

In a Strange Room Study Guide

In a Strange Room by Damon Galgut

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Plot Summary

"In a Strange Room" by Damon Galgut is the story of Damon who begins in the story as a solitary and unhappy young man who is traveling by foot in Greece. Damon travels constantly not because he enjoys seeing the sights or because he wants to learn about other cultures and peoples. He stays on the move because he is fundamentally very unhappy with life and doesn't have as much time to think about his miserable existence while traveling from place to place. The story is set in modern times, but Damon, who hails from South Africa, spends the majority of his time on foot during the first of the three sections of the book. The reader is privy to Damon's private thoughts and when he encounters another traveler, it is apparent that he is intrigued by the slightly older man. They seem to have an immediate connection and wind up traveling together.

The first part of the book is entitled, "The Follower," and it is obvious that Damon, the younger of the two men, is the follower. The older man, a German named Reiner, is the dominant person in this traveling twosome. Reiner decides when they will begin their walk each day, where they will walk and how long they will walk each day. Damon, although ostensibly compliant, is grappling with a growing resentment for his co-traveler to whom he is both subservient and physically attracted. Their relationship ends when Damon finally blows up and vents all his complaints to Reiner.

In the next section, "The Lover," Damon is some years older now and is still traveling. He meets a young man on his travels named Jerome. Although they speak different languages, Damon finds the young man physically attractive. And although Jerome seems to recognize Damon's attraction for him and he seems to have a mild attraction for Damon himself, neither man has enough self-confidence to pursue a real, intimate relationship.

In the final section, "The Guardian," Damon has found his niche in life. As a caretaker for a mentally disturbed friend, Damon stays busy and finally has a feeling of purpose. He watches his friend, Anna, to make sure she takes her medications and stays away from alcohol and recreational drugs. He also has to stay vigilant so that she does not commit suicide which is a looming threat throughout their time together. Finally, Anna makes a serious attempt on her life and Damon is at her side during her recovery. However, Damon's inability to truly connect on an emotional level is obvious when he tells Anna that he will keep her alive while he's with her while he's her guardian. But when she leaves and returns home, he tells her she can do whatever she likes and presumably, even commit suicide.



Part One: The Follower

Part One: The Follower Summary

Pages 15 through 34

In the Greek countryside, a lone traveler encounters another traveler, a man dressed all in black. The traveler tells the man that he is staying in the hostel in the village. The traveler makes it to the ruins and tries to imagine the history of the place. The narrator indicates that he is the traveler although he feels he is watching a stranger.

Later that evening, the traveler returns to the hostel to find the man in his room. He missed the train for Athens. The traveler is uneasy although he tells the man he can stay with him until the morning when he can catch another train. The two men crawl into their sleeping bags, neither one undressing. The man, who is German, says his name is Reiner and the traveler is Damon, a South African.

The next day, the two men visit some ruins. Damon tells Reiner what he knows of the legend of grief and revenge behind the ruins. They hike up a mountain part way and rest. Damon tells Reiner that he has been traveling all over Europe. The German tells Damon that he has come to Greece to think. He has some personal problems he needs to resolve. The next day, the German reveals that a woman in Berlin wants to marry him but he does not want to marry her. He is also there because of someone else - a man. That evening, both men strip to their underwear. Reiner shares an apple with Damon. There is a tension between them, an obvious attraction. They go to the train station, exchanging contact information and go their own ways.

In Sparta, Damon sees a TV that shows the fighting and bombing of the Gulf War. He feels so removed from everything. He has no home but doesn't really like traveling. He travels because he is not happy anywhere. A year and a half later, Damon returns to Cape Town, South Africa, to a friend's house. A letter had arrived for him from the German. They begin exchanging letters. Reiner is in Canada working on a forestry project. Damon is miserable and expresses his wish that Reiner would visit. Reiner writes that he will be there. Reiner arrives and is greeted at the airport by Damon who takes him back to his apartment. There is only one bed but Reiner insists on sleeping on the balcony.

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Reiner suggests they take a hiking trip to a region called Lesotho. In the two weeks before they depart for Lesotho, Damon begins to notice that Reiner goes everywhere with him and ridicules his daily, mundane tasks. Reiner tells Damon that he is a philosopher, making Damon wonder how Reiner supports himself. Damon sees differences between them. He likes to walk but not obsessively like Reiner. Reiner is an obsessive person and he studies the Lesotho map for hours without a break. He wears



earplugs so he is not distracted by outside noise. The men get some camping gear together. Reiner is especially excited about the trip and will fund it. Damon can pay him back but he won't have to. Money is a trivial thing to Reiner.

The first leg of the trip is on a train to Bloemfontein. There they take a taxi to the Lesotho border. Expecting a quaint setting, they are surprised to arrive in the city of Maseru and find hotels, casinos and crowded streets. They get a hotel with a room high over the street. They look around town and return to the hotel where they go to a sauna where a woman offers to give them a massage. They eat dinner and Reiner goes back to the sauna for a massage. He doesn't return and Damon goes to sleep. The next morning Reiner tells Damon he slept with the sauna woman. The sex helped him get rid of his tension. They depart and head to the mountains. They hike through the wooded foothills. Damon is fatigued and would rest if he were alone but Reiner does not let up and Damon is forced to keep up with him. After darkness falls, they finally stop. There is no where to pitch the tent which thrills Reiner because they have to sleep in the open, exposed. They sleep in a cave. The sexual tension still exists between them.

They buy food at a small grocery. Oddly Reiner buys things like potatoes and tins that will be heavy to carry. He buys chocolate, too, because he likes it. Damon feels resentment that Reiner is controlling what they buy and where and how long they walk. They do share chores like pitching the tent and cooking. The days fall into a pattern. They get up and walk early and take a break during the hottest part of the day. Late in the afternoon, they head out on their final walk of the day. At sunset they find a place to sleep. They pass villages where people wave and call to them. At times, Reiner insists they take short cuts and leave the road which makes Damon uneasy.

Page 55 through 84

After a week, they complete the first part of their trip and camp in an abandoned seminary in a town called Roma. The next morning they take off for the Drakensberg mountains. That night it rains and they cannot find a place to camp. A local priest sends them to the village where they sleep on the mud floor of a hut. The next day they plan to undertake their longest walk to a settlement named Semonkong. Although the two men look alike and seem alike, there are many differences in them. Perhaps that's why they remain silent. There is a silent struggle for ascendancy. Reiner bathes each morning in river water or bottled water. He makes sure that he is where Damon can see him which infuriates Damon. Reiner continues to dominate in their choices of food and their travels. Damon sees Reiner as someone who is loved. Damon equates being loved with having power. He feels powerless.

One night Reiner tells Damon that he wants to travel 60 kilometers the next day to challenge himself. The next day, they head for the mountain road which is about an hour away. The road to Semonkong is seemingly endless. Even when night falls, they still walk. Finally, Damon suggests they stop but Reiner wants to keep going. In the dark, they reach a village and take a room, too exhausted to pitch their tent. They stay there a few days. They are exchanging very few words. Reiner wants to continue a pattern of big walks followed by days of rest. Damon is exhausted. He busies himself around the



camp trying to revive himself. He feels he's in a strange room and must empty his mind of thoughts before he can sleep.

The camp owner tells them where there is a beautiful view of the area. They find the spot and as Reiner stands there near the mountain edge, a flash goes through Damon's mind of how easy it would be to push Reiner over the edge. The next day, Reiner decides they should do a night hike. During their night walk, a powerful storm hits. They have just enough time to get their tent up for shelter against the downpour. The next morning all is clear. Damon makes tea as Reiner goes off for a short walk. Later, Reiner wants to leave but Damon is still looking for some of the tent pegs that were lost in the storm. Reiner says to leave them. When Damon insists they stay and find the pegs, Reiner says nothing but takes his backpack and walks off. Damon grabs his belongings and eventually follows.

Damon takes a short cut and not only catches up with Reiner, but he lands on the road ahead of him. Later when they are walking together, Damon falls on a slick rock but Reiner doesn't help him or bother to wait for him. When Damon catches up again, he confronts Reiner, demanding to know why he didn't wait. Reiner tells him they will discuss it later, which only enrages Damon all the more. He begins throwing things out of his rucksack in anger. He rages at Reiner, telling him of all the ways Reiner has annoyed him during their trip. Damon storms off but Reiner stops him. He hands him a fifty rand note. Damon is penniless and so it takes it. They say good-bye.

Later, Damon begins to feel guilty for abandoning Reiner but there is no way he can find him. He stays in the hut and the next day he gets a ride with a woman who's going to Maseru. She is a young American woman and tells Damon to get in the back of her van with her workers. The woman drops him on the edge of the Maseru. Damon decides to head north to Pretoria where his mother lives. He walks along the road unable to hitch a ride. He asks a driver to take him to Pretoria but the charge is 70 rand. He only has 30 left. The driver agrees to take him when he offers him his watch in addition to the money.

Damon stays in Pretoria for several weeks. He wonders what Reiner is doing. He calls friends in Cape Town to see if they might have seen him. His friends are appalled that he left Reiner making Damon question his actions. Damon travels to Cape Town and after a short while runs into Reiner. He's staying with an acquaintance. He is haggard and exhausted. He plans to be taking a flight home in about a week but is so weak and ill that he stays three months to recover. Damon does not visit Reiner but asks others about him. Reiner also asks about Damon. Finally, Reiner recovers, is sent money from someone and makes plans to fly home. They run into each other in the post office but don't talk. In fact, Reiner storms off which gives Damon a sense of victory. Damon sees Reiner one evening in the street, walking with a woman. Reiner leaves Cape Town and Damon knows that it is the end. He wasn't sure if their relationship was based on love or hate.



Part One: The Follower Analysis

Pages 15 through 34

Damon is a South African who is traveling throughout Europe. He travels only because he is not happy anywhere. He does not explain the source of his sadness, leaving it as a mystery and perhaps foreshadowing an event or problem that is haunting him and that will be revealed later in the book. He meets Reiner, a German, who openly confesses he is trying to get away from his personal problems. He refers to a woman and a man he is trying to leaving behind, intimating that the man may be bi-sexual. The two men make a strong connection even though they spend only a few days together. There is a sexual tension between Damon and Reiner that is still strong when they reunite two years later. The narrator of the story indicates that he is actually Damon although he had not initially made that point clear.

Pages 35 through 54

Reiner and Damon take off on a trip to Lesotho. It was a place Reiner found on the map. Reiner makes all the decision about their trip and finances the trip for both of them. Reiner is a mysterious, very controlling person. He claims to be a philosopher but he does not seem to philosophize about much. He does things that he knows intuitively will annoy Damon. He sleeps with an older woman who gives massages at the hotels sauna. He flaunts his sexual encounter knowing that Damon is attracted to him. Reiner decides to purchase heavy foods like potatoes and food tins even though they will be heavy to carry. He gives Damon absolutely no voice in what they do. It seems as though he is trying to provoke Damon who quietly seethes but says nothing. Damon resents Reiner's dominance but he seems unable to stand up to him. Even when he is exhausted and wants to rest, he will suffer in silence until Reiner says it is time to stop. Damon is completely dominated by Reiner.

Page 55 through 84

Damon is both a character in the book and the story's narrator. That fact is not always made clear. The writer varies between referring alternately to Damon by his name and by the pronouns "he" and "him" and then referring to the character by the pronouns "I" and "me." Damon is an unhappy person who does not feel loved. He equates love with power which is why he feels that Reiner must be loved because he seems so powerful. But Reiner's power is just Damon's fantasy. He has bestowed that power upon Reiner by allowing him to control everything about the trip they take together. Damon is completely subservient to Reiner and Reiner is aware of it and apparently enjoys it.

Resentment grows within Damon because of the inequity of their relationship. Damon's meek personality makes the reader wonder what in Damon's past caused him to have so little self-worth. It is also not clear why Damon agreed to go on the walking trip with Reiner because he is miserable ninety-nine percent of the time. It is difficult for the reader to summon up much sympathy for Damon since he is an adult and did not have



to go on the trip. There are continuing indications, however, that Damon has a sexual attraction to Reiner but never acts on it.

The account of the trip that Damon and Reiner took is completely joyless. The only pleasure that Damon seemed to have was when he and Reiner were in the post office at the same time. It was Reiner who could not bear to stay in the same room with Damon. Damon wonders at the end whether their relationship was based on love or hate. It could possibly veer more towards the latter since at one point Damon contemplates murdering Reiner.



Part Two: The Lover

Part Two: The Lover Summary

Pages 85 through 104

Damon is traveling in Zimbabwe a few years later. He is still a nomad without a home. He has failed to connect with the world in any meaningful way. He feels like a failure and cannot give or receive love. One night he takes the overnight train to Victoria Falls. He enjoys the isolation and darkness of the nighttime journey and doesn't want it to end. The next morning, he finds his way to a camp and pitches his tent. He watches the power and fury of the falls. He goes white-water rafting. During the whole time, he feels he is both taking part in the activities and watching himself doing so.

Damon is invited to join a group of travelers who are going to Malawi, Zambia. One of the travelers is Richard, an Australian. Damon feels comfortable with the group and feels no pressure to "fit in." They take a train and in the middle of the night everyone is woken up by the sound of broken glass and a scream. A light is turned on revealing a man clutching his bloodied face and moaning. A rock had been thrown through the window near him. More rocks pelt the train car. When the assault ends, a woman with triplets asks if she can sit by Damon. The window by her was broken and it was allowing cold wind to blow in on her babies. The woman nurses the babies, two at a time. Damon holds the third one while she's nursing the others.

The next morning, they arrive in Lusaka which has all the earmarks of a shanty town. The group goes to a bus station for the next leg of their trip. It is chaos there but Damon notices three white travelers across the room, a woman and two men, wondering who they are. They take a bus to the border which takes eight hours. They are processed at the Malawian border. Damon, as a South African, is the only one who can pass through the border—the others will need a visa. He walks up to the three white travelers. The older man tells Damon he is French and points to his two travelers, the man and woman who are much younger, and tells Damon that they are from Switzerland. Damon notices that the young man is so beautiful that it is almost shocking.

Damon stays with the original group who is finally able to cross the border. But he soon grows discontent with them. They have become loud and are constantly complaining about the country and are not sympathetic to the poor. Things improve when they arrive at the lake which entrances Damon. He watches the fisherman and enjoys the slow, laid-back pace. The local people facilitate the travelers. They arrange for them to fish; they row them out in the lake; prepare meals for them. This place seems like paradise.

Others tell Damon that it's a great place to live—people survive on next to nothing. Friendships are being made in the group and Damon is beginning to feel like an outsider. He is unable to even strike up casual conversations with the others. His feeling



of isolation worsens. He has angry confrontations with several others in the group. He decides to move on alone.

Damon travels to Monkey Bay where he meets up with the Frenchman, Christian, and the two young Swiss people, Alice and Jerome. They wind up on the same boat that Damon takes and he learns that the two young people are twins. Christian and Jerome met in West Africa and were later joined by Alice in their travels. He begins asking Jerome questions but he speaks little English and Christian has to translate for them. The boat docks at Nhkata Bay where Damon takes a long swim in the lake. When he returns, the three others are standing there. They decided to leave the boat and stay for a few days.

Damon tries to get time alone with Jerome but one of the others is always there. A few days later, Christian tells Damon they will be leaving for Tanzania. Christian invites Damon along and he accepts.

Pages 105 to 124

The next morning, Rodrigo, a man from Santiago, Chile, is waiting for the bus to Tanzania along with Damon and the others. The travelers arrive in Karonga and walk from the bus station to lodging. The thought of crossing a border always nags at Damon. It is leaving the known for the unknown. There is an invisible border within him. This time, Damon is unable to cross the border at Malawi because he has no visa. He pleads with the security man but to no avail. Christian and the others exchange contact information with him. Jerome invites him to Switzerland and Damon promises he will visit. He sees Rodrigo walk off with them. Rodrigo is the man who came to take his place.

A guard on the Malawi side tells Damon to offer the Tanzanian guard a bribe to get across. After he apologizes to him, the Tanzanian guard eventually accepts forty dollars and allows Damon to cross. Damon knew that Christian and the others were going to travel by bus to Mbeya. He takes the next bus to Mbeya arriving there three hours later. He gets a hotel near the station and spots Jerome and Christian across the street. He runs out and has a happy reunion with them. They take a taxi to the train station. Rodrigo tells Damon about the murder of an American that he had been traveling with.

Elections are being held in Tanzania and Damon worries about what will happen when his friends leave in a few days. He'll be all alone again. They arrive in the city of Dar es Salaam early in the morning and get a ride from a private couple who drives them to a cheap hotel. Christian, Jerome and Alice are in one room and Damon and Rodrigo are in another. Everyone is growing tired of Rodrigo's constant complaining. Christian is not able to use his credit card at the hotel. They all walk to a bank where Christian and Alice enter in an attempt to get some cash off his credit. Damon is finally alone with Jerome who grabs his arm and asks him to come to Switzerland. The bank won't give Christian any cash. The embassy tells Christian to travel to Kenya where he can get cash off his credit card. Everyone takes a bus to Kenya the next day so that Christian can get some



money. At lunch, it is Alice this time who asks Damon to come to Greece with them where her mother has a summer home. Damon promises to think about it.

Pages 125 to 146

Damon meets an older man in an antique store in town. The lanky man has a heavy English accent. Damon mentions he's off to Malawi in a few days. The next day, he returns to the shop and the English man asks if he would like company on his trip to Malawi. Damon tells him he would like a companion. When he returns to the hotel, the others have already left. He rushes to the bus station and tells them good-bye. Jerome asks him to come to Switzerland. He tells Jerome he will see him again. When he returns to the hotel, he reaches for his wallet to pay the proprietor for another night. Suddenly, there is a hand tugging at his fly. It is one of the local prostitutes. He rejects her and she mocks him. He goes to his room thinking of the friends he just parted with and cries.

Damon is depressed and sleeps a lot and wanders around the town. He visits Charles, the man in the antique shop, several times. He wants to leave for Malawi after the elections. He keeps forgetting Damon's name. After the election is over, Charles is ready to travel. They spend a night in a resort on the beach near Charles' family home. He regrets not going with Jerome and the others. He plans to go to Greece as soon as he can. They drive in Charles' car toward the border. Just before they get there, Charles pulls over and lights a joint. Turns out Charles is smuggling \$20,000 worth of Afghan rugs. They aren't discovered when they cross the border. In Dar es Salaam, they stay at the residence of an official at the embassy that Charles knows.

Charles and Damon are not getting along. Charles blames Damon for not watching the map and making him miss a turn. Charles either doesn't call him by name or calls him Noel. In Malawi, Damon says good-bye. Charles tries to get him to stay longer because he's afraid of the Malawians but Damon is firm. Charles asks for his contact information and Damon writes down his name as "Noel," and jots down a bogus phone number. He makes it home to Pretoria where he plans to make travel plans to see Jerome but an apathy comes over him and he puts it off.

Four months later, he goes to Europe. He travels to Amsterdam, then to Germany and Switzerland. He calls to let Jerome know he is coming but Alice answers the phone. She is happy to hear that he is coming. When he arrives at their house, Catherine, Jerome's mother, greets him along with his younger and older sister. He and Damon go on a walk before dinner. Jerome is in military school and home only on weekends. Damon sleeps on the floor in Jerome's room. Jerome takes him around with him and introduces him to his friends. Damon stays at the house even though Jerome returns to school. He feels comfortable with the family. Damon is back the next weekend. He seems different than when they were in Africa. He is terse and more remote. Jerome hints at the possibility of a trip together to Greece when he finishes military school in a few months.

Damon is getting stir-crazy and decides to leave for London. Jerome doesn't want him to go but Damon tells him he must go but that they will be together again, perhaps on



another trip. In London, the old restlessness returns and he travels to other towns. Eight months later, he is back in London and then on to Amsterdam and then plans to travel back to South Africa. He calls Jerome who begs him to visit. Damon considers it but then finally decides against it and goes to Paris instead. He calls Jerome who is disappointed but they agree to travel together, perhaps the next year.

Back in Africa, Damon is staying in the home of a friend. The friend is away and had told Damon he could stay there while the family was away. He begins to feel a genuine connection to the house and surroundings, a new experience for him. Damon receives a letter from a friend of Jerome's family. It announced the death of Jerome who died in a motorbike accident. Damon feels like he's lost in a strange place he's never been to before.

Part Two: The Lover Analysis

Pages 85 through 104

A young Swiss man becomes the sexual target of Damon. The man, Jerome, is traveling with his sister and an older man. The relationship between Christian and the two younger people is not clear. Prior to hooking up with them, Damon was on a trip with another group of people. His old demons come back to haunt him. As the others begin to form friendships, Damon begins to feel left out. He cannot connect with anyone. He begins to harbor resentment for the others and becomes silently critical of them.

Just as he did with Reiner, the rage in Damon builds to such a point that he blows up at the others. After his outburst, he strikes out on his own. Although he seems to choose to be alone, it seems that Damon is always anxious to connect with people. There are many inner conflicts that Damon is not facing or dealing with. It is obvious that he is attracted to the young Jerome but he doesn't seem to know how to advance the relationship.

Although he feels passionate about the young man, he is passive and just hopes to be alone with him but takes no active role in trying to pursue the object of his desire. He is suspicious that the older man, Christian, may be Jerome's lover. There always seems to be a barrier, real or perceived, between Damon and a person he feels an attraction for. Damon apparently does not feel worthy or capable of a close relationship.

Pages 105 to 124

Rodrigo joins the travelers. There is something mysterious about this man. He has tales of murder and Damon has a strange sensation that he is there to take Damon's place with the others. Damon's attraction for Jerome remains strong. He is bolstered when Jerome asks him to come to Switzerland. Jerome's emotional state signals his attraction to Damon. But Damon's passivity, which he describes it as an invisible border, stops him from taking the next step. As much as Damon travels and visits many different regions and lands, it is quite apparent that the man never seems to enjoy himself. He has a



fundamental belief that he is unworthy of love and he must, therefore, feel that he is undeserving of joy as well. Damon focuses on love alone and because he cannot achieve that, he denies himself of the other simple pleasures of life.

Pages 125 to 146

This part is called "The Lover," and it is obvious that the object of Damon's affection is the young Swiss, Jerome. Even though Damon is much older and more experienced in life than Jerome, something holds him back from pursuing the young man. It is probably still that separation he feels, the border that exists within him. Damon is a person who lives his life in his mind. Even though he spends time with others and Jerome who he apparently feels passionate about, he cannot seem to get out of himself. He is a very morose figure who does not allow himself to show his emotions.

In this section, Damon continues his pattern of staying on the move. He begins to feel most oppressed when he is standing still. Perhaps it allows too much time for him to think. Damon still has difficulty getting along with others. He travels with an older man, Charles, who he grows tired of. In a sense, Damon would rather be alone and seems happier then. But as soon as he is alone, he becomes obsessed with being with someone again. He has an unrequited love for Jerome but it will stay unrequited because the young man was killed in an accident. Damon seems to be destroyed. He had been staying alone in a friend's house and was for the first time feeling a connection with the house and the surrounding area. As soon as he received news of Jerome's death, that feeling of belonging completely evaporated.



Part Three: The Guardian

Part Three: The Guardian Summary

Page 147 through 168

Damon meets Anna at the airport. She is an old friend who has a history of mental problems. At an airport bar, she orders a beer. Damon reminds her with all the medication she is on that she should not be drinking. She cancels the drink but as soon as the plane takes off she orders a whiskey. One won't hurt, she tells him. She displays strange behavior during the flight. In Bombay, they check into the hotel but she leaves immediately for the bar. Anna has suffered from mental conditions for quite a while. She had undergone electro-shock treatment for her problems.

Damon and Anna will be heading for a small quiet village near Goa where she will be able to relax, free of the normal stresses of life. She plans to stay for eight weeks. Damon watches Anna carefully to make sure she takes her medication. Anna is a friend and is like a sister to Damon and he feels protective of her, like a guardian. He realizes that the real danger to Anna lies within her. Damon is middle-aged now and had been to India two other times for extended stays and had actually begun to feel a connection to the place. Damon and Anna travel to a little village near Margao.

Anna has severe mood swings despite the medication she is taking. She also displays manic and obsessive behaviors. She comments that it would be nice if they could make love. But it's impossible, he tells her. Her female partner is his best friend. Besides, he didn't think she was into men. Her relationship with her partner is over, she tells him. Anna's very pretty and has a sexual encounter with an American. When he leaves town, she is on the hunt for another man. He's been keeping in touch with Anna's girlfriend about her condition but he doesn't tell her about Anna's sexual escapades. Anna falls for a fifty-year-old Frenchman named, Jean. She becomes obsessed with him but he refuses to be intimate with her. Jean is not good for Anna. Damon learns later that Jean's been giving Anna hash, cocaine and alcohol.

Damon takes Anna off on a trip around the region, leaving Jean behind. Anna is displaying aberrant behavior. She talks of Jean incessantly and gets into disputes with strangers. Damon is always watching her, cleaning up after her. She has become a stranger, someone he doesn't know. He hit the boiling point one afternoon when she came back to the hotel on a cocaine high. He confronts her and she becomes weepy and sorry, like a child. If she doesn't stay clean and sober, he warns her he will leave.

They visit a temple in Madurai. She wants to spend more time there than he does, so they separate for a while. They reunite at the train station where they will travel to Bangalore. Anna is sobbing. Someone stole her medications she tells Damon. Damon can feel himself becoming colder, more remote toward her. On the train, she remembers that she left her medications in the cloakroom at the station. The conductor stops the



train so she can call the station. She learns that the cloakroom is closed for the day. They continue on the train. Another passenger volunteers to contact the the railway police about the matter. The man is able to have the medication tracked down and it will be delivered to her.

Anna feels relieved about the medication but confesses that she was planning on committing suicide on the train. That's why she wanted her medication since she was going to take it all. After being honest with Damon, Anna seems more like her old self. The medicine comes the next day and they travel on to Hampi to see the ancient Hindu ruins. Unfortunately, the setting is disturbing to Anna and she becomes depressed again and she wants to move on.

Pages 169 through 188

Damon announces to Anna that he will be going to Margao by himself. Back in their room later, Anna is in her nightgown. She says she's tired from swim. Damon does some chores then notices a big pile of pill containers on the floor next to her bed. He realizes that she has overdosed. He rushes to her and tries but fails to wake her. Finally he shakes her and her eyes open. She ingested all 250 pills. He runs down to the restaurant and shouts to the waiter to call a doctor. He tries to get her to throw them up. Caroline, another hotel guest heard the commotion and comes in the room. She pours salt water down Anna's throat and then tries to gag her with a long reed.

Damon and Caroline drag Anna to her car and take her to the hospital. The doctor decides to pump her stomach. A nurse pumps saline solution down Anna's throat. The nurse draws the liquid back and tells Damon that her stomach is empty. Caroline was watching and said she thinks the nurse got the tube in her lung. Although the nurse denied it, Caroline was right. The doctor calls for a stomach wash. Her lungs were filled with liquid from the saline solution and she eventually develops pneumonia. She is sent to intensive care where she is placed on a heart-lung machine. She is in a serious state. The decision is made to transfer her to a better hospital in Panjim. An ambulance will take her there and Caroline volunteers to ride with her.

Damon goes back to their room to gather some of her belongings. He finds her journal and there is a message written there for him. She tells him not to feel guilty about her suicide. She did not want to return home because she would have been admitted. There are instructions about what to do with her body and possessions. The owner of the hotel volunteers to drive Damon to Panjim. When they arrive, Anna has still not been admitted. She looks lifeless. Caroline tells Damon she fears that Anna is dying. She is finally admitted and is sent to the ICU. Damon realizes that he must sit with her as long as she's there. They do not seem to be giving her much attention.

A friend of Damon's named Sjeff happens by and volunteers to take turns watching Anna. They will keep up a vigil. The first night is very long and sleepless. By the next morning, Anna is no better. Damon returns to the hotel to handle messages and emails. He gets in touch with Anna's girlfriend who wants to come to be by Anna's bedside but it's too complicated—she has no visa and it would take forever for her to gain passage.



Damon feels he must tell Anna's girlfriend about her affair with Jean. He tells the woman that Anna said their relationship was over and she wants to be with this man. Reading more of her journal, he sees that Anna had been planning her suicide for quite some time.

Damon cleans up the tell-tale medication wrappers. Suicide is a crime in India. He contacts the South African embassy in Bombay to gain their support in case the Indian authorities try to arrest Anna—that is, if she survives. By the third day, Anna is moving a little, showing some signs of life. She is moved out of ICU. Anna starts to come around enough to communicate and get out of her bed with help. But she is hallucinating. She refers to the woman in the next bed as enormous when the woman is actually tiny. Sjef watches her that night and when Damon returns, he learns that the night was a rough one. The weak and almost angelic Anna has turned into a bitter shrew. She is complaining about Sjef and cursing him out despite being reminded that Sjef sat with her for days to make sure she was okay. Anna rages at Damon for leaving her with Sjef. She acts like a totally different person.

Pages 189 to 207

Damon tells Anna that he and Sjef are doing everything they can to keep her alive. She tells him that she didn't ask them to keep her alive. He responds that he'll keep her alive until she returns to South Africa. After that, she can do what she will. Anna is fighting infection. Caroline comes by and helps Damon apply ice to her body to bring her temperature down. Anna seems to like the attention and becomes her other, angelic self. But without provocation, she turns back into her dark self. She gets worse by the day. As she becomes stronger, she becomes more powerful and wily. She is bent on self-destruction and Damon is just as determined that she fails.

As her health improves, she is shifted to different wards, rooms that are over-crowded with sometimes two people in the same bed. She angrily proclaims that she will not stay under those conditions. She demands to leave but the doctors are vague as to when she will be discharged. It may depend on the results of a psychological examination. When she finally is discharged, she will not be able return to the village. Damon will have to see that she's put right on a plane. A police officer stops by one day and tells Anna that she will be detained by the police after she is released from the hospital. Strangely, Anna is happy to see him. A doctor advises Damon to take her out before the hospital notifies the police that she's being discharged. But where to take her?

Damon is put in touch with Dr. Ajoy who runs a private hospital. He agrees to take Anna into his facility. Damon, Caroline and Sjef get her an early release and quickly get her to a taxi. Anna is upset when she realizes she's not going back to the hotel and the beach. She goes berserk when she is taken into her hospital room. Anna is kept heavily sedated at the private hospital but she is still demanding and difficult. Luckily, there are hospital attendants and it's not necessary for Damon or anyone to stay with her around the clock. Finally, she is released from the hospital and Damon brings her passport and plane ticket and rucksack to the hospital. Damon and Anna say goodbye there at the hospital.



Damon has to adjust to the lack of activity and tension after Anna leaves. He hears word that Anna arrived home safely and has entered a clinic there. Damon is relieved that Anna is no longer his problem. He stays in touch with Caroline. At the same time he feels like he owes Caroline a debt of gratitude, he resents her since she reminds him of the turmoil surrounding Anna. Caroline is beset by insomnia and fits of depression. He senses that she is becoming dependent on him and that she thinks he can bring her out of her bad frame of mind. She tells him the sad story of what happened to her husband thirty years before. He leaves for Bombay and takes with him the dreadful experience with Anna and Caroline's sad tale.

Anna keeps in touch. She had been released from the clinic, broke up with her girlfriend and gotten her own place. But then she had a relapse and was suicidal again, starving herself and placed back in the clinic. Later, she is out again and going back to work. He doesn't return her letters since that chapter of his life is over. Damon receives word that Anna finally got her way. A friend found her dead in her apartment—an overdose. Damon continues to travel because he cannot stay in one place.

Years later when he's traveling in Morocco, he visits the grave of Caroline's husband and a woman who died in the same accident. Although he didn't know them and it had been so many years, he cannot stop crying.

Part Three: The Guardian Analysis

Page 147 through 168

In this section, Damon is the protector, the guardian. His charge is an old friend who has mental and emotional problems. He is now middle-aged and seems more engaged than in the past. His maturity has allowed him to grow outside himself, be concerned with the welfare of someone other than himself. Perhaps it took someone who Damon perceived to be in a worse emotional condition than he was to feel some compassion.

Damon has had his own share of emotional problems in the past. Although he is being "strong" for Anna, one would question whether spending so much time of eight weeks with someone with serious mental problems and who apparently is in a downward spiral is healthy for him. What long-range impact could this experience have on Damon?

Damon tries to do his best in monitoring Anna's intake of drugs but feels totally frustrated to learn that she is drinking and using cocaine. More than concern for her relapse, he feels betrayal. Perhaps he did not fully recognize the deteriorated state that Anna was in. It seems as though his expectations may have been unrealistic, thinking that in her imbalanced state should could have been sincere about recovering. As usual, Damon allows his anger to build slowly and as in the past when he gets to a certain point, he explodes. He warns her that he will abandon her if she continues to abuse alcohol and drugs. It is rather immature of him not to understand that anger and threats will not have a positive impact on someone with emotional and mental issues.

Pages 169 through 188



Damon has had enough of Anna and protecting her since it seems she's doing little to help herself. After he confronts her again and tells her he's leaving, Anna crams all her pills - all 250 of them - down her throat and nearly commits suicide. Damon is frantic and begins blaming himself for not seeing the red flags that she was putting up since the trip began. Since Damon had always been such a self-absorbed person, he probably felt that he had let her down. After all, his anger and decision to leave had brought on the attempt on her life. He reads her journal in which she tells him not to feel guilty about her suicide. It wasn't his fault and it was something she had been planning for a long time.

But often those who commit or attempt suicide want the person who is closest to them at the time to feel guilty. Anna's attempted suicide probably brought back to mind how he had, in a way, abandoned Jerome so many years before. Had he stayed with Jerome like he begged him to, perhaps Jerome wouldn't have died. Now, he felt responsible for Anna's attempted suicide. Telling Anna that he was leaving was enough to put her over the edge. She was a weak and fragile person.

Pages 189 to 207

Something within Damon compels him to feel duty-bound in protecting Anna. Although this section began by describing Anna as a friend and like a sister, Damon shows very little real love or caring for her. He tends to her—sometimes around the clock—because he feels it's his responsibility not because he really cares for her. It is a challenging relationship, but he has the tenacity to keep it together and is militant about her welfare. His real feelings are revealed when she screams at him to let her die. He responds that he will do everything in his power to keep her alive until she returns to South Africa. After that, she can do whatever she likes—for example, commit suicide. In that exchange, it is obvious that his true relationship with Anna is being her guardian which does not equate true caring.

Damon resents Caroline's growing dependency upon him. He apparently does not want to be her guardian. She tells him about the horrible death her husband suffered some thirty years before. He seems to have no sympathy for her and instead, he is most concerned with how her sad tale impacts him and resents that he takes the sadness with him. Years later, he finds the man's grave and sobs uncontrollably. Damon is not crying for the man or for Anna or Caroline or even Jerome. Damon is crying for himself.



Characters

Damon

Damon is the main character in the novel, "In a Strange Room." Damon is a deeply unhappy person who continuously travels so that he is distracted and does not have to dwell on his own misery. He seems utterly joyless in his travels. Damon visits ruins and exotic places but is never impressed by or engaged in what he is doing or experiencing. The three sections of the book have eponymous titles in that they relate to Damon's current emotional state.

The first section is entitled, "The Follower." In this first section of the three vignettes, Damon is a young man who is traveling alone. Damon is young and becomes subservient to an older man who he decides to travel with. He represses his resentment until it boils over and he blows up in anger at his companion. In the second part entitled, "The Lover," Damon is physically attracted to a young, "beautiful" man but is not equipped with the emotional ability to pursue that "love."

In "The Guardian," the concluding section of the book, Damon has matured and found a way to connect with another person. While still incapable of a deep, intimate relationship, Damon has finally discovered his purpose in life. He takes on the role of caretaker for a friend who is emotionally and mentally disturbed.

Anna

In the third vignette of "In a Strange Room," Anna is a featured character. The main character of the book, Damon, is traveling with Anna in various remote areas of India. Anna has a long history of emotional and mental illness. Damon has agreed to travel with Anna to a quiet place where Anna can relax and be free of the stress of living and working in the populous Cape Town, South Africa. During the course of a day, Anna must take numerous prescribed medications to treat her mental condition. Damon's job is to watch her carefully to make sure she stays on the medication and stays away from alcohol and recreational drugs.

Damon soon learns that Anna is a handful. Against doctor's orders, she consumes alcohol and takes cocaine and Damon is unable to do much to stop her. Anna is getting away from a stressful job and a long-term relationship with another woman. Anna wants to end the relationship with the woman and begins having sexual encounters with men during her stay in India. She meets a Frenchman named Jean whom she falls in love with.

After Damon washes his hands of her and tells her that he is leaving the resort, Anna freaks out and overdoses on her prescription drugs. She takes over 250 pills and is unconscious when Damon realizes what she has done. She is rushed to the hospital and after a long stay there, she eventually pulls through. She returns to South Africa



and to her job. Damon learns later that she attempted suicide again and that time was successful.

Jerome

Jerome is the young Swiss man who Damon has a powerful attraction for. Jerome seems to be attracted to Damon as well but neither take any action to deepen the relationship.

Alice

Alice is Jerome's twin sister. She travels with Damon, Jerome, and Christian in Africa. She invites Damon to their home in Switzerland.

Christian

Christian is an older Frenchman who is traveling with Jerome and Alice when Damon meets them in Africa. Damon is not sure of the relationship between Christian and Jerome.

Charles

Charles owns an antique shop in Tanzania. He asks Damon to accompany him to Malawi with him. Charles smuggles Afghan rugs over the border.

Catherine

Catherine is Jerome and Alice's mother. She welcomes Damon to their home and does not mind how long he stays.

Caroline

Caroline is a former nurse who helps Damon take care of Anna after she tries to commit suicide. Caroline has a sad tale to tell Damon about losing her husband many years before.

Jean

The troubled Anna had been in a long-time lesbian relationship back in Cape Town. While staying in India, she meets a Frenchman named Jean with whom she falls in love.

Rodrigo

Rodrigo is a fellow traveler from Santiago, Chile. He joins Damon, Christian, Alice and Jerome on their trip to Tanzania.



Objects/Places

Cape Town, South Africa

The main character in the novel, "In a Strange Room," is Damon who is a native of Cape Town, South Africa.

Lesotho, South Africa

Damon travels to Lesotho, South Africa, with his companion, Reiner. They are surprised when they arrive there to find a bustling city with casinos and an active nightlife.

Drakensberg Mountains

Damon and his traveling companion, Reiner, hike for many days in the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa.

Zimbabwe

Damon is traveling around Zimbabwe when he encounters a group of travelers who ask him to join them.

Malawi, Zambia

Damon travels with a large group of travelers in Zambia. They stay in the city of Malawi.

Tanzania

Damon travels to Tanzania with three Europeans he meets in Zambia. They stay in the city of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

Kenya

When the Europeans Damon is traveling with cannot use their credit cards in Tanzania, they take a bus to Kenya where they are able to get cash advances off their credit cards.



Europe

Damon spends some time in London and the surrounding English countryside. He then travels to Amsterdam and Germany.

Switzerland

Damon spends several weeks at the residence of Jerome and Alice, two of the Europeans he met and traveled with in Africa.

India

Damon travels with Anna to remote areas of India including Goa, Margao, and Bangalore.



Themes

Co-Dependency

The story told in the novel, "In a Strange Room," is one of a unhappy man who must keep traveling in order to feel he has purpose and to distract him from facing what he perceives to be his own miserable existence. However, an underlying theme throughout the story is the co-dependence that exists between various characters in the book.

In the first vignette entitled, "The Follower," the main character, Damon, is traveling by foot among the ruins in the Greek countryside. He encounters Reiner who is also a solo traveler. Later, the two meet up again to hike in a mountainous region in South Africa. Damon, who suffers from low self-esteem, is "the follower" in this story and Reiner is the domineering force. At first blush, one would think of Damon as co-dependent on Reiner, the person who makes all the decisions about their travels. However, on further inspection, Reiner is also co-dependent since he could not feel powerful unless he had some one to order about. His need to be dominant is dependent upon another person being subservient to him.

In the second part of the book entitled, "The Lover," a more mature Damon is attracted to a younger man named Jerome. They both appear to be attracted to each other but neither has the confidence to elevate the relationship to the next level. Each man is aware of the attraction by the other but is apparently satisfied to maintain the fantasy. Healthier individuals would not be happy with such a relationship but their shared lack of confidence made it possible. Their ability to maintain the relationship as a fantasy was dependent on each of them not exposing the pretense.

In the third and final story, Damon finally finds purpose in life when he becomes the caretaker for a friend who is suffering from emotional and mental problems. Her sickness gives his life some meaning. Anna, the friend he is tending to, is dependent on Damon to keep her on her medications and remain clean and sober.

Repressed Emotions

Damon, the constant traveler in the novel, "In a Strange Place," is always in a strange place. He prefers this. When he is stagnant too long in a familiar place, he has too much time to think about how unhappy he is. One of the main reasons he is miserable is that he has never learned to allow love and true intimacy in his life. He thinks of himself as unworthy of love. He describes an invisible border that he feels is inside him - something that will not allow him to venture over an imaginary emotional marker that he has created.

As a young man, he travels with a German man named Reiner. Reiner is aware of Damon's attraction to him and flaunts his well-turned out physic in front of him. Although Damon is tempted by Reiner's allure, he can never muster up the courage to pursue the



interest that he has in him. Instead, Damon silently fumes in resentment because of the conflicted feelings he has for Reiner and his powerlessness to do anything about them. When the relationship ends in anger, Damon comments that he wasn't sure if he loved or hated Reiner.

A few years later when he is wiser and more mature, Damon still suffers from emotional immaturity. He is attracted to a young man who seems to return the attraction. The younger man, Jerome, is waiting for the older man to make the first move but it never happens. Damon is incapable of expressing his feelings or acting upon them because he fears rejection.

In the last vignette, Damon tends to a female friend of his who is suffering from mental and emotional problems and perhaps that's why he feels superior to her. He is her caretaker, making sure that she doesn't overdose or drink alcohol. Due to her fragile condition, she is difficult to handle. Damon grows frustrated with the woman for not helping herself. He seems cold to the fact that she probably isn't able to. He tells her that he is only concerned about her while he's with her. Once they part, she is free to do what she wants. The not so subtle message is that if she wants to commit suicide, she can wait until she returns home after their time together. Although he takes care of her, it is obvious that he does connect with her on an emotional level. She just gives him a purpose for a short interval.

Avoidance

Damon is the main character in the novel, "In a Strange Room," by Damon Galgut. In the book, Damon is seen as a constant traveler. He visits many regions of Africa, Europe and India. It is readily apparent to the reader that Damon does not seem to enjoy his travels. In fact, most of the time he is miserable and thinking of where he'll go next. What Damon is doing is distracting himself from what he perceives to be a miserable life. He is a sad and depressed person who travels more to get away from himself than to enjoy the adventure and excitement of traveling to distant and exotic lands.

Even in his travels, Damon is antsy to move on to the next stop after staying only a short while at a destination. When he is left with too much time on his hands, he begins thinking of a personal life that he does not consider worthwhile. It seems as though he is in search of something or someone. Although he can make an initial connection with the people he encounters along the way, he is soon restless and must move on. By keeping on the move, Damon avoids meeting himself in the mirror. He is unhappy with who his is and what his life has come to be. He considers himself unworthy of a normal life and tries to leave himself behind with every trip that ends. In the conclusion when he visits the grave of an unknown person, he weeps uncontrollably. Perhaps he sees himself as an unknown person who had a meaningless life; and a man who will leave behind no legacy other than the skills associated with traveling and the ability to avoid facing himself.



Style

Point of View

In his novel, "In a Strange Room," Damon Galgut abandons traditional storytelling by creating a dual point of view—he uses both first and third narratives. In this work, Galgut uses a post-modern, experimental style of writing. The main character, Damon is referred to by the narrator as "he" and "him" but is also referred to by the narrator as "I" and "me." Noticing that the author's first name is Damon further confounds the point of view and adds a mystique to the tale. The reader wonders whether the author's story is partially autobiographical.

Also unusual in this novel is that it is told entirely in the present tense, despite the fact that it obviously covers many years in Damon's life. Paraphrasing the writing, the author writes lines in third person like, "He is walking down the path," immediately followed by a switch to third person in the same paragraph with a line like, "I look at the tall trees as I walk down the path." There is no warning or transition to the changes in perspective. And after his first transition, one might think the change would be permanent but that is not the case. The author continues to switch back and forth throughout the entire book. At first, this style of writing is confusing, but after catching on the reader realizes that the narrator is both the main character and the narrator and maybe even the author.

Setting

"In a Strange Room," is the story of Damon, a solitary man who finds life bearable only by staying on the move. The story is a drama but is a virtual travelogue as Damon's travels take him to many regions of Africa, Europe, and India. The story begins when Damon, a native of South Africa, is traveling in Greece. He visits the ancient ruins found in the Greek countryside and in the populous city of Sparta. Later, he travels with a German named Reiner. The head to Lesotho in South Africa and then on to the Drakensberg mountains where they hike for weeks.

In another trek, Damon hikes through Zimbabwe and is invited to join a group of people who are traveling to Malawi, Zambia. Later, Damon meets a trio of European travelers at Monkey Bay. He joins them and takes a boat to Nkhata Bay where they stay a few days. After their stay on the lake, they make plans to visit Tanzania. The group arrives in the city of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania where some locals take them to a cheap hotel. The Europeans have no cash and cannot obtain any from the local banks by using their credit cards. They all take a bus to Kenya where they will be able to obtain some cash. Two of the Europeans are from Switzerland and invite Damon to visit them there.

Damon eventually makes it to London and other regions around the English countryside. He takes a flight to Amsterdam and then to Germany and finally to Switzerland where he stays for several weeks at the residence of the young people he



met in Africa. In the finally section of the book, Damon is traveling with a friend in India. There he visits several remote communities including Goa, Margao, and Bangalore. The end of the novel finds Damon visiting a grave in Morocco.

Language and Meaning

The overall tone of "In a Strange Room," is dark and morose. Damon, the main character throughout the three sections of the book, is an unhappy man who finds life bearable only when he is on the move. In the book, the South African national travels extensively throughout Africa, Europe, and India. The author, Damon Galgut, portrays Damon as an introspective individual who lacks self-worth and the ability to connect on an intimate level with another person. The reader is privy to the personal thoughts of Damon who lacks the ability to develop a deep relationship with anyone.

In the first section, there is very little dialogue between Damon and his co-traveler, Reiner. The reader learns the burning resentment that is building within Damon as he feels relegated to a subservient role to the dominant Reiner. This first section, entitled, "The Follower," is aptly titled in that Damon follows in silence the orders of Reiner during their travels together—but not without an inner rage that finally emerges.

The author is able to use his skills to portray a more mature and seasoned Damon in the next section entitled, "The Lover." He chooses this title to indicate that Damon has finally found an individual who he feels he could love. But unfortunately, Damon remains emotionally crippled and cannot convey in words or deeds, his true feelings. The author illustrates the immaturity and shallowness of Damon by creating the object of his desire as a young man who is physically beautiful but to whom he cannot communicate because they speak different languages.

In the last section of the book, the author portrays Damon as older and finally able to have some form of human connection. His relationship that is featured in this section, "The Guardian," is not an intimate one in a caretaker capacity. Damon finds his purpose in protecting a friend who is emotionally and mentally disturbed. The author illustrates Damon's inability to love anyone when Damon expresses his true feelings about the suicidal Anna. He is concerned with keeping her alive while they are together. After she returns home, she can do what she wants with her life—even end it.

Structure

"In a Strange Room" by Damon Galgut is separated into three main sections. These sections are not separated into chapters or any other sub-categories. Each section is a stand-alone entry. The three sections of this novel are entitled, "The Follower," "The Lover," and finally, "The Guardian." All three sections are about the life of the main character named Damon. The book shares the personal feelings of Damon who throughout all three sections of the book travels extensively. The three distinct portions of this man's life and very loosely connected at best. There are no direct references from one section to the next although the reader is aware that Damon is the main

character throughout and that he is maturing. The sections follow one another in chronological order.

In a sense, the book is structured to portray the character arc of Damon. In "The Follower," Damon is seen as a young traveler who feels powerless, unloved and unworthy. He feels subservient to a slightly older man who he is traveling with. The older man is in charge of their movements and makes all the decisions about their travels and Damon complies and hence the title, "The Follower."

In the next section, "The Lover," it is Damon who is the older man to another character, Jerome, a teenager who Damon is attracted to. Damon's character has developed to a point where he is able to love although he cannot act upon his feelings. In the last part, "The Guardian," Damon has found his role in life. While he cannot truly connect with a person on an intimate basis, he can have human contact by being a caretaker for someone.



Quotes

"He knows that he is beautiful and somehow this makes him ugly." (Part One, p. 21).

"All the images and impressions and countries and continents he'd vised had been erased. What you don't remember never happened." (Part One, p. 29).

"And maybe that is the true reason for this journey, by shedding all the ballast of the familiar life they are each trying to recapture a sensation of weightlessness they remember but perhaps never lived, in memory more than anywhere else traveling is like free-fall, or flight." (Part One, p. 40).

"In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were." (Part One, p. 62).

"Maybe when two people meet for the first time all the possible variations on destiny are contained in their separate natures." (Part One, p. 81).

"Without love nothing has value, nothing can be made to matter very much." (Part Two, p. 85).

"I am writing about myself alone, it's all I know, and for this reason I have always failed in every love, which is to say at the very heart of my life." (Part Two, p. 128).

"A journey is a gesture inscribed in space, it vanishes even as it's made. You go from one place to another place, and on to somewhere else again, and already behind you there is no trace that you were ever there." (Part Two, p. 146).

"Though I know from other visits how fine a place it is, and if the air is disturbed every now and then by the death-screams of a pig, well, there is slaughter even in paradise." (Part Three, p. 155).

"At some point in that long day, perhaps in the street, perhaps when they get back to the room, she says it. The revelation comes casually, without weight or significance, but it wipes out the surrounding world. You know, I was going to kill myself on the train." (part Three, p. 163).

"There's no theme, no moral to be learned, except for the knowledge that lightning can strike from a clear sky one morning and take away everything you've built, everything you've counted on, leaving wreckage and no meaning behind." (Part Three, p. 202).



"Lives leak into each other, the past lays claim to the present. And he feels it now for the first time, everything that went wrong, all the mess and anguish and disaster." (Part Three, p. 207).



Topics for Discussion

In Part One, which character is "The Follower?" Who is the narrator of the three parts of the novel? Why is that not clear initially?

Why is Damon fascinated with Reiner? Why is he happy to be subservient to him? What gives Reiner power over Damon?

Why does Damon travel so much? What enjoyment does he get out of traveling? Does he seem like a tourist?

Why is Damon's attraction to Jerome superficial? What does Jerome think of Damon? Why doesn't Damon pursue an intimate relationship with Jerome?

Why does Damon feel compelled to protect Anna? What are his true feelings for her? What conversation shows how he really feels about her.

Why does Damon feel gratitude for Caroline while at the same time resent her? How does the account of her husband's death impact Damon and why?

At the end of the last part, whose grave does Damon visit? Why does he sob uncontrollably?