Long Walk to Freedom

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NELSON MANDELA

Nelson Mandela was born in 1918 into the Thembu royal family in the Xhosa people of South Africa. After studying to become a lawyer, he became increasingly involved as an activist against apartheid, the racist set of laws that governed life in South Africa during much of Mandela's lifetime. Mandela's participation in activist groups like the African National Congress made the government view Mandela as an enemy, culminating in him being sentenced to life in prison. During this time in prison, Mandela didn't give up hope and began writing an autobiography that would later for the basis for his book *Long Walk to Freedom* (later published in 1994). Mandela eventually achieved freedom in February 1990, and he went on to become the first president of South Africa to be democratically elected in a free election. He became less active in public life starting around 2004, although he continued to make occasional appearances and published a collection of his speeches and letters called *Conversations with Myself* in 2010. He died in 2013 at the age of 95.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As Mandela describes in his novel, the South African policy of apartheid—or legally sanctioned racial segregation—was first instituted in 1948. It ensured that South Africa's minority White population remained in power in politics, economic concerns, and when it came to housing and employment opportunities. Numerous acts throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s banned interracial marriages and sexual relations and required South African citizens to register their race. Beginning in the 1960s, then, the government began to move Black South Africans into segregated neighborhoods and eventually into bantustans—a group of 10 segregated tribal areas—that were conceived of as independent states. People who moved into bantustans lost their South African citizenship. The African National Congress (the political party Mandela would later join) was founded in response to South Africa's long history of anti-Black racism in 1912, and it remained the leading political organization opposing apartheid until the policy's end in 1990. After a transition period, Mandela won South Africa's first free and open election in 1994, making him the country's first democratically elected president. In 1996, Mandela commissioned the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to study the effects of apartheid, which found 21,000 deaths occurred during the apartheid period as a result of political violence.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Nelson Mandela's earliest literary influences were often writers that he felt could help him in his political ambitions. In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela mentions reading writing both by and about radical politicians such as Che Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mahatma Gandhi. He was not allowed to read political books in prison, but he does cite reading *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, books that, while fictional, combine political ideas with narrative in a way that is similar to what Mandela does in his autobiography. Mandela's work went on to have a big influence on the genre of political autobiography, which has only grown in popularity in recent years, becoming a regular part of political campaigns around the world. Of the many recent political memoirs, Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* is perhaps the one most influenced by Mandela, with Obama eventually writing the foreword for Mandela's *Conversations with Myself*. Mandela's ideas and writing also had an influence on the development South African literature, specifically among novelists who condemned apartheid, including Alan Paton (*Cry, the Beloved Country*), Nadine Gordimer (*Burger's Daughter*), and J. M. Coetzee (*Age of Iron*).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Long Walk to Freedom
- **When Written:** 1977–1994
- **Where Written:** Robben Island prison and other locations across South Africa
- **When Published:** 1994
- **Literary Period:** Postcolonial
- **Genre:** Autobiography
- **Setting:** South Africa
- **Climax:** Mandela is freed from prison.
- **Antagonist:** Apartheid
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Better Late Than Never. Although advocating for Mandela's freedom became a popular cause internationally, not everyone supported him. Ronald Reagan, for example, gave a speech saying that the ANC used "calculated terror" to create "the conditions for a racial war." He placed Mandela on a terrorist watchlist, where he remained until 2008, and before then, Mandela's U.S. visits required a special waiver.

Mandela's Effect. Mandela has long been a figure in global popular culture, inspiring songs ("Free Nelson Mandela" by the Specials, "Asimbonga" by Johnny Clegg), films (*Invictus*, a movie adaptation of *Long Walk to Freedom*), authorized and unauthorized biographies, statues, public murals, and even a Chris Rock stand-up routine about marriage.

PLOT SUMMARY

Nelson Mandela is born Rolihlahla Mandela into the Thembu royal family of the Xhosa people in South Africa, near the beginning of the twentieth century. His wealthy father loses much of his money in a dispute with a rival, and after his father's death, Mandela goes to live under the guardianship of the Thembu regent Jongintaba. While in Jongintaba's care, Mandela attends prestigious schools. Though he excels at academics, he is sometimes regarded as a bumpkin from the country. When Jongintaba tries to arrange a marriage for Mandela, Mandela runs away to Johannesburg, finding himself adrift with little idea what to do next.

Mandela eventually gets accredited as a lawyer and starts a law firm with Oliver Tambo. He meets his first wife, Evelyn Mase, and although they're happy together at first, they start to grow apart and divorce. Not long after, he meets his second wife, Winnie, a social worker who will remain married to Mandela for the next several decades. Mandela becomes increasingly involved in work as an activist against apartheid, the White government policy of separating people by race and forcing non-White people to live in inferior conditions. Mandela gets involved with a political party known as the ANC and rises through the ranks. Although the ANC initially attempts to change South Africa through nonviolent techniques inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's work in India, eventually several ANC members conclude that it's time to consider more aggressive actions in response to the government's oppression. Mandela takes charge of forming and leading MK, a military arm of the ANC. Although Mandela considers the possibility of guerrilla warfare, he ultimately decides that sabotage of property is a more effective technique.

The actions of activists like Mandela cause the government to clamp down even more than before, calling a State of Emergency in order to have more power to follow and detain political prisoners. Mandela is subject to travel bans that stop him from using his **car**, and eventually, he is detained in prison. After getting out, Mandela goes underground, doing political organizing in secret because it is no longer legal to do so openly. Finally, Mandela is caught and put on trial with several of his allies.

Although Mandela defends himself well in court, he is ultimately declared guilty. He fears the death penalty but Judge de Wet gives him a life sentence instead. Mandela begins his life sentence at **Robben Island** prison, located off the coast of South Africa. Conditions there are difficult, particularly for Black prisoners, and Mandela has to work long hours in a lime quarry.

As time goes on in prison, Mandela tries not to lose hope, something that he is able to do because he believes he is fundamentally an optimist. He does what he can to organize with fellow activists in prison, like Walter Sisulu, trying hard to keep up with news of the outside world. Some warders at the prison seem intrigued by Mandela, while others are cruel and seem intent on breaking him down. While in prison, Mandela works on the first draft of a memoir, which will eventually become *Long Walk to Freedom*. He has a friend smuggle the manuscript out so that it isn't discovered.

Mandela gets transferred to Pollsmoor prison, which has slightly better living conditions but leaves him even more isolated from his fellow activists. He continues to only be able to see his family on very rare occasions. Eventually, he is transferred to Victor Verster prison, where his accommodations are nicer, almost like a cottage, but the barbed wire fencing reminds him that he is confined.

As news of the horrors of apartheid spread, countries and international organizations put pressure on South Africa to abandon the apartheid system. Mandela starts going to meetings that include President de Klerk, who supports apartheid but believes that he has no choice but to release Mandela if he wants to hold on to power. In February 1990, Mandela finally walks free from prison. He doesn't take much time to relax, traveling across Africa and the rest of the world before coming back to help organize South Africa's first free democratic election where anyone can vote, regardless of race.

The time leading up the election is tense, with violence continuing across South Africa, even among groups that oppose apartheid. In the end, however, the ANC triumphs in the election, falling just short of being able to govern completely on its own, but still getting the largest share of the votes. Mandela becomes president and at his inauguration, people of all backgrounds and from all parts of the country come together to sing.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nelson Mandela – Nelson Mandela, the author of this autobiography, is a Black man from the Xhosa people in South Africa who is born into the Thembu royal family. Although his father loses much of his wealth, Mandela goes on to get a good education at prestigious schools under the guidance of the Thembu regent Jongintaba. Still, when Jongintaba tries to arrange a marriage for Mandela, Mandela runs away to Johannesburg. Mandela's experiences in school and working as

a lawyer in Johannesburg help him to realize the extent of the racism present in South African society under the apartheid system. He becomes a committed member of the liberation political party the ANC, rising to a leadership position. Over time, his views evolve, and as he sees how unreasonable the ruling Nationalist party is, he begins to increasingly see violence as a reasonable response. As a result, he begins to lead MK, the military arm of the ANC. Ultimately, Mandela's political actions make him an enemy of the government, and Mandela ends up forced to spend over 27 years of his life in prison at **Robben Island**, Pollsmoor, and Victor Verster. Despite the often-bleak conditions in prison, including forced labor, Mandela tries to remain optimistic and make plans for the day when he's eventually released. That day comes in February 1990, but Mandela's work isn't over—he campaigns to become the country's first democratically elected president, negotiating between the demands of his own allies and the White ruling party.

Nomzamo Winifred "Winnie" Madikizela – Winnie is a Xhosa social worker who becomes Mandela's second wife and an anti-apartheid activist. She marries Mandela not long before his legal troubles begin, and the two of them remain married through the entirety of Mandela's 27-plus year prison sentence. Mandela states at one point that he believes Winnie's life outside of prison may have even been harder than his own in prison, due to the fact that in addition to raising a family alone, she dealt with harassment by police and the government as a result of her and Mandela's political involvement. Mandela announces his divorce to Winnie at a press conference a few years after his release but claims that the separation isn't due to animosity. Winnie is Mandela's personal connection to the outside world for much of his time in prison, and she demonstrates how the personal and political intertwine in Mandela's life.

Jongintaba – Jongintaba is the regent of the Thembu people and is the father of Justice, eventually also becoming a surrogate father figure to Mandela when Mandela comes to live with him. Jongintaba is a just man who helps Mandela get a good education, but he can also be very traditional. This leads to a clash when Jongintaba tries to arrange a marriage for Mandela and Mandela runs away. Not long after, Jongintaba gets sick and dies, leaving Mandela to regret how he handled things with Jongintaba. Jongintaba represents an old way of life in South Africa that managed to survive into the colonial era, but which new apartheid laws seemed determined to crush.

Chief Albert Luthuli – Chief Albert Luthuli is a lifelong anti-apartheid activist who becomes president of the ANC and is an ally of Mandela's. In general, Luthuli represents what began as the more radical and activist side of the party and which eventually became a more mainstream position. The one issue where Luthuli differs with Mandela is on violence—Luthuli is reluctant to give up on nonviolent tactics, although he does ultimately allow others in the ANC to use violence. He is a formative figure in shaping Mandela's own politics, and his death while Mandela is in prison is a great tragedy for Mandela.

Walter Sisulu – Walter Sisulu is a prominent anti-apartheid activist and ANC leader who becomes one of Mandela's closest allies. He and Mandela are accused together at what later becomes known as the Rivonia Trial. The two of them spend time in prison together in both **Robben Island** and Pollsmoor, although authorities often try to keep them apart. Like Mandela, Sisulu remains optimistic and hopeful even during his time in prison.

Oliver Tambo – Oliver Tambo is a lawyer who starts a new firm with Mandela and eventually goes on to become one of his biggest allies in the anti-apartheid struggle, becoming president of the ANC after Luthuli. Although Tambo is a staunch and respected activist, he causes some controversy within the ANC later in his life due to his willingness to negotiate with South Africa's white supremacist government. Ultimately, however, he helps to build the foundation for a democratic South Africa. He dies of a stroke just before Mandela gets elected president in the nation's first free election.

F. W. de Klerk – F. W. de Klerk is the prime minister of South Africa who releases Mandela from prison. He has a complicated relationship with Mandela, with the two of them winning the Nobel Peace Prize jointly, and Mandela sometimes tentatively praising him. Ultimately, however, de Klerk does not want to fundamentally dismantle apartheid, and partly as a result of this, he loses to Mandela in South Africa's first free democratic election.

Robert Sobukwe – Robert Sobukwe is an anti-apartheid activist that Mandela admires, but the two of them are eventually at odds with each other once Sobukwe becomes the head of the PAC. The PAC champions Pan-Africanism as the solution to apartheid, not multiracialism like the ANC. Like Mandela, he spends much of his life in prison and is an influential figure in the liberation movement.

Judge de Wet – Judge De Wet is the judge who presides over the Rivonia Trial, in which Mandela and several other anti-apartheid activists are tried. Although he is not as radically conservative as some of the other people Mandela encounters, choosing not to give Mandela the death penalty, he does ultimately sentence Mandela to life in prison.

Justice – Justice is the son of Jongintaba, and he becomes like a brother to Mandela as the two of them go to school together and later run away to Johannesburg. Justice ends up succeeding Jongintaba, perhaps reflecting the type of life Mandela himself might have had if he hadn't left home and become part of the larger liberation struggle.

MINOR CHARACTERS

H. F. Verwoerd – Verwoerd is a Dutch-heritage South African prime minister who becomes one of the key figures in shaping apartheid. He enacts several racist laws and frequently uses brutal methods like imprisonment to stop his political opponents, which is what leads to Mandela's long time in jail.

Chief Buthelezi – Chief Buthelezi is the head of the Inkatha, an African group that violently opposes the ANC, leading to strife as Mandela and others try to arrange South Africa's first free democratic election.

Dr. Xuma – Dr. Xuma is a friend of Mandela's family who helps Justice get a job near Johannesburg, not realizing that he and Mandela are running away from home. Dr. Xuma becomes the head of the ANC, but he resigns after the more activist wing of the party forces him out.

Evelyn Mase – Evelyn Mase is a nurse who became Mandela's first wife. Their marriage ended in divorce, in part due to how much time Mandela was devoting to political activities and to Evelyn's increasing involvement as a Jehovah's Witness.

Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa (Mandela's Father) – Mandela's father is a member of the Thembu royal family in South Africa. He is deposed in a political dispute and loses much of his wealth, so he sends Mandela away to live with Jongintaba.

Nosekeni Fanny (Mandela's Mother) – Mandela's mother is one of several wives of Mandela's father, known as the Right Hand wife. She dies while Mandela is in prison, which causes Mandela to think of his past and take stock of his life.

P. W. Botha – Botha is a prime minister of South Africa who continues the policy of apartheid. He is one of the first to contemplate releasing Mandela, but he only offers to do so under unfavorable terms.

Dr. Malan – Dr. Malan is a Dutch nationalist who becomes prime minister of South Africa and lays the groundwork for apartheid.

Zindziswa "Zindzi" Mandela – Zindzi is one of Mandela's daughters with Winnie. She's named after the daughter of a Xhosa poet, and at one point, the Mandelas forge her birth certificate to allow her to visit Mandela in prison.

Zenani "Zeni" Mandela – Zeni is one of Mandela's daughters to goes to a boarding school in Swaziland with her sister Zindzi. She eventually marries into the Swazi royal family.

Desmond Tutu – Desmond Tutu is a Nobel Peace Prize–winning anti-apartheid activist. He crosses paths with Mandela on a few occasions, like when he calls to congratulate Mandela on his release.

Madiba Thembekile – Madiba "Thembi" Thembekile is Mandela's first son with Evelyn Mase. His death in a **car** crash while Mandela is in prison is a major tragedy of Mandela's life.

Ahmed "Kathy" Kathrada – Kathy is an Indian anti-apartheid activist whom Mandela spends time with during his imprisonment on **Robben Island**.

Colonel Piet Badenhorst – Badenhorst is a brutal commanding officer who rules **Robben Island** for a short period of time before being forced out, partly due to Mandela's official complaints about him.

Colonel Willemse – Colonel Willemse is a commanding officer at **Robben Island** who is slightly more just than Badenhorst and who meets with Mandela when he is negotiating his release.

Reverend Mabutho – Reverend Mabutho is a man who Mandela stays with near Johannesburg after he runs away from Jongintaba to avoid an arranged marriage.

Mr. Xhoma – Mr. Xhoma is a Black landowner near Johannesburg that Mandela briefly lives with after running away from Jongintaba.

Dr. Moroka – Dr. Moraka is elected president of the ANC after Dr. Xuma steps down. He has the support of Mandela and other younger activists at the time.

Robert Resha – Robert Resha is a journalist and ANC member whose comments get taken out of context to support the government's case against Mandela.

Mac Maharaj – Mac Maharaj is a prisoner on **Robben Island** who helps Mandela smuggle a draft of his autobiography out of prison.

George Bizos – George Bizos is a lawyer and friend of the Mandelas who defends Winnie in court.

Kobie Coetsee – Kobie Coetsee is the South African minister of justice who doesn't support Mandela, but who nevertheless plays a role in negotiating his release.

Dr. Barnard – Dr. Barnard heads a South African group similar to the CIA, and his presence at meetings about Mandela's potential release often intimidates Mandela.

Dullah Omar – Dullah Omar is an attorney who represents Winnie.

TERMS

African National Congress (ANC) – The ANC, which **Mandela** joins and eventually becomes president of, is the major political party in South Africa opposed to apartheid. It was a multi-racial coalition that aimed to incorporate all opponents of apartheid, and for much of its existence, it was illegal because the White South Africans in the government believed it was dangerous.

Apartheid – Literally meaning "apartness," apartheid was a policy implemented by the white supremacist government of South Africa to keep people of different races apart. It was in place from 1948 until 1990. **Mandela** and several other figures in the book oppose apartheid and the racial injustice that it

perpetuates.

Bantustan – A *bantustan* is a territory in South Africa created under the apartheid system. The bantustan system forced Black South Africans out of their homes, giving more of their land to White residents and attempting to divide Black citizens by separating them into tribes. Those who moved to a bantustan lost their South African citizenship.

Inkatha – Inkatha is a group led by **Chief Buthelezi** that initially works with the ANC against apartheid but which eventually comes to oppose the ANC, sometimes violently. Inkatha causes trouble during **Mandela**'s efforts to hold South Africa's first free democratic election.

Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) – Like the ANC, the PAC opposes apartheid, but they employ different methods. They only have Black members (as opposed to ANC, who are multiracial), and they advocate for more aggressive actions. **Mandela** admires many elements of the PAC but also sometimes finds them frustrating.

Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) – Meaning "spear of the nation," MK is the paramilitary arm of the ANC. Despite his reluctance to employ violence, **Mandela** leads the MK at its inception because he believes that the unreasonable South African government leaves him and his allies with no choice.

Xhosa – The Xhosa are a large ethnic group in South Africa that **Mandela** belongs to. "Xhosa" can also refer to the language they speak.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACISM AND DIVISION

Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* describes Mandela's life in South Africa primarily during the apartheid era, when racial segregation is an official government policy. As a Black man in the country, Mandela experiences racism in ways big and small, and he also witnesses it happening to others. Mandela first experiences this racism at school and in his law career, when White people try to assert dominance over him by making him do chores for them, even in situations where he technically outranks them. As he becomes more politically conscious, he gets involved with the African National Congress (ANC), an initially peaceful group that nevertheless is persecuted by the government and the police. Mandela is banned from traveling in his **car**, banned from political activity, imprisoned, forced underground, then imprisoned again, all because the government sees him as dangerous, largely due to his race and his influence on other nonwhite South Africans. During Mandela's more than 27 years in prison, conditions in prison continue to reflect the strict racial hierarchy of South Africa, with Indian and Coloured (mixed race) prisoners getting marginally better food than African ones like Mandela until several years into his sentence. Additionally, though some White South Africans live comfortably in suburbs just miles from where Mandela suffers in prison, Mandela's autobiography shows how racism even makes things worse for white South Africans, who don't understand Mandela's true aims and so instead live in fear and ignorance.

Mandela describes how White South African leaders like Verwoerd, Botha, and de Klerk attempt to use racism to their advantage, holding on to power by keeping their opposition divided. The cornerstone of this is the bantustan plan, which on the surface appears to give Africans a place to live. But in practice, it uproots their lives and gives an even larger share of the land to the country's White residents. The bantustan system also attempts to foil unity efforts like the ANC, trying to get African people to identify with their local tribes rather than banding together to oppose the government. To a lesser extent, some African figures and groups in the book also promote racial divisions, like the Pan-African Congress (PAC), whom Mandela disagrees with because of their narrow focus on specifically African unity, rather than on his own goal of unity among all races. Although Mandela acknowledges that overcoming racism is difficult, he believes it is the only hope for a stable, peaceful South African government. His beliefs are vindicated when the multiracial ANC takes power at the end of the autobiography, although Mandela readily acknowledges that one election is not enough to fully remove the influence of racism from South African life. Still, *Long Walk to Freedom* depicts how racism leads to injustice and impedes social progress, even for those who supposedly benefit from the racism, because of how racism divides people into groups and fosters animosity and distrust.

NEGOTIATION, DEMOCRACY, AND PROGRESS

Although today, Nelson Mandela is widely admired for his political and social justice accomplishments, his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* shows how his ideas were controversial in their time, earning many admirers for his bravery but also facing opposition from all sides. Mandela's primary opponents throughout the book are the Nationalists, a political party in South Africa dedicated to apartheid, a form of legally-sanctioned white supremacy. Although the Nationalists are supposedly democratically elected, only White people have the right to vote in South Africa during their reign, making their rule far from democratic—White people are a tiny majority in

South Africa. In addition to the Nationalists, over the course of his long career in politics, Mandela also faces opposition from people who are on his side of the liberation struggle but who have different ideas about the best course forward. Most prominent among these opponents are the PAC, who focus exclusively on the Black experience and leave out members of other oppressed races in the country, like Indian South Africans. Additionally, Mandela also has allies like Tambo and Luthuli, who are less radical than Mandela when it comes to endorsing violence as a protest tactic. Mandela always listens to and respects these allies, even backing down in cases where he sees he's outnumbered, but he's also forthright about defending his own opinions about the best path forward.

Amid all this opposition, Mandela tries to present himself as someone who is willing to negotiate and make compromises. As the book's title suggests, Mandela believes that obtaining freedom is a long progress, and he celebrates small, incremental gains, while realizing that there is still more work to do. Mandela tells stories that describe various instances when he managed to negotiate with people who had different viewpoints from him. For example, although Mandela strongly disagrees with President de Klerk, he accepts the Nobel Peace Prize in conjunction with him and makes sure to shake his hand after their presidential debate. Mandela believes that it is important to respect his enemies and try to find common ground, even when he believes that their policies or beliefs are unjust. The culmination of Mandela and his allies' efforts is the first truly democratic election in South African history, when all citizens have a right to vote. The election does not immediately resolve the nation's racial strife or violence, but Mandela relates how the occasion brings together people of different races, singing together in both Afrikaans and Xhosa. Ultimately, Mandela's autobiography suggests that while democracy can be a slow and uneven way of effecting social change, it is still the most effective way to achieve change that lasts. Additionally, his story shows how the path to this change may involve negotiating and compromising without losing sight of one's principles.

NONVIOLENT PROTEST VS. VIOLENT PROTEST

In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela presents himself as a pragmatist, but this can be difficult when he faces moral and strategic questions about the use of force that have no easy answer. Mandela is a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, who famously relied on nonviolent forms of protest like civil disobedience, including general strikes and hunger strikes, while protesting British rule of India. But while Mandela finds some success by employing similar tactics in South Africa, these nonviolent actions don't do enough to dismantle apartheid, a system of legally-sanctioned racism. As the government's response to him and his allies becomes more aggressive, Mandela increasingly begins to believe that violence may be necessary to combat apartheid. Mandela weighs options for violent actions that range from sabotaging property to open guerilla warfare, believing that force is required because the government of South Africa is less rational than the British government that Gandhi opposed.

But while the beginning of the book charts Mandela's evolution from a nonviolent idealist to a more pragmatic and sometimes militant leader, the ending of the autobiography finds Mandela once again considering the value of nonviolence. As his political party, the ANC, attains legitimacy and has a chance to rise to power, Mandela begins to see the spiraling violence in the country as counter-productive, making future unity impossible. Although Mandela never fully rules out violence, he urges his followers to continue the struggle peacefully, namely by voting. This reflects how South Africa has changed—from Mandela's perspective, the violence that advocated in that past is no longer necessary, in part due to his opposition becoming slightly more reasonable and receptive to new ideas. In his autobiography, Mandela argues that an effective leader is not absolutist about violence versus nonviolence. While he suggests that nonviolence is preferable because it causes less suffering, some opponents and situations can only be addressed with violence.

THE VALUE OF OPTIMISM

Even at the darkest moments of his life, like during his more than 27 years in prison at **Robben Island**, Pollsmoor, and Victor Verster, Nelson Mandela maintained a sense of optimism, calling himself "fundamentally an optimist." As Mandela makes clear in his autobiography, it's possible to be optimistic even while acknowledging the problems and injustices of the world. In fact, Mandela believes that being optimistic is an essential part of his liberation struggle, and that optimism is what keeps him from being defeated by despair. Mandela believes that the only way to properly prepare for a better future is to believe that it's possible for one to exist, and so while he's in prison, he always busies himself under the assumption that he will one day be released. One of the most important activities is writing an autobiography—a draft of the very same manuscript that will eventually become *Long Walk to Freedom*. The autobiography is useless to Mandela in prison—if discovered, the guards will simply throw it away and no one will ever see it. But Mandela arranges to smuggle the manuscript out of prison. This suggests that he believes both that he will one day be out of prison, and that future generations of people will be interested enough in his life and work to read a book about him.

As it turns out, while not all of Mandela's wishes came true in his lifetime, his optimism is generally proven correct after he gets released from prison. It's in this post-prison segment of the autobiography that the value of Mandela's previous

optimism becomes apparent. Because Mandela spent so much of his prison sentence studying important topics, keeping his body physically fit, and keeping up to date on current news, he emerges from prison in a condition to lead his country. Mandela's autobiography thus argues that optimism is valuable because it offers people hope, but also because it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, people who remain optimistic in times of trouble often deal with those difficult times better and emerge with the strength to build a better future that lives up to their optimistic worldview.

SYMBOLS

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

CAR

Nelson Mandela is one of the few Black men in South Africa to own a car, and the car becomes a symbol of his independence and self-sufficiency—which the government wants to take away under the apartheid system. Mandela's ability to procure a car testifies to both his hard-working attitude as well as to the comparatively privileged situation compared to other Black South Africans, since he was born as a member of Thembu royal family. Importantly, however, Mandela doesn't just use his privilege for himself—his car becomes a means for him to travel around the country and get involved in political organizing, even taxiing other activists around. When Mandela starts to become a popular figure, the government issues travel bans on him, trying to limit his autonomy by controlling where he can drive his car.

Although Mandela likes his car and makes good use of it when he can, cars also sometimes play a darker role in his life. Mandela's son Thembi dies in a car accident, and his wife Winnie is later injured in another accident. This reflects how the freedom that cars represent also comes with dangers and costs. Still, the book ends with a triumphant image of Mandela in a car being driven out of prison with Winnie. Mandela's drive from prison in a car reflects how his autonomy has been restored to him after decades of travel bans and imprisonments designed to take his independence away. Cars in *Long Walk to Freedom* thus represent the autonomy and mobility of Black South Africans that the government tries to take away, and while this autonomy can sometimes be difficult to attain or come with costs, Mandela's drive out of prison at the end of the book offers hope for a better future in which all South Africans have autonomy and equal rights.

ROBBEN ISLAND

The prison on Robben Island symbolizes the South African government's goals with apartheid: to isolate Black South Africans, sow division, and in doing so, deprive them of any power and agency. Robben Island is the first of the three prisons where Mandela serves his over-27-year sentence. The island is physically cut off from the rest of the country by water, showing how Mandela's imprisonment is an attempt not just to punish him but to remove him from the nation's political scene. Within the prison, the authorities go even further to isolate Mandela, limiting the times when he can talk to his fellow prisoners and transferring him once he gets too influential among one group of prisoners.

What the prison authorities do to Mandela and other Black prisoners is similar to what South African authorities are doing to the country in general under apartheid, with life in the prison often being a microcosm for life in South Africa at large. For example, just as they receive slightly preferential treatment outside the prisons, Indian and Coloured prisoners have slightly better diets than Black prisoners, and they're also allowed to wear long trousers. The Robben Island prison thus symbolizes the cruel tactics that the South African government used to isolate activists like Mandela and attempt to sow division among them—but it also ends up highlighting the strength of Mandela's character, and his firm belief that apartheid will only end if people can come together and work toward a common goal.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bay Back Books edition of *Long Walk to Freedom* published in 1995.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Apart from life, a strong constitution, and an abiding connection to the Thembu royal house, the only thing my father bestowed upon me at birth was a name, Rolihlahla. In Xhosa, Rolihlahla literally means "pulling the branch of a tree," but its colloquial meaning more accurately would be "troublemaker." I do not believe that names are destiny or that my father somehow divined my future, but in later years, friends and relatives would ascribe to my birth name the many storms I have both caused and weathered. My more familiar English or Christian name was not given to me until my first day of school.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa (Mandela's Father)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Mandela begins his autobiography by telling the origin and meaning of his name, which ends up being extremely important for his whole story. Although he is best known today as Nelson Mandela, he was originally born with the Xhosa given name of Rolihlahla, only getting the name Nelson later in school. Mandela doesn't actually know the original source or the significance of "Nelson," aside from the fact that it is British and a reflection of how White colonizers in South Africa were trying to remake the country in their own image. Still, Mandela has come to terms with the name, whatever its origins, reflecting his strategy of compromising and trying to bring people from different groups together.

It's also significant that the meaning of Mandela's original name, Rolihlahla, roughly translates to "troublemaker." In his youth, Mandela does indeed occasionally show troublemaker qualities, like when he sneaks out to a dance and accidentally dances with a professor's wife. Although Mandela dedicates his life to justice and equality, sometimes his quest for justice in an unjust country forces him to be a different kind of troublemaker, where his defiance is strategic and aimed at the government. Mandela goes on to lead campaigns of civil disobedience and even sabotage, all forms of "trouble" that nevertheless have a larger purpose. Mandela's explanation of his name makes an effective opening to his autobiography because it foreshadows the different identities Mandela takes on as he grows up into the leader he will eventually become.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ My time at Clarkebury broadened my horizons, yet I would not say that I was an entirely open-minded, unprejudiced young man when I left. I had met students from all over the Transkei, as well as a few from Johannesburg and Basutoland, as Lesotho was then known, some of whom were sophisticated and cosmopolitan in ways that made me feel provincial. Though I emulated them, I never thought it possible for a boy from the countryside to rival them in their worldliness. Yet I did not envy them. Even as I left Clarkebury, I was still, at heart, a Thembu, and I was proud to think and act like one.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Jongintaba, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa (Mandela's Father)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Mandela's experience at a prestigious school, Clarkebury, after the death of his father when he came to be under the care of the Thembu regent Jongintaba. Despite the fact that his father was poor due to a dispute that he lost, Mandela has always taken a sense of pride in his family's royal heritage, and he sees it as his own duty to become the sort of Thembu leader that would make his father proud.

This passage highlights how when Mandela wrote his autobiography, he was a much older man reflecting back on these younger days with a different perspective. For example, he describes himself at this age as not being "an entirely open-minded, unprejudiced young man." Although Mandela retains a sense of pride in being Thembu even into his later life, he realizes as he gets older that there is more to life than just one part of South Africa. Just as the progress of social justice in South Africa was gradual, Mandela portrays how his own growth into his current self was a gradual process, as slowly over time he became more mature and left behind some of the biases that stopped him from seeing the larger picture of the liberation struggle.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Even though I thought what I was doing was morally right, I was still uncertain as to whether it was the correct course. Was I sabotaging my academic career over an abstract moral principle that mattered very little? I found it difficult to swallow the idea that I would sacrifice what I regarded as my obligation to the students for my own selfish interests. I had taken a stand, and I did not want to appear to be a fraud in the eyes of my fellow students. At the same time, I did not want to throw away my career at Fort Hare.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is about one of the first important moral choices that Mandela faces as a leader, which comes up during his education at the prestigious South African university Fort Hare. Mandela and some other students organize a protest of the university's poor food, and during a student representative election, Mandela and five other students get elected but all refuse to serve until dining conditions improve. The principal strongly disapproves of this action

and tries to get Mandela to just serve his term as usual instead of resigning in protest.

This passage shows the even-handed way that Mandela makes decisions. Even though he ultimately chooses to stand with his original decision to resign as promised to the other protestors, he acknowledges that he might be "sabotaging my academic career over an abstract moral principle." Even when Mandela stands by a decision, he is aware of the potential consequences and downsides. Still, while Mandela is pragmatic about his choices, this passage ultimately shows Mandela standing up for his principles and trying not to be a "fraud," something that differentiates him from the cold pragmatism of other politicians he deals with, who are more interested in simply holding on to power.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ The secretaries were not always so thoughtful. Some time later, when I was more experienced at the firm, I was dictating some information to a white secretary when a white client whom she knew came into the office. She was embarrassed, and to demonstrate that she was not taking dictation from an African, she took a sixpence from her purse and said stiffly, "Nelson, please go out and get me some hair shampoo from the chemist." I left the room and got her shampoo.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Mandela shares an experience he had after he had graduated from school and was starting his legal career by working in a law office at a time when Black legal clerks like Mandela were rare in South Africa. In some ways, Mandela's time in the job is a triumph, as he paves the way for future Black South Africans to have legal careers, all the while getting his first taste of urban life where people of different races intermingle. But this triumph is marred by one of the White secretaries, who reports to Mandela for her work but nevertheless tries to belittle him by making him run an errand to fetch her shampoo.

What's noteworthy about this passage is that under normal circumstances, the White secretary is content to take Mandela's dictations as required, but as soon as "a white client whom she knew" arrives in the office, she feels ashamed about her status compared to Mandela. Through this woman's reaction, Mandela highlights how White society can reinforce racism, even if they're otherwise perfectly pleasant to their Black coworkers. She still upholds racist prejudices, and she does so in part because she's afraid of being ostracized. Mandela's decision to do the woman's errand shows how in spite of his later reputation as a "troublemaker," his initial impulse is not to fight back against the prevailing racial order in the city.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ I cannot pinpoint a moment when I became politicized, when I knew that I would spend my life in the liberation struggle. To be an African in South Africa means that one is politicized from the moment of one's birth, whether one acknowledges it or not.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Although much of the early part of Mandela's autobiography is about his growth into becoming a politically active person, he notes in this quote that it is difficult to narrow it down to an exact moment when it happened. In many ways, this aligns with Mandela's theory about how progress typically happens incrementally over time. Just as South Africa changed gradually but dramatically over the course of Mandela's life, so did Mandela himself.

Mandela ultimately concludes that in many ways, because he was a Black man in South Africa, he was "politicized" from the moment he was born, whether he knew it or not. This is because he was born under a government that deliberately targeted non-White people with discriminatory laws. Mandela presents his journey to becoming political as not a transformation but as a type of self-discovery, in that he learned about something that already existed. He builds the argument that, while he sometimes gets branded as a radical or an agitator later in his life, he was born into a situation that *required* him to be political, and he rose to meet this necessity.

Chapter 13 Quotes

Malan's platform was known as apartheid. Apartheid was a new term but an old idea. It literally means "apartness" and it represented the codification in one oppressive system of all the laws and regulations that had kept Africans in an inferior position to whites for centuries.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Dr. Malan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

During this passage, Mandela describes *apartheid*, a political concept in South Africa that Mandela would spend the majority of his adult life trying to dismantle. On the surface, Dr. Malan's policy of "apartness" might sound like a neutral topic, but as Mandela notes, one of the ultimate goals of apartheid was to keep Black people in an "inferior position." In practice, the state's policy of "apartness" nearly always benefited White South Africans at the expense of other races.

Mandela observes that apartheid is "a new term but an old idea." This means that although the specific laws and concepts associated with apartheid are new, the idea of discrimination against non-White South Africans is something that goes way back. What distinguishes apartheid from previous forms of oppression is the "codification" of discrimination—how it puts racist ideas into law and thus gives them the legitimacy. Although Mandela promotes justice throughout his life, his explanation of apartheid is important because it helps highlight how just because something is the law does not automatically make it just—and when laws are unjust, then defiance becomes the just course of action.

Chapter 14 Quotes

The government saw the campaign as a threat to its security and its policy of apartheid. They regarded civil disobedience not as a form of protest but as a crime, and were perturbed by the growing partnership between Africans and Indians. Apartheid was designed to divide racial groups, and we showed that different groups could work together. The prospect of a united front between Africans and Indians, between moderates and radicals, greatly worried them.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Dr. Malan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mandela continues to explore the policy of apartheid and explain what it really means for life in South Africa. Non-White South Africans, who had no voice in electing the White government implementing apartheid, begin to stage forms of civil disobedience like strikes. Despite the government's policy of trying to keep people apart by race, people end up coming together anyway, united in opposition to the new policies.

Mandela notes that he and his allies were "a united front between Africans and Indians, between moderates and radicals." Building this type of coalition is a cornerstone of his political strategy—and it eventually becomes one of the main sources of disagreement between him and some of his allies in the liberation movement. Mandela is already setting up his argument that activism is most effective when it unites a diverse group of people. For him, it makes sense on a logical level—if apartheid is about separation, then unity must be the most effective way to fight it. This belief leads Mandela to seek unity throughout his political career, opting for negotiation and compromise even at times when not all his allies agree with him.

Chapter 22 Quotes

The bantustan system had been conceived by Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, the minister of native affairs, as a way of muting international criticism of South African racial policies but at the same time institutionalizing apartheid. The bantustans, or reserves as they were also known, would be separate ethnic enclaves or homelands for all African citizens. Africans, Verwoerd said, "should stand with both feet in the reserves" where they were to "develop along their own lines." The idea was to preserve the status quo where three million whites owned 87 percent of the land, and relegate the eight million Africans to the remaining 13 percent.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), H. F. Verwoerd

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the bantustan system put in place by

Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, a minister of native affairs who later went on to become the prime minister. It is an evolution of apartheid, aimed at "institutionalizing" apartheid by expanding on the initial premise. In Verwoerd's plan, Black people would be sent to live in "reserves" away from White people that were supposedly based on their ethnic homelands.

As Mandela explains, this policy was designed to seem harmless or even benevolent on the surface to outsider observers in other countries, but it had a much darker true intent. In South Africa at that time, the White population was less than half the Black population, and yet White South Africans still owned 87 percent of the land. The bantustan system wouldn't improve that ratio and in fact would make it even worse by pushing out any Black people who lived in any areas newly designated as White. And so, in this passage, Mandela examines the language his political enemies use, highlighting how seemingly innocuous phrases like "develop along their own lines" helped to mask the dark, unjust intentions behind the bantustan system and apartheid.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ My devotion to the ANC and the struggle was unremitting. This disturbed Evelyn. She had always assumed that politics was a youthful diversion, that I would someday return to the Transkei and practice there as a lawyer.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Evelyn Mase

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

Mandela describes his divorce from his first wife, Evelyn Mase. Divorce can be a contentious subject, but just as Mandela does with politics, he tries to approach events in his personal life from a level-headed perspective while nevertheless still advocating for his own viewpoint.

Mandela begins this quote by taking blame for his role in the dissolution of the marriage. He says that his devotion to the ANC was "unremitting," suggesting that he wasn't leaving enough time or energy to be there for his family. Still, as Mandela goes on, the tone of his description begins to shift. He notes that Evelyn always figured that Mandela would give up on his activism as a "youthful diversion." This puts some of the blame on her, for having unrealistic expectations and for not recognizing or taking seriously Mandela's priorities. In the end, however, Mandela's criticisms of Evelyn are mild, and as he does in nearly all his arguments, whether political or personal, he treats the other side with respect, showing how fundamental negotiation is to his philosophy in life.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ Her name was Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela, but she was known as Winnie. She had recently completed her studies at the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work in Johannesburg and was working as the first black female social worker at Baragwanath Hospital. At the time I paid little attention to her background or legal problem, for something in me was deeply stirred by her presence. I was thinking more of how I could ask her out than how our firm would handle her case. I cannot say for certain if there is such a thing as love at first sight, but I do know that the moment I first glimpsed Winnie Nomzamo, I knew that I wanted to have her as my wife.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Nomzamo Winifred "Winnie" Madikizela, Evelyn Mase

Related Themes:

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the first time that Mandela properly meets with Winnie, who goes on to be his second wife in a marriage that lasts for decades, including the entirety of Mandela's imprisonment. Although Mandela doesn't mention his ex-wife Evelyn by name, his interest in Winnie's job as a social worker suggests that he hopes her goals in life will be similar to his own and that she will understand his activist work, something that generally turns out to be true.

What's surprising about this passage is that Mandela, who is known for patience and for negotiating to achieve incremental change, falls in love at first sight, saying that he "wanted to have her as my wife" the moment he sees her. This highlights how, as much as Mandela can be cerebral and think about decisions, he is also quick to take action when he feels passionate about something. Although Mandela generally puts his work and his causes ahead of his personal life, this passage suggests that sometimes the two of them can intertwine and that personal relationships can be strengthened by a shared interest in similar causes.

Chapter 35 Quotes

❝ Although we were kept together, our diet was fixed according to race. For breakfast, Africans, Indians, and Coloureds received the same quantities, except that Indians and Coloureds received a half-teaspoonful of sugar, which we did not. For supper, the diets were the same, except that Indians and Coloureds received four ounces of bread while we received none. This latter distinction was made on the curious premise that Africans did not naturally like bread, which was a more sophisticated or "Western" taste. The diet for white detainees was far superior to that for Africans. So color-conscious were the authorities that even the type of sugar and bread supplied to whites and nonwhites differed: white prisoners received white sugar and white bread, while Coloured and Indian prisoners were given brown sugar and brown bread.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mandela complains about the food at a prison where he is being detained in anticipation of his eventual trial. Food and nutrition have long been a concern for Mandela, with one of his earliest roles as an activist having to do with the food at Fort Hare, the university he attended. Although Mandela dislikes the poor quality of the food and how Black people get the worst of it, what this passage calls attention to more than anything is the absurdity of apartheid.

For example, the prison food policy is based on the premise that Black people don't like bread because it is a "more sophisticated or 'Western' taste." Indian-heritage South Africans do get bread, however, in spite of the fact that India is in the East, in Asia, not the West. Mandela further pokes fun at the absurdity of the system by noting how "color conscious" the prison authorities are, giving white bread to White prisoners and brown bread to Coloured and Indian prisoners. This matching of bread to skin tones is clearly unscientific and shows how the whole premise of apartheid is based on made-up ideas about different races. By exploring this small issue of food in a prison, Mandela shows how the wider concept of apartheid—and bigotry in general—is based on faulty ideas.

Chapter 39 Quotes

❝ I did not regard the verdict as a vindication of the legal system or evidence that a black man could get a fair trial in a white man's court. It was the right verdict and a just one, but it was largely as a result of a superior defense team and the fair-mindedness of the panel of these particular judges.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mandela describes the outcome of his first major court case, when he and several of his allies are all accused of being dangerous Communists. With the help of his defense team and the other accused, Mandela has tried to calmly argue why the ANC is not a dangerous organization and why the prosecution is wrong to try to paint him as a Communist. Meanwhile, the prosecution has seemingly already made up their minds about Mandela's guilt and does little to actually prove any of his wrongdoing in court, something that the judges finally have to acknowledge, letting Mandela and his allies go free.

Although Mandela's victory in court is a joyous occasion for him, he doesn't celebrate much because he knows he owes his freedom to the "fair-mindedness of the panel of these particular judges" and that another group of judges could be significantly less open-minded. Ultimately, Mandela tries to find a balance of praising the judges for making the right decision while ultimately acknowledging that the justice system of South Africa still has some fundamental flaws in it due to the influence of apartheid.

Chapter 45 Quotes

❝ In planning the direction and form that MK would take, we considered four types of violent activities: sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and open revolution. For a small and fledgling army, open revolution was inconceivable. Terrorism inevitably reflected poorly on those who used it, undermining any public support it might otherwise garner. Guerrilla warfare was a possibility, but since the ANC had been reluctant to embrace violence at all, it made sense to start with the form of violence that inflicted the least harm against individuals: sabotage.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mandela describes the tactics he considered undertaking as he led the newly formed MK, the military wing of the ANC, in a fight against apartheid. Today, Mandela is best remembered for becoming president in a peaceful transfer of power, so it may be surprising that he once considered tactics as violent at terrorism and open revolution. But as Mandela makes clear throughout his autobiography, he never turns to violence for rash reasons and always prefers to avoid it when he can.

This passage is yet another example of how astute Mandela can be when it comes to thinking about image. He rejects terrorism not because of concerns about feasibility but because it "inevitably reflected poorly on those who used it, undermining any public support it might otherwise garner." Still, against the objects of some ANC allies, Mandela does ultimately end up endorsing sabotage believing that it "inflicted the least harm against individuals." This passage shows how, even when contemplating violent actions, Mandela remained focused on his ultimate goal of unity, attempting to choose violent actions that would still leave open the possibility of reconciliation afterwards. It also highlights that his goal is to make a point through violence, not kill people randomly (as might happen in a terrorist-style attack). This is, in the end, why he chooses sabotage, as it'll get the ANC's point across without killing innocent people.

Chapter 51 Quotes

❝ I entered the court that Monday morning wearing a traditional Xhosa leopard-skin kaross instead of a suit and tie. The crowd of supporters rose as one and with raised, clenched fists shouted "*Amandla!*" and "*Ngawethu!*" The kaross electrified the spectators, many of whom were friends and family, some of whom had come all the way from the Transkei. Winnie also wore a traditional beaded headdress and an ankle-length Xhosa skirt.

I had chosen traditional dress to emphasize the symbolism that I was a black African walking into a white man's court. I was literally carrying on my back the history, culture, and heritage of my people.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Nomzamo Winifred "Winnie" Madikizela

Related Themes:

Page Number: 324

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the second big trial of Mandela's life, which came to be known as the Rivonia Trial. Mandela has become more confident in his status as a leader and an activist, and so when he appears in court this time, he takes the highly symbolic step of dressing in traditional Xhosa clothing for the court case. The people in the crowd clearly see something resonant in this choice, responding "*Amandla!*" and "*Ngawethu!*" ("power to the people"). Mandela's choice of clothing deliberately makes him stand out, showing how he doesn't support the whole premise of a trial conducted on the White government's terms.

The leopard-skin kaross (garment like a cloak) that Mandela wears suggests a connection to nature that recalls his rural childhood. Although Mandela has vocally spoken out against putting tribal loyalties ahead of the larger liberation movement, in this case, Mandela's pride his family history is a rebuke of apartheid and the bantustan system, which tries to erroneously use the ethnic homelands of Black South Africans as a way of dividing them instead of united them. Mandela's choice of clothes shows his determination to remain defiant, even in spite of having a whole country's justice system stacked against him.

Chapter 57 Quotes

❝ I was prepared for the death penalty. To be truly prepared for something, one must actually expect it. One cannot be prepared for something while secretly believing it will not happen. We were all prepared, not because we were brave but because we were realistic. I thought of the line from Shakespeare: "Be absolute for death; for either death or life shall be the sweeter."

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Judge de Wet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 374

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mandela describes the feelings that he and many of his allies were dealing with as the Rivonia Trial wound down, with Mandela declared guilty and awaiting a verdict. Given the crimes that the state was charging

Mandela with (treason), the death penalty was a real possibility, and Mandela tries here to get himself to accept the possibility of his own death—to really accept it and not be "secretly believing it will not happen."

Mandela's willingness to accept death shows the extremes that he is willing to go to for the sake of the liberation movement. While contemplating his future, Mandela thinks of a line from Shakespeare he once came across (in the play *Measure for Measure*, which notably takes place partly in a prison, which will be relevant later to Mandela's life). The quote suggests that if you accept death, then either you'll be ready when it comes or happy when it doesn't. In this way, the optimistic Mandela manages to take the fearful possibility of death and try to adjust his attitude in order to be ready for whatever the future holds for him.

Chapter 59 Quotes

That first week we began the work that would occupy us for the next few months. Each morning, a load of stones about the size of volleyballs was dumped by the entrance to the courtyard. Using wheelbarrows, we moved the stones to the center of the yard. We were given either four-pound hammers or fourteen-pound hammers for the larger stones. Our job was to crush the stones into gravel.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 385

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Mandela's first week in prison, where he would end up spending nearly three decades of his life. One important part of life in prison is hard labor, and Mandela goes into detail about exactly what he was forced to do, in order to convey the difficulty of the task and the tediousness of it. He gives specifics, like the size of the rocks he broke up and the weight of the hammers he used, all to bring the experience to life for readers to imagine.

Mandela's description of the work focuses in particular on how large stones get crushed down into smaller ones. In many ways, this could be a symbol for the government's policies in general, which aim to divide and break things apart rather than unifying. The process of crushing with a hammer in particular evokes oppression and crushing opposition. Mandela's language in this description shows how the government used prisons as a way to further its agenda of isolating and crushing anyone who went against them.

Chapter 63 Quotes

In jail, all prisoners are classified by the authorities as one of four categories: A, B, C, or D. A is the highest classification and confers the most privileges; D is the lowest and confers the least. All political prisoners, or what the authorities called "security prisoners," were automatically classified as D on admission. The privileges affected by these classifications included visits and letters, studies, and the opportunity to buy groceries and incidentals—all of which are the lifeblood of any prisoner. It normally took years for a political prisoner to raise his status from D to C.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 398

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mandela continues to describe the struggles of prison life on Robben Island, including in particular how it dehumanized the prisoners by stripping them of their individuality and their dignity. Similar to how apartheid separated people by race and ethnic group, the prison system of classification seemed designed to separate prisoners by even more arbitrary categories. In particular, the D rank that political prisoners start at and remain at for a long time seems to be designed to emphasize their low status—even in prison where everyone has an inherently low status.

Similar to how the bantustan system attempted to give legitimacy to the racist philosophies at the heart of apartheid, the letter system in prison becomes a way of justifying why certain prisoners shouldn't have basic rights, like the ability to communicate with the outside world. Mandela is told that he can increase his rank but doesn't have the opportunity to do so in a timely manner. This illustrates in miniature how life in South Africa is fundamentally biased against Black people like him, with racist ideas hidden under official-sounding categories and language.

Chapter 66 Quotes

❝ For me, hunger strikes were altogether too passive. We who were already suffering were threatening our health, even courting death. I have always favored a more active, militant style of protest such as work strikes, go-slow strikes, or refusing to clean up; actions that punished the authorities, not ourselves. They wanted gravel and we produced no gravel. They wanted the prison yard clean and it was untidy. This kind of behavior distressed and exasperated them, whereas I think they secretly enjoyed watching us go hungry.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 423

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Mandela describes how even while in prison, he and his fellow prisoners found ways to rebel against the status quo. One of the few options that prisoners had available to them was hunger strikes (refusing to eat), a tactic that has worked well for other protestors around the world, most notably for Mahatma Gandhi in India. The premise behind such a strike is that it calls attention to the brutal conditions in the prison and reflects poorly on the prison authorities.

Despite the effectiveness of hunger strikes for other protestors, however, Mandela does not support them on Robben Island. He believes that hunger strikes depend on figures in authority being able to feel shame and compassion, and he feels that instead, the prison authorities "secretly enjoyed" watching prisoners begin to starve. Still, in spite of Mandela's tactical disagreement on the plan, he goes along with it anyway because he's outvoted. This is yet another example from Mandela's life highlighting his role as a team player and a negotiator, and although he is often able to make others see his viewpoint, in this case, he demonstrates that he is willing to concede when he knows his own ideas have lost the debate.

Chapter 69 Quotes

❝ The High Organ was the source of some controversy because of its ethnic composition: all four permanent members were from Xhosa backgrounds. This was a matter of coincidence rather than design; the senior ANC leadership on the island, the only four to have served on the National Executive Committee, happened to be Xhosa. It would not have been proper to take a less senior comrade and put him on the High Organ simply because he was not a Xhosa. But the fact that the High Organ was Xhosa-dominated disturbed me because it seemed to reinforce the mistaken perception that we were a Xhosa organization.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Walter Sisulu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 442

Explanation and Analysis

Mandela describes a small group known as the High Organ, which became the head of the ANC within the Robben Island prison. Although the formation of this group represented a step forward and a way for Mandela to continue his activism even while in prison, this quote also touches on one of the ways that the group was controversial: namely, that all the members were Xhosa.

Mandela is generally a supporter of diverse coalitions, and he has long advocated for putting aside differences between races or ethnic groups and forming organizations that accept people from all backgrounds. Still, his position is nuanced, and he believes that a relatively homogenous group of four Xhosa may nevertheless be the best choice to lead a more diverse group, particularly since he and his three Xhosa companions have senior leadership experience already. At the same time, Mandela is aware that even the appearance of bias can have negative effects on an organization's legitimacy, and for this reason, Mandela and his companions arrive at the compromise of having a rotating fifth member of the group who isn't Xhosa. This controversy shows how seriously Mandela takes his duty to unify people as a leader and how this means avoiding even the appearance of prejudice wherever possible.

Chapter 78 Quotes

❝ One day, Kathy, Walter, and myself were talking in the courtyard when they suggested that I ought to write my memoirs. Kathy noted that the perfect time for such a book to be published would be on my sixtieth birthday. Walter said that such a story, if told truly and fairly, would serve to remind people of what we had fought and were still fighting for. He added that it could become a source of inspiration for young freedom fighters. The idea appealed to me, and during a subsequent discussion, I agreed to go ahead.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Walter Sisulu, Ahmed "Kathy" Kathrada

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 477

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes how Mandela developed the idea to write the manuscript that would eventually evolve into *Long Walk to Freedom*. Although the publication of his memoir won't come for roughly another 15 years, Mandela is always thinking about the future. In addition to being good strategy from a political standpoint, Mandela's constant planning for the future is also a way for him to stay optimistic while confined in prison—in particular showing optimism that the people of the future will one day care enough about his life and his message to read a book by and about him.

As this passage shows, the idea to write a memoir was not Mandela's alone and in fact came from his friends Kathy and Walter. Later on in the chapter, Mandela describes how Kathy and Walter even played an important role in the editorial process, helping to shape the story in order to better fulfill the goal of making the book "a source of inspiration for young freedom fighters." The fact that the literal process of writing his life's story is a collaboration shows how Mandela's successes are only possible through the support of his allies and how, even though his book is the story of a single person, it is also the story of a whole liberation movement and its ideas.

Chapter 84 Quotes

❝ It took fifteen years, but in 1979, the authorities announced over the intercom system that the diet for African, Coloured, and Indian prisoners would henceforth be the same. But just as justice delayed is justice denied, a reform so long postponed and so grudgingly enacted was hardly worth celebrating.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 502

Explanation and Analysis

This quote follows up on an issue that Mandela first began complaining about when he was first detained in prison before his trial, when he had not yet even been handed his life sentence. Finally, for the first time, Black, Indian, and Coloured prisoners will all receive the same meals. But while Mandela notes that this seems like a change that should be "worth celebrating," the reality of the situation makes it difficult for him to feel a sense of triumph.

Aside from the fact that the change has been "long postponed" and is way overdue, it is also difficult to celebrate the change because of how it is "grudgingly enacted." As Mandela later describes, the food remains generally subpar for people of all races, with Black prisoners getting a marginal upgrade and other prisoners actually getting a slightly worse deal. Mandela further notes that in the spirit of cooperation, many prisoners had already been pooling their food to share for years, making the change even less impactful. While Mandela advocates throughout his life for the importance of incremental change, one important component of this is never being satisfied with insufficient conditions. Because Mandela and his allies still aren't free, he implies even a vast improvement in the food would not be enough to satisfy him in his liberation struggle.

Chapter 93 Quotes

❝ I responded that the state was responsible for the violence and that it is always the oppressor, not the oppressed, who dictates the form of the struggle. If the oppressor uses violence, the oppressed have no alternative but to respond violently.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Colonel Willemse, Kobie Coetsee, Dr. Barnard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 537

Explanation and Analysis

After years of imprisonment and being sidelined from political matters, Mandela finally has a chance to speak openly with representatives of the government that has so long oppressed him. The room is full of intimidating and powerful White government officials like Colonel Willemse, Kobie Coetsee, and Dr. Barnard. Nevertheless, in spite of Mandela's difficult bargaining position, he refuses to back down from his principles or apologize for his past actions.

Mandela's assertion that "it is always the oppressor, not the oppressed, who dictates the form of the struggle" is at the root of his philosophies of violence and nonviolence. As Mandela has noted on several occasions, he believes that nonviolent protest is generally the ideal option but against certain opponents, violence is the only course of action left. This is what he means by saying that the oppressor "dictates the form of struggle"—that rather than blaming the activists using violence, one should instead blame the oppressors who create conditions that require violence in the first place. The fact that Mandela says all this directly to the White officials shows how he will not be intimidated by them—and how perhaps he even hopes that some of them will understand his viewpoint if he explains it to them.

Chapter 99 Quotes

❝ De Klerk again excused himself and left the room. After ten minutes he returned with a compromise: yes, I could be released at Victor Verster, but, no, the release could not be postponed. The government had already informed the foreign press that I was to be set free tomorrow and felt they could not renege on that statement. I felt I could not argue with that. In the end, we agreed on the compromise, and Mr. de Klerk poured a tumbler of whisky for each of us to drink in celebration. I raised the glass in a toast, but only pretended to drink; such spirits are too strong for me.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), Nomzamo Winifred "Winnie" Madikizela, F. W. de Klerk

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 558

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the lead-up to the momentous occasion when Mandela finally gets released from prison. Still, while Mandela has been waiting for this occasion for over 27 years, he doesn't want to let his own eagerness lead him into a rash decision. Counterintuitively, de Klerk wants to release Mandela sooner, while Mandela wants to be released a week later (in order to give his supporters time to spread the news and prepare to turn out for the event). Mandela and de Klerk eventually reach a compromise: Mandela is able to leave how he wants, directly from Victor Verster (the last of the three prisons where he serves his sentence) but in exchange, he agrees to go quickly on de Klerk's timeline with almost no time to prepare.

Mandela's ability to negotiate with de Klerk, his political opposite and future rival for the presidency, shows how committed Mandela is to the idea that negotiation is possible even in tricky situations. For all de Klerk's flaws, Mandela sees him as more reasonable than his predecessors, even if he isn't much of an improvement from a moral standpoint. Notably, Mandela only pretends to drink the whisky de Klerk offers him, suggesting that he still has serious reservations about him and doesn't want to let de Klerk impair his judgement. Mandela's push to be released directly from prison, where he's driven out in a car with Winnie, shows how he wants to highlight his new autonomy, as he freely exits from the place that once oppressed him.

Chapter 104 Quotes

❝ Despite his seemingly progressive actions, Mr. de Klerk was by no means the great emancipator. He was a gradualist, a careful pragmatist. He did not make any of his reforms with the intention of putting himself out of power. He made them for precisely the opposite reason: to ensure power for the Afrikaner in a new dispensation. He was not yet prepared to negotiate the end of white rule.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker), F. W. de Klerk, Chief Buthelezi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 577

Explanation and Analysis

Mandela expresses his frustrations with de Klerk who, in spite of being the South African politician to finally free Mandela from prison, nevertheless failed to live up to Mandela's hopes in other ways. As Mandela describes, there

is a fundamental contradiction with de Klerk, where he sometimes seems to take "progressive actions" but ultimately only does them "with the intention of putting himself in power."

In many ways, Mandela shares qualities with de Klerk—it would also be fair to call Mandela a "careful pragmatist," and while Mandela is not necessarily a "gradualist" by choice, he is willing to accept and work with incremental change in a way that some of his more radical allies won't. Still, the big difference with de Klerk is that many of his actions are done with the intention of keeping himself and White people like him in power. Although Mandela does want more power for non-White Africans, he isn't seeking domination, and he portrays himself as only seeking his own power as a means of achieving progress for others. This passage shows the complicated ways that Mandela was both willing to negotiate with people who oppressed him but also how in spite of his willingness to collaborate, there remained some issues that he wouldn't back down on, like Black liberation.

Chapter 115 Quotes

❝ I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.

Related Characters: Nelson Mandela (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 625

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is the final words of Mandela's memoir, as he reflects back on his life after winning the first free democratic election to become South Africa's first Black president. He describes his life as a "long road to freedom," which recalls the title of his book. The "long road" of Mandela's life reflects the sheer length of time that it took him to find freedom, both from prison and more generally from discriminatory practices like apartheid, but the idea of a road also suggests that Mandela always had a destination ahead of him and that it was inevitable that he would one day reach it.

During this moment of reflection, Mandela acknowledges his past failings, which he calls "missteps," and he anticipates challenges in the future, which he calls "many more hills to climb." Still, for the moment at least, Mandela can rest and look back at the "glorious view," which symbolizes the good things that he has accomplished in life—particularly dismantling apartheid, but perhaps also the other things in life that have brought him joy like friends and family. Rather than ending his memoir conclusively (he was, after all, just beginning his presidency when it was published), Mandela instead commits himself to continuing to work for freedom, acknowledging that the world still contains injustice but offering hope that one day that may no longer be the case.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Mandela's father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa, gives him the name Rolihlahla, which in Xhosa means something like "troublemaker." He doesn't get the name Nelson until his first day of school. He is born July 18th, 1918, in a small village called Mvezo. His father is a chief of the Thembu tribe, who rule in the Transkei area of South Africa, although at this point in history, chiefs need approval by the English government. Mandela is expected to one day counsel the leaders of his tribe.

Mandela's description of his birth gives a sense of the many different identities he will assume over the course of his life. On the one hand, Mandela comes from a proud heritage of African leaders, and this hints at how Mandela will be a natural fit for leadership as he grows up. Still, this passage also shows how European colonists and their descendants like the magistrate are attempting to exert their control over South African life, pushing aside the old traditions.

Mandela's father has four wives, and his mother, Nosekeni Fanny, is known as the Right Hand wife. Each wife has their own kraal (homestead). Mandela's father can be rebellious, and one day he gets into a complaint with one of his subjects about a stray ox. The subject takes the case to an English magistrate, and when Mandela's father refuses to come see the magistrate, the magistrate deposes him. Mandela's father loses his family fortune.

Mandela's father's rebelliousness and refusal to do as he's told foreshadow what Mandela himself will do with his life. Mandela's father loses his status due to his rebellion, but Mandela's life offers an opportunity for redemption and for a new generation to reclaim the status that Mandela's father lost.

CHAPTER 2

After his father's deposal, Mandela and his family go to live in the village of Qunu. The village is mostly full of women and children, since the men work on distant farms. Mandela becomes a herd boy at age 5 and spends most of his free time playing with other boys on the *veld (grassland). Mandela always tries to keep up his reputation with the other boys, although he also tries to never dishonor any of the other boys, even his rivals.*

Mandela's rural upbringing is an important part of his character and something that he continues to think about long after he's been living cities for a while. Mandela's goal of never embarrassing the other boys he plays with highlights his budding ability to negotiate, even with people with whom he disagrees.

As is typical for a Xhosa child, Mandela learns primarily through observation. He doesn't ask questions and is shocked at all the questions children asked the first time he visited a White house. In general, there aren't many White people near Qunu, except the magistrate and the occasional traveler or policeman coming through town.

This passage highlights a difference between life for Black and White South Africans. On the one hand, it shows how Mandela has less autonomy than his White peers, being forced to just observe instead of asking questions. On the other hand, however, this passage suggests that there are benefits to the observational approach, as it helps to make Mandela perceptive and humble.

The Xhosa are rivals with the amaMfengu, and a few of them live near Qunu. The amaMfengu have closer ties with Europeans and are often seen as more Western. The rivalries between tribes seems harmless to Mandela as a boy, but later, White rulers will try to exploit these rivalries. Mandela's father doesn't follow these prejudices and is close with two amaMfengu, the Christian Mbekela brothers. George Mbekela recommends that Mandela go to school, and so he does. There he gets his name Nelson from his teacher. Mandela still doesn't know the origin of the name Nelson, but he thinks may have been inspired by the sea captain Lord Nelson.

One of the main political challenges Mandela faces throughout his life is determining to what extent he should try to hold on to Xhosa values like the ones his father represents versus to what extent he should try to adapt to the European-influenced customs of White South Africans. Mandela's father chooses not to ostracize the more Western-influenced rival tribe, setting an example his son will work to follow later.


CHAPTER 3

One day when Mandela is nine years old, his father comes home with a bad coughing fit, and Mandela knows immediately that his father will die soon. His father's death leaves Mandela feeling adrift, and his mother tells him it's time for him to leave Qunu. Mandela packs and goes west with his mother, not questioning her. They arrive at the impressive home of Jongintaba, the current regent of the Thembu people. Jongintaba has offered to be Mandela's guardian, a role he fulfills for a decade. Mandela's mother goes back to Qunu.

A regent is an acting temporary ruler. Jongintaba's status as a ruler clearly parallels Mandela's father and the status his father might still have if he hadn't lost it in a dispute with the magistrate. Mandela's departure from his birth home marks a coming-of-age moment for him as without his biological parents to guide him, he begins to take stock of the things that he values in life.

Young Mandela quickly adapts to life in Mqhekezweni, the temporary capital of Thembuland, where Jongintaba lives. He gets along well with Justice, the regent's son, and Nomafu, the regent's daughter. Mandela enjoys doing chores for Jongintaba, like pressing his Western-style suits. He also gets involved in Christianity, largely due to Reverend Matyolo, an impressive local preacher.

This passage is another early example of how, in spite of the prejudice that many White South Africans have against Black South Africans, Mandela still finds elements of European culture (like suits and Christianity) fascinating. This helps him to develop the idea that it's perhaps better to find common ground between people of different races and cultures, rather than simply elevating one group.


Mandela picks up many of his future philosophies about leadership by watching Jongintaba in his court. All men in court are free to give their opinions, although women still don't have a say, as Mandela regretfully notes. Mandela also takes an interest in African history. Chief Joyi, one of the most experienced elders, tells fiery stories about how White men have tried to turn Xhosa against each other.

Mandela's interest in history is something that stays with him throughout his life. For Mandela, history reminds him that the current White leadership of South Africa is a relatively recent development, and that this means that one day it too could become something from the past. Mandela also learns about how this White rule is based on keeping the various African groups divided, something that Mandela himself will try to avoid doing in his career.

Many initially see Mandela as a bit of a "yokel" from the village, and this causes problems when he asks out Winnie, the daughter of Reverend Matyolo. Winnie's older sister, nomaMpondo, invites Mandela to lunch to try to embarrass him with his bad manners and how he uses silverware wrong. Winnie still likes Mandela, however. They correspond for a few years and eventually lose touch, and Mandela learns to improve his table etiquette.

This is not the same Winnie that Mandela later marries, but like many other elements of his childhood, this experience helps prepare Mandela for his future. This passage is an early example of how Mandela's rural status makes it difficult for him sometimes to adapt to new traditions. But rather than sticking to his traditions, Mandela dedicates himself to learning the new ways so that he can fit in with both worlds.

CHAPTER 4

Jongintaba decides when Mandela is 16 that he must be circumcised, which is a Xhosa tradition. The circumcision is an elaborate ceremony, and one custom is that a boy must perform an act of bravery before it. Mandela gets together with some of the other boys and steals a pig from a local farmer. At the ceremony, Justice goes before Mandela and cries out "Ndiyindoda!" which means "I am a man!" and is part of the ritual. When it's Mandela's turn, he's in shock and feels like the other boys handled the surgery with more bravery.

This passage emphasizes how, as much as Mandela tries to adapt to the new, modern world, he also respects traditions that have been around for a long time. Participating in this ceremony cements Mandela's place among the Xhosa, even if he himself doubts his performance.


After the ceremony, Chief Meligqili speaks. He makes Mandela and the other young men angry by saying that Black South Africans are a conquered people who don't have the authority to rule themselves. Mandela feels like the chief is spoiling the triumph of the day, but later on, he feels the words sticking with him.

This passage shows how Mandela initially rejected ideas that he would later take more seriously. Mandela realizes later that he isn't angry at the chief but at the state of his country that the chief is accurately describing.


CHAPTER 5

Mandela leaves home again to go to Clarkebury Boarding Institute, one of the most prestigious schools in Thembuland. Mandela thinks that his distinguished family line will give him an advantage but finds that all of the boys at school come from illustrious families. He struggles to adjust at first and is mediocre at sports, but he eventually begins to excel academically and completes his program early.

Mandela's early years, much like his later life, are about slow progress, and he doesn't present himself as a prodigy or a natural. Although Mandela is modest about his own accomplishments in this passage, he's still proud. This experience at school also sets him up to rub shoulders with other powerful Black peers.


CHAPTER 6

At age 19, Mandela goes with Justice to study at Healdtown, which was at the time the largest African school south of the equator. The school follows a strict schedule. Mandela gets appointed to prefect in his second year there. One day, he sees about 15 other students urinating off a veranda. One of them is a fellow prefect. Prefects are not supposed to report one another, so after considering, Mandela decides that since it wouldn't be fair to exclude the prefect, he doesn't report any of them.

A prefect is a student who enforces rules over other students. The presence of prefects at Mandela's school shows the influence of the British education system. This passage reveals that Mandela has values that go beyond strictly following his duties—he believes in equality so strongly that he would rather let all of the students go free than let only one escape punishment. This also demonstrates Mandela's sense of mercy.

In Mandela's final year at Healdtown, the famous Xhosa poet Krune Mqhayi comes to campus. Mandela is initially disappointed at how normal he looks. But as he continues speaking, he makes Mandela reconsider some of the things he believes about the White men who teach at his school. Mqhavi starts by talking about African unity but ultimately ends up praising the Xhosa as best. Mandela himself is confused about his identity but graduates thinking of himself as Xhosa first, African second.

Once again, this passage shows how young Mandela has yet to fully develop his political beliefs. Initially, Mandela seeks out acceptance in the British-influenced school system. While Mandela in some ways presents the school as a triumph of what African people can accomplish, he also begins to realize the limits of his education. It's fitting that a poet, someone from the arts rather than from a traditional academic subject, teaches Mandela to begin thinking in unconventional ways.

CHAPTER 7

Mandela goes on to study at University College of Fort Hare, which for a Black South African is like Oxford or Harvard. He knows many of the 150 students there from his time at Clarkebury and Healdtown. Mandela studies a wide range of topics, from English to politics. Although he learns a lot from prestigious professors, he also sometimes witnesses elitism and hazing.

Mandela's description of his education continues to show both the triumphs and the limitations of schools like Fort Hare. The high quality of his education is nevertheless tainted by the elitist attitudes and hazing that he witnesses around him. For Mandela, this elitism seems to suggest that while students are learning the positive aspects of European-style education, they're also learning the negative ones.

Mandela also learns a lot outside the classroom. At one point, he sneaks out to a dancehall with some friends and accidentally ends up dancing with the wife of his famous professor. He is embarrassed but never faces any punishment. Mandela also befriends a boy named Paul Mahabane. Mandela is shocked how Paul acts around a White magistrate who asks Paul for a favor, with Mandela finding Paul disrespectful. But later Mandela realizes that Black men like him and Paul have to put up with lots of minor indignities like the favor the magistrate asked.

Mandela presents himself as someone who is not naturally a rebel but who came to develop rebellious ideas based on the things that he witnessed. Mandela initially finds Paul shocking because, in Mandela's quest to do the right thing, he believes that respecting the authority of the magistrates is just what one does. This passage hints at Mandela's growing awareness that sometimes doing the right thing doesn't just mean doing what he's "supposed" to do.

During his final year, Mandela gets involved in a boycott about the food at the college and about the amount of power that the student representative board has. He later gets elected as a student representative, but he resigns out of support for the boycott. This angers Dr. Kerr, who is the main founding figure of Fort Hare, but Mandela sticks to his beliefs and refuses to serve on the student council. Mandela ends up having to leave the college.

Mandela's involvement in the boycott is a foreshadowing of events that will happen later in his life. Mandela's refusal to serve as a student representative shows how Mandela is not someone who is eager for power at any cost. Rather, he's someone who is very conscientious about trying not to become a puppet for forces he disapproves of—even if that means making sacrifices, like the end of his education at Fort Hare.

CHAPTER 8

Mandela returns to Mqhekezweni uncertain about his future. Jongintaba summons him and Justice one day to announce that he believes he may die soon and wants to see his sons married first—and so he has arranged girls from good families for each of them. Neither is excited about this. Although there is nothing wrong with the bride Jongintaba has selected for Mandela, Mandela doesn't like being forced into the marriage, and he and Justice try to run away to Johannesburg. Jongintaba has heard of their plan and notifies a local train station to try to stop them, but they still manage to slip away.

This passage shows Mandela's growing rebelliousness. What bothers Mandela most about the arranged marriage is how it deprives him of his ability to choose. Just as Mandela learns at school that he doesn't want to conform to the elitism of European-style education, he learns in his adoptive family that he doesn't want to simply follow the traditions of Xhosa life. Mandela's decision to go off on his own with Justice represents the beginning of his journey to form a new kind of life for himself.

CHAPTER 9

Near Johannesburg, Mandela sees a gold mine for the first time. Justice and Mandela have made arrangements about a mine job ahead of time through telling only part of the truth to Dr. Xuma, a friend of Jongintaba's involved with the ANC who promises them work. But the foreman at the mine, Piliso, only has a clerical job for Justice because he wasn't expecting Mandela to come too. Piliso then gets angry at both of them once he learns that they're running away from their father. He takes back his offer and refuses a job for either of them. Mandela stays with his cousin, Garlick Mbekeni, for a little while before moving in with a local Anglican preacher, Reverend J. Mabutho, and his wife. Mandela also neglects to tell Mabutho at first that he has run away from home, and the reverend feels that Mandela deceived him.

In this passage, Mandela learns the consequences of trying to deceive someone. He and Justice believe that because Johannesburg is so far away, they can lie to people like Dr. Xuma and Piliso about why they've come to the city. They soon learn that the truth has a way of coming out and that there are consequences to being exposed as a liar. This focus on honesty stays with Mandela throughout his political life, even as he has to deal with people that he strongly disagrees with on issues or who aren't honest with him.

Reverend Mabutho kicks Mandela out but helps him find a new home with Mr. Xhoma, who is one of the rare Black landowners in the area of Alexandra, near Johannesburg. Mandela begins to work as a clerk at a law firm while studying to finish his B.A. at night at the University of South Africa. Although that fact that the law firm hired an African clerk shows that it was fairly progressive, Mandela still experiences discrimination, like when a white secretary who works under him instructs Mandela to go buy her shampoo. Still, he meets some fellow clerks his age and also begins to socialize at parties where people don't seem to see skin color.

As Mandela continues to see more of South African life, including spending more time around White people, he learns more about the injustice Black South Africans face and how some people won't respect him no matter how hard he works. Mandela also learns that politics aren't necessarily straightforward. The same law office can be both a relatively progressive place and *a place where racism continues to negatively guide behavior, as illustrated by the incident with the woman who forces Mandela to do the menial task of buying shampoo for her.*

CHAPTER 10

Life in Alexandra is full of highs and lows for Mandela. It's overcrowded, and Mr. Xhoma isn't wealthy, although he is generous. Mandela reconnects with Ellen Nkabinde, a friend he knows from Healdtown, and falls in love with her. But she is Swazi, not Xhosa, so romance is difficult due to society's expectations. Mandela later falls in love with Didi, one of Mr. Xhoma's daughters.

This passage shows that even among people of the same race, things like ethnic background can still keep people apart. As he dates, Mandela becomes increasingly aware of how separate the different South African tribes are—and how little opportunity there is to create unity among them.

In 1941, Jongintaba comes to visit Johannesburg, and Mandela is nervous about seeing him. But Mandela manages to repair their relationship and earn the regent's approval again. But Jongintaba is harder on Justice, since as the biological son, he faces more responsibilities. Six months after the visit, in the winter of 1942, Mandela and Justice hear that Jongintaba has died. They go back to Mqhekezweni for the funeral. Justice has to take on new responsibilities, while Mandela heads back to Johannesburg to finish up his B.A. degree.

As with the death of Mandela's biological father, Jongintaba's death marks a transition point in Mandela's life, as he increasingly has to rely on himself to make his own decisions. Justice embodies an alternate outcome of Mandela's life in that he goes back to the place he grew up, while Mandela is free to enter into politics and seek to create inroads among the various tribes in South Africa.

After finishing his B.A., Mandela begins getting a law degree at the University of Witwatersrand (which is known as "Wits"). He learns more about African liberation and also befriends some of the Indian students, who are engaged in their own liberation struggle.

Like South Africa, India was also at one time colonized by the British. Rather than seeing Indian students as rivals or as intruders, Mandela sees them as potential allies, helping him develop his goal to break down racial and ethnic divisions.

CHAPTER 11

Mandela isn't sure exactly when he became political, but he believes in some ways that being a Black South African made him political from birth. The world order is changing, with Churchill and Roosevelt signing the Atlantic Charter in 1941, although many don't believe the promises about democratic principles. The African National Congress (ANC) creates its own charter in response, calling for full citizenship for all African people. Mandela meets a mentor named Walter Sisulu whose home becomes a center for activists. Mandela also meets a charismatic lawyer named Anton Lembede who says that the key for to liberation is for African people to get over an "inferiority complex" and celebrate what makes them beautiful. While spending time with activists at Sisulu's home, Mandela meets his first wife, Evelyn Mase.

This passage shows how the personal and the political intertwine in Mandela's life. Many of his lifelong friends, as well as both of his eventual wives, are all people he meets through his activist and political work. The African National Congress, a political party that Mandela will later lead, has ambitious goals for Black life in South Africa that might at first seem unrealistic, given the country's White-dominated government. But Mandela believes in the ANC from the beginning, reflecting his optimistic personality.

CHAPTER 12

In 1946, one of the largest mine strikes in South African history takes place. Many men, including the prominent Communist J. B. Marks, get arrested in the wake of the strike. The government crushes the strike, in part to make an example of Communists. Another law restricts the movement of Indian people in South Africa, as well as their ability to own property.

Communists are another group that are often stigmatized in South Africa, particularly when they are also Black . Mandela's approach to life is not to accept common stigmas and to instead try to understand what people are really like and what they believe.

Meanwhile, Mandela and Evelyn move into an apartment in the city of Orlando. There, she gives birth to their first son, Madiba Thembekile, whom they call Thembi for short. A clergyman named Michael Scott comes to live with them. In July 1947, Lembede suddenly gets sick and dies at 33, shocking other activists like Sisulu. Later that year, the ANC and two of the Indian resistance groups sign a document called the Doctors' Pact to work together.

This passage once again shows how Mandela's personal and political lives intertwine. Mandela's increasing involvement in politics comes at the same time that he has his first son, and both of these events reflect how Mandela is taking on more responsibility and trying to play a role in shaping the future.

CHAPTER 13

African people can't vote in elections, only White people can. A party called the National Party takes power. Led by the Dutch Dr. Malan, the party rejects both African people and the British, having sided with Nazi Germany during World War II. The cornerstone of their platform is apartheid, which means "apartness" and is about separating African people from White people. The victory surprises everyone, particularly the United Party, which is also White and led by General Smuts, who fought the Nazis.

Apartheid is perhaps the most important concept for understanding South African politics in the twentieth century. Similar to defenders of segregation in the United States, pro-apartheid politicians in South Africa like Dr. Malan spoke about the supposed benefits of separating people by race, all while downplaying the extent to which non-White people faced inferior conditions and discrimination.

Malan begins to implement apartheid. Dr. Xuma, the head of the ANC, doesn't like the tactics of some of the more activist members, and so the activists rally around trying to elect Dr. Moroka to depose him. They eventually convince Dr. Xuma to resign. Mandela, whose influence in the ANC is growing, ends up taking over many of Dr. Xuma's responsibilities. Strikes occur across the country, despite the threat of harsh punishment, and the ANC sometimes struggles to coordinate actions with other groups, like the Marxists.

Mandela constantly feels a pull between more radical activists who want change immediately and more cautious activists who want to work within existing systems of power. In this case, Mandela sides with the more radical activists. And once again, Mandela observes the difficulty—and he recognizes the necessity—of coordinating with various groups with the same goal, the Marxists in this case.

CHAPTER 14

The National Party follows through on its threats, putting in place laws that force all South Africans to register their race. According to apartheid, people have to live in different areas by race. The party also greatly restricts the voting rights of "Coloureds" (mixed race South Africans) who previously had voting rights. Meanwhile, Mandela gets his driver's license—an unusual thing, because not many Black people own **cars** in the country. He begins to taxi other activists around, taking messages to Dr. Moroka. Mandela and others in the ANC lead civil disobedience against Dr. Malan's policies, inspired in part by Gandhi.

Mandela's driver's license represents the unusual amount of autonomy that he has for a Black South African. This is partly due to his family heritage, his good education, and his respectable job as a lawyer. Apartheid is also still in its early stages—so Mandela has more rights now than he will at later points. By sharing that the ANC's protests were inspired by Mahatma Ghandi, who was famously nonviolent, Mandela begins to develop his ideas about what effective protest looks like in different situations.

June 26, 1952, is the start of the Defiance Campaign, when Mandela and other activists purposely begin to break the unjust apartheid laws, with many ending up in prison. The government responds harshly to the campaign, putting out propaganda to smear the leaders. Police infiltrate local branches of the ANC. One day while Mandela is working as a law clerk, someone comes with a warrant for his arrest as part of a coordinated campaign to arrest several other activist leaders.

Mandela learns that his relative freedom in the previous part of this chapter was only due to the fact that he was not challenging the unjust system of apartheid. As soon as he and his allies start challenging these laws, even nonviolently, the government responds harshly, using official tools of power like the police in an attempt to crush dissent.

Dr. Moroka, who was also arrested, causes a stir in the ANC by taking on his own attorney, rather than being tried together with all the other ANC members. Like Malan's government, Dr. Moroka hates Communists and wants to distance himself from them. On the witness stand, Dr. Moroka denounces the idea that Black and White people should be equal in attempt to get a lighter sentence. Mandela and the others are sentenced to nine months in jail with hard labor, although the sentence is suspended for two years. Although the Defiance Campaign succeeded in raising awareness against the apartheid laws, Mandela regrets allowing the campaign to fizzle out, rather than ending it at its height. That was something Dr. Xuma suggested as a way of making headlines.

Dr. Moroka's actions surprise Mandela and others in the ANC because the idea of unity is so important to them. This contrasts, for example, with Mandela's actions earlier when he was a prefect at school and decided to show a whole group of fellow students mercy rather than allowing just one of them to go free. Dr. Moroka further disgraces himself by betraying the principals of the ANC to try to get a lighter sentence—something readers should keep in mind going forward, as Mandela is repeatedly tried and imprisoned.

CHAPTER 15

At 1952's annual ANC conference, Chief Albert Luthuli takes over, poised to lead in a more activist direction. Mandela supports him but after his arrest can't legally attend meetings or leave Johannesburg. Nevertheless, Mandela starts holding secret meetings about a project called the M-Plan that will help local communities organize and coordinate nationally. Although the M-Plan achieves some success, Mandela feels that no one is prepared for how swiftly and powerfully the government will crack down.

Although Mandela believes in honesty and openness, he also ends up having to attend illegal secret meetings to organize. This reflects how Mandela is willing to adapt his ideas according to the present situation. One downside of Mandela's optimistic attitude to life is that it sometimes leaves him unprepared when the South African government reacts aggressively.

CHAPTER 16

Throughout his activism, Mandela continues to work at various law firms. He studies for the qualification exam, and he eventually passes, which allows him to become a full-fledged attorney. In August of 1952, Mandela opens his own law office with fellow African lawyer Oliver Tambo, the first firm owned by African lawyers in the country. Among other things, they help fellow African people who get charged with the crime of going to "Whites Only" areas. The government tries to shut them down for lacking the proper permit, but eventually, they sort it out.

Mandela's job as a lawyer reflects his interest in the law and his belief that it's possible to bring about justice by working within the legal system, at least to an extent. Mandela and Tambo continue to protest apartheid by offering their legal services to people who are charged with unfair, ludicrous crimes.

CHAPTER 17

The Nationalist government begins evacuating Africans and forcing them to live in new neighborhoods. The ANC gets involved with trying to stop these removal efforts. At one meeting on the subject, Mandela crosses a line he hasn't crossed before, saying that it might be necessary to use violence to stop apartheid. He believes that, while nonviolent resistance worked for Gandhi, his enemies were from a faraway country and acted more rationally than the Nationalists. But Mandela's bold speeches sometimes get him in trouble with fellow ANC members.

Mandela's views on violence as a political tool are nuanced and evolve over the course of his life. Crucially, Mandela never depicts himself as seeking violence as a first solution. In many ways, the first part of Mandela's autobiography is an argument that builds to the point of why violence may be necessary for political change in South Africa. Sometimes, he suggests here, it's necessary to turn to violence to make a point if nonviolent protest clearly isn't working.

CHAPTER 18

Mandela has gotten used to an urban lifestyle, so but a part of him still feels most at home in a rural setting, like when he drives in his **car** out to the Orange Free State to celebrate the end of the government's travel ban on him. But out at this rural area, police are waiting for him, and they give him even more severe bans, again limiting his travel and forcing him to resign from the ANC. Mandela is crushed and doesn't like being forced to the sidelines of a cause that has become his whole life by this point.

The travel bans that the government places on Mandela to restrict his physical movement also represent how in general the government is trying to restrict the autonomy of Black South Africans—stopping their social mobility as well. The fact that the police are waiting for Mandela even out in a rural area reflects the extent to which Black South Africans are increasingly living under a state of surveillance.

CHAPTER 19

Because Mandela can't attend the ANC conference, another member of the executive reads the speech he had prepared, which becomes known as "The No Easy Walk to Freedom" speech after a line from Jawaharlal Nehru. Mandela's opponents try to get his attorney accreditation removed due to his political activities, but he manages to win his case. Luckily, he gets a judge who believes in judicial independence, rather than just working for the Nationalists.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a prominent anti-colonial leader in India who went on to become the country's first prime minister. As a man who is now considered one of the founders of modern India, it's clear why he would be an inspiration to Mandela, who one day hopes to remake South Africa using tactics based on those used by the anti-colonial movement in India.


CHAPTER 20

Activists continue to hold rallies about the government's plan to remove African people from their homes. The ANC continues to face arguments from within about when, if ever, to use violence. In 1953, the Nationalist government passes the Bantu Education Act, which attempts to control and restrict how African people are educated. Many religious groups, which run some of the schools, oppose this measure because it puts more control of education in the government's hands.

Mandela's own education, for all its flaws and all the obstacles he faced, is a cornerstone of how he attained his current status and became politically conscious. In this context, the government's education laws are an attempt to prevent the education of future activists like Mandela. The opposition of religious groups, who oppose the laws not on racial grounds but because they interfere with their ability to make decisions about education, are an early sign of how apartheid laws have negative effects that go beyond the immediate impact on Black South Africans.

The ANC attempt a school boycott, but it's disorganized and doesn't fully succeed, although the government does make some changes to the Bantu Education Act. The ANC expands its national organization, holding a convention called the Council of the Congress of the People chaired by Chief Luthuli. The convention is not just for Black African people, but for all residents of South Africa. Delegates come from all over the country to Kliptown, a village outside of Johannesburg. Mandela drives his **car** to Kliptown in spite of his travel ban but stays at the periphery.

Mandela attempts to be honest about the growing pains and shortcomings of the ANC, which continues to grow and evolve over the course of his lifetime. Although the school boycott is not particularly successful, Mandela shows how the organization does succeed in drawing together a diverse coalition of South African protestors, setting the stage for its successes in the future. Mandela often plans for the distant future, both in his personal life and politically.

While the ANC is finalizing a charter on the second day of the convention, police raid it and break it up. In spite of this, word of the charter spreads, and it becomes a "blueprint" for the liberation struggle.

The increasing presence of police show how the government is increasingly starting to view the ANC as a threat and cracking down. In spite of these setbacks, the ANC's efforts lay the groundwork for future progress, vindicating Mandela's hopeful view of the world.


CHAPTER 21

In September 1955, Mandela's travel ban expires. He drives his **car** back to see several places in the *veld near where he grew up. At one of his stops, a police sergeant detains him, but when Mandela gets him to admit that Mandela isn't under arrest, he is forced to let Mandela go. Mandela returns to Qunu, where his mother still lives. He sees his sisters too, then goes on to Mqhekezweni, where Justice still lives. As Mandela travels around, he can't help being paranoid wondering if a hitchhiker he picks up is secretly an undercover police officer. Still, a visit to Cape Town—where political action is rarer than in Johannesburg and so the activists have to show a lot of courage—helps rejuvenate Mandela when he sees the enthusiasm of a local ANC meeting.*

Mandela's suspicions that a hitchhiker may be an undercover officer reflects how the government is trying—and succeeding—to keep the opposition disorganized by making them paranoid and distrustful. Mandela's visit to the place where he grew up emphasizes how the roots of his childhood continue to shape his adult life, but this trip also emphasizes how much Mandela's life has changed and how he can't go back to his old way of living. The enthusiasm Mandela sees at the ANC meeting shows how while his new life means giving up the old one, it also has positive sides.

CHAPTER 22

When Mandela returns to Johannesburg, he gets caught up in a controversy over whether ANC should participate in the Bantu Authorities. Mandela thinks it could be a good opportunity to spread the ANC platform, but the younger activists who want no part in any apartheid structure remind Mandela of his own younger self. Mandela also agrees that the government's policies to resettle African people by ethnic group are cruel, treating people's lives like a "jigsaw puzzle."

The Bantu Authorities Act gave more authority to traditional tribal leaders. While in practice, this might seem like an idea Mandela could support, the real intent of the law was to give the government more control over the tribal leaders and to use these tribal associations to keep Black South Africans separated so they couldn't and wouldn't unite against the White national government.

Mandela gets banned again from traveling and attending political meetings, this time for five years. This time, he is more determined than ever not to let his ban affect his activism. Surprisingly, one of the biggest conflicts Mandela helps mediate during this period is at a local boxing gym where he often trains. Several boxers feel the owner is neglecting the gym and want to go start a new one. Mandela calls a meeting with both sides, but it resolves nothing. Mandela goes with the boxers to a series of new locations, none of which are any better than the old one. Although Mandela is unable to resolve this dispute, he remains fascinated by boxing because while African boxers often earn little money for their work, many have overcome the odds to build a global reputation.

Boxing is a violent sport, but it is also about control and technique. Mandela's interest in boxing reflects his views about political violence—boxing is not about recklessly attacking but instead about being strategic. The conflict between members of the gym and the owner is a microcosm for how many Black South Africans feel that the institutions of their country are not providing enough for them. As is often the case in Mandela's early career, Mandela doesn't achieve immediate success, but he celebrates small victories (like the unity the boxers found together) and hopes for a better future.

CHAPTER 23

On December 5, 1956, Mandela wakes to a loud knock on his door. Police come in and arrest him for high treason. Mandela gets taken to the local police station and learns that there has been a raid on activists across the country. Although he gets transferred to prison, he is encouraged when he reads in newspapers about how people are outraged by the raids.

The police have gone from stopping Mandela out in public to intruding on him in his own home. This reflects how the South African government has become increasingly violent and brazen, reflecting how the journey towards equal rights in the country was full of setbacks along the way.

Mandela arrives in court as part of a group of 156 activists all charged with treason. Supporters have crowded into the court. While a prosecutor is reading the charges, a gunshot goes off, and the trial ends up being delayed over the course of a couple days. When Mandela is released on bail, ironically, Black and Coloured people have to pay less for bail than White people.

The gunshot at the trial highlights how violence is increasingly playing a role in disrupting daily life in South Africa. When Mandela notes that White people ironically had to pay more for bail, this is one of many ways that he calls attention to the fact that apartheid even hurts White people, even if it is to a lesser extent.

CHAPTER 24

Mandela's marriage to Evelyn was in trouble even before the trial. They lose a daughter, and six years later, Evelyn gives birth to another daughter that they give the same name, which is a custom in their culture. Evelyn becomes a devout Jehovah's Witness, and Mandela dislikes the "submissiveness" that Jehovah's Witnesses seem to preach. Evelyn struggles to understand Mandela's commitment to the ANC and activism, which forces him to have a demanding schedule. Tensions rise, and when Mandela gets out of prison, Evelyn has left with their children to live with her brother. Mandela regrets some of his actions, particularly the effect the end of their marriage has on his children.

Mandela describes his failed marriage in terms similar to how he sometimes describes political opponents—by using positive language even when describing conflicts. Mandela is quick to take blame for his own fault, and he tries to describe his ex-wife in terms that make their actions seem rational and understandable. Still, Mandela also offers criticism that shows how Evelyn followed different principles in life than he did, noting how the "submissiveness" of Jehovah's Witnesses clashes with his own ideas about racial equality.

CHAPTER 25

On January 9, 1957, Mandela's trial continues, with the defense presenting its case. Mandela is grateful for his skilled lawyers, who poke holes in the state's claim that Mandela and his allies wanted to overthrow the government and replace it with Communism. It's a long trial, and the defendants sometimes spend time doing crosswords or playing Scrabble. The case drags on for most of the year, until suddenly in September, the state drops charges against several of the defendants, including Luthuli and Tambo, although not Mandela. Thirteen months after the start of the trial, the magistrate announces that Mandela and the remaining accused will stand trial for treason in the Supreme Court.

The drawn-out nature of Mandela's trial is yet another example of how progress often comes slowly. Part of the reason why Mandela emphasizes the length of the trial is to show the inefficiency of the White South African government. This, combined with the fact that the trial seems to dismiss cases against certain activists in an arbitrary manner, suggests that the government is conducting things haphazardly, undermining the idea that what is happening is true justice.

CHAPTER 26

One day when he's out driving, Mandela sees a beautiful woman. A couple weeks later, he is surprised to see the same woman in his office with her brother. Her name is Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela, and she goes by Winnie. Mandela falls in love almost immediately. He finds a pretext to invite her to lunch and takes her to get Indian curry, which she's never had before. She starts to visit him frequently, even coming to political meetings and his gym.

Mandela's quick romance with Winnie suggests that, although Mandela is patient on some matters, he also knows when to be decisive. Winnie's trips to political meetings and the gym seem to reflect a desire on her part to get to better know the things Mandela values, offering a contrast to the end of his previous marriage when he and Evelyn realized they held different (and irreconcilable) values.


Mandela and Winnie marry on June 14, 1958. He gets a six-day hold on his travel ban for the wedding and to go visit Winnie's relatives. There's no time for a honeymoon because Mandela's ban takes effect again, and he becomes busy with his trial.

This passage shows how the government's restrictions on Mandela make it difficult for him to celebrate typical life events like a marriage. Although Mandela's activism is a self-imposed burden, passages like argue that in many ways the government left him with no choice but to continue fighting these types of injustices.

CHAPTER 27

There is a new election in 1958, where 3 million White people can vote but 13 million African people still can't. ANC tries to organize a strike around the election, but it fails to come together. The Nationalist Party wins more votes than they did in the previous election. In the aftermath, some wonder whether ANC should have tried more aggressive tactics, but Mandela is skeptical, believing that support is weak if you have to force it.

Mandela cites the population by race of South Africa in order to emphasize how a small group of South Africa's people is ruling a much larger group who have no say. Mandela is a big believer in democracy, and these numbers help to demonstrate how South Africa's supposed democracy is really anything but.


CHAPTER 28

One of the Nationalist Party's least popular policies is passes for women that they call "reference books." Although police have been arresting women who protest, Winnie tells Mandela that she wants to go to a protest. Mandela supports her but lets her know of the possible consequences of getting arrested, including losing her job. Many women go to protest at the Central Pass Office, and Mandela and Tambo's law firm gets involved with defending those arrested. Winnie is among those arrested, but she gets out on bail and remains determined to stay involved with the protest movement.

The pass laws, which required Black South Africans to carry around passes, show the extent that the government is willing to go to control the lives of Black citizens. The fact that Winnie is among those arrested in the protest shows how Mandela's personal and political lives are intertwined, with Winnie unable (and for that matter, unwilling) to escape the consequences that come along with being married to an activist husband.

CHAPTER 29

Mandela's trial, along with trials for the 91 other accused, will begin in August 1958. The trial looks bad for Mandela, particularly when it gets moved from Johannesburg to Pretoria, forcing their defense team to travel every day. His team succeeds on some risky legal maneuvers before the trial starts, but the case's outcome still remains in doubt. Meanwhile, Winnie gives birth in February 1958 to a daughter that they name Zenani ("Zeni"). Winnie is still in her mid-twenties and struggles to adjust to both marriage and motherhood, but she soon gets used to it.

The fact that Mandela stands trial united with 91 fellow allies shows once again how he believes in unity in the face of adversity. His team's risky maneuvers continue to show his optimism that things will work out even when they're difficult. Additionally, this passage continues to highlight how Mandela's personal and political challenges intersect, as his family grows, and Mandela struggles to be there to help Winnie.

CHAPTER 30

A new group called the Pan Africanist Conference (PAC) arises, with a specifically African perspective that contradicts ANC's multiracial perspective. Despite this rivalry, Mandela knows and respects the PAC president Robert Sobukwe and has other former colleagues in the party as well because they used to be part of the ANC. Mandela finds the viewpoint of the PAC "immature." Still, he remains interested in reading about their policies, believing that one day the two groups will reunite.

Mandela's feelings about the PAC reflect his nuanced views on the liberation struggle. Mandela admires many things about PAC but ultimately argues that they go too far in the direction of Black nationalism. Although Mandela believes that Black people should be proud of their history and accomplishments, he sees this as part of a larger, multiracial liberation movement, not as an end in itself.

CHAPTER 31

In 1959, the government implements the Promotion of Bantu Self Government Act, which separates people into eight separate "bantustans" based on ethnic group. This is part of *groot*, a state policy that means "grand apartheid." Under the bantustan policy, 70 percent of South Africa's people must live on 13 percent of the land. The policy leads to violence as people are forced to move from their homes.

Bantustan was a word invented to describe a Black ethnic state within South Africa under apartheid (most ethnic groups of Black South Africans fall under the larger category of being Bantus). Although the government promised homelands for these people, the policy had the effect of displacing Black South Africans from their old homes and giving their land to White South Africans.

CHAPTER 32

Two years and eight months after Mandela's initial arrest, the trial actually begins in August 1959. On October 11, there is another delay when the prosecutor unexpectedly dies from a stroke. The prosecution brings witnesses who fail to convincingly prove that ANC is full of Communists. Still, they have an audio recording of one prominent activist named Robert Resha seemingly advocating for violence, although Mandela believes the quote is taken out of context. Mandela thinks the judges might be beginning to see the ANC side when all of a sudden everything changes on March 21, 1960.

Mandela tries to describe the prosecution's case in an even-handed way that nevertheless shows why the prosecution fall short. He acknowledges, for example, that the sudden death of the prosecutor represents a blow to their case, but he doesn't let that stop him from picking apart the logic they use, which is full of flaws. Mandela walks a careful line, showing that he has sympathy for some of the Communists in the ANC but doesn't identify as one himself, attempting to unite by appealing to both sides.

CHAPTER 33

In December 1959, the annual ANC conference takes place in the middle of the protests against passes. The Nationalists are fearful due to successful liberation movements in other parts of Africa. ANC has planned an antipass protest for March 30, but PAC schedules one for March 21 and invites ANC to join. Mandela believes this is a tactical move, not one based on unity, and ANC doesn't join. Sobukwe, the PAC president, turns himself into the police on March 21, but he unexpectedly gets a sentence of three years rather than three weeks.

This passage continues to explore how Mandela respects PAC, but also finds them frustrating. PAC schedules their own protest earlier, and Mandela implies that perhaps PAC is thinking too narrowly and not taking stock of the broader liberation movement. The arrest of Sobukwe, who receives an unexpectedly harsh sentence, shows the consequences of PAC acting without being fully prepared.

At one PAC protest in Sharpeville, police open fire, killing 69 African people, including women and children. Many were shot in the back of the head as they fled. The UN Security Council finally takes notice and blames the South African government. Mandela, Luthuli, and others in the ANC organize a massive protest on March 28. It's so large that the government declares a state of emergency and institutes martial law.

In this passage, Mandela shows that in spite of his differences with the PAC, he still believes that they are on the right side of history compared to the South African government. Although Mandela sometimes supports violence as a method of working toward liberation, here he shows how it often does the opposite, acting as a tool of oppression.

CHAPTER 34

On March 30, Mandela again hears a knock at his door that he's sure is the police. They tear his home apart for evidence, and he's taken to a local station. The accommodations are filthy and he gets only meager food. Mandela gets singled out by an officer for being "cheeky" because he was standing with his hands in his pockets. He's taken to a commander's office and finds that Resha is also there. Things get tense between Mandela and the commander, but then Mandela is informed that he has to go to Pretoria to continue his treason trial.

This passage shows how the government is going out of its way to antagonize Mandela, punishing him for even the smallest offenses like keeping his hands in his pockets. This passage makes it clear that what the government really wants is to control Mandela, and they will use any excuse as a pretext to do so, putting Mandela in an unwinnable position. Mandela's refusal to lose hope during this difficult time shows his optimistic spirit.

CHAPTER 35

Mandela is outraged to learn that Luthuli has been assaulted during his time in jail. Meanwhile, one of Mandela's allies who's also accused at the trial manages to escape the country when police mistake his identity, thinking he's an interfering bystander, and order him to leave. Around the country, more than 2,000 people get detained without trial. Mandela himself remains imprisoned while the trial goes on.

The government fails to do its job in ways that are both comic and tragic. The assault of Luthuli in jail is a sad comment on how the government isn't respecting the rule of law, and the escape of Mandela's ally on trial shows how despite the government's attempts to crack down, they sometimes remain incompetent to an extent that is almost humorous.

CHAPTER 36

The State of Emergency makes it difficult for Mandela and other accused to communicate with their lawyers. They develop a strategy of trying to drag the case on as long as possible, with the hope that the State of Emergency will end. Prison life remains difficult, although Mandela sometimes finds camaraderie with the other prisoners, and on rare occasions, Winnie is allowed to visit. Mandela and the others continue to stall in court by calling one another as witnesses until finally the State of Emergency ends and their lawyers are allowed back.

Mandela shows how one of the main strategies of the South African government to sow division among activists is to shut down communication between them. By contrast, Mandela positions himself as someone who believes that open communication helps people to better understand one another, representing a healthier alternative to the paranoia that the government tries to foster.

Mandela's own testimony begins August 3rd. The state wants to paint him as a violent Communist. They think it's dangerous to give votes to people who aren't "educated," but Mandela points out that there are many types of education and that an illiterate person may nevertheless know things you can't learn in school. Mandela finishes his testimony. The defense ends with Professor Matthews, who argues eloquently that the accused are part of a nonviolent struggle for freedom.

As Mandela's own early life shows, there are many different types of education, and formal education isn't the only way to learn things. In this passage, Mandela compares the prosecution's argument to the elitism he used to see at the prestigious schools he went to when he was growing up.

CHAPTER 37

In September, when the Emergency is over, Mandela and the rest of the ANC meet secretly to plan for the future. Mandela is so busy that he sees little of his family. Winnie gives birth to a daughter that they name Zindziswa ("Zindzi"), which is the same name as the daughter of a famous Xhosa poet.

Mandela's name of his daughter after the daughter of a Xhosa poet recalls how it was a talk from a Xhosa poet back in college who first helped Mandela begin to understand the liberation struggle.

CHAPTER 38

Mandela's trial continues to drag on. His travel ban ends two days before adjournment, and he doesn't think the police keep track of such things, so he makes plans to drive a **car** 300 miles to Pietermaritzburg for a meeting. He will return to Pretoria for a verdict. The speech Mandela gives calls for unity from all groups, including Black, White, Indian, and Coloured. Meanwhile, Nationalists hold an all-White referendum that declares that South Africa should become a republic.

Mandela's speech at the trial about unity among the different racial groups is a summary of all the ideas he has been putting together over this first part of his life. Once again, he contrasts his own positive view of the future with a more negative portrayal of the Nationalists, who claim to be a democracy but who pointedly exclude most of the population from the voting process.


CHAPTER 39

On March 29, 1961, the date of the verdict of the treason trial, the courthouse is crowded. The judge declares that the prosecution has failed to prove that ANC is a Communist organization, and people cheer. Mandela is allowed to go free, but he knows that he has only made the state angrier with him. Still, he commends the judges for overcoming their prejudices and seeing his case fairly.

Although Mandela's troubles with the government are far from over, this small early victory is a sign that it is possible for Mandela to win over even people who hold very different beliefs from him. In spite of all of Mandela's criticisms of the South African justice system, he maintains an optimistic belief that in the long run, justice will prevail.

CHAPTER 40

Mandela doesn't go home after the verdict because he's still anxious about authorities coming for him, so he stays at a hotel in Cape Town. He makes the decision to start living underground, which changes his whole resistance strategy, requiring even more planning than before. There's a warrant for his arrest, and he begins going out mostly at night. He begins to look unkempt to try to hide his identity.

Although Mandela triumphed in court earlier, his decision to go underground reflects his growing understanding that no matter what he does, he won't be able to succeed within the crooked South African legal system. Mandela shows once again that he isn't rigid in his beliefs and is willing to adapt his strategy to whatever makes sense in the present moment.


CHAPTER 41

While in hiding, Mandela busies himself planning a May 29 stay-at-home protest. Verwoerd, the prime minister, warns people against participating in the protest. But the protest ends up being one of the most successful yet. At a meeting with Luthuli, Mandela argues that the state has left activists with no choice but violence, and Luthuli himself feels very conflicted, despite his previous commitment to nonviolence. Luthuli seems to consider endorsing violence, then wavers, and Indian people at the meeting speak out strongly against nonviolence. Mandela receives authorization to create a separate organization from the ANC that can use force.

Mandela makes it known that, while he ultimately ends up advocating for violence, he only does so reluctantly and after listening at length to his allies who prefer nonviolent methods of protest. By showing the different viewpoints and different factions within the group of activists, Mandela shows that it's possible for people to have disagreements but still ultimately remain unified on the issues that matter most.

CHAPTER 42

Mandela, who has never fired a weapon, gets put in charge of forming an army called the Umkhonto we Sizwe ("The Spear of the Nation," abbreviated MK). Unlike ANC, Mandela allows White members in MK. Mandela starts reading about people like Fidel Castro, Mao Tse-tung, and Che Guevara. On June 26, 1961, which is Freedom Day in South Africa, Mandela releases a letter to newspapers from hiding in which he writes that he will never give himself up to a government that he doesn't recognize.

Political leaders like Fidel Castro and Mao Tse-tung are very different from some of the earlier influences Mandela has mentioned like Gandhi, showing Mandela's changing interests. Mandela's diverse group of influences shows how he takes his ideas from a wide range of sources—just like how in person, he likes to listen to ideas from people who hold different opinions from him.


CHAPTER 43

During the early part of his hiding, Mandela lives in a White suburb called Berea with the family of Wolfie Kodesh, a reporter who fought in World War II. He stays inside almost all day, even running in place for an hour for exercise. Mandela leaves after some passersby discover Mandela has left milk out to make *amasi* (a type of sour milk), since a White person wouldn't usually make this. Mandela moves on to a doctor's house in Johannesburg.

Mandela's mistake with the amasi *shows how in hiding, even the smallest actions can have consequences. It also shows how Mandela can't help being who he is (making the milk that he had as a child), and that for this reason, hiding doesn't come naturally to him. This once again shows Mandela's honest nature.*

CHAPTER 44

In October, Mandela then moves on to Liliesleaf Farm in a northern suburb of Johannesburg, where he poses as a caretaker for a house waiting for his master to return. Mandela occasionally has visitors who help him with planning MK. Eventually the White allies Arthur Goldreich and Mr. Jelliman move onto the farm, with Mandela posing as their servant. Mandela generally enjoys his time at the farm. He is, however, haunted by an incident when he tried to prove his marksmanship by shooting a sparrow with an air rifle, and Arthur Goldreich's young son started crying, saying that now the bird's mom will be sad.

In some ways the farm is a reprieve for Mandela because it reminds him of his rural childhood. Still, the threat of danger hangs over Mandela's time at the farm, as his practice with the air rifle suggests. Mandela's reaction to killing the bird shows that he regrets violence, even when it's not against a human, once again emphasizing how his role in leading the military group MK is out of reluctant necessity.

CHAPTER 45

Mandela decides that MK should begin with sabotage, since it is the form of violence that is easiest to do and least likely to have negative repercussions. Still, Mandela is prepared to move on to using terrorism or guerrilla warfare if sabotage isn't effective. Many of Mandela's recruits come from ANC, and he worries that some are no longer performing their ANC duties. In December, Mandela hears that Luthuli has won a Nobel Peace Prize. Although Mandela is happy about this, he finds it a little awkward, since not long after, MK deploys homemade bombs at power plants and government offices around the country.

Although Mandela doesn't disavow his decision to lead MK, he reflects honestly on the downsides of using violence, even in the limited form of sabotage. As Mandela notes, all actions come with an opportunity cost, and spending more time with MK leaves members with less time to do any normal ANC activities. Still, while Mandela criticizes himself, he also subtly differentiates himself from people like the activists in PAC, who didn't seem as concerned with whether or not their actions conflicted with the actions of the ANC, even if they were fighting for the same ideals.

CHAPTER 46

Winnie visits Mandela occasionally but has been coming less frequently as the police become more vigilant. On a visit, one of Mandela's sons accidentally reveals Mandela's real name to one of the White children living on the farm, and Mandela decides it's time to move on. But first, Mandela goes abroad to represent ANC at a conference about pan-African freedom. Traveling through Tanganyika to get on a flight to Ethiopia, Mandela realizes for the first time what it feels like to be free in a country ruled by African people. It surprises Mandela to see that the plane's pilot is African, but then he realizes that his expectations have just been warped by apartheid.

Mandela expands his goals, attempting to build a diverse coalition not just in South Africa but globally. Even though Mandela is optimistic about what Black South Africans can accomplish, seeing other countries with Black leaders helps to expand his horizons. Mandela uses the example of the airline pilot to illustrate this, showing how as much as he's spoken about the capabilities of Black people, he didn't realize that he himself still associated highly skilled jobs like flying planes as the domain of White people. Mandela will bring this sense of possibility back with him to South Africa.


CHAPTER 47

Mandela arrives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The conference is the first time in a long while that Mandela gets to put aside his disguises and speak as himself. Still, some at the conference worry about the lack of unity and coordination between ANC and PAC, but Mandela tries to reassure them that everyone is working toward a common cause. After the conference, Mandela flies to see other parts of Africa, meeting freedom fighters from across the continent. Mandela also meets with political leaders and raises money for the South African cause. He prepares to go on to London.

Although Mandela's trip across Africa helps to show him how different some other African countries are, with their Black leaders, this passage ultimately emphasizes the commonalities between different countries. Mandela recognizes a freedom struggle happening in these countries that is similar to what's happening in South Africa. This shows that Mandela's philosophy of unity goes beyond even South Africa's borders.

CHAPTER 48

Although Mandela hates British imperialism, he is an Anglophile in other ways and has long wanted to see Britain. He enjoys seeing the famous sights in London, then goes back to Addis Ababa to receive six months of military training. Only a few weeks into the program, however, Mandela gets word that he is needed urgently back in South Africa to lead MK. Although Mandela is on high alert as he travels back to South Africa, he manages to make it to Johannesburg.

Mandela's interest in London is yet another example of how he presents himself as someone able to compromise and negotiate. In this case, Mandela manages to appreciate many aspects of British culture, in spite of the fact that he has a fundamental disagreement with British practices like colonialism.

CHAPTER 49

Mandela makes it back to Liliesleaf Farm. He holds a secret meeting with his allies, and they plan to make minor changes to the ANC so that it is easier for foreign governments to understand their goals. One day, while Mandela is out driving around the country with a friend, he sees a **car** with White men in it signaling for them to stop and knows that his "freedom" is over. The men are police officers, and they take Mandela to the local station, where he refuses to give his name or make a statement. In prison, Mandela hears a cough and is surprised to find that it's Sisulu.

Mandela's plan to change South Africa with help from outside nations ends up being strategic, even if it does take a long time for it to pay off. The fact that Mandela's freedom ends while he's driving around in his car shows how the government's goal is to restrict his movement—knowing that his ideas could be influential if he has the chance to spread them. Mandela's refusal to give his name reflects a more defiant attitude than he's expressed previously, seemingly reflecting an increasing lack of faith in the government to carry out justice.

Mandela is taken to court and charged with leaving the country without travel documents, a "crime" that can lead to up to a decade in prison. Mandela sees Winnie looking distressed in the spectator gallery. She is allowed to visit him later when he's detained at Johannesburg Fort, and Mandela tries to reassure her.

The presence of Winnie in the audience shows how Mandela's potential imprisonment has costs not just for him but also to the many other people in his life, first among them his family.

CHAPTER 50

At Johannesburg Fort, the colonel watching over Mandela is less of a hardliner than some of the others in his party. Mandela has heard stories that an American official with CIA connections tipped off the government about Mandela's return, but despite the CIA's role in the politics of other countries, Mandela has never personally found evidence of their involvement in his capture. Mandela is eventually transferred to Pretoria. Mandela begins making plans to bail Sisulu out of prison, believing that unlike Mandela, Sisulu worked more behind the scenes and so a bail attempt is more likely to succeed. Mandela himself thinks about escaping, which in addition to benefiting him personally, would also be a publicity blow against the government. Still, Mandela is reluctant to take risks, since a failed escape might be lethal to MK.

Mandela's calculations about whether or not to try to bail himself out or to try to escape reflect the difficult decisions that he increasingly has to make as a leader. As is often the case, Mandela ends up having to put the good of others before himself, as he notes that Sisulu is more likely to be successfully bailed out and that a failed escape attempt on Mandela's part could have negative consequences. Whereas Mandela took risks earlier during his first big trial in court, this caution here seems to reflect a growing awareness about the rising dangers in South Africa.

CHAPTER 51

Mandela's first hearing is October 15, 1962. People gather around the slogan "Free Mandela." Mandela shows up in traditional Xhosa clothing rather than a suit. The state calls up many witnesses. Mandela tells the judge that he will have just as many witnesses as the state, but when it's his turn, he doesn't call any—he knows that the evidence against him is solid, even if the law itself is unjust.

Unlike the first time in court, where Mandela and his defense team managed to convince a skeptical judge to let Mandela go, this time Mandela doesn't even attempt to play by the rules of a normal trial. His contempt for the court process reflects a belief that in this case, no matter what Mandela does, he'll be found guilty. Still, he remains hopeful.

Abroad, the General Assembly of the UN votes in favor of sanctions against South Africa. Sabotage, as protest against Mandela's trial, spreads around the country. On the day of the verdict, Mandela gives a long speech asking for mitigation of his sentence, not expecting it to work but hoping it will be politically significant. The magistrate takes a 10-minute recess to consider Mandela's sentence, then comes back and gives him five years without parole, the longest term yet for a South African political prisoner.

Although Mandela's earlier decision not to call witnesses in court might make it seem like he's losing hope, his decision to give a speech on the day of the verdict shows he still has some optimism left. Mandela gives the speech solely for political reasons, not expecting it to work, and this would seem to suggest that he believes he can still play a role in shaping the nation's politics by speaking up so others know what he believes and what they're fighting for.

CHAPTER 52

Mandela sees prison as about taking away a person's identity. He feels isolated in Pretorial Local, the prison where he's staying, getting only half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the afternoon for exercise. Mandela knows Sobukwe is somewhere in prison and hopes to see him and put aside any competition between ANC and PAC. They and a couple other political prisoners get to speak briefly in the courtyard. Two weeks later, Sisulu also comes to Pretoria to serve a six-year sentence. But bail efforts for him are successful, and once he's out, he goes underground. The prison gives Mandela the wrong dosage of blood pressure medication, and he blacks out at one point, needing stitches from the fall. Rumor spreads that his health is poor.

Although being sent to prison is a major setback for Mandela, both politically and personally, he still tries to make the best of his situation. For example, being stuck in prison helps Mandela and Sobukwe to put aside the rivalry between the ANC and PAC, recognizing that they both face a common enemy. While Mandela tries to remain strong in the face of adversity, the mix-up with Mandela's blood pressure medication is a reminder that he is mortal and faces limitations. That he's injured when the prison administration gives him the wrong dose also highlights how little power he and other prisoners have in this situation.

CHAPTER 53

While Mandela's trial is going in in 1962, the ANC holds its first annual conference in a few years. ANC finally acknowledges MK as its military arm. The government goes ahead with the bantustan system, which people protest with acts of sabotage. On March 1, 1963, the government implements a law specifically to combat MK. It gives the government more power to detail suspected political offenders, and stories spread about people being abused in jail. Some political prisoners, like Sobukwe, are simply re-detained after their original sentences are up.

The ANC's acknowledgment of MK as its military arm reflects how, despite initial resistance, more people in the organization are coming around to Mandela's idea that violence may be the only option remaining. This dovetails with the government's increasing abuses of civil rights, including imprisoning people with even less justification than before and abusing people in prison. These actions suggest the government is even less willing that before to listen to reasonable arguments.

CHAPTER 54

One night in late May, Mandela learns that he's being transferred to the **Robben Island** prison. The guards at the new prison all seem to take pride in being strict and cruel. Mandela tries to remain defiant while avoiding being beaten, which is common in the prison. He struggles with the poor conditions, particularly the isolation, in spite of his attempts to connect with other prisoners when he gets the opportunity. One day at prison, he sees a foreman from Liliesleaf Farm and realizes that the police must have discovered his old hiding place. He learns later about a raid at the farm that led to several arrests.

The transfer to Robben Island is a bit of a blow to Mandela, particularly given the poor conditions. Robben Island thus emerges as a symbol for how the government seeks to isolate activists like Mandela and in doing so, deprive them of their power. When Mandela learns about the raid on Liliesleaf Farm, he is reminded again of how the people who support him often face consequences—and this gives him a sense of responsibility to live up to the trust that these people put in him.

CHAPTER 55

On October 9, 1963, Mandela gets taken in a police van to the Supreme Court in Pretoria, for a trial that gets known as the Rivonia Trial, which features the state vs. him and some other activists. Mandela hates having to go to court in a khaki prison uniform. Over three weeks, he gets two half-hour visits a week with his defense team. Meanwhile, government-supporting newspapers print headlines to try to paint Mandela as a dangerous revolutionary. When the trial starts, the prosecution attempts to portray Mandela as someone willing to blow up all of Johannesburg. But Mandela and Sisulu, his ally who is also among those on trial, all plead not guilty, saying the real guilty party is the government.

Years after they first started, Mandela's legal struggles still continue. This reflects the lack of progress by the current South African government and how in many ways, they keep doing the same thing, administration after administration. Mandela also highlights how the government's portrayal of him has become increasingly inaccurate as they stretch the truth. In their arguments, Mandela has gone from simply being a Communist to being someone willing and able to blow up a whole city. Although Mandela has the truth on his side, this is not enough to survive in the increasingly corrupt court system.

The state has a star witness, Bruno Mtolo, who goes by Mr. X. He is a Zulu man who was a leader in MK. He says he lost faith in the organization and came to believe it was just a tool of the Communists. He presents a document from MK about guerrilla warfare, but Mandela tries to argue for the truth: that while MK considered this option, they never believed it was viable. In spite of the grim mood and the trial, Mandela and the other prisoners try to keep their spirits up, with one asking for Mandela to be his new child's godfather.

Once again, the passage shows how Mandela and his allies are capable of thinking with nuance, but the government tries to portray things in absolutes. Mandela learns that regardless of whether or not he uses techniques like guerrilla warfare, the state will blame him for it anyway. This demonstrates how the government distorts the truth, further showing how their rule is illegitimate.

CHAPTER 56

The state presents its case against Mandela from December 1963 through February 29, 1964. Although some of Mandela's allies have only weak evidence against them and may go free, others fear the possibility of the death penalty. Mandela tries to make a good first impression for the defense as the first witness. Mandela maintains that he is not a communist and believes that all of his political actions have been carefully considered, not rash or violent. He speaks of racial injustice in South Africa, and when he ends, the court is silent. Sisulu follows Mandela and faces harsh cross-examination. Mandela is surprised when the judge suggests that the prosecution has not adequately proved that Mandela and his associates were planning guerilla warfare.

Throughout the whole Rivonia Trial, there is a sense of futility and the idea that no matter what Mandela and his allies say, the government will brand them as dangerous and the court will go along with it. So that is why it's surprising at the end that a judge suggests that the prosecution have not correctly proven some of their assertions. This vindicates Mandela's optimistic worldview and shows that it's worthwhile making an effort even in situations where things seem hopeless. It suggests that even if his efforts at persuasion mostly fall on deaf ears, they are worth it on the chance that they reach someone who is receptive.

CHAPTER 57

News of the Rivonia Trial spreads as far away as London. On June 11, Mandela and the others all gather in the courtroom for the verdict. Judge de Wet announces that almost every one of the accused is guilty, with sentencing to be decided at a later date. This outcome greatly favors the state, and Mandela fears this means the death penalty is imminent.

Even though the judge acknowledged flaws in the prosecution's argument, Mandela and his allies get convicted anyway. This is yet another example of the absurdity of the South African justice system, which Mandela highlights to show how undemocratic the whole government is.

CHAPTER 58

Friday, June 12, 1964, is Mandela's last day in court. Security is high, although Mandela manages to wave to Winnie and his mother in the crowd. The journalist Harold Hanson and the author Alan Paton come to plead mercy on Mandela's behalf, but Judge de Wet doesn't seem to be listening. After this, the judge reads out that Mandela and the others will not face the death penalty, but they will face a life sentence. Mandela and the others celebrate, although it's bittersweet.

Harold Hanson and Alan Paton were White writers who nevertheless took Mandela's side over the government's, showing the persuasiveness of Mandela's messages to those willing to listen. Although Judge de Wet doesn't seem to be listening to arguments for mercy, he does ultimately give Mandela a sentence that is less severe than it could be, a positive development given the circumstances.

CHAPTER 59

As Mandela and the others are taken off in a police van, one of the officers tries to console Mandela by saying that there's so much demand for his release that he'll probably be out in a couple years anyway. The van takes them all to **Robben Island**, the prison Mandela was at before. When Mandela gets to his cell, he finds that he can walk the length of it in three paces. He is 46 years old. At prison, he and the others have to crush heavy stones into gravel. There are more prisoners than Mandela remembers from the last time he was on the island. Mandela complains about how African prisoners are forced to wear shorts while Indian prisoners, like Kathy, get long trousers, so one day someone dumps trousers on his cell floor. But when Mandela realizes he's the only African prisoner who received trousers, he complains, and they get taken away.

Mandela's imprisonment is a logical outcome of the government's efforts to restrain him—now, instead of just being barred from using a car, he is limited to moving around in a cell that's only three paces long. The fact that Mandela is only 46 and faces a lifelong sentence suggests that he is realizing that he might spend his next several decades in that small cell. The issue of shorts versus trousers might seem like a small or even arbitrary difference between prisoners, but it's significant to the government because it's a way to mark Black men's lower status. And so, it becomes significant to Mandela to fight this small injustice, not just for himself but for all of his fellow prisoners.

CHAPTER 60

After two weeks, Mandela's lawyers come to check about appealing the sentence. Mandela inadvertently upsets one of his lawyers by asking about the lawyer's wife, not realizing that she drowned in an accident just this week. Mandela gets permission from a major at the prison to send a condolence letter, but the major never posts the letter. Mandela focuses his energy on trying to survive his sentence without being broken down by it. He identifies as an optimist but isn't sure where his optimism comes from.

This is a low point in Mandela's life story, when he still have several decades in prison left ahead of him. Nevertheless, this is the moment he chooses to reflect on optimism and the role that it plays in his life. Crucially, at this point Mandela doesn't know when or if he'll get out of prison, and so he tries to keep himself healthy and mentally fit on the chance that he could get out at any time. This optimism helps to sustain him through what could otherwise be a hopeless situation.

CHAPTER 61

The prisoners get woken up by a brass bell at 5:30 each morning, although they can't leave their cells until 6:45. The cells have no running water, just iron buckets. Food is based on race, with Indian and Coloured people getting slightly better food than African people, although pretty much all the food is awful. Mandela is among the prisoners who complain. The cooks are prisoners themselves and sometimes hoard away the best food for themselves and friends.

The brass bell waking up prisoners over an hour before they can leave their cells is yet another example of how the South African justice system is arbitrary and designed to wear prisoners down. The issue with the food mirrors the earlier issue with the trousers, and rather than just accepting these facts of prison life, Mandela rebels against them, trying to do his best to help everyone in prison receive better treatment.

CHAPTER 62

Mandela learns all the prison regulations and tries to use them against the guards, like when they try to make him take a photo but fail to provide the proper authorization. He only allows one prison photo from a sympathetic journalist, because he believes prison photos can be demeaning. People from as far away as Britain and America come to see the prison and its conditions.

Mandela's hesitance to being photographed shows how conscious he is about his image, even in dark times like when he's imprisoned. This consideration about his image shows how Mandela is still thinking about the broader liberation movement, even at a time when he is experiencing his own personal struggles.

CHAPTER 63

All prisoners are classified as A, B, C, or D, with D having the fewest privileges. All political prisoners begin at D and can take a long time to rank up to C. Guards call Mandela a "troublemaker" and refuse to raise his status. Mandela is allowed only one letter and one visitor every six months. Letters become precious, even when they are so censored that they become barely legible. On the rare occasions when Winnie can come, Mandela finds that she seems to be under a lot of pressure. He learns later that she lost her job and has a travel ban. After the visit, he expects to not see her again for six months, but it ends up being two years.

The alphabetical classifications put on prisoners show how prison is a deliberately dehumanizing process that reduces people into categories. The censorship of letters, which hinders communication with the outside world, further contributes to this dehumanization process by making it difficult for the prisoners to continue meaningful relationships with their loved ones on the outside, a process made even worse by the strict rules around visits.

CHAPTER 64

In January, Mandela is surprised when all the prisoners are lined up. He finds that they're being taken to work at a lime quarry. Although the work is hard, Mandela and the other prisoners find it strangely invigorating. The heat, however, is bad and causes a constant glare. It takes three years of requests before prisoners get sunglasses. The common-law prisoners start to mock the political prisoners with songs, but the political prisoners respond with their own songs. Eventually a guard who understands the Xhosa language forces them to stop. Mandela remains convinced that he can convert the common-law prisoners to his side.

January is summer in the southern hemisphere and is thus one of the hottest times of the year. The conflict between the common-law prisoners and the political prisoners is yet another example of people with a common enemy disagreeing with one another (much like the ANC and PAC). Mandela's refusal to see these fellow prisoners as enemies, in spite of their taunting of him and his allies, shows how he remains committed to be a unifier, even when he's struggling during hard prison labor.

CHAPTER 65

One day in summer 1965, Mandela and the other prisoners receive particularly good food. The word is that the Red Cross will be coming for an inspection. Mandela manages to get a meeting with the Red Cross representative that's unmonitored. This first representative isn't very helpful, but in later years, the Red Cross will fight more effectively for prison improvements.

The Red Cross visit is a hopeful occasion for Mandela because it reminds him that as much as the South African government wants to lock him away in isolation to stop his influence from spreading, there are still people who are watching and paying attention to what happens to him in prison.

Studying is important to Mandela, and he and the others struggle to get approved for it and get the right books. Newspapers are very valuable to the political prisoners, but they're forbidden from reading news. Sometimes they steal newspapers that guards use as sandwich wrappers out of the garbage. Prisoners often get sent to isolation for arbitrary offenses, something Mandela complains to the Red Cross about every time they arrive.

In this passage, newspapers go from literal garbage to prison guards to the most valuable resource for prisoners. This dynamic hints at how dire conditions are for prisoners while also highlighting the privileges and good things the guards have compared to the prisoners they oversee.

CHAPTER 66

Mandela learns that the warder in his particular section of the prison has more of a direct impact on his life than any higher-ranking prison official or politician. While most warders still think of the prisoners as beneath them, some are fair and even willing to listen to prisoners. In general, communication in the prison is highly restricted, although Mandela and his allies find way around this, like using coded script on toilet paper.

Once again, this passage shows how prisoners are resourceful and manage to make the most of things that might seem worthless, like toilet paper. Mandela's ability to find ways to communicate with fellow prisoners even in an environment with such heavy surveillance shows his ingenuity as well as how important communication is to him.

Word gets to Mandela about a hunger strike in the prison in July 1966, protesting the poor conditions. To Mandela's surprise, he soon hears that the warders are also striking—not in support of the prisoners but to protest their own conditions. The prison authorities negotiate with the warders, then agree to meet with some representatives from the prisoners, which Mandela considers a success. Mandela himself had advocated for more aggressive strikes, like stopping work, but he went along with the hunger strikes after he was outvoted.

Mandela's thoughts on the hunger strike are another development in his ongoing thoughts about violent versus nonviolent forms of protest. On the one hand, Mandela has a lot of admiration for other leaders who have used hunger strikes, like Gandhi. Still, Mandela also carefully considers how his own political situation may be different and how a different situation may require a different form of protest.

CHAPTER 67

Mandela gets his second prison visit from Winnie in 1966, during the hunger strike. Police have been harassing her, even raiding her home while she was getting dressed. They talk about family and reference ANC matters in code. Not long after, police arrest Winnie, and she spends four days in jail and loses her job. The government tries to strip Mandela of his law accreditation, but he makes plans to defend himself and eventually the government decides it's easier to just quietly drop the matter. The warders at the lime quarry become laxer, allowing the prisoners to talk among themselves. They debate a variety of topics, such as the future of the ANC and whether or not tigers exist in Africa.

The fact that police continue to harass Winnie in her home even after Mandela is in prison shows how the government is attempting to control every aspect of Mandela's life, even his family. Mandela's law practice was a point of pride for him earlier in life (since he was perhaps the first Black man in the country to open his own law firm) and so holding onto his accreditation is not just strategic for him but also of symbolic importance. His strategy of overcoming the government by essentially just outwaiting them shows the value of being patient.

CHAPTER 68

The prison warders start to become more relaxed toward the prisoners, but everything changes in September 1966 when Mandela gets news that Verwoerd has been assassinated by a White parliamentary messenger. When the warders learn of this, they take out their anger on the prisoners. A particular warder called Van Rensburg starts cracking down on prisoners at the quarry. The prisoners call him "Suitcase" because of how his lunchbox looks. Under Suitcase's reign, conversation is banned at the quarry. Mrs. Suzman, the only member of the liberal party in Parliament, comes to visit the prison, and after listening to Mandela, she gets Suitcase transferred out of the prison.

The assassination of Verwoerd is yet another sign of how apartheid isn't even bringing stability to White South Africans. Instead, it's engulfing the whole country in a state of violence. The situation with Suitcase is yet another example of how although Mandela's efforts in prison may at first seem futile, his persistence allows him to make incremental gains. The expulsion of Suitcase shows how reform is possible even in prison at the height of apartheid in South Africa.


CHAPTER 69

After a few years in prison, Mandela despairs that the state has grown stronger, and ANC has grown weaker. Still, the liberation struggle continues in other parts of Africa, with MK soldiers fighting in Rhodesia. Mandela also hears of Luthuli's death, which leaves an even bigger leadership void. The ANC members on **Robben Island** form a leadership body that they call the High Organ, and it includes Mandela, Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, and Raymond Mhlaba. It's controversial because all four members are Xhosa, but Mandela feels this was just coincidence and that the leaders remain impartial. Still, they decide to add a rotating fifth member who will not be Xhosa.

As the book goes on, Mandela's objectives have expanded, with his new goal being liberation not just for oppressed South Africans but for people suffering oppression across Africa and around the rest of the world. Partly because of Mandela's universal outlook, he is concerned with the optics of all of the Robben Island ANC members being from the same ethnic group. Mandela's willingness to add a fifth member shows how he takes great efforts to try to overcome weaknesses in his image.


CHAPTER 70

Time seems to stop in prison even as it keeps going outside. Mandela's children grow up, and his mother loses a lot of weight. Eventually, Mandela learns that his mother has died of a heart attack. Her death causes Mandela to reflect on his life and how, despite the difficulties, he is glad he has dedicated himself to liberation. On May 12, 1969, Winnie is arrested and detained without trial under the terms of the Terrorism Act. It pains Mandela to think of Winnie in jail. In July of the same year, Mandela learns that his son Thembi has died in a **car** accident at age 25.

The death of Mandela's father and then later the death of Jongintaba were also occasions that caused Mandela to reflect on his life. With the passing of each authority figure in Mandela's life, the burden becomes more and more on him to lead a way into the future. But as Mandela learns in particular after the death of Thembi, the future is far from certain, and sometimes even Mandela's best efforts can do nothing to stop it.

CHAPTER 71

Conditions on **Robben Island** slowly improve, although there are still setbacks. Prisoners are eventually allowed to attend religious services. Mandela is Methodist but attends every ceremony he can of all religions. Prisoners hold tournaments in chess, checkers, bridge, and Scrabble. They also put on plays around Christmas, and Mandela gets involved with a production of *Antigone*.

Mandela's interest in all religions, even ones that are very different from his, show how he has an interest in the things that unify people. In a similar vein, the games and theater production that Mandela gets involved with also fulfill the role of bringing people together. Antigone is especially significant because it's a play about an unjust government.

CHAPTER 72

Near the end of 1970, a new commanding officer named Colonel Piet Badenhorst comes to the island, and he is particularly brutal. He calls Mandela out at the quarry, provoking him by insulting his mother. When Mandela responds, Badenhorst drops several prisoners' classification level down from C to D.

Although Mandela's time in prison is generally one of slow progress, the arrival of Colonel Badenhorst is a reminder of how quickly progress can reverse, as quantified by Badenhorst's decision to drop several prisoners down a letter grade.


CHAPTER 73

Mandela and the others try to resist Badenhorst. They meet with him, and he says he'll take their complaints into consideration. After a prisoner is severely beaten, Mandela speaks on behalf of all the prisoners at a meeting with some judges. After this, Badenhorst seems more restrained, and within three months, he's transferred away. Mandela is absolutely shocked when, before he leaves, Badenhorst says he wishes Mandela good luck and seems sincere. Mandela believes that Badenhorst only acted brutally because he was part of a brutish, inhuman system.

Mandela's final conversation with Badenhorst helps to illustrate why Mandela remains so determined to negotiate and find common ground with people, even those who seem like mortal enemies. Mandela's belief that systems are more at fault for oppression than people is yet another example of his optimistic attitude. He sees his enemies as fellow humans and blames their flaws largely on the situation they live in.


CHAPTER 74

Colonel Willemse succeeds Badenhorst and is not quite progressive, but he's much better than his predecessor. Willemse asks Mandela for help disciplining the prisoners. Mandela gets permission to meet with his allies to consider the proposal. More MK soldiers enter the prison, and while Mandela isn't happy to see them captured, he's grateful for news from the outside.

Although Mandela tries to see the humanity in all his oppressors, he also changes his behavior based on how reasonable his current adversary seems. Here, Mandela can sense that Willemse is more reasonable than Badenhorst, and so Mandela cooperates with him, reasoning that it's important to cooperate if there's a chance doing so will help his cause.

CHAPTER 75

One day, to his surprise, Mandela and the others aren't taken to the quarry but instead to a beach to collect seaweed. The work is surprisingly difficult, but the atmosphere on the shore is more relaxed. They even collect clams, mussels, and crayfish to make a kind of stew.

The stew that the prisoners make out of scraps on the beach is a sign of their resilience and how, like Mandela, many of these prisoners are determined to keep up their spirits over the course of their imprisonment.

CHAPTER 76

Robben Island becomes known as the University due to how much the prisoners there study. During downtime at the quarry, Sisulu teaches a course he's invented about the history of the ANC. Mandela also busies himself with legal work for African people who can't afford a lawyer (since South African law doesn't guarantee one). Mandela only obtains some victories, and often he never meets the people he helps, but it still helps to give him a sense of purpose.

The lack of a guaranteed lawyer for accused people is yet another sign of the crookedness of the South African justice system during this time period. As is typical for Mandela, he doesn't succeed in everything he attempts, but the few legal victories that he does score for clients help him to make incremental progress despite his imprisonment.

CHAPTER 77

Although Winnie's stay in prison isn't very long, police keep harassing Winnie and finding excuses to detain her. Zindzi turns 15 in 1975, but Winnie modifies her birth record to make her look 16 so that she can visit Mandela in prison. Mandela hasn't seen her since she was 3 years old. She is shy at first, but Mandela tries to make her comfortable.

Although Mandela generally favors honesty, his and Winnie's decision to forge Zindzi's birth record is yet another instance that shows how Mandela isn't rigid in his views. He is willing to adapt to the needs of the specific situation.

Winnie has trouble organizing her next visit to Mandela, and he gets in an argument with a warder about it. The warder charges Mandela with insulting him, and Mandela gets the lawyer George Bizos to defend him. Eventually, they get the prosecution to drop the case. The whole time in prison, Mandela thinks of escape plans, but despite considering many options, none of them come to fruition for him.

Once again, Mandela finds that his best weapon is sometimes just his persistence, as he gets the government to drop yet another case against him by stalling it out. Although Mandela often contemplates escape, his patience not to attempt a risky plan shows yet again his methodical style of seeking progress.

CHAPTER 78

Birthdays aren't a big deal on **Robben Island**, but around Mandela's 57th birthday in 1975, some prisoners start making plans for his 60th, with Kathy leading the plan. Kathy and Walter suggest that Mandela should work on a memoir. He finishes a draft in four months, with Kathy and Walter editing. Fellow prisoner Mac Maharaj manages to smuggle a copy of the manuscript out.

Mandela's work on his memoir, even when he's in prison and has to keep it secret, shows yet again how he is always thinking about his legacy and the future, even when that future is uncertain. Mandela's memoir, which became this current book, reflects his belief that often the best way to convince another person of your viewpoint is to make them see you as a fully formed and sympathetic human.

Mandela buries his copy of the manuscript in different parts of the prison, intending to destroy it once he hears that Mac is safely out of the country. But when digging for a new wall starts at the prison, Mandela decides to dig up most parts of his manuscript and destroy it right away. Still, part of the manuscript gets dug up, and Mandela loses study privileges for four years. Meanwhile, Mac's copy makes it safely to London. It isn't published while Mandela is in prison, but it becomes the basis of this memoir.

Mandela's willingness to risk his study privileges shows just how important writing a memoir is to him. The fact that Mandela has to bury the memoir in prison to hide it from the warders dovetails with how in general, Mandela has to "bury" parts of himself in prison in order to avoid facing consequences. Although Mandela himself won't be free for a while, his manuscript's freedom is an optimistic sign of the possibility that Mandela will one day achieve freedom.

CHAPTER 79

In 1976, Jimmy Kruger, the minister of prisons, comes to visit Mandela. He still believes that Mandela and ANC are violent Communists, so Mandela tries to explain to him ANC's slow process toward incorporating violence. Mandela tries to negotiate the release of some prisoners, but Kruger doesn't want to hear it. Instead, his offer is for Mandela alone to move to Transkei and recognize the legitimacy of its bantustan government in exchange for a lighter sentence. Mandela refuses.

Jimmy Kruger's views differ strongly from Mandela's, but Mandela still takes the time to try to set things straight with him. While Mandela values cooperation, he realizes that what Kruger really wants is for Mandela to legitimize the government's unjust practices, and so Mandela refuses the offer.

CHAPTER 80

Mandela hears a rumor about an uprising on June 16, 1976, after some of the young people arrested in the uprising end up at **Robben Island**. A group of 15,000 schoolchildren came to Soweto to protest the policy of teaching in Afrikaans. New prisoners are appalled by the bad conditions and see Mandela and those like him as too moderate. Mandela learns that many of them are part of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which has helped get young people into politics. Mandela finds them inspiring, although he disagrees on their policy of focusing on Blackness rather than all races. Physical fights break out among ANC, PAC, and BCM, but Mandela tries to promote unity.

Afrikaans is a language that evolved from Dutch, and so teaching Afrikaans in schools is a method of trying to bring European culture into South Africa—something the schoolchildren do not want, as they'd like to see South Africa be its own, distinctly African country. Although Mandela was once part of the activist wing of the ANC, his experience with meeting the new, younger prisoners shows how Mandela's views have gradually evolved to focus more on celebrating incremental gains. The fights in prison among ANC, PAC, and BCM foreshadow future violence.

CHAPTER 81

In 1977, after two years of a go-slow strike by prisoners in the quarry, **Robben Island** finally ends manual labor. Mandela is happy to devote himself more to studying and even gets permission to make a small garden. He orders gardening books and soon improves his yields. Without quarry work, Mandela gains weight, so he starts to take exercising seriously again. Although Mandela is still barred form studying at this point, he has access to other books, mostly novels like *War and Peace* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Mandela's gardening work is a way of reconnecting with his rural upbringing as well as yet another way for him to do things that will pay off in the future. The books that Mandela reads, War and Peace and The Grapes of Wrath, are set in very different times and places from contemporary South Africa. But they both contain realistic portrayals of societies in crisis, which would certainly be of interest to Mandela.

CHAPTER 82

After the student uprising in Soweto, Winnie gets involved with helping the students. Police find out and she gets exiled to a remote part of the country. Zeni, who has been abroad at boarding school in Swaziland, marries Swaziland's Prince Thumbbumuzi. Because Mandela can't attend, he gets George Bizos to go in his place. George reports back that the wedding was a joyful occasion. Now that Zeni is part of the Swazi royal family, she has diplomatic privileges to visit Mandela. She comes to introduce Mandela to his new granddaughter and ask for a name. Mandela suggests Zaziwe, which means "Hope."

The fact that Zeni has to marry the prince of a foreign country just to be able to see Mandela shows the extent to which the government is trying to separate Mandela from his family. Although Mandela can't attend his own daughter's wedding, his suggestion to name his granddaughter (who represents a new generation) Hope shows that in spite of the difficulties, Mandela still hasn't lost faith in the idea that he and his allies might one day build a better future.

CHAPTER 83

In the couple years after 1976, Mandela often feels dreamy and nostalgic. He dreams of being released from prison and writes about his dreams to Winnie. He starts building a photo album of pictures of his family he gets in the mail, and the photo album attracts the interest of other prisoners curious about the outside world. Mandela reluctantly shares it, and men remove the photos to keep for themselves.

While Mandela has survived much of his time in jail by thinking about the future, this passage shows how the past can also be a source of comfort. The fact that the other men take Mandela's photos shows that people in prison are eager for any sign of the outside, potentially pointing to their loss of hope.

CHAPTER 84

In 1978, the prisoners finally get to hear the news, broadcast on radio over the prison intercom. The first report is the death of Sobukwe, and more stories tell of government victories. John Vorster retires as prime minister, which the prisoners only later learn was due to corruption, and P. W. Botha takes office. In prison, they sometimes show films, and eventually, when prisoners have the power to select them, Mandela gets interested in documentaries. In 1979, all prisoners—African, Coloured, and Indian—finally get the same diet.

This chapter shows how conditions in prison have been slowly improving, perhaps as a result of the complaints of people like Mandela. Although the change in food for Black prisoners is relatively minor, the equality that they get with the other prisoners shows that the different racial groups in prison are being treated more fairly—a hopeful sign that racial equality may be possible in South Africa after all.

CHAPTER 85

In 1979, Mandela gets a severe limp while playing tennis. He gets taken to a hospital in Cape Town. Mandela is reluctant to undergo any sort of medical procedure, but a kind doctor convinces him of the necessity of heel surgery. Despite rumors of his poor health spreading, Mandela recovers successfully. In 1980, prisoners can finally buy newspapers. Although the papers are both conservative and heavily censored, Mandela learns of the existence of a Free Mandela campaign outside of prison. This campaign helps to rekindle some of Mandela's hope.

Mandela's limp from tennis is a sign of how he is aging and coming up against his limits. His refusal to undergo surgery is at first an attempt to try to remain self-sufficient, but he ultimately acknowledges that he needs help. This connects with the growing Free Mandela campaign outside of prison, which also shows how, for as much as Mandela tries to protest and negotiate on his own in prison, he also needs the help and support of people on the outside.

CHAPTER 86

One day, some Thembu chiefs come to visit Mandela. The visit gets official approval because authorities believe Mandela's involvement in Transkei matters will distract him from the broader liberation struggle and that traditional leaders might counterbalance the ANC. The Thembu chiefs have a leadership crisis: Sabata, the main traditional chief, has been deposed by K. D. Matanzima, Mandela's nephew and the prime minister of Transkei. Mandela hears the situation and advises them to support Sabata, since Matanzima is usurping power. Matanzima wants to meet with Mandela, but Mandela refuses, out of fear that this would legitimize Matanzima.

This passage shows how complicated some of the political questions Mandela has to face are. Mandela has to advise the Thembu chiefs against supporting Mandela's own nephew, because to do so would legitimize the government's attempts to exert control over Transkei. Mandela's decision shows that he respects tradition and legitimacy, putting justice ahead of his own family connections and contrasting himself with the corruption that many of the Nationalist politicians exhibit.

In 1982, Mandela hears that Winnie is in the hospital after a **car** accident. He gets Winnie's attorney, Dullah Omar, to come and tell him the full story. He learns that Winnie is recovering successfully. Soon after, Mandela hears that he's being transferred. He doesn't know why and is anxious. He packs his things and is taken to a new location, only learning when he arrives that it's called Pollsmoor Prison.

The car used to be a symbol of Mandela's status and mobility, but now a car crash has killed his son and injured Winnie. This reflects how as much as Mandela tries to plan for a better future, some things are random and outside his control. The prison authorities try to further reduce Mandela's autonomy by leaving him in the dark about things like his prison transfer.

CHAPTER 87

Pollsmoor is a maximum-security prison located outside of Cape Town near a prosperous White suburb. Mandela is disoriented and believes that authorities are trying to stop ANC's influence in **Robben Island** by removing him. Despite this downside, the food at Pollsmoor is better, and Mandela has more access to news and more room in his cell to exercise. When Winnie comes, Mandela also sees that the visiting area is nicer. He gets more space to grow a garden and cooks meals for other prisoners, also giving some vegetables away to warders. In general, regulations are less strict and Pollsmoor's problems are easier to fix.

Although Mandela's conditions in Pollsmoor are not quite as bad as at Robben Island, Mandela is still sure to highlight the disparity between his life locked in a cell and the life of prosperous White South Africans living not far away from him, which captures the unfairness of apartheid. Mandela himself seems to be aware that, as much as he enjoys having space to garden, there are still prisoners back at Robben Island who don't have access to the same privileges—and he can't give up on fighting for their rights along with his own.

CHAPTER 88

Mandela feels more connected to the outside world at Pollsmoor and feels that the struggle for freedom is picking up. MK is still planting bombs at power stations and military targets, and while Mandela is horrified whenever he hears of accidental civilian casualties, he believes that there is an unavoidable cost to war. In 1984, Desmond Tutu wins the Nobel Peace Prize, continuing to spread awareness about African liberation struggles. The government begins sending "feelers" to test making a deal with Mandela, but he can sense that they just want to diminish his influence.

Desmond Tutu is a major figure in the South African anti-apartheid movement who was one of the few activists who was not imprisoned during this time period. He gets mentioned only briefly in this book, reflecting how broad and widespread the liberation movement was. Tutu's Peace Prize, combined with the "feelers" that the government sends to Mandela, all reflect how public support, especially internationally, is turning against the government.

In January 1985, Botha offers Mandela freedom, but only if he unconditionally rejects violence. Mandela senses it's just a ploy and rejects it. Mandela drafts a careful response that says he cares more about everyone's freedom than just his own.

Mandela's reply to Botha echoes actions he's taken in the past. He consistently rejects special treatment for himself in favor searching for true equality and helping others improve their lives.

CHAPTER 89

In 1985, Mandela goes for a checkup and finds that he needs prostate surgery. After the surgery, he is picked up from the hospital by a commanding officer, Brigadier Munro, which alerts Mandela's suspicions. Mandela finds that he's been moved to a larger cell but has been isolated from his friends. Mandela tries to turn his new circumstances into an opportunity, making a secret plan that he doesn't even tell his fellow ANC members on the rare moments when he can still see them.

Mandela's transfer in prison to a new cell is yet another sign of the how the government is trying to minimize his influence by separating him from his allies. The government's secrecy and policy of keeping Mandela in the dark until the last minute are further attempts to isolate him. Although Mandela increasingly has to work alone, he doesn't give up, continuing to make plans for himself for the future.

CHAPTER 90

Mandela writes to the government requesting a meeting, but he gets no response. Finally, in early 1986, he manages to secure a meeting with some high-up figures, including Kobie Coetsee, the minister of justice. While Mandela is happy to talk to them, he says that they should also speak to Tambo, who is currently the real leader of the ANC. Meanwhile, Tambo has been leading people in civil disobedience, and international pressure on South Africa is growing. At Mandela's next meeting with the same group, he requests to meet President Botha himself.

Mandela's letters to the government shows that even after two decades in prison, he hasn't given up on the idea that it might be possible for him to advocate for a better life for himself and others. Despite his status as a prisoner, Mandela carries himself with confidence, asking to take matters all the way up to Botha. Mandela shows a willingness to negotiate with these men, even though they are part of the system that has kept him in prison for so long.

CHAPTER 91

Before Christmas in 1986, Lieutenant Colonel Gawie Marx, deputy commander at Pollsmoor, takes Mandela out to see Cape Town. People tend not to recognize Mandela because the last published photo of him was from 1962. Mandela sees the tranquility of the White suburbs, which are oblivious to the conflict going on elsewhere. He believes that the prison authorities are trying to make him get used to life outside prison so that he'll strike a deal for his freedom.

Mandela's lack of recent photographs shows how, despite Mandela's best efforts, the government has in some ways succeeded in minimizing his presence. While the colonel seems to want to show Mandela how well people are living in the White suburbs, Mandela isn't impressed, because as usual, he disapproves of situations where only some people get rights and privileges.

CHAPTER 92

In 1987, Mandela gets in touch with Kobie Coetsee again. They arrange a meeting, but Mandela gets nervous when he learns that Dr. Barnard, the head of South Africa's version of the CIA, will be attending. Mandela decides to communicate with his colleagues in prison, including Sisulu, as well as trying to send a message out to Tambo. Tambo seems concerned that Mandela may have lost his way, but Mandela is determined to prove him wrong.

Although Mandela is willing to negotiate with his political opponents, this passage shows how he retains a sense of wariness, knowing the sorts of tactics that the government has used in the past. Mandela presents himself as being aware of these dangers in order to contradict the assertions of people like Tambo who believe that Mandela is acting naively by trying to work with the government.

CHAPTER 93

Mandela begins meeting with a group that includes Coetsee and Dr. Barnard in 1988. Their first meeting is awkward, but as they meet more, Mandela finds that they're surprisingly open-minded and don't actually know much about the ANC. He tells them that when it comes to violence, "it is always the oppressor, not the oppressed who dictates the form of struggle." Mandela tries to reassure them that Communists aren't so frightening, and that Mandela's own economic ideas are less radical than the Communists anyway. He promises that ANC wants to govern all people of South Africa equally, even the White minority.

Just as he's done since he used to play in the veld as a boy, Mandela tries to treat his enemies honorably, particularly when they seem receptive to listening. Here Mandela again justifies violence as a potential form of protest, blaming the violence on oppressors who create conditions where violence is necessary. Still, Mandela is also careful to deny his association with some radical policies like Communism, showing how he is looking to find common ground with the government.

CHAPTER 94

International pressure builds on South Africa, which has to call states of emergency again in 1987 and 1988. Still, the Nationalists have a large share of the votes. Mandela goes to the hospital again for water in his lung. He is moved to a fancy clinic where he is the first Black patient, and Coetsee comes to visit him. The nurses, who are all White or Coloured, throw a party for Mandela in his room before he leaves the facility, while his guards stand and watch.

Although Mandela is unusual as the first Black patient at the hospital, he becomes popular there, showing how racial differences and prejudices become less important as people form personal relationships with those who are different. The support that Mandela has among the nurses is yet another sign that things are slowly changing in South Africa, even if the elections don't yet reflect it.

CHAPTER 95

Back at prison, in December 1988, Mandela notices that the security in his ward seems to be particularly alert. Mandela is told to pack his things and get ready to leave. He is taken to the new prison of Victor Verster, which is 35 miles northeast of Cape Town. There, Mandela gets his own cottage, which is full of insects but spacious. It even has a swimming pool. His cook is a White man who once worked as a warder on **Robben Island**. He is even able to procure wine for when people like his lawyer, George Bizos, come to visit.

Each of Mandela's prisons is an upgrade over the previous one, at least in terms of amenities. But while Mandela celebrates incremental progress, he does not let these improvements distract him from his ultimate goal of freedom for himself and his allies. The reversal of roles of Mandela and his cook, who once was clearly above Mandela in the hierarchy as a warder, shows how arbitrary these roles were to begin with.

CHAPTER 96

Mandela continues to meet with the government. He writes to Botha that he is afraid of South Africa splitting into Black and White on separate sides. Negotiations are slow, especially after Botha suffers a stroke, and all the while, political violence continues across the country. For Mandela's 71st birthday, much of his family is allowed to visit him, including Winnie. Mandela is happy but also sad as he thinks of all the family gatherings he's missed over the years.

Mandela's long separation from his family has been one of his biggest struggles in prison, and so the fact that he is able to see all of them for his birthday. While Mandela is generally optimistic and forward-looking, he does take this moment to reflect back on the many family gatherings he's missed due to being in prison, which is a powerful reminder of what the government has unjustly taken from him.

CHAPTER 97

On July 4, Mandela learns that he will meet President Botha. Mandela is excited but also nervous because of the president's reputation for having a temper. But the president is friendly, and he and Mandela take a photo together shaking hands. The only tense moment of the meeting is when Mandela asks for the release of all political prisoners and Botha refuses. About a month later, Botha resigns and F. W. de Klerk, who promises a platform of reform, becomes the new acting president.

Although Mandela spends most of the book dealing with people's unfair and unrealistic expectations of him, in this passage, Mandela reflects on how Botha differed from Mandela's own expectations. Notably, Mandela does not necessarily endorse Botha and his policies—Botha's friendliness simply shows that a person can promote unjust policies without being unpleasant in person.

CHAPTER 98

On October 10, 1989, de Klerk announces that Sisulu and several other of Mandela's allies from **Robben Island** will be going free. Mandela sends a letter to de Klerk similar to the one he wrote to Botha. When Mandela eventually meets de Klerk, he finds that de Klerk wants to modernize apartheid rather than abolish it, which is unacceptable to Mandela. Although many elements of de Klerk's plan for the country fall short for Mandela, he believes the two of them can work together.

De Klerk and Mandela have a complicated relationship, since their political goals are fundamentally at odds with each other. Mandela wants to abolish apartheid while de Klerk merely wants to reform it. Still, Mandela's meetings with de Klerk show how it is possible for two people with such different goals to nevertheless reach an agreement that will be mutually beneficial to them.

CHAPTER 99

On February 2, 1990, de Klerk finally begins to dismantle apartheid and set the stage for a democratic South Africa. As part of this plan, Mandela will finally be released. While Mandela welcomes this, he is still apprehensive about how his release will play out, and he wants it to be on his own terms. At Mandela's request, he is allowed to walk directly out of Victor Verster, which he believes will send the strongest message. As a compromise, Mandela drops his request to have a week's advance notice (to give time for all his supporters to be notified) and instead agrees to go free the very next day..

In this passage, Mandela again shows his patience and careful consideration. As much as he wants freedom, he wants to make sure that it comes on favorable terms, and he senses that de Klerk needs the deal to work out for his own reasons. The suddenness of Mandela's release, which is planned for the very next day, shows how as much as Mandela's story is one of incremental progress, sometimes change can also come all at once.

CHAPTER 100

Mandela wakes early on February 11, 1990, the day of his release. He is set to be released at 3 p.m., driven in a **car** with Winnie, and he makes a point of wanting to say goodbye to his warders. Despite some delays, when the time of release finally comes, it's a triumphant moment, with huge crowds gathered to watch.

Mandela gives lots of specific details in this chapter to illustrate how the day of his freedom still remains so clearly in his mind. The car that Mandela drives out is heavily symbolic because in South Africa's recent history, it was still rare for a Black person to own a car.

Mandela and Winnie are driven in the **car** to Cape Town for a Grand Parade. They stop to visit Dullah Omar, and Mandela gets a phone call from Desmond Tutu. Mandela then leaves and gives a speech to a large crowd about how apartheid must end. Although he criticizes de Klerk, he calls him "a man of integrity," which he later regrets saying after seeing some of de Klerk's actions. Mandela would like to take a leisurely trip to Transkei, but the ANC has plans for him first.

The parade that Mandela participates in shows how widespread support for him in the country is—something that the government tried to hide from him while he was in prison. The wave of support that Mandela receives after getting his freedom vindicates his many years of optimism and his idea that, when given the chance, many people will turn out to reject injustice and discrimination.

CHAPTER 101

Mandela holds his first press conference, where he talks about his release and continues to say that armed struggle and peaceful negotiations can go hand in hand. He makes clear that White people also have an important role to play in the liberation struggle, promising that anyone who opposes apartheid can join his movement. He spends the night with Winnie at their old address, but he sleeps uneasily due to the loud crowd outside.

Mandela's statements once he gets out of prison remain consistent with the sorts of things he was saying way back before he first got arrested. Even after his long imprisonment, he remains convinced that unity is possible and the best way forward. The crowd outside the window of Mandela and Winnie's apartment is a reminder to him of the tremendous pressure on him to be a good leader, given how many supporters he now has. His hope, it seems, has been infectious.

CHAPTER 102

On February 27th, Mandela reports to the leadership of ANC and also meets with several other African heads of state. Eventually, he embarks on a six-month tour across Africa, meeting with people and speaking to crowds. After that he goes to Europe, thanking all of the international anti-apartheid activists during a concert in London at Wembley Stadium.

Mandela's tour of Africa and the rest of the world is a way for him to make the most of his freedom. In addition to the symbolic value of him being able to travel freely, this trip also parallels Mandela's earlier trip abroad when he was still in hiding. The fact that Mandela can now move about freely is a sign of how much progress has been made.

CHAPTER 103

When he returns to South Africa, Mandela has to deal with issues within the ANC. One involves Chief Buthelezi, who split off from the ANC and now leads a violent resistance group called the Inkatha. Mandela makes plans to meet with him to try to stop the violence.

Mandela's conflicts with Chief Buthelezi show once again how even among Black South Africans, there is disagreement about what to do about apartheid. Mandela is honest about the challenges the country still faces, even after he finally obtains his release. That is, his release from prison is important, but it wasn't his primary goal. Abolishing apartheid is his goal.

CHAPTER 104

Mandela schedules face-to-face meetings with de Klerk and his government. The government had hoped that enthusiasm about Mandela would die down after his release, but Mandela remains politically influential. Mandela sees de Klerk not as an "emancipator" but as a "pragmatist" who is willing to do whatever it takes to keep power. Mandela believes the talks are surprisingly friendly, and they agree on the Groote Schuur Minute, which pledges both sides to peace.

Mandela continues to walk a careful line whenever he describes de Klerk, noting how de Klerk helped to lay the groundwork for a democratic South Africa while also noting that he seemingly did so for selfish reasons, in an attempt to hold on to power. Mandela's decision to sign a peace agreement seems to reflect his belief that de Klerk is someone who, for all his flaws, will keep his word, unlike his predecessors.

CHAPTER 105

Mandela finally has a chance to go to Qunu and see where his mother is buried. A month later, he goes to **Robben Island** and tries to convince some MK political prisoners to accept a government amnesty deal. In June, Mandela again goes abroad to Europe and North America. He meets with world leaders like George Bush and Margaret Thatcher and sees New York City for the first time.

Mandela's trips, which take him farther abroad than he's ever been before, show how as much as his efforts focus on the situation in South Africa, he is also thinking globally and has long taken lessons from politicians from other countries. Bush and Thatcher are both conservative politicians compared to Mandela, but they accept Mandela, once again providing hope that people with differing viewpoints can cooperate with each other. Meeting them also helps legitimize Mandela and his cause.

CHAPTER 106

By July of 1990, Mandela is back in South Africa, and violence has only gotten worse. The government led by de Klerk recently arrested several ANC members. Mandela believes that the violence in the country is an impediment to future negotiations, and he believes the government is responsible for stoking tensions. Although he has temporarily advised the ANC against using the violent tactics that MK used in the past, he begins to reconsider this position.

Earlier, Mandela wrote about sitting across the table from de Klerk and having what seemed like a productive conversation about limiting violence in the country. Now, however, Mandela sees that the government hasn't been keeping its word. This shows the dangers of Mandela's strategy of trusting his opponents, but it does not seem to fundamentally shake his belief in the idea of trying to find unity.

CHAPTER 107

In December of 1990, Tambo finally returns from exile abroad to South Africa. He gives a controversial speech about how ANC must push international countries to start rolling back sanctions against South Africa. Meanwhile, to try to contain the spiraling violence in the country, Mandela meets with Chief Buthelezi. They each agree for their side to follow a code of conduct that will hopefully stop the bloodshed. But Buthelezi doesn't seem to follow the code. In July 1991, the ANC holds its first conference in South Africa in 30 years. The ANC wants to formalize itself as a legal, legitimate political party. Within 17 months of legal activity, they gain 700,000 members. Meanwhile, Mandela and George Bizos attempt to wrap up some of Winnie's legal issues.

Mandela again faces challenges from all sides, even after he is free and a democratic future for South Africa is finally in sight. Chief Buthelezi's challenges to the ANC recall some of the ANC's earlier struggles with the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement, but the violence adds even higher stakes. In spite of these challenges to its authority, the ANC manages to legitimize itself by holding its first legal conference in three decades. Mandela notes the success of the ANC as a way of showing how people are receptive to the liberation movement after enough exposure to it.

CHAPTER 108

After all of the preliminary talks, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) begins. Although there are some issues with the talks, such as PAC boycotting them, Mandela believes they are a historic moment. On the first day, de Klerk surprises Mandela with a request for a speech, which Mandela grants, but after de Klerk gives a speech that questions the trustworthiness of ANC, Mandela is angry with him. Six weeks after the beginning of CODESA 1 (the first part of the talks), de Klerk holds a referendum with White voters on whether to continue negotiations with the ANC. When he finds that he has support, de Klerk begins to use more aggressive negotiating tactics.

Similar to Mandela's legal trials, the process of setting up South Africa's first freely democratic election is a long one. Although Mandela faces many challenges, including an uncooperative de Klerk, he continues as he always does to make incremental progress. To advance his arguments, Mandela portrays himself as an honest negotiator and highlights the ways in which de Klerk is less honest, walking back his promises and attempting to take hard-line positions.

CHAPTER 109

On April 12, 1992, with Sisulu and Tambo by his side, Mandela announces that he's separating from Winnie. He says the divorce is for personal reasons and believes that Winnie may have had a more difficult life out of prison than he did, due to how many things she had to do alone.

Similar to his first divorce, Mandela tries to take responsibility for his role in the dissolution of his marriage, portraying Winnie in a positive way. He tries to strike a tone of unity and compromise even when discussing difficult topics like divorce.

CHAPTER 110

In May of 1992, CODESA 2 begins, and Mandela and de Klerk are still at odds on several issues. As negotiations stall, the ANC adopts a policy of "rolling mass action" that incorporates strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts. Tensions rise when the Inkatha lead a strike that kills 46 people and de Klerk and the police do nothing. Members of the ANC push Mandela to recommend violent protest, all while de Klerk threatens that the government may also be ready to use violence. During a protest march on a stadium in Bisho, government soldiers open fire, killing 29 and injuring over 200.

Mandela highlights the violence of his political opponents as a way of showing how they are less reasonable than he is. While Mandela could use the situation as a pretext for the ANC itself to justifiably turn toward more violent tactics, he holds off for the moment, putting his faith in the idea that the upcoming elections will provide a peaceful resolution to these conflicts.

Mandela sees the tragedy in Bisho as "the darkest hour before there is dawn," since soon after, he and de Klerk seemingly have a breakthrough in negotiations. They create a framework for negotiating called the Record of Understanding. This agreement angers Chief Buthelezi and causes Inkatha to drop out of negotiations, abandoning both the ANC and the Nationalists. Aside from this setback, the Record of Understanding leads to an agreement for a 5-year national unity government where parties polling over 5 percent get proportional representation in the cabinet. After 5 years, the nation will become a simple majority-rule government.

Despite being let down during previous negotiations, Mandela holds on to the optimistic belief that it's still possible to reach an agreement with rivals like de Klerk. Chief Buthelezi's protest of the plan shows that it's not possible to please everyone. Nevertheless, after decades of struggle, Mandela's tactics prove themselves effective as he and de Klerk lay out the blueprint for an election that will fundamentally change the government of South Africa.

CHAPTER 111

Mandela begins building a country house for himself in Qunu, which is completed in the fall of 1993. In April of 1993, a popular ANC and MK member named Chris Hani gets assassinated by white supremacists, and some fear that this could spark a race war. Mandela is angry but urges people to resist starting a civil war, as white supremacists want. Mandela experiences another great loss as Tambo, who has been ill for a while, passes away from a stroke. Mandela often thought of Tambo in prison, and he arranges for the ANC to give Tambo a state funeral, even though the ANC is not yet in power.

Now that democratic elections are in sight, Mandela begins increasingly abandoning the violent tactics he sometimes considered in the past, believing that violence will only destabilize the election plan in place. Mandela strives to create a sense of stability and normalcy, giving his old friend Tambo a state funeral in order to make it feel like ANC is already a political party with legitimate power.

CHAPTER 112

June 3, 1993, is a landmark in South African history, although few know it. It was the date when they set the date for elections on April 27, 1994. People will vote in the first one-person-one-vote election to elect an assembly who will write a new constitution, serve as parliament, and elect a president. Buthelezi continues to protest the proceedings, wanting a constitution to be drawn up before the election.

One person, one vote is one of the most fundamental principles of democracy, and one that has been missing in South Africa. It is the idea that at least in theory, each citizen of a country has an equal opportunity to decide the course of the government. The fact that the election will also lead to the drafting of a new constitution means that the voters of South Africa will have the ability to elect representatives to form the country's political foundations.

In 1993, Mandela wins the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with de Klerk. He is moved, although says he never go into the liberation struggle seeking recognition. Despite his criticisms of de Klerk, Mandela did not refuse the prize, believing that the prize makes de Klerk a stronger negotiating partner, giving legitimacy to their new agreement for elections. Mandela then begins to campaign in earnest for the election, traveling the country to hear people's opinions. The ANC puts together a 150-page document about how to rejuvenate the country.

Despite Mandela's many disagreements with de Klerk, he remains pragmatic and focused on his larger goals rather than attempting to settle personal scores. Mandela realizes that because de Klerk is his negotiating partner, any legitimacy he receives will also help bolster Mandela and their joint plan for new democratic elections.

CHAPTER 113

The path to freedom is rocky, as Inkatha and some other groups refuse to participate in the elections, but Mandela presses on. He and de Klerk have a televised debate. Mandela is harsher in his criticisms of de Klerk than he's been before, but he makes a point of shaking his hand at the end.

The televised debate between Mandela and de Klerk is a mark of how far South Africa has come. It contrasts with the many unjust court cases Mandela was part of, where truth, fairness, and public opinion often had no impact on the outcome.

CHAPTER 114

Mandela casts the first vote of his life on April 27th. This day is the second of the four days of voting, and Mandela votes at a high school near where John Dube, first president of the ANC, is buried. A reporter asks him who he's voting for, and he jokes that he took a long time thinking about it. When the votes are counted, the ANC has 62.6 percent, just shy of the two-thirds they need to make a constitution without votes from other parties. Mandela is actually happy that now more parties than the ANC will play a role in the constitution. On May 2nd, de Klerk gives his concession speech.

Mandela casting his first vote is a culmination of all the causes he has struggled for throughout his life. His joking with a reporter suggests that he is in good spirits and willing to celebrate the occasion, even though his work is far from over. Mandela's happiness about the ANC not having enough to make the constitution on their own shows that even in victory, he holds on to his principle of trying to unify different groups of people. Similar to how Mandela worried that the ANC group he formed in prison was all Xhosa members, Mandela doesn't want to open himself up to the criticism that he and his allies are only looking out for their own interests.

CHAPTER 115

On May 10th, Mandela is sworn in as president. Everyone, regardless of race, sings both national anthems, one of which is in Afrikaans and one of which is in Xhosa. Mandela feels it's a historic moment, as he reflects how much things have changed in South Africa during his lifetime. He believes that apartheid created a tremendous "wound" in the country, but it also had the unintended effect of giving rise to great people in the resistance who became Mandela's comrades.

The different languages of the national anthems show how the election has begun to break down the separations put in place by apartheid. The fact that Mandela can go from a notorious political prisoner to the sitting president reflects how much it is possible for a nation to change within the course of one lifetime, offering hope for a better future with less division and violence.

Mandela remains optimistic that people are fundamentally merciful and must be taught to hate. Mandela feels that he was born free and only realized as he grew up that his boyhood feelings of freedom were an illusion. He joined the ANC and the liberation struggle to try to get back this feeling of freedom for everyone, not just himself. He believes that he has to free both the oppressor and the oppressed, and that his work isn't over yet. On his "long road to freedom," Mandela feels that he can rest for a moment to enjoy success but most soon continue his journey.

Mandela published this autobiography near the beginning of his presidency, during a time of potential but also uncertainty. He spends the final moments of the book reflecting back on where his activism started and where it ended up, showing how a long journey full of mostly small, incremental gains added up to the difference between captivity and freedom. Mandela's commitment to keep working shows his optimism that even though he has accomplished his main goal of ending apartheid, he still believes it's possible to continue building a better future in other ways.

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