

White Teeth Study Guide

White Teeth by Zadie Smith

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Plot Summary

White Teeth is the first novel of young London novelist Zadie Smith, following the lives of members within two unique families. Archie Jones, patriarch of one family, is an indecisive man on the brink of suicide when he finds true love for the first time and begins a new life with his Jamaican bride. Samad Iqbal is Archie's good friend, head of a family of second-generation immigrants who fail to understand their father's obsession with the traditions of the past. Both men struggle not only with raising their children, but also with dealing with strong wives who hold opinions of their own. *White Teeth* explores the dysfunction within all families with humor and humility.

Archie sits in his car, determined to kill himself due to a bad divorce, until the owner of a nearby butcher urges him to move on. Archie sees this man as a symbol that life has re-embraced him and he decides to live. Archie goes for a drive and finds himself at the home of a young man who had thrown a large New Year's Eve party. Archie thought this might be a place where he could begin a new life, so when he meets Clara Bowden it seems like fate. Within a few months the couple is married. Shortly after the wedding, Archie moves Clara into a house a few blocks away from the home of his good friend Samad Iqbal. Clara and Samad's wife, Alsana, become good friends over the next few months when they become pregnant at the same time.

After the birth of his twin boys, Samad becomes the ideal father, immersing himself in the politics of their school. However, in doing so, Samad finds himself becoming obsessed with a young teacher at the school. Due to the restrictions of his religion, Samad is tortured with guilt over his obsession with this young woman and comes to realize that his own sons will come to suffer even greater than he has from the temptations of the Western world due to their lack of exposure to their home land and its traditions. Samad decides the only way to protect his children from this downfall is to send them home. However, Samad cannot afford to send both boys, so he is forced to choose between them. Samad sends the elder of the two boys in secret, incurring the wrath of his wife.

Several years pass while the children grow older. Magid, the eldest Iqbal son, embraces the culture of Bangladesh, raising his father's hopes that he might join the church. Millat, Magid's twin, is the opposite, getting into trouble constantly. Archie's daughter, Irie, is intelligent and obedient, but so deeply in love with Millat that trouble seems to follow her every move. At 16, Irie and Millat get caught up in a drug raid at their school and as a punishment are sent to study with a fellow student in his home.

The Chalfens, whose names are Joyce and Marcus, welcome Millat and Irie into their family. Joyce, a gardening expert, takes Millat under her wing as though he is one of her own sons in need of guidance. Marcus, a scientist, welcomes Irie's organizational skills and gives her a job working in his office. Clara and Alsana are not happy with their children's new family, feeling pushed out of their own roles. When Marcus begins to correspond with Magid, tensions grow to a boiling point. Against Samad's wishes, Marcus encourages Magid to become a lawyer and pays to bring him back to England.



While happy to see their son again, Samad and Alsana are outraged at Marcus and Joyce's presumptuous involvement in their children's lives. Alsana and Joyce battle over Millat while Clara attempts to set down some ground rules with Irie. Both confrontations backfire, encouraging yet more rebellious behavior in their children.

During this time, Marcus has been working in genetics on mice. One of his mice is due to be put on public display. Many organizations become upset about this mouse, believing that Marcus's work is an example of cruelty to animals. One of these groups is KEVIN, an organization of which Millat is a part. Both families converge on the ceremonies opening this display to support Irie and Magid in their work with Marcus. During the ceremonies, Millat pulls a gun to kill Marcus in order to make a statement against animal cruelty. However, recognizing Millat's intentions, Archie jumps in front of the gun and takes a bullet in his leg. Luckily Millat receives a light sentence and the families continue to live in happy dysfunction.



Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 1, The Peculiar Second Marriage of Archie Jones,

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White Teeth is the first novel of young London novelist Zadie Smith, which follows the lives of members within two unique families. Archie Jones, patriarch of one family, is an indecisive man on the brink of suicide when he finds true love for the first time and begins a new life with his Jamaican bride. Samad Iqbal is Archie's good friend, head of a family of second-generation immigrants who fail to understand their father's obsession with the traditions of the past. Both men struggle not only with raising their children but also with dealing with strong wives who hold opinions of their own. *White Teeth* explores the dysfunction within all families with humor and humility.

Archie Jones sits in his car outside a butcher's on New Year's Day with the engine running, waiting for the exhaust to fill his car and end his life. However, the car is blocking the delivery driveway for the butcher and the owner of the butcher demands that Archie leave. Archie listens to the man's demands and realizes this is life's attempt to embrace him once more and give him a second chance. Archie drives away. Archie has attempted suicide because he is in the middle of a divorce. Archie has been married for 20 years to a woman with mental health issues, but he has stood by her and supported her all those years. However, now his wife has turned on him and Archie, who is more relieved by the divorce rather than devastated, is depressed because his life has lost its direction. Archie does not know where to go from here. His friend Samad told him he should find a new wife, but Archie does not know how to go about doing this.

Archie folds paper for a living. However, he has not always done this. Archie was once a track cyclist. In fact, Archie rode in the Olympics and came in thirteenth place, sharing the position with a Swede named Horst Ibelgauf. Ibelgauf still writes to him on occasion with notes that often seem to be insightful of the events taking place in Archie's life. In fact, at that moment Archie had a postcard from Ibelgauf that talked about how they have both aged and are coming to the end of their lives.

Archie finds himself outside a house where an end-of-the-world party has ended. Archie rings the bell and invites himself inside, finding a house filled with hippie-type people recovering from the drink and drugs from the party the night before. Archie is accepted into a circle of friends and feels as though he has found his new direction in life until a discussion about World War II, in which Archie fought, brings tension into the house. Archie sits on the stairs in the aftermath of the argument, trying to decide what to do next, when a beautiful Jamaican woman steps around him, telling him not to be



offended by the opinions of her friends. Archie falls head over heels at this initial meeting. Three months later, Archie will marry this Jamaican woman, Clara Bowden.

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 1, The Peculiar Second Marriage of Archie Jones, Analysis

Archie wants to kill himself, not because he is depressed over his divorce, but because he has lost his direction, his identity. This begins the novel by exploring one of the themes of the story, identity. Archie no longer knows who he is without his wife, despite the fact that the marriage was a miserable one and Archie was not happy with his mentally disturbed wife. The marriage defined Archie's life more than his mundane job and his mediocre past in sports. When the butcher tells Archie to move on, Archie sees this as life telling him his time is not up and that he should do as his friend suggested and find a new direction in life. Archie does this by crashing a party and joining a group of hippie-types in a poker game.

Archie is lonely and lost; his character in this chapter is described adequately by these two adjectives. The reader immediately relates to Archie because of his attempt to kill himself since most readers have either been in a similar state of mind at least once in their lives, or known someone who was. Archie's simplistic acceptance of his second chance also serves to express his character to the reader, showing an almost childish side of his nature that suggests it is easy to persuade Archie to someone else's will with little or no effort. Later, when Archie talks about how his friend told him to find a new woman and get married, not only does this underscore Archie's gullibility but it also foreshadows the end of the chapter when Archie meets Clara Bowden. Archie is immediately attracted to the beautiful Jamaican and the author announces in the final paragraph in a bit of omniscient narration that they will be married in three months, fulfilling these previous suggestions.



Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 2, Teething Trouble,

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 2, Teething Trouble, Summary

Clara Bowden was born in Jamaica and moved to England when she was sixteen. Clara was an outcast at her school due in large part to the fact that her mother was a Jehovah's Witness and encouraged Clara to convert the children at her school with the religion's literature. As a result, Clara found herself drawn to another outcast, Ryan Topps. Clara saw Ryan as her opportunity to escape her mother's obsession with the Jehovah's Witness and their prediction of the end of the world, which was scheduled for New Year's Day 1975. Clara had seen Ryan at school, but met him when she knocked on his door to offer him Jehovah's Witness literature. Clara and Ryan hit it off and quickly became lovers.

Clara and Ryan would meet in secret as often as possible. Ryan introduced Clara to his friends, a group of hippie-types who indulged in marijuana and free love, concepts that were new to Clara. However, one afternoon when Clara was supposed to meet Ryan, she was held after class. By the time Clara got home, she discovered that Ryan had gone there looking for her and met her mother. Within days Ryan began to change. Clara's mother, Hortense, had introduced him to Jehovah's Witness and convinced him to change his ways in order to save his soul before the end of the world came. Ryan embraced Hortense's beliefs and began trying to convert Clara, but she wanted nothing to do with the religion any longer. One afternoon Clara and Ryan went for a ride on his Vespa. The bike ran into a tree because Ryan and Clara were arguing over Ryan's conversion, breaking out most of Clara's top teeth but leaving Ryan unhurt. Ryan saw this as proof of Clara's doomed soul.

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 2, Teething Trouble, Analysis

This chapter offers some back story on Clara Bowden, Archie's new love. Clara grew up with a strictly religious mother and this experience has left her an embarrassed outcast at school. Clara was unhappy with her life and reached out to the school's rebellious teen, Ryan Topps. At first, Ryan offered Clara all she desired—sex and drugs and all the other things Clara's religion forbade. However, after Ryan met Clara's mother, Hortense, he embraced her religion and turned on Clara, attempting to convert her as well. Clara ran away from this and embraced Ryan's friend, at whose home she was visiting when she met Archie the day the world was supposed to end.



Clara is characterized by her past and by her mother's religion. Hortense forced her daughter to attempt to spread the news of their religion at school, leaving Clara an outcast among her classmates. Due to this situation, Clara is left struggling to find an identity for herself that does not include her mother or her past, touching on the theme of identity and heredity. Clara is the child of a religious woman, but she is not sure this is what should define who she is, so she rebels against this identity. However, when Clara attempts to find her identity in the arms of another outcast, he finds his true identity in Hortense and rejects Clara's desired life. This sends Clara running into Archie's arms to begin a different life that was suggested in the previous chapter.



Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 3, Two Families,

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 3, Two Families, Summary

Clara and Archie get married at the registrars with Samad and his wife, Alsana, as their witnesses. Clara knows she is not marrying Archie for love, but he is a mild mannered man who is not obsessed with the end of the world, so she thinks he can give her the life she has always wanted. Besides, she knows Archie loves her and that seems good enough. Archie bought Clara a nice house in Willesden Green. It is not exactly the exotic location Clara had hoped for when she asked Archie to take her far from London, but is a nicer neighborhood than she lived in before and seems like a good place to raise children. Samad and Alsana have recently moved to the same area a few blocks away as well, so they will have friends nearby. Clara and Alsana have not become friends as of yet, and in fact Clara believes Alsana does not approve of her, but she hopes they will someday.

Samad, who once was a science student with a bright future, now works as a waiter for his cousin due to an injury that left him with only one working hand. Samad hates his job and hates the way the customers treat him, but he works hard and has saved up the money to buy a home in a better neighborhood. However, now Samad needs a raise to make the payments on that house and to provide for Alsana, who only recently learned she was pregnant. However, Samad's cousin is thrifty and does not agree to the raise. Samad must then go home and tell Alsana, who is not happy and walks out on Samad in the middle of the ensuing argument. Alsana walks through the neighborhood, realizing how good she and Samad really do have it despite their problems. Alsana stops to pick up a pair of Samad's shoes from a neighborhood store where her cousin has repairing them and then continues through the neighborhood until she runs into Clara and Archie. Clara is happy to see Alsana and Alsana's announcement about her pregnancy brings the two women a little closer together.

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 3, Two Families, Analysis

Clara's character is again explored as the reader watches her marry a man they know she does not love. Clara is so desperate to get away from her past and her mother's religion that she has sold her soul to the first man who promises to take her away from all that. These actions show Clara's independent spirit and her determination to survive by her terms, thus proving she has found the identity she wants to label herself with despite the oppression she has felt from her mother and the religion that surrounded her

childhood. Clara is a strong person and this will have an impact later in the novel on the people around her.

Alsana and Samad are introduced in greater detail in this chapter. Samad is an angry man due to the fact that he should be a well-respected scientist but is instead serving food to ignorant Western people due to an injury that has left him with only one working hand. Samad must now rely on his cousin, an unpleasant man who is too greedy to give his cousin a raise. Alsana takes this news harder than Samad, showing the reader that she is the more dominant partner in this relationship, the one who will rule the home. Alsana also reveals that she is pregnant, a fact that provides the reader with a direction for her story and tension to the story as it is clear that pregnancy at this point will be a hardship on Samad and Alsana's finances. However, the pregnancy does appear to begin to bring Alsana and Clara closer, suggesting that the two will bond together over the next few chapters and bring these two families closer together.



Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 4, Three Coming,

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 4, Three Coming, Summary

Archie learns that Clara is pregnant while at work. Archie buys some Indian sweets to spread the news since he cannot find any cigars in the local stores. Archie tries to share the news with his co-workers, but many of them are not terribly impressed. Archie brought Clara to a business dinner a few weeks before and many of his co-workers did not like that he had married a young, black woman. In fact, Archie's boss calls him into his office while he is still sharing his news and attempts to inform him that Clara is no longer welcome at business dinners, but Archie is too happy to understand what the man is trying to say. Finally his boss gives up, giving Archie a handful of coupons to assuage his own guilt.

Alsana and Clara begin to spend a lot of time together, partly to share their pregnancies and partly because they have few other friends in the area. Alsana and Clara meet in a park one afternoon for lunch with Alsana's niece, Neena. Over lunch they discuss their babies and their husbands. Alsana has recently learned she is carrying twins and laughs as she describes Samad's reaction to the news. Clara shares the name she hopes to give her child if it is a girl and reveals that Archie will not like it. Neena encourages Clara to do as she likes since it is her body from which the baby will come. This leads to a discussion about marriage and how a woman sometimes must bend to her husband's wishes. Neena believes this is not a good way to spend one's life, but Alsana believes it is important to keep a marriage happy. Alsana then continues by talking about how old Samad and Archie are and how they live in the past too much, but Clara becomes upset so Alsana stops.

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 4, Three Coming, Analysis

Archie again reveals a piece of his personality in the beginning of this chapter. After having been married for more than twenty years to his first wife, Archie is now finally going to become a father. Archie is so excited he goes out and buys candies to share the news with his coworkers. However, the coworkers are not very excited for him and Archie does not understand why. The author reveals the truth to the reader when the boss suggests to Archie that he not bring Clara to any more business dinners. Archie is so happy about the baby and so unwilling to see darkness in people, he does not understand what the boss is trying to say to him. Archie's ignorance in this situation shows his kind heart and his childish side that is too innocent to realize that not everyone in the world is as kind as he.



Alsana and Clara are both pregnant now, giving the reader a clear direction for their story over the next few chapters. They have also become friends. However, neither is happy in their marriage and this is clearly revealed in this chapter as they discuss their husbands in unkind terms. Alsana does not think highly of Archie's childlike innocence and simply dislikes her own husband. However, Alsana believes complacency is the best way to keep her marriage happy. Alsana's beliefs suggest that her marriage will continue, but also suggest tension and unhappiness in her future. Clara defends Archie, clearly having grown somewhat fond of her husband despite the lack of love between them. Clara is kinder, gentler than Alsana, and clearly happy with her current circumstances. Clara has what she has wanted and sees no need to make things difficult for herself.



Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 5, The Root Canals of Alfred Archibald Jones and Samad Miah Iqbal,

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 5, The Root Canals of Alfred Archibald Jones and Samad Miah Iqbal, Summary

Archie and Samad met during World War II when both were very young. Archie was a driver on a tank and Samad was the radio man. Archie had never seen a man of Samad's nationality and spent the first few weeks they were in the tank together staring at him. Samad was offended by this behavior, but was drawn to Archie because he was the mildest of the men in the tank with him. Samad was an angry young man because he had seen himself as a soldier capable of becoming a hero like his great grandfather Mangal Pande, but an accident while with the Bengal corps caused him to lose the use of one hand. Samad would tell this story often, causing him to be teased by the other men in the tank.

One afternoon while driving through a tiny Bulgarian village the tank broke down. Since they were going to have to wait a long time for help, Samad suggested they take turns going into town for refreshment. The captain agreed and allowed Samad and Archie to be the first. After spending the afternoon eating and drinking at a local cafe, Samad and Archie returned to the tank to find everyone had been killed. Not only that, but the radio was useless and they could not call for help. Samad spent the first night sleeping near the tank and attempting to fix the radio. Within a few days, Archie and Samad had become popular with the local children and had struck up a bartering system with the locals for the supplies they needed. Samad and Archie had also taken up residence in an abandoned hospital. Stuck alone together, Samad and Archie became good friends. To prove his loyalty to Archie, Samad shared the story of his great-grandfather Mangal Pande who was credited with beginning a rebellion against the English a hundred years before.

The next day a band of Russian soldiers came to town. Samad was not happy because they brought with them the news that the war had ended, meaning Samad had lost his chance to become a hero. However, when Samad learned that the Russians were planning to take prisoner a doctor living in town who was accused of war crimes, he saw it as his last chance. Samad convinced the Russians that he was a lieutenant and Archie a captain and insisted that they be allowed to lead the group to the doctor's home. Once they arrived, however, they found the doctor suffering from the side effects of diabetic retinopathy. The doctor, whom the town had nicknamed Dr. Sick, was weak and hardly capable of putting up a fight.



Samad had developed a morphine habit while living in the abandoned hospital and this added to the effects of a depression caused by his inability to prove himself a hero. However, Samad saw one more chance to prove himself. Samad played poker with the Russians and when he won more than the Russians could pay, Samad convinced them to give him and Archie a jeep and the doctor. The Russians reluctantly agreed. Samad drove out to the middle of nowhere and then convinced Archie that he should kill the doctor. Archie hesitated, but wanted to please his new friend so he walked off into a field with the doctor and then returned a short time later with a bullet wound in his leg, but no doctor. Samad was impressed with Archie's heroics.

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 5, The Root Canals of Alfred Archibald Jones and Samad Miah Iqbal, Analysis

This chapter takes the reader back in time to 1945 to the back-story of Archie and Samad's first meeting. It was during World War II and both men were fighting for the English army in a tank company. Archie had never seen an Indian man before and was fascinated by Samad. Samad found Archie's attentions annoying, but turned to Archie as a friend anyway because he was milder than the other men stuck in the tank with them. Samad was an angry man and the teasing he received from the other men only provoked him more. Samad had lost the use of his hand in the Bengal corps where he had been training to be a sharp shooter. Samad wanted to be a hero like his great-grandfather, but felt he had lost his chance. The anger and disappointment Samad suffered due to this injury would follow him the rest of his life, as the reader has already seen, and mold who he would be as a person.

When the crew of the tank was killed while Samad and Archie were enjoying a meal in the tiny village where their tank broke down, they found themselves abandoned and forced to rely on one another, and the two became friends. However, Samad continued to be obsessed with his chances of becoming a hero. When the Russians came to town and informed them that the war had ended, Samad became terribly depressed. The depression, increased by an addiction to morphine, caused Samad to make some poor decisions, including convincing the Russians that he and Archie were officers.

Samad insisted on leading the Russians in their quest to arrest a doctor wanted for war crimes, hoping this would offer the opportunity to become a hero. However, the doctor was too ill to put up much fight. Later, Samad came up with a scheme to take the doctor away from the Russians. However, Samad did not kill the man himself, but sent Archie to do it. The decision to give Archie the task of killing Dr. Sick gives the reader insight into Samad's character. Samad wanted to be a hero but was unwilling to get his hands dirty in order to do it. Instead, Samad sat back and allowed Archie, a gullible young man, to do it. Samad was quite impressed with Archie's heroic actions and this reaction suggests a reason why Samad continued to be friends with Archie despite their differences.



Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 6, The Temptation of Samad Iqbal,

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 6, The Temptation of Samad Iqbal, Summary

In the ten years since his children were born, Samad has become very involved in their lives and the school they attend. Samad goes to the weekly school council meetings and often argues with school policy over trivial matters. At one particular meeting, Samad argues over the paganism of a holiday known as Harvest Festival. Harvest Festival is simply a day in which the children take food to a senior citizen in the area, but Samad feels the holiday is inappropriate. After the meeting, the art teacher, a young, beautiful woman, shares Samad's sentiments and suggests they work together to end the celebrations. Samad is attracted to this young woman and is excited at the prospect of spending time alone with her.

Poppy Burt-Jones is a redheaded beauty and Samad cannot stop thinking about her. Samad tries to be a good Muslim and part of being a good Muslims says he cannot have sex or indulge in masturbation. However, Samad finds it difficult to follow these rules. Having sex is not a problem since Alsana has not invited him into her bed for a long time, but masturbation is an activity that Samad indulges in far more often than he is willing to admit. Being close to the art teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones, only makes this situation more difficult for Samad. Samad discusses the situation with a young man at the restaurant where he works, but the young man can only suggest that he stay away from English women because they are trouble. This does not help. On the morning Samad is to meet with Poppy Burt-Jones to discuss their plans to have Harvest Festival eliminated from the school's schedule, Samad insists on taking the children to school. Magid, Samad's oldest by two minutes, and Irie, Archie's daughter, are refusing to speak because they think Samad's quest to end Harvest Festival is unfair.

Samad tries to get a glimpse of Poppy Burt-Jones when he drops off the children, but misses her. Later in the afternoon Samad returns to the school for his meeting with the art teacher and catches her in the middle of a music class. Samad finds himself fantasizing about her despite the classroom full of children there with her. After class, Samad and Poppy Burt-Jones go to her small office in the back of a supply closet. They talk for a minute, but Samad is so enamored with Poppy that he cannot concentrate. Finally, Samad kisses her.



Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 6, The Temptation of Samad Iqbal, Analysis

The narration has jumped ten years into the future, bringing the reader to 1984. Samad is now the father of ten-year-old twins, Millat and Magid. Samad has immersed himself in his children, relishing the opportunity to argue with the school officials over school policy. During one of these meetings, Samad catches the attention of a young and beautiful teacher. Samad has been trying to be a good Muslim and a good husband, but has found it difficult in recent years. The attentions of this young teacher make things even more difficult for him. As the chapter title suggests, Samad is tempted by this young woman.

Samad's difficulty adhering to the rules of his religion explores his character. Samad wants to be traditional and religious, but he cannot force himself to follow the simplest rules of this religion. Just like in the previous chapter Samad wanted to be a hero without during the work required, here Samad wants to save his soul without having to follow the rules his religion says he must. Samad's character is also expanded through his relationship with his children. The beginning of the chapter suggests that Samad is a good father, devoted to the education of his children. However, later in the chapter Samad agrees to take his children to school for what appears to be one of the first times and finds one of his sons refusing to speak to him because of his actions at the school counsel meeting. Samad's actions and the actions of his children suggest to the reader that Samad does not have the ideal relationship with his children suggested at the beginning of the chapter.

Samad's fascination with this teacher goes deep and is highly sexual. Samad's fixation on this woman goes beyond his religion and makes suggestions about his marriage as well. Samad reveals to the reader that he and Alsana have not shared a bed in a long time. To the reader, this sounds as though their marriage is not on the most solid ground. Although sex is not required to make a good marriage, Samad's fascination with another woman and his desire to become involved with another woman suggests that the emotional side of his marriage to Alsana is not being fulfilled either. If it were, Samad would not be able to hurt his wife by having an affair, even if the affair were only sexual. Samad's desire to cheat on his wife adds tension to the novel and predicts trouble in his marriage in the following chapters.



Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 7, Molars,

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 7, Molars, Summary

The day of the Harvest Festival, which Samad was not successful in stopping, the Iqbal twins and Irie prepare sacks of food for their senior citizen. Each one has chosen food he or she likes, including a coconut and potato chips. They ride the bus to the address the school gave them, carefully taking all the food out of the bags so they can hand it to the elderly person the moment he opens the door. However, when they arrive at the man's house, he mistakes them for solicitors and refuses to open the door the first time they try. Millat insists the man open the door and listen to them, finally convincing him they do not mean him any harm. However, when the man sees the food the children have brought he is saddened because he cannot eat any of it. The man gives the children a lecture about brushing and caring for their teeth so they will not end up like him when they are old. The children become frightened by the old man's intensity and run away.

At the same time, Samad has taken the bus in the opposite direction toward Harlesden. To establish an alibi, Samad stops in to visit a relative and tells her that he is on his way to meet with an insurance agent to speak about obtaining more life insurance to protect his wife and children. Samad meets Poppy Burt-Jones in a small park and they begin to walk. While walking, they run into a crazy woman who often prowls the area around Willesden. The woman accosts the couple, demanding answers to crazy questions and beating Poppy Burt-Jones with a stick when she does not answer quickly enough. Samad stands up to the crazy woman and scares her away. Later, Poppy and Samad sit on a bench and discuss their affections for each other. Poppy suggests that Samad go home and stay the night with her. However, before Samad can answer he sees the children coming toward them.

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 7, Molars, Analysis

The children have stubbornly become an active part of the Harvest Festival despite Samad's opinions against it. The children's actions suggest they do not hold Samad's opinion to the highest of standards and also predicts tension between Samad and the children as the plot continues to develop. The children are beginning to search for an identity of their own, touching on a theme of the novel, and it is apparent that they do not feel the need to follow directly in Samad's footsteps, though it is early in their story and this could change. The children have brought their senior citizen the food that is part of the gift of the Harvest Festival, but have failed to take into account that their



senior citizen might not have the teeth needed to eat these foods that the children find appetizing. Their oversight only underscores how naive these children still are.

Samad, in the meantime, is on the other side of London preparing to meet with the woman he hopes to have an affair with. Samad is clearly serious in his attempts as he goes to the trouble of setting up an alibi should he be spotted with Poppy Burt-Jones. These actions show Samad's unhappiness in his life and his willingness to disregard the teachings of his religion when it fits a certain situation. Samad meets with Poppy Burt-Jones and even saves her from a crazy woman, showing his more viral side for the first time to both the readers and Ms. Burt-Jones. However, before Samad can begin to consummate this relationship, he sees his sons and Irie walking toward him. The sight of the children gives insight into the next chapter and adds tension to a situation that was already fairly tense for poor Samad.



Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 8, Mitosis,

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 8, Mitosis, Summary

Samad is at O'Connell's, a neighborhood bar, waiting for Archie. He is upset because he has begun to think that his own temptations in this Western world prove that his children, without the background of Bangladesh traditions, are doomed. Archie arrives and speaks for a moment with the owner of the bar, Mickey, before going to Samad. Samad explains his situation. Samad sees his children every time he is with Poppy Burt-Jones and feels that they are about to be corrupted by the loose Western morals. Samad wants to know what to do to protect his children, short of ending his relationship with Poppy Burt-Jones. Archie has no idea what to tell Samad, so when he goes to get their food from Mickey, he asks Mickey's advice. Mickey suggests Samad either sends his children back to Bangladesh or live with whatever happens to them. Archie returns to the table and tells Samad this, making it seem as if it is his advice, not Mickey's.

Samad likes the idea of sending his children back to Bangladesh, but cannot afford to send them both. Samad must choose one. Samad thinks on this a long time, first thinking he should send Millat since he is the more rebellious of the two, the more likely to get into trouble. However, Magid is the eldest and more studious; therefore he would most likely get more out of the traditions of Bangladesh. Finally Samad settles on Magid and begins to make arrangements. During this time, Indira Gandhi is assassinated in New Delhi. Alsana, who knows nothing of Samad's plans, becomes very upset because this assassination will mean fighting in the streets of Delhi and the deaths of people she grew up with. Samad does not understand his wife's grief and his lack of empathy leads to a fight between him and Alsana. During the fight, Alsana reveals that she knows about Poppy Burt-Jones, causing Samad to end his relationship with Poppy Burt-Jones. However, Samad does not allow this to change his mind about sending Magid away. A few months later, Samad is working in the restaurant the night he is to take Magid to the airport and is told that he has been requested specifically to wait on one particular table. Samad is the head waiter and chose not to serve tables that night in order to slip out at the appointed time. However, he is forced to serve this one table at which he finds Poppy Burt-Jones with her sister. Samad suffers this humiliation, arriving at Archie's home in time to get Magid to his plane.

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 8, Mitosis, Analysis

Samad turns to Archie when he is in a crisis. Samad's guilt causes him to see his children every time he is with Poppy Burt-Jones, convincing him that the relaxed moral



system of the Western world is going to corrupt his children and turn them into criminals. Instead of focusing on his own weaknesses, his own guilt, Samad focuses on his children. Samad's focus shows the reader another snippet of his weak character and his inability to keep his own morals in line. Samad decides he must do something to save his children. Archie, on the other hand, is not a man who makes decisions easily. Archie cannot even come up with advice for Samad and instead repeats to Samad advice he got from the owner of the bar where they spend a great deal of their time when away from their families. Archie does not tell Samad that this advice is not his own, however, suggesting there might have been other times when Archie was not completely open with Samad.

Samad decides, based on Archie's advice, to send one of his children back to Bangladesh where they can learn the values of that country and grow up to be a moral person like their father before them, a small twist of irony since the reader knows that Samad is not all that moral himself. During the planning of this trip, Alsana tells Samad that Indira Gandhi was killed and that this will mean fighting in the streets of Delhi, sure death for their friends and family members. Samad does not see this as a problem despite Alsana's great fear. They fight and Alsana announces that she knows about Poppy Burt-Jones, finally shaming Samad into breaking off the relationship. However, this does not change Samad's opinion that Magid should go back to Bangladesh. The reader has also learned through this argument that Alsana knows nothing about Samad's plans, giving the reader some insight into the tension that will more than likely come between Alsana and Samad in the following chapters.



Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 9, Mutiny!

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 9, Mutiny! Summary

Alsana stops speaking directly to Samad when she learns what he has done with her eldest son, driving him crazy with her insistence on indirect speech. An earthquake hit Bangladesh shortly after Magid arrived, causing Alsana unbearable grief for the week it took her to learn he was alright, suffering only a broken nose. A few months later, the family received a letter from Magid speaking of his love for his new country and his devotion to his religion, giving Samad hope that his son might grow up to join the church. Millat, in the meantime, has become the forgotten one in the turmoil over his brother's disappearance. Millat begins to act out, getting involved in drugs, gangs and sex.

In October of 1987 a terrible storm hits London, causing Samad, who was unprepared for a storm of this magnitude, to take his family to Archie's. Despite Archie's lack of maturity in some matters, he is highly prepared for the storm. Unfortunately, Archie could not have predicted the shallow roots of the tree outside his kitchen that crashes through the wall while both families are in the room preparing a snack. Fortunately, no one is hurt. Irie and Millat escape during the chaos, however, to walk in the storm. During this walk, Millat accuses Irie of being in love with him, which is true, and gives her her first kiss, one he swears to never repeat.

In January of 1989, Millat and a group of his friends jump a train to Bradford in order to participate in the burning of some books that have offended the Indian community in London. When Millat returns home, he finds that his mother, who saw him burning books on television, has burned all his Western belongings, including some rare gangster movies that were his favorites. On November 10, 1989, both families gather in front of the television to watch the Berlin Wall come down. Archie and Samad do not understand what the big deal is, but Clara, Alsana, and Irie feel it is important to watch. During a debate over the historic importance of the event, Irie becomes enraged and storms out of the house. Clara also becomes upset and she and Alsana retire to the kitchen. Archie and Samad, unsure what all the fuss is about, go to O'Connell's.

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 9, Mutiny! Analysis

Alsana is so angered by her husband's actions with their oldest child that she begins to speak to him in riddles to avoid speaking to him directly. Alsana is hoping this will drive him mad to punish him for sending her child away. However, news from Magid only



serves to prove to Samad that what he did was the right thing because Magid appears to be embracing the culture of Bangladesh despite the violence and the natural disasters that put his life in danger. Millat, the youngest son left behind, begins to feel invisible in his parents' fight over his brother and begins to act out, getting involved in drugs and sex. However, no one seems to notice at first.

Time begins to pass, as noted by dates the author provides in the narration. Three years pass and find Irie a preteen with a crush on Millat, a feeling he has no intention of returning. Irie's crush is important because it sets in motion a direction that her character will follow over many of the following chapters because of these feelings. Millat's refusal to indulge her feelings except with a single kiss also predicts a certain amount of tension to fill their story as the plot continues to develop. Several more years pass and the reader sees Millat participating in what can be called activism. Millat's actions at the book burning cause his mother to burn some of his favorite possessions, putting Millat and Alsana against each other for the first time in the book. Several years later the Berlin Wall is taken down and gives Irie an opportunity to stand up to her father's ignorant views on the world, presenting her in a new light. Irie is strong, opinionated, and unafraid to stand up to the adults in her life. This gives the readers their first real insight into Irie's personality and will prove to be important as the novel begins to embrace the children as the plot develops further.



Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 10, The Root Canals of Mangal Pande,

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 10, The Root Canals of Mangal Pande, Summary

Archie and Samad spend New Year's Eve 1989 at O'Connell's because it seems their families do not want them at home. Samad spends much of the evening attempting to convince Mickey to hang a photo of his famous great-grandfather, Mangal Pande. However, Pande is an unattractive man and Mickey is hesitant to hang the picture. Mickey eventually agrees, but not before a debate breaks out over Pande's heroism. Samad's opinion on what happened in the last days of Pande's life and history's version are very dissimilar. Archie has done research on Pande and learned that he was most likely drunk when he attempted to shoot his English commander for forcing Muslim men to bite on bullets lubricated with grease made from pigs, the act that caused him to be sentenced to death and began a rebellion of the Indians against the English. Samad, however, does not believe this version and believes that Pande was sober and knew what he was doing at the time.

A nephew of Samad's invited him to a local university to look at a book in which the story of Pande is much more sympathetic and is more closely linked to Samad's own version. Samad rushed to the school to see this book and cried when he read the brief description of Pande's actions. Now Samad uses this version to bolster his argument with Archie over his great-grandfather's heroism. However, a big part of Archie's argument is that Pande missed the commander even though he was supposed to be a good shot. Samad suggests that the gun was faulty and that is why Pande missed. Archie suggests perhaps Pande just could not kill another human being. Archie seems to sympathize with this idea, but Samad does not see Archie's sympathy, believing that Archie once killed a man in cold blood himself.

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 10, The Root Canals of Mangal Pande, Analysis

Samad convinces Mickey to hang a picture of his great-grandfather in the bar because he believes him to have been a hero. However, Archie disagrees due to some reading he has done on the subject. Archie believes Pande was a coward who shot at his commanding officer because he was drunk. Many books on the subject back Archie up, but Samad is not convinced. Samad's desire to believe the best about his great-grandfather makes the reader think again about a previous chapter in which Samad was determined to become some sort of war hero even though the war ended before he could do anything outstanding. Perhaps the reader could infer from Samad's obsession with Pande that he sees in his great-grandfather a character trait that is lacking in



himself but believes he can still lie claim to due to their relationship. It is as though Samad has to believe his great-grandfather was a hero in order to believe that he is a good person as well.

Archie argues the point with Samad. This is the first time the reader has really seen Archie with an opinion of his own that goes against Samad. Archie is normally timid, afraid to have an opinion that Samad did not give him first. However, in this one thing Archie has informed himself and stands up for himself. The reader must wonder why. As the chapter concludes and Archie begins to suggest that Pande was not the type of person who could kill another, the reader is reminded of the episode in which Samad sent Archie to kill Dr. Sick. Due to Archie's sympathetic understanding of Pande's dilemma, the reader must begin to wonder what really happened while Archie was alone with Dr. Sick. This idea is further explored later in the novel, bringing out surprises the reader might not see coming.



Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 11, The Miseducation of Irie Jones,

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 11, The Miseducation of Irie Jones, Summary

Irie believes that she is too fat and constantly obsesses on ways to lose weight and get the English-type figure of her classmates. Irie believes if she begins to look like the girls that Millat spends so much of his time with that he might want to spend time with her as well. Millat has a great number of English girlfriends, each one appearing to be even more turned on by him the more trouble he gets himself into. Irie is terribly jealous and longs to find a way to get his attention. One possibility crosses Irie's mind. She thinks that if she has her hair straightened, she might get his attention that way. Irie goes to a salon that specializes in straightening black women's hair. However, Irie has washed her hair recently and does not tell this to the hairdresser. The chemicals used to straighten the hair burns Irie's hair without the protective layer of dirt and consequently the hair falls out. The hairdresser arranges to give Irie hair extensions for free.

Irie goes straight to Millat's house to show off her new hairdo, but he is not home. Alsana and Neena are there. Neena teases Irie about her hair, knowing that it is for Millat and explaining to Irie that she need not have wasted her time because Millat will never become her lover. Millat needs her friendship too badly. Alsana also gives Irie a lecture about natural beauty and gently admonishes her for her actions. During this conversation, Samad enters the kitchen and shows Irie a letter from Magid in which the boy has included a picture of himself with a writer who gave him an award for his own writings. The writer is a historian who wrote an unflattering book about Mangal Pande, infuriating Samad. Magid's admiration of the writer further upsets Samad. Irie leaves the room and catches sight of herself with someone else's hair on her head. Irie removes the hair extensions, leaving herself with hair only a few inches long, but at least, she thinks, hair that is her own.

Irie hears a rumor that there will be a drug raid at her school. Irie goes in search of Millat to warn him. When Irie finds Millat, he is speaking with a boy he once hung out with who has since joined a Muslim radical group. Millat is fascinated with what his friend is saying and ignores Irie. When Irie finally gets Millat's attention, he laughs her off, telling her he can escape when the raid comes. Irie takes his joint and begins to walk back around the school. Irie runs into Joshua Chalfen, a boy in one of her classes who has a crush on her. The boy asks for a hit on her joint and as Irie is offering it, Millat runs toward her. At the same moment, the raid begins and all three are caught with the joint. A few days later, all three are in the headmaster's office to receive their punishment. Joshua attempts to lay claim to the joint in order to protect Irie, but no one believes him because he has always been a star student. Finally, the headmaster reveals that Irie and Millat will be punished by having to attend tutoring sessions at Joshua's home in



their weaker subjects, math and science. The headmaster feels that Joshua's parents, both educated professionals, will be a good influence on Irie and Millat.

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 11, The Miseducation of Irie Jones, Analysis

Irie is still in love with Millat even though several years have passed since this crush was revealed to the reader. Irie wants to look like one of her English classmates, to be small and shapely, but her Jamaican heritage makes this impossible. Irie obsesses on the idea anyway because she thinks if she can look like one of the many girls that Millat dates he will begin to see her as a girl and not just his friend. Irie decides to have her hair straightened in order to get Millat's attention, but this backfires when the chemicals cause her hair to fall out. Irie then gets hair extensions, but soon comes to realize that natural is much better than having someone else's hair glued to her head.

Irie is searching for her own identity in this chapter, a theme of the novel, searching for a person who will be pleasing to Millat, the boy she loves. However, it seems Irie comes to her senses toward the end of the chapter when she realizes that she looks like a fool trying to impress Millat. Irie is still a teenager, however, and her search for an identity and her attempts to get Millat to love her will continue, giving the reader some idea of how the plot will develop over the next few chapters. Irie's obsession with Millat also serves to give the reader some insight into Millat's personality. Millat is a troublemaker, the kind of bad boy all the girls love. Millat is a playboy, moving from girl to girl like a locust. Millat's behavior suggests a young man who either has little concern for the feelings of the people around him or is confused to his own identity and afraid that other people can see through him. Either way, Millat adds tension to Irie's life, giving her story motivation and forward motion.

Irie hears about a drug raid and her first thought is of Millat. Irie goes looking for him and finds him speaking with a Muslim radical, an event that predicts Millat's association with the same Muslim group later in the novel. Irie tells Millat the news, but he blows her off. Irie then runs into Joshua Chalfen, a young man in the same boat as her since he has a crush on her that will not soon be fulfilled. While they are sharing a joint, the raid takes place and Irie, Millat, and Joshua are all caught in it. As punishment, Irie and Millat are sentenced to study at Joshua's house, a situation that will introduce a new family of characters into Irie's story.



Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 12, Canines: The Ripping Teeth,

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 12, Canines: The Ripping Teeth, Summary

Joyce Chalfen is a botanist who has written several books on plants and human relationships. Joyce is a maternal person who only feels needed when her children need her, but her children are all too old to really need her anymore. Therefore, when Joyce learns about the headmaster's idea to have Millat and Irie come to her home as punishment for their drug offense, she jumps at the opportunity. Joyce's husband, Marcus, is a scientist who is currently working on a genetics project that causes the growth of tumors on mice. Joyce and Marcus are very close and have a strong marriage. They are close to their children as well, but have few friends. Joyce and Marcus feel that all they need is each other and their children. When Joyce meets Millat, she is immediately drawn to his good looks and obvious need for mothering. Irie and Millat find Joyce and Marcus strange, however, due to their habit of saying what is on their minds no matter the appropriateness of it.

Irie soon finds herself fitting in with the Chalfens in a way she never has with her own family. Irie can express her opinions and they were not only accepted, but understood by the Chalfens. It is the kind of family Irie has always wanted to be a part of. There is plenty of affection and easy acceptance, things Irie has missed in her own family. Millat appears to be enjoying his time at the Chalfens as well, despite his initial desire to rob the house and never return. Joyce has taken a special interest in Millat, so special that even Joshua feels pushed out around the two of them. Millat can talk to Joyce about anything, and though it took him a long time to open up, he eventually begins to share his deepest secrets with her. Not only this, but he finds he can convince Joyce to give him money without giving her a large number of reasons and that he can stay in their spare room whenever he has a fight with his father, which is often. Millat has joined a Muslim organization called KEVIN, which his father disapproves of.

Marcus takes special interest in Irie and begins taking her up to his office to share his work with her. Irie does not understand most of what Marcus tells her, but she enjoys the sound of his voice and the time he takes to be with her. Irie offers to help Marcus straighten out his files one day when he has trouble finding some photos he wanted to show her and this leads to a job when Irie and Millat's punishment concludes. Clara and Alsana are not happy with the introduction of the Chalfens into their lives. Alsana feels that Joyce's hold on her son is too great and wants to do something to change it. Alsana and Clara convince Neena to get herself invited over to the Chalfens for dinner in order to check these people out. Neena takes her girlfriend with her, shocking Joyce with her sexuality, and reports back to Alsana that Joyce is a homophobic basket case. Clara wants to believe the best of Joyce and decides to invite herself to the Chalfen home.



However, Clara finds Joyce unpleasant and the visit reminds her of her mother's past, a past she hates to be reminded of.

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 12, Canines: The Ripping Teeth, Analysis

The introduction of the Chalfens to the novel appears to be the introduction of a truly functioning family, a family that is normal and who all love each other the way families are supposed to do. The Chalfens show Irie and Millat a world that exists that they always suspected but never truly believed in. Irie feels accepted in ways she never felt before, nurtured and cared for in ways she has longed for her entire life. Millat too seems to have found happiness in the bosom of this family. Millat takes advantage of Joyce's kindness and takes money from her while sharing his emotions with her in order to satisfy her need to mother him.

Irie takes a job working with Marcus, an event that suggests their continuing presence in Irie and Millat's lives despite the end of their punishment from the school. Irie loves spending time with Marcus and loves the fact that he takes the time to share some his day with her. Irie has longed for a father she can relate to and clearly she had not gotten this from Archie. Irie's attachment to the Chalfens gives the reader an idea of tension that has the potential of driving a wedge between Irie and her parents. When Alsana comes out against the Chalfens and sends Neena to their home to check them out, her actions suggest exactly what the reader has suspected: that the Chalfens involvement in the lives of Irie and Millat is not welcomed by the rest of the family. Neena's poor report only serves to underscore Alsana's concern and lead her to attempt to eradicate them from Millat's life. However, Alsana does little in that direction in this chapter.

Millat has joined KEVIN, the radical Muslim group that was touched on in the last chapter. Millat wants to be a part of something bigger than himself and he believes the answer to this is KEVIN. The fact that Samad is not happy with this choice is obvious in his reactions to Millat's friends. Samad's actions should make the reader somewhat curious, however, since Samad is a Muslim himself. The reader might ask him or herself what Samad's problem with this group is. Samad's concern not only brings tension to the novel, but it gives the reader some thought that this group will only add to Millat's already growing list of troubling behavior and might lead him into a situation that will make all the trouble he has been in before seem minor.



Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 13, The Root Canals of Hortense Bowden,

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 13, The Root Canals of Hortense Bowden, Summary

Captain Charlie Durham, an English sailor, was a tenant in the Bowden home when Ambrosia Bowden, Hortense's mother, was a young woman. Durham decided he wanted to teach Ambrosia and began inviting her up to his room during the day. Durham taught Ambrosia how to read and write, as well as the pleasures of the flesh. When Ambrosia was only a few months pregnant, Durham was called away from Kingston. Durham sent Ambrosia to a friend, Sir Edmund Flecker Glenard to continue her education, but when her pregnancy became obvious, Sir Glenard sent her home again. Sir Glenard suggested that Ambrosia take up studies with Mrs. Brenton, a Jehovah's Witness who introduced Ambrosia to the teachings of her religion.

Ambrosia studied the writings of the Jehovah's Witness founder, reading them aloud to the point that Hortense believed she learned them while still in the womb. Ambrosia embraced the religion and learned everything she could about it. When Ambrosia was nine months pregnant that January, she was singing a hymn as she walked down the street when she ran into Sir Glenard. Glenard asked Ambrosia to accompany him to Santa Antonia church and Ambrosia agreed because he was a friend of Durham's. However, Glenard was not a nice man and his intentions were not honorable. Glenard attempted to rape Ambrosia. However, in the middle of the attack the worst earthquake to ever hit Kingston began. Glenard was killed by a falling statue. Seconds later, Ambrosia went into labor. Ambrosia gave birth to Hortense in the middle of a Santa Antonia church while the earthquake raged around her. Durham returned the following day and attempted to find Ambrosia among the survivors, but was unable to convince her to leave Jamaica with him.

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 13, The Root Canals of Hortense Bowden, Analysis

This chapter is a flashback to 1907. Ambrosia Bowden is Hortense's mother, Clara's grandmother. Ambrosia met an English sailor and became his lover when he took an interest in her education. Ambrosia was not interested in learning anything, but she liked Durham, so she agreed to the lessons. When Durham had to leave, Ambrosia met a Mrs. Brenton who taught her about the Jehovah's Witness church, a religion she would embrace whole-heartedly and pass down to her daughter. Ambrosia's acceptance of the church explores the theme of religion and gives some insight on why Hortense became so obsessed with the same religion. Hortense must have believed that the religion had



something to do with killing the man who had tried to rape her mother the day she was born, thus saving them both.

Ambrosia gave birth in the middle of an earthquake, leaving her daughter with the impression that the hardest part of her life was already over thanks to the trouble of her birth. Hortense has embraced life, especially the teachings of her church, and attempted to pass this on to Clara. However, Clara has rejected her mother's beliefs in favor of the simplicity of family life. However, the last chapter suggests that Clara is not a good mother and that her family does not provide her child with the things that she needs. Perhaps this is why Clara has begun to think about her mother and her past at this point. The fact that the past is rearing its head at this point in the narration suggests it will have an impact on Irie, the subject of this section of the novel, and Clara's daughter. This chapter is about Irie's past, her heritage which is a theme of the novel, and it gives more insight into the strength of the women in Irie's past as she continues to search for her own unique identity.



Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 14, More English Than the English,

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 14, More English Than the English, Summary

Marcus and Magid begin exchanging letters, a fact that causes Irie to fall from Marcus's radar. Irie is jealous and steals some of the letters to see what the two of them are talking about. In one letter Irie finds that Marcus has a low opinion of her scientific abilities and recommends that rather than pursue a career in science she should become a dentist. After reading that letter, Irie stops reading. At the same time, Joyce is still trying to solve Millat's troubles. Millat has finally found a girl he can be monogamous with. However, his KEVIN brothers do not approve of her and begin pressuring him to pick a more pious girl. Millat breaks up with the girl and is heartbroken, though he is somewhat confused as to why he is so unhappy. Joyce decides to put Millat into therapy to help him become more in touch with his feelings.

When Irie is close to graduating, she announces to her parents that she intends to go to college and become a dentist, plans that make her parents happy. However, Irie also announces that she intends to take a year off and travel. Clara and Archie forbid this plan, concerned for their daughter's welfare. Irie is stubborn and continues to argue the point, deciding one night to discuss it with her mother in the middle of the night when she tends to be easier to persuade. However, during this conversation, Irie knocks over a glass and finds a set of teeth inside. Clara wears false teeth to replace her lost ones and Irie has never known until now. This is another of a long line of secrets that Irie has come up against with her parents and it is the final straw. Irie runs out of the house in the middle of the night and goes to stay with her grandmother.

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 14, More English Than the English, Analysis

Marcus and Magid begin to correspond, finding kindred spirits in each other. This action pulls Magid back into the story and implies that the reader will be hearing more about him in the next few chapters. However, Irie is jealous of Marcus's attention on her old friend and feels insulted when she steals a letter and learns that Marcus does not believe she is smart enough to become a scientist. Irie is smart enough, however, to take Marcus's suggestion that she become a dentist, touching on the running theme in the title of some of the chapters and the title of the book. Millat, at the same time, is having love troubles. He has finally found a girl he can be monogamous with, but his KEVIN brothers do not approve. The girl is too English, too revealing, and the KEVIN brothers think Millat should be with a more conservative girl. Millat is confused by this,

though his attachment to the girl shows growth in his character. Joyce decides to put him in therapy, suggesting tension once more between Joyce and Alsana.

Irie is about to graduate from high school and go on to college, which is a great moment for the Jones family since she will be the first in the family to do so. However, Irie wants to take a year off and travel but her parents are concerned for her safety. In the attempt to convince them, Irie learns by accident that her mother wears fake teeth. Irie is tired of the secrets in the family. Irie has struggled hard enough to find out who she is without having to deal with the secrets her parents hide from her. Irie decides to run away and go stay with Hortense, bringing her character back into the story.



Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 15, Chalfenism Versus Bowdenism,

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 15, Chalfenism Versus Bowdenism, Summary

Hortense recognizes Irie immediately even though it has been six years since they last saw each other. Archie used to bring Irie to see her grandmother, but when Clara learned about the meetings she put an end to it. Now Hortense welcomes Irie into her house and feeds her before putting her to bed on the couch. In the morning, Irie discovers that Hortense has a man living with her. The man, Ryan Topps, was once a friend of Clara's, another secret Irie did not know. Ryan is even stricter in his religious beliefs than Hortense. In fact, Ryan is working with the Jehovah's Witness leaders in New Jersey to determine the true date the end of the world will come. Clara is unhappy with Irie's decision to stay with her grandmother because she is afraid Hortense will convert her daughter to the Jehovah's Witness religion. However, Irie is strong in her atheist beliefs and does not fall under Hortense's spell like Ryan did. In fact, Irie finds Hortense's method of living in the moment due to the impending end of the world tedious and difficult. Irie also finds Ryan unusual in his deep beliefs. She cannot have a conversation with Ryan without him answering the simplest questions with passages from scripture.

Irie misses school for a few weeks. When she returns, she sees Millat on a regular basis, but he is deeply involved in KEVIN now and they have little to discuss anymore. Irie continues to work for Marcus but avoids the rest of the family as much as possible. In January, Joshua comes to visit Irie. Joshua has left home and is working with an animal activist group. In April, Samad comes to visit, begging Irie to help him with Millat. Millat has disappeared for a time, gone off on some retreat with KEVIN. Irie suggests that Samad bring Magid home to involve Millat in the family once again, but Samad does not think this is the solution. Samad feels as if he has done wrong by sending Magid away because Magid is more English than before and Millat has embraced the Muslim traditions, but through a radical organization rather than a traditional mosque. Samad feels lost, but Irie cannot relate to what he is saying and has no words of comfort. That night when Hortense and Ryan return from church, they announce that they finally have the true date of the end of the world: New Year's Day in the year 2000. Hortense has decided she wants to spend that day in Jamaica, to die where she was born. Hortense invites Irie to go with her.



Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 15, Chalfenism Versus Bowdenism, Analysis

The theme of six degrees of separation begins to be known in this chapter. Irie arrives at her grandmother's home to find a man from her mother's past living there. Irie knows nothing about her mother's past since Clara was intent on keeping the past in the past, going so far as to keep Irie from her grandmother. However, Hortense quickly explains who Ryan Topps is, reminding the reader as well. Ryan is Clara's boyfriend whom Hortense converted to the Jehovah's Witness faith, ending Clara's relationship with him. Ryan, who is now a fanatic in the religion, leaves Irie with a strange feeling when she realizes this man could have been her father had things been different.

Clara is unhappy with Irie's decision to stay with Hortense because she is afraid the same thing that happened with Ryan, his conversion, will happen to Irie. However, Irie feels strongly about her atheist views and is not easily swayed by Hortense and Ryan's beliefs that the end of the world is imminent and she needs to embrace their beliefs to save her soul. Irie simply wants a place to stay in order to figure out who she is and what she wants out of life. Irie is tired of the dysfunction of her own family and finds the Chalfens' uneven loyalties tedious. It seems Joshua Chalfen agrees as he has left home and joined an animal rights group. Samad has also reached a dark conclusion about his family, finding that his attempts to save his sons have backfired despite his good intentions. All three of the families in this book appear to be dysfunctional despite the presentation of the Chalfens as a normal family. The Chalfens are so embroiled in their own dramas surrounding the Iqbal boys that they have missed Irie's unhappiness as well as the unhappiness of their eldest son.



Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 16, The Return of Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal,

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 16, The Return of Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal, Summary

Marcus has arranged for Magid to return to England in order to pursue a degree in law. Marcus goes to the airport himself, having left the Iqbals at home under the guise of not having enough room in the car for all of them, excited to finally meet the young man he has bonded with over his research with FutureMouse, a genetic experiment that involves the growing of cancerous tumors on mice. Alsana and Samad are thrilled to have their son home with them. Alsana even begins to speak directly to her husband again. However, Millat refuses to see him and refuses to live in the house with Magid there. Magid moves in with the Chalfens since Alsana and Samad believe it is more important for Millat to be home at that point. Joshua has moved in with the Jones family and Irie is staying at the Chalfens' to help Marcus prepare for his exhibition of the FutureMouse.

Not everyone is happy to have Magid home. Irie finds him difficult to be around because he does not seem to understand simple things that Irie takes for granted and constantly needs things explained. Not only this, but Magid has become deeply religious and speaking to him is not dissimilar to speaking with Ryan. Joyce believes that Magid is emotionally damaged just like Millat and takes him under her wing in much the same way. Irie finds this irritating as well because Magid is not damaged, only confused. Quietly, Irie feels that Joyce should be more concerned with Joshua than the Iqbal boys.

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 16, The Return of Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal, Analysis

Magid returns home like the prodigal son and throws everything into a tail spin. The Chalfens have brought Magid home because they think they are saving him just like they have done with Millat. However, Magid does not appear to need saving. Magid is independent and easy going, not offended when his own family makes him move out of the family home in order to please Millat. All the children are playing musical houses, with Joshua moving in with the Jones' while Irie lives with the Chalfens with Magid, and Millat is at home. The dysfunction appears to be continuing.



Marcus is preparing his genetic experiments for an exhibition. The fact that Joshua is involved in an animal rights group should cause the reader to raise a few eyebrows at this point, curious how his group will react to Marcus's experiments on mice. Irie appears to be curious about the same thing, quietly questioning why Joyce is so obsessed with the Iqbal boys but does not seem to notice the unhappiness surrounding her own child. However, Joyce is so confident in her own parenting skills and so convinced that Alsana is a bad mother that she has never stopped to consider that Joshua has any problems. Again, this goes to the idea of dysfunctional families, proving there are many ways for a family to be dysfunctional, even in a supposedly normal family.



Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 17, Crisis Talks and Eleventh-Hour Tactics,

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 17, Crisis Talks and Eleventh-Hour Tactics, Summary

Joyce goes to the Iqbal home to talk to Alsana about forcing the Iqbal twins to meet. At first, Alsana will not let Joyce into the house, but finally relents. The two women begin to argue about Millat's state of mind and Joyce's decision to provide therapy for him. Millat comes into the house during the argument and listens, taking small satisfaction in having two women fight over him. Millat is struggling with his Muslim beliefs, finding it difficult to abstain from drugs and sex like his brothers tell him he must do. Millat is also a big fan of gangster movies and likes to emulate what he sees in the movies, but has been told this is wrong as well. Millat knows that KEVIN hopes to make a leader out of him, to prove someone with terrible faults can be saved, and he does not want to let his brothers down, but he is struggling.

After Alsana puts pressure on him, Samad agrees to speak with Magid about meeting with Millat. Samad takes Magid to O'Connell's, a decision that causes an uproar at the bar because outsiders are rarely welcome. Mickey welcomes Magid, however, because he appears to be an intellectual type that Mickey admires. Mickey struggles when Magid requests a bacon sandwich because Mickey does not serve pork products in his bar, but he relents because Magid is a special customer. However, Samad is outraged by Magid's choice of meals because it goes against his Muslim beliefs and makes the boy move to another table despite the fact that their discussion over a meeting with Millat has not been completed. Samad feels a meeting between the two men would be disastrous, but Magid is willing. Archie attempts to make a decision for them by flipping a coin, but the coin ends up falling into a pinball machine without offering a decision.

Clara arranges for Magid and Millat to use a room at the college where she attends classes. Irie is given the task of delivering the key to Millat. When Irie arrives at the Iqbal home she finds Millat in his room in the middle of a forbidden imitation of one of his favorite gangster movies. They talk for a minute and when Irie hands Millat the key, their hands touch and both are overcome with the sexual tension that fills the room. Irie and Millat make love. When it is over, Millat immediately moves away in shame for failing his brothers once more. Irie is humiliated and decides to strike out at Millat the only way she knows how. Irie rushes back to the Chalfen home and makes love with Magid. A few days later, Magid and Millat meet and fight over their radical beliefs, releasing much of the tension that has grown between them in Magid's absence.



Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 17, Crisis Talks and Eleventh-Hour Tactics, Analysis

Joyce once again puts her nose in other people's business and attempts to convince Alsana that the twins need to meet. This is the first time Joyce has bothered to meet Alsana despite having called her a bad mother all this time. Millat overhears this conversation and finds it flattering. However, Millat has troubles of his own that he has not discussed with anyone, not even Joyce's therapist. Millat is having trouble living up to the expectations of KEVIN. If Millat knew that his father had struggled with the same type of religious struggle, he would most likely be horrified. However, Millat's struggles do parallel those Samad went through earlier in the novel, showing the reader how alike the two men are despite their animosity toward one another.

Samad attempts to talk with Magid about seeing his brother despite his own reservations regarding the meeting. Samad is horrified when he discovers that his son eats pork, something that goes against all of Samad's beliefs. Samad has come to terms with the fact that his son, raised in Bangladesh to create in him the proper moral base, has become more English than his son raised in England. However, this last insult seems to be the final straw for Samad. Archie, watching this entire episode with the interest of a bystander, once again proves his inability to make difficult decisions when Samad asks him to decide if the twins should meet. Archie throws a coin only to have it miraculously end up in a pinball machine. This coin toss is symbolic of Archie's difficulties with making decisions. Archie's choice of throwing a coin to make major decisions is also a habit that is not new and its use here foreshadows a time when the reader will learn of another moment when a coin toss made a decision for Archie that would shape his relationship with Samad.

Irie has had a crush on Millat most of her life. When Irie goes to Millat to give him the key to the room where he will meet his brother, she finds him vulnerable and lonely. Irie makes love to him only to have him pull away. This is humiliating for Irie, and it proves to her that Millat will never be to her the lover she has always wanted. To hurt Millat, Irie goes to Magid. This behavior seems out of character for Irie, but it is easily explained by her hurt and anger toward Millat. Irie loves Millat and hates that he treated her like one of his girlfriends, even though this is what Irie thought she had wanted all these years. Irie's behavior also should cause the reader to wonder if there will be consequences to her actions in later chapters.



Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 18, The End of History Versus the Last Man,

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 18, The End of History Versus the Last Man, Summary

Millat attends a rally of KEVIN and listens to their founder speak. Their founder is an awkward speaker, a young man who founded the organization out of his garage. However, Millat and his brothers find little fault with his speeches because they deeply believe everything he has to say. During the speech, Millat is approached by several brothers who have heard about Marcus's plan to put his genetically altered mouse on display. These brothers find the mouse experiments obscene and contrary to their religious beliefs and want to do something to protest it. Millat agrees to participate, seeing this as his chance to prove his leadership skills with to the group.

Joshua has joined an animal activist group because he is in love with its cofounder, Joely. The fact that Joely is happily married has done little to deter Joshua's devotion. The group is also planning a protest at the opening ceremonies of Marcus's exhibition of his FutureMouse. Joshua is deeply involved in the planning even though it will hurt his father, having broken off almost all contact with his family due to his jealousy over Magid's position in the family. Magid has become Marcus's partner, co-conspirator, and confidant, helping Marcus with FutureMouse and taking Joshua's place as oldest and most trusted son. At the same time, Irie learns that Ryan and Hortense plan to organize a protest at the opening ceremonies as well. The Jehovah's Witnesses have a problem with Marcus's attempts to change the nature of one of God's animals.

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 18, The End of History Versus the Last Man, Analysis

This chapter reveals that three of the major characters will be involved in a protest against Marcus's FutureMouse in one form or another. Millat plans to join the KEVIN brothers in a protest while Joshua has joined an animal activist group to do the same. Even Hortense is getting in on the fun, planning to take her Jehovah's Witness prayer group to the opening ceremonies of the exhibition in order to protest the experiments. The reader can feel a climactic moment approaching as the day of the ceremonies comes closer. The only people missing from the big night are the Jones and Iqbal

parents, but the reader must suspect that where the children are, the parents will not be far behind.



Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 19, The Final Space,

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 19, The Final Space, Summary

It is New Year's Eve, 1992, and people are already out in the streets beginning their celebrations. Joshua is in a car with Joely and other members of the animal activist group preparing for their protest that night. Crispin, Joely's husband, continuously questions Joshua's loyalty as they make their way to Hyde Park despite his apparent enthusiasm for the plan. Joely jumps to Joshua's defense, fueling his belief that she will one day realize her true feelings for him.

Millat and his brothers in KEVIN are on a train on the way to Hyde Park as well. Millat is high because he was nervous and found a bag of marijuana in his drawer. He smoked the entire bag. The plan that KEVIN originally had was to bring violence on Marcus, but after the arrest of their leader in anticipation of tonight, the brothers have decided a dramatic reading would be more appropriate. Millat is not satisfied with that and has come up with a plan of his own, but he is so nervous and high now he is not sure he will be able to go through with it. Millat stops in the park once they arrive to see his father's name cut into a bench there. Samad once told his son that writing his name there had been a warning from Allah that he was becoming like an English man. Millat disagrees, seeing it only as the ramblings of a broken man. Millat intends to prove himself better than his father, brave like his great-great-grandfather, Pande.

Ryan Topps leads a procession of Jehovah's Witnesses to the church while Archie, Clara, Samad, Alsana, and Irie make their way to Hyde Park by bus. An argument has broken out among the adults over the insistence that they attend this ceremony. Samad sees it as supporting the Chalfens and is offended by the very idea. However, Clara and Alsana see it as an attempt to support their children. Irie listens to them fight for a short time and becomes angry. Irie has just learned she is pregnant and is consumed with choosing which potential father to convince of his paternity. Finally pushed to a breaking point, Irie screams at the two families, expressing her desire to be a part of a family where the parents did not care for their children because at least then she could live her life in peace.

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 19, The Final Space, Analysis

Joshua is on his way to the ceremonies of his father's exhibition, still attempting to convince his fellow animal rights activists that he is loyal to their plans. Joshua is still loyal to this group because he is still in love with Joely and takes her every action on his



behalf to mean that she is falling for him as well. This crush parallels the crush Irie had on Millat for so long and the reader must realize that this crush cannot end any better than Irie's did. The reader can see where Joshua is headed with the group, but perhaps Joshua is too close to see it for himself. Joshua's nearsightedness suggests to the reader that soon things will move in a direction where he will be able to see clearly and it leaves the reader wondering how Joshua will cope with this.

Millat too is on his way to the ceremonies in order to protest the man who took him in and allowed his wife to mother him in a way his own mother never did. Millat wants to perpetrate violence on Marcus, believing that this is the only way to prove himself a brave man and to be better than his father was before him. Once again, Millat's emotions parallel those of his father who was also obsessed with proving himself a hero like Pande. Millat has found his identity in his heredity, a theme of the novel, but it is the same identity that his father has with the same emotions and struggles that his father has dealt with. It is unfortunately the two men are not close enough to discuss these feelings with each other and to learn from each other's mistakes.

Irie is also on her way to the ceremonies with her parents and the Iqbals. Now everyone who has had a starring role in the novel is converging on the same place, suggesting a final climactic scene in the final chapter of the novel. Irie has learned she is pregnant and is trying to choose which Iqbal twin to place paternity on since there is no way of knowing which man is truly the father. However, in the middle of this dilemma, Irie becomes enraged at her families for arguing over the importance of attending the evening's festivities. Irie finally yells at her family, expressing her opinion about their obsession with their children's welfare, wishing in a twist of irony that they were not such concerned parents but more like the bad parents that Joyce has constantly accused them of being.



Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 20, Of Mice and Memory,

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 20, Of Mice and Memory, Summary

Everyone is assembled when the speeches begin. Archie sits with Mickey and listens to both the speech and Mickey's take on things, fascinated by the whole things despite struggling to understand the scientific parts of Marcus's speech. Joshua is excited and a bit nervous about Crispin's plan, sure that it will backfire because Crispin has not gotten them seats that will make their work. Millat is still high and getting more nervous about his private plan by the minute. Outside, voices can be heard in prayer. Clara recognizes them and sends Samad outside to quiet the Jehovah's Witnesses who are praying on the steps. Samad attempts to do this, but cannot get them to be quiet any better than the security guards could before him. Samad returns to the auditorium just as Marcus begins to introduce the men on the panel beside. One man in particular catches Samad's eye. It is an elderly man by the name of Dr. Marc-Pierre Perret, the real name of Dr. Sick.

Just as Samad makes the connection between this elderly man and Dr. Sick, Archie makes the same connection. Archie remembers that night clearly. Dr. Sick begged for his life but Archie could not decide if he should do as Samad asked or let the man live. Finally Archie decided to flip a coin. While the coin was in the air, Dr. Sick took the gun and shot Archie in the leg. Fortunately for Dr. Sick, the coin landed in his favor and Archie let him live. Now in the auditorium, Archie glances at Millat just in time to see him pull a gun. Archie leaps in his path, taking a bullet to his leg and saving Dr. Sick a second time. In police statements, witnesses could not tell if it was Millat or Magid who shot Archie, so both men were given community service. Irie took a year off as planned and became Joshua's lover, raising her daughter alone without worrying about the paternity any longer. Samad, Alsana, Archie, and Clara continue as before with the exception of the ladies finally being invited to join their husband's at O'Connell's New Year's Eve 1999. Hortense saw in the new year in Jamaica that same year with Irie by her side.

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 20, Of Mice and Memory, Analysis

All the main characters of the book have assembled in this one auditorium for Marcus's opening of his FutureMouse exhibition. Archie is the only one who seems to find the experiment interesting as everyone else has their own motivations for being present.



Millat wants to prove himself heroic while Joshua wants a married woman to notice him. Magid is present to take credit for his part in the experiments, while Irie is there to support the man who pays her bills. Even Hortense is there, proving a distraction for Samad at a time when he needs to be distracted.

When Samad returns to the room he sees a ghost from the past. Touching again on the theme of six degrees of separation, the doctor that Archie supposedly killed, the act that created respect in Samad for Archie, appears alive and well. Samad is shocked to see this and his opinion of Archie is sure to change. However, before Samad can truly react, Millat takes advantage of Samad's outburst to pull a gun. Archie sees this and jumps in front of the bullet, proving himself braver than he has ever been in the novel, making a decision for the first time without help from Samad or a coin. Archie's actions show growth in his character and how brave he could have been given the right circumstances.

The final paragraphs of the novel give a snap shot of the future of all the main characters. Irie has her baby and ends up with Joshua, which seems appropriate since the two of them are similar in nature and Joshua did at one time have a crush on Irie. Millat and Magid are sentenced to community service since neither will confess to the shooting and cannot be positively identified by witnesses. Neither seems concerned that Irie has given birth to a child that could be either one's daughter. Hortense lives to see another end-of-the-world date come and go, living it up in Jamaica with Irie. Samad, Archie, Alsana, and Clara all live out their lives the same as they have thus far, finding solace in each other's company despite their claims in the beginning to not love each other. Time has brought a bond to these two couples and perhaps it is this bond that makes them happy despite the dysfunction of their lives and their children's lives.



Characters

Archibald Jones

Archie begins the novel by attempting to commit suicide in his car. However, Archie has parked his car in front of the loading dock for a butcher's and is asked to move. Archie sees this as a second chance at life and immediately sets out to find someone to share his second chance with. Archie happens on the remnants of a New Year's Eve party and meets Clara Bowden, a young Jamaican woman also looking for a new life. They marry quickly and settle into a comfortable life.

Archie is a man who does not make decisions easily, often forced to take advice from other people or to resort to flipping a coin in order to make important decisions, such as how to advise his friend on which child to send away or whether or not to kill a man. Archie has never made a difficult decision without some sort of help. Archie is also a somewhat naive man who does not see the prejudices in the world, even when face to face with a man telling him that his wife is not an acceptable presence at business dinners. Archie sees the world through rose-colored glasses, only seeing what he has to see and nothing more. However, despite his faults, Archie has a big heart that has turned him into a loyal friend and husband. In the end, Archie makes one decision on his own, without thought or advice, when he jumps in front of a bullet meant for a man he should have killed fifty years before. By doing this, Archie saves the future of his best friend's son.

Clara Bowden Jones

Clara is only nineteen when she meets Archie, but she is already more mature than most girls her age. Clara grew up with a mother who was deeply involved in Jehovah's Witnesses and waiting for the end of the world. This often caused Clara deep embarrassment, especially when she had to go out into the neighborhood in order to spread the news of this religion. The final straw was when Clara's mother converted her first boyfriend and caused him to withdraw his affections. Clara knew she needed to get out of the house and make a life of her own outside of her mother. When Clara meets Archie, she is presented with the perfect opportunity to do this.

Clara does not love Archie, but she makes a life with him because he represents the life she wants. Clara wants a stable family and a life that does not revolve around crazy religious beliefs or a past that she believes has little to do with the future. By accepting this relationship, Clara empties her life of everything that took place before the marriage. This causes her daughter to feel as if she has been left in the dark. This situation causes tension between the two women, straining their already difficult relationship.



Irie Ambrosia Jones

Irie is the daughter of Clara and Archie. She is an intelligent young woman who constantly finds herself in trouble not because of her own actions, but because of the young man she is in love with. Irie loves Millat, one of Samad's sons. Millat is a rebellious boy who leads Irie into drugs and other teenage angst. Irie follows willingly, hoping that if she can become the type of person Millat admires, he will discover he loves her. However, this does not appear to be something that will occur.

Irie and Millat are caught in a drug raid at their school and sentenced to several months of studying at the home of a fellow classmate. During this time they meet the Chalfens, a family of academics who become deeply involved in their lives. Irie is distracted from her obsessions with her looks and Millat's affections by Marcus's work, becoming jealous when Marcus fails to encourage her to become a scientist and instead begins a relationship with Millat's twin, Magid. Irie soon finds herself torn between these two boys, hating one and loving the other. Imagine her distress when she discovers she is pregnant and either boy could be the father.

Samad Miah Iqbal

Samad is a man from Bangladesh. Samad met Archie during World War II when they were both assigned to the same tank. Samad was the radio man, Archie the driver. The tank broke down in a small village and while Samad and Archie were in town enjoying a few drinks, the rest of the crew of the tank was killed. Samad and Archie were left alone to wait for rescue. During this time, they got to know each other very well. Years later, after getting married, Samad moved to England and reunited with Archie. The two once again became good friends and moved within a few blocks of each other.

Samad is a Muslim who has difficulty following his faith. Samad finds himself tempted by the luxuries of the Western world, including women and drink. However, he believes himself to be a religious man and attempts to force these values on his family. When Samad's steal grip on his family begins to loosen, he decides to send his children back to Bangladesh to get them away from the temptations of the Western world. However, Samad can only afford to send one child and decides to send the eldest boy. Samad's wife cannot forgive him for this decision and refuses to speak directly to him for almost ten years. Samad believes he did the right thing, however, when his son sends home letters full of promising news. However, when the boy decides to return to England and become a lawyer, Samad feels as though his efforts were in vain.

Alsana Iqbal

Alsana is married to Samad. Alsana did not meet Samad until the morning of their wedding. At first, Alsana believed Samad to be a likeable man, but the more she came to know him, the less she liked him. However, due to her upbringing and the traditions of her people, Alsana cannot even consider a divorce. Alsana works as a seamstress and



works hard so that she and Samad can buy a home in a good neighborhood before they have children. Alsana is excited at the idea of becoming a mother. When the blessed moment comes, Alsana is shocked to learn she is pregnant with twins.

Alsana is a good mother, devoted to her children. However, traditions cause strains in her family, partially because of her conversion to some of the more relaxed attitudes of the Western world. Alsana and Samad clash often over the discipline of their children. Alsana tends to go easy on the children, not encouraging the traditional behaviors of her birth country. Samad is outraged that Alsana would behave in this way and attempts to be more strict with the children. However, when this dual approach does not work, Samad goes behind Alsana's back and sends one of their children to Bangladesh. Alsana refuses to speak directly to Samad for all the years that her son is gone. However, when their son returns, thanks to the generosity of the Chalfens, Alsana begins to speak to her husband again.

Millat Iqbal

Millat is the youngest of the Iqbal boys by two minutes. Millat is a rebellious boy, the opposite of his brother. Millat becomes the leader of a group of rebellious children in his teen years, leading them into all kinds of trouble, including the burning of some books that are controversial among Muslims. Millat smokes and has sex at a young age, growing up faster than others his age in part because of difficulties at home and in part because of his struggle with attempting to figure out his own identity in face of the liberations of the Western world that is in direct odds with the traditions of his father's birth country.

Millat joins a Muslim group as a teen and becomes an activist against the political inferiorities of his adopted country. One of the events this group decides to protest is the genetic manipulation of a mouse done by a friend of Millat's, Marcus Chalfen. Millat wants to make an example of Marcus, angry with him for loving his brother more than him. However, the group decides to back down after the arrest of their leader. Millat goes on his own and obtains a gun with the intention of killing Marcus and his fellow scientists. However, before Millat can get up the courage to do this, he does a large amount of marijuana. When the moment comes, Millat pulls the gun and Archie jumps in his way, taking the bullet in his leg. Millat receives a light sentence because the witnesses cannot be sure if he or his twin brother was the gunman.

Magid Iqbal

Magid is the eldest Iqbal son by two minutes. Magid is a formal young man, in both dress and behavior. Magid is polite and kind, the type of child a parent would be proud of. When Samad becomes concerned over the influence of the Western world on his children, he chooses to send Magid home to Bangladesh in order to give him a proper education. Magid accepts his new situation without protest and embraces the traditions of his father's birth country. Magid grows up close to the church, studying well and



nurturing his intelligence. As a teen, Magid becomes acquainted with Marcus Chalfen through letters. Marcus encouraged Magid to follow his desire to become a lawyer even though Samad dearly wanted Marcus to join the church. Marcus paid for Magid to return to England and reunite with his family, in exchange with schooling and law school.

Hortense Bowden

Hortense is Clara's mother. She was born in the middle of a famous earthquake in her native Jamaica, leaving her with the belief that nothing in life can stop her. Hortense is the daughter of an English sailor, a fact that she does not like and purposely married a black man she did not love in order to have a black child rather than a mixed one. However, this did not stop her daughter from marrying a white man and having a mixed child. Hortense is deeply religious, believing in the teachings of the Jehovah Witness Church. Hortense would often send her daughter out to spread the word of the church, causing Clara great embarrassment as a child. Hortense also believed that the world would end one day and only Jehovah Witness believers would be lifted into heaven, a belief she held over her daughter all her life.

Joshua Chalfen

Joshua is a classmate of Millat and Irie. Joshua is not a part of their crowd because he is more of an intellectual, but this does not stop him from having a crush on Irie. Joshua wants to impress Irie, so when he is caught in a drug raid with Irie and Millat, he attempts to take credit for selling drugs, even though he has never done anything wrong. As a result of this situation, the school sentences Millat and Irie to several months of studying at Joshua's house, hoping not to punish but to enrich the children and encourage them to behave. Joshua is happy about this at first because it means more time with Irie. However, Joshua's mother becomes obsessed with Millat and this causes Joshua great embarrassment. As a result, Joshua rebels against his family and joins an animal rights group who organizes a protest against Joshua's father. Later, Joshua and Irie will become lovers.

Joyce and Marcus Chalfen

Joyce Chalfen is a horticultural expert who has written several books on the subject. Joyce is a mother and she wants to be needed. However, Joyce's own children are too old to need her, so when Millat shows up on her doorstep, she inserts herself into his life quickly, thrilled with the idea of being needed. However, Alsana does not appreciate the interference of this woman and battles with her over Millat. Joyce thinks Alsana is a bad mother and does not care about her opinion and continues to become involved with Millat anyway, even paying for Millat to see a therapist.

Marcus Chalfen is Joyce's husband. Marcus is a scientist who has genetically engineered a mouse to grow cancerous tumors. Marcus's work inspires a great deal of disapproval from many groups, including an animal rights group, Millat's KEVIN, and the

Jehovah's Witnesses. Marcus does not understand this disapproval as he believes what he is doing is a good thing. Magid is on Marcus's side, helping him with the demonstration of the mouse that is set to take place over several years in London. It is at the opening ceremonies of this demonstration that Millat pulls a gun and attempts to kill Marcus and his scientist friends.



Objects/Places

The Hussein-Ishmael

The Hussein-Ishmael is a halal butcher outside of which Archie attempts to commit suicide and is instead urged to move on.

The Watchtower

The Watchtower is a secular magazine published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Clara's mother is a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Clara grows up peddling these magazines to neighbors in order to save her soul.

Letters from Horst Ibelgauf's

Archie receives irregular letters from Horst Ibelgauf's, an opponent in a track cycling race, of which he believes are somehow psychically relevant to the events in his life.

Ryan's Scooter

Clara was riding without a helmet on the back of her boyfriend, Ryan's, scooter when they hit a tree and she lost her top teeth. Later, Hortense would become Ryan's passenger when he moves in with Hortense and provides a sidecar for the scooter.

The Palace

The Palace is a restaurant run by Ardashir Mukhul, Samad's cousin. Samad works as the head waiter at this restaurant throughout the book.

O'Connell's

O'Connell's is the name of the cafe/bar where Samad and Archie often spend their evenings.

Santa Antonia Church

Hortense was born inside Santa Antonia Church during the infamous Kingston earthquake of 1907 in Jamaica.



Glenard Oak Comprehensive School

Glenard Oak Comprehensive School is the school that Irie and Millat attend. The school was ironically named after an English man living in Jamaica who attempted to rape Ambrosia Bowden moments before she gave birth to Hortense Bowden in Santa Antonia Church during the great earthquake. Glenard was killed by a falling statue during this earthquake moments before Ambrosia's water broke.

Gangster Movies

Millat is a huge fan of gangster movies and likes to imitate actors such as Al Pacino and Ray Liotta.

FutureMouse

FutureMouse is Marcus's creation, a genetically altered mouse that grows cancers at a predictable time and rate.

KEVIN

Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation, or KEVIN, is the radical Muslim organization that Millat joins as a teenager.

Clara's Teeth

Irie learns about Clara's false teeth during a middle of the night discussion and uses this undisclosed secret as a reason to flee her parents' home.



Themes

Identity and Heredity

Identity is an important element of a person's self esteem. This identity comes from the way a person looks at his own behavior and feeling about who he is as a person. Heredity in this context is the identity that a person has from who his parents are and what their traditions might be. In this novel, these two definitions of identity are at war with each other when it comes to specific main characters within the novel. Samad is an immigrant from Bangladesh whose family was highly religious and steeped in great tradition. Now that Samad lives in England, he has found a world that is less strict and more open to behaviors that had been banned by Samad's religious upbringing. This causes Samad to have an identity crisis, especially when faced with the temptations of sex and alcohol, both things that were highly regulated and discouraged in his childhood. Not only does Samad struggle with his own identity crisis, however, but he also worries over the wellbeing of his children.

Samad's children are second-generation immigrants. As a result, they are caught between the world they live in, the world of free sex, drugs, and independence, and the world their father attempts to create in their home, one of religious teachings and strict rules governing their behavior. Complicating things even more, the children see their father failing to live up to his own rules of behavior and have trouble seeing through the hypocrisy of his rules as compared to his behavior. The children, especially Millat, feel as though they have little guidance on how to form their own identity in this confusing environment. Millat acts out, joining gangs and religious cults, stealing and doing drugs, finally getting himself caught up in an attempted murder plot. Magid, on the other hand, has been sent to live in Bangladesh and has grown into a responsible, religious young man. Magid has continued to embrace the Western world anyway, however, disappointing his father by returning to England in order to pursue a career in the law. Neither boy lives up to his father's expectations, but both find an identity that he can be content with. Samad himself, however, never seems to find peace with his own identity.

Irie, Archie and Clara's daughter, also struggles with her own identity. Irie is the granddaughter of a Jamaican maid and an English sailor. However, Irie does not know the full extent of her heritage because her mother does not feel the need to share with Irie the details of her own past, let alone her mother's past. Clara feels that the past should remain buried and that the present is all that matters. Irie does not see it this way and decides to leave home when yet one more revelation comes to light that leaves her feeling as though she knows little about her own past. Irie cannot form an identity without a full disclosure of her mother's identity. Heritage is what truly matters to Irie. However, in the end, Irie realizes that she is a strong, independent woman who does not need another person to help form her identity, and thus does not need her heritage to know who she is. In this way, Irie eventually comes to discover herself and find happiness in who she is.



Religion

Religion is an important theme to this book because it is an element that can be found in both the stories of Millat and Magid, as well as Irie. Millat especially finds religion to be a driving force in his life first because of his father and later because of a religious sect he joins in order to escape the oppression of his father's hypocrisy. Millat's father is a Muslim. However, Samad finds following this religion difficult in face of the temptations that exist in the Western world where he lives. Samad wants to be a good Muslim but cannot give up alcohol and women. Millat sees this behavior and finds his father to be a hypocrite who does not practice what he preaches. Due to this, Millat cannot bring himself to follow his father's rules or to look up to him the way a child should.

Later, when lost in a world of teen angst, Millat joins a group called KEVIN that is a strict Muslim association that is involved in activism. Millat finds the group exciting and embraces it in a way he was never able to do with his father. However, the group causes Millat to question some of his own behaviors and often leaves him angry and confused, leading to a murder plot that nearly culminates in the death of one of Millat's adult friends.

Clara grew up with a mother who was a strict Jehovah's Witness. Clara spent a large amount of her childhood spreading this faith door to door and waiting for the end of the world. However, when Clara's mother converts one of Clara's boyfriends, Clara sees through this religion and decides to get out as quickly as possible. This is when Clara meets and marries Archie. Religion ceases to be a part of Clara's life. However, when her daughter, Irie, becomes a teenager and seeks out her grandmother in order to help her find a piece of her own identity, Irie becomes embroiled in this religion as well. Irie is stronger than her mother and is able to see through the talk of doom and the odd behavior of her grandmother and her young convert. Religion does not have the same impact on Irie's life that it did her mother's, but it still serves to shape a small amount of Irie's personality and therefore is an important theme to her story.

Six Degrees of Separation

Six degrees of separation is a theory to explain that all people in the world are separated at most by six people. This theory plays an important role in this novel, making it a theme of the novel. There are several incidences in this novel in which people from the past, either from a main character's direct past or a relative's past, that will have an impact on the lives of the main characters. The first of these incidences is Dr. Sick, a scientist that Samad and Archie come into contact with during World War II. Dr. Sick has been accused of war crimes and is arrested by a group of men led by Samad, who is pretending to be an officer rather than his true rank of private. Samad feels that he has not made a contribution to the war in an honorable way and sees the punishment of this scientist as his last chance to make a difference. Samad and Archie take the scientist and Samad encourages Archie to kill him. However, despite allowing Samad to believe he has done this, it is later revealed that Archie did not kill Dr. Sick.



Instead, Archie made a deal with the man and allowed him to survive, only to come face to face with him again.

Another incident involves the high school where Irie and Millat attend. The school is named after the Englishman who established the business that was originally housed in the building. This Englishman turns out to be an English entrepreneur who lived in Jamaica about the time that Irie's grandmother was conceived and born. Later, the author reveals that this man not only knew Irie's great-grandmother, but was in the process of raping her when an earthquake hit, causing his death by falling debris. It was on this day that Irie's grandmother was born. Finally, the man who saved Archie's life at the beginning of the novel, a butcher, turns out to be a relative of Samad's cousin and a member of KEVIN, the same group that Millat joins toward the end of the novel. These incidences have a small impact on the overall plot of the novel, but their impact is large enough that the reader should consider them an important thematic element to the overall plot.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person omniscient. The author uses many different characters as her point of view character, shifting often between the many main characters, occasionally several times within a single chapter. Since the point of view is omniscient, the reader is given insight not only into the actions of these chosen point of view characters, but their emotions as well. The author also tells back-stories on these characters that frequently do not have a clear narrating character that the reader is familiar with. The author also offers opinions and commentary on the plot in situations where the commentary is mildly obtrusive.

This point of view has the potential of being confusing due to the constant shifting of narrating characters. However, the author keeps this confusion to a minimum by announcing the narrating character at the beginning of the passage and sticking with that character until a clear divider, such as the end of a chapter or a double space between paragraphs, signals a change in narrator. The author uses many narrating characters in order to handle to large number of main characters and to introduce aspects of the plot that could be told by only specific characters within the novel. This technique allows for a much broader and more in-depth story than the author might have been capable of offering with another point of view technique. The back-stories and the author's opinions also have the potential of being confusing and somewhat distracting. However, the author handles the back-stories by separating them into separate chapters, a technique that again keeps confusion to a minimum. The opinions expressed by the author are often left within the text of the plot development, leaving the reader occasionally wondering if these statements are from the author directly or thoughts of the narrating character and are somewhat confusing. However, the comments serve to enrich to plot and therefore are a minimum distraction to the overall impact of the novel's plot.

Setting

The great majority of the novel is set in London, specifically the suburb of Willesden. Willesden is where Archie and Samad buy homes for their wives with the idea that the area is better than others to raise children. The streets are tree lined and have less trash and unsavory characters living on them than other areas of the city where they had lived before their children's births. However, this area fails to protect the children from becoming involved in trouble in their teen years. In fact, Millat becomes involved in drugs as well as other teen angst, dragging Irie along with him. It is this circumstance that brings Irie and Millat to the Chalfen's, a family of intellectuals who will have a large impact on the lives of both the Jones and the Iqbals.



The true setting of the novel is family. The novel's plot revolves around the impact of family on all the main characters of the novel, beginning with the heritage of Clara's mother's religion to Samad's attachment to his heritage left behind in Bengal, including the history of his great grandfather's rebellion against the English. Clara's mother was obsessed with Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs that the end of the world was upon them, forcing Clara to run toward the first man to show her any kindness. Clara marries believing it is the best way to get away from the craziness of her mother and to begin a life of her own, controlling her own destiny. Samad, in the meantime, believes it is his duty to raise his children with the same values his parents raised him with, a feat that quickly appears to be impossible in the Western world. Samad sends one of his children home to Bengal, causing disruption in his own household. It is this disruption that causes not only tension in his marriage, but his son to act out in exactly the way he had hoped to prevent. It is the impact of family and the actions of family members that propels the plot of this novel and thus works as a major setting within the novel.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in clear English with slang and foreign phrases scattered liberally throughout. Due to the fact that the setting and the author both are English, there are many references to English slang, such as using the word fag for cigarette, that lend authenticity to the setting as well as the dialogue throughout the novel. The author also uses foreign phrases on occasion when referring to Samad and his family, enriching the authenticity of their Bengali background. The writer also has a good ear for accents and attempts to write the dialogue for Hortense with a Jamaican flare that expresses the complex accent that she retained from her home country of Jamaica.

The use of English slang within the novel could become confusing for the reader at times throughout this novel due to the unfamiliarity of certain slang phrases for readers in areas other than Europe. However, the author is careful not to use more than a few of these slang words throughout the novel and when using words that might be unrecognizable the author often gave explanations of their meaning in dialogue or quick commentary. The foreign phrases are also quickly explained and are often not used in a context in which the reader must know exact definitions in order to understand their use or meaning within the plot.

Finally, the use of accents in the dialogue as it pertains to Hortense is difficult to read and often causes the reader to slow down in order to understand each passage. However, this dialogue does make it clear to the reader who is speaking and enhances the character of Hortense by showing this traditional side of her character.

Structure

The novel is written in four parts with twenty chapters. Each part is named for a character that has a major impact on that section of the novel. Each chapter also has an individual name, many of those names pertaining either to a character and specific

event, or to a dental condition or operation. These names serve not only to add a little humor to the novel, but also to give the reader a hint to what will take place within the chapter.

The novel has one main plot, that being the interactions of Archie and Samad with their families. However, there are also many subplots, each following a different member of the family. The main subplot follows the lives of Millat and Irie as they grow into adolescence and become friendly with the Chalfen family.

Another subplot follows the controversy around Marcus Chalfen's FutureMouse and the momentum of this controversy that brings all the main characters into the final showdown of the final chapter. There are also several other subplots that explore the family histories of both Clara and Samad, as well as the motivations of several other minor characters.



Quotes

"Alfred Archibald Jones was dressed in corduroy and sat in a fume-filled Cavalier Musketeer Estate facedown on the steering wheel, hoping the judgment would not be too heavy upon him."

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 1, The Peculiar Second Marriage of Archie Jones, pg. 3

"A dark line would now be drawn underneath the whole incident, underneath the whole sorry day, had something not happened that led to the transformation of Archie Jones in every particular that a man can be transformed; and not due to any particular effort on his part, but by means of the entirely random, adventitious collision on one person with another. Something happened by accident. That accident was Clara Bowden."

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 1, The Peculiar Second Marriage of Archie Jones, pg. 19

"Clara saw Archie through the gray-green eyes of loss; her world had just disappeared, the faith she lived by had receded like a low tide, and Archie, quite by accident, had become the bloke in the joke; the last man on earth."

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1975, Chapter 2, Teething Trouble, pg. 38

"But as soon as she had said it, the weight of the other possibility rested on the brains of the two girl-wives. That their husbands told each other everything. That it was they themselves who were kept in the dark."

Part One, Archie, 1974, 1945, Chapter 3, Two Families, pg. 55

"Children. Samad had caught children like a disease. Yes, he had sired two of them willingly—as willingly as a man can—but he had not bargained for this other thing. This thing that no one tells you about. This thing of *knowing* children."

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 6, The Temptation of Samad Iqbal, pg. 105

"And the sins of the Eastern father shall be visited upon the Western sons."

Part Two, Samad, 1984, 1857, Chapter 7, Molars, pg. 135

"But Irie didn't know she was fine. There was England, a giant mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a strange land."

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 11, The Miseducation of Irie Jones, pg. 222

"A little English education can be a dangerous thing."



Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 13, The Root Canals of Hortense Bowden, pg. 301

"Millat was right: these parents were damaged people, missing hands, missing teeth. These parents were full of information you wanted to know but were too scared to hear. But she didn't want it anymore, she was tired of it. She was sick of never getting the whole truth. She was returning to sender."

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 14, More English than the English, pg. 314

"Irie switched Joyce off. It was quite therapeutic, switching Joyce off. This was not entirely personal. It just seemed tiring and unnecessary all of a sudden, the struggle to force something out of the recalcitrant English."

Part Three, Irie, 1990, 1907, Chapter 15, Chalfenism versus Bowdenism, pg. 332

"Because this is the thing about immigrants ('fugees, ymigrys, travelers): they cannot escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow."

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 17, Crisis Talks and Eleventh-Hour Tactics, pg. 385

"But surely to tell these tall tales and others like them would be to speed the myth, the wicked lie, that the past is always tense and the future, perfect. And as Archie knows, it's not like that. It's never been like that."

Part Four, Magid, Millat, and Marcus, 1992, 1999, Chapter 20, Of Mice and Memory, pg. 448



Topics for Discussion

Why does the author introduce Archie and Samad's experience in the war the way she does? What does their time in Germany have to do with the overall plot of the novel? Why is Archie's killing of Dr. Sick important to Samad? How do you think Samad would have acted toward Archie if he had known the truth about Dr. Sick's death? What does Archie's actions with Dr. Sick say about Archie? What does his decision to save Dr. Sick's life at the end of the novel say about Archie?

Why does the author go into such depth to discuss Clara's family? What does Hortense's birth have to do with the overall impact of the novel? Does the introduction of Hortense's birth and the circumstances surrounding it have anything to do with Archie and his relationship to Dr. Sick? Does one foreshadow the other? If so, how? How would you describe the theme suggested by these circumstances?

What are the similarities between the Iqbal marriage and the Jones' marriage? How are they different? Is there love in these marriages? If not, why does Clara marry Archie? Why does Alsana marry Samad? Why do these marriages last so long if not based on love? What are they based on?

The past has a great deal to do with the plot of this novel. Why is that? How does the past affect Irie, Millat, and Magid? How does the past affect Archie and Samad? What about Clara and Alsana? Do their pasts have an impact on their present?

Why does the writer introduce the Chalfens? What is the purpose of these characters? How do they introduce tension into the plot? Is this tension an expected turn within the plot? Do the Chalfens fit in with the plot? What about Marcus's FutureMouse? Why does the writer introduce this aspect? Is it necessary to the overall plot?

What is the significance of beginning the novel with Archie's attempted suicide and ending it with his decision to jump in front of a bullet? How does this show change in Archie's character? Why does Archie have so much trouble making decisions throughout the novel but finds this decision easy? Why does Archie save the same Dr. Sick two times? Is Archie really saving Dr. Sick at the end or is he saving Millat and Samad?

Analyze Archie and Samad's friendship. What is the nature of this friendship? What impact does it have on Archie? What impact does it have on Samad? Do these two men get the same thing out of the friendship? Why or why not? How does this friendship shape the lives of their family members?