the troubles of Ndotsheni. But the note that he receives from James suggests otherwise—it suggests that Stephen's failures have made him more fit to help Ndotsheni. His experience has made him someone who can reach past "custom" and create true bonds with others. Note how Stephen's fears that Margaret died of grief were incorrect. But he would never have known that had he not ignored custom and written to James. He would have felt guilt about her death, and that would have poisoned his relationship and perhaps destroyed the opportunity to build a new Church. By white and blacks working together, positive change can come to South Africa.

Stephen is overjoyed, and explains that the note is from God. The bishop is skeptical at first, but when he reads it, and hears about the milk and the dam and Napoleon, declares that it is not God's will that Stephen leave Ndotsheni. When he goes back inside, Stephen finds his wife and some other women making a simple but beautiful wreath for James.

The bishop sees the hand of God at work—and he's not wrong. It is the hand of God at work, in the sense that it is Stephen's religious faith and compassion that allowed him to build this bond with James. Now the town and James have created a new cycle, one not of destruction but of giving each other gifts.

BOOK III, CHAPTER 35

Napoleon shows the people of Ndotsheni how to build a pen for the cattle and new ways to plow the ground. Not everyone is happy about these new developments. The man whose land is eaten up by the damn is resentful, but since Stephen had given him milk that had saved his nephew, he had done it. The dam is being built. Everything is not going to happen overnight, but it will happen. There is new life in Ndotsheni.

Ndotsheni is beginning to turn around with Napoleon's help. There is hope for the land's restoration yet.

Napoleon gives Stephen a tour of the developments. He tells him that once the dam is working, Stephen will no longer have to take the "white man's milk." Stephen chastises him, saying that many would be dead or gone if not for that milk. Napoleon says that he is grateful for James Jarvis, but that in general, it was white men who took land from black men, and so anything good a white man does is "repayment" for that foolishness. Stephen resists this line of reasoning, but Napoleon presses on. He says that even if the valley was restored to its former glory, it would still not be big enough to hold all the people, and some would still go to **Johannesburg**.

Napoleon is not wrong—it is good that the people of Ndotsheni become self-reliant. He is also correct that even when the land is restored, it is still unevenly distributed, and thus some people will still leave for the corrupting force of Johannesburg.

Stephen reflects on this. He asks Napoleon who it is that he does this for, and Napoleon says "not for a white man or a black man, but for Africa." He then clarifies that he is not a very political man and does not mean to make trouble in Stephen's community, he just wishes to make it right. Stephen reminds him that while it is good to have such thoughts, he should not hate or desire to rule over any man, for it will corrupt him. The young man agrees.

Stephen obviously recognizes the traits of his brother John in Napoleon—political astuteness, brilliance—without the accompanying corruption. This is why he gives Napoleon the warning to not seek power, as John has.

BOOK III, CHAPTER 36

The day before Absalom is to be executed, Stephen tells his wife that he needs to go into the mountain. She understands. Stephen has gone to the mountain several times in his life—once, when Absalom was young and very ill, another time when Stephen had been sexually tempted by a teacher in town, another time when he was considering leaving the ministry. Stephen asks his wife to come with him, but because Absalom's wife is very near her due date, she cannot leave her. She makes him some cakes and tea, and Stephen begins the walk.

The mountain is where Stephen goes when his soul is facing a great trial or temptation. Though he had gone of the journey of this novel with so many others, this time, he must go alone. He must be alone with God, with his faith.

As he begins on the path, he sees James Jarvis. James thanks him for the flowers, and says that the plans for the new church will be coming shortly. He asks after Napoleon, and then tells Stephen that he is going to be leaving Ndotsheni for **Johannesburg**. When James asks Stephen where he is going, Stephen says that he is going into the mountain. Even though he does not explain why, James understands.

His final interaction with James before his pilgrimage shows that the two men have come to peace with one another, and with their own losses.

Stephen continues up the mountain. Because he is old, he climbs slowly. He eventually reaches the summit, and finds the spot where he has always sat. He confesses all of his sins, openly, and then gives thanks for all of the wonderful things that he can remember. Stephen falls asleep, but then wakes up again. He knows that at dawn, his son will be executed, and so he waits for dawn. He thinks about South Africa and the people in it.

Stephen confesses to his sins and weaknesses and failures, and thanks God for everything that he has been given. In these moments of suffering, Stephen's faith supports him.

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Stephen falls asleep again, and wakes just before dawn. He wonders about his son, about what he must be thinking and doing this hour before his death. He wonders if he will face his execution, or weep? Will he pray? Stephen takes out the cakes and tea and eats them and gives thanks, and as the sun rises he takes off his hat and prays.

Before his son's death, Stephen takes a kind of communion. Even as his son dies, he prays to God, showing his undying faith.

The narrator describes the sun's light tipping over the mountains and into the valleys, one by one. Dawn has always come, and dawn will continue to come. But *when* dawn will come on all of this fear and suffering, that is still unknown.

The narrator insists that dawn will always come, that even though understanding does not come all at once, it, too, is inevitable. But when *it comes—when this great cycle of suffering will end—that is not known by anyone. And the fact that this is unknown is the reason for the importance of faith. One can respond to the unknown with fear—by retreating, by trying to control, by segregating—or one can respond with faith, with compassion, by reaching out to others. Stephen has shown that only the latter can solve the complicated problems that afflict South Africa.*

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