

# **The Good Doctor Study Guide**

## **The Good Doctor by Damon Galgut**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Good Doctor Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 7.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 8.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 10.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 11.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 12.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 13.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 14.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 15.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 16.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 17.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 18.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 19.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">43</a>



Style.....44

Quotes.....45

Topics for Discussion.....47



# Plot Summary

The Good Doctor is set in a neglected, deserted, ill-supplied and crumbling rural hospital. The hospital is in the predominately poor, black section of post-apartheid South Africa which was previously called the homelands. The book opens with the arrival of Dr. Laurence Waters who is a recent medical school graduate with high ideals and a need to "make a difference." The initial and prophetic pronouncement made upon him by Dr. Frank Eloff a disillusioned veteran physician is that Dr. Walters won't last.

There is a minimal staff at the hospital. In addition to Frank there is only; Dr. Ngema, the administrator and head surgeon; the Santanders, a couple of doctors originally from Cuba; and Tehogo, who does the work of both a nurse and an orderly, but without proper qualifications. Dr. Ngema has been at the hospital many years, awaiting her 'promotion' to a job at a larger, better facility in the city. Frank originally came to this post as her replacement, but when her promotion fell through and she stayed, Frank also stayed on to await her eventual exit. The staff is an interesting cast of misfits; Dr. Ngema whose medical skills are fading professes a desire for change but is constantly working against change; The Santanders who are both miserable and fight constantly with each other; Tehogo who is sullen, mysterious and a bit threatening; and Frank who is apathetic, weak, bitter and pessimistic.

Dr. Laurence Waters joins this mixture of personalities as an idealistic agent of change with little wisdom and no tact. Laurence is shocked at the condition of the hospital which is literally falling apart. The hospital has little furniture, because it has been looted. Lawrence is also surprised at the lack of patients. The doctor has come to the hospital to do meaningful work and to make a difference but there are few patients in the hospital. Of the few patients that are in the hospital, the ones with anything but the most minor complaints must be referred to the "big" hospital in the city due to the lack of supplies and equipment in his hospital.

Eventually Laurence comes up with a plan to hold clinics in nearby villages both to minister to the people and to make them aware of the existence of the hospital. The entire staff is skeptical about Lawrence's idea, but they do hold the first clinic which is such success that it brings renewed optimism to the hospital staff.

A second clinic is planned, but never happens because a chain of tragic events unfolds, beginning with the shooting of Tehogo and ending with the demise of both him and Laurence.

The two protagonists, Frank and Laurence, oppose one another and yet in many ways they are very similar. Frank's pessimistic resignation and wasted potential clash with Laurence's almost other-worldly idealism and his drive to do good. Laurence is often forces Frank to face his many demons. Laurence also reminds Frank of what he is not. For both of these reasons, Frank resents him. Both of the doctors have dysfunctional love lives. Frank, having lost his wife to his best friend and business partner, now restricts his involvement with women to primal sex with Maria, a village woman who



owns the souvenir shop. Although Maria is the name she gives Frank, it is not her real name. Laurence is involved with Zanele, an American who changed her name from Linda in order to adopt a more 'African' identity for her work in the villages. The only thing she and Laurence have in common is their idealism and, after an awkward visit to see him at the hospital, Zanele ends their relationship.

In the end; Dr. Ngema gets her transfer to the big hospital; Frank takes over her post; Claudia Santander leaves her husband and returns to Cuba; Tehogo and Laurence are kidnapped by hostile forces and are presumed dead which fulfills Frank's prophecy. As *The Good Doctor* comes to an end, people have come and gone, but nothing has changed, nor do we feel that it will. Laurence's idealism has been swallowed up in reality and once again, it is Frank who survives.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The story opens with the arrival of young Dr. Laurence Waters at the hospital. He is greeted by the cynical Dr. Frank Elf who has already been working there for some time.

Frank's first impression of Laurence is that looks too young, lost and bewildered and that Laurence just won't last. Laurence is a confused by the unkempt hospital office with its pink walls, wilting plants and lack of patients. Frank takes Laurence to the rather austere bedroom that they will share. Initially, Frank had been less than happy at the prospect of sharing his room with someone, but eventually he accepted the idea. Once in the room, Laurence shares his bewilderment at the condition of the hospital and the town with Frank. Frank obviously had a similar experience upon his arrival. Frank tells Laurence that the way that the town was created when, 'evil bureaucrats in a city far away,' arbitrarily declared this very spot as the capital of their homeland and that the hospital, was not a 'real' hospital but 'a joke.' Frank goes on to say that when the people get sick or injured they go to the hospital in the city and that they hate this place because it is where their 'puppet dictator' had lived and where the army came from. The chapter ends with Frank in discomfort. Frank feels, "tense and watchful and somehow angry" with this newcomer sharing his room.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The arrival of the new, fresh-faced Dr. Waters, rather than being the good company Dr. Eloff was anticipating, instead, moves Frank out of his resignation and back into feeling angry and resentful with his situation. Frank, had come to this hospital years ago, expecting a busy, modern facility and just like Dr. Waters his expectations were destroyed by the stark reality of his new environment. Frank had become angry and frustrated which eventually until he eventually resigned himself to his life in the hospital.

Initially, Frank did not want to share his room with the newcomer, but he'd changed gum mind because he though it might be good to have some company to pass the time. However, after his initial encounter with the bewildered and question-filled Dr. Waters who stirred up the contempt and resentment he'd long sublimated, Frank feels only anger and tension.

We cannot help but wonder if Frank is angry at himself for staying there so long, rather than still being angry at his environment.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

The chapter opens with a flashback to a conversation between Dr. Ngema and Frank. Dr. Ngema informs Frank that Dr. Waters would be coming to the hospital to do a year of community service although his services were not requested by the hospital. Frank is apathetic about the prospect until Ngema informs him that Laurence will be sharing his room. Frank protests her decision and asks why Laurence can't use one of the many empty rooms. Ngema reminds him that there is no furniture in those other rooms. Frank then suggests that Laurence room with Tehogo, but Ngema says that it would not be appropriate because Tehogo is not a doctor. Frank understands that the underlying impropriety is not because of doctors and non-doctors rooming together it is the problem of rooming a black man with a white man.

On Dr. Waters' first morning, he is already awake, showered and eagerly awaiting his meeting with Dr. Ngema before Frank even wakes up. Laurence seems anxious and distracted and he attempts to rush Frank, so that they can get going. Although Laurence is told that the doctors do not wear their white coats at this hospital, he does not remove his. Laurence wants to go directly to see Ngema, but Frank takes him for breakfast first, where he is introduced to the Santaders, Jorge and Claudia, who are surprised to see a new face. After an uncomfortable breakfast, they go to the main office and meet Dr. Ngema, who barely notices Laurence. Both men accompany her on her rounds. Today there are only two patients, but frequently there are no patients at all. The first patient is a young illegal immigrant who was being treated for dehydration. Frank and Ngema agree that he is progressing well enough to begin solid food in the morning. The patient will be discharged the next day.

The second patient is post-op. Dr. Ngema had performed an emergency appendectomy on her the previous day. This patient is not doing well; she is weak and her abdomen is distended. Not wanting to offend Dr. Ngema, Frank does not mention her condition. Laurence; however, has no such reservations so he announces that the 'stump' is leaking and that the situation is rather urgent. Frank rebuffs Laurence for his insolence and asks Ngema what she would have him do. Ngema tells him to take this patient to the big hospital right away. On the way out, Laurence catches up with Ngema and, as though nothing has happened, asks her what his duties are to be. Ngema coldly tells him to ride with Frank because he 'might learn something.' The venom of her remark is completely missed by Laurence.

While Frank and Laurence drive the patient to the big hospital in the old ambulance, Frank reminisces about how much he had loved the fertile landscape when he first arrived. Back then, Frank had walked and explored for hours until eventually the land had begun to seem threatening and oppressive.



When the doctors arrive at the big hospital they are greeted by doctor du Toit. Doctor du Toit seems to have a distain for Frank because he has had to rescue many of their patients in the past. On the way home, Frank and Laurence stop for lunch at a roadside restaurant and Frank explains that the big hospital gets the funding because it is on the white side, as opposed to the homeland (black) side. Laurence protests that there no longer are such political distinctions and this should not be. Laurence is confused because reality does not line up with the political rhetoric. After lunch, Laurence asks to drive. Along the way, Frank directs him to pull over at a wooden souvenir shack. The woman in charge, Maria, smiles a tight, strained smile at Frank. Laurence buys a carved wooden fish for Frank in gratitude for allowing Laurence to tag along with him. Maria tells Frank he's been too busy lately and Laurence realizes that Frank has been to see Maria before. Frank acknowledges this, but explains that he stopped at Maria's stand on his first day on the way to the hospital. Seemingly out of the blue, Laurence asks Frank if he's slept with Maria. A surprised and somewhat taken-aback Frank denies it, but the rest of the drive home is spent in silence. Frank is feeling restless, no one wants to eat supper and finally Frank, gives in to his "old yearnings and needs," and drives back to Maria's, where she is waiting for him. Maria takes him by the hand, leads him in and latches the door.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

In the episode with the failed appendectomy, we learn that Dr. Ngema is quite proud. Even though her hands and sight are unsteady, which results in medical complications for her patients, she continues to perform all the majority of the surgery at the hospital. Dr. Ngema refuses to face her frailty, at the expense of her patients, either because she knows that there is someone at the big hospital to clean up her messes or because she does not really care about her patients. In either case, Dr. Ngema is never the one who has to face the doctors at the other hospital that humiliation is left to Frank.

Frank has resigned himself to his subordinate position in spite of Ngema's failing skills. Because he does not want to offend her, Frank has become a part of Dr. Ngema's denial by not confronting her or correcting her. It is only Laurence, the seemingly impudent outsider, who matter-of-factly states the obvious; the patient is in serious trouble and needs immediate attention. Ngema is embarrassed almost to the point silence, yet Laurence is oblivious to his faux faux. At the conclusion of this incident, we again see Frank's discretion when he walks a few paces behind her Ngema rather than beside her. Similarly, we see Waters complete lack of sensitivity when he runs right up to Dr. Ngema to inquire about his duties.

With Frank's explanation that the stark difference between the two hospitals is a result of lack of racially motivated funding, more light is shed on the situation. Still, Laurence does not understand why the reality of the circumstances have not changed with the changes in political rhetoric. Laurence is too idealistic to accept this reality.

We see the same separation of the races in Ngema's discussion of the rooming situation, on the surface Laurence can not room with Tehogo because Tehogo is not a





doctor, but in reality, Laurence can not room with Tehogo because Laurence is white and Tehogo is black. Once again, apartheid is 'dead' in theory and policy, but reality has not caught up.

Again we see Frank made uncomfortable by Laurence. The trip to Maria's stirs up emotions of a different sort than in chapter one, yet they are still emotions he's long buried and now must deal with thanks to Laurence.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter we find out that Frank's marriage had failed and that he'd had a short fling with Claudia Santander at the hospital and a few 'brief encounters,' with other women. We also learn the history of the relationship between Frank and Maria. Frank had indeed stopped at the souvenir shack on his first day in town, as he told Laurence. He had looked around, exchanged brief pleasantries with Maria and continued on his way. But what Frank neglected to tell Laurence was that he had returned two years later on his way back from taking a patient to, "the other, better hospital," drawn in by the sign which was misspelled and roughly drawn. It is during this visit that Frank asks her name and she tells him it is Maria. He presses her for her "real name," her "African name," but she only repeats, "Maria." Frank spends the next two hours talking to her and asks her all kinds of questions. Maria tells him that she's been there for three years, courtesy of her husband, who set her up with her little business and returns every now and then to visit her. She lives in the shack, gets water from the village and sleeps on a blanket. Frank asks her to come back to his room with him, but she declines and tells him to return to her when it gets dark. He does, fighting irrational fears that people are lying in wait to do him harm of many sorts. They have sex and he returns time and time again to visit her. One night Maria tells him not to come the next day because her husband will be visiting and it would be dangerous. Frank decides to drive by to check it out and sees a white car parked there. The next time they are together he asks her whether or not this was her husband or just a boyfriend since she wore no wedding ring, but she insists that the man was indeed her husband. Frank describes their relationship as one without tenderness or kissing. Sometimes, though, instead of sex, he would just lay with her in silent, comforted by her breathing. Frank lies to Maria about who he is, why he is there and his life in general in order to keep his two lives separate. Frank tells her that he is an engineer for the government, he is working on a project at the hospital and he has a wife in the city.

One night Maria asks Frank for some money. From that day on, he doubts everything she tells him or has ever told him. Frank wonders if her motive had been money all along. He begins to go to Maria's in the daytime to try to see if his doubts have merit, but that proves fruitless as there are always tourists and villagers around during the day. Frank's nighttime visits become less and less frequent until they stop altogether.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter we see Frank leading two lives, the one at the hospital which he characterizes as "empty and adrift" and the one with Maria which he characterizes as "illicit and intense." What he fails to see, or perhaps just refuses to admit, is that his 'life' with Maria is equally empty because it consists only of "primal" sex with no kissing, no real intimacy, vulnerability, or disclosure. And yet, there are times when Frank just lays



with her, somehow comforted by her presence in the dark. Frank experiences both sex and closeness without intimacy. Frank was so wounded by the betrayal of his wife and friend that he will not allow himself the luxury of intimacy anymore. Instead Frank clings to façades such as the hospital he works at which seems to be a place of healing, but is virtually incapable of real healing.

It is interesting that Frank says he'd come to Maria, "looking for comfort and relief," and after she asks him for money he wonders if her motive had been money all along. Frank is insulted and he feels betrayed by her request. He begins to doubt everything she's ever said to him. Frank had assumed her motives were the same as his and he is shocked to find that they are not. Just as Frank is dishonest with Maria, telling her lies about who he is, he is dishonest with himself, telling himself that she feels something for him. Maria never expressed any feelings for him, but up until she asks for money Frank deludes himself into believing she had feelings for him.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Frank begins by recounting his history with Dr. Ngema. We learn that he had first come to the hospital to take over for her upon her promotion to a position in the Department of Health in the city. Dr. Ngema had already been at the hospital for over ten years. However, Ngema's job opportunity disappeared, leaving Frank rather stuck. He chose to stay in case the opportunity re-surfaced, but it never did. Now it is more than six years later and both of them are still there.

Dr. Ngema approaches Frank and suggests he take Waters around for the "full tour." Frank knows that the reason she requests this is to discourage Laurence enough for him to request a transfer, which Ngema will gladly facilitate. As they tour the hospital, we learn that the hospital had begun, "as a project of the first chief minister of the homeland, but as soon as all the buildings had gone up there was the military coup and everything had been stalled and suspended." (p.33) A few years later, "the homeland had ceased to be a homeland and with its re-absorption into the country the meaning and the future of the hospital became permanently unclear." (p.33)

The hospital has too many of the things they don't need (like condoms) and too little, if any, of the things the doctors do need (like medicines or a generator.) The facility has been plundered, furniture was stolen and even sinks were pulled from the walls. No one at the hospital knows who plundered the hospital or when since nothing is locked. Frank once again questions Laurence about why he came to this place and Laurence again avoids him.

Frank and Laurence take a ride into town in Laurence's old blue Volkswagen Beetle. Frank attempts to enlighten Laurence about the previous chief minister of the homeland, but Laurence is not interested in politics. Frank shows Laurence a library, a school and government buildings, all of which are unused and dormant. Finally, Frank takes Laurence to the only place in town where you can get a drink; Mama Mthembu's place is a dirty, crowded establishment run by, "an enormously fat old lady, always wearing the same floral print dress and slip-slops and the same gap-toothed smile." Laurence finally explains to Frank that he came to this hospital, "to make it hard on himself." His other classmates chose good hospitals, but Laurence felt that by choosing a small, rural facility he could, "do work that means something." When Frank reminds him that in order to do meaningful work there has to be work to do, Laurence insists that things can change. Frank calls him idealistic and Laurence tells Frank that he likes him.



## Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter we see that Frank has chosen to live in denial about Ngema's prospects for leaving and his for promotion for many years. He is, content to let his fate remain dependent on hers.

Ngema's can not abide having the young upstart Dr. Waters in her presence after he confronted her with her mistake, so she suggests that Frank show him enough despair and disrepair to discourage Laurence into leaving. Frank knows exactly why she suggests the tour, but cooperates with her mission

Ngema says, "I'm all for innovation and change." Frank comments that this is one of her key phrases, but it is empty as she would go to great lengths to avoid change. She too is deceiving herself. Ngema wants Laurence to leave because he represents change and she does not want that.

This book is full of wasted potential. The library, school, housing, government buildings, the hospital itself and even the doctors have all been plundered and laid waste in different ways.

Laurence's motivation for coming to this hospital is almost like a penance; he tells Frank he wants to make it hard on himself rather than taking an easy position like the rest of his classmates. He thinks that only in, 'the tiniest place, the furthest away from anything' can he do meaningful work. We wonder why the Laurence has so much self-hatred and why he feels the need for penance.

Frank becomes uncomfortable when Laurence tells him that he likes him. Frank is made even more uncomfortable when he realizes that it is mutual. He finds it increasingly difficult to resent Laurence and this makes Frank, "resent him more." Frank specializes in keeping his distance from people. Frank runs from involvement and he does not want to become attached to anyone, especially not Dr. Waters.

Does Dr. Waters remind Frank of himself? Frank came to the hospital running from a bad marriage to hide out and perhaps to do his own form of penance. Now with Laurence's confession that he came here to make it hard on himself, we wonder, is he doing penance for something? Is Laurence hiding from something? Or is he really altruistic as he professes?



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

In this chapter we learn that Frank's wife's name is Karen and that Frank was in the army at one time.

Frank relates an incident when he had come back to their room to find that Laurence had rearranged the furniture. Frank was not happy at this and reminded Laurence that he was just a temporary guest in his room and when the Santanders' left, Laurence would be moving to their room. Laurence puts up some photographs, including his girlfriend Zanele, who he met in the Sudan while she was doing famine relief work. She is now in Lesotho and she and Laurence correspond weekly.

Laurence also has a photograph of his older sister who raised him because their parents were killed in a car accident when Laurence was only a baby. Frank, in turn, reveals that he lost his mother to leukemia when he was 10. Laurence insists that the reason Frank became a doctor is because of his mother's death, but Frank denies it. Frank tells Laurence the story of how he was called to be a doctor. When Laurence was twelve years old he went to the cemetery where his parents were buried to visit them. He could not find their graves and he began to cry. An old black man in a uniform with a white coat found him and tried to help him locate his parents, but it was to no avail. After taking Laurence to his office for some tea and bread, the man took Laurence home to his sister. It was that incident, according to Laurence, that inspired him to become a doctor. Frank insists that his own decision was over time and not a 'light bulb' moment like Laurence. Frank thinks to himself that his true motivation in becoming a doctor was really a desire to impress his father.

Laurence asks Frank why he still wears his wedding ring and Frank reveals that his divorce is not final yet. His wife Karen left him and ran off with his best friend and business partner, Mike. Karen and Mike had recently decided to leave the country and get married, so Karen resumed the divorce proceedings. Upon hearing about this, Laurence assures Frank that he would never betray him in such a way.

Frank and Laurence pass the time together, playing table tennis, going on walks and going to Mama Mthembu's place at night. When people inquire about his "friend," Frank insists that Laurence is not his "friend," but merely a companion.

Dr. Ngema asks how the tour went and Frank reports that Laurence is quite happy here and has no desire to leave. Ngema suggests that Frank pressure him a bit, but he says he doesn't really mind having him around anymore; however, if a room becomes vacant, Frank would appreciate having his own room to himself again.

Laurence has a conversation with the Santanders and he finds out that they are not leaving as Frank had told him earlier. The Santanders tell him that they'd come to the



hospital because they wanted to make a difference. This allows Frank, as narrator, to recount his history with Claudia. The Santanders had spent a traumatic six months in Soweto before coming to this hospital. The gruesome injuries they treated took a toll on them. Shortly after their arrival, a woman who'd been brutally attacked was brought in. They tried to save her, but could not. Claudia broke down and Frank comforted her. They wound up beginning an affair that had ended with bad feelings on her part.

Frank then tells Laurence that it would not be the Santanders' room he'd get, but rather Tehogo's, as now Frank insists he's leaving at some point to go somewhere. Tehogo is a nurse by duty, but not by qualification. Tehogo had been at the hospital longer than Frank. His family had been killed in the political violence when he was working at the hospital on his nursing studies. Despite his poor grades, they kept him on because there was no one else. Frank describes Tehogo as, "sullen and sour, continually drawn in on some dark core in himself," (p.54) with only one friend. Tehogo is a young, good-looking, well-dressed man who wears an earring and a silver chain. No one knows the source of Tehogo's income because he speaks very little and when he does speak it is only in, 'grudging syllables.' Frank now resents Tehogo's presence because he is a mere 'nurse' but is using the doctor's room that Laurence should be in.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Laurence continues to try to either find or manufacture similarities between Frank and himself. Laurence insists that because they'd both lost their parents at a young age, they must have had similar 'callings' to medicine. Laurence also continues to press himself on Frank as a friend, while Frank continues to keep his distance. Frank is still suffering from the betrayal of his wife and best friend, so he keeps everyone at a distance. As hard as Frank tries not to have a relationship with him, Laurence tries equally as hard to manufacture one.

Frank is waiting for someone else to move in various areas of his life. He is waiting; for Dr. Ngema to move so he can take her job; for the Santanders or Tehogo to move so Laurence can move into one of their rooms, for his wife to move on the divorce. In each case Frank leaves his fate in the hands of other people instead of taking charge of his own destiny. He has chosen powerlessness.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Frank finds Laurence padlocking a door at the end of the hallway to prevent further looting. Frank thinks he's wasting his time, but Laurence insists that looting is wrong and that the staff should prevent it if they can. On another occasion, Laurence cuts the grass between their bedroom and the main wing with an old rusty scythe and the next day he pulls out all the weeds growing on the roof. Laurence ignores Frank's mantra of, 'why bother, it does not matter.' Laurence insists that it does indeed matter and that the premises will look better when he's done, which it does.

Frank returns to visiting Maria at night, once or twice a week. Maria asks about his 'friend' and Frank insists that Laurence is not his friend but then admits, grudgingly, that perhaps Laurence is his friend. Although Frank doesn't tell Laurence about Maria, Laurence knows what is going on and does not intrude.

Laurence treats every patient very seriously, no matter how minor or major their complaint. This behavior bothers Frank because it highlights the fact that Laurence cares and that Frank no longer does.

On a trip to bring a patient to the big hospital, Laurence comments that he wishes he'd been in the army. Frank retorts that he doesn't know what he's asking for. Frank does not elaborate on this declaration. Alone later that night, Frank recalls an incident when he'd been sent to the Angolan border and then to a small camp deep in the bush, fresh out of medical school. The Commandant called Frank to a cell where soldiers had been interrogating an enemy soldier. The black man lay on the floor, naked, bloody and beaten. The Commandant asked Frank to take a look at him and see if his labored breathing was real or not. Frank informed him that the man was having an asthma attack and he administered a nebulizer, after which the prisoner's breathing improved. The Commandant then asked Frank how much more the man could take. Frank replied that the man was in need of medical care. The Commandant, angered, asked again. Frank said if he were allowed to give the prisoner 'proper care,' the asthma could be cured. The Commandant asked if the soldier were about to die. Frank's fear overtook him and he replied that the man would not die yet. He was dismissed back to his tent.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Once again, Laurence's presence forces Frank to deal with his emotions, his environment and his past. Laurence's commitment to the few hospital patients disturbs Frank because it reveals the level of Frank's apathy. Of even greater significance, Laurence's insistence that Frank must have been called into medicine, causes Frank to spend time in self-examination. Frank finally does remember a 'defining moment,' but it is a terrible memory that Frank does not want to deal with. The powerlessness, apathy,



frustration and resignation that characterize his life may not have their origin in this incident, but they are certainly encapsulated in the army incident.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Frank returns from visiting Maria and finds Laurence still awake, sitting on his bed with a map. Laurence invites him on a hike the next day and Frank accepts. Laurence wakes Frank the next morning and he has already packed a rucksack with sandwiches, beer and suntan lotion. They drive a ways and then park to hike up the river. When they stop at a pool of water a monitor enters the water. Laurence is afraid it was a crocodile, but Frank corrects him and goes for a swim while Laurence remains on shore. When Frank suggests they eat, Laurence says it is too early, that they have not gone far enough yet and eventually he explains that this is not a random hike, he is looking for a certain village. Frank is angered that Laurence has intentionally chosen the most inaccessible village and he decides to remain where he is while Laurence sets off to find it. After cooling off, Frank regrets having spoken so sharply. Frank goes for his own little walk and happens upon an abandoned house. He goes inside to find it ransacked and nearly unrecognizable as to rooms. Frank begins to feel afraid, as if there is an evil presence in the house, so he leaves. When Frank returns to the pool, Laurence is waiting for him. Frank tells him of the house, but refuses to take Laurence to see it. Laurence was unable to locate his village and he apologizes for their earlier tiff.

That night they are awakened by the Santanders who are having a violent argument in their room next door. Frank knocks on their door. No one answers, but the fighting ceases. Laurence is now fully awake and he shares his reason for wanting to find this village today. Laurence wanted to check it out to see what the conditions of the villagers were and what their needs were. Laurence hopes to set up a clinic at the village since the people will not come to the hospital themselves. Frank tells him that it is a crazy idea. Laurence is offended and they argue. They reconcile and once again Laurence professes his friendship to Frank.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

At the beginning of the chapter, Frank observes that Laurence has a, 'sense of mission about him,' (p.68) as Laurence is planning their hike. Frank's remark foreshadows the revelation that Laurence actually does have a purpose and that this is not just a fun outing.

Once again, Laurence is compelled to, 'make things hard on himself,' by choosing the most inaccessible village to investigate as a potential field clinic. Laurence does not seem to understand, or is unable to accept that 'meaningful work,' can be done anywhere. Good work is not only done in remote areas and it does not necessarily require the doctors to suffer extreme hardship. We again sense that he is punishing himself for something but we do not know what he is doing penance for.



Laurence's profession of friendship to Frank (again) causes us to wonder why he feels the need to tell Frank he likes him repeatedly. Is Laurence truly so insecure or needy that he needs constant reassurance, or is he just manipulative? Further, Laurence's statement that he, 'wouldn't want anything to change between us,' (p.79) foreshadows a challenge to their relationship.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

One night, when Frank visits Maria, he decides that instead of sex, he wants Maria to tell him everything about her life. He asks her a lot of questions and she becomes angry and she insists that she's already told him everything there is to tell. Frank gives up and they have sex.

Laurence's girlfriend, Zanele, is to come for a visit. Laurence asks Frank if there is a hotel nearby where Zanele can stay. Frank tells him that he will vacate their room, but Laurence protests that it would not be right so Laurence asks Frank to inquire of Mama Mthembu if she has a room. Frank stops by Mama's on his way to visit Maria and he sees some military-looking men in civilian attire at the bar. They are the first part of a larger group of border patrol soldiers assigned to keep out illegals, drugs and guns. The Brigadier, (the former, now deposed leader) is rumored to be involved in this illegal trade, but no one is certain of his involvement. In fact, the Brigadier's very existence is the subject of rumor and speculation. Frank inquires with Mama regarding a room and is rather dismayed when he finds out that she not only remembers Laurence's name, but she refers to him as 'her friend.' Frank has been at the hospital much longer and Mama does not even know his name. Mama agrees to give Zanele a room and Laurence goes to check the room out for himself and he brings a vase of flowers to put in the room.

Upon her arrival, Laurence throws a party for Zanele, to which everyone comes, drinks a lot and is uncharacteristically amiable. Tehogo brings his friend Raymond, who assures Frank that Tehogo will be leaving for a good job in a couple of months and Frank can have his room. Frank gets very drunk. Zanele is small, pretty and American, which comes as a surprise to Frank. At the party Dr. Ngema (who only stays a few minutes as she has "work" to do) tells Frank that she wants to talk to him about 'his idea' for the 'outreach thing.'" It becomes clear that Laurence has spoken with her about Laurence's idea for an outreach clinic, but given her the impression that it was Frank's idea, rather than his own.

Laurence asks Frank to keep Zanele company the next night because Laurence has to work. Frank first suggests that Laurence speak to Dr. Ngema about changing his shift and then offers to work the shift for him, but Laurence insists that his shift "is a commitment" that he did not want to change. Laurence drives Zanele home, then returns and asks Frank whether or not his party was enjoyable and how it compared to other parties in the past. Frank tells Laurence that his party was their first party ever. Frank then asks Laurence why Dr. Ngema's thinks the clinic was his suggestion rather than Laurence's. Laurence tells Frank that he was right to suggest that Laurence should try Maria's village before going to more remote locations and that he'd been there several times already to check it out. The trial clinic would be held in about a week. The following morning Tehogo asks Frank to return the tapes he'd borrowed for the night before. The camaraderie between them is gone and everything is back to what it was.



## Chapter 8 Analysis

We see Laurence's sharp sense of morality in his insistence that Zanele stay at Mama's during her visit, rather than with him. Why has Laurence given Dr. Ngema the impression that the idea for the outreach clinic is Frank's and not his? Was it unintentional, was it out of respect for Frank as his senior, was it manipulative because Laurence is 'the new guy' and felt he needed Frank to give his idea credibility, or did he really think that Frank's offhand and sarcastic comment was actually a serious suggestion? Most likely the latter is true and Laurence's rigid sense of right and wrong caused him to give Frank the credit.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

As he had promised Laurence, Frank takes Zanele out for dinner at Mama's while Laurence works. There is quite a bit of activity there because there are many soldiers present. Zanele is uncomfortable and Frank has too many whiskeys. She tells him that her real name was Linda, but when she'd come to Sudan she took the name Zanele. She was one of seven foreign volunteers working in Lesotho. They hoped to build a library, a literacy training program and other infrastructure. Zanele teaches children from age six to sixteen. Frank has the same distain for her idealism that he does for Laurence's idealism. Zanele tells Frank a number of things about Laurence, including that Frank is the first friend he's ever had. She also corrects the false history that Laurence told Frank about his childhood. It turns out that his parents were NOT killed in a car accident, but that he was an illegitimate child, raised by his mother. Laurence's mother had lied to him and told him that she was his sister and that his parents had died in a car accident. The reason Laurence could not find his parent's graves in the cemetery as a child, was that the graves had never existed. When Laurence had arrived home afterward his sister/mother was forced to him the truth.

Among the soldiers at Mama's is Colonel Moller, the soldier who had called Frank to assess the prisoner that they had been torturing all those years ago. It has been over ten years, but the memory still sickens Frank and he finds himself trembling and unable to eat. Zanele notices his distress and asks what is bothering him. Frank merely points out Moller and says he worked for Moller in the army. Zanele is surprised that Frank was in the army. Frank interprets her reaction as negative and becomes defensive, saying that Laurence had once told him that Laurence wished he'd been in the army. When Zanele dismisses the comment as silly, Frank becomes angry and tells her that Laurence would have learned more about life in the trenches than in community service. This upsets Zanele and Frank's anger, fueled by whiskey, turns insulting. The exchange ends with Zanele cursing at him and running off to her room. Once Frank calms down he goes to her room and apologizes to her. Zanele forgives him and they reconcile. Zanele confesses that she is confused and uncertain about her relationship with Laurence. She feels that the only thing they have in common is their work.

Frank and Zanele decide to go for a drive. Zanele spots a huge house on a hill, which he tells her is the Brigadier's house. Frank defines the Brigadier as, "the ex-tin pot dictator of the ex-homeland," (p.102). There are many rumors about where the ex-dictator is; some say he is dead, some say he is involved in illegal activities, but no one knows for certain. Frank's only encounter with the man was when the Brigadier had come to the hospital years ago with chest pains and Dr. Ngema had taken care of him. Zanele wants to drive up to his house, so they do. A small side gate is open and at Zanele's insistence, they sneak in for a look. They hear two gardeners, one with a manual lawnmower and one with clippers. The next thing they know, Frank and Zanele are face to face with the Brigadier. Zanele tells him that they wanted to see his house



and surprisingly, he bids them to follow him. The house is not only empty, but the Brigadier himself is locked out. "They" took the entire contents of the house away in three trucks. Zanele and Frank peer into the rooms through the windows. Zanele somehow connects with the pain of the Brigadier's displacement, which angers Frank, because Zanele had had such contempt for the army just hours before. They ride home in silence, return to her room and have sex.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Zanele's idealism angers Frank who comments that, "she and Laurence were the same kind of person: blindly and naively believing in their own power to change things," (p.97). Frank thinks that changing her name from Linda to Zanele is presumptuous and false. Frank also has contempt for the relationship between Zanele and Laurence, calling it 'just another idea' (p.97). Frank thinks that Zanele and Laurence are not living in a fantasy world and that eventually they will both see the error in their idealistic beliefs.

During their unscheduled visit with the Brigadier, Frank can not understand how Zanele could have contempt for his time in the army and yet feel sympathy for this deposed dictator. The inconsistency in her convictions causes Frank to feel a strange combination of revulsion and desire. He surmises that the fact that the Brigadier was once a powerful man causes Zanele to admire him, not for his character but for his position. That may be true, but considering that Zanele's life's work is helping the poor, it is more likely that she overlooks his sins and sympathizes with his pain. To Zanele the Brigadier is just a human being who has been unjustly treated. Frank's assumption probably stems from his own cynicism rather than an accurate assessment of the situation.

When Frank and Zanele return to her room, we do not expect them to engage in sex, even though this should not surprise us about Frank, it is inconsistent with what we know of Zanele as there has been no hint of attraction on her part.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Frank reports to Laurence that he and Zanele had dinner at Mama's, but he doesn't tell Laurence anything about the Brigadier incident. When Zanele and Frank meet again, she is very formal and distant.

Frank drives into town to call his estranged wife, Karen, ostensibly for no reason at all except to hear her voice. Karen tells him that the divorce papers are ready for his signature. At first Frank doesn't even realize what she is talking about because the divorce is the furthest thing from his mind. However, he tells her that he is done running and will come to sign the papers. Dejected, he goes to Maria's. Maria asks him why he hasn't been to see her in the past few days and he tells her that he's been too busy at work. Frank then asks why she didn't tell him that Laurence had been to the next village, but Maria denies knowing anything about it. Frank is unsure whether or not to believe her. He notices a bruise on the side of Maria's face, but when he asks her about it, she declines to answer. Frank tries to put his arm around Maria to comfort her, but she pulls away and tells him to come back tomorrow.

At the Monday morning staff meeting, Dr. Ngema announces that on Thursday there will be a clinic in one of the nearby villages. She introduces it as Laurence's idea, calling it a 'good idea,' but she adds that her work will prevent her from attending the clinic personally. Everyone at the meeting is surprised at the proposal and no one says anything favorable about it. Claudia asks why they would want to do such a thing and Laurence responds that he, 'thought it would be a way of drawing attention to the hospital...and of actually doing something,' (p.120). Laurence's remark offends everyone. Laurence looks toward Frank to express support, but instead Frank announces that he won't be there either because he has to go away for a few days. Later on, Frank explains to Laurence that he must go to Pretoria to sign his divorce papers. Laurence is crestfallen at the negative response from the staff and he is even more disappointed that Frank won't be there since it was Frank's concept to begin with. Frank backs away from any ownership in this clinic plan. Laurence is now depressed and confused.

When Frank goes to see Dr. Ngema that afternoon, she tells him that, 'things are moving again,' (p.122) with respect to her job and; therefore, his promotion is also within reach again. Dr. Ngema cautions Frank not to get too involved with Laurence's disruptive ideas.

Back in his room, Frank comes across Tehogo's cassettes and goes to return them to him. The door to Tehogo's room is open, but Tehogo is not there. Frank goes into the room anyway. Tehogo's room is a complete mess of trash and women's fashion magazines. On the table next to the bed is a photo of an elderly couple, presumably





Tehogo's parents. Frank also sees pipes and bed frames, causing him to exclaim, "and then I knew," (p.125).

## Chapter 10 Analysis

The guilt Frank feels over his betrayal of Laurence with Zanele is made that much more ironic by Laurence's comment that Frank is, "a real friend" (p.115). Does Frank hate himself so much that he is driven to undermine and destroy every relationship he has? Is Frank so driven by bitterness over his wife's affair with his best friend that he is compelled to exact his revenge on surrogates?

Frank's continuing uncertainty regarding whether or not to believe Maria reflects his own deceit. Because Frank is a liar, he assumes that everyone else is as well. Frank's tenderness and concern towards Maria's bruised face is uncharacteristic and surprising. Why does he demonstrate tenderness now? Is it concern for Maria or is it guilt over his conduct?

Frank's discoveries in Tehogo's room foreshadow something major to come. Has Tehogo been looting the hospital? Is that where his money comes from?



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Frank invites Laurence out to Mama's. There are many soldiers at Mama's. Business is very good and Mama tells them she's going to be getting a pool table. Frank tells Laurence that he has an 'ethical dilemma' and then he explains what he saw in Tehogo's room. Laurence sees no dilemma, Tehogo is stealing and Dr. Ngema must be told about it. Frank argues that it is not that black and white. Frank points out that there are extenuating circumstances such as Tehogo's difficult background. Laurence makes no such allowances and nothing is resolved between the two. However, Frank's dilemma has clearly become Laurence's dilemma as well.

The following day, Laurence asks Frank if he's decided what to do about Tehogo. Frank does not give a clear answer, so Laurence offers to tell Dr. Ngema for him. Frank tells Laurence to do whatever he thinks is best, shifting the responsibility from himself to Laurence.

Laurence has received a letter from Zanele breaking off their relationship. Laurence says that he really didn't care that much because work is the most important thing in his life anyway. Laurence asks Frank what it's like to be married, but Frank doesn't to answer.

On his drive home, Frank encounters a roadblock of soldiers who question him and inspect his car. When he passes Maria's, he sees the white car and, therefore, can not stop as he'd promised her. At that moment the thought occurs to Frank that it might be the same white car that he saw at the Brigadier's house.

Frank drives to his father's house in Pretoria. His father is married to his fourth wife, Valerie. Valerie is younger than Frank and this adds a distinct awkwardness to their relationship. Frank's father is a man of some renown as he saved the lives of miners who'd been severely injured in a terrible accident His father had been photographed in all the papers for his heroic actions. Frank's father had also hosted a television quiz show and developed a line of products. Frank always felt he had something to prove and that he never could because the bar was just too high.

Frank's father-in-law, Sam, is an attorney and long-time friend of Frank's father. Sam had never approved of Frank because he thought that Frank was worthy of his daughter Karen, but he had always been gracious to Frank.

Karen is a fickle person. Karen dabbled in many things during their marriage, from drama to owning a gift shop with her mother, to interior design. Frank goes to Karen's home and signs the divorce papers without reading them. Karen then asks him how he feels about Mike now, after all this time. Frank has not forgiven Mike for what he did nor has he forgotten. Karen tells him that Mike wants to forget all the ill-will and re-establish



a relationship, but Frank will have none of it. She asks if he has anyone, to which he replies that he does. She suggests they all get together for dinner sometime, which nearly causes Frank to laugh at the incongruity of the three of them with Maria eating a nice dinner. Upon parting, Karen casually offers her condolences upon the illness of Frank's father, which Frank knows nothing about. Karen backpedals and says she must be mistaken, but Frank does not believe her.

Back at his Father's house, his parents ask Frank to stay for a while, but Frank insists he must return in the morning. His father offers to get him a job in one of the local hospitals, but Frank declines, citing imminent promotion prospects which his father discounts. Frank's father tells him it is time to move on and that he should not be taking orders from a black person, especially a woman. As if to illustrate his point, the maid brings in coffee and Valerie tells her that the flowers on the mantle would look nice in her room (rather than directly instructing her to remove them as Frank's father had told her to do). Betty removes the vase, trailing petals behind her, which Frank's father makes her immediately pick up, pointing each petal out to her as she crawls on the floor to retrieve them.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

When Frank tells Laurence about his 'ethical dilemma,' he doesn't really want Laurence's advice; he just wants relief from the burden. He knows that Laurence's morality is very rigid and Frank is intentionally passing this burden on to him. Once he has told Laurence Frank feels relieved, but Laurence is clearly feeling weighed down.

When Laurence offers to tell Dr. Ngema for Frank and Frank tells him to, 'follow his conscience,' Frank knows that Laurence has to tell Dr. Ngema and therefore, Frank will not have to be the bad guy. In this entire episode Frank exhibits cowardice.

When Laurence says he found out that he really didn't care all that much for Zanele when she broke up with him, it underlines how strained their relationship was and how hard he had worked to convince himself that there was actually something to it. Laurence seems to feel more relief than grief over their breakup.

Frank's trip home reveals everything we need to know about why he is the way he is. His father is a man of many accomplishments, whose shoes Frank has desperately and unsuccessfully tried to fill. We are given the impression that Frank's father must have reminded him on a daily basis that he was a disappointment. Frank's father is on his fourth marriage, so his track record with women is not exactly stellar. If what we see in this visit is any indication of how he has treated his previous three wives, it is not a great mystery why his marriages failed. In addition to being a racist, Frank's father is a misogynist. He treats his wife with only slightly more respect than he does his maid and his conduct is embarrassingly disrespectful. No one is good enough for Frank's father and no one meets his high standards and expectations; not Frank, not his wife and not his maid. Having seen Frank's father's demeaning interactions with both these women,

we no longer wonder why Frank's marriage did not work and he has been reduced to primal sex with a village woman.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Frank returns late at night and sees Laurence through the window working, but he chooses to go right to bed. In the morning, Laurence excitedly tells him that everything is different now and he explains that he'd gone to see Dr. Ngema regarding Tehogo. He wanted to keep Frank out of it, so Laurence told Dr. Ngema that he was the one that had gone into Tehogo's room and observed the pipes and bed frames, but he was unable to tell her why he was in there in the first place. Dr. Ngema's initial response was that he'd had no right to go into Tehogo's room without permission. Dr. Ngema called Tehogo into the room and made Laurence re-tell the story. All three of them went to his room and found no contraband whatsoever. Upon returning to Dr. Ngema's office, Laurence confessed that he'd lied and that it had been Frank who had seen the allegedly stolen goods in Tehogo's room. Laurence apologized and he and Tehogo shook hands. In relaying this to Frank, Laurence is smiling broadly, insisting that everything is now okay, but Frank doesn't see it that way. Frank goes to Dr. Ngema's office, where she tells him that everything is all sorted out and not to worry. She asks him to keep an eye on Laurence due to his impulsiveness.

Dr. Ngema informs Frank that the clinic went well and that the Santanders were pleased so she'd promised Laurence that he could do it again in a month. The next clinic would be held during a celebration occurring in a village that was going to be receiving electricity for the first time. There would be local politicians and media there, so Dr. Ngema strategized that it would be good exposure for the hospital to hold a clinic at the village during the celebration.. Dr. Ngema also told Frank that she'd essentially blackmailed Laurence, holding the prospect of this clinic over his head and telling him that if he brought charges against Tehogo she bring charges against him for lying and there would be no more clinics. Laurence had backed down. Frank has a hard time believing that Laurence just gave up on a moral issue so quickly, but Laurence had. Dr. Ngema says that Frank is the only one who can actually accuse Tehogo anyway, implying that Frank won't. Frank shocks her by intimating that he just might accuse Tehogo. Frank asks her why it does not seem to bother her that Tehogo is stealing from her hospital right under her nose. Her response is that it really doesn't matter because it is not being used anyway. Frank relents and decides not to push it. He leaves and goes to the recreation room where the Santanders are playing table tennis and Themba and Julius are drinking coffee and talking. The mood is energetic, positive and light which is a definite change. Claudia sits down right next to Frank and begins excitedly telling him what a good clinic it had been. Frank is shocked by the fact that she is so pleasant to him, given their history.

At the staff meeting a few days later, Dr. Ngema announces that since the clinic was such a success, there would be more. She further proclaims that one of her measures of success is the renewed positive spirit among the staff. Everyone claps except Frank and Tehogo.



Frank then recalls that the day he'd returned from his trip, he'd walked past Tehogo's friend Raymond, who had made a gesture of slitting his throat at him. After the meeting, Frank finds Tehogo and tries to make amends by telling Tehogo that he was not Frank's enemy. Tehogo does not reply. He just leaves.

A couple of days later, Laurence tells Frank that at the clinic, Maria told him she was pregnant and wanted him to abort the child. Laurence hints to Frank that he wants him to do it. Frank will not volunteer, but instead, enjoys the Laurence's discomfort in the situation. That night Frank drives out to see Maria, but the white car is there and he can not stop. While driving he has a daydream that Maria was wearing a yellow dress and he was asking her to come away with him.

Frank returns home and with murderous thoughts, concludes that it is Laurence who is his enemy.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

It is Frank who is his own enemy rather than Tehogo or Laurence. We wonder if Laurence is as squeaky clean as he seems, or if he is actually calculating Frank's demise.

Laurence's strict sense of morality caused him to confess to Dr. Ngema that he'd lied. Frank pretends that he will make an accusation but it does not take him very long to drop it.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Frank is enjoying Laurence's dilemma over Maria. Frank goes to Mama's and looks for Colonel Moller, just to see him. We learn that there was a robbery in town, a very rare occurrence and that the manager had been badly beaten by a gang in a white Toyota. Frank wonders if it is the same car he's seen at Maria's or at the Brigadier's.

Tehogo has been increasingly late and absent from work. Frank confronts Dr. Ngema regarding this, hoping she will take some kind of action, but she makes excuses for him.

Laurence tells Frank that due to the success of the clinic, Claudia no longer wants to return to Cuba. Frank is disdainful and remarks that it's only taken her ten years to find her purpose in life.

An old man comes to the hospital (because he's heard about it at the clinic), but his problem is cataracts and they didn't have the means to help him, so they had to refer him to the big hospital anyway. The man is confused at this.

Frank watches Laurence assemble his instruments and supplies to go to Maria's. Frank knows that Laurence doesn't want to do this, but Frank refuses to help him, enjoying his misery. Laurence returns hours later and Frank hears him washing over and over again. Frank is sitting on Laurence's bed (in his underwear) waiting for him when he exits the bathroom. Laurence comes in, naked and sits on Frank's bed. He asks Frank why he has done this. Frank protests that he's done nothing and then Frank proceeds to tell Laurence that everything is his fault and that they were just fine until he came along and ruined everything. Frank and Laurence argue about the clinic; Frank insists that they can't change things and Laurence insists that they can. Laurence tells Frank that he is, 'not a part of the new country,' (p169) because Frank rejects everything and that his problem is that he refuses to change himself; therefore, Frank can't change anything else. Nothing is resolved between them and, exhausted, they wind up falling asleep right where they are, in each other's beds.

In the morning, Laurence is dressing to go check on Maria, but Frank insists he will do it himself later on. Frank spends the day scrubbing every inch of their room. When he drives out to Maria's, the shack itself is gone.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Frank's admission that he goes to Mama's in hopes of seeing Colonel Moller indicates that somehow he wants, or needs, to be reminded of that terrible memory. We are forced to wonder if he does this to punish himself for not standing up for what is right, or to reinforce his sense of helplessness and hopelessness? Is Frank under the delusion that he will somehow find the courage to confront Colonel Moller for the wrong he did all



those years ago? Frank is most likely seeking some sort of absolution for his part in the torture and death of that soldier.

In laying out his instruments for Maria's abortion in front of Frank, Laurence hopes to force Frank to see what is to be and at the same time Laurence is making a silent appeal to Frank to volunteer for the procedure. This final appeal fails. Once again, Frank fails to step up and instead, revels in the misery of his 'friend.'

Upon his return home, Laurence washes over and over to remove the stain of what he'd done. Exhausted, he emerges from the shower and the two men sit naked on the same bed exposed and exposing their true feelings for the first time.





# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Having discovered Maria's shack no longer even exists, Frank speeds recklessly back to the hospital, where he encounters Laurence planning his next clinic. Laurence inquires about Maria and Frank lies and says she's fine.

In the morning, Frank goes back to the village and asks about Maria and the shack. No one in the village knows anything, or if they do, they are not saying anything. Frank returns to the hospital and lies down on his bed, thinking. Laurence comes in and tells him he thinks too much and its making him depressed. Laurence invites Frank out for a drink but Frank declines.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Why does Frank lie to Laurence and tell him that Maria is fine? Why does he conceal her complete disappearance? Frank actually cares about Maria's condition which is very uncharacteristically selfless of him. However, it is also too late, because she is gone. He can not share this information with Laurence because he has to 'fix' it. The burden of Maria's condition has shifted once again back to Frank.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Not wanting to be observed, Frank walks (instead of driving) to the Brigadier's compound and finds it dark and deserted. He sees something unidentifiable moving in front of him and he falls back in fear. Frank returns home cut and dirty, showers and goes to bed. The next day Laurence inquires about the cut on his head. Frank lies and says he bumped into the medicine cabinet.

Tehogo has left, but Dr. Ngema insists that Tehogo might return, so she does not want to try to hire anyone in his place. The hospital will have to manage without a nurse for the moment. Frank asks her why she'd even consider taking Tehogo back after his disappearance. Dr. Ngema excuses his behavior by saying that Tehogo has had a hard time lately, implying that Frank is the cause of his difficulties.

There is another robbery in town, a service station, by the same gang driving the same car. There is a rumor that it is in fact a gang of soldiers who are responsible for the robberies. In fact, there has been a distinct change of attitude toward the soldiers. Initially they were regarded as a positive for the community because they brought new life and activity to the town. Now the soldiers are resented.

Frank goes to Mama's. Drunk, he approaches Colonel Moller and tells him that the Brigadier is hiding in the old army camp in town. Frank quickly leaves and drives home. As he enters the gate to the hospital, the Colonel drives up behind him. Frank is both afraid and embarrassed. The Colonel tells Frank that he didn't quite hear what Frank had said to him. Frank tells him that he knows he's looking for the Brigadier, but the Colonel denies it. Frank tells him that it is the Brigadier who is behind all the illegal trafficking that the Colonel and his men are supposed to be here to put an end to, but the Colonel appears uninterested. Frank tells the Colonel not to harm a woman if he happens to find her in the army camp, that is, if the Colonel does go to the old army camp to check things out.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

There is a parallel between the soldiers and the town and Laurence and the hospital — initially both the soldiers and Laurence were viewed (albeit cautiously) as positive, bringing new life and change and now they are resented as intruders. Change is a nice ideal, but it is very uncomfortable reality.

Once again, Frank's cowardly 'hit and run' pattern is seen when he thinks he can just tell the Colonel about the Brigadier and the Colonel will take care of the situation. This occurrence is very similar to Frank telling Laurence about Tehogo's "stash" of hospital parts. Frank believes that Maria is being kept at the Brigadier's and that the Colonel will rescue her indirectly.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

The following day, Frank goes back to Maria's village to inquire about her again, but without success. When he returns to the hospital, it is dark out, but there is much activity inside. Tehogo has been shot in the chest and the doctors are trying to save him. Someone had dropped him off, but no one could remember what the man looked like or what kind of car he drove. Dr. Ngema had tried to operate, but was unsuccessful and now Tehogo's condition is very grave.

Frank is certain that the culprit is Colonel Moller or his men. Frank believes that they went to the old army camp at Frank's suggestion and shot Tehogo by mistake. He goes to Mama's and confronts the Colonel in the doorway of his room. The Colonel denies that he or his men went to the camp and he denies knowing anything about Tehogo's fate. Frank explains that he feels responsible and that he will feel better if he just knows how it happened, but Frank's appeal is fruitless. Frank also asks if there was a woman there and if she is okay, but this question also meets with complete denial and Frank returns to the hospital.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Why does Frank go try to get Colonel Moller to admit that he and/or his men are responsible for Tehogo's condition? How will knowing the details of what happened make him feel better? Frank feels responsible for Tehogo's condition because he is the one who suggested that Colonel Moller should go to the old army camp in the first place. Frank hopes that Colonel Moller will say something that will relieve Frank of his burden of responsibility. Frank is also desperately trying to find out about Maria. Frank now feels responsible for what has happened to both Maria and Tehogo.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Guilt-ridden, Frank checks on Tehogo frequently. He suggests to Dr. Ngema that Tehogo should be moved to the big hospital. She says his condition is too bad to consider moving him that right now.

Colonel Moller sends a soldier to handcuff and guard Tehogo. Dr. Ngema protests, but the soldier does not listen to her.

Frank assumes complete care of Tehogo, from turning him in the bed to emptying his catheter, all the duties Tehogo himself would normally be doing. Tehogo's condition improves and, in order to keep him from pulling all his tubes out, Frank ties him to the bed with soft cloths. Laurence is the only one who does not come by to check on Tehogo. In fact, Laurence spends all his time planning his next clinic. When questioned about this by Frank, Laurence remarks that life must go on and he ask Frank why he is so concerned with someone for whom he has never cared before. Laurence suggests that somehow Tehogo is a symbol to Frank.

The next morning, Tehogo is awake but weak. Claudia is tending to him and Frank tells her that he will take over for her. Dr. Ngema wants to operate to remove the bullet in a few days, but Frank wants this to be done at the big hospital so Frank pushes her to postpone the clinic, which she refuses to do. Frank decides to skip the clinic to take Tehogo to the big hospital, by himself, the next day. Tehogo can now consume liquids, so Frank feeds him soup but Tehogo will not look at him. Frank leans in and tells him once again that Tehogo is not his enemy. Still Tehogo does not respond to him.

Frank tells Laurence that he will not be at the clinic because he has to move Tehogo in the morning. But when Frank gets up the next day, Laurence, Tehogo and even the bed, are gone.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

We see the role reversal of Frank exhibiting empathy and caring for Tehogo while Laurence does not. Laurence is busy planning his clinic. Why does neither Dr. Ngema nor Laurence seem to care about Tehogo? Has Laurence become hardened or did he never really care in the first place? Is Tehogo a symbol for Laurence of all the evils of the 'old' way, which must be left behind in favor of the 'new' way which is symbolized by his clinic? Is that why Frank (in addition to his guilt) needs to hang onto him and why Laurence wants to move on? Is Tehogo a symbol, in fact, to BOTH of them? It seems that Frank's actions are of course, motivated by guilt, but also a desperate need to keep the status quo alive. Frank can not let go while Laurence's ambition and idealism for the 'big picture' have overshadowed his compassion for individuals.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

The next morning Frank wakes early and encounters Dr. Ngema who tells him that Laurence and Tehogo are gone. Frank wonders about the details but he assumes that Laurence was taken because his sense of honor would have caused him to protect his patient from being abducted. The soldier who had been guarding Tehogo actually fled when the intruders came. Dr. Ngema tells Frank that she's already reported the abduction to Colonel Moller, who told her to write up a report. The clinic; however, would still go on as planned.

Frank drives out to the army camp intending to be courageous for once in his life by offering himself in exchange for Laurence, but no one is there except for Colonel Moller who tells him (without admitting direct knowledge or involvement) that Laurence and Tehogo are gone, not to be seen again. Frank tells the Colonel that he knew him years ago and that he helped him, but the Colonel doesn't remember him. Frank shakes his hand and leaves.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

It is ironic that Dr. Ngema reports the crime to Colonel Moller who is the one responsible for the abduction of Laurence and Tehogo. Equally ironic are his instructions to her, Dr. Ngema should write a report and send it to him. Dr. Ngema completes her report and feels as though she has done all she could possibly do for Laurence/

Frank has found his courage too late. When Frank finally decides to act in courageously rather than fearfully, he is cut down by the reality that timing does matter, in spite of his good intentions and newly discovered (or perhaps resurrected?) boldness. His cowardice has cost him and others dearly once again.

Why, at this point, does Frank tell the Colonel he knew him years ago? Frank is most likely trying to make a connection that will curry favor and cause the Colonel to open up and tell him what happened to Laurence.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

After Laurence has been gone a week, Frank puts his belongings away. He comes across a letter from Zanele and decides to write and inform her of Laurence's disappearance. He wonders about Laurence's mother, but Dr. Ngema tells him that she's already informed her.

One or two months after his disappearance, Laurence's mother shows up. Frank and she speak in his room. Laurence's mother tells him that Laurence wrote of him often, that he was a good friend and had taken care of him. Frank tells her that he knows she is his mother, not his sister.

The soldiers and Colonel Moller leave the area. Claudia goes back to Cuba. Dr. Ngema begins her new job in the city and Frank assumed her job as head of the hospital.

One day a young man comes to the hospital and tells Frank that he could take him to Maria. A couple of days later they go and the white car is there (it is a Datsun which is not the one at the Brigadier's at all). Maria is with her husband and she is shocked and displeased to see Frank. Maria runs into the house and her husband angrily confronts him, speaking through the young man as translator. Maria's husband wants to know what Frank wants with his wife. Frank explains that he is a friend from before and that he just wants to know if she is okay. Maria's husband says that she is and Frank leaves. When Frank drops off his translator, he gives him the pile of money he'd intended for Maria.

Before his father died of cancer, Frank was able to tell his father that he was finally head of the hospital. Frank was; however, glad that his father was not physically able to come out and visit the hospital because it would have been a disappointment to him.

Only Frank and Jorge and two cooks remain at the hospital. Frank is trying to save the hospital from closing down by citing their important work in their rural clinics. Frank now uses Dr. Ngema's office and room.

### Chapter 19 Analysis

People have come and gone, but nothing has changed. Frank's prophesy that Laurence would not make it there came to pass. In the end it is Frank who survives. Idealism has been defeated by the reality of the hospital both personally as well as politically.



# Characters

## Dr. Ruth Ngema

Dr. Ngema is the black, female doctor who is the head of the hospital. Her medical skills and eyesight are weakening, but her pride is not. Dr. Ngema insists on being the primary surgeon, often at the expense of her patients. She has been at the hospital for many years, waiting for a promotion to a better facility. Her hospital is being looted right under her nose yet Dr. Ngema she does nothing to stop it because the equipment is not being used anyway. Dr. Ngema just wants to survive her time at the hospital long enough to get transferred somewhere better. She insists that she favors change and progress, yet she consistently rejects any change until Laurence's first clinic is a success. Dr. Ngema then she realizes that the clinics could be a boon for the hospital and she backs his new idea.

## Dr. Frank Eloff

Dr. Frank Eloff is the middle-aged, embittered, apathetic veteran doctor who originally came to this hospital as Dr. Ngema's replacement, until her transfer fell through. He remained on, hoping for her eventual transfer. Frank is running from a failed marriage in which he was betrayed by his wife and his best friend and he is determined to keep everyone at arms distance. Frank's hurt and resentment have mingled with his low self esteem, which stems from the verbal abuse of his over-achieving father, to produce the powerless apathy and bitter pessimism in which he lives. Frank is contemptuous of anyone with the audacity to be idealistic or who thinks that things can change for the better.

## Dr. Laurence Waters

A young, idealistic doctor fresh out of medical school, Laurence has chosen to spend a year of community service at a rural hospital in order to make things hard on himself. He is driven to do 'good work,' but in Laurence's mind, good work can only be accomplished through sacrifice and discomfort. Still, Laurence is an optimist and he functions as an agent of change in the story. Laurence comes up with a plan to bring a clinic to one of the nearby villages because the villagers are not coming to the hospital. Laurence has a very strong sense of right and wrong. Laurence's honesty and morality fly in the face of the status quo and cause much resentment. Eventually his morality causes his demise.

## Maria

Maria is the black village woman who owns the souvenir shack. Although Maria is the name she tells Frank to use, it is not her real name. Maria lives in the souvenir shack



under the most austere of conditions. Her husband set her up with this business and occasionally returns to visit her. Maria and Frank have a long term arrangement (it really cannot be called an affair) that allows him to visit her at night for sex. Frank also gives her money (although gifts of money were not part of the initial arrangement).

## Tehogo

The 'nurse' at the hospital, Tehogo performs the duties of a nurse and an orderly, although he is not actually qualified to do so. Tehogo is sullen, barely communicates and is, at times, frightening. His erratic behavior is tolerated because there is no one to take his place. His only friend is Raymond is somewhat of a 'pretty boy.' Tehogo dresses well and he has jewelry and money that no one knows the source of. Tehogo is actually looting the hospital.

## Colonel Moller

Colonel Moller first met Frank when they were in the army together. Colonel Moller and his men were brutally torturing a black soldier and he called Dr. Eloff to assess whether the man could take any more torture. Frank did not stand up to him which essentially gave Colonel Moller permission to continue with the torture. In this way, Colonel Moller is an integral part of the self-hatred in Frank's life. Moller appears again as a part of the contingent of soldiers who are sent to patrol the border to stop the illegal trafficking of guns and drugs. Moller dredges up old demons for Frank and in the end Colonel Moller does not even remember encountering Frank so many years ago.





## Objects/Places

### The Hospital

The hospital is the neglected, looted, under-supplied facility where the story takes place. It is on the homeland side of the country and, thus, not funded. It is a hospital in name only.

### The City Hospital

The big, well-supplied, well-funded hospital in the white section where all of the patients who need anything but the most minor amount of care, as well as those on whom mistakes have been made, are taken.

### Souvenir Shack

Maria's place of business and residence where she sells cheap souvenirs to tourists by day and has sex with Frank at night.

### Mama's Place

The village 'watering hole' is the only social gathering place in the village. Both the locals and the soldiers come here to drink and unwind.

### Frank's Room

Once his retreat, Frank now shares his room with Laurence. It is very sparsely furnished.

### Tehogo's Room

The opposite of Frank's room Tehogo's room is full of trash, women's fashion magazines and things he's looted from the hospital.

### The Brigadier's Compound

Now locked up and empty, the huge house on the hill is where the Brigadier used to live.



## **Frank's Father's House**

Where Frank grew up — a house of money and cruelty.

## **Maria's Village**

The site of Laurence's first and only clinic—the beginning and the end of new things.

## **Water's White Coat**

Upon arrival, Frank tells Laurence that the doctors don't wear their white coats here, but Laurence puts it on and does not take it off because it symbolizes who he is and he can not lay it aside.



# Themes

## Idealism vs. Reality

Post-apartheid South Africa provides the setting for the clash of the political ideal of black and white working together and the reality of separation and discrimination. Caught within this clash are Laurence, the idealist and Frank, the realist. Laurence's idealism is also frequently challenged by the reality of his circumstances. He has come to this hospital to do meaningful work because Laurence envisions himself as doing his part to relieve suffering and save humanity. However, the reality is that this is a sham of a hospital and Laurence will have to take his skills to the villages in order to reach the people who need him. Laurence has come to do good work, yet there seems to be no work to do. The hospital should be a place of healing, yet it is without patients and it is in need of healing itself. There is no apartheid anymore, officially and yet the hospital on the white side gets all the funding, while the hospital on the former "homeland" (black) side gets none. There is no more apartheid, yet Laurence still can not room with Tehogo because Laurence is white and Tehogo is black.

## Betrayal

Frank was betrayed by his wife with his best friend. Laurence betrays Frank when he tells Dr. Ngema that it was Frank who saw Tehogo's 'stash' of looted hospital parts. Frank and Zanele betray Laurence by having sex with each other. Frank sees Maria's request for money as a betrayal of their 'relationship.' Maria sees Frank's arrival in her village, during the day, in front of her husband, as a betrayal of their arrangement to keep their lives separate. Dr. Ngema is betrayed time and again by those in charge of her future when she is promised a promotion and then the opportunity disappears. Claudia Santander has betrayed her husband by her affair with Frank. Frank betrays everyone, including himself, as a way of life. The hospital itself is a betrayal in that it offers healing but can not deliver. Every time someone is seriously hurt, they must be transported to the big hospital in the city.

## Emptiness

This book is full of emptiness and wasted potential. The hospital itself is a monument to useless form without function. It is a hospital in name only. Rooms stand unused and empty, the staff is unused and their lives essentially empty of purpose. The Brigadier's house on the hilltop appears regal from a distance, but it is in reality wasted, empty and locked up. Frank's relationship with Maria is empty of real emotion or communication as is Laurence's with Zanele, although on a different level. Frank's father's marriage is empty of respect and compassion. Frank and Laurence spend their time trying to fill up their empty lives; Laurence seeks purpose and validation while Frank just seeks oblivion.



# Style

## Point of View

The Good Doctor is written in first person omniscient, with Dr. Frank Eloff as the narrator.

## Setting

The Good Doctor is set in a poor, small, rural hospital in the former 'homeland' (black) part of post-apartheid South Africa. This is an important backdrop as it is the reason for the hospital's existence and for its disrepair. The town itself Frank calls a "ghost town" (p.5), which is, "uninhabited, in which nothing has ever happened," (p.4). It was, 'a town that had been conceived and planned on paper, by evil bureaucrats in a city far away,' arbitrarily choosing it and marking it as their 'homeland' (p.4). The hospital is, 'not a real hospital. It is a joke' (p.5) according to Frank. The people do not come there because, "It's where the army came from. It's where their puppet dictator lived. They hate this place." (p.6) The hospital is in extreme disrepair, with, 'frail plants wilting in their pots,' (p.1), the bare minimum of furniture and no real comforts. The grounds are overgrown and not maintained, even though the staff has plenty of time on their hands, given the lack of patients, to accomplish the work should they so desire.

## Language and Meaning

The language is straight-forward, almost stark. It mirrors the environment and the lifestyle of the inhabitants. The language is without frills and without embellishment, just like Frank.

## Structure

The Good Doctor has nineteen chapters. The plot is linear with occasional use of flashbacks to fill us in on details and relationships as they exist presently.



## Quotes

"The first time I saw him I thought, he won't last." (Chapter 1, p.1)

"So for a while I had two lives: one that was empty and adrift, in the hospital by day and another that was illicit and intense, by the side of the road at night. The one had nothing to do with the other." (Chapter 3, p.26)

"Innovation and change: it was one of her key phrases, a mantra she liked to repeat. But it was empty. Ruth Ngema would go to great lengths to avoid any innovation or change, because who knew what might follow on?" (Chapter 4, p.33)

"When he said, 'I would never do that to you,' he was telling me that he was a true friend. I think he felt that way almost from the first day. Yet the feeling wasn't mutual. He was a room-mate to me, a temporary presence who was disturbing my life." (Chapter 5, p.47)

"It would have made no difference. You didn't have a choice. You only answered the question." (Chapter 6, p.67)

"It was as if somebody had pushed a finger through a weak place in the fabric of my past and was looking in through the hole. And I had the odd temptation to look in too and see myself from outside. But I couldn't do it. I had found my grand defining moment, but what it revealed I didn't want to know." (Chapter 6, p.67)

"I like change and innovation, you know that. But it's how you change. Or in this case, when. That's what matters." (Chapter 7, p.87)

"It seems to me," I said, "that past a certain point, anything is exactly the same as nothing." (Chapter 8, p.97)

"Ideas are always better than reality, of course. But sooner or later the real world always wins." (Chapter 9, p.100)

"The past and the future are dangerous countries; I had been living in no man's land, between their borders, for the last seven years. Now I felt myself moving again and I was afraid." (Chapter 10, p.117)

"You can't change the way things are." (Chapter 14, p.169)

"The truth of this place was just absence and desertion." (Chapter 15, p.179)

"What had we come to at last? The familiar was turned on its head. The nurse had become a patient. The dedicated and caring young doctor had eyes only for himself, while I, the bitter unbeliever, would have prayed if I thought it would help." (Chapter 17, p.194)



"I had made my little confession, but he couldn't give me absolution. Acting on an impulse that I didn't understand, I took two steps towards him and held out my hand. He shook it. The gesture was nothing, an empty formality; the real transaction had happened a long time ago." (Chapter 18, p.204)



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss Laurence's need to make things hard on himself and his belief that good and meaningful work can only be done in remote areas, under conditions of great hardship and sacrifice.

Both Frank's and Laurence's "defining moments" are traumatic. Discuss the parallels between the two. Discuss how a jarring reality has seemingly different effects on both of their lives.

Frank deceives people as a way of life. Why is he so indignant at the thought of someone deceiving him, such as when Maria asks him for money or when Valerie retracts her statement that his father is ill?

Why does Frank think everyone else has to disclose themselves to him, but he refuses to disclose himself to anyone?

Why does Laurence feel the need to repeatedly profess his friendship to Frank?

In what ways are Frank and Laurence opposite of one another? In what ways are they the same?

Why is Laurence resented by Dr. Ngema? By Frank?

Why does Frank continue to return to Mama's place hoping to see Colonel Moller?

What does Frank's visit to his father's home reveal about why he is the way he is?

Why does Frank take continuous care of Tehogo after he is shot, while Laurence ignores him?

Is there a parallel between Frank's actions upon the disappearances of Maria and Tehogo and Laurence?

Who is Frank's enemy?

Is there a difference between change and transformation? Explain using examples from the book.