

Bitter Fruit Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Bitter Fruit is the story of a family trying to come to grips with the past. Living in post-apartheid South Africa, one day Silas Ali comes face-to-face with the man, Du Boise, who raped his wife Lydia nearly twenty years ago. This encounter throws the Ali family into a downward spiral as each member tries to come to terms with what happened.

Under the apartheid regime, Silas worked for in the underground resistance. His secret life put his family into danger and Lydia's rape was probably related to his resistance work. Silas is now working as a liaison between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the government. Silas remains idealistic and optimistic about the future of the country. His family life; however, is thrown into turmoil when he sees Du Boise. He discovers that his brother-in-law was present the night Lydia was raped. Silas tries to avoid the topic and reality of Lydia's rape, remaining passive as his family slowly breaks apart. Silas attempts to get Lydia to testify in front of the TRC but he is helpless, and unwilling, to take any further actions to help his family because he is caught in his own pain.

For Lydia, the sighting of Du Boise causes memories of the rape to erupt to the surface. She feels again the pain, helplessness, and emotional damage of the rape. In her anguish, Lydia injures herself, giving her a visible symbol of her internal turmoil. She seems to become more emotionally unstable and fragile, as she clings to her son Michael and lashes out at Silas. In the end, Lydia's solution to the pain is to disengage from her family. She takes on a new job, sleeps with a man at her husband's birthday party, watches her son self destruct, and finally, Lydia leaves her town and her husband for a new life elsewhere.

Michael's transformation within the novel is the most drastic. He learns of his mother's rape by reading her diary and he also discovers that he is Du Boise's child. As he struggles to come to terms with this information, Michael embarks on several affairs from which he gains information about Du Boise and a stolen gun from the women he sleeps with. Michael reconnects with the Silas's family, hoping to prove Lydia wrong, and he is drawn into his late grandfather's mosque. In the mosque Michael learns of his grandfather's personal revenge against the man who raped his sister and Michael gains a safe haven for himself. When a young woman he knows admits to him that she has been sleeping with her own father, Michael is pushed to the edge. He kills the woman's father and then Du Boise, before starting his journey to India and safety.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

At the grocery store, Silas Ali watches an old man, with thinning hair and dry, dying skin. The man turns around and Silas sees he is Francois Du Boise from the man's blue eyes. Silas moves closer, watching as Du Boise pushes his groceries along the conveyor belt. As Du Boise prepares to leave, Silas pictures Lydia's face and knows that she will be angry when he returns without the things that she asked him to pick up. Nonetheless, Silas follows Du Boise to a café. Silas then walks up and asks the man if he is Lieutenant Du Boise. The man responds that he is, but he doesn't seem to remember Silas. Silas turns and walks away.

Returning home, Silas grabs a six-pack and without saying a word to Lydia goes down the street to a small park. He lies down in the park and drinks the beer. Silas knows he will have to tell Lydia that he saw Du Boise, as he is not good at keeping secrets. Silas falls asleep and wakes up with his son standing above him. He sits up as Mikey tells him that they have to be at Jackson and Mam Agnes's by three. He knows that Lydia has sent Mikey to get him.

They return to the house and the three members of the family drive to Jackson and Mam Agnes's house. There, Silas says he'll stay with the car. Jackson, Lydia's father, comes out to get him and they have a drink. Mikey leaves with Mam Agnes to drive her to a wedding.

Lydia and Silas begin driving home. On the way, Silas tells her about seeing Du Boise. Lydia is upset but she keeps her inquiries about the encounter casual. At the house, she changes into her work clothes. Silas tries to talk to her but she leaves and he falls asleep. Silas wakes to the sound of a car in the drive. He goes down and finds Lydia in the wicker chair on the front step.

She is in one of her inconsolable moods, like she was the day that Steve Biko was killed and the day she found out about Silas's affair with another member of the underground. As they begin to talk, Lydia reveals that Du Boise had raped her years ago. Silas was being held in a police van while it happened, although he could hear it happening. They argue about whether Silas needed to bring the information home and about whether their pain over the situation is similar. Silas tries to tell Lydia that they need to deal with this and that perhaps they could take it to the Truth Commission. Lydia scoffs at the idea, saying that it will make no difference. She tells him that if he were a real man, he would have killed Du Boise for what he did to her.

Silas grabs her and the glass of beer that Lydia is holding falls to the floor and shatters. They kiss and Lydia begins making a gentle dancing motion. Silas looks down and realizes that Lydia has cut her feet on the glass.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The opening chapter introduces us to a number of the important events and themes of *Bitter Fruit*. At the center is Du Boise's rape of Lydia while Silas was working in the underground. This is further complicated by their present situation because the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is gathering information and testimony about crimes that occurred in the past. Their situation represents a microcosm of the larger environment where perpetrators and victims are coming face to face with one another again after apartheid.

We also see the strain of their past pain in Lydia and Silas's marriage. They have not talked about the rape or how it affected each of them. They seem to exist in a space of silence and tension. They are miserable and they are subtly taking it out on one another. Instead of comforting each other over what happened, they argue and snap at each other, almost as if they are trying to inflict further pain.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Lydia continues to cling to him and dance on the glass, oblivious to Silas's pleas to stop. He picks her up and carries her to the settee, watching her blood seep into the white linen slipcover. Silas calls for an ambulance. Lydia's crying becomes slower and Silas worries that she is going into shock. He takes two towels and binds Lydia's feet with them to stop the bleeding.

He calls his brother-in-law, Alec, and tells him that Lydia has had an accident and that he needs to get her to the hospital. In his mind, her wounds have become a tragic accident rather than self-inflicted wounds. Alec and Gracie arrive, saying that Mikey was driving Jackson and Mam Agnes over as well. They carry Lydia to the car and take her to a hospital, but not to the clinic that she works at.

Lydia has to stay in the hospital for three weeks, as she has cut one of the tendons in her foot. Each night, the family gathers at her bedside, all trying to remain cheerful for Lydia. They talk for a while and then leave Silas alone with her. Mikey sees their distance and their avoidance of intimacy.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, we see more of the family dynamics. The extended family is protective of Lydia. They want to know what really happened although they don't ask. The family comes to see Lydia and they watch over her while she recuperates. Lydia's family, in many ways, presents a united front that surrounds her. Yet, Silas is somewhat outside of this. They are suspicious of him and Lydia's "accident."

We also see the relationships between Lydia, Silas, and Mikey. They are uneasy with one another. Mikey, in some ways, is a typical adolescent. He leans against the hospital walls and keeps himself separate from the rest of the family. It is clear that the family isn't usually affectionate with one another as illustrated by Mikey's unease when he embraces his mother in the hospital. As with Lydia's rape, Lydia and Silas both deny what really happened to injure Lydia. They try to make it look like nothing horrible has happened, when even if it had been an accident, the events are dreadful for the couple.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Mikey lies in bed thinking about a debate that he had several days before with his teacher. He hears his father in the bathroom and begins to think about his mother in the hospital. "But his mother's distance bothers him, the feeling that she is detached from her surroundings, that she is burrowing into her pain for comfort" (pg. 28). He thinks that he doesn't know his mother anymore. Mikey knows that his mother thinks about things because he has seen her bent over her desk writing in her diary but he does not know what she writes about.

Mikey hears his father leave as his car pulls out into the rain. His father, Mikey thinks, is a man who can't tell you anything when you look him in the eyes and yet, he is trying to reconcile the country's problems. Mikey gets up and dresses. He pauses at Lydia's desk and finds that the drawers are locked. Mikey finds an old bunch of keys in the tool cabinet and tries each of them until he can open the drawers. Much of the material is ordinary. There are things like an entrance tickets to the zoo, invitations to weddings, a solitary dried carnation, and receipts. His mother's diary is hidden underneath some legal documents. He takes it with his breakfast tray to the back of the house, where he sits outside. Michael has trouble bringing himself to read the first entry because he feels a sense of foreboding about its contents. Michael feels that the diary will have something to do with Lydia's accident and the name Du Boise, which his parents have whispered to each other in the hospital.

But Michael is also reluctant to read her diary because it will contain information about him, such as the day that Lydia found him and Mireille 'playing Gandhi' in his room. Lydia had opened the door to find her son and her sister lying naked, side-by-side on the bed, only their hands touching. He later overheard his parents talking, after Lydia's tear-filled conferences with the other female family members, and Michael heard Lydia tell Silas that the two must be sleeping together.

Michael thinks back to the day it started. The family had been talking about what the children wanted to be when they grew up and Mireille had laughed at Mikey when he said that he wanted to be a writer. Later, she apologized while they were in her room. They had grown up together so she felt comfortable undressing in front of him. Mikey began telling her about a book he was reading on Mahatma Gandhi and how he would test himself by going to bed with young, naked girls. Mireille asked him if he wanted to play Gandhi and told him to undress as well. They had lain down next to each other, but they had not had sex, although Mikey now thinks that that probably would have ended the whole thing. Instead, they resisted the urge, and continued to "play Gandhi." Soon, they were playing their game often.

One day, Mikey woke, sensing that someone was watching him. The retribution came swiftly as Mireille was sent away to Canada. Mikey had lost Mireille and he had become



alienated from his mother. Time had passed. Nelson Mandela was freed, and the whispering conversations among the adults stopped. Mikey forgot about Mireille.

Now, Mikey stretches, realizing that he has fallen asleep in the sun. He goes inside, and remembers a party on the polished wooden floors of the house. He had danced with Mireille. He decides to call her in Canada, thinking that he has seen her private number in Lydia's telephone book.

She answers on the fourth ring and she is sleepy because it's before six in the morning there. Mireille tells him that they should not contact each other, that what they did was perhaps wrong. She doesn't want to repeat the experience of being found by the adults and being banished to Canada to live with Aunt Martha. Afterwards, Mikey wonders if he too will grow old and develop an adult's shame about what happened.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

One of the themes of *Bitter Fruit* is how individuals deal with the past and its secrets and hurts. In this chapter, we learn of another past episode that will weave its way through the novel, Mikey's involvement with Mireille. Although this will be a minor plot line in comparison to some of the others, we see in Mireille's reaction to the past a desire to forget her mistakes and move on. Mikey thinks that she has accommodated new realities into her memory. Mireille will forget the injustice and seek no retribution. Mikey's reactions later in the novel to Lydia's rape will contrast with Mireille's attempts to forget her involvement with Mikey.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Mikey tells Silas that he is not feeling well and that he will not be going to the hospital that night. He climbs the stairs, leaving his father without a chance to question him or see whether he really is sick.

Silas thinks that he will bear the burden of Mikey's absence when he goes to the hospital. Any explanation that he tries to give will be turned into something more sinister. His son has turned into a moody, reclusive stranger. Silas remembers when Mireille, just two years older than Mikey, was sent away. Mikey had withdrawn from the family and he became sick often.

The doorbell rings and Silas answers it, finding Kate Jessup and Julian Solomon at the door. Silas hugs them. He tells the visitors that Mikey is sick and that he doesn't want to leave him alone while he goes to the hospital. Kate and Julian offer to stay. Julian is going through a difficult time in his marriage and there have been rumors that he is gay as well. Kate is involved in a triangle of sorts as her former lover, Marguerite, showed up unexpectedly from Europe, demanding the same hospitality that she had shown to Kate. Kate is currently living with Janine, so having them both in the same house is complicated and delicate.

At the hospital, Lydia asks where Mikey is and Silas tells her that he is at home but that Julian and Kate are with him. Lydia seems anguished and pained, crying that her son has not been brought along. The absence of her son brings out the same pain that caused Lydia to dance on the broken glass. Silas is anguished at the sight of her crying and he sags down to the floor, his legs going out from under him. Silas is having a seizure and the family calls for help. When the doctor has finished examining him, he asks Lydia if Silas had ever had an attack like this before. She replies that he has, twenty years ago, under severe stress.

Silas is admitted to the hospital overnight. The family tries to decide what to do since someone should stay with Mikey, but this meant driving back to their houses and then to the suburbs to Mikey. Gracie calls Mikey to let him know, but gets Kate instead. When Gracie explains, Kate offers to stay with Mikey.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter again offers a glimpse of the family and the troubles between them. Mikey is distant and separates himself by choosing not to go to the hospital. Silas knows that he will be blamed for not making Mikey come along even though Mikey is saying that he is sick. Silas later collapses in the hospital, foreshadowing a revelation about the extended family that will take place later in the book. Lydia is overcome by the pain and suffering that the Du Boise sighting has brought back to the surface. Lydia is



overwrought and dramatic, yet silent in her pain. Mam Agnes complains about having to go all the way over to Silas and Lydia's house, even though she offered to go stay with Mikey. Alec thinks that the women in the family have tongues that are as sharp as their eyes.

We are also introduced to Kate and Julian in this chapter. They work with Silas and are his friends, offering him support. They both have complicated home lives. Julian is having trouble in his marriage. Kate is currently living with both a former lover and a current one.



Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

Silas and Kate had never been involved romantically, although many people thought that they had been involved. They had been involved in the same MK counter-intelligence unit and as part of their job, they had to identify infiltrators and informers. Sleeping together would have compromised their objectivity and integrity. But, Silas did have an affair with another MK comrade who was not in his unit.

One day, in 1988, Kate came to the clinic where Lydia worked and told her that she and Silas were a part of the ANC underground. Kate also told Lydia that Silas was having an affair and that the MK was worried that the police might try to exploit this information. Lydia was shocked at finding out that Silas was not only having an affair, but that he had been involved in the underground without telling her. Lydia was also angered by Kate's sense of righteousness. Silas would later admit his involvement, telling Lydia that Kate was helping to prepare for negotiations between the government and the movement.

Lydia could not forgive Silas for endangering their lives by participating in the movement without telling her. She was also upset that Silas seemed to disregard her dislike of Kate by inviting her to dinner or Sunday tea. At first she thought that these times were just an excuse for them to talk about their work, but later she understood that they were friends. Over dinner one night, Kate had declared that she was a lesbian. Lydia found this particularly distasteful. Mikey, who was only sixteen, was at the table and she knew that Kate's declaration was due to Mikey's presence. She and Silas had had a big argument about Kate afterward.

At the time, Silas had been astounded by his wife's bitterness. He was also surprised that she had developed into a woman with knowledge of books and music. "And then he remembered that Lydia, too, had never been the same since the night she was raped. Somewhere inside of her that *other* Lydia was hiding, shielding herself from the memory of being raped and from his response to it. It would take too much energy to find her, and he felt tired, drained of all his enthusiasm for the struggle this would demand" (pg. 60). Lydia had told him at the time to keep Kate away from Mikey.

For a few years after that incident, Silas's social life had lessened and he had stopped making Lydia host his friends at dinner parties. Kate came to the house much less often. Silas spent more time at home. But Lydia and Silas were uncomfortable together and they spent much of their time in the house engaged in separate activities. He had known that Lydia really wanted to explore her hidden pain, but Silas told himself that he wasn't capable of it. He was a liaison between the Ministry of Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Silas told everyone else to be objective so what would happen if he broke that rule himself?

Now Kate is staying with Mikey and Lydia is worried about what might happen.



Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

We learn more about Kate in this chapter along with her relationship to both Silas and Lydia. Although she is Silas's friend, Lydia dislikes Kate for having told her about Silas's affair and for behaving as she did with Mikey at the dinner party. Lydia fears that something could happen between Mikey and Kate, although she seems to realize that if anything should happen, both Mikey and Kate would be responsible.

This chapter, like the previous ones, continues to illustrate the difficulties between Silas and Lydia. Although the rape created a distance between them, Lydia has also grown in different ways than Silas. They couple doesn't share the same interests and they don't really spend time together even when they are in the same house. Silas's affair and his involvement in the underground has also created a large rift between them. Lydia can never fully forgive him for not telling her about his work in the underground, as this work put all of them in danger. Silas risked their lives without their knowledge or consent.



Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

Kate calls Janine to tell her that she won't be home until late. She feels that Janine is beginning to withdraw from the situation. There are too many complications in their relationship; Kate's former lover living with them, her bisexuality, and her comfortable relationships with both wealthy and radical friends. One part of Kate was always conflicted with the other. Kate and Julian drink glasses of whiskey and watch the news. Mikey comes downstairs so Kate and Julian decide to order a pizza. They talk about the Ali family living here in Berea which is a dangerousness place, and how Mikey must not have anyone to look up to in the community.

Kate goes to see how Mikey is doing and finds him staring out the window. He silences her when she tries to speak to him, "His strange, rather shallow skin was tinged with blue, as if he had no color of his own, as if his complexion was created by absorbing light from elements around him, from the fluorescent tubes above them and the darkness into which he started. When at last he did turn towards her, it was to convey a passing acknowledgement, to reinforce that fact that there was something more mysterious and exotic out there. His beauty was sinister, she thought, and then smiled to herself. How crude that was! Using his good looks in order to justify her desire for him" (pg. 71). She thinks of her daughter, Ferial, who is only three years younger than Mikey and this restores her adult hierarchy over him. She turns to go back to Julian, but Mikey opens the window and a tiny bird hops in and stands on the sink. Mikey extends his hand and the bird hops onto it. He holds his glass so that the bird can drink out of it. Julian comes into the kitchen and the bird flies away from Mikey, crashing into the window. Mikey picks it up and carries it outside while Julian and Kate watch. In a swift motion, he propels the bird upward and it flies off.

Julian receives a call that his son has a fever. As he and Kate talk about his wife, Mikey comes into the room and says that his Aunt Gracie is on the phone. As Kate talks to her, Mikey walks up the stairs, indicating that he is going to sleep. Gracie tells Kate about Silas, and Kate volunteers to stay the night with Mikey. She calls home again to let Janine and Ferial know that she won't be home after all.

After the call, Kate goes upstairs. There are four doors on the landing: the master bedroom, Mikey's room, the guest room, and a fourth door which offers a glimpse of the street below in its glass pane. Kate goes through this door to the balcony. She hears someone muttering and thinks that it must be Mikey. She peers through a narrow window into his room, and sees him naked on his bed with a blue glow coming from his stomach. She watches him, unable to turn away from his beauty. She leans closer and sees that he was some sort of stone, giving off a blue glow, lying in his navel.



Mikey stirs and Kate pulls away from the window. She hopes that he has not seen her. She retreats to the other end of the balcony and drinks the rest of her glass of wine, watching the traffic below.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

We see in this chapter Kate's attraction to Mikey. She desires him, even though she is older than he is and has a daughter almost his age. Kate is drawn to Mikey in the kitchen and later watches him from the balcony. Yet, it is still unclear how Mikey feels about Kate. He seems distant with her as he is with the other people in his life. There is little indication that Lydia has anything to fear between the two of them.

Kate's other relationships are complicated as well. She believes Julian to be gay, but he denies this. Janine is beginning to withdraw from her, due in part to Marguerite's presence and to Kate's own contradictions. Her relationship with Silas is strained because of Lydia's dislike. Yet, Kate seems oddly accepting of all of this. She seems more consumed with thoughts of Mikey than she does about her own failing relationship or Lydia's distrust of her.



Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

Gracie can't sleep. She lies in her bed, smelling the fifteen years of accumulated odors in the walls of her house. Their history is in those smells and they are in a twilight zone between black and white. They try to be both and end up as neither.

Alec is half-awake. She turns toward him, but tells him not to get any ideas about sex. Gracie wants to talk to him about Kate and about what's going on between Silas and Lydia. She says that Silas was looking at Alec while he was talking and that's when he passed out. Gracie knows that Lydia didn't just cut herself and she wants to know what Silas has told Alec, thinking that the two men have talked to each other since they've been friends since childhood.

Alec gets up, his mood cold and hard. He remembers back to when survival was paramount even if it meant breaking the law to do so. If one was black, it often meant accommodating the forces that were more powerful. "Now moral zealots were running the world. They were always judging others, looking for something corrupt even in the efforts of ordinary people struggling to make a living," (pg. 85). Alec makes himself some tea and sits at the table, overcome by a rage at everyone; Gracie, Silas, Lydia, Mikey, and Nelson Mandela. He sits in silence with his thoughts before finally going back to the bedroom.

Climbing into bed, he apologizes to Gracie and she is grateful for this, even if she knows that he isn't really sorry. She pulls him close and they make love.

In the next scene, Mikey is thinking that he has no religion. Silas and Lydia have brought him up as a Christmas Christian. He looks down at the holy Kaaba stone he has laid on his navel. Maybe he can identify with Ali Ali, from whom the stone came from.

Mikey senses someone and he sees Kate peering at him through the window. He resents that she is intruding on him. He remembers the first time he met her, at a cottage on the banks of the Bushman's River. Mikey becomes aroused in a way he associates with Mireille.

Later, at precisely three a.m., Kate sees Mikey standing in the doorway of the guest room where she is sleeping. She raises the covers and he climbs into bed with her. Afterwards, Mikey thinks about the image of a woman's shoulders, trying to remember where the image is from. The image is not Kate, but Lydia.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

We see glimpses of things to come in this chapter. Alec turns to thoughts about individuals having to survive in times past and how they had to do things that were against the law. This foreshadows secrets that will be revealed later in the novel. It also complicates the idea of responsibility and blame. If an individual cooperated in order to survive, are they as guilty as those who committed brutal acts without any reason to?

Kate and Mikey also begin their affair. Lydia's fears about the two have proven correct. Kate is attracted to Mikey but it is unclear why Mikey is involved with her. There is some indication that she invokes the same arousal that Mireille did, but at the same time, Mikey is irritated by her intrusion into the house.



Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Silas wakes up from a dream about his death. In the dream he was swept away on a bier of floating flowers for a burial at sea, while Mikey and Kate watched, naked, on the shore. A distant fear that Mikey is not biologically his son comes to his mind and he struggles to wake himself. It is five a.m. Across from Silas, doctors and nurses work on a patient, before stepping away to reveal that the body is already cold and curled up. A nurse turns sees Silas, and pulls the curtain around the dead man. They take the shrouded dead man away.

Silas gets up, wondering who stayed with Mikey. Wandering down the hospital hallway, Silas speaks briefly with a nurse. Lydia's face intrudes and he remembers that she became a nurse because she had no choice. Lydia is black and even if she could have found a place at a university, her parents could not have paid for it. He wonders if she married him because he was the lesser of two evils.

Silas stands in the shower, thinking about what he needs to do that day, as he always does. He thinks that he needs to apologize to the nurse for speaking sharply to her. He finds his car keys and other belongings in his coat pocket. As he is leaving, Silas sees the nurse and to him, she is Lydia and every woman he has ever known. She interrupts his thoughts and asks him if he is ok. The nurse then has him sign a refused hospital treatment form.

Driving, Silas thinks about how things have changed. Ten years ago, he would have been one of the only black people driving down the road in a sedan. Now the lanes were full of traffic, people of every color were heading towards their destinations. He decides to drive through the city center. Silas drives past Anstey's Building, where he and Betty had leased a secret apartment for themselves. Thinking about it all, he remembers that Betty is gone, moved with her husband to another country somewhere. "They had loved each other absolutely, he and Betty, once when it was dangerous to love like that, selfishly, ruthless in their disregard for others" (pg. 98). Arriving home, Mikey tells him that Kate spent the night.

Later, at his office, he hears about his coworker's concern for his health. Silas has to deal with a crisis to deal with since there are rumors that the government and the TRC are disagreeing. Silas retreats to his office and looks out the window. He thinks back to the night before and realizes that Alec's voice brought back some memory of Du Boise raping Lydia. Silas closes his eyes and tries to listen to Alec's voice again. Alec's voice had a distinctive township accent. Had Alec been present that night? If he had, Alec would have been a perpetrator or a conspirator. He calls Alec, wanting to test the memory of that night and whether Alec's voice would bring up anything. He asks Alec about several people they once knew and they end up discussing Fanny Dip. Long ago, she had shown Silas her "fanny" and she had made him swear not to tell anyone what it



looked like. Since she was Chinese, the rumor had been that her genitalia were sideways. He remembers how Alec had tried to get it out of him, by arguing that they were brothers. Silas thinks that it was ridiculous to think Alec was there the night of Lydia's rape.

Another memory springs to Silas's mind. Lydia had found out about his experience with Fanny Dip. She argued with him about why he would do such a thing. Silas thinks that there was a change in Lydia from that day forward. Her love for him became slightly hardened and she began recoiling slightly from his touch. Silas thinks that it was that moment when they realized what they didn't want to know. Although they were both colored, they were not naturally compatible with each other.

Alec calls back and Silas finally tells him what he saw that day. Fanny had a deep knife wound that hadn't been properly stitched. After they hang up, Silas goes over what he will need to say to the public to quell the latest uproar.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

Silas wonders in this chapter whether Alec was present the night of Lydia's rape. Something about Alec's voice triggers Silas's memory of that night. He tries to find out by recalling Alec's voice and calling him for a more immediate reminder. Silas is still unsure, although he thinks that Alec couldn't have been there because Alec was like his brother. Surely Alec would have done something or said something about it before now.

The questions in this chapter will continue through the novel. In the last chapter, we saw a glimpse that Alec had done something in his past that he was ashamed of but felt that he had to do to it in order to survive. The two men are bound by their childhood experiences and by being married to sisters, but there is the hint that something is lurking beneath their friendship.



Part 1, Chapter 9

Part 1, Chapter 9 Summary

Lydia receives a letter from Martha in Toronto, but the letter is addressed to her maiden name and it's taken the hospital a while to figure out whom the letter was for. Lydia knows that someone has opened it because it has been resealed with tape. She remembers how the postman used to avert his eyes when he delivered their mail in the township. Since she hadn't known about Silas's underground work at the time, Lydia realizes that she had been exposed anytime a man came to the house whether he was; a meter-reader, a postal worker, or municipal inspectors, any one of them could have been an assassin or a rapist who could have used her and Mikey to get to Silas.

Martha writes that Mireille had received a call early in the morning that Martha thinks was from Mikey. As she finishes the letter, a nurse pokes her head in the door and tells Lydia that she is going home. As the doctor and nurse look over the x-ray plates, Lydia notices a cross on the wall, probably placed there because Silas had put "Catholic" on the entrance questionnaire. She remembers the halls of the Catholic school that she went to. As a child, she had wanted to marry God, like Sister Catherine. She had dreamed of God and Sister Catherine showing their unspeakable love to each other. When she tried to confess about her dreams, she had begun laughing deeply and the monk had leaped to her, praying over her to expel Satan. Sister Catherine had counseled Lydia that perhaps she was not cut out for a life of devotion.

Back in Durban, the family's relocation to Johannesburg was confirmed. Lydia had wandered off and she had seen some prostitutes. She chose one of the prostitutes, a young Chinese woman as her fantasy lover. Lydia named her fantasy girl Cathy and conjured up her image whenever she had sex with a man. Lydia thinks that Silas has infused her with the girl who stripped for him, just as she has infused him with Cathy. She had known immediately after Du Boise raped her that she was pregnant. Lydia still prays each night that her purity will overcome Du Boise's rapist genes in Mikey.

The nurse comes in with her discharge papers and Lydia dials Silas's number. His secretary tells her that Silas is in a meeting but tells Lydia that she'll get a message to him. A few minutes later, the secretary calls back to tell her that Silas will end his meeting and come get her. Lydia thinks that Silas has brought her rapist home with him, making it difficult to live with him.

Angry with Silas, Lydia calls a taxi before he gets to the hospital.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Analysis

We learn in this chapter that Mikey is Du Boise's child and he is a product of Lydia's rape. Mikey's reluctance to open Lydia's diary because he instinctively knows that something life altering awaits him in it, hints at this. The family relationship is further

complicated, although Mikey does not yet know about his conception. Mikey's attempts to come to terms with the events once he does find out will present another version of how individuals try to come to terms with their pasts. Yet, Lydia and Silas do know the truth and this must contribute to their difficulties with each other. Although they have both tried to forget that the rape happened, it is always present with them in the form of their son.



Part 1, Chapter 10

Part 1, Chapter 10 Summary

Mikey is working on his literature assignment. Shirley Graham, the head of the department, has given Mikey access to her library at home. She has given him her volume of Kafka's *Diaries* which is a first edition. Shirley was flustered when she gave it to him, as lending it to him was an excuse for him to return to her home.

Mikey gets Lydia's diary from its new hiding place, a secret compartment in the built in cupboard. Mikey has also hidden some secret TRC records that Silas had brought home and forgotten about. He begins to read. The first entry tells of Lydia's rape and that she knows that she is pregnant. She talks about how she can't talk to Silas about it because he makes her pain his tragedy and he wants her to suffer silently. Lydia debates with herself in the diary over whether to end the pregnancy but decides to compromise: she will wait until the child is born to decide whether it should live or die.

It is dawn, and Mikey is calm, detached from the knowledge that he is child of rape. At first he had been filled with horror, but now he had settled down. Mikey hears his father come home, and he switches off the light so that his father will think that he has been asleep. Eventually, Mikey turns on the light again and reads until May 1994 when the entries stop. It seems a random date to him and he can't remember any importance to it. He thinks that it would have been different if he had been fathered by a black man working for the old system. "But were they all traitors, the many black people who collaborated with the old regime?" (pg. 131).

He replaces the diary in his mother's desk drawer and calls Kate.

Part 1, Chapter 10 Analysis

Mikey has now learned of the events of his conception: he is a product of a rape. Through Lydia's diary, Mikey learns of the events of her rape, her thoughts about ending her pregnancy, and her inability to talk to Silas about the event. In her diary we see not only Lydia's pain but also her alienation from Silas. Lydia feels that he takes on her pain as her own, making him a victim. Because of his reaction to her rape, he does not offer her the support that she needs after the rape. Lydia retreats from her husband and she does not talk to him about the rape.

Mikey thinks about a theme that has been present in the other chapters; how guilty are the collaborators when atrocities are committed? Are they as guilty as the perpetrators? How does their fragile existence, collaborating to survive, mediate in this equation? Alec has thought about these questions and now Mikey considers the issue. It appears that this topic will be returned to later in the book.



Part 1, Chapter 11

Part 1, Chapter 11 Summary

Mikey is with Kate. It is the fifth or sixth time that they have made love. He has a physical power over her and Kate wonders if having sex with her aging body, as old as his mother's, shames him. Kate suspects that there is some meaning behind their meetings as Mikey's questions about her work are very precise and thought out. Mikey asks about the 16th of May 1994 and Kate tells him that she had a party that his parents came to and that it was the day they completed the TRC White Paper.

Kate teasingly begins to call him Michael. Mikey tells her that only his Uncle Toyer used that name for him, but he died. They touch again and Mikey tells her that he needs her help. Mikey wants her to get some documents on an ex-cop named Du Boise. She tells him that she can't and Mikey apologizes to her. They make love again. Afterwards, he tells her that she must go because his mother is on her way home. Kate dresses and pulls her car away from the house just as a taxi approaches.

Kate imagines that Lydia will know something is wrong as soon as she enters the house and sees Mikey. Kate wonders if Mikey will tell his mother that he is sleeping with her. She thinks that they will all have to learn to live in the new South Africa. "We have to learn to become ordinary, learn how to lie to ourselves, and to others, if it means keeping the peace, avoiding discord and strife, like ordinary people everywhere in the world" (pg. 138). Kate readies herself for her meeting with the President while she drives.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Analysis

Mikey's affair with Kate is somewhat surprising. She is his mother's age and when he began the affair, Mikey did not know about Lydia's rape. It appears that he is continuing the affair, at least in part, because he thinks that Kate will get him information on Du Boise. It is unclear, yet, whether Mikey wishes to know about Du Bois in order to learn about the man who is his biological father or whether he is planning revenge for his mother. This will become clearer in future chapters. Although Kate has said that she won't give him the information, Mikey's focused curiosity makes it clear that he will continue on this path.



Part 1, Chapter 12

Part 1, Chapter 12 Summary

When Mikey thinks of Lydia, he doesn't see her as his "mama" anymore. He knows that she can not offer him refuge. When he was younger, he and his mother used to sniff each other, not unlike animals do. He used to be able to sense her mood. Lydia touched him differently than Silas did and he didn't like his father's smell. Mikey thinks that when Lydia touches Silas it is as if those actions belong to the past, as if she is trying to hasten her time with him. When she touches Mikey, it is in the present, and the intimacy causes great joy and pain for them.

Mikey senses that his mother is close by. He makes Kate leave but when he thinks of her nakedness, he wants to rid his mind of the memory. He smashes Oupapa Ali's Kaaba stone against the wall. The stone doesn't break, but it cuts into his hand.

Lydia comes into the house and Mikey is there to greet her. They hug. She is angry with him because she knows that Kate was here even though Lydia didn't see her as she pulled away. However, as they embrace, her anger softens. Lydia sits on the settee. Mikey knows that she won't mention Kate, but there will be a barrier between them for a few days. He goes to her, laying his head on her lap. He has often used this exact same pose to silently ask her forgiveness. He can smell his mother's scent and he begins to compare it to Kate's and to Mireille's. Mikey is frightened by his thoughts but he remains with his head in her lap. He can feel Lydia's fear as well.

Then, Mikey senses his father outside. Mikey gets up and looks at Lydia, "When he walks away, there is an acknowledgement, for the first time, of a conspiracy between them, shapeless and undefined, the shadows of two complete strangers cast in their images, shadows they are unlikely ever to explore with words, and so to reveal their cruel meaning" (pg. 144).

Part 1, Chapter 12 Analysis

Mikey and Lydia's relationship is changing as well as each of their respective relationships with Silas. Mikey does not feel as close to his mother. There is now a distance between them, although it began long before he learned about her rape and the secret that she kept from him about his conception. There is a sharpness between them now. He knows that his mother does not like Kate; yet, he has involved himself with her and Mikey knows that they will not be able to talk about this.

Yet, at the same time, there is a connection between them that neither of them has with Silas. Mikey refers to it through scent. Mikey can smell his mother and he likes her scent while he dislikes Silas's scent. This; however, leads to problems as Mikey begins thinking about Lydia's scent in a sexual way, comparing it to Kate and Mireille's.



Part 1, Chapters 13-14

Part 1, Chapters 13-14 Summary

Silas used to visit his father, Ali Ali, in the hospital when he was dying of cancer. His mother had taken the name Mrs. Ali even though it had no legal standing and marked her as a second-hand Christian wife. His father was Muslim and his family had always shown Silas and his mother. His father never spoke much during the visits. One day Silas had arrived to find his father's bed empty and a nurse told him that his father had died. He had left Silas a Kaaba stone. Silas now thinks that maybe he should give the stone to Mikey and he wonders where it is.

Silas stands at the door to his house, afraid to enter. He had been a little late to the hospital, but when he arrived Lydia was gone already. He sits down on the curb, afraid to go in. What if he found Lydia and Mikey together? He wonders about what he expects. Does he really think that Lydia and Mikey could be intimate together? Suddenly, Silas realizes that Mikey has been sleeping with Kate. Finally, he rises and goes to the door.

Kate's day has passed uneventfully. The President asks about Silas and everyone had agreed that he was a good man. When she gets a chance, Kate leaves work and goes home for a hot bath. Before leaving, she asks the security chief if he could locate the records of Francois Du Boise. Later she regrets asking him at all. Her thoughts drift to Mikey and she wonders how he had known that Lydia was coming, as there hadn't been a warning phone call or other indicator. She thinks that Mikey is bright and full of promise.

Part 1, Chapters 13-14 Analysis

We learn more about Silas's background in this chapter. His father was a Muslim named Ali Ali and he gave Silas the Kaaba stone that Mikey now has. Silas's family and background will come to influence Mikey in later chapters as he learns more about it. They will also lead him to the mosque and the Imam, who helps Mikey escape from South Africa after he has his revenge.

We also see that Silas also senses a sexual tension between Lydia and Mikey, perhaps in response to their closeness or behavior. Silas is apprehensive about entering his house, thinking that he might find them together. This follows from Mikey's thoughts in the previous chapter and will come out again in later chapters.



Part 1, Chapter 15

Part 1, Chapter 15 Summary

From the moment that Silas opened the door, he, Lydia, and Mikey established a code of silence and understanding for that day. Whatever had happened, no one would talk or even hint at it. "They would think of it as *that day* in their minds, independently acknowledging that their relationships with each other had started their real transformation when they sat trapped in their separate spaces, unable to reach out to each other, unable to express outrage or assert innocence, unable to accuse, justify, or recriminate" (pg. 151).

Silas enters the house to find Lydia asleep on the settee. He finds Mikey on the computer in his room. Mikey tells him that Lydia asked for some of Silas's sedatives. The two rearrange the house, making the Silas's study into a bedroom for Lydia so that she will not have to climb the stairs. Lydia smiles when she wakes up and discovers what they have done for her. The family eats a light supper and they each go to their own rooms to sleep.

In the days following Lydia's return home, the family spends little time together because of Silas's difficulties at work. The ruling party has tried to stop the publication of the TRC report and Silas spends hours meeting with Ministers, lawyers, and politicians. Lydia's feet are healing and Mikey is preparing for his exams. They spend their home hours in separate rooms of the house

Mikey meets with Kate one more time at her house. They make love in her study and Mikey is fierce and almost violent with her. As he is about to leave, Kate gives him a think manila envelop.

That night, Lydia is laying on her bed in the study, which is filled with her husband's world. Silas has told her about a special session for abused women to testify before the Commission. When she refuses, Lydia sees in Silas a moment of disappointment, as if her appearance would have given him the chance to play the brave husband. But, she thinks that testifying would not have alleviated her pain. She thinks of Du Boise and how he is now in her house. She wonders if she desires Silas anymore. Can she return to their bed and make love to him?

She hears a door close somewhere and she thinks that it is Mikey. Lydia gets up and pushes the door open. She sees him come from the kitchen and stand by the staircase. When he notices that the study door is ajar, Mikey goes up the stairs. Lydia quickly closes the door. Settling back down, Lydia tries to read a book, but she thinks about bringing a cup of hot milk up to Mikey. She tries to imagine what would happen if she went up there.



She hears a key in the door and Silas comes in. He tells her that the TRC has completed the report and that they would hand it over to the President the following week. He describes for her the troubles and tensions that have been happening regarding the report. Then he tells her that although the report is complete, the amnesty hearings will continue. Du Boise has applied for amnesty and he has named Lydia as one of the women he raped. She pleads with him to try to stop it, but he tells her that he can't.

Silas kisses her, running his hands over her body, but she pushes him away. When he tries to apologize, she tells him that he has every right as her husband. Silas is angry, asking if their marriage has come down to rights. Mikey comes down stairs as Silas is leaving. He puts his arms around Lydia comforting her, as Silas storms out. Lydia draws him to her and kisses him. She leads him to her bed and he lies down, closing his eyes and falling asleep. Lydia weeps, even as she observes his body and longs to reach out and touch him. She thinks that it will be difficult to love him only as her son from now on.

Part 1, Chapter 15 Analysis

The family drifts farther apart. They don't talk about any of the important matters that are happening or confront each other with their suspicions. Silas doesn't ask Mikey about Kate or confront Lydia about her closeness to Mikey. Lydia longs for the closeness that she used to have with her son but she feels awkward in his presence. The ending scene where Lydia feels a sexual attraction to Mikey will further this separation.

In this chapter, Silas does tell Lydia that Du Boise has applied for amnesty for raping her which brings up their pain. The amnesty hearings will further propel the events of the novel, as Lydia's rape is no longer secret and the family must deal with it and its effects.



Part 1, Chapter 16

Part 1, Chapter 16 Summary

The family lives secretive existences, concealing their lives from each other. There is no drama, no shouting, and no arguments. Silas hides his anger. Mikey walks endlessly around the city and has taken to going to Newclare, where Silas grew up. Yet, the family continues to live together. "The Alis remain together in their middle-class home in Berea, perhaps because they have no choice, perhaps because they realize that for any one of them to move out would require an acknowledgement of the 'thing' that has divided them, for ever. They do not speculate about their fate, they each find a way to deal with the reality of the 'thing'" (pg. 164).

Mikey talks to Vinu Viljoen, a woman from his English class. He tells her that from now on, he wants to be called "Michael." He remembers that Kate called him this, but dismisses the distressed feeling he gets when he thinks of her.

Lydia lives in a self judging, honest world. She is sleeping upstairs again, but Silas has moved to Mikey's bedroom, and Mikey is using Silas's study as a bedroom. Lydia takes out her diary and suspects that someone has read through it. Her feet are healing. Lydia thinks that she kissed her son carnally and whether his lack of response means that she hadn't really kissed him carnally? Lydia can't deny the kiss. Had they made love, there would have been repercussions. It was worse because Mikey had just walked away after he had woken up, acting as if nothing has happened. Lydia thinks his instinct and desire for her was just as strong as hers for him but that he resisted, proving his self-discipline.

In the course of one month Mikey changes dramatically. Mikey starts wearing tight black clothes and cropping his hair short. He gets an earring and listens to hard, driving music. Mickey begins going to clubs and he comes home smelling of alcohol. He is reading the Koran.

The TRC report is given to the President and Silas is on TV. Lydia takes a new job as part of a research team doing tests on HIV positive mothers. She is transformed by her work and she talks of buying a car.

Lydia tells Silas that her new boss has invited the family to dinner. Her boss is the TRC advocate's wife. When the night of the dinner arrives comes, Silas is ready but Michael isn't home. His parents worry but go to the party without him. At the party they run into Kate and after Lydia walks away, Silas and Kate talk about his upcoming birthday. Kate decides that they must have a party.

On their way home, Silas is happy and he thinks about asking Lydia to sleep with him. But, when they arrive they hear Michael's voice and a woman's voice in Silas's study. Silas tells her that he is going to have a party to celebrate his fiftieth birthday party and



they go to their separate room. Lydia is restless, as Michael has never brought a woman home before, except for Kate. Lydia takes a sleeping pill and silently wishes Silas a good night. In his room, Silas can't sleep either. He hasn't had sex for months and he begins thinking about his first time. He had slept with a neighbor girl, but later the gray-suited men had taken her and her family away.

Part 1, Chapter 16 Analysis

The fragmentation of the family continues. They each exist in their own separate world and begin building different lives for themselves. Lydia takes a new job and she discovers a new sense of independence and confidence in her work. Mikey changes his clothing and hair and he begins hanging out at clubs. His change in appearance is also illustrated by the fact that he decides to be called "Michael" from now on. Silas alone remains more or less unchanged. The rest of his family are moving on without him.

The fragmentation began before Silas ran into Du Boise but his symbolic entrance into the household hastens the changes along. Lydia is forced to confront her rape and Mikey's parentage. Mikey learns that he is the child of rape. Yet, they don't talk about it with each other. They continue their unspoken vow of silence about the rape, Lydia's attraction to Mikey, and their separation from each other.



Part 2, Chapter 17

Part 2, Chapter 17 Summary

After Michael has read the diary, he thinks back to a day when Ouma Angel, Silas's mother, was with him. A man came to the door and spoke to her in a language of authority. Michael had felt her fear and when he looked up, he saw the man's white-flecked blue eyes. He realizes now that it was Du Boise. Later that same day, he had heard Silas and Lydia talking with Ouma Angel about it. Shortly afterwards, Ouma had started shrinking, growing frailer, and having breathing problems. She died the month before Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

Michael decides to trace their old sojourns to the township. He hates dwelling on the past, but he feels compelled to do so. Mikey doesn't plan, but takes a taxi into the city center. The journey is unremarkable and soon he leaves the city. He looks for landmarks and things he remembers. Mikey goes to their old house and he wonders what happened to the neighbors. Things have changed and after looking for a while, Mikey goes back for a taxi. Once home, he thinks back over his trip and wonders what he was searching for. Is he trying to prove that he is Silas's son, that Lydia is wrong? He decides to visit his father's family, to see what he can learn from them, even though they may very well be hostile to him.

Mikey finds their house and is invited in. Uncle Amin is shorter and darker than Silas. He introduces Michael to the rest of the family, but they only discuss mundane topics. Mikey says that he must go catch the last taxi to town, but his cousins Haroon and Sadrodien offer to take him back. As they drive, Sadrodien invites Michael to the Griffith Street Mosque where their grandfather had been the Imam. He accepts.

The meeting at the mosque is not what Michael expected. He is brought to a small, ordinary classroom. The desks have been moved aside and carpets have been put on the floor. The Imam enters and greets Michael. Imam Ismail Behardien speaks in Arabic and then he switches to English and welcomes Michael to the gathering. Michael sees a stone that looks like the Kaaba stone he has. Afterward, the Imam comes to talk to Michael. Sadrodien tells him about the tariqah, an elite group open only to the most pious. Michael goes home, thinking that he hasn't thought about Silas, or Lydia, or Lydia's diary in some time.

Michael debates with the Imam, visiting him once a week and then every other day. They talk until one of them has to leave. Someone has told the Imam that Michael has a unique insight into the new government and Michael does not disappoint him in their discussions. Michael asks if the Imam would help if someone came to him with a cause for personal justice. The Imam asks what Michael knows about his grandfather and then the Imam tells Mikey that he will tell him a story about Ali Ali.

Part 2, Chapter 17 Analysis

Michael's transformation continues as he comes into contact with his father's family and begins to meet with the Imam. These actions lay the groundwork for events in the rest of the novel. Michael is searching for his identity, trying to discover whether he is Silas's son or Du Boise's. His search leads him to their old house, where he remembers seeing Du Boise. Not finding answers there, Michael visits Silas's family. He is unsure of what their reception of him will be like, but they invite him in.

Through his father's family, Michael comes into contact with his grandfather's mosque. There, the Imam takes Michael under his wing, meeting with him several times a week to talk and debate. It is through the Imam that Michael will learn about Ali Ali which furthers his ideas of personal justice and revenge. We see from his questions that Michael is already thinking about the ideas of vengeance and justice.



Part 2, Chapter 18

Part 2, Chapter 18 Summary

The Imam begins the fable about Ali Ali, Michael's grandfather. Ali was born in India and his real name was Hamed Chothia. He was born in the early 1890s, when India was still ruled by Britain. When he is seventeen, a British soldier rapes his younger sister, Hajera. No one believes Hajera's accusations of rape even after she is found to be pregnant. The soldier accuses her and the family of trying to disgrace him, stating that he is engaged to a nice English woman and that he has no need to rape an Indian. The family is angry with Hajera for bringing up the accusation rather than keeping it quiet. His sister is sent away to another village and she gives birth in a state hospital. The baby dies while Hajera is feeding her and she is charged with murder. Hajera is found to be insane and she is sentenced to a madhouse.

The family suffers shame, but only Ali Ali seems to remember his sister. He sends a message to the officer telling him that some knowledge has fallen into Ali's hands proving the rape. The officer goes to Ali, hoping to bribe him into silence. They find the officer three days later hanging from a tree, executed by Ali. Ali flees, but his exact course is not known. At some point, he was in Mecca and finally he came to South Africa. He helps set up a mosque in Amsterdam, South Africa. Ali then goes to Cape Town, marries, and establishes himself. Then, he moves to Johannesburg and becomes the founder of a Rumi tariqah.

The British stop looking for him, amidst other crises and events. The Imam continues, "There are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them. In ancient times, conquerors destroyed the will of those whom they conquered by impregnating the women. It is an ancient form of genocide...You conquer a nation by bastardizing its children" (pg. 204).

Michael leaves the Imam and wanders aimlessly through town. Returning home, he finds Vinu on the veranda waiting for him. She tells him that she has nowhere else to go. They go inside and, after drinking tea, and she tells him that she has been sleeping with her father since she was fourteen. She thinks that it first happened because it was cold in Amsterdam, where they were in exile, and she had climbed into bed with her father. While he slept, he began caressing her and she kissed him, which woke him. They had sex and her father apologized. From that day onward, it continued. But, Vinu has discovered that her father is sleeping with a friend of her mother's and when confronted, he had confessed to a counselor that he had abused her. She is angry that he reduced their love to abuse.

Vinu falls asleep. Michael thinks about the situation and becomes angry. He wakes her, telling her that her father raped her and that she is deluding herself if she calls it otherwise.



Part 2, Chapter 18 Analysis

The revelations in this chapter foreshadow events in later chapter. The knowledge of his grandfather and the actions he took for his family will propel Michael to act. Michael learns that his grandfather killed the man who raped his sister and then fled for his own safety. The Imam's discussion of how rape is something that people don't forget or forgive reinforces the feelings that Michael is already having. Throughout the novel, Michael has been conflicted about his family and the knowledge that his mother had been raped. The knowledge that he is the product of that rape only increase Michael's confusion.

Struggling to find himself and his place in the world, Michael is treading on dangerous ground. He desires a way to find justice, or revenge. Vinu's revelation will further push Michael down the path toward his later actions. He is being pulled by his sense of duty to the family and by his growing discontent with the past apartheid system. Both of the rapes were committed by white men against black women, reinforcing to Michael the evils of imperialism.



Part 2, Chapters 19-20

Part 2, Chapters 19-20 Summary

December is a month of anniversaries. Mam Agnes and Jackson will be married for 42 years this December. Silas will be fifty. Alec and Silas are out for a drink, the afternoon that Mam Agnes and Jackson are having their party. Alec flirts with the waitress. He tells Silas that the women have been calling each other about Michael and Silas. Alec tells Silas that Michael has become involved with "bad people" and that he's been talking to Imam Ismail. Alec has heard that they are involved with the Muslim vigilantes. He has learned these things through his connections at the National Intelligence Service. Silas knows that they told Alec so that Alec would tell him about Michael's activities.

Silas tells Alec that he had applied for an ambassador's post in France but that he was turned down. He senses that Alec wants to tell him something important. As Alec begins to talk, Silas hears the voice from the night Lydia was raped again, realizing that the man had been trying to disguise his voice so Silas wouldn't know him. Alec had been there and he was a traitor. "What a crude word. Who knows what goes on in the hearts of people who are confronted with such stark contrasts: work for us, betray your friends and comrades, or endure unending pain" (pg. 216). Silas asks why Alec is telling him now. Alec replies that he's needed to tell someone for years and thought that person should be Silas. Alec walks out of the bar.

A mass is said for Mam Agnes and Jackson. Lydia and Silas ride back to Mam Agnes and Jackson's house for the party. They talk about Michael. After they arrive, Silas drinks whiskey. Later, he empties it out and gets some cold water, thinking that he should have stopped drinking earlier. He hears Alec, who has been avoiding him, in the house and he wants to talk to him about that the night of the rape. He sees Alec approaching him with a group of people. He wants Silas to tell the group a story, but as he begins, he sees Michael and becomes suddenly aware of his loudness.

Silas looks over to Michael and sees Vinu with him. Silas is attracted to her and he stares at her. The party breaks up after Silas goes up to Michael and Vinu and flirts with her. Lydia tells him that she is going with Alec and Gracie, making it plain that he embarrassed her. Silas wonders if it is time to leave this place and this country.

Michael and Vinu are back at the house, sitting under the fig tree. They see Silas stagger in and drink water at the sink. Michael resists the sympathy he feels for Silas. Instead, he asks Vinu what she plans to do about her father. She tells him that only death will resolve the issue, telling Michael that she could get him to kill her father for her. She calls him Michael the Avenger. But she thinks that true justice is not death but depriving someone of life without killing him.



Part 2, Chapters 19-20 Analysis

The events of the novel are beginning to culminate. Silas learns that Alec was present the night Lydia was raped, ending his speculation on the issue. Silas doesn't seem angry with Alec. Instead he thinks about what some people faced in the old regime; giving up family and friends for their own safety. He also wants to talk to Alec about that night, to learn more about it and perhaps to resolve some of his own feelings about that night and its effect on his life.

Vinu also suggests that Michael kill her father, even though she doesn't really want him dead. This suggestion foreshadows events in the last section of the novel, as Michael will take on the title of Michael the Avenger. He has pulled away from his family and no longer feels the same connections that he did, yet, he still feels the need to avenge his mother's rape and the death of their family.



Part 3, Chapter 21

Part 3, Chapter 21 Summary

Kate, Julian, and Silas are meeting over lunch to talk about Silas's fiftieth birthday party. Julian's wife has left him. Julian chooses a restaurant called the "Crucible." Kate and Silas, on the way to the restaurant, talk about what they plan to do in the future. Kate thinks that Silas is going to ask her about her affair with Mikey, but he doesn't, even though she has prepared the speech in her mind. She wonders what Mikey will do with the information she gave him on Du Boise and she hopes that he won't do anything stupid. Kate then wonders if Mikey knows that Du Boise raped Lydia. As they pull up, Silas asks her if she knows that Du Boise is dying of cancer. They talk for a moment of the poetic justice that several perpetrators are now dying of incurable diseases.

Silas and Kate find Julian in the restaurant and he repeats a poem to them. They eat and Silas is happy to be there with his friends. Silas fantasizes about having sex with someone much younger than him. Julian volunteers his house for the party and then the conversation turns to the fact that they will all be out of jobs once the new president takes over. As the friends commiserate together, they become loud and boisterous, receiving the disapproval of those around them.

Part 3, Chapter 21 Analysis

The friends meet to plan Silas's party and to talk with one another. Changes have occurred for all three since the beginning of the novel. Julian's wife has left him and he is now openly gay. Kate has had an affair with Mikey, risking her own relationships with her lover and daughter. Kate has also given Mikey information about Du Boise and she hopes that he won't do anything stupid, never realizing how serious Mikey is about the idea of justice. Silas's own marriage and family is slowly disintegrating.

We also see a contrast between Silas and Michael. Silas talks with Kate about how it is poetic justice that some of the old regime are now dying of diseases. Although Silas had the chance early in the novel to harm Du Boise, he does not. Perhaps he feels that doing so will change nothing and he realizes that it can't erase the night that Lydia was raped. Michael, in contrast, is headed toward a violent confrontation with the men he sees as guilty of rape, Vinu's father and Du Boise. Michael believes that he must avenge the women and bring justice back into his world. Michael and Silas represent the different ways that individuals deal with violence and atrocity.



Part 3, Chapters 22-23

Part 3, Chapters 22-23 Summary

Michael is trying to negotiate the purchase of a gun. He has stolen an expensive gun from Professor Graham's house and he is trying to exchange it for an untraceable gun. A man is appraising the gun behind a closed door. Michael waits with Sadrodien in the tiny living room. Michael knows that Vinu had not been serious when she called him Michael the Avenger. The man comes back and says that although he prefers cash, he will do the gun exchange. The gun he gives Michael will be from somewhere else, making it difficult to trace.

Later, riding in the taxi, Michael wonders why he is doing this. Killing Vinu's father will not eradicate his crimes or his guilt. Michael does not acknowledge to himself that Vinu's father is a practice run for his own vengeance. He imagines what it will be like to kill Johan Viljoen and he thinks that Du Boise will be no different.

Someone from the university calls Lydia, asking her to come to talk about Michael. Lydia wonders what he did that makes it necessary for her to come down for a meeting. She thinks that Silas will have to talk to him about whatever it is since she no longer feels able to talk to him about anything. She hopes that Mikey's transgression was academic rather than sexual. Lydia imagines what the woman, Dr. Johnson, who she is meeting, will look like and realizes that she is imaging herself.

Dr. Johnson talks to Lydia and tells her that a colleague of hers became involved with Michael and while he was in her home, he took some things that belonged to the woman's husband. Lydia asks if she means that Mikey stole something and the woman says yes. Michael took a book, a rare first edition, and a gun. Dr. Johnson says that while she does not condone the affair between the woman and Michael, it doesn't justify Michael's exploitation of the woman. Lydia responds that Michael couldn't have exploited an older woman, but she says that she will look for the book and the gun.

At home, Lydia sits outside, drinking tea. She thinks to herself that she wants her sexual desires to die. The phone rings and the answering machine relays Michael's voice saying that he will be away for a few nights. She realizes that she has been waiting to enter Michael's room so she unlocks his door and goes in. Lydia finds a number of books, stolen from others, all rare and priceless. All the books have in common is ownership by someone else; individuals, libraries, and museums. Lydia realizes that Michael steals books for the pleasure of having them.

She continues to look but does not find the gun. Lydia thinks that she could find Mikey. She could call Vinu who would know where he is. But she doesn't know how to confront him about the books and the gun. She could call Silas and have him talk to Mikey, but Mikey is not Silas's son. Lydia wonders if they each know this even though she told



neither. Then she thinks that she should do nothing but let Mikey take responsibility for his own actions.

The phone rings again. Julian is calling to ask her whether she has come up with a special gift for Silas's party. She says that she is going to give him his father's diary. Angelina gave her Ali Ali's diary for safekeeping, telling her that Silas would resent it. Lydia thinks that she will hand Silas his heritage and then walk away from him, free of him and his past.

Part 3, Chapters 22-23 Analysis

Michael has stolen a gun from one of the women he has been sleeping with. He intends to use the gun to kill Vinu's father and then Du Boise. In some ways, Vinu's father is a practice run for Du Boise, but he is also guilty of the same crime as Du Boise in Michael's eyes. Michael sees himself as avenging the women's honor and as bringing justice to the men by killing them. Michael is putting his plan into action by getting another gun and by planning the murders.

Lydia is aware that something is going on. She has found the books that Michael has stolen. Lydia also realizes that Michael has probably taken the gun with him since she can't find it in the room. Even though she has trouble admitting to herself, Lydia seems to know that Michael is about to commence on a dangerous plan, both physically and emotionally. Yet, she chooses to do nothing. She doesn't try to find Michael and talk him out of whatever he is planning nor does she call Silas to do so. In this way, Lydia is not unlike Silas, who knows that Michael is involved with dangerous people and yet does not try to save him. Both parents seem to see the disintegration of their family as inevitable and helping Michael as impossible.



Part 3, Chapters 24-25

Part 3, Chapters 24-25 Summary

Michael thinks that it is easy to fire a gun, just point the barrel and pull the trigger. He has practiced over and over how he will shoot Johan Viljoen, aiming for a spot on the breastbone and firing again if the man doesn't immediately fall. He knows that Vinu's father is alone every afternoon and that he walks to the edge of the garden at the end of his workday. Michael plans to stand under a tree and wait for Vinu's father to raise his head from smelling his roses, then, he will shoot him. The silencer on the gun will make the sound foreign to anyone who might hear it. Michael should be able to walk away unnoticed. Du Boise will be a different kind of challenge as he lives in a noisy area full of people.

Johan Viljoen falls backwards after Michael shoots him and not forward the way he expected.

Silas hears about Johan Viljoen's death at a weekly meeting. Viljoen had died the previous evening and it is unclear to the police whether it was politically motivated or whether it was an "ordinary crime." Tonight is Silas' birthday party. Silas wishes the night be both a celebration and a farewell. "In many ways, his marriage to Lydia seemed to have dissolved. Let tonight be our last night of intimacy, of true friendship," (pg. 255). When he gets home, Lydia has left him a note saying she has gone to pay her respects to the Viljoens, but the note does not express affection for Silas. Silas thinks that she no longer needs him.

Part 3, Chapters 24-25 Analysis

Michael's transformation over the course of the novel is almost complete. He has been moving toward acts of revenge or personal justice since he read Lydia's diary and learned that she had been raped. His desire for vengeance was reinforced by the Imam's fable about his grandfather and how Ali Ali had avenged his sister's rape. Michael is following in Ali Ali's footsteps by avenging the rapes of the women he is closest to.

Silas, like Lydia, seems to recognize that their marriage is over. Although Silas wishes for one last good night with Lydia, he doesn't seem to plan on reinventing their relationship. Although their marriage had problems before Silas ran into Du Boise, that event hastened the end of their relationship. They have come to a point where neither seems to want to try to help the relationship; instead they passively accept that there is nothing that they can do about their marriage, or about Michael.



Part 3, Chapter 26

Part 3, Chapter 26 Summary

Julian's house is located in a private community and the guests must go through a security checkpoint before going in. The night is clear and warm. Waiters serve drinks from trays and Julian and Kate greet the guests. Silas finds Lydia, they hug, and then part to talk to other people. Julian and Kate each make a short speech. Lydia gives Silas the package containing his father's diary. Lydia thinks that he is in danger of losing control, perhaps thinking that his father didn't care about him when he was alive. But Silas regains control and gives a short speech. He draws Lydia to him and kisses her. Michael comes to join them at the front of the crowd.

The party divides into dancers and drinkers. Lydia joins the dancers although she rarely dances anymore. Alec and Gracie arrive and while Gracie goes to talk to Silas, Alec and Lydia dance. They walk back to their seats. A young man approaches Lydia and although she tries to decline, she ends up going to the dance floor with him. They dance, their bodies close together. "You only dare to do this if you have the skill, a perfect sense of timing, the ability to blend with your partner's movements, and, if you are the woman, a willingness to abandon yourself to the man's rhythm, the demands of his body," (pg. 262). The man introduces himself as Joao. They move naturally together. Joao tells her that she is beautiful as the song ends and Lydia discreetly pushes him away, aware that Silas is watching her. He walks her back to her seat.

Joao and Lydia dance several more times later and she finds herself leaning against him. Julian arranges a dance contest and when Silas does not want to dance with her, she searches for Joao. As they dance, he tells her that he wants her. Lydia walks away but later she finds him and leads him to a room containing only a billiard table.

At the end of the party, Julian finds Silas sitting on the steps leading to the tropical garden. He appears drunk to Julian. Kate drives him home. Kate had seen Lydia's disappearance with Joao. They arrive at the home and he gets out, waving her off. Silas had seen Lydia and Joao having sex on the billiard table, at his birthday party. "He would have to live with that. His wife had found release at last from both her captive demons: from Du Boise and from himself. Now not every man would be a rapist to her" (pg. 267).

Part 3, Chapter 26 Analysis

Although Silas's party was meant to be a celebration of his fiftieth birthday, it becomes a farewell of sorts. Although the family is present, it has disintegrated. Michael has already killed one man and he plans on killing another. Lydia has sex with a man at her husband's party and Silas sees her. Lydia also passes on Silas's father's diary, even though she must know the pain it will bring to him. But Lydia needs to transfer Silas's

history back to him before she can leave him. While they have known that the end was coming for some time, the party appears to be the final end to their family. They have moved from a family to simply individuals who are creating their own ways.



Part 3, Chapter 27

Part 3, Chapter 27 Summary

It is daybreak. Michael is at the mosque, waiting for Imam Ismail. He remembers the sight of Lydia and Joao on the billiard table and the sight of Silas watching them and then stumbling away. Michael also wandered away last night, coming upon a convoy of cars. He stopped to watch, wondering who the convoy was for. Then a car window rolled down and Nelson Mandela smiled at him from the car, asking him why he was out so late. Michael is surprised but then remembers the gun in his pocket and he retreats. Throughout the night, he had practiced pulling the gun out.

Michael wakes after the Imam comes in. Michael tells him that he needs a favor. In return, he has a disc with the full list of the new government's legislative programs, anti-terror measures and some references to agents hiding in different organizations. Michael wants passage to India so he will be able to hide. The Imam tells Michael that he will help and that he has a place for Michael to hide until he goes to India.

Part 3, Chapter 27 Analysis

Michael lays out the next part of his plan, although the order of his actions illustrates how little he has thought everything out. Rather than having his exit plan fully planned out and ready, Michael has already killed one man before he arranges for his escape. Michael has been so caught up in the desire to avenge Vinu and his mother that he has thought little of what will happen afterward. In this chapter Michael begins making plans for what will happen after he has completed his self-appointed task. He plans to hide in India, reversing the path of his grandfather Ali Ali.



Part 3, Chapter 28

Part 3, Chapter 28 Summary

Silas sits quietly on the veranda. "The grief was in his heart now, a dull, embedded presence, as if he had just detected something wrong with its beat. But it *was* grief, undeniable sorrow, that sense of loss he had sworn he would never succumb to. Lydia had finally left him" (pg. 271-2). He does not know where she is and her car is gone. He wonders if he could track her down and pretend that he was concerned for her safety, but Silas realizes that it is too late. The scene on the billiard table was her public declaration of freedom.

Silas hears a noise. Vinu emerges from the dark, striking at him, telling him that she did not tell him to. She asks him why. Silas tells her that he is not Michael. She looks at him and slumps against him. Silas holds her as if she were his daughter. He leads her inside and makes her tea. She asks him to hold her and he does. They fall sleep and when Silas awakes, she is gone.

Part 3, Chapter 28 Analysis

Silas realizes that Lydia is gone. Her decision to sleep with Joao was her declaration of freedom from him. He thinks that he probably find her and do something about it, but, as with his relationship with Michael, Silas does nothing. Perhaps he realizes that it is too late for them and for their family. Silas's passivity and inaction appears to have begun with Lydia's rape, although he could not have prevented it no matter what he did.



Part 3, Chapter 29

Part 3, Chapter 29 Summary

Michael approaches the Killarney Mall. He needs to be there ten minutes before Du Boise arrives and doesn't want to be there too early because he would be forced to hang around and he might be noticed. Michael has made himself familiar to the taxi drivers so that the drivers will tell the police that they had not driven anyone to the mall that they hadn't seen before.

Michael wonders who Du Boise is. He fights off the questions, knowing that he can't be distracted. He thinks about the biographical information that he knows. Du Boise was born in April 1936 and was the son of an impoverished farmer. He completed Standard Eight and went to work in the steel mills. Du Boise joined the police in 1957 and transferred into the security police in 1965. It had taken him another nine years before he raped Lydia. He had two children. Michael thinks that he has two half-siblings.

He sees Du Boise coming, beginning to walk up the incline to the lower part of the mall. Michael calls his name and Du Boise looks up. "Michael raises his gun, sees the fleeting horror in Du Boise's eyes, then the sudden look of acknowledgement. He has been waiting for such a moment for a long time now. Du Boise seems unafraid, a smile begins to form on his thin mouth" (pg. 276). Michael fires the gun, twice, into Du Boise's face, forgetting his plan to shoot him in the heart. He wants to destroy Du Boise's face, to leave nothing behind.

Michael hurries away. He plans to take a taxi into the city. He needs to be at the Oriental Plaza at 6:30 where someone will drive him to Lenasia. Later he will be transported to a scholar's retreat and then on to India. Michael does not look back. The boy named Michael will disappear in this place and he will transform himself into a man named Noor.

Part 3, Chapter 29 Analysis

Michael's transformation is complete. He has sought justice and revenge against Vinu's father and now against Du Boise. He has sought justice for his mother's rape. Throughout the novel, Michael has been transforming. He began as Mikey, a university student who was a part of a family. Then, he became Michael, a troubled youth trying to find himself and his history. Now, he will become Noor, a fugitive who will hide in India. His transformation echoes the disintegration of the family. As Michael has extracted himself, the family has gradually fallen apart, although the foundations for this had been present for some time.



Part 3, Chapter 30

Part 3, Chapter 30 Summary

Lydia hears of Du Boise's death on television. She is in a hotel room about 500 kilometers south of Johannesburg, heading toward Cape Town. The report says that no one observed the incident and no arrests have been made. She turns off the TV and calls home.

Silas answers. She asks where Mikey is and Silas says he thinks that Mikey is gone. He will look for him tomorrow. In response to her question, Silas tells her that the police have not been around. Lydia wants to tell him about the gun, about how the women at the university will hear about Du Boise's death and the vague descriptions of the young man seen hurrying away and call the police. But she does not. Silas tells her that he saw her and Joao and he thinks that Michael may have as well. He tells her that they can sort it out. Lydia tells him that their marriage is over and that she'll call later.

She hangs up and lies down on the bed. She could get up now and go back home. She rises and stuffs her things into her bag, deciding to press on. She can be in Cape Town by ten or eleven. She thinks that Silas didn't ask her about the money, probably because he has not realized that she has withdrawn everything in their account. Lydia drives and thinks about Mikey. She wonders where he is, but resists the temptation to turn around and try to find him. She thinks that time and distance will free her.

Part 3, Chapter 30 Analysis

The disintegration of the family is complete. Michael has run away after killing Vinu's father and Du Boise. Lydia is running off to Cape Town, trying to find a new start. Silas, alone, is left behind in their house. He tries to get Lydia to come home to him but she refuses, his effort has come too late. Lydia no longer wants to talk to him about what happened or to hear his confessions. Silas has been passive too long. Lydia runs from him, avoiding their problems in the same way that she avoided dealing with Michael.



Characters

Silas Ali

Silas is the husband of Lydia and the father of Michael. He works as a liaison between the Ministry of Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He was part of the underground movement before the new government in South Africa, working as someone who rooted out infiltrators and collaborators. During that time, he had an affair with someone else in the movement and kept his involvement with the movement a secret from his wife which put his family in jeopardy. About twenty years ago, Du Boise raped his wife while Silas was being held in a police van. Silas has not really talked to Lydia about this, preferring not to confront her pain and hurt. His son Michael is a product of that rape, although Lydia thinks that Silas and Michael do not know this.

The novel opens as Silas comes face to face with Du Boise at the same time that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is putting together its reports on the past injustices and violence. Silas is shaken by this event, remembering Lydia's rape and his own inability to stop it. Returning home, he tells Lydia about the event and she willingly hurts herself and is hospitalized after she steps on broken glass. Throughout the book, Silas examines his past, his present failing marriage, and his wayward son, but does little to alter the course of events in his life. At his fiftieth birthday party, he sees Lydia having sex with another man, proclaiming her independence of him.

Physically, Silas is never really described in the novel, beyond that he is considered "coloured." Emotionally, Silas has cut himself off from his family by refusing to confront the problems that plague them. He won't talk to Lydia about the rape and he does not confront Michael about his involvement with the Imam. Silas is haunted by the past and, although he does care about his family, he seems passive in the face of their difficulties.

Lydia Ali

Lydia is Silas's wife and Michael's mother. She is the daughter of Mam Angus and Jackson and the sister of Gracie. She works as a nurse at one of the hospitals in Johannesburg. About twenty years before the novel takes place, she was raped by Du Boise and her son Michael was conceived. She was unaware of Silas's activity in the underground or his affair until Kate Jessup came to her one day and told her about both.

When Silas tells her that he has seen Du Boise again, all of her suppressed feelings about her rape came to the surface. She injures herself by dancing on broken glass which leads to a three-week hospital stay. During that time, she is visited by her family and when she comes home, she finds herself attracted to her son. Lydia thinks that she will never think of him just as her son again. This troubling attraction and the memories of her rape continue to slowly rip apart the already brittle family. Rather than talking



about the events that have gone on or that are occurring, they all retreat to separate corners, passively accepting the end of the family. Lydia slowly gains more independence as she feels her marriage dying. She buys a car, sleeps with another man at Silas's party, and then leaves to start a new life.

Lydia also is not described in much detail physically. She, like Silas, is considered "colored" and she seems to be attractive both to Silas and other men. Emotionally, she is a survivor, although she is deeply scarred by her rape and by having to hold her feelings in. Although she cares about Michael and perhaps to a lesser degree, Silas, she too does not make any moves to hold the family together. When she realizes that Michael is stealing rare books and has stolen a gun, Lydia does not try to find him or talk to him. Lydia does not even call Silas to have him try to talk to Michael. It is as if the family has passed beyond the point of no return and knowing this, Lydia is trying to save herself.

Michael Ali

Michael is Silas and Lydia's son. He is nineteen and a college student. Michael undergoes a transition throughout the novel as he tries to come to terms with his family's past. He reads about Lydia's rape in her old diary and he begins a quest to avenge her. Michael begins the novel as Mikey, a slightly awkward young man who is close to his mother and takes care of his family. He is sensitive, caring, and curious about life and women. He begins an affair with Kate the night that Lydia is taken to the hospital.

After reading Lydia's diary, Michael begins to transform. Michael asks Kate to get him information on Du Boise and he begins searching for his family's past which leads him to the mosque that his grandfather served at. He begins withdrawing from his family and changes his appearance. Michael starts wearing tight black clothes and he crops his hair very short. He begins listening to hard, driving music and he acquires the callousness of an uncaring youth. He goes out to clubs and he stays out late. Michael begins talking more to Vinu, who discloses to him that she has been sleeping with her father since she was fourteen.

As Michael learns more about his grandfather and his history, his plans to avenge both Vinu and his mother take shape. Michael has been stealing rare books from people's houses and he steals a gun from his professor's house after sleeping with her. Michael kills both Johan Viljoen and Françoise Du Boise. Then, he starts on his journey to India to hide from the authorities. He thinks that Michael has died and Noor has taken his place.

Françoise du Boise

Du Boise now has thinning hair, a slight paunch, and dry, dying skin indicating that he is dying. Silas and Mikey recognize him by his blue eyes. Twenty years ago, he raped



Lydia, holding Silas captive while he did so. Although Du Boise does not realize it, he is Michael's father.

Michael learns that Du Boise was born in 1936 and that he is the son of a poor farmer. Du Boise completed Standard Eight and went to work in the steel mills. He joined the police in 1957 and after two years training and three years as a constable; he became a part of the detective squad. Du Boise transferred to the security police in 1965. Nine years later, he raped Lydia. He has married and has had two children. At the end of the novel, Michael tracks him down and kills him to revenge his mother's rape.

We know little of Du Boise beyond this. The other characters construct him as a monster that abused his power and hurt others. He applies for amnesty during the novel, but it is unclear whether he is doing so because he feels sorry for the things he'd done or whether it is to avoid prosecution.

Kate Jessup

Kate was born into privilege as a white, rich, educated woman, although she worked in the resistance movement. She has a daughter, Ferial. Kate's former lover, Maguerite, has shown up and is living with Kate and her current lover Janine. Kate met Silas in the underground and she has remained his friend. It is Kate who informed Lydia of Silas's underground activities and his affair. Kate now works in the transitional government.

The night that Michael stays home from the hospital, Kate stays with Michael and begins an affair with him. They sleep together a number of times and Kate gives Michael the information on Du Boise after he asks her for.

Kate appears to care for Silas and Michael. Yet, she also shows a certain amount of coldness in how she told Lydia about Silas's affair. She continues her affair with Michael even though she knows that Silas and Lydia will not approve of it. She also pursues her affair with Michael despite her involvement with someone else and the complicated situation that they have found themselves in.

Julian Solomon

Julian is a specialist in tropical diseases working for the government. He worked with Kate and Silas in the underground and has remained friends with them. During the course of the novel, his wife leaves him and he comes out of the closet. He helps Kate plan Silas's party and he hosts it at his home.

Vinu Viljoen

Vinu is a young woman that Michael meets at the university and becomes friends with. She has brown eyes flecked with blue and her skin is a honey color. Following her parents' divorce she starts coloring her hair in bright colors.



Vinu tells Michael that she and her father have been sleeping together since she was only fourteen and she is angry that her father now refers to the events as abuse when she sees it as a reflection of love. Vinu tells Michael that she could get him to kill her father to avenge her, setting in motion Michael's actions on her behalf. Later, she thinks that she doesn't really want her father dead; she wants him to be in a limbo where he would be faced with his actions and his conscience.

Alec

Alec is married to Gracie, Lydia's sister. He grew up with Silas and the two share many stories and experiences. Alec collaborated with the police during apartheid and he was present the night that Du Boise raped Lydia. He tells Silas this toward the end of the novel, unable to keep the secret hidden any longer. Alec is haunted by his collaboration.

Mam Agnes Oliphant

She is Lydia's mother and the matriarch of the family. She is cheerful in the face of adversity and she holds her family together. She presents a strong force within the family, helping them to make the decision about sending Mireille to Canada and discussing the problems of the family. She takes control when Lydia is in the hospital, gathering the family, trying to put them at ease, and offering to stay with Mikey when Silas is also hospitalized.

Jackson Oliphant

He is Lydia's father. His face is the color of dark wood. In the novel, Jackson exists almost as a shadow of the Oliphant women and Mam Agnes in particular. He goes along to the hospital and to the wedding in the beginning of the novel, but Mam Agnes is the one making the decisions and carrying the family.

Gracie

Grace is Lydia's sister and she is married to Alec. With the other Oliphant women, Gracie helps to keep the family together and safe. She helps make the decision to send Mireille to Canada and she also talks to Lydia about Silas and Mikey. She does not seem to know, however, that Alec was present the night of Lydia's rape.

Johan Viljoen

He is Vinu's father. He and Vinu have been sleeping together for some time, until he confesses to a counselor and begins to call his actions abuse which angers Vinu. Vinu is confused because she believes they have been expressing love for each other. Vinu



somewhat jokingly tells Michael that he should kill her father to avenge her. Johan will become Michael's first victim and his practice run for the killing of Du Boise.

Ali Ali

Ali is Silas's father. He was a Muslim and grew up in India. His sister was raped by a British soldier and she eventually killed her child and went mad. Ali killed his sister's rapist and ran from the authorities, ending up in South Africa. In South Africa Ali Ali became the Imam at the Griffith Street mosque. He took Silas's mother as his second wife.

Imam Ismail

He is the leader of the Griffith Street mosque. He talks with Michael nearly every day after they meet. He eventually tells Michael his grandfather's story about killing his sister's rapist and running from India. The Imam agrees to help Michael escape South Africa and hide in India.



Objects/Places

The Ali House

Silas and Lydia's house is located in the suburbs of Johannesburg, South Africa. Silas has a study, which is converted to Lydia's make shift bedroom when she returns from the hospital and then to Michael's bedroom when she has recovered. The house has a veranda overlooking the road below.

The Hospital

Lydia is taken to the hospital after she injures her feet with the broken glass. She stays at the hospital for three weeks. Silas spends one night there after he collapses.

Kaaba Stone

This stone, which glows blue, belonged to Ali Ali, Michael's grandfather. Michael now has the stone. At one point he tries to break it against the wall, but it cuts his hand instead.

Griffith Street Mosque

Ali Ali was the Imam here when he was alive. Now, Imam Ismail serves the mosque and tells Michael about his grandfather. It is through the Imam that Michael plans to escape after killing Vinu's father and Du Boise.

Julian's House

Located in an exclusive community, Julian's house is the location for Silas's fiftieth birthday party. At the party, Lydia sleeps with another man and Silas sees them, signaling the end of their marriage.



Themes

Justice, Retribution, Revenge

Set in post-apartheid South Africa, *Bitter Fruit* explores how individuals deal with pasts that include violence and abuse. Inherent in this exploration are questions of guilt and innocence. When Silas encounters Du Boise, it forces the Ali family to confront Lydia's rape. In doing so, the characters each choose different paths in their quests to deal with or forget about the past. For years Lydia has wanted to confront what happened to her and talk to Silas about it. When Silas tells her about seeing Du Boise, the emotions that she buried burst to the surface. Yet, Lydia continues to maintain that she doesn't want to bring up her rape to the TRC. Silas spends much of the novel engrossed in his own pain over the event, leaving Lydia and Michael to fend for themselves. Silas tries to forget the rape and the fact that Michael is not his biological son. Michael takes a very different path, seeking justice and revenge for both Lydia's rape and Vinu's abuse. Michael believes that both men deserve to die for their actions and he kills the rapists, just as his grandfather did years before.

The novel also explores whether there are varying degrees of guilt in situations like this. Alec, like some other blacks, was forced to collaborate with the corrupt apartheid regime in order to save himself and his family. As a result, he participated in the abuse of other individuals. Alec was present at Lydia's rape; yet, Silas does not appear to hold Alec responsible for his actions, although it does strain their relationship. Both Silas and Michael at various times consider the guilt of those who were forced to collaborate.

On a larger level, the novel speaks about the problems that individuals face after repressive and abusive regimes end. Numerous countries have undertaken commissions to study the abuses of past regimes, including the TRC of South Africa. Although the novel is fictional, it does point to issues and emotions that may arise as victims and perpetrators come face to face or as the abuses are brought up years later. Victims may seek some sort of justice through such commissions although some have chosen not to, believing that the past cannot be changed or reconciled.

The Disintegration of a Family

Bitter Fruit traces the disintegration of the Ali family as they each try to deal with the past. As the novel begins, the family is already somewhat fragile and brittle. Silas and Lydia have long tried to avoid the subject of her rape and Lydia avoids telling Silas the truth about Mikey. The two have grown apart during their marriage as Lydia often retreats into music and reading. They have become in some ways strangers to each other.

With Silas's sighting of Du Boise, memories of Lydia's rape and the pain that it caused both of them erupts to the surface. Both Lydia and Silas attempt to deal with the



situation in different ways, again pushing them further apart. Silas remains idealistic and he tries to convince Lydia to testify to the TRC about her rape, hoping that this will give her some closure. The pain that the memories of the rape bring up surrounds Lydia. She injures herself physically, as an outward symbol of her internal struggle and torment. When Michael learns of Lydia's rape, he withdraws from the family almost completely. His personality changes and he begins a quest to find his family and to avenge his mother. Each member of the family walks alone in their search for answers and comfort. Rather than talking about what happened together or confronting the problem as a united force, the three remain silent to each other.

By the end of the novel, all of the family ties shatter. Michael kills Du Boise and begins his journey to India. Lydia starts a new life, after she sleeps with Joao, by leaving Silas and Michael behind. Silas is left alone at the house, but even he lacks the motivation or energy to try to change his situation. Rather than fighting together, the family actively pursues paths alone and passively accepts the end of the family unit.

Race

Bitter Fruit takes place in post-apartheid South Africa, where a nation struggles to come to terms with its racist past and to reconcile different races to each other. The TRC is collecting testimony on racially and politically based crimes which occurred under the old regime. The characters in the book represent a smaller microcosm of the issues and emotions that the nation as a whole faces. Du Boise, in many ways, is the face of the racist, apartheid system. He is white and he committed violent acts, including rape, against blacks. We see little remorse from him, perhaps because the story is not his, so he remains a clear villain in the novel. Yet, Dangor does not portray all white individuals as perpetrators. Both Kate and Julian are revolutionaries and have tried to make changes in the system

Michael states at several points that he believes the abuses faced by his mother and Vinu are related to their status as "colored" while those who committed the crimes against them are white. He believes that the white men's statuses allowed them to rape and abuse the women and that their white status, even in the new regime, will allow them to go unpunished for their actions. Michael, in some ways, represents those individuals who believe that political actions such as the TRC will bring about no true reconciliation or justice for victims.

We also see the issues faced by "colored" individuals who were forced to collaborate with the past regime in order to survive or keep their families safe. Although we are not told the reasons for his involvement, Alec collaborated and is tormented by this. He was there the night that Lydia was raped, but was as powerless as Silas to stop it. Throughout the novel, the characters contemplate the guilt of individuals such as Alec. For the most part, it seems that these individuals are not blamed for their forced collaboration. Alec suffers no punishment, beyond a strained relationship with Silas, and he remains a part of the family.

Style

Point of View

Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* is written in the third person point of view, focusing on the Ali family. The majority of the story is told through the narrator's description and the characters' inner thoughts.

The vast majority of the book focuses on the transformation of the members of the Ali family and the disintegration of the family itself. Dangor uses the third person perspective to follow the family members through their different lives and thoughts. With this perspective, the reader is able to see the inner thoughts of all the main characters as well as see the overall picture of their actions. The reader is a voyeur to the events of the novel, knowing what each of the characters feels and thinks about their situation and each other.

Setting

Bitter Fruit takes place in Johannesburg, South Africa in the years following the breakdown of apartheid. The transitional government is in place and they are preparing for the new president. In addition, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is finishing up its reports on the abuses of the old regime and during the novel, its report is turned over to the president.

It is within this context that the characters live and act. The situation of a past regime that committed abuses and a new government trying to reconcile the country and heal old wounds creates a caldron of memory and pain. The Alis are confronted by the memory of Lydia's rape, Du Boise's application for amnesty, and Alec's presence the night Lydia was raped.

The setting also helps to recreate the social hierarchy of class and race. Silas and Lydia had moved to the suburbs but their suburb is still considered a "colored" area. Julian, in contrast, lives in an exclusive, white neighborhood and he has to warn the gate attendants that other races will be coming to the party and will be welcomed in his house.

Language and Meaning

Dangor uses accessible language throughout the novel. Due to the novel's themes, strong language, and explicit descriptions of sexual acts, the novel may not be suitable for younger readers. There are several descriptions of Lydia's rape throughout the novel, which may also be difficult for some readers.



The violence that is described in the novel, including Lydia's rape and Michael's killings, is not sensationalized. The descriptions of Lydia's rape help to explain her feelings of pain and her anger at Du Boise and at Silas.

Much of the book is told through descriptive narrative and the character's inner thoughts. In this way, the reader is allowed to see how various characters feel about events.

Structure

Bitter Fruit consists of three parts and thirty chapters. The plot is linear with flashbacks to events that happened years earlier. The first section is entitled "Memory" and it deals primarily with reminders of Lydia's rape and its aftermath and Michael's discovery of these events. The Ali family is still together, at this point, although there are problems.

Part 2 is called "Confession" and it involves the confessions by various characters for their past actions. Alec confesses to Silas that he was present the night Lydia was raped. Vinu tells Michael that she and her father have been sleeping together. Imam Ismail tells Michael about Ali Ali's flight from India after killing his sister's rapist.

The third part is entitled "Retribution" and the main events of this section involve the disintegration of the family. Michael kills Vinu's father and Du Boise in his search for vengeance and justice.



Quotes

"It was inevitable. One day Silas would run into someone from the past, someone who had been in a position of power and had abused it. Someone who had affected his life, not in the vague, rather grand way in which everybody had been affected, as people said, because power corrupts even the best of men, but directly and brutally." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"He glanced down the slenderness of her back, saw the slow pool of blood spreading on the floor, saw his heavy shoes immersed in its dark glow, saw her feet dancing, delicate little steps, on the jagged edges of the broken beer glass." Chapter 1, pg. 17

"He had not brought her son to visit her, her face said, that was the least she expected of him, and tears flowed down her cheeks. Mikey's absence was bringing out into the open the anger and unhappiness that both of them had suppressed, postponed for another time, the night Lydia danced on broken glass and experienced a physical pain momentarily more overwhelming than the pain in her heart and mind." Chapter 4, pg. 48

"And then he remembered that Lydia, too, had never been the same since the night she was raped. Somewhere inside of her that *other* Lydia was hiding, shielding herself from the memory of being raped and his response to it. It would take too much energy to find her, and he felt tired, drained of all his enthusiasm for the struggle this would demand." Chapter 5, pg. 60

"A distant fear came back to Silas, one that he rarely allowed to take shape in his mind-*Mikey is not my son, not physically*-and he struggled to rouse himself before the dream of death flowed into his life." Chapter 8, pg. 91

"She realized, later on, that she had been exposed, she and her child, to potential assassins, rapists, men who would do anything to intimidate people working actively against them, all because Silas hadn't confided in her. But she also thought: there is no point in starting another argument about this. It is men's nature to hide things from the people they love." Chapter 9, pg. 111

"But were they all traitors, the many black people who collaborated with the old regime?" Chapter 10, pg. 131

"When Mikey thinks of his mother, the word 'Mama' no longer comes to mind. Gone is the softness, the warmth of that word. It is no longer capable of absorbing him, the way it did when he was a child." Chapter 12, pg. 139

"They would think of it as *that day* in their minds, independently acknowledging that their relationships with each other had started their real transformation when they sat trapped in their separate spaces, unable to reach out to each other, unable to express outrage or assert innocence, unable to accuse, justify, or recriminate." Chapter 15, pg. 151



"The drama in their lives are gone. There is no need for it or its gaudier sibling, melodrama. They live truly secret-and secretive-lives. They are as concealed from each other as they are from the world. No one shouts or remonstrates, Silas does not storm out of the house, even when he is angry." Chapter 16, pg. 162-3

"But they continue to live together, in proximity to one another, a family unit whose names seem more and more incongruous when said together: Silas Ali, Lydia Ali, Mikey Ali." Chapter 16, pg. 163

"What is he really looking for? For evidence that he is indeed Silas's son, that Lydia is wrong, that her usually infallible maternal instincts had been undermined by bitterness, by her fear of the worst, when she proclaimed him to be Du Boise's bastard son? What will that evidence be? Physical resemblance, the unmistakable lineage to be found in the shape of a nose, the contour of a cheek, or, even more telling, the depth of an eye, the familiarity of a glance?" Chapter 17, pg. 186

"There are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them." Chapter 18, pg. 204

"Alec had been there! A traitor. Silas stopped himself. What a crude word. Who knows what goes on in the hearts of people who are confronted with such stark choices: work for us, betray your friends and comrades, or endure unending pain." Chapter 19, pg. 216

"No, she does not want wish Johan dead; punished, yes, but not dead. True justice would be to deprive someone of life without having to kill them. Perhaps the guilty would be put in limbo, made to live in some twilight zone, conscious of their sins for ever?" Chapter 20, pg. 225

"So who is Francois du Boise? Does he have a character, a persona, is he more than a white man, a former security policeman, a rapist and torturer?" Chapter 29, pg. 274

"Time and distance, even this paltry distance, will help to free her. Burden of the mother. Mother, wife, lover, lover-mother, lover-wife, unloved mother. Unloved, in sum, except for those wonderful, unguarded moments, Mikey, Silas, and, of course, black Joao, beautiful as jet. Even Du Boise does not matter any more." Chapter 30, pg. 281



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast how the characters approach the past. Which approach do you think is the best one?

Discuss Michael's transformation in the novel. What causes this transformation? Why do you think it takes the direction it does?

Compare and contrast Michael and Ali Ali. How does Ali Ali influence Michael?

Trace the disintegration of the Ali family. What are some of its causes?

Kate has a different relationship with each member of the family. Discuss these relationships and why each is different.

Do processes like the TRC work? What would the characters of the book say about such an undertaking?

Is Michael's killing of Vinu's father and Du Boise justice or revenge? Discuss your answer.

Discuss how the members of the Ali family deal with their pain over the past. What paths do they each take to try to overcome the past?